

## **Billingford scheduled ancient monument**

The monument is an important part of the heritage of Billingford showing the context in which Billingford and neighbouring villages developed from Roman times in relation to the natural feature of the River Wensum, the valley and the adjacent route constructed at that time between mid England and the east (now approximately along the line of the B1145).

The details below are from [historicengland.org.uk](http://historicengland.org.uk)

### **Summary**

A Roman small town or roadside settlement occupied between the C1AD and c.750AD.

The scheduled area is to the south of the road between Billingford and North Elmham, about 150m south-west of Billingford Hall. NGR TG00842000

### **Reasons for Designation**

The Billingford Roman Settlement is designated for the following principal reasons:

- \* Documentation: the settlement is well documented archaeologically, with evidence from field walking, metal detecting and excavation.
- \* Rarity: The continuity of settlement into the early Anglo-Saxon period seen here is rare.
- \* Group Value: The settlement is associated with a network of Roman settlement and small towns in Norfolk, and is immediately connected to Roman roads and to Swanton Morley fort to the south. The continuity of settlement into the early Anglo-Saxon period and its association with the early see at North Elmham is also significant.
- \* Survival : The survival of features in similar soil conditions beyond the scheduled area has been demonstrated by excavation. The presence and survival of a large and diverse quantity of finds indicates that similar features will survive within the scheduled area.
- \* Potential: The scheduled area potentially contains the evidence for domestic, commercial and other structures, as well as details of the social and economic life of the settlement, and can contribute to our understanding of the hierarchy of settlement in Roman Britain.
- \* Vulnerability: Buried archaeology is vulnerable to plough damage and other ground breaking activity.

### **History**

Five types of town are known to have existed in Roman Britain: *coloniae*, *municipia*, *civitas* capitals, Roman provincial capitals and Roman small towns. The first four types can be classified as 'public towns' because each had an official status within the provincial administrative system. Roman small towns are settlements of urban character which lack the administrative status of public towns, but which are nevertheless recognisably urban in terms of morphology, features and function. They tend to lack the planned rectangular street grids, public buildings and well-appointed town houses of the public towns and instead are generally characterised by mainly

insubstantial timber or half-timbered structures. Some small towns possess an enclosing wall, while others have masonry or earthwork defences. Additional features include temples, bath houses, ovens, kilns and cemeteries.

Roman small towns began to emerge in the mid-first century AD. However, the majority of examples appeared in the later first and second centuries, while the third and fourth centuries saw the growth and development of existing establishments, together with the emergence of a small number of new ones. Some small towns had their origins in earlier military sites such as fort-vici and developed into independent urban areas following the abandonment of the forts. Others developed alongside major roads and were able to exploit a wide range of commercial opportunities as a result of their location.

The small Roman town to the west of the present settlement of Billingford appears to belong to the latter category, being well placed to take advantage of or control movement along the Denver to Brampton road at the River Wensum crossing, as well as traffic to and from the north at a road junction towards the east end of the settlement. Surface finds dating to the Roman period were first discovered here in 1934, and again between 1946 and 1951, with a substantial pottery scatter identified in the 1960s. In 1984 a formal programme of metal detecting was begun, and although this gave rise to more informal detecting thereafter, it seems that many finds resulting from that were reported. Cropmarks identified from aerial photographs taken in 1959 were subsequently interpreted and mapped under the National Mapping Programme in 2008; although slightly ephemeral, these have helped inform our understanding of Roman and earlier occupation of the site.

In the 1940s an area to the south of the site was quarried for gravel, and in 1991-92 excavations were undertaken immediately to the south of these old workings in advance of further gravel extraction. Further archaeological watching briefs followed to the south between 1995 and 2002. The limits of settlement are defined by a reduction in the density of finds, by the presence of a cemetery (which remained in use into the C5) and by a rectilinear pattern of field boundaries and trackways oriented east-north-east to west-south-west, revealed by excavation, the main feature of which was a road aligned on a Roman river crossing identified from bridge foundations and associated finds. This track seems likely to have connected the settlement to the Roman fort at Swanton Morley, south of the river. Evidence for later continuity of occupation was found towards the northern edge of the excavation in the form of three early Anglo-Saxon post-built halls, one with an associated sunken featured building immediately to the south, while Middle Saxon occupation was represented by a pit containing evidence of iron smelting.

## **Details**

The monument includes the buried remains of a Roman roadside settlement or small town to the east of the River Wensum, to the west of the village of Billingford and to the south of the road between Billingford and North Elmham. The settlement lies to

the north and south of the Roman road that runs between the small town of Brampton (scheduled as NF 383) to the east and Denver to the west, where the road joins the Fen Causeway to the Roman town of Durobrivae, south-west of Peterborough. Aerial photographs indicate pre-Roman settlement in the form of a clearly defined co-axial field system, apparently truncated by the 1940s quarry to the south. To the north of this field system parallel ditches follow the projected line of the Roman Brampton to Denver road, which travels west towards a possible crossing point over the River Wensum. Although the full extent of the settlement is not well defined, the evidence from surface finds and metal detecting indicates a focus to the north and south of this road, west of the point where the road from Brampton branches north to North Elmham. There are relatively few finds to the north of this (also the line of the modern North Elmham road) but to the south the density, number and range of finds provide evidence of a civilian settlement continuously occupied from the early C1AD until c750. Including material found in the course of the 1991-92 excavations, finds are dominated by a large quantity of coins, about 1500 altogether, but also include articles of personal adornment and dress. Pottery consists mainly of local grey wares, predominantly from the kilns at Brampton, but also includes fine wares. The nature of the finds suggests that activity within the town was mainly commercial. No building materials, stone, tile or tesserae have been found, indicating that the buildings were constructed of timber and thatch.

**EXTENT OF SCHEDULING** The scheduled area encompasses the core of the small town to the north, bounded on the north by the North Elmham to Billingford road, to the west by the field boundary, to the east by the track, excluding a small rectangle of land to the south-west corner, where buried archaeology will have been disturbed or destroyed by the pigsties that previously occupied this area. The south boundary crosses the site from east to west just north of the quarry bank.