
Archaeological excavation at 'The Walnuts', Oundle Road, Woodston, Peterborough

John Thomas and Stephen Jones

With contributions from Jennifer Browning, Nicholas J. Cooper, Paul Courtney, Alice Forward, Patrick Marsden, Angela Monckton, Daniel Prior and Deborah Sawday

Archaeological evaluation and subsequent excavation was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) at 'The Walnuts', Oundle Road, Woodston, Peterborough in advance of housing development by George Wimpey (East Midlands) Ltd. The earliest evidence came from a scatter of Neolithic pits associated with Peterborough Ware located in the southern half of the site. A small scatter of pottery and tile also hinted at nearby Roman occupation although no direct evidence was recovered on the site. A long sequence of medieval and post-medieval occupation was represented across the site. Complex occupation remains close to the Oundle Road street frontage consisted of twelfth to thirteenth century pits, thirteenth to fourteenth century boundaries and a fifteenth to sixteenth century agricultural building associated with yard surfaces, drainage and pits. Further evidence for sixteenth to seventeenth century occupation included a well, boundary ditches, pits and the creation of a large pond. Evidence for activities to the rear of the properties included changing boundaries, pits and quarrying remains reflecting use of the area between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. A wide range of pottery, animal bone and well-preserved environmental evidence adds to the picture of domestic occupation and associated activities on the site, providing important information on the early development of Woodston.

Introduction

Woodston is a largely residential area of Peterborough, situated approximately 1.5 miles south of the modern city centre (Figure 1). Historically however, Woodston was part of Huntingdonshire, and settlement there had its origins in a village which grew around the junction of Oundle Road and Wharf Road in the late tenth century.

Redevelopment of an area of land formerly known as 'The Walnuts' (now known as 'The Squires'), to the south of Oundle Road, presented the opportunity for archaeological examination of a significant area within the historic core of the former village. The site lies in close proximity to St Augustine's church, which has pre-Conquest origins, and the probable site of the medieval manor, two of the early village's key

components. A number of chance finds and small-scale interventions have hinted at the archaeological potential within the historic core of Woodston and the present project offered the largest area so far to examine evidence of the area's early development.

The development proposals by George Wimpey (East Midlands) Ltd. outlined plans for residential use at 'The Walnuts' affecting an area of c. 0.55ha. A trial trench evaluation was undertaken by ULAS in June 2003 which established the archaeological potential of the site, revealing stratified medieval deposits close to the Oundle Road street frontage and Neolithic and medieval remains towards the rear of the site. A subsequent excavation was undertaken by ULAS in August and September 2003, following consultation with the Peterborough City Council Planning Archaeologist.

The site lies on fairly level ground at a height of c. 11m OD. The natural substratum consists of Second River Terrace deposits (bedded gravels) over Oxford Clay (fossiliferous interbedded clays, shales and mudstones).

This report presents the results of the fieldwork and incorporates the results of specialist analysis of the artefacts and ecofacts recovered. Full specialist reports for all finds categories exist within the site archive. A small number of features indicated use of the area during the Neolithic period, whilst further evidence of prehistoric activities was provided by a thin scatter of struck flints. Residual Roman finds also hinted at nearby occupation although no direct evidence was revealed. The bulk of the evidence reflected a sequence of occupation from the early medieval period through to the nineteenth century. The site archive will be deposited with Peterborough City Museums (Accession No. WAL 2003).

Historical Background

Paul Courtney

The place-name Woodston seems to combine an Old English personal name, 'Wood' or 'Woods', with the habitative element *-tun* (a farm or settlement; Mawer

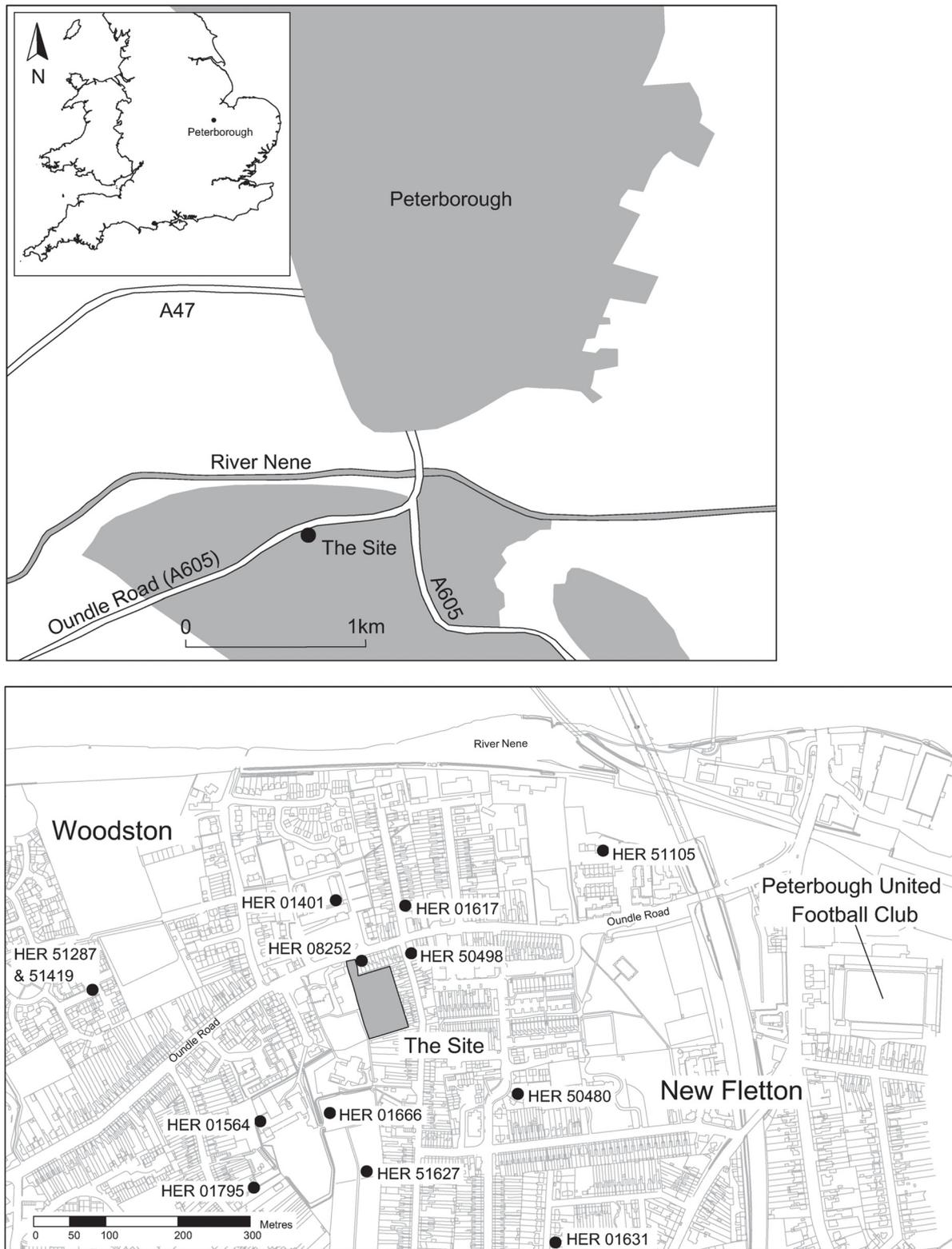


Figure 1. Location Plan © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number AL 100029495.

and Stenton 1926, 229). Woodston was among the lands given to Bishop Aethelwold by King Edgar in order to endow Thorney Abbey in the late tenth century (Page *et al.* 1936, 233). The Domesday Book (1, 205a) records that the manor was rated at 5 hides. The abbey had two ploughs on one and a half hides of land (the demesne or inland). The tenant population comprised 16 villeins with four ploughs. Domesday also recorded a church and a priest, as well as 16 acres of meadow and four acres of underwood (coppice).

In 1268 the abbot of Thorney obtained a market grant at Woodston for a market and fair (Calendar of Charter Rolls (CChR), ii, 101). The market is recorded in the Quo Warranto proceedings of 1286 but not the fair, and the market appears to have disappeared by the 1330s (Caley and Illingworth 1818, 298; Masschaele 1997, 170).

Woodston comprised approximately 65 households in 1279 *Rotuli Hundredorum* (RH), (ii, 643–4). The Hundred Roll of the same year records that Thorney Abbey had five and a half hides and one and a half virgates of land at Woodston. The abbot had one and a half hides (188 acres) in demesne, one and a half acres of pasture, eight acres of meadow and a windmill. The manor court covered an acre (RH, ii, 643–4). Eight villeins held full virgates (25 acres) and thirteen held half-virgates (14½ virgates in total). In addition there were 29 cottagers, a product of the expanding population, who were almost certainly supported by wage labour. Dyer (1985) has noted a link between boroughs and adjacent communities of cottagers who provided extra workers for the town; although the seasonal economy of the fens (grazing, fowling and fishing) may also have provided work. Also mentioned in 1279 were 12 free tenants of which the most notable were William de Waldeshef and Martin of Woodston, who each held two virgates. These two also had four minor tenants between them.

In 1327, 24 persons in Woodston were taxed and in 1332, 29 persons were taxed (Raftis and Hogan 1976, 185–6 and 250–1). No poll tax records survive for Huntingdonshire. The bishopric of Lincoln recorded 96 communicants in Woodston in 1603 (Foster 1926, 286). In the 1664 hearth tax roll 20 persons holding 54 hearths are recorded in Woodston but it is uncertain how many were too poor to pay (Sneath 2000, 28). The Compton census of 1670 recorded 86 communicants (Whiteman 1986, 317). In 1327 Woodston was ranked seventeenth out of 22 vills in the Normancross Hundred based on number of tax payers. In 1603 it was ranked ninth out of 19 parishes in the deanery of Yaxley and in 1670, ninth out of 20 parishes, both based on numbers of communicants. It thus seems to have risen in the rural hierarchy since the fourteenth century, possibly due to the economic impact of the nearby borough. It probably had a population of over 300 in the late thirteenth century and around 250 in the mid seventeenth century based on the above records.

Site Topography

The site lies within the historical core of Woodston, which was centred on the T-junction formed by Wharf Road and Oundle Road. The main components of the medieval village were St Augustine's church, the manor site and former peasant tofts (enclosures). The latter numbered 16 in 1086 but had evidently been subject to amalgamation and splitting by the time of the 1811 enclosure map (Figure 2). The manorial site, Woodston House, clearly lay west of the church, its court evident on the enclosure map. Former peasant tenements also extended east of the church to the parish boundary with Fletton. It is possible that the tenement immediately east of the church was once the site

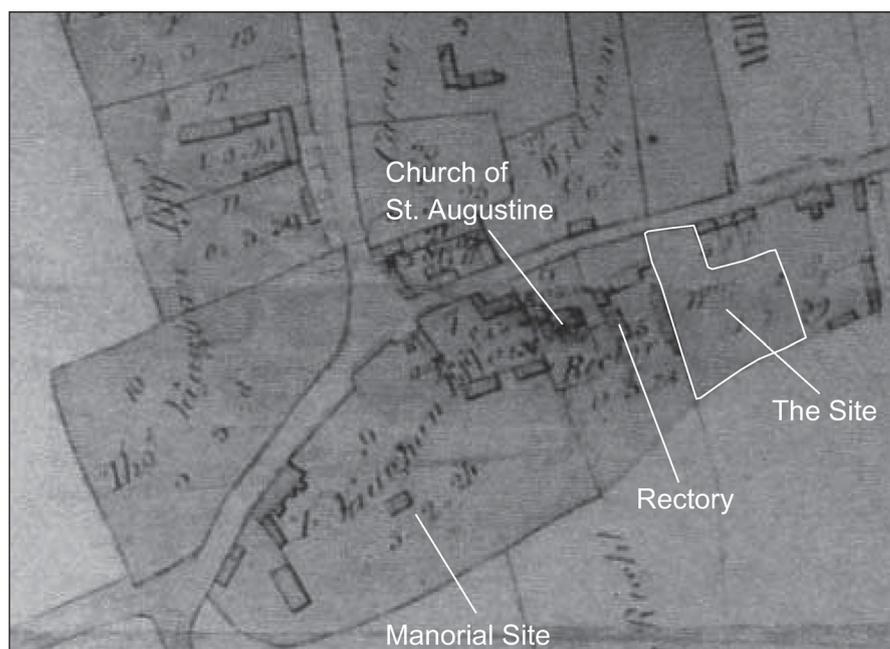


Figure 2. 1811 Enclosure Map of Woodston showing location of site, manor and rectory (North to top, not to scale).

of the medieval vicarage.

The 1811 enclosure map also indicates the presence of the rectory immediately east of the church. Its antiquity otherwise remains uncertain. By 1889, the current rectory had been built and Palmerston Road had been inserted into the landscape, a short distance east of the excavated site. The development site itself appears to have been pasture with trees at this time. A tennis court had been added by 1926 in the southern part of the site. Between 1958 and 1968 a house and outbuildings had been built at the southern end and a row of garages and other small structures at the north end.

Archaeological Background

Archaeological evidence for past activities in and around Woodston has been recovered as a result of excavation, evaluation and from chance finds (see Figure 1 for location of nearby examples). To the south west of 'The Walnuts' site, a small Palaeolithic handaxe (Peterborough Historic Environment Record (HER) Ref. 01795) represents the earliest evidence for human activity in the area. Later prehistoric activity is also attested from excavated evidence on the opposite side of Oundle Road at the former British Sugar factory (Casa-Hatton 2001a, Cooper 2002; HER Refs. 51287 and 51419). A probable prehistoric ditch was also revealed during evaluative work at Marshall's Garage to the east of 'The Walnuts' (HER Ref. 51105) suggesting the site lay within a wider area of later prehistoric occupation. Roman finds include coins (HER Ref. 01617), about 100m to the north-east of 'The Walnuts', and a face-urn pot (HER Ref. 01564), about 200 m to the south-west; but all such finds were casual discoveries. Roman coins and a brooch were also discovered to the south east of the site (HER Ref. 01631). However, due to the scattered distribution of these finds the nature of former Roman settlement in the immediate area of Woodston village is uncertain. The most important archaeological find in the vicinity of the site is the pagan Saxon cemetery about 200 metres south of the present site (HER Ref. 01666). This is largely known from finds made during gravel digging in the nineteenth century, but in 2007 a grave associated with the cemetery was excavated following the exposure of human bone in an allotment plot (HER Ref. 51627). An Anglo Saxon brooch found to the east of the main cemetery area (HER Ref. 50480) may also be related to the cemetery. Prior to the excavation at 'The Walnuts', there was little evidence relating to the medieval village of Woodston although early medieval metalwork and worked bone close to the site (HER Ref. 08252) and a stone-lined well to the east (HER Ref. 50498) provided some indication of domestic occupation. Remains of medieval ridge and furrow have been recorded in two areas to the north of the site (HER Refs. 01401 and 51105), both set back from the Oundle Road frontage and suggesting the location of agricultural plots directly behind the village tofts.

The Excavation Results

John Thomas and Stephen Jones

with specialist input from Jennifer Browning, Nicholas Cooper, Alice Forward, Patrick Marsden, Angela Monckton, Daniel Prior and Deborah Sawday.

The evaluation identified a complex sequence of stratified archaeological remains close to the Oundle Road frontage in the northern area of the site. Further archaeological remains were also present in the central part of the development area, relating to rear plots of properties adjacent to the street. In contrast no remains were revealed in trenches located in the extreme southern part of the site.

In response to the evaluation results and the threat from development proposals three areas were chosen for further excavation work (Figure 3). Area 1 was situated adjacent to the Oundle Road frontage and comprised a c. 232 square metre area. The central part of the site was excavated in two areas (Areas 2 and 3), comprising c. 1010 and c. 505 square metres respectively.

The recent land use history of the site had meant that archaeological deposits were relatively well-preserved. The area of the former house platform at the south-west of the site was unaffected by the development and foundations for the garages that had recently occupied the frontage were very shallow.

The complexity of the archaeology in Area 1 has resulted in a high degree of residuality of finds (finds groups were mixed as a result), of intercutting of features from different periods, particularly in the later layers and features. In spite of this a number of key contexts offered sealed and well-dated pottery assemblages which, when combined with stratigraphic information gathered from targeted excavation, resulted in a good understanding of the site's development.

Archaeological remains revealed in Areas 2 and 3 relate to activities carried out in the backyard areas of properties fronting onto Oundle Road. As a result of the sites layout and the location of designated areas that were affected by the development, Areas 2 and 3 lay to the south-east of Area 1 making it difficult to relate episodes of activity between the street frontage area and those to the rear of the site. It seems more likely that the activity recorded in Areas 2 and 3 relates to occupation of neighbouring properties to the east of that examined in Area 1. Nonetheless some insight into the changing nature of property size and the activities therein can be gained from the excavation results, with three broad phases represented.

The archaeological results from the excavated areas will be presented in chronological sequence and the overall development of the site considered in the Discussion.

The character of the archaeology closest to the street frontage, with many overlapping and intercutting episodes of activity, resulted in a complex archaeological sequence with mixed assemblages of datable finds in many instances. As a result the over-

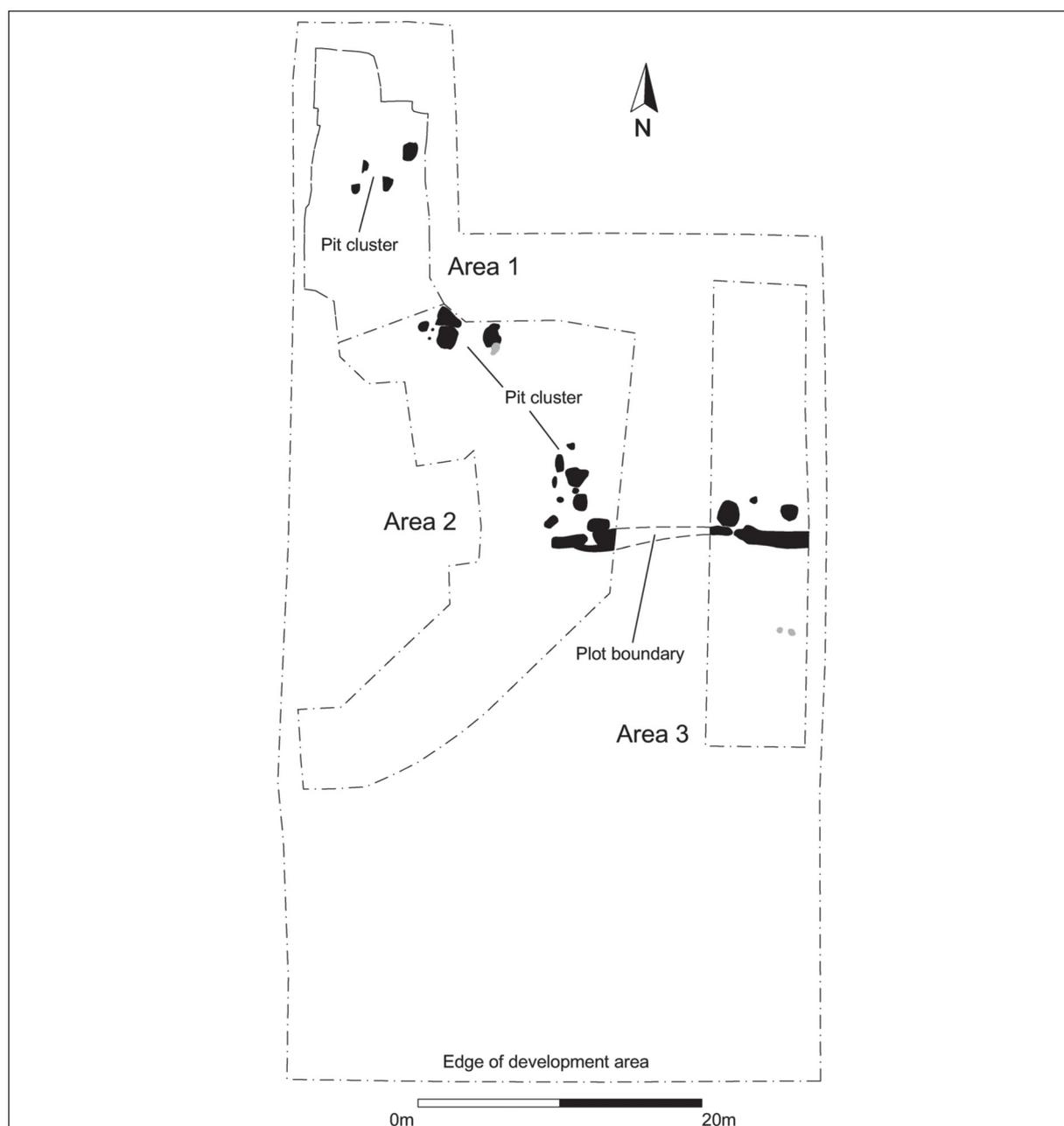


Figure 3. Overall site plan showing locations of the excavated areas, prehistoric pits (grey) and early medieval (12th to 13th century) features (black).

all chronological development of the site is presented in a series of necessarily broad periods.

Prehistoric and Roman Activity

The earliest evidence for activity on the site came from three small pits in Areas 2 and 3 which produced a total of 14 sherds of Neolithic Peterborough Ware and associated flintwork (for location see Figure 3). All three pits were filled with distinctive light greyish brown silty sands. Limited evidence for seeds and cereal grains was recovered from environmental analy-

sis of the pit fills, although the species represented are more typical of medieval deposits and are likely to have been intrusive. A thin scatter of typologically Neolithic/Bronze Age flint flakes was also present across the site in later features indicating that the pits were located in a wider area of occupation around the site.

Four sherds of Roman pottery and a small assemblage of roofing tile were recovered from later (medieval) features across the site. Though small and fragmentary, the pottery group, consisting of Nene Valley, Grey and Shelly Ware sherds indicates a consistent later 3rd to 4th-century date. No other direct

evidence could be related to Roman occupation on the site but the finds do point to activities in the vicinity.

Medieval and Post Medieval Activity

Early Medieval Activity (twelfth to thirteenth Century) Figure 4

A scatter of pits cutting into the natural clay in the southern part of Area 1 represented the earliest medieval activity adjacent to the street frontage. Due to the intensive nature of subsequent occupation of the site, much of this evidence was poorly preserved. The finds assemblages associated with the pits are indicative of domestic waste, hinting at nearby occupation, although no direct evidence for structures was observed.

Pottery, including products of the kilns at Stamford, St Neots and Bourne, provided a mid-thirteenth century date for this activity. Some of the pottery was sooted from use in cooking while the plant remains surviving in the pit fills included bread wheat and a little rivet wheat, as well as barley grains and chaff indicating that they derived from cereal processing or bread making, and suggest the pit had been used to deposit domestic refuse.

The southern limit of medieval properties on the site between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was marked by an east-west boundary lying approximately 58m back from the street frontage, and possibly indicating the southern limit of Woodston at this time. This boundary was observed in Areas 2 and 3 and consisted of a series of inter-connected ditches measuring between c. 0.79m–1.4m wide and c. 0.5m deep. The ditches generally produced a low number of finds with only a small assemblage of Stamford and Shelly Ware sherds recovered, alongside cattle and dog bones, perhaps reflecting their relative distance from the main areas of occupation to the north.

Several clusters of pits indicated activity areas, probably associated with small-scale episodes of quarrying, within the area defined by the plot boundaries. A number of the pits showed evidence of natural slumping around their edges, suggesting that once excavated they had remained open for some time to allow weathering to occur. This would explain why later episodes of quarrying avoided the earlier pits. Not all of the features yielded dateable material but close spatial grouping suggests broadly contemporary activity. It is a possibility that a further north-south aligned boundary lay within the unexcavated part of the site between Areas 2 and 3.

Medieval Activity (c. 1250–1450) Figure 4

Slight evidence for activity during the thirteenth to mid fifteenth centuries was represented towards the rear of Area 1 by two associated features, probably reflecting two phases of a boundary. The earliest, a shallow linear feature on an east-west alignment,

may have been a truncated ditch from which thirteenth to fourteenth century Bourne and Stanion-Lyveden Ware pottery was retrieved. This feature was observed over a distance of c. 1.3m although it had been badly truncated and is likely to have originally continued across the site.

Adjacent and to the north of the linear feature, a stone wall may have been a replacement boundary. The wall consisted of four or five courses of limestone, bonded with pale orangey brown mortar. It was observed over a length of c. 4m although this had also suffered truncation at either end from later pit digging. Traces of the wall footings were noted to the east however, indicating that it had once spanned the full length of the excavated area. There was no evidence for an associated foundation trench, although it is possible that any footings were fairly shallow and may not now be archaeologically visible. Layers of slumped clay to either side of the wall's base may have provided some support in lieu of a foundation trench. It is equally possible that these deposits were the remains of a cob wall that had been allowed to fall into disrepair, eventually slumping against its stone foundations.

Two pits provided further evidence of activity during this period, both of which contained a range of medieval pottery including Stamford Ware, St Neots Ware, Lyveden-Stanion and Bourne B Ware pottery.

The overall organisation of space within Areas 2 and 3 appears to have been maintained into the fourteenth century although both areas were clearly used more extensively than before. The southern extent of the properties was demarcated with a loose arrangement of ditches and possible quarry pits which lay on a broad east-west alignment slightly south of the former twelfth to thirteenth century boundary. As with the previous period of activity, there was little in the way of datable finds from these features, although a small group of Stamford, St Neots and Bourne B Ware sherds was recovered. A substantial amount of animal bones was found in the central part of the boundary ditch, where they appear to have been discarded as refuse. The majority of this assemblage comprises remains of horse (38 bones), but also of cattle, sheep and pig (19 bones in total).

A north-south oriented ditch was observed in the central part of Area 2, running for approximately 9.4m before terminating some 4.6m from the northern edge of the area. This ditch contained a range of pottery including Stamford Ware, Shelly Ware, St Neots Ware and Bourne B. A discrete burnt deposit within the ditch terminal contained charred seeds associated with food preparation and possibly represents domestic hearth waste that was disposed of in the open boundary. It seems likely that this ditch represents part of a property boundary and may even define the eastern limit of the street-frontage occupation represented in Area 1. Slightly to the west of the ditch a stone-rich spread containing occasional thirteenth to fourteenth century pottery sherds may have been an area of hard-standing for a temporary structure or specific activity.

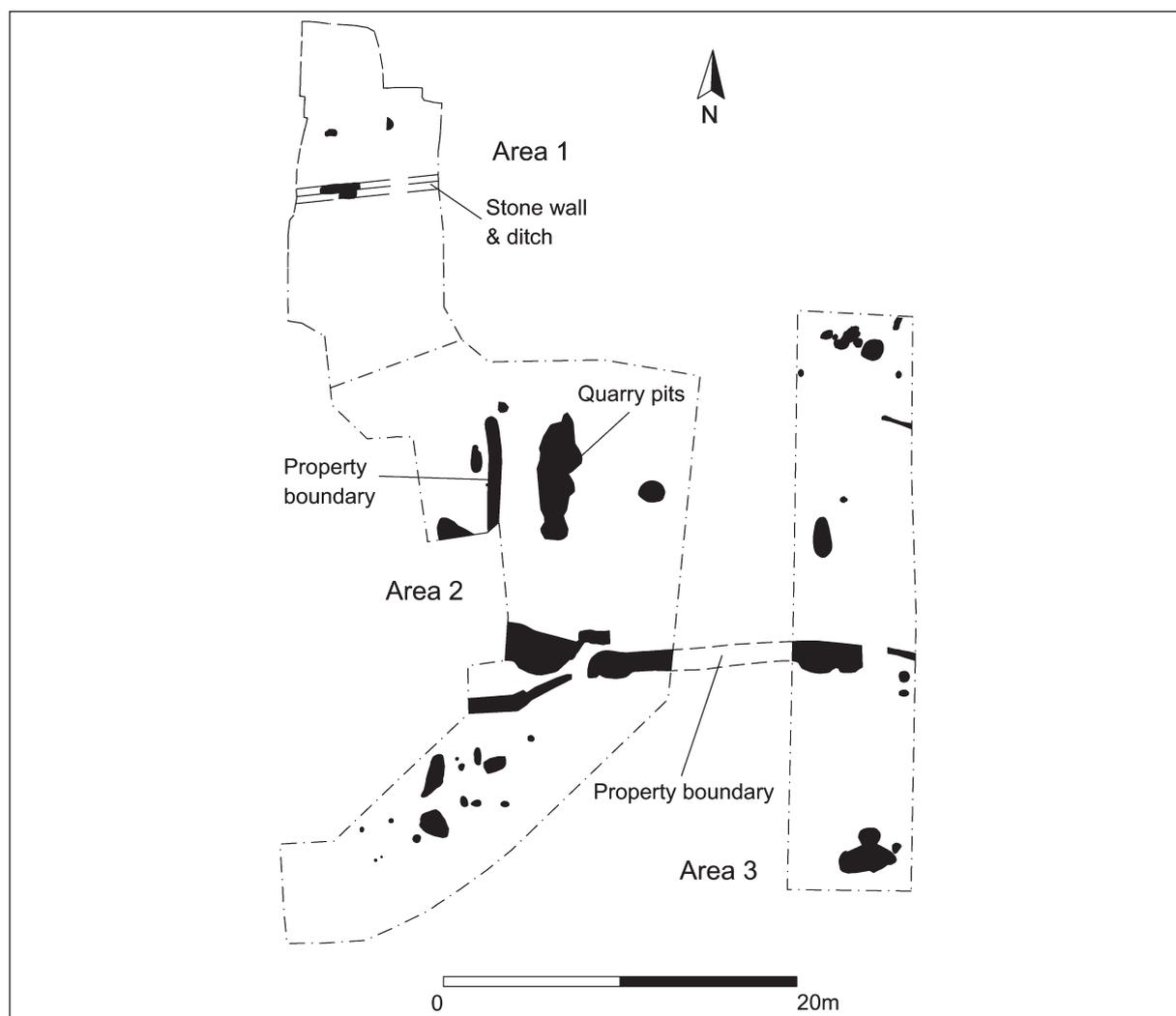


Figure 4. Medieval activity: features dated to c. 1200–1450.

No other obvious north-south boundaries were evident for this period although it may have been that such markers were represented by shallow fences or hedges at this time which would leave little archaeological trace. A linear arrangement of pitting, probably for gravel quarrying lay in the centre of the site and had developed along a north-south line, possibly in respect of the ditch described above.

Scattered single pits located across the site during this period probably also represent small-scale quarrying and occasional refuse pits. Most of these features are generally undated but several produced small quantities of Stamford Ware, St Neots Ware and Bourne B Ware.

On the eastern side of the site, at the northern end of Area 3, a cluster of features including pits, post-holes and gullies indicated a relatively busy area, perhaps closer in form to areas of occupation on the street frontage. Generally these features are undated, but one pit contained a group of pottery sherds made in Stamford, Shelly, Lyveden-Stanion and Bourne B Wares.

In contrast to the earlier phase of occupation, there was limited evidence for activity to the south of the boundary system. A cluster of post-holes lay in association with several quarry pits in Area 2 and a pair of intercutting quarry pits was located in Area 3. These were associated with small amounts of thirteenth to fourteenth century pottery including Bourne B and Lyveden-Stanion Wares. The irregular pattern of the post-holes makes explanation difficult, although their presence indicates structural activity, most likely they are the remains of fences or animal pens.

Later Medieval Activity (c. 1450–1500/1550) Figures 5 and 6

Much of the occupational evidence for Area 1 can be attributed to activity during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This activity appears to have been centred on a timber building which was also associated with external yard areas and pit digging.

Several distinct layers reflect both external and internal areas. Cobbled surfaces on the western and

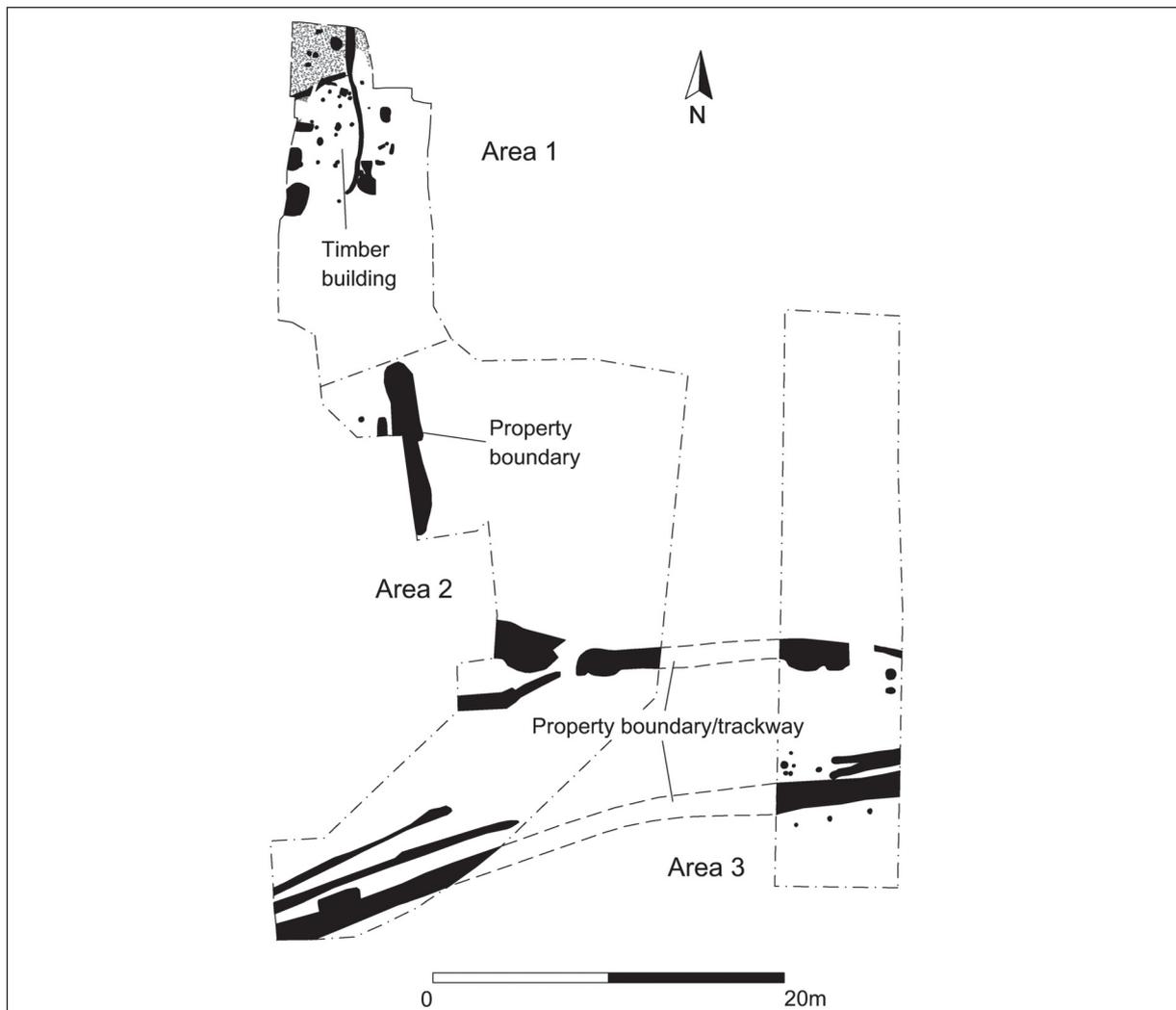


Figure 5. Later Medieval Activity: features dated to c. 1450–1550.

northern sides of the site indicated yard surfaces while more silty layers in the centre of Area 1 are suggestive of internal surfaces, perhaps relating to earthen floors within the timber building. A spread of pottery from the silty layers included a large amount of Bourne Ware as well as charcoal indicative of nearby domestic occupation.

Evidence for a timber building consisted of a concentration of post-holes in the centre of the site which lay in close association with the silty layers. Although somewhat disjointed as a result of later disturbance, the overall pattern of the post-holes reflects a rectangular timber building measuring c. 9.6m in length by c. 5m wide. The building plan is oriented north-east to south-west with its northern gable end closest to the street frontage. Some evidence for internal division is also indicated by a number of post-holes, particularly concentrating in the northern part of the building. Although the overall plan of the structure is difficult to resolve the evidence suggests that it is likely to be a result of several phases of rebuilding and renovation on the same spot. This is particularly

evident from the overlapping silty layers within the building, which suggest the floor was regularly renewed.

A series of loosely associated spreads of compact stone and pea-gravel were probably related to the later use of the building, possibly reflecting the introduction of more solid flooring at some point. These were mostly clustered near the north-eastern corner of the structure but one patch straddled the projected wall-line on the western side of the building and may have served as a threshold at some stage. A scatter of post-holes in this general area of the building may have formed an internal porch but their function within the building is uncertain and they could just as easily have belonged to a separate phase of construction. A number of the post holes were found to contain fragments of Bourne D Ware pottery providing an indication of their later medieval date.

A number of pits were located around the building's perimeter, further emphasising the space that it occupied.

Two pits to the rear of the building are associated

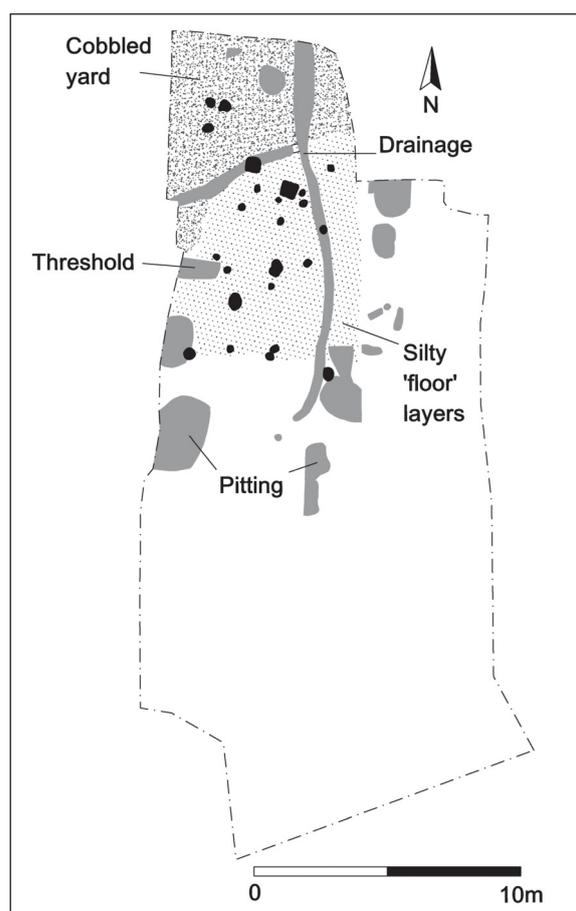


Figure 6. Detail of timber building.

with a large assemblage of domestic waste comprising Bourne and Lyveden-Stanion Ware pottery, oyster and mussel shells and animal bones of cattle, horse, sheep, pig and goose, some of which were butchered or gnawed.

A series of drainage features was also associated with this phase of activity. It is possible that some were directly associated with the building although they may represent a number of separate attempts at removing water from the area. In the northern part of the area a narrow gully crossed the northern part of the area on a north-east to south-west alignment and lay at the meeting point of the cobbled surface and siltier layers.

Another, more sinuous, drainage gully ran through the middle of Area 1, projecting from the northern edge of the site at the frontage, and terminating just beyond the back end of the building. This contained a mixed pottery assemblage including later medieval Bourne Wares, Lyveden Stanion Ware and residual Shelly Wares. Animal bone fragments of cattle and sheep/goat were also recovered.

A more well-constructed drain crossed the western side of Area 1 on a north-east to south-west alignment. In comparison to the other simple gullies, this was partially stone-lined, with a clay base and regularly placed limestone blocks forming the sides and

capping. Pottery sherds recovered from the drains fill indicate a *c.* sixteenth century date for the drain's infilling. A scatter of domestic waste from cereal cleaning, including wheat (rivet and bread varieties) and chaff fragments, as well as fish scales was also recovered indicating nearby occupation, perhaps associated with the timber building.

A final phase of activity represented in Areas 2 and 3 indicates a reorganisation and expansion of the area to the rear of properties fronting Oundle Road. This is represented by a substantial new boundary ditch running across the southern edge of the two areas approximately 76m from the Oundle Road street frontage. This new boundary measured *c.* 2.2m wide with a fairly steep-sided concave profile *c.* 0.45m deep and contained fragments of Late Medieval Transitional and Bourne D Ware and animal bone. The boundary may have been augmented with smaller fences, as suggested by a regular line of post-holes lying adjacent at the southern end of Area 3 or the parallel gullies at the southern end of Area 2.

This new ditch may have functioned as a boundary by itself or could have formed the southern side of a trackway, with the previous southern boundary ditch acting as the northern side. Given the broad date range of the pottery (thirteenth–fifteenth century) it is a possibility that both boundaries were in use together. Both follow a similar orientation and the gaps in the northern boundary may have been deliberately placed to allow access from the tofts. A small cluster of post holes lying adjacent to the southern boundary in Area 3 suggested structural activity although it was impossible to interpret their overall plan.

Two phases of a north-south ditch lay in the northern part of Area 2. Both were approximately 17m in length and appeared to have functioned as property boundaries. Both ditches contained quantities of fifteenth to sixteenth century pottery and animal bone.

Early Post Medieval Activity (*c.* 1500/1550–1650+)

Figure 7

It is unclear when the timber building on the street frontage went out of use and it could feasibly have continued to stand into the early post-medieval period. However a number of features, predominantly dating to the sixteenth to seventeenth century, encroached upon the area formerly occupied by the structure, suggesting its removal by this time.

Two drains clearly date to this period of activity, while a north-south linear spread of large pits lay in the centre of the area, truncating the eastern side of the earlier building and some of the associated features.

On the southern side of the area two inter-cutting pits both contained large amounts of pottery, dominated by Bourne D Wares and occasional animal bones. One also contained a fragment of worked shelly limestone, possibly once part of a small architectural column. One flat side has been worn smooth through indicating re-use of the fragment, possibly as a grindstone or smoother. To the north of these a large

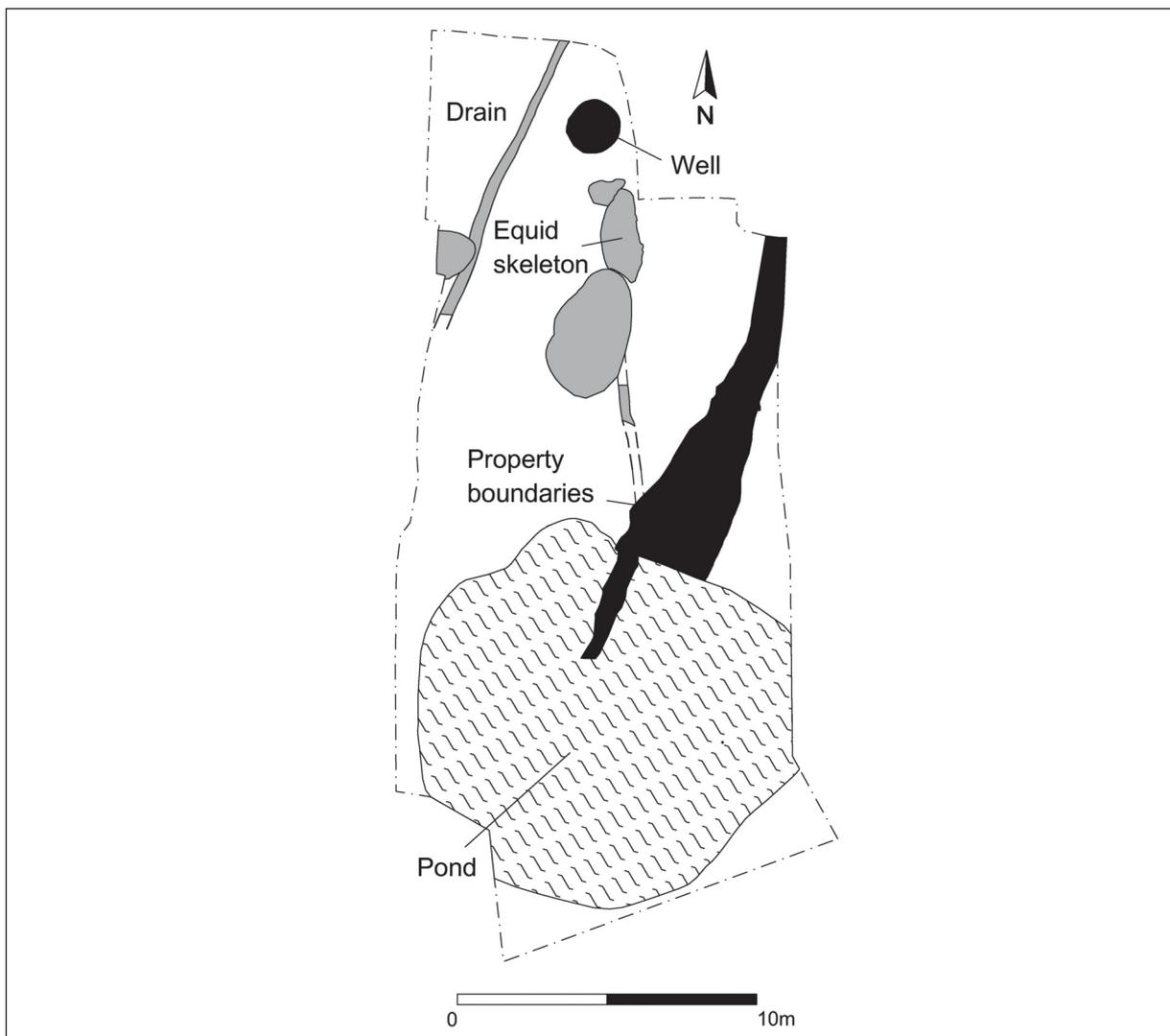


Figure 7. Early Post-Medieval activity (c. 1500/1550–1650+) in grey and Later Post-Medieval/Early Modern activity (c. 1600/1650–1750+) in black.

oval pit contained a small amount of pottery including a *tyg* or handled cup of Post-Medieval Black Ware.

A pair of inter-cutting pits lay in the centre of the area. The earliest of the two contained a disarticulated equid skeleton, as well as cattle, sheep and pig remains. What remains of the equid do not enable a precise identification although the limb proportions, coupled with measurements on the first phalanx suggest the animal to have been a donkey rather than a horse. Quantities of pottery were also recovered, with Bourne D Wares dominating the assemblage. A c. 0.1m thick compact layer of limestone rubble sealed the pit, and may have served to consolidate the softer, underlying pit fill. The later pit was slightly larger and appeared to have lain open for a longer period. Pottery, animal bone and building material are associated with this pit as well as a fragment of whetstone.

A final pit associated with activity of this period protruded in from the northern edge of the excava-

tion. The fill of this pit contained pottery, including Post Medieval Glazed Red Earthenware, animal bone and charcoal. After the pit had gone out of use it had been capped with a layer of yellow clay, perhaps suggesting usage as a cess-pit. High densities of charred plant remains and occasional fish bones and scales were evident, as is often the case in such features, although the lack of mineralised remains indicated that no sewage was present.

Later Post-Medieval/Early Modern Activity (c. 1650–1750+) Figure 7

Further evidence for activity near the Oundle Road frontage represented seventeenth to eighteenth century occupation. Although no direct domestic remains were found the nature of the features from this phase, and the associated finds, suggest the main living areas were situated close to the excavated area.

A stone-lined well lay near the northern edge of Area 1. The stone lining was *c.* 1m in diameter although it was situated within a larger construction pit with a diameter of *c.* 1.8m. The well construction pit was filled with mixed clays against which the well structure had been built. An assemblage of pottery from these deposits contained residual medieval sherds but also a substantial group of Bourne D Ware fragments suggesting a sixteenth to seventeenth century date for the well's construction. The well structure was made of coursed limestone blocks, each measuring *c.* 0.2m x 0.2m x 0.1m. The uppermost *c.* 0.6m section of the well construction has a narrower diameter (*c.* 1m) than the lowest course which widened to a diameter of *c.* 1.3m. Following disuse the well was infilled with a number of deposits which were associated with pottery, tile and glass dating from the eighteenth century onwards.

A large pond *c.* 11m in diameter dominated the southernmost part of the area. The lower fills contained fragments of bone, pottery, clay pipe and glass dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Preserved plant and seed remains from these layers confirm the presence of standing water with nearby marginal vegetation.

An associated layer of limestone and flint nodules set in clay represented ground consolidation around the northern edge of the pond. This layer also contained a range of seventeenth century pottery indicating that it was contemporary with the pond. It is possible that this layer also served as an access route to the rear of the property at this time.

The uppermost levels of the pond contained seventeenth century pottery, large stone fragments, clay pipe, broken brick and animal bone. This layer was between 0.2m and 0.4m deep and spread several metres beyond the northern edge of the pond, partially covering the stone layer and perhaps indicating a final period of disuse and abandonment of this part of the site by this time.

A sequence of frequently re-cut linear features following a similar north-east to south-west alignment on the eastern side of the area may have formed a property boundary. The earliest feature was a shallow undated gully which was succeeded by a more substantial ditch associated with seventeenth century pottery, butchered animal bone and a large dump of demolition material containing hand-made brick fragments. A final ditch was partially revealed but due to its location on the very edge of the excavation it could not be fully examined. The relationship between the ditches and the pond is unclear and the pottery from both suggests broadly contemporary use. It is feasible that the ditches acted both as boundary features and drainage for the frontage area, taking water into the pond at the back.

A rubble-rich demolition layer containing eighteenth and nineteenth century finds, directly overlaid the excavated area. This was machined off carefully prior to hand cleaning in the early stages of the excavation. Similar deposits, containing finds dating from the eighteenth century onwards, were also found

within the upper backfills of the well suggesting a phase of consolidation and ground levelling prior to new development.

Discussion

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Excavation at 'The Walnuts' has revealed slight evidence for prehistoric and Roman activity and important new evidence for the medieval development of Woodston. Although slight, the prehistoric remains complement previous discoveries of similar dates from nearby archaeological sites. The main evidence reflected a long sequence of medieval and post-medieval occupation adjacent to the Oundle Road street frontage with corresponding plots to the rear, providing evidence for the early growth and development of Woodston village.

Prehistoric and Roman

There is little that can be said regarding the Neolithic pits, other than that they add to a growing picture of prehistoric activity in the Woodston area and offer some of the earliest evidence. The flint and shell-tempered fabrics from the site are typical of those characterising Peterborough Ware in eastern England. The dating of Peterborough Ware has been re-assessed in recent years so that a date range of 3500–2500 BC is suggested, placing it earlier in the Neolithic than had been previously thought (Gibson and Kinnes 1997; Gibson 2002).

Archaeological work to the north of 'The Walnuts', on the opposite side of Oundle Road, has revealed evidence of post-built structures, substantial ditches, gullies and pits associated with Late Bronze Age or Iron Age material (Casa-Hatton 2001a, Cooper 2002). Slightly further afield, to the east of the site, a cluster of shallow Neolithic/Bronze Age pits was discovered during excavations at Botolphs Bridge, Orton Longueville (Kemp and Spoerry 2002, 13). Further evidence from Orton Longueville, in the form of enclosures and possible droeways, indicates probable livestock management activities dated to the Neolithic/Bronze Age (Casa-Hatton 2001b). The presence of the pits at 'The Walnuts' highlights the potential for prehistoric remains in the area.

The presence of Roman pottery suggests some sort of occupation at Woodston between the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. Although the evidence is fragmentary, a wider area of occupation may be postulated by the scattered presence of Roman coins, pottery and a brooch found from the surrounding area.

Medieval

Archaeological remains relating to activities on the street frontage and rear plots of the early village of Woodston represent the bulk of the evidence from the site. Unfortunately the disposition of the excavated areas does not enable an examination of an entire

property from front to back, however evidence from the southern side of the site (Areas 2 and 3) does indicate the changing nature of the village plan over time.

The earliest evidence for medieval activity suggests twelfth to thirteenth century occupation and is characterised by a scatter of pits near the street frontage and the formative plot layouts to the rear. The domestic nature of the finds associated with the pits suggested they lay close to nearby occupation areas although no clear evidence for buildings was revealed. It is possible that any associated buildings lay to either side of the excavated area, or had been truncated by later activities. A range of pottery vessels such as jugs and spouted pitchers indicate the essentially domestic nature of the finds and these are predominantly of Stamford, St Neots/type and Shelly Wares, indicating the relatively local supply of pottery to Woodston at this time.

Butchered animal bone and charred plant remains indicative of cereal processing or bread making further support the evidence for nearby domestic occupation. Abundant cereal remains were found in early medieval samples from the frontage, which contained cereal cleaning waste of chaff and weed seeds with charred cereal grains of free-threshing wheat including bread wheat and rivet wheat, with barley. The later medieval samples are interpreted as containing proportionately more cereal cleaning waste than suggested for the earlier period, suggesting that this was an important activity on or near the site. The presence of chaff and weed seeds may suggest the local cultivation of wheat including both bread wheat, rivet wheat, and barley. It is possible that threshed cereals brought to the site from local fields or elsewhere, were being cleaned from contaminants for sale or use in foods made from whole grains. Some of the deposits are also thought to contain domestic waste from food preparation. The site provides evidence for rivet wheat outside the town of Peterborough where it was present from the thirteenth to fourteenth century onwards (Moffett 1991, Monckton 1996), and found at this site perhaps at a slightly earlier date. Other crop remains over the phases of the site are of charred legumes, including peas and possibly beans.

The rear yard areas during this phase appear to have been loosely defined by a discontinuous system of short ditches and pits. This relatively informal boundary arrangement may suggest that it developed in piecemeal fashion over a protracted period. It might also indicate that movement between properties was unhindered, perhaps hinting that some resources were shared between properties. Alternatively, less archaeologically visible boundaries such as hedges or shallow-founded fences may have been used. Limited evidence for activities in the rear yard areas is restricted to a scatter of large pits which were represented across the two southern areas. These may have originally served as quarry pits although it is clear that domestic refuse was finding its way into them during backfilling, possibly indicating the presence of nearby middens as a source.

Continued occupation during the thirteenth to

fourteenth centuries, characterised by the presence of Bourne A and B Wares is indicated, although the evidence for this period is relatively sparse, perhaps also suffering from truncation by later activities. Limited evidence for street frontage activity is represented by two phases of boundary which, although truncated, appeared to have once spanned the excavated area from east to west. It is likely that this boundary once separated activities on this part of the site and may have marked the rear of the main occupied area. Activities in the rear yard area appear to have been very similar, with evidence for quarrying and smaller-scale pitting occurring in discrete clusters about the site. The existing boundary system at the southern limit of the properties appears either to have been developed or replaced. This uncertainty is a result of the broad dates associated with pottery from these features, but the system seems essentially to have been maintained from the previous phase. A linear development of quarry pits on a north to south alignment appears to have developed adjacent to an existing boundary, which would have sub-divided the rear yards. As with the previous period of occupation a certain amount of domestic refuse was incorporated into the backfilling of the boundary features and quarry pits, indicating continued settlement activity in the vicinity.

Late and Post Medieval

Occupation on the site seems to have peaked sometime during the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries with much of the evidence for domestic occupation on the street frontage relating to this period. The focus of activity within the excavated area was a timber building with clearly associated internal and external surfaces relating to a succession of floors and cobbled yard areas. Although the overall plan of the building was relatively evident it was also clear that this was a product of numerous phases of renewal and repair on the same spot, perhaps a measure of its importance and continued use, or of a shortage of available space at this time. The precise nature of the building's use is difficult to interpret although it seems not to have had a domestic function given the lack of evidence for an associated hearth, and the general flimsiness of the build. By this period at the Botolphs Bridge settlement at Orton Longueville to the east, domestic buildings were constructed of stone, or at least had stone footings (Kemp and Sperry 2002, 16) and it seems more likely that this structure had an agricultural function. The provision of drainage adjacent to the walls of the building may perhaps indicate its use as a livestock shelter at some stage.

Domestic occupation must have been located nearby however, owing to the number of refuse pits distributed around the perimeter of the building. Finds assemblages from these pits included large amounts of pottery, with Bourne D Ware evidently of major importance, animal bone and charred plant remains supporting the notion of continued domestic activity in the vicinity. The pottery groups are dominated

by wares from the Bourne production centre less than 24km to the north of Peterborough, although a smaller amount of pottery from the Lyveden-Stanion kilns is also represented. The pottery types are representative of refuse from domestic occupation, with jars, jugs and bowls all present. A range of domestic animal bones were also present within the pits, suggesting cattle, sheep and pig were eaten and/or kept by the sites occupants. A number of the horse and cattle bones had evidence of gnawing suggesting that the bones had not been buried instantly but had perhaps become incorporated into middens, making them available for scavenging. Further evidence for nearby domestic activities included charred plant remains and fish scales from a pit that had probably been deliberately sealed with a clay layer, suggesting its possible use as a cess pit.

The timber building was demolished towards the end of the sixteenth century indicating a reorganisation of the immediate backyard area, although continued evidence for pit digging and drainage indicates that domestic occupation of the site had not ceased. This is further supported by the construction of a well at this time, presumably serving as a domestic water supply. The two large pits in the centre of the frontage area also provide interesting evidence of activities during this period. Although there is clearly a continued domestic element to the finds assemblages the presence of semi-articulated horse/donkey bones in a pit of this period also hint at other activities. Given that the main meat-bearing areas of the animal remained intact it seems unlikely that it was killed for consumption; in any case this was generally not accepted in medieval society except in extreme circumstances (Grant 1988, 160). Light cut marks on the skeleton indicate removal of the hide which was probably taken, along with the three missing limbs, and intended for processing elsewhere. A very similar example was recently discovered in Leicester where a complete horse's trunk displaying evidence of hide removal had been buried within a medieval pit alongside domestic refuse (Score 2006, 47). It is suggested that here also that the hide had been removed deliberately for use in leather-making. The tanning process was strictly controlled in the medieval period with only cattle hides used. However whittawying, a process similar to tanning, was allowed to use the skins of a wider range of animals, often making use of hides from animals that had died naturally (Thomson 1981, 171). The possible donkey on this site may well have died of natural causes and the hide been removed and taken to a whittawyer while the rest of the body was buried on site. Excavation of sixteenth to seventeenth century tanning pits at Bonners Lane in Leicester also revealed remains resulting from the whittawying process, including articulated horse limbs (Finn 2004, 33–4).

The southern limit of properties during this period was extended southwards and defined by a more formalised boundary arrangement, perhaps involving a trackway. Not only does this indicate a major reorganisation of the properties revealed within the

development area, but it provides a reflection of the reorganisation of property that Woodston may have experienced at this time. This new boundary, a much more permanent and formalised version of its predecessors, can be seen to have formed the south-eastern limit of a large oval shaped area of land forming the southern side of the village until at least 1811, reflecting its importance and continued use into the nineteenth century.

Despite the formal nature of the southern plot boundary, distinction between individual properties appears to have remained rather vague. A single, relatively short, north-south boundary may have acted as a boundary between properties. However there was little other evidence for similar divisions of this period across the site suggesting either an informal arrangement of ownership or perhaps the use of hedges as boundaries.

Activity in the seventeenth century is characterised by the creation of a pond which effectively demarcates the southern limit of the street frontage area. Areas of hard-standing around the pond edge suggest that it was intended as a watering hole for animals. This is a marked change of use for the area but the presence of domestic remains in the lower pond fills suggest that occupation was still situated nearby. The sequence of ditches dating to this period on the eastern side of Area 1 may have acted as property boundaries but would also have helped drain standing water into the pond. Building rubble and domestic refuse within the ditch fills suggest that habitation lay nearby. Abandonment of the site is marked by final infilling of the well and deposition of a demolition/levelling layer containing rubble and domestic debris dating to the eighteenth century after which there appears to have been little activity on the site until modern times.

Overall the results of the excavation have shown a considerable history of occupation reflecting activity in the area before the village of Woodston was established, and also the development of the settlement during the medieval period. A number of smaller archaeological investigations within Woodston have revealed evidence for similar deposits, however the larger scale of this project has enabled a more understandable picture of occupation. Clearly the street frontage area was a busy and important zone of activity throughout the medieval period. Although direct evidence for habitation was not revealed, the nature of the finds assemblages indicates that it probably lay in close proximity. Pottery finds show how Woodston fitted into the wider pattern of trade and exchange, which was essentially a local supply with changing foci as the medieval period progressed. Animal bones and plant remains provide a good measure of what was kept and consumed by the site's occupants and, in the case of the dismembered equid skeleton, an insight into contemporary local crafts. The changing nature of medieval village organisation is also highlighted well by the regularly reworked backyard plan.

The level of complexity and survival of archaeo-

logical remains at 'The Walnuts' highlights the potential for similar preservation in other parts of the village and will aid future planning decisions. On a regional level the excavation results will contribute important evidence for the growth and development of rural settlement, contributing to key research aims for the area (Wade 1997, 52; Murphy 1997, 54).

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