WILBY WAY, WELLINGBOROUGH
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

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Figure 1  Location plan
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GLOSSARY

ARCHAEOLOGY
For the purposes of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains, from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

CONTEXT
The simplest level of excavated archaeological data, i.e. a context could be the cut of a ditch (shown as -[1]), or its fill (shown as (2)).

IRON AGE
The first period in which iron was the predominant metal. In Britain it is dated between c700 BC to the Roman conquest in AD 43.

MEDIEVAL
Taken here as the period from the Norman invasion in AD 1066 to approximately AD 1500.

NATURAL
Defined in archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, e.g. Lower Lias clay, river terrace gravels etc.

NGR
National Grid Reference given from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD
Ordnance Datum; used to express a given height above mean sea level.

POT-SHERD
A fragment of a pottery vessel.

RIDGE AND FURROW
Remains of cultivation of medieval or later date forming a corrugated surface.

SETTLEMENT
An area of habitation, perhaps surrounded by associated closes, paddocks, approach ways and other features which together constitute a complex of earthworks or cropmarks distinct from fields.
SUMMARY

In November and December 1997 Cotswold Archaeological Trust (CAT) carried out an archaeological excavation on land north of the A45 Wilby Way roundabout, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire. This work took place immediately to the north of an excavation of a large Iron Age settlement carried out by CAT earlier in the year.

The new excavation was carried out on the northern periphery of the Iron Age settlement. Two parallel ditches which formed part of a ditched trackway leading southwards to this settlement were identified, along with ditches belonging to enclosures identified in the earlier excavation. Several pits, one of which contained a human cremation, were also revealed.

The information from this excavation supplements the data gained from the larger excavation to the south. It also indicates that the area east of the track and immediately north of the settlement was relatively unsettled, possibly being used for agricultural purposes. However, the identification of a human cremation also points to some ritual activity north of the main settlement.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 In November 1997 Cotswold Archaeological Trust was commissioned by Alfred McAlpine Homes Midlands Limited to carry out an archaeological excavation in advance of residential development to the north of the A45 Wilby Way roundabout, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire (Fig. 1).

1.1.2 The excavation was in response to a planning condition placed upon the development by the Borough Council of Wellingborough. It followed the excavation of part of an Iron Age settlement, prior to commercial development, immediately to the south of the study area. The same project design, issued by Northamptonshire Heritage, was used for both excavations and it is intended to merge the results of both excavations into a single future publication report. This report briefly summarises the results of the second excavation.

1.1.3 The excavation was carried out in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG 16), and the ‘Policy and Guidance for Archaeological Fieldwork in Northamptonshire’ (1995).

1.2 The study area

1.2.1 The excavation was located on grazing land to the north of the A45 Wilby Way roundabout, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire centred on NGR: SP 488266. Topographically the site lay between 87-91m OD.

1.2.2 The underlying geology of the site is mapped by the British Geological Survey as Inferior Oolite overlain by Boulder Clay and morainic drift.
1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The Iron Age settlement at Wilby Way was identified in the 1960's by aerial photography. As a result it was the subject of sporadic archaeological investigation, both in the 1970's and the early part of the 1990's. In 1979 rescue excavation of several roundhouses, and associated field boundaries dated to the middle Iron Age and a substantial D-shaped enclosure of late Iron Age date was undertaken in advance of the construction of the A45. This work identified the site as being of national importance, and resulted in the preservation in-situ of the core area of settlement.

1.3.2 In the spring of 1997 Cotswold Archaeological Trust carried out an extensive programme of staged archaeological excavation and recording of approximately 1.5 hectares on the northern periphery of this extensive Iron Age settlement (Fig. 2, archaeological zones A-E and G). This work followed on from a desk-based assessment, aerial photographic transcription, geophysical survey and field evaluation, all undertaken by CAT during 1996. The site was characterised by a series of unenclosed and enclosed settlements, ranging in date from the early to late Iron Age. In addition an undated inhumation was also discovered.

1.3.3 Early-middle Iron Age features were largely confined to the western part of the excavation area with a possible stock enclosure and a settlement to the east. The settlement comprised four roundhouses, a possible granary, pits, gullies and postholes. A pit, located within Roundhouse 1, contained burnt grain processing debris suggesting the roundhouse may have been a working area. In addition an animal skull had been placed upside down in the base of the drip-gully terminal, presumably placed as a ritual deposit and perhaps indicating the importance of grain to the community. The large quantity of pottery recovered from the gully defining Roundhouse 3 may indicate that it was an area of more domestic occupation, whilst a bone tool recovered from the gully of Roundhouse 2 may indicate a use associated with craft-based activities.
1.3.4 A number of intercutting pits, interpreted as clay quarry pits, were identified immediately to the east of this settlement area. A further possible clay pit was also identified at the very eastern end of the site. A large quantity of pottery (115 sherds) recovered from this pit suggests further domestic activity dated to the early to mid Iron Age may be located to the east of the excavation area.

1.3.5 In the middle to late Iron Age settlement shifted to the east. There was some slight overlapping with the previous settlement area, with Roundhouse 1 replaced by a small multi-phased enclosure with opposing entrances on the north and south sides. After rapid backfilling the enclosure ditches appeared to have been recut several times. There were no internal features associated with these enclosures to indicate their purpose. However the ditches were covered by a dark soil, from which 45 sherds of a mid to late Iron Age cremation urn were recovered suggesting the area had some ritual/funerary importance.

1.3.6 Located 30m to the north was a series of enclosures. Several phases of activity could be identified, all of which was dated to the middle to late Iron Age. At least seven roundhouses, which exhibited several phases of construction, were recorded. The boundary ditches enclosing this area also showed evidence of change to layout overtime, and is perhaps suggestive of stock control and corralling. It is possible that this evidence is a reflection of seasonal occupation, perhaps with the ritual/funerary monument also serving as a territory marker.

1.3.7 Late Iron Age occupation comprised three enclosures, a clay quarry and an isolated storage pit. Another enclosure cut through the ritual/funerary monument, whilst respecting its layout and maintaining the southern entrance. Environmental evidence suggests this deep ditched enclosure contained permanent water, and is likely to have been connected to a nearby watercourse or pond. It was contained within a large rectilinear enclosure, measuring 36m E-W by 38m N-S where revealed by excavation. A further enclosure, with a
western entrance, lay to the east. Towards the western edge of the excavation area an isolated pit was recorded, from which 41 sherds of late Iron Age pottery was recovered.

1.3.8 Initial assessment of the overall pottery assemblage suggests the site was long-lived, with occupation throughout the Iron Age. Whilst there are sites which produce either early-middle or middle late Iron Age assemblages, there are few with the apparent longevity of this one, in Northamptonshire. Therefore the material appears virtually unique amongst the published pottery assemblages of the period within the county (P. Blinkhorn, pers. comm.).

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 The excavation was carried out in two stages. Initially, approximately 50% of the study area was stripped of topsoil by a 360° tracked mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision. An assessment of all archaeological features found during this process was then carried out and this was followed by excavation of all features. Later the remaining 50% of the study area was stripped of topsoil and excavated in the same manner.

1.4.2 All artefacts were recovered and processed in accordance with the CAT Finds Recording Manual (1994). It is proposed to examine these artefacts in conjunction with those from the excavation carried out to the south of the study area. However, for the purposes of this report the ceramics were briefly scanned by Emma Harrison, in accordance with the Northamptonshire Ceramic Type Series. Human bone from a cremation burial will be analysed, in conjunction with human remains from the earlier excavation, by Dr. Jacqueline McKinley.

1.4.3 Environmental sampling and assessment was undertaken in accordance with the CAT Environmental Sampling Manual (1994). Two samples, were taken
from a pit and the human cremation burial. These samples will be examined by Dr. Keith Wilkinson and it is also proposed to analyse these findings in conjunction with the samples taken from the excavated area to the south.

1.4.4 The excavation was monitored by Mr. Sandy Kidd of Northamptonshire Heritage.

2. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

2.1 General

2.1.1 A range of archaeological features were identified. These can be classified into two general categories, namely ditches and pits. All four of the ditches formed continuations of Iron Age features found in the excavation to the south. The pits were found in two discrete groups with isolated outliers. One of these outliers contained a human cremation (Fig. 3).

2.2 Ditches

2.2.1 At the western end of the site ditches [2120] and [2137] formed the continuation of a pair of mid-late Iron Age ditches seen in the excavation to the south. These formed part of a track or droveway, defined by a ditch to either side, leading southwards into the settlement. The fills of both ditches (2121 and 2140) produced single Iron Age potsherds.

2.2.2 Immediately to the east of the trackway NW-SE aligned ditch [2145] formed the continuation of a mid-late Iron Age enclosure ditch seen to the south. It contained a single recut [2125]. The fact that this ditch appears to be converging with the trackway may indicate that they were not contemporary. Five sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered from the fill (2006) of this ditch and its recut (2142).
2.2.3 To the east of ditch [2145] were two curvilinear ditches [2100] and [2102] which ran from eastern terminals. These form the original and replacement ditches of an enclosure seen in the excavation to the south.

2.2.4 To the east of ditches [2102] and [2100] ditch [2127] formed part of the northern side of a mid-late Iron Age enclosure seen in the excavation to the south. This ditch had been recut once. Seventeen sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered from the ditch fill (2128) and that of its recut (2018).

2.3 **Pits**

2.3.1 In between the two trackway ditches was a small isolated 0.1m deep pit [2156].

2.3.2 Between trackway ditch [2137] and enclosure ditch [2145] was a group of mostly irregular, very shallow pits. Their purpose is uncertain although they may have formed small clay quarries. They are similar to a group of pits to the south which produced mid-late Iron Age pottery. A further sixteen sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered from the fills of these pits together with two flints.

2.3.3 To the east of enclosure ditch [2145] was an isolated elongated 0.36m deep pit [2003].

2.3.4 Just to the east of curvilinear ditches [2100] and [2102] was an isolated 0.1m deep pit [2118]. Its fill (2119) produced 2 sherds of medieval pottery, possibly derived from two medieval plough furrows which cut through the pit at either end.

2.3.5 Immediately to the NW of enclosure ditch [2127] was a group of five shallow pits. The relationship between the ditch and pit [2133] could not be
established because of the identical nature of their fills. However, this pit contained the shallow bottoms of two possible postholes [2129] and [2131] in its base and produced 2 Iron Age potsherds within its fill (2134). The fill (2010) of 0.22m deep pit [2009] also produced 4 sherds of Iron Age pottery and 2 flints.

2.3.6 To the north of ditch [2127] was a circular 0.23m deep pit [2013]. It contained three discrete fills, the secondary of which was burnt.

2.4 Cremation pit

2.4.1 Just to the north of pit [2013] was a pit [2001] which was 0.45m in diameter and 0.2m deep. It contained a high percentage of cremated human bone with charcoal fragments together with a flint.

3. THE FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

3.1 The pottery (by Emma Harrison)

3.1.1 A total of 51 Iron Age and 2 medieval potsherds was recovered from the excavation. These will be assessed as a group with the large pottery assemblage recovered from the excavation to the south. However, for the purposes of this report all were assigned fabric types in accordance with the Northamptonshire Ceramic Type Series.

3.2 Animal bone and flint
3.2.1 Sixty-seven animal bone fragments and 5 struck flints were recovered from the excavation. These will be identified and assessed together with the major bone and flint assemblages from the excavation to the south.

3.3 **Human bone**

3.3.1 The bone from the cremation burial will be analysed in conjunction with the human remains recovered from the excavation to the south.

3.4 **Environmental evidence**

3.4.1 The fill of the cremation burial was 100% sampled and a 10 litre sample was taken from the burnt fill of pit [2013]. The residues from these samples will be analysed in conjunction with the samples taken from the excavation to the south.

4. **DISCUSSION**

4.1 The study area lies on the northern periphery of the Iron Age settlement and, as expected, it contained relatively few archaeological features when compared with the main excavation area to the south. However, this further work has proved valuable in that it tends to confirm the findings of the earlier excavation.

4.2 The continuation of the trackway leading into the settlement was identified. However, it appears that apart from a few isolated pits the area immediately east of the track and north of the settlement was relatively unoccupied. This may be associated with a change in the geology here to more of a clay-based heavy soil. This area may have served as an area of pasture, possibly
enclosed in part by ditch [2145]. However, at least some ritual/funerary use of the area is indicated by the presence of the cremation burial.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cotswold Archaeological Trust would like to thank Mr. Duncan Shaw of Alfred McAlpine Homes Midlands Ltd. for his assistance throughout the project. The excavation was monitored by Mr. Sandy Kidd of Northamptonshire Heritage. The fieldwork was supervised by Mark Brett with the assistance of Tom Moore, Jo Williams, Tim Havard, Alan Thomas and Peter Moore. The report illustrations were prepared by Rick Morton.
Fig. 1 Location plan