

# INTRODUCTION

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## Context of the Excavations

With the exception of Site 7, excavated in 1990, the excavations published in this report were undertaken between 1967 and 1973, in advance of and during, the construction of Rutland Water reservoir. The reservoir, which lies 20 miles east of Leicester, was created by damming the River Gwash immediately south-west of Empingham village (fig.1) and flooding the twin valleys formed by its upper reaches to the west. The lower reaches of the river continue to flow eastwards to join the Welland, just beyond Stamford, Lincs., which ultimately flows into the Wash. The flooding of the reservoir covered an area of 3,100 acres of farmland in a rural part of the County of Rutland, submerging in perpetuity a sizeable portion of the archaeological heritage of the East Midlands.

Today, the construction of the largest artificial lake in Western Europe would occasion a full-scale archaeological investigation in advance of its construction, but in the late 1960s there was no permanent archaeological unit in the region that might monitor the impending destruction. For this reason a great debt is owed to those individuals who undertook the excavation work described in this report, often under extreme rescue conditions. The archaeological work which took place, was

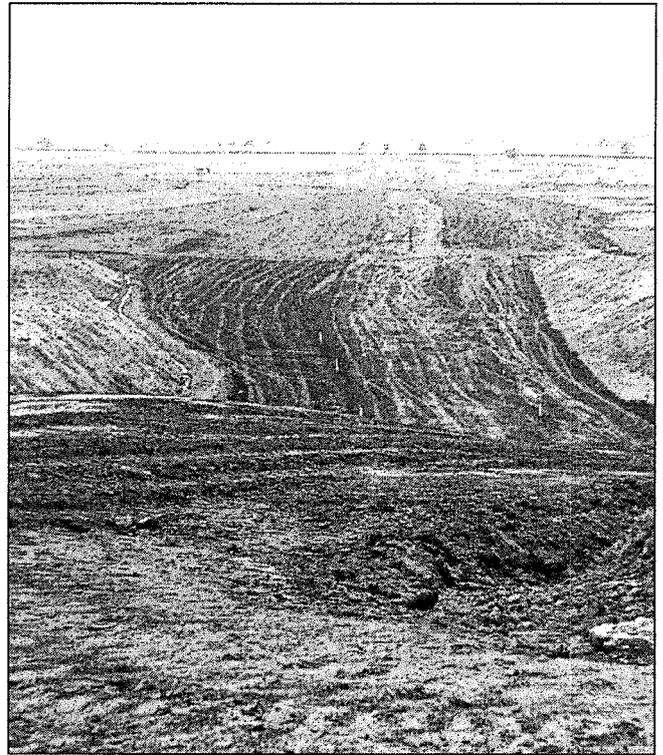


Plate 2: Construction underway in the area of the dam c.1972.

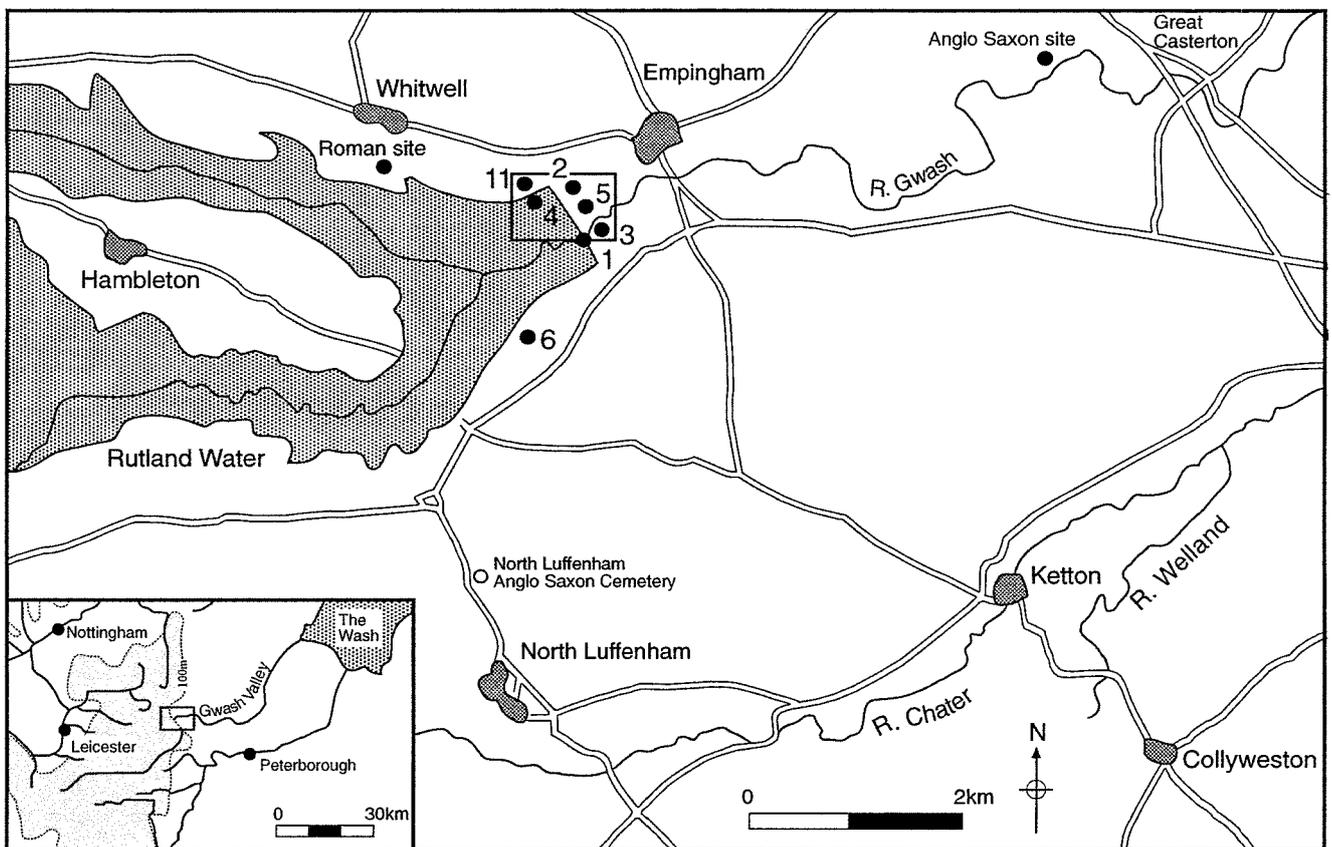


Fig. 1 a) The Gwash Valley within the East Midlands b) Rutland Water, the Gwash Valley, and Empingham

concentrated at the eastern end of the reservoir, in the area of the dam, where construction work was most intense, and so only a relatively small part of the submerged area was investigated in detail. However, the combination of the excavation of known sites with watching brief activities during the grading (topsoil removal) of the valley sides meant that a relatively complete picture of an approximately one square kilometre area (fig.2) was obtained, with two major additional sites excavated in the immediately surrounding area in subsequent years.

These two sites comprised firstly, the Empingham II Anglo-Saxon Cemetery excavated in 1974-75 (Timby 1996), and, secondly, the Iron Age and Roman settlement at Whitwell excavated in 1976-77 (Todd 1981). Neither site was actually to be submerged, but the building of car parking, administrative and leisure facilities on the north shore of the reservoir led to their discovery and dictated their partial destruction. The full publication of these two sites is now complete, and while a brief statement summarising the results of all the excavations undertaken in the area has been published (Adams *et al.* 1982), the present publication seeks to complete the outstanding record of the Prehistoric to Anglo-Saxon periods. The only other outstanding excavations are those undertaken by the Rutland Field Research Group at the medieval villages of Nether Hambleton in the south western part of the reservoir and Whitwell (Adams *et al.* 1982).

### Excavations 1967-73 and 1990

The excavations undertaken between 1967 and 1973, were initially directed (Sites 1 and 3) by Malcolm Dean who was tragically killed in a car crash in May 1970. Direction (Sites 1, 2, and 3) was taken on by Sam Gorin during the summer seasons of 1970 and 1971, who then oversaw work that continued at weekends into the Autumn of 1971, and then, intermittently, under watching-brief conditions, through 1972 and 1973 (Sites 4 and 6). Site 5 was excavated in 1968 by Anthea Diver. This report also includes an account of the salvage excavations undertaken in 1990 by Leicestershire Archaeological Unit at Tickencote (Site 7), along the line of the Petrofina plc pipeline, situated three miles downstream of Empingham.

To avoid confusion when referring to the excavations by their original names, each has been given a number, and a concordance and period description are listed below.

*Site 1* Known as 'Empingham Roman' (site code EPR) and excavated in 1969, 1970, and 1971. Romano-British aisled barn and farmstead (Wilson 1970, 286; 1971, 258-9, and 1972, 316).

*Site 2* Known as 'Empingham North' (site code EPN) to distinguish it from EPR. Trial trenched in 1970 and excavated in 1971. Roman-British aisled villa building with middle Anglo-Saxon burials (Wilson 1972, 316).

*Site 3* Known as 'Empingham I' Anglo-Saxon Cemetery to distinguish it from the cemetery at 'Empingham II'.

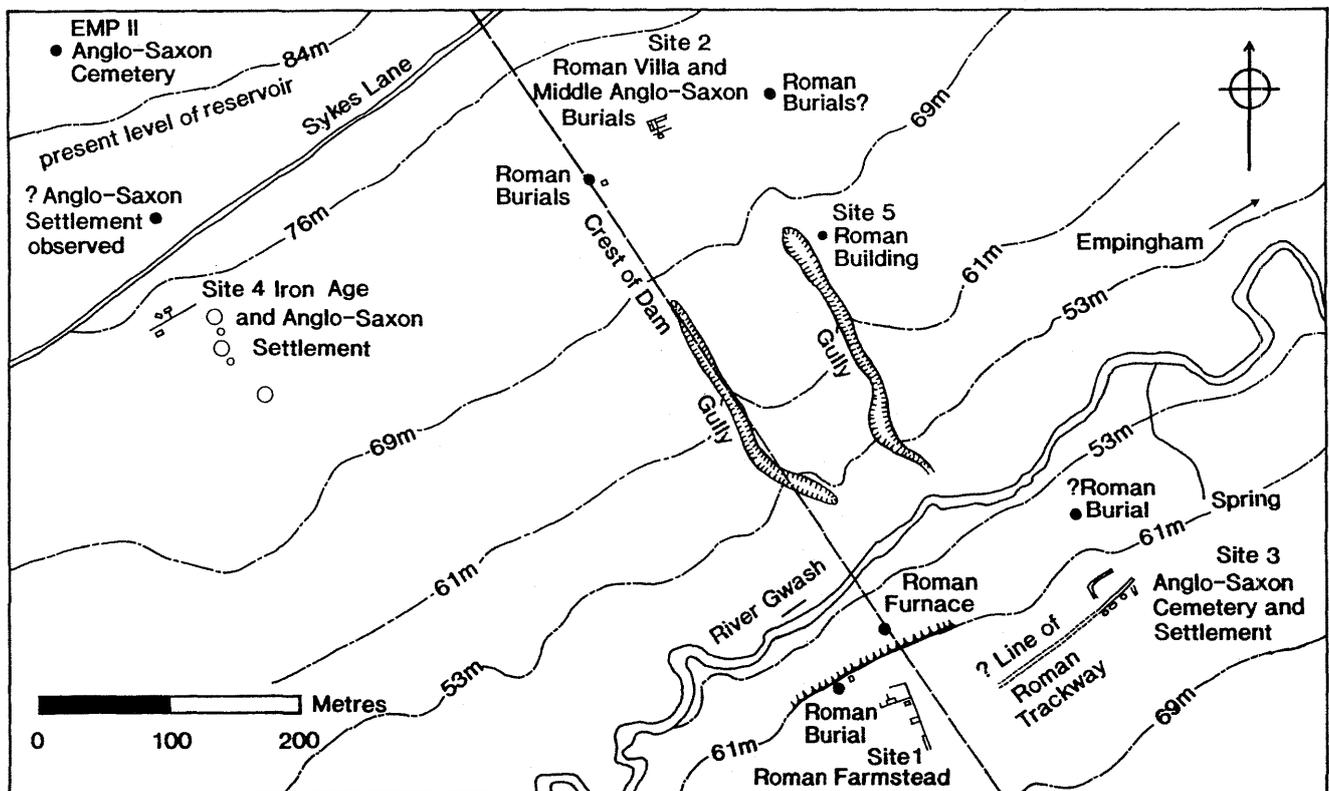


Fig. 2 The Excavations at Empingham 1967-73

Excavated in 1967 (site code EMP 67) and subsequently in 1969, 1970 and 71 when known as 'Empingham Saxon' (site code EPS) to distinguish it from Site 1. Limited early Roman evidence overlain by Early Anglo-Saxon settlement and cemetery (HMSO DoE 1968 and 1970, 68).

*Site 4* Known as 'Empingham West' (site code EPW). Excavated in 1971 and 1972. Iron Age and Early Anglo-Saxon settlement.

*Site 5* Known as 'Empingham 1968' (site code EMP 68). Excavated in 1968. Late Roman farm building and grain processing oven.

*Site 6* Known as 'Renner's Park' or 'Empingham 73' (site code EMP 73). Excavated in 1973. Roman farmstead with well and grain processing oven.

For a number of reasons the excavations at Sites 1 to 6 remained unpublished for nearly three decades. The main reason was that the director was not a full-time archaeologist and had neither the time nor the resources to undertake the necessary post-excavation work. Additionally, the death of Malcolm Dean made the publication of the Empingham I cemetery difficult, although he had written a draft report on the 1967 excavations. The lack of published sites from Rutland, in any case, created a significant lacuna in the archaeology of Leicestershire, and the sites in the area of Rutland Water were particularly significant since nowhere else in the county had such a detailed picture of a small area of landscape been revealed by excavation, with prehistoric, Roman, and Anglo-Saxon sites in close proximity, for the simple reason that in no other instance has such a wide area been stripped of topsoil.

Discussions between the writer and Peter Liddle, now Keeper of Archaeology for Leicestershire Museums, generated a project proposal (The Rutland Water Project) to undertake the post-excavation work necessary

to produce this volume within the School of Archaeological Studies at Leicester University, and English Heritage were enthusiastic in providing financial support. In addition to the post-excavation project, the needs of student fieldwork training within the School provided the opportunity to undertake a programme of fieldwalking survey in the area of the reservoir which would help place the earlier work within the context of the surrounding landscape. Twenty-five fields were walked in the parishes of Empingham and Hambleton between 1990 and 1994 and the preliminary results of this survey have been incorporated into the final discussion section of this report with a summary published elsewhere (Cooper 1998, 189-90).

## Geological Background

The solid and drift geology of the Gwash valley is summarised in figure 3 with the locations of the major archaeological sites marked for comparison (map based on OS Solid and Drift Geological Sheet 157 for Stamford, 1957). The Gwash Valley cuts through a low limestone plateau which forms the eastern side of the Vale of Catmose and, together with the twin tributaries of the Chater to the south, forms part of the northern catchment of the River Welland which flows into the fens some twelve miles to the east. The landscape produced is one of rolling country rising to 120m punctuated by broad valleys supporting rich arable farming and sheep pasture. The area of the valley near Empingham cuts through the Lincolnshire Limestone which, in the immediate area of the sites, towards the valley bottom, gives way to ironstone with liassic clay forming the base. The narrow stream itself has formed only a thin band of alluvium over this. The boundary between the clay and the base of the ironstone acted as a spring line which appears to have been an important factor in settlement location along the valley sides.

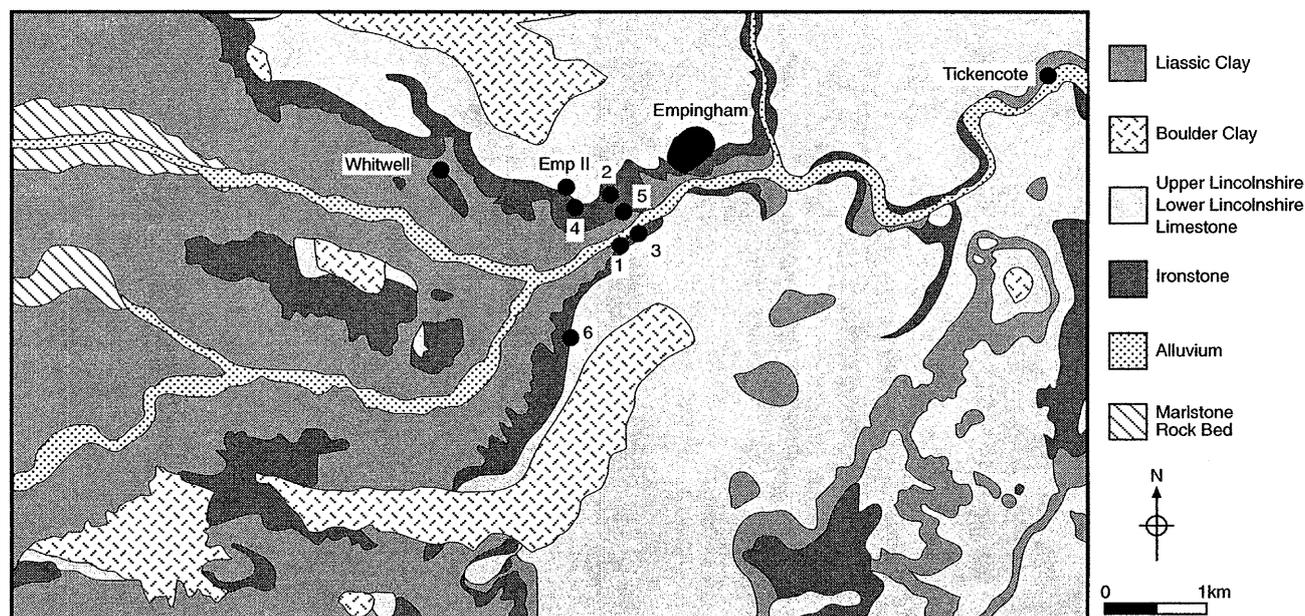


Fig. 3 The Geology of the Gwash Valley