

# **NORMANGATE FIELD**

**PARISHES OF CASTOR AND AILSWORTH, PETERBOROUGH**

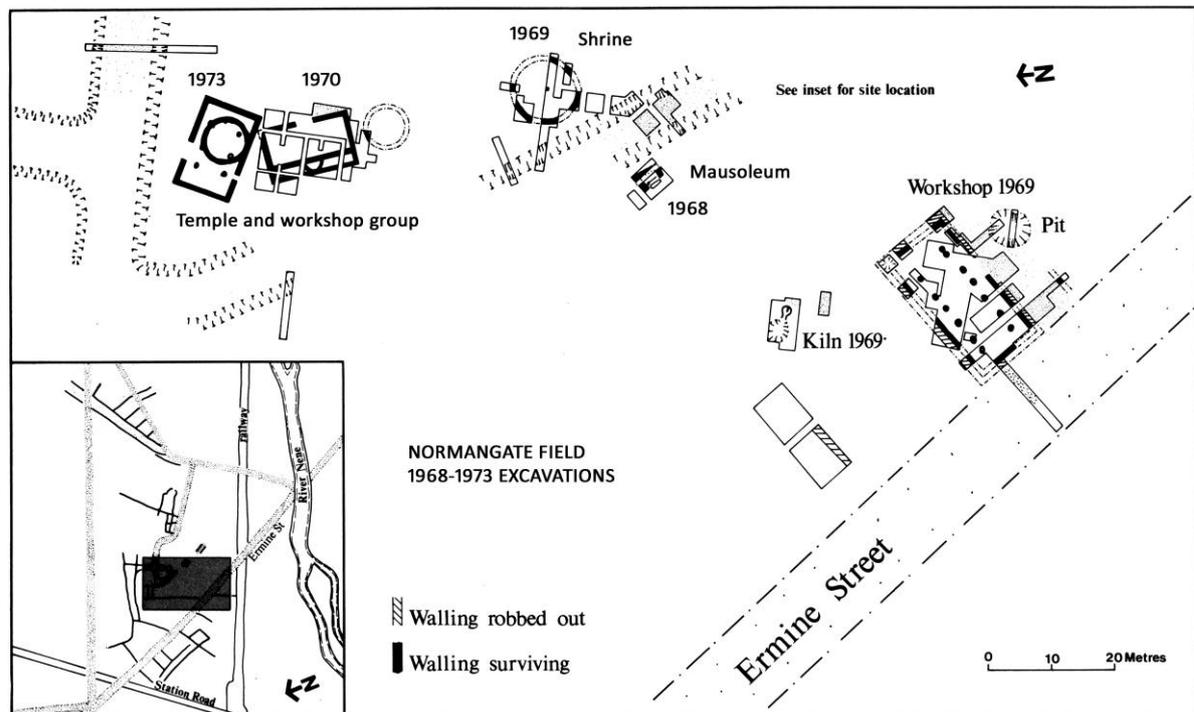


**EXCAVATIONS BY THE NENE VALLEY RESEARCH  
COMMITTEE 1968-1975**

# Preamble

At the end of each three-week summer excavation season the Directors prepared a summary account of what had been found and how it could be interpreted in its setting. The document was circulated to the supervisors and volunteers who took part in the excavations and to our many supporters locally, without whose help and vital input the excavations would not have been possible. The interim reports presented together below reflect the situation at the end of each dig: editing has been minimal (font types vary), and there has been no attempt to revise the conclusions and interpretations which were advanced by the Directors at the time.

The excavations were principally funded by the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works and its successor bodies in response to the various threats which hung (and still hang) over Normangate Field's archaeological remains.



*Plan of excavations in Normangate Field 1968-1973 (the excavations in 1974-75 lay further north) (del. G.B.Dannell)*

## Excavations in August-September 1968

Excavation was carried out under the aegis of the Nene Valley Research Committee in Normangate Field, Castor (TL 116979), during the period 28th August to 8th September 1968. The work was directed for the Committee by Mr G.B. Dannell and Dr J.P. Wild and was supported by grants from the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. Best thanks are due to the Secretary of the Committee, Mr Eric Standen, for considerable help during the planning of the excavations.

At the kind invitation of Mr R.C.H.Longfoot two sites were explored in the western part of Normangate Field, NE of the line of Ermine Street. The area is threatened by the building of an approach road to Castor in connection with the Peterborough Overspill scheme and, more immediately, by normal farming activities. It is a pleasure to record the help and interest which Mr Longfoot and his family showed in our work.

The first site tackled lay on a short drove-road visible on the air photographs as a pair of ditches. It runs parallel to Ermine Street and crosses the central N-S division of Normangate Field c.350' N of the railway.

The drove-road itself (c.18' wide) had been largely ploughed away, but traces of rough metalling survived. The two side ditches (c.10' wide 6' deep) had been filled during the fourth century, but the type of pottery recovered from each ditch had a distinctive character. The material from the NE ditch included a number of recognisably late colour-coated pieces and coin issues of Valentinian I, Valens and 2 worn coins of Gratian.

Next to the drove-road on its western side lay a crudely constructed rectangular building which had served as a mausoleum. Rough stone footings alone survived. It had contained at least three simple inhumation burials in wooden coffins and a fourth burial in a Barnack stone coffin which had been inserted through its SW side (if a SW side had ever existed). One of the simple burials had been disturbed when the coffin was put in, but the whole complex was so close to the surface that the stratigraphic relationships between the burials could not be exactly ascertained. One of the simple burials had among its grave-goods a colour-coated pentice-moulded beakers and an onion-head crossbow brooch, both dateable to the fourth century. The stone coffin yielded a pair of gold earrings (*frontispiece*), a silver bow-brooch (of late third century date?), bronze bracelets, a shale spindle-whorl, bone comb and a colour-coated flagon. One bracelet had fragments of a plain-weave textile adhering to it. The bones had been destroyed by rodents, but the teeth suggested that the occupant of the coffin was a woman of about 30 years of age.





*Two views of a Barnack stone coffin containing the burial of a woman with rich furnishings*

The angle between the drove-road, the line of Ermine Street and the N-S hedge-boundary appeared on the air photographs to contain only a large pit.

Through the kindness of the Oxford Laboratory a limited survey by proton-magnetometer was carried out at very short notice by Mrs Anne Millett and a number of anomalies were noted and investigated in this part of the field. Many of them were deeply buried at least one was a clay-lined pit, and from preliminary trenching some of the others would seem to be pits. The section cut into the enormous pit which had also been seen on the air photographs produced a valuable group of fourth-century Nene Valley ware.

Excavation at the point where a 150 gamma anomaly had been recorded revealed at least 7 superimposed potters' kilns and associated working floors, all lying within a few inches of the ground surface and in danger at each ploughing. This evidence of intensive industrial activity was associated with a building directly against Ermine Street. It had at least three phases of construction, two in timber and one in stone. In the final phase the wall had been dismantled and its SW corner became the site for a kiln or oven constructed across its footings.

Two important points emerged from the limited excavations which were possible here:

*The structure of the 'kilns' or ovens*

Mr E.T. Artis illustrates a number of curious bottle-shaped ovens which he found during his excavations and field-surveys near Castor in 1820-40. The structures revealed this year are of this type. Their precise purpose is obscure, but what little evidence there is suggests that they may have been pottery kilns. A wide flue leads into a comparatively cramped 'firing chamber', which is merely an apsidal extension of the flue and measures as little as 1' 3" across.

One of our 'kilns' was reasonably well preserved, with three successive floors and seven linings. No kiln debris, dome-plates or standard kiln-furniture was found, but burnt and unburnt clay, presumably from a dome (?), was spread over the area of each 'kiln'. After successive re-linings, the 'kilns' were demolished and rebuilt in the reverse position over the former stokehole. A few sherds of indented beaker from the floor of one 'kiln' and associated coins give a fourth-century date for the operation of the 'kilns'.



*Furnace/kiln/oven inside Workshop A (1968)*

### *The problem of Ermine Street*

The southern end of the building examined this year appears to have been built over the edge of the *agger* of Ermine Street; for its footings rise sharply as they encroach on the road. It is clear that the course of Ermine Street changed with time, and the building may have been erected over the earlier line of the road. Indeed, Artis shows a paved(?) causeway at just this point on his plan of Normangate Field, beneath and to the NE of the visible mound of the road. The question is made more difficult by the fact that Artis and some of his successors mistook the mediaeval headlands on the line of Ermine Street for the actual *agger*, and exaggerated its size. A 'lane' shown on Artis' map W of Ermine Street also complicates the situation.

In the available time it was not possible to examine the lower levels of this building, but where they were sampled beneath the later gravel surfacings much early-second-century pottery associated with potters' clay and debris was found.

This must await further excavation.

Closer examination of Artis' plans has revealed that it is possible to pinpoint more confidently the pits, buildings and kilns in Normangate Field which he surveyed. It is hoped to produce a composite plan showing recent excavations against the background of his work. The more urgent need, however, is for survey of wider areas by proton-magnetometer and examination of sites revealed in advance of ploughing.

GBD JPW Oct 68

## **Excavations in August-September 1969**

The second season of excavation in Normangate Field, Castor (23.8. – 15.9.69) continued the work begun there on a small scale in 1968. The excavation was directed by Mr G.B.Dannell and Dr J.P.Wild for the Nene Valley Research Committee and the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. Once more it is a pleasure to record our gratitude to the farmer, Mr R.C.H. Longfoot, and his family for allowing the excavation to take place and for the interest which they showed in the progress of the dig. The directors would also like to express their thanks to the Secretary of the Nene valley Research Committee, Mr Eric Standen, and the Treasurer, Mr G.F.Dakin, for their untiring efforts: the dig largely owed its success to them.

We were fortunate to have as site-supervisors Miss Freda Berisford, Mr R.Thomas and Mr A.Main. Volunteers were accommodated in Stibbington School through the kindness of Mr R.H.Forster and the Huntingdon Education Committee. Tools were kindly lent by the Huntingdon County Council.

### *The Site*

A triangular area in the western part of Normangate Field bounded by Ermine Street, a modern footpath to Castor Station and a N-S hedgeline immediately north of the point where the railway cuts Ermine St was the scene of the excavations of 1968 and 1969 (code: CAS 68, CAS 69). According to present plans an access road from the A47 to the Nene is to be driven through this site and the excavation was undertaken to record the archaeological features before their destruction.

A survey by proton-magnetometer of this triangle was begun by Mrs A.Millett in 1968 and finished in 1969. The results of her work are of major importance and formed the starting-point for excavation.

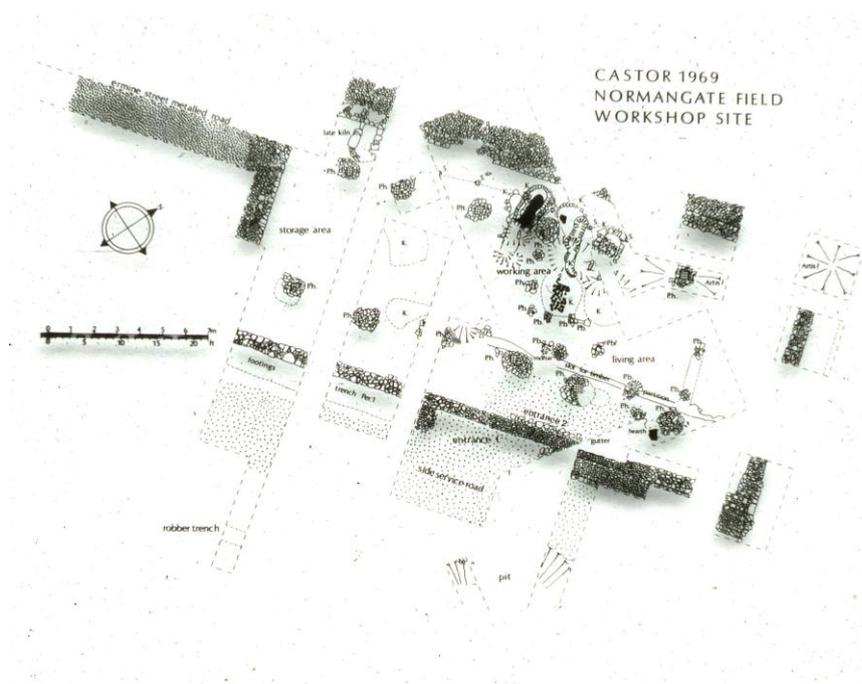
### *The Workshops on Ermine Street*

A plan of the area of Normangate Field adjacent to Ermine St, published by Mr E.T.Artis in 1828 on the basis of his own excavations, shows a series of workshops set at intervals along both sides of the road. Associated with them are potters' kilns and pits. Our attention in 1968 and 1969 was devoted to the investigation of one of these workshops, located by Mrs Millett, and the preliminary examination of another.

## Workshop A

The brown sand (stained by vegetation ?) which underlies the metalling of Ermine St. and spreads with little variation in level across the whole site was the original Roman ground surface. On the northern side of Ermine St, c.120' NW of the point where the road is cut by the railway, potters were at work by the early second century, if not earlier. (There was a persistent scatter of Flavian samian.) On the site of the later Workshop A a spread of potters' clay and charcoal was found associated with decorated jars dating to the period before the rise of the colour-coated pottery industry in the mid-second century. The forms of these jars and their fabrics resemble first-century 'Belgic' pottery; the incised half-moon decoration on wide cordons round the body of the vessel is found again on jars in standard Nene Valley grey-ware, dating (presumably) to the second century. No structures or kilns could be assigned to this period of occupation.

The first stone workshop erected on this spot was probably put up in the latter half of the second century (for parallels see *JRS* XLVIII, 1958, 139f.). It was built on a foundation of pitched herringbone masonry about 3'6" wide and its external measurements are 85' N-S by 43' E-W. Its roof (perhaps covered with shingles) appears to have been carried on two rows of massive posts, so that the whole structure resembled an aisled barn with a nave c.19' wide. The two posts nearest the northern end of the workshop are not precisely opposite one another. It is perhaps unlikely that the walls were carried up to their full height in stone; for the foundations were comparatively shallow.



*Plan of Workshop A on Ermine Street 1968-69 (del G B Dannell)*

A metalled side-road (c.15' wide) ran from Ermine Street along the eastern side of the building, perhaps ending in a cul-de-sac. The main entrance to the workshop appears to have lain here on the long axis, but the thorough robbing of the wall along this side made it impossible for us to check this to our satisfaction. Of the 6 buildings with entrances shown by Artis on his plan, five have them on the long axis. The area between the line of the wall and the eastern row of posts carrying the roof was metalled with gravel at this point and carts may have been unloaded here from the side-road.

It is interesting to note that the southern end of the building overlies the edge of Ermine St.; for the northern drainage-ditch of the road, filled up with bright orange sand, lies c.12' inside the workshop. The construction-trench for the south wall was terraced into the road metalling and chippings washed from the road's surface.

When this building was erected (or perhaps shortly afterwards) a layer of gravel was spread over the area enclosed within its walls. This sealed a worn bronze coin of Vespasian and a few sherds of early colour-coated ware. In the western aisle of the building a complicated series of overlapping lenses of coarse yellow clay, burnt and un-burnt, grew up on the gravel floor, separated by layers of ash. These strata are indicative of brisk industrial activity in this part of the building and are evidence for the building and firing of potters' kilns or furnaces. Of the excavated examples only one kiln could be assigned to this period. It was cut by a main upright and also by the construction-trench for the Period II stone building. It appeared to be of dumb-bell type (see below) designed for firing large calcite-gritted storage jars.

While standard Roman potters' kilns are normally built out of doors, to minimise the fire-risk, kilns for special purposes, such as the samian ware kilns of Lezoux in Central Gaul, were sometimes constructed in an enclosed building. In the case of Workshop A the kilns lay in the aisle, but their small stokeholes were in the nave, more easily accessible to the potter who was attending them.

At a later date, perhaps in the first half of the third century, Workshop A was totally reconstructed. It appears, however, to have remained in the hands of the same firm; for the same types of kiln are found in Period II as in Period I, and there is no sign of a break in occupation.

The style of the rebuilding is unusual: a narrow wall of pitched herringbone masonry (*c.*2' wide) was built against the inner face of the outer earlier wall. It varied in depth, being up to 3' deep in places, measured from the lowest course of horizontal slabs. The building-stone (limestone) appears to have been derived from the robbing of its predecessor. The workshop thus retained its original plan, but its external measurements were now 79' N-S by 36' E-W.

On the western side of the building the new wall is flanked on the east by a 3' wide construction-trench which cuts through the earlier industrial floor-levels. At the edge of the construction-trench a row of posts had been set at 5' intervals and later sawn off. They present a problem of interpretation: they may have been for scaffolding or even for holding the roof up temporarily during the reconstruction. Along the eastern side of the workshop the earlier outer wall had been demolished almost without trace, and its robber trench had apparently become in part a construction trench for the later wall. The same appears true of the north wall, but substantial remains of the original foundation were also found still in situ at the north-east corner.

On the eastern side of the workshop where the entrance seems to have been in the earlier period the later narrow wall presents a number of problems. At the point on the long axis where the metalling of the side-road and of the loading-area inside the building present an unbroken gravel surface, the narrow wall of Period II is surface-built, as if it marked an entrance and merely carried through the building-line. The deeper herringbone foundation resumes on either side of this presumed entrance. If this is the correct interpretation, then the entrance is nearer the north-east than the south-east corner.

The posts which supported the roof in the second period (probably 6 on each side) appear to have been replacements of, or additions to, the series existing in Period I. The post-pits measure 4' across and 3' 6" deep, heavily packed with stone and carrying posts over 12" in diameter. All of them were cut or recut in Period II and the tops of the post-pits may have been repacked as the level of the floor rose during the lifetime of the Period II workshop. The space between the posts and the inner surface of the wall was only *c.*6' in the second period.



*Post-pits for the arcade posts in Workshop A, reinforced with stone crowns*

No subdivisions of the interior were discerned except at the north-east corner where in 1968 a slot for a timber partition was found running on the line of the posts of the eastern aisle. The partition was faced with clay which had been heavily burnt, perhaps in the last phase of the workshop's life. The room may have been an office.

In the western aisle of the workshop a complex series of over 12 contemporary or successive superimposed kilns and furnaces was uncovered. Some were merely represented by the surviving patches of their burnt-clay floors. The earlier examples were of dumb-bell type, that is, two linked circular clay-lined chambers (measuring *c.*2'4" across internally) with a single flue. They were constructed of rough stone and large quantities of clay, which spilled across the surrounding floor. It seems from the meagre finds that they were built for firing large calcite-gritted jars and worked on the horizontal-draught principle. There was no trace of kiln-furniture or dome-plates.



*'Dumb-bell' kiln/furnace in Workshop A (1969)*

One of the latest kilns of the series was built on a different plan with a long flue-channel and very small firing-chamber. It was excavated in 1968 and reported on in the account (above) circulated of the 1968 excavations.

There was no evidence of kilns at the southern end of the building or in the nave.

The potters who worked in the Period II stone building were extremely tidy and left very little dating evidence. The presence of fragments of colour-coated flagons and indented beakers and the absence of the coarser colour-coated wares of the later third century from their working levels suggest that their main activity is to be dated to before *c.*AD 275.

A small cup containing an orange-red pigment (?) dropped down one of the holes left when the stump of a sawn-off scaffolding(?) -post rotted away. The material may have been used for painting the buff flagons of the Nene Valley, it is in any case unlikely that the potter was making only calcite-gritted jars.



*Paint-pot from a scaffolding(?) -hole in Workshop A*

At the northern end of the building and in patches elsewhere which had escaped the plough there were abundant signs of a fire which had destroyed the woodwork of the roof at the end of Period II. (There were no roofing-tiles in this layer.) Over the debris, but not burnt, was a scatter of stone from the destruction or demolition of the Period II stone wall.

Ploughing in mediaeval and modern times has removed most of the evidence of later Roman structures on the site of Workshop A. But it is clear that the stone walls were levelled, and over the walls at what had been the south-west corner of the building, two channelled furnaces had been built. The post-pits and post-holes for the main roof-supports of the former workshop had been very carefully packed with stone - which speaks perhaps for an orderly demolition by the original owners of the workshop. Some heavy tumbled stonework over the side-road was associated with late fourth-century pottery, and so, whatever the precise function of the channelled furnaces may have been, there is evidence for fourth-century industrial activity on the site. In the course of this a pit was cut through the north-west corner of the workshop and filled with almost pure ash.

### *Workshop B*

About 100' west of Workshop A Mrs Millett located a group of magnetic anomalies which proved to be kilns and furnaces within a probable second workshop. Two stone-built channelled furnaces found had been severely damaged, but an earlier dumb-bell kiln was a fine example of its type. It possessed not only a main flue, but a contemporary subsidiary flue issuing from the side of the further firing-chamber. A wide robber trench for what was probably the eastern wall of this workshop was disclosed.

A heavy deposit of dirty yellow sand effectively sealed off the earlier

levels at this spot. Where this was sectioned, a quantity of jar-fragments bearing the cordons and incised decoration mentioned above was recovered. They lay on a baked clay floor or working-surface. This area of the site would clearly merit further examination.

North-east of the kilns, the investigation of a number of anomalies revealed a complex of linked pits which could not be fully explored in 1969.

### *The potter's kiln*

A magnetic anomaly of 200 gamma in the area north of the workshops led to the discovery of an isolated potter's kiln of standard Nene Valley type. It measured 4'4" by 4' internally with a tongue-pedestal and solid intermediate floor constructed over firebars.



*Potter's kiln behind the Workshops A and B*

The walls of the furnace chamber were of solid clay and the cracks in it had been carefully sealed. A ledge 22" above the furnace floor carried the specially shaped ends of the firebars. The clay tongue-pedestal had been damaged by raking and the front of it was shored up on a pile of re-used firebars. The firebars, square in section, had been linked sideways with one another by dividers to form a continuous floor pierced by vents. A quantity of dome-plates was found.

The clay-lined flue (18" wide by 20" high) had been damaged. It ended in small, roughly constructed, flue-cheeks. The stokehole was practically clean of debris resulting from the firing of the kiln. A shallow pit had been cut into it to bury a horse. To judge by the pottery, the kiln had produced flagons and indented beakers with a dark colour-coat, probably dating to the mid-third century or somewhat earlier.

## *The circular shrine*

At the northern end of the site the magnetometer surveys of 1968 and 1969 traced a minor road with side-ditches running parallel to Ermine Street. It is about 40' wide, including two 10' ditches, and is visible on the air photographs of the area.

On the southern side of the road a small mausoleum containing fourth-century burials came to light in 1968. The material from the filling of the northern road-ditch, including a vast amount of cut bone, led us to believe that the northern side of the road would also be worth examining.

Trenching led to the discovery of a circular building with an internal diameter of 30' and wall-footings 2'6" wide, lying 6' from the lip of the ditch. No walling was in position and the pitched foundation had been stripped by the plough. There was a single stone-packed post-hole (c.1' wide) at the exact centre of the building, but otherwise there was no hint of the character of the superstructure. It was probably of timber, roofed with Collyweston tile.

The floor inside had been tessellated as numerous scattered tesserae in red tile and white limestone indicated. The relative proportions of the colours suggest that a plain white centre had been surrounded by a narrow red border.

Despite a careful search no burial could be found. The building, therefore, is best construed as a shrine and local parallels are to be found at Brigstock and Collyweston Wood. Indeed, the circular shrine seems to have been popular in this area and Lewis regards it as a Coritanian [Coritavian] type. No dating evidence was forthcoming.

The Roman tradition of burial beside a main road was obviously out of the question in Normangate Field after the second century, since the workshops had claimed the valuable frontage along Ermine St near the bridge over the Nene. The minor road at some distance from the workshops was chosen instead. In addition to the mausoleum of 1968 and the shrine of 1969 some human remains were noted this year north-west of the shrine. It may be that this minor road was lined on both sides with tombs and religious monuments to form a necropolis.

Ermine Street was sectioned mechanically opposite the southern end of Workshop A. The original surface overlying natural brown sand was of packed gravel 20' wide. It was accompanied (at least on the northern side) by a V-shaped road-ditch. No dating evidence was found, but the ditch had gone out of use by the mid-second century when Workshop A was erected.



*Mechanically cut section across Ermine Street*

Subsequent resurfacing with broken limestone slabs and chippings added 4' to the depth of the metalling. The old surface seems to have been flattened in each case before the new make-up was laid. The maximum width of the road was 25'. The construction-trenches for the south wall of Workshop A were terraced into the lower metalling, but there was no sign at any stage of a colonnade or side-walk between the workshop and the road proper.

A timber-lined drain was revealed in section on the south edge of the road, but no buildings could be identified on that side. The level appears to have been made up by rubbish dumped across the road from Workshop A.

JPW GBD Sept 1969

(published in *Bulletin of the Northants Federation of Archaeological Societies* 5, 1970, 7-12)

## **Excavations in August-September 1970**

This year a site was selected for excavation north of previous work, where the land falls away from the protective *agger* of Ermine Street and topsoil cover is minimal (TL 116979).

The earliest features on the site were two large pits, the sides of which had either fallen in or been dug away in antiquity, leaving a long gully *c.*20' long and 8" wide. The pits had been dug through the natural sand into a clay layer, probably to obtain flooring material and were filled uniformly with layers of occupation debris including large quantities of bone and the ashy detritus from an industrial process as yet unrecognised, but met previously in similar pits in Normangate Field. This material after the initial silting must have filled the pit to the brim in Roman times (about 5' deep), and then began the long process of consolidation. A fine group of early second-century jars came from the filling.

The first make-up layer in the sinkage consisted of oven-rakings which probably came from a group of hearths dug into the sand immediately NE of the pits. One of these yielded a worn dupondius of

Nerva, but the stratigraphic level of the hearth lay just below the plough-soil and their connection with other parts of the site was impossible to establish.

The continuing sinkage over the pits protected a very fine series of 'dumb-bell' kilns which had been built on and cut through a puddled-clay floor similar to the floors encountered last year in Workshop A. In all, there had been at least three and probably five kilns, inserted into one another as need arose. The latest and best preserved had one bowl *c.*24" in diameter (nearer the flue), the other *c.*33" in diameter. The latter had a steep side-vent rising from the furnace floor, which had been entirely raked away down to the soft pit-filling, but which must have been about 18" deep. The kilns appeared to differ from those found previously in that they had no laid stone walls, but only the odd stone in places as reinforcement. No industrial waste was found.

Immediately to the SE and probably associated with this level (although ploughing once more made this impossible to prove) were the remains of three tiny ovens resembling miniature Nene-Valley kilns. They appeared to have furnace chambers 15"-18" in diameter, stone-lined flues and small stoke holes. In places traces of a clay lining remained and the furnace floors had been raked away. Besides quantities of white wood-ash and a little charcoal, the most noticeable deposit was a thick layer of soot. Perhaps the ovens were boilers of some kind.

To the east lay a fine puddled-clay floor, which had been fired hard on its easternmost edge. All attempts to find a (wooden) building to border this floor, and indeed to enclose the other industrial activity on the site, failed. Ploughing for the most part had left features like the floors as islands in the soft sand, and elsewhere later Roman activity and what were presumed to be E.T. Artis' investigations had erased the evidence.

The top levels of the sand immediately beneath the plough soil contained a persistent scatter of late first- and early second-century pottery, together with two *dupondii*, one of Claudius, one of Vespasian.

After the industrial activity had ended, a rectangular shed was erected on the site in a similar style to the workshops of 1969. It measured 44' by 20' (a standard Nene Valley builder's unit) and was laid out with relation to the N-S drove. The doorway appeared to be in the long east wall; for outside it was a cobbled surface and at the same point for about 10' the wall foundations were carried through in smaller rounded stones. Elsewhere the trench-built foundations consisted of pitched stone *c.*2' deep, except where the west wall was carried over the line of deep pits. Here, the pit-filling had been deliberately removed and large stones inserted right to the pit bottom. Moreover, the builders' trench was widened at this point on both sides and as much as 18" of extra foundation projected on both sides in a bow, the widest additional work occurring above the deepest part of the pits. The pitched stones, 2' 6" wide, were capped by a layer of flat stones which formed the first building course. A 6" offset on the inside was carefully marked in the mortar over the flat stones, to provide a true line for the subsequent wall courses. Very little remained anywhere of the walling except in the area of the pits, but it consisted of triangular facing stones with a rough stone-and-mortar filling.

The floors associated with this structure could not be identified with certainty since a narrow trench had been dug in recent times along the inner face of the west wall, where the pit sinkage might have been expected to offer protection to the stratigraphy. However, above the 'dumb-bell' kilns there were the remains of gravel flooring which might well have been associated with the first phase of the workshop.

Sometime later the building was altered. A portico was added to the west 4ft 6in wide internally. Its wall foundations, 2' wide, had been poured into the foundation trench and consisted mainly of reused stone, heavily burnt, as if derived from demolished kilns or a burnt-out building. In the centre of the portico, facing the eastern entrance, lay an apse of pitched stone, one course deep. This could hardly have reached roof height as a structural unit and presumably formed a niche, measuring about 10' across. At the same time the floor of the main room was tessellated in white limestone cubes, grouted with mortar. The interior was plastered and painted, basically in red, but a number of polychrome moulding fragments in yellow, black and red suggest a more ambitious scheme. At the south end of the portico the west wall of

the original had been tampered with and the foundations adjusted. At this point a pair of long stone slabs had been set in the foundations at right angles to the wall to form a cist about 1' long. Within it lay a fine bronze fibula of early second-century date (Collingwood type Q).



*Fibula (Collingwood type Q) in stone-framed cist in portico*

The only other objects associated with the building were buried in a patch of plaster which had been mixed before the floor was laid. Another second-century fibula and parts of a pair of tweezers were recovered from it. Where the tessellated floor had sunk over the pits, a small area of debris suggested that the building had lost its roof in a fire – certainly the tesserae of the floor were heavily burnt.

Chronologically it would appear that activity on the site commenced in the early second century and the industrial working continued until the end of that century. From the uppermost make-up level of the pit, below the first of the gravel floors came a tazza in white ware with painted decoration. This is probably early third-century in date and should just pre-date the first building. No fixed date can be proposed for the alterations.

As to purpose: the first phase of the building resembles the industrial workshops along Ermine Street, but being smaller did not need internal posts to support the roof, which could be easily spanned by large timbers. Its best parallel is the potters' workshop at Stibbington. The rebuilding with portico, apse, painted plaster and tessellated floor suggests, a non-industrial, perhaps a religious use in view of what we know of the surrounding structures. Normally one would expect to find the apse on the short axis of such a building, but there was here no room for this arrangement. Further investigation showed that immediately to the south were the robbed-out remains of what appears to be a circular building similar to the one excavated in 1969. To the north a series of stone structures came within 1' of the north wall. So no entrance was accessible at the north or south, so, since it would be normal for a cult statue or object to stand opposite the entrance, the position of the apse was fixed accordingly.

Two sections were cut to establish the position of the drove road. The first cut the west ditch of the continuation of the road examined in 1968 and 1969. The other was made to test the exact position of the road as it swings east towards the crossroads excavated by Dr Graham Webster. A heavily cobbled surface extended halfway across the space between the ditches, some 30'. The rest

was absent, ploughed out or perhaps never laid. The northern or outer ditch was c.4' wide and deep, but the southern or inner ditch was more impressive, being 6' down to the water-table and nearly 8' across the top. This may represent the effects of re-cutting in the light subsoil, but it is also possible that the road was laid out along an existing property boundary. Certainly this ditch compares in size with the ditches at the Lonthorpe farmstead.

Not the least important of this year's excavations was the confirmation of the tragic state of the monuments in Normangate Field. In the area examined the plough soil extended directly to the natural sand, except where walling had caused the plough share to be lifted, and in the lee small areas of flooring may survive. Except over the pit sinkage all later material had been destroyed, and only fragmentary evidence from the second century survived. Further to the north the land drops still more and a great light patch on aerial photographs probably marks the point at which all archaeological evidence, except for pits and ditches, has been lost. The need for urgent work to plan what remains is obvious. In another five years even the stone buildings will disappear.

The directors wish to express their thanks for innumerable kind and helpful acts to many residents of the Nene Valley. The Secretary and Treasurer of the Nene Valley Research Committee have shouldered much of the administrative burden. Mr Jim and Mrs Eileen Morris of the Cross Keys, Wansford, who fed the dig, made a major contribution to the success of the work. Mr J.Harris very kindly put his bungalow at our disposal and solved for us a difficult accommodation problem. Mr R.H.Forster again allowed the volunteers to use Stibbington School, an ideal centre. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to Mr R.C.H.Longfoot for permitting us for a third season to dig at Castor.

GBD JPW Oct 1970

(published in the *Bulletin of the Northants Federation of Archaeological Societies* 5, 1971, 12-15)

## **Excavations in August-September 1973**

Excavation in Normangate Field in 1973 was confined to an area immediately adjacent to the drove-road which crosses the present north-south hedge-line some 150m north of the railway.

### *The Pits*

Two large pits were identified with the help of a 'Maxbleep' proton-magnetometer, kindly provided by the Institute of Archaeology, London. These lay north of the drove, and both had been sunk to a depth of c. 1.75m (5' 9"). Their top fillings had repeatedly consolidated, and the resultant hollow had been topped up.

The more northerly pit was circular, c.3.2m (10' 6") in diameter, and had been kept open long enough for the natural gravel sides to collapse and 'bell out' at the bottom. The other pit was rectangular, c.4.8m (15') by 1.8m (6') and only the northern section was excavated. Both pits had a scatter of ash and charcoal in the deep topsoil over the sinkages. However, the lower fillings contained layers of charcoal-rich rakings, with coarse-wares and Lezoux samian of the later second century. A date range of c.140-180 AD would fit the samian. The other pottery, on the basis of present knowledge, almost certainly belongs to the same period. Some of the coarse ware appeared to be misfired, but this was an interpretation of the surface condition rather than an actual deformity, and it is possible that it had resulted from subsequent use. On the other hand, the rakings are familiar as a by-

product of pottery making. What was lacking, as usual at this period, was any sign of substantial kiln structures. Certain magnetic anomalies immediately around the pits were cleared for observation, rather than excavation, but these proved to be areas of burnt sand, covered in places by friable baked clay. They could easily be the remains of bonfire potteries, and if kilns of the period remain wanting, some serious thought must be given to the technical problems of producing Nene Valley grey-wares in bonfire conditions.

### *The Buildings*

To the south of the drove-road, excavation was continued in the area of the porticoed building (cf *Bulletin of the Northants Federation of Archaeological Societies* 5, 1971, 12-15). At the end of the 1970 season a complicated wall junction was detected, almost abutting the north-east corner of the excavated building. The relative shallowness of the topsoil cover demanded prompt action. Clearance of the site in 1973 revealed four main periods of use.

The earliest was represented by a thin scatter of occupation material mixed into the natural silty sand, which forms a coherent horizon wherever excavation has taken place in this part of the field. The identifiable pottery seems always to extend down to the Antonine period, but artefacts going back to the Neolithic, which are also present, indicate that at some stage this level must have been open ground which was tilled.

In places the sand was burnt by later industrial activity, and covered by lenses of baked clay (see above). The best preserved area revealed intense heating over some 80m<sup>2</sup> (900 sq. ft.), with at least four main nodes. Sections revealed discoloration down to 13cm (5"), and occupation material, including sherds of early colour-coated beaker, Hadrianic-Antonine samian, and a fine bronze strip-mounting from a circular box. A coin of Hadrian was found between two of the associated clay lenses.

### *The circular building*

The industrial activity was replaced by the construction of a circular building with stone footings (cf *BNFAS* 5, 1971, 7-12 for similar structures). It was c.7.9m (26') in diameter, and the northern circuit from south-west to south-east was composed of limestone blocks c.36cm (14") by 23cm (9"), laid in two parallel courses with a rubble infill between them. The total width of the footings over this stretch was c.61cm (2'). This building style ended abruptly in two post emplacements, probably for squared timbers of c.25x25cm (10"x10"). The remainder was carried through in more normal pitched stonework, but the overall width was reduced to c.46cm (18"). Against the inner face of the block-work three pitched stone supports were found, and the spacing suggests that there were originally six. They consisted of two flattish stones c.25cm (10") on edge, retaining smaller stones packing an area between them of c.18cm (7"). Careful examination of the blocks revealed that in two cases the masons had cut a recess immediately behind the projecting support, and one support had a large nail driven into the packing. While the supports could be structural, the strength of the block foundations suggests that the main wall load was taken there. It is more likely that they formed foundations for half-engaged pilasters, or possibly supports for a bench. No evidence of flooring or for a central roof support remained, but curiously the very slight remains of four external scaffold supports were found. These were c.90cm (3') from the walls and the spacing suggests eight originally. They consisted of only two or three small stones each, which were presumably used for blocking-up during construction of the upper works when timbers would otherwise sink into the subsoil.



*The circular building and the aisled barn/workshop which replaced it*

The purpose of the circular structures in Normangate Field has yet to be established. At Brigstock and Collyweston, the parallels are religious. At Rudston, and on a growing number of villa sites in Roman Britain (such as Barnsley Park, Glos.), they seem to have domestic or agricultural uses. Of the three local ones, one is robbed out, one had a tessellated floor and a central roof support, while the present example has an interesting internal design, and presumably on the basis of the foundations, a broad entranceway to the south. Here, the balance seems against purely domestic or agricultural/industrial use, and a better understanding of the suburban area may throw more light on the subject (cf the addition of the portico and apse to the building next door, and the mausoleum across the drove-road).

#### *The aisled barn*

The circular building was supplanted by an aisled barn *c.*15.2m (50') by 9.1m. (30') carried on two rows of three posts. The measurements are not the usual 2:1 ratio, but the need to fit the building into the corner site probably conditioned the dimensions. On the south side, the long axis overran, and for a short length used, the earlier circular foundations, until the curve took the line so far out of true, that the builders were forced to abandon it, leaving a crescent bitten out of the pitched stonework. At this point the building line is only *c.*30cm (1') from the porticoed building, and it was this junction that was seen in 1970. The walls of the barn were generally in pitched stone foundation with flat courses laid over an earth levelling layer. The upper courses hardly survived at all, and in places the foundations were ploughed away, so that precise detail is difficult to assess. However, the various changes in quality and direction of the pitching remaining suggest a width varying between *c.*90cm (3') to the south to as little as 70cm (2'3") elsewhere. The post-pits on the other hand were perfectly preserved. They were circular, *c.*1.07m (3'6") in diameter, and *c.*76cm (2'6") deep. The packing still preserved the post impressions, tree-trunks, untrimmed and around 53cm (1'9") in diameter. The posts were carefully founded on large flat stones at the bottom of the post-pits, taking the thrust of the roof and preventing the whole structure from sinking into the unstable subsoil. The complete absence of flooring makes the internal arrangements otherwise problematical.

A difference in the level of the foundations for some 90cm (3') at the western end of the south

wall suggests a pedestrian entrance, but it is not easy to identify the main vehicular doorway, which is also usually found in a long wall. It was presumably on the north side, but this is the worst area of plough damage. The western end also contained some internal post-bases, again entirely unrelated to any floor level. These presumably belonged to internal partitions, and the narrow doorway to the south appeared to open into a small lobby, from which access could be gained to the rooms.

The chronology of the site is distinctly unsatisfactory. Apart from a definite late second-century horizon connected with the industrial activity, the other sequences remain relative and not absolute. The general building plan for the area could be interpreted as:-

1. Open ground, first farmed, later used for industry: first and second centuries.
2. Circular buildings: early third-century?
3. Insertion of rectangular building (precursor of porticoed building), narrowing entrance approach to the northern circular building: mid-third-century?
4. Replacement of circular building, and adaption of rectangular building: late third to early fourth century.

### *Acknowledgements*

We wish to record our thanks to the Peterborough Development Corporation and to Mr R C H Longfoot of Castor for permission to dig respectively at Lynch Farm and in Normangate Field. Their active interest was, as always, a great encouragement to us. We are grateful to Mr R H Forster, Warden of the Stibbington Outdoor Centre, and to Mr A E Berridge, Headmaster of Castor School, for allowing us to house our volunteers on their premises. Our cooks at Stibbington, Mrs J Simmons and Mrs M Stokes, made a major contribution to the dig - in a form that was readily appreciated by everyone.

M. Roland Sauvaget, Miss Mary Hawkins and Mr S G Upex at LF2 and Messrs R Thomas, A D Main and J A Hadman at CAS acted as site supervisors. Other posts of special responsibility were held by the Misses R Colman, S Hawkins, R Prentice and S Wadlow. Our foreman was Mr D Kirkpatrick. Our best thanks are due to all of them. Anglo-Scottish Plant provided huts and digging machinery with their customary efficiency. We are particularly grateful to members of the Nene Valley Research Committee who visited the site and gave us the benefit of their advice on a variety of problems.

JPW GBD Oct 1973

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## **Excavations in August-September 1974**

The summer campaign of excavation directed by Mr G B Dannell and Dr J P Wild for the Nene Valley Research Committee had two objectives this year: 1. to complete the excavation of the early Roman levels at Lynch Farm (Site 2) and: 2. to begin the exploration of the line to be taken by the Sutton Outfall Sewer through Castor.

The directors are indebted once more to Mr R H Forster and the Cambridgeshire Education Authority for their hospitality at the Stibbington Outdoor Centre where the volunteers were

accommodated. Our cooks, Mrs J Simmons and Mrs M Stokes, maintained their very high standards of 1973 which we greatly appreciated.

Mr Roland Sauvaget directed the work at Lynch Farm and wrote the report. Miss M Hawkins, and Messrs R Thomas, S G Upex, S Ellis acted as site-supervisors at Lynch Farm and Castor. Mr J A Hadman, Secretary of the NVRC, was both supervisor and labour agent. All of them made a major contribution to the success of the excavations. Over 50 volunteers took part in the excavations and our best thanks go to them for sustaining the main burden of activity.

### *Main site in Normangate Field*

Through the kindness of Mr R C H Longfoot who farms the western part of Normangate Field, it proved possible to explore the proposed line of the Sutton Outfall Sewer along Splash Dyke. A strip 300m long by 40m wide was investigated by a mixture of mechanical trenching and area excavation.

At the western end of the field vestiges of a small Roman timber building came to light. It had been almost ploughed out of existence, but a scatter of small stones covering a rectangular area marks its original extent. No floor levels survived. The remains were associated with fourth-century pottery, but overlay a small pit containing earlier material,

Along the area we stripped we encountered numerous irregular hollows filled with a uniform black soil, devoid of finds. This appeared to be water-laid silt, but the date of its deposition was not established. It may have been the result of pre-Roman flooding of Splash Dyke.

Close to the N-S hedge which divides Normangate Field into its two parts remains of a more complex series of structural features was revealed. Poor weather, and the sheer difficulty of locating and interpreting the features in the sandy subsoil, made it impossible to finish this part of the site in 1974.

Briefly stated: a beam-slot running E-W was succeeded by a shallow ditch, and this in turn underlay at its eastern end a series of substantial stone-packed post-pits. A similar, but not identical, sequence of slot and ditch related to a further series of posts and scattered stone on a N-S line: but here the slot appeared to cut the post-pits. Within the angle formed by these two lines were the settings for more, smaller posts, parallel or on right-angles to the post-pits already mentioned. No floor levels survived but the compacted earth immediately beneath the topsoil, perhaps associated with the E-W row of post-pits, contained much fourth-century pottery. The ditch which underlay these posts also contained fourth-century pottery.

Two pits within the angle were excavated and found to contain second- and early third-century pottery.

It is far from certain that the slots and post-pits indicate a roofed structure or structures here. A fenced yard with internal subdivisions would perhaps fit the evidence better. But work in 1975 may shed more light on the problem.

Preliminary trenching by JCB beyond the southern and eastern limits of the main trench opened in 1974 revealed a N-S metalled road and structural remains, the excavation of which must be postponed until 1975.

The metalled road led directly into a clearly marked E-W road (Margary No.250) further down the field. A trench was opened on the north side of the E-W road, just east of the road-junction, and traces of two periods of substantial timber building were recorded alongside it. Beneath the features noted there ran a V-shaped ditch on a completely different alignment. It contained no finds.

Previous excavation, coupled with the evidence of aerial photography, indicated that all the roads in Normangate Field were lined with buildings - or grave plots. This season's work confirmed this impression; for it was only against the roads that structural features came to light. The rest of the

land examined in 1974 may have been given over to farming activities.

### *Mill Lane, Castor*

In the eastern part of Castor parish the projected sewer line clings to the northern side of the Nene Valley Railway, both east and west of Mill Lane. Thanks to the kind co-operation of Mr E J Woods, who farms this land, three trenches were cut by JCB along most of this crucial stretch.

At the point where aerial photographs show a Roman road heading south from the Fen Causeway (Margary no.250) to the Mill Hill Villa trenching revealed nothing of archaeological importance. Cornbrash is very close to the surface here, and whatever caused the line of parched crop on the RAF vertical photographs (RCHM, *Peterborough New Town* [1969] 39) could no longer be traced on the ground.

East of Mill Lane the sewer line crosses the northern approaches to an extensive Iron—Age and Roman Farm known as the Boat House Complex. An unmetalled drove bounded by shallow ditches was photographed from the air by Mr S G Upex in 1974 and then uncovered on the ground. There was no dating evidence for it within the strip allotted to the sewer line.

About 80m further east a single immense ditch, 3m wide and 2m deep, ran parallel to the drove. Its upper filling contained bone and a few sherds of early Roman pottery, but the lower filling was clean in the sections which were dug across it.

GBD JPW Oct 1974

(published in *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 10, 1975, 153-154)

## **Excavations in August-September 1975**

Under the current development programme for Greater Peterborough a major outfall sewer will shortly be laid to serve a new industrial area at Sutton near Castor. The line of the sewer will pass along the northern edge of Normangate Field in the parishes of Ailsworth and Castor, creating a zone of disturbance some 30m wide. It poses a considerable threat to the archaeological remains inside and outside the area scheduled as an Ancient Monument by the Department of the Environment.

A rectangular area 55m by 35m was stripped by JCB in September 1974 to a depth of about 40cm and the site was left open throughout the winter. The weathering brought out more distinctly the traces of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation, running east-west. In 1974 the JCB removed the top of the B horizon, but a further 15-20cm had to be removed by hand in 1975 before all the Roman features were reached.

The natural ground surface was of sandy clay overlying gravel; but deep patches and thinner surface deposits of a dense black soil were noted in it. At first these were taken to be archaeological features, but they proved to be quite clean and were cut repeatedly by the Roman ditches and pits. They may be the result of water action, but their precise origin has not yet been established.

## *The Prehistoric Period*

A thumb-nail scraper, sundry worked flints of Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date and a small sherd of cord-impressed ware point to early occupation on the site. No features were found, however, which could be attributed to prehistoric settlement.

## *The Roman Period*

### *The First Period*

The earliest Roman feature on the site was a narrow slot found in a trench dug south of the main open-area excavation. It was cut by a later road-ditch, and its filling contained a few sherds of Roman pottery and a crucible with droplets of bronze still adhering to it.

The earliest coherent feature was a Roman drove-road, leading northwards. It bisected our site; but it may at this stage have stopped short of the present course of the Splash Dyke, which forms the northern boundary of Normangate Field. Only at one point was there any sign of primary metalling, and that was of fine gravel, deeply rutted by wheeled traffic.

The drove (about 1.70m wide) was flanked by two drainage-ditches, which did not match one another in size or character. The western ditch was relatively shallow, and had a flat bottom, c.40cm wide. Its original profile was lost through later cleaning. The filling above the primary clayey silt was noticeably gritty, and we have assumed that this was fine metalling washed from the surface of the road. The corresponding eastern ditch had a V-shaped profile (1.30m wide by 50cm deep) and in its last stage was allowed to fill with dark brown silt.

There were two clear breaks in the line of the western road-ditch, where the ground had not been dug. The southern gap was about 2m wide, and could be seen to be related to a second, east-west, ditch, which approached the road ditch from the west at 90° and then stopped 50cm short of it. The second gap, further north, was not associated with an east-west ditch; but its character was obscured by trench-digging for a later gateway on the spot.

There may once have been two gaps in the eastern road ditch at corresponding points. Certainly, at the north end of the site, an east-west ditch came up to the eastern road-ditch and stopped short in a butt-end, echoing the arrangement further south on the opposite side of the road.

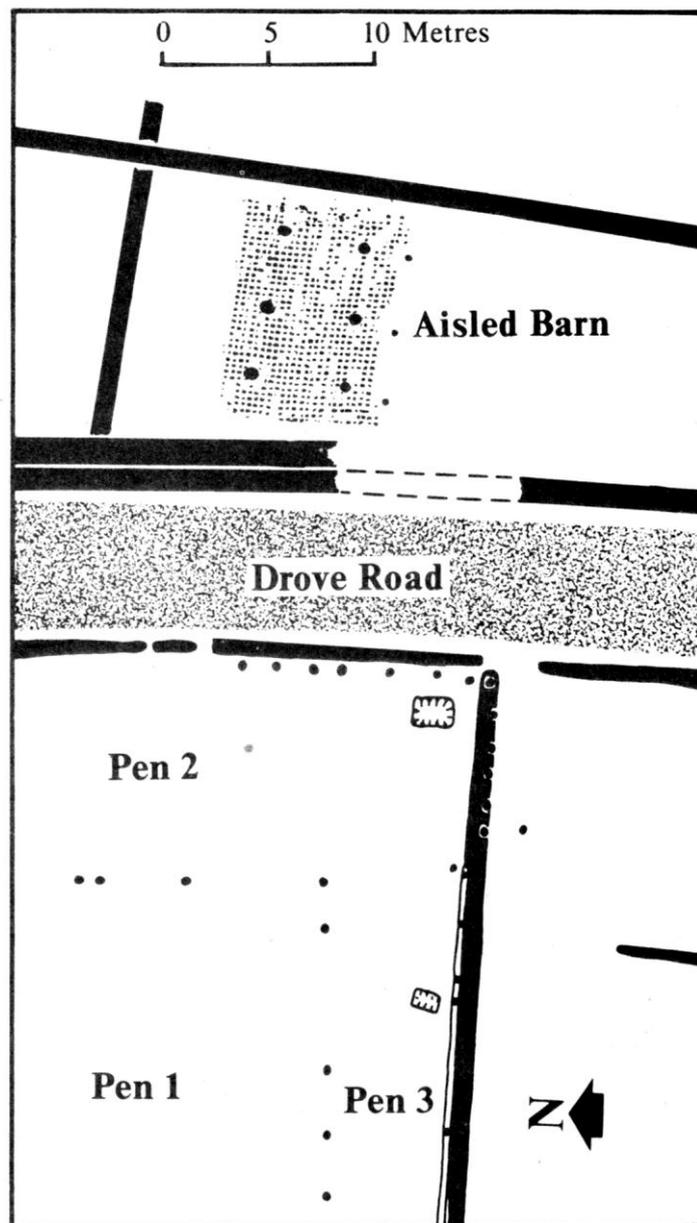
The two east-west ditches, one on each side of the road, appear to mark out parcels of land. The ditch on the western side was traced for a distance of 26.5m to the baulk and measured 60cm wide by 20cm deep. Its ultimate filling was of black organic refuse. The east-west ditch across the road was deeper (55cm) and wider and only a short length of it (17m) was followed.

We suggest that the enclosures marked out by the ditches described above were used in this part of Normangate Field for agricultural purposes. There is no proof of this, but the land-use in the second period (see below) indicates it. The gaps at the T-junctions between ditches may be a result of the way in which the land was surveyed rather than designed to provide a narrow passage for beasts.

The date of the first period of occupation probably falls within the first half of the second century A.D. No stratified material was associated with it, but the beginning of the second period of activity in the mid second century provides an approximate *terminus ante quem*.

### *The Second Period (c.AD 150-190/200)*

A number of separate archaeological features have been assigned to Period II on the grounds that they were all either demolished or drastically modified at the same point in time. Whether they were all built or dug at the same time is an open question; but they would fit well as elements of a single planning scheme.



*Plan of the agricultural features, structures and drove road at north end of Normangate Field*

#### *The road*

The existing drove-road was now surfaced with pieces of limestone and river pebbles; but this metalling, although compact, was nowhere more than a single layer thick. The prepared surface was up to 7m wide in places and extended across the whole of the excavated area, a distance of 35m. It showed unmistakable signs of heavy wear from wheeled traffic and there were many ruts in it. In places the weight of passing traffic or animals had given the road a dished surface.

While this work has been attributed to the second main period of activity on the site, it could equally well represent improvements at the end of Period I; for the grit filling the western road-ditch, which was cut by the gang building the fence in Period II (see below), is stratigraphically as likely to have been washed from this new metalled road as from its less substantial predecessor.

### *The enclosure west of the road*

The enclosure bounded in Period I by the western road-ditch and the east-west gully which joined it continued in Period II, but in a modified form.

Along the outer edge of the western road-ditch, cutting into the gritty silt which had accumulated in it, a line of six stout fence-posts was erected. They were set at intervals of about 2.30m in stone-packed post-pits which were 30cm deep on average. The posts, rounded in section (untrimmed timbers?), were about 30cm in diameter. A similar row of six posts in post-pits at right angles to this line replaced the east-west gully which had been backfilled with black organic refuse. It is interesting to note that these posts were square or rectangular in section; and that where the two rows met at the south-east corner, there were two posts standing curiously close to one another, as if two teams had been working independently, or the work was done at different times.

At the western end of the east-west row of posts an offset post-pit suggests that there may have been a gateway there. At the northern end of the north-south row along the road a single deep trench (2m long by 53cm deep) contained post-impressions which point to the provision of a narrow, but solidly built, gateway. North of the foundation-trench of this gate the earlier shallow road-ditch was replaced by a much wider and deeper ditch which sloped down towards the present position of the Splash Dyke.

Beyond the western end of the east-west fence the line of the backfilled gully was taken up in Period II by a vertical-sided palisade-trench, 25cm wide and 30cm deep. It cut away obliquely the northern edge of the earlier gully and ran quite straight for 16m until it met the baulk. There were impressions in the bottom of it made by posts *c.* 15cm in diameter, which appeared to have been set at intervals of between 1.20m and 1.50m.

At the point where the palisade reached the fence represented by the post-pits, the southern end of another fence on a north-south alignment was discovered. Its line was marked by only four or five post-holes, and so it must remain hypothetical: but it would conveniently divide the yard or pen bounded on the east and south by the fence in post-pits from that bounded on the south by the palisade. Furthermore, an east-west series of post-pits north of, and parallel to, the palisade trench provides a northern boundary for a second, smaller, fenced enclosure.

The larger eastern enclosure on this showing measures 10m (33 Roman feet) east-west by at least 20m north-south, while the smaller western enclosure measures 6m (20 Roman feet) north-south by at least 16m east-west. Each enclosure had its own rectangular tank, which, to judge by the vertical sides, was once timber-reveted. Both had been dug to the top of the water-table, about 1.5m down, presumably to water stock.

The enclosures may be interpreted as the animal pens of a working farm. They lacked internal features, but their surfaces were covered with about 15cm of black, trampled, earth. The eastern yard with its particularly stout fence and larger tank may have penned cattle, while the western yard held smaller animals.

South of the main east-west fence and west of the road there was little to indicate the use of the land; but the butt-end of a very shallow north-south ditch was picked up.

### *The enclosures east of the road*

Across the road the east-west ditch at the north end of the site still appeared to be functional in Period II. A short length of a parallel ditch was uncovered in a trench dug south of the main excavation area. If these two ditches are contemporary, they delimit an enclosure 42m (140 Roman feet) north-south by at least 18m east-west.

### *The aisled barn*

Within this enclosure, precisely parallel to the northern east-west ditch, lay the remains of a small aisled barn. The stone packing round the six arcade-posts was noticed first, and a careful

search, using the standard formula for the plan of an aisled barn, revealed three smaller posts on the line of the south wall. The north wall had been removed by a deep medieval furrow, and the east and west gables had been destroyed by later Roman ditches.

The arcade-posts were erected in neatly dug square or rectangular flat-bottomed pits, measuring between 80cm and 1m in each direction. Their depth was at least 50cm, but this is a minimum measurement since the original ground surface had been lost. The posts set in the pits measured 30cm in diameter, and were held upright by heavy stone packing to a depth of 60cm or more.

The three surviving post-pits for the south wall were much shallower and only 40cm across. They were full of black soil and the post-impressions in the centre were about 10cm across. Patches of gravel in these post impressions and in the tops of some of the arcade-post pits suggest that the barn once had a gravelled floor.

The nave of the barn was about 4m wide, the aisle(s) 2m, while the arcade posts were spaced at 3.4m intervals. The original width of the building was therefore about 8m (? 25 Roman feet) and the overall length perhaps about 13m (? 40 Roman feet).

If this structure is correctly interpreted as an aisled barn, it is among the smallest of its class. It may be compared with the aisled barn near Winterton village (25ft by 50ft: *Journal of Roman Studies* 44,(1954, 92) and the first barn in the villa-complex at Welton Wold (7.5 by 15m: *Britannia* III, 1972, 311). An even closer parallel is provided by the early building at Lynch Farm (1972-3), restored on the basis of six (out of eight) massive post-pits as an aisled barn measuring 8m by 13.5m.

Our new aisled barn is one of the earliest dated examples of its class (see below). The wall construction on posts set in the ground rather than on a herringbone masonry foundation (with or without a horizontal plate) may reflect its early date. Likewise, its modest size may mark the beginnings of the architectural type.

The barn may have been used by a farmer in connection with the animal pens across the road.

Just south of the barn on the edge of the road were found a number of pits of various sizes. The largest of them (1.30m by 2.20m) had a clean filling of brown silted loam, while four smaller pits contained pottery and charcoal.

#### *The end of Period II and its dating*

The aisled barn was systematically demolished and its arcade-posts were rocked and then withdrawn from their holes. Only the south-west post seems to have been sawn off. A collection of pottery (with joining sherds of the same vessel) was dumped into two of the empty post-holes. More of a similar - if not the same - group was deposited in the eastern road-ditch north-west of the barn, in one of the pits south of the barn, in the easternmost post-hole of the palisade on the western side of the road and in a relatively shallow ditch nearby.

The group contained relatively few colour-coated vessels, and those were beakers, flagons and typologically early Castor boxes. Small indented beakers in colour-coated ware and a pale sandy grey-ware were common. There was a notable absence of the standard Nene Valley forms current in the third century. A date of c. A.D. 190-200 can be assigned to the group, and this accords with the samian and the mortarium present in it.

If the barn and associated pens across the road went out of use in the last years of the second century, when can Period II be said to begin? Two sherds of buff self-coloured pottery from a post-pit of the barn were not immediately helpful. A tentative date in the mid second century may be proposed for the beginning of Period II in the absence of any other relevant stratified deposits.

#### *The Third Period (early third century)*

The demolition gang for Period II successfully reduced the eastern part of the site to a *tabula rasa* — presumably their intention, if they were also responsible for the features which we have called Period III.

There is some evidence that the road-ditches were cleaned out periodically during Period II; but by the end of the second century they had become full of brown silt which may have been laid fairly rapidly. A new eastern road-ditch was cut just east of the previous one, but merged with it to the south. On the western side of the road lengths of ditch were re-cut at the southern end of the site and perhaps at the northern end, too — but in the central sector the refurbishing was not so thorough and the bottom of the earlier ditch could still be seen. The front of the stone packing round some of the fence posts was dislodged, but it may be that the fence was left standing and the ditch-diggers had hesitated to undermine it by digging deeper.

Patches of new metalling were added to the road surface in the form of pieces of limestone which showed very little sign of wear. In places they sealed the filling of the Period II road-ditches. Metalling of this kind was also noted in a *sondage* on the north of Splash Dyke.

A north-south ditch which removed the east gable of the aisled barn may also belong to the third phase of occupation. It runs at a slightly oblique angle to the road about 10m from it at the south end of our site. It remained in use for a considerable period of time; for a length of it was re-cut on a slightly different line. From its filling, which was identical with that of the road-ditches, came a few sherds of late third or early fourth-century colour-coated pottery, the latest material from the site.

In Period III the road and its ditches were the most significant features on the site, and it seems likely that they gave access to the Roman buildings and potters' kilns which have been recorded further north in the Development Corporation's Tree Nursery. While it may be far-fetched to see agricultural land being abandoned in favour of industrial development, the absence of fourth-century pottery and clear fourth-century activity on the site requires explanation. The stream which preceded Splash Dyke may have given rise to flooding in the later Roman period; but this need not have been the only factor.

### *Conclusions*

The present excavation has made an important contribution to our understanding of the complex pattern of land-utilisation in the northern suburbs of Durobrivae. We have been able to demonstrate second-century agricultural activity surprisingly close to the industrial working along Ermine Street and in the eastern sector of Normangate Field. But, perhaps more significant, new light has been thrown on the system of land-division which can be traced throughout Normangate Field.

Aerial photography in 1975 and in past seasons reveals that the land alongside Ermine Street and alongside many of the secondary drove-roads was divided into sub-rectangular allotments by a series of ditches. The same picture emerges again in greater detail from our magnetometer survey which was carried out down the projected axis of the north-south road uncovered in 1975. At the northern end of Normangate Field excavation now indicates that at least part of this system of land-division must date to the earlier second century.

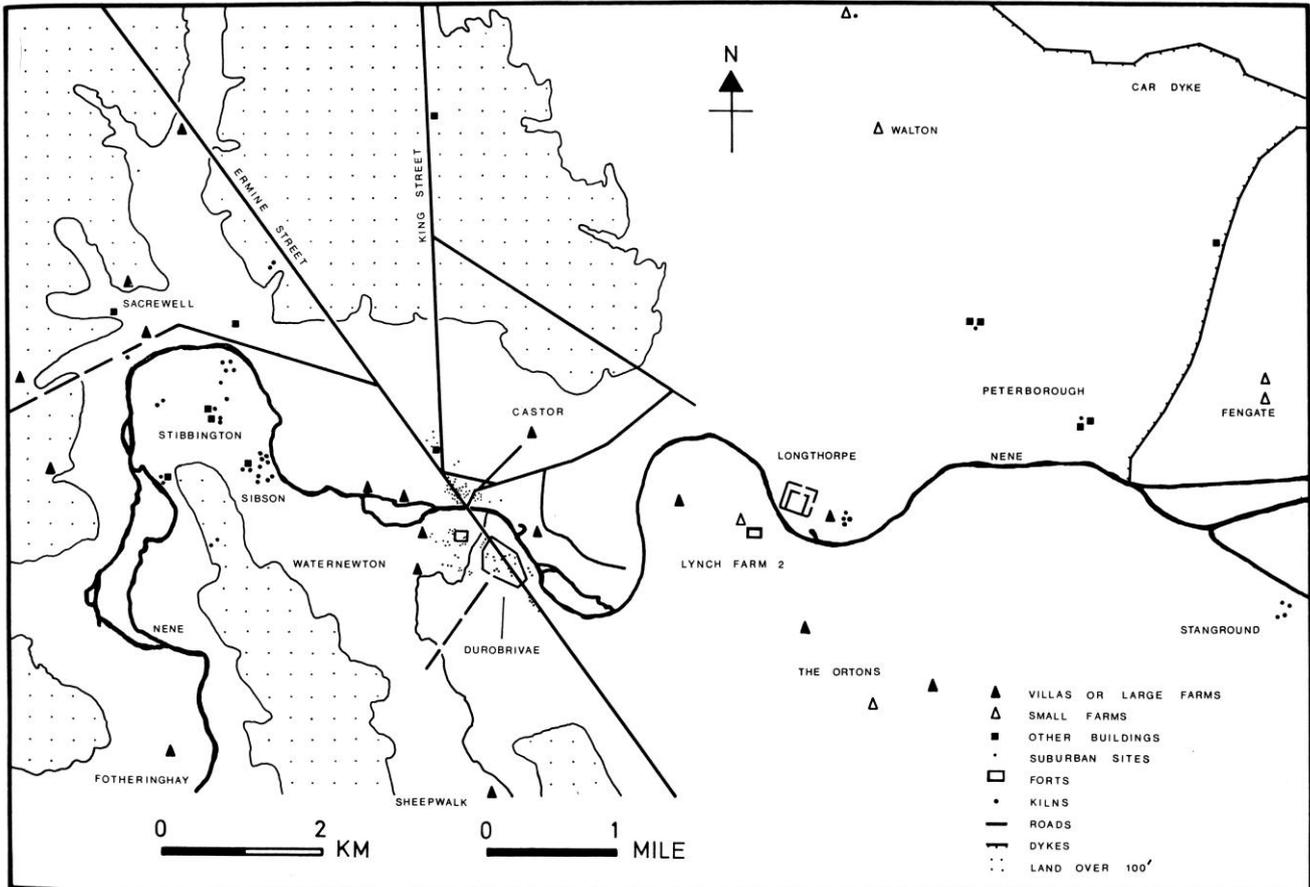
On the Ermine Street frontage the parcels of land were taken over by potters and metalworkers and the ditches may have been maintained as property boundaries. Our work in 1968 and 1969, viewed in the light of Mr E.T. Artis' more extensive excavations on Ermine Street, supports this hypothesis. If an early second-century date can be proposed for the *whole* system of land-division in Normangate Field, it may be that it came about in response to increasing pressure for land from the

inhabitants of the town. The needs of the craftsmen may have begun to conflict with the requirements of the local farmers - but this is mere speculation. It would not be unreasonable, however, to see the central authority of the *vicus* of Durobrivae at work here, dividing and assigning plots of land.

In 1970 and in 1973 we learnt how religious buildings away from Ermine Street might become potters' workshops, and that workshops might equally well be converted into shrines. Land-utilisation and building-function were not static, nor in a thriving community could they be expected to be.

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*The Lower Nene Valley in the Roman period showing the Roman town of Durobrivae south of the Nene and the Normangate Field complex on the north bank in Castor and Ailsworth parishes.*