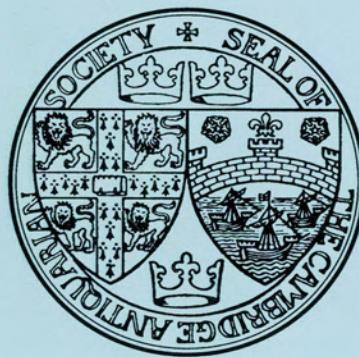

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

**Volume XCV
for 2006**



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Romano-British and medieval saltmaking and settlement in Parson Drove, Cambridgeshire

Phil Andrews

Contributions by Rachel Every, Stephanie Knight, Lorraine Mepham and
Chris Stevens

The site, centred TL 37440 08460, is located in the silt fenland of Cambridgeshire, on the edge of a roddon, within an area studied in detail by the Fenland Project. The excavation revealed evidence for three phases of Romano-British rural settlement spanning the 1st – 4th centuries AD, associated with salt production and animal rearing. Medieval settlement did not begin until at least the 12th century, the main period of activity was in the 13th – 14th centuries and, as in the Roman period, the layout and alignment of features appear to have been influenced by the existence of the roddon. Trackways and associated enclosures indicate the rearing of animals, and a series of pits and ditches provide further evidence for somewhat unusual, inland saltmaking. The surviving linear village plan of Parson Drove demonstrates its connection with the later medieval, post-reclamation planned landscape of this part of the Cambridgeshire fenland. A single ditch assigned to the 14th or 15th century probably reflects this later medieval phase, characterised by long droves and strip fields associated with the change from pastoral to arable agriculture.

Introduction

The site covers c.1.5ha within the western part of the linear village of Parson Drove (Fig. 1). It is located in the silt fenland of Cambridgeshire, an area dominated by the dendritic patterns of Flandrian river and stream channels. These former rivers and streams are today marked by low banks of sand or silt (roddons) representing infilled channels of once tidal watercourses. Much of the roddon system is likely to have been utilised in the Late Iron Age or early Roman period and reflects a phase when the area was salt marsh dissected by meandering tidal creeks and channels which gradually silted up. The site lies on or close to the eastern edge of a substantial roddon mapped as part of the Fenland Project (Hall and Palmer 1996, fig. 95), at c.1.80m OD.

The village plan of Parson Drove demonstrates its connection with the later medieval, post-reclamation planned landscape (Hall and Palmer 1996, 182). However, cropmark evidence indicates earlier

(Romano-British and ?medieval) settlement orientation to reflect that of the roddons – the new village alignment being almost perpendicular to the former layout.

Archaeological background

Prehistoric

Prehistoric finds are recorded in very small numbers from the pre-Flandrian surface in this part of the Fenland, but nothing is known from the vicinity of Parson Drove. Towards the top of the Flandrian sequence in this area is a relatively thin but widespread peat layer, representing stagnation following freshwater incursion. At Murrow (just south of Parson Drove), this peat has been dated to 2130 ± 50 BP (370–340 cal BC; Q2590) (Hall and Palmer 1996, 165). Brown silt occurs over the peat at Parson Drove and forms the chief deposit in this area. There was no dry land in the vicinity throughout most of the Iron Age, and all of the Roman and medieval settlement recorded in the excavation occurred on top of this upper silt deposit.

Roman

The Fenland Project has recorded (largely from field-walking and aerial photographs) extensive evidence for Roman activity on roddons on the fen-edge (Hall and Palmer 1996, 171 and fig. 94). The majority of sites are salterns, or settlements adjacent to and related to salterns, and include an extensive array of enclosures and ditched droves (represented by cropmarks) less than 500m northwest and southwest respectively of the site. No further information of relevance to the site has subsequently been added to this cropmark plot (Rog Palmer, pers comm). These features are consistent with a stock-raising economy, the animals being grazed on the fen in summer. An evaluation undertaken of cropmarks northwest of the site at Throckenholt Farm in 1993 indicated a short period of occupation in the late 2nd – mid 3rd century (Bray 1994). Evaluation of the Parson Drove site (HAT 2003) recorded only 15

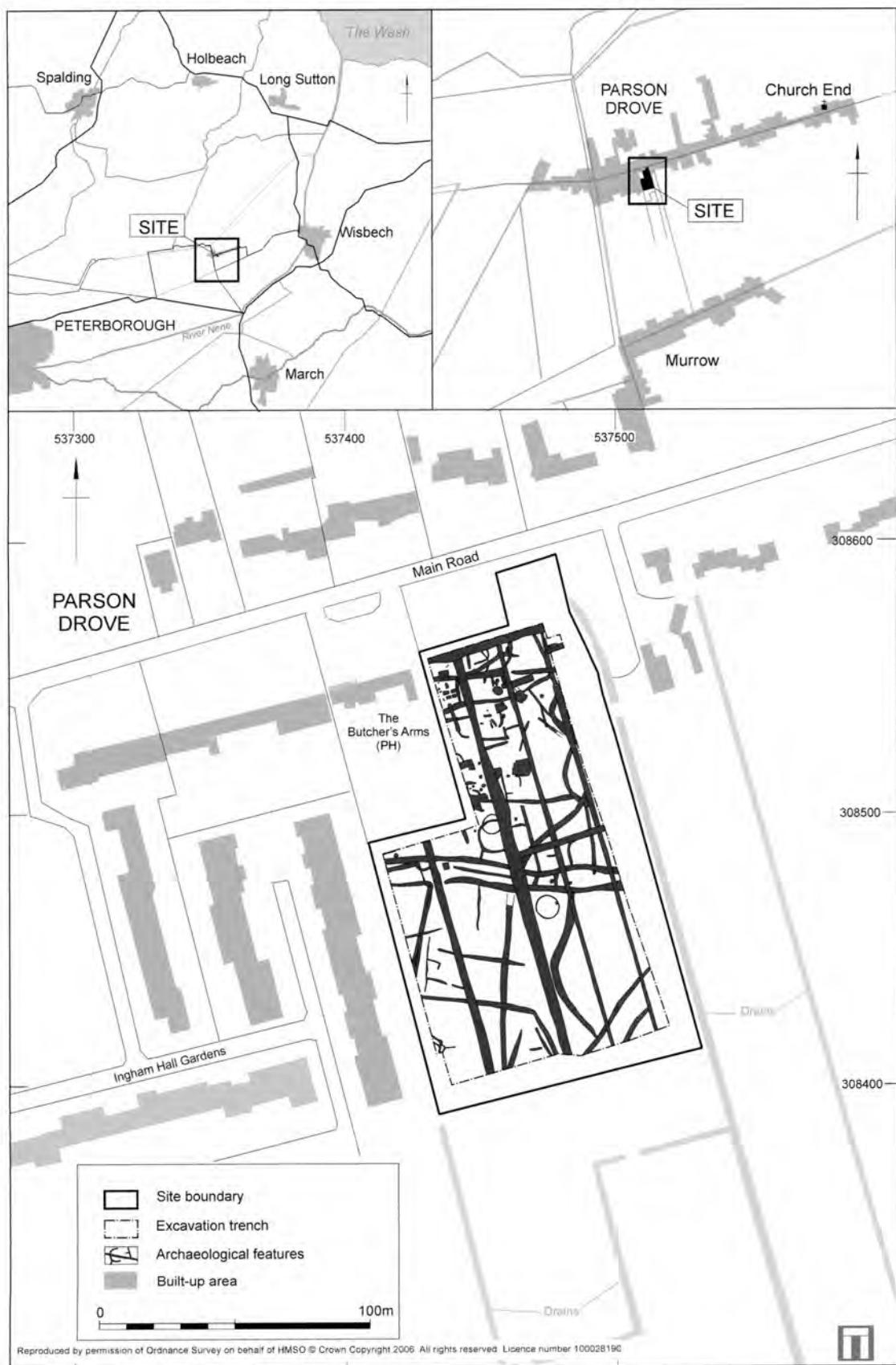


Figure 1. Plan showing excavation area and all features.

(residual) sherds of Roman pottery and no contemporary features. No work undertaken in this area has shown evidence for any 'post-Roman silt' which has been found to overlie much of the Roman landscape in Lincolnshire and Norfolk.

Medieval

The evaluation (HAT 2003) identified enclosures, ditches and pits broadly assigned to the 13th – 15th centuries, representing more than one phase of activity.

Parson Drove is one of the second stage reclamation linear settlements, its location determined by the slightly higher ground provided by a roddon. Like other second stage medieval settlements in this area it is characterised by a long, wide drove reflecting the planned landscape which developed as reclamation of the fen proceeded westwards. St John the Baptist's church, containing 13th century elements, lies in Church End at the east end of Parson Drove, and at the west end of the village is the Fendyke Bank, a major medieval flood defence which was breached on several occasions, most seriously in 1437, 1570 and 1770. The whole area of medieval dry land appears to have been divided into strip fields as former wetland grazing areas were replaced by arable agriculture which followed drainage and reclamation.

A small number of sites in the area have provided rare evidence for medieval settlement and wetland exploitation in the (former) peat fen, all but one located on roddons. One of these sites, within Parson Drove parish, 3km northeast of the site, was partly excavated in 1991 and proved to be a medieval saltern of unusual type in that it lay inland rather than on the coast (Pollard *et al* 2001). The presence of this saltern indicates that brackish water must have backed-up through what was by then medieval arable land until as late as the 14th century.

Post-medieval

Parson Drove has changed remarkably little from its later medieval linear layout. Subsequent housing continued to reflect the original width of the drove, but there is no map or documentary evidence for there ever having been post-medieval buildings within the site itself, and the Butcher's Arms public house does not appear on maps before 1886. The will of one John Bend (dated 1593), gave a messuage (close to and including the site) with 15 acres of land in South Inham Field, its rents devoted to '*making a stock to set the poor people to work*' (HAT 2003).

Site sequence

An average 0.5m of generally undifferentiated top-soil/subsoil overlay natural deposits. The homogeneity of the overburden reflects recent cereal cultivation which had truncated upper parts of archaeological features. This truncation was most apparent in the western third of the site where the fine sand/silt comprising the eastern edge of the roddon was exposed.

Here, the section along the western edge of the site showed that 0.3m or more of this raised feature along with the fills of features cutting it had been mixed by ploughing. Truncation was less pronounced in the slightly lower lying eastern two-thirds of the site where the natural, 'off-roddon' deposits comprised clayey silts/silty clays.

The Holocene sequence recorded locally was confirmed in the excavation, with Roman and later features cutting the roddon and adjacent deposits. These deposits were c.0.85m thick and covered a thin and discontinuous layer of peat up to 0.1m thick which can be equated with the Iron Age peat layer recorded elsewhere and dated to the Iron Age (above). The peat, at c.0.5m OD, lay above saltmarsh deposits variously comprising yellowish brown and blue clays and mid- to dark yellow sands with grey mottling.

The majority of the archaeological features were shallow (only post-medieval ditch 103 and medieval ditch 163 were more than 1m deep) and many contained single, undifferentiated fills. Larger features were generally visible following machine stripping, but several of the smaller features only became apparent after a week or more of weathering. There were no complex stratigraphic sequences and although some relationships were apparent at surface level, others could only be determined with some difficulty through excavation, and a few were never resolved.

Virtually all the features have been assigned to the Roman, medieval or post-medieval periods respectively, with a very small number remaining unassigned. (Note that feature numbers shown in boxes on Figures 2 and 3 have sections illustrated in the archive report, Wessex Archaeology 2004).

Roman (Fig. 2)

Phase 1: 1st – 2nd century

Features were largely restricted to the central part of the site and comprised a small enclosure and an associated group of circular structures. The north and east boundaries to the enclosure (measuring at least 40m by 28m) were represented by shallow ditches 211 and 290 respectively (up to 1.5m wide and 0.5m deep), with ditch 211 producing relatively large quantities of pottery. Gully 292 may have marked a boundary to the south and gully 287 an internal division. Within the area enclosed by these gullies and ditch 211 to the north were two ring-gullies perhaps representing round-houses. The earlier of the two ring-gullies (175) was approximately 7m in diameter, and the later (174) 11m in diameter and substantially deeper (at c.0.25m). No associated post-holes or post-ghosts were identified, but ring-gully 174 had two short 'spurs' on the south and east sides (293 and 291 respectively). A single sherd of Late Iron Age pottery came from ring-gully 174. A further ring-gully (294), surviving as little more than a soil stain, lay approximately 20m to the southeast, outside the enclosure. This ring-gully was 8m in diameter, and a shallow, internal pit (679) on the east side produced one sherd of early Roman pottery. A short length of curvilinear gully (170)

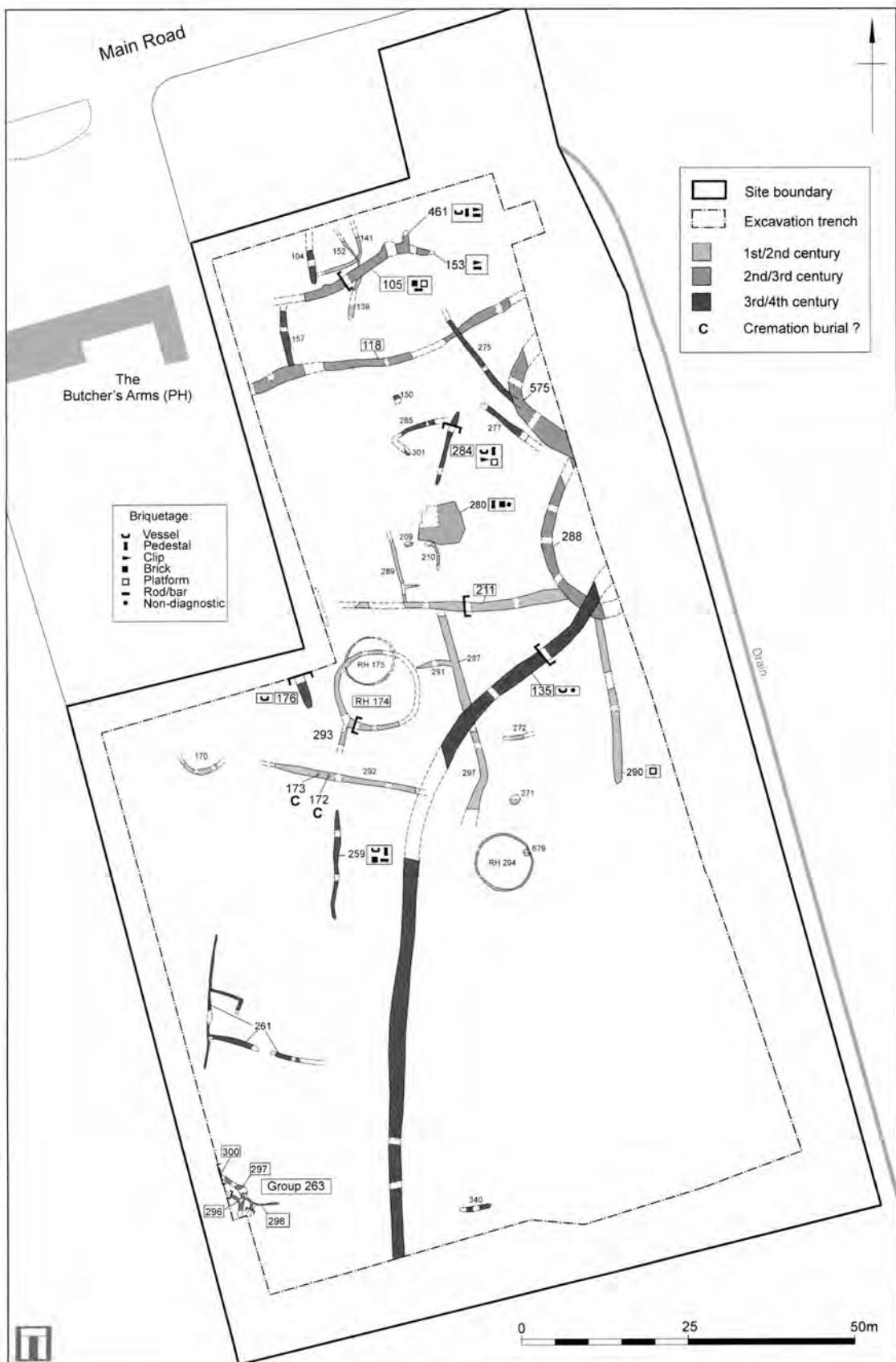


Figure 2. Roman features.

further to the west may represent the remains of another ring-gully. Several of these features contained very small quantities of fragmentary briquetage, and a complete, rectangular clay slab was found in the southern terminal of ditch 290.

Probably associated with the central group of features were pit 271 and a further small complex (pit 209 and gullies 210 and 289). Also assigned to this phase are two heavily truncated possible cremation burials (172 and 173, 0.18m and 0.03m deep respectively), both unurned, placed close to each other in the top of gully 292. Neither feature produced human bone, but both were filled with discrete deposits of charcoal-rich soil that contained small quantities of heavily burnt bone representing one or more young sheep.

Other features which might have belonged to the earliest Roman phase are shallow, intercutting gullies 141 and 152; these produced no finds but pre-dated trackway ditch 105. A large, shallow subrectangular pit (280), c.8m by 7m by c.0.3m deep, remains enigmatic. The 'stepped' edge apparent in plan along the west side suggests that it may have been a small quarry, but its function and place in the sequence are uncertain. It produced some fragmentary briquetage.

Phase 2: 2nd – 3rd century

Features assigned to this phase were dispersed from south to north across the site, but were largely restricted to the western half, on the edge of the roddon. At the southern end, and extending beyond the limit of excavation to the west, were intercutting, curvilinear gullies (group 263, comprising gullies 296, 297, 298 and 299 and pit 300) which produced prolific quantities of pottery including five near-complete vessels. This group of gullies is likely to represent a sequence, though what this was could not be determined with certainty. Gully 297 cut pit 300 and perhaps represents a replacement of gully 296, with gully 298 possibly being a secondary feature. The nature of these features and the amount of pottery they contained suggest that there was contemporary settlement in the immediate vicinity, and the most likely interpretation is that they were rainwater gullies surrounding a structure, possibly a roundhouse, which lay to the west.

At the north end of the site were two more substantial ditches (105/153 and 118), between 1.4m and 1.9m wide and 0.45m and 0.8m deep, which though irregular in plan ran broadly parallel to each other and may have defined an east-west aligned trackway approximately 12m wide. If so, then this trackway appears to have terminated on the eastern edge of the site. Ditch 105/153 produced briquetage including several clay 'bricks', and ditch 118 contained an ashy deposit with charcoal and possible briquetage fragments. Towards the east terminus of ditch 105 was a short, shallow extension (461) on the north side, perhaps a small pit, which contained a concentration of pottery and several types of briquetage.

Along the western edge of the site were two curvilinear ditches (288 and 575), flat-bottomed, 1.9m

to 2.85m wide and c.0.5m deep. Ditch 288 cut earlier enclosure ditch 211, and was itself cut by ditch 135. However, the relationship of ditches 288 and 575 to the other 3rd – 4th century features containing briquetage was equivocal, and it is uncertain which was earlier, or whether they were contemporary.

Phase 3: 3rd – 4th century

Several features assigned to this phase were characterised by the quantities of briquetage they contained, sometimes as discrete deposits, and a distinctive slightly bluey green hue to their fills. They contained little or no pottery, but where stratigraphic relationships could be determined these showed them to post-date the 1st – 2nd century features. Their relationship to the late 2nd – 3rd century features was sometimes less clear. No hearths, tanks or channels directly associated with salt production were identified.

The most substantial feature was ditch 135, up to 2.85m wide and 0.55m deep, which ran close to the eastern edge of the roddon for at least 100m. It contained at least two discrete dumps of briquetage fragments, with a 'background scatter' along its length. Two short gullies or elongated pits (272 and 340) were the only features to the east within the excavated area. An irregular ditch/gully 259 to the west contained several pedestals and a range of other types of briquetage, and ditch terminus 176 contained a dump of briquetage vessel fragments.

Two shallow gullies at 90° to each other (261) had been heavily truncated and contained very few finds, but there was one discrete deposit of pottery close to a gap which probably marks an entrance. A small, trapezoidal arrangement of gullies, open to the south, probably represents a later modification of the system.

Further north, an apparently related group of gullies (275, 277, 284, 285 and 301) and pit 150 all contained fragmentary briquetage. A further group of pedestals, along with other briquetage types, came from gully 284, although only gully 277 contained pottery. Gullies 275, 277 and 284 appear to have formed a funnel arrangement, and 285 and 301 a trapezoidal arrangement similar to that identified to the southwest (see above, gully 261).

Two other features were assigned to this phase on the basis of pottery, but neither contained briquetage. These lay in the northwest corner of the site and appear to represent changes or additions to the earlier trackway. A shallow gully (157) between ditches 105/153 and 118 perhaps marked a gate or temporary fence, and a further shallow ditch or gully (104) may reflect an enclosure or paddock in this area.

Medieval (Fig. 3)

Two principal phases are clearly apparent based on the layout of features and the stratigraphic evidence, but these phases cannot be distinguished by ceramic dating which broadly spans the 12th – 15th centuries, with a likely focus around the 13th / 14th centuries.

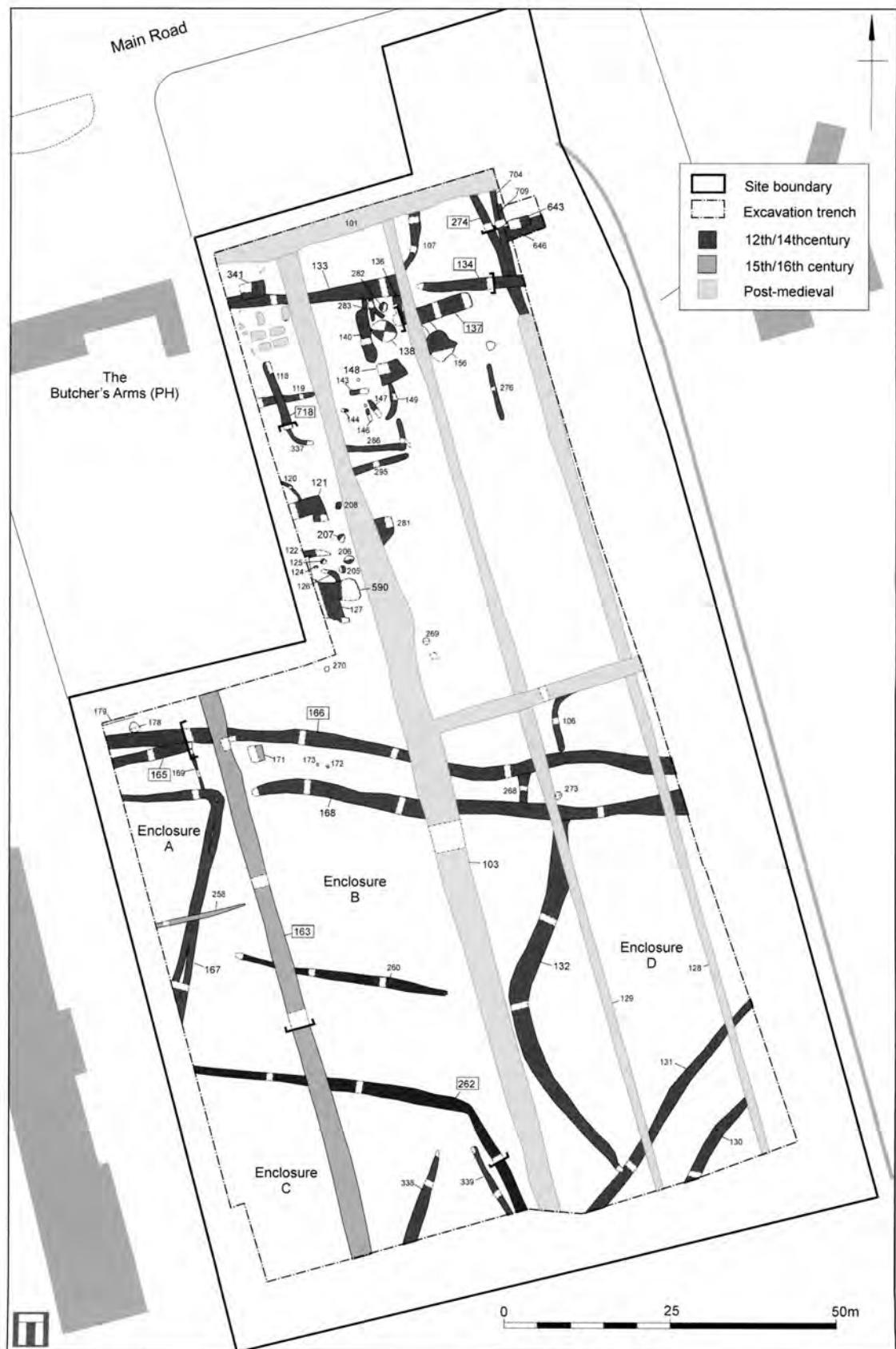


Figure 3. Medieval and post-medieval features.

Phase 1: 12th – 13th/14th century

The absence of any overlap between the features in the northern and southern halves of the site suggests that they were broadly contemporary.

Northern area

Features included at least six subrectangular, near vertical-sided, flat-bottomed pits (137, 148, 341, 643, 709 and 718/720). It is not certain whether all were contemporary, however pits 341, 643, 709 and 718/720 either certainly or probably cut medieval ditches in this area, and pit 148 may be later on ceramic grounds. Pit 137 may have been the earliest of the group, but this could not be demonstrated stratigraphically. The pits, with the exception of 137, varied between 2.8m and 5.3m long (average 3.9m), 1.3m and 3.4m wide (average 2.2m) and 0.55m to 0.85m deep (average 0.65m). Pit 137 was exceptional in that it was 12m in length, between 2m and 2.5m wide, and 0.6 to 0.8m deep. The fills, like those in the other pits, appeared to comprise clearly defined episodes of natural silting and possibly, in the case of the basal fill, marine silting. However, layer 599 near the base of pit 137 at the west end (and layer 689 in the central section) comprised a mixed layer of redeposited silt reddened by burning and containing fragments of fired clay and charcoal. Indeed, all of the pits contained sparse quantities of similar, rather hard, red, brick-like fragments, but not in the concentration recorded in pit 137. There was no clear evidence for linings of timber or wattle (eg post- or stake-holes or timber stains), but this is considered likely in some examples. None of the pits shows evidence of having been cleaned out, though this may not be apparent in features which were lined, but the smallest example (718/720) had been recut. The pits (and ditches) rarely contained more than a dozen sherds of pottery, mostly small sherds in the upper fills, but pit 137 produced a near-complete Grimston jug lying on the base of the pit.

Ditches can be assigned to at least two sub-phases, the earlier certainly pre-dating at least two of the subrectangular pits (341 and 643). The earliest group comprised north-south ditch 274, which itself had been recut (as 704), ditch 646, and ditch 102 (later recut as 133) which ran west to east and then curved to the north (as ditch 107). Together these may have formed an enclosure, with the gap between 107 and 274 possibly forming a droveway. The second phase saw a single, approximately east-west alignment comprising ditch 133, a recut of 102, which continued to the east, after a gap, as ditch 134 that cut across earlier ditch 274. A thin peat layer within ditch 134 may reflect high water conditions or a period of abandonment. All ditches except 133 had U-shaped profiles and were between 1m and 1.8m wide and 0.35m and 0.7m deep. Ditch 133 was flat-bottomed, 0.5m deep, and near its eastern terminus (destroyed by a post-medieval ditch) widened to almost 3m. A further shallow ditch (119) lay 15m to the south and parallel with ditch 133 and may have been contemporary.

Two short lengths of shallow ditches (118 and 140), both approximately 8m long, up to 1.5m wide, and

between 0.4m and 0.5m deep, also lay to the south of ditch 133. Their relationship to the other ditches in this area is unclear, but ditch 118 cut 119 and was cut by pit 718/720. In the same area were a variety of shallow pits/scoops within an area partly enclosed by gullies 286 and 337 on the south and west sides respectively, and possibly also 149 and 283 on the east side. Gully 337 cut medieval ditch 162, but elsewhere it was impossible to be certain of, for example, the relationship between gully 149 and pit 148. Virtually no dating evidence was recovered from these very shallow features, all less than 0.15m deep, nor from the few shallow post-holes and slots (144–147) which lay within the putative enclosure; they may have been contemporary and perhaps represented a structure of small but indeterminate form. A further group of shallow features lay ‘outside’ to the northeast, and comprised two very shallow pits (136 and 282) and one larger sub-circular pit (138) containing a distinct band of charcoal-rich soil. Gullies 276 and 295, and shallow pit 156, may also have belonged to the same, medieval phase represented in this part of the site. Overall, a clear sequence of activity is indicated by these various features though the precise nature and duration of this remains unclear.

A short distance to the south, but probably still part of the same group, was a further concentration of features on the western edge of the excavated area. Again, the shallow nature of several, the similarity in their fills, the paucity of dating evidence and the prevailing dry conditions made it impossible to establish any certain relationships between them. There were four substantial pits (121, 127, 281 and 590), of which pit 127 was particularly large (5.5m by at least 3.5m and 0.8m deep) and the L-shaped plan of 121 defies comprehension. None but pit 127 was rectangular, but all had flat bottoms, near-vertical or steeply sloping sides and contained similar, virtually undifferentiated fills of brown/yellowish brown clayey silt loams. In the immediate vicinity were six small, shallow, sub-circular pits (124, 125, 205, 206, 207 and 208) and three, somewhat irregular curvilinear gullies (120, 122 and 126). Only pit 205 contained a distinctive fill, incorporating much mussel shell.

Southern area

Features comprised entirely ditches and gullies which defined trackways and enclosures. Their layout and alignment still reflect broadly the edge of the roddon.

The two trackways identified lay on a converging path which (projected) would have met approximately 50m east of the site. The trackway in the southeast corner was defined by two very shallow, parallel ditches (130 and 131) 8m apart, with that in the central part of the site defined by a pair of deeper but more irregular ditches (165/166 and 168) often less than 5m apart. These latter ditches may represent an easterly extension to an earlier trackway defined by ditch 165 and the northern arm of ditch 167 forming Enclosure A. Cross-ditches/gullies 169 and 268 may mark the locations of gates or barriers along the trackway.

Four possible enclosures have been identified within the angle formed by the two trackways, all of rather irregular shape and size, and apparently contemporary. Enclosure A, defined by recut ditch 167, extended beyond the limit of excavation to the west and only a relatively small part of the interior was exposed. To the east lay Enclosure B, entered from the northern trackway through a gap in the northwest corner between ditches 167 and 168, with gully 260 forming an internal division. Enclosure C lay to the south and extended beyond the limits of excavation. It was separated from Enclosure B by ditch 262, and it is possible that it was part of Enclosure A. Two converging gullies (338 and 339) reflect internal arrangements within Enclosure C, and are likely to relate to stock management. Enclosure D lay at the junction of the two trackways and was created by the digging of ditch 132 which closed off the area in between.

13th/14th – 15th century

Ditch 163 ran at 90° to Main Road and was substantial with a variable profile. One section shows it almost 3m wide, 0.7m deep with gently sloping upper edges, becoming steeply sloping with a flat bottom, perhaps indicating that it had been cleaned out. Elsewhere it is recorded with an open V-shaped section, but with no clear evidence of having been recut or cleaned out, although a shallow U-shaped gully (422) was recorded cutting the upper fill in one section and following the same alignment. Perhaps this gully represents the post-medieval boundary shown on the 19th-century tithe map (below). Ditch 163 cut across the earlier (and differing) alignment of medieval trackways and enclosures, as did gully 258 which lay at 90° to ditch 163. Only a very few sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from these two features, insufficient to provide closer dating, and shallow pit 171, adjacent to ditch 163, may have been contemporary but was undated. These features probably also post-dated the complex of pits and ditches at the north end of the site, but any relationships between this complex and ditch 163 lay outside the limit of excavation.

Post-medieval (Fig. 3)

All of the post-medieval features have been assigned to a broad period spanning the 18th – early 20th centuries. The principal features represent drainage ditches in the eastern half of the site, aligned at 90° or parallel to Main Road, but there was also a small group of animal burials and post-holes in the northwest corner.

Ditch 103 was the most substantial feature and may have originated at an early, possibly even medieval date (see below). However, the fills produced large quantities of late post-medieval/early modern finds, although the ditch had certainly been re-cut/cleaned out, perhaps when ditch 583 was dug at 90° to the east. Ditch 583 cut two parallel, rectangular-sectioned

(probably machine-cut) ditches (128 and 129), neither of which produced any datable finds. Both ditches are considered likely to be post-medieval, and had different profiles as well as fills (slightly peaty) compared with medieval ditch 163 to the west. Map evidence indicates that ditch 101, crossing the northern edge of the site, was extant until the early 20th century, and was the former western arm of the drain which defines the eastern boundary to the site.

Eight animal burials formed a close group within the angle formed by ditches 101 and 103. They comprised five cattle (112, 158, 159, 160 and 161), one horse with a pig (111) and two sheep (114 and 115). The cattle and horse had been placed in neatly dug graves and the sheep in shallow scoops. Industrial whiteware, indicating a 19th or 20th century date, was recovered from the one completely excavated burial (159); the others were excavated only as far as was necessary to establish what animals had been buried. An arc of six small post-holes (108, 109, 110, 113, 116, 117), one of which produced industrial whiteware, lay in the same area, but their relationship to the burials, if any, is uncertain.

Artefacts

Roman pottery

Rachel Every

A moderate amount of material, 475 sherds, weighing 9428g, was recovered from the excavation. The majority are early to mid-Roman in date, while two are probably Late Iron Age. The assemblage mainly comprises locally-made coarsewares with small amounts of imitation Gallo-Belgic and imported wares. The condition of the material is variable, but generally good to average. The mean sherd weight is high, at 19.82 grammes. Analysis followed standard Wessex Archaeology recording system (Morris 1994), which accords with nationally recommended guidelines (Darling 1994).

Fabrics

Twenty-five different fabrics were recorded, belonging to three broad groups based upon predominant inclusion types (Q: quartz; G: grog; C: calcareous) in addition to a range of 'established' (E) wares of known type or source (Table 1). These included Southern and Central Gaulish samian, Central Gaulish glazed ware, North Gaulish whiteware and Rhineland whiteware mortaria.

The fabrics are largely coarse, locally made wares, from a number of sources. The widest range occurs amongst the sandy wares which can be further subdivided into whitewares (Q103–105, 109, 111, 112), coarse oxidised wares (Q101, 110) and greywares (Q100, 102, 106–108). Potential sources include the Nene Valley industry (Perrin 1999) and kilns of the Cambridge area (Hull and Pullinger 1999).

As at other sites in the southeast Fenlands area, calcareous wares formed a significant part of the as-

Fabric Code	Fabric Name	Number	Weight(g)
Q100	Coarse greyware; frequent quartz <1mm; sparse chalk/limestone <2mm	95	1771
Q101	Fine oxidised ware; moderate quartz <0.5mm; micaceous	8	74
Q102	Greyware; frequent quartz <0.1mm; frequent subangular voids <0.1mm; slightly micaceous	68	872
Q103	Whiteware; frequent quartz <1mm; moderate chalk <1mm; micaceous	26	184
Q104	Whiteware; frequent quartz <1mm; moderate chalk <2mm	8	13
Q105	Fine whiteware; moderate quartz <1mm; slightly micaceous	13	168
Q106	Coarse greyware; frequent quartz <2mm	15	240
Q107	Coarse greyware; frequent quartz <1mm; sparse igneous inclusions	10	187
Q108	Greyware; frequent quartz <0.5mm; well finished	10	291
Q109	Fine whiteware; frequent quartz <0.5mm; laminated matrix; sparse grog <3mm	19	434
Q110	Coarse oxidised ware; frequent quartz <0.5mm	17	275
Q111	Whiteware; frequent, poorly sorted quartz <0.5mm; frequent grog <0.5mm; reduced core	10	29
Q112	Whiteware; frequent quartz <0.5mm; frequent quartz <0.5mm; moderate chalk <0.5mm; white/buff with reduced (grey) core	8	8
Q113	Late Iron Age sandy ware; frequent quartz <1mm; mica	1	33
C100	Coarse shell-tempered; frequent shell <2mm	23	227
C101	Coarse shell-tempered; frequent shell <5mm; moderate quartz <1mm; rare patinated flint <4mm	114	3166
C102	Coarse calcareous-tempered; moderate crushed limestone <2mm	3	44
G100	Fine grog-tempered; moderate grog <1mm; moderate quartz <1mm	3	21
G101	Coarse grog-tempered; moderate grog <3mm; moderate quartz <1mm; sparse chalk	1	22
G102	Coarse grog-tempered; frequent grog <1mm; slightly micaceous	12	520
E129	Central Gaulish lead glazed ware (Greene 1979, 90)	1	1
E204	North Gaulish whiteware mortaria (Tomber and Dore 1998, 75)	1	507
E205	Rhineland whiteware mortaria (Tomber and Dore 1998, 78)	1	323
E301	South Gaulish samian	7	17
E304	Central Gaulish samian	1	1
Total		475	9428

Table 1. Late Iron Age and Roman pottery: Ware groups and fabric types by number and weight.

semblage, accounting for approximately 30% of the overall number of sherds. Although probably derived from a number of different centres (Gurney 1996, 200), the crushed fossil shell in the single most common fabric (C101, Table 1) suggests that at least some of these were located on the Jurassic limestone beds in the south Midlands. These clays were utilised for pottery from the Iron Age onwards and the possibility that some of the less diagnostic sherds in this assemblage are of earlier, perhaps even Late Iron Age, date cannot be fully excluded.

Grog tempered wares formed only a minor component of the assemblage and are probably confined to the early Roman period, although pit 398 did include one body sherd in a coarsely tempered fabric (G101) possibly of Late Iron Age date.

Forms

A site-specific vessel type series was created. Brief descriptions and basic quantification are presented in Table 2, while full details are contained in the archive. One form, a bead rim jar (Fig. 4, 1) in a fine sandy fabric is of Late Iron Age date; the Roman forms mainly span the period from the mid-1st to 3rd century AD.

The white and oxidised wares are represented by a restricted range of flagons (body sherds only), flanged bowls (Fig. 4, 7 and 14) and necked, cordoned jars (Fig. 4, 11) – medium quality wares mainly used at table,

Table 2. Roman pottery: vessel forms.

Vessel Types	Detailed forms	Number of examples	Weight (g)
Flagon	Body sherds only	4	79
Jar	Bead rim jar	2	71
	Storage jar	2	362
	Slack shouldered jar	4	431
	Necked and cordoned jar	10	1026
	Other jars	6	263
Beaker	Central Gaulish Glazed Ware	1	1
	Greyware	1	3
Platter	Imitation Gallo-Belgic forms	2	27
Bowl	Carinated bowl	1	147
	Round-bodied flanged forms	3	117
	Samian	2	3
Dish	Round rimmed dish	1	110
Mortarium	Rhineland whiteware	1	323
	North Gaulish whiteware	1	507
Lid	All forms	1	104
Total		42	3574

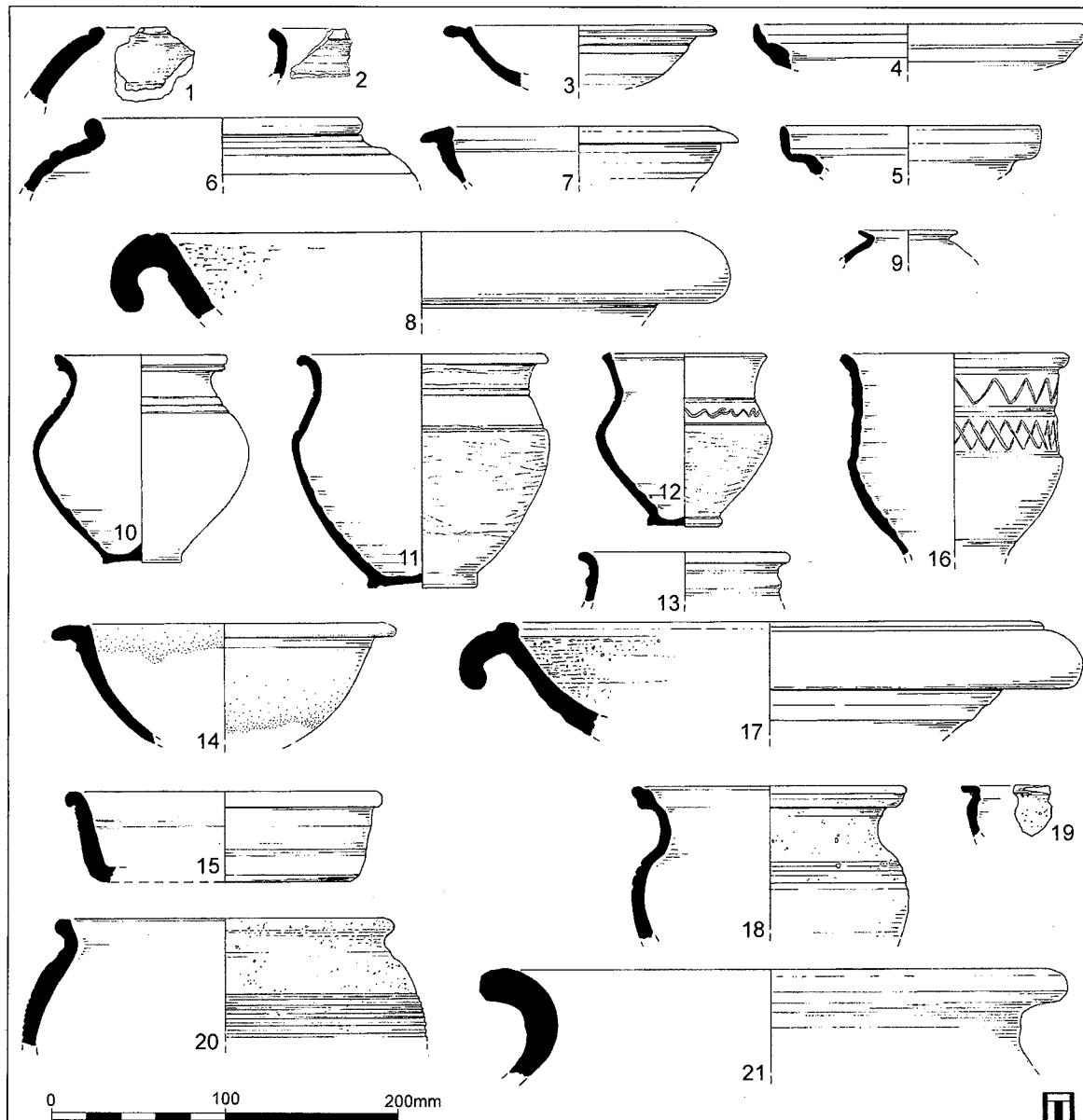


Figure 4. Roman pottery.

1. Bead rim jar, Rim 21, Late Iron Age sandy ware; context 200, ring gully 174
2. Necked jar, Rim 2, Greyware; context 198, pit 138
3. Round-bodied flanged bowl, Rim 3, Greyware; context 198, pit 138
4. Platter, Rim 14, Greyware; context 504, ditch 211
5. Platter, Rim 18, Coarse greyware; context 626, ditch 211
6. Bead rim jar, Rim 19, Coarse greyware; context 627, ditch 211
7. Round-bodied flanged bowl, Rim 17, Coarse oxidised ware; context 626, ditch 211
8. Mortarium, Rim 15, North Gaulish whiteware; context 504, ditch 211
9. Beaker, Rim 1, Greyware; context 309, gully 296 (Group 263)
10. Necked and cordonated jar, Rim 5, Well-finished greyware; context 311, gully 297 (Group 263)
11. Necked and cordonated jar, Rim 6, Fine whiteware; context 311, gully 297 (Group 263)
12. Necked and cordonated jar, Rim 11, Coarse greyware; context 330, gully 297 (Group 263)
13. Necked and cordonated jar, Rim 16, Greyware; context 640, ditch 135
14. Round-bodied flanged bowl, Rim 7, Fine whiteware; context 352, ditch 298 (Group 263)
15. Round rimmed dish, Rim 9, Coarse greyware; context 332, gully 297 (Group 263)
16. Carinated bowl, Rim 10, Coarse greyware; context 330, gully 297 (Group 263)
17. Mortarium, Rim 20, Rhineland whiteware; context 664, ditch 211
18. Slack shouldered jar, Rim 8, Coarse shell and flint tempered; context 331, gully 297 (Group 263)
19. Small vessel with flat, out-turned rim, Rim 12, Coarse shell tempered; context 424, gully 277
20. Jar with short, thickened rim, Rim 13, Coarse shell and flint tempered; context 485, ditch 104
21. Storage jar, Rim 4, Coarse shell and flint tempered; context 336, gully 157

and mortaria (Fig. 4, 8 and 17). A wider variety of utilitarian food preparation vessels as well as 'everyday' table wares was provided by the greywares. These included necked and necked/cordoned jars (Fig. 4, 2, 10, 12 and 13), bead rim jars (Fig. 4, 6), beakers (Fig. 4, 9), carinated bowls (Fig. 4, 16), flanged bowls (Fig. 4, 3), platters (Fig. 4, 4 and 5) and dishes (Fig. 4, 15). The calcareous wares too provided a range of utilitarian vessels, mostly jars for food preparation (eg Fig. 4, 18–20) and storage purposes (Fig. 4, 21). Soot deposits on the exterior surface of jar sherds found in gullies 261, 296 and 297 and ditches 107 and 298 suggest that these were used for cooking while internal residues, possibly representing food remains, were noted on coarse shell-tempered sherds from ditches 104 and 118.

Conclusions

Overall the pottery is similar to assemblages recovered from other sites in the Cambridgeshire Fenland Survey area (Gurney 1996, 199). The range of fabrics and vessel forms can be paralleled at other sites in the region (eg Marney 1989; Perrin 1999; Hull and Pullinger 1999). Amphorae and British finewares – especially Nene Valley colour-coated wares, were notable by their absence, although it is possible that some of the more abraded oxidised wares were originally colour-coated. The character of this assemblage is consistent with domestic debris from a rural farming community of fairly low status.

Briquetage and fired clay

Rachel Every

A total of 1636 fragments (31,820g) of briquetage and fired clay was recovered. The vast majority is assumed to be Roman; most came from features of this date, with some occurring as residual material in later (medieval and post-medieval) features. A relatively small quantity of briquetage came from the evaluation where it was either recorded as undiagnostic fired clay (367g) or mistakenly identified as early to mid-Saxon pottery (298 'sherds' weighing 1816g).

Fabric types are predominantly organic-tempered (recognisable vessel fragments are exclusively in these fabrics), with sandy/silty fabrics much less frequently represented. One small group from ditch 176 is made in a coarse poorly sorted fabric with large inclusions of quartz, flint and organic. As discussed by Morris (2001a, 354), the organic fabrics mark a late development in the manufacture of briquetage, which may also be the case for this assemblage.

Types

Much of the briquetage comprises fragmentary material that cannot be attributed to specific forms. A sufficient number of diagnostic pieces do, however, survive to indicate the presence of the expected range of types. These include containers (Fig. 5, 1–3), clips (Fig. 5, 7–8), pedestals (Fig. 5, 4–6), platforms, rods and bars (Fig. 5, 10–11), bricks (Fig. 5, 9), slabs and a thumb-pot (Fig. 5, 12), all well paralleled within assemblages from later prehistoric and Roman salt-

erns in the Fenland area (Lane 1993; Lane and Morris 2001). Using the type series created by Morris (2001a) the assemblage has been classified into the briquetage classes listed in Table 3 (see archive report for further details, Wessex Archaeology 2004).

Table 3. Briquetage by type and number.

Class	Type	Number
Container	Troughs	2
	Pans	14
	Unidentified vessel	52
Supports	Pedestal	31
	Clip	12
	Rod	2
	Bar	7
	Rod/bar	5
	Brick/slab	23
	Platform	6
Miscellaneous	Thumb pot	1
Total		155

Distribution (see Fig. 2)

Briquetage was distributed in a number of Roman features of all phases across the site, with the largest groups coming from those assigned to the 3rd – 4th centuries, in particular gullies 259 and 284 which produced assemblages of pedestal and vessel fragments. Other notable groups and single finds came from ditches 105 and 176 and pits 280 and 461, with undiagnostic groups of probably largely residual material from medieval pits 138 and 148.

Functional significance

The briquetage assemblage indicates that saltern industries were active in the vicinity from perhaps as early as the Late Iron Age through to the Late Roman period. No structural evidence survives to indicate what heat source was used here, an absence which is typical of other sites in the area (Morris 2001a, 373). Morris has suggested two types of heating devices which may have been utilised: saltern hearths and saltern ovens, the latter being used in the Late Iron Age (*ibid*, 374). The majority of vessels/containers in this assemblage have a powdery texture, illustrating they have been burnt, through use. Organic-tempered fabrics were common in this region from the Late Iron Age onwards and a high percentage of this group is made in this fabric. The addition of organic temper made the fabrics stronger and more malleable, and it has been suggested that the introduction of organic fabrics may have influenced the change from troughs to pans in the saltmaking process. In this assemblage the organic-tempered briquetage is found with Roman shell-tempered pottery. This occurrence of organic-tempered briquetage and shell-tempered pottery is common for the Late Iron Age in the region, as noted at Cowbitt (Knight 2001), and also during the Early Roman period, as seen at Morton Saltern (Crosby 2001).

Development from simple troughs and pedestals in the earlier Iron Age, through to troughs, pans used with pedestals, clips, rods, platforms and bars in the

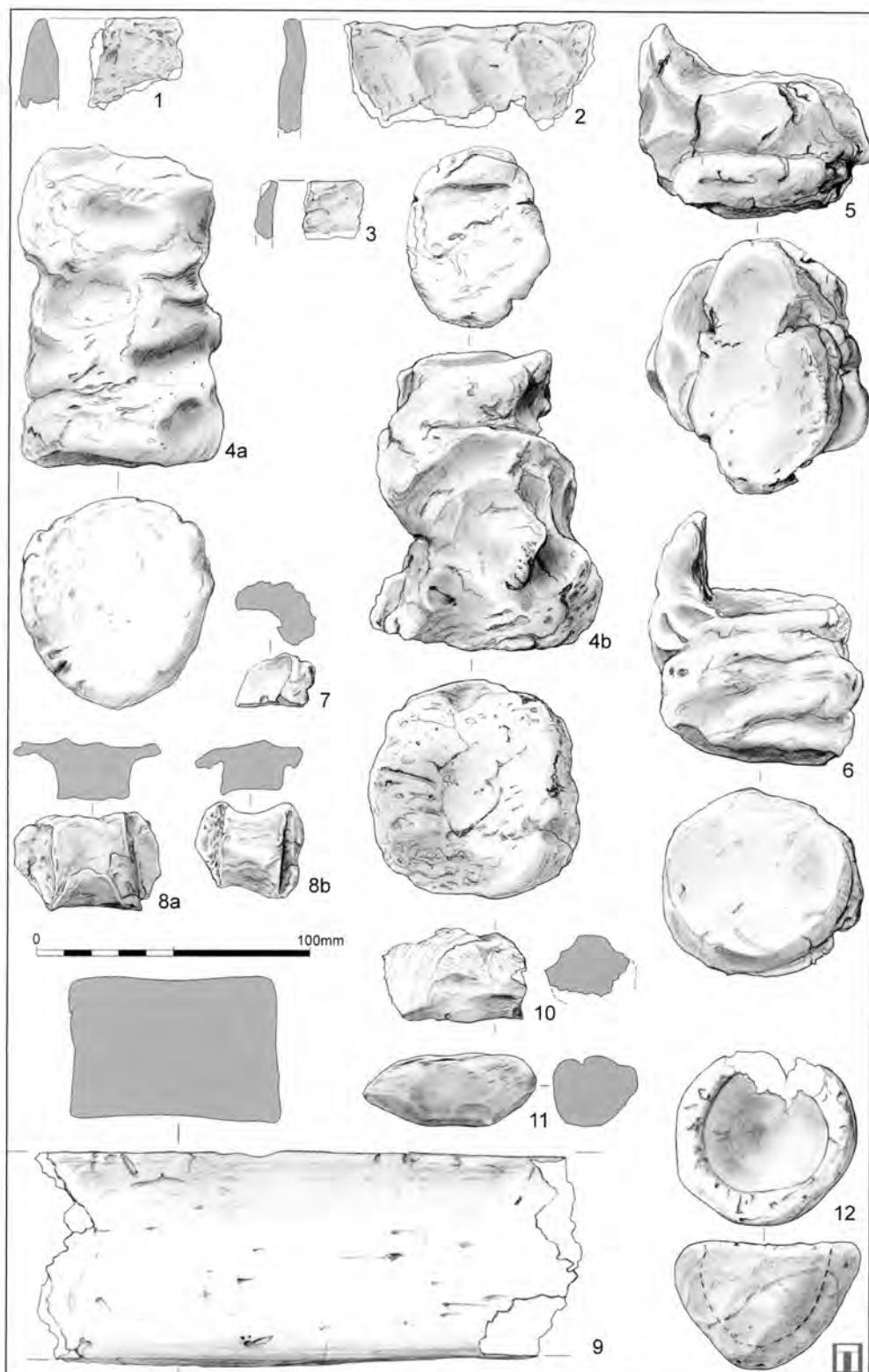


Figure 5. Briquetage.

1. Rim from pan, R4 type, context 623, ditch 107
2. Rim from trough, R6 type, context 559, ditch 560
3. Rim from trough, R6 type, context 331, gully 297
4. 'Squeezed hand brick' pedestal, context 407, ditch 118
5. 'Squeezed hand brick' pedestal, PD13 type, context 546, gully 259
6. 'Squeezed hand brick' pedestal, context 546, gully 259
7. Clip, CL1 type, context 496, ditch 118
8. Clips, CL2 type, context 464, pit 461
9. Brick, BK1 type, context 493, ditch 105
10. Bar, BR2 type, context 499, ditch 105
11. Bar, BR2 type, context 546, gully 259
12. Small thumb pot, Object 1, context 546, gully 259

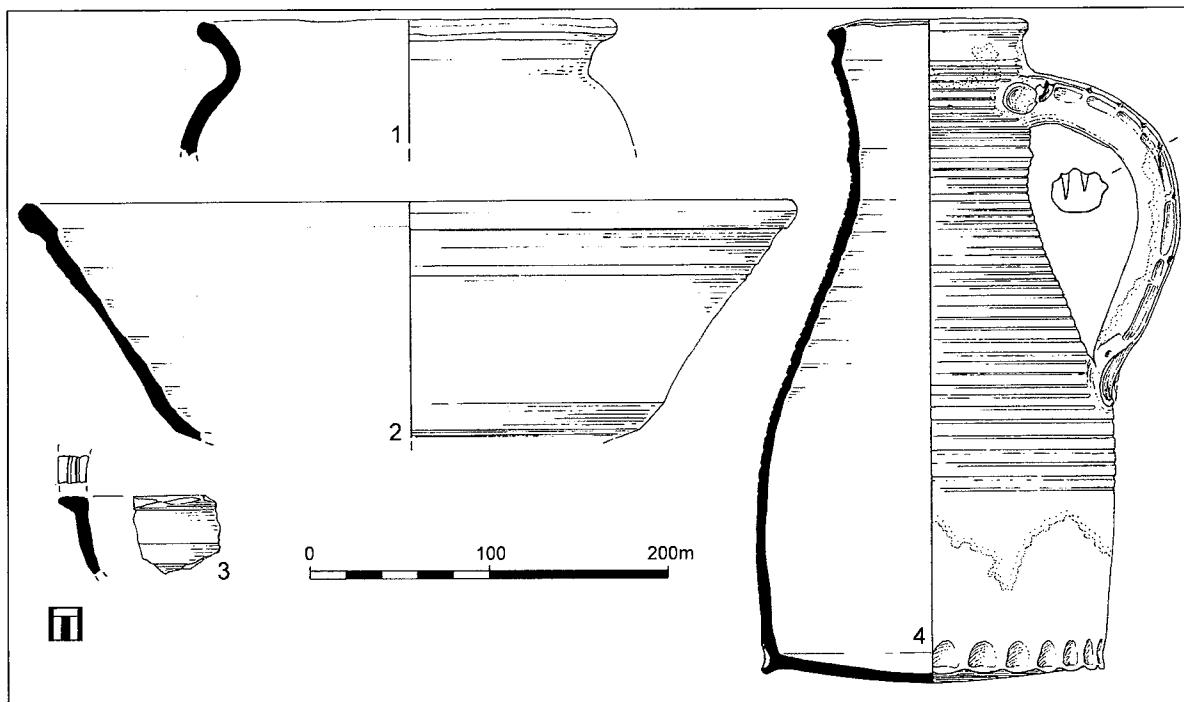


Figure 6. Medieval pottery.

1. Jar rim, coarse shelly ware. PRN (Pottery Record Number) 245, context 428, pit 341.
2. Flared bowl, Grimston ware; internal limescale. PRN 226, context 426, ditch 121.
3. Bowl/dish rim, Grimston ware; knife-trimmed exterior. PRN 248, context 428, pit 341.
4. Jug profile, Grimston ware; horizontal rilled decoration. PRN 301, context 688, pit 137.

Late Iron Age and, finally, flat-bottomed pans with support bricks in the Roman period has been commented on by Morris (2001a, 374). At Parson Drove, 14 contexts have vessels with flat bases in association with brick/slabs, compared with 12 contexts that produced both pedestals and vessels, some of which have curved bases and plain rims. A further four contexts have a mixture of bricks, pedestals and vessel sherds. The assemblage as a whole indicates that both troughs and pans were used on the site, perhaps from as early as the Late Iron Age and continuing throughout the Roman period. This timespan and the range of briquetage make the assemblage particularly interesting in terms of the saltmaking industry in the Fenland, though more work is required on similar assemblages to develop the study of saltmaking industry in this area, and to further understand the transition from troughs to pans.

Medieval pottery

Lorraine Mepham

A total of 246 sherds (4772g) of medieval pottery was recovered. Seven separate fabric types have been identified and coded using the regional fabric type series for Cambridgeshire. Table 4 presents a quantified breakdown of the assemblage by fabric type. A further 74 medieval sherds (1350g) came from the evaluation and are in similar fabrics and of broadly similar date. They are not included in Table 4, but ac-

count of these is taken in the discussion below.

The condition of the assemblage is variable. Mean sherd weight overall is 19.4 grammes, and sherds are generally in a relatively unabraded condition although few reconstructable profiles are present. In many cases, however, it is apparent that sherds have been affected by some process(es) which have resulted in the severe deterioration of glazes, particularly internal. This will be considered further below along

Table 4. Medieval pottery by fabric type.

Fabric Code	Description	No. of sherds	Weight (g)
GRIM	Grimston type ware	177	3917
MEL	Medieval Ely ware	13	184
MELCOAR	Medieval Ely coarseware	17	217
SHW	Coarse shelly ware	2	126
Essex Red	Essex redware (Cunningham 1985, fabric 21)	13	142
BRILL	Brill ware	1	3
Sand	Miscellaneous sandy ware, generally medium-grained with no other macroscopically visible inclusions	23	183
Total		246	4772

with other potential evidence for vessel use.

Fabrics and potential sources

The range of fabrics under discussion here appears similar to that already identified from a medieval salt-ern site 3km to the northeast (Hall 2001), although the relative proportions of Grimston and Ely type wares varies considerably between the two sites – Ely wares at the previously excavated site made up 36% of the total by number of sherds, but only 12% of the assemblage discussed here, while Grimston wares make up, respectively, 19% and 72%. No definite examples of Hall's fabric B, a possible Blackborough End (Norfolk) product, were identified in the current assemblage, but positive identification may have been hampered by the close visual similarity between this and the Ely wares. A miscellaneous category of sandy wares could include further Ely or Grimston wares, or indeed wares from other sources.

Differences in ware proportions between the two sites could be due to chronological factors; the previously excavated assemblage had a restricted date range within the 14th century, while the pottery from the current site has a potential range of 13th to 14th century (possibly into the 15th century), with a few possibly earlier (12th century) wares. It is, however, difficult to see why this should be so, since both Grimston and Ely wares have similar currencies.

Vessel form and condition

Rims and other diagnostic sherds are fairly scarce within the assemblage. Recognisable vessel forms comprise jars (four rims; Fig. 6, 1), flared bowls (five rims; Fig. 6, 2), one dish/bowl with knife-trimmed exterior (Fig. 6, 3), and six jugs (three rims and three [separate] handles), including one complete profile of a pear-shaped jug with rod handle, collared rim and rilled decoration (Fig. 6, 4).

Although the number of identifiable vessel forms is low, a few points can be made. First, the high proportion of identifiable bowls in relation to jars is unusual and is likely to have a functional implication. Second, the surface condition of many of the sherds is noteworthy. The severe deterioration of glaze has already been noted, and to this may be added the presence of residues – sooting and other burnt residues externally, and whitish 'furring' internally. The latter (which reacts with hydrochloric acid) is probably a result of the continuous boiling of liquids. Other sherds exhibit the white surface 'blushes' or slip-like deposits characteristic of ceramics exposed to salt water. These surface effects, coupled with the use of open forms, is consistent with a use for these vessels in the processing of brine to produce salt by evaporation, and a similar conclusion was reached for the previously excavated assemblage from Parson Drove (Hall 2001, 443). However, the larger than normal size range observed there was not matched within the assemblage currently under discussion, largely due to insufficient evidence.

The relative proportion of jugs is also high, and this could, in other instances, be taken as an indica-

tion of a site with some social pretensions. In this case, however, it is possible that the jugs, too, have some functional connection with saltmaking.

Other artefacts

Finds other than pottery and briquetage are represented in small quantities and comprise ceramic building material (including post-medieval brick and tile fragments), clay pipe, burnt flint, stone (building material), fuel ash slag and metalwork. The vast majority of these finds came from post-medieval features, particularly ditch 103, with a few iron nails, an iron bracket and a lead strip from medieval contexts.

Some of the ceramic building material comprises small, bright red, hard undiagnostic fragments of fired clay. Most of this material came from the medieval pits thought to have been associated with saltmaking and it is possible that the fired clay was briquetage in some way associated with the process. Brick fragments (of generally larger size) were also found on the medieval saltmaking site excavated in 1991 to the northeast where it is suggested that bricks may have been used in the construction of specialised hearths (Healey 2001).

Environmental evidence

(Note: Further information and methodologies are included in the archive report (Wessex Archaeology 2004), along with contributions on snails, sediments and foraminifera).

Animal bone

Stephanie Knight

Only the Roman material is considered below as the medieval assemblage is very small (295 fragments) with fewer than 100 bones identified to species. Data from all three Roman phases has been amalgamated to provide an adequate sample size.

Preservation

The bones were in variable condition, with a minority in poor condition due to mineral concretion and the flaking of the bone surface, presumably from exposure to salt water. A few, mainly unidentified, fragments were abraded, and the incidence of gnawing was relatively low, seen on only 20 of the 935 bones. There were low proportions of whole bones (N=14) and helical fractures (N=36).

Species observed

Cattle and sheep/goat were the most common species by NISP (number of individual specimens) and restricted element counts (Table 5). Pig and horse bones were present in small numbers, and one dog bone was recovered. The presence of only two bird bones and no fish, amphibians or small mammals may be more suggestive of their scarcity than of poor recovery, as the addition of sample material (0.5mm sieves) did not increase the species count. Samples contained a high proportion of unidentified fragments as they

Element	Cattle	Sheep/goat*	Pig	Horse	Large mammal	Medium mammal	Dog	Bird	Unidentified	Total
NISP (hand-recovered)	147	85	13	9	64	14	1	1***	290	624
NISP (samples)	5	10	1	0	3	1	0	1	290	311
NISP total	152	95	14	9	67	15	1	2	580	935
Restricted element*	50	29	7	7				1		94

Table 5. Animal bone (Roman): species presence and frequency.

* Davies 1992. ** Three positive identifications of sheep, none of goat. *** c.f. Domestic fowl.

contained mainly small calcined pieces, especially from contexts 640 (in ditch 135) and 424 (gully 277).

No significant differences between the three Roman phases were observed, but the 2nd–3rd century deposits showed the highest proportion of cattle bones and lowest number of large mammal ribs and vertebrae.

Age

While the majority of the cattle appear to have survived to maturity, bones from very young calves were recovered from five contexts. Young sheep/goats are also in evidence, and approximately a third of individuals seem to have died before the age of six months. An apparently high proportion of sheep/goats did not survive to maturity, with only 50% reaching the age of 18 months, and a very low proportion surviving to three years. Epiphyseal bone fusion and tooth eruption/wear evidence suggests that all pigs survived their first year, but none survived beyond the age of 12–16 months. One horse tooth from an individual aged between 8 and 9 years was recovered, and all horse epiphyses were fused, as would be expected from an animal not kept primarily for meat.

Butchery and consumption

Butchery was noted on 58 bones, mainly cattle. Chop marks and helical fractures were most common, although knife disarticulation was also practiced. Cut marks typical of skinning were found on horse and cattle lower limb bones. Chops to remove the feet from the rest of the limbs were also common, but cut marks from filleting were relatively infrequent.

There is a low frequency of pelvises and scapulae, and an absence of distal femora over 50% complete. Flesh from the pelvis and scapula and, at certain times, the ribs and vertebrae may therefore have been intended for use off-site, perhaps immediate consumption or, after salting, trade.

Discussion

The range of species from Roman contexts at Parson Drove is narrower than that from nearby Iron Age–Roman Fenland sites (Albarella and Mulville 2001) and considerably more restricted than in the medieval period (Albarella 2001). This, despite the smaller size of the assemblages from, for example, Iron Age Cowbit Wash, Lincolnshire, and medieval Parson

Drove (Fenland Survey site 15; see Pollard *et al.* 2001) represented by restricted fragment counts of 137 and 270 respectively. Considering the wetland nature of the environment, more birds and fish would be expected. The absence of such small bones from sieved samples, and the generally fair condition and presence of fragile neonatal bones, suggests that poor preservation is not to blame. Instead it appears that the economy in the Roman period (at this site and others in the area, as well as the Late Iron Age site at Billingborough, Lincolnshire; Iles 2001) was based on industrial activity and pastoral animal husbandry with little or no exploitation of wild resources.

The predominance of cattle and, to a lesser extent, sheep/goat at Parson Drove is also seen at the Iron Age saltern sites of Cowbit Wash and Langtoft, Lincolnshire, whereas the early Roman saltern at Morton Fen, Lincolnshire, has a predominance of sheep/goat. The small assemblage from the late Roman site of Middleton, Norfolk, consists mainly of horse bones. Thus in terms of domestic species proportions, Parson Drove best resembles the Iron Age sites. However, they also produced more wild species, dogs, cats and birds than Parson Drove, indicating a wider range of activity and/or food procurement.

The advanced age of many of the Roman cattle at Parson Drove could indicate that they were used for ploughing on the higher, drier and sandier soils of the roddons, and therefore that arable agriculture may have been part of the economy. However, the production of meat from pigs, sheep/goats and to a lesser extent, cattle, and cattle and sheep/goat milk formed the mainstay of the economy, similar to late Iron Age and early Roman Billingborough, Lincolnshire (Iles 2001). Storage of dairy products was suggested as a possibility for Cowbit Wash (Albarella and Mulville 2001, 385), but there were a greater number of very young calves (under 1 month old) from this site. Like the other Fenland sites, no particular periods of slaughter of domestic species that could suggest seasonal occupation were observed at Parson Drove; indeed the presence of neonatal domestic animals suggests breeding on or near site, which would be consistent with permanent occupation.

The sizes of animals are roughly comparable with those from the Iron Age and Roman Fenland sites mentioned above, with a slightly smaller withers height for the horse and slightly larger height for

the cattle at Parson Drove. The sheep appear to be very similar in size at all settlements, but no conclusions could be drawn due to the very small numbers. Roman period sheep/goat and cattle are consistently smaller than the late medieval animals at Parson Drove (Albarella 2001).

Butchery marks at Parson Drove indicate skinning, disarticulation and chopping, with some marrow extraction, but very little filleting of meat, consistent with the pattern of butchery that would be expected when meat was cooked on the bone. The relatively high proportion of head and foot bones could be connected to the import or retention of hides, complete with the bones from extremities, for tanning. While no clear evidence for large-scale meat salting or trade in carcass parts has been found, low proportions of certain meat-bearing bones such as the scapula suggest that some meat may have been salted on the bone and then traded off site.

Using data from Essex (though they do not provide any figures) Fawn, Evans and McMaster (1990, 33) suggest that meat salting would produce larger numbers of bones than normally found at salt working sites, and that it would have been more cost-effective to transport the salt to the meat rather than drive animals to, or exchange carcass parts with, salt making areas. This is true of highly specialised sites, but where domestic and industrial activity coincide, a range of activities may be inferred, perhaps taking place seasonally or concurrently if small scale in nature.

Charred plant remains and charcoal

Chris Stevens

Roman plant remains

Grass culm nodes were present in all but a few samples, accompanied by occasional cereal grains of barley and hulled wheats. Identification of other chaff fragments revealed the presence of glume bases (sometimes in high quantities) and spikelet forks of both emmer (*Triticum dicoccum*) and spelt (*Triticum spelta*), suggesting that these cereals were brought to the site and stored in spikelet form. Several samples also contained fragments of hazelnut shells (*Corylus avellana*) and so are indicative of the exploitation of wild foods. Many of the remaining seeds may have come to the site along with the cereals and represent weeds of the fields. Most are commonly recorded as weeds of arable fields from Romano-British sites.

There is a strong likelihood that the abundant culm nodes come from the burning of common reed stems in peat rather than cereal straw. Occasional fragments of charred masses of stems were found in a few of the samples, perhaps also derived from the burning of peat, along with a glossy, vitrified silica material. High numbers of culm nodes might indicate an early stage of processing when straw is removed from the crop, but much larger numbers of weed seeds would be expected, along with other cereal remains. That many of the samples contain high numbers of culm nodes with few weed seeds or other cereal remains

supports Murphy's conclusions from elsewhere in Parson Drove that they represent the burning of peat (Murphy 2001). This conclusion might also be supported by the high numbers of seeds of sedges recorded. For example, a sample from ditch 575 produced many culm nodes, but few other cereal remains, as well as large numbers of seeds of sedges and rushes, which may suggest burning peat containing both fragments of common reed and seeds of sedges and rushes.

However, the sample from gully 261, from a discrete deposit of carbonised material, contained the highest number of weed seeds and cereal remains for the period, along with many seeds of sedges, yet contained no culm nodes. This tends to leave some ambiguity over the source of the seeds of wetland species and whether they indicate the growing of crops upon wetter soils, or are to be associated with either the burning of peat or the burning of reeds and straw in the saltmaking process. As a result of the difficulty in identifying cereal straw from other grasses this issue may be difficult to resolve. Nevertheless, seeds of wetland species have been commonly recorded within charred assemblages containing cereal grains and seen as indicative of crops on such soils (Jones 1988; van der Veen 1992).

There was a relatively high occurrence of barley grains (*Hordeum vulgare*) in the sample from gully 261, and Murphy has suggested (Lane and Morris 2001, 380) that as a salt-tolerant crop its presence may indicate local barley cultivation on poor, slightly saline soils. The presence of capsules and seeds of runch (*Raphanus raphanistrum*) and runch/wild mustard (*Raphanus/Brassica*) probably also indicate cultivation of light sandier soils such as occur on roddons.

The presence of duckweed is of some interest. Of the three species native to Britain only fat-duckweed (*Lemna gibba*) is associated with brackish water, while the remaining two are only associated with freshwater. The presence of seeds of this genus may be associated with flooding, however its absence from some of the shallower features such as gully 261 might indicate that it is present as a result of the bringing of brackish water through the ditch systems and into pits on the site.

Medieval plant remains

The medieval samples, like those from Roman features, contained quite high proportions of grass culm nodes along with occasional charred masses of stems and vitrified silica material, perhaps also from the burning of peat. However, these samples, unlike the Roman ones, did contain reasonable quantities of cereal grains, mainly from free-threshing wheats (*Triticum aestivum*) and barley (*Hordeum vulgare* s.l.). Several of the barley grains could also be seen to be still in their hulls. In one case three were still attached to each other as they would be in the ear and these, along with several rachis fragments, indicate the presence of six-row barley. Rachis fragments of free-threshing wheat were also present in the samples, as were a few grains of rye (*Secale cereale*), and it is possible that some of the larger grains of oat (*Avena* sp.)

represent the cultivated variety. As noted above, barley is a salt-tolerant crop and along with rye, which is suitable for leached free-draining sandy soils, could have been cultivated locally on the roddons. Other crop remains included those of flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) and bean (*Vicia faba*).

The culm nodes may come from burnt straw, but it would again seem probable that they were associated with the burning of peat containing fragments of common reed. While cereal grains were relatively abundant, samples indicative of sheaves should contain higher proportions of both rachis fragment and small weed seeds. Seeds of oats (*Avena* sp.) were common in the samples, but those of other weed species were less abundant.

Seeds of duckweed (*Lemna* sp.) were again common, as they had been in Roman contexts, but were absent from all six of the samples from pit 137. This pit did, however, contain abundant evidence for peat burning in the form of culm nodes. The association of the highest frequencies of duckweed in the same feature, pit 281, as freshwater molluscs may well suggest that all of the seeds of duckweed are to be associated with freshwater.

Charcoal

In general, very little wood charcoal was present, and most could not be characterised as being from roundwood or heartwood, although occasional round wood fragments were present. The general absence of charcoal may be associated with the use of straw or peat for fuel, as also suggested for other sites in the region where woodland, and therefore charcoal, is scarce (Gale 2001).

Discussion

Against the background provided by the Fenland Project for this area (Hall and Palmer 1996), the site represents a significant area of controlled excavation of the landscape through which various assumptions and hypotheses concerning settlement chronology, form, economic basis and environment can be tested.

The excavation has revealed the eastern edge of a substantial roddon mapped as part of the Fenland Project (Hall and Palmer 1996, fig. 95) and shown this edge to lie approximately 100m east of its indicated (ie visible on air photographs) position (see Fig. 7). This represents the maximum extent of the sands and silts of the associated levee(s) rather than simply the infilled channel that ran along the middle. No cropmarks have been discerned on or in the immediate vicinity, presumably because of the heavier nature of the soils in this area towards the edge of and beyond the levee, and the shallow nature of most of the archaeological features. The features recorded at Parson Drove, in particular ditches, indicate that the cropmarks, though predominantly reflecting Romano-British settlement, may include medieval elements.

Roman

Excavated evidence for enclosures, trackways and probable roundhouses, representing rural settlement of perhaps three or more phases, enhances the cropmark evidence recorded on the same roddon to the northwest and southwest respectively (Fig. 7). Limited excavation to the northwest (Bray 1994) indicated short-lived settlement there from the late 2nd to the mid-3rd century, but the excavation at Parson Drove has provided evidence for settlement beginning in probably the 1st century and continuing until the 4th century. There is, however, no obvious continuity in the layout of the features on the site, and perhaps the sequence represents several short-lived shifting 'uses' of this area on the edge of the roddon, perhaps subject to periodic inundation, where more permanent boundaries were not established.

The earliest phase comprised a small enclosure associated with a succession of roundhouses. This phase has been assigned to the 1st – 2nd centuries, but two sherds of Late Iron Age pottery were recovered (one representing the only find from roundhouse 174) hinting at some pre-Roman activity. The quantities of early Roman pottery found in enclosure ditch 211 adjacent to successive roundhouses 174 and 175 suggest these structures served a domestic function, as may roundhouse 294 which contained a small pit. However, the possibility that one or more of the ring-gullies represented drainage gullies around thatched hay or corn stacks cannot be entirely discounted. This interpretation has been suggested for many of the large number of 'fen circles' recorded on aerial photographs, most of which are thought to be of Roman date and lie in the silt fen to the southeast of Parson Drove (Hall 1996, 180). Two possible cremation burials placed in one of the ditches related to the enclosure are also likely to have been associated with the earliest phase of settlement, and pit 280 to the north might be interpreted as a small quarry pit to extract material suitable for making daub or briquetage. The presence of relatively small quantities of fragmentary briquetage does attest to saltmaking in this phase, but perhaps not in the immediate vicinity. This and the evidence for the agricultural economy is discussed further below.

The earliest phase of occupation was succeeded in the 2nd century by new, perhaps more 'open' settlement, though it should be stressed that the excavation lay on the edge of the roddon and, by implication, the edge of the settlement. The group of gullies (263) in the southwest corner of the site provides some evidence for settlement in that they produced the highest quantity of pottery from the site, including several near-complete vessels, which suggest that there was occupation in the immediate vicinity. These gullies are likely to represent a complex of drainage features, perhaps defining part of an enclosure containing a round-house which lay to the west.

What is interpreted as a trackway is likely to have been associated with animal husbandry and the northernmost of these ditches (105) and an adjacent feature (461) produced a notable quantity and range

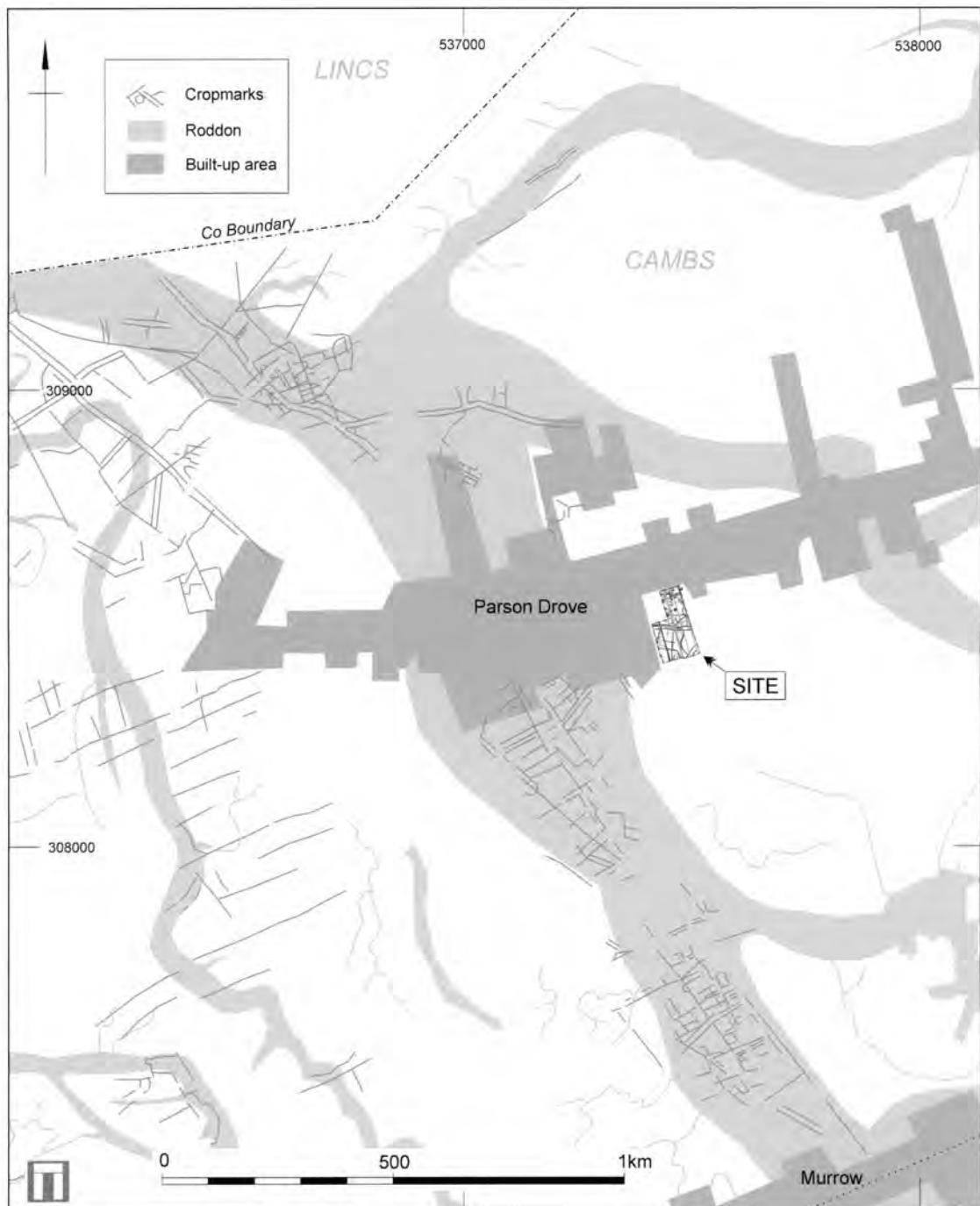


Figure 7. Site in relation to cropmark evidence (from Hall and Palmer 1996, fig. 95).

of briquetage. Two curvilinear ditches (288 and 575) if not the corners of enclosures, may have supplied water for saltmaking, though with the exception of a single pedestal neither contained more than a few tiny fragments of briquetage.

Rearing animals, together with saltmaking, formed the basis of the Romano-British economy in this area. The animal bone assemblage indicates a mixture of activities that probably went beyond production for basic domestic requirements. These activities perhaps included production of milk (or milk-derived foods),

meat salting and small-scale hide working, and were based on pastoral animal husbandry, although some arable farming might be inferred. The charred plant remains have raised the possibility that barley, a salt tolerant crop, may have been grown in small quantities on the lighter, sandier soils on the roddons. Exploitation of wild animal resources is not apparent, and it appears that a restricted range of species was exploited. The low incidence of gnawing and relatively good preservation suggests rapid burial of bone waste, presumably into disused ditches, or tem-

porary accumulation in protected middens followed by disposal into ditches and pits.

Culm nodes of grasses and seeds of rushes and sedges (*Cyperaceae*) dominated the soil samples from Roman features, with generally few remains of cereal grains and fragments of chaff other than straw nodes. While the culm nodes of grasses could come from cereal straw, Murphy (2001) thought they might come from burning peat that contained stems of common reed (*Phragmites australis*) which might also account for the high proportion of charred seeds of sedges, rushes and stems.

Features containing briquetage represent the final, 3rd – 4th century phase of Roman activity. There is increasing evidence for salt production in the two earlier phases, but it is only in the final phase that the quantities of briquetage indicate saltmaking in the immediate vicinity of or perhaps on the site. Briquetage was found in several shallow gullies whose purpose is unclear, and one larger ditch (135) that ran approximately parallel to the edge of the roddon and may have marked a boundary. No hearths survived and there were no complexes of features which might be interpreted as supply channels or settling tanks, but the briquetage debris, including parts of vessels, complete or near-complete pedestals, clips, bricks and rods/bars, is unlikely to have been deposited far from the focus of activity. A rectilinear arrangement of gullies (261), perhaps representing an enclosure, produced little pottery or briquetage, but contained a discrete dump of carbonised material including the largest assemblage of cereal remains and weed seeds from the excavation. This deposit may provide evidence for occupation in the immediate vicinity, perhaps contemporary with saltmaking. Some of the salt produced is likely to have been used locally in the preparation of salted meat, with the remainder transported further afield.

The channels along the centres of the roddons were clearly still active in the Roman period, though gradually reduced in width, and these would have provided the brackish water required for saltmaking. It was along the narrow banks (levees) of dry, sandy soils either side of the channels that settlement would have developed, sometimes linked with double-ditched tracks (visible on air photographs) which followed the meandering courses of the roddons (Fig. 7). These tracks may have developed as early features which encouraged the spread and growth of settlement along their length, and were used for both communications and stock droves linking enclosures on the roddons and pasture on the lower lying fen. The trackway which follows the roddon at Parson Drove west of the site can be traced northwards into Lincolnshire and represents one of the longer examples, extending over several miles.

Saltmaking sites have been identified, largely from fieldwalking, along many of the roddons, although only one site, on another roddon to the west, had been identified in Parson Drove parish prior to the excavation in 2003 (Hall and Palmer 1996, 171, fig. 94). However, four saltern sites were recorded on the

same roddon as that at Parson Drove approximately 2.5 km to the southeast in Wisbech St Mary (Fig. 8) and others, undetected by field walking, undoubtedly remain to be discovered. In addition to these sites and related cropmark evidence, there is one other Roman site in the vicinity known from Fenland Project survey. This lies approximately 1km east of the Parson Drove site and is unusual in that it is very low-lying, not on a roddon, and there are no associated cropmarks or saltmaking debris (Hall and Palmer 1996, 172). However, there is a notable amount of pottery, much of it of 1st century date, and this might indicate settlement, perhaps only a single building, contemporary with the earliest phase of Romano-British settlement at Parson Drove.

Medieval

No Saxon activity has been identified and it would seem that there was little or no settlement in the vicinity, occupation perhaps being restricted to the higher silts to the east at, for example, Tydd St Giles (Hall and Palmer 1996, 182). There is, however, no evidence in this area for a blanket of post-Roman silts such as recorded in parts of the Lincolnshire fens. Medieval settlement may have begun as early as the 12th century, but the main period of activity was in the 13th – 14th centuries, possibly extending into the 15th. Two medieval phases have been identified, the latter reflecting a marked change in the layout, alignment and use of the area, but these phases could not be distinguished chronologically on the basis of the pottery.

The layout and alignments of many of the features assigned to the earliest medieval phase reflect the continued influence of the roddon and not of the medieval drove (Main Road) which lay at approximately 90° to it, inferring that this drove was not in existence or did not extend this far to the west. Perhaps at this time it extended only as far as the church, manor house and associated settlement at Church End, 500m east of the site (Fig. 1). As in the Roman period, there is evidence for an economy based on animal rearing and, perhaps to a lesser extent, saltmaking.

Animal husbandry is indicated by the complex of trackways and enclosures in the southern half of the site, representing part of a much more extensive arrangement. The ditches produced little pottery and amongst the small quantity of animal bone cattle was the most common species. This contrasts with the medieval site (site 15) excavated in 1991 at Parson Drove, to the northeast (Fig. 8), where sheep was the most common of a wider range of species which also included red deer, roe deer, hare, swan and possibly wild boar (Albarella 2001). These wild species along with a merlin indicate hunting and hawking, and there were also marine and freshwater fish entirely absent from the 2003 excavation assemblage. For the earlier site it was suggested that the assemblage might indicate a high status site, with evidence for animal rearing on or near the site, and the sheep bred for milk and wool as well as meat (Albarella 2001, 449). The animal bone evidence might be interpreted

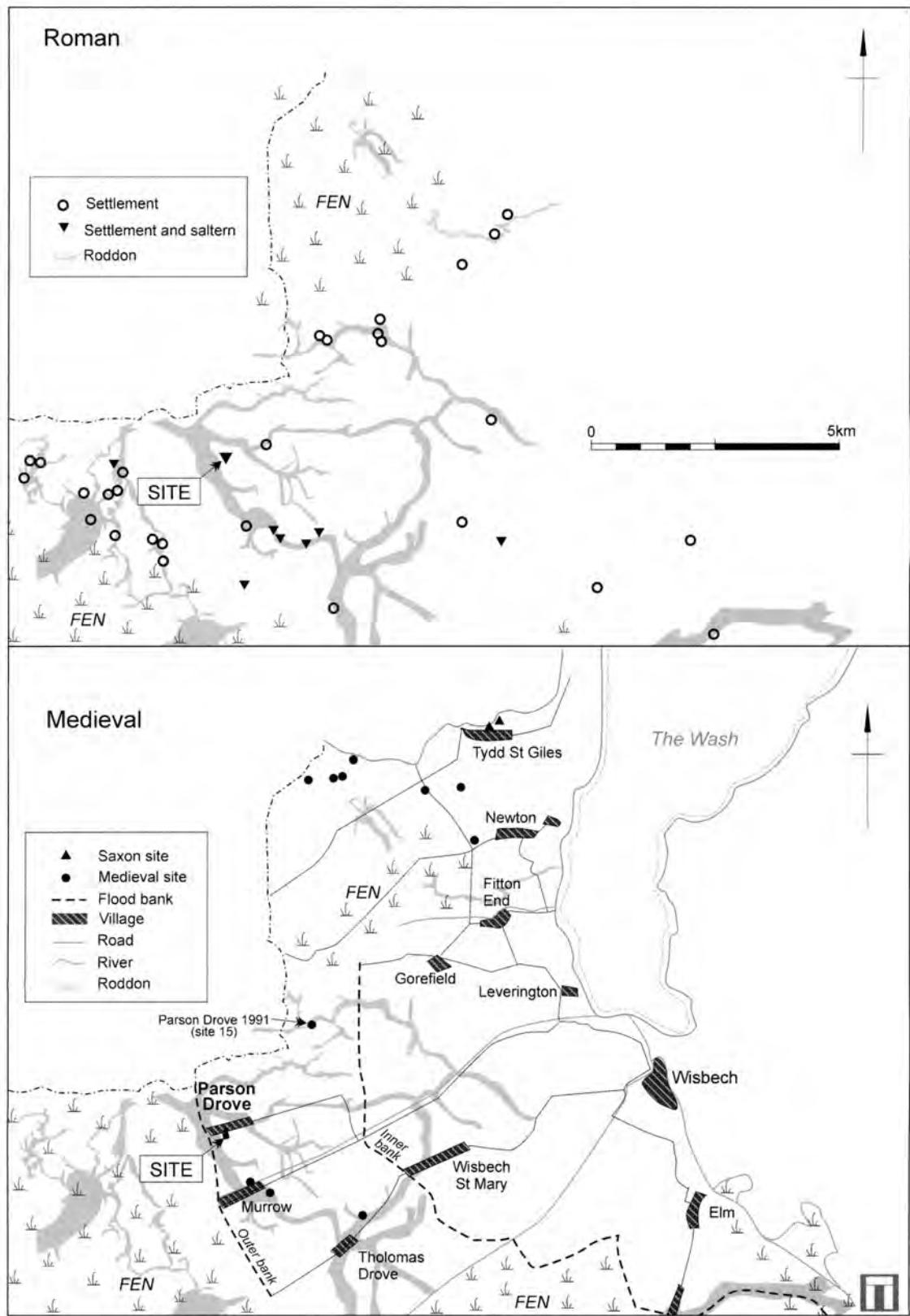


Figure 8. Site in relation to Romano-British landscape (from Hall and Palmer 1996, fig. 94) and medieval landscape (from Hall and Palmer 1996, fig. 98).

to suggest that, as in the Roman period, animals were wintered on the roddons and taken to summer grazing on the fen. Perhaps the various enclosures identified on the site represent these wintering quarters, with the two converging trackways running west to east providing a route to the summer grazing land. There is no certain evidence for any arable agriculture on the roddons at this time, although it has been tentatively suggested that there may have been local rye cultivation (Murphy 2001, 450).

The pits and ditches north of the main trackway suggest a different, contemporary or slightly later use of this area. There was a marked difference in the quantities of pottery recovered from the two areas, with considerably more (though still small quantities overall) coming from the features in the north. This is likely to reflect occupation in the immediate vicinity associated with the use of the pits and ditches, though no coherent building plans were identified. A small enclosure defined by a shallow gully (286 / 337 etc) was a later feature and may have contained an ephemeral structure represented by a few shallow post-holes and slots. To the southwest a cluster of curvilinear gullies, small sub-circular pits and larger rectangular features hint at settlement nearby, probably on the higher ground of the roddon. There is, however, no evidence from the layout and alignment of any of these features that indicates the existence of a medieval drove (represented today by Main Road) as early as the 12th, 13th or possibly even 14th century.

The function of the larger, generally subrectangular pits in the northernmost part of the site has not been conclusively demonstrated. However, as a group, they bear some similarities to the unusual 'inland' medieval saltern excavated in 1991 (site 15), also in Parson Drove (Pollard *et al* 2001. See Fig. 8). This is one of a group of nine sites identified in the Fenland survey, in the parishes of Parson Drove, Wisbech St Mary and Tydd St Giles, which provide rare evidence for medieval settlement and wetland exploitation in the peat fen. Like the site excavated at Parson Drove in 2003, these are (with one exception) located on roddons, and have produced mostly 14th century pottery along with fragments of bright red fired clay. The site excavated at Parson Drove in 1991 has been interpreted, after initial reservations, as a rare saltern which lay on the edge of the peat fen behind the Sea Bank, rather than on the saline mudflats on the seaward side (Pollard *et al* 2001, 426). This is the interpretation which is also put forward here for the site at Main Road, with the pits representing brine settling tanks, though the evidence is somewhat equivocal and other explanations are possible.

The arrangement of pits and ditches recorded at Parson Drove in 2003 do not show as close a relationship to each other as those recorded in the earlier excavations (Pollard *et al*, fig. 140). Furthermore, it is not clear whether some ditches simply represent enclosures, rather than ditches which provided brackish water. There was, however, juxtaposition between some features (eg pit 709 and ditch 704, and

pit 643 and ditch 646, all in the northeast corner of the site), which may not simply represent different phases. Furthermore, the near-vertical or steeply sloping sides and the absence of weathering cones in the pits suggest that they once had organic linings, although no trace of these survived. The sediments and the very limited foraminiferal evidence from pit 137, the largest example (and the only one analysed – see archive report, Wessex Archaeology 2004), indicate that it once held water, perhaps brackish water or material from a vegetated saltmarsh, and there were also deposits of burnt clay perhaps derived from an 'industrial' process. No snails were recorded from this feature, and other medieval features produced generally small numbers of aquatic, freshwater and, rarely, terrestrial species (see archive report, Wessex Archaeology 2004). Significantly perhaps, no species tolerant of low, or fluctuating, salinities was recovered.

None of the briquetage can certainly be ascribed a medieval date on the basis of being different in form to the Roman material, but many of the (small) fragments of fired clay recovered from medieval features are in a harder fabric and do not appear to be ceramic building material. Furthermore, the surface condition and residues on some pottery would suggest an association with saltmaking, in particular boiling brine (Pollard *et al* 2001, 443), rather than, for example, tanning or retting. In addition, the high proportion of bowls, in particular, and also jugs in relation to jars is consistent with this interpretation. Evidence from charred plant remains may provide a further clue. The medieval samples generally contained more cereals and weed seeds than those from Roman features, but they were similar in the high proportion of grass culm nodes present. Perhaps, as earlier, these may have derived from the burning of peat that contained stems of common reed, or from cereal straw, either of which could have been used as a fuel in brine evaporation. Agricola recorded bales of straw being used to fuel the fires under salt pans in the 14th – 15th century in the Netherlands (Agricola 1556, 553). He also records burning peat to make lye, which was then washed through with seawater to extract salt that had naturally accumulated within it (Agricola 1556, 558). The resultant brine was then further boiled with the impurities scooped off. Such methods would also produce charred evidence for material from burnt peat, but might explain the absence of *in situ* accumulations of sediments containing visible burnt peat at Parson Drove.

The roddon channels in this area would certainly have ceased to be active by the medieval period, and there is no obvious local source of brackish water unless the drain bounding the eastern side of the site served this purpose. This drain now runs south to join the Sea Dyke and then eastwards to the Wash. If this drain did originate in the 13th or 14th century then it, and presumably the associated saltmaking activity, post-dated the enclosures and trackways at the southern end of the site as it would have cut across the ditches and gullies defining these. Murrow lay at

the west end of the Sea Dyke and it may be no coincidence that there are two sites there, on either side of the Sea Dyke, which have produced fragments of red clay possibly representing briquetage. Pottery collected from fieldwalking spanned the 13th – 15th centuries, and it has been remarked that saltmaking would have been possible here if brackish water was allowed up the Sea Dyke (Hall and Palmer 1996, 182).

If the evidence from Parson Drove does represent saltmaking then the scale was small, particularly compared to the late medieval coastal salterns. One explanation for the existence of these small inland sites in Cambridgeshire might be that they augmented salt production on the seaward side of the Sea Bank around the Wash, particularly if the larger salterns were periodically washed away in storms. The inland salterns may have been operated seasonally at household level as part of a mixed economy, and were abandoned by the end of the 14th century because of a continuing reduction in the salinity of the channel water available.

This mixed economy was succeeded by activity largely based on arable cultivation, with a quite different and distinct pattern of land use – a pattern that survives relatively unchanged at Parson Drove. This was primarily represented in the excavation by a single ditch (163) which cut across the earlier medieval features and lay at 90° to the drove (Main Road). It seems probable that this ditch represents the establishment of the medieval system of long droves and strip fields in the area, fitting into the ‘planned’ fenland of the second stage of land reclamation (Hall and Palmer 1996, 182). A 13th century date for this ditch is possible, but a 14th or 15th century date is considered more likely – perhaps somewhat later than might have been envisaged if it does indeed represent the second stage of land reclamation. Perhaps the continued operation of the saltern meant that here the division into strip fields did not take place until its abandonment.

The earliest stage of land reclamation, represented by construction of the inner flood bank to the east of Parson Drove (Fig. 8), is of probable pre-Conquest date, and is likely to have been initiated by the manorial owners – Ely monastery and cathedral – to improve the silt lands. This was followed by construction of artificial channels to drain the land and creation of strip fields. The second stage of land reclamation is likely to have begun before the end of the 12th century, represented by construction of the outer flood bank (Fendyke Bank) which ran north to south at the ends of three, wide droves (Fig. 8). It was towards the ends of these droves, perhaps extended westwards as reclamation progressed, that the settlements of Parson Drove, Murrow and Tholamas Drove respectively developed. Strip fields were laid out between the droves, their length, sometimes exceeding 1.5 km, contrasting with the shorter and less regular layout of the fields associated with the earlier phase of reclamation (Hall and Palmer 1996, 185).

There was no evidence for any late medieval settlement adjacent to the drove (Main Road) within the ex-

cavated area at Parson Drove. Perhaps this remained focused around St John’s church in Church End with subsidiary development on the slightly higher ground of the roddon towards the west end of the drove close to Fendyke Bank.

Post-medieval

Ditches belonging to this period were all field boundaries or drainage features. An anomaly is that the field boundary shown crossing the site on the Tithe Map corresponds closely with medieval ditch 163 (by then infilled) and not with ditch 103 which was more substantial and remained open until well into the 19th century. However, it is possible that a shallow gully running along the top of at least part of infilled ditch 163 might represent this later field boundary. The group of animal burials are likely to reflect a single episode, given the variety of species represented, perhaps the result of an epidemic which affected a nearby farm or smallholding.

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