UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Access Cambridge Archaeology

Archaeological investigations on the earthwork in Castle Close, Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire, 2013

Carenza Lewis and Alex Pryor
with contributions from June Barnes

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE Cambridge Community Heritage

LOTTERY FUNDED

Arts & Humanities Research Council

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Access Cambridge Archaeology

Archaeological investigations on the earthwork in Castle Close, Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire, 2013

Carenza Lewis and Alexander Pryor
with contributions from June Barnes

Access Cambridge Archaeology
McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research
University of Cambridge
Downing Street
Cambridge
CB2 3ER

01223 761518

access@arch.cam.ac.uk
www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk

Front cover image: 2m x 2m trench at Castle Close, Sharnbrook under excavation in 2013

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Access Cambridge Archaeology

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Access Cambridge Archaeology

1. Summary

This report details the project design, results and interpretations of archaeological investigations in August 2013 in the interior of a circular earthwork enclosure, defined on the HER as a medieval moated site, in Castle Close, Sharnbrook, (Beds HER 994 and SAM 20404). The excavation was funded jointly by the Heritage Lottery Fund 'All Our Stories' scheme and the Arts and Humanities Research Council R4CH 'Cambridge Community Heritage' programme. The Castle Close project was proposed by Sharnbrook Local History Group, and developed with guidance from Access Cambridge Archaeology (University of Cambridge) and English Heritage. The project was conducted as a community excavation, where volunteers undertook excavations under the supervision of archaeologists from Access Cambridge Archaeology (University of Cambridge).

Excavation over four days of a 2m^2 trench within the circular earthwork exposed a hearth or oven with associated stoke hole and parts of several other features hinting at the presence of one or more built structures, all dated by associated pottery to the 12th century AD. The character of the features appeared to be largely domestic, although some specialisation is indicated and the presence of a sizeable assemblage of horseshoe nails supports the suggestion that the site was moderately high-status. Occupation was short-lived, certainly spanning less than a century and possibly only a decade or so.

The date (12th century) and the form (circular and embanked) are both atypical of moated sites and the site is now better defined as a small, late ringwork: it may represent a transitional phase between ringworks and moated sites. Historical records suggest it may have been the documented 'bury' of Trikets manor. The likely context for its construction is the Anarchy of the early 12th century and it was probably abandoned after Henry II came to power in 1154 AD.

The 2013 excavation in Castle Close has added to the significance of this site by dating this unusual circular earthwork and by identifying it as a ringwork rather than an early moated site. The excavation also gave members of the public living in and around Sharnbrook the chance to take part in archaeological investigations on a site at the centre of their community, during which they developed a wide range of practical and analytical archaeological skills including archaeological excavation, recording, augering and finds processing. The excavation also provided data which will be able to inform and guide future conservation, management, interpretation and presentation of the monument in Castle Close.

2. Introduction

The project '*Sharnbrook's moated earthwork - castle, manor house or what*?' was a £7,600 project that received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under their *All Our Stories* and *Cambridge Community Heritage* schemes (respectively) to conduct community archaeological investigations on and around the site of a circular earthwork enclosure in Castle Close, Sharnbrook. The site is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM), listed number 994 on the HER for Bedfordshire. The project was devised and developed by *Sharnbrook Local History Group*, part of *Sharnbrook Learning for Pleasure*, in discussion with Bedford Borough Council, English Heritage and the University of Cambridge, with the aim of advancing understanding of the origin and purpose of the monument and its relationship to the rest of the village, raising local interest in the monument and informing it future management[1]. With the support and supervision of archaeologists from the University of Cambridge, local residents carried out surveys, an excavation, and shovel pitting and also researched documentary evidence. The Photography and Art Groups of *Sharnbrook Learning for Pleasure* also contributed their skills to the presentation of the project and its findings.

This report details the aims, methods and results of fieldwork and excavation on the earthwork enclosure in Castle Close over four days between 29th August and 1st September, including a small-scale excavation on the site and an auger survey of the surrounding ditch. It follows the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) and the Project Design prepared in advance of the work and submitted for assessment to English Heritage to obtain permission for the investigations on this scheduled ancient monument (SAM).

2.1 All Our Stories

The *All Our Stories* grant programme[2] was initiated jointly by the AHRC and HLF to help local communities explore and discover more about their past. The funding was specifically intended to promote contacts and interaction between local communities and academic researchers based in UK universities, with the aim of giving community groups greater access to resources and expertise that exists within universities, while creating new opportunities for academics to conduct research and gather data in a community context. Responding to this grant call, a team of researchers based in the University of Cambridge was brought together to form 'Cambridge Community Heritage' (CCH), to act as a point of contact for community groups interested in making use of this funding opportunity[3]. A series of brain-storming sessions were held in mid-late 2012 allowing interested parties to meet and discuss the potential projects. In total 500 projects were funded by the scheme nationwide, including 28 that were assisted by CCH. These projects included several test pitting projects in villages across East Anglia, including Meldreth, West Wickham, Toft, Shillington and Sharnbrook.

[1] http://slhg.org.uk/?project=castle-close-heritage (accessed May 2013)
[2] http://www.hlf.org.uk/news/Pages/AllOurStories.aspx (accessed October 2013)
[3] http://www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk/communities/cch (accessed November 2013)

2.2 Cambridge Community Heritage

Cambridge Community Heritage (CCH) was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to enable University of Cambridge researchers to help such groups develop community projects and bid to the HLF's All Our Stories Programme. 90% of local groups in East Anglia who received advice from University of Cambridge researchers in preparing their application were successful in being awarded up to £10,000 funding each from the HLF. Cambridge Community Heritage provided ongoing support to All Our Stories projects including training and help with running activities in 2013, with additional funding by the AHRCT

The Cambridge Community Heritage team includes researchers with a wide range of interests and expertise, headed by Dr Carenza Lewis, a well-known television archaeologist who ran the community excavations featured in *The Great British Story.* Dr. Britt Baillie, a member of the CCH team and a resident of West Wickham oversaw the West Wickham Big Dig.

2.3 Access Cambridge Archaeology

Access Cambridge Archaeology (ACA)[4] is an archaeological outreach organisation based in the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research in the University of Cambridge. ACA aims to enhance economic, social and personal well-being through active engagement with archaeology. It was set up by Dr Carenza Lewis in 2004 and specialises in providing opportunities for members of the public to take part in purposeful, research-orientated archaeological investigations including excavation. Educational events and courses range in length from a few hours to a week or more, and involve members of the public of all ages, experience and abilities.

Thousands of members of the public have taken part in scores of programmes run by ACA, including teenagers involved in Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA) test pit excavation programmes intended since 2005 to build academic skills, confidence and aspirations. More widely, ACA has involved thousands of members of the public of all ages and backgrounds, including those with special needs, in a wide range of archaeological activities including field-walking, excavation, analysis and reporting. These have included projects funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and events in 2011-12 as part of the Cultural Olympiad for the 2012 London Olympic Games.

[4] http://www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk/ (accessed May 2013)

3. Aims, Objectives and Desired Outcomes

3.1 Aims

The aims of community excavations on Castle Close were as follows:

- To identify the character, age, survival condition and significance of any archaeological remains and deposits on the island and the depth and condition of the ditch and bank. Specific research questions to be addressed included:
    - Is there any evidence for structures or other features in the excavated area?
    - What was the nature and date of any excavated features found on the island?
    - What is the potential for waterlogged preservation of palaeo-environmental remains in the ditch?
    - What is the nature and date of eco-factual material from the island?
    - What is the nature of the post-construction processes that have affected the site?
    - What is the depth and condition of any surviving archaeological features on the island and ditch, and does this indicate a need for new approaches to management of the site?
- To give members of the public living in and around Sharnbrook the chance to take part in archaeological investigations on a site at the centre of their community.
- To enable local community group members to develop a wide range of practical and analytical archaeological skills.
- To increase knowledge and understanding of Castle Close and its environs by heritage professionals and members of the public, especially those resident in the local area.
- To increase interest in and engagement with the Castle Close site by those living in the area.
- To provide data to inform and guide future conservation, management, interpretation and presentation of the monument in Castle Close.

3.2 Objectives

The objectives of the community excavations on Castle Close were as follows:

- Excavation of a single 2m x 2m archaeological trench on the island contained by the ditch and bank in Castle Close.
- Auger survey across the ditch and bank in Castle Close
- Contextualization of the results of the excavation and Auger survey in relation to previous work in the vicinity of Castle Close including geophysical survey on the island and test pitting in the village.
- Contextualization of the results of the excavation and Auger survey in relation to other investigations in 2013 including field survey of the earthwork area and geophysical survey of the nearby playing field.
- Preparation of a report on the results of the excavation and Auger survey, to be submitted to Bedfordshire HER and uploaded to Oasis

- Submission of a summary of the results of the excavation and fieldwork to Beds HER and a local journal if the results warrant the latter.
- A public talk on the results, to be given in the village.

3.3 Desired Outcomes

The desired outcomes of the community excavations on Castle Close were:

- An improved understanding of the presence, extent, character and condition of buried archaeology on the Scheduled Ancient Monument in Castle Close, Sharnbrook which will help inform management regimes for the site in order to best protect it for the future.
- A better understanding of the date and function of the monument which will enhance appreciation of it both by those living locally and visiting the site, and by heritage professionals with an interest in sites of this form, of which many examples exist, few of which are securely dated or positively identified.
- A local population more engaged with and informed about the monument in Castle Close who will be inspired to learn from it and care for it.

4. Location

The village of Sharnbrook is situated in the historic county of Bedfordshire 11km north of the county town of Bedford, 24km east of Northampton and 14km southeast of Wellingborough, centred on NGR SP 99093 59600, as shown in Figure 1. The village of Sharnbrook lies beside the eponymous Sharn Brook, just west of the A6 road and immediately north of a loop in the River Great Ouse which forms the southern boundary of the parish. The Sharn Brook is a small stream that rises near Hobbs Green a few kilometres west of the village and joins the River Great Ouse just east of the village. The brook has been managed and diverted in recent times, and it seems likely that it once connected drainage ditches north and west of Sharnbrook village.

Figure 1: *Map of England with insert map of East Anglia and the location of Sharnbrook highlighted in red.*

Sharnbrook today is a large nucleated village of around 2,000 people, with a range of shops, primary and secondary schools and large areas of relatively recent housing. The older part of the settlement is mainly arranged as a double row in a NW-SE orientation running parallel to Sharn Brook with High Street to the north and Lodge Road to the south. There are 50 listed buildings, mostly houses of 17th and 18th century date. The Grade I listed 13th century parish church of St Peter's lies c.200m south of the High Street within a large churchyard. The largest employer in the area (Unilever), uses one of the old Medieval manors - Colworth House - as its base. The Midland Railway line passes just to the north of the main village centre. Sharnbrook station, which enabled Sharnbrook to be connected directly to Leicester, Bedford and London, was closed in 1960 and the

station buildings were subsequently demolished. Sharnbrook Viaduct (10 arches) that crosses the River Great Ouse is another surviving testament to this Victorian-era history.

The circular banked and ditched earthwork that was investigated by this project (Beds HER 994) lies approximately 0.5 km west of the parish church set back from Lodge Road, to the west of the area occupied by the modern village. A map of the extent of the parish is shown in Figure 2.

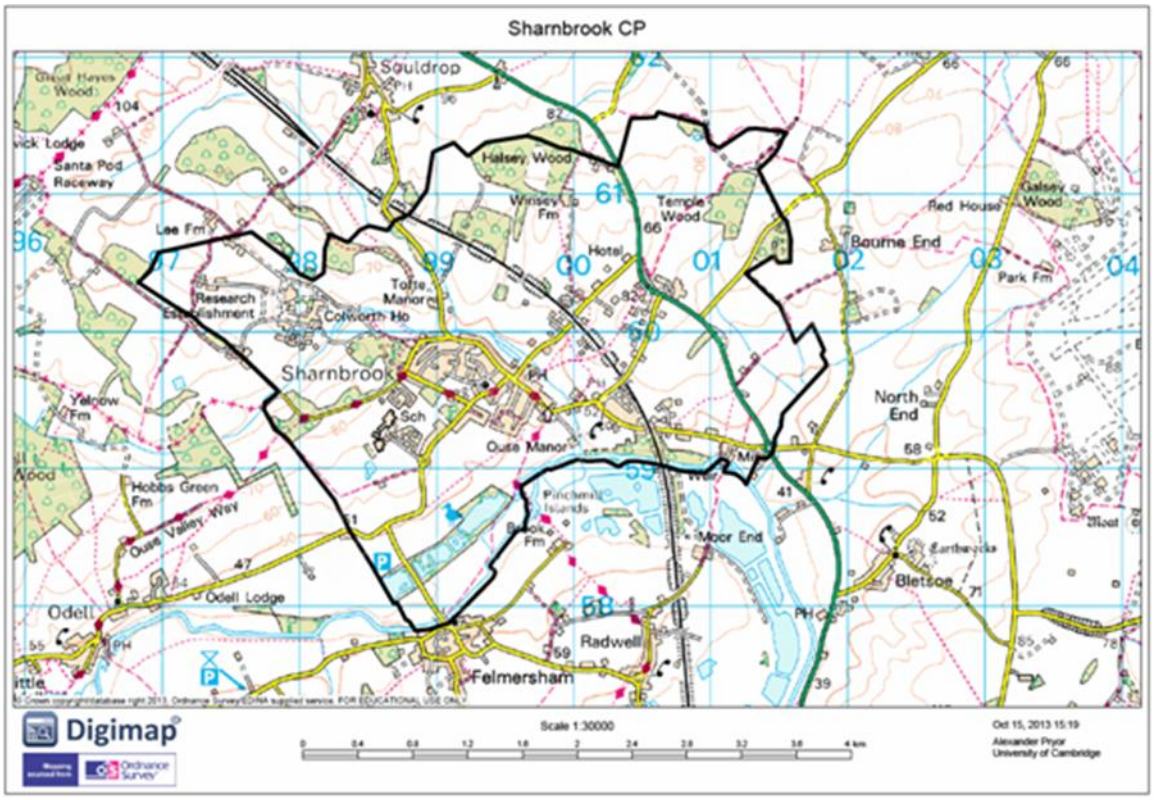

Figure 2: *Extent of Sharnbrook parish (highlighted in black)*

5. Geology and Topography

Bedfordshire is an inland county in East Anglia bordered by Northamptonshire to the north, Cambridgeshire to the east, Hertfordshire to the south and Buckinghamshire to the west. The village of Sharnbrook lies between 40m and 70m OD sloping gently upwards from the River Great Ouse valley towards an area of high ground to the NW. The village is located near a boundary in bedrock geology between sedimentary mudstones, limestone and interbedded sandstones and siltstones, all dating from the Jurassic era. These deposits are capped by superficial deposits dating from the Quaternary Period of the last two million years, comprising a mixed sand, gravel and clay diamicton of the Oadby Member and mixed sands and gravels from the Felmersham Member[5]. The surrounding landscape drains to the North Sea via the River Great Ouse and is broadly composed of flat or gently undulating open farmland with drainage ditches, water courses and fragmented hedgerows forming field boundaries.

[5] http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html?location=sharnbrook (accessed May 2013)

6. Archaeological and Historical Background

There is no known historical evidence for the Castle Close site at Sharnbrook, although the manorial history is long and complex (Page 1912). The site and lands named 'Castle Close' lies within the Toft estate when they are first identifiably recorded in estate surveys in the 17th and 18th centuries. A survey of 1617 locates Castle Close above Church Furlong, alias Limekyll Furlong. A map of 1765/70 [reprinted 1849] also shows 'Castle Closes' (two plots referred to as C1 and C2a few fields northwest of the parish church) as part of the Tofte manor estate. Within the two closes is a semi-circular feature which is very similar to the earthwork described in Harvey (citing Lewis's 1861 Topographical Dictionary) as " a circular mound and moat, called Castle Close at Sharnbrook, indicating the site of a castle, probably at the time of Stephen" (Harvey 1872-8, 455). The 1809 pre-enclosure map for Sharnbrook shows the same fields with a straight road (now Lodge Road) cutting off a corner of the eastern part of the Castle Closes. Due south of them is "Limekiln Piece". In the 1812 Enclosure Award, Castle Closes are described as "part of an old inclosure called Grass Castle Close with the ancient fences thereto belonging" The 2nd and 3rd editions of the 6" OS map name the area as Castle Close.

The name Sharnbrook (recorded as *Scharnbroc* in 1278 but also variously as *Seernebroc*, *Sernebroc* and *Sarnebroc*[6]) probably has a Saxon origin, and means "dung brook". The first mention of Sharnbrook is in the Domesday book, where eight landowners are mentioned by name. Three of these eight manors still exist today, comprising Tofte Manor just north of the parish church, Ouse Manor southeast of the village and Colworth House to the west. Of these, Tofte Manor is the most interesting to the current study as it was once owned by four generations of the Triket family in the 12th-13th centuries[7], who have also been linked with the Castle Close monument (see below). The existing Tofte Manor house is a small, mostly stone-built 16th century house located c.600m north of the parish church of St Peter's.

Archaeological evidence for human activity around Sharnbrook dates back to the prehistoric period, and includes a number of ring ditches identified from crop marks in aerial photographs in the fields to the south of Castle Close on the northern side of the River Ouse. These include 3 ring ditches south of Prospect Place (HER: 15084); an isolated ring ditch east of Glebe Farm (HER 732); and 1 to 3 ring ditches south west of the village (HER 1839). A small scatter of Roman pottery identified by field-walking just south of St Peter's church indicates a small settlement in the area at this time, although the site was disturbed by gravel pits and is now under a housing development (HER 2684).

The only identified surviving archaeological evidence possibly dating to the pre-Norman period is a fishpond (HER 14461) which is possibly that mentioned in the Domesday Book, however evidence from the mid-later medieval period is plentiful. The oldest surviving building in the village is St Peter's Church, which is mainly 13th-15th century in date with later additions, and is built of limestone rubble and ashlar (HER 1112). Aerial photographs and field-walking have also identified areas of ridge and furrow field systems near the village (HER 1642; 10698; 15675), and a possible deserted medieval village on the north bank of the Sharn Brook where the ground slopes down towards the stream, north of the area occupied by the present village (HER 15675). Investigations at no. 48 High Street and at 2 Church Lane revealed no evidence for medieval occupation in these

[6] http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42388 (accessed May 2013)
[7] http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42388 (accessed May 2013)

locations (HER 16946), suggesting that the core area of settlement at Sharnbrook has shifted through time, although a large quantity of medieval pottery was found at 58 High Street while gardening (HER 15642). A medieval rectangular earthwork enclosure is also known to the SE of the village, close to the River Great Ouse (HER 10697).

Little previous excavation has been carried out in Sharnbrook, or in the vicinity of the Castle Close monument, and that which has been conducted has yielded little of interest. Four excavations recorded on the NMR Excavation Index are: Site code SCS04 at 2 Church Lane, revealing modern activity only; Site Code SOR03 at Fox Hedge Estate, adjacent to Sharnbrook Upper School, where a possible hearth of unknown date was found; Site Code SPS1076 St Peter's Church churchyard, where unmarked burials and crypts of modern date were identified and Project Code WB173 St Peter's Churchyard in which no archaeologically significant deposits were revealed.

A programme of test pit excavations by Access Cambridge Archaeology at the University of Cambridge between 2007 and 2012[8] has revealed activity of Bronze Age date along the High Street, indications of Iron age and Roman settlement on the southern fringes of the village, limited early Anglo-Saxon activity south of the High Street, and a dispersed scatter of several discrete settlement sites across the present village in the late Anglo-Saxon period. In the high medieval period pottery has been found widely across the village especially along the High Street, but very little in the Castle Close area. There is little evidence for contraction in the late medieval period, and most of the pre-modern village footprint appears to have been in existence from c. 1750 AD. Very little pre-modern material was found in any of the pits nearest to Castle Close.

6.1 The Earthwork in Castle Close

The location of the earthwork in Castle Close, Sharnbrook (Beds HER 994) is shown in Figure 3 and is described in the Historic Environment Record (HER) for Bedfordshire as 'an oval banked & ditched enclosure, medieval in date'. It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 20404), described in the schedule notes as a moated site. The ascribed medieval date was based on the assumption that it is a moated site: until the excavations reported here, there was no corroborative archaeological or documentary evidence to confirm this date. The monument has a sub-circular or oval form, measuring about 60m across. It is defined by a ditch approximately 7m wide by up to 3m deep, inside which is a bank which stands c. 1.5-2m above the ditch bottom and c. 1m above the earthwork interior, which is an approximately level area (Figure 4) measuring approximately 25m by 20m. There are no causeways across the ditch. The eastern side of the ditch is fed by seepage, holds standing water at certain times of the year and is drained by a leat or stream, 4m wide and 0.5m deep, which runs for approximately 100m to the east where it joins other field drains. Today, the monument is accessed via a path that approaches from Lodge Road through a small copse of woodland comprising the Castle Close Wildlife and Heritage Site[9]. These trees previously also covered the monument itself including the bank, ditch and entire central area, however the trees in the central area were removed to help protect the monument in 2006. Access to the central area is now gained via a new, small causeway across the moat on the southern side of the monument.

[8] http://www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk/reports/bedfordshire/sharnbrook (accessed May 2013)
[9] http://sharnbrookonline.co.uk/environment/castle-close/ (accessed May 2013)

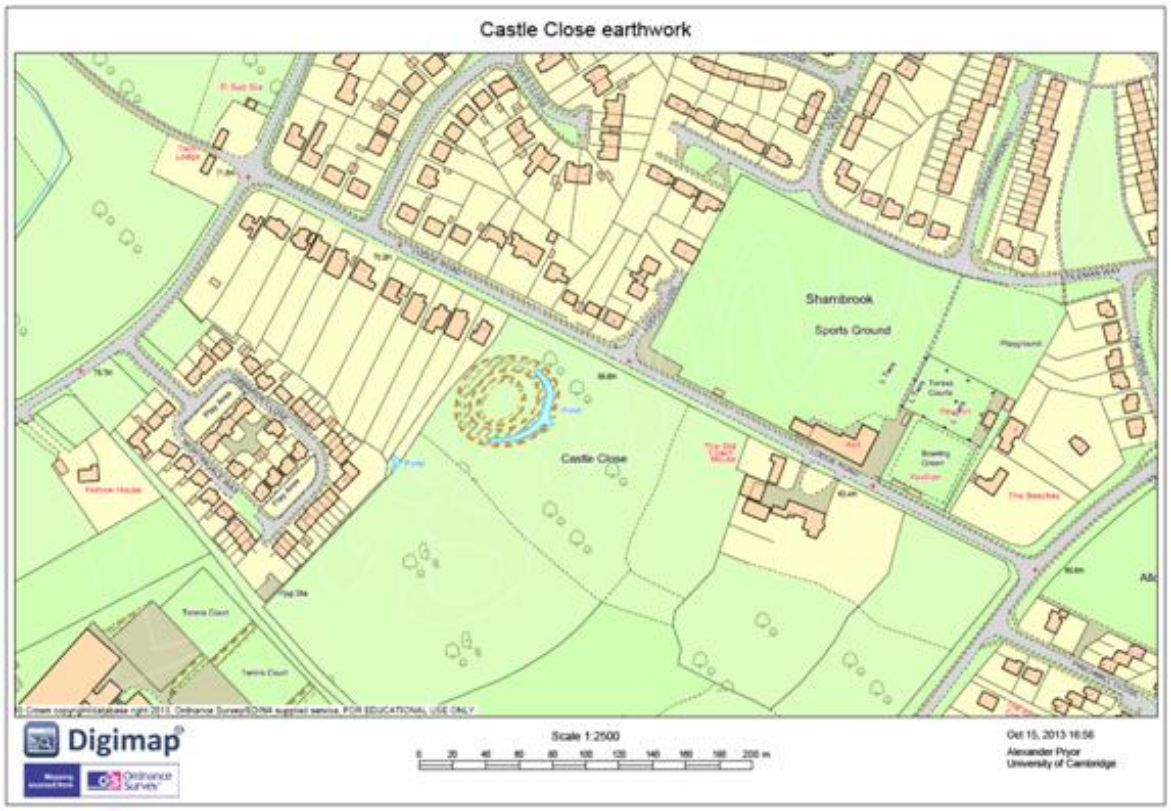

Figure 3: *Circular banked and ditched earthwork enclosure in Castle Close, Sharnbrook.*

The earthwork at Sharnbrook is one of a number of ditched enclosures of known or suspected medieval date located on the northern slopes of the Ouse valley, such as the moats at Bletsoe and Thurleigh and castles at Thurleigh and Odell (see Section 6.5).

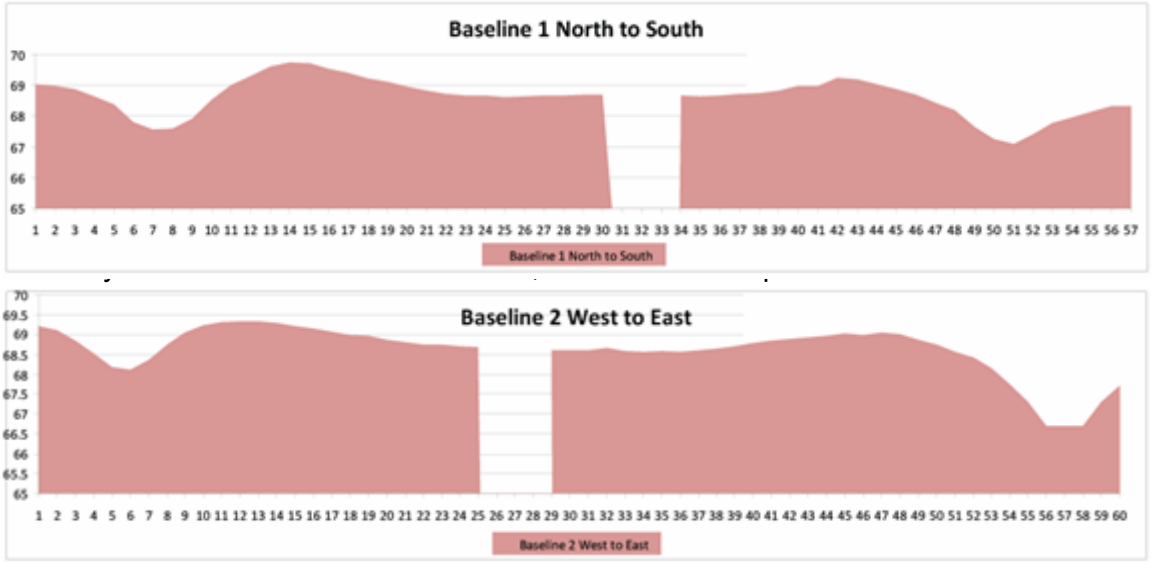

Figure 4: *Profiles across the Castle Close monument showing the profiles of bank and ditch features. Survey conducted by Sharnbrook Local History Group and graph prepared by Des Hoar.*

6.2 Previous Archaeological Investigation of the Castle Close Site

No previous archaeological excavations are known to have been carried out on the site of the Castle Close monument. A field survey was carried out in 1979/82 by Leicester University students (Brown and Taylor 1991), in which it was described as a “simple site” compared to the six other north Bedfordshire sites included in the survey. The report highlighted the difficulty of dating moated sites on field and documentary evidence alone. The description of the Castle Close site is brief and the illustration has very little detail. The report suggests that the site probably enclosed a single dwelling, and while conceding that the inner bank superficially gives the site the appearance of a ringwork, they conclude that was not defensive but an early form of circular manorial moat.

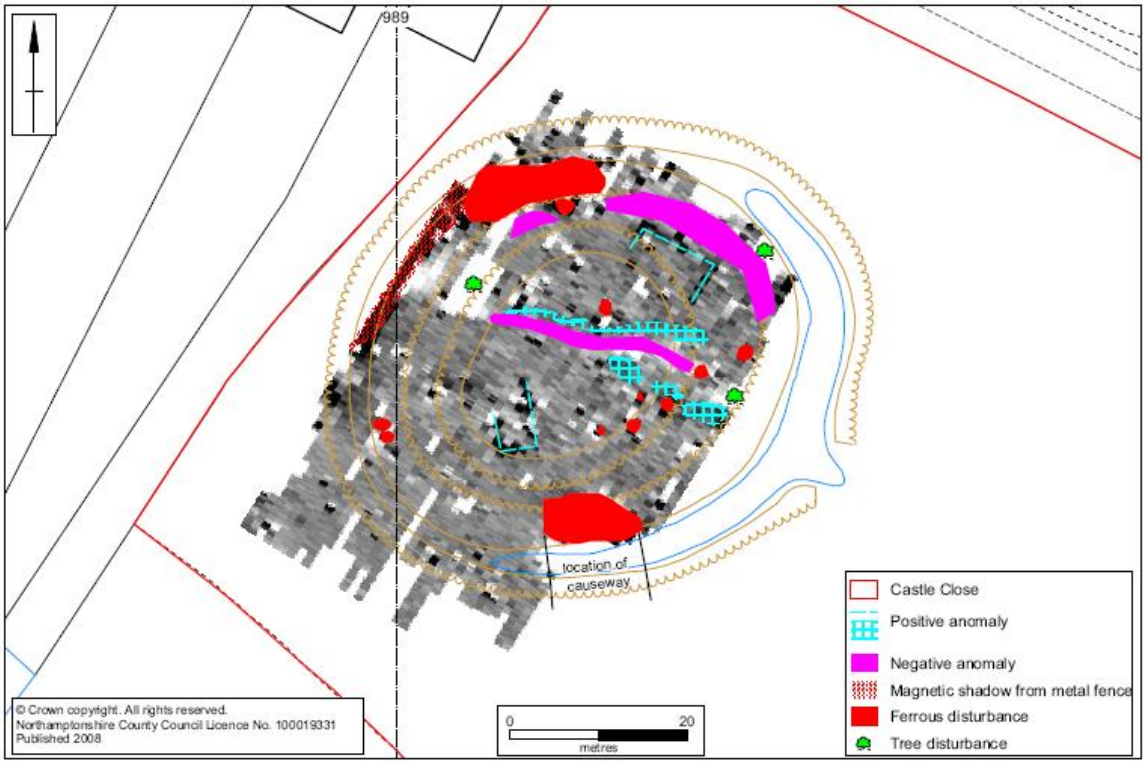

Figure 5: *Geophysical survey results obtained from magnetometry survey, annotated with the interpreted features (Simmonds 2008). Clearly visible are the two rectangular structures identified as possible buildings (dashed blue lines).*

In 2008 a geophysical survey was carried out by Northampton Archaeology on behalf of Sharnbrook Parish Council (Simmonds 2008), using magnetometry and resistivity to search for possible features. The results indicated two rectangular features on the island, measuring 10m by 6m and 8m by 5m respectively and interpreted as "perhaps denoting buildings within the interior" of the mound (Figure 5) (Simmonds 2008, 5). Other features detected by the survey included possible disturbance from tree roots, and fluctuations associated with the bank and ditch that surrounds the monument.

6.3 Moated Sites

Medieval moated sites are defined as small enclosures defined by ditches (usually wide and shallow) with the enclosed area often described as a platform or island. The enclosed area is usually less than 100m wide and most commonly rectilinear in form. Habitative moats contain a medieval domestic residence (Taylor 1978). Most habitative moated sites date to the early 13th to mid-14th century (Le Patourel and Roberts 1978, 47), and are generally considered to reflect the desire of middle-ranking lords (who lacked the inclination, means, rank or licence to construct a castle), to display their seignorial status by surrounding their residences with moats. Moats performed a range of functions as status symbol, aesthetic embellishment, stock pond, water reservoir/conduit (if linked to a leat system) and defence. In many areas where manorial moated sites are common, they are sited in or near nucleated villages, sometimes, but by no means always, in a prominent position and/or close to the parish church. The distribution of moated sites across England is very uneven (Aberg 1987, 2 (Figure 1)) and they are common in lowland areas of England with heavy land (which retains water easily) and dispersed patterns of settlement (Roberts and Wrathmell 2000, 14 (Figure 9)). Some regions have large numbers of moated sites located in close proximity, far too many for them all to be manorial sites. It is inferred that over time, moat construction moved down the social scale, with wealthy freeman, especially those independently farming their own enclosed land, increasingly inclined to build moats around their homes.

Circular moats and moats with high internal banks are both uncommon and may be earlier in date, with some shown by excavation to date to the 12th century (Le Patourel 1978, 41-2): it has been noted that such sites are more similar to ringworks than moated sites (ibid.). A description of moated sites as 'semi-fortified offshoots of the ringwork and motte and bailey traditions translated down the twin scales of relative importance and social status' (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002b, 58), emphasises the close connection between moats and ringworks.

6.4 Ringworks

Ringworks are fortified habitative enclosures of medieval date, with one or more domestic buildings enclosed by a ditch and internal bank topped with a palisade or wall (Kenyon 1990, 3-8). Ringworks are usually considered to be a type of castle, lacking a mound or motte. In England medieval fortified habitative enclosures appear (in apparently small numbers) in the late Anglo-Saxon period, with the 'fortified manor' at Goltho (Lincs) built c. 850 AD (Crieghton 2002, 24 and op. cit.). It has been suggested (although hotly disputed), that possession of a defended enclosure was an essential prerequisite of late Anglo-Saxon thengly status (Brown 1954, 46-9), although one might suspect that if this were the case, more such sites would be known. Despite the introduction of the motte and bailey castle in 1066 and their subsequent proliferation, ringworks (which lack either motte or keep) continued to be built until the mid-12th century, albeit in smaller numbers than mottes. Only 190 ringworks are known in England and Wales and they are outnumbered by motte and bailey castles approximately 4:1 (Kenyon 1990, 5). Ringworks are usually smaller than motte and bailey castles, and would certainly have been quicker and more economical to build (King 1988, 57-8).

The reasons why some lords built mottes while others built ringworks are unknown (Higham and Barker 1992, 194-7): simple personal preference is often cited as the main factor. It has been suggested that ringworks proliferated in the early years of the Norman Conquest by virtue of being quick to construct (Liddiard 2005, 22-3) and also that ringworks lay lower down the social scale than mottes (Kenyon 1990, 5). Some ringworks were converted into motte and bailey castles by the addition of a mound, with the ringwork sometimes retained to function as the castle bailey. Excavation shows material culture from ringworks such as Goltho not to be significantly distinctive from other settlement sites (Creighton 2002, 25).

6.5 Moated Sites and Ringworks in Bedfordshire

There are around 300 moated sites in Bedfordshire although 174 of these have been totally or partially destroyed (Coleman 1990). They are associated with both nucleated and dispersed settlement as well as sometimes being found in isolation (Baker 1978, 60). There are notable concentrations in central and north Bedfordshire (Baker 1978; Brown and Taylor 1991) where places such as Thurleigh, Bolnhurst, Cranfield and Marston Moretaine contain between 11 and 13 moated sites per parish (Lewis et al 1997, 137). Moated sites are less common in the valleys of the rivers Ouse and Ivel.

Most moated sites in Bedfordshire are rectangular but some have double islands or more unusual configurations. However only four – a tiny minority - are known to be circular (Stephen Coleman 1990). The only other circular moated site in the Brown & Taylor study is Palaceyard at Roxton which (unlike Castle Close) is surrounded by a number of other sub-rectangular enclosures. Two other possible sites of moats have been identified in Sharnbrook – one at the Grange and one at Temple Wood, but no evidence for either of these survives. Carlton Hall has a sub-circular medieval moated enclosure. Excavations at Tempsford (listed as a castle by King (1983, 7) in east Bedfordshire have revealed middle Saxon ditches underneath the medieval moated site (Maull et al 2000).

Bedfordshire contains 25 known castles (King 1983, 4), of which just four take the form of ringworks, three of which have baileys. King notes the density of castles in Bedfordshire (at 1 castle to 18.9 square miles) to be the highest in England outside the border counties (King 1983, 4), and tentatively associates this with the Danish wars of the early 11th century rather than the Norman Conquest or the Anarchy of the 12th century. The distribution of castles in Bedfordshire favours particularly landscapes, the Flitt and Ivel greensand valleys in the south-east of the county, the Ouse Valley and the northern claylands.

Castle sites listed by King as ringworks are Arlesey, Biggleswade, Old Warden and Renhold (Howbury) (where only possible traces of a bailey remain). Surviving castle sites with moats near Sharnbrook are Bletsoe and Odell. Sharnbrook is not listed by King as a castle, or even included in his list of 'possible castles' (1983, 4-9).

6.6 The Enigma of the Castle Close Earthwork Site

There are a number of issues arising from the evidence above regarding the monument in Castle Close, defined in its schedule as a moated site, which show it defies easy

classification as a moated site, while documentary sources do not provide definite evidence to identify the site as a medieval manor.

Castle Close, Sharnbrook does not fit easily into the category of medieval manorial moated site for a number of reasons. Firstly, its oval form is atypical: circular or oval moats are uncommon, with the great majority of moated sites being essentially rectilinear in form (Aberg 1978 and see this document, 2.1.2 above), as is shown in numerous examples in the neighbouring county of Northamptonshire, whose upstanding archaeological sites were surveyed in detail by the RCHME (RCHME 1975; 1979; 1981; 1982). As noted, circular moats are often considered likely to be of early origin (Oake et al 2007, 87), and it may in some instances be futile to attempt to distinguish between early moats and ringworks. The possibility that the Castle Close site is a ringwork castle is reflected in the site name, recorded in a survey dated 1617 which refers to the land in which the monument lies as "Castle Close". Its small size, however, suggests that if it had long continued this function in the Norman period, it would have been furnished with a bailey, as have monuments of similar form to Castle Close at Farthingstone and Long Buckby (Northants) (RCHME 1981, 86-8; 133-5).

A number of other monuments which are morphologically similar to Castle Close, with a homestead surrounded by a curvilinear ditched enclosure, have been defined as manor houses (rather than moated sites), such as Barby in the neighbouring county of Northamptonshire, where a circular ditch encloses an area 65m wide comprising a low (1.5m high) flat-topped mound (RCHME 1981, 13-14). At nearby Braunstonbury, an oval ditched feature c. 75m along its long axis is likewise defined as a manor house (RCHME 1981, 22-3 and fig 28). This distinction highlights the semantic nuance in the typological classification - a medieval manor house with a contemporary ditch around it may be defined as a manor house by one authority and a moated site by another.

Another issue confounding easy definition of the Castle Close site lies in the lack of evidence for its date. Although presumed to be medieval, no archaeological evidence of medieval date has been recovered from the site, indeed there are no known finds from it of any date. Test pit excavations carried out near Castle Close[10] produced only tiny quantities of medieval pottery, normally inferred as likely to indicate arable in the vicinity, or possible even less intensive use, and not habitation (Lewis, 2007a; Lewis 2007b-2012; Lewis and Ranson unpublished report). Pottery of Roman date has been produced from the test pits in similarly small quantities. Larger numbers of sherds are present only from the 17th century AD onwards, and the numbers of these are still relatively low. Profiles of test pits around Castle Close have consistently shown shallow subsoil largely devoid of medieval material overlying natural less then 0.5m below the present ground surface. The monument in Castle Close could plausibly be of Roman or later prehistoric date, as activity in both periods has been attested from test pit excavations sited, like Castle Close, on the southern margins of the existing village of Sharnbrook[11]. Both these periods are characterized by features similar to that at Castle Close, usually interpreted as enclosures or enclosed settlements, such as at Brigstock, Fotheringay, Harringworth, Southwick etc in nearby Northamptonshire (RCHME 1975, 20-1; 40-4; 48-50; 86-7 etc.) (although many such features are in fact only dated on morphological grounds). Features such as that in Canons Ashby (Northants), similar in form and size to Castle Close and described non-committedly as a 'mound' by RCHME have been identified as a barrow by the Ordnance Survey and a castle motte by Pevsner (RHCME 1981, 36 and Figure 34).

[10] http://www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk/reports/bedfordshire/sharnbrook (accessed May 2013)
[11] http://www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk/reports/bedfordshire/sharnbrook (accessed May 2013)

The oval ditched and internally banked site of John of Gaunt's Castle near Daventry (Northants), a similar size to Castle Close, Sharnbrook, produced tile and brick which was identified on discovery as Roman, although this has subsequently been questioned (RCHME 1981, 69-70).

A third anomalous feature of Castle Close is its location. It is somewhat detached from the village: Castle Close is more than 400m from the church and even further from the main locus of the village in the 12th – 16th century, which has been shown by test pit excavation to lie along the High Street[12]. It is also not associated with any other earthwork complex which, although not unknown, is uncommon. In addition, it is atypical of most moated sites in Bedfordshire which are low-lying. Castle Close earthwork is located at nearly the highest point locally on a spur of land between the River Great Ouse to the south and the Sharn Brook to the east/north-east.

A fourth uncertainty pertains to whether the Castle Close site, usually presumed to have been habitative, was indeed so. Not all moated sites were residential, with a significant number being ornamental additions to gardens, as seen at Aldwinckle in nearby Northants (RCHME 1975, 6-7) or functional elements within systems of ponds and leats used for managing fish and/or waterfowl. Such features may be medieval or later in date.

Another factor which makes classification problematic at Sharnbrook is the lack of evidence for any entrance. The present causeway was inserted, with the consent of EH, when the Parish Council took over the site, in order to facilitate access to the island and minimise further damage to the moat and bank. There was no suggestion that it was sited in the location of an original causeway, and no evidence as to whether or where there might have been a causeway or bridge. Nothing was indicated by the geophysical survey (2008). Brown & Taylor (1991) commented "On the south-western side the bank is partly broken through, but this break is not an original entrance." All habitative moated sites had an entrance to provide access, often manifested as a causeway across the ditch associated with a break in the line of the inner bank. Access gained via a bridge might not be discernable in upstanding earthworks, although in some cases narrowed stretches of moat are presumed to indicate be where abutments for a bridge stood. While the lack of evidence for an access point to the Castle Close enclosure does not preclude the site being a medieval moat, it certainly does not support such an identification, and leaves open the possibility of it being a prehistoric burial monument, or a post-medieval garden feature, such as are preserved at Hackleton (Northants) (RCHME 1979, 69).

[12] http://www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk/reports/bedfordshire/sharnbrook (accessed May 2013)

7. Methodology

7.1 Small Scale Excavation

- The excavation involved opening a test pit measuring 2m x 2m square. The size and layout of the trench was discussed with English Heritage and was considered by all parties to represent the best way of addressing the aims of the project. The excavation was deemed large enough to establish the presence, condition and date of archaeological remains while small enough to cause minimal disturbance.
- All excavation, including removal of turf and topsoil and backfilling, was carried out by hand.
- The trench was excavated in 10cm spits with features excavated sequentially in the normal way.
- All spoil was sieved by hand to ensure maximum retrieval of archaeological finds using sieves with a standard 10mm mesh.
- All artefacts from the excavation were retained in the first instance.
- In situ features, when encountered, were carefully cleaned, planned and left in situ.
- The excavated area was planned at scale 1:20. Sections were drawn at 1:10.
- A register was kept detailing photographs taken including context number, direction of shot and date and time of day.
- At the end of the excavations, the trench was backfilled and the turf replaced neatly to restore the site.
- All excavated areas were inspected by an English Heritage officer prior to backfilling.

7.2 Auger Survey

The Auger survey aimed to establish the depth of the ditch and the height of the bank above the original ground surface, along with any other information about the building and post-construction history of the monument which may be observable, including whether there is any evidence for an outer counter-scarp bank beyond the ditch.

- The survey was carried out by hand using a 10mm diameter auger, coring at intervals of 1m from the inside of the bank to beyond the outer edge of the ditch.
- Each core aimed to reach natural.
- Cores were examined on site with any samples warranted by visual observation taken for analysis by appropriate specialists.

8. Results

Excavation and auger survey took place over four sunny days between 29th August and 1st September 2013. The 2m x 2m trench was sited slightly south and west from the centre of the monument on flat, grassy ground (Figure 6). This location was chosen on the basis of geophysical survey data which recorded a rectangular feature defined by outer edges that showed a high resistance/magnetic signal (Figure 5). By chance, the area excavated contained the rotten remains of a tree stump that had been sawn off at ground level, located on the northern boundary of the trench. The stump and several large rotted roots remained in place, but upon excavation it was determined that these roots were confined mostly to the top 40cm of the stratigraphy.

The auger survey of the bank and ditch was sited on a transect orientated east-west, beginning on the flat ground outside the ditch and finishing on top of the internal bank.

The findings and interpretations made from these investigations are presented below.

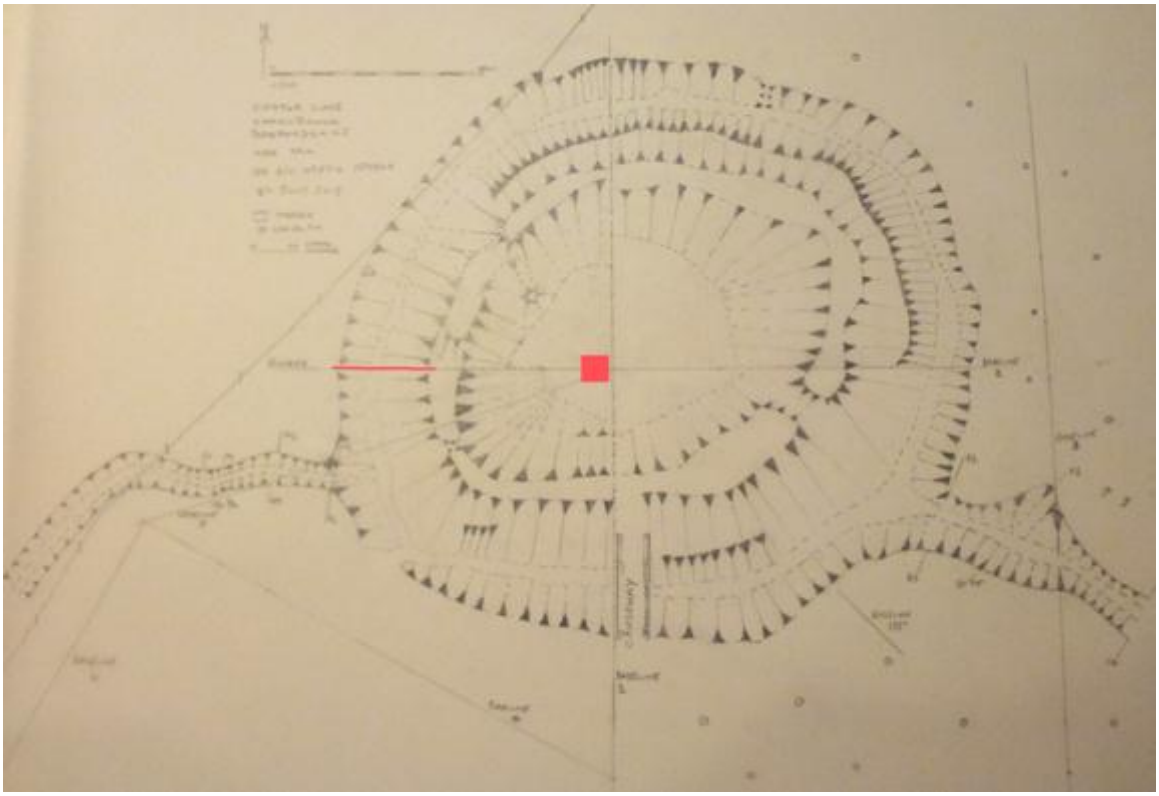

Figure 6: *Plan of Castle Close monument, produced following a site survey conducted by Sharnbrook Local History Group in July and October 2013 (image provided courtesy of Des Hoar). Location of 2m x 2m trench and the auger transect marked in red*.

8.1 Excavation Results

Excavation of the 2m x 2m trench uncovered a scatter of stones at c.0.3m depth, under which were discovered an *in-situ* burnt clay deposit (**F.1**), two cut features (**F.2** and **F.3**) and a post hole (**F.4**). The large pottery assemblage discovered during excavation is summarised in Table 1 (below), and referred to in the following presentation and discussion of the excavation results.

	STAM		SHC		EMW		HG		
Context	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	Date Range
1			10	33					1100-1200
2			13	22					1100-1200
3			36	133	1	7	1	13	1100-1200
4	2	3	73	583					1000-1200
6			4	13					1100-1200
7			3	9					1100-1200
8			8	14					1100-1200
9			14	42					1100-1200
11			10	25					1100-1200
12			6	12					1100-1200

Table 1: *Pottery finds from all contexts*

Topsoil and subsoil was initially removed across the whole of the trench in three 10cm spits (contexts (1), (2) and (3)). Below the turf line, the sediments in (1), (2) and (3) constituted highly organic sandy silts and contained abundant roots of different sizes, including some large tree roots and many smaller roots in various stages of decay. Other inclusions comprised frequent angular cream-coloured gravel and occasional charcoal flecks. Finds from these layers included 59 sherds of Early Medieval Shelly Ware single sherds of Early Medieval Sandy Ware and Hertfordshire Greyware, including some rim pieces and larger sherds. Other finds from (1), (2) and (3) included small fragments of red CBM, 10 pieces of slag and some unidentifiable fragments of iron including an open-ended teardrop shaped iron loop, which may have been part of a horse harness or agricultural equipment. Nine animal bones were also found, one of which could be identified to sheep/goat.

At 0.3m depth a stone-rich layer (4) was encountered, largely comprising fragmented limestone in flat, 'tablet' form ranging in size from small (c.5cm long) to relatively large and substantial (c.30cm long). None of the stones showed any sign of anthropogenic modification and no mortar was present on or between any stones, although frequent charcoal flecks were visible in the silt between the stones, alongside some larger charcoal pieces up to 3cm in diameter and fragments of bone and pottery. The stone was distributed across the base of the trench in three irregular pseudo-linear spreads (Figure 7), with stone most notably absent at this depth in the SE corner of the trench where a stone-free layer of mid-brown silt (6) was present. Stone was also largely absent from a narrow band orientated south-west to north-east running diagonally across the trench from corner to corner, delineated along its south-eastern side by an irregular line of stones which appeared to respect this line. Close inspection indicated that no part of (4) constituted an *in situ* constructed feature such as a wall or floor and the layer did not appear to reflect an intentional act of deposition: it was interpreted instead as a re-deposited spread, possibly demolition rubble from a bank, un-mortared wall or other constructed feature. The apparent linearity of the stone spread, especially alongside the

central diagonal band, may have been due to tree root action or might possibly indicate the former presence of a structural feature such as a horizontal timber plate for a building.

Removal of a 10cm spit of (4) and (6) showed the stony layer (4) to be shallow across most of the trench where it was less than 0.4m deep, but to dip down in the south-east corner, here continuing under (6) (Figure 8), where it was excavated as context (8). A dark pink deposit of burned clay (**F.1**) against the west side of the trench continued into the unexcavated area. Two other features exposed at this level were a small, round depression (**F.5**) and a larger poorly-defined cut feature in the northwest corner of the trench (**F.2)**.

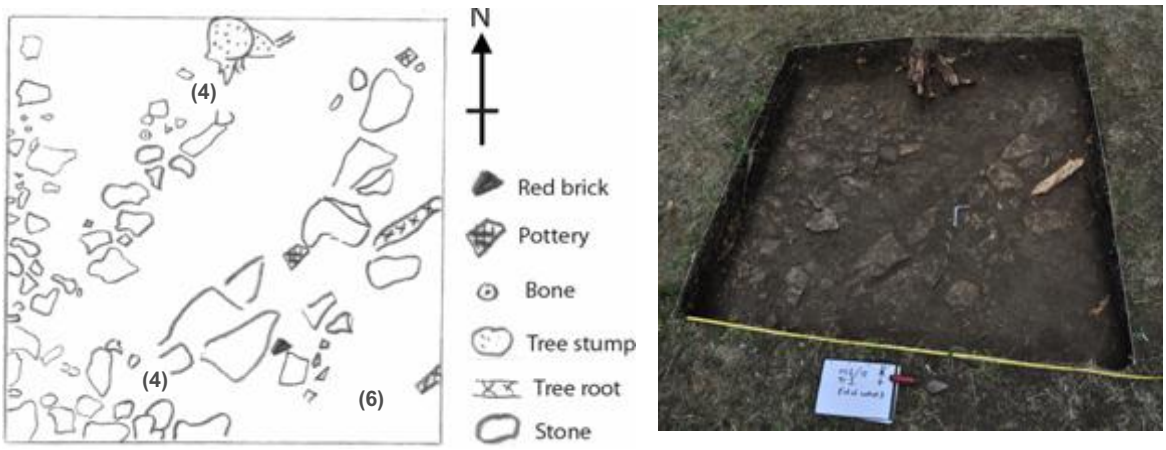

Figure 7: *Top of context/layer (4), showing linear distribution of stone layer (4) in three bands. Visible also is the top surface of the stone-free layer (6) in the south-east corner of the trench. Left: site sketch plan of top of layer 4; Right: photograph of top of layer 4.*

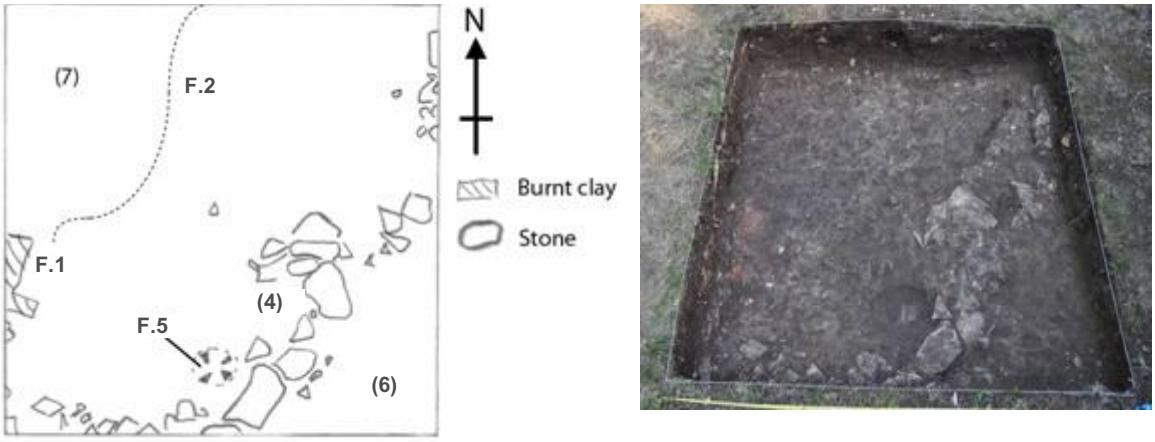

Figure 8: *Site sketch plan and photo of trench after removal of spit/layer (4). Visible are a small shallow circular feature (**F.5**); the upper surface of the fill (7) of a pit (**F.2**); the burnt clay feature (**F.1**) and the remainder of stone-free layer (6) in the SE corner, which overlay the stone layer (4) as it dipped down in this corner of the trench.*

Context (4) contained abundant pottery including two sherds of Stamford Ware and 73 sherds of Early Medieval Shelly Ware, significantly more than in any other context. Three small corroded iron artefacts also found in context (4) were identified as horseshoe nails similar in form to Ian Goodall's Type A (Goodall 2012), dating to the 11th to 13th century

AD (Figure 9). Other finds included eight animal bones, fragments of red brick or tile, and charcoal.

Context (6), overlying the stony layer in the south-eastern corner of the trench, was comprised of a sandy silt containing four sherds of Early Medieval Shelly Ware, single pieces of slag and fragments of red brick or tile and 2 animal bones. This contrasted sharply with the larger number of finds found in the stony layer (4).

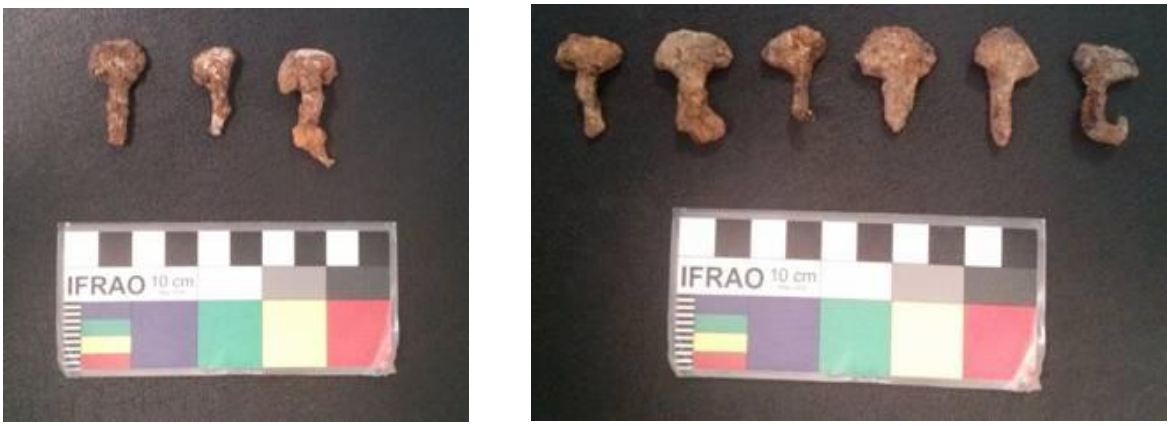

Figure 9: *Corroded iron horse shoe nails (Goodall Type A) from Contexts 4 (left), and 11 (right).*

Underlying context (6), the remainder of the stone layer (here excavated as context (8)) proved to be a continuation of the stony layer (4), identical in terms of its composition and its finds which included 12th century pottery sherds, small fragments of red brick or tile, animal bones and small amounts of slag. Context (8) dipped into a cut feature of indeterminate form, **F.3**, of which both context (6) and (8) constituted the upper fills.

Figure 10: *Photographs of the lowest layer of stone (context 8) before removal, looking north (left) and south-east (right)*

Removal of context (8) revealed the gently sloping profile of **F.3** and its lowest fill which was a largely stone-free mid-brown silt (11) containing 10 sherds of 12th century pottery sherds, small fragments of red brick or tile, slag and six more corroded iron Type A horseshoe nails (Figure 9). **F.3** was cut into the natural, here present as a mixed deposit of pale clay and chalky gravel. The cut for **F.3** continued into the section to the east and south, making it impossible to determine its form from the small area exposed, although it appeared to be tending towards linear or sub-rectangular rather than ovoid or circular.

Within the base of **F.3,** the cut [13] of a small circular feature (**F.4**) was observed and investigated by half-sectioning. This showed **F.4** to be steep-sided tending to near vertical below a sharp break of slope near the top of the feature. The fill (12) comprised a dark brown silt, easily distinguishable from the surrounding paler mixed clay, chalk and gravel natural. Finds from **F.4** included charcoal pieces up to 3cm in size and six sherds of 12th century Early Medieval Shelly Ware. **F.4** was interpreted as a post hole, cut into the base of **F.3** at 0.8m below ground level. The presence of this post hole raises the possibility that **F.3** could be associated with a built feature, and might possibly have been an under-floor storage or ventilation area for a timber-floored building above or a ditch.

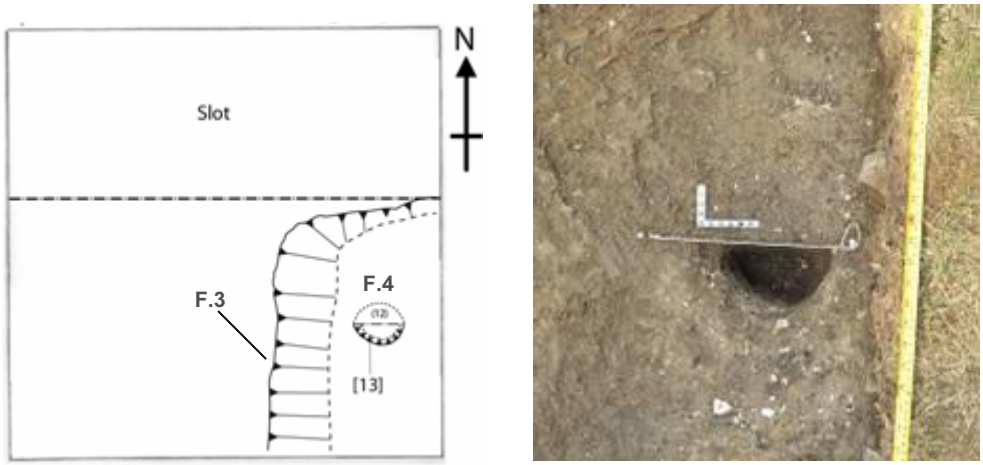

Figure 11: *Working site sketch plan and photograph of post hole **F.4** within the sub-rectangular cut feature **F.3**.*

Figure 12: *Photograph of burned pink/red clay deposits and burned stone comprising **F.1**, left in situ and re-buried at the end of excavation.*

In the central part of the trench, **F.5** (Figure 8) was an insubstantial small sub-circular deposit c. 3cm deep with indistinct edges. The fill (5) was mid-brown silt with no finds.

Given the location of the deposit directly underneath two large stones this was interpreted as derived from the natural effect of water run-off and pooling under the stone.

On the western side of the southern half of the trench, feature **F.1** comprised a discrete deposit of clay (14) much affected by heating rendering it dark pink, some of which had been heated sufficiently to create a hard brick-red ceramic deposit (Figure 12). As it extended west into the unexcavated area it was not observed in its entirety in the 2013 excavation. **F.1** was deemed to be an *in situ* constructed feature, thus it was cleaned and left intact. Cleaning showed **F.1** to extend over an area of at least 0.5m and to be up to 20cm thick. A large fragment of limestone, whose pink colour showed it also to have been previously subject to heating, lay along the southern edge of F.1 and appeared to be part of it. **F.1** was interpreted as the base of a clay hearth or oven.

The need to leave in situ features intact, combined with time constraints, prevented total excavation of the site, but a slot across the northern half of the trench was excavated to a greater depth than elsewhere to allow investigation of feature (**F.2**), whose upper fill (7) was visible at 0.4m below the surface following a poorly defined irregular curving line (Figure 13). Excavation showed the fill of **F.2** (7) to be compact and very mixed, densely populated with flecks of charred material and containing an irregular small dump of ash, large lumps of pale clay and chalk-flecked sediments (similar or equivalent to natural), and occasional smaller chalk inclusions. Finds from (7) included four small sherds of Early Medieval Shelly Ware, three animal bones, some red CBM and a piece of slag. After removal of (7), the cut [10] for **F.2** was visible as gently sloping curved feature c.0.3m deep following an irregular curved line. The western side of feature **F.2** continued into the trench section and its southern side continued into the unexcavated area beyond the slot, at which point it appeared likely to continue under **F.1**. **F.2** was tentatively interpreted as either a pit or a stoke hole for the hearth or oven (**F.1**) immediately to its south, with a fill (7) mostly comprising material riddled or raked away from the oven/hearth after use.

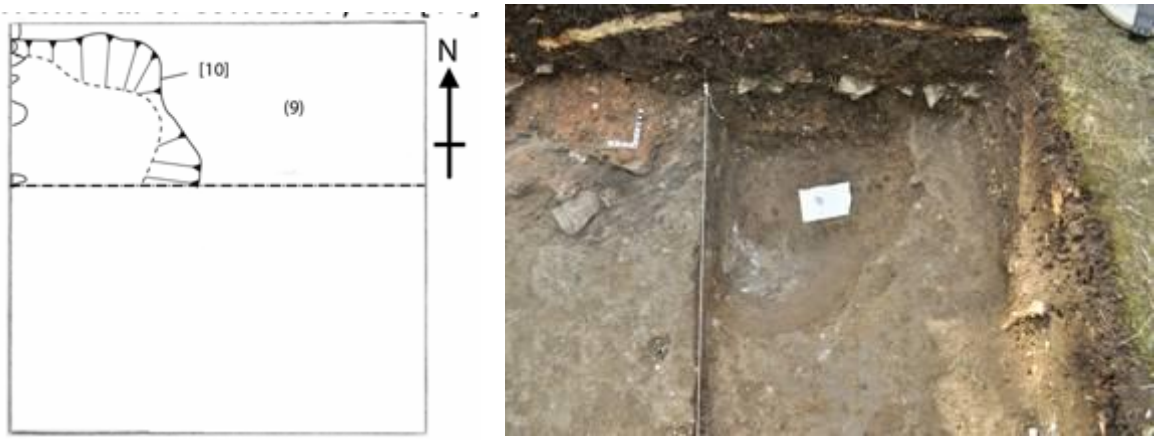

Figure 13: *Site sketch plan and working photograph (facing west) of **F.1** (against section, on left) and **F.2** (against section, on right) after removal of fill (7).*

East of **F.2**, the slot excavated across the northern half of the trench contained a compact, clay-rich spread layer with chalk inclusions up to 3cm in diameter (context 9). This layer included 13 sherds of Early Medieval Shelly Ware and four more corroded iron Type A horse shoe nails. It was not possible in the time available to establish whether any further cultural deposits remained at lower levels.

Figure 14: *Photographs of the 2013 trench in Castle Close, Sharnbrook at the point at which excavation halted. Top: view looking north. Bottom: view looking south.*

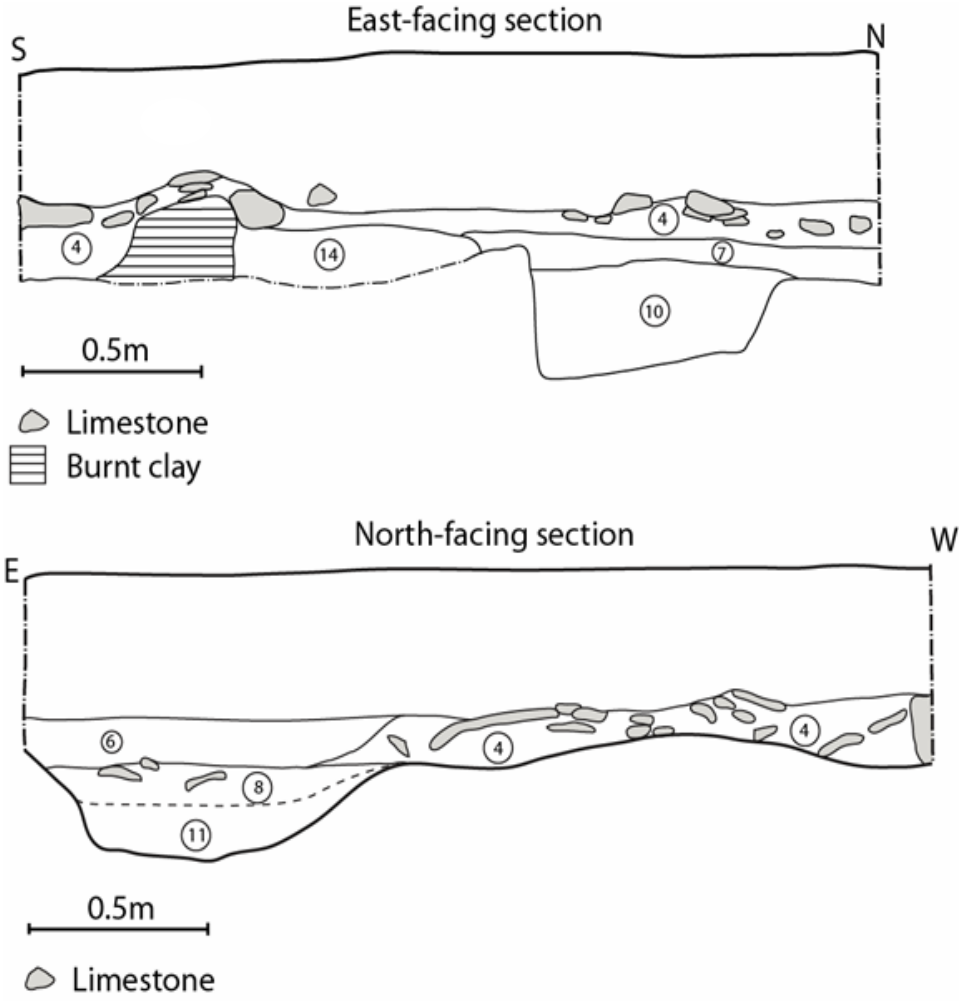

Figure 15: *Section drawings showing east-facing (top) and north-facing (bottom) sections.*

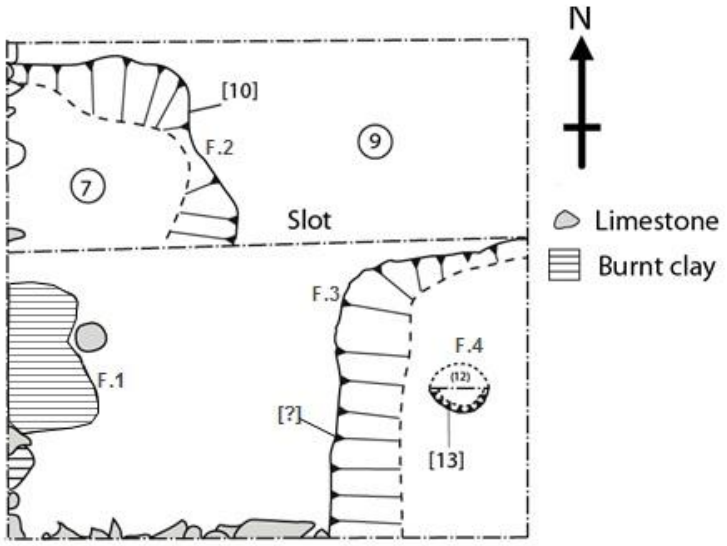

Figure 16: *Final plan of 2013 trench in Castle Close, Sharnbrook.*

8.2 Auger Survey Results

The Auger transect was sited along the western edge of the monument, along the line of the profile surveyed by Sharnbrook Local History Group (shown in Section 8, Figure 6), with point '0' marked by a post established during the profile survey. The resulting transects are shown in figure 17 and the associated depths are shown in Table 2.

All of the auger holes encountered natural deposits or stones within 40cm, and most within 20cm. Those that encountered stones were auger holes 7, 8 and 9 on the top of the bank inside the ditch, suggesting that the bank may have been partly constructed by piling stones up to form a basal layer. Two auger holes were drilled at each of these positions confirming that the stones were spread extensively in these areas and could not be penetrated. The two holes at position '7' hit stones at 11cm and 18cm respectively, showing the stones were uneven in this location, while those at 8 and 9 encountered stones at the same depths in both holes. The only observed layering was between a dark humic woodland topsoil containing large quantities of decaying leaf matter and a slightly more clay-rich compact subsoil with some roots. The natural deposits were very compact clay-rich sediments with small chalk-gravel inclusions up to 5mm in size. No waterlogged or wet deposits were encountered, and no preserved ecofactual material warranting specialist examination was found.

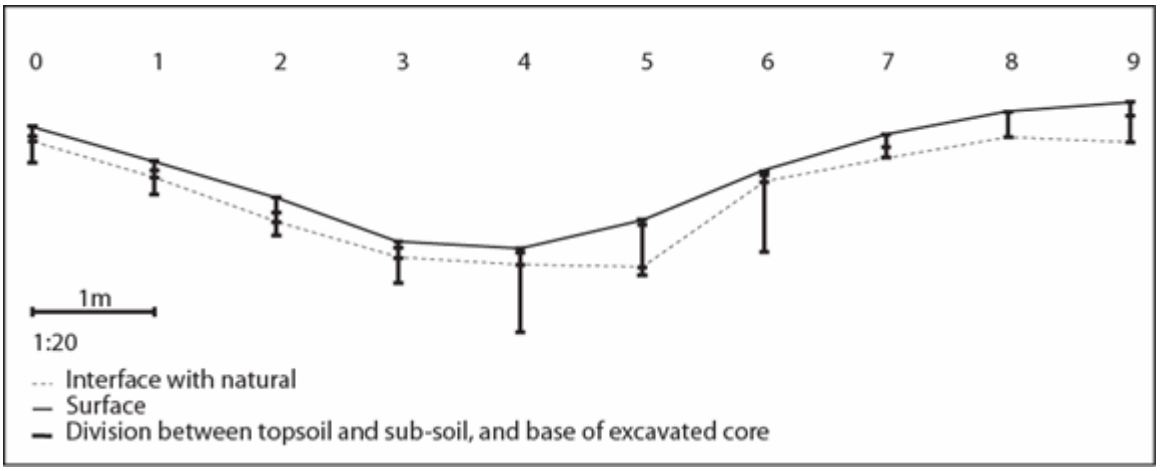

Figure 17: *Results of Auger survey across the bank and ditch earthwork features demarking the monument in Castle Close.*

m	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
topsoil/subsoil interface	12	13	13	5	4	2	2	--	--	13
Top of natural	20	18	20	13	13	38	8	11-18	20	32
Base of core	40	31	31	33	68	45	65	11-18	20	32

Table 2: *Depths in cm of sediment divisions measured from the auger transect.*

9. Discussion

9.1 The Archaeological Evidence

The small trench and the auger holes excavated in Castle Close in 2013 produced a range of useful information which considerably advances knowledge and understanding of the date, role and condition of the monument.

The burnt clay deposit (**F.1**) was the only *in-situ* constructed feature, and appears to be the remains of a hearth or oven constructed with a clay base partly surrounded with kerbing stones. The general appearance of this feature, along with the absence of significant amounts of slag and any noted charred grain from adjacent deposits, suggests it was a domestic hearth or oven used for cooking. The horseshoe nails are mostly bent and appear to have been used, and were not in any case found in close association with **F.1**, so it is inferred that the feature was not related to the manufacture of the nails. Adjacent to the north side of **F.1**, the charred and ashy material in the shallow pit (**F.2)** must derive from clearing out exhausted fuel and other residues from the hearth/oven. The presence of this deposit suggests **F.1** is more likely to be an outside hearth or (more likely) an oven, rather than a hearth inside a building. The hearth/oven is indicative of domestic activity within the Castle Close monument, with the very small quantities of animal bone (coupled with a complete lack of oyster) suggesting that such activity was explicitly zoned with domestic refuse disposed of somewhere else rather than spread around the cooking area.

On the other side of the trench, the relatively large cut feature **F.3** is difficult to interpret as it is impossible to know from the small area excavated what form it takes and how large it might be. It may be the edge of a ditch, or of a pit, but the post hole (**F.4**) in its base does raise the alternative possibility that there may have been some sort of timber structure associated with this, possibly overlying it. The presence of several horseshoe nails in the primary silting of **F.3** suggests this feature may have been associated with shoeing or re-shoeing horses. However, no slag was noted in any of the fills, suggesting that the nails are not likely to have been made in the immediate vicinity, although it may be suspected that they were made nearby on this same site.

All the exposed features (**F.1**-**F.4**) were covered with the layer of broken limestone which extended across most of the trench at 30-40cm below the present ground surface and dipped into **F.3**. The stone spread displayed some linearity, hinting at the former presence of a more substantial built feature, but no mortar or definite structural components were observed, and the spread overall therefore appears to represent demolition rubble from an un-mortared wall or stone bank. This layer must have been deposited after the stone-free primary silting of **F.3** had accumulated, but while **F.3** was still clearly visible as a depression at least 30cm deep. The stone may be from an un-mortared wall, but it alternatively is plausible that it derives from the bank encircling the site and was deliberately spread across the site interior in an attempt to slight the bank.

The small excavated data does not positively confirm the presence of the rectangular building tentatively indicated by geophysical survey, but does not disprove this either. There was no definite evidence for a building, but the presence of a post hole, and the linearity of the stone rubble spread, does hint at the presence of building. On balance, it seems reasonable to conclude that it is likely, but currently unproven, that there was a timber or stone-footed wall orientated north-east to south-west present in the excavated area. This may have been part of a building, but could alternatively have been a windbreak or boundary feature demarcating different activity zones within the site. It is

plausible that such a feature separated the area of the oven/hearth (and its residues) in the north-west of the trench from the ditch/pit and post hole exposed in its south-east, which may itself represent the remains of a built structure extending beyond the limits of the excavated area.

Investigation by auger survey of the bank and ditch surrounding the excavated site and defining the Castle Close monument indicated that the bank is largely comprised of broken limestone similar to that spread across the trench. This stone occurs naturally widely in the locality but shovel pitting (also carried out in 2013 by Sharnbrook Learning for Pleasure as part of their 'All Our Stories' project) has shown it not to be found naturally in the immediate vicinity of Castle Close, indicating that the stone is there as a consequence of human action. The coring indicated that the ditch has not been substantially affected by silting, with the natural only marginally deeper than the present ground surface. The inner surface of the ditch/outer face of the bank was a little steeper than is the case today, and there was no berm separating the bank and ditch: in their latest phase, these two features were a single united entity and are contemporary. The absence of any waterlogged deposits meant that no ecofactual remains were recovered and the potential for this in this area of the monument appears to be very low.

Sequencing and dating human activity on the Castle Close site is informed by stratigraphic evidence and the finds, most notably the pottery. Stratigraphic evidence indicates that all the excavated features (**F.1**-**F.4**) underlying the stone spread could be contemporary, although they are not necessarily so, as there is no stratigraphic evidence to link the features in the north-west and south-east of the trench (apart from the fact they all underlie the later spread of stone rubble). The likelihood of these features being tightly contemporary is however supported by the pottery, all of which was closely dated to 1100-1200 AD while the horseshoe nails, the only other datable finds, also fit comfortably within the same period. The absence of any finds from the coring allows no further deductions to be made as the date of the bank and ditch, but there is no reason to suspect these are not contemporary with the 12th century activity in the excavated area. The total absence of any finds dating from other periods is notable and if replicated across the rest of the site would clearly indicate that the site is entirely of 12th century date.

The information from the excavation, especially the dating evidence, allows the character of the Castle Close earthwork to be reconsidered. The 12th century date suggests that the site is seignorial, as enclosed sites of this form do not appear to have percolated down to sub-seignorial levels of society by this date. Castle Close is also now known to be earlier than most moated sites (Le Patourel and Roberts (1978) suggest that fewer than 20% of moated sites pre-date 1200 AD). As a result of the 2013 excavation, it is clear that not only is the form of Castle Close (circular, ditched and banked) atypical of moated sites, but so also is its date. In both these respects, Castle Close is much more characteristic of a ringwork. The date and size of Castle Close places it at the later, smaller end of the range for ringworks: nearby Renhold, for example (Beds HER 2806) is thought to be of Norman or even Danish origin and has a more substantial bank (3m high by 8m wide) than Castle Close enclosing an area c. 40m in diameter. Castle Close is therefore now most appropriately defined not as a moated site but a ringwork, of lower-ranking seignorial status, one of many such sites which proliferated in the early 12th century (before or during the Anarchy of 1135-54 AD), probably in order to display lordly status while also bolstering the security of its occupants. Large numbers of these castles are known from later sources or their physical remains but are not recorded in any known medieval documentary sources, as is the case with Castle Close.

The identification of Castle Close as a ringwork also provides a context for its abandonment before the end of the 12th century (which is otherwise difficult to explain satisfactorily). The period after 1154 AD saw many castles, including large numbers of unlicensed sites for which no documentary evidence survives, abandoned or razed to the ground as part of the Henry II's campaign to demilitarize seignorial residences. A move away from Castle Close to a different site would have demonstrated the owners' support for Henry, and would have been a politically astute move even if demolition had not been expressly requested.

9.2 The Historical Context

Given the confirmed 12th century date for Castle Close, there is scope for considering whether this site can now be identified with any of the recorded medieval manorial holdings. Although there is good historical evidence for the manorial history of Sharnbrook, relating historical evidence to excavated sites is not always straightforward (Le Patourel 1978, 24), and (as is commonly the case) documentary evidence pertaining to Sharnbrook in the 12th century is less secure than for earlier or later periods.

Given that the Castle Close site is likely to be seignorial and dates to the 12th century, it is likely to relate to one of the holdings recorded in Domesday Book just a generation or so earlier, but the fact that there are no less than eleven of these (Williams and Martin 2003, 565; 568; 573; 580; 582; 584; 587) makes this difficult. A number of these holdings can be ruled out as they are small, lack demesne land and are mostly held by freemen who are unlikely to have built an enclosed residence at this date: these are the holdings of Osbern de Breuil (1½ virgates) from Hugh de Beauchamp, held by sokemen (Williams and Martin 2003, 573); Robert (½ hide plus ¼ virgate) held from Hugh the Fleming (Williams and Martin 2003, 580); Osbern the fisherman (½ hide) (plus disputed 1¼ virgate) held of himself (Williams and Martin 2003, 582); Hugh (3 virgates) held from the Countess Judith (Williams and Martin 2003, 584); Almaer (½ virgate) held from the Burgesses of Bedford (Williams and Martin 2003, 587).

A man of greater status who held land in Sharnbrook was the Bishop of Coutances. In 1086 his Sharnbrook holdings were divided into four smaller holdings, of which the bishop himself held only one (½ hide) (Williams and Martin 2003, 565). These lands had become united into a single holding by the 12th century when it was granted to the Knights Templars and then to the Hospitallers in 1331 (Page 1912, 88-94). However, the lost moated site in Temple Wood, Sharnbrook is likely to be associated with this holding, and therefore the bishop or Templars are unlikely to be the builders of the Castle Close site.

This leaves two other Domesday Book holdings, those of Robert fitz Rozelin and Albert of Lorraine: both these included demesne land, and are also large holdings of around two hides. Robert fitz Rozelin held his land from Count Eustace, with half the land in demesne (Williams and Martin 2003, 568). In the 12th century this holding was passed to four generations of the Triket family, who granted it piecemeal to Newnham Priory over the course of the 13th century. They leased it to William Tofte in 1331 and it thereafter became known as Tofte's. The Tofte estate eventually passed via the crown to George Boteler in the 16th century (Page 1912, 88-94). The holding of Albert of Lorraine (2 hides and 1 virgate) included 1 hide in demesne (Williams and Martin 2003, 582). This passed to the Lorings family and was thence known as the Lorings manor, but passed by marriage in the late 14th century to the Harrington family before being also acquired by George Boteler in the 16th century (Page 1912, 88-94).

Either of these last two holdings could be associated with the Castle Close site, but there is some evidence to link it with the fitzRozelin/Trikets/Tofte estate. The Bedford Eyre of 1202 (86) records a messuage described as 'Triket's Bury' in Sharnbrook, and both the date of this reference, and the 'bury' term fit well with archaeological evidence for the date and form of the Castle Close site. Furthermore, the Newnham Cartulary hints that the Triket's 12th century manor house may have lain in the general area of the church, as Deed 660 refers to the Prior granting Baldwin Triket a "*messuage, that was his father's [William], and land, that on the day of the agreement was made, was in his demesne between the church of Sharnbrook and the aforesaid messuage*" (Godber 1963). The cartulary also records numerous grants by the Trikets of their land in Sharnbrook to Newnham Priory including, by 1278–9, the capital messuage (Page 1912, 88-94). Although this is reasonably persuasive evidence to link Castle Close with the fitzRozelin/Triket holding, it remains possible that it was the site of the Lorings manorial site, whose medieval location is unkown but whose presence in the general area of Castle Close is hinted at by nearby 'Loring Road', a modern street whose name may be taken from earlier estate maps, where the name may have been preserved in field names.

On balance, however, it seems most likely that Castle Close was part of the fitzRozelins/Triket holding. Lords of this relatively lowly rank are exactly those likely to have built minor earthwork castles (ringworks or motte and baileys, according to taste or resources) to enhance and defend their property in the troubled period of the 12th century without leaving any documentary record. Such edifices may have been constructed on existing sites, or new ones: no archaeological evidence was recovered from Castle Close predating 1100 AD, leaving open the question whether or not it was the site of the pre-12th century (Saxon-Norman) demesne residence. Pre-12th century evidence may, of course, be present beyond the 2013 excavations (which did not reach natural), but alternatively, it is entirely plausible (although currently unproven) that the Saxo-Norman demesne lay elsewhere.

It should be noted, however, that it is not entirely clear from the 2013 excavation whether Castle Close was the demesne residence in the 12th century, or simply a strategically sited seignorial defensive retreat/store/lookout. A better understanding of the medieval development of the Tofte manor site would be needed to explore this further: if evidence for 11th/12th century occupation were to be found on the Tofte manor site, this would add support to any suggestion that Castle Close was created as a strategic look-out or mustering post to protect Triket lands whose 12th century lord actually resided on the Tofte site on the other side of the Sharn.

Whether it was a seignorial residence or a fortified outpost, a small ringwork like Castle Close would really only have been of local significance, but nonetheless the post-Anarchy period does provide a context for the abandonment of this sort of site (perhaps not long after it was built), as decommissioning or moving away from even such a lightly-defensible site would clearly signify the lord's loyalty to the new king. If Castle Close *was* the demesne residence for the Triket estate, it may be presumed that the family then moved to the present site of Tofte Manor, nearly 1km to the north-west on the other side of the Sharn Brook. Such a move would by then have been desirable for other reasons. A small earthwork enclosure would by the late 12th century have been old-fashioned and be increasingly cramped as seignorial households grew in size. The Tofte site would have been more commodious and pleasant, nestled in a gentle south-facing coombe: an important consideration in a period when ostentation and comfort were beginning to outrank military considerations in the design of manorial residences. This scenario fits well with the suggestion that while the existing buildings at Tofte Manor date to the 17th

century (Beds HER 1116), the site is on the site of a manor 'of 13th century origin' (Beds HER 10812), although it is not clear what evidence supports this assertion.

10. Conclusion

The 2013 excavations at Castle Close were very productive, effectively addressing the project aims and producing a range of useful new data to identify, date and characterise the monument.

The date of the excavated features can now be confidently ascribed to the 12th century AD, and it can be inferred with reasonable confidence that the entire monument dates to this same period.

Whether the site should be termed a ringwork or a moated site is to some extent simply a semantic issue, as the two types of site may not have been clearly differentiated in the medieval period and it can in any case be difficult to distinguish between them (Taylor 1978, 5). However, in terms of form and (now) date, the site in Castle Close fits much more comfortably into the category of ringwork than moated site.

The excavated features within the Castle Close ringwork are largely domestic, notably the oven/hearth and the domestic nature of the deposits is also indicated by the large amount of pottery. Some specialisation is indicated by the possibly zoned nature of the deposits (with little domestic refuse present in the excavated area) and the presence of a sizeable assemblage of horseshoe nails. Seignorial origin/status is indicated by the form of the site and its date, but whether this site in the 12th century was the lord's demesne residence or a strategic defensive outpost remains unclear.

Castle Close has added significance as one of a relatively small number of ringworks to have been dated by excavation. As a small, late example of a ringwork it may represent a transitional developmental phase between earlier ringwork castles and later rectilinear unbanked moated sites.

The 2013 excavation showed the survival and condition of the archaeological remains (with the exception of organic matter) to be good, with features preserved intact and the ditch little affected by silting (although it is possible this is due to recent clearing-out of accumulated deposits). The bank may have been slighted in antiquity (when the site was abandoned in the 12th century). Tree roots may have caused some damage, and it is possible that some at least of the linearity apparent in the excavate area may be due to tree rooting. The 12th century features in the excavated area have been overlain by a spread of stone rubble, presumed to derive from constructed features of the same date, which has protected the underlying remains, and there is no evidence for any post 12th century activity in the excavated areas of the site at all. At least one structure, the base of an oven or hearth, was present in the excavated area, and there is reasonably persuasive (although not categorical) evidence for others, with more tentative evidence for the former presence of a boundary or building wall. However, there was no evidence from the auger transect for waterlogged preservation of palaeoenvironmental remains in the ditch, and thus no comment can be made as to the nature and date of ecofactual material from the interior.

The surviving archaeological features in the excavated area are fairly shallowly buried beneath the present surface, with the upper surface of the rubble spread just c. 30cm beneath the surface. This provides some protection for the medieval archaeological remains, but this may not pertain elsewhere on this site. Overall, it should be noted that the archaeological remains are of considerable importance, deriving as they do from a now securely dated example of an unusual type of site, and such remains are likely to be present widely across the site at shallow depths. Trees should certainly be prevented

from becoming established on presently open areas, and consideration should be given to removing or restricting the growth of those trees which are present to ensure their roots do not cause any further damage in the future.

The 2013 excavations also gave upwards of 40 members of the public living in and around Sharnbrook the chance to take part in archaeological investigations on a site at the centre of their community, during which they developed a wide range of practical and analytical archaeological skills including archaeological excavation, recording, augering and finds processing. The excavations certainly increased knowledge and understanding of Castle Close and its environs by heritage professionals and members of the public, especially those resident in the local area, and seem to have increased interest in and engagement with the Castle Close site by those living in the area. They also provided data which will be able to inform and guide future conservation, management, interpretation and presentation of the monument in Castle Close.

11. Acknowledgements

The 2013 excavation at Sharnbrook was funded as part of ‘All Our Stories’ by The Heritage Lottery Fund and their support is gratefully acknowledged, as is that provided by The Arts and Humanities Research Council who funded the Cambridge Community Heritage programme which supported the development and running of the excavation. The Sharnbrook excavation was advised and directed by Dr Carenza Lewis and the excavations were supervised by Dr Alexander Pryor. In Sharnbrook, thanks are due to members of Sharnbrook Learning for Pleasure, especially June and David Barnes and Des Hoar, who worked so enthusiastically, tirelessly and efficiently to promote and organise the project locally. Finally, thanks are due to all the residents of Sharnbrook and the surrounding area who took part in the excavation for all their hard work and enthusiasm.

12. References

Aberg, A. (ed)	1978	*Medieval Moated Sites*. Council for British Archaeology Research Report no. 17.
Aberg, A.	1978	'Introduction' in A. Aberg (ed) *Moated Sites*, 1-4
Baker, D.	1978	'Bedfordshire Moated Sites' in A. Aberg (ed) *Moated Sites*, 60-63
Baker, D.	1982	'Mottes, Moats and ringworks in Bedfordshire: Beauchamp Wadmore revisited' in *Château Gaillard* Vol. 9-10, 35-54.
Brown, A. E. and Taylor, C. C.	1991	Moated Sites in Northern Bedfordshire: some surveys and wider implications. *Medieval Settlement Research Group Annual Report* Vol 4. pp 14-16
Collett-White, J.	2006	*How Bedfordshire Voted 1685-1735. The Evidence of Local Poll Books, Volume 1*. Bedford, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society
Coleman, S.	1990	'The work of Bedfordshire County Council Archaeology Service in 1989: Monuments Protection Programme' in *South Midlands Archaeology* vol 20. pp. 2,3 & 5.
Godber, J. (ed)	1963	*The Cartulary of Newnham Priory.* Bedford, Bedford Historical Record Society. Volume 43.
Goodall, I.	2012	*Ironwork in Medieval Britain.* Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph Series, Vol. 31.
Harvey, W. M.	1872-8	*The history and antiquities of the hundred of Willey, in the county of Bedford*. London, Nichols and Sons.
Higham, R and Barker, P.	1992	*Timber Castles*. London, Batsford.
Kenyon, J. R.	1990	*Medieval Fortifications* . Leicester, Leicester University Press
King, D. J. C.	1988	*The Castle in England and Wales*. Beckenham, Croom Helm.
Le Patourel, J.	1978	'The excavation of moated sites' in Aberg (ed) *Moated Sites*, 36-45.
Lewis, C.	2007	'New Avenues for the Investigation of Currently Occupied Medieval Rural Settlement – Preliminary Observations from the Higher Education Field Academy' *Medieval Archaeology* 51, 131-161.
Lewis, C., Mitchell Fox, P. and Dyer, C.	1997	*Village Hamlet and Field.* Manchester, Manchester University Press

Lewis, C. and Ranson, C.	2014	*Test Pit Excavations at Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire, 2007-12* (University of Cambridge unpublished reports).
Maull, A. and Chapman, A.	2000	*A Medieval Moated Enclosure in Tempsford Park.* Bedfordshire Archaeology Monograph No. 7. Northamptonshire County Council and The Bedfordshire Archaeological Council
Page, W.	1912.	*A History of the County of Bedfordshire. Volume 3.* London, Victoria County History
RCHM(E)	1975	*An Inventory of Archaeological Sites in North-East Northamptonshire* (London, HMSO)
RCHM(E)	1981	*An Inventory of Archaeological Sites in North-West Northamptonshire* (London, HMSO)
Roberts, B. and Wrathmell, S.	2000	*An Atlas of Rural Settlement in England.* London, English Heritage
Roberts, B. and Wrathmell, S.	2002	Region and Place: A study of English rural settlement. London, English Heritage.
Taylor, C. C.	1978	'Moated sites: their definition, form and classification' in A. Aberg (ed) *Moated Sites*, 5-13
Thompson, J. S.	1990	*Hundreds, Manor, Parish and the Church.* Bedford, Bedford Historical Record Society, Volume 69.
Simmonds, C.	2008	*Archaeological Geophysical Survey on a moated site at Castle Close, Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire, May 2008*. Report 08/09. Northamptonshire Archaeology.
Thompson, J. S. (ed)	1990	*Hundreds, manors, parishes and the church.*
Williams, A., and Martin, G. H. (eds)	2003	*Domesday Book A complete Translation*: Alecto Historical Editions. Folio Society edition, London

14. Appendices

14.1 Pottery Report (Paul Blinkhorn)

ST: Stamford Ware. Made at several different sites in Stamford in Lincolnshire between AD850 and 1150. The earliest pots were small, simple jars with white, buff or grey fabric, or large jars with painted red stripes. By AD1000, the potters were making vessels which were quite thin-walled and smooth, with a yellow or pale green glaze on the outside, the first glazed pots in England. These were usually jugs with handles and a spout, but other sorts of vessel, such as candle-sticks, bowls and water-bottles are also known. It appears to have been much sought after because it was of such good quality, and has been found all over Britain and Ireland.

SHC: Early Medieval Shelly Ware: AD1100-1400. Hard fabric with plentiful fossil shell mixed in with the clay. Manufactured at many sites in western Bedfordshire. Mostly cooking pots, but bowls and occasionally jugs also known.

EMW: Early Medieval Sandy Ware: AD1100-1400. Hard fabric with plentiful quartz temper. Manufactured at a wide range of generally unknown sites all over eastern England. Mostly cooking pots, but bowls and occasionally jugs also known.

HG: Hertfordshire Greyware, Late 12th – 14th century. Hard, grey sandy pottery found at sites all over Hertfordshire. Made at a number of different places, with the most recent and best-preserved evidence being from Hitchin. Range of simple jars, bowls and jugs.

		STAM		SHC		EMW		HG		
TP	Context	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	Date Range
1	1			10	33					1100-1200
1	2			13	22					1100-1200
1	3			36	133	1	7	1	13	1100-1200
1	4	2	3	73	583					1000-1200
1	6			4	13					1100-1200
1	7			3	9					1100-1200
1	8			8	14					1100-1200
1	9			14	42					1100-1200
1	11			10	25					1100-1200
1	12			6	12					1100-1200

Table 3: *Pottery excavated from CC1/13*

The range of pottery types suggests very strongly that activity at the site is limited to the 12th century. There is no glazed pottery, which is fairly common after 1200, so the assemblage is thus very likely to pre-date that time.

14.2 Finds Report (Alex Pryor)

Context	Ceramic (excluding pottery)	Metal & metal-working	Stone	Other
C. 1	red CBM x2 =15g			corroded rubber band =<1g.
C. 2	red CBM x5 =19g	slag x2 =39g	burned flint =2g	
C. 3	red CBM x16 =117g, old brick fragment? =7g	slag x8 =39g, corroded iron fragment =3g, corroded iron nail =1g, corroded iron loop, part of a horse harness? =18g		pale cream/grey daub? x3 =5g
C. 4	red CBM x196 =654g	corroded iron fragment =3g, corroded iron horse shoe nails x3 =14g	charcoal x2 =<1g	
C. 6	red CBM x2 =49g	slag =8g.		
C. 7	red CBM x4 =14g	slag =10g	charcoal x4 =1g, spherical stone ball =9g	
C. 8	red CBM x8 =68g	corroded iron fragments x2 =2g, corroded iron horse shoe nails x2 =5g	charcoal =<1g	
C. 9		corroded iron horse shoe nails x4 =21g		
C. 11	red CBM x2 =2g, cream brick fragment =40g	corroded iron horse shoe nails x6 =30g, slag =1g	charcoal x2 =4g	
C. 12			charcoal x2 =<1g	

Table 4: *Finds excavated from CC1/13*

14.3 Faunal Report (Vida Rajkovača)

A small moderately preserved assemblage was recovered totalling 41 assessable specimens, only six of which were identified to species level (Table 5). Three loose pig teeth were recorded. Sheep/ goat was identified based on one tibia fragment and a loose tooth. A fragment of cow mandible came from context (4). The prevalence of sheep-sized limb bone elements suggests sheep or pigs were the preferred domesticate, as opposed to cattle. It was not possible to obtain any ageing data, and there were no butchery marks.

	Context									**Total NISP**
Taxon	[2]	[3]	[4]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]	[11]	[12]	
Cow	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	1
Sheep/ goat	1	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	2
Pig	.	.	.	.	.	1	1	1	.	3
Sub-total to species	**1**	**.**	**1**	**.**	**.**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**.**	**6**
Cattle-sized	.	3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3
Sheep-sized	2	3	6	2	3	6	3	3	3	31
Bird n.f.i.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	1
Total	**3**	**6**	**8**	**2**	**3**	**8**	**4**	**4**	**3**	**41**

Table 5: *Number of Identified Specimens for all species from all contexts; the abbreviation n.f.i. denotes that the specimen could not be further identified.*