

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

TOWCESTER

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Background to the Report

This is one of a series of reports compiled by Northamptonshire Heritage as part of the English Heritage funded Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) of Northamptonshire, which is intended to provide an effective information base and research framework to guide the management of the county's urban archaeological resource. The survey encompasses all urban settlements and others that may have had some urban attributes, from the Roman period to the 1930s. The only exception is Northampton, which is the subject of an Intensive Urban Survey in its own right.

Each report comprises three distinct sections: a detailed description of the town in each major period; an assessment of potential and definition of a research agenda; and a strategy for future management. A consistent approach has been taken in the presentation of the description in each report with detail being presented under each standard category even where this has no direct or obvious relevance to the urban aspects. This section has however been presented in the form of a gazetteer with standard headings so enabling the reader to identify those sections of particular interest. The Towcester report is presented in three parts: the first covering the Roman period by Jeremy Taylor; the second covering the medieval and post medieval town prepared by Jane Laughton, Sean Steadman and Glenn Foard; the third covering the industrial period, from 1750 to the 1930s, by Jennifer Ballinger. The report draws upon research previously conducted by Glenn Foard on the medieval and post medieval towns of the county; from the survey of historic buildings and land use in selected towns conducted by the Archaeology Unit in the late 1970s, and has benefited from the specialist advice of Dr Barrie Trinder on industrial period. Other contributions to the EUS on digital mapping, database input and related work have been made by various individuals including Christine Addison, Chris Jones, Paul Thompson, Rob Atkins, Phil Markham and especially Tracey Britnell and Abi Kennedy.

The first objective of the report is to determine layout, character and chronology of the development of Towcester from its Roman origins up to the 1930s. An attempt has been made to identify the various components of the town which are likely to have left identifiable archaeological remains and, as far as practicable, to define the exact location and extent of these buried or upstanding 'monuments'. They have also all been assessed for likely current survival and their potential to contribute to research objectives. The relationship of the town to its hinterland has also been considered and the potential for study of that interaction has been assessed. In this way the report aims to provide a well founded research framework, establishing the current state of knowledge of Towcester's history and defining a research agenda which can guide future archaeological investigation within the town. Conservation objectives have also been defined. This report should be viewed as a starting point rather than a definitive study, which it certainly is not. If this report serves its purpose then it will need to be regularly reviewed and substantially revised in future years as archaeological investigations, and hopefully also further documentary research, is undertaken.

Given the limitations of time, which inevitably must guide the conduct of a countywide project, it has been necessary to limit the depth of investigation. No original archaeological earthwork or other such field survey has been conducted, but all available existing archaeological data has been consulted. Mapping from aerial photographic sources in the Northamptonshire SMR, CUCAP and the NMR has been completed. Although each town has been visited to examine the topography of the town and an assessment attempted as to the general state of archaeological survival, no attempt has been made to complete a cellar survey

comparable to that undertaken for Northampton as part of the Intensive Urban Survey of that town. This is due to the absence of detailed mapped evidence comparable to that which exists for Northampton and the very poor results achieved in 1979 when a cellar survey was attempted in Thrapston, Higham Ferrers and Towcester. Nor has it been possible to examine all documentary sources, even for the medieval period. However, an attempt has been made to assess the overall potential of this crucial part of the record of the urban past and to examine in detail the most documentary important sources. An index has been compiled from various lists and indexes in the Public Record Office, Northamptonshire Record Office, National Register of Archives and British Library. Given the vast quantity of documentation, particularly for the last 200 years the limitations in the documentary assessment, especially regarding the industrial period must be acknowledged. Attention has focussed on those sources that might contribute significantly to the reconstruction of the historical topography of the town and to the broader characterisation of the various monuments within the town.

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SUMMARY

Towcester is probably the most extensively recorded of the 14 nucleated settlements included in this survey that definitely or probably acted as local or regional centres in the Roman period. Located astride Watling Street between the major settlement at Whilton Lodge (Bannaventa) to the north west and Fenny Stratford (Magiovinium) to the south east, Towcester was, along with Irchester and Water Newton (Durobrivae) one of largest and most significant small towns in the county. Lying on both a key strategic route through the province and at a junction with roads to a number of other small towns in the region, Towcester acted as a local craft, commercial and religious centre that probably also played a role as a focus of local administration and taxation.

Towcester's layout seems to owe much to local considerations of topography and drainage and the need to accommodate an emergent pattern of regional roads joining Watling Street. Significant parts of the core area were well established by the later first century AD and occupation covered all the identified suburbs by the mid-late second century AD. The majority of the known settlement lay to the west of Watling Street, occupying a spur of land surrounded on three sides by low lying marshy ground on the floodplains of the Tove and Silverstone Brook. Across the watercourses to both north and south further ribbon development suburbs developed along Watling Street, though their extent and form is still poorly understood. Further suburbs along the modern Brackley Road and Alchester Road extended ribbon development into the surrounding agricultural landscapes to the west and south west of the town.

A reasonable amount can be said about the town's historical development though knowledge is patchy for some areas. Watling Street and immediately neighbouring areas appear to have been laid out in the third quarter of the first century AD, quite probably in a way that was designed to intersect with a pre-existing Late Iron Age focus of settlement and possibly religious significance located on and immediately to the west of the floodplain of the Tove.

During the late first to early second century the remaining routes between Watling Street and other emerging centres such as Brackley/Evenley, Alchester, Irchester and/or Duston were formalised and additional buildings constructed close to their frontages. During the course of the second century in particular, the construction of stone founded probable strip buildings gradually filled the road frontages with simple shops, workshops and houses. Close to the core of the town the later first century saw the development of a number of important religious buildings alongside other substantial buildings of uncertain function but which may have been a mansio, bath house, large private residence or even a public building.

In the later second century AD the core spur of land and the junction of the Alchester Road, Watling street and possibly Brackley road were enclosed within a large earthen rampart and ditch defensive circuit. These defences may have incorporated an integral stone wall at this time or that may have been added at an as yet unknown date later in the Roman period. In the fourth century the town's defences were further augmented with bastions or corner towers. The construction of these defences clearly cut through a number of existing areas of settlement and may also have cut through several side roads in the town, cutting off parts of the interior from the surrounding land. The overall

effect of this is not clear but there is some suggestion from the south western quarter that this led to the dereliction of some areas behind the main road frontages.

Around the fringes of the settlement a series of enclosures defined small agricultural plots and stock yards that periodically seem to have been used for small clusters of burials close to their boundaries. The settlement was clearly occupied up to the end of the fourth century

There is as yet no significant evidence which would indicate that the town was occupied in the early-middle Saxon period, although the discovery of a few early-middle Saxon sherds from near the castle may indicate a settlement very close. There was however significant occupation on the permeable geologies of the Tove valley in this area, for an early Saxon cemetery has been found a short distance to the north west of the town. By 1086 there were two royal estate centres in the Tove valley, one at Greens Norton and the other at Towcester. The intermixing of the dependencies of these estate centres and of their dependent hundreds suggests that the two represent a splitting of a single late Saxon and possibly earlier estate centre. This was probably at Norton, whose name seems to reflect its position to the north of the Roman town. The re-establishment of occupation and an estate centre at Towcester may have been a result of the refortification of the Roman town as a burh against the Danes in 917 by Edward the Elder. At this time Towcester probably represented the most defensible location on the Danish frontier. The defeat of a Danish attack on the town in that year represented the key action in the reconquest of this part of the Danelaw by the kings of Wessex. Whereas before 917 Towcester and Norton were probably part of a Mercian province attached to Kings Sutton, after the reconquest they became part of the new shire attached to Northampton. Towcester itself may only have been reoccupied from this time onwards. Slight evidence of late Saxon activity has been recovered in the town, in the form of boundary ditches in the Allen's Yard area. This may have been part of the laying out of an agricultural settlement at Towcester, within the Roman defences. There is no evidence that the settlement was raised to urban status with the creation of the burh, although this remains a possibility. If so then the laying out of the late Saxon ditches may have been part of this process.

It is uncertain whether the refurbished Roman defences continued to function into the early medieval period, but in the late 11th or earlier 12th century a motte and bailey castle was constructed at Towcester in the south eastern part of the defended area. This will have been constructed both as an estate centre but perhaps most importantly to control the road network at a key location where the Oxford to Northampton road crossed Watling Street. It will have been constructed by the king or by the Earl of Clare who subsequently acquired the manor.

The market is not recorded until 1220, but it had already been in existence for some time. It is possible that a market existed here in 1086 and was simply not mentioned in Domesday, however the other Domesday markets encompass the handful of what appear to have been the most important administrative centres of the Saxon period, evenly distributed across the county. It is therefore likely that the market did not exist in 1086. If so then it must have been established soon after. The town clearly developed as a significant local marketing centre, benefiting not only from its function as an estate centre in the Tove valley and so at the heart of the best agricultural land in the area, it

also had the important added advantage of lying at a key junction in the national road network. The town maintained its marketing functions through the medieval period and survived the recession of the 14th century to re-emerge as a successful small town in the post medieval period.

This role as a local commercial centre was maintained through the post medieval period and up to the present day. It benefited substantially from the expansion of travel in the 17th century and especially from the development of coaching. During the 18th and early 19th centuries Towcester flourished as an important staging post on what was by then the single most important road in England, the coaching route from London to Holyhead. A substantial amount of the economy of the town was based on passing trade and a number of coaching inns were established along Watling Street through the centre of Towcester. The coaching routes declined rapidly following the establishment of the railway network across the country. Despite the loss of a major element of its trade Towcester retained its status as a market town and as a centre for local administration. There was some limited industry in the town including lace making and wool stapling in the 18th century and a small boot and shoe trade in the 19th century, but this remained secondary to its commercial role.

The town is also unique in the county in having the Roman and late Saxon through to modern town superimposed on exactly the same site. Despite this re-use, the archaeology of the town from the late Iron Age to the post medieval has been demonstrated to survive in good condition in various locations and it clearly has a very high archaeological potential. There is also a good survival of historic buildings in the town, with a handful from the medieval period and many more from the post medieval and industrial periods. Although its documentary record is nowhere near as good as that for Oundle, Brackley or even Daventry, it clearly has a high potential for the investigation of urbanisation from the Roman through to the present.

I DESCRIPTION

TOPOGRAPHY & GEOLOGY

Towcester lies on a low rise largely on Upper Lias clay but with a small area of river gravel on the southern boundary of the settlement, within a loop formed by the confluence of the River Tove to the north and west with Silverstone Brook to the south. The choice of site was clearly dominated not by the normal factors of permeable geology and good agricultural land which dominate the distribution of medieval and earlier settlement in Northamptonshire. The choice of the site of Towcester seems likely to have been determined to a large degree by the river crossing of the major road where it passed through the broader valley area. This might explain why the Saxon focus probably shifted from Towcester to Greens Norton only returning when defensive and commercial factors once more became dominant.

The vast majority of the catchment of the Tove, which dominates the hinterland of the town, is a boulder clay covered plateau. This was always poor quality agricultural land which for much of the past remained covered by extensive areas of woodland. In contrast, the valley of the Tove itself has exposed areas of permeable geology where pre-Iron Age activity was concentrated and where right through to the post medieval period settlement and agricultural wealth was concentrated.

A PRE-MEDIEVAL

1.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

2.0 TOPOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Prehistoric

Prehistoric origins for the settlement at Towcester have long been suspected. It has been suggested, largely on the basis of scattered finds of residual Iron Age pottery, that the pre-Roman settlement was as extensive as the Roman town. There is also a suggestion, based on the *duro* element of the Roman place-name (OE fort on low ground), that the settlement may have been fortified, although no trace of an early defensive circuit has been found¹. However, surviving features relating to this pre-Conquest settlement appear to have been largely confined to the east of the present town in the area between the line later taken by Watling Street and the floodplain of the River Tove. A single late Iron Age, 'Belgic', ditch, possibly associated with gateposts, and another undated feature discovered during excavations at Bury Mount in 1984², indicate settlement in this area at an early date. Recent excavations in Easton Neston Park revealed part of a ditched cemetery, comprising at least five identified inhumations dating from the late Iron Age. Evidence for associated settlement was slight, mainly due to truncation of archaeological deposits by later activity, but some traces of round houses survived³. Elsewhere in the town evidence for pre-Roman settlement is slight with

¹ C Woodfield, 'Prehistoric and Roman Towcester', in J Sunderland and M Webb (eds) *Towcester The Story of an English Country Town*, Towcester Local History Society, 1995.

² M Audouy, 'Site D Bury Mount' in C Woodfield, 'The Defences of Towcester' *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 24, 1992.

³ G Walker, Towcester Retail Development, Northamptonshire, Interim Report on the Results of an Archaeological Evaluation, CAT Report No 9293, Cotswolds Archaeological Trust, 1992.

occasional discoveries of Iron Age pottery reported from the Sponne School site west of the town and 'Belgic' pottery of both pre-and post conquest date from a number of spots across the later walled area of the town.

The discovery of four poorly provenanced Iron Age coins in and around the town, and the presence of the ditched cemetery, an unusual feature on a pre-Roman site in this region, attest the probable high status of this Late Iron Age settlement. The extent and nature of occupation and any associated activities, however, remain poorly understood.

2.2 Roman

The earliest subsequent occupation can be dated to the mid-late first century AD when roadside boundary ditches and enclosures seem to have been laid out close to the newly constructed major route of Watling Street in what subsequently becomes the core of the town. Clear evidence for buildings and occupation dating to the mid-first century AD is, perhaps, surprisingly scant. Evidence for the early development of the settlement is largely confined to the widespread presence of residual mid-first century material in contexts usually dated to the Flavian period (the AD70s).

Lambrick interpreted a stone building, dated to c70AD, as a possible *mansio* adjacent to the junction of Watling Street and Alchester Road, though this building was not aligned on either road. He goes on to suggest that the town may have developed as an extra mural vicus, whilst emphasising that no evidence for an earlier fort has been found⁴. Woodfield has recently re-interpreted this building as the *temenos* wall of a possible temple precinct⁵. To date the only evidence to support a military association or even foundation for the subsequent Roman town is provided by a small group of dress metalwork considered to be of military origin. A bronze 'Centurion's' pendant dating from the mid first century AD was discovered at Sponne School⁶. A similar example was found at the legionary fortress at Colchester. A mount from an early scabbard chape dated to the early first century AD, and therefore already old fashioned by the time of the conquest, was found at Park Street⁷. A strap-end pendant found in a first century ditch at Allen's Yard, is paralleled by finds from Roman forts at Doncaster, Hod Hill and South Shields⁸. A possible scabbard mount from the south-west suburbs may also be of military origin. Although these find-spots clearly cannot be described as a concentration, their locations suggest that any early military occupation lay to the west of the later line of Watling Street.

The true period of development of the large nucleated settlement at Towcester occurred, as elsewhere, during the last quarter of the first century and the first half of the second century AD. Although we know very little about the nature of occupation along Watling Street within the core of the town, the ubiquity of late first and second century pottery recovered from many of the present properties suggests that the main frontages were flourishing. Further

⁴ G Lambrick, 'Excavations in Park Street, Towcester' *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 15, 1980, p113-114.

⁵ C Woodfield, 'Prehistoric and Roman Towcester', in J Sunderland and M Webb (eds) *Towcester The Story of an English Country Town*, Towcester Local History Society, 1995, p15-16.

⁶ G Webster, 'Small Finds' in AE Brown and JA Alexander, 'Excavations at Towcester 1954: The Grammar School Site' *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 17, 1982, p51, Fig. 18;2.

⁷ F Grew, 'Other Small Finds' in G Lambrick, 'Excavations in Park Street, Towcester' *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 15, 1980, p60-61, Fig. 13;3.

⁸ C Woodfield, 'Prehistoric and Roman Towcester', in J Sunderland and M Webb (eds) *Towcester The Story of an English Country Town*, Towcester Local History Society, 1995, p7.

settlement was established along Watling Street to the north of the river Tove and to the south of Silverstone Brook. To the west, the Alchester Road, apparently constructed in the later first century AD, was also soon flanked by settlement along its frontages at least as far as Allen's Yard⁹. Thus by the mid-second century AD most of the known area of the town was already occupied. The Park Street *mansio* appears to have gone out of use in the mid 2nd century, when domestic buildings were constructed in this area¹⁰. A possible *mansio* with associated bath house, the fragmentary remains of which survive beneath St Lawrence Church and graveyard, was built in the second century and subsequently rebuilt or refurbished with a brick herringbone (*opus spicatum*) floor. Although a period of decline is indicated by the building's partial use for metalworking in the 3rd century AD, the building was refurbished again in the 4th century AD¹¹.

Subsequent development largely involved areas of remodelling of this core plan and expansion of the town's road network with the construction of additional side roads and eventually a new branch road towards Fleet Marston¹². In part at least these can be seen as a response to the new demands on the town plan imposed by the construction of a substantial defensive circuit, enclosing c11.7 hectares, in the third quarter of the second century AD. The defensive zone, comprising rampart, berm and outer ditches, was c60m wide and must have had a significant impact on existing occupation¹³. Indeed, from the third century AD there is some suggestion that the nature of occupation within the defended area changed at a time when settlement in suburban areas expanded. Occupation both within and outside the defended area continued well into the late fourth century AD and even the early fifth before the appearance of dark earth deposits in a number of locations seem to indicate the end of identifiable settlement. (R MacPhail's note in Charmian's 1992 article dates the Dark Earth to the late 2nd or 3rd century and suggests that these deposits were deliberately introduced cultivation deposits).

2.3 Saxon Origins

There is some evidence to suggest that the major public building under St Lawrence's Church remained in use into the 5th century AD. The latest recorded coins from the town, however, are all late fourth century issues, which suggests that urban life was beginning to break down before the official end of Roman administration in AD410. Although there is structural evidence for occupation well into the late 4th century at several locations, especially along the Alchester Road suburbs, evidence for subsequent Anglo-Saxon occupation into the fifth century AD is absent.

There is generally an absence of evidence for activity during the Early-Middle Saxon period, although pottery sherds of this date were found in the vicinity of Bury Mount. A gold stud found in St Lawrence Road and dated to the 6th century, was almost certainly the result of accidental loss, probably by a high status traveller using the old Roman Alchester Road¹⁴ A

⁹ A E Brown, & C Woodfield, 'Excavations at Towcester Northamptonshire: The Alchester Road Suburb' *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 18, 1983, p43 - 140

¹⁰ G Lambrick, 'Excavations in Park Street, Towcester' *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 15, 1980, p114.

¹¹ C Woodfield, 'Prehistoric and Roman Towcester', in J Sunderland and M Webb (eds) *Towcester The Story of an English Country Town*, Towcester Local History Society, 1995, p13-14.

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ C Woodfield, 'The Defences of Towcester' *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 24, 1992.

¹⁴ P Woodfield, 'The Dark Ages and the Anglo-Saxon Period' *Towcester The Story of an English Country Town* ed J Sunderland and

mixed cemetery containing both inhumations and cremations, established in the vicinity of Belle Baulk Farm 1km west of Towcester¹⁵, suggests that occupation may have shifted away from the former Roman town by the early 6th century, though the cemetery may have been at some distance from its associated settlements.

This part of Northamptonshire probably formed part of a province of the kingdom of Mercia centred in the middle Saxon period on the settlement at Kings Sutton in the mid 7th century. Given the polyfocal character of the estate centres of the middle and late Saxon period it is possible that Towcester served some central place functions but it is perhaps more likely that the town was not occupied until the early 10th century and that prior to this Greens Norton was the administrative centre of the royal estate with Whittlebury as the royal residence.¹⁶ In 1086 the estates of Towcester and Greens Norton were interspersed as were their dependent hundreds, while the name Norton may imply it was established, as with Kings Sutton, as a major centre in relation to the old Roman town.

Viking raids during the late eighth and ninth centuries led to the establishment of the Danelaw in the east of Northamptonshire. Watling Street formed one of the boundaries of the Danelaw but it is thought unlikely that Towcester fell under Viking control¹⁷. Mercia was supplanted by the kingdom of Wessex following the battle of Derby in AD918. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states that Towcester, part of kingdom of Wessex, successfully resisted the Danish army, based in Northampton during the early 10th century, sometime between AD917 and AD921. The Chronicle refers to a burh at Towcester and states that following the defeat of the Viking army by King Edward the Elder in the same year, the town's defences were to be strengthened with a stone wall¹⁸. To date, no evidence for this stone wall has been recovered. There is evidence that the Roman town defences were re-used but the dating remains imprecise. There is also evidence to suggest that the defended area was reduced in size from 29 acres in the Romano-British period to 25 acres. Anglo-Saxon ditches and a possible palisade trench uncovered in Allen's Yard suggest that the line of the late Saxon defences ran along the eastern side of Richmond Road. Environmental evidence suggests that the SW corner of the former defended area may have become increasingly marshy, creating an additional, natural, line of defence¹⁹.

3.0 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

3.1 COMMUNICATIONS

Information about the road layout at Towcester is generally good for the major through routes but as is so often the case far less so about details of the internal secondary street pattern. Broadly, the main road pattern can be considered to consist of four parts:

M Webb, 1995, p53.

¹⁵ G Cadman, 'Cemeteries' in 'Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit Report for 1992' *South Midlands Archaeology* 23, p42 and Fig1, p43.

¹⁶ G Foard, 1985, The Administrative Organisation of Northamptonshire in the Saxon Period, *Anglo Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*. P Woodfield, 'The Dark Ages and the Anglo-Saxon Period' *Towcester The Story of an English Country Town* ed J Sunderland and M Webb, 1995 p55.

¹⁷ Ibid, p56

¹⁸ Ibid, p57

¹⁹ Ibid, p58

3.1.1 Watling Street

Whilst the general course of Watling Street is reasonably well understood its specific course through the town is still somewhat uncertain. The present road changes alignment twice, first at Silverstone Brook and then at the River Tove but it has been suggested²⁰ that the results of the Park Street and Allens Yard excavations indicate the Roman road originally ran further to the west, only later being realigned. Irrespective of its precise route, Watling Street was the primary road through the town around which the rest of its communications networked developed during the later first and second centuries AD.

3.1.2 Alchester Road

This is probably the best understood of all the routes through the town having been identified through excavation at a number of points both inside and outside the defended area. The 9-13 Park Street excavations²¹, the Alchester road suburb excavations²², and the unpublished work in Allens Yard all indicate that the road was first demarcated and metalled, if not first used, in the Flavian period (AD70s). This then acted as the primary route to the south west until well into the late fourth century AD. Subsidiary roads and track ways fed onto this road from properties on both sides with at least four known from the Allens Yard area including a fairly substantial intramural road running broadly north-west to south east. Outside the later defences the stripping and recording of a 620m length of the Alchester Road revealed a branch road to the south running in the general direction of Fleet Marston that appears to be a late addition to the town's road network constructed in the late third century AD.

3.1.3 Kings Sutton Road

Far less is known about the date and route of this road, thought to broadly follow the line of the modern Brackley Road west from the town. Simple enclosure plots recorded to the rear of Sponne School in 1954 would have fronted on to the north side of this road and would suggest that it was already in use by the late first century AD.

3.1.4 Duston Road

In the 1880s Dryden noted an extensive spread of material running north-east from the railway station (north of the present town) towards Gayton in the general direction of Duston. Woodfield²³ suggests this marks the course of another branch road from Watling Street to the north east outside the town but the absence of modern archaeological intervention leaves its course and date open to investigation.

At present the direction of any side roads to the east or south-east of Watling Street towards Irchester are unknown and it is difficult now to see where such a route would run given that no such evidence was encountered in the recent excavations on the floodplain of the River Tove east of the town defences. The small scale and early date of most archaeological interventions in this area, alongside the degree of destruction caused by the continued medieval and post-medieval occupation of this part of the town mean that our knowledge of any roads or track ways in this area is very limited.

²⁰ Woodfield, C. (1995) Prehistoric and Roman Towcester, in J. Sutherland & M. Webb (edd.) *Towcester: The story of an English Country Town*. Towcester & District Local History Society, p8

²¹ Lambrick, G. (1980) *op cit*.

²² Brown, A.E. & Woodfield, C. (1983) *op cit*.

²³ Woodfield, C (1995) *op cit*, 45

3.2 DEFENCES

A relatively large number of excavations and watching briefs across the line of the defences at Towcester most recently synthesised by Woodfield²⁴ mean that its date, method of construction and course are comparatively well known. The construction of the defences during the third quarter of the second century AD had a profound impact on the topography of the town excluding substantial areas of ribbon development along the roads out of town to north, south and west from its core around the junction of the Alchester Road and Watling Street. Enclosing an area of approximately 12ha they ultimately consisted of a high earthen rampart with integral stone wall and circuits of two or more ditches outside along some of its length. Woodfield believes the rampart and stone wall to be contemporaneous integral features of the original defences but Wachter²⁵ considered this unlikely. On reflection it is currently clear that a clinching archaeological argument either way still awaits discovery. The defences were elaborated in the fourth century to include bastions.

The course of the defences is fairly well understood and forms a polygonal enclosure narrow towards its northern apex but far wider towards the centre and south. Its line is best explained by its use of the existing topography of the rise between Silverstone Brook and the River Tove along its eastern and northern sides whilst still incorporating part at least of the ribbon development along the Alchester Road south-west of Watling Street. The precise course of the defences along the southern side of the town have long been a matter of debate but recent excavation ahead of supermarket development in Water Lane²⁶, residential development on Richmond Road²⁷, and a Watching Brief along Meeting Lane²⁸ now suggest that they ran broadly along the line of the northern side of the present Richmond Road. Excavation in advance of development on the Meeting Lane/ Richmond Road corner in 2001 & 2002²⁹ also seems to suggest that east of this location the line of the defences may gradually curve slightly to the north. If true this would suggest that the defences crossed the course of Watling Street some 30-40m further north than has traditionally been considered the case. Furthermore it would suggest that the 'base of a masonry structure of uncertain but presumably monumental function' noted by Woodfield³⁰ at this point may be the town's south gate.

The line of the defences in the south-eastern corner of the town is still little understood. If, however, the line suggested by the recent work along Richmond Road to the west is correct it would seem that to the east of Watling Street the defences may have run closer to the line of Church Lane than is usually considered. If so this overall plan supports the impression of a defensive enclosure designed to incorporate ribbon development along the two main road frontages for a distance of only about 250m around the central road junction. To the east and south the defences simply formalised the line of wet lower lying ground on the floodplains of the two watercourses whilst incorporating the large building under St Lawrence's Church in its south-east corner.

²⁴ Woodfield, C. (1992) The Defences of Towcester, Northamptonshire. *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 20, 13-66.

²⁵ Wachter, J.S. (1993) *Town Centre redevelopment Towcester, Northamptonshire: An Archaeological Assessment*

²⁶ Northamptonshire Archaeology (1999) *Safeway Development Water Lane, Towcester 1998*. Post Excavation Design Specification

²⁷ Jackson, D.A. (1992) *An Archaeological Evaluation at 25 Richmond Road, Towcester*; Northamptonshire Archaeology (2002) *17 Richmond Road, Towcester. Archaeological Recording Action*

²⁸ Northamptonshire Archaeology (1999) *Archaeological Watching Brief, Meeting lane, Towcester, Northamptonshire, May-June 1999*

²⁹ Northamptonshire Archaeology (2001) *An Archaeological Evaluation at 163-165 Watling Street, Towcester*; (2002) in prep

³⁰ Woodfield, C. (1992) *op cit*, 32

3.3 BUILDINGS

The range and number of buildings recorded across the Roman town of Towcester represent an important if often fragmentary corpus nationally. Because of this and for clarity they are discussed by likely function and then area below.

3.3.1 Possible Public Buildings

Several potentially very important public buildings have been suggested to lie within the defended area of the town. Most unfortunately are known from early or highly fragmentary observations and thus remain difficult to interpret with any certainty. They nevertheless represent a suite of substantial and clearly well appointed buildings that are rare within small towns nationally and very rare from the county.

An extensive stone founded building (“A” on Figure 3), clearly in part hypocausted (a bath-house?) is known from a range of finds recovered from St Lawrence's church yard, notes made by Dryden during the installation of a church heating system in 1883, and an evaluation in 1983. Floored initially with *opus signinum* and later *opus spicatum* it was clearly a substantial building expensively furnished. Though insufficient of its plan is recorded to be sure the likely presence of a bath house and its location within the town defences on Watling Street near the core of the town would indicate that it was probably a *mansio* for travellers or possibly and unusually for a small town a public baths.

A second substantial building (“B” on Figure 3), this time of sill beam and timber upright construction and of uncertain function lay to the south of Alchester road in Allens Yard. Reasonably well appointed with red mortar floors, white painted walls and a tiled roof it appears to have been approximately 16.5m long and 10m wide. Built in the early-mid second century AD it may on the basis of evidence from finds have been associated with another hypocausted building. At present there is insufficient evidence to suggest its function but it may have been part of a substantial private house or bath house.

3.3.2 Houses and Workshops in the Core of the Settlement

At 9-13 Park Street some of the earliest buildings within Towcester were recorded to date to the mid first century AD (“C” on Figure 3). Truncated by subsequent activity on the site they are difficult to interpret but may well represent the earliest domestic buildings in the nascent Roman settlement developing along Watling Street. Though they have been suggested as having military parallels there is nothing in their construction that need suggest such an interpretation. A polygonal building on this site is probably a temple and is thus discussed further below.

Excavations in 1954 on the Sponne School site³¹ identified simple timber built rectilinear buildings constructed in the middle of the second century AD under and to the east of the later ramparts (Site “D” on Figure 3). Swept away by the construction of the towns defences these buildings may have been workshops or sheds behind buildings on a main frontage facing on to the Kings Sutton road to the south. In the early fourth century AD a pair of rectangular timber buildings were erected but soon replaced by a stone founded building, which continued into the late fourth century. Both phases appear to have been reasonably

³¹ Brown, A.E. & Alexander, A.J. (1982) Excavations at Towcester 1954: the Grammar School site. *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 17, 24-59

substantial houses of modest pretensions set back some 60m from the Kings Sutton road. Subsequent excavations in the same area in 1997³² discovered part of a probable timber round house dating to the later first century AD that appears to have been demolished by the early-middle second century. A second building surviving as robbed stone wall with a probable timber veranda dated to the middle years of the second century before its demise at about the time of the construction of the neighbouring defences. Seven post holes cutting the line of this building may mark a later timber building standing at any time between the late second and fourth centuries.

To the south-west along Alchester road in the Allens Yard area, slight rectilinear timber buildings of beam slot and post hole construction were built during the later first century AD ("E" on Figure 3). These were then largely replaced in stone during the course of the second century such that this stretch of the road was flanked by a string of buildings used as combined houses and workshops during the second and third centuries AD. These appear similar to the foundations of buildings noted in earlier work at the bottom of Meeting House Lane.

3.3.3 Houses and Workshops in the Northern Suburbs

North of the river Tove a series of evaluations close to the junction of the A5 and A43 have identified a northern suburb for the Roman town. Although mostly small scale trenches these excavations have identified sufficient evidence to suggest the likely form of buildings in this area. No complete building plans have been recovered but limited pre-emptive excavations in 1986³³ and 1988 during the construction of a petrol filling station³⁴ and trial trenching and geophysics south east of the main roundabout in 1990³⁵ both suggest that this area is characterised by stone founded strip buildings in a ribbon development close to Watling street from the second to fourth centuries. Areas of gravel and limestone hard standing found in both the 1990 excavations and subsequent work south of Mandalay House³⁶ may be all that remains of timber structures alongside these buildings. No buildings of first century date have been recorded within the limited areas assessed although plenty of late first - early second century material has been recorded.

3.3.4 Houses and workshops in the southern suburbs

Architectural evidence for housing and workshops from this side of the town is largely dependent on the results of large scale rescue work along the Alchester road from 1967 to 1978. The circumstances of this work and level of archaeological preservation were far from ideal but despite this a significant sequence of architectural development is known. Shortly after the road was first formalised (during late 1st to late second century AD) the only buildings were small timber round huts up to 5m in diameter, probably for agricultural usage.

During the late second to late third century AD, however, these seem from the somewhat fragmentary remains to have been replaced by a number of lightly framed post built timber and cob or unmortared stone buildings. Rectilinear, and seemingly aligned parallel to the road several of these are of uncertain function though they could have sufficed as housing. A

³² Northamptonshire Archaeology (2000) *Archaeological Excavation at Sponne School, Towcester, Northamptonshire, June-July 1997*

³³ Jackson, D.A. (1986) *Trial trenching on Towcester Bypass, 9th April 1986*

³⁴ Northamptonshire Archaeology (1990) *Towcester: Petrofina Garage watching Brief (SP68794941)*.

³⁵ Northamptonshire Archaeology (1990) *Archaeological evaluation at Towcester, Northants, 1990*.

³⁶ Northamptonshire Archaeology (1993) *An Archaeological evaluation at Mandalay House, Towcester, Northants, 1993*.

variant on this design was seen in a further four buildings that were constructed with unmortared stone walls and a possible superstructure of cob and stone. Possibly also housing of a simple form, the occupants of several of these buildings may also have been involved in iron smithing and possibly small scale pottery manufacture.

During the early to middle fourth century AD these buildings were also replaced by new traditions of timber building that were to continue in use until the end of the century. Woodfield³⁷ suggests these took two forms, although again their fragmentary survival makes confident ascription difficult. The first is thought to have taken the form of relatively simple D-shaped timber structures some 6 to 12m across, lying within enclosing drainage features. No structural evidence for these buildings survives other than earthen floors seemingly opening out onto the main road. Alongside these structures (and largely thought by Brown & Woodfield to succeed them) were the remains of rectangular timber buildings with internal rows of posts resting on pairs of stylobates.

3.4 COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

Evidence for craft production and the study of trade at Towcester is abundant though of variable quality. Towcester, having had more published excavations than any other roman small town in the county is comparatively well served with specialist reports on artefactual and ecofactual evidence to support study of its economic activity. This is though partly hampered by the early date of some of the main excavations and their uneven distribution focused as they are predominantly on the west and south west of the town.

The quantified assemblages from the core of the town indicate that in the second century at least nearly 50 percent of Towcester's pottery was of regional (>20km away) or imported origin. This figure is well above that found at contemporary rural sites and is high even by urban standards (c.f. Cooper forthcoming). Whilst, as everywhere in Britain, this proportion drops away significantly during the third and fourth centuries it strongly indicates the significance of the town as a focus for wider pottery supply and exchange, probably linked to trade in a wider range of largely archaeologically invisible agricultural products.

Analysis of the animal bone from the Park Street excavations indicates that sheep and pigs were largely reared for their meat whilst cattle seem to have primarily been for draft or secondary products such as milk or leather before being slaughtered. All the primary domesticated species were clearly butchered on or near to the Park Street site and as has been suggested by Maltby (REF) probably indicate the slaughter of animals driven live to town. Whether these were animals reared in the immediate hinterland by members of the town's community or from further afield by neighbouring agricultural farms are not possible to determine. The consumption of domestic fowl, geese and duck is also attested in Towcester and the recovery of hare from three of the excavations and roe deer from Alchester road indicates some limited consumption of hunted game from the second to fourth centuries.

Evidence of significant grain (or more likely flour) storage within the town comes from the beetle and seed assemblages from the Alchester road suburbs. A wide variety and significant

³⁷ Brown, A.E. & Woodfield, C. (1983) Excavations at Towcester, Northamptonshire: The Alchester Road Suburb. *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 18, 43-140.

number of grain pests were recorded from contexts associated with the fourth century buildings either side of the road.

Woodfield has suggested the presence of a leather working area within the south west quarter of the town on the basis of leather working waste recovered from the 'late moat' ³⁸ in this area. The context of this material is unknown to the author, however, and is not phased or dated by Woodfield. Small quantities of pieces of worked but unfinished antler objects and off cuts recorded in the Alchester Road suburbs (4th century contexts) and at the Sponne School site (also 4th century) suggest that this may have been part of a wider trade in the production of goods from secondary animal products. The spinning of textiles is only really attested from a small assemblage of associated artefacts largely of fourth century date along the Alchester road.

Iron working in different forms was evidently a significant activity within the town. At Allens Yard Woodfield notes furnaces, quenching tanks and hearths dating to the late first and second centuries AD. To the south west in the Alchester road suburb iron working was initially limited to smithing in the late second to third century but later was augmented by smelting too. Further evidence for iron working of indeterminate form in the northern suburb along Watling Street is cited by Woodfield.

Evidence for other forms of metalworking activity is limited but nevertheless potentially significant. A pit containing bronze smelting debris and crucibles under St Lawrences church alongside small quantities of bronze cast and trim recovered from the Alchester road suburb indicate limited bronze working activity in the third century. The discovery of chopped up lead pigs and smelted lead fragments also from the Alchester Road area strongly suggest the presence of lead or pewter working in the fourth century and in the light of this it is perhaps worth noting the presence of a surprisingly high number of pewter vessels and fragments from several locations across the town.

The analysis of monetary exchange can draw on one large and two very small published groups from Alchester Road (489 coins), the 1954 Sponne School excavations (9 coins) and the Park street excavations (26). Whilst clearly an unbalanced sample in both numbers and location, together they constitute a significant and valuable assemblage for the comparative analysis of monetary activity. At present no such wider synthesis has been attempted but an initial evaluation suggests that within a pattern of coin discard comparable to smaller urban foci elsewhere there are interesting anomalies within the Towcester group that would reward further study.

3.5 RELIGIOUS, RITUAL & FUNERARY

3.5.1 Temples and Shrines

The excavations and other chance discoveries at Towcester provide strong indications of at least one if not more temples or shrines within the town. None of the likely sites have been fully investigated and thus we are still left with somewhat tantalising or ambiguous evidence. probably the clearest evidence, however, comes from the Park Street excavations near the centre of the Roman town. Here, close to the junction between Watling Street and the

³⁸ Woodfield, C. (1995) *op cit* 30

Alchester Road, Lambrick noted the fragmentary remains of what appears to have been a polygonal (probably pentagonal) stone founded temple dating from the later first century AD (“1” on Figure 3). This building though, had been replaced by the late second century and evidence for ritual or religious foci in Towcester in the later Roman period needs to be looked for elsewhere.

The as yet unpublished excavations in Allens Yard a short distance to the south west along the Alchester Road may have discovered another rather different religious focus. Here the discovery of a substantial mortared conduit 0.7m wide and 1.4m high was associated with an oval shaped and possibly originally stone lined cistern (“2” on Figure 3). Woodfield has speculated that this may have been to supply a bath house in the building found in the south east corner of the site (see Possible Public Buildings above). Whilst eminently possible it is equally possible that the site was associated with water from a nearby spring and that the features we find are part of a complex associated with a temple. If so it too was replaced in the second century but the centre of the site becoming or reverting back to a marsh or shallow pool. The latter may well have continued to have acted as a small shrine or religious focus given the highly unusual finds groups (including a mirror) and cattle bones found deposited in it.

Other possible temples or shrines may have existed in a further two locations. The first, close to Watling Street just inside the northern defences of the town indicated by a short length of curved walling and associated stone floor that may have been part of a circular building predating the defences (“3” on Figure 3). In the absence of other evidence, however its interpretation remains open to question. The second, lies outside the defended area to the south west along Alchester Road. Here the substantial mortared foundations of a further building were observed in the 1960s to the west of the Alchester Road just south of the point at which it crossed Silverstone Brook. Though again a number of possibilities exist for its function the presence of miniature votive axes suggest that it may have been associated with ritual activity close to the stream.

3.5.2 Burial & Cemeteries

Literally hundreds of burials have been noted from many locations across the town. Unfortunately, most are either poorly or completely undocumented in detail and so cannot be interpreted with confidence. Despite this there are clearly areas around the outskirts of the town that were foci for burial if not necessarily formal cemeteries of the kind excavated at Ashton and elsewhere.

North of the town across the Tove Woodfield suggests the presence of a northern cemetery running broadly from the old railway station to Elm Lodge. Roman inhumations were recorded to the west of Watling Street in 1975 during construction at SP 6877 4935³⁹ but none have been found in trial trenching anywhere along the eastern side of A5 in 1986 or 1990s. This recent work and the general nature of the burials that have been recovered suggests these are perhaps more likely to be small groups of boundary burials.

The discovery and intermittent recording of skeletons alongside the modern Brackley Road in the early part of the twentieth century would seem to indicate the presence of a possible cemetery outside the town to the west. Little opportunity has arisen, however, to check this

³⁹ RCHME (1982) 154

area in recent years under modern excavation conditions and so again the location and extent of any such locus is uncertain.

More reliably recorded evidence for burial comes from sites either side of Watling Street to the south of the Roman defences. 28 inhumations and 1 unurned cremation were recorded in evaluations to the south of Richmond Road. The majority of these were located in separate plots some 30m south of the defences and 60m back from the line of Watling Street. Again it is debatable as to whether this group, scattered and associated with a number of separate bounded plots as it is, can be considered a cemetery in the formal sense. Nevertheless, further inhumation burials recorded on the TMT site some 60-100m to the east of Watling Street with three and possibly four burials noted by Windell may well represent further such disposal of the dead in the damp low-lying land south of the town between the defended area and Silverstone Brook. If so it would appear that the various small seemingly agricultural plots of this area were at least commonly used as burial ground.

3.6 LAND USE

The location of the town at Towcester within the confluence of the Tove and Silverstone Brook combined with the survival of pockets of deeply buried and sometimes waterlogged deposits suggests that the potential for study of the immediate environment or land use strategies in its vicinity is good. Unfortunately the early of several of the key excavations combined with the small scale evaluation based nature of subsequent work mean that few paleoenvironmental analyses have been carried out.

The only major published report is from the Alchester road suburb⁴⁰ and provides a useful summary of local environmental conditions in the middle to later Roman to the south west of the town close to Silverstone Brook. Together they predominantly suggest locally damp conditions mostly associated with human domestic, storage and stock stalling environments. There was little evidence for nearby cultivation but rather species of open grassland that may have been introduced to the site as hay.

The numerous small ditched plots to the south and east of the town may indicate that some arable cultivation may have taken place close to the town. One of these south of Meeting Lane included a malting oven but paleoenvironmental analysis here proved largely unfruitful due to the fluctuating water table and the alkalinity of the soil. In the absence of such supporting botanical evidence, it is difficult to suggest what this may indicate other than that the processing and consumption of arable agricultural produce may have been an important if not primary function of the settlement.

Within the core of the town virtually nothing is known although the development of significant areas of 'dark earth' deposits from a number of the more deeply buried sites in the south-western quarter may suggest that from the third century onwards parts of the town were used for horticultural activity.

The absence of published environmental reports as part of other excavation or evaluation on the flood plain of the Tove to the east and north of the town prevents any assessment of the extent, date and location of former paleochannels and alluvium. Whilst evaluation of these areas may provide valuable palaeoenvironmental samples the conditions encountered to the

⁴⁰ Brown, A.E. & Woodfield, C. (1983)

south of Meeting Lane may suggest that unless permanently waterlogged or carbonised deposits are found that preservation may not always be good.

B MEDIEVAL & POST-MEDIEVAL

1.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Towcester was the centre of a late Saxon royal estate and this administrative function persisted into the medieval period when it served as head of the hundred. The Domesday entry recorded that Towcester was held by the king and that it comprised 7½ hides, with land for 22 ploughs. Only 12 ploughs were accounted for in 1086: two ploughs which were held in demesne, and ten ploughs which were held by 15 villeins. There were 12 acres of meadow, and a wood two leagues long and one league wide.⁴¹ This large entry undoubtedly included the subsidiary hamlets known from the medieval period: Wood Burcote, Caldcot, Abthorpe, Foscot, together with Handley (?) which was part of Whittlebury Forest, and possibly a small fee in Silverstone which was dependent upon Towcester in the 13th century.⁴²

Towcester comprised the main (or Royal) manor and the subsidiary manor known in the medieval period as the Nether (later Priors) Manor. In 1086 the king held Towcester, but subsequently granted the manor to the St Hilary family, possibly by 1135. It passed through marriage to the earl of Arundel, and was subsequently acquired by the de Munchensi family through the marriage of Arundel's daughter to William de Munchensi in 1204. The de Munchensis retained control throughout the 13th century, until the death of Dionisia de Munchensi in 1313 when the manor passed to her cousin the earl of Pembroke, who was certified lord of Towcester in 1315. From him it passed to the Hastings family, and in 1389, when John Hastings was killed and the earldom of Pembroke terminated, Towcester went to the heir general Reginald de Grey, Baron Grey of Ruthin. Towcester was purchased from the earl of Kent by Sir Richard Empson, from whom it was subsequently purchased by Richard Fermor in the early 16th century. The link with the Fermor Hesketh family persists to the present day. In 1086 Thomas the Sokeman, held half a hide and the fifth part of half a hide, in all probability a small manor granted to the abbey of Fontanelle by William the Conqueror. The property was later exchanged with Bradenstoke Priory who held the fee until 1484 when it was sold to John Ashby and William Colyngton. In 1501, Ashby's son John sold the Nether Manor to Richard Empson and by 1530 it was held by the Fermor family under whom it was merged with the main manor.

Physical evidence for a pre-Conquest church at Towcester is largely circumstantial. Woodfield suggests that the carved stone cross-shaft(?), dated to 10th – 11th century, built into St Lawrence church tower, indicates that a Saxon minster stood in this area⁴³. Soon after the Norman Conquest, William the Conqueror granted the advowson of the church at Towcester to Fontanelle Abbey. A history of the parish church has been published by the Reverend James Atwell, and is therefore only briefly summarised here⁴⁴. By 1200, a substantial Late

⁴¹ *VCH Northants*, I, 305.

⁴² *Luffield Priory Charters*, Part I, ed. G.R. Elvey, published jointly by Buckinghamshire Record Office and Northamptonshire Record Office, 22 (1968), xvi.

⁴³ P Woodfield, 'The Dark Ages and the Anglo-Saxon Period' *Towcester The Story of an English Country Town* ed J Sunderland and M Webb, 1995 p58

⁴⁴ J Atwell, 'St Lawrence Church, Towcester' *Towcester The Story of an English Country Town* ed J Sunderland and M Webb, 1995 pp75-81.

Norman 'Transitional' church had been built to replace the pre-Conquest church. A south aisle and side chapel were added in the early 13th century. The chancel was extended in the 14th century and the north aisle and side chapel added to balance the south aisle. The Chantry Chapel was added to the parish church at the request of William Sponne, Rector of Towcester and Archdeacon of Norwich, in 1451. Following this, the nave arcades were rebuilt and the tower was constructed in the later 15th century.

A motte and bailey castle was built on the north-eastern side of Towcester, near to the junction of Watling Street and the new road laid out between the *burhs* of Oxford and Northampton, a site now known as Bury Mount. The precise date for its construction is not known but a date soon after the Conquest, is most likely. Its purpose would have been to serve as administrative centre of the royal estate and to control the river crossing and the two important routes of communication. The castle comprised a substantial earth mound, or *motte*, with an outer court or bailey to the south, enclosed by a moat. A second bailey possibly lay to the north of the motte, although limited excavation found little evidence for medieval activity in this area.⁴⁵ The moat has now been backfilled and only the earthen motte remains, albeit much reduced from its original height⁴⁶. The close relationship of the motte to the church raises the possibility that the castle may have been deliberately built on the site of an Anglo-Saxon royal or comital Court.⁴⁷ Woodfield suggests that the motte lies over, or near, the east gate through the Roman defences.⁴⁸ There is no evidence that the castle was ever enlarged or strengthened, and it has been suggested that it fulfilled its defensive function for only a century or so, before slowly falling into disrepair.⁴⁹ The buildings within the southern bailey of the castle nevertheless continued to function as the manorial centre throughout the medieval period. In the 14th century the site of the manor is described as containing a hall with a chamber, a kitchen with a small stable annexe and ancillary buildings. Within the manor was a moat (*mota*), and within the moat a motte (*mons turr*).⁵⁰ By the late 15th century the *mottehyll* was described as in decay⁵¹.

As a royal and hundredal manor Towcester might have been expected to have had a market at an early date, but the first reference to a market at Towcester, dates from c.1220.⁵² However, in 1275, at the Inquiry into the burgesses of Northampton's objections against seven markets which infringed the burgesses' claim to exclusivity within a radius of ten leagues, it was stated that the date of the establishment of the market at Towcester and the authority for its foundation were unknown. This would suggest that the market was indeed an ancient prescriptive one, in existence before formal market grants were required.⁵³ The market area recorded on the earliest maps of the 19th century consisted only of a widened part of the main street in the central part of the town. It has been suggested that the market area occupied the

⁴⁵ M Audouy, 'Site D, Bury Mount 1984' in C S Woodfield 'The Defences of Towcester' *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 24, 1992, pp25-29.

⁴⁶ The motte was used as a gun emplacement during the Civil War and cottages were built into the south side of the motte in the early 19th century.

⁴⁷ P C Courtney, 'Saxon and Medieval Leicester: the making of an urban landscape' *Trans. Leics. Archaeology and History Society*, 72, pp 110-145, 1988.

⁴⁸ C S Woodfield, 'The Defences of Towcester, Northamptonshire' *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 24, 13-66.

⁴⁹ P Woodfield, 'Medieval Towcester' *Towcester The Story of an English Country Town* ed J Sunderland and M Webb, 1995 p66.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p67

⁵¹ PRO DL43/14/3

⁵² *Luffield Charters*, I, 210, 211.

⁵³ P. Goodfellow, 'Medieval Markets in Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 7 (1987-8?), 312.

space between the castle and Watling Street in the early medieval period, as a castle gate was a typical market location. There is no evidence for any building connected with the market in the medieval period, nor for a market cross. Similarly, no evidence for the infilling of this suggested early market place has been found.

In October 1318, Aymer de Valence was granted an annual fair at his manor of Towcester, to be held on the vigil, feast and morrow of the Annunciation (25 March).⁵⁴ By 1330, the date of the fair had been changed to coincide with the feast day of the parish church, the feast of St Laurence (10 August).⁵⁵ In 1544, Henry VIII granted the inhabitants of Towcester two fairs, one on the feast of St Philip and St James (1 May), and one on the feast of St Luke (18 October). In 1684 Charles II granted Sir William Fermor and his heirs a weekly Tuesday market and three yearly fairs; one on the 23 September instead of a certain fair lately held on the feast of St Laurence, one on Shrove Tuesday, and one on 22 March.

Towcester was not a medieval borough and its inhabitants had no powers of self-government. There are, however, references to burgages in the medieval town, dating from 1326 onwards and many of the long and narrow plots along Watling Street, with the principal building on the street frontage, are typical 'burgage plots'. A certain ambiguity exists for the status of the burgage tenements, which were sometimes termed '*messuage burgage*' or '*messuage/tenement or burgage*', while other properties were sometimes classified as burgages and sometimes not⁵⁶. This suggests that the privileges once appertaining to the burgage tenements had been lost, together with any legal significance. No definite evidence for burgage plots has yet been excavated. Medieval building remains were reportedly observed along Meeting Lane (Ref?) and in 1991, medieval stone wall footings were uncovered in the adjacent area.⁵⁷ Stray pits, presumably associated with occupation on the Watling Street frontage have been recorded within the medieval core of the town.⁵⁸ More extensive remains of this period were uncovered along the west side of Watling Street South. Boundary ditches, backfilled rubbish pits, dump deposits of domestic refuse and cess, all suggest activity to the rear of a burgage plot. The discovery of a mortar mixing pit suggests construction or repairs to a stone building fronting onto the street.⁵⁹ The remains of a medieval road, possibly linking Watling Street and the deserted medieval village at Easton Neston were also uncovered in this area. Further domestic deposits, associated with tenements fronting Watling Street were encountered immediately to the north.⁶⁰ This southern suburb of the medieval town was known as Nether End and formed part of the NetherManor.

The leper hospital of St Leonard, probably located on the north side of the north bridge, was in existence by 1200. Unlike many leper hospitals which were converted to ordinary infirmaries following the decline of leprosy in the late medieval period, it appears to have

⁵⁴ *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, III, 391.

⁵⁵ Goodfellow, 'Medieval markets in Northamptonshire', 317, 322.

⁵⁶ NRO, FH 290, 390, 461, 466, 467, 471, 489, 498, 500, 509, 539, 639, 659, 709b, 710.

⁵⁷ S Steadman and M Shaw, *Archaeological Evaluation at Meeting Lane, Towcester*, Northamptonshire Archaeology Unpublished Client Report. 1991

⁵⁸ J Prentice, *An Archaeological Evaluation at 163-165 Watling Street, Towcester, Northamptonshire*, Northamptonshire Archaeology Unpublished Client Report, 1992; C Woodfield and R Atkins, 'Archaeological Excavation at Sponne School, Towcester, Northamptonshire' *Northamptonshire Archaeology* forthcoming.

⁵⁹ A Thomas *Towcester Racing Stables, Towcester, Northamptonshire. Archaeological Evaluation*. Cotswolds Archaeological Trust, Report Number 97454, 1997.

⁶⁰ A Barber, *Land to the rear of 6 and 8 Watling Street, Towcester, Northamptonshire. Archaeological Evaluation*. Cotswolds Archaeological Trust, 1997.

gone out of use by the mid 15th century. The robbed out remains of a substantial medieval wall and associated surfaces uncovered to the south of the River, may represent the site of the former leper hospital⁶¹.

A schoolmaster is first recorded in Towcester in 1548 but it seems likely that there had been a schoolmaster in post from as early as 1451. William Sponne, archdeacon of Norfolk and rector of Towcester, left instructions in his will for the founding of a chantry chapel within the parish church of St Laurence. Although there was no mention of a school in the deeds of foundation of the chantry, established in 1451, a century later the commissioners of Henry VIII reported that Sponne's Chantry had been founded to maintain two priests, '*... one to preach the word of God and the other to keep a grammar school*'. In 1552 the chantry house, with which Sponne's chantry had been endowed, was acquired by the feoffees of the Tabard charity, and used as a school. A map of Sponne's Charity Estate made in 1820 depicted the School House and garden on the north side of Church Lane stretching from Moat Lane to Watling Street.⁶² A new school was erected on a new site in Brackley Road in 1890, following two decades of closure. The chantry house was sold and completely demolished, with the exception of one wall and a doorway, and the stones were used in a new building erected on an adjacent site.⁶³

The 'fraternity and gylde of Our Lady and St George' was named in a will made in 1519, and is mentioned in other early 16th century documents.⁶⁴ No evidence survives for the guild's activities.

2.0 TOPOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

The absence of relevant documents makes it impossible to reconstruct the topographical development of Towcester with any certainty. No detailed rentals and surveys survive from the medieval period and the earliest maps of the town date only from the first half of the 19th century. Moreover, these maps lack schedules.

The plan form of medieval Towcester, as indicated by the surviving documents, appears to have been relatively simple. The only named streets and lanes are: Watling Street, Park Lane (1325), Horsmylne Lane (1386), Mill Lane (1449), Church Lane (1451), and 'chirche path leading to the church' in 1475. There is mention of the 'lane leading towards the lord's mill' in 1449, and to the 'lane leading towards the lord's oven' in 1462.⁶⁵ The plan form may have developed in the late Saxon or early medieval period, possibly in association with the new road which had been laid out to link the burhs of Oxford and Northampton. This road entered Towcester from the west, crossed the market place and continued on to Northampton across the mill-race through Easton Neston and Hulcote, where a green lane known as the 'Old

⁶¹ R Atkins, *Watling Street, Towcester, Flood Alleviation Scheme, Archaeological Evaluation*, Northamptonshire Archaeology Unpublished Client Report, 2001.

⁶² NRO, TC 101a. The School Close, held by the same tenant, and just over one acre in size, lay to the west of the town, beyond the turnpike gate and adjoining the road to Brackley. (Check)

⁶³ *VCH Northants*, II, 229.

⁶⁴ Serjeantson and Longden, 'Parish Churches of Northamptonshire', 203.

⁶⁵ NRO, FH, 185, 352, 581, 582, 639, 666; *CPR* for 1451: check. NB Place-Name volume (94) cites only Church Lane, Mill Lane and Park Lane (1404 given as 1st reference to Park Lane).

Road' was marked on the OS 6" map. 'Le Portwey' of Northampton was given as a boundary of an acre in the north field of Easton Neston in 1296.⁶⁶ The medieval town focused on the castle, the church and the market place but Park Lane was a fundamental element in the layout of the medieval town. In the 15th century Brackley Way seems to have been beyond the built-up area.⁶⁷

Riden has found little sign of '*planning*' in the layout of the plots on either side of Watling Street and concludes that no part of Towcester shows any indication of being a medieval '*new town*', nor even of being an expanded town, as was Brackley. He writes: '*There is little evidence that either the population or the built-up area of Towcester expanded or shrank to any extent between the end of the Middle Ages and the early 20th century*'. The only major change to the layout of the town before the 19th century appears to have been the realignment of the road from Northampton. He concludes that it is probably safe to accept the map of 1848 and the 1882 OS map as a guide to the size and shape of the medieval built-up area. This would mean that on Watling Street the main settlement extended as far as the most southerly of the three bridges which carry the main road over the Tove. Both sides of the main road between the bridge over the stream near Vernon Road and the bridge over Silverstone Brook were fully built up in the 19th century and '*presumably had been since the Middle Ages*'. To the north of the Brackley Road junction the 19th century built-up area extended a further 175 yards, as far as the police station which occupies a site first developed in 1852.⁶⁸

Riden concludes: '*Both in the Middle Ages and later Towcester was for the most part a one-street town, with most of its principal houses standing on one side or the other of Watling Street. The lanes which branched off Watling Street either had no building on them or only secondary development at the back end of plots fronting Watling Street. The one exception to this seems to have been Park Street, the southern end of the triangle already mentioned on the west side of Watling Street. On the opposite side of the road the plots run back to a boundary formed by Sponne Yard, behind 189-191 Watling Street, and gradually increase in depth from a few yards at the corner of Watling Street to about 90 yards by the time one reaches the junction with Brackley Road, which seems to be the western edge of a regular pattern of plots. Beyond this junction, Brackley Road (which in the 19th century was known as Park Lane as far as the edge of the built-up area) may not have been developed at all until the early 19th century, since the plots on which the existing houses stand look as though they have been cut piecemeal from adjoining fields.*' It was along Brackley Road that most of the limited amount of 19th-century building on new sites took place.⁶⁹

However the plan form of the settlement may indeed show areas of medieval expansion. The most significant might be the Nether End, although it is possible that it was the site of the subsidiary manor recorded in Domesday Book and occupation may therefore have originated in the pre-Conquest period. The first surviving reference to the Nether End dates only from 1381, but the properties mentioned in that document were already there in 1369, and perhaps in 1296.⁷⁰ In the 13th century tenements in the lower part of Towcester were described as

⁶⁶ NRO, FH 137.

⁶⁷ NRO, FH 283, 383, 471.

⁶⁸ Riden and Webb, *Towcester Tenements*, 9, 10, 12-13.

⁶⁹ Riden and Webb, *Towcester Tenements*, 13.

⁷⁰ NRO, FH 135, 317, 339.

extending from Watling Street to the Tove Brook, or from Watling Street to the watercourse, where there was evidently much meadow land. At least part of the roadside frontage appears to have been occupied by houses and their adjacent curtilages; the deeds carefully recorded provision for access to the meadows behind. By 1336 a lane ran from Watling Street towards the meadow held by Geoffrey Hardyng. This was known as Hardyngs Lane in 1413.⁷¹ In 1506 there is mention of a tenement 'between the waters' in the Nether End, extending to 'Cuttulforth'. This could be the first reference to tenements seen in the early 19th century lying to the east of those fronting Watling Street. Alternatively, the tenement could have been located on the main road between Silverstone Brook and the stream to the south.⁷² In c. 1265-75 a messuage with toft, croft and garden was described as lying between Watling Street and the road leading to Burcote and the Heathenwell. This has been interpreted as defining the southern limit of medieval development.⁷³ In 1468 Stephen at Mylle held a tenement and two cottages at the end of the highway towards London.⁷⁴ Bradenstoke priory owned the Nether Manor until 1530. An account roll for this Towcester property survives, and the customary tenants are named. Several names are familiar from the deeds discussed above, but the document gives no details which shed further light on craft activities in the Nether End.⁷⁵

Tenements in 'le Spetull ende' are recorded in 1498, and they perhaps represent expansion of the town to the north.⁷⁶ The leper hospital would have been built beyond the main area of habitation, but its closure at some stage before the 1440s enabled Towcester to expand in this direction. The process of urban expansion is also reflected, as in so many other towns, by the existence of an area of tenements called 'Le Newland'. In 1433 a messuage there was described as extending from Watling Street to 'le Comyn Balke below the town'. This location cannot be identified with certainty, but see discussion below in section

Another indication of changes in the town plan in the medieval period is a reference dating from 1330 to 'the old street of Towcester'. The property in question was a cellar with loft above, and it perhaps lay in an area of intense development on the west side of Watling Street, with 'le Personsleyes' to the west.⁷⁷ Properties on the west side of Watling Street were sometimes described as extending back to the water course or to the Tove Brook and to meadow land. One or two butchers are known to have held land here.⁷⁸ In later centuries the rich flood ground to the east of Towcester was used as sheep pasture. In 1748 the liberty granted to the Butchers' shops allowed each shop to have ten sheep in Church Meadow.⁷⁹

⁷¹ NRO, FH 135, 232, 234, 317, 454.

⁷² NRO, FH 794.

⁷³ *Luffield Charters*, I, no. 199.

⁷⁴ *Luffield Charters*, II, no. 766.

⁷⁵ BRO, xxxx (still need reference and date for this).

⁷⁶ NRO, FH 765.

⁷⁷ NRO, FH 216.

⁷⁸ NRO, FH 97, 135, 232, 234, 317. In the late 13th century Galfr. Atwell (?ancestor of the Northampton butchers William and Edward Atwell) granted messuage extending from his meadow to Watling Street to Henry son of Simon the butcher (FH 97). In 1369 Thomas Saundres of Towcester was granted a messuage extending from Watling Street to the Tove Brook; in 1381 he left the goods and chattels in it to his son Richard. It would seem likely that Richard was the Richard Saundres of Oxon' butcher who in 1429 was named as the former owner of lands and tenements in Towcester granted to the butcher Richard Patteshill of Towcester (FH 317, 339, 503).

⁷⁹ NRO, YZ/4290 (reference in Moss, 'Community of Towcester', 20).

3.0 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

3.1 MANORIAL

3.1.1 Manors

The manorial organisation of Towcester appears to have been relatively straightforward, consisting as it did of the main manor and the subsidiary manor known in the medieval period as the Nether (later Priors) Manor.

3.1.1.1 The Royal Manor

In 1086 the king held Towcester, but the manor was subsequently granted away, possibly by 1135, to the St Hilary family. It passed through marriage to the earl of Arundel, who was named as the holder of seven hides and four small virgates at Towcester in the (?mid to late) 12th century Northamptonshire Survey.⁸⁰ The de Munchensi family acquired the manor through the marriage of Arundel's daughter to William de Munchensi in 1204; and they retained control throughout the 13th century, apart from some periods of confiscation. Dionisia de Munchensi married Hugh de Vere, a younger son of the earl of Oxford, and on her death in 1313 the manor passed to her cousin Aymer de Valence, earl of Pembroke, who was certified lord of Towcester in 1315. From him it passed to the Hastings family, and in 1389, when John Hastings was killed and the earldom of Pembroke terminated, Towcester went to the heir general Reginald de Grey, Baron Grey of Ruthin. His great great grandson Richard earl of Kent alienated the disposable estates and Towcester was purchased by Sir Richard Empson, from whom it was purchased by Richard Fermor in the early 16th century. The link with the Fermor Hesketh family has lasted to the present day.⁸¹

3.1.1.2 Nether Manor

In 1086, in addition to the royal manor at Towcester, there was mention of the holding of Thomas the Sokeman, which consisted of half a hide and the fifth part of half a hide, for which he rendered five shillings a year. In the Northamptonshire Survey, Wybert atte church (*ad ecclesiam*) held six small virgates of the fee of St Fontanelle. It has been suggested that this must have been the holding of Thomas the Sokeman, because half a hide and one tenth of a hide equate exactly to six small virgates. It would seem likely, therefore, that William the Conqueror had granted this small manor to the abbey of Fontanelle, in addition to the advowson of Towcester church. Indeed, the name '*ad ecclesiam*' may perhaps signify 'belonging to the church'.⁸² The property was later exchanged with Bradenstoke Priory who held the fee until 1484 when it was sold to John Ashby and William Colyngton. In 1501 John Ashby, son and heir of John Ashby, sold the Nether Manor to Richard Empson ; by 1530 it was held by the Fermor family under whom it was merged in the main manor.⁸³

The manor maintained a court, to which its tenants owed suit, but no location is known for a manor house serving the Nether Manor. Presumably it lay in the Nether End of Towcester, the area of ribbon development along Watling Street to the south of the Silverstone Brook, where those manorial tenements which have been identified were located.⁸⁴ The first specific

⁸⁰ *VCH Northants*, I, 363; *Luffield Charters*, xvi.

⁸¹ Bridges, *History of Northamptonshire*, I, 272-4; Baker, *History of Northamptonshire*, II, 312-16; J. Sunderland and M. Webb, eds., *Towcester: The Story of an English Country Town*, Towcester Local History Society (1995), 64-6. NB Baker (316) states that the earl of Kent was the great great grandson of Grey; Towcester book (65) says he was the great grandson.

⁸² *VCH Northants*, I, 373.

⁸³ Baker, *History of Northamptonshire*, II, 316-17; NRO, FH 780.

⁸⁴ *Luffield Charters*, 199, 766 (check); NRO, FH 183, 650, 657.

reference to ‘Netherende’ dates from 1381, but the messuages and tenements of that property transaction were already there in 1369, and perhaps in 1296.⁸⁵ In a deed of c.1265-75 a messuage with toft, croft and garden was described as lying in length from Watling Street on the south and on the west between the road leading to Burcote and the Heathenwell; it has been suggested that this defined the southern limit of medieval development.⁸⁶ Indeed, if the manor had been granted to Fontanelle Abbey by William I and if it were the holding recorded in Domesday, then occupation in the Nether End may have originated in the pre-Conquest period. The area could have witnessed medieval expansion. In 1498 a tenement in Towcester was described as lying ‘between the waters in the Netherend’ and extending to Cuttulforth. This could represent the first reference to tenements seen in the early 19th century lying to the east of those fronting Watling Street.⁸⁷

3.1.2 Manorial Appurtenances

3.1.2.1 Castle

A motte and bailey castle was built on the north-eastern side of Towcester on a site which rises gently from the River Tove. The date of its construction is not known but it is thought to be either the later 11th century or the early 12th century. This would make it the work of the Crown. Its purpose would have been to serve as administrative centre of the royal estate and to control the road from Oxford to Northampton, which then followed the line of Church Lane and crossed the Tove near the corn mill. It then continued through Easton Neston and Hulcote, where a green lane is still called the ‘Old Road’ (OS 6”), towards Northampton.⁸⁸ This was not a major line of Roman communication and it is possible that a new road linking the burhs of Oxford and Northampton was laid out in the first half of the 10th century. The location of the royal manor at Towcester in the pre-Conquest period is problematical and the Norman castle need not have been built on an existing manorial site. There is a possibility, however, that the Saxon manor house had occupied the same strategic location near the junction of Watling Street and the road between Oxford and Northampton, in order to control the river crossing and the two important routes of communication. There is no evidence that the castle was ever enlarged or strengthened, and it has been suggested that it fulfilled its defensive function for only a century or so, before slowly falling into disrepair.⁸⁹

The buildings within the southern bailey of the castle nevertheless continued to function as the manorial centre throughout the medieval period. In 1280-90 the ‘*court of the lord of Towcester*’ was said to lie behind tenements fronting onto Watling Street; and in 1448-9 a tenement was described as lying ‘*on the corner opposite the rector’s door between the tenement once of Mr William Sponne on the north, and the lane towards the ‘convulendum’ (presumably a mis-reading of molendinum) of the lord on the south, Watling Street on the west and the manor gate of Towcester on the east....*’. This tenement was therefore located just to the north of Church Lane and the manor accordingly lay between the

⁸⁵ NRO, FH 135, 145, 230, 317, 339. In 1369 (FH 317) the messuage was described as lying between two tenements and extending from Watling Street to the Tove brook.

⁸⁶ *Luffield Charters*, 199 (in *longum de Watlingstrete in parte australi et occidentali inter viam que ducit versus Borkot’ et le Hethenwelle*).

⁸⁷ NRO, FH 766, 794.

⁸⁸ RCHME, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northampton; volume IV: Archaeological Sites in South-West Northamptonshire* (London, 1982), 158. Note that ‘le Portwey of Northampton’ was listed as a boundary of the north field of Easton Neston in 1296 (FH 137); and ‘Portwey’ was a bound of lands in the field of Stoke Bruerne in 1388 (FH 358).

⁸⁹ Sunderland and Webb, *Towcester*, 66.

motte and the church. The manor gate evidently lay in what is now Moat Lane, and perhaps occupied the same site as the original castle gate, which would have faced directly onto the market place prior to later medieval infilling.⁹⁰

Among the endowments of Sponne's chantry which had been established by letters patent dated 17 November 1448 was a messuage with one end abutting Church Lane and the other lying towards 'le courteyerd'.⁹¹ Richard Ters held a parcel of the lord's court next to the rectory at a yearly rent of 12 pence. The same rent was paid by John Josep for the remainder of the court.⁹² A messuage and toft called 'Court burn and Courtyard' were sold in 1549. They lay next to the river running to the lord's mill and included a garden known as 'Berymothyll', south of which was a piece of the lord's land called 'Courtstable'. A second bailey possibly lay to the north of the motte where a large square shaped plot of land was owned in the 19th century by the manorial lord. The existence of a bailey in this area may explain the reduction in the length of the tenement plots fronting Watling Street in this part of the town. This area may have been the orchard close of 1½ acres recorded in the manorial extent of March 1392, and the 'Beryorchard' listed in 1549.⁹³

In 1392 the site of the manor contained a hall with a chamber at its southern end(?) (*in capite australi*) roofed with 'sklet', a thatched chamber at the end of the hall, and a thatched kitchen with a small stable annexed. Two large barns were described as *distantes*; there was an oxhouse with stable and carthouse under one roof, a sheepfold for 200 sheep with their lambs, and a dovecote. Within the manor was a moat (*mota*), and within this a motte *mons turr*. This mound had evidently been used as pasture but that year had no value. In 1467-8 the site of the manor was farmed for 25s 4d; the 'motehyll' was in the lord's hands and listed among the rents in decay.⁹⁴ In 1609 the Berry Mounte Hille was among the pieces of land rented by Michael Weste. In November 1643 the defensive works ordered by Prince Rupert involved the levelling of the mount for use as a gun emplacement, with the river diverted along the old Roman ditch as a moat.⁹⁵ A rental of 1720 named William Clarke as tenant of a messuage, garden and orchard called Berrymount Hill, together with land in the fields.⁹⁶ It was said to have been landscaped in the 18th century. In 1791 Bridges gave the dimensions as 102 feet in diameter and 24 feet in height, and described it as surrounded by a much narrowed moat supplied with water from the mill leat. In the early 19th century a building is said to have been built on the side of the motte, while more recently the moat has been completely infilled.⁹⁷ Today, only the castle motte survives as a distinctive feature.

3.1.2.2 Water Mill

Two mills were listed in the manorial extent of 1392, one a water mill and the other a horse mill; both were at farm and valued at £8. In 1467-8 the mills (no details given) were farmed

⁹⁰ *Luffield Priory Charters*, 197 (... *extendit se a curie domini*); NRO, FH 582. The original of this deed needs to be checked to see if 'convulendum' can be re-interpreted, and also to verify the bounds. The calendar of the FH deeds in NRO gives 'Watling Street on east and manor gate on west'.

⁹¹ *VCH Northants*, ii, 225 (quoting *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1446-52*, 455).

⁹² BRO, ST 127.

⁹³ PRO, DL 43/14/3, fol. 47d; NRO, FH 865.

⁹⁴ *The Grey of Ruthin Valor*, ed. R.I. Jack, Sydney University Press (1965), 66-9.

⁹⁵ *Northamptonshire Notes and Queries*, III (1890), 471; A.E. Brown and J.A. Alexander, 'Excavations at Towcester 1954: the Grammar School Site', *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, 17 (1982), 31-2.

⁹⁶ BRO, ST 127.

⁹⁷ Bridges; SNAS Survey, p. 37.

for £8 a year; 20 shillings had been spent on their repair.⁹⁸ The tenants of the Nether (Prior's) Manor were obliged to grind their corn at the Cotill' Mill, which stood near to Cuttleford and Cuttlebridge where Watling Street crosses the Silverstone Brook.⁹⁹

North Mill

In 1086 there was a mill at Towcester which rendered 13s 4d a year.¹⁰⁰ This may have been the North Mill which was certainly in existence before 1173 when Roger de Clare, lord of the manor, granted it to the Knights Templars as parcel of their preceptory at Dingley. It later passed with all the property of that order to the Hospital of St John.¹⁰¹ By the early 16th century the North Mill was at least partly in private hands, for in 1512 Robert Wale of Northampton granted half his mill in Towcester called the North mill to a local townsman.¹⁰² At the view of frankpledge held in March 1542 two millers were in trouble for taking excessive toll. The miller who held the king's mill called 'le Churche mylnes' was fined one shilling; the miller who held the mill called 'le North mylne' was fined sixpence.¹⁰³ The North Mill had passed to the Crown after the Dissolution, and in 1574 it was granted to Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester. A rental of the manor of Towcester drawn up in 1609 recorded only the North Mill, for which £5 a year was received. Presumably the Church Mill was held by Sir George Fermor, then lord of the manor.¹⁰⁴

An indication of the location of the North Mill is provided by a deed of 1285-6, in which two boundaries of an acre in Towcester's field were given as 'the court of the hospital' and 'the little ditch of Mulnewey'.¹⁰⁵ The hospital stood 'at the end of Towcester', next to the North Bridge.¹⁰⁶

Church Mill

The earliest reference to Church Mill discovered to date is from 1542. The name perhaps derives from the mill's location adjacent to a meadow called Churchmede. This meadow belonged to the manorial lord and adjoined the close known in 1549 as Beryorchard and which was near to the ditch and water running to the lord's mill.¹⁰⁷ This ditch had perhaps been dug in the early 14th century. In 1317 a townsman had granted Aymer de Valence, lord of the manor, a cut 18 feet wide across his land, taking water to the lord's mill, recently renewed, and to its fishery. A second townsman quitclaimed a piece of meadow 13 perches in length and 18 feet in width leading to a watercourse to the lord's mill.¹⁰⁸ In 1449 a property

⁹⁸ PRO, DL 43/14/3, fol. 48d; *Ruthin Valor*, pp. 66, 68.

⁹⁹ NRO, FH 657, 782, 830.

¹⁰⁰ *VCH Northants*, I, 305.

¹⁰¹ Bridges (I, 275) states that Roger de Clare granted a water mill to the Knights Hospitallers; the Towcester book states (p. 64) that he gave the mill to the Knights Templar in the mid 12th century.

¹⁰² NRO, FH 814.

¹⁰³ PRO, SC 2/195/86, m. 1.

¹⁰⁴ *NN and Q*, III, 471.

¹⁰⁵ NRO, FH 118.

¹⁰⁶ NRO, FH 897.

¹⁰⁷ NRO, FH 865.

¹⁰⁸ NRO, FH 169, 170.

was described as standing on the corner opposite the rector's door, with the lane leading towards the lord's mill on the south.¹⁰⁹

3.1.2.3 Horse Mill

The location of the horse mill is uncertain. There is a reference to Horsmylne Lane in 1386, but no details are given which indicate its position. In 1449 a cottage was described as extending 90 feet in length along Myllelane, and 20 feet along Perkelane. It would seem safe to conclude that this Mill Lane was not associated with a mill on the Tove, and it is possible that the horse mill was in this vicinity.¹¹⁰ Perhaps the horse mill was in use for just a short period. The two known references both date from the late 14th century. It could be noted, however, that when Towcester manor was leased to Sir Richard Empson in 1508, three mills were listed among the appurtenances, although the three could have been the two water mills and the windmill.¹¹¹

3.1.2.4 Windmill

The 1392 Survey listed a large field of 42 acres called 'Wyndemilleposte' among the demesne arable, and there was mention of a rood of land at 'Wyndmyll'weye' in a property transaction of 1400.¹¹² The latter reference almost certainly involved land in the field of Wood Burcote. The Field Book of 1606 recorded a 'Wyndemyll hyll furlong' in the east field of Caldecote; 'windmill field' as an abutment of Moore field; and 'Windemill field *alias* Benley field'.¹¹³ A windmill was recorded in a document of c.1720.¹¹⁴

3.1.2.5 Bakehouse

An undated document of the 13th century recorded the grant by Avelina, Countess of Essex, to the canons of Holy Trinity, London, of 6s 8d quit rent from the rent of her oven in her manor of Towcester. This payment was still made when Warin de Munchensi was lord of the manor.¹¹⁵ On the death of William de Clinton, earl of Huntingdon, in 1354, the profits of the oven were returned at 20 shillings a year; the common oven was worth 20 shillings a year in 1392. In 1467-8 it was at farm for 66s 8d.¹¹⁶ In 1462 a tenement called 'le Bell' stood on the corner of the lane leading to the lord's oven.¹¹⁷ There is no mention of Bakehouse Lane in the street names listed in the Place-Name volume, but it is known from later documents. It was evidently the small lane leading from Watling Street to what is now Moat Lane, described by Baker as the lane as 'between High Street and Berrymount'. Baker noted that the lord's oven had been used within memory, but the customary profits had been waived. In 1590 Sir George Fermor sued a man who had erected a bakehouse in Towcester, declaring that from time beyond memory he (Fermor) and all his ancestors had had a bakehouse and a baker there to bake white bread and horse bread for all the inhabitants and strangers passengers, and that none had a bakehouse there but by their appointment. The defendant pleaded that when he

¹⁰⁹ NRO, FH 582.

¹¹⁰ NRO, FH 352, 581.

¹¹¹ NRO, FH 807.

¹¹² PRO, DL 43/14/3, fol. 48; NRO, FH 406.

¹¹³ NRO, FH A/1, fols. 33, 62, 63.

¹¹⁴ BRO, ST 127.

¹¹⁵ *Catalogue of Ancient Deeds*, II, A 2533. Warin de Munchensi died in 1255 (Towcester book, p. 64).

¹¹⁶ PRO, DL 43/14/3, fol. 48d; *Ruthin Valor*, p. 66; Baker, *History of Northamptonshire*, ii, 321.

¹¹⁷ NRO, FH 639.

erected his bakehouse there were three bakers there, that he was an apprentice to the trade, and that he set up his bakehouse for the benefit of all persons, as it was lawful for him to do. Judgment went against him.¹¹⁸ Perhaps the manorial lord was enforcing his monopoly with particular vigour at this period. The court held in March 1599 laid down penalties for butchers and brewers but made no reference to bakers. In the 1540s, however, two or three bakers from Towcester regularly broke the assize of bread, and five local bakers were named in the records of a court held in the 17th century.¹¹⁹

The Nether manor had a bakehouse which its tenants were obliged to use. This bakehouse fell into decay for a period in the 1280s and, because there was no other bakehouse in the town, the tenants '*went of their own will*' to the lord's bakehouse. Once the priory bakehouse was repaired, all the tenants returned.¹²⁰

3.1.2.6 Deer Park

There was a deer park at Handley, to the south west of Towcester. Park Lane led out of the town in this direction. The park was first recorded in 1220 (?or 1229) and it was disparked in 1631. According to Bridges, it had been arable before c.1720. Ridge and furrow in Handley Park is thought to date from the 17th century.¹²¹

3.1.2.7 Warren

In October 1318, two days before he was granted an annual fair at his manor of Towcester, Aymer de Valence was granted free warren in all his demesne lands in Towcester.¹²² In 1336 William de Clinton leased the manor of Towcester to Walter le Warde of Towcester, together with custody of his wood and warren.¹²³

3.2 CIVIL WAR DEFENCES

In the autumn of 1643 the town of Towcester was fortified as the primary garrison of royalist Oxford army by Prince Rupert. Defences were constructed bringing water around the town and with the installation of gun platforms for artillery, including the modification of the castle mound to form a 'mount'. It is to be expected that bulwarks for artillery will have been placed at each of the points at which the defences changed direction to enable adequate covering fire along the curtain. There were some 10,000 troops garrisoned in an around the town for a short period that winter. The garrison was never besieged but was abandoned in early 1644 with the progressive withdrawal of troops to other campaigns and following the fall of the nearby minor garrison of Grafton Regis on the 25th December.

Limited evidence for the defences has been recovered in excavations on the north west side of the town by Alexander on the Sponne School site, published by Brown, and by Jackson in the area immediately to the north of the Northampton road on the north east side. In part the

¹¹⁸ Baker, *History of Northamptonshire*, ii, 321.

¹¹⁹ NRO, ZA 6679; LB 52; PRO, SC 2/195/86, mm. 1, 3, 7, 8, 9.

¹²⁰ *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, I, 1219-1307, no. 1435.

¹²¹ D. Hall, *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire* (Northamptonshire Record Society, X, 1995), 353; RCHME, *South-West Northants*, 158, 160 (reference taken from *Rot.Litt.Claus.*); *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire*, English Place-Name Society, X (1933), 95: *parco regis de H* (Close Rolls for the year 1229). According to RCHME the ridge and furrow at Handley Park dates from the medieval period.

¹²² *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, iii, 391.

¹²³ NRO, NPL 888. The lease gives details of the grain, livestock and agricultural equipment of the manorial demesne of this date.

form of the castle motte may have resulted from the reworking of the earthwork to for the gun platform, although the majority of the changes were probably undertaken in order to develop it in the 18th or 19th century as a landscape or garden feature.

3.3 CHURCH

3.3.1 Church of St Lawrence

There is no pre-Conquest evidence, either documentary or archaeological, for the church, although it could be suggested that it was in fact a Saxon minster serving Towcester's dependencies.¹²⁴ It was, however, certainly in existence in the immediate post-Conquest period, for William I granted the advowson to the abbey of Fontanelle. The 1392 Survey recorded that the advowson belonged to Bradenstoke Priory.¹²⁵

The surviving fabric indicates a large and important church building from the twelfth century, arcaded with north and south aisles around 1200. The Chancel was subsequently extended to the east over a crypt at the start of the fifteenth century; the crypt presumably being used as a charnel house for burials disturbed in the extension.

It was perhaps as a result of the establishment of the chantry chapel in 1451 that parts of the church were rebuilt some years later. Both aisles were rebuilt and also the tower, a spire may have been added and a clerestory inserted over the nave and chancel. The costs would have been substantial and Edward IV granted the parishioners '*in reliefe of the grete importable costs and charges by the said pa'ishens susteigned in buylding and reparacione of their steple, churche and churcheyerde, as moche stone as they shulde fynde within the circuyt and compasse of 40 feet every way square, within any place in his querrey in the bailifwycke of Hanley in the forest of Whitelwode.*' This grant was subsequently confirmed by Richard III.¹²⁶

A large west gallery was erected in 1627, and the chancel roof replaced 13 years later. In 1872 the chancel was restored by Ewan Christian and the chancel arch installed; the nave was restored by Pearson in 1882. The existing fabric and the development of the church is described in detail by the RCHME and so is not discussed in further detail here.

3.3.2 Chantry Chapel

In 1447 William Sponne, archdeacon of Norfolk and rector of Towcester, expressed his intention of founding a chantry of two priests to celebrate divine service daily at the altar of St Mary in the church of St Laurence. On his deathbed he prayed that his executors should found this chantry with all speed. The chantry was to be known as Sponne's Chantry and by 1451 the foundation had been effected.¹²⁷ According to Bridges, the chapel belonging to the chantry was at the upper end of the south aisle, and had originally been called the chapel of St Mary. In his day, the aisle still retained the name of 'Sponne's aisle'.¹²⁸ In the late 15th and early 16th centuries, however, it appears that the Virgin's association with the chapel was still remembered. In 1498 a local townswoman asked to be buried in the chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the parish church. Other wills of this period included bequests to the altar of the Virgin, and to Our Lady's light. In 1531 10 shillings was left to repair the window in the

¹²⁴ Foard, 1985.

¹²⁵ PRO, DL 43/14/3, fol. 49.

¹²⁶ Baker, *History of Northamptonshire*, II, 328 (check). Details of this rebuilding need to be checked.

¹²⁷ *VCH Northants*, II, 225-6.

¹²⁸ Bridges, I, 275.

aisle of Our Lady. Two years later, William Synkyn bequeathed a two-year-old bullock to 'Our Lady in the yle, to maintain her with'.¹²⁹ Other altars and lights mentioned by testators in the early 16th century were those of St Anne, St Agnes, St Anthony, St Catherine, St Clement, St George and St Lawrence. Bequests were left to the sepulchre light and to the light of the rood or Holy Cross.¹³⁰

3.4 MONASTIC & OTHER ESTABLISHMENTS

3.4.1 Monastic Houses

No monastic houses were established at Towcester in the medieval period, only a hospital.

3.4.2 Hospital of St Leonard

The leper hospital of St Leonard was in existence by 1200 when the county sheriff Simon de Pateshull rendered account of a royal gift of 40 shillings to the Leprous Brethren of Towcester.¹³¹ In 1285-6 the court of the hospital was given as one of the boundaries of an acre of land in Towcester field. The hospital is more closely located by a document of 1366 which recorded the collection of money for the repair of the North Bridge 'next the hospital of St Leonard at the end of Towcester.'¹³² A location north of the bridge would appear likely, for leper hospitals were usually sited away from the main areas of habitation. Indeed, the 'spittle' meadow and furlong names recorded in 1606 were concentrated in the southern corner of Caldecot parish. The chapel of St Leonard's is mentioned in 1384-5, and the names of two wardens in the late 1380s are known. The hospital did not feature in the visitations carried out by William Alnwick, Bishop of Lincoln, in the years 1436-49, nor did it receive a bequest from Archdeacon Sponne in 1447. It therefore seems likely that it had ceased to function before the mid 15th century.¹³³ The incidence of leprosy declined in the late medieval period and many leper hospitals became ordinary infirmaries, but it would appear that this did not happen at Towcester.¹³⁴ The north bridge continued to be associated with the former hospital. In 1509 a local butcher left 6s 8d to the highway at 'spittull brigge'.¹³⁵

3.4.3 Grammar School

William Sponne, archdeacon of Norfolk and rector of Towcester, left instructions in his will for the founding of a chantry chapel within the parish church of St Laurence. The chantry was established in 1451.

There was no mention of a school in the deeds of foundation but a century later the commissioners of Henry VIII reported that the College or Sponne's Chantry had been founded to maintain two priests, '*being men of good knowledge, one to preach the word of God and the other to keep a grammar school*'. From 1451, therefore, there had been a

¹²⁹ NRO, Early Will Register, fols. 59r, 61v, 71v, 77v, 172v; R.M. Serjeantson and H.I. Longden, 'The Parish Churches and Religious Houses of Northamptonshire: their dedications, altars, images and lights', reprinted from *Archaeological Journal*, LXX (1913), 217-452, by the Royal Archaeological Institute (1913), 202-3.

¹³⁰ NRO, Early Will Register, fols. 61v, 71v, 77v, 172v; Serjeantson and Longden, 'Parish Churches of Northamptonshire', 202-3.

¹³¹ *VCH Northamptonshire*, II, 165.

¹³² NRO, FH 118, 897.

¹³³ *VCH Northamptonshire*, II, 166.

¹³⁴ M. Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, London (1990), 244. There were still admissions of lepers to the leper hospital in Chester in the 1390s and the first decade of the 15th century: Morris, *Chester*, p. 157. Henry IV rumoured to have turned leprosy after ordering the execution of Archbishop Scrope: C. Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society in later medieval England*, Stroud (1995), 14-15.

¹³⁵ NRO, Early Will Register, fol. 172v.

schoolmaster, and almost half the revenues of the chantry had been provided for his stipend. In 1548 the annual salary was £7 6s 8d, and the schoolmaster was described as well-learned and said to teach daily and freely. The commissioners found that the school had been continually kept, and that it was *'very mete and necessary to continue'*. Payments to the schoolmaster can be traced into the 17th century. In 1552 the feoffees of the Tabard charity, which had also been established by Sponne's executors in accordance with his will, acquired the chantry house and cottage with which Sponne's chantry had been endowed. They used the chantry house as a school, and from that date they nominated and appointed the schoolmaster.¹³⁶ However, an entry in the accounts of the Collectors of the Tabard rents for the year 1483-4 suggests that the Tabard feoffees already had some responsibility for the school. In that year *'Master Christopher'* had been paid 6s 8d *'to make the scole house'*.¹³⁷

A map of Sponne's Charity Estate made in 1820 depicted the School House and garden on the north side of Church Lane stretching from Moat Lane to Watling Street.¹³⁸ This was presumably on the site of one of the two messuages acquired when the chantry was established. One was described as lying *'at the corner opposite the gate of the rectory, between a tenement sometime of Master Sponne on the north and the lane extending towards the mill of the lord on the south, and between Watling Street on the west and the gate of Towcester manor on the east'*. The second messuage and garden lay *'between the tenement of the lord on the south and the burgage of John Possell on the north, one end abutting Church Lane towards the west and the other towards the courtyard'*.¹³⁹ The chantry house was timber-framed between stone end walls, and contained a ground floor hall, offices and kitchen, with chambers above. In front was a small courtyard surrounded by a wall.¹⁴⁰ A new school was erected on a new site in Brackley Road in 1890, following two decades of closure. According to the VCH the chantry house was sold and completely demolished, with the exception of one wall and a doorway. The stones were used in a new building erected on an adjacent site.¹⁴¹ The full description of the Chantry House formerly the Grammar School given in P. Riden's new book does not square with this statement.¹⁴²

3.4.4 Guild of Our Lady and St George

The 'fraternity and gylde of Our Lady and St George' was named in a will made in 1519, and 'the brotherhood of Our Lady and St George' in c.1524. A bequest of 1526 mentioned the 'gylde of Our lady'.¹⁴³ There is no earlier evidence for this, or any other, guild at Towcester, and this suggests that the townsmen did not feel the need to establish some form of self-government under the cover of a religious guild, as happened in other towns. Possibly they enjoyed a measure of informal autonomy. This is suggested by a document of 1366, in which 12 named inhabitants, together with all the community of Towcester, gave notice that they had appointed proctors to collect money for the repair of the North Bridge.¹⁴⁴ After 1451

¹³⁶ VCH Northamptonshire, II, 181-2, 225-8.

¹³⁷ NRO, TC 104, fol. 5d.

¹³⁸ NRO, TC 101a. The School Close, held by the same tenant, and just over one acre in size, lay to the west of the town, beyond the turnpike gate and adjoining the road to Brackley. (Check)

¹³⁹ VCH Northants, II, 225.

¹⁴⁰ A. Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales*, II (Cambridge, 2000), 188.

¹⁴¹ VCH Northants, II, 229.

¹⁴² P. Riden and M. Webb, *Towcester Tenements: A Survey of the Victorian Town* (Cardiff, 2000), 25-6, 28.

¹⁴³ Serjeantson and Longden, 'Parish Churches of Northamptonshire', 203.

¹⁴⁴ NRO, FH 897.

prominent townsmen played a part in the administration of a charity also established by Sponne, a number serving as trustees and electing two of their members each year to act on their behalf. The same men can be seen holding manorial office.¹⁴⁵ No evidence survives for the guild's activities.

3.5 TENEMENTS

3.5.1 Population and Wealth

The medieval taxation records included the hamlets of Abthorpe, Foscote, Caldecote and Wood Burcote with Towcester itself, thus making it difficult to establish the population and wealth of the urban settlement. In 1301 Towcester was assessed *cum membris* (i.e. with the hamlets). A total of 111 taxpayers were listed, of whom 45 (40.54%) lived in Abthorpe, Foscote and Caldecote. This would leave 66 taxpayers (just under 60%) for Towcester, although there is a slight possibility that the names of other hamlets have been lost in the damaged left hand margin of the document. One or two of these 66 taxpayers are known from other sources to have lived in Wood Burcote. Almost all those assessed to pay the largest amounts lived in the town.¹⁴⁶

In 1334 the subsidy assessment of Towcester was fixed at £8. No mention was made of the hamlets but they were not named separately and must therefore have been silently included in the assessment for Towcester.¹⁴⁷ Towcester with its members contributed £7 16s 0d to the poll tax, indicating a total of 468 taxpayers in the town and the hamlets. If the percentage of urban taxpayers remained at some 60 per cent, as in 1301, then about 280 taxpayers lived in the town, indicating a population in the region of 550 people.¹⁴⁸ By the mid 15th century changing economic conditions meant that many of the assessments which had been fixed in 1334 were out of touch with reality and reductions in the yield were authorised throughout the country. In 1446 a national cut of about 16 per cent was uniformly spread among the counties, but within each county it would seem that the reductions were awarded with close consideration of the particular circumstances of each township.¹⁴⁹ Towcester's assessment fell from £8 to £6, a reduction of 25 per cent. This was well above the national average, and far greater than the reduction granted to Higham Ferrers (5.88%), although less than the 41.07 per cent reduction awarded to New Brackley.¹⁵⁰ Archdeacon Sponne appears to have appreciated the difficulties incumbent upon paying the tax, for in 1447 he vested in trustees a messuage called the Tabard, plus lands in Towcester, Wood Burcote and Caldecote, from which the payment of the fifteenth was to be paid, whenever the tax was levied.¹⁵¹ A payment of £6 6s 8d for the fifteenth was made by the collectors of Sponne's charity in 1491-2, and payments of the tax in other years were recorded in the Account Book. A number of receipts for the payment of the fifteenth in the 16th century survive.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁵ NRO, Towcester Charities (Introduction to List 58); TC 104, *passim*; PRO, SC 2/195/86, mm. 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9.

¹⁴⁶ PRO, E 179/155/31.

¹⁴⁷ R.E. Glasscock, ed., *The Lay Subsidy of 1334*, Oxford (1975), 211.

¹⁴⁸ Figure taken from C. Dyer's transcript of Fenwick. Check Fenwick when available.

¹⁴⁹ W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant: The Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village*, London (1957), 83-4.

¹⁵⁰ PRO, E 179/155/105, m. 2. The remaining four townships in Towcester Hundred also received above average cuts in their quotas.

¹⁵¹ NRO, Towcester Charities, Lists 58.

¹⁵² NRO, TC 104, fol. 21; TC 160.

The bailiff's accounts of 1467-8 recorded a total of £20 12s 0d from the rents of assize and rents at the lord's will. The decays of rents amounted to £5 5s 9¼d. These figures may be compared with those for 1392, when the assized rents amounted to £24 16s 4d, and when an additional £3 14s 0¼d was received for various lands and tenements which were at farm. A sizeable percentage of the decays listed in 1467-8 resulted from the lord's generosity. They included £2 allowance of rent given to a couple for their lifetime, four shillings allowed to a widow for the rent of her cottage, and 16 pence allowed to a tenant because his house had not been well repaired. These decays do not indicate population decline. Among the decays, however, was the sum of 44s 4d from the rents of 13 shops. Three shops were in the lord's hands and presumably untenanted; ten shops paid a reduced amount. These decays suggest that the town's commerce was experiencing economic difficulties.¹⁵³

The names of 111 people, three of them women, were listed as taxpayers in the subsidy assessment for the *villata* of Towcester in January 1525.¹⁵⁴ The taxpayers of Burcott, Abthorpe and Calcott were named separately, but there was no separate listing for Foscote. It would therefore seem likely that the majority of the 111 taxpayers listed under the heading 'Towcester' did in fact live in the town. There are serious problems involved with the 1524-5 subsidy records, because the different areas of the country were not assessed consistently and because towns assessed by county commissioners were often under-assessed compared to boroughs which assessed their own taxes. There has been disagreement as to whether the taxpayers were heads of households, or taxpaying individuals of whom more than one could live within a household. Alan Dyer, in his recent study of the 1524-5 subsidy, has opted for a multiplier of 6.0. This multiplier produces a figure of 666 for the population of Towcester, from which a percentage representing the Foscote inhabitants should perhaps be deducted.¹⁵⁵ Four of the taxpayers were assessed to pay on lands, 63 on goods and 44 on wages. The three wealthiest men owned goods worth £40; at the other end of the scale were 25 people assessed on goods valued at £2, two assessed on lands valued at £2, and 44 people assessed on wages of £1. Excluded from the list would have been those deemed too poor to contribute, who perhaps comprised a quarter of the population.

In January 1525 the collectors for Towcester Hundred assiduously recorded changes in the circumstances of the taxpayers since the taxes collected the previous year. The collectors did not note whether any of the current taxpayers had moved into Towcester since 1524 and it is therefore impossible to say whether the town had lost a sizeable percentage of its population in the intervening period.

It has been suggested that a quitclaim of 1513 may have been the first document to distinguish Towcester township from its dependencies. The manor then contained 200 messuages, 2000 acres of land, 1000 acres of meadow, 1000 acres of pasture, 200 acres of wood, 2 mills and 40 shillings rent in Towcester.¹⁵⁶ The number of messuages appears rather high when compared with the 111 (maximum) taxpayers listed in 1525. A rental of 1609 listed 70 tenants in the manor of Towcester, four of whom paid only for a shop, while one

¹⁵³ PRO, DL 43/14/3, fol. 48d; *Ruthin Valor*, 67-8.

¹⁵⁴ PRO, E 179/155/131.

¹⁵⁵ A. Dyer, 'Urban decline' in England, 1377-1525', in T.R. Slater, ed., *Towns in Decline AD 100-1600*, Ashgate (2000), 267-72. At the Birmingham Conference in April 1996, Dr Dyer acknowledged that there was a problem with the single multiplier, since every town should have its own.

¹⁵⁶ NRO, FH 817.

man rented the North Mill. Ten different tenants paid small amounts for parcels of the waste.¹⁵⁷

The Hearth Tax of 1674 was paid by 146 townspeople from Towcester, by 14 from Caldecote and by 12 from Wood Burcote. Another 130 people were listed as ‘certified’, and it would seem that this list included those certified in all three places. Abthorpe and Fosco were taxed separately and contained 27 taxpayers and 52 people who were certified.¹⁵⁸ The highest number of hearths in Towcester was 19, paid for by Mr Willes. Next came Mr Jones with 15 hearths and Mr Whittear with 12 hearths. Twenty-eight townspeople had between 4 and 8 hearths, 27 townspeople had 3 hearths, 34 townspeople had 2 hearths, and 54 townspeople paid for just one hearth. All those who were certified had only one hearth. The occupations of some taxpayers can be found in the lists of probate records. The large number of windows paid for by Mr Willes and Mr Whittear can be explained by the fact that they were both innholders. Tax on five hearths was paid by a tanner and by a smith, which suggests that they were among the more substantial craftsmen. A carrier paid for 3 hearths and a tobacco-pipe maker for one.¹⁵⁹

In 1694 the number of tenancies was 129, but some men were named several times and, as the rents varied from one shilling to £30, it would appear that some tenants held only field land. A rental of 1720 listed seven messuages, 36 houses, ? tenements, two inns, a smith’s shop, a shop, a mill, a bakehouse and half a windmill.¹⁶⁰

3.5.2 Borough/Burgage

Towcester was not a borough and its inhabitants had no powers of self-government. The medieval town was under the control of the lord of the manor and regulated by an annual leet held on the feast of St Gregory (12 March). The court continued to meet on this day throughout the 16th century. In the 1740s and 1750s, although the court was called for the feast of St Gregory, the session was always adjourned to a date in April.¹⁶¹ There are, however, a dozen references to burgages in the medieval town, and the mention of ‘*Bondemanne mede*’ in Hulcote in an undated deed of (perhaps) the early 13th century hints that there may have been some distinction between the agricultural and urban tenants at some time in the medieval period. The earliest surviving reference to a burgage dates from 1326, when it was termed a ‘*messuage burgage*’.¹⁶² This ambiguity as to the status of the burgage tenements persisted, with three further examples of holdings described as ‘*messuage/tenement or burgage*’, while other properties were sometimes classified as burgages and sometimes not.¹⁶³ This suggests that the privileges once appertaining to the burgage tenements had been lost, together with any legal significance. Many of the plots along Watling Street are long and narrow, with the principal building adjoining the street, and are typical ‘burgage plots’.

¹⁵⁷ *Northamptonshire Notes and Queries*, III (1890), no. 471.

¹⁵⁸ PRO, E 179/254/14. Figures taken from transcript of this document in NRO.

¹⁵⁹ NRO, photocopy of *Northampton Archdeaconry: Administrations and Inventories 1677-1710*.

¹⁶⁰ BRO, ST 127.

¹⁶¹ PRO, DL/43/14/3, fol. 47d. In 1530 payments to the manorial officers included 13s 4d to the bailiff for dinner on St Gregory’s leet day ‘by old custom’: NRO FH 845. PRO, SC 2/195/86, mm. 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9; NRO, ZA 6679; X 3582, mm. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5d, 6, 6d.

¹⁶² NRO, FH 62, 194.

¹⁶³ NRO, FH 290, 390, 461, 466, 467, 471, 489, 498, 500, 509, 539, 639, 659, 709b, 710.

Only some four or five burgages are recorded in the collection of charters on which this discussion is based. There may well have been other burgage property held by different tenants elsewhere in the town but no evidence survives. Can anything be said about the location of the burgages recorded in the Fermor Hesketh documents? The charters are vague but close reading suggests that some burgage tenements may have clustered on the west side of Watling Street, near to the junction with Park Lane. The tenant of the 'messuage burgage' attested in 1326 subsequently took over the neighbouring property, which included a chamber, loft and cellar. In 1330 he rented out the cellar and loft, allowing the new tenant access through his door (*hostium*; FH calendar gives 'lodge') from the 'old street' of Towcester to the cellar.¹⁶⁴ Can this 'old street' be linked with the former Roman road from Alchester which ran diagonally from the south-western corner of the town to join Watling Street just north of Park Street? The excavator of the Park Street site believed that the Roman road may have remained in use as a yard or alley. He reported a 'large properly built oven' in the south-east corner of building F, and another smaller, hearth or oven, perhaps lasting from the late medieval period to the early 17th century.¹⁶⁵ This does not seem to have been the manorial oven, for Bakehouse Lane was on the east side of Watling Street. A tenement or burgage called the Bell stood next to the lane leading to the lord's oven.¹⁶⁶ The slender evidence hints at a concentration of burgages in the centre of Towcester, and it is possible that the 'Newland' was somewhere near to Park Lane. Perhaps the establishment of the new road from Oxford allowed some re-organisation of the properties in this area.¹⁶⁷

The medieval documents are not helpful as far as dimensions are concerned. In 1309 a piece of land with a portion of house built on it between two messuages in Towcester vill contained in the lower part towards Watling Street, in breadth 20 feet and in length 9 perches. In 1433 a messuage and adjacent garden in Park Lane extended from the highway to a second messuage and was 6 perches in length. In 1449 a cottage was 20 feet in width along Park Lane and 90 feet in length along Mill Lane. In 1501 a tenement was described as 30 feet wide along Watling Street and 27' 7" wide at the head of the garden. (This may have been on the west side of Watling Street near the corner of Park Lane).¹⁶⁸ The 19th-century maps are not helpful, because a good deal of sub-division of plots had taken place by that date, both lengthwise and laterally, with some plots perhaps amalgamated to form larger units. This irregularity has led Riden to conclude that '*any attempt to reconstruct an 'original' layout of 'primary' plots from 19th-century map evidence, much less to suggest that at some date all the plots had been of roughly equal width, would be fanciful*'.¹⁶⁹

The medieval documents commonly describe tenements as adjoining and give the impression of road frontages which were densely packed, at least in the central areas. Many tenements had curtilages, crofts and gardens, and could be separated from neighbouring properties by

¹⁶⁴ NRO, FH 194, 216.

¹⁶⁵ G. Lambrick, 'Excavations in Park Street, Towcester', *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, 15 (1980), 36, 113, 115, 116.

¹⁶⁶ NRO, FH, 639, 659.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Hosteler who was granted tenement in 'le Neweland' in 1401 (FH 414) was the Robert Londersthorp with burgage in 1418 (FH 466; and see 523). His widow quitclaimed tenement to Robert Wale of Brackley in 1429 (FH 502); in 1433 Robert Wale of Towcester granted tenement in 'le Newland' (FH 520). In 1448 Robert Wale had tenement called the Angel (? granted to feoffees of Wm Sponne) (FH 578). The Tabard Accounts indicate that the Angel was next to the Tabard (TC 104, fol. 5d). Documents indicate that the property focused on Park Lane.

¹⁶⁸ NRO, FH 151, 527, 581, 779.

¹⁶⁹ Riden and Webb, *Towcester Tenements*, 9.

quick hedges.¹⁷⁰ The plots could be extensive, stretching for example from Watling Street to the river, and there is mention of a barn of three bays. One ?early 13th-century house was described as '*founded and built between two postes*'. Accommodation in a messuage sold at some date before 1290 included a cellar, loft, chamber, stable, brewery and kitchen. The adjoining curtilage stretched from the orchard near the fence next to the sawing yard to the outer corner of a brewery, from the brewery to the old pear tree, and in width from the curtilage of Walter Lupus to the fence of the sawing yard, with right of access. The messuage lay between the messuage of Walter Lupus and the nearer gate on the upper side. In 1436 a burgage was described as lying between the tenement of Mr William Sponne on the north and the tenement of Thomas Josep, lately called 'le Yatedest' on the south, and extended from Watling Street on the east to Personesleyes on the west.¹⁷¹ Six of the Fermor Hesketh conveyances include mention of a cellar, but it seems probable that all references apply to the same property. In the first half of the 14th century the cellar and loft were leased out separately and were evidently seen as a commercial unit. The property may have been sited on the west side of Watling Street near the junction with Park Lane.¹⁷² The Tabard Account Book recorded details of building work and repairs carried out in the years 1482-1566. The only indication of a cellar on the premises dates from 1485-6, when 4 standing beds were listed in the 'wyne seler chamber'.¹⁷³ It is possible that cellars were not a characteristic feature of the medieval town.

Twenty of the surviving 17th-century inventories have been checked and they give an indication of the accommodation of Towcester's houses at that period. Rooms listed in the home of the carrier Thomas Jones in 1680 included house chamber, gatehouse chamber, garret, little house, buttery, plus stable and outhouses. In 1681 the appraisers of the goods of the mercer Joseph Clarke began in the shop and garret and recorded other items only in the chamber. A glover's house in 1662 consisted of hall, parlour, kitchen, little parlour, buttery, best chamber and chamber over the hall. Rooms named in 1664 in the house of William Rowell were chamber over the buttery, chamber over the parlour, parlour, middle room, foremost room, buttery and brewhouse. An inventory of 1699 listed kitchen chamber, gatehouse chamber, garret, parlour, kitchen and cellar (NB only reference to cellar found so far). The yard evidently contained a wheat 'hovill', three little 'hovills' of peas and some wood, and possibly the barn and hayloft. In 1674 John Lee paid for three hearths. His inventory was drawn up the following year and recorded goods in the little chamber, middle chamber, chamber over the entry, little parlour, pantry, hall, study, buttery and brewhouse. Furniture in the school house included a long table, forms, benches and a cupboard. Mention of a fire iron indicates that one of the hearths was in this room; hay and lumber were stored in the chamber over the school. There was a yard with a stable.¹⁷⁴

The Tabard accounts recorded much work on chimneys. In 1485-6 Richard Mason was paid 4 shillings for making the chimney in the new parlour; in 1502-3 a tiler mended the chimney in the hall and the chimney in the chamber towards the Angel; in 1547-8 the old chimney in the hall was taken down and a new one built with 500 bricks purchased from a Lillingstone

¹⁷⁰ NRO, FH 183, 266, 290, 352, 406, 423, 466, 477.

¹⁷¹ NRO, FH 55, 83, 403, 539. (NB It would be possible to locate some of these tenements I think).

¹⁷² NRO, FH 83, 181, 186, 201, 202, 216, 263.

¹⁷³ NRO, TC 104, fol. 1.

¹⁷⁴ NRO, Towcester Inventories: 1663 A+I bundle; 1666 I bundle 199; 1675 A+I bundle; 1681 I Bundle 87; 1681 I loose 102; 1699 A+I bundle 74.

man.¹⁷⁵ In c. 1580 John Slatyer agreed to build a chimney to serve as a double chimney for the ‘spyninge howse’ (which was to be made into a kitchen) and the buttery.¹⁷⁶ The numbers of hearths listed in 1674 indicate the potential dangers of fire. Two years later a large fire destroyed over 85 bays of building belonging to the townsmen who petitioned for relief, and many more belonging to other inhabitants. The miller Edward Padbury claimed that three bays of his house had been destroyed and that he had lost goods valued at £12. By 1681 his property seems to have been repaired; his inventory recorded a kitchen buttery, parlour, brewhouse, kitchen chamber, and buttery chamber.¹⁷⁷ The experience of such fires may have prompted the regulations recorded in a 17th-century court roll. Any inhabitant with a wooden chimney was to amend it within 20 days or refrain from lighting a fire. The keeping of wood in kilns was also forbidden.¹⁷⁸ Such regulations did not prevent further calamities. In 1749 a fire broke out in the stable of the George Inn. Thirty-six houses were destroyed, plus barns and outbuildings, and damage came to almost £2000.¹⁷⁹

In years when the tax of the fifteenth was not demanded money from Sponne’s Charity could be used for repairing the pavements of Towcester. The surviving records of the charity include details of these repairs from the 15th century to the 18th century, by which date the funds were mainly devoted to road repairs and to distributions of money to the poor. In 1485 Richard Braban worked for 22 days ‘dykyng and pychyng stone’ at the ‘spetell brigg wey’ and was paid 11 shillings. An agreement between the trustees and two bricklayers in 1737 listed the pavements which were to be kept in good repair and gave some specifications.¹⁸⁰ Concern for hygiene can be seen in orders recorded at the court held in March 1599. No dung was to be carried from private yards into the street but was to be carried away. All dust and dirt was to be swept into piles and carried away within six days, except in the months of November, December and January, when the ‘winterly weather’ prevented it from being conveniently carried away. No inhabitants were to lay blocks in the street, except one under the house side or window. Courts of the mid 18th century laid down similar orders. People were ordered to remove posts and steps at the doorways in front of their homes, were amerced for not cleaning their doorways and for mending old wagons in the street.¹⁸¹

3.5.3 Decline and Recovery

Population figures for 1750-1842 have been discussed in some detail by S.R. Moss, and those quoted here are taken from his work.¹⁸² The 1777 Militia List recorded 203 men between the ages of 18 and 45. They probably represented about one quarter of all males and perhaps one third of all adult males. The Curate’s Survey of 1781 gave the population as 1688. By 1801 the population had increased to 2030, and each of the next four censuses recorded further increases: to 2245 in 1811, to 2554 in 1821, to 2671 in 1831, and to 2749 in 1841. There was then a slight fall, to 2665 in 1851, but thirty years later the population had grown to 2834.

¹⁷⁵ NRO, TC 104, fols. 7v, 34v, 105v. Note, too, the reference to a reredos over the fire in the kitchen in 1497-8 (fol. 30).

¹⁷⁶ NRO, NPL 912.

¹⁷⁷ Sunderland and Webb, *Towcester*, 135-6; NRO, Towcester Inventories: 1681 I loose 174.

¹⁷⁸ NRO, LB 52.

¹⁷⁹ Baker, *History of Northamptonshire*, II, 324.

¹⁸⁰ NRO, TC 102; TC 104, fol. 2v.

¹⁸¹ NRO, ZA 6679; X 3582, mm. 2, 5.

¹⁸² S.R. Moss, ‘The Community of Towcester 1750-1842’ (unpublished MA dissertation, Department of English Local History, University of Leicester, 1975), 31-40.

The number of houses was 424 in 1801, 465 in 1811 and 529 in 1821. In 1831 there were 542 inhabited houses in Towcester, Caldecote, Handley and Wood Burcote. By 1881 the number had increased to 624.¹⁸³ The work of P. Riden has shown that there were about 250 houses on Watling Street in the 1850s. He has suggested that if the older property on Park Street is added to this number and if it is assumed that there was always some secondary building behind the larger plots, then there were perhaps some 300 houses in medieval Towcester. This would imply, he suggests, a population of at least 1000 and possibly as many as 1500.¹⁸⁴ The tax figures do not support this total.

3.4 COMMERCE

3.4.1 Market

Towcester's location, at the crossing of several important roads, offered strong commercial possibilities. Watling Street, which ran from south-eastern England to the north-west of the country, crossed the road linking Northampton and Oxford (via Brackley), while a road that crossed the Thames at Windsor and headed north through Aylesbury and Buckingham ended at Towcester. Towcester offered trading facilities between Northampton and Brackley, a distance of 20 miles.¹⁸⁵

In the medieval period Towcester had no rival markets within the distance considered prejudicial. Northampton lay some nine miles to the north east, Brackley about ten miles to the south west, Stony Stratford seven miles to the south east, and Buckingham eleven miles to the south. Moreover, the market days of these towns did not clash with Towcester's Tuesday market. Northampton's market days were Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays; Brackley's market was held on Wednesdays; Buckingham had a ?Saturday market and Stony Stratford.

Towcester was a royal and hundredal manor and might have been expected to have had a market at an early date, as did King's Sutton where the market was recorded in Domesday Book. The first reference to a market at Towcester, however, dates from c.1220, when there was mention of the market place.¹⁸⁶ In 1275 the market at Towcester was one of seven markets to which the burgesses of Northampton objected, since all of them lay within ten leagues of the county town and thereby infringed the burgesses' claim to exclusivity within this radius. (It would appear that a league was a mile). At the Inquiry it was said that the date of the establishment of the market at Towcester and the authority for its foundation were unknown. This would suggest that the market was indeed an ancient prescriptive one, in existence before formal market grants were required.¹⁸⁷

In October 1318, two days after he was granted free warren on his demesne lands, Aymer de Valence was granted a yearly fair at his manor of Towcester. No mention was made of a market.¹⁸⁸ In 1330 a Tuesday market and an annual fair were claimed by William de Clynton

¹⁸³ Baker, *History of Northamptonshire*, II, 324; NRO, *Population of Great Britain 1831: Population Abstract, Census of England and Wales: 1881*.

¹⁸⁴ Riden and Webb, *Towcester Tenements*, 9.

¹⁸⁵ *Luffield Charters*, I, vii.

¹⁸⁶ *Luffield Charters*, I, 210, 211.

¹⁸⁷ P. Goodfellow, 'Medieval Markets in Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 7 (1987-8?), 312.

¹⁸⁸ *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, III, 391.

on behalf of Laurence de Hastings.¹⁸⁹ The market day did not clash with the market days of Northampton (Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays) or Brackley (Wednesdays). Until 1278 Towcester's market may have benefited from the fact that a number of villages between there and Northampton had no second market within a reasonable distance. In 1278, however, a Thursday market was granted to the lord of Alderton, some four miles to the east, and in 1465 Earl Rivers was granted a Thursday market at Grafton Regis, just one mile east of Alderton. This second grant suggests that the market at Alderton had failed.¹⁹⁰ In any event, Thursday markets fitted into a cycle and did not clash with Towcester's Tuesday market. In 1392 the market and fair at Towcester were worth £5 6s 8d a year, but in 1467-8 their value had fallen to 40 shillings.¹⁹¹

Among the commodities sold at Towcester's market was corn. In April 1275 the prior of Luffield agreed to pay for corn in accordance with the price current at Towcester on the three market days preceding 24 June.¹⁹² In 1329-30 the bailiff, who held the manor at farm, was fined for unjustly levying toll from people who had purchased corn for sustenance or seed. This was contrary to the custom of the market, which only permitted toll to be taken on corn bought for sale or merchandise.¹⁹³ Some accounts of the Clerk of the Market dating from the early 15th century list the fines imposed on individual traders. These records accordingly indicate something of the nature of the trade carried out in the town, although perhaps not exclusively in the market.

The records of the Clerk of the Market allow tentative comparisons to be made between the market towns. In 1327-8, for example, Northampton's amercements totalled £5; next came Peterborough, Kettering, Higham Ferrers and Daventry (40 shillings each); followed by Brackley (33s 4d) and Oundle (26s 8d). Rothwell, Buckby and Towcester each paid 20 shillings. The remaining places listed for Northamptonshire were market villages, with the exception of Wellingborough; they paid between 6s 8d and 15 shillings apiece. Other accounts did not mention so many places, but Towcester's ranking remained fairly consistent. In 1329 Brackley's total was 20 shillings, those of Daventry and Towcester 13s 4d apiece, Welford and Buckby 10 shillings each, and Brixworth and West Haddon each paid 6s 8d. In 1331-2 the order was: Northampton (£4), Rothwell (26s 8d), Brackley (20s), Kettering (16s), Daventry (13s 4d), Bulwick (10s), and finally Towcester, Brixworth and Clyve (8s each). The 1401-2 accounts recorded fines of 6s 8d on Towcester, Wellingborough, Brackley and Kettering, and 10 shillings on Rothwell.¹⁹⁴ These records suggest that Towcester was a middling market town, and it was represented as such on the Gough Map, which depicted it as smaller than Buckingham and Stony Stratford and far less impressive than Daventry. The market survived into the early modern period, and although Towcester was not marked on Saxton's map of 1576, it was included in the 1627 *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* published with the maps of John Speed.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁹ Goodfellow, 'Medieval Markets in Northamptonshire', 322.

¹⁹⁰ Goodfellow, 'Medieval Markets in Northamptonshire', 312, 313, 316, 319, 320.

¹⁹¹ PRO, DL 43/14/3, fol. 47v; *Ruthin Valor*, 66.

¹⁹² *Luffield Charters*, II, 436.

¹⁹³ Baker, *Northamptonshire*, II, 321.

¹⁹⁴ PRO, E 101/256/6; 256/7, m. 1; 256/9; 257/17, mm. 5d, 8d.

¹⁹⁵ Goodfellow, 'Medieval markets in Northamptonshire', 316.

The market remained important and Towcester served as a regional centre for sales of cattle and corn.¹⁹⁶ In 1712 John Morton wrote that the town owed its improvements to a well-frequented market, and to the great West-Chester road on which it stood.¹⁹⁷

3.4.1.1 Market Place

The only known references to Towcester's market place occur in documents relating to the grant of a messuage next to the market (*forum*) to Luffield Priory in c.1220. On the other side of the messuage was a house.¹⁹⁸ The market area as recorded on the earliest maps of the 19th century consisted only of a widened part of the main street in the central part of the town. In 1737 the Butchers' Shambles were sited here, near the lane leading to the church yard gate.¹⁹⁹ It has been suggested that a more significant market area existed at Towcester in the early medieval period, occupying the space between the castle and Watling Street. It would seem unlikely that this area would have been built over whilst the castle still served a defensive function, and a location at a castle gate was a typical market location. Had a market occupied this area in the early medieval period, this would help to explain why the church is set so far back behind tenements, why the main gate of the manor should open onto a minor lane, and why the pre-turnpike road from Brackley to Northampton should take such a tortuous route through the town. No evidence for the infilling of this suggested early market place has been found. Had encroachment begun at an early date, this could perhaps help to explain the absence of references, although a more likely explanation could be the absence of relevant documentation.

3.4.1.2 Shops & Stalls

There is very little evidence for shops and stalls in the medieval period. In c.1220-1 one penny rent from a shop in Towcester was granted to Luffield Priory; in 1322 a widow quitclaimed one third of a shop (*choppa*) to Richard son of Richard Chalouner.²⁰⁰ The 1392 survey made no specific reference to shops or stalls, which were perhaps included among the various tenements at farm. Thirteen shops were listed among the decays of rents in 1467-8. Three shops were in the lord's hand and presumably untenanted. One had been occupied by William Wexschaundeler at an annual rent of 14 shillings. Rents of 5 shillings and 3s 4d had formerly been paid for the other empty shops. The former tenants were perhaps related to townspeople recorded as holding property near the junction of Park Lane and Watling Street earlier in the 15th century. This raises the possibility that the two shops were in this location. In 1467-8 the rent of a fourth shop had been reduced from 6s 8d to two shillings; the remaining nine shops were all rented out at reduced rates.²⁰¹

The manorial rental of 1609 listed nine shops, for which the rents ranged from 6s 8d down to just two pence.²⁰² Only one reference to a shop has been found in the inventories which have been searched, the shop of the mercer Joseph Clarke. In 1681 it contained goods worth over £36, including linen cloth, figs, raisins, tobacco and coloured stockings, plus some scales and weights. White stockings worth £11 10s were stored in the garret. More evidence for shops

¹⁹⁶ Moss, 'Community of Towcester', 34, 40, 47.

¹⁹⁷ J. Morton, *Natural History of Northamptonshire*, 18. (reference taken from Moss, 'Community of Towcester', 27).

¹⁹⁸ *Luffield Charters*, I, 210, 211, 215.

¹⁹⁹ NRO, TC 102.

²⁰⁰ *Luffield Charters*, I, 213; NRO, FH 175.

²⁰¹ PRO, DL 43/14/3, fol. 48d; *Ruthin Valor*, 67-8; NRO FH 382, 461, 464, 466, 473, 779.

²⁰² *NN & Q*, III, 120-2.

certainly exists. In 1686, for example, that of an apothecary contained drugs, syrups, chemical oils and syrup pots.²⁰³ In the years 1750-1842 Towcester's retail traders occupied an important position in terms of influence and significance, and many of them were moderately well-off.

3.4.1.3 Market House and Market Cross

There is no evidence for any building connected with the market in the medieval period, nor for a market cross.

3.4.2 Fair

In 1318 Aymer de Valence was granted an annual fair at his manor of Towcester, to be held on the vigil, feast and morrow of the Annunciation (25 March).²⁰⁴ By 1330, however, the date of the fair had been changed, and the fair then claimed on behalf of Laurence de Hastings was held at the feast of St Laurence (10 August).²⁰⁵ This change meant that the fair coincided with the feast day of the parish church, and this may have been the reason for the altered date. Alternatively, a fair in early August might have suited the local agrarian economy better than a fair in late March, even though harvesting might still have been in progress. In 1392 the market and the St Laurence fair were worth £5 6s 8d a year; by 1467-8 their value had fallen to 40 shillings.²⁰⁶

In 1544 Henry VIII granted the bailiffs, men and inhabitants of Towcester vill two fairs each lasting one day, one on the feast of St Philip and St James (1 May), and one on the feast of St Luke (18 October). In 1684 Charles II granted Sir William Fermor and his heirs a weekly Tuesday market and three yearly fairs: one on the 23 September instead of a certain fair lately held on the feast of St Laurence, one on Shrove Tuesday, and one on 22 March. In Baker's day there were fairs on Shrove Tuesday, 12 May and 29 October; the March and September fairs were evidently no longer held. All three were held on Market Hill.²⁰⁷

3.5.3 Inns & Alehouses

Towcester's location at the junction of important routeways allowed the place to function as a thoroughfare town. The inhabitants benefited by providing facilities for travellers and their horses, men like the officials of Merton College, Oxford, who in November 1299 journeyed to Surrey via Brackley, Towcester and Northampton. They spent 3s 6¼d at Towcester, on a meal of bread, ale, beef, chicken and eggs, and on candles, fuel, coal and straw for their beds. Fodder for the horses cost over one shilling, and two pence was spent on hay.²⁰⁸ In 1401-2 Walter Osteller and Emma Smyth were amerced for overcharging strangers for food; among the eight men who broke the assize of ale was Robert Osteler. In 1403-4 Robert Osteler and Walter Osteler broke the assize of ale and Thomas Cook was fined for selling reheated food at excessive prices. The following year both Robert and Walter offended again, and the occupational term '*ostiler*' was added after their surnames. In these early years of the 15th

²⁰³ NRO, Towcester Inventories, 1681 I loose 102; photocopy of *Northamptonshire Archdeaconry. Administrations and Inventories 1677-1710*, 81.

²⁰⁴ *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, III, 391.

²⁰⁵ Goodfellow, 'Medieval markets in Northamptonshire', 317, 322.

²⁰⁶ PRO, DL 43/14/3, m. 47v; *Ruthin Valor*, 66.

²⁰⁷ Baker, *History of Northamptonshire*, II, 321.

²⁰⁸ *The Early Rolls of Merton College, Oxford, with an appendix of thirteenth-century Oxford Charters*, J.R.L. Highfield, ed., Oxford Historical Society, XVIII (1964), 177.

century, one or two of the men charged with breaking the assize of ale are known to have held property near the junction of Park Lane and Watling Street.²⁰⁹

In 1542 five common victuallers and innholders were presented at the annual view of frankpledge for overcharging. In 1543 five innholders were amerced, three of them paying 12 pence and two paying eight pence. The same number were amerced two years later, three who had been named in 1543 and two new men; each paid 12 pence. In 1546 five innholders were recorded, including two new men, one of whom paid just four pence. The following year the number of innholders fell to four, but five were named in 1548. These figures suggest that there were five inns in Towcester at this period, three of them with tenants who did not change and two occupied by men who quickly moved away. The long-term tenants appear to have had other occupations. John Percyvall was also named as miller at the Church Mill, and William Caporne was a tanner. In 1542 and 1543 three brewers were named at the annual view of frankpledge, and the number increased to six in 1546 and 1547, and to seven in 1548. The lowest number of tipplers recorded in these years was nine in 1547; there had been 14 tipplers in 1543 and there were fifteen in 1547. Among them was Alexander Taylour whose customers were charged with playing at dice and cards, and Robert Almayne whose alehouse had the added (and illegal) attraction of a bowling alley.²¹⁰

References to named inns can be found from the early 15th century. In 1410 William lord Clinton granted an annuity of 40 shillings to John Porter payable by the tenant of the Tabard in Towcester.²¹¹ This property was purchased by William Sponne in 1440 and a few years later, in accordance with his last wishes, it was vested in trustees and the rents used to pay the fifteenth when it was demanded, to repair the Tabard, to repair the pavements in Towcester, with any remaining funds to be distributed to the poor.²¹² A tenement called '*le Aungell*' was recorded in 1448; the Bell tenement stood on the corner of the lane leading to the lord's oven in 1462, and the tenement known as the Swan was mentioned in 1484-5. References in the feoffees' account book make it clear that the Tabard lay between the Angel and the Swan.²¹³

The Tabard/Talbot

Details of repairs to the Tabard recorded in the account book reveal something of the appearance of Towcester's leading inn in the years 1482-1566. It stood on the west side of Watling Street, facing the main market area. Behind it lay an extensive stretch of land, probably stretching as far as the lane known in later centuries as Sawpit Lane, the boundary of the Tabard lands in 1820.²¹⁴ On this ground stood various outbuildings ranging from a thatched hog sty to the great stone barn. There were at least three stables: the great stable, the ostery stable and the long stable, each containing a number of mangers. The stables were evidently timber-framed but they were roofed with tiles and crests. In 1495-6 nails were purchased to mend the stairs leading to the stable chamber and to mend the door of the stable

²⁰⁹ E 101/257/17, m. 5d; 257/20, m. 3d; 258/1, m. 2. See n. 102 for Robert Hosteler, who was granted a tenement in 'le Neweland' in 1401 and who was recorded as holding a burgage in 1418.

²¹⁰ PRO, SC 2/195/86, mm. 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

²¹¹ NRO, NPL, No. 890 (*notre houstell ... appelle le Tabard*).

²¹² NRO, Towcester Charities, Lists 58; TC 6, 16-19. (Check these)

²¹³ NRO, FH 578, 579, 583, 639, 659, 808, 810; TC 104, fol. 5d. In 1484-5, for example, 17d was spent on mending a wall between the Tabard and the Swan, and one penny on cleaning the gutter between the Tabard and the Angel.

²¹⁴ NRO, TC 101A (1820 survey). The place-name volume does not mention Sawpit Lane. Perhaps it may be associated with the sawpit recorded in the account book in 1533-4, when 4d was paid for the carriage of timber to the sawpit and from the sawpit to the barn (TC 104, fols. 82v, 83).

next to the ostery. This last-mentioned building perhaps provided accommodation for the men who cared for the horses. It had its own kitchen, from which it was separated by a jetty, and a chamber known as the ostery chamber.²¹⁵ Other facilities offered by the Tabard included a pond in the backyard and a well in the court. In 1484-5 a stone 'house' was built over the well and over twelve pence was spent on an iron winch. Two years later the court was paved, a channel was laid at the entry and a great stone was set before the well.²¹⁶

A plan of proposed alterations to the Talbot (as the Tabard was known in later years) in 1855 shows the main rooms extending back from Watling Street and linked by a side passage.²¹⁷ This plan form may have mirrored that of earlier centuries. In 1855 the rearmost rooms were the service rooms and included the pantry, cellar and kitchen. No evidence survives which records the location of the kitchen and brewhouse in the later medieval period. In 1485 the brewhouse was furnished with a great brewing lead, three 'wort' leads and two vats. Three years later work on the louver in the kitchen cost 7s 6d, and an additional nine pence was paid to a smith for the necessary iron work. Repairs to the louver were carried out in 1496-7, and two pence was spent on cord for it. There was a fireplace in the kitchen with a reredos, and also a dresser. Other service rooms included a larder house and a buttery, for which a lock and key were purchased in 1495-6.²¹⁸

In 1485 there were more than a dozen 'standing beds' at the Tabard: two in the chief chamber, three in the '*drawhte*' chamber, two in the cross chamber, four in the 'wyne seler' chamber, and two in the chamber over the stable toward the Angel. The chief chamber was furnished with a cupboard and there was a wooden screen by the door. The accounts of 1485-6 recorded considerable refurbishment. A new parlour was built, complete with a stone chimney, mantelpiece and bay window. The window was impressive, furnished with glass costing ten shillings and with a lattice painted with verdigris and red ochre. This parlour may have faced onto Watling Street.²¹⁹ Two years later an oriel was made over the stair foot leading to the principal chamber. There was mention of an oriel chamber with two windows in 1495-6; in the same year the great chamber was whitelimed and painted within and without.²²⁰ The accounts indicate the ongoing efforts made to provide accommodation attractive to visitors. In 1502-3 the chimney and the bench in the hall were repaired, a glazier from Daventry worked on the hall window, and three chambers were painted with pictures of coloured flowers. In 1507-8 a painter received 5s 4d for painting the Tabard with the '*standard and legger*'. In 1533-4 the man who painted the Tabard sign was paid 7s 6d, and a man from Potterspury was paid 16 shillings for painting the '*signe beame poste*'. A local smith received three pence for mending the iron work of the sign board and two pence was spent on ale when the sign was set up.²²¹

Towcester continued to function as a thoroughfare town in later centuries. Watling Street was turnpiked in 1709 and three years later John Morton described the town as owing '*its improvements to a well-frequented market, and to the great West Chester Road upon which it*

²¹⁵ NRO, TC 104, fols. 4, 4v, 5, 6, 6v, 9, 10, 15, 24, 24v, 26d, 27, 32, 32v, 33, 34v.

²¹⁶ NRO, TC 104, fols. 6, 9v, 10, 43v.

²¹⁷ NRO, TC 256 (2).

²¹⁸ NRO, TC 104, fols. 1, 4, 15v, 27, 27v, 28v, 30.

²¹⁹ NRO, TC 104, fols. 1, 7v, 8, 35v.

²²⁰ NRO, TC 104, fols. 13v, 27.

²²¹ NRO, TC 104, fols. 34v, 35, 42, 82v, 83.

stands. One of its inns has the best custom, it is generally said, of any single inn upon the Chester road'. In the 1730s the Saracen's Head offered ample accommodation and stabling for 86 horses. The facilities were not dissimilar from those provided at the Tabard in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, and included a large yard, a brewhouse, a well-fitted barn, pasture and arable land adjacent, kitchens, parlours and ground rooms for drinking. The inventory of the proprietor in 1742 listed 22 rooms, among them the '*Best Yellow Room*', '*The Peacock Chamber*' and '*The New Chamber*'.²²² The inventory of the goods of Thomas Bland, dating from 1668, allows a glimpse of a 17th-century inn. The rooms listed included the hall, spence, parlour, buttery, kitchen, brewhouse, '*Green Chamber*', '*Grave Chamber*', stable, barn and loft.²²³

3.5.4 Hinterland

The definition of hinterlands for this study has necessarily been conducted in a relatively simplistic fashion. Firstly using Bracton's theoretical measurement of $6\frac{2}{3}$ miles as the distance within which a new market could be considered to provide direct competition to an existing market.²²⁴ An alternative has been calculated using Thiessen polygons. The latter have just taken into account the markets towns which were clearly successful and which survived into the post medieval period. The Thiessen polygons are likely to give a closer definition of the area in which the town had the dominant impact but the former should provide a guide as to the widest hinterland from which the town will have derived the most of its trade. These theoretical constructs will of course have been substantially influenced by the road pattern. They will also have been affected by physical topography and land use, though in Northamptonshire, unlike upland counties, these are likely to have been relatively limited in their impact.

The hinterland of Towcester was not well served with markets, and many settlements did not have a second market within reasonable distance. Northampton, Brackley, Buckingham and Stony Stratford were the nearest market towns. In 1278 a market was granted to the lord of Alderton, just three or four miles to the south east of Towcester, but it would seem that this market did not succeed, because it was replaced by a market at Grafton Regis in 1465. None of the market days clashed with Towcester's Tuesday market.

One reason for the lack of markets may have been the nature of the hinterland, characterised as it was by a pattern of dispersed settlement. The town was surrounded by a number of very small shrunken places including Fosote, Duncote, Caldecote, Hulcote, Heathencote and Wood Burcote, whose names indicate their secondary or subsidiary status.²²⁵ Towcester is considered to have been historically the market town for the northern half of Cleley Hundred, and it has been claimed that the dependence of villages in the Hundreds of Towcester and Greens Norton continued into the 19th century.²²⁶

There is little evidence to draw upon for trading links in the medieval period. The Tabard Account Book listed payments for sedge from Alford, haulm from Pattishall, straw from '*Potte Kote*', stone from '*pery delf*' and from Harlestone. Tiles came from '*Betylysden*' and

²²² John Morton, *Natural History of Northamptonshire*, 18; reference taken from Moss, 'Community of Towcester', 72, 76-81.

²²³ NRO, Northampton Administrations and Inventories, Thomas Bland of Towcester, 1668 I bundle.

²²⁴ The issue is discussed briefly in the Northamptonshire context by Goodfellow, 1987, 305.

²²⁵ C. Lewis, P. Mitchell-Fox and C. Dyer, *Village, Hamlet and Field. Changing Medieval Settlements in Central England* (Manchester, 1997), 149, 152-3.

²²⁶ Riden and Webb, *Towcester Tenements*, 5; Moss, 'Community of Towcester', 39.

from Alderton, lime from Cosgrave, and more tiles and bricks from Lillingstone.²²⁷ In 1489-90 William Pargeter of Northampton spent five days at Towcester with his two servants ‘*okeryng, pargytyng and whitlymyng*’. In 1502-3 a glazier from Daventry was employed to make the hall window, and he provided the glass and nails.²²⁸

Among the men who sold bread at Towcester in the 1540s were bakers from Northampton and Roade. A butcher came from Wappenham. Bakers in the 17th century came from Northampton, Wooton and Norton Davy. Men from Flore and Nobottle sold meat at Towcester’s market in the early 1750s.²²⁹ But Towcester’s location on the road network also led to wider trading contacts. A London mercer claimed a debt of £18 15s from two Towcester townsmen in 1400.²³⁰

3.5 INDUSTRY

3.5.1 Ironworking

Evidence for iron working in the Roman period has been discovered in the Alchester road suburb of Towcester.²³¹ Entries in Domesday Book indicate that the area around Towcester was the focus of iron working in the years preceding the Conquest, when the annual render from the smiths of Greens Norton, Blakesley and Adstone amounted to £7, and that from the smiths of Towcester amounted to 100 shillings. The size of the payment has led to the suggestion that the *fabri* were iron workers rather than smiths. In 1086, however, they paid nothing.²³² There is no certain evidence for iron working at Towcester in the medieval period, and any continuation of the industry should perhaps be sought in the hamlets rather than in the town. Two annual rents still paid in the 13th century possibly reflect iron-working activities: an iron needle due at Easter for land in the west field of Hulcote, and a needle of St Germanus due at Christmas for land in the east field of Easton Neston.²³³ Henry the charcoal burner (*carbonarius*) is attested at Abthorpe in 1260-80, and Robert son of John le Kolier of Heymundecote was granted a messuage in Towcester in 1303.²³⁴ The documents indicate that the town itself usually numbered a smith or two among its inhabitants throughout the medieval period, among them in the late 13th century a prominent man with a seal bearing his name and the device of a hammer.²³⁵ However, smiths were found in many settlements, both rural and urban, where they carried out the smithing work necessary for the community.

3.5.2 Leather Trades

A tanner, a mustarder and a painter were named in the 14th-century deeds and the practice of giving an individual his occupation became slightly more common in the deeds of the 15th and 16th centuries when the following were recorded: 3 tanners, 3 coopers, 2 butchers, 2 mercers, 1 glover, 1 shoemaker, 1 tailor, 1 shearman, 1 dyer, 1 carpenter and one man

²²⁷ NRO, TC 104, fols. 10, 22, 25, 26v, 33, 34v, 88, 106v.

²²⁸ NRO, TC 104, fols. 19v, 34v.

²²⁹ PRO, SC 2/195/86, mm. 1, 3, 7, 8, 9; NRO, LB 52; X 3582, mm. 5d, 6.

²³⁰ PRO, CP 40, cxxxvi. The men were Henry Fisher and Thomas carswell, both of whom were named in the Clerk of the Market accounts for 1401-2 (E 101/257/17, m. 5d).

²³¹ A.E. Brown, C. Woodfield with D.C. Mynard, ‘Excavations at Towcester, Northamptonshire: the Alchester road suburb’, *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, 18 (1983), 43.

²³² *VCH Northamptonshire*, I, 305.

²³³ NRO, FH 71, 85.

²³⁴ *Luffield Charters*, I, 192; NRO, FH 145. It seems that the Colier family then settled in Towcester.

²³⁵ NRO, FH 132.

recorded as both saddler and innholder.²³⁶ These men were the wealthier members of the community, among them feoffees and officers of Sponne's Charity. The tanners in particular appear to have been leading figures, and at least two served as collectors of the Tabard rents.²³⁷ In the 1540s two leather testers (*gustatores corii*) monitored the quality of the hides on sale in Towcester, and sealed the goods which were up to standard with the town's seal. In 1543 the tanner Thomas Pyncard was presented for having sold 'two *bendes de corio an[gli]ce clowt ledder vocat*' butt *bendes non sufficient*' tannat' neque signo ville sigillat' and also a '*pellem vocat*' le grene hyde insuffic' tannat'. In 1547 the tanner Richard Maryat was amerced six pence because '*vendebat 2 pelles corii vocat*' clout lether antequam suem sigillat' sive signat' contra formam statuti'. Thomas Pyncard was amerced four pence for having sold two '*bendes corii*' which had not been sealed; the shoemaker John Smyth stood surety for a man from Potterspury who had two '*pelles corii vocat*' hydes' to sell which were insufficiently tanned. In 1545, 1546 and 1548 the leather testers reported that no offences had been detected (*omnia bene*).²³⁸ Sales of hides at Towcester's market are attested in the early 15th century. In 1401-2 the records of the Clerk of the Market named the tanner John Yrlond who had been amerced one shilling for badly tanned hides. The shoemaker John Kendale was amerced six pence for overcharging. No other craft workers were named, and this perhaps indicates the significance of leather workers in Towcester at this time.²³⁹

Tanning

The importance of tanning to the local economy can be seen in two orders issued at the court held at Towcester in March 1599. The first decreed that every butcher who brought flesh to sell at the market was also to bring the hide and tallow. The penalty for each offence was five shillings, and the meat was to be arrested until this was paid.²⁴⁰ This was a common practice in medieval towns, and although no evidence survives for Towcester, it would seem likely that it also applied there. An order appended to the 1599 court record laid down *that 'no man, woman nor child shall barke any trees within the lordship, either crabbe tree, whit thorne or black thorne, or lime greene tree'* under penalty of ten shillings a time.

The process of conversion of arable to pasture which is attested in the area around Towcester from the end of the 15th century may have been linked with the development of leather working. At Field Burcote, some two to three miles to the north west of Towcester, four houses were destroyed by Sir Thomas Green in 1499 and 200 acres were converted to pasture. In 1551 the '*lands, meadows and pastures*' were grazed by John Hickling's flock of 2000 sheep. The neighbouring hamlet of Caswell disappeared in 1509, when Sir Nicholas Vaux of Harrowden (who had married Green's heiress) destroyed five houses, perhaps the whole hamlet, and converted 300 acres to pasture.²⁴¹ In 1525 the leather workers formed the largest trade grouping in Northampton and it is possible that some of the raw materials they required came from this area, although they presumably used cattle hides more frequently than sheep skins.²⁴² Studies of other towns have shown that tanners often travelled on regional circuits in search of raw materials, and it is possible that Towcester may have been

²³⁶ NRO, FH *passim*.

²³⁷ Laurence Latymer and Thomas Pyncard.

²³⁸ PRO, SC 2/195/86, mm. 3, 5, 7, 8, 9.

²³⁹ PRO, E 101/257/17, m. 5d.

²⁴⁰ NRO, ZA 6679.

²⁴¹ Steane, *Northamptonshire Landscape*, 171-3.

²⁴² A. Dyer, 'Northampton in 1524', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, ?VI (1979) 76.

included in a circuit used by Northampton men.²⁴³ The importance of sales of raw hides in the market in the 1540s is indicated by the two leather testers and the use of a town seal to testify to the quality of the hides.

In most medieval towns it was normal for tanners to work at a distance from the main residential areas. Two deeds suggest that the Nether End may have been a focus of tanning activities in the 15th and 16th centuries. The tanner Laurence Latymer was granted a messuage and garden here in 1477, and the same property may have been occupied by the tanner Richard Marryat in 1530. It was then described as abutting Watling Street on the west and extending to the close of William South. In 1477 Richard South and John South the younger, both of them coopers, had shared the messuage with Laurence Latymer.²⁴⁴ Further suggestions of tanning activities in the Nether End can be found in the naming of the tanner John Fage among the witnesses to property transactions in that part of Towcester in the 1330s, and an agreement of 1451 in which a son took over a messuage in the Nether End from his parents, undertaking in return to provide them with food and clothing, together with a cartful of wood and 100 barkers' turves each year.²⁴⁵

3.5.3 Butchers

Towcester's butchers may well have been associated with the tanners by providing at least some of the raw hides that were needed. This link may have helped the butchers to prosper. The Early Register Book of Wills proved at the Deanery of Northampton contains seven wills made by testators from Towcester. Only one man gave his occupation, the butcher Nicholas Margitts, who made his will in October 1509.²⁴⁶ Perhaps he was related to the tanner Richard Maryatt attested in 1547, who may have been the Richard Maryot who was one of the three wealthiest taxpayers at Towcester in 1525.²⁴⁷ Butchers may also have benefited from the business engendered by Towcester's role as a thoroughfare town. (Archaeological evidence for butchers' waste. The 'dominance of young animal bones' which could suggest the presence of wealthy consumers – does this date from the Roman period or the medieval period?) Two centuries later, in 1742, the landlord of the Saracen's Head offered his customers brandy from London, cider from Stratford on Avon, and meat from a local butcher.²⁴⁸

Towcester lay close to the two important droving routes known as the Welsh Road and Banbury Lane. The former passed through Syresham, some six miles to the south west of the town, and headed for Buckingham. Banbury Lane crossed Watling Street at Foster's Booth, some five miles north west of Towcester, and continued on through neighbouring Pattishall (where it is called '*Butchers' Lane*' on the OS Explorer Map) to Hunsbury Hill, on the south-western outskirts of Northampton.²⁴⁹ Butchers are attested at Pattishall in the 14th century. In 1377 two men from Towcester were among four mainpernors of the butcher William Freynche of Pattishall. In 1378-9 William Patteshull was one of the foreign butchers selling

²⁴³ See forthcoming paper on Melton Mowbray; also M. Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter* (Cambridge, 1995) 303-4.

²⁴⁴ NRO, FH 680, 844.

²⁴⁵ NRO, FH 232, 243, 585.

²⁴⁶ NRO, Early Register, fol. 172v. He had two houses, one of them new, and his bequests included a cow, a heifer, sheep and a new doublet of bucks leather. He left 6s 8d to the highway at Spittull bridge.

²⁴⁷ PRO, E 179/155/131.

²⁴⁸ Moss, 'Community of Towcester', 81.

²⁴⁹ J. Steane, *The Northamptonshire Landscape* (London, 1974), 247-9.

meat at Northampton. His name in this context almost certainly indicates his home town.²⁵⁰ In 1429 there is mention of Richard Patteshill butcher of Towcester, who with a bookbinder of Oxon' held lands and tenements in the vill and fields of Towcester and Wood Burcote from a butcher of Oxon'. This document perhaps allows a glimpse of trading networks.²⁵¹ So too does the will of the Northampton butcher William Atwell, who in 1485 had 200 sheep at Eastcote barely a mile from Pattishall, and 200 sheep at 'Groste Wydwyle' (?Grafton Regis). He left bequests to several churches including those of Pattishall and Grafton, and named Thomas Pyncard as one of his main beneficiaries.²⁵²

3.5.4 Other Industries

Until the early 14th century occupational surnames are considered reasonably reliable indicators of an individual's trade or craft. The 1301 taxation assessment for Towcester records a variety of occupational surnames. If the names referring to agricultural occupations and to manorial office are ignored, some seventeen surnames remain, a standard number for a small to middling market town. The range of occupations is also typical, including as it does victuallers, textile workers, leather workers, smiths and farriers, and some mercantile involvement. It should be noted that Hulcote was the place of residence of Elias *Mercator* and Thomas *Mercator* in the first half of the 13th century, and that William 'le Ledebetere' was described as a merchant in a document dating from around 1290.²⁵³ The evidence is admittedly scanty, and those named would have been the more prosperous townsmen, but there are hints that Towcester already served as a thoroughfare town (smiths, farriers, marshal, wheelwright, cook), that there was an interest in leather working (tanner, glover, shoemakers), some textile working (shearman, chalonier, weaver, tailor), and some mercantile activity (chapman, linendraper, ?salter).

Shearing may have been a craft which focused on the Nether End in the medieval period. The tenement of John the Clipper (*retonsor*) was here in 1303, adjoining the messuage once held by John 'le Blextere'. This property, or one close by, was granted to Thomas Possel in 1335; later members of this family were certainly shearmen. The documents did not specify that the property extended to the river.²⁵⁴ In 1383 a widow passed over to her son a brewhouse and adjacent court. When the son granted the messuage to Roger Mylleward of Lillingstone in 1389, it was described as being in the Nether End next to Cuttle Bridge. Brewing was another activity which needed good supplies of water.²⁵⁵

The property conveyances indicate sons moving to the capital. Among them were John Whytebred, citizen and saddler of London, named in 1394 as son of Hugh Whytebred of Towcester; Philip Possell, citizen and tailor of London, named in 1420 as son of a Towcester shearman; and John Bacon, citizen and woolmonger of London, named in 1435 as relative of Laurence Bacon of Easton Neston. In 1419 a weaver from Coventry sold property in Towcester which he had inherited from his father. In 1433 a pelterer from Exeter sold a

²⁵⁰ CPR, 1374-1377, 540; NRO, Royal Charter No. 28, m. 1d.

²⁵¹ NRO, FH 503.

²⁵² NRO, Early Will Register, fol. 40r. In the 1540s, a Thomas Pyncard was a tanner in Towcester. There may well have been a family connection. Note, too, that the name Atwell occurs in the FH documents (e.g., 135).

²⁵³ NRO, FH 59, 72, 78.

²⁵⁴ NRO, FH 145, 230, 266, 474.

²⁵⁵ NRO, FH 347, 362.

message in Park Lane previously held by his father.²⁵⁶ Sureties named in the 17th-century probate records commonly came from Northampton, and included cordwainers and malsters.²⁵⁷

In the years 1677-1710 some 24 non-agricultural occupations were listed for those Towcester testators for whom administrations and inventories survive in the records of the Northampton Archdeaconry.²⁵⁸ This may be compared with the seventeen occupations attested in the medieval period. In 1677-1710 the occupations listed were: baker (2), butcher (4), tallow chandler (2), miller (1), weaver (1), tailor (2), shoemaker (5), baker (1), currier (2), farrier (1), blacksmith (4), glazier (2), carrier (1), innkeeper (4), clockmaker (1), schoolmaster (1), labourers (5), druggist (2), grocer (1), mercer (4), ironmonger (3), draper (1), linen draper (1) and merchant (6). It should be noted that the mercantile categories were somewhat fluid. Two men described as merchants in some records were elsewhere given the more precise description of draper and linen draper. Two of the blacksmiths were also recorded as ironmongers; one mercer was also described as a chandler. The evidence is very partial, because the occupations of most of the testators were not recorded. It would appear to suggest, however, that leather working remained important, and that Towcester's role as a thoroughfare town was of increasing significance.

3.6 COMMUNICATIONS

Towcester developed on either side of Watling Street, the Roman road which ran from south-eastern England to the north west of the country. In the Roman period the road from Alchester and Dorchester entered Towcester at the south-western corner and joined Watling Street just north of the present Park Street. It has been suggested that the intersection of these two early military routes may have been the main reason for the siting of the town. It appears that the Alchester road went out of use at the end of the period of Roman occupation. In the late Saxon period a road linking the Saxon burhs of Oxford and Northampton was built. It entered Towcester along Park Lane, crossed Watling Street at the market place in the town centre, and continued past the church and over the river through Easton Neston towards Northampton. The Gough Map of c. 1350 showed Towcester as lying on a road which branched off the London to Northampton road at Stony Stratford and which continued through Buckingham, Towcester and Daventry.

Towcester lay close to two important droving routes, the Welsh Road and Banbury Way. The proximity of these roads doubtless stimulated interest in the trade in livestock and in hides. Leather working was an important activity in Towcester from the medieval period and on into the 19th century. The hinterland of the town was an area of dispersed settlement but was well served with lanes and trackways.

There is a little evidence which shows concern to keep the town's streets and bridges in good repair. In April 1366 twelve leading townsmen, together with '*all the community of Towcester*', gave notification that they had appointed proctors to collect money for the repair of the bridge called the North Bridge next to the hospital of St Leonard at the end of Towcester.²⁵⁹ The butcher Nicholas Margitts left 6s 8d to the highway at Spittull bridge in

²⁵⁶ NRO, FH 383, 471, 473, 474, 475, 527, 534.

²⁵⁷ NRO, photocopy of *Northampton Archdeaconry. Administrations and Inventories 1677-1710*, *passim*.

²⁵⁸ Details taken from photocopy of a printed volume held in NRO.

²⁵⁹ NRO, FH 897.

1509.²⁶⁰ From the mid 15th century the town benefited from the charitable bequest of Archdeacon Sponne, who vested in trustees a messuage called the Tabard, the rents of which were to be used for a variety of purposes, including repairing the town's pavements.²⁶¹ Details of the repairs carried out in any one year were recorded in the Account Book of the collectors of the Charity.

3.7 LAND USE

3.7.1 Woodland

The large quantities of fuel needed for iron working were readily available in the immediate hinterland, both in Whittlewood forest and within the manor of Towcester itself. Woodland two leagues in length by one league in breadth was recorded in the manor in Domesday Book. This can be related to the woods, by then perhaps somewhat reduced in extent, which were listed in the manorial extent drawn up in March 1392: 195 acres in the wood called Dokwellehay, and just over 260 acres in the wood called Rokenhull. The value of the timber made each acre worth 66s 8d. The underwood was managed on a ten-yearly cycle, which evidently allowed 36 acres to be cut each year. In 1392 each of these acres was worth 6s 8d, giving a total revenue of £12.²⁶² In the 16th century (and probably earlier) both manorial woods had a keeper (*custos*) who, with the other manorial officers, made their presentments at the annual view of frankpledge, typically naming people who had entered the woods to cut down 'asshen polles'.²⁶³

It is possible that the timber resources were exploited in their own right. Thomas Carpenter was an important townsman in the ?mid-13th century, and Richard and John de la Wodehall became prominent in later decades.²⁶⁴ 'Woodhall' is recorded as a place-name within the manor a building/central complex where the timber was stored etc.²⁶⁵ At some date before 1290, John de la Wodehall took a messuage in Towcester with a curtilage bounded on one side by the fence of the sawing-yard ('sawger jerd'), with right of access.²⁶⁶ It appears that sawpits were invented in the 15th century and it is possible that one was subsequently established in Towcester, and gave its name to Sawpit Lane. The account book of Sponne's Charity made first reference to the sawpit in c.1533-4, when four pence was paid for the carriage of timber to the sawpit and from the sawpit to the barn; and on another occasion a man was paid four pence for taking four loads of timber to the sawpit.²⁶⁷ No evidence survives, but perhaps Towcester was a marketing centre for timber in the medieval period, as was Lutterworth (Leicestershire), where the road from the west crossed a stone-built bridge known as the Wood Bridge and entered the town along the street called the Woodmarket.²⁶⁸ Villagers from woodland settlements in the Whittlewood forest near Towcester doubtless exploited the local resources, as they did in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when

²⁶⁰ NRO, Early Will Register, fol. 172v.

²⁶¹ NRO, List 58: Towcester Charities.

²⁶² PRO, DL 43/14/3, fol. 49.

²⁶³ PRO, SC 2/195/86, mm. 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9.

²⁶⁴ NRO, FH 55, 60, 62, 82, 97, 99, 132 (NB names Thomas the Smith son of Thomas the Carpenter), 133, 134.

²⁶⁵ NRO, FH A/1 (Survey of the manor 1606), fol. 78: 3 leys at Woodhall ground; mention of Woodhall hedge (in Moore Field). The 17th-century terrier recorded 'the king's land called Woodhall', Woodhall Close and Woodhall Lane: NRO, YZ 5430.

²⁶⁶ NRO, FH 83.

²⁶⁷ Reference to first sawpits in J. Grenville, *Medieval Houses* (ref from Chris Dyer). NRO, TC 104, fols. 82v, 83.

²⁶⁸ J. Goodacre, *The Transformation of a Peasant Economy: Townspeople and Villagers in the Lutterworth Area 1500-1700* (Aldershot, 1994), 26-7. For purchases of timber at Lutterworth by Catesby priory for a barn at Thedingworth: PRO, SC 6/947/3.

Silverstone was home to ‘*tree-fellers and hewers, sawyers and hurdlers, spoke-choppers and faggoters, lath-renders, rake and ladder makers ..*’.²⁶⁹ Woodland products may have been sold at Towcester’s market.

3.7.2 Open Fields & Inclosure

In the Middle Ages the open fields may have extended almost up to the edge of the town on the west and the south; on the east there was meadow land, and more meadow land to the north, beyond which lay the open fields of Caldecote.²⁷⁰ The Field Book of 1606 described 8 unequal fields: Spittle Field, Calcot West Field, Calcot East Field, North Mill Field, Towcester, Hanley Field, Moore Field, Windmill alias Benley Field and Dockwell Mill Field. The terrier of c.1700 described three major fields: Moore Field (46 roods), Windmill Field (46 roods), Docklemill Field (24 ?roods), and Normill Field (6 ?roods). It has been suggested that the last mentioned field may have topped up Docklemill Field to 49 roods, making a fairly equal distribution. The terrier proves that the fields surveyed in the 1606 Field Book were complex, with more than one system operating. The three major fields recorded in 1700 were to the south and west of the town and would seem to have been the fields of Towcester and Burcote. Caldecote would therefore have had a separate system, as is suggested by the names recorded in 1606.²⁷¹

The probate records of the early 16th century attest the involvement of townsmen in agriculture. The bequests of the butcher Nicholas Margitts in 1509 included sheep, a cow, a heifer, and strikes of barley and malt.²⁷² Bequests to the altars and lights within the parish church were similar: a two-year-old bullock, an ox-calf aged 12 weeks, three ewes and three lambkins, a quarter of barley, two strikes of malt.²⁷³ Many of the orders issued at the court held at Towcester in March 1599 concerned agriculture. The times were specified when peas could be gathered in the fields, and when peas, beans and white corn could be gleaned. Other orders specified the numbers of hogs, cattle, sheep, horses and geese which could be kept, and the dates when sheep could be put on the common.²⁷⁴

The fields of Towcester were enclosed in 1762. Handley Park contains some ridge and furrow that dates from the 17th century. It was disparked in 1631 and Bridges states that it had been arable before c.1720.²⁷⁵

²⁶⁹ Moss, ‘Community of Towcester’, 28-9 (quote from J.E. Linnell, *Old Oak: the Story of a Forest Village*).

²⁷⁰ Riden and Webb, *Towcester Tenements*, 9-10.

²⁷¹ NRO, FH A 1; D. Hall, *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire* (Northamptonshire Record Society, X, 1995), 353.

²⁷² NRO, Early Will Register, fol. 172v.

²⁷³ Serjeantson and Longden, *Parish Churches of Northamptonshire*202-3.

²⁷⁴ NRO, ZA 6679.

²⁷⁵ Hall, *Open Fields of Northamptonshire*, 353; he quotes Bridges, i, 279. for Handley Park. Note that RCHME, IV, 160, states that the ridge and furrow in Handley Park must date from the medieval period. Much ridge and furrow in the parish but the exact arrangement of the fields is not known.

C INDUSTRIAL

1.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Towcester's greatest role, in the period following 1750, was clearly as a thoroughfare town located along Watling Street - the Holyhead Road from 1815. The chief economic function of the town was to accommodate the coaches that passed through on a daily basis. Pigots Trade Directory of 1830, written at the height of the coaching era, claimed Towcester '*is a town of considerable thoroughfare, being on the main road to the metropolis and the principal towns in Warwickshire, Staffordshire etc; this circumstance adds considerably to its domestic trade; and the passing of numerous mail and other coaches through, gives it an appearance of bustle and business*'. Coaches from Towcester travelling daily to London, Holyhead and Shrewsbury and Liverpool and thrice weekly to Northampton and Oxford were listed in the directory. There was also an additional note indicating '*Besides the above, upwards of twenty coaches pass through Towcester between London and Birmingham etc in the course of 24 hours*'.²⁷⁶ The main service to travellers was the provision of inns, public houses and taverns, of which there were 20 listed in Pigots directory of 1830. The main inns which provided accommodation (and other services including that of posting house and excise office) were Saracen's Head, Talbot Inn and White Horse Inn. The Post Office was also of considerable importance as it was the main sorting office for mail-traffic from London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Dublin (via Holyhead), Northampton and Oxford.²⁷⁷ A proportion of the population appeared to derive their income primarily from the thoroughfare nature of the town. The Militia Lists of 1777 indicate that there were 9 blacksmiths, 4 ostlers and 5 post boys, although interestingly only 4 men between the ages of 18 and 45 were listed as innkeepers (indicating that the remaining innkeepers were either women or older men). It is clear that many tradesmen in the town benefited from the continuous passing of traffic along the Watling Street and the good transport links with other parts of the country.

Transportation and communication links were clearly crucial to the fortunes of Towcester in the period following 1750. The thoroughfare of Watling Street provided the mainstay of the economy of Towcester in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The town was also well connected with other communications with turnpike roads being established from Old Stratford to Dunchurch (1706), Towcester to Weston on the Green (1756), Towcester to Brackley (1762) and Towcester to Cotton End (1795). In 1805 the Grand Union Canal opened through the county. Towcester was located just 3 miles from the canal and had access to this transportation system through the turnpike road to Cotton End which passed through Blisworth and an additional road was also laid out running through Shutlanger to the canal centre of Stoke Bruerne. The development of the railway had a negative impact on the settlement of Towcester. On December 30th 1830 a meeting was held at White Horse Inn, Towcester to consider the problems which would be caused by the proposed London to Birmingham railway line in close proximity to the town. The perceived problems were the impact on the land, the lack of privacy, danger, effect on water system and natural drainage and the fact that sufficient transportation systems were already in place in the locality. The decline of trade in the town due to competition to the coaching traffic was not mentioned, but it is presumed that this would have been recognised at the time. A statement from the meeting

²⁷⁶ There were also carriers to London, Birmingham, Brackley, Buckingham, Bicester, Oxford, Daventry, Northampton and Stony Stratford.

²⁷⁷ Towcester and District Local History Society, Towcester The story of an English Country Town, 1995

indicated that *'This meeting are not aware of any advantages likely to be produced by the said Railway sufficient to countervail the certain evils that will be inflicted by it'*²⁷⁸. The London to Birmingham Railway opened in 1838, regardless of the protests, and the fortunes of Towcester began to decline. Income from tolls fell from £5,895 in 1835 to £2,702 four years later, the number of coaches passing through the town declined significantly and many of the former inns and public houses closed down. A station was established on Stratford and Midland Junction Railway line near Towcester in 1872; the town also had two branch lines to Blisworth (1866) and Olney (1891), however, this did not significantly enhance the economic status of the town.

The town did not undergo a substantial decline, as might have been expected. The population of the town in the late 19th century remained remarkably consistent and did not decline until the early 20th century. An article in the Northampton Free Press and General Advertiser in 1855 claimed *'This ancient market town has been much improved in its buildings during the last few years. Fears were entertained by many that when the stage coaches were taken off the road (through the railway being opened from London to Birmingham) it would dwindle down to a mere village.....Through the granting of leases for terms of years by the Earl of Pomfret, who owns much property in the town, many of the houses and shops in the Market and High Street have been rebuilt and this having been followed up in several instances by owners of private property, has put already quite a new face on the town'*.²⁷⁹ A comparison of map evidence for 1840 and 1885/1900 indicates that although physical growth of the town was limited in comparison with other towns in the county there was no reduction in the size of the settlement. A large number of the inns and public houses have survived as physical reminders of the coaching era *'How thoroughly the town was once a town of inns may be sufficiently seen in this suburb. Those lofty gateways which now lead to tumble down workshops, or to small tenements for the poorer classes, led in the old time, to spacious yards for the reception of various merchandize and were surrounded with stabling, warehouses and dormitories'*²⁸⁰.

Towcester's status as a market town with an important local administrative role had been overshadowed during the coaching era. It was this function that helped to sustain the economic position of Towcester in the late 19th century. The town was the centre of the Towcester Poor Law Union comprising 62 square miles and 23 parishes, the location for the Petty Sessions, Magistrates court and County Police Station, and polling place for the western division of the county. The commercial role of the town was apparent throughout the period; the Tuesday market remained in operation and there were a number of annual fairs, although these declined in number during the 19th century. A wide range of shops and services are located in the town and there are a substantial number of surviving early shop frontages.

A number of different industries were in operation in Towcester. The militia list of 1777 indicates that there was already a boot and shoe trade operating in the town - fifteen men were listed as 'cordwainer'. There was also a textile industry with two lace makers (the majority of lace makers would have been women who were not included in the lists), six frame knitters and three stay makers. The lace industry continued in operation until the mid

²⁷⁸ Towcester and District Local History Society, Towcester The Story of an English Country Town, The celebration of 2000 years of history, 1995

²⁷⁹ Towcester and District Local History Society Newsletter March 1997

²⁸⁰ G J de Wilde, Rambles roundabout and poems by the late George James De Wilde, Editor of the Northampton Mercury, 1872.

19th century; Pigots trade directory of 1830 lists three male lace dealers and claims ‘The chief article manufactured here is lace, the making of which still employs many females; but its prosperity has been much invaded by the Nottingham machine lace’. There was also a wool stapling industry in the town as three woolstaplers (including an agent) are listed in the trade directory of 1830. There are a number of surviving documentary records relating to the woolstapling Jenkinson family in the town in the late 18th century.²⁸¹ The boot and shoe industry in Towcester remained important throughout the late 19th century with numbers of people employed in the industry rising steeply in the middle decades of the century with 86 in 1841, 178 in 1851 and 301 in 1861.²⁸² A large boot and shoe factory (Hesketh factory) was erected on Vernon Road in 1891 and several other smaller works and warehouses were established in the town at varying times. Much of the trade was, however, based on outworking and very small-scale works. Other industrial works included several breweries and maltings, which later became incorporated in Phipps Brewery, a mineral water manufacturers and a motor vehicle manufacturing centre. There were also a number of small scale tradesmen who were listed in trade directories of the period. One of the twelve ironworks in Northamptonshire was established in Towcester in the 19th century. It was in operation between 1875 and 1882 and was the only ironworks in the county to operate by the ‘direct reduction’ method using two rotary furnaces rather than blast furnaces. Although there were some small quarries in close proximity to the ironworks, the main source of raw material for the ironworks were the large-scale quarries at Blisworth and Gayton. The ironstone was transported to the site by the local railway lines.²⁸³

2.0 TOPOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

The study of the urban topography of Towcester is hindered by the lack of an Ordnance Survey map of 1926²⁸⁴; this has caused problems in following the usual methodology for the project. An approach has been followed whereby the 1:2500 map of 1900 has been compared with the next available map - the 1:10,560 map of 1950; this has been done both as a mapping exercise and as part of the field visit. There are however limitations with this approach as developments which occurred between these dates cannot be pinpointed exactly, monuments which developed after 1900, but were demolished before 1950 are not likely to be found and the scale of the 1950 map means that monuments which were there by 1950, but have since been demolished are also likely to be lost. In the main there appeared to be very little large scale development in Towcester in the period between 1900 and 1950, it appears to have been limited to the development of typical 20th century housing to the extremities of the town. There is a detailed map of the town of 1848 which indicates the layout of the town and the location and existence of individual buildings within the settlement.

The physical development of Towcester in the period following 1750 was predominantly determined by the existence of Watling Street - the Great Road between London and Holyhead / Dublin through the heart of the settlement. The earliest surviving map of the town dated 1848²⁸⁵ shows the effect of the road with settlement densely concentrated along its

²⁸¹ Towcester and District Local History Society, Towcester. The story of an English country town. The celebration of 2000 years of history, 1995

²⁸² Hatley VA & Rajczonk J, Shoemakers in Northamptonshire 1762-1911 - A statistical survey.

²⁸³ Trinder B, Industrial Archaeology in Northamptonshire A report for Northamptonshire Heritage, 1998, Unpublished.

²⁸⁴ The area was not surveyed by the Ordnance Survey between 1900 and 1950.

²⁸⁵ NRO, Map 3084/ 4473

length; there were very few plots of land along the Watling Street frontage which were not infilled with buildings. The main pattern for development appeared to be for large buildings fronting on to the main street with infilling of the plots to the rear with smaller structures. These plots were curtailed on the eastern side by the River and Bury Mount and presumably on the western side by the allocation of land by the Enclosure Award Act of 1762. The only other elements to the town plan at this date were the development of properties along the Brackley Road to the west of the town - by 1848 this was already fairly substantial - and a number of buildings located to the south and east of the church. King Lane (leading to Brackley Road) and Park Street were the only other major roads showing on the plan. Moat Lane would appear to have been operating as a back road to the eastern side of Watling Street; to the west there were already buildings located on Islington Row and the alignment for Saw Pit Lane was in existence, with the green located along its length, but it is not possible to tell from map evidence if it was used as a lane. The Green had been specifically mentioned in the enclosure act - it stated that it was not to be enclosed 'but shall remain at all times after the said intended inclosure, for the same uses, for the benefit of the parishioners and inhabitants of Towcester' and is still in existence today.²⁸⁶

There was very little development in the late 19th century - the only real expansion was to the west of the town - with the infilling of buildings along Sawpit Lane and the development of Pomfret Row and Queens Terrace. The former comprised the development of a miscellaneous range of buildings including the infant school, terraced houses and industrial / agricultural buildings. Pomfret Row and Queens Terrace were short streets with terraced houses on, the former were erected in 1854 by Earl of Pomfret and the latter by Thomas Ridgeway.²⁸⁷ There was also some limited retraction of the town with the loss of buildings from the land in close proximity to the church - this would appear to be due to the development of the brewery on that site. The development of the town in the first few decades of the 20th century would appear to have been limited, as discussed above.

Due to the dominance of the central road through the town it is difficult to ascertain whether there were any particular functional zones within the plan of the settlement. It is clear that the commercial and civic buildings such as public houses, inns, shops, hotels, post office and town hall were located along Watling Street, but so were educational (national school), religious (chapels), utilities (gas works) and industrial (brewery, boot and shoe factory) buildings in addition to a substantial number of town houses. To an extent Watling Street itself can be divided into sections. The northern part has a large number of public houses and inns, the middle section predominates with shops and other commercial buildings and the southern end of the road out of the town is a mixed zone with industrial, utilities and religious / recreational back lanes (as are to be found in many of the market towns in the county). However, Saw Pit Lane, Brackley Road and Park Street were clearly more substantial developments which formed a core function in the town - the former two areas were mixed zones which developed in the 19th century whilst the latter was a core area of the town with a number of buildings of 17th, 18th and 19th century date located in this area.

²⁸⁶ Towcester and District Local History Society, Towcester The Story of an English Country Town, 1995

²⁸⁷ The community of Towcester 1750-1842, Dissertation for MA degree in English Local History Department, University of Leicester, 1975

3.0 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

3.1 INDUSTRY

There were a wide range of industrial buildings relating to a number of different industries in Towcester; these included a large brewery, motor vehicle manufacturing centre, iron works, foundry, mineral water works and boot and shoe factories / workshops. A substantial number of these have not been identified as part of the mapping and field work exercise.

The period 1750-1842 has been studied in detail and the 1777 Militia List, baptismal registers and trade directories have been used to determine the occupational structure of Towcester in these years.²⁸⁸ Population growth was illustrated by the persistence of occupations related to house building, and by an increase in the numbers of men involved in shoe making. The shoe makers were the largest craft grouping and the carpenters came second. There was development of coaching and ancillary occupations, and steady representation of milling, malting and brewing. The appearance of semi-professional occupations such as banker and bookseller was a sign that Towcester was emerging as a social centre with a 'polite society' attached to it. The development of lace making did not emerge from the sources, because this work was done by women and children. It was, however, of considerable importance. Thomas Pennant, writing in 1782, described Towcester as 'supported by a great concourse of passengers, and by the manufacture of lace, and the small one of silk stockings.'²⁸⁹ The largest trade groupings in the Militia List of 1796 were the 15 cordwainers, 8 blacksmiths, 7 grocers and 5 carpenters.²⁹⁰ In 1841 shoe making and lace making were the most important crafts numerically, but the retail trades were more important in terms of influence and significance. Domestic shoe making was the largest employer of male labour in Towcester in the mid 19th century, but it declined sharply in the 1880s, when mechanisation came in. The one factory established at Towcester was not successful, and it was burnt down in 1911.²⁹¹

3.1.1 Boot & Shoe Industry

The boot and shoe industry in Towcester was of economic importance in the town, particularly in the late 19th century, however there are very few built surviving remains. The boot and shoe factory on the corner of Vernon Road / Watling Street was burnt down in 1921 and its replacement has been demolished. The later warehouses / factories in the town have not been identified although a number of unidentified industrial buildings came to light during the field visit. Although there must have been a considerable amount of outworking in the town only one or two possible workshops were located during the field visit.

3.1.2 Wool Industry

Two wool warehouses originally owned by the Jenkinson family were identified by a student at University College, Northampton²⁹². Both are located on Moat Lane and are still in existence one is currently in use as a garage and the other is standing empty. Both buildings appear to have been changed considerably.

²⁸⁸ Moss, 'Community of Towcester', 31-40. Reference should be made to this thesis for full details.

²⁸⁹ T. Pennant, *The Journey from Chester to London* (1782), 199 (reference in Moss, 28).

²⁹⁰ Sunderland and Webb, *Towcester*, 160-3.

²⁹¹ Riden and Webb, *Towcester Tenements*, 15.

²⁹² Bridgens M, A Study of Towcester, Examining whether it conforms to the theoretical model of an industrialised market town, BA Dissertation, Nene University College, 1999

3.1.3 Brewing

In the early 19th century there were a number of brewers operating in the town²⁹³ - one of which was also a mineral water manufacturers - and it is possible that if the outbuildings of some of the many public houses and inns in the town were investigated a number of former small scale breweries would be found. The largest commercial brewery in the town was Phipps Brewery, this became established in the town in 1801. Initially it was a very small scale brewery located in the rear of a plot of land on Watling Street West - in 1874 a much larger site was purchased on Watling Street East; this site was clearly marked on early Ordnance Survey maps, but has now been demolished and 'Malthouse Court' residential home stands on the site. There are two remaining elements of the brewery complex - the 'Fire Engine House' which is now a domestic residence and 'Old Brewery House' to the frontage of the plot which is a 17th century building, but must have been utilised by the brewery during its period of operation.

3.1.4 Other industry

Of the other industrial complexes the ironworks on the Tiffield Road have gone, but the area has not been substantially re-developed and the Old Baptist Chapel in which Victor Ashby had his motor vehicle manufacturing works is still in existence and in use by 'MJ Gowling Carpets and Flooring'. The Groom and Tattersalls foundry workshop located next to Towcester Station appears to remain in existence, although the station itself has been demolished. There was reportedly a tanning pit on Saw Pit Green, but this had gone by 1830 - there are some clear earthworks on the green, but it is not possible to ascertain whether these were linked to tanning or later activity in the area. There are a number of industrial buildings located throughout the settlement which have been unidentified to particular trades.

3.2 AGRICULTURE

Parliamentary Enclosure in Towcester was enacted relatively early for Northamptonshire in 1762 and hence there are no surviving farm buildings within the town itself. Farm buildings around the extremity of the town have not been considered as part of the survey.

The water mill to the east of the town is still in existence; the mill was built in 1794, but suffered a large fire in 1911. The mill is now in use as an antiques business and the associated mill house, which was built in the 19th century, is in use as offices for Northamptonshire County Council.

3.3 HOUSING

There are a large number of surviving early houses in Towcester - primarily dating from the 17th century onwards; many of these have now been converted into shops and other premises - particularly along Watling Street. There are also a number of buildings which were utilised as both shop and dwelling from an early period.

There are a number of substantial sized houses located around Towcester - primarily dating from the 18th and early 19th centuries - these include large country houses such as Park View (now demolished) and Easton Neston house, slightly smaller structures such as Chantry House and the Vicarage and substantial three storey town houses on Watling Street and Park

²⁹³ 6 are listed in M Brown, Brewed in Northants, A directory of Northamptonshire brewers (including the Soke of Peterborough) 1450-1998

Street. There are not, however, the usual late 19th century 'villa' style houses which are usually found in many towns in the county.

Of the smaller houses in the town a substantial number have been demolished, but there are surviving cottages and terraces which tend to be located on many of the yards and back plots in the town. Examples include terraces on Spring Gardens, on Meeting Lane adjoining the Independant Chapel and to the rear of former public houses at the northern end of Watling Street; planned rows of terraces exist on Pomfret Row, Queens Terrace and Sawpit Lane. The terraces appear to be much simpler in construction than those in other towns, solidly built and spacious, but do not have decorative detail and architectural embellishment associated with builder-speculator premises in the late 19th century growth towns.

3.4 COMMERCE

There are a large number of surviving commercial buildings in Towcester including the major public buildings of the Town Hall / Corn Exchange and Market Square as well as numerous public houses, inns, shops and banks.

The Town Hall and Corn Exchange was erected in 1866 on a specially chosen site to the south of the Market Square. The building is an elaborate limestone construction in Italianate style and is still in public usage. The Market 'Square' consists of a slight widening of the Watling Street approximately in the centre of the town - the current extent of the area is the same as that depicted on the map of 1840 and early Ordnance Survey maps and was until recently utilised as car parking. There are currently street works being carried out in the area. The cattle market which was located behind Hesketh Hotel to the north of the town has been demolished.

3.4.1 Banks and Post Office

In the coaching period the town operated as a posting town and was the sorting office for mail traffic from London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Dublin, Northampton and Oxford. It would appear likely that this function was carried out at some of the main coaching inns in the town and that there was no specialised building for the sorting of post. The present Post Office is located on the Market Square in a large late 18th century town house; it is uncertain how long the building has been utilised for this purpose. There were a number of banks operating in the town in the 19th century, although only one building was marked as such on early Ordnance Survey maps - this building is a three storey brick building with some simple classical features and is currently in use by Nat West. There is also an early 20th century bank frontage on an older building which is now in use by HSBC bank.

3.4.2 Public houses and inns

There were a very large number of public houses, inns and hotels in Towcester during the coaching era of the 18th and early 19th centuries and a large number of the associated buildings remain in existence. Seventeen buildings have been identified as public houses or inns as part of the mapping and fieldwork exercise, although there were no doubt more during the height of the coaching period. Of these buildings two have been demolished, eight remain in existence but are utilised for a number of differing purposes including houses, shops and offices and seven are still in use as inns. The three main coaching inns (as listed in Pigot's Directory of 1830) were the Saracen's Head (still in use as a public house and hotel of the same name), The Talbot / Tabard (in use a Sponne Shopping Centre) and the White Horse (currently used as offices and storage). The Hesketh Hotel, which was erected in the

late 19th century in close proximity to the railway station is still standing, but is now in use as 'Degra House' remand home.

3.4.3 Shops and Commercial buildings

There are a large number of early shops frontages surviving in Towcester these are all on Watling Street - with the majority located in the central section. These buildings date from the 17th century onwards although the majority are of 18th or 19th century date. The buildings combine both shop and dwelling, although some would appear to have been houses originally with the shop inserted at a later date. There are a large number of surviving shop frontages from the 19th and early 20th centuries with a combination of side or central doorways. A considerable number of these buildings are listed.

3.5 TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

The road transport network was of crucial economic significance to Towcester in the 18th and early 19th centuries. The section of road between Oxford and Northampton, which linked Towcester with Northampton, was turnpiked in 1795. In the years just before the beginning of the Victorian era Towcester was described as '*a town of inns. Every other house was an inn, and a posting place to boot. Towcester was on the high-road between London, Birmingham and the north-west of England, and between Peterborough and Oxford. Coaches and chaises passed through the town every hour of the day, and almost of the night. Postboys congregated there by dozens, and were as cheeky as any other postboys in the kingdom. The large inns had large stables where horses were kept to work the coaches and to draw the post chaises.*'²⁹⁴ In 1830 upwards of 20 coaches passed through the town each day and there were three inns, 16 taverns and public houses. It was noted in Pigot's Directory of that year that '*the passing of numerous mail and other coaches through, gives (the town) an appearance of bustle and business.*'

In 1838, however, the railway opened at Blisworth, some four miles to the north-east of Towcester, and the 1840 Directory noted the absence of coach traffic through the town. The impact of the railway is attested in a newspaper article written in 1869. '*How thoroughly the town was once a town of inns may be sufficiently seen in the (southern) suburb. Those lofty gateways which now lead to tumble-down workshops or to small tenements for the poorer classes, led, in old time, to spacious yards for the reception of various merchandise, and were surrounded with stabling, with warehouses and dormitories.*'²⁹⁵ The largest and most successful inns tended to be on the west side of Watling Street, where there was more room for the necessary stables, barns and closes. The line of the river Tove and of the mill leat restricted development on the east side of the street.

The roads which were laid out and utilised in this period are still in operation today. Watling Street is clearly the main communication link and this remains a very busy thoroughfare, although traffic has diminished slightly since the building of the M1 in the 1960's and the alignment of the former turnpike roads remain intact. No monuments associated with these roads - toll houses, milestones etc have identified as part of the fieldwork and mapping exercise.

²⁹⁴ Sunderland and Webb, *Towcester*, 175.

²⁹⁵ Moss, 'Community of Towcester', 29-30, 40, 71-2.

The railway station which was established on the Stratford and Midland Junction Railway line in 1872 has recently been demolished, but part of the alignment of the railway remains intact, although other areas have been eroded away by modern development.

3.6 UTILITIES

A gasworks was established in the town in 1838 and was in operation until at least the middle of the 20th century. The works have now been demolished and modern housing stands on the location. The water supply for the town was based on a supply from natural sources which were boosted by a small pumping station near the railway station and a pump in the lower part of Watling Street - these monuments have not been identified as part of the mapping and fieldwork exercise. There is no record of an early sewage works system for the parish.

3.7 ADMINISTRATION AND WELFARE

Towcester Poor Law Union was established in 1834 and comprised 62 square miles and 23 parishes. The Poor Law Union Workhouse was erected in 1836 to a design by Gilbert Scott. The building is constructed of stone and is a listed building. It continued in use as a workhouse until 1930's and has since been used for civil defence, by various local organisations, as a building for Northamptonshire County Council and as a district library - it has now been converted into a luxury development of houses and flats. The town also had a county Police Station which was erected in 1852 - the building comprised a residence on either side of the hall for the inspector and constable, four cells for the confinement of prisoners and chambers for magisterial and other business. The original building has been demolished and replaced with a new structure on the same site which was built in 1937. There was a small fire engine station located on Watling Street - the building is still in existence as a Pizza Parlour. The building is single storey and divided into two with a shed-type structure to one side with a large doorway for the fire engine to enter the building and an area possibly used as an office to the other side. A cemetery was established to the extreme west of the town along Brackley Road in 1886 - this is still in operation.

3.8 EDUCATION

The first school was established in Towcester in 1448 by Archdeacon Sponne; during the 19th century the school was located in Park Lane²⁹⁶, but in 1890 new school buildings were erected on Brackley Road. The structures were destroyed by fire in December 1923 and a new building was erected on the same site in 1929. The building is still in use as 'Sponne School'.

The National School was erected in 1849 to a design by the architects Hall and Briggs - a gothic style structure of stone with a tiled roof. The school was badly damaged by a lorry in 1921 and large scale repairs had to be undertaken. The school was sold in 1929 and is now in use as a series of shops - the building is located to the rear of the plot where the town hall now stands. An associated infant school was erected in 1869 on Saw Pit Lane. The building is still in existence and is in use as the library for the town - there is a plaque on the wall 'Towcester Church of England School erected 1869. Enlarged 1929 to accommodate the scholars from the National School'.

²⁹⁶ Whellan=s Trade Directory 1849

3.9 RELIGION

The Church of St Lawrence is still standing and in use as the parish church - the church was 'repaired, beautified and repewed' in 1836. In addition to the parish church there were Wesleyan, Baptist and Congregational / Independant congregations in the town. The oldest chapel in the town is the Wesleyan chapel in Sun Yard which was erected in 1788. The building is still in existence behind the Baptist Church of 1877, but is now in use as a barn / storage and all its interior has been removed. The structure is of stone, but with substantial brick repairs. The replacement building for this chapel was built in Brackley Road in 1893, this building was also built of stone and is still in use for the same purpose today. The original Baptist chapel was erected in 1853 and constructed of stone, but was quickly replaced by a new brick built chapel in 1877. The former building was re-utilised for a number of purposes including a car manufacturing garage in the 1920's and is now a carpet warehouse; the later building is now used by 'Watling Street Christianity Centre'. The Congregational Chapel was erected in 1850 on 'Meeting Lane' - the building was a barn-like construction of stone with the use of the red brick in the gables; it is now in use by the Roman Catholic Church.

3.10 RECREATION

There were relatively few recreational facilities in Towcester in the period following 1750 and it is assumed that originally the public houses and inns fulfilled this need and later that the town hall provided a substantial range of entertainment. Oddfellows Hall was established on the corner of Park Road / Brackley Road in 1903, although it was later replaced with a new building dated 1932 which remains on the site today. The Mission Hall marked on early Ordnance Survey maps at the southern end of Watling Street West, which is now in use as offices, may also have provided a recreational facility for the town. In 1939 Towcester Cinema was erected, as a gift to the town from the Hesketh family and included a small private box for their use. It was designed by Messrs J Brown and AE Henson and was one of the most up-to-date cinema buildings of the time; it was profiled in the Architect's Journal (1940). Towcester Racecourse was established in close proximity to the town from 1876 - in the early years there was an annual Grafton Hunt steeplechase on Easter Monday. In 1928 a company was formed and the course began to operate under National Hunt rules. A permanent grand stand was erected in the 1930's and the course is still in operation today. The Towcester Racecourse was, however, of county and even regional significance and was not primarily for the benefit of locals to the town.

II ASSESSMENT

A PRE-MEDIEVAL

1 ROMAN

1.1 ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE AND SURVIVAL

Towcester is a significant example of a class of medium to large defended small town not uncommon within the wider region. Its size, defences and the possible extent of its suburbs suggest that it lay towards the top of settlement hierarchy in the county. There is abundant if not always quality information to support the view that the town was a major focus for trade and a variety of crafts in the Roman period. It appears to be an example of a well developed local centre based partly on the largely pastoral wealth of its agricultural hinterland and its strategic location at the junction of a series of regional roads and Watling Street.

The presence of a number of substantial, sophisticated and well furnished buildings within its core, including one or more temples and a bath house/mansio, suggest that it also acted as an important service centre for travellers on this major Roman highway. Many largely small scale opportunities exist for future investigation of the town but the shortage of modern excavation within the defended area east of Watling Street currently limit what can be said about its precise origins. Despite this it is clear from the trial work on the floodplain of the Tove to the east of the town that Towcester was already a significant focus settlement and ritual activity in the Late Iron Age and it remains a site of National Importance.

Much of its core has been a focus for continuing settlement since the medieval period and thus it remains difficult to judge whether the settlement bears close comparison with some of its nearest neighbours but it appears to have been most closely paralleled by Irchester. Most of the suburbs of the settlement are likely to have been damaged by housing and industrial development or truncated as part of related landscaping works but parts of the town in the vicinity of the main watercourses and within its core are sufficiently deeply buried to have excellent potential for preservation. Though the precise extent of these deposits are only patchily understood it is likely that a number of areas of the south western quarter of the defended area of the settlement in particular may be deeply buried.

1.2 DOCUMENTARY

Towcester is usually considered to have been the Roman settlement of LACTODURUM noted in the Antonine Itineraries (as LACTODORO) and the Ravenna cosmography (as IACIODULMA). There is no direct epigraphic or literary evidence to confirm this but Towcester is the only significant settlement lying in the appropriate position on Iter II and Iter VI. The name is more problematic than may at first seem. Lacto- is often taken to be from the British meaning 'milk' and the -durum from 'hillfort' or 'fort'. Often taken at face value, as meaning fort or defended town of the dairymen this is a rather unsatisfactory interpretation. Other alternatives have been suggested and are discussed by Rivet and Smith (1979, 382-3) but one suggestion that the name may in part refer to a river or 'milky water' may accord with the presence of a petrifying stream that runs into Silverstone brook south of the town.

In addition to this the only other evidence comes from the recent discovery of one (and possibly more) *defixio* or curse tablet in the water meadows to the east of the modern town.

Though not fully deciphered it contains three names, those of GENESIVS; an un-named son of MATERNVS, and CUNORMIRINVS. Respectively of Greek, Latin and Celtic origin the names have potentially interesting implications for our understanding of the ethnic diversity of the town though their discovery on a *defixio* need not mean the individuals listed had any direct link with the town.

1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL

1.3.1 Summary of Previous Investigation

The broad extent and morphology of the Roman town at Towcester is reasonably well understood thanks to a long tradition of the reporting of finds in and around the present town since the nineteenth century and a reasonable number of more recent excavations and evaluations. Within this overview, however, there are three notable areas where our knowledge is still particularly scant: the southern suburbs along Watling Street south of Silverstone Brook, the western suburb and possible cemetery west of the town along the Brackley Road and perhaps surprisingly the very core of the town inside the defences, especially east of Watling street. Knowledge of the architecture and density of settlement over much of the town is still poor and though several potentially very important public or religious buildings have been recognised they are all poorly studied.

1.3.2 Survival

The only surviving earthwork remains are those of a short length of the now denuded western defences close to the Sponne School. The excavations and evaluations in the south-western quarter of the core of the town and along the Alchester Road provide a reasonable picture of depth and survival of roman archaeological deposits in one part of the town. Within the defended area and to the west of Watling Street work before and during development in Allens Yard, Park Street, Richmond Road and Meeting Lane indicates that Roman deposits in this area are frequently to be found at a significant depth (1.2-2.5 meters) below medieval and later overburden and that the natural topography of this is area was significantly different to that of today. At 15a Park Street and Meeting Lane the natural subsoil lay at least 1.8-2.5 meters below modern ground surface and here and at the other sites noted above between 0.5 and 1.1m of Roman deposits often survived. This work clearly demonstrates the likelihood of significant Roman deposits surviving across much of the uncellared areas of this part of the town.

Elsewhere within the defences the picture is far less clear, in part because of the shortage of recent archaeological interventions in the core of the medieval and post-medieval historic town. A series of smaller excavations across the northern and eastern parts of the town's defences, however, provide us with some guide to the potential for survival of Roman archaeological deposits in this area. Though variable it seems clear that deposits lay between 0.8 and 1.4metres below modern ground surface at the rear of 164-6 Watling street, and 156-8 Watling street and that in the areas between 0.9 and 1.6metres of Roman stratigraphy survived. In the area of the Bury Mount by contrast Roman deposits had been truncated in many areas but still survived to a depth of 0.6m in places.

Outside the defences some of the best instances of surviving Roman archaeological deposits come from alluviated or levelled up areas close to the courses of the streams and river Tove. Despite large scale landscaping from the nineteenth century onwards of the former TMT site Roman deposits up to 0.4m thick were found at depths of 1.4-3m. Within Towcester Meadow to the east of the town Iron age and roman deposits were buried by between 0.25

and 1.4m of alluvium though the deposits themselves are only relatively thin or cut subsoil below this.

There are few instances away from the floodplains of the various watercourses outside the defences where archaeological deposits are buried to any significant depth and in these areas much damage will have been done in the course of residential and other development. Between recent developments, however, instances of good survival of Roman deposits are encountered. This has been most clearly demonstrated in the work along the Alchester Road and the series of excavations and evaluations carried out either side of Watling Street north of the town.

1.3.3 Potential

Settlement Morphology and Communications

Whilst reasonably understood in overall plan the road system is not particularly accessible to archaeological evaluation in many areas where it coincides with the course of extant roads. Along the line of Watling Street for example the course and state of preservation of the Roman road is not very well known as the survival of most of the historic buildings along its main frontage prevents access. It is likely that in places the road will have been significantly affected by the construction and maintenance of services unless, as was noted above, they are buried to sufficient depth to have survived.

The most obvious requirements are for further archaeological work as part of local redevelopment either side of Watling street to better establish its course through the centre of the town, especially given Woodfield's suggestion that the roads course may have been changed (a rare if not unprecedented act on a route of this significance). Further work is need to confirm that there is indeed no road to Irchester running east from the town itself and that its route in fact branches off from Watling Street to the north of the town across the Tove in the northern suburb.

Defences

The line and state of preservation of the defences are now pretty well understood around most of the town. Only a short section on the western side survives today, as an extant earthwork but a significant part of the truncated remains of the rampart and base of the wall foundations as well as the surrounding ditches have been located in several places. The reuse of stone for later occupation in the town and potentially the refurbishment of the defences in later periods has damaged or removed much of the town wall and currently limits our ability to confirm and date the exact constructional sequence of the defences. Finding an area where part of the walls or at least their foundations survives is still a priority for future work. Furthermore we still understand little or nothing about the town gates and their survival or the course of the defences in the south eastern corner of the town.

Buildings

Inside the defences of the town there are good reasons to believe that the foundations of many stone and timber buildings survive along the main road frontages where burial of Roman deposits is substantial. This provides the opportunity to study sequences of construction that have often been severely truncated elsewhere due to agricultural or development works. Two significant problems in understanding the plan and architectural form of buildings that remain, however, result from the destruction or fragmentary survival of deposits between occasional intrusive later works such as pits, sewers or cellaring, and the

small scale of the majority of present and future developments and thus archaeological interventions in the town. It is a telling fact that despite a long history of archaeological research we still do not have the complete plan of a single building within the core area.

Outside the defences the problem is a more familiar one seen elsewhere in the county where thanks largely to the records of the excavations and watching briefs since the 1950s a satisfactory amount is known about the range of building traditions used at Towcester. With a broad range of timber buildings of both round house and rectangular post built and sill beam construction and many stone founded rectangular buildings it is clear that a wide range of constructional techniques were used from the first to fourth centuries AD. As is common in many areas stone largely superseded timber forms in the second and third centuries AD but the survival of rectangular timber buildings with shallow foundations of fourth century date is an important discovery that adds significant examples to a poorly understood area of study.

It is also clear that the main road frontages and an area c.40m either side of them were quite densely occupied from the later first century in the core of the settlement and at least from the 2nd century AD in the suburbs. The destruction caused by more recent urban developments, however, makes it unlikely we will ever get a clear idea of the overall nature and layout of the towns architectural traditions. This should not stop attempts to assess evidence for individual buildings when the opportunity arises, especially if it proves possible to attempt to investigate the functions or internal layout of surviving buildings especially in the core of the town and the southern and western suburbs where our knowledge is still extremely sketchy. Importantly, given development opportunities in the areas behind the main road frontages we need to evaluate whether domestic/craft/agricultural buildings occupied the intervening space and if so, their general orientation in relation to any potential side roads.

Commerce & Industry

Many surface built structures such as hearths, furnaces and ovens do survive in the deeper archaeological deposits found within the towns defences and in pockets elsewhere. Outside this area subsequent cultivation followed by housing and other urban development will have truncated or destroyed much important information but the existing evaluations and excavations show how much still survives for study. The town has a good body of artefactual and ecofactual evidence some of which has been published to a good standard. There is thus considerable potential to build upon this to create a greater synthetic overview of patterns of commerce and industry in the town and its suburbs through time.

Religious, Ritual & Funerary

The various likely religious or ritual sites identified so far identified are all known from rather fragmentary information. The Park Street temple was partially damaged by later Roman and medieval development on the same site but was sufficiently good condition to provide useful information. It should extend into the neighbouring plot but Woodfield has noted that this area was redeveloped without archaeological intervention and a chance therefore may have been lost to study this site in more detail. The uncertain interpretation of the building and marshy area in Allens Yard, however, should not detract from the fact that in places preservation was good and significant areas of important archaeological deposits should still survive here and in adjacent plots.

Likewise the circular building found at 156-8 Watling Street has only been investigated on a very small scale and its interpretation as a temple is still open to debate. The quality and

depth of preservation of this site, however, is known to be good and much of its location to the rear of the present buildings fronting Watling Street provides a good opportunity for future investigation. Unfortunately, this is less likely to be the case for the fourth potential ritual site along the Alchester Road where it crosses Silverstone Brook. There is little to indicate that deposits survived at any depth on this site and the scale of development and works related to the Brook itself suggest that remains here are likely to be fragmentary and severely truncated.

The uncertainty over the status of the many burials that have been recorded across much of the town's landscape makes assessment of the likely state of preservation of possible cemetery difficult. There is clearly a significant focus of burial along both sides of the Silverstone Brook south of the town and in between areas of subsequent development or drainage works pockets of burials may still survive. Although elsewhere housing has clearly damaged a number of burials and thus prevents a reasonable understanding of the overall layout and development of burial in these parts of the settlement, significant numbers of burials probably survive in the intervening spaces. In particular, wherever possible these need to be recorded in future in order to better understand chronological and spatial trends in burial location to the west of the town along the Brackley Road, and to the west of Watling Street north of the town. The surviving deposits on the floodplain to the east of the town evidently include a very important group of probably Late Iron Age burials as well as potentially further Roman ones that together provide the best preserved and contiguous group that is likely to be available for future study. These clearly deserve protection in future.

Landscape & Environment

A limited amount of potentially useful environmental and archaeological work has been done on Roman Towcester. Though far from complete it represents one of the better bodies of information available from the county. The survival and proximity of significant alluviated areas of floodplain on three sides of the town potentially provide a valuable resource for future environmental work. A cautionary tale for work in this area, however, comes from the Water Lane evaluations where preservation was not as good as might have been expected. The survival of organic remains in waterlogged or anaerobic conditions, including leather and wood, however from sites such as the TMT yard suggest that some areas on the southern and eastern fringes of the defended area of the town may provide well preserved sequences for analysis. Elsewhere deeper soil cut features frequently reach the water table and thus potentially contain waterlogged remains. Within the town the quality, depth and extent of so-called 'dark earth' deposits and their protection of underlying features suggests that programmes of environmental assessment may prove fruitful.

The analysis of bone assemblages from earlier excavation has already provided important information on potential food and agricultural strategies in and around the town and further work will allow a more sophisticated view of this to be developed. What is currently a pressing concern is the need for more palaeobotanical assessments from ongoing evaluations and excavations to see if quality of preservation is good in unwaterlogged deposits.

1.4 HINTERLAND

For the purposes of assessment of the hinterlands of the Roman towns an arbitrary boundary of 10km radius was established and its potential graded according to professional judgement. A wider understanding of the role of urban foci in the region and their relationship with surrounding agricultural landscapes is better reviewed as a whole and the findings of such an

approach to Northamptonshire are summarised in the Roman period section of the general report of the Extensive Urban Survey.

The historic landscape in the immediate hinterland (within 2km) of Towcester has been significantly affected by medieval and later settlement. The area immediately to the north, west and south west of the Roman settlement has been subject to significant settlement expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the extent that most of the Roman settlement and its immediate hinterland lies under modern development. Much of this development before the 1960s took place with limited or no archaeological recording but since then a significant corpus of evidence has been built up.

To the east the presence of Easton Neston Park has ensured the partial survival of both a pre-Roman Iron Age burial ground and a significant parcel of land close to the subsequent Roman town incorporating potentially important alluviated areas of the Tove valley. It is one of the few instances from the county where such an area close to a Roman small town has not been destroyed by mineral extraction or damaged by urban development.

Further afield the overwhelmingly rural nature of the surrounding landscape today and in the historic past suggests that much of the archaeological potential of the town's hinterland is still good. This part of the county was long dominated by pastoral land use that ensured the survival of significant parts of the former medieval landscape. The presence on earlier ground and aerial surveys of such extensive earthwork evidence for medieval cultivation and settlement, however, clearly indicates that to a significant degree the earlier Roman landscape will still have been denuded. Parts of this landscape have also now seen significant ploughing, as formerly pastoral areas were turned over to arable or temporary pasture in the last 50 years. Despite this there are good reasons to believe that parts of this landscape, especially if still under permanent pasture, will have very good potential for future study.

Unlike many areas of the neighbouring Nene Valley, the hinterland of Towcester has not seen an intense or long-lived tradition of field walking or excavation. Several important villas have seen antiquarian or later investigation but there has been little systematic field survey that has subsequently been collated. This situation, however, is currently changing quite rapidly as a consequence of recent road schemes, urban expansion and research. Archaeological survey and excavation ahead of the construction and widening of the A43 has provided a substantial number of examples of Iron Age and Roman rural settlements that at least in part have all been investigated under modern recording conditions. This linear transect across the south western quarter of the hinterland of Towcester will provide an invaluable balance to the former bias towards the larger and more spectacular villa sites previously investigated. An appreciation of the wider picture of Late Iron Age, Roman and Early Medieval settlement patterns and landscape history across the southern part of Towcester's hinterland will also be produced as a result of the intensive fieldwork being carried out as part of the Whittlewood Project.

Elsewhere within the wider hinterland of Towcester there is less evidence for rapid development in our understanding of the Roman landscape. One possible exception is the area to the extreme northeast in and around the tributary streams of the Nene to the south of Northampton. Here developer funded work ahead of urban expansion supplemented by earlier discoveries is starting to build up a fragmentary but useful picture of the development of the Roman landscape to the south of Duston around the former Iron Age hillfort at

Hunsbury. Though marginal to the landscape under consideration here it currently represents the nearest point of comparison within the county for the results of the ongoing work to the south of Towcester.

Given this history of development and archaeological research only a very patchy picture of overall patterns of settlement and land use in the late Iron Age and Roman period around Towcester is currently possible. The completion of the work currently underway around Silverstone and Whittlewood to the south and the southern edge of Northampton to the north east, however, does provide the opportunity to begin addressing this gap in the near future.

2 SAXON

There is little evidence for Saxon occupation in the area of the current town. Residual artefacts in later levels and chance finds represent the only material remains. Far more extensive investigation is needed to establish if there was a genuine hiatus in activity in Towcester, as happened in many of the dispersed settlements of the region during this period. However the potential for the investigation of the final collapse of the Roman town in the 5th century, of any continuity of re-establishment of occupation in the early-middle Saxon period, the defences of the burh itself and the way in which the establishment of the burh may have transformed the fortunes of the Saxon settlement means that there are a wide range of themes worthy of investigation. The lack of significant Saxon remains being recovered in the town in excavation in the last few decades does not mean that such remains do not survive or exist. Other archaeology has been shown to survive in good condition in some areas of the town and it is possible that important Saxon remains will still be recovered.

The reference to Towcester in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle leaves no doubt that Towcester was occupied by the early 10th century, and that it was defended, but no evidence for the nature of this settlement or its defences has been discovered. The plan form for the medieval settlement indicates that the Roman defended core was re-utilised and it has been suggested that Towcester was the centre of a Royal estate, with the manor possibly located in the area now occupied by Bury Mount and a possible Minster Church adjacent. This juxtaposition of Royal manor and church has been identified at Saxon estate centres elsewhere in the county, notably Higham Ferrers. It has also been taken as an indication that other settlements, such as Daventry and Oundle, functioned as Royal estate centres. Any evidence to suggest that the medieval town of Towcester developed from a high status Saxon settlement would be of national importance for the contribution it could make to the overall unravelling of the development of central places from the Roman through to the early medieval period.

Potential

The construction of the motte and bailey castle, known as Bury Mount, in the suggested location of the Saxon Minster has ensured that there is likely to be little opportunity to recover evidence for a Royal or comital court in the vicinity. Similarly, although evidence for a high status Roman building survived beneath the parish church, there is likely to be little opportunity to recover evidence for the pre-Conquest church, nor to examine its possible Minster status. Towcester has been subject to piecemeal development over several decades. Numerous observations have detected well preserved archaeological deposits of Romano-British date buried at a depth in excess of 1.5m. It may be that Saxon settlement remains located above this depth have been lost or that the nature of Saxon deposits has rendered them more difficult to detect in limited observations.

B MEDIEVAL & POST-MEDIEVAL

1.1 ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE AND SURVIVAL

Towcester does not have the same combination of documentary, archaeological and historic building survival that has been seen in Oundle and Brackley. Reconstruction of historical topography has not proved possible and is unlikely to be achieved unless significant and as yet unidentified documentary sources are revealed. The greater part of the medieval frontages are still built up and have been intensively built up since the post medieval. A large part of the frontages are also occupied by listed or other significant historic buildings. It is therefore unlikely that extensive opportunities will arise for large scale investigation of the most significant medieval deposits. The survival of the castle as a major earthwork does offer high potential for investigation of the origins and development of the manorial focus. The church also may offer similar potential although there has not been any significant investigation to establish the degree of survival of archaeological remains. However, given the importance of investigation of the town for its Roman and Saxon precursor so the medieval deposits will inevitably become available for investigation and thus the study of the town could and should be pursued as an 'added value' to these earlier studies.

1.2 DOCUMENTARY

1.2.1 Summary of Previous Investigation

The Victoria County History includes a chapter on Towcester. More recently a detailed popular history of Towcester has been published by Towcester Local History Society in 1995. Other work on documentary sources related to the medieval town has been published by Dr Rodney Conlon. Despite the relative paucity of primary sources for the medieval period, there is still the potential for detailed documentary study.

1.2.2 Research for this Report

The indexes and catalogues to the major relevant collections in the Public Record Office, Northamptonshire Record Office and British Library have been searched as have those in the National Register of Archives. Work has been concentrated on reconstruction of historical topography from documentary sources of the post medieval period. This provides a firm basis for the carrying of the reconstruction back to the medieval period. Historic map transcription has been conducted to re-scale data from the early 19th century map to an Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1st edition base. The inaccuracies of the original mapping together with the limitations of working with xerox copies of the 1st edition mapping has led to an error of some 3-4 m in the positioning of some features, as identified by reference to surviving buildings on the modern digital mapping, though in exceptional cases a higher error may be found. A limited amount of work has been conducted on the primary sources for the medieval history of the town.

1.2.3 Survival

There are a substantial number of medieval charters and other post medieval deeds in the Fermour Hesketh collection and several rentals and other late medieval and early post medieval sources. However they are not sufficient to enable reconstruction of the historical topography at a tenement level.

1.2.4 Potential

A detailed documentary study of Towcester is required to establish, if possible, the nature and location of burgage tenements in the early medieval village. Currently, much of the published evidence for the medieval town, and its Saxon predecessor, is largely speculative. Evidence relating to the status of the manor and the church is required to establish Towcester's position in the hierarchy of Saxon and medieval estates. Any evidence for the location and extent of the original market place would be valuable. In particular, evidence for the date of the establishment of burgages in this area is urgently required. However, it is not clear whether sufficient comprehensive surveys and rentals exist which will enable the relationship between burgage tenements and the market place to be reconstructed for the medieval period. Such reconstruction should be a high priority of future work.

1.3 HISTORIC BUILDINGS

1.3.1 Summary of Previous Investigation

A brief note on the main surviving stone houses is given in the VCH chapter for the town. The church is dealt with in the unpublished RCHME survey of the churches of the county. There has been no systematic detailed survey of the lesser historic buildings of the town although there have been detailed surveys of a number of historic buildings in the town by Giggins and others.

1.3.2 Research for this Report

No specific original research on the historic buildings of the town was conducted for this report.

1.3.3 Survival

Some medieval standing building remains have been identified in Towcester but a systematic survey of all the historic buildings has not been conducted so it is uncertain how many contain early fabric. There are however a substantial number of buildings of post medieval date in the main streets of the town some of which could incorporate medieval remains and certainly a substantial number with important post medieval fabric.

1.3.4 Potential

There are sufficient historic buildings surviving in the town, listed and unlisted, to contribute significantly to the development of understanding of the character of the post medieval town. The survival of medieval fabric is however unlikely to approach that seen in Oundle where there is a far larger historic building stock. However Towcester is on a par with the best of the rest, notably Brackley, Daventry and Higham Ferrers.

1.4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL

1.4.1 Summary of Previous Investigation

Numerous investigations have been carried out within the town, although these have largely concentrated on the Roman town. Ditches, possibly associated with the Late Saxon *burh* defences have been uncovered in the vicinity of Bury Mount and also at Allen's Yard. The remains of a medieval stone building were partially uncovered adjacent to Meeting Lane to the rear of the Watling Street frontage. Elsewhere within the town, isolated rubbish pits have been discovered. Limited evidence for a section of medieval Watling Street has been investigated on the southern edge of the town. Further to the south extensive evidence for activity to the rear of tenements adjacent to Watling Street South in the suburb of Nether End

has been discovered. The possible remains of the medieval Leper Hospital have been recorded adjacent to Watling Street to the north of the town.

1.4.2 Research for this Report

No specific archaeological survey work was conducted for this report.

1.4.3 Survival

There is good earthwork survival for the castle motte, the fishponds and associated features immediately to the east of the mill leet and of the north west corner of the defences, but nowhere else do significant earthworks survive.

The degree of 19th and 20th century redevelopment of the historic settlement core is far greater than might initially seem to be the case. The frontages of the medieval and post medieval town are almost wholly occupied by buildings. Whereas in the other small towns with the highest archaeological potential, especially Oundle and Brackley, a high proportion of frontage is either not built up or are dominated by surviving historic buildings, in Towcester this is not the case. Almost the whole of the medieval and post medieval frontages are built up but in the north and south ends of the town the buildings are largely of 19th and 20th century date. Only in the central area, the heart of the medieval and post medieval town, around the market place, immediately adjacent and in Park Street, do substantial numbers of historic buildings dominate the frontages. Only here might one expect a high potential for the survival of good archaeological deposits of medieval date beneath the structures. However until there is testing of the relative survival of deposits in these two very different contexts then the conclusions on potential must remain speculative. What is clear is that there are no significant areas where medieval frontages remain without buildings, in contrast to almost all the other of the high potential medieval small towns in the county.

In contrast to this however there is a relatively low level of destruction of deposits in the rear of tenements judging by the limited degree to which there has been infilling of the back of tenements. It is here that investigations over the last 20 years have shown reasonable survival of archaeological deposits. However these areas are not likely to contain any significant settlement remains only the evidence for the laying out of the tenements themselves.

Waterlogging has however been demonstrated in the deeper features in various locations around the town. Given the low lying location of the town and the presence of clay beneath a significant part of it there is in Towcester probably the highest potential of any of the high potential small towns in the county for the survival of waterlogged remains. This has been clearly demonstrated from the evidence for leatherworking recovered from the fishpond to the north east of the mill.

There has been no significant investigation within the market area to determine whether significant remains exist of medieval shops or stalls etc. However the potential is probably low given the lack of good topographical reconstruction to locate such features accurately and the small area within which there may be structures surviving.

1.4.4 Potential

Investigations to date suggest that while Romano-British deposits are generally well preserved beneath layers of later material. In contrast medieval remains may only survive at a

much shallower depth, as has been noted in all the small towns of the county. As a result the survival of such deposits is likely to be restricted to the less developed areas of the town. These, as we have seen are away from the frontages. However the survival of archaeological deposits on the frontages has yet to be established for certain and therefore, a high priority should be given to testing a wide range of sites within the medieval area of the town, even where there has been 19th and 20th century redevelopment.

Despite the possible loss of buildings on the street frontages, good survival of pit groups and other stratified deposits may enable issues such as the chronology of the tenements, their status and related functions to be addressed. The potential is dramatically strengthened by the possibilities of substantial survival of waterlogged deposits in which Towcester may offer the highest potential of any of the small towns in the county.

Specific potential exists for the investigation of the castle both of the motte itself and of the bailey area, which although it is largely built up may still prove to have reasonable survival of archaeological deposits. If the interior of the bailey does not yield good surviving remains then the defences at least, in the form of a moat, should be well preserved and are likely to contain important waterlogged deposits. The motte will also be important for the potential it offers for evidence of its use as a gun platform in the Civil War. The refurbishment of the defences of the town in 1643 also offer the potential for significant archaeological evidence. The archaeological potential of the church is as yet largely untested, apart from the discovery of the major Roman building beneath the porch.

1.5 HISTORICAL TOPOGRAPHY

1.5.1 Survival

Towcester's medieval street pattern appears to have survived largely intact. The only substantial change has been the insertion of the 'new' road which leads from Brackley Road into Northampton Road and thus over the Tove. The frontages too are largely built up where they were in the medieval and post medieval period. Many of the property boundaries today still preserve the layout of tenements in the medieval and post medieval town, despite the high degree of infilling by later buildings. There has not been the degree of engrossing of tenements through construction of modern housing or commercial developments. The parish church, dating from the 13th century preserves the position of the original church. The motte and bailey castle largely surviving from the late 11th or 12th century preserves the location of the medieval manor to the east of Watling Street. There is therefore in Towcester a relatively high degree of survival of the structure of the medieval town even if there has been substantial infilling of this pattern with 19th and 20th century buildings.

2.0 URBAN HINTERLAND

Apart from the substantial urban area of Towcester itself, there has been relatively little urban development or mineral extraction in the hinterland of Towcester. However as the study of the Saxon settlement origins has not been identified as a major research potential then this is not a major consideration. Far more important will be the medieval settlements themselves. Here the potential is far more limited. There are relatively few well preserved deserted or heavily shrunken medieval settlement sites within the hinterland. However there are at least four well preserved sites within the hinterland which might be used for comparative study: Easton Neston, Kirby, Foscoate and Charlock. Most of the settlements have a relatively low potential and thus the opportunities for the investigation of the interaction of the town and its

hinterland in the medieval period are limited. Of the documentary potential there is less data available and it is not possible at present to make an informed judgement as to the potential.

C INDUSTRIAL

1.1 ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE & SURVIVAL

Towcester is located on Watling Street / Holyhead Road a nationally important communication route. The town was one of three in Northamptonshire where the overriding characteristic of the town in the 18th century was that it was a coaching station; the other two being Brackley and Daventry. The influence of the coaching era on the physical development of the settlement, with the entire town being focused around the road running through the centre, can be seen more clearly at Towcester than in any other settlement in the county. Towcester is clearly of county of importance and needs to be assessed against other coaching towns in a national context.

The topography of Towcester survives remarkably well and there are a large number of buildings from the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. This is primarily due to the lack of large-scale development in the central area of the town. A substantial number of the buildings, including shops, public houses and inns, relate to the central role of Towcester as a coaching town and commercial centre. There is some good surviving documentation for the transport networks and commercial enterprises in the town. Therefore there is a very good potential for a detailed study of one of the major coaching towns in the county.

1.2 DOCUMENTARY

1.2.1 Survival

Documents

There are a wide range of documents relating to Towcester in the period following 1750. These include Rural District Council records and Parish Council records for the entire town; records relating to the principle coaching inns - the Talbot and the White Horse; Turnpike Trust and highways district surveys and accounts and documents for the Great Holyhead Road. There are also miscellaneous documents relating to the town hall and corn exchange, Oddfellows Society, Friendly Society, Towcester Races and many more individual items. There are also a number of Militia Lists for the town - providing further indication of the economic base of the settlement throughout its main period of prosperity in the coaching era.

Maps

The earliest surviving map for the parish as a whole is the map dated 1848²⁹⁷ which shows the town in some detail. This provides a useful comparison with later Ordnance Survey maps, although the town did not undergo a great deal of change or development in the 19th century. In addition the tithe map²⁹⁸, maps of the estates of Earl of Pomfret and the Grafton estate²⁹⁹ and plans of the Park View Estate³⁰⁰, railway line³⁰¹ and sale catalogues³⁰² may provide an insight to the nature of the development of the settlement.

²⁹⁷ NRO, Map 3084 / Map 4473

²⁹⁸ NRO, T33

²⁹⁹ NRO, Map 2923, 4266, 2922

³⁰⁰ Map 4523

³⁰¹ Map 3479 / ZA 5650

Photographs

There are a number of photographs and other pictorial records for Towcester in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Northamptonshire Record Office, Northamptonshire Local Studies Library and Northamptonshire Heritage. These include street scenes, individual buildings and aerial views.

1.2.2 Potential

The topography of Towcester survives largely intact from the late 19th century, but photographs have the potential for providing detail about changes to individual buildings and structures.

The lack of an Ordnance Survey map for the period between 1900 and 1950 is problematic for a full consideration of the settlement through to the 20th century, but is mitigated by the relatively limited amount of development in that period.

1.3 STANDING BUILDINGS

1.3.1 Survival

There are a large number of surviving early buildings in Towcester; there are a total of 86 listed buildings with the vast majority of these dating from the 18th and 19th centuries and two from the early 20th century. The buildings included in the statutory listings include houses, shops / dwellings, public houses and inns, the church and a chapel, the town hall, workhouse and watermill and a number of miscellaneous monuments including tombs, telephone boxes and a wall.

1.3.2 Potential

The buildings in Towcester which have greatest potential for informing about the nature and development of the settlement in the period following 1750 are the commercial buildings in the town; the shops, and in particular the public houses and inns. This group of buildings, which appears to be extensive may be worthy of further study in the context of Towcester as a major coaching and market town in the period following 1750. In contrast there are very few buildings associated with industry remaining in the town - the major structures such as the brewery and boot and shoe factory have gone and others have simply not been identified.

Towcester underwent a period of stagnation during the 19th century - a major period for building / re-development in other parts of the county and therefore many of the buildings such as terraced houses, water and electricity works, board schools and social clubs were simply not built in large numbers in the town. Thus the lack of buildings relating to particular monument categories reflects the nature of the development of the town as opposed to the rate of attrition of these buildings.

1.4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL

1.4.1 Potential

The potential for below ground archaeological investigation for Towcester in the period following 1750 is limited, as the majority of the urban topography of the town is still upstanding.

The only monuments of the period following 1750 that would merit archaeological investigation are the patent rotary furnaces at the ironworks to the north of the town. This is the only incidence of any significance in Northamptonshire's iron industry in the development of metallurgical technology.³⁰³

1.5 TOPOGRAPHY

The urban topography of Towcester with its singular, linear street forming the core of the town centre has remained intact. A considerable proportion of buildings shown on an Ordnance Survey map of 1900 as fronting on to Watling Street are still in existence today. The commercial / mixed nature of this central area has been retained intact. The structures leading back from the frontage along the tenement plots have in some cases being subject to demolition, but in many cases the plot boundaries remain intact. A large number of the alleys, yards and lanes in Towcester have remained in use even where individual buildings along them may have gone. The basic layout has not been substantially disturbed by modern development. Houses have been erected in areas where buildings have been demolished (i.e. on the former brewery site), but large scale changes brought about by supermarkets etc have been limited to plots of land away from the main settlement area. The block of land to the west of the town bordered by Brackley Road and Sawpit Lane has also remained largely intact although individual buildings have gone and been replaced with other structures. The only component associated with the town which has been substantially re-modelled is the railway station and associated hotel and cattle market. This area has been substantially re-developed with the demolition of the railway station, much of the railway alignment and the cattle market; the building of a Tescosupermarket site on the area has involved a considerable amount of landscaping.

Modern development of the town has been considerable, but has mainly comprised new housing estates located primarily to the west of the town and has not infringed on the early layout of the settlement. The lack of an Ordnance Survey map for the period between 1900 and 1950 has hindered the methodology of the project, but it would appear that development in this period was far more limited than in other settlements and that very little is likely to have been lost. There are a minority of buildings, such as the 'Hesketh' cinema, which were only identified through a combination of documentary / secondary source research and local knowledge.

³⁰³Trinder B, Industrial Archaeology in Northamptonshire A report for Northamptonshire Heritage, 1998. Unpublished.

III RESEARCH AGENDA

1.0 PRE MEDIEVAL

Provided with the evidence above and the current potential of the site for future investigation the sections below list a series of key research questions about the Roman town of Towcester. Certain wider research issues are better dealt with in relation to a discussion of all the towns within the region and are considered in the overview chapter.

Origins

What is the date and nature of Late Iron Age and conquest period occupation at Towcester? Critically, is there clear evidence that some form of settlement and religious/burial focus already existed on the floodplain and within the eastern half of the later town? If so was this swept away in the middle years of the first century AD or does the familiar pattern of the later town only develop from the later first-early second century AD?

Communications

What is the course of Watling Street through the core of the town and how does it relate to any pre-existing focus of occupation? Is there any evidence to suggest that its line was subsequently altered in the Roman period? Is there any evidence to suggest the presence of a road running towards Irchester or Duston to the east of the town? Is the road thought to run north east from the town's northern suburb just such a route?

How and when do the network of secondary roads branching off the main routes develop? How does the construction of the town's defences change this pattern? Do for example many of the secondary roads (as has been suggested for the south western part of the town) become little used or abandoned back lanes leading nowhere?

Urban Topography and Zonation

What is the density of occupation along the main Watling Street frontage and what were the functions of buildings along this prime area of the town? To what extent are the buildings and frontages within the defended area of the settlement different from those of the suburbs? Do strip buildings crowd the main Watling Street and Alchester Road frontages near the core of the town alone or do they extend across the watercourses to north and south along Watling Street or along the Brackley Road? Is a significant proportion of the core of the town actually occupied by a range of public and religious buildings?

How does the construction of the defences change the location of different activities within the town? Does the construction of the defences lead to a decline in the density and nature of domestic occupation in the centre of the town and a rise in suburban development as some of the excavations so far might suggest?

Landscape and Environment

Is the agricultural or other land use of the floodplains to north, east and south of the town different from higher ground to the west and around the northern and southern suburbs? What was the environment in the immediate vicinity of the defences? Is there any evidence for a cleared zone around them? Can alleviated areas, deeper cut features or surviving 'dark earth' deposits within the settlement provide us with useful information about the urban environment? What was the landscape of the immediate area like during the settlement's foundation from the Late Iron Age?

Craft and Agricultural Practice

Does the impression so far provided of a town with a diverse and well developed economy of commerce and craft production from the late first century AD stand up to further investigation? Is iron smithing or smelting a more significant part of the town's economy than other identified trades?

The pottery assemblages from Towcester indicate that it acted as a market for the exchange of a broad range of local and regional products. Is this true, and if so, how was this organised in relation to the wider agricultural communities of the hinterland? Was the town a significant centre for the collection and processing of animal and plant products (such as bone, antler and leather working) or partly at least an agricultural settlement in its own right? What secondary products were produced and on what scale? Was craft production organised significantly differently to smaller agricultural settlements in the region? Were the small enclosures known around the fringe of the town used for specialised agricultural production, for livestock management (as has been suggested in the Alchester Road suburb) or simply an extension of the surrounding agricultural landscape?

Religious, Ritual & Funerary

What was the nature and wider significance of the shrines and temples in the town? Did they occupy an early or focal place in the town's development? Were any of them related to the pre-existing focus for burial and occupation in the Late Iron Age or were they new foundations? Which deities and religious practices were followed? Is there evidence from other parts of the settlement for related or different religious practices in non-ceremonial/public locations?

Is there any significant evidence of intra-mural burial? Are the areas of burials already noted parts of clearly defined cemeteries or clusters of burials scattered across plots as part of boundary burials? Are there other as yet unrecognised cemeteries related to the town especially in the meadows to the east and along Watling Street to the south? What is the evidence for early Roman burial practice?

The Later Roman Town

What do the 'dark earth' deposits within the walled area of the town tell us about late roman occupation? Is as has been suggested much of the intra-mural area no longer occupied by housing, at least away from the main Watling street frontage? If so what activities are taking place within the town the later fourth century AD? Are any of the temples or potential public buildings still in use and if so what for? How late does occupation in the extra-mural suburbs extend? Does it take a similar form to that in the Alchester Road suburb or is it closer to developments within the defended area?

Anglo-Saxon

The nature and extent of Saxon settlement will only be established through excavation. Any evidence of continuity from the Roman period may contribute to our understanding of central places. The chronology of the settlement is also important. Was the settlement deserted, as may be suggested by the cemetery 1km to the west of town, or did this cemetery relate to separate, peripheral occupation outside the main settlement? Was there a shift in settlement, as occurred at Higham and possibly also Daventry, with the village originating in the Saxon period rather than in the 10th century?

Perhaps the most significant questions will be addressed through the investigation of the church and of the castle site, if it lies on top of the late Saxon manorial focus. The origins of this focus will be significant to understanding the origins and development of the Towcester/Greens Norton Saxon estate.

2.0 MEDIEVAL & POST MEDIEVAL

The first priority must be to determine the quality of survival of archaeological deposits across the town capable of answering all or any of the Research topics outlined below. Until this is determined then many research questions cannot be adequately framed.

Castle

The origins and development of the castle will be a major research theme. Although the motte is a well preserved earthwork the presence of the manor within the presumed bailey has not been confirmed nor have the defences been located. The definition of the extent and state of preservation of the castle bailey must be a major objective.

Urban character

Examination of the character, layout and chronology of activity within the medieval core of the town should be considered a priority. The established history of medieval Towcester is based on documentary records and, to a certain extent, informed guesswork. The process by which the medieval tenements were created is poorly understood. Any evidence as to the varying wealth and or nature of activity taking place within individual tenements will be particularly important if the nature of individual medieval tenements is to be established. However it is probably in the potential for waterlogged deposits that the greatest opportunities for archaeological contribution to the study of the small town urbanism in Northamptonshire.

Market

The chronology of the laying out of the market place is an important research objective. Did Towcester originate as a market village in the late Saxon period or was the process of urbanisation aided by the creation of a market following construction of the castle at the junction of two important roads? Though a late creation will not prove that no market existed earlier, the existence of the market place in the original layout of the burh would be a strong argument for the early origin of the market. The methodology for studying the origins and development of the market should be developed with reference to other market settlements. The original extent of the market place and the date of possible encroachment in front of the church and the manor needs to be established.

Nether End

The date of the creation of tenements in the southern suburb of Nether End also needs to be established. Does this provide evidence of prosperity and expansion in the medieval period? Also the relationship of this suburb to the Nether Manor needs to be established.

Leper Hospital

The exact location and layout for St Leonard's Leper Hospital should also be confirmed by excavation if the opportunity arises.

Civil War re-fortification

The post medieval refortification of the town during the Civil War is a significant research theme. This will include the identification of the southern extent of the defences, which probably did not follow the Roman line. They will also include the investigation of the motte, which was modified to form a mount for artillery.

3.0 INDUSTRIAL

Coaching town

The major research potential for Towcester lies in developing a further understanding of its extensive role in the coaching era. The town has not been extensively re-developed and therefore there are a very large number of coaching inns and shops remaining along the Watling Street. Detailed documentary research (which has not been utilised during the survey) has been conducted on the town by the Victoria County History. Detailed building recording should augment this research and would provide a good case study for developing an understanding of the nature, use and construction of buildings in a traditional coaching town. Key questions which need to be addressed are when the coaching inns were established, how many people they catered for, what was the nature of the accommodation and how and why the buildings changed over time.

Wool industry

The surviving wool warehouses in Towcester should be subject to recording to determine whether there are any physical remains that may provide information about the nature and organisation of the industry. Documentary research should be undertaken to determine whether there are any other structures relating to the industry in Towcester.

Iron Furnaces

The innovative iron furnaces to the north of Towcester would be worthy of investigation if the area were to be threatened with development. The key research objectives would be to assess whether the patent rotary furnaces actually worked and to determine why they were later replaced with conventional blast furnaces. It would also be important to determine whether the structures were built to the designs of the original plans.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Trinder B, Industrial Archaeology in Northamptonshire A report for Northamptonshire Heritage, 1998, Unpublished.

IV STRATEGY

The assessment of the management and conservation priorities within the Extensive Urban Survey have been based around an assessment of levels of importance previously applied elsewhere in the county for management purposes. The grading falls into six categories:

Scheduled: nationally important remains that have statutory protection.

Unscheduled national importance: in some cases statutory protection is suggested while in others recording action may prove to be the appropriate response to threats.

County importance: Where significant archaeology is known or where it is likely but confirmation is required. Normally recording rather than preservation would be the appropriate mitigation strategy.

Historic buildings: Buildings known or which have the potential to contain significant pre 19th century structural remains.

Local importance: where archaeology may survive but where, on present evidence investigation does not appear appropriate.

Destroyed: where the archaeology has been wholly destroyed.

White Land: Archaeology not assessed for this report.

In addition in some cases recommendations have been made for the designation of new or the extension of existing Conservation Areas and for the listing of specific buildings.

This approach has not been possible for the industrial period, as further work on the period is needed at a county, regional and national level before a definitive assessment can be made. The town has been divided up into zones and priorities for additional research, recording and conservation measures have been assigned to each individual area.

1.0 EXISTING DESIGNATIONS

1.1 SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS

There are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Towcester; part of the bank and ditch of the Roman town (SAM 112) and Bury Mount Motte (SAM 13623).

1.2 LISTED BUILDINGS

There are 86 listed buildings in Towcester.

1.3 CONSERVATION AREA

There is a conservation area which covers the majority of the historic core of Towcester. The area was designated in June 1970 and was extended in November 1977, July 1994 and February 1998.

2.0 MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

2.1 PRE MEDIEVAL

2.1.1 Evaluation and Recording Priorities

Given the apparent degree to which Roman period remains survive across the settlement core, and the limited understanding of the Roman Town's topography due to the superimposed medieval, post-medieval and industrial periods settlements, any site within the Roman settlement core (both the defended central area and the suburbs) should be considered to have potential for the survival of important Roman archaeological evidence. Development proposals of even modest size (e.g. one house) should be subject to initial archaeological evaluation before final decisions are made on the appropriate archaeological response. Full archaeological excavation will be required on any site, where preservation *in situ* of the Roman remains cannot be achieved. Smaller disturbances should normally be subject to at least a funded watching brief with contingency provision for more intensive archaeological investigation and recording if required.

Priorities for archaeological investigation and recording should include any identified deposits or layers retaining evidence for the contemporary Roman landscape and environment, and areas where Roman remains are well-preserved beneath later deposits. The depth of later material which appears to overlie and seal Roman remains in the south-western part of the town in particular and the identification of late Roman soil layers in this part of the town increases the potential significance of preserved remains in this area.

Any evidence of early or middle Saxon activity within the walled area or immediately adjacent may prove to be of high importance in the understanding of the continuity of Roman occupation or the origin of the late Saxon estate centre. They should be subject to comprehensive excavation if they cannot be preserved *in situ*. In the wider township there should also be evaluation of substantial development sites of a few houses or more, in order to locate any dispersed Saxon settlement or cemeteries.

2.1.2 Conservation Priorities

The surviving earthworks of the town defences, in the north-west quarter of the settlement should be conserved. The bank and ditch are currently designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and are not under any direct immediate threat, but opportunities should be sought to improve the condition, interpretation and amenity value of this monument.

The other area where conservation of the identified archaeological resource should be given a high priority is the floodplain east of Towcester, where important Late Iron Age and early Roman burials and settlement remains have been identified. This area lies within the later Easton Neston landscape park, and forms part of the Registered Historic Park area.

2.2 LATE SAXON, MEDIEVAL & POST MEDIEVAL

2.2.1 Evaluation and Recording Priorities

In view of the high importance of the archaeology of the late Saxon burh, both of its defences and of any occupation within it, especially when combined with the significance of Roman

remains within the walled area, it will be necessary for proposed disturbances of even fairly modest size, and certainly of a single house or more, to be subject to prior evaluation. Smaller disturbances should normally be subject to at least a funded watching brief with contingency. Where any evidence of late Saxon date is identified then full excavation will be appropriate if preservation in situ cannot be achieved.

If any certain probable medieval frontage is to see significant redevelopment then there should be evaluation. Even the most modest areas of survival at the frontage may contribute significantly to the understanding of the evolution and character of the town. Within the rear of properties and elsewhere within the medieval settlement core investigation will also be appropriate to investigate the origins and development of the tenement structure. Investigation should also be conducted in low lying areas, both within and adjacent to the settlement core, to locate significant waterlogged deposits which may contain artefactual or palaeo-environmental evidence.

Although there are many practical problems with investigation within standing buildings and with requiring funded investigation on conversion works within domestic properties there is a strong case for such work within the historic core of Towcester. This will be particularly important where standing medieval fabric is demonstrated, but it may be appropriate in other pre 19th century buildings on certain or probable medieval frontages which are to be subject to substantial internal below ground disturbance. Such investigations should demonstrate whether medieval remains can be recovered in such situations.

Towcester is one of only a four medieval small towns in the county where a significant medieval and or post medieval building stock survives over a substantial part of the town. In these circumstances the standing buildings may be able to make a significant contribution to the understanding of the character of the late medieval and post medieval town. For this reason there should be evaluation in response to significant threat where they arise on any of the standing structures in all historic buildings of pre 19th century date where there is the potential for medieval or post medieval fabric.

2.2.2 Conservation Priorities

The road pattern of the town should be conserved and, as far as possible, the pattern of lanes and paths which follow medieval and post medieval precursors should be retained. Where possible the tenement boundaries within the historic settlement core, where they maintain the post medieval and probably the medieval pattern, should also as far as possible be preserved. This is because Towcester represents one of the best examples in the county of the survival of the historical topography of a medieval town.

The castle earthwork should be conserved and enhanced. It is suffering from neglect and from significant erosion and other damage. A scheme should be developed for the conservation of this important earthwork which offers a high interpretation and amenity value for the town.

The landscape park provides an important setting for the castle site and for the adjacent post medieval and industrial period mill and mill leet and indeed for the Church. This setting is an important components of the historic value of the town. The link between the town and the landscape park in visual terms should be maintained. Development should not be allowed in this area.

2.3 INDUSTRIAL

2.3.1 Zone 1 - Core area of the town including central business district

This zone encompasses the vast majority of the town of Towcester, including all the shops, public houses and inns which form the essential character of the town. Almost the entire area is designated as a conservation area and a large proportion of the buildings are listed; there is also a Conservation Area Partnerships Scheme for Towcester. Therefore there are no further conservation recommendations.

Many of the buildings in the central area of Towcester should be subject to detailed building recording if they are to be substantially altered, in line with the research objectives determined above. This will have to be determined on an individual basis.

2.3.2 Zone 2 - 19th century expansion of the town

This zone forms the only element of substantial 19th century expansion in Towcester and even this is very limited. The zone is primarily made up of two streets of terraced houses, the grammar school which has been demolished and Towcester Union Workhouse. The latter is a listed building and has been converted into flats.

There are no conservation or recording recommendations for this area.

ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library
BRO	Bedfordshire Record Office
NN&Q	Northamptonshire Notes & Queries
NN&P	Northamptonshire Past & Present
NRL	Northamptonshire Reference Library, Local Studies Collection
NRO	Northamptonshire Record Office
NRS	Northamptonshire Record Society
PRO	Public Record Office
RCHME	Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England
SMR	Sites & Monuments Record
VCH	Victoria County History
VCH Notes	Notes compiled by the VCH in the early 20 th century, now in NRO

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