

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



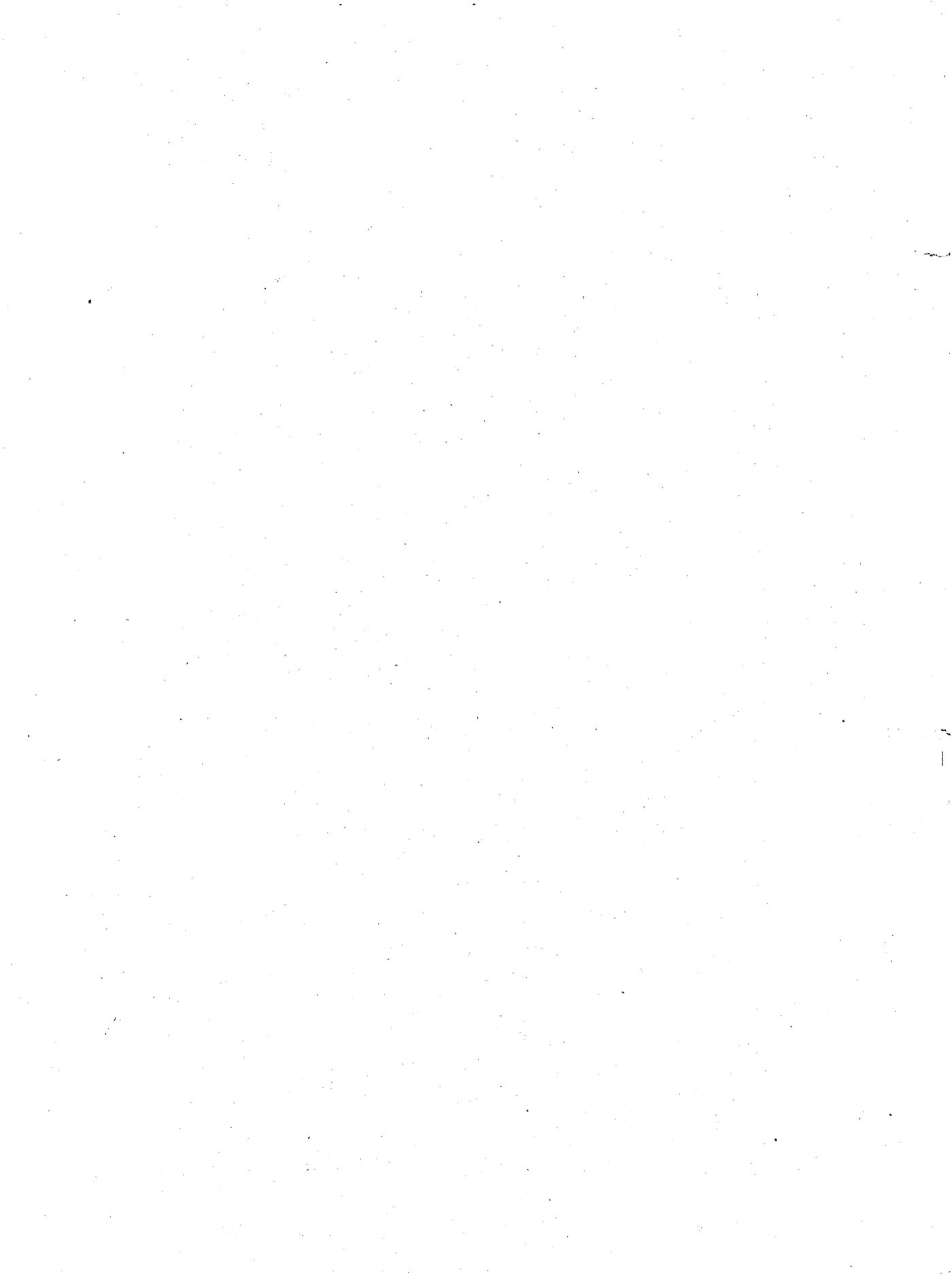
VOLUME LIV

JANUARY 1960 TO DECEMBER 1960

CAMBRIDGE
DEIGHTON BELL

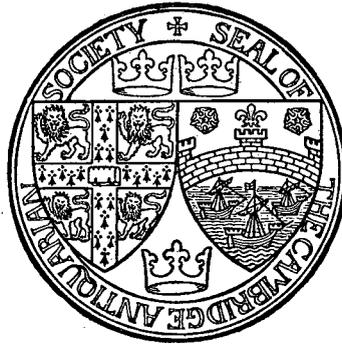
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*Published for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society (incorporating the Cambs and Hunts
Archaeological Society) by Deighton Bell, 13 Trinity Street, Cambridge*

*Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge
(Brooke Crutchley, University Printer)*

CONTENTS

<i>Officers and Council of the Society 1960-61</i>	<i>page vi</i>
<i>Report of the Council for the Year 1959</i>	vii
<i>Summary of Accounts for the Year 1959</i>	viii
Obituary Notes	I
<i>By G. H. FINDLAY and G. H. S. BUSHNELL</i>	
The Excavation of a <i>Bos primigenius</i> at Lowe's Farm, Littleport	3
<i>By F. W. SHAWCROSS</i>	
Neolithic Pottery from the Great Ouse Valley	17
<i>By H. J. M. GREEN</i>	
Bronze Age Cremation Urn at Rabbit Hill, Lakenheath	19
<i>By GRACE BRISCOE, F.S.A.</i>	
The Aldwick Iron Age Settlement, Barley, Hertfordshire	22
<i>By M. D. CRA'STER</i>	
Iron Age Weaving Combs from Cambridgeshire and Suffolk	47
<i>By NORMAN SMEDLEY, M.A., F.S.A.</i>	
A Romano-British Site at Orton Longueville, Huntingdonshire	50
<i>By G. F. DAKIN</i>	
Roman Godmanchester, Part II: The Town Defences	68
<i>By H. J. M. GREEN</i>	
Roman Cremation Groups from Godmanchester	83
<i>By C. F. TEBBUTT, F.S.A.</i>	
An Early Twelfth-century Building at Eynesbury, Huntingdonshire	85
<i>By C. F. TEBBUTT, F.S.A.</i>	
Early Medieval Godmanchester	90
<i>By H. J. M. GREEN</i>	
A Thirteenth-century Architectural Sketch from the Hospital of St John the Evangelist, Cambridge	99
<i>By MARTIN BIDDLE</i>	
A Medieval Squabble	109
<i>By J. F. WILLIAMS</i>	
The Victoria County History of Cambridge	112
<i>By JOHN ROACH</i>	
Archaeological Notes	127
<i>By M. D. CRA'STER and C. F. TEBBUTT</i>	

EARLY MEDIEVAL GODMANCHESTER

H. J. M. GREEN

THE excavations at Godmanchester have produced evidence, both positive and negative, for the topography of the early medieval town. The purpose of this paper is to summarize this evidence and also to publish some further remains of this period found on the site of the Roman baths in Pinfold Lane. The earlier discoveries were reported in these *Proceedings*, vol. LI (1958), pp. 31-4, under the title 'Saxo-Norman Pottery from Godmanchester'.

SAXO-NORMAN OCCUPATION SITES

Saxo-Norman pottery has been recorded from only a few sites in Godmanchester (Fig. 1). The largest group, which was dated to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, was found on the site of the Roman baths. Mr J. G. Hurst has recorded the discovery of St Neots ware in Colney Close.¹ This pottery was in the old Huntingdon Museum collection, which is now at the Norris Museum, St Ives. I have also seen a flanged bowl of St Neots fabric from the medieval town ditch in West Street.

Several flanged bowls, apparently rilled externally, have been found in central Godmanchester, and are published as early medieval by the late Dr J. R. Garrood.² They are very similar, however, to a late Roman bowl form found in this area. The fabric of these Roman bowls is almost identical to St Neots ware, but the latter is never rilled.

Despite extensive trenching, three areas in the town have produced no Saxo-Norman occupation material. The Causeway site, excavated in 1957, was one of these areas;³ another was in the vicinity of the Roman south gate, where excavations were carried out in 1959 by the Ministry of Works.⁴ The third site⁵ was Mr Garner's Paddock, now a private house and garden. Trial trenching carried out here many years ago by Dr Garrood showed that the metalling of the Roman road, Ermine Street, had been dug out prior to the medieval period. Medieval pottery was not found in any quantity nor at any great depth.

The structural remains associated with Saxo-Norman pottery are at present confined to pits, ditches and the robber trenches of the Roman bath building. No early

¹ J. G. Hurst, 'Saxo-Norman Pottery in East Anglia, Part I', *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. XLIX (1956), p. 65.

² J. R. Garrood, 'Late Saxon and Early Medieval Pottery in Huntingdonshire', *Trans. C.H.A.S.* vol. VI, p. 109, nos. 1-3, 8.

³ H. J. M. Green, 'Roman Godmanchester, Part II', *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. LIV, p. 68.

⁴ C. Green, 'The Town Wall of Durovigutum', *Hunts Post*, 14 May 1959. But see postscript to the present article.

⁵ J. R. Garrood, 'Roman Godmanchester', *Trans. C.H.A.S.* vol. V, pp. 441-2.

medieval domestic buildings have so far been recorded. Some twelfth-century masonry was re-used in the parish church of St Mary, but the earliest work *in situ* is dated to the middle or second half of the thirteenth century.¹

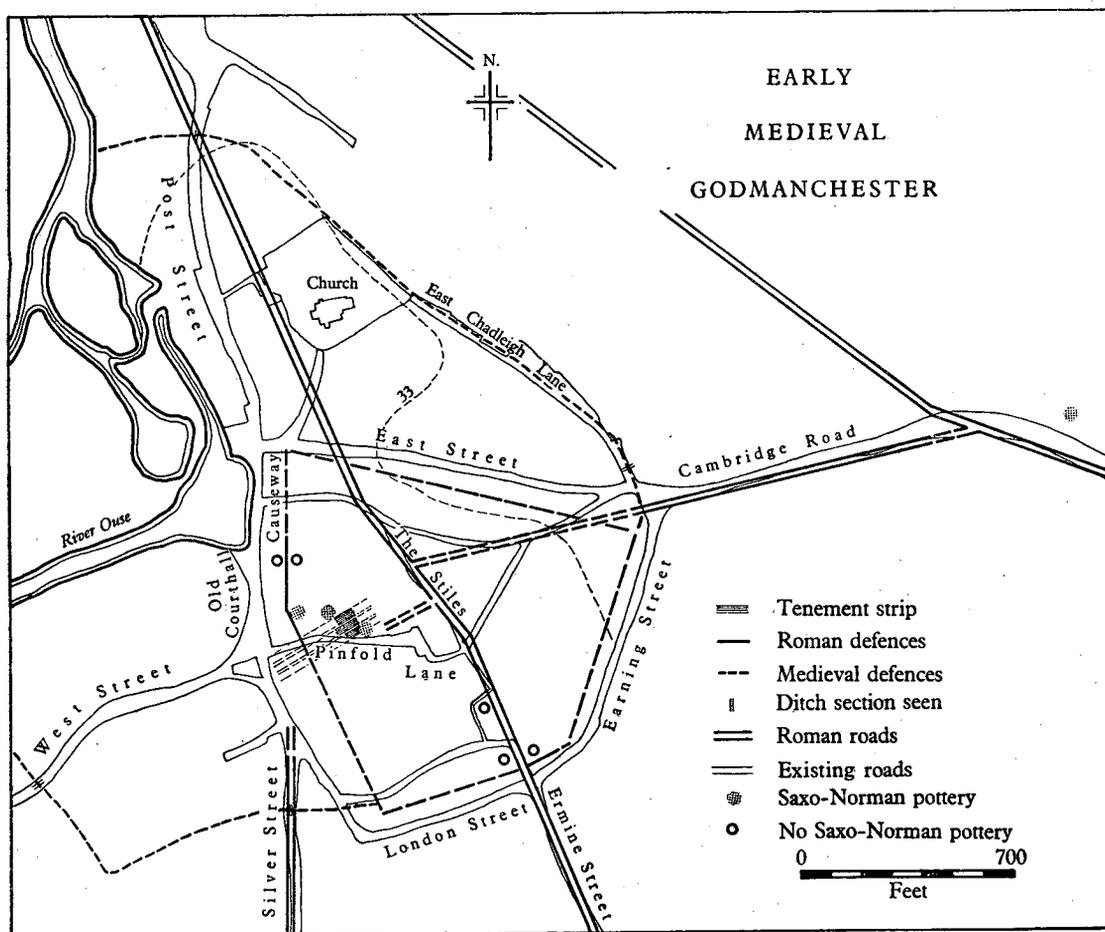


Fig. 1. Town plan.

TENEMENT STRIPS

The character of the Saxo-Norman deposits on the site of the Roman baths is of some interest. The Roman building had been dug out in a series of parallel strips, separated by baulks with an average width of about 5 ft. It seems extremely probable that these strips were tenements and that the baulks lay beneath the boundaries between them. Traces of three strips were found. From the centres of the baulks they were of the following widths: area 1, 25 ft.; area 2, 30 ft.; and area 3, at least 25 ft.

Since the publication of these areas, further pits and deposits containing Saxo-Norman pottery (App. I) have been found. Area 4 (southern section of the drain),

¹ R.C.H.M., *Huntingdonshire* (1926), p. 107.

area 6 (the dry hot room) and pit S 14 all probably lay in the same tenement as area 1. Area 5 (northern section of the drain) and pit S 6 were in the same strip as area 2. Area 7 (part of the eastern boundary wall), area 8 (the changing-room) and pit S 13 may have been in a fourth tenement south of area 6. No boundary strip was found between areas 6 and 8, but it may possibly have been completely dug away on this part of the site. Unfortunately the dating of these various areas and pits, and their relationship to areas 1, 2 and 3 are not clear. The Saxo-Norman pottery from these later excavations is similar to that from other parts of the site, and therefore probably dates mainly to the second half of the eleventh and the first half of the twelfth century.

In most cases the Roman building underneath the boundaries was left untouched, although it is clear that even here the baths had been robbed to foundation level by this period. The weathered condition of the hypocaust *pilae* indicates that these foundations had remained exposed at some period for a long time.

The quantity of early medieval occupation material from this area suggests that dwellings of this period are not far away. The general distribution and density of this material indicates that they probably lay to the west with frontages perhaps along Old Courthall. Pinfold Lane probably did not exist at this period.

THE TOWN BOUNDARY

In 1956 a large ditch, which I believe to have been the medieval town ditch, was located in three places on the outskirts of Godmanchester. On the west side of the town this ditch was found during the drainage operations in West Street.¹ It is said to have been 8 ft. deep and ran towards the river. It contained human and animal bones, together with Roman pottery and the St Neots ware sherd already mentioned. Dr Garrood states that it was discovered west of no. 23, but judging from information supplied by the engineers there seem to be at least two other possible places. The most likely of these is opposite no. 40, where pottery and skeletons are said to have been found. A further ditch section, also 8 ft. deep, was seen in Silver Street.² Dr Garrood does not mention its exact position, but I understand it was found opposite the Baptist Chapel. Both Dr Garrood and the drainage engineers believed that it was the same ditch as that seen in West Street. Connecting these two sites, and running beyond them down to the river, there are a series of field and garden boundaries whose character strongly suggests that they follow the line of the medieval ditch.

Another large ditch, 10 ft. deep, was found at the southern end of East Chadleigh Lane.³ It contained human and animal bones, Roman pottery and glazed sherds. Dr Garrood states that it 'appears to be the old town ditch which still runs across the fields as an open sewer'. It is not clear which of the several field ditches in this area

¹ J. R. Garrood, 'Romano-British Finds at Godmanchester', *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. LI, p. 84.

² Garrood, *ibid.* p. 84.

³ Garrood, *ibid.* p. 83.

Dr Garrood considered to be the old town ditch. I think it probable, however, that it followed an old boundary line curving north-west along East Chadleigh Lane and the north wall of the churchyard, across Post Street and so to the river. At the point where the ditch would have crossed Post Street the drainage engineers said they found dark earth to a considerable depth.¹ They believed it to have been a Roman well, but it may possibly have been the medieval town ditch.

Along its middle section I believe that the medieval defences used the Roman ditch and wall from the northern end of Earning Street round to the west end of London Street. So far there is no evidence of a medieval wall, but it is probable that there was a bank and palisade. The human bones from the medieval ditch may be the disturbed remains of late Roman inhumation burials, of which there were many around the outside of the Roman town.²

THE ORIGIN AND SITING OF THE TOWN

The Roman road from London to York, called in medieval times Ermine or Earning Street, approaches the Great Ouse from the south-east. A low spur of gravel jutting north-westwards from the highland carried a dry route to within about half a mile of the river bend, where fording, and later bridging, was possible. On the slopes of this spur, and confined mostly to within the 33 ft. contour, was built the earliest Roman settlement. Water was supplied by means of an open leat³ brought in from the highland to the south, and probably by shallow wells. It is not certain how closely the river approached the west side of the town during the Roman period. Two other Roman roads joined Ermine Street near the early settlement. The road from Cambridge passed just outside the northern limits of the town, with a branch road to the centre. The other road from Sandy is more difficult to trace, but it probably bounded the west side of the site. During the first and second centuries the town expanded along Ermine Street and these other roads. About A.D. 200, or possibly later, the central area of the town was walled and subsequently, during the fourth century, the town shrank within the defences.²

The general character of the Roman settlement is therefore clear. It grew up at a road intersection, but in order to ensure dry foundations this occurred some distance away from the actual river crossing. This factor probably proved to be a disadvantage later on, and may partly account for the growth of Huntingdon at the expense of Godmanchester during the medieval period.

There is evidence of Romano-British occupation within the walled area until at least the last decade of the fourth century, and there is a strong possibility that some sort of civic life lingered on well into the fifth century. No early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries have been recorded from the immediate vicinity of the town, although a pottery sherd of this period was found on the site of a late Roman inhumation

¹ C.B.A. Group 7, *Bulletin*, no. 3 (1956), p. 2.

² H. J. M. Green, *loc. cit.*, p. 76, fig. 1.

³ H. J. M. Green, 'An Architectural Survey of the Roman Baths at Godmanchester, Part II', *A.N.L.* vol. VI, p. 256.

cemetery along Cambridge Road.¹ Elsewhere in East Anglia early Anglo-Saxon occupation near certain Roman towns has been interpreted as being the result of the settlement of barbarian mercenaries for their protection.² As yet, however, there is no conclusive evidence that this occurred at Godmanchester.

This single sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery is the only indication of occupation in or around Godmanchester until the late Saxon period. There is a reference to the parish church of St Mary during this period. The church with three hides of land is stated to have been given by King Edgar (c. 969) to the monks of Ramsey.³ This suggests that a small community had already settled at the northern end of the gravel spur, possibly along the future line of Post Street. The other principal nucleus of occupation appears to have been in the area of the Old Courthall, and perhaps extended along the patch of alluvial gravels in the region of West Street. The date of the Saxo-Norman material from Pinfold Lane suggests that this second centre of occupation was in existence at least by the time of the Norman conquest. The absence of Saxo-Norman pottery from the Causeway site may indicate that these two centres were originally two quite separate communities. Both are closer to the river than the nucleus of the Roman settlement and when they eventually joined together the spine of the settlement was formed by the Roman road from Sandy. The evidence from the Causeway site suggests that this occurred not earlier than the middle of the twelfth century.⁴ The expansion of the settlement along this road probably resulted in the final abandonment of the Ermine Street route through the centre of the Roman town, although the line survived as a footpath. The metalling of the Roman road in this area had begun to be robbed before the medieval period. A short branch road (now London Street) ran round the outside of the Roman defences and diverted the Ermine Street traffic through the new centre of the town. East Street probably performed the same function for traffic coming along the Roman road from Cambridge. It has been suggested that these developments were brought about by the presence of an early market at Godmanchester.⁵

The archaeological evidence for town growth towards the end of the twelfth century is supported by documentary sources. Under Edward the Confessor the fee farm was rated at £40, under William at the time of the Domesday survey it was still £40, in 1190 it was £50 and in 1212 it had risen sharply to £120.⁶ In 1212 the growing importance of the town resulted in the grant of a charter by King John, which made the town a self-governing manor or liberty.⁷ It was possibly at this period, as at Cambridge,⁸ that the construction of the medieval town defences took place.

It appears unlikely that there was any continuity of occupation at Godmanchester between the end of the Roman period and the late Saxon period. However, there are, I believe, two clues to the origin of these Late Saxon settlers. The first is the suggestion of a mercantile character about the early medieval town. The second is the

¹ *Ant. J.* vol. VII (1927), pp. 315-19.

³ *V.C.H. Huntingdonshire*, vol. II, p. 294.

⁵ *V.C.H. loc. cit.* p. 286.

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 287-8.

² R. Rainbird Clarke, *East Anglia*, p. 130.

⁴ H. J. M. Green, *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. LIV, p. 75.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 287.

⁸ R.C.H.M., *City of Cambridge*, vol. I, p. xiv.

status of the inhabitants, who regarded themselves as free sokemen with no bondmen among them, and in 1279 were officially recognized as such.¹

These factors may indicate that Danish settlers formed an important element in the early population of Late Saxon Godmanchester. In East Anglia the marked development of such towns as Norwich and Thetford during the early medieval period has been attributed to the trading activities of Danish settlers.² It has also been noted that the concentrations of free peasants roughly coincide with the areas of intense Danish settlement.³

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Mrs A. Conington, Mr and Mrs B. Conington and Mr W. Fairy for permission to excavate. I am grateful to Mr Barnes, the Resident Engineer, and Mr W. Powell for reporting discoveries found during the course of the drainage operations; and also to Mr C. Green for information about the 1959 excavations. I am also grateful to Mr J. G. Hurst for examining the pottery. Finally, I wish to thank Miss P. Minter, Mr J. G. Wilson and other members of the Huntingdonshire Archaeological Field Group for helping with the work of excavation.

POSTSCRIPT

An important find was made in Godmanchester after the present paper was completed. During further excavations on the site of the Roman south gate by the Ministry of Works in 1961, Saxo-Norman pottery and a single Middle Saxon sherd were discovered.

APPENDIX I

THE POTTERY

(Fig. 2)

Area 4

1. Spouted pitcher, Stamford ware. Buff fabric with a yellow-green glaze.
2. Jar with everted rim, grey medieval fabric.

Other pottery (not illustrated)

Spouted pitcher, Stamford ware with blue-green glaze. Storage jar, Thetford ware. Jar with everted hollowed rim (cf. no. 17, pit S 5), St Neots ware. Angular shallow dish (cf. no. 19, area 3), St Neots ware. Angular shallow dish (cf. no. 15, area 8), St Neots ware. Bowl, grey medieval fabric.

Area 5

3. Deep bowl with rounded inturned flanged rim, St Neots ware. Cf. with bowl from Cambridge.⁴
4. Jar with everted rim, St Neots ware.
5. Storage jar with applied thumb-strip round the rim and down the sides. Thetford ware.

¹ *V.C.H. loc. cit.* p. 288.

³ Clarke, *ibid.* p. 164.

² Clarke, *op. cit.* pp. 165-6.

⁴ Hurst, *loc. cit.* p. 60, fig. 5, no. 40.

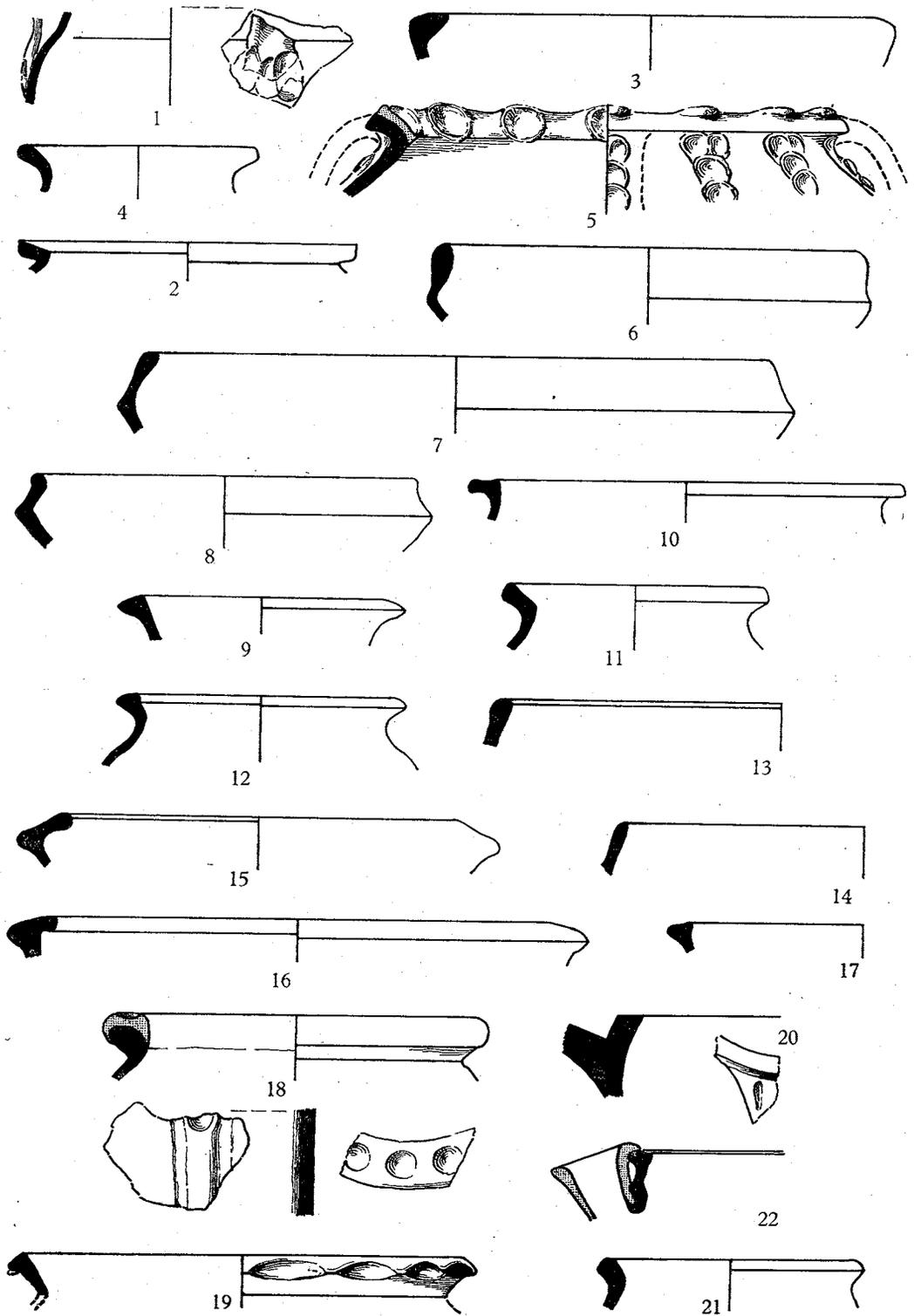


Fig. 2. Saxo-Norman and medieval pottery (third natural size).

Other pottery (not illustrated)

Angular shallow dish (cf. no. 15, pit S 5), St Neots ware. Large jar with everted rim, square outside and hollowed inside (cf. no. 21, area 3), St Neots ware. Large jar with everted hollowed rim (cf. no. 20, area 3), St Neots ware.

Area 6

- 6-8. Angular shallow dishes, St Neots ware.
- 9. Flanged bowl, St Neots ware.

Other pottery (not illustrated)

Angular shallow dish (cf. no. 15, pit S 5), St Neots ware. Large jar (cf. no. 21, area 3), St Neots ware. Jar with everted hollowed rim (cf. no. 1, area 1), St Neots ware. Vessel in red fabric with buff slip and spots of dark green glaze.

The medieval glazed sherd and the nearly upright rims of the dishes (a late feature)¹ indicate a twelfth-century date for this deposit.

Area 7

- 10. Spouted pitcher, Stamford ware. Pink-white fabric with an orange-green glaze.

Other pottery (not illustrated)

Jar with everted rim (cf. no. 1, area 1), St Neots ware.

Area 8

- 11. Jar with everted rim, St Neots ware. Another similar jar was found in this area.
- 12. Jar with everted rim and internal groove, St Neots ware.
- 13, 14. Angular shallow dishes, St Neots ware.
- 15. Angular shallow dish with inturned rim, St Neots ware. Cf. with dish from Paxton² (mid-eleventh century).
- 16. Deep bowl with inturned flange, St Neots ware. Cf. with bowl from St Neots³ (Pre-Conquest).
- 17. Hammer-headed bowl, St Neots ware.
- 18. Storage jar with applied thumb strip round the rim and down the sides, Thetford ware. Cf. with no. 28, area 3.
- 19. Jar with offset at shoulder, hard grey medieval fabric with brown slip.
- 20. Rim and part of handle, possibly from a jug. Hard grey medieval fabric.

Other pottery (not illustrated)

Spouted pitcher, Stamford ware with white fabric, light green glaze and orange spots. Two other glazed vessels, probably spouted pitchers, with pink fabric and an orange and green glaze respectively.

The occurrence of certain early forms in this group (nos. 11, 12, 15 and 16) suggests that this deposit may be Pre-Conquest in date. But nos. 13, 14, 19 and 20 indicate that it was still in use during the twelfth century.

¹ Hurst, *ibid.* p. 53.

² Hurst, *ibid.* p. 66, fig. 7, no. 6.

³ Hurst, *ibid.* p. 67, fig. 8, no. 5.

Pit S 6

21. Jar with everted rim, St Neots ware.

Unstratified

22. Spouted pitcher, Stamford ware. Pink-white fabric with a patchy yellow-green glaze.

Note on pottery fabrics

Stamford ware has a hard thin fabric of a cream colour, often tinted pink. The lead glaze has been applied by dusting galena on the rim and shoulder of the vessel. Thetford ware is hard, sandy and grey. St Neots ware has a black core with pounded shell and a soapy surface. It varies in colour from a light brown to a purple-black.



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Aerial view of Godmanchester looking north-east.
Note excavations in progress on site of Baths (indicated by arrow).



(a)



(b)

(a) Ditch R 2 (3) cutting ditch R 1 (4) containing ox skull and stones (arrow).
 (b) Beneath ditch R 2 (3) lie rubbish deposits (5).



(c)



(d)

(c) Footings of wall and loose rubble in robber trench.
 (d) Pit R 1 (foreground) and footings of wall.

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