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Anglo-Saxon and medieval boundaries and burials at the former Oblic Engineering site, Church Street, Litlington

Thomas Woolhouse

with contributions from Peter Thompson, Nina Crummy,
Carina Phillips and Val Fryer

An excavation carried out on land adjacent to Litlington parish church found boundary ditches dating from the sixth to the tenth centuries AD (Anglo-Saxon period) and eleventh-thirteenth centuries AD (early medieval). Three undated inhumation burials are thought to be broadly contemporary with the earliest ditches, which may have demarcated the eastern limit of a burial ground connected to an earlier church.

Litlington is a village on the southern county boundary of Cambridgeshire, some 20 kilometres south-west of Cambridge. The opportunity for archaeological investigation of a site in Church Street (TL 3100 4270; Fig. 1) arose in 2003–5. The excavation, whose results are detailed in this report, followed earlier stages of investigation comprising a desk-based assessment (Doyle & Harris 2005) and trial trench evaluation (Grant & Keir 2003).

Human activity is attested in the area from the Mesolithic onwards (Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (HER) 03071 on Fig. 2) and two important prehistoric communication routes, the Icknield Way and Ashwell Street, pass through the parish. There are numerous Bronze Age burial mounds along the route of the Icknield Way, although many are plough-damaged and survive only as ring ditches. By the Late Iron Age, a settlement of some kind existed in Litlington and Iron Age features have been uncovered at Manor Farm, to the south-east of the site at Church Street (Fig. 2; HER 11752).

A Romano-British cemetery, Heaven's Walls (Fig. 2; HER 03262), was discovered in 1821 during gravel extraction to the south of the village and is arguably the finest in Cambridgeshire. It contained approximately 250 inhumations and at least 80 cremations in an area enclosed by a flint and brick wall. It was in use between the first and fourth centuries AD and yielded rich grave goods including coloured glass vessels and jewellery. It might have been related to a villa that stood just a few hundred metres to the north, discovered and excavated in 1829, which is believed to have included about 30 rooms, hypocausts, a bath, and at

least one mosaic pavement (Fig. 2; HER 03186; Taylor 1997, pp. 79–80).

A detailed study of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval development of the village has recently been conducted by Susan Oosthuizen (2002). In the Middle Saxon period, Litlington seems to have formed part of the 'warland' of a large multiple estate centred on Steeple Morden. There is no evidence that there was a manorial centre in Litlington at this time and the estate tenants are likely to have lived in dispersed hamlets and farmsteads. Litlington was probably granted away as an independent estate following the West Saxon reconquest of Cambridgeshire in 917. By the late tenth century, it was the centre of an estate of some 20 hides, with a probable manorial centre in the area defined by Church Street, South Street, Meeting House Lane and Cage Lane (Fig. 2). The population lived in planned settlement blocks to the south-east and west of this enclosure.

Oosthuizen argues that after 1066 the Anglo-Saxon manorial demesne was abandoned and new manorial centres were laid out for the two Norman sub-tenants of the new king, at what would later become Huntingfields and Dovedales manors. The villagers and smallholders continued to live in the old planned settlement areas until direct control by the two manors slackened in the early to mid-fourteenth century (Oosthuizen 2002, p. 60). The manor of Huntingfields, immediately to the south-east of the site discussed below, acquired its name in the mid-thirteenth century when its heiress married Roger of Huntingfield, lord of the Boxworth manor. The manor house that stood in its grounds was first recorded in 1337 (Taylor 1997, p. 80).

A church is first mentioned in the village in 1168 (Wright 1982, p. 63) and the earliest parts of St Catherine's Church, located immediately north-west of the site, date to the twelfth century (HER CB14887). In 1336, the church was given to the University (later Clare Hall, Cambridge), and Clare Hall built a house for the priest on the rectory gardens, which included a hall, kitchen and two upstairs rooms. It was still extant in the late eighteenth century, but was generally

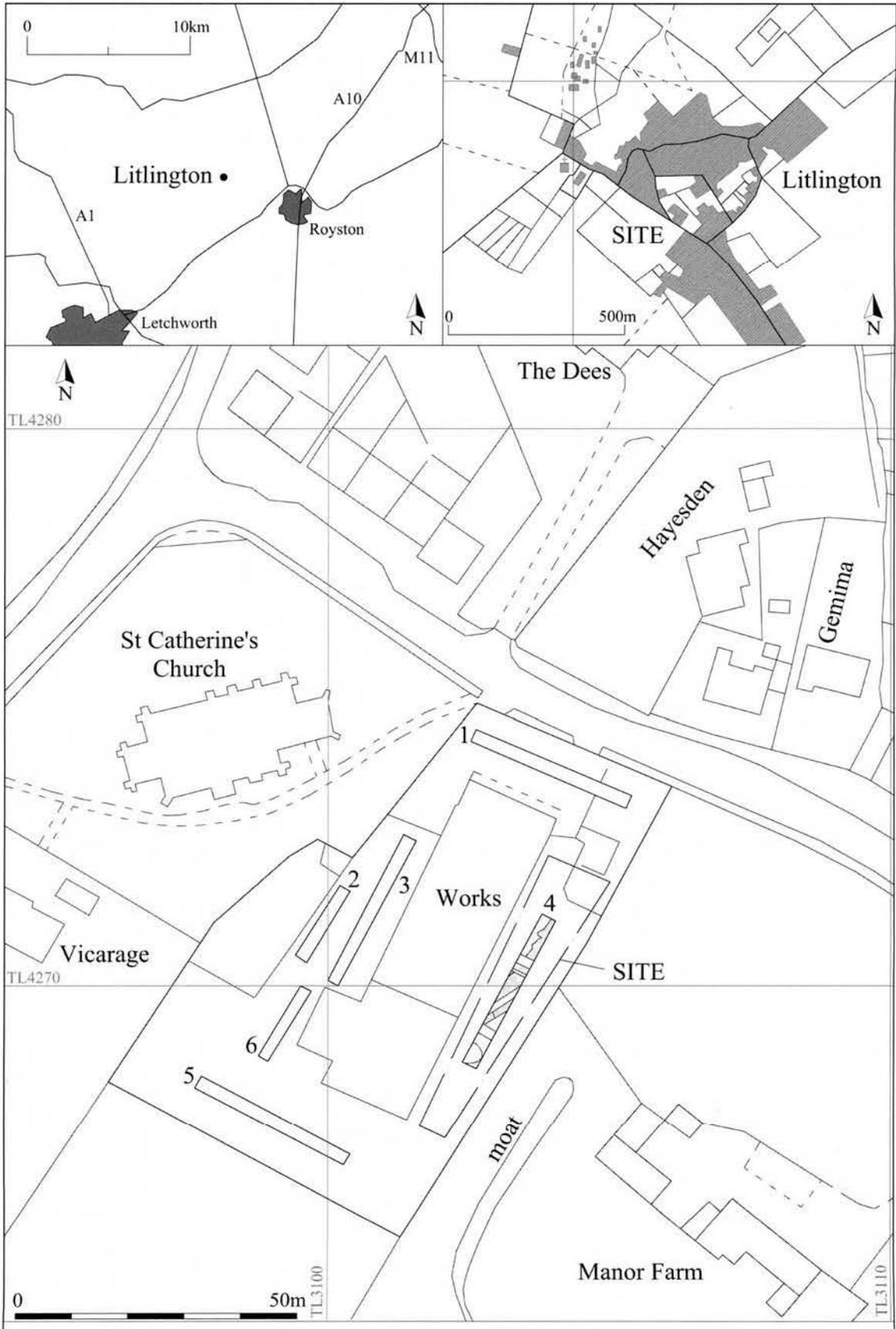


Figure 1. Site location.

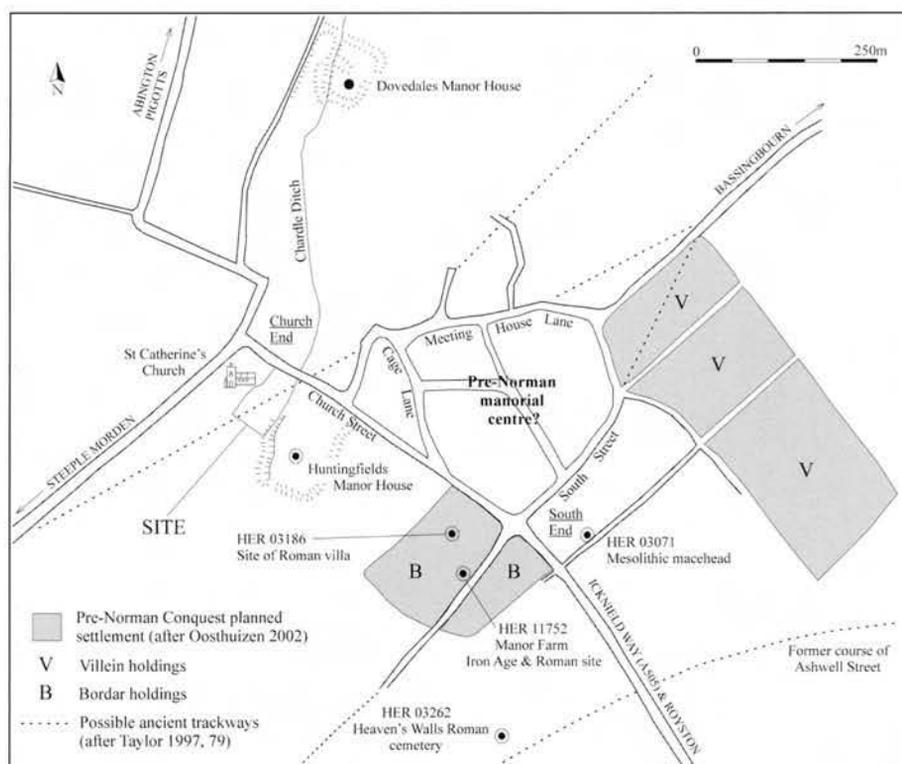


Figure 2. Archaeological sites and finds in Litlington.

unoccupied. In 1816, the Reverend Dr William Webb, Master of Clare College, started to build a new vicarage, which is still extant adjacent to the site. The village's economic base remained predominantly agricultural into the modern period.

The 1830 Enclosure Map (Cambridgeshire Record Office Q/RDc46) shows the site as a sub-rectangular plot south-east of the vicarage. It contained nine buildings and was owned by Clare Hall. Part of the site was granted by Clare College for the construction of a new National School in 1857; a schoolroom and teacher's house had been built by 1859. The 1886 Ordnance Survey map (1:2500) shows that six buildings were demolished and four more constructed during this development. By 1950, the school had been moved to a disused RAF hut and the old schoolroom was sold in 1965 (Wright 1982, p. 66). Prior to the trial trench evaluation in 2003, the site was occupied by the Oblic Engineering Works, the front part of which had been part of the old school house. The engineering works were until recently in use as a garage. The rear of the site contained storage yards, metal containers and hardstanding, with a range of concrete and brick buildings extending along the central spine of the site, surrounded by reinforced concrete roadways.

The excavation (Fig. 3)

The excavation found three inter-cutting ditches dated to the sixth to tenth century, two ditches dated to the

eleventh to thirteenth century and three inhumation burials tentatively assigned a date broadly contemporary with the ditches. These features are discussed in detail below. Other post-medieval or modern features comprised field drains, and modern building foundations in the northern corner of the site. These had caused some truncation to earlier features.

The uppermost deposits encountered related to the construction, use and demolition of the former Oblic Engineering Works. The construction of the factory buildings had also involved substantial ground reduction across the site. Consequently, the natural drift deposits, comprising chalky clay with patches of clayey chalk, were encountered at a shallow depth.

Anglo-Saxon and early medieval ditches

Feature F2003 (Fig. 3) was a large curvilinear ditch (0.90–1.70 metres wide x 0.58–0.72 metres deep). In the north-eastern corner of the site, it was aligned north-east to south-west, but it gradually curved to a north to south alignment, before bending to an east to west orientation at its southern end. The ditch was re-cut as ditch F2005, which was of similar dimensions and followed the same sinuous alignment. Both ditches displayed similar steeply-sloping bowl-shaped profiles.

Both of the ditches contained sixth- to tenth- or eleventh-century pottery; small fragments of abraded medieval flat roof tile in an oxidised sand-tempered fabric were also found in ditch F2003. Ditch F2003 also contained intrusive medieval and post-medieval sherds, but was cut by two ditches, F2005 and F2012,

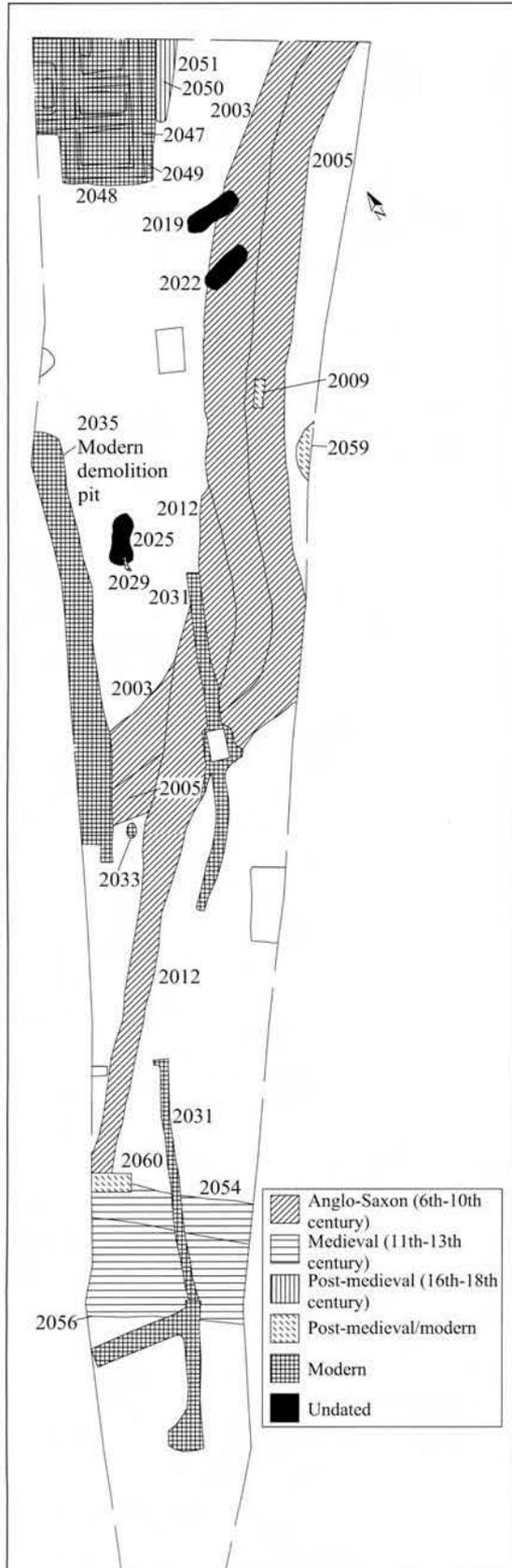


Figure 3. Phase plan.

which contained only sixth- to tenth-century pottery, with no later finds. In addition, the sixth- to tenth-century pottery recovered from ditch F2005 was in good condition, suggesting it was a primary deposition. Both F2003 and F2005 were cut to the south by ditch F2012, which had a similar profile to the earlier ditches and ran for more than 15 metres from north-east to south-west across the centre of the excavation area. Its southern terminus was obscured by a modern pit (F2060). Sherds of sixth- to tenth-century pottery were recovered from segments dug along the length of ditch F2012.

Towards the southern end of the site, two north-west to south-east aligned ditches were excavated. Both were very large (up to four metres or more wide), but shallow (c. 0.32 metres deep), with stepped sides and flat bases. There was one twelfth- to thirteenth-century sherd in ditch F2054. Ditch F2056 appeared to be a re-cut of F2054 and contained a large assemblage of eleventh- to thirteenth-century pottery (47 sherds) and 21 fragments of animal bone, as well as a fragment of human tibia. An environmental sample taken from the basal fill of F2056 suggested that the ditch had been filled with water on at least a semi-permanent basis and that it had been situated in an area of turfed grassland, although its banks might have been overgrown with weeds and shrubs (Fryer, this report). Both ditches contained fragments of Romano-British building materials, including fragments of tegula and imbrex roof tile and flue tile, with traces of mortar indicating re-use in a later structure (identification by Andrew Peachey). Ditch F2056 also contained a damaged, but distinctive, metal plate, probably dated to the thirteenth century (Crummy, this report).

The graves (Fig. 4)

Two graves (F2019 and F2022), which had been identified during the earlier trial trench evaluation and left *in situ*, were located close together towards the north-eastern corner of the site. Both cut F2003, the earliest of the ditches. Both graves were shallow (0.05–0.07 metres deep) and severely truncated. They were sub-rectangular and aligned east to west. The skeletons were oriented so that the head would have lain to the west and the feet to the east. Their east to west orientation suggests a Christian funerary rite and their relationship to ditch F2003 indicates a date no earlier than the sixth century AD. Grave F2019 contained four fragments of tenth- to eleventh-century pottery, although this might have derived from ditch F2003, into which the grave was cut.

Approximately nine metres to the south-west was a third inhumation (F2025). This was less regular in plan than F2019 and F2022 and was aligned north-east to south-west, with the fragmentary skull at the south-western end. A modern pit, F2029, cut the grave to the south, truncating the skeleton. The skeleton lay in an extended supine position, with a large flat-sided stone apparently placed between the legs and another smaller stone placed at the foot of the burial.

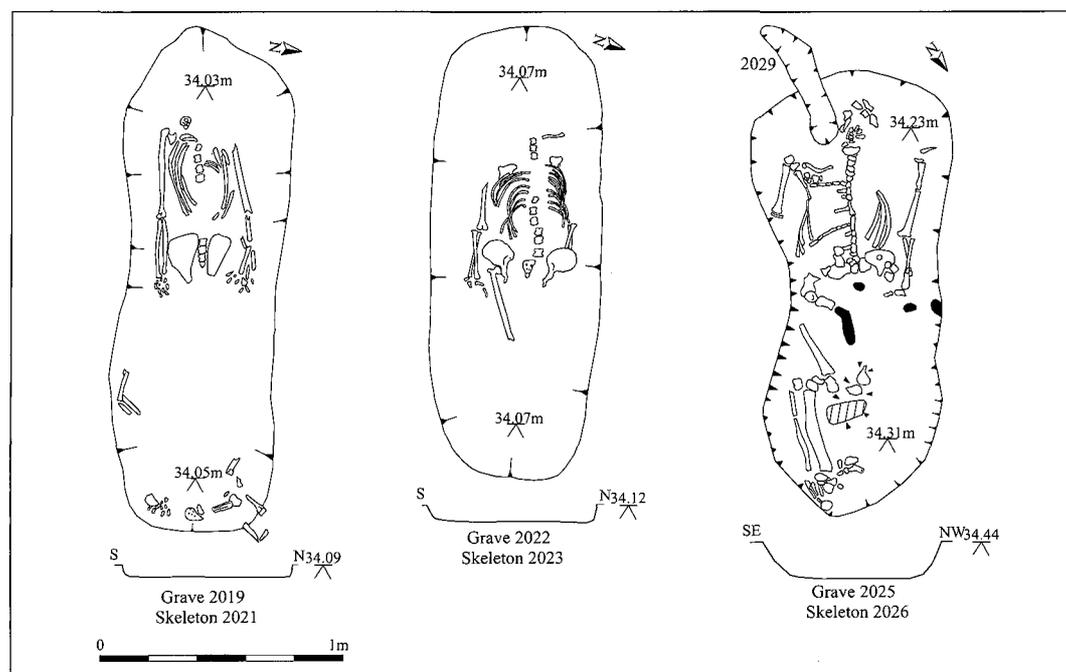


Figure 4. The graves.

The alignment of the grave parallel to ditch F2012 might suggest a broadly contemporary sixth- to tenth-century date.

The relatively poor condition of much of the bone and the incompleteness of the skeletons restricts detailed analysis of the sex and state of health of the individuals. The recovery of a disarticulated tibia fragment from ditch F2056 in the south of the site could suggest the former presence of other Anglo-Saxon or early medieval graves, obliterated by the digging of this ditch, probably in the thirteenth century.

The pottery

Peter Thompson

The excavation recovered 81 sherds (1.007 kilogrammes) from seven features, with the largest assemblage recovered from ditch F2056 (47 sherds/58% of the site total). The condition of the pottery is mixed: assemblages from some contexts are quite heavily abraded, but that from F2056 is in a generally good state of preservation and includes four rim sherds and an almost-complete profile. The pottery is almost all datable to between the sixth and thirteenth centuries AD. The sherds have been quantified according to context, by sherd count, sherd weight and fabric type. The ware types/fabric descriptions are given in Table 1.

The majority of the pottery from the three earliest ditches (F2003, F2005 and F2012) cannot be closely dated. A burnished rim sherd to a small cooking pot was found in ditch F2005 (Fig. 5.1); pots such as these are common forms throughout most of the Anglo-Saxon period (Hurst 1961, 254). The use of organic

temper (grass or chaff), seen in sherds from these three ditches, is suggestive of a late fifth- to ninth-century date, but the fabric might have continued into the eleventh century (Hurst 1976, p. 309). However, at the large well-studied Saxon settlement and cemetery of Mucking in Essex, it is noted there was a marked increase in the use of grass tempering during the sixth and seventh centuries (Hamerow 1993, p. 31). Thick sherds in coarse gritty fabrics were present in ditch F2005 and also fit a broad fifth- to ninth-century date.

A Developed St Neots-type rim sherd from ditch F2056 (Fig. 5.2), with a clubbed, almost squared rim, has affinities with twelfth-century Developed St Neots Ware and twelfth- to thirteenth-century grey Medieval Sandy Ware forms from Ashwell, Hertfordshire (Hurst & Hurst 1967, fig. 11 no. 13 & fig. 12 no. 38). The calcareous wares (MCII) do not appear to have parallels with Ashwell, but at nearby Therfield motte and bailey castle, a similar sandy ware with limestone inclusions was dated to the eleventh century (Biddle 1964, p. 70). Such calcareous wares comprising shell, chalk, or limestone, although more common in the tenth to twelfth centuries, are known to continue in use into the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries in areas where calcareous sources are present (Turner-Rugg 1995, p. 46). The complete profile of a bowl with sagging base (Fig. 5.3) and a fairly upright, expanded rim suggests a date centred on the twelfth century.

The bulk of the pottery comprises sandy, sometimes gritty, dark to mid grey wares with mid to light grey or pale buff surfaces. The pottery assemblage from Litlington probably most closely parallels the 'Developed Early Medieval' and 'Rough Medieval'

Site specific code	Ware description	Approximate date range
ORG	Organics (grass or chaff temper)	500–900/1000 AD
SHORG	Fine shell and organics	500–900/1000 AD
SORG	Sand with organics	550–1000/1050 AD
CSORG	Coarse sand and organics	550–1000/1050 AD
NEOT	St Neots Ware (shell temper)	850–1150 AD
MCI	Late Saxon/early medieval sandy coarseware	850–1150 AD
DVNEOT	Developed St Neots-type. Mid grey fabric with paler grey surfaces. Early medieval forms	1150–1250/1300 AD
MCIa	Medieval coarseware. Moderate to common angular to sub-rounded quartz and sparse to common rounded calcareous chalk or limestone. Grey or brown cores; grey surfaces	1000–1200/1250 AD
MCIb	Moderate to common coarse to very coarse rounded to sub-angular quartz and sparse to moderate rounded limestone with voids, rare angular flint, and harder white inclusions, possibly calcite	1000–1200/1250 AD
MCIa	Medieval coarseware. Mid to pale grey fabric, slightly micaeous with moderate to common sub-angular to sub-rounded quartz and sparse to moderate very coarse grog	1050–1300 AD
MCIb	Buff/grey/red/brown surfaces; brown cores with common coloured fairly well-sorted quartz	1050–1300 AD
MG	Medieval Glazed Ware (oxidised)	1225–1450/1500 AD

Table 1. Ware types and fabric descriptions.

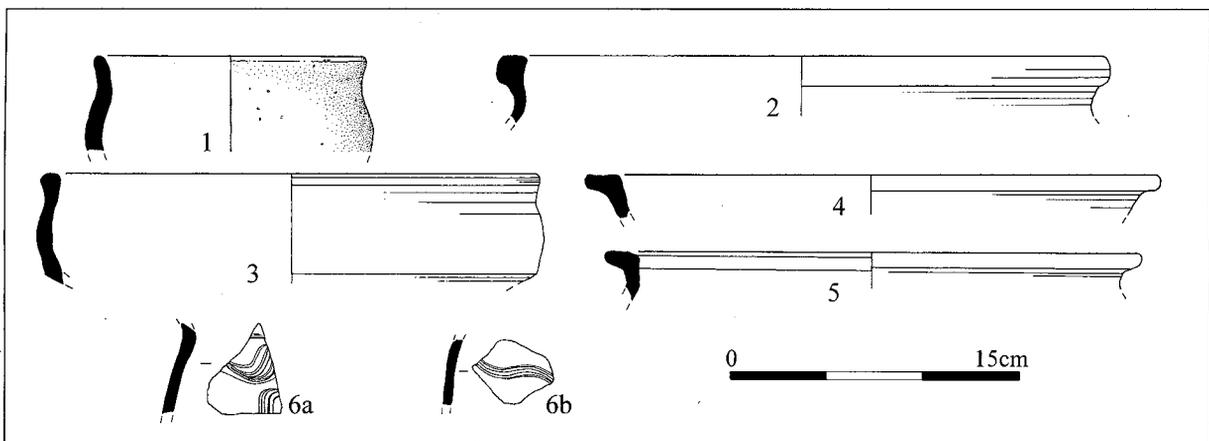


Figure 5. Pottery illustrations.

- 5.1 F2005 L2041: Burnished rim sherd to small sixth- to tenth-century cooking pot. Black fabric with sand and organics.
 5.2 F2056 L2057: Developed St Neots-type cooking pot. Grey fabric with shell and sand.
 5.3 F2056 L2057: Bowl profile. Grey/brown fabric with sand and chalk inclusions.
 5.4 F2056 L2057: Flanged bowl rim. Sandy grey ware.
 5.5 F2056 L2057: Flanged jar rim. Grey sandy fabric; buff surfaces.
 5.6a F2056 L2057: Incised decoration. Light grey sandy ware with darker surfaces.
 5.6b F2056 L2057: Incised decoration. Light grey sandy ware with darker surfaces.

fabrics from Northolt Manor, dated to 1100–1250 (Hurst 1961, pp. 261–3); although, unlike at Northolt, no flint-gritted wares were found (Hurst 1967, p. 81).

Other sherds found at Litlington have parallels in the region. Two sherds from ditch F2056 (Figs 5.6a & 5.6b) have incised wavy line decoration comparable to a mid-twelfth century example from Therfield Castle, whilst another twelfth-century example is from a decorated cooking pot from Northolt Manor (Biddle 1964, p. 77; Hurst & Hurst 1961, p. 266). The two wheel-made flanged rims, from a bowl and cooking pot (Figs 5.4 & 5.5), are probably a little later in date, from the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. At Northolt Manor, similar rim forms were introduced in around 1300 (in Surrey ware) and at Ashwell, flanged forms (although with squared rims) appear in thirteenth-century contexts (Hurst 1961, pp. 273–4; Hurst & Hurst 1967, p. 79). However, the gritty bowl rim (Fig. 5.4) in a slightly friable fabric could be a little earlier and flanged rims appear at Denny Abbey and Therfield Castle in contexts dated to the second half of the twelfth century (Coppack 1980, p. 225 no. 12; Biddle 1964, p. 77).

Another sherd from ditch F2056 is in a fine, sandy, oxidised ware with glossy green glaze with darker speckling. This may be late medieval Hertfordshire Glazed Ware; at St Albans these first appear from the mid-fourteenth century, having been preceded by other glazed pottery from the early thirteenth century (Turner-Rugg 1995, pp. 48, 52). It is therefore likely that the Litlington sherd is either a late Hertfordshire Glazed Ware, or a precursor. If the former, and not intrusive, this sherd would date ditch F2056 to the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, but the balance of the evidence suggests a thirteenth century date.

The metal and glass objects

Nina Crummy

The remains of a lead-alloy (pewter) plate (diameter 180 millimetres), with a shallow decorated rim (height 17 millimetres), were found in the fill of ditch F2056 (Fig. 6, Plate 3). The rim is plain at the top, which is slightly thickened and everted; the lower part is decorated with incised triangles alternately containing diagonal grooves and/or a semicircle. The base had a concave centre with a slight bead around the edge, matched on the underside by concentric tooling applied on a lathe. The centre is partly missing and has

clearly been subjected in antiquity to a series of blows from a round-headed hammer applied from both sides. The plate might have been a household vessel. Alternatively, it might have been made in imitation of a silver communion paten to accompany a priest's burial, as was the custom in the thirteenth century following an instruction issued in 1229 by William of Blois, Bishop of Worcester (Oman 1990, p. 790). Lead-alloy does not survive well in most soil conditions, but in burials where both a paten and chalice survive the cup had been placed upright and covered with the paten, suggesting that the cup would have held consecrated wine and the plate consecrated bread (Bruce-Mitford 1976, p. 138; Biddle & Kjølbye-Biddle 1990, p. 793; Ottaway & Rogers 2002, pp. 2942–4; Crossan 2004, p. 110). The damage to the centre of the plate found at Litlington might be an indication that a pair of such vessels had been disturbed, deliberately damaged and discarded separately.

The form of the plate, with low raised rim, wide flange and dished centre, is quite unlike patens found in Winchester and York, which are generally smaller (100–160 millimetres in diameter), shallow and dished, often almost concave, although some also have broad flanged rims (Biddle & Kjølbye-Biddle 1990, figs 231–2; Ottaway & Rogers 2002, fig. 1509). The difference in the form of the plate found at Litlington suggests that it might instead have been a lid. When inverted, it displays the decoration on the rim to greater effect and the concentric tooling on the underside becomes visible. Were such an interpretation correct, the object could then be linked to four lidded lead coin hoard containers found at Colchester and Winchester, which range in date from the late eleventh to the mid-thirteenth century (Brooks, Crummy & Archibald 2004, pp. 132, 138). However, the underside of the plate is much less corroded, indicating that it has been in contact with the soil for a shorter period than the top, a situation appropriate for a plate set face up in a grave, but contrary to the object's use as a lid. Identification as a paten is therefore preferred and the proximity of graves dating from the sixth to thirteenth centuries adds further weight to this interpretation.

The only other metal and glass objects found on the site were a small post-medieval or later bead (in ditch F2003) and two post-medieval nails (in drain F2009).

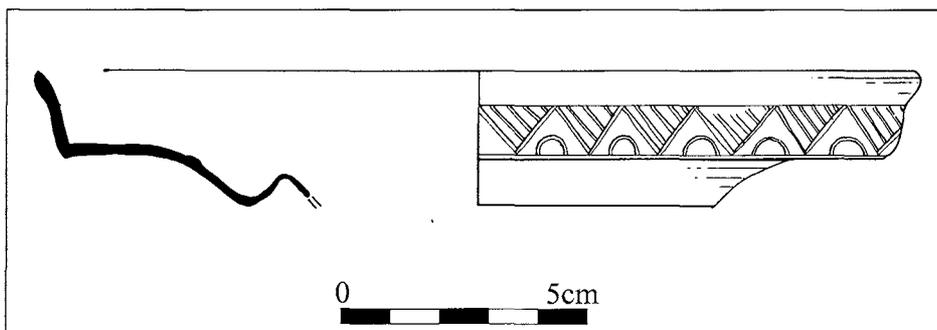


Figure 6. Pewter plate from ditch F2056.

The human bone

Carina Phillips

Three human skeletons and a disarticulated fragment of a human tibia were recovered from Church Street, Litlington. The skeletons were in moderate condition but all were less than 50% complete. Surface erosion had affected all the bone (stage 3 surface erosion; Brickley & McKinley 2004) and fragmentation occurred frequently. Skeletons SK2021, SK2023 and SK2026 were recovered from graves F2019, F2022 and F2025, respectively (Fig. 4).

Each skeleton was examined in order to determine sex, age, height and to record any pathology. Sex estimates were assigned based on sexual traits present in the pelvis and cranium (see Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994 and Ferembach, Schwidetsky & Stloukal 1980 for details). Age estimates for adult skeletons were based on the pelvic features of the auricular surface and pubic symphysis and on cranial suture. Ages based on dental attrition in adults were considered following Miles (1963). Dental eruption (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994), bone fusion (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994) and long bone length (Ubelaker 1999) were used to assign immature ages. Measurements were taken when possible and have been converted to stature estimates for the adult remains following Trotter (1970). Preservation was also recorded using the stages defined in Brickley & McKinley (2004).

Fragmentation and surface erosion had affected the bone of skeleton SK2021 (stage 1–2 surface erosion). A small fragment of the occipital was the only part of the skull present. Fragments of thoracic and lumbar vertebrae, ribs and pelvis were present in small numbers. Most long bones were present, but fragmented, hindering the estimation of height. The incompleteness and fragmentation of the skull and pelvis restricted estimation of sex. The fusion of the bones present indicates the individual to have been aged 14–24 years at death.

The skull and upper cervical vertebrae of skeleton SK2023 were missing, as were the left humerus, femur, tibia, fibula and both feet. The radii and ulnae were the most complete bones present, enabling estimation of a height of 163 ± 4.24 centimetres; this falls in the range for this date suggested by Roberts & Cox (2003, p. 195). Pelvic traits suggest that the skeleton was probably female. The bone fusion points observable indicate the individual to have been an adult. Observations of the auricular surface indicate the individual to have been in middle adulthood (40–49 years), although this is only based on one pelvic trait.

One small fragment of the skull, part of the mandible and small fragments of vertebrae were present in skeleton SK2026. Some long bones were present, but none were complete, hindering length measurement and estimation of height. Bone fusion indicates the individual to have been adult and dental attrition indicates an age of 35–45 years; however, dental attrition is not considered to be the most reliable age indicator due to differences in diet between populations affecting the rate of attrition.

A fragment of the shaft of a right human tibia was identified in ditch F2056. The bone was adult-sized, but age cannot be determined. It cannot be associated with skeletons SK2021 or SK2026, as these both had their right tibiae. The right tibia from skeleton SK2023 was missing, but the fragment cannot be associated with it with any certainty.

The animal bone

Carina Phillips

The animal bone assemblage consisted of 134 fragments. The majority of the bone (78%) came from features of sixth- to tenth-century date. A small number of fragments (16%) came from early medieval features and only five came from post-medieval features. Four fragments came from undated features. The bone is of good to moderate preservation, suffering from no surface erosion, but is brittle, which has resulted in fragmentation. The small size of the animal bone assemblage has affected detailed analysis and consequently little can be said about the bone with regard to husbandry practices, butchery and utilisation.

Bones were identified and recorded by species and skeletal element when possible. No mandibles were sufficiently complete to enable estimation of age. One horse skull was aged using the dental eruption ages stated in Sisson & Grossman (1953). Measurements, and bone fusion state, were recorded when possible, as was evidence of butchery, burning or gnawing. It was not possible to calculate heights for any bone. Fragments that could not be identified to a particular species were recorded under the categories of 'large-sized', consisting of cattle (*Bos* sp.), horse (*Equus* sp.) and large deer, 'medium-sized fragments' and 'small-sized', consisting of sheep/goat (*Ovis/Capra* sp.), pig (*Sus* sp.) and dog (*Canis familiaris*) bone fragments (Table 2). Unidentifiable bone fragments were recorded as such.

Cattle, horse, sheep/goat and dog were identified in both the Anglo-Saxon and early medieval assemblages. In the Anglo-Saxon assemblage cattle was the most frequently identified species and was therefore probably most frequently utilised. (the other assemblages are too small to consider quantification). Horse was the second most common species. The large-sized and small-sized counts in the assemblages support this dominance of the larger species, cattle and horse. The presence of more horse bones than sheep/goat bones is unusual, but it may be biased by the deposition of a number of horse bones in ditch F2003 (the bones from at least two horses were present in this feature). A horse skull from ditch F2012, which was less than 50% complete, was noted to have come from an animal aged approximately two-and-a-half years at death. One of the horse metacarpals exhibited scrape marks on the medial shaft. These are likely to have been caused by the removal of flesh and skin from this bone (R. Jones Pers. comm.). This is surprising, considering that very little meat would have been present on the metacarpal. If the flesh was being

removed, it is likely that the skin would also have been utilised. In the Anglo-Saxon period, horse meat was consumed (Wilson 1991, p. 76). However, based on the presence of one bone at Litlington, it can only be inferred that the horse carcass was utilised in this one instance and conclusions about the purpose can only be speculative.

The charred plant macrofossils and other remains

Val Fryer

Samples for the extraction of plant macrofossil assemblages were taken from the fills of graves F2019, F2022 and F2025 and from the basal fill of ditch F2056.

Charred plant remains are extremely scarce, comprising oat (*Avena* sp.) and wheat (*Triticum* sp.) grains and small charcoal fragments. It is assumed that all are derived from scattered refuse and were accidental inclusions within the contexts.

The de-watered assemblage from ditch F2056 appears to be indicative of an accumulation of material within a ditch that had been filled with water at least semi-permanently. The ditch was probably situated within an area of dry, short-turfed grassland and the sides were possibly partially overgrown by colonising weeds and shrubs. Waterlogged root/stem fragments are abundant and seeds of ruderal weeds, aquatic plants and tree/shrub species are also common. Taxa noted include hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), stinging nettles (*Urtica dioica*), duckweed (*Lemna* sp.) and elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*).

Although specific sieving for molluscan remains was not undertaken, shells are present in all but the sample from grave F2019. However, the material from grave F2025 is almost certainly modern in origin as the shells are extremely well-preserved, with excellent surface structuring. The most notable assemblage is that from ditch F2056, where all four of the ecological groups of terrestrial molluscs described by Evans (1972) are represented, along with numerous shells of the freshwater obligate species *Gyraulus albus*.

Discussion

The ditches dating from the sixth to tenth centuries (F2003, F2005 and F2012) found during the excavation constitute important evidence of earlier activity at what would become one of the centres of the village after the Norman Conquest. They could date from as early as the sixth century AD. If so, this raises the interesting possibility of an early post-Roman settlement close to what had been a sizeable rural settlement or estate centre in the Late Roman period. The longevity of the villa complex 300 metres to the south-east of the site (Fig. 2, HER 03186) is uncertain, but Heaven's Walls Roman cemetery (Fig. 2, HER 03262) certainly remained in use into the fourth century, attesting to the continuing presence of a Romano-British population in the area.

There are numerous other examples throughout Cambridgeshire and the wider region of Anglo-Saxon settlements and burial grounds lying adjacent to, or reusing, prominent Roman remains (Taylor 2000). At Cardinal Distribution Park, Godmanchester, for example, a fifth- to seventh-century Anglo-Saxon settlement grew up close to the ruins of the Roman town (Gibson with Murray 2003). At Gallows Hill, Swaffham Prior, it seems that several sixth- to seventh-century inhumations were deliberately interred within the remains of a Romano-British temple complex (Malim 2006). A Romano-British farmstead at Orton Longueville was taken over, without a break in occupation, by people using Anglo-Saxon pottery and living in timber halls and sunken huts (Mackreth 1996). A range of factors probably played a part in the decision to settle adjacent to or to reuse a Roman building or settlement. These might have included practical considerations such as the possibility of making use of good stone buildings that were still standing, or of field boundaries that were still visible. However, less everyday concerns, such as a desire on the part of new settlers to associate themselves with the local ancestors, or to legitimise power by reference to the past, might have also been important (Malim 2006, p. 112; O'Brien 1999, p. 60).

All of the ditches (F2003, F2005, F2012, F2054 and F2056) were fairly prominent features and were probably originally larger, having been truncated during

	Anglo-Saxon		Medieval		Post-medieval	
	NISP	MNI	NISP	MNI	NISP	MNI
Cattle	24	3	3	1	2	1
Horse	12	2	2	1	1	1
Sheep/goat	6	1	5	1	0	0
Dog	1	1	1	1	0	0
Large-sized	33	-	7	-	2	-
Small-sized	8	-	2	-	0	-
Unidentifiable	20	-	1	-	0	-
Total	104	-	21	-	5	-

Table 2. Number of Identified Specimens/fragments (NISP) and Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI).

the erection of the former factory buildings. It seems likely that the ditches were boundaries, although exactly what they served to demarcate cannot be determined with certainty. They may have been connected to earlier precursors of the nearby late twelfth-century parish church, 50 metres to the north-west, or of the post-Norman Conquest manorial centre of Huntingfields immediately to the south-east (approximately 40 metres away). A connection with an earlier church seems particularly likely in the case of the three earliest ditches (F2003, F2005 and F2012), which appear to curve around to enclose an area to the north-west of the site (beyond the limits of the excavation), where St Catherine's Church is located (Fig. 3). Their stratigraphic and spatial relationships with the three inhumations also lend weight to this suggestion as, although graves F2019 and F2022 cut the earliest ditch (F2003), they respect the line of its re-cut (F2005) and are located within the area enclosed by it. Grave F2025 had no stratigraphic relationships by which it could be dated, but its alignment parallel to ditch F2012 might suggest that the grave was positioned with respect for the boundary ditch. These relationships suggest that the sixth- to tenth-century ditches could have formed the eastern boundary of a burial ground, perhaps the cemetery of an earlier church.

There is some slight evidence that other graves were originally present. The fragment of residual human bone found in ditch F2056 might be from another burial, disturbed when this ditch was dug, probably in the thirteenth century. In addition, the pewter plate found in the basal fill of the ditch is possibly a replica communion paten originally accompanying a priest's burial. Again, this might have come from a grave disturbed by the cutting of the ditch. It is of course possible that these residual finds originated in one of the three graves which were identified on site. However, the excavated graves were all located some 25 to 35 metres away from ditch F2056 and the process by which their contents could have been transported this distance is unclear. It can therefore be tentatively concluded that the three surviving inhumations represent the remains of what was originally a larger burial ground. Other burials were probably destroyed by the digging of ditches F2054 and F2056 in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, as well as during ground levelling for the late twentieth-century engineering works. A relatively long period of use might be inferred from the need for the cemetery boundary ditch to be re-cut three times.

The presence of an earlier church on the site of St Catherine's would accord with Richard Morris's suggestion (1997) that most parish churches were in existence in some form by around 1000 AD. Many of these buildings would probably have been of timber and so have left little archaeological evidence of their existence, particularly if subsequent re-builds in stone occupied approximately the same footprint. The pottery associated with the cemetery ditches does not allow close dating of when this earlier church might have been in use; it could have been at any time between the sixth and tenth centuries.

Several early churches excavated elsewhere in Cambridgeshire never developed into full parish churches in the formal sense. A possible Middle Saxon timber church with an associated burial ground has been investigated at Gamlingay (Murray with McDonald 2005, p. 264). Here, the site was abandoned by the late eighth century and there is no evidence of a church in the village until the twelfth century, when a parish church was established several hundred metres to the north. A similar small timber church associated with a large inhumation cemetery has been excavated at Cherry Hinton (Last 2000). Burials continued at this site into the eleventh century, but then shifted to the site of a new parish church some 400 metres away (Taylor 2001, p. 175). The exact processes by which some early churches became parish churches, while others failed to make the transition, require further investigation. The development of a churchyard consecration rite from around 900 and of laws ensuring payment of dues to churches (e.g. the laws of Aethelstan, 925–39), were probably important factors (Taylor 2001, pp. 168–9).

The three partially complete skeletons found during the excavation tell us little about the structure and state of health of Litlington's sixth- to tenth-century population. Two of the individuals were in middle adulthood (aged 35–45 and 40–49), while the third, SK2021, was an adolescent or young adult aged 14–24. Only one skeleton, a female, could be sexed (SK2023). Only this skeleton was complete enough to estimate her height, being around 163 ± 4.24 centimetres tall, in the usual range for women of this period. Grave F2025 was notable for the apparent placement of a large flat-sided stone between the legs of skeleton SK2026 and another smaller stone at the foot of the burial. While the grave had clearly been subject to significant truncation and these stones might have been intrusive, it is equally possible that they were part of the original grave furniture. The placement of stones around the head is not uncommon in later Anglo-Saxon burials (Hadley 2001, p. 98). Pillow stones were found in three of the seventh- to eighth-century graves at Gamlingay (graves 12, 83 and 112) (Murray with McDonald 2005, p. 265). At Cherry Hinton, pillow stones included large stone blocks decorated with interlaced ornament (Taylor 2001, p. 175). However, the placement of stones between the legs or at the foot of the body is more unusual. One possible explanation is that grave F2025 was originally stone-lined and that the two stones noted during excavation were all that remained of this. A stone lining might have been a mark of status, having been used, for example, in a priest's grave at St Leonard's hospital, Chesterfield (Hadley 2001, p. 113).

Ditches F2054 and F2056 might have also been related to the cemetery. Although there is some evidence that they were dug through pre-existing burials in the area, this does not necessarily indicate that the cemetery was disused: careless treatment of earlier internments is a fairly common feature of early medieval burial grounds (Hadley 2001, pp. 107, 119). However, it is perhaps more likely that the ditches were

associated with the manorial centre at Huntingfields, 40 metres to the south-east. Although a house on the site is first mentioned in the early fourteenth century (Taylor 1997, p. 80), there are strong indications that the manorial centre was first laid out shortly after the Norman Conquest for one of Litlington's two new Norman lords (Oosthuizen 2002, p. 56). Until the early nineteenth century, Huntingfields was enclosed by a rectangular moat (Taylor 1997, p. 80), which now only survives as a wider part of the Chardle Ditch stream (Fig. 2). Ditches F2054 and F2056 were both large features (over four metres wide), although they were very shallow as a result of ground levelling for the former engineering works. An environmental sample taken from the basal fill of ditch F2056 suggested that it had been filled with water on at least a semi-permanent basis. The possibility thus arises that the eleventh- to thirteenth-century ditches represent a northern arm of the moat, perhaps surrounding ancillary buildings outside the main moated enclosure. Such an arm, following a similar alignment, is shown close to the southern edge of the site on the 1830 Enclosure Map (Cambridge Record Office Q/RDc 46). Ditches F2054 and F2056 might have been earlier demarcations of this part of the moat.

No evidence was found of domestic structures, but both the sixth- to tenth-century and eleventh- to thirteenth-century ditches contained debris suggesting that there might have been dwellings nearby. The debris included, for example, sherds of St Neots ware from F2056 with soot from use in cooking. Small quantities of Romano-British building materials were also recovered from both the later ditches (F2054 and F2056). Several fragments bore traces of mortar on all surfaces including the breaks, suggesting re-use in later structures. These almost certainly derived from the large Roman villa (Fig. 2, HER 03186), excavated in the early nineteenth century, which lay approximately 300 metres to the south-east of the site. Its ruins would presumably have provided the early medieval villagers with a cheap and readily available source of good building material. Although there was no clear evidence of exactly when these Roman building materials had been re-used, the fact that they were stratified within ditches F2054 and F2056 suggests a date no later than the thirteenth century. However, the ground disturbance caused by construction of the engineering works could mean that these finds were intrusive within the ditches. In contrast with the evidence from the finds, which suggested occupation near the site, environmental samples indicated that ditch F2056 was situated within an area of dry, short-turfed grassland, and that the ditch sides were possibly partially overgrown by colonising weeds and shrubs. This is perhaps more consistent with a location on the periphery of a settlement.

In the post-medieval period, the northern portion of the former Oblic Engineering Site appears to have been occupied by buildings extending back from Church Street. The clunch foundations uncovered in the far northern corner of the excavation area correspond well with the locations of buildings depicted in

the vicinity on the 1830 Enclosure Map (Cambridge Record Office Q/RDc 46) and the 1842 Tithe Map (Cambridge Record Office P108/27/1).

Conclusion

The remains of a sixth- to tenth-century burial ground excavated on site suggest that an earlier church preceded the twelfth-century parish church located 50 metres to the north-west. It has previously been argued (Oosthuizen 2002) that the tenth-century settlement at Litlington was focused around a manorial enclosure some 300 metres to the east, in the area defined by Church Street, South Street, Meeting House Lane and Cage Lane. The manor at Huntingfields and St Catherine's Church, between which the site lies, were thought to have developed after the Norman Conquest. In contrast, the excavation has shown that this part of the village was already a centre of activity by the tenth century at the latest.

The burial ground on site could date from as early as the sixth century AD. If so, this highlights the possibility of an early post-Roman settlement close to the Romano-British villa and cemetery a short distance to the south-east. This fits with the growing body of evidence from elsewhere in Cambridgeshire of Anglo-Saxon settlements and burial grounds lying adjacent to or reusing prominent Roman remains.

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The site archive can be accessed at the Cambridge County Archaeological Store. A grey report containing full specialists' reports is available at the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record and the National Monuments Record.

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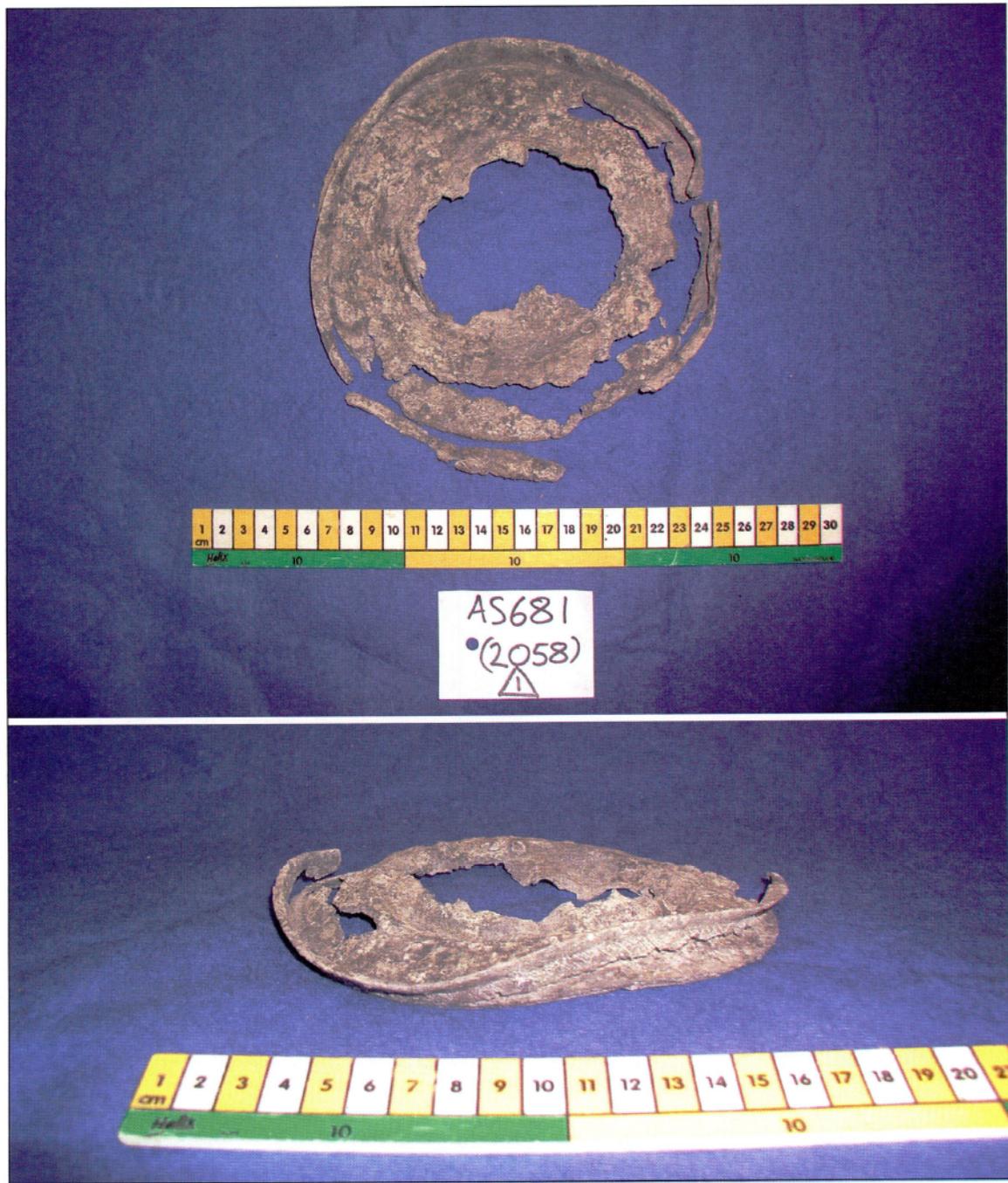


Plate 3. The remains of a lead-alloy (pewter) plate or lid with a shallow decorated rim found in the fill of ditch F2056 at the former Oblic Engineering site, Church Street, Litlington.