

## WHILTON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

### “BANNAVENTA”

On 19th May our speaker was Stephen Young, the Director of CLASP (Community Landscape and Archaeology Survey Project). His talk was entitled 'Bannaventa in the landscape.'

Many of us have known of the existence of a Roman settlement which straddled the A5 (Watling Street), and whose site is in both Norton and Whilton. After 20 years of research in the triangular area bounded by Bannaventa, Duston and Towcester, and large tracts of geophysical surveys, much more is now known about Bannaventa and its hinterland.

Among the many interesting details, we learned that this area was heavily populated in the Iron Age, and that when the Romans arrived adjustments and changes in ways of living were slow. It now seems that the site of Bannaventa was already a late Iron Age settlement, which the Romans made use of. The lack of evidence of military sites around here suggests that the local people were friendly towards the Romans, but did not quickly change their ways. It was many generations before the old round houses were abandoned in favour of Roman designs.

Being on the Watling Street it developed as a walled posting station, but its development mirrors changes within the Roman world. Bannaventa means "market on the promontory" and this with other evidence shows this was a flourishing town for several centuries, although its fortunes varied with changing circumstances. Coins and potsherds found show the town was occupied throughout the Roman period and afterwards.

The Roman period lasted from the first century until about 420 AD, but life did not change much for generations after they left. However, during the Roman occupation there were developments and adjustments. Bannaventa came to be more of an urban than a rural settlement. The site was changed a number of times, and it appears that the early wide urban sprawl was changed to a well defended small town with banks, ditches and walls being built and developed in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries. Farming in the area changed from being mixed to adapting for sheep when wool was needed in the Empire, with a later return to mixed farming. There were many villa complexes in the hinterland; some of these may have specialised as Whitehall Farm in Nether Heyford did, producing hares, probably for coursing. There are almost certainly more villa sites still to be identified.

Much of the research which has revealed Bannaventa's history has been carried out by volunteers. If anyone is interested in finding out more, or in becoming a volunteer, the CLASP website is: [www.claspweb.org.uk](http://www.claspweb.org.uk).