

PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN  
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LXXII

for 1982 and 1983

IMRAY LAURIE NORIE AND WILSON

1984

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# THE MOATED SITE AT HARDWICK, WEST CAMBRIDGESHIRE

COLIN HASELGROVE

In July 1974, a small-scale trial excavation of the presumed medieval moated site at the south end of Hardwick Village was undertaken by the author at the request of the Cambridgeshire Archaeological Committee. The results of this investigation and the threat of continued deep ploughing led to further excavations in January and February 1975 which were directed by L.M. Groube on behalf of the Department of the Environment<sup>1</sup>. As the results of the latter investigation were at variance with those obtained by the author, an attempt is made here to resolve the contradictions by the separate publication of the results of the trial excavation<sup>2</sup> as part of a general reassessment of the status of the earthworks.

## *The Earthworks and the Moated Site*

The parish of Hardwick is situated on the so-called 'strong loams' to the west of Cambridge. Most of the parish is above 50 m O.D. the ground rising from Bourne brook, which forms its southern boundary, to its northern boundary, a ridgeway which is now the Cambridge-St. Neots road. A further early trackway crosses the parish from east to west, half a kilometer south of the village green.

On the east side of the modern road leading south from the village to Toft there is a small area of earthworks, which only receives passing mention in the Royal Commission survey, where they are described as old closes<sup>3</sup>. The earthworks, which are typical of those resulting from village contraction, were subsequently surveyed by C.C. Taylor, whose account these notes follow<sup>4</sup>. The earthworks are described in turn from south to north (Figure 1).

At the south end of the site is part of a presumed rectangular close, bounded by a shallow ditch on the north and east, and a low scarp to the west. Some slight features within it may be modern, and it is possibly the site of a house and garden<sup>5</sup>. Immediately to the north is another small rectangular close bounded by shallow ditches with traces of possible internal divisions. There is also a low mound and two shallow depressions. This close was the south part of a paddock called Little Hall Close<sup>6</sup>, and again is presumably the site of a house and garden.

The next close has a more complex pattern. It is again bounded by a shallow ditch, on the south and the west, and there are a number of internal features which are likely to be relatively recent. The north side, which in 1836 formed the boundary between Little Hall Close and Hurley's Close, is a low scarp which runs across the northern half of the presumed moated site (TL 372583) in the north-west corner of Little Hall Close. In 1972, it consisted of a U-shaped water-filled ditch 4-6 m wide and up to 1.75 m deep. Its backfilling in 1974 occasioned the trial excavation described below. From the north-east corner a ditch, which is perhaps later, extends east. The interior of the moated site was flat and featureless and raised 0.25 m above the adjacent ground surface. To the north of the moat was a further rectangular area which extended east into the adjacent ridge-and-furrow. This ridge-and-furrow is divided into at least three blocks by shallow ditches or scarps, the southermost of which was called Pea Close in 1836, the remaining areas being partly in Great Hall Close and partly in Hurley's Close. The Enclosure Map makes it clear that this ridge-and-furrow and the closes were 'old enclosures' and not part of the common fields.

## *The 1974 Trial Excavation<sup>7</sup>*

At the time the surviving section of the moat ditch was back filled as a preliminary to deep ploughing over the enclosed area, the Hardwick site was thought never to have been subjected to modern agricultural methods. The Cambridgeshire Archaeological Committee therefore decided to undertake some investigations with a view to confirming that the visible remains were those of a normal rectangular moated site, the northern portion of which had been destroyed, possibly when the area was divided into two closes separated by the scarp which bounded the north side of the surviving moat and extended to the road. As a resistivity survey undertaken by Dr D.H. Trump with the help of extra-mural students seemed to indicate the probability of surviving structural remains, the author was requested by Dr J.A. Alexander to undertake a trial excavation in an attempt to confirm the status of the monument, and to assess the condition of the archaeological deposits. A trench 15 m long was therefore laid out to intersect the presumed line of the moat ditch on the western side of the site, at a point where bulldozer activity had brought a considerable quantity of stones to the surface over an area of over 50 m<sup>2</sup> in the process of backfilling the southern portion of the moat (Fig.1); in this way it was hoped to demonstrate

the former existence of a section of moat ditch north of the boundary of Hurley's Close as well as recovering a sample of occupation material from the interior.

In the event, results of considerable promise were obtained, although in view of the small scale of the excavation they were not without ambiguities. The area of disturbed stones extended over all of the trench excepting 4 m. at the western end. (Fig.2: Section Layer 2).

It was clear that they had already been disturbed at least once before, apparently by ploughing.<sup>8</sup> Wear on several stones and their disposition suggested that they were all that remained of a cobbled surface. Associated with them, in addition to modern material, was an organic rich deposit and quantities of shelly medieval pottery fabrics and animal bone. Immediately underlying the stones was a uniform deposit of apparently redeposited natural boulder clay 3, 0.2 - 0.3 m thick, which contained shelly wares and animal bone. Cut through this layer were a number of features, but owing to the disturbed nature of the stone deposit, it was difficult to ascertain from what level they were cut. The absence of contamination in the two post holes 7 and 9 (Fig. 2: Plan) would suggest that they pre-date or were associated with the laying of the cobbled surface. To the west of these postholes, the remainder of the trench contained a disturbed brown clay deposit with post-medieval pottery, layer 5; this was cut by a shallow gully 8 containing an eighteenth century clay pipe bowl. This clay deposit was interpreted as post-medieval infill of the northern section of the moat ditch, and as time was limited, a decision was made to concentrate on the homestead interior. The removal of the re-deposited natural clay 3, interpreted as a platform constructed from the upcast generated by the digging of the ditch, revealed a number of probable features, including pits and gullies. One of the gullies, 12, appeared to be a beam-slot, while the other, 11, was apparently a foundation trench, possibly for a substantial building. None of the features contained pottery.

To complete the excavation, a section was cut into the edge of the presumed ditch fill, and down into the natural clay, but if the ditch did indeed exist at this point, its side had only a very slight incline. A gully 19, containing post-medieval pottery and running diagonally across the trench, appeared to be sealed by the supposed ditch fill. No further work on the site was possible.

Thus, although a northern extension of the ditch was not confirmed at this point, there seemed no reason to doubt the existence of a relatively early medieval occupation site, and the author was invited to carry out a full-scale excavation. Other commitments, however, rendered this impossible. Responsibility for investigations was therefore resumed by the Cambridgeshire Archaeology Committee, under whose aegis the excavations early in 1975 were carried out.

#### *The Medieval Finds.<sup>9</sup>*

The collection of medieval pottery fabrics, some hundred sherds in all, was briefly examined by John Hurst. The bulk of the material was shell-tempered ware, apparently of thirteenth-century date, although some of the simpler rim forms were more appropriate to the twelfth century. This fabric is common in the region in the medieval period; the Hardwick finds are paralleled by material from other recently excavated sites in the County such as Ellington.<sup>10</sup> There were also sherds of East Anglian red ware with painted decoration, and a few of a medium grey sandy ware, both of which date to the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Hurst remarked on the comparative scarcity of the sandy ware and felt as a result that the Hardwick group might well be nearly all twelfth to thirteenth century. Certainly the proportions of shelly and sandy wares at Hardwick were the reverse of those from the site at Fowlmere, where activity continued into the fourteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

The only stratified artefact, other than sherds of pottery, was an annular ceramic loomweight. Unstratified finds included iron knives, nails, a buckle and a horseshoe, all of which may be paralleled at Ellington, and some of which are likely to have been medieval. The animal bones identified were those of horse, ox, sheep/goat and pig; only ox and sheep/goat, however, were recovered from the stratified deposits, along with oyster shells. It is interesting to compare this result with an extent of 1251 for the Manor of Hardwick. Then, the demesne stock which could be kept, comprised 4 cows, a bull, 26 sheep and a ram, but no pigs, unless they were fed in the courtyard.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Discussion of the results of the 1975 Excavation*

The results obtained in the 1974 Trial excavation were in complete harmony with the tradition of surrounding medieval halls with moats. This practice, presumably rooted primarily in considerations of

status, was well-established in East Anglia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the interpretation of the Hardwick site as belonging to this class would not call for further discussion, were it not for Groube's claim, on the basis of his excavations, of a nineteenth century date for the construction of the ditch.<sup>13</sup>

However, if the identification of the Hardwick earthworks as a moated site is to be sustained on the basis of such a limited sample as was given by the trial trench, then the following criteria must be met. First, any independent archaeological or historical evidence must be consonant with the hypothesis. Secondly, observations which led Groube to conclude that the moat was nineteenth century must be explained in some other way.

In its general context, as an element of a series of earthworks which are typical of those generated by village shrinkage, the Hardwick 'moat' clearly meets the first of these criteria. Equally, while the historical sources for the parish are too generalised to establish the medieval owners of the moated site they do confirm the existence in the parish of landowners of sufficient standing to have invested in a moated enclosure, notably the Abbots and Bishops of Ely.

The very placenames 'Great Hall Close' and 'Little Hall Close', are suggestive of a manorial site. Moreover, in comparison with the long-closes or tofts behind the two houses to the south, the close behind the site of the moat is apparently on a rather larger scale. The elevation of the interior surface of the moat is another detail which seems to fit the basic model.

Groube's rejection of a medieval date for the feature rests on four points. The absence of structures or of more than a few sherds of medieval pottery may be a function of the particular portion of the moat interior which Groube excavated. Indeed the appalling conditions in which he had to work will have made the recognition of clay filled features cut into the clay platform difficult, if not well-nigh impossible. As Groube did not excavate into the clay which he encountered immediately below the turf, his results cannot be held to have any bearing on the question of whether there were earlier features sealed beneath the artificial clay platform on this part of the site, nor indeed whether the clay was redeposited to form a platform. A second point, the absence of any indication of the moat on the Enclosure Map of 1836 would, if upheld, call into serious question the medieval date of half the moated sites in West Cambridgeshire.<sup>14</sup> In any case, the U-shaped ditch was in existence by 1834, and it is rather the abandonment of the site and the destruction of any northern sector of the ditch by this date, which seem to be established by the first edition of the One Inch Ordnance Survey Map. Similarly, the discovery of a field-drain containing early nineteenth-century material running through the interior of the site on an East-West alignment must be discarded as a pertinent argument, when it is realised that the field drain intersects the line of the moat ditches just *north* of the point to which they appear to have been back-filled before this date. In this context, the field drain makes perfect sense, as having been inserted just inside the southern boundary of Hurley's Close, at the time of, or more likely some while after, the reorganisation of the close boundaries took place.

Groube's final point, the presence of a ramp of 'paving' stones, containing some small scraps of Transfer-printed pottery, leading up from the base of the ditch, is no more conclusive of a nineteenth century date for the U-shaped ditch. Groube was puzzled by the fact that the 'paving' stones were placed directly on a "natural looking" boulder-clay, and there was no sign of any humus or soil development beneath the stones, such as would have been expected had a ramp been constructed into a ditch which had stood open for centuries. However, it would appear that this observation might be explained in at least two other ways in view of the very great difficulty in distinguishing between redeposited and *in situ* boulder clay strata in the absence of clear disconformities between the overlying deposit and the natural sub-soil. A possibility which appears not to have been tested by Groube is that the boulder clay in which the 'paving' stones were set, was deliberately laid to form the body of the ramp structure. Alternatively, it is possible that the ramp was constructed soon after the destruction of the northern section of the ditch, being laid directly on its clean clay fill. Further to the north, the layer which was taken to represent the fill of the ditch, was a clean natural-coloured clay, admittedly with some 'post-medieval' pottery in the top few centimetres. The 'ramp' was clearly constructed with a view to utilizing the water source to which it led down; indeed, the retention of a portion of the moat rather than its backfilling in entirety, is surely indicative of some such underlying rationale. It should also be noted that in admixture with later nineteenth century material, Groube recovered a significant quantity of medieval pottery which was not further discussed.

It is thus clear that Groube's objections, while collectively impressive, are based on observations

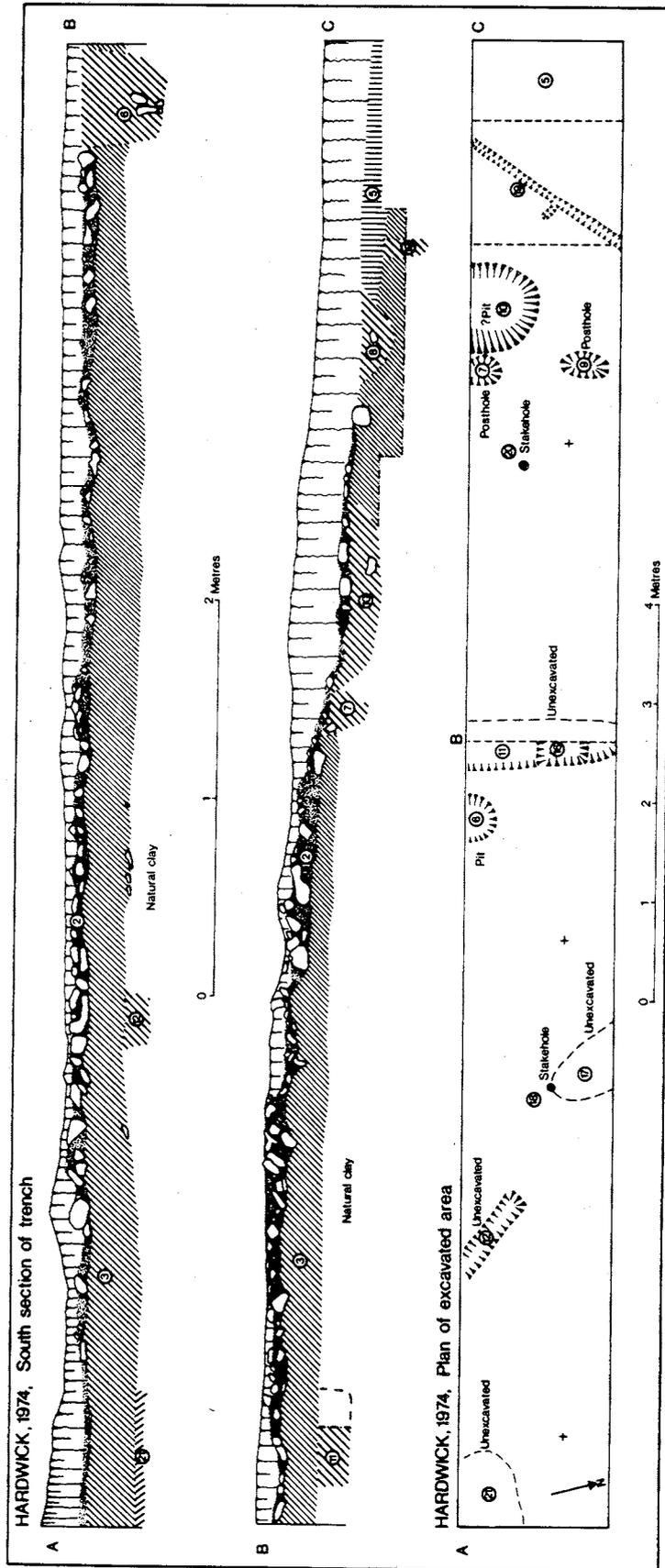


Fig. 2. South section of trench

which are individually susceptible to alternative explanations, and which would themselves be perfectly consistent with the interpretation of the Hardwick site as a medieval homestead moat. Moreover, when freed from the constraint of having by themselves to prove the medieval standing of the site, the results of the trial trench, meagre though they undoubtedly are, provide an adequate basis for a tentative reconstruction of the sequence of the site in accord with what is known from the documentary sources.

### *Conclusion*

The origins of the Hardwick settlement and estate remain obscure. There seems no reason to doubt a model of scattered woodland clearance and settlement on the heavy claylands or 'strong loam' soils of West Cambridge for much of the second half of the first millennium AD, and it may be that the presence of placenames which show Danish influence such as nearby Bourn, Caxton or Toft, a feature which is rare elsewhere in the County, may point to intensified colonisation of the woodlands from the later ninth century.

Hardwick itself was certainly in existence by the late tenth century, as the Ely documents record the gift of a number of estates including Hardwick to the monastery by Brihnorth of Essex in about AD 991.<sup>15</sup> Confirmed in the possession of the Monastery by Edward the Confessor, both Domesday Book and the *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis* give the assessment of Hardwick as 3 hides, 1 virgate and 12 acres in the late eleventh century. The Abbot's holding consisted of land for six ploughs, and woodland was noted only as sufficient for fencing. The *Inquisitio Eliensis* records 20 swine, and as there are references to an assart and woodward in neighbouring Toft in the thirteenth century, the extent of woodland in the area may still have been considerable.

The record of the late documentary sources would seem to be one of arable expansion and population growth up until the middle of the fourteenth century, although subsequently the population seems to have fallen. The emphasis on sheep and the absence of pig in the demesne stock in the mid thirteenth century could well be linked to a process of arable expansion and intensification, with at least seven fields or 'doles' referred to, as well as meadow, pasture and a wood. Establishment of three fields is not attested until the seventeenth century, and there is no record of the existence of a manor house at any period.

It has already been observed that the earthworks are typical of those resulting from village shrinkage. The absence of pottery recognisably later than the fourteenth century in date would seem to offer a *terminus ante quem* for the abandonment of the moated site, while the presence of little material likely to be much earlier than thirteenth century in date suggests that the occupation of the site was not of great duration. On the assumption that the green represents the original nucleus of the settlement, these earthworks would readily fit within the context of the expansion of the settlement southwards towards the Portway track. Such a pattern of growth, and its termination in the later fourteenth century, is sufficiently common to require no further discussion here.

The occupation of the 'old enclosure' within which the moated site is located is unlikely to have begun before the late twelfth century. At some stage the occupant decided to construct a moated enclosure with a slightly raised internal platform. A single sherd of East Anglian red ware with painted decoration from the platform makeup suggests that this event is unlikely to have been before the late thirteenth century at the earliest. There was no evidence for the construction of a hall building in the excavated area. The cobbled surface is, however, paralleled at various sites, including the extensively excavated moat at Ellington with its substantial rectangular structure. The evidence for the ditch in the excavated area was not conclusive and it may well be that the cobbles represent part of an entrance causeway midway along the western side of the moat, a suggestion which finds some support in the geophysical survey results. An alternative interpretation of the cobbled surface, on the basis of its containing a few pieces of what appeared to be building material, as having been laid down after the demolition of a substantial structure, partly built in stone, is for obvious reasons, less attractive. Whichever hypothesis is preferred, the absence of significant quantities of later fourteenth century pottery from the site tends to support the suggestion that the moat was already abandoned by then. At some time after their abandonment the boundaries of the closes were redefined with the creation of Hurley's Close. It does not appear to be until the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries that material was again being incorporated in the soil; the field drains were laid and the northern section of the moat ditch back filled.

The documentary sources offer us little guidance as to the likely owners or occupants of the moated enclosure or the close. Although it may represent a grange of the Abbey (subsequently Bishopric) of Ely,

it is at least as likely to represent the holding of a successful freeman tenant who decided on the aggrandisement of his dwelling, most probably in the second half of the thirteenth century. Such an interpretation would seem as consonant with the totality of the excavated evidence from the site as any others which have so far seen the light of day.

#### *Acknowledgements*

I am grateful to the owners of the land, Chivers Ltd. for their permission to carry out the excavation, and to all those who assisted in the project. Chris Taylor has kindly allowed me unrestricted use of unpublished material, and I am also indebted to John Hurst and James Rackham for their help with the finds, and to Yvonne Brown and Pamela Lowther for their assistance with the drawings which accompany this report. Most of all, I am deeply grateful to Dennis Haselgrove for his help with the documentary sources and to my wife Susanne, who was an unfailing source of support throughout the excavation.

#### NOTES

1. *Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc.* LXVI (1976): 175-6. A further account, entitled "A preliminary report on excavations at 'The Moat', Hardwick" was presented to the Cambridge Archaeological Committee in 1975, but as yet a final report on Groube's excavation has not appeared in print.
2. The records and finds from the author's trial excavation were handed over to the directors-designate for the full-scale excavation, successively D.M. Browne and L.M. Groube, for incorporation in the final report. Some years later the records and some of the finds were returned to the author; these, and notes taken on the material now lost, form the basis of this short report.
3. R.C.H.M. *West Cambridgeshire* (1968), 127-8.
4. In 1972. I am indebted to Mr. Taylor for permission to reproduce his survey as fig 1. A further survey took place in 1978-9: *Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc.* LXIX (1980): xi.
5. In 1836. it was a small hedged plot called Mutton's Close. See note 6.
6. 1836 Enclosure Map. (Cambridge Record Office).
7. This account of the excavation is based on the full archive report, *A Trial excavation on the Medieval Homestead Moat at Hardwick, West Cambridgeshire*, a copy of which is lodged in the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.
8. Ploughmarks are clearly visible on late 1940's air photographs J.K.S. St Joseph Collection, Nos. 201037, 565328, University of Cambridge.
9. Note 2 above. It is to be hoped that the missing finds will eventually come to light. Publication has been held back until now in the hope of their rediscovery.
10. *Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc.* LXIII (1971), 31-73
11. *Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc.* LXVII (1977) 69-77
12. *Op. Cit.* Note 7 above: "A preliminary historical note", by D.C. Haselgrove.
13. *Op. Cit.* Note 1 above,
14. C.C. Taylor. Personal communication.
15. Note 12 above.