

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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Hallgate, FLEET, LINCOLNSHIRE**REPORT BY****HILARY HEALEY NDD, M.Phil., FSA**

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*context descriptions
- part soils
No section drawings
Archive information.*

2001

Archaeological Watching Brief at Hallgate, FLEET, Lincolnshire

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Summary

An Archaeological Watching Brief was carried out on a conservatory extension at The Cottage, Hallgate, Fleet, Lincolnshire, on behalf of Mr and Mrs P. Coote. The principal feature recorded was part of a possible beam slot for a wooden building, its fill including pottery of the early 13th century. A further possible ditch was not examined, since it lay below the depth of the foundation trench.

1. Introduction

An Archaeological Watching Brief was carried out on a site in Hallgate, Fleet, Lincolnshire, at NGR TF 3895 2367 on behalf of Mrs L. Martin. The development consisted of a conservatory extension to an existing unoccupied cottage, a Listed Building).

2. Historical and Archaeological Background

The village of Fleet lies in the south-east Lincolnshire Fens (Fig. 1). It is one of the east-west line of villages south of the Wash which developed on a broad silt ridge, and it is today a remarkably narrow parish some 20km in length south to north, its shape largely due to successive stages of reclamation from both the sea marsh and freshwater fen (Fig. 2). The relatively small Fleet River would originally have carried water the length of the parish from south to north into an estuary known as Fleet Haven. Little trace of its old course can be seen at ground level today, but in medieval times it passed close by the east side of the church and a narrow strip of land in this vicinity indicates the former river bed (Fig. 3). In a twelfth century charter there is a reference to 'the bridge at Fleet church' (H. Hallam, 1968). Fleet River entered the sea about two and a half kilometres north of the village, a kilometre south of Holbeach Hurn. The road from Holbeach Hurn to Gedney Dyke follows the medieval sea bank. The river outlet would have been controlled by sluices from a very early date.

The whole area south of the Wash was heavily settled in the Roman period, although some of that evidence is concealed beneath later alluvial deposits. The known Romano-British sites in Fleet, largely recorded by Mrs. S. Hallam, are some 3km south of the village core at Church end (S. Hallam, 1970). The origin of the present village of Fleet is probably in the seventh century AD, and no doubt the existence of the river was a significant factor in its creation and evolution, not least since the place-name means 'the inlet, creek or stream' (Cameron, 1998). There is some similarity between the villages on the Lincolnshire side (west) of the River Nene and the Norfolk side (east). Research in Norfolk for the Fenland Survey Project has identified Middle Saxon settlements as the forerunners of

those villages (Sylvester, 1988), but the Lincolnshire part of that survey did not include the area under discussion.

The known information on the archaeology of Fleet is that there was a Middle Saxon settlement here, from the seventh century onwards (Healey, 1979), probably attracted by the once navigable river that had its outlet in Fleet Haven. From the ninth century until after the Norman Conquest the Late Saxon population expanded and occupied an area somewhat wider area than the present core of Church End. No church is recorded in 1086 in Domesday Book, and the oldest parts of the present church of St. Mary Magdalene date only to the twelfth century, but this does not necessarily prove that no Saxon church existed here.

3. The Site

The site lies in the medieval core of the village, only 50m east of the church, and within the current Conservation Area (Cope-Faulkner 1999). The line of the present road, Hallgate, lies on the east side of the church, and in the medieval period the river at this point, as explained above, would have run along the west side of the road (Fig.3). The soils are classified as Snargate Series, coarse silty gleyic brown alluvial soils found mainly on relatively high ground in the fens at OD 3-4m (Robson 1990). Robson suggests that these soils occur on areas settled since Anglo-Saxon times.

The existing cottage is a Listed Building comprising a rendered brick and pantiled cottage with a nineteenth/twentieth century extension. The cottage listing describes the earliest parts of the cottage as 'mid eighteenth century', suggesting that the lozenge datestone 'AJL 1801' is an addition, but gives no reason for this statement. Indeed the type is characteristic of fenland brick cottages dating either side of 1800, and there is no reason to suppose that this is not correct. At the time of the Watching Brief most of the rendering had been removed and there were no obviously early features, such as brick tumbling, to be seen. The cottage was being re-furbished, but had been empty some time. One local tradition suggests that this cottage was once the parsonage, but there is no evidence for this. The documentation of the glebe land suggests that the rectory site was always immediately south of the churchyard. The cottage was, however, formerly glebe (ie. rectory) property, and this may have caused confusion. Another reason it could not have been the rectory is that it was clearly built as a double tenement, the other blocked door being revealed once the rendering was removed (Pl. I). It appears as two properties, each with its own garden, on the earliest map of Fleet, the 1840 Tithe plan, and again as late as the second edition Ordnance Survey map six inch to one mile series of 1906 (Fig.3). The Rev. James Ashley was rector in 1801; he had no other Christian name, but the L may be the initial of his wife. Similar arrangements of initials, with the surname initial at the top, are known elsewhere. It is also noted that no names of other residents of the parish at the period, derived from a list compiled by the vicar in 1808, in any way fit these initials.

4. The Finds

The site was monitored in a single day. The footings for the conservatory were on the south side of the Listed Building and around the rear to the east (Fig.4). Towards the south-east end of the trench the ground had been previously disturbed for a well or cistern, the brick structure of which had survived; this is only indicated by shading on the plan.(Fig.4). Along the east side the soil was

disturbed down to the full depth of the foundation trench (Pl.II). Only the south and west sides showed stratified soils. The topsoil, which extended to an average depth of 50cm was a light-coloured mottled silt with very sparse gravel, stones being up to 200mm in size (Pl.II). This contained a clay pipes of late fragment of seventeenth century date as well as pottery of the same date, with some medieval sherds. The subsoil extended to 70cm below ground level. A ditch or gully (F3) was found on the west side; which took a had a slight angled shape (Fig.4 and Pl.III). The upper parts of this feature (003) were excavated sufficiently to remove the visible parts of a cooking pot. Only a small section at its east end was taken out due to limitations of time. The upper level is context 002 and the lower part, almost a slot, is 005. A second ditch or gully, F4, was seen on the west side, measuring 75cm in width. This was not excavated, since it lay entirely below the depth of the foundation trench (Pl.III). A slight scatter of cockle shells in the west trench just above F4 containing a 17th century clay pipe stem and a heavy iron nail (004) were noted to the south of this feature (Pl.III). On the south side sherds of medieval pottery found in the disturbed soil above F3 fitted part of the neck rim of a medieval cooking pot (Pl.IV) of which a considerable part of the body remained *in situ* in F3 (003), as can be seen in Pl.IV.

5. Conclusion

The most likely interpretation of this gully is that it represents part of a beam slot trench for a timber framed building. Evidently this structure, which would probably have been of mud and stud construction, had gone out of use by the time the 1801 building was put up, and since the alignments are different, it is very likely to have been entirely forgotten by this time, as there was no pottery in any of the features later than the seventeenth century, let alone the eighteenth. Since the excavated part of the slot contained pottery of the thirteenth to fourteenth century and no later material, this is suggested as the period at which the slot was filled in.

APPENDIX The pottery

The unstratified pottery seen on the upcast soil ranged in date from the thirteenth to the 19th century. None of this material was retained.

Topsoil (unstratified)

1 fragment stone roofing slate; 2 glazed red earthenware (17th century), 1 Bourne D ware with white slip and copper glaze with brown streaks (c.16th century); 2 clay pipe bowls c.1680, and one stem, similar date; 3 glazed Toynton All Saints type medieval wares; 2 glazed and 1 unglazed Grimston medieval wares; 1 Nottingham type pale sandy fabric glazed jug sherd; 1 medieval red fabric jug rim, clear glazed internally, copper glaze externally; 1 dark grey thin unglazed sherd, similar fabric to material in (003) below. Pottery from stratified contexts is listed below:

Context 001

1 sherd Bourne D ware (c.16th century); 1 fragment of fired clay; 3 sherds Grimston glazed medieval ware, probably jugs; 5 sherds unglazed Ely type ware, sandy with sparse shell inclusions, probably cooking pot, some joining; 10 sherds dark grey unglazed ware, some joining; 3 pieces cut animal bone; 2 fish bones. **Latest dated material 17th century.**

Context 002

1 Grimston sandy ware dish, rd fabric, 1 Grimston glazed jug body sherd with iron rich pellet, 1 Ely type cooking pot rim. **Latest date 14th century.**

Context 003

7 Ely type cooking pot, buff with grey core, mostly joining sherds; 4 dark grey cooking pot sherds including rim, all joining. **Latest date 14th century.**

Context 004

1 2mm bore clay pipe stem; 1 unidentified medieval sherd; 1 Fe nail with large head, broken. **Latest date 17th century.**

Context 005

1 sherd dark grey shelly fabric; 1 unidentified buff/grey shelly fabric with rounded calcite inclusions up to 3mm in size; cockle shells. **Latest date 13th/14th century.**

Acknowledgements

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Primary Sources

Fleet Tithe Award and Plan (Lincolnshire Archives Office ref: C103).

Fleet parish deposit, Lincolnshire Archives Office.

Fenland Cottages Project Archive, in possession of the author.

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Cover picture: Hallgate, Fleet; general view of site

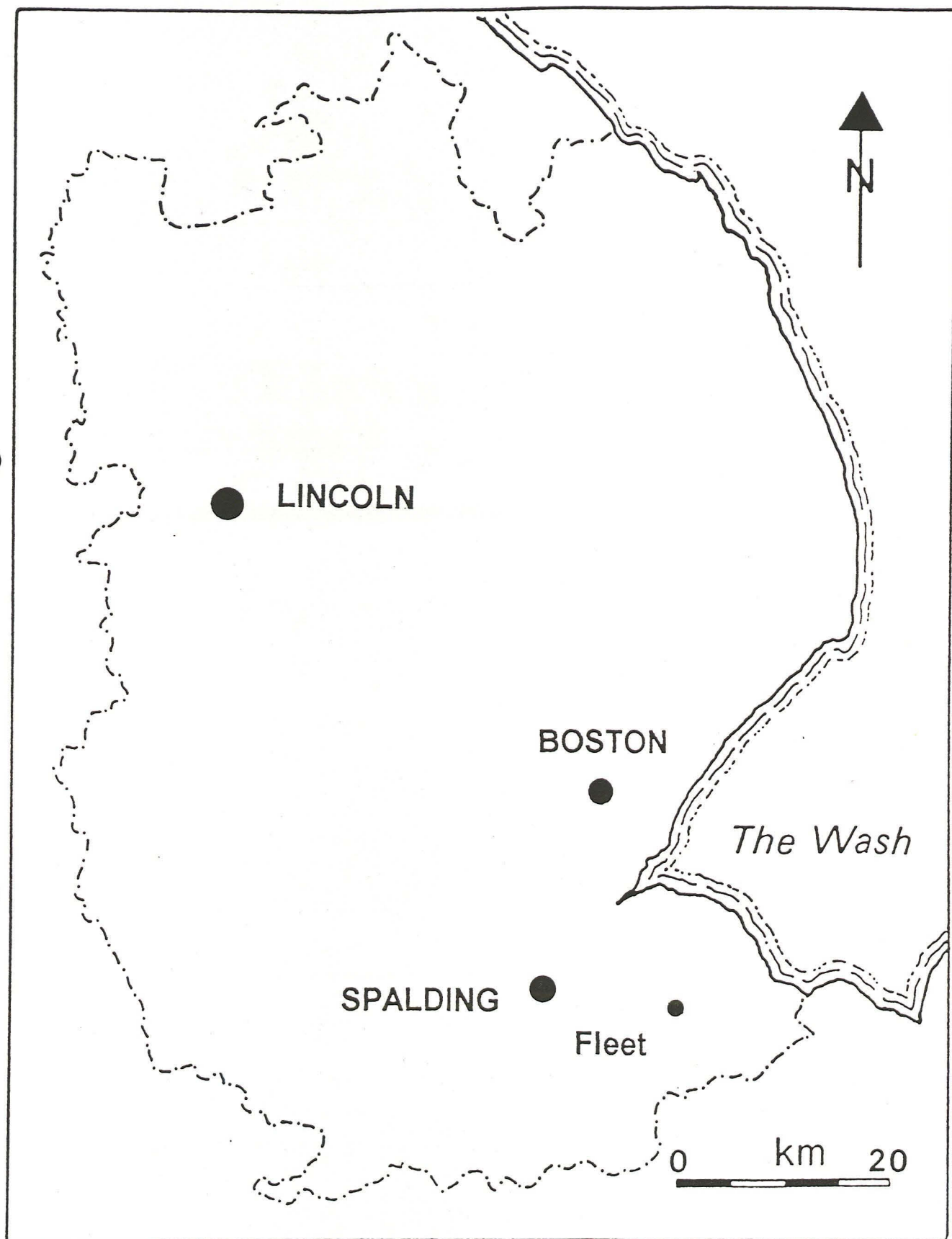


Fig. 1 Fleet, Lincs. Location map.

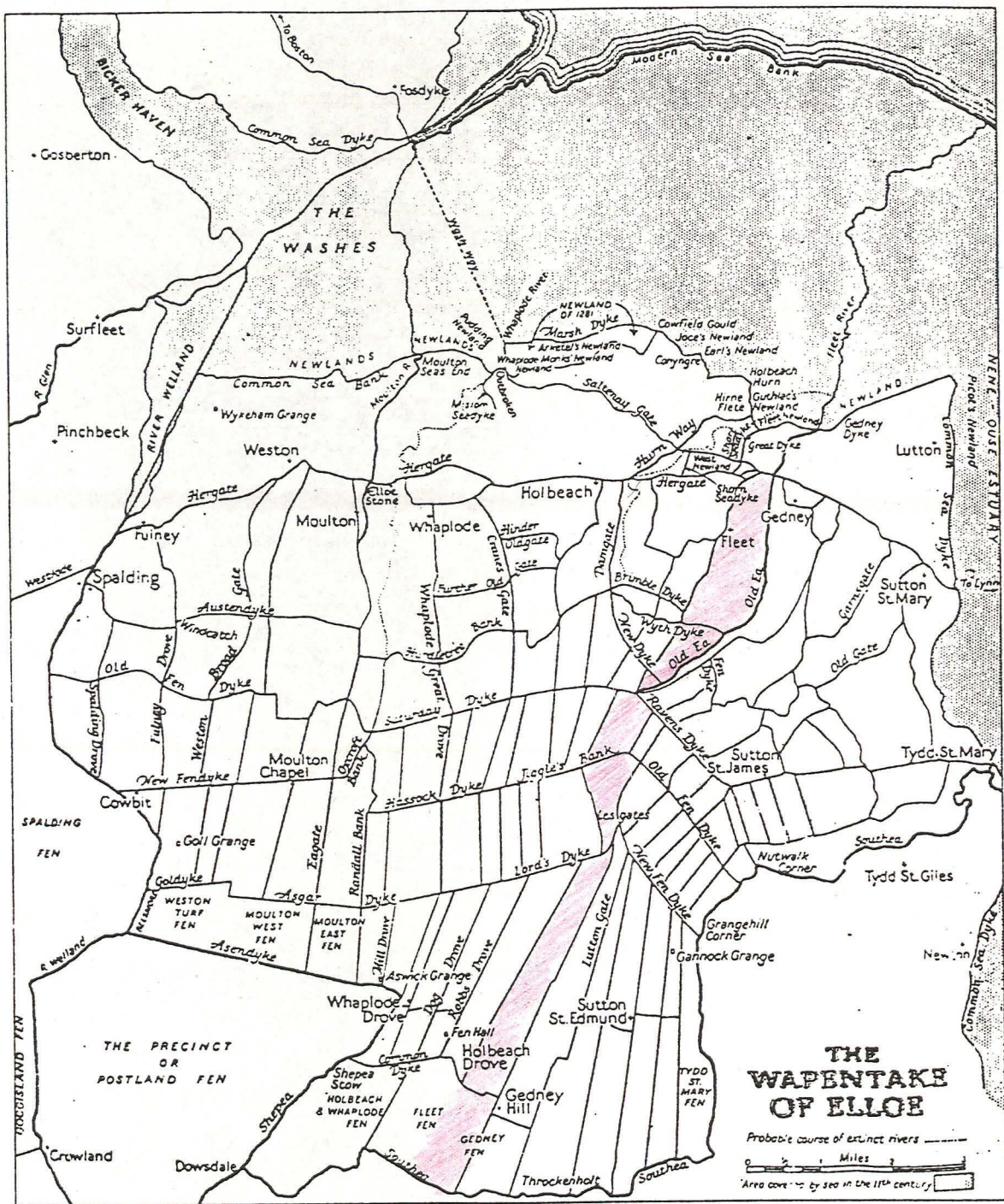


Fig. 2. The medieval fenland south of the Wash (from Hallam, H., 1954).
Fleet parish shaded.

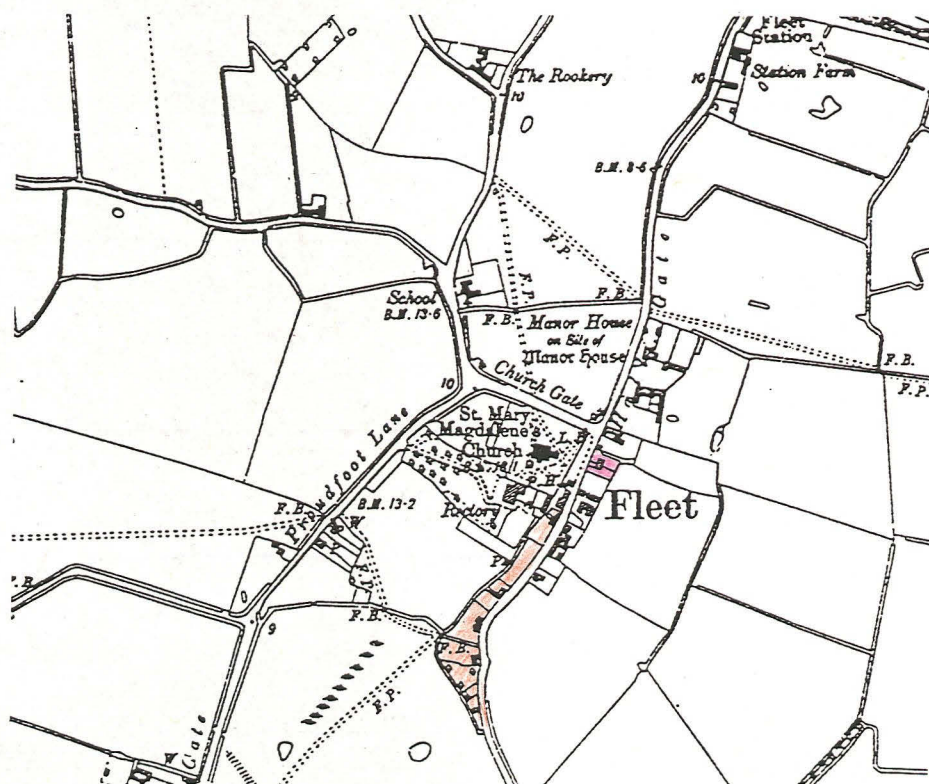
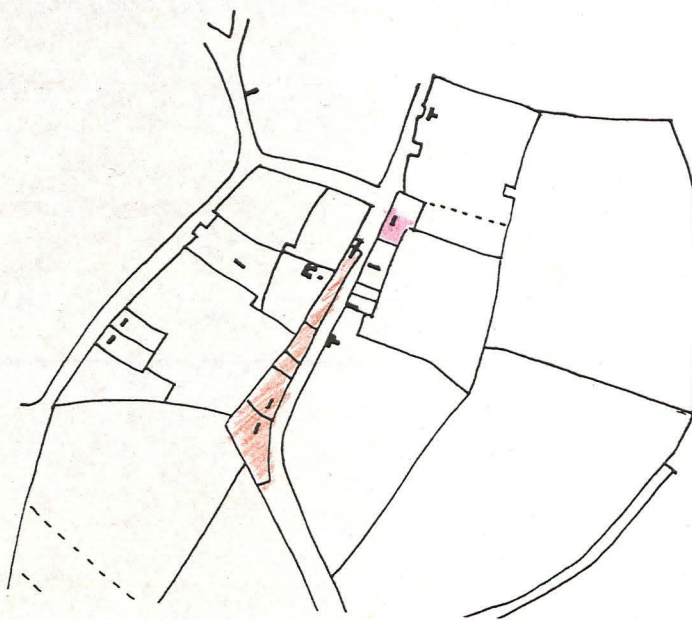
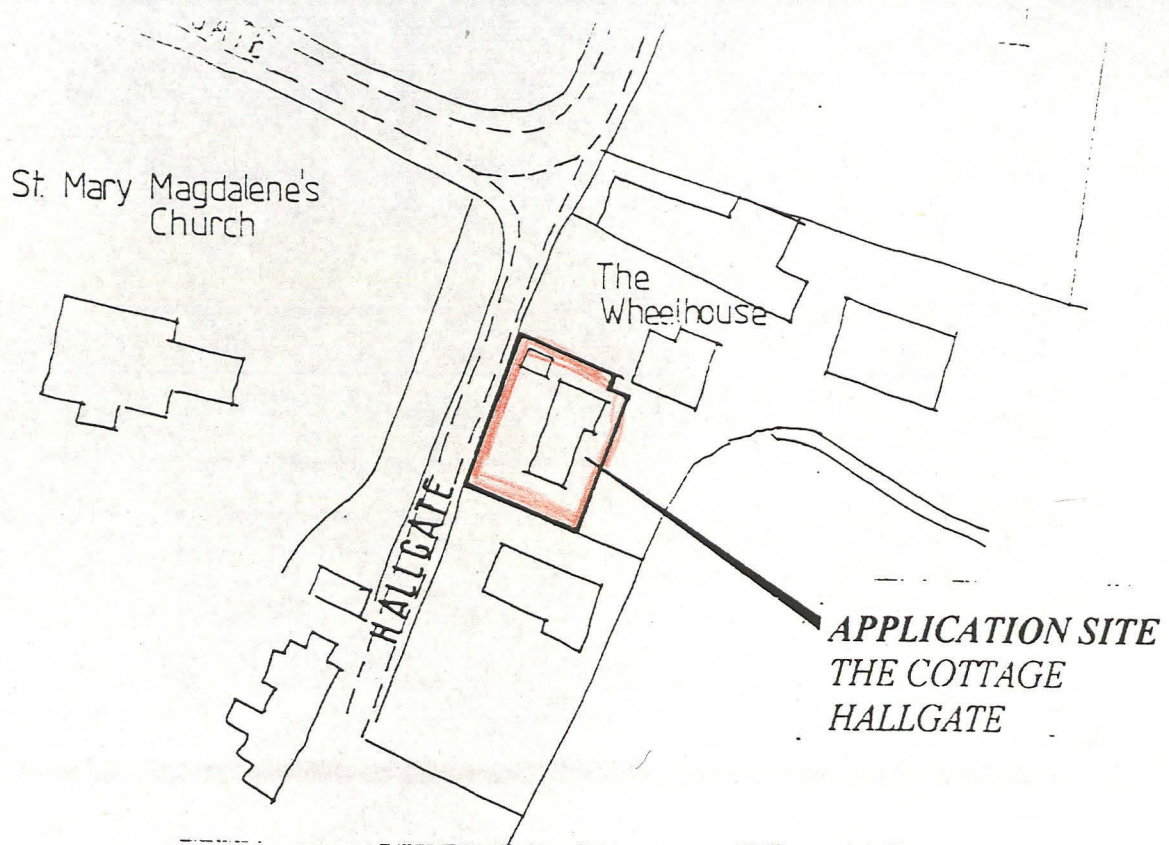


Fig. 3. Centre of Fleet. Above: Sketch map based on the Tithe Plan of 1840
Below: Ordnance Survey map (6" to 1 mile), 1906 . Former river bed shaded.



LOCATION PLAN 1 : 1250 scale

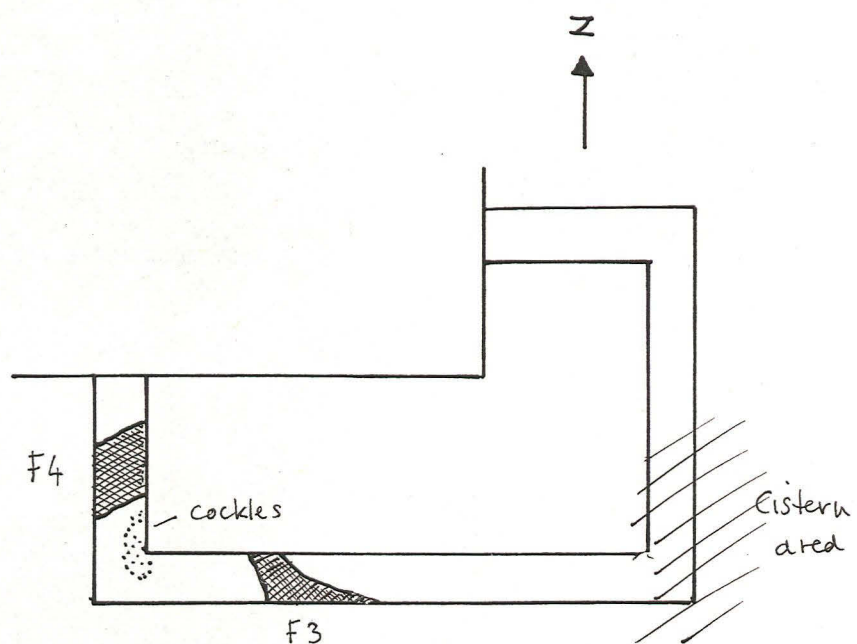


Fig.4 Site plan



Plate I. The Cottage, Hallgate, Fleet. Above: the Listed Building,.
Below: close-up showing date stone.



Plate II. General view of foundation trenches. L. South side looking west; R. West side looking north.



Plate III. L. Gully F3 and R. ditch or gully F4 (note cockle shell spread at lower R of picture)..



Plate IV. Above: Gully F4 showing rim of medieval cooking pot (L of measuring pole)
Below: Excavated section of part of ditch F3 showing depth and form.