

An Archaeological Resource Assessment of Roman Nottinghamshire

*Mike Bishop, Principal Archaeological Officer, Environment Department,
Nottinghamshire County Council.*

Note: For copyright reasons the figures are currently omitted from the web version of this paper. It is hoped to include them in future versions.

Introduction

Currently, there are some 648 records in the Nottinghamshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) which are relevant to the Roman period. These constitute some 9.25% of the total Record. They include 9 military installations, 5 so-called small towns, 12 villas and probable villas, over 250 settlements identified from cropmarks on aerial photographs, 2 temples or shrines, 28 coin hoards and 171 instances of single coins, and 516 surface scatters or finds spots of Roman material, principally pottery.

The Romans attracted the early interest of historians and antiquarians in Nottinghamshire no less than anywhere else, and some of the more major sites have long been known from earthworks and discoveries of building remains or objects. These were the principal means of identifying Roman sites before the advent of aerial photography. Our knowledge of many of the major sites is still dependent in large part upon excavations dating back to the 19th Century, as in the case of the Barton in Fabis villa ¹, through to the late 1960s. Particularly notable is the work, principally between the wars, of Oswald at sites such as Margidunum ² and the Mansfield Woodhouse villa ³. The 1950s and 1960s saw excavations at number of important sites, such as the small towns of Margidunum ⁴ and Ad Pontem ⁵, the temple site at Red Hill ⁶ or the villa at Southwell ⁷, often in response to threats from development or [as in the case of Rampton ⁸] as a reaction to field observation and new discoveries.

As in other areas of archaeological study in the County, knowledge and understanding of the Roman period was revolutionised from the late 1950s onwards by the results of aerial reconnaissance. First, the Trent Valley was shown to contain densely distributed remains of prehistoric and Roman settlements ⁹ and then, from 1974, the extensive landscape of Roman fields, trackways and settlements on the Bunter Sandstones of North Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire was revealed by Derrick Riley ¹⁰. Riley's work and, since 1980, field walking and study by the Trent and Peak Archaeological Trust has done much to describe and analyse this landscape. By contrast, comparable work in the Trent Valley has been limited. In the sector north of Newark, Whimster has provided a valuable description of cropmarks ¹¹ and a programme of fieldwalking has been undertaken in the area around South Muskham ¹² which was designated as an Area of Major Archaeological Importance in the Nottinghamshire Minerals Local Plan. However, although cropmarks have been re-plotted by the National Mapping Programme ¹³, much remains to be done to disentangle the palimpsest of Iron Age and Roman settlements and landscapes.

Excavation of these cropmark sites has been relatively limited. In the 1970s settlements of Iron Age and Roman date were excavated in advance of gravel extraction at Holme Pierrepont ¹⁴ and more recently, in 1988, excavations of rectangular enclosures on the gravel terrace above Holme Pierrepont, at Gamston, uncovered a sequence of Iron Age and Roman settlement and landscape features ¹⁵. In the Idle Valley salvage excavations at Chainbridge Lane ¹⁶ and Wildgoose Cottage ¹⁷ on features uncovered during gravel extraction, have made useful contributions to the understanding of the North Nottinghamshire landscape,

whilst more wide ranging information has come from larger scale excavations at Dunstan's Clump¹⁸ and Menagerie Wood, Worksop¹⁹.

Gamston and Wildgoose Cottage were part developer-funded, and Menagerie Wood was wholly developer-funded. Current work, much of which is long-term, following evaluation, and related to mineral extraction, is also developer-funded. In the Idle Valley excavations of Roman field systems at Blaco Hill Quarry, aka East Carr, Mattersey, have revealed some 70 small sub-rectangular enclosures, presumed to have an agricultural function, and previously unexpected complexities in field boundary ditch digging²⁰. Similar complexities are also apparent in the large area study in an extension of Hoveringham Quarry, in the Trent Valley, which is revealing a history of prehistoric and Roman land-use and settlement²¹. Also from this work comes what appears to be a field or stock pond, the fill of which has produced unusually large pieces of pottery, including Samian, together with organic objects. Downstream in the Trent Valley, evaluation has demonstrated a Roman date for what amounts to a large village at Ferry Farm, Collingham and another smaller settlement adjacent, both of which are to be excavated as the quarry progresses²². The Roman settlement at Rampton, discovered in the 1960's and now shown to consist of ditched enclosures and open settlement is also under examination²³.

Work is not confined to mineral sites however. Included amongst recent work is evaluation on a proposed supermarket site on London Road on the north side of Newark, adjacent to an area where Roman remains were known from earlier work, which has shown that Roman settlement was more extensive and better preserved than was previously believed²⁴. Most recent of all, while this paper was being written, has been the sectioning of the Roman road in the Greet Valley, north of Southwell at Belle Eau Park²⁵.

Despite all these discoveries and excavation, there remain limitations to our knowledge about Roman sites in Nottinghamshire. Substantial parts of the County are on geologies and soils, which do not generally produce cropmarks. Consequently, we are dependent upon the "traditional" means of site recognition in the claylands of the Mercia Mudstones north and south of the Trent, in the Coal Measures, and to a large extent also on the Magnesian Limestone. Here, the lack of systematic fieldwork limits both knowledge and interpretation, as does the lack of reporting to the SMR of Roman finds by both finders and researchers.

Nevertheless, the numbers and distributions of Roman finds and other observations shows that there is no reason to believe that these areas were any less densely settled than the cropmark producing zones. The potential of the areas without cropmarks is well illustrated by Laxton, a parish that has received much attention because of the survival of its mediaeval field systems. Less well known is that Roman pottery and other material has come from at least 13 different locations within the parish²⁶. Whatever the interpretation of these finds, at least one villa and one other substantial settlement appears to be involved. When all sources of information are put together, it is evident that the whole of Nottinghamshire was well settled, and its landscape well used, during the Roman period. At its apogee, probably in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., its population probably equalled, perhaps exceeded, that of 1086.

No satisfactory detailed synthesis of the evidence for Roman Nottinghamshire has been written, and there has been insufficient time in preparing this paper to investigate and close many of the issues involved in developing such a synthesis. In what follows then, I will look at military matters, settlement, economy, religion and the end of Roman Nottinghamshire, and thereby hope to cover the principal themes of this Frameworks project.

Military.

As discussed in the paper on the 1st Millennium, it appears likely that at the time of the Roman Conquest Nottinghamshire straddled a social, economic and possibly political divide. On one hand the Trent Valley and south Nottinghamshire was well settled, economically strong and viable, and looked to, indeed was part of, the societies and economy of the regions to the south and east. On the other hand, as one travelled north or west from the Trent Valley however, settlement became more sparse and probably poorer, and land use less intense and different. This geography is the most likely explanation for the distribution of early Roman military installations.

South or east of the Trent, Conquest period forts have been claimed at each of the small towns along the Fosse Way, at Vernemetum in the south, Margidunum, Ad Pontem, and Crococalana in the north. Evidence for these forts is not abundant, consisting largely of early pottery and from Ad Pontem some cropmarks alleged to suggest military fortifications²⁷. Mainly the case appears to be predicated on expectations which were not unreasonable at the time, but which might now be thought less certain. Indications of pre-Roman activity at Crococalana²⁸ and probably Margidunum²⁹ also, suggest that these and perhaps the other sites may have already been some sort of focal points, if only for communications. While this is interesting for what it may say about the initial establishment of Roman military control, it also suggests that the origins of these so-called small towns may not wholly lie in the post-Conquest development of settlements outside of fort gates.

The only other certain forts in this zone are at Holme³⁰ in the Trent Valley itself, at Marton on the Lincolnshire bank commanding the crossing from Littleborough on the Nottinghamshire side and at Newton Cliffs, also on the Lincolnshire bank. The fort at Holme is on the flood plain in a position to command of crossings of the Trent which are well-recognised in later history. North and west of the river, however, there is evidence of considerable military activity. Forts, fortresses and marching camps are known from Broxtowe³¹, Calverton³², Farnsfield³³, Osmanthorpe (Edingley)³⁴, Gleadthorpe³⁵, Scaftworth³⁶ and Littleborough³⁷, and from Rossington Bridge in South Yorkshire³⁸ only a little beyond the Nottinghamshire boundary. All of these, save Broxtowe and Littleborough are known from aerial photography. Broxtowe, north west of Nottingham, is known from finds and observations made during housing construction. The presence of a fort at Littleborough, which became the small town of Segelocum and the only site of this type north of the Trent, is indicated by what appear to be barrack-block type structures uncovered in excavation of the deepest deposits in the town. A number of these sites appear to be of more than one phase, either because of redesign as at Calverton and Osmanthorpe, or from the pottery as at Broxtowe, but where dateable material has been retrieved, all seem to fall into a pre-Flavian context.

Taken overall, the distribution of these installations suggests north and west of the Trent was a border zone alongside, even perhaps extending into, the client kingdom of Brigantia. The occupation and reoccupation of forts, in which vexillation fortresses such as Osmanthorpe, Newton Cliffs, and Rossington Bridge just beyond Nottinghamshire in South Yorkshire, and other forts such as Broxtowe, Littleborough, and Calverton may have functioned as winter quarters, summer bases or supply bases, suggests both “peace-time” manoeuvres and the platform for the eventual annexation of Brigantia.

These forts appear to have been abandoned after the 70s AD as the Roman Province was expanded northwards. No military presence is obvious in the County thereafter until the late Roman period when the little fortlet at Scaftworth was built. That this is the sum of the late Roman military provision may be doubted however. By this time the Province of Britannia had been divided and Nottinghamshire fell within the new Province of Flavia Caesariensis, with its capital at Lincoln and encompassing what in later centuries would be northern Mercia. The small towns of Margidunum, East Stoke and Littleborough were equipped with walls which, given the questionable urban status of these places, are likely to have been built for security rather than display. These so-called towns then, along with other communities, could well have housed full time or part-time, regular or para-military, detachments that would not necessarily be apparent in the limited archaeological record.

This distribution of the Scaftworth fortlet and the town fortifications suggests security dispositions guarding against movements from the north and up the Trent. We may see in this perhaps, the first manifestation of a strategic imperative that influenced the place of Nottinghamshire in national affairs from Anglo-Saxon times down to the 18th Century. In this, Nottinghamshire north of the Trent was border country between north and south, with communications channelled into the Rossington Gap on the county boundary with Yorkshire, where a gravel ridge runs through the lowland marshes. While these lowlands appear to have been habitable for most of the Roman period, it is likely that the marshes that occupied them subsequently were growing by late Roman times. The Rossington Gap then was a critical point at which hostile movement from the north had to be controlled. If such movement were not broken in this area, then the last line of defence between north and south was the Trent, for once this was crossed a multiplicity of routes

southwards were available. By the late Roman period then, it can be suggested that Nottinghamshire's border position had come to the fore again, now to be interpreted perhaps as a defensive posture contrasting with the offensive positioning of forts in the Conquest period.

Settlement

The evidence for Roman settlement in Nottinghamshire is extensive but difficult to characterise in a coherent fashion. Along the Fosse there are the 4 small towns of Vernemetum, Margidunum, Ad Pontem and Crococalana, to which we must add a substantial roadside settlement at Newark. Here recent excavations have revealed two phases of settlement, the first belonging to the 1st and early 2nd centuries that was of high status or military character, and the second belonging to the late 3rd and 4th centuries. At Littleborough there is the fifth small town of Segelocum. [Since this paper was presented, a collection of metal detecting and surface finds from Red Hill has been shown to the County Archaeologist. This collection demonstrates widespread settlement, metalworking and probably commercial activity on a scale far greater than that of a rural settlement. Taken together with the temple and so-called "villa" on the same site, it is evident that Red Hill was a major urban-type settlement at the junction of a communication system with a possible waterfront on the River Soar, close to the confluence with the Trent.]

Roman villas are known from across the county, ranging in form from winged corridor houses as at Car Colston³⁹, to full-scale courtyard and outer compound types as at Barton in Fabis, Mansfield Woodhouse, or Cromwell⁴⁰. To these must be added less well understood sites such as those at Thurgarton⁴¹, Sibthorpe⁴², or Laxton where building remains, material culture or other observations suggest villas or sites of some status. In the Trent Valley, and on the gravels of the Smite/Devon Valley, a number of different types of settlement can be observed, although detail is not possible because of the lack of analysis of cropmarks. Over 105 settlement foci can be identified amongst these, but this takes no account of the less dense and less striking features and the pottery scatters which might indicate unenclosed or smaller scale settlements.

Amongst the settlement 'foci' in the Trent Valley 3 main settlement types stand out. There are enclosed farmsteads of a type we have already seen in the Iron Age, like those at Holme Pierrepont, which comprise a series of subrectangular ditched enclosures, some of which appear to have contained dwellings while others were used for stock or other functions. Then there are arrangements of individual rectangular enclosures and enclosure complexes that are strung out along trackways, which is a type that is particularly noticeable on the north bank of the Trent in the Newark Basin. Finally there are the rarer settlements of such size and/or complexity that the term "village" seems the only one applicable. Examples of these would include Ferry Farm, Collingham, where an extensive complex of subrectangular enclosures of various sizes and proportions is set within a street pattern of varying widths and with wide Y or funnel shaped junctions, or the seemingly more simple settlement across the stream from Ferry Farm, at Cow Wath Pasture, Collingham, which appears to consist of regulated rows of rectangular enclosures either side of a central trackway.

Settlement complexes similar to the types seen in the Trent Valley are also found on the west bank of the Idle Valley, where they appear to be on the eastern margin of the so-called "Brickwork Plan" landscape of the northern Sherwood Sandstones. Christened the "brickwork plan" because of the rectilinear fields which originally appeared to be characteristic, this landscape has been shown in fact to be made up of a number of elements, phases and settlement types, with a chronological depth which begins before the Conquest and extends to the 4th century. Simple rectangular enclosures of varying sizes, with varying depths and widths of ditches, and clusters of enclosures appear to characterise the Roman phases. Excavation of one such cluster at Dunstan's Clump revealed occupation spanning the 1st to 3rd centuries, within a rectangular ditched enclosure exhibiting three phases of construction, adaptation and replanning, accommodating rectangular post-built structures. Excavation of another ditched rectangular enclosure, on the edge of another cluster, at Menagerie Wood, Worksop, showed settlement from the 2nd to 4th centuries with several phases of ditch digging, pits, post-hole, and possible palisades.

The "Brickwork Plan" landscape covers over 100 square miles in North Nottinghamshire. Farther south on the same Sherwood Sandstones, comparable enclosures and clusters of enclosures appear with some

adjacent pieces of field systems, but without the apparent extent and coherence seen in the north. Elsewhere, evidence for settlement consists largely of finds and some few excavated features. These show that, settlement was extensive in the Clays and Coal Measures and probably no less dense than in the areas producing cropmarks.

Overall, the impression left by this evidence is one of reinforcement of patterns that were already in existence or were evolving at the time of the Conquest. The towns and the villas are new types of settlement, the most Romanised or Romanising types of settlement, but for most of the remainder we appear to be seeing the continuation of communities plus the establishment of new ones in areas already well settled before the Conquest and the expansion of settlement into underpopulated areas. Many of the rectilinear fields in the “brickwork plan” and their associated enclosures for example, appear to be infilling central areas on the Sherwood Sandstones which had been left by the occupants of the earlier settlements on their peripheries⁴³. Such evidence may suggest that the Roman period saw an initial rise in and then maintenance of population levels until at least the 4th century, and probably later. However, we must beware the possibility that such population rise is overrated because of the bias imparted by the increased volume of Roman material culture, and its visibility to us, as compared to earlier periods

Although there is clearly a whole range of variation in wealth and status amongst the settlements of Roman Nottinghamshire, in which we may safely see the villas and towns at the higher end and with much less certainty some of the “brickwork plan” settlements at the other, the evidence for the relationships between these in a hierarchy of settlement and economic structure has not been identified [or sought]. There may be a relationship between towns and villas to be deduced from the occurrence of some villas in the vicinity of some towns. However the models of symbiosis or of movement of the elite out of towns which have become current on the basis of such villa distributions appear to be less than the whole story of Nottinghamshire. The most urban looking, certainly with the longest walls, of the Nottinghamshire towns at Segelocum (Littleborough) does not at present appear to have a cluster of villas around it, while the villas at Mansfield Woodhouse, and Oldcotes have no obvious urban focus and appear to belong to a particular group of such sites running down from Yorkshire along the Magnesian Limestone. Other villas in south and central Nottinghamshire also appear to be at some remove from the towns. Of course, it may be that we can use the distribution of the villas to suggest economic or administrative territories for the towns, but before we do this we will need to look more closely at the evidence and consider with more rigour the criteria to be applied. It is insufficient to work from distribution maps alone; local topography and the distributions of other types of settlement must also come into consideration, particularly when as in Nottinghamshire both social and physical geography is dominated by the major river valley, the Trent.

The relationship of villas to other types of settlement is even more enigmatic. Physical proximity is not necessarily any guide. No particular pattern of association between types of settlements and villas has yet been identified. If on the analogy of Lockington, just over the Nottinghamshire border in Leicestershire, we may suspect a relationship between villas and larger “village-like” settlements, how then should we look at the proximity of the Collingham sites at Ferry Farm and Cow Water Pasture to the major villa site at Cromwell. So close, and yet so far because the Trent lies between them just as it appears to have done in Roman times.

Indeed, some of these comparatively scarce larger rural settlements themselves approach the small towns in extent, plan form and types of activity. Ferry Farm, Collingham is as large, perhaps larger in area than Ad Pontem and the plan of its streets and enclosures resembles the layout inside the walls of Segelocum/Littleborough as recently plotted by the RCHME's National Mapping Programme. The pottery and activity in the settlement at Newark could suggest a closer relationship to the towns than to usual rural sites.

Further, as we now know the history and development of those small towns may be longer and more complicated than was once thought. Areas of settlement may misfit the circuit of the defensive walls, as at Littleborough where the occupied area appears much less than the enclosed area, or at Margidunum where there was “ribbon” development along the Fosse Way beyond the walls. The distinctiveness of the small towns appears to reside mainly in the presence seemingly structured layouts and walls. Both of these are likely to be a function of the role these places fulfilled in provincial administration and economies, as

staging in the “cursus publicus” with the suggested mansio at Margidunum ⁴⁴, or as market centres. Otherwise the degree of difference between small towns and some other settlement types may have been comparatively slight.

Economy

Of the economy of Roman Nottinghamshire we can say little in detail. The extent of settlement and the palaeoenvironmental evidence combine to indicate a landscape well cleared of woodland and well used for farming. The demand for timber and wood products will have been high from the Conquest onwards, and can not have been met by the clearance of surviving pieces of primaeval forest which is indicated by the forest oak used to line a 1st century well at Margidunum ⁴⁵ or of a younger woods as in the building of the Roman road at Scaftworth ⁴⁶. As in later periods there must have been woodland that was carefully managed to produce both fuel and wood products. Coppiced hazel from Menagerie Wood and Sherwood type oak from the well lining at Wildgoose Cottage provide hints of this.

Turning to the farming economy, the field systems of the Sherwood Sandstones in North Nottinghamshire have already been mentioned, as comprising more than the coaxial elements that monopolise the eye on first sight. Similar coaxial elements are also visible in the Trent Valley, although the cohesiveness and extent of the “brickwork plan” is frequently lacking. There may be several reasons for this which may lie in geography, i.e. the extent of the areas of cropmark production or the width of the Valley and the presence of the River. However, it may also reflect differences in land use and agricultural regime.

At Bunny, the palaeoenvironmental evidence from a well indicates a mixed agricultural regime, with tillage of wheat and other grain crops, grassland and possibly hedgerows ⁴⁷. Bones demonstrate the keeping of sheep and some pigs. A predomination of cattle bones after the 1st century at Margidunum could hint at some specialisation in animal husbandry in the surrounding region. In the Idle Valley, timber and insect remains from the well at Wildgoose Cottage, Lound appear to indicate an open environment on the sandlands and a grassland environment in the valley. Management of this grassland could be reflected in the many small sub-rectangular enclosures at Blaco Hill if we can accept an interpretation of these as hay ricks. These grasslands might support the contention that the brickwork plan landscape was designed for livestock management and more specifically sheep. Direct evidence of this might be the burial of a neo-natal lamb at Menagerie Wood. It is perhaps possible that the sandlands were of limited use for arable in the enhanced conditions of “droughtiness” which the warmer climate of the early Roman period may have engendered, despite the undrained state of the Idle Valley and the untouched aquifer. However, this observation needs qualification for growing seasons are likely to have been shorter also.

Evidence for arable appears in the pollen record or in grains and the seeds of weeds of cultivation at a number of sites, Quern stones are not uncommon finds, while a corn-drying oven is recorded from Bunny, and charred grain was found in the settlement at Carnavon School, Bingham ⁴⁸. Further, the increased deposition of alluvium in the Trent Valley in the late Roman period indicates extensive ploughing at the least, if not the introduction of the heavy plough as has been claimed ⁴⁹.

In sum then, the evidence is too limited to provide a coherent picture of the Roman agricultural economy in Nottinghamshire. We may perhaps go so far in reconciling the variety of suggestions possible as to say that the period saw an increase in arable but that farming in general was weighted towards animal husbandry, perpetuating a possible pre-Conquest emphasis, and that local, district or estate specialisations are likely.

Other local economic evidence is limited. A pottery kiln is recorded from Newark ⁵⁰, and the recent excavations have produced pottery that is believed to have been manufactured locally. Tile kilns have been recorded at Sookholme ⁵¹ and Bulcote ⁵². Metalworking is attested from a number of sites. Iron slag comes from Carlton in Lindrick ⁵³, South Muskham ⁵⁴, Gringley on the Hill ⁵⁵, Misterton ⁵⁶, Saundby ⁵⁷ and Red Hill. If these records do indicate iron smelting then the raw materials will have had to be imported to the sites, for the area of immediately available iron ores will have been the Coal Measures. Iron working is also evident at Margidunum, perhaps to be associated with the early military occupation. Iron “hammer flakes”, indicating smithing, come from Menagerie Wood. The only other direct evidence of metalworking is a

small bronze smelting hearth at Rampton. The fragmentary “scrap” quality of the portions of two lead cisterns or “fonts” from Brough and Thorpe⁵⁸ may perhaps suggest the recycling of lead, if ritual behaviour is discounted. The lead pig from Farnsfield⁵⁹ however, is best interpreted as being related to long distance trade rather than local metalworking. Although it may be anticipated that the Romans dug coal, no evidence of such works have been identified. That coal was obtained and used is shown by its presence at Carlton in Lindrick, Gringley on the Hill, and Menagerie Wood.

Access to a wide market economy is demonstrated by the imported pottery and other objects coming from many of the County’s Roman sites. Perhaps the most exotic evidence of this may be the grape pips which were found at Menagerie Wood, that is unless they were locally grown in the warmer conditions which prevailed into the 3rd century. Roads will have played a part in the development and maintenance of this market, and in the role which the small towns may have had as market centres. Some 11 roads in Nottinghamshire can be ascribed to the Roman period, with varying degrees of certainty. The evidence for these is summarised in the Appendix to this paper. Most appear to have had military origins although their use of pre-existing trackways in some areas is likely. Overall, the evidence for roads is not substantial given the volume of cropmarks and other data.

Religion

One Roman temple or shrine is known from the County, at Red Hill. The principal evidence for this is several lead curse tablets, the structural evidence being fragmentary and somewhat incoherent. It is clear however that this site comprised a complex of buildings, one of which appears to have been high status, described by some sources as a villa. A find of a votive figurine at Kingshaugh⁶⁰, in a location where there are petrifying springs suggests another likely shrine in the north of the County. Altar stones are recorded from Cottam⁶¹ and Granby⁶², and tombstones from Thorpe and North Wheatley⁶³. A lead figurine, possibly of a fertility goddess, comes from Calverton⁶⁴.

Cremation burials are recorded at Newark⁶⁵, and mausolea for cremations at the Mansfield Woodhouse Villa. Inhumation burials are known from Greasley⁶⁶, Scrooby⁶⁷ and from the cemeteries of the small towns of Margidunum and Brough, where lead coffins have also been produced.

Classical gods, Jupiter Optimus Maximus at Red Hill, local and household gods appear to be the objects of the religious activities represented by these finds, whilst the burials in the towns cemeteries are likely to be a mixture of both pagan and Christian burials. Specific evidence of Christianity is provided by the portions of two lead cisterns or fonts from Brough and Thorpe which have already been mentioned and the recent find of another complete, but crushed and damaged, example from Flawborough⁶⁸. This last find had been dumped into a Roman ditch on the edge of what appears to have been a high status, probably villa, site. Its survival, condition and location could suggest a ritual “killing” of its potency as part of the depositional process, perhaps indicating the continuation of pre-Roman beliefs and practices amongst the population.

Finally, although not necessarily religious, this is an appropriate place to mention for the sake of completeness the find of an wooden alleged statue in a possibly classical style from the fens between Misson and Haxey⁶⁹ and a marble bust, claimed to be of an Emperor and 3rd century in date from Claborough⁷⁰.

End of Roman Nottinghamshire

The circumstances and processes of the transition of Roman Nottinghamshire to Anglo-Saxon Nottinghamshire are no clearer than for any other part of England. It is marked by the decline and disappearance of the villas and small towns in particular, and the disappearance of the characteristically highly visible material culture particularly pottery. Although the dating of later 4th century material appears to present problems, coin evidence suggests that the occupation of villas, towns and rural sites was maintained through this century. Decline and disappearance of the towns and villas, and of other sites, seems to belong to the 5th century. While some Anglo-Saxon sites and material may belong to the latter half of the 5th century, most appear to date from the 6th century. This may suggest that the 5th century saw

a sub-Roman society in traditional pre-Roman economic and social structures came back into the fore, but now with new networks of power and in new circumstances.

Some of the new power factors may be represented by a set of 5th Anglo-Saxon brooches from Brough ⁷¹, by small quantities of Anglo-Saxon pottery from Margidunum, late pits and other features including Anglo-Saxon pottery from the Southwell villa, and some of the earliest cremations in the Millgate Cemetery at Newark ⁷². Evidence for changing circumstances may be found in the increased deposition of alluvium in the Trent Valley during the late Roman period. This may be the result of a number of factors in combination such as the deteriorating climate, which was becoming colder and wetter, rising sea level, and the possible onset of an ecological crisis precipitated by over cultivation of land with vulnerable soil structures such as on the Sherwood Sandstones. In the Idle Valley rising ground water was beginning the growth of the extensive peat marshes which would eventually bury the Roman landscape. Such changes will have affected land use, making farming more difficult and causing changes in agricultural regimes and patterns. Nor should we forget that historical sources record outbreaks of plague and other epidemics during the 5th century, which may well have reduced a population already in decline as a result of the deteriorating agricultural situation.

Overall, it appears that the effects of the decline of Roman Nottinghamshire were felt primarily in the 5th and 6th centuries and resulted in a reversion to the “Two Cultures” geography discussed previously, and which is apparent in succeeding centuries. In Nottinghamshire north and west of the Trent there appears to have been retraction of settlement and the eventual conversion the sandlands to rough grazing and woodland, with huge expansion of woods on the clays of the Mercia Mudstones and the Coal Measures. South of the Trent on the other hand population levels and the basic economic vitality were maintained, even if they were reduced and settlement was to be reorganised in such a way that many settlement sites became redundant ⁷³.

In both areas, however, some enduring influences survived. These may be seen in the continued use of some boundaries, in the association of some villa and town sites with activities of status and power, and in the interpretation of other aspects of Anglo-Saxon settlement and social organisation.

To sum up then, we have a wealth of evidence from Roman Nottinghamshire that could permit a much more extensive account than this poor offering. Equally important, the Nottinghamshire has the types and range of sites and the geographical location to be able to contribute significantly to the wider research issues in the Roman period. As usual, all it needs is the investment of resources, commitment and energy.

Appendix

Roads

It is apposite to consider roads at this point since most of these appear to have a military origin.

- **Fosse Way, modern A46** - Seen west of modern road at Willoughby on Wolds cemetery, possibly beneath modern road at Saxondale south of Margidunum, in Margidunum & Brough, and agger claimed west of modern road at Syerston and Langford. An early route has been claimed northwards from Margidunum, 300 yards west of, and parallel to, the modern and allegedly later road. Generally, there is scant evidence of the Roman road beneath the modern road.

- **Till Bridge Lane** - Lincoln to Doncaster. Seen in vicinity of the forts at Scaftworth.
- **Greet Valley** - from Trent crossing at Ad Pontem northwards past Southwell to Osmanthorpe fort and northwards to Bilsthorpe. Identified from cropmarks & gravel metalling approaching Edingley fort, and sectioned in Belle Eau Park, Bilsthorpe..
- **Ad Pontem** - cropmarks & gravel metalling approaching Roman town from east. Placename to the Bridge(s). Linked to Sewston Lane?
- **Modern A6097**, possible/likely road along Dover Beck from Fosse Way at Margidunum. Identified from a historically attested road from Bingham to the Trent crossing at Gunthorpe, through Margidunum.
- **Great North Road** - mediaeval GNR and later A1 paralleled in cropmark trackway north of Newark, in the Muskham, and Cromwell.
- NB No need to look for crossing at Cromwell now that Roman Bridge here has been shown to be mid-Saxon. But crossing somewhere in this zone likely - alleged road west from Brough, early fort at Holme, does this point to Holme crossing as later?
- **Long Hedge Lane** - Long distance trackway used as boundary of parishes to cross/join Fosse at Syerston, crossing Trent where? Pre-Roman in origin - no evidence of metalling in Notts.
- **The Portway** - post mediaeval long distance route through Leakes linking to Vernementum or Waltham on the Wolds and beyond, - crossing Trent somewhere in Ratcliffe on T /Lockington area - linked to RC temple at Red Hill/what about the Hemington bridges ?
- **New Bound Mill, on Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire border, northwards modern A 6417** through Clowne towards Castleford/Doncaster. Should link southwards with Broxtowe fort, and may perhaps be reflected in the western boundary of Sherwood as described in 13th Century perambulations. No structural evidence in Nottinghamshire.
- **Roman Bank, Serlby. Not a Roman Road** - mediaeval park boundary
- **Coventry Lane** - alleged R road from Trent at Attenborough to Broxtowe fort. Problem is that prior to recent times Coventry Lane deviated off line through Bilborough. While this would indeed lead it towards the Broxtowe fort, which is itself off-line from Coventry Lane, it renders arguments based on straightness and alignment dubious.
- **Strelley** - place-name points to Roman road, possibly Broxtowe fort to Little Chester

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