Excavations at
The Paddock, High Dike
Navenby

Gavin Glover

Navenby Archaeology Group

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Illustrations by Gavin Glover and Ian M Rowlandson

Finds photography by Chris Casswell

Edited by Natasha Powers
The Paddock excavation revealed a complex series of remains, dating almost entirely to the Roman period. A sequence of five buildings were encountered within the excavation area indicating relatively frequent redevelopment of the site during a period from the 3rd to early 5th centuries AD.

Features associated with the buildings included a possible road or yard surface which was maintained throughout much of the period that the buildings were in use, along with ovens, pits and the remnants of possible floor surfaces.

The site produced a remarkably large assemblage of finds which included, 7619 sherds of Roman pottery, 3734 fragments of animal bone, 312 coins, 238 fragments of glass, the remains of at least nine new-born infants and a number of personal finds such as bone hair pins, iron styli, fragments of shale bracelets, a glass intaglio from a ring, at least two gaming counters, a lead dice, several pieces of copper alloy scale armour and a large number of iron nails.

This impressive assemblage was recovered from an excavation area measuring just 9.0m x 8.5m and serves to highlight the intensity of activity in and around the excavation area during the Roman period.
Introduction

The excavation formed part of a community project set up by the Navenby Archaeology Group and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The aim was to ensure as much community involvement in the archaeological works as possible.

All of the excavation staff, with the exception of the site director, were volunteers drawn from the Navenby Archaeology Group, other local archaeological groups (including the Grantham Archaeological Group and the Lincoln Archaeology Group for Excavation Education and Research) and from the wider local community.

The project ran during the week and at weekends, within school term time and during school holidays, and with the active involvement of volunteers in excavation, surveying, finds work and other post-excavation tasks. A total of 160 volunteer staff worked on the project.

The archaeological aim of the project was to investigate archaeological remains in a small, uncultivated paddock on the east side of High Dike, a road which follows the line of Roman Ermine Street.

The excavation revealed seven phases of use and a complex sequence of Roman remains, the most significant being a sequence of structural remains relating to five buildings which fronted onto Ermine Street and dated from the 3rd to the early 5th century.
A genuine community excavation
Navenby is located in the administrative district of North Kesteven District Council, approximately 13km south of central Lincoln. The excavation took place within a paddock situated to the south of Green Man Road, which fronts onto the High Dyke. The excavation area was a roughly rectangular block of land approximately 9m x 8.5m and lay at approximately 67m above Ordnance Datum.

The local geology is a clay bedrock forming part of the Lincolnshire Limestone Crossi Beds.
The earliest significant remains at the site relate to its use as a quarry for limestone, probably for building stone. The quarry comprised a large, irregular pit that extended across most of the excavation area and which was cut directly into the limestone bedrock. Full excavation was not possible but pottery from the upper fills of this feature suggests that it was filled in and levelled by the late 2\textsuperscript{nd} to the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century AD.
Phase 2

The Roman settlement at Navenby probably had its antecedent in a small, native, enclosed farmstead located close to Chapel Lane approximately 350m northwest of the present site (Lyall 1994, Palmer-Brown 1994). Ermine Street, a major Roman road running from London to Lincoln, York and beyond, was constructed in the 1st century AD and its creation likely saw the replacement of the native farm by settlement along the road. The relatively low volume of finds recovered from the quarry fills at the present site might be explained if the site was located in an undeveloped area on the southern periphery of the settlement.
The 3rd century metalled surface

After the quarry had been filled in, a metalled surface was constructed over it. Pottery from this surface suggests that it was constructed during the 3rd century and it is possible that it was laid to stabilise the relatively soft ground of the filled in quarry.

The impetus for this may have been that by the 3rd century the settlement was expanding, at least on the east side of Ermine Street, and this previously marginal area was ripe for development.
The earliest structural remains at the site post-date the filled in quarry and partly extend over it.

Two floor surfaces, set close together, were both constructed from limestone fragments. One of these was bounded on its southern side by a stone kerb, or possibly a narrow wall.

A large posthole at the end of the kerb probably indicates that a structure with timber uprights was constructed either adjacent to the floors or extending over one of them.

Pottery from the floor surfaces and landscaping layers was typically of late 2nd century or later date but, as these layers extended over the metalled surface constructed over the top of the quarry, the floor surfaces and structure must be of at least 3rd century date.

Little of the putative structure survived but the orientation of the kerb or wall line suggests that the building was constructed at a right angle to the course of Ermine Street. The absence of a kerb on the western side of the floor may be the result of truncation, but it is also possible that the structure was open on its west side where it faced the road.

The function of this structure is unclear but the size of the finds assemblage recovered from the floor surfaces was relatively modest which may imply that it was not lived in or simply that it had been kept very clean.
In the late 3rd or early 4th century, the site was levelled again and a building with stone foundations was constructed. Only part of what was probably the foundation of the west wall of the building survived but landscaping deposits extended over much of the eastern half of the excavation area and the building may originally have extended as far.
A near complete absence of roof tile from the site suggests that the roof of the building was not covered with tile, and thatch or perhaps wooden shingles are more likely to have been used. Similar roof coverings were presumably used on all subsequent buildings at the site.

A sequence of three, circular ovens had been built into the floor of the building. All were small and produced only low densities of charred organic remains. As a result it is not clear what they were being used for and they may have served more than one purpose, although clearly their use for cooking is a possibility and the building may have had a domestic function.

Ferrous spherules were noted in environmental samples taken from one of the ovens but not in the quantities required to suggest that the oven had been used in metalworking and a more likely explanation is that metalworking was being undertaken nearby or that the spherules had been brought to the site in deposits dumped as part of ground levelling or landscaping activity.

The construction of the building in the late 3rd or early 4th century is probably broadly contemporary with the excavated evidence from the west side of Ermine Street. There, the extensive investigations undertaken in 2009 (Palmer-Brown and Rylatt 2011) suggest ribbon development of properties fronting onto Ermine Street.
The circular ovens

The 2009 excavations concentrated mainly on the final surviving phases of Roman activity and therefore offer only limited insights into the origin of the settlement but it is noteworthy that the earliest stone founded building at the present site appears to be contemporary with what appeared to be the later phases of activity on the opposite side of the road.

In all probability, by the late 3rd or early 4th century the Ermine Street frontage on both sides of the road was cluttered with properties.
Of particular note within the pottery assemblage associated with this building was a group of 30 fragments from a facepot. The pot was made locally and shares similarities to examples found in Lincoln and during 2009 excavations in Navenby. These pots are most commonly associated with household shrines or areas where fire presents a danger and it seems most likely that this example fits within this group.

The facepot
Phase 4

Plan of Phases 4 and 5

The building seen in Phase 3 was replaced by a second, similar structure which continued in use into Phase 5. The date of construction is uncertain but pottery from within the wall of the building was of late 3rd to 4th century date and the building is most likely of 4th century date.
The 4th century building
The remains indicate that the building was extensively refurbished on at least one occasion in the later 4th century when internal features were replaced.

The remains of what appeared to be a large stone structure were revealed within the building but were largely obscured by a later stone-built oven, which was constructed during Phase 5. Although only partially visible, this structure shared some similarities with the later oven and may have been a similar, earlier feature.

**Phase 5**

The large stone-built oven was constructed during a phase of refurbishment of the building and suggests a degree of continuity of use, not just with the possible replacement of one stone oven with another within the same building but with large ovens replacing the previous smaller, circular ones.

A very large stone oven would not be a simple replacement of the earlier small circular ovens and it is possible that the construction of the new building in Phase 4 represents a move from a domestic dwelling to a commercial property, or to a greater emphasis on the commercial aspect of a property serving as both a domestic and commercial premises. It may also reflect an improvement in the status of the buildings occupants.
The later oven had a narrow central passage where burning took place, surrounded by a large square stone structure and a rake out pit at the end of the central passage. It is comparable to examples such as the oven in Building 5 at Dragonby in North Lincolnshire (May 1996, 87–88), which is also thought to be of late 4th century date.

There are some physical similarities between the oven and examples often interpreted as grain drying structures. However, the setting of the feature within a building which produced a large assemblage of domestic style pottery, might imply that it was used mainly as an oven for the preparation of food. Whole wheat grains and spelt chaff were common in soil samples taken from the fills of the stone oven.

The recovery of a nearly complete, miniature shell-gritted jar from the rake-out pit of the oven may be evidence of ritual closure of the oven and the use of miniature vessels in similar contexts has a number of parallels.

A large circular pit adjacent to the oven had been carefully dug, perhaps originally to accommodate a lining, although none had survived. It may have acted as a water tank, perhaps associated with the use of the oven. A greyware wide-mouthed bowl and a complete antler were found within the pit in what appears to have been a structured deposit, perhaps with the objects deliberately placed to signify the end of the life of the pit, the oven or the building.
The large, stone-built oven
Probable closure deposit with greyware bowl and antler

Closure deposits are not well understood but are commonly associated with beliefs related to household gods.

A new-born baby had been buried in a shallow pit against the inside edge of the building. The burial of young infants against the footings of buildings is not uncommon in Roman settlements and two were recovered in similar situations during the 2009 excavations on the opposite side of Ermine Street (Palmer-Brown and Rylatt 2011 46, 51).
The position of new-born babies within Roman society was different to older children and adults as a baby was viewed as being born twice, once at birth and then again when socially accepted and named.

Between these two births the child was in a liminal position, not yet accepted into society (Moore 2009, 33). Burial of young children was markedly different to adults, undertaken without the level of ceremony applied to older children or adults but as liminal beings infants could be seen as a conduit between the living and the spiritual world. The burial of young children in association with hearths, ovens or other sources of fire in domestic settings is a recurrent theme (ibid, 39) and that may have been the case at the present site where the burial had been made in close association with the oven.

External to the building a stone surface was constructed which most likely acted as a yard or pavement between the building and Ermine Street.

The construction of the surface, although sound, did not appear to be solid enough or of sufficient quality to have been Ermine Street itself, although the possibility cannot be completely dismissed.

There is no evidence that this yard surface had existed prior to this time and its construction seems to have been associated with the construction of the building containing the large ovens. The construction of the surface may further reflect the change in function or status of the building, providing a hardwearing and possibly ‘cleaner’ access to the property from Ermine Street.
In the later 4th or possibly the early 5th century a further building was constructed over the demolished remains of the earlier building and over the ovens.
The stone foundation of the new building was slightly wider than its predecessor but part of the foundation had been built directly on top of the earlier structural remains. Such a construction method would have lead inevitably to instability and may have contributed to the short lifespan of the building which probably went out of use in the early 5th century.

What appeared to be a length of internal partition wall extended from the west wall of the building to create a defined square space in the corner of the building which measured approximately 2m x 2m.

A large greyware storage jar had been placed upright within a pit in the corner of the defined area, buried so that only its rim and perhaps part of its shoulders were visible. Attrition inside the vessel suggests that fermentation took place within the jar, a possibility being that the jar had been used for brewing.

A whole pot lid and complete bowl were also found next to the jar, both partially covered by the rubble of what appeared to be collapse of the southern wall of the building.

Greyware storage jar and bowl
The distribution of coins from this phase of activity is also striking, with a very distinct concentration of coins found within the small, defined area in the corner of the building. Of the 73 coins from deposits originating during this phase of activity 53 were found within this 2m square area. This is clearly not a random scatter, but may indicate some specialised function for this small space within the building.

There are a number of possibilities to account for the distribution of the coins. It could reflect the spread of a dropped purse or a disturbed hoard to name just two. However, the concentration of coins may also represent the loss of coins used in payment.

The short length of internal foundation need not necessarily be a wall and could be an internal fitting such as the base of a shop counter or bar.

As the erosion of the internal surface of the buried jar is likely to be evidence of fermentation and its was positioned behind the partition, the interpretation that the feature was the bar in some form of hostelry is an attractive one.

The coins may represent payments across the bar or counter which have been dropped. Such a large number of lost coins would be plausible if the floor had a covering such as floor boards where the coins could fall between gaps.

The notion that the building may have been a hostelry is supported further by the recovery of 82 fragments of vessel glass, by far the largest assemblage of glass from any of the phases of activity on site. The glass most likely originates from drinking vessels, suggesting that drinking was an important aspect of the activity being undertaken within the building, whilst fine ceramic tableware from the building may indicate that the establishment was also serving food.
Profile of the greyware jar
Altar and stone cup, possibly a second altar
The apparently late 4th or early 5th century date for the possible hostelry seems at odds with the results from the 2009 excavations on the other side of Ermine Street. It has been suggested that the evidence from that site points to the settlement being in decline by this period with middens and dumps of material being deposited over the earlier Roman settlement remains and the area becoming waste ground (Palmer-Brown and Rylatt 2011, 65–66).

The suggestion from the present site is that there was considerable redevelopment during the late 4th century and into the early 5th century, pointing to a complex situation in the settlement, perhaps with some parts experiencing decline but others prospering.

If the building had indeed been a hostelry, its fortunes are likely to have been at least partially dependant on the traffic along Ermine Street. It is possible that the proprietors were able to exploit the passing trade more effectively than those living on the opposite side of the road and also signifies that the road remained in regular use despite the declining fortunes of Roman Britain.

A small broken, undedicated altar and a stone, cup-like object, which may have been a second altar, were recovered from the construction layers of the possible hostelry. They may have originated from one of the earlier, now demolished buildings.
Phase 7

A final structure was erected after the possible hostelry had been demolished. Unlike the previous buildings, which largely followed the same basic footprint, this latest building probably extended to the south of the site, sharing its north wall line with the south wall line of the previous building. Little of the building was visible within the excavation area and later disturbance had destroyed any internal deposits.

Dating of the structure is unclear as the finds embedded in the wall and those from the few additional features assigned to this phase of activity had clearly originated during earlier phases of activity and were residual. It is possible that the structure represents a final phase of Roman activity but it is quite conceivable that it is of a much later date.

Historic Ordnance Survey maps do not indicate any development within the paddock, showing only that the paddock has remained an open space. Allotment gardens are shown on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map but there is no indication that they extended into the paddock. The structure therefore dates to some point within a very broad period stretching from the 5th to the 19th century.

The latest deposits in the excavation area were layers of rubble which contained numerous finds including fragments of clay pipe and 19th/20th century pottery. The deposits had clearly been heavily disturbed and represent landscaping of the paddock.

An extensive layer of rubble is also one of the likely reasons that geophysical survey of the paddock struggled to indicate clearly defined features despite the presence of structural remains.
The most recent structure which remains undated
The Navenby project has revealed a complex series of remains and produced a remarkably large assemblage of finds, all of which greatly increase our understanding of the area during the Roman period.

As an example of community archaeology it was a resounding success, offering the chance for members of the local community of all ages to engage with the history of their village and feedback from those who attended open days, came to the site as casual visitors or as organised school groups shows how well received the project was.

There is no doubt that this was a challenging, technical project and the volunteer project staff rose admirably to the challenge. The success of the project has undoubtedly been aided by the quality and quantity of the archaeological remains, but it is the careful excavation of these remains which has enabled new discoveries about Roman Navenby to be made and credit for that goes to all who participated in the project.

*Intaglio*
References

Lyall, J, 1994, Magnetometer Survey, Navenby, Lincolnshire, Unpublished Landscape Research Centre report


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