EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY
FOR
BEDFORDSHIRE

HARROLD ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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Preface

All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Project

English Heritage has initiated a national series of Extensive Urban Surveys. This report is an archaeological assessment of Harrold and forms part of the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) for Bedfordshire. The survey of the 12 historic towns of Bedfordshire is funded by English Heritage (EH) and managed by the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) of Bedfordshire County Council (BCC). It is a joint project undertaken by staff of Albion Archaeology and the Heritage and Environment Group of BCC.

The EUS comprises three stages: Data Compilation, Assessment and Strategy. The first stage, Data Compilation, draws together the accessible history of the town, known archaeological sites and historic buildings data. The Assessment presents this evidence in the form of a report which provides a history of the town, an account of its buried and standing archaeology, together with an assessment of archaeological potential. The Strategy stage will draw on the Assessment to develop a strategic framework for the management of the archaeological resource for each town.

The chronological framework used in the Assessment reports to describe each town's development (normally section 5) reflects the periodisation used in the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Any broad dating system of this kind has limitations in the face of the mass of detailed evidence that exists for each town. It has, therefore, occasionally (*e.g.* Bedford in the Saxon and Saxo-Norman periods, or Luton in the early industrial period) been necessary to use slightly different chronological divisions. In addition, the town of Sandy is exceptional in its own right because only the Roman town has been included in the Bedfordshire EUS.

1.2 Structure of this Document

This report has been compiled using a number of sources including the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER), the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service (BLARS) and the Albion Archaeology (formerly BCAS) project database.

The location and topography of Harrold is described in Section 2. The nature of the evidence is discussed in Section 3 and a historical summary of the town is presented in Section 4. The archaeological and historical development of the town is described by chronological period in Section 5. Section 6 comprises an assessment of Harrold's character, importance and potential. The historical development of the town and areas of archaeological potential are presented in plan form at the end of this report.

2 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

Harrold is a small town in north Bedfordshire, close to the borders with Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, on the north banks of the River Great Ouse. It is situated just to the south of the ridge of high ground separating the watersheds of the Great Ouse and Nene rivers, and is centred at OS grid reference SP 950 568. The average height is 45m AOD. (For location map, see Fig 1).

The town is situated about 13 km north-west of Bedford, 12km south of Wellingborough and about 20km south-east of Northampton. The small village of Carlton is 2 km to the south-east, with Odell a similar distance to the north-east. The direct road between Bedford and Irchester runs north-south on the eastern side of town, effectively forming its boundary (as well as the parish boundary) on that side. The road to Lavendon runs roughly east-west (turning to the south-west) right through the centre of town.

The underlying geology consists of stratified Upper Estuarine clays and silts, Great Oolite clay and Limestone and Cornbrash. This is overlaid by boulder clay on the higher ground and river gravels and alluvial deposits on the lower ground.

The Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales, Sheet 147, shows the area of the town to be predominantly in urban use. Land to the east is now part of Harrold and Odell Country Park following extensive gravel extraction; this is mainly in recreational (non-agricultural) use. The agricultural land surrounding the town is classed as Grade III.

3 NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

3.1 Previous Archaeological Investigations

Excavations are described below in two sections – the first dealing with investigations outside and the second with those inside the historic core. Locations of all excavations are shown in Fig 2.

3.1.1 Excavations outside the historic core

There have been several excavations in the vicinity of Harrold (see Fig 2), producing archaeological evidence of all periods of human activity from the early Neolithic to the post-medieval period. The results of these excavations are important for two reasons – 1) for understanding the wider archaeological context and background of town development, and 2) for realising the archaeological potential of land which is now rapidly being brought into the town as it expands.

Excavations in gravel quarries on the north side of Harrold were carried out in the early 1950s by J. Edwards and M. Carey and later written up by Eagles and Evison (1970). These revealed evidence of prehistoric activity in the form of a Bronze Age ring-ditch and cremation cemetery, as well as Iron Age round-houses, ditches and other settlement remains. Also found was a 7th century Anglo-Saxon cemetery, focused upon the existing Bronze Age barrows (some of the inhumations were secondary in the sense of being dug into the sides of the earlier mounds). Grave-goods included spearheads, knives, beads, *etc*. One of the graves was identified as that of a 9th century Viking. Two Anglo-Saxon sunken feature buildings were also uncovered (Eagles and Evison 1970).

Further evidence of the rich archaeology of the area around Harrold was revealed during the Odell pits excavations carried out by the forerunner of BCAS in the mid-1970s (Dix 1980, 1985). Technically in the parish of Odell, these excavations took place in advance of gravel extraction immediately to the east of Harrold where the Country Park lakes are now. A complex of cropmarks (HER 543) was known from aerial photographs. Three years of continuous excavation brought the boundaries, structures, wells, cemeteries, tracks and general layout of a late Iron Age and Roman farmstead to light. A number of middle Saxon wells were also found (Dix 1981). The high quality of artefactual evidence, especially from waterlogged deposits in wells, makes this one of the most important excavations to have taken place in Bedfordshire. Unfortunately the excavation was never published, though a draft report is held by Bedford Museum (Dix 1985).

A recent watching brief (Project 909) just to the west of the Odell site did not identify any features of archaeological interest.

In 1997-8 BCAS carried out a field evaluation (Project 478) and full excavation (Project 519) of land off Meadway, just to the south of the area

covered by the 1950s excavations. The site of an Anglo-Saxon settlement in the form of unenclosed post-built and sunken buildings of 5th-7th century date was found. These existed alongside quarry pits which had been re-used for refuse. A large assemblage of pottery was recovered from these features. Also found was a ring ditch with central inhumation dating from the late Neolithic / early Bronze Age and a small late Iron Age cremation cemetery.

An evaluation (Project 850) and full excavation (Project 906) was carried out in 2002 by Albion Archaeology on the site of the former Bridgeman Joinery Works. A late Iron Age and early Romano-British field system, including a 1st-2nd century malting oven, was uncovered. Also found were a single Saxon sunken feature building and several Saxo-Norman pits, as well as late medieval ditches showing land parcels.

In 2003 Albion conducted a further evaluation just to the south-east of the Bridgeman site, on land adjacent to 68 High Street (Albion 2003). Three trial trenches were excavated. No Iron Age or Roman features were found, though residual pottery from these periods was recovered. A boundary ditch running east-west, the infilling of which dated to the 11th-13th centuries, was shown to cut a former stream channel (which it may have replaced as the watercourse that effectively formed the northern boundary of Harrold).

3.1.2 Excavations within the historic core

Albion Archaeology (formerly BCAS) has carried out a few small investigations within the historic core of the town (see Fig 2).

A watching brief (158) was undertaken close to Church Walk in 1991. Possible medieval features included a substantial ditch (2.5m wide) running north-south across the site and numerous pits on the eastern side of the ditch.

No archaeological deposits were recorded during a watching brief (141) undertaken within the grounds of St Peters Church.

A more recent watching brief (814) on three test pits dug to the south of the church revealed an extensive make-up layer of demolition-type deposits, thought to be of post-medieval date. It was suggested that these could be the fills of medieval gravel quarries, although the proximity of the church might argue against this view. Also noted during this project were the standing remains of a wall that formerly led southwards from the church. The possibility that this wall was once something to do with the Priory (which might have stood just to the south of the church) should perhaps be considered.

Another watching brief in Hall Close to the south of the church found quantities of architectural fragments dating from the Tudor period – re-used as rubble in a make-up layer. These could be fragments from the Priory buildings known to have been located nearby.

An excavation at Brook Lane (HER 1183) produced evidence for a medieval

pottery kiln dating to the 13th century (Hall 1972). Another possible kiln site was identified by Hall in the western part of the High Street at SP 947 967.

It has been suggested that a third possible kiln site may have been located in the grounds of Priory Middle School, where Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out a recent evaluation (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2002). Many pottery sherds, including 'wasters', were found. Also discovered in the northern part of the site were two ditches and a gully running north-south, dated to the 11th-12th centuries. These were thought to be related to the manorial complex known to have been situated near here. Stone foundations of the supposed manor (then thought to be part of the Priory) may have been found when the Riverside Café was constructed in the 1930s, though these could have been remains of an early mill. There are also reports of stone foundations being found when the school itself was built.

At the time of writing this report a full excavation (Project 874) is being carried out on the Priory Middle School site by Albion Archaeology, following on from the evaluation. Evidence dating from the 11th-15th centuries - in the form of ditches, surfaces, structures, a possible pond and vast amounts of pottery - is being recovered. No actual kiln has been found, however. Approximately 1m of stratified medieval deposits survive on the site, indicating that it has never been ploughed.

3.2 Historical Evidence

Volume III of the Victoria County History, published in 1912, gives a history of the Willey Hundred, which includes Harrold (Page 1912). Annette Edwards produced a Harrold Town Survey (Edwards 1974) and a Parish Survey was written by Alison Bennett (Bennett 1980). Both these unpublished documents are held by the Heritage and Environment Group of Bedfordshire County Council. A more general county-wide historical background is provided by Godber (1969).

The Bedfordshire and Luton Archive and Record Service (BLARS) holds archive material about Harrold, including manorial documents, but the majority of this relates to the post-medieval period. There is an extensive series of parish registers, dating from 1602. Census returns from 1801-1991 are also held here.

Map evidence for Harrold parish is good, but poor for the town itself. A map of Harrold Manor estate surveyed in 1719 (L33/286) shows only a small portion of the town, but it depicts the manor itself and a few buildings near the green. The Jeffrey's map of 1765 shows Harrold in the context of the county as a whole. A map of 1799 (DDGA 2587) originally depicted the entire town but is unfortunately torn in a crucial place. The Inclosure map of 1799/1800 is the first undamaged and complete map of Harrold. The road layout of the town, the organisation of common land and positions of many buildings are clearly shown. For more detailed and accurate maps, however, see the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1884, with subsequent editions in 1901, 1920 and 1937.

The Historic Environment Record, maintained by Bedfordshire County Council's Heritage and Environment Group, lists over 110 historic buildings ranging in date from the 12th century parish church of St Mary's (HER 862) to the Village Hall (HER 6561) dating to the 19th century. The Local Studies section of Bedford Library holds a small amount of material about Harrold, including parish surveys, newspaper cuttings and magazine articles.

The project database of Albion Archaeology (formerly Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service) contains records of all the work they have carried out in and around Harrold, though some of the older excavation records and finds have been accessioned to Bedford Museum.

4 HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Harrold is mentioned in Domesday Book and is, therefore, known to be of at least Anglo-Saxon origin. Mawer and Stenton suggest that the name derived from the Old English "har-wealde" - 'har' meaning boundary and 'wealde' meaning stone (Mawer and Stenton 1926, 32-4).

At the time of the Domesday survey the manor of 'Harwelle' was owned by Gilbert de Blosseville who inherited it from Countess Judith, wife of Waltheof of Huntington. At this time Harrold consisted of ten hides. These were held before the Conquest by three thegns of King Edward and were worth between twenty and sixteen pounds (Page 1904, 258). However, by 1086 the value of the land had dropped to six pounds. Alcock estimated that the population in 1086 consisted of the Lord of the manor, ten villeins and their families - approximately fifty people. Compared with other villages within the immediate vicinity, such as Turvey, the population was low (Alcock 1972, 10).

In the mid-12th century Harrold Priory was founded on land granted by Sampson le Fort to the Church and Convent of St Nicholas of Arrouaise. The nunnery was governed by a Prior until 1188 when the Priory established its independence. From then on it was governed by a Prioress (Bennett 1980). The first mention of the parish church is in the foundation charter of Harrold Priory, dated to 1136-38.

Harrold Manor, alongside Harrold Priory, was one of the two most important administrative bodies in Harrold throughout the medieval period. (It is crucial not to confuse it with Swanton Manor - also in Harrold parish and held by the de Grey family but situated 3km to the west of the town.) The situation of Harrold Manor by the river meant that it controlled milling and fishing rights, as well as being attached to Harrold Park. Its importance faded away, however, in the 16th and 17th centuries. The last buildings were demolished in the early 19th century (Page 1912, Bennett 1980).

Harrold Priory was dissolved in the 1530s and was demolished some years later to make way for Harrold Hall - built in about 1610 by Francis Farrar.

The population of the town had probably never been more than a few hundred. A rough estimate for the late 16th and early 17th century, based on ecclesiastical records, suggests a figure of about 360 (Alcock 1972, 24).

According to Bennett (1980), the weekly market was established in the early 17th century. The 17th and 18th centuries saw the economic heyday of the town, with production centred on agriculture and cottage industries such as lace production. Even so the market had died out by 1806, due to competition from other market towns such as Bedford. The market house on the green was built in the early 18th century. Fairs were held on the green in July and September from the 17th century to the late 19th century. During the late 19th and early 20th century leatherworking became an important industry, though

the factories have now been demolished. The present population is about 1,300.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The Prehistoric Period (c10,000BC - AD43)

A Palaeolithic flint flake was found to the north of the town (HER 618). Small concentrations of Mesolithic material were found during the Odell excavations in 1979 (HER 543).

A Neolithic axe was found to the south of Harrold (HER 9056) and late Neolithic assemblages (HER 519) have been recovered to the north. A late Neolithic / early Bronze Age ring ditch with two phases of central burial was recorded at land off Meadway in 1998. This had been built on the site of an early Neolithic burial.

A Bronze Age ring ditch (HER 543) was excavated by Brian Dix during the Odell excavations just to the east of town (Dix 1980). Excavation to the north of the town in the 1950s uncovered a middle to late Bronze Age ring ditch and cremation cemetery (HER 64) which subsequently became the focus for the later Iron Age and Anglo-Saxon cemeteries (Eagles and Evison 1970). A ring ditch from this early prehistoric burial complex was found on the Meadway site just to the south (BCAS 1999).

An Iron Age farmstead (HER 64), comprising two round houses and a series of hearths associated with ditched enclosures, was also discovered during excavation in the 1950s. Two cremation cemeteries dating between AD25 and AD50 were located outside the boundaries of the farmstead (Eagles and Evison 1970). A similar late Iron Age cremation cemetery was also found on the Meadway site (BCAS 1999).

Brian Dix's Odell excavations to the east of town produced outstanding evidence of a late Iron Age and Romano-British farmstead. Initially identified as an extensive complex of cropmarks on aerial photographs (HER 543), excavation revealed enclosures, pits, wells, roundhouses, cremations, inhumations and other features. A pattern of stockyards, fields, and settlement areas set out on either side of a track can be discerned from the all features plan, with the focus of settlement shifting westwards over time.

The discovery of a droveway running north-south through the farmstead enclosures suggests the existence of a ford across the river to the east of the present bridge.

Cropmarks to the south of the river (HER 540, 539, 2149) and elsewhere in the vicinity may indicate other farmstead sites and suggest a background of intensive exploitation of the resources of the river valley in late Iron Age and Romano-British times.

5.2 The Roman Period (AD43 - AD410)

There are no known Roman sites within the historic core of the town, where only residual pottery from this period has been found. Albion recently discovered a 1st-2nd century malting oven during the Bridgeman Joinery Works excavations, on land just to the north of the present settlement (Project 906). As already indicated, there is evidence for significant rural settlement and agricultural activity throughout the area which includes the later town.

The Iron Age and Romano-British farmstead located to the east of Harrold (HER 543) and excavated by Brian Dix (1980) has been described in the previous section (5.1). Occupation of the farmstead and use of the stock enclosures continued right through the Roman period to the 4th century, when a rectangular stone farmhouse was constructed. The sheer quality of finds indicates that the occupants of the farmstead were of high standing. This is perhaps the most important site of its type in Bedfordshire.

Extensive evidence for settlement and pottery production was discovered at Lodge Farm (HER 1182), 2 km to the south-west of Harrold. Finds from this area, including coins and an occulist's stamp, were first reported in the 19th century (Simco 1984). Surface scatters of building material and pottery proved on investigation to indicate the location of a pottery production site comprising kilns and associated domestic activity. An unusually large number of coins was recovered, indicating the commercial nature of the site (Simco 1984). Excavated in 1970, the site was in use from the 1st century to the 4th century (Brown 1972).

It has been suggested that a Roman road runs roughly north-south from Irchester to Kempston (HER 58/Viatores route 170a) through the parish of Harrold (Viatories 1964). Reference is also made in the Viatores work to a further Roman road (HER 10480) running north-west to south-east , forming part of the Harrold/Bozeat boundary 1km to the north of Harrold. The evidence for both these roads has been questioned by Simco (1984).

In 1815 late Iron Age and Roman urns containing cremated remains were found during gravel extraction in a field called Potter's Close (about 1km to the south-west of the present town). Only two of the pottery vessels were recorded; a 1st century flagon and a Belgic jar. Two skeletons were also found. The finds may represent the site of a late Iron Age and early Roman cemetery site (Simco 1984).

Scatters of Roman pottery (HER 830, 832, 838, 840, 842, 4428) have been located by fieldwalking in the countryside north of Harrold (Hall and Nickerson 1966).

5.3 The Anglo-Saxon Period (AD410 - AD1066)

There are no known Anglo-Saxon sites within the town itself. However, significant settlement and burial evidence from the early-middle Anglo-Saxon period has been found just to the north. Excavations during gravel quarrying in the 1950s uncovered two sunken feature buildings of 5th-6th century date.

These were over 150m apart, suggesting that the settlement covered a wide area. At least 13 burials were identified from the cemetery, the central focus of which was a Bronze Age barrow (Eagles and Evison 1970). Covering the southern part of the same settlement, BCAS/Albion excavations at the Meadway site have revealed post-built structures, pits, a possible well and a substantial boundary ditch, all of early-middle Saxon date (BCAS 1997, 1999). The Bridgeman Joinery Works excavation also uncovered enclosure ditches and other evidence of early-middle Saxon activity on the southern part of the site. The settlement almost certainly extended further south towards the river, under the present town.

Middle Saxon wells were also found by Brian Dix on the Odell site to the east of the town. These appeared to be situated within and to respect the line of some of the earlier Romano-British ditches, suggesting continuity in the use of field boundaries. Wooden artefacts from waterlogged fills of the wells included fragments of a musical instrument. For the most part, however, settlement appears to have shifted further to the west (Dix 1981) – probably now making use of different river crossings.

The manor of Harrold was in existence and the mill in use at least by late Saxon times (both are mentioned in Domesday Book). The general layout of the town - then just a village or group of small hamlets - is likely to have originated in the middle-late Saxon period. It is strongly suspected, though not known for certain, that the present church was in existence before the Conquest. Possible Saxo-Norman stonework may be contained within the north wall of the nave. Alternatively, the present arcades may be on the line of an earlier church (Kennet 1978).

5.4 The Medieval Period (AD1066 - AD1550)

References to Harrold in the medieval period begin with Domesday Book in 1086. The next references occur in relation to the founding of the Priory in the mid-12th century. The introduction of a religious order to the village would have been extremely important to the development of urban characteristics. Possibly Harrold, in common with Shefford and Woburn, only became a 'proto-urban' centre as a result of the stimulus provided by the founding of a religious house nearby.

5.4.1 Priory

The location of the Priory is the subject of a great deal of confusion. It was almost certainly situated just to the south of the church and to the north or west of the former site of Harrold Hall. Today, nothing survives of its structure above ground, but the Priory is known to have had a close connection with the church, and to have been mostly demolished at the time the Hall was built.

The source of the confusion seems to have arisen in the late 18th century when Samuel and Nathaniel Buck made a set of prints of monastic ruins in the county. Old stone barns which had once been part of Harrold Manor (note: Harrold Manor is not the same as Harrold Hall) were misidentified as Priory

buildings. The mislabelled print was subsequently published in the Victoria County History (Page 1912). The site of Harrold Manor (now the grounds of Priory Middle School) was also wrongly labelled as the site of the Priory on early editions of Ordnance Survey maps. Note that there is also the misleadingly named Priory Farm on the western outskirts of Harrold; this could have been the site of a further manor called Claybrookes (Bennett 1980). The possibility that it really was a grange or farm connected to the Priory is undermined slightly by the fact that there is no record of it being called Priory Farm before the 19th century.

The Priory was an Augustinian convent, founded between 1140 and 1150. It included the church of St Peter's, which is likely to have pre-existed the Priory (almost certainly the Priory was sited next to the already existing church). By 1359 and again in 1400 the nuns claimed poverty – on the grounds that they were situated next to a public road and had to provide expensive hospitality to travellers, and being situated next to the river they were subject to periodic flooding of buildings. Even at this date the buildings were said to be in a ruinous state. By 1536 there were only six nuns and the Priory was surrendered to the Crown (Bennett 1980).

A year later, after the dissolution of the Priory, the site was granted to John Cheney on a 21-year lease (Page 1912). A lease dating to 1555 mentions the Priory, an outhouse, barns, malthouses and stables (CRT 130:7 No 1735). The Priory buildings were occupied by the Farrar family from 1558. In 1608 Francis Farrar built Harrold Hall and demolished much of the Priory in the process. The Priory is last mentioned in a deed of 1614 (Page 1912, Bennett 1980).

5.4.2 Church

St Peter's Church (HER 862) is the oldest surviving building in Harrold. It is first mentioned in the foundation charter of the Priory, dated 1136-8 (Fowler 1935, 2). Part of the endowment to the Priory, the church is likely to have been in existence for centuries before then. Even though the first recorded priest was appointed by the Prioress of Harrold Priory in 1226, and the earliest work in the church is often said to be 13th century, there are indications that the church is older. Some Anglo-Saxon or early Norman work may be visible within the north wall of the nave. Kennett (1978) thought that a Saxon church must have been situated on the line of the present arcades. Whether the church is regarded as older (in which case it conditioned the siting of the Priory) or younger (in which case it would have originated as a Priory church) has quite important implications for an understanding of the early development of the town.

It is probable that the church was largely rebuilt in the 13th century, with the tower added in the 14th century and the spire in the 15th century. Extensive medieval wall paintings may be hidden by plaster on the nave walls (these were partially revealed by redecoration in 1995). The chancel was apparently shortened by about 12m after the dissolution of the Priory.

5.4.3 Manor

Harrold Manor (HER 6757) is first mentioned in the 1086 Domesday Book. Originally held by three thegns of King Edward, it came into the hands of the de Blossevilles after the Conquest. At Domesday Harrold Mill was attached to the manor. Throughout medieval times the lord of the manor had a fishery on the river and rights of free warren. Harrold Park, containing 240 acres in 1278, also belonged to the manor. It was situated in the north-west part of the parish.

The site of the manor buildings (marked on early maps) is on an area of slightly higher ground to the west of the High Street and north of the river, not far from the green and the mill. Extensive L-shaped earthworks (HER 2923) to the west of the manor site are shown on early edition Ordnance Survey maps. However, the same maps mark the site of the manor as the site of the Priory – a basic mistake that led to the somewhat misleading name of Priory Middle School (which now occupies part of the site).

By 1278 the overlordship of the manor had passed to the de Grey family and in 1292 there is mention of a Chapel within the Grey's Manor House. Ralph Morin was granted a licence to reopen the chapel:

> *"…on account of the distance of the Manor from the Parish Church and the fact that the intervening road was often flooded in winter"* (Lincoln Record Soc 48, quoted in Bennett 1980).

In 1325 the manor was described as a capital messuage with two dovehouses and other farm buildings (Page 1912). A gatehouse is included in later accounts. The manor buildings seem to have become dilapidated by the 17th century, when it is possible that the manor house itself was demolished.

However (as already noted), two stone barns belonging to the former manor were mistakenly identified as Priory buildings by the Buck brothers in an 18th century print. Their 'Harwood Nunnery: North-East View' shows some very well constructed buildings with interesting architectural features, suggesting that these were once much more than just barns. Representing either the manor house itself or perhaps the private chapel known to have been attached to it, the barns were demolished in 1840. Relating the buildings in the print to those marked on maps is problematic unless the print is taken to be a mirror or reverse image (a not uncommon occurrence with early prints) and taken as a view from the north-west rather than the north-east. Then it makes sense.

The interior of the manor building is shown on a print in Fisher's 'History of Bedfordshire' (1823). A copy can be found in the record office (BLARS Z 49/258). It is also reproduced in Steward (1898).

Earthworks can still be seen in the playing fields of Priory Middle School, during the construction of which old stone wall foundations were supposedly found. Other stone wall foundations were discovered during building work for the Riverside Café (CRO 130 HAR). As already discussed, excavation within

the school grounds has recently shown there to be unusually good survival of archaeological stratigraphy up to 1m deep, producing unprecedented quantities of medieval pottery.

5.4.4 Mill

The earliest mention of the mill (HER 1067) occurs in the Domesday survey, which states that it was attached to Harrold Manor. At that time it was worth 36s.8d a year and 200 eels. Documents suggest the addition of a second water mill in 1279. The location of this is unknown, but post-medieval references indicate it is likely to have been a second water wheel added to the original mill building rather than a different site altogether. Together with the actual mill building there would have been extensive water management works (weirs, mill race, etc). It could be that the present division of the river into two is artificial and may date back as far as Saxon times, with the northern stream serving as the mill leet and race.

5.4.5 Dam and fishponds

Two fishponds (HER 2551) situated to the west of the Lavendon Road, south-west of Priory Farm, were created by constructing an earthen dam across the valley of a small stream. Other examples of this interesting form of water management are to be found elsewhere in Bedfordshire, *e.g.* at Old Warden and Colmworth.

5.4.6 Green

The green was almost certainly a central feature of the village in medieval times just as it was in the post-medieval period, though there is no record of a market prior to the 17th century. The houses of Harrold would have been grouped around the green, which has the long triangular shape characteristic of many greens in Bedfordshire, with roads or tracks running along each of the three sides.

5.4.7 Streets

Just as it does today, the High Street would have formed the main street of medieval Harrold. Formerly known as Town Street, it was referred to as 'Harewold Weie' in Priory documents dating to the 12th-13th century. Brook Lane is also mentioned in the mid-13th century, as the Eyre of 1247 refers to it as 'Broustrate' (Fowler 1939) – taking its name from the stream which flows alongside it. Streets mentioned in late 16th century documents - Orchard Lane, Potters Close Lane (now Mansion Lane), Mumbles Lane and Church Walk - were almost certainly in existence in the medieval period.

'Harewold Weie' or High Street was doubly important because its continuation effectively linked Harrold Priory, Harrold Manor and Swanton Manor, running along a ridge overlooking the river. A grant issued in 1434 describes the route:

"…along Harold Weie beginning…by the main road north and then towards Swaneton until it reaches the great field of the nuns which is on Wighephikhel. This may decrease to a width of ten feet running between cultivated fields to the head of Land hedge, and from there it continues of the same width along

the boundary until it reaches the way which runs along the bottom of the valley and leads to Swaneton' (CRO: x80/153).

The road which runs through Harrold to Lavendon was known as the Twistway during the 15th century.

The 'Fuleweie' is the earliest mention of a road in Harrold. The reference occurs in the foundation charter of the Priory in 1136/8 (Fowler 1935). This road is basically the north-south road which passes to the east of the town and crosses the river at Harrold Bridge. It formed the main route between London and Oakham, passing through St Albans, Luton, Bedford and Chellington. Its exact course may have been slightly different at one time. The bridge is likely to have replaced/co-existed with a ford, the original access to it still preserved in the broad verge on the eastern side of the modern road (Simco and McKeague 1997).

5.4.8 Boundaries

Sometime in the medieval period the stream which runs southwards down Brook Lane was diverted to run eastwards along what is now Back Lane, effectively forming a northern boundary to the eastern part of Harrold. This boundary seems to be quite ancient and may well be late Saxon in origin.

5.4.9 Bridge

The various settlements at Harrold have probably been situated on an important north-south route since prehistoric times. However the exact course of the track(s) must have changed through time. There were perhaps several different sites of fords, too, across the river at different periods. As the settlement shifted, so the roads (and therefore the fords) changed accordingly. During the Odell excavations in the 1970s, a road was found to go right through the middle of the late Iron Age and Romano-British farmstead. This must have forded the river somewhere to the east of the present bridge. Other crossing points may have existed in subsequent periods: certainly by the mill and perhaps south of the church. It is of course possible that more than one crossing was in use at any given time.

Harrold Bridge (HER 999), located to the south-east of the town, is first mentioned in foundation charters of the Priory dating to 1136-1146. The actual date of its construction is unknown. It could be much earlier in date than the Priory. However, the building of the Priory would certainly have provided the rationale and probably the funding for the building of the bridge (taking traffic away from more westerly river crossings, which formerly went right through the settlement). In the medieval and early post-medieval period the bridge carried the important road from London through St Albans, Luton and Bedford to Oakham (see Owen and Bowen's road map of 1720).

The current bridge comprises six arches spanning the river. On the south bank of the river there is a short causeway and then a further nine arches crossing the floodplain. Then a foot causeway of 20 arches runs parallel to the current road for a further 200m. There is a tradition that the building of this causeway

was commissioned by a Prioress of Harrold Priory: hence it is sometimes known as 'Nun's Bridge' (Simco and McKeague 1997).

The stonework of the early foot causeway, which originally ran right up to the river, is still visible beneath some of the flood arches. Marked differences in the style of construction suggest three main periods of development of the bridge. The majority of the construction is typically medieval, with massive stone piers and triangular cutwaters on the western (upstream) side. But the arches of the river bridge have rounded profiles whereas the remainder have pointed profiles – perhaps reflecting a change to a more Gothic pointed style which became popular in the 13th century. The earliest surviving parts of the bridge may, therefore, be preserved within the flood arches (Simco and McKeague 1997).

5.4.10 Buildings

The only medieval structures to survive are St Peter's Church (HER 1373) and Harrold Bridge (HER 999), with some late medieval work surviving in Dickens House in Orchard Lane (HER 2290). It is possible that further evidence for early structures survives behind the facades of later buildings.

HER No.	Address	Comments
862	St Peters Church, Church Walk	Early 12th century
999	Harrold Bridge	13th century
2290	Dickens House, Orchard Lane	15th century timber framing

Table 1. Medieval buildings in Harrold

Medieval buildings belonging to Harrold Manor (though mislabelled as Harrold Nunnery) were drawn by the Buck Brothers in 1730. The print is reproduced in VCH (Page 1912). The buildings, used as barns in the 18th century, were demolished in about 1840.

5.4.11 Trades

Pottery was manufactured in the town during the medieval period. A 13th century kiln has been found on Brook Street (HER 829, Hall 1972), where the stream would have provided the necessary water. Large quantities of 'wasters' have been found throughout Harrold – especially near the manor site. It therefore seems likely that further kiln sites await rediscovery. There is also evidence for iron smelting as numerous extraction sites have been found in the countryside to the north of the town. These occur in the form of slagheaps, which have survived in woodland or have been scattered by recent agricultural activity (Hall and Nickerson 1966).

Harrold has always been a prime area for sheep-grazing and it is likely that wool-production and leatherworking, in addition to the growing of crops, were important medieval industries. The river would have provided fishing, osier beds, and rushes for use as thatch and matting - as well as the power needed to drive the mill. The mill is likely to have been used for fulling (the de-greasing of fleeces), for which purpose fuller's earth would have been brought in from Aspley Guise and elsewhere.

5.5 The Post-Medieval Period (AD1550 - AD1850)

The early post-medieval period is marked by the dissolution of Harrold Priory, the decreasing significance of Harrold Manor and the rise in importance of Harrold Hall (built close to the site of the former Priory). Changes in ownership of land and property entailed radical changes in the economy of the town, leading to enclosure of open fields in 1799. Cottage industries such as lace-making and leatherworking established the 'proto-industrial' conditions which later enabled Harrold to support several large leatherworking factories and play a full part in the industrial age.

Alcock (1972) estimated the population of Harrold to be about 360 at the beginning of the 17th century, increasing to about 550 in 1717. The town flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries with the introduction of the market. By the time of the first census in 1801 the population had reached 763. In 1851 it had increased to 1083.

5.5.1 Market and Green

The market was established in the early 17th century, with the market house or buttermarket (HER 63) built between 1702 and 1740. This still survives and is located on the green, which was the focal point of the town. Also on the green were some stocks and an animal pound. The circular lock-up (HER 2287) was built in 1824. There may have been other market structures. The market declined in the late 18th and early 19th century, when Lyson described it as:

> *"…so inconsiderable that it scarcely deserves the name."* (quoted in Bennett 1980).

The decline was blamed on improvements in roads and the development of other markets offering better facilities in towns such as Bedford. Fairs were held on the green three times a year up to the late 19th century (Kelly's Directory 1890).

5.5.2 Mill

The first detailed description of the mill (HER 1067) occurs in 1584 in the form of a lease from Thomas de Grey to John Orlyber:

> *"…two water myllnes under one Ruffe in Harewolde together with the streame of water or watercourse where uppon the sayd Myllnes now stradle and all those his holmes, cobbes and bedds of Ozyers and Russhes now stanynge uppon the Sayde streame"* (Anon 1966).

In 1617 the de Greys sold the mill and fishing rights on the river to Thomas Boteler of Harrold Hall – symbolising the shift of power away from the manor to the new house. William Boteler rebuilt the mill in the mid-17th century, involving the construction of a new mill house and possibly the addition of a third mill. In 1672 a lease lists 2 corn mills and one wheat mill. The third mill was sold in 1712. Water was supplemented by steam power at the beginning of the 20th century.

One of the former mill sites mentioned above was probably rediscovered when substantial stone walls were uncovered during the building of the Riverside Café in the 1930s.

5.5.3 Manor

In the late 16th century the manor house (HER 6757) fell into a state of disrepair (Page 1912). It was repaired in 1630, when it was known as the Great Manor House (CRT 130: 7). A lease dating to1636 gives an indication of the buildings associated with the manor. These included a gatehouse and a cottage, set within 13 acres of land. From 1679, however, the manor became known as Manor Farm or Charlton Farm - perhaps reflecting its declining importance. Edward Quincey held the tenancy in the late 17th century. In 1706 this passed to Samuel Charlton of Wootton.

As already discussed, a drawing produced by the Buck Brothers in 1730 shows the manor buildings, at that time apparently used as barns (Page 1912). Thought to have been demolished in the 1840s, their positions are marked on early maps. The site of Harrold Manor reverted to agricultural use, probably pasture (recent excavations indicate that it has never been ploughed). First and second edition OS maps wrongly identified it as the site of the Priory. This mistake led to the misnaming of Priory Middle School - which now occupies the site.

5.5.4 Farrar Mansion

On dissolution, the Priory buildings were granted on a 21 year lease to John Cheney, and then granted on a permanent lease to a Ralph Farrar. The Farrars initially used the Priory buildings as a residence, and sometimes this is referred to as the manor (another factor in the general confusion of manor and priory sites). Francis Farrar is said to have built a mansion on Priory land in the late 16th century. VCH describes this as an H-shaped house (Page 1912), and it is likely that part of this survives as the Old Mansion or Old Manor (HER 2288).

5.5.5 Harrold Hall

In 1608-1614 Francis Farrar built the new house that later came to be known as Harrold Hall (HER 1068). This was situated on Priory land between St Peter's Church and the river. Surviving building accounts state that at least some of the Priory buildings were demolished at this time, with the new house built in the grange yard where the garner house once stood (CRT 130:6). Records of the building of the Hall therefore provide concrete evidence of the whereabouts of the Priory.

The Boteler family took over the tenancy in 1653. A schedule attached to the lease lists garden paths, gates, gravel walks, orchards, *etc*. and talks about the situation of the new building in relation to the 'old house' - though whether this is the earlier Farrar mansion or remaining Priory buildings is unclear (CRT 130: 6/7). In 1702 the Hall was sold to Anne Jolliffe and eventually came by inheritance to the Alstons of Odell.

In WWII the Hall was used to accommodate Italian prisoners of war, who worked on local farms.

Harrold Hall was demolished in about 1960 and replaced by the modern housing development of Hall Close. Its wooden staircase was salvaged and re-used in the St John's Ambulance headquarters in Bedford.

5.5.6 The Mansion

The Mansion or Mansion House Farm (HER 1069) was built in 1619 on the north side of Harrold, with extensive grounds and an avenue of trees leading southwards to the High Street (Bennett 1980).

5.5.7 St Peter's Church

St Peter's Church (HER 862) continued in use throughout the post-medieval period, undergoing substantial restoration in the 19th century.

5.5.8 Chapels

The United Reform Chapel (HER 5288) was built on north side of the High Street as the Harrold Independent Church in 1808. It was rebuilt in 1838 and enlarged in 1863. It has its own graveyard (HER 8900).

5.5.9 Streets

The pre-Inclosure map of 1799 shows the principal roads and streets that comprise the basic street pattern of Harrold today. While the network of little tracks leading through the open fields was replaced by a pattern of private roads radiating out from the town, there was little change to the main routeways of late medieval times. At inclosure, however, the continuation of the High Street that formerly led to Swanton Manor and was once known as 'Harrold Weie' ceased to be a major route. It was first re-laid as a private road, but later degenerated into little more than a track. That part of it known as Potter's Close was renamed as Mansion Road.

The road to Lavendon was now the main route entering the town on its western side. Formerly known as the Twistway, this road was turnpiked in the 1820s (Bennett 1980).

At the beginning of the post-medieval period the north-south road crossing Harrold Bridge was on the main route between London and Oakham (see Bowen and Owen's road map of 1720). Other routes may have taken on this function in the 18th century, however, and the road ceased to provide the main link between some of the major towns of Bedfordshire.

5.5.10 Bridge

Repairs were carried out to the bridge throughout the post-medieval period (Simco and McKeague 1997). A plan and elevation of the bridge was made in 1825 (CRO: GA 2).

5.5.11 Buildings

The Historic Environment Record keeps records of surviving post-medieval buildings and gives indications of date. These have been tabulated below.

HER No.	Address	Comments
2284	Barn to Pointers Lodge, Church Walk	16th/17th century
2288	The Old Manor, 21 High Street	16th/17th century
2290	Dickens House, Orchard Lane	15th -16th century timber-framing
5294	Priory Farmhouse, High Street	16th century

Table 2. 16th century buildings in Harrold

HER No.	Address	Comments
63	The Market House, The Green	17th/18th century
1069	The Mansion	1619
1654	29 Brook Street	17th century
2281	Mulberry Lodge, High Street	17th century
2282	31 High Street & 1 Church Walk	17th century
2283	The Old Vicarage	1670
2285	Quintin House, High Street	17th, 18th and 19th century
2294	2 Brook Lane	17th century
2297	10 Orchard Lane	17th, 18th and 19th century
2298	31 Brook Lane	17th and 18th century
4798	42 Brook Lane	17th century
5258	48 High Street	Late 17th and 18th century
5276	6 Orchard Lane	17th/ 18th century
5298	Honeysuckle Cottage, 13 The Green	17th / Early 18th century

Table 3. 17th century buildings in Harrold

HER No.	Address	Comments
1656	8-10 Dove Lane	18th century
2276	Hazeldine, 26 High Street	18th century
2279	50 High Street	18th century
2289	Nunswood, 85 High Street	1726
2292	73 and 75 High Street	Late 18th / 19th century
2293	67 and 69 High Street	18th century
2295	102-106 High Street	17th / 18th century
2299	21-27 Brook Lane	18th century
4797	34-40 Brook Lane	18th/ 19th century
4799	56 Brook Lane	18th / 19th century
5190	Barns, Pointers Lodge, Church Walk	18th / 19th century
5191	Manor Cottage, High Street	18th and 19th century
5259	52 High Street	18th century
5261	Barn, 76 High Street	18th century
5266	119-121 High Street	18th century
5271	Outbuilding, 76 High Street	18th century
5274	The Smithy, 49 High Street	18th century
5277	20-22 Orchard Lane	18th century
5278	Post office and adjoining stores, High Street	18th and 19th century
5285	General Stores, High Street	18th and 19th century
5290	10-26 Mansion Lane	18th and 19th century
5297	7-11 The Green	18th / Early 19th century
10230	Mansion House Barn	18th/19th century

Table 4. 18th century buildings in Harrold

HER No.	Address	Comments
1069	The Mansion	19th century
1635	61-63 High Street	19th century
1652	1-3 Brook Lane	19th century
1657	88 High Street	19th century
1662	90-94 High Street	19th century
2275	Greystones, High Street	19th century
2277	The Maples & Maple Cottage, High Street	Early 19th century
2278	4 Dove Lane	Early 19th century
2287	Lock-up on the Green	1824
2291	77 and 79 High Street	Early 19th century
2296	118 High Street	19th Century
4374	Barnham Cottage, High Street	19th century
4795	10 Brook Lane	19th century
4796	26 and 28 Brook Lane	19th century
5256	Manor Farm	19th century
5260	Outbuildings, Quintin House High Street	19th century
5262	Oakley Arms Public House, High Street	19th century
5264	Globe Public House, High Street	19th century
5265	65 High Street	19th century
5267	House High, Street	Late 19th century
5268	16 and 18 Brook Lane	19th century
5269	School and School House, The Green	19th century
5270	Evangelical Church and Manse, High Street	19th century
5272	116 High Street	19th century
5273	20-24 Brook Lane	19th century
5275	4 Orchard Lane	19h century
5279	11-15 Brook Lane	19th century
5280	30-32 Brook Lane	19th century
5281	7 Church Walk	19th century
5282	Pointers Lodge, Church Walk	19th century
5284	Village Hall, The Green	19th century
5286	76 High Street	19th century
5287	United Reformed Church Hall, High Street	19th century
5288	United Reform Church, High Street	1808, rebuilt 1836
5289	124 High Street	19th century
5291	2 Orchard Lane	19th century
5292	12 Orchard Lane	19th century
5293	14-16 Orchard Lane	19th century
5295	1 and 3 The Green	19th century
5296	5 The Green	19th century
5299	Institute, High Street	Late 19th century
5300	17 Brook Lane	19th century
5301	33-35 Brook Lane	19th century
5302	46-52 Brook Lane	19th century
8900	United Reform Churchyard	19th century

Table 5. 19th century buildings in Harrold

5.5.12 Trades

Piggots Directory of 1830 lists 30 tradesman in the town – including apothecary, bakers, blacksmith, boot and shoe makers, brewers, brick makers, butchers, chandler, lace makers and dealers, malsters, saddler, schoolteacher, stone masons, tailors, iron monger, joiners, carpenters and wheelwrights. Lace was a prominent cottage industry during this period and remained so throughout the 18th century. There were also several clockmakers working in the town. The seasonal activity of rush-cutting took place at Harrold as it did all along this part of the Great Ouse valley, providing material for basket-

makers. Agriculture was the most important economic activity, with sheep-farming a crucial component. Local skins may have been used in leatherworking and related trades, with tanners working in the vicinity of the river or streams. The mill continued to play a significant role in local production.

5.6 The Industrial and Modern Period (AD1850 - present)

The population at the beginning of the industrial period was estimated at 1,083. This increased to 1,119 in 1861, but declined to 1,042 in 1871 and 851 in 1911. By 1931 there was a slight increase to 924 and in 1981 the population was estimated at 1,161. The present population is about 1,300.

Harrold is unique amongst the towns/villages of north Bedfordshire in having an industrial heritage to rival that of Luton in the south of the county, even if (unlike Luton) industrial development did not lead to expansion of the town. Industrial development was almost entirely due to the flourishing of the leatherworking industry in the period from 1850-1980.

5.6.1 The Leatherworking Industry

It is difficult to grasp today, when no trace remains of the numerous factory buildings, that Harrold was until recently one of the main centres of leatherworking in the country – an island of industrial activity in the heart of rural Bedfordshire. According to Manton (1983), whose paper is drawn upon heavily in the account below, leatherworking was introduced into Harrold and Odell in about 1850 by a Welsh fellmonger called Edward Rate. However, it is likely that there was a strong local tradition of tanning and leatherworking stretching right back into medieval times. This would have provided the basic conditions within which more intensive industry could take root in the Victorian era.

Starting at Horsefair Lane in Odell, Rate expanded his tanning business on a new site at Orchard Lane in Harrold. It was there in 1880 that he met his rather ironic death when he fell into one of his tanning pits and drowned – as some might rather cruelly say, tanning his own hide in the process. The Orchard Lane business was taken over by William Manton – a 'Bootmaker, Leather Seller,&c'. Former employees of Rate who started businesses of their own included Charles Pettit. He began on a site in Brook Lane (possibly on the site of the later Bridgeman Joinery Works) and then built a factory south of the High Street. This was demolished in 1928 when Charles' son Herbert Pettit and James Goode built a new factory on the south-east side of the green. Another factory was built by Charles Partridge on a site south of the High Street and Mansion Lane junction. This was later incorporated into a huge factory known as the 'Harrold Leather Manufacturing Company' or the 'Eagle Works', which belonged to the Mantons and later the Tustings. The Tustings built a new factory south-west of the green in the 1920s, later owned by the Van den Bergs. A further factory was built by George Wells in Orchard Lane (perhaps on the site of Edward Rate's original tannery); subsequent owners were James Drage and Reginald Dickens. Some of the factory sites (not all) can be identified from maps and information provided by Manton (1983) and

Tusting (1996). These are shown in Fig 7.

Another production site, known as Clarke's Boot Tree Factory, was situated at the top end of Orchard Lane. This has not been mapped.

Tanning was initially an important part of the industry but from the early 20th century pre-tanned hides from goats and sheep were imported from India (especially Madras), West Africa and elsewhere for soaking, drying, cutting, rolling, brushing, dyeing, polishing and further processing. These were brought by train to the nearby station at Sharnbrook and carted from there to the factories at Harrold – an interesting example of industrialisation taking root where railways had not reached. The large amounts of water required were drawn from the River Great Ouse (except in the case of the Drage/Dickens factory in Orchard Lane, where water was drawn from a well) to be pumped into wooden tanks and drums. The river also served to carry effluent away. Many of the factories used steam engines to provide power to the numerous machines. These were later replaced by electric motors and in the 1930s by mains electricity. Most of the workforce (up to 200 at any one time) came from Harrold and surrounding villages, travelling to work by bicycle. Before WWII nearly all the workforce was comprised of men, but women increasingly came into the industry in post-war years. Manton (ibid) describes scenes reminiscent of mills in the industrial north, with thick black smoke emerging from chimneys, a smell of leather hanging over the whole town, the Great Ouse running every colour under the sun as effluent was pumped back into the river, and factory whistles marking the end of each shift.

Leather trimmings were used as domestic fuel in local cottages or dumped in disused gravel pits. The combustible nature of leather led to occasional factory fires, sometimes completely destroying buildings as at Goodes factory in 1961.

Processed leather from the factories provided material for the shoemaking industry in Northampton, Rushden and Wellingborough. But much of the processed leather from Harrold was exported, and became internationally famous for its quality in places as far afield as Canada, USA, South Africa, Norway and Switzerland. In 1972 the Harrold Leather Manufacturing Company won the Queen's Award for Export Achievement. But due to rapidly changing economic conditions the industry went into a dramatic decline, and all production ceased in the 1980s. The factories have since been demolished to be replaced by housing. Little remains, therefore, of the production sites of an industry which flourished here for over a hundred years.

5.6.2 Joinery Works

The Bridgeman Joinery Works came to Harrold in 1969, occupying a large site in the north of town and specialising in the production of doors. It closed in the 1990s with the loss of over a hundred jobs.

5.6.3 Modern Developments

Recent housing developments at Mowhills, Hall Close, Meadway, Peach's Close and Odell Road have greatly extended the area covered by the town of

Harrold while at the same time infilling some of the town core – especially the areas formerly occupied by the leather factories. At the time of writing this report, the land recently occupied by the now demolished Bridgeman Joinery Works is also being developed for housing. This means that the industrial aspect of the townscape of Harrold has been all but obliterated within a period of only a few decades. The radical transformation of Harrold from an industrial centre to a desirable residential town has been a swift one.

5.7 Summary of Town Development

Harrold is one of the very few places in Bedfordshire that can be shown to have been more or less continuously settled since at least late Iron Age times, with a number of Bronze Age barrows and evidence of early Iron Age activity on the north-east side of the present town suggesting that the area had significance in much earlier prehistoric periods. Being situated on the River Great Ouse, Harrold (OE Har = boundary) may have had the character of a boundary settlement long before the shire boundaries were set in the 10th century.

In the Roman period it appears that settlement was focused to the east of the present town, taking the form of a large farmstead with stockyards and enclosures set out either side of a trackway. The track ran north-south and crossed the river some way to the east of the present bridge.

In the early-middle Saxon period settlement shifted westwards, almost certainly using a different north-south track and river-crossing, this time to the west of the present bridge. Situated to the north of the present town, the settlement was fairly dispersed and may have extended northwards along the Dungee ridge as well as southwards towards the river. A pagan cemetery was based around a Bronze Age round barrow.

The basic layout of Harrold as we know it today probably originated in the middle-late Saxon period, perhaps coinciding with the introduction of Christianity and the building of the first church (presumed to be on the site of the present church). The dispersed settlement described above moved southwards towards the river, possibly using the same north-south track and river-crossing. It seems likely that houses nucleated around the church and along the track (now represented by Church Way and Dove Lane). Another river crossing can be inferred to have existed at the site of the mill. The manor recorded in Domesday and the green were both situated along this second track (of which Orchard Lane and Brook Lane may be continuations). So it seems that the settlement at this time had more than one centre and was grouped around two north-south axes rather than just one. These tracks were probably more important then than the east-west road that later became the High Street (originally a north-east to south-west running track which was diverted through the settlement).

The building of the stone bridge/causeway and the arrival of the Augustinian nuns were two important events which may have been connected. There are good reasons for supposing that the bridge was built in the 12th century at the

same time as the Priory. The two existing river crossings or fords were probably not suitable for the building of the kind of substantial bridge the Priory required. If a new site for a bridge was chosen at this time, the main north-south road or 'Fuleweie' would have been diverted accordingly. North-south routes that formerly passed through the town would now have started to decline in importance. On the other hand the importance of 'Harewolde Weie' (now the High Street), linking the settlement with the main highway to the east and Swanton Manor to the west, would have been greatly enhanced.

The dissolution of the Priory in the mid-16th century marked the end of the medieval period. The construction of Harrold Hall involved a shift of power away from Harrold Manor, which went into decline. But the development of lace-making as a cottage industry led to the opening of a flourishing market on the green. Although the market had gone by the 19th century, there was rapid growth in the leatherworking industry. The construction of numerous factories, one of them in use up to the 1980s, marked the industrial phase of Harrold's development - all the more extraordinary for the fact that the town never had a railway station of its own. Present enlargement of the town is taking place through modern housing development.

6 ASSESSMENT OF HARROLD'S CHARACTER, IMPORTANCE AND POTENTIAL

6.1 Character of the Present Town

Harrold stands out as the only 'town' in the county north of Bedford. In many respects it has the character of a large village today, having lost its market nearly two hundred years ago. Entering the village from the south is quite a memorable experience – crossing the bridge over the river, with the tall steeple of St Peter's in the background, then turning left down the narrow High Street towards the green. The presence of a post office, garage, electrical shop, butchers, hairdressers, schools, etc, indicate that it is a thriving place. But at the same time the many back lanes, the little bridges of Brook Lane, the houses of local limestone or orange brick, the thatched cottages and the proximity to the river create a pleasant 'country' atmosphere. The triangular tree-covered green with its octagonal market house is a picturesque centre-piece to the town.

Situated near the borders of both Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire, Harrold has connections with both these counties. Although the ridge to the north of Harrold is at once a significant topographic and cultural boundary, separating the watershed of the River Nene valley from that of the River Great Ouse (with all the differences in dialect and cultural identity of these two regions), the town does look towards Northamptonshire in many respects. The leatherworking industry, for example, developed in tandem with the shoemaking industry of Rushden, Wellingborough and Northampton. Both the east-west and north-south routes which pass through Harrold serve to link Bedfordshire with its neighbouring counties.

Describing features of a town in terms of medieval, post-medieval, industrial and modern can often mean imposing more or less arbitrary distinctions, but in the case of Harrold the conventional terminology quite accurately describes the various stages of development the town went through. The shift from one period to another was marked by corresponding shifts in focus of town life, with each period represented in the surviving fabric of the town.

The two principal administrative units of medieval Harrold - Harrold Priory and Harrold Manor - have long since disappeared. But St Peter's Church and Harrold Bridge are impressive medieval structures which survive to contribute immensely to the character of the town today. The site of the mill has remained the same since Domesday. And the basic street pattern of the medieval town is still there, with intriguing hints of former north-south roads and river crossings hidden in present-day topography.

Post-medieval Harrold (which saw Harrold Priory replaced by Harrold Hall and the fading in importance of Harrold Manor) is well represented by the numerous 17th, 18th and early 19th century houses. The market house or 'buttermarket' on the green testifies to the former existence of a flourishing market, supported by local cottage industries such as lace-making. The

medieval street pattern was retained and modified at enclosure. Harrold Hall no longer survives, but the Old Manor just south of the eastern end of the High Street is a related building of similar date.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries Harrold was the only small town in Bedfordshire with a significant amount of heavy industry. The leatherworking industry of Harrold is as distinctive a local achievement as the hat-making industry of Luton and Dunstable. The industrial heritage in the form of leatherworking factories has now vanished, but there are still many pointers to the prosperity generated by such activity. The Institute (Village Centre) is an example of one of several buildings provided for the town in the late 19th century by Charles Petitt, the leather manufacturer and local philanthropist. The spaces formerly occupied by the factories are in several cases occupied by modern housing.

Modern development has led to significant expansion of the town through housing construction. Recent gravel quarrying has resulted in the creation of Harrold and Odell Country Park to the east of town. In 1981 the historic core of Harrold was designated a Conservation Area (see Fig 8).

6.2 Archaeological Potential

Archaeological investigations have shown that there was extensive occupation and agricultural use of the landscape around present-day Harrold in prehistoric, Roman and early Saxon times. The multi-period discoveries to the north and east of the town have been of great interest. General range and quality of evidence has been exceptional, with survival of buildings, malting ovens, roads, wells, ditches, barrows, inhumations and cremations from various periods. Preservation of organic artefacts and structures in waterlogged Iron Age, Romano-British and Saxon wells deserves particular mention. Results of excavations suggest that the Harrold area has been a focus of shifting unenclosed settlement for thousands of years – one of the main reasons being that there were suitable fording-places on this stretch of the River Great Ouse, attracting routes from all directions. There is clearly potential for finding traces of this early rural activity within as well as around the historic core of the later town.

There is also great potential for exploring the question of how the pattern of shifting farmsteads, roads and river crossings developed into the permanent settlement of late Saxon and medieval times. Much evidence must be waiting to be found within and under the present village, should the opportunity ever arise to excavate it. The church and the green are likely to have been particular foci for settlement over the last twelve hundred years. Given the wealth of evidence already excavated and the scope for further discoveries, Harrold is perhaps the best place to study the origins of villages and towns in the Bedfordshire countryside.

Excavations that have taken place within the historic core have indicated good conditions for survival of archaeological evidence - especially on the site of Harrold Manor, which appears to have escaped from the later post-medieval

ploughing. Complex stratigraphy up to 1m deep is unusual in such a semi-rural context. The Priory and its associated buildings, orchards, cemetery, *etc*, have yet to be found through excavation. Along with the traces of Harrold Hall, these await discovery under the large gardens of houses in Hall Close. Preservation of structures and features is likely to be good. Generally there is great potential for survival of archaeological levels beneath existing buildings within the historic core.

6.3 Archaeological Components

The locations of archaeological components identified here are shown in Fig 9.

- **Component 1.** *Probable Late Saxon Settlement Core*
  The late Saxon settlement core is likely to have been centred on the line of two parallel north-south routes; one represented by Church Walk and Dove Lane, crossing the river to the south of the church and the second represented by The Green, Orchard Lane/Brook Lane, crossing the river beside the mill. These tracks may have been in use since the early Saxon period and were probably initially more important than the east-west road that later became the High Street. (It can be inferred from maps that this was originally a north-east to south-west running track which was diverted through the settlement). Note that the church, the green, the manor and other major features were all situated on or adjacent to these north-south routeways. The area identified as the core of late Saxon settlement is bordered on the northern side by the ditch running along Back Lane – likely to be an early boundary.

- **Component 2.** *Medieval Street Pattern*
  The basic layout of streets probably originated in the late Saxon period, as described above. The important difference in medieval times was that the construction of Harrold Bridge took the principal north-south traffic away from the town and past the Priory instead. Former north-south routes, however, remained fossilised as central elements of the medieval and post-medieval layouts.

- **Component 3.** *Mill*
  The mill is mentioned in Domesday and, though frequently rebuilt, has probably stayed in the same location since then. The site of the mill is important for several reasons, not least because (like the Ivel Mill at Biggleswade) it represents a likely early crossing-point over the river.

- **Component 4.** *Harrold Manor*
  Like the mill, the manor is also mentioned in Domesday and clearly has its origins in the late Saxon period – becoming the most important secular institution in Harrold throughout the medieval period. Attached to it were fishing rights, the mill, and Harrold Park in the north-west of the parish. The manor had dovecotes, gatehouse, numerous outbuildings and its own chapel. Excavations at Priory Middle School, have revealed up to 1m of archaeological stratigraphy, indicating that much of the area of the present playing fields has never been ploughed. The great potential for further

investigation here must be highlighted. Extensive earthworks to the west suggest that the manor site (indicated by buildings marked on early maps) may have shifted from a previous location nearby.

- **Component 5**. *Church*
  St Peter's Church with its impressive steeple is a landmark for miles around. Although first mentioned in records as part of the endowment of the Priory, it probably existed on the same site long before the Augustinian nuns arrived in the mid-12th century, and may be Saxon in origin. This early church would have been a focus of late Saxon settlement, which is likely to have extended along Church Walk (itself possibly an ancient north-south route leading to a ford over the river). The fact that a church already stood here was probably a major factor in the siting of the Priory, which was built on land just to the south – perhaps over part of the church graveyard.

- **Component 6**. *Augustinian Priory*
  Located on land just to the south of the church (not north-west of the mill, as shown on early maps) the Priory figured strongly in the development of Harrold throughout the medieval period. It was demolished shortly after the dissolution, when Harrold Hall was built. Nothing survives above ground but there may well be buried traces of wall foundations. As well as the Priory itself, outbuildings would have included barns, malthouses, stables and dovecotes. There would also have been gardens, orchards, cemetery, *etc*. The precise location of all of these remain to be discovered.

- **Component 7**. *Harrold Bridge*
  The bridge and causeway represent the oldest surviving structures in Harrold today, though it is technically situated outside of the settlement itself. In providing a safe crossing of the river and floodplain, it was closely associated with (and may even have been constructed at the same time as) Harrold Priory. As the principal means of access between Harrold and the rest of Bedfordshire, it continues to be of major importance to the development of the town.

- **Component 8**. *Green/Marketplace*
  The green with its market house and lock-up was once the commercial heart of Harrold, especially in the post-medieval period when the market flourished. Its origins as an open space could go right back to late Saxon times. In addition to the surviving market house, other structures associated with markets and fairs may have been located on the green.

- **Component 9**. *Harrold Hall and Gardens*
  Built in the early 17th century, Harrold Hall effectively replaced both Harrold Manor and Harrold Priory to become the most important single institution in the town throughout the post-medieval period. See OS maps for location of hall and gardens. Constructed on part of the site of the Priory, it was demolished in about 1960 to be replaced by the modern houses and gardens of Hall Close.

- **Component 10**. *Leatherworking Industry*
  Some of the later factory sites from the industrial period have already been mapped (Fig 7). But what is little known is where leatherworking and tanning activities took place prior to industrialisation. Almost certainly it was the skills built up through hundreds of years of leatherworking as a 'cottage' or 'back-garden' industry that later enabled the industry to flourish in the 19th and 20th centuries. Archaeological evidence for this early activity, however, is still to be found.

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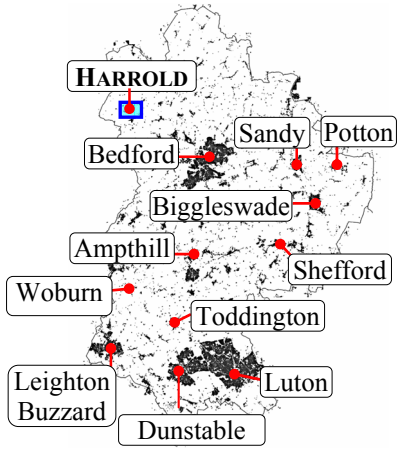
Maps

1719 Map of Harrold Manor estate (L33/286)
1720 Owen and Bowen road map, Chellington to Farndish section (sheet 120)
1765 Jeffries map of Bedfordshire
1797 Inclosure map (DDGA 2587)
1799-1800 Inclosure map - surveyed by Richard Gee (MA12)
1799-1800 Estate map - surveyed by Richard Gee (X1/92/2)
1883 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map
1901 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey map
1920 3nd Edition Ordnance Survey map



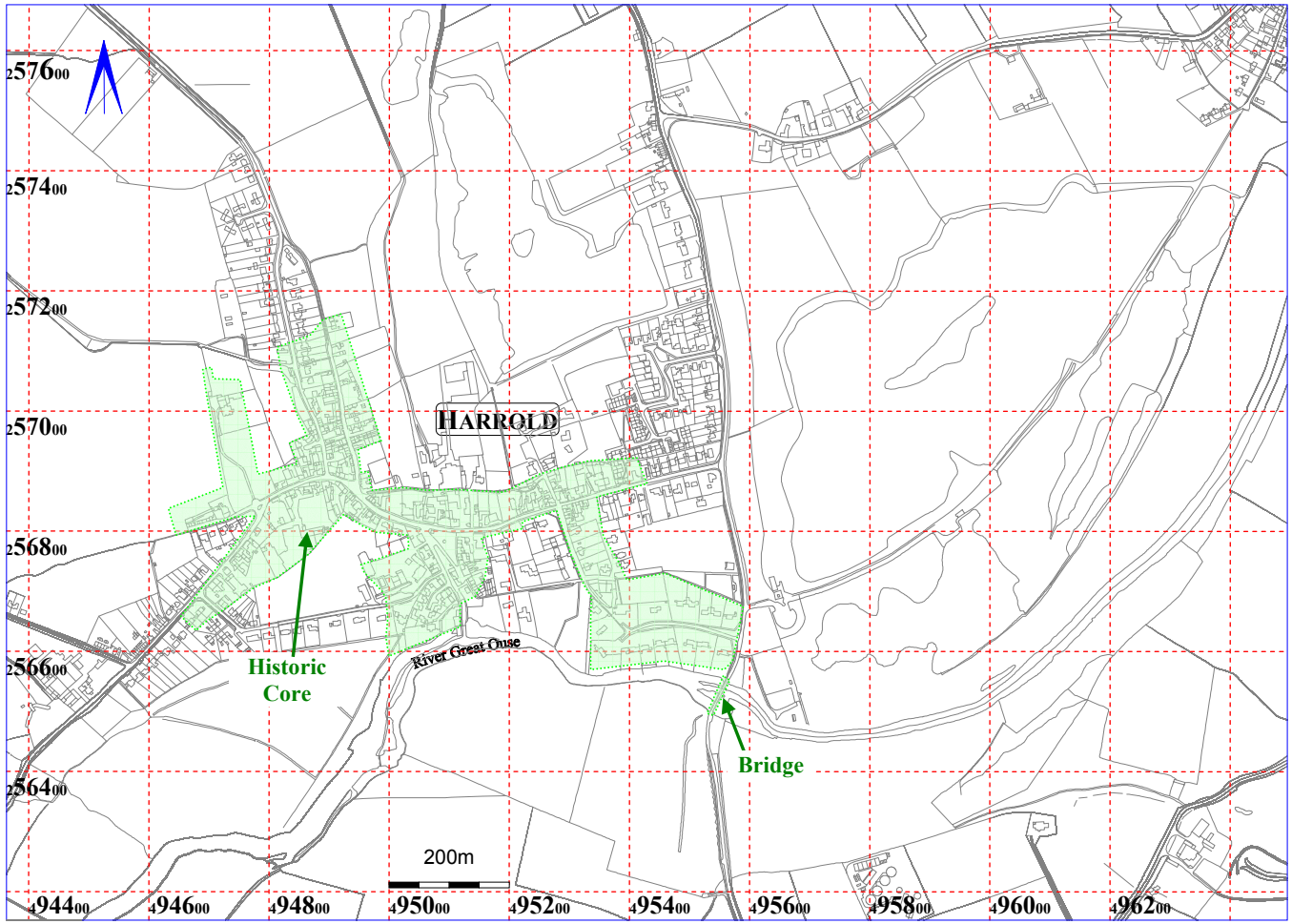


Figure 1: Location map

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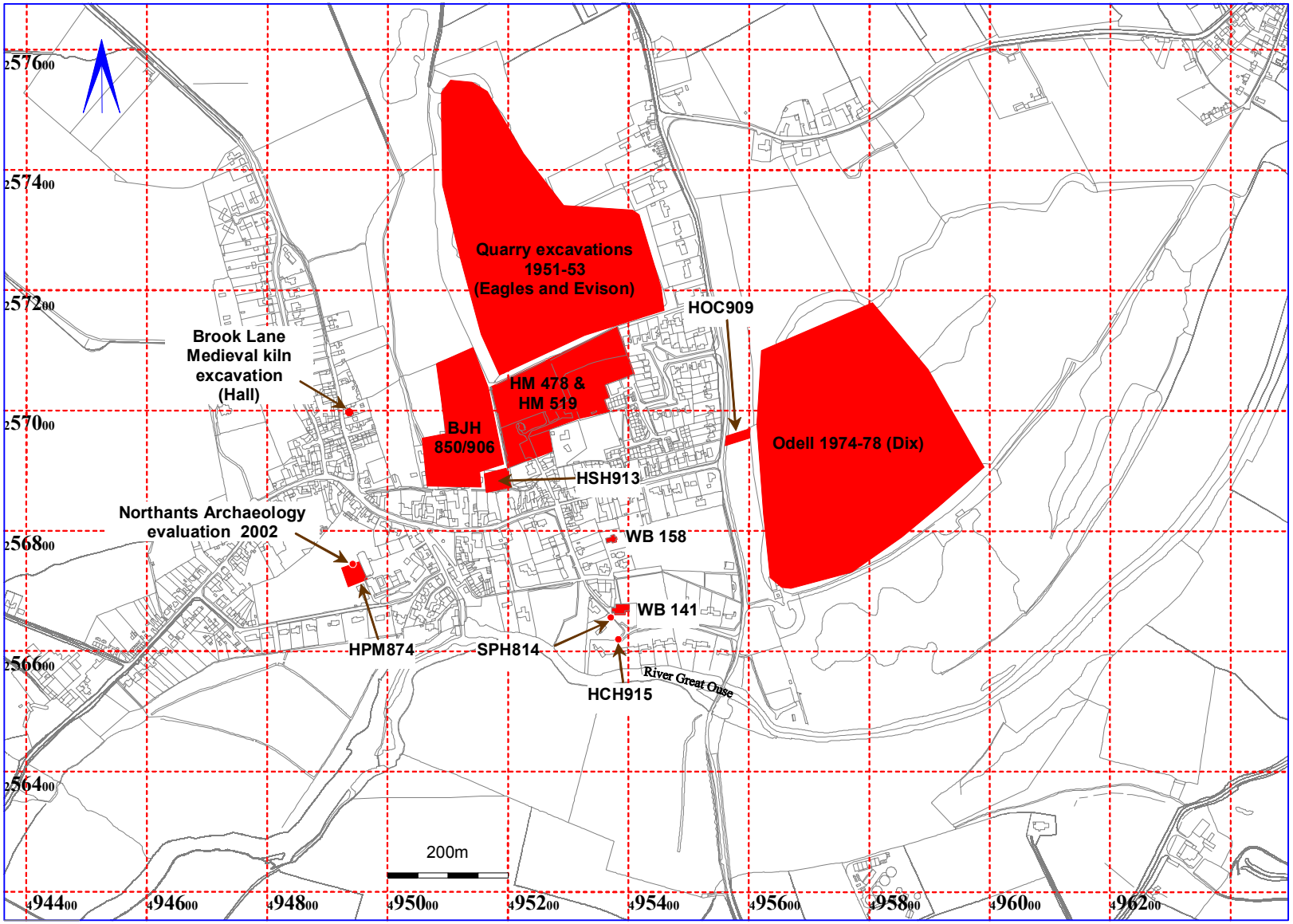

Figure 2: Archaeological excavations

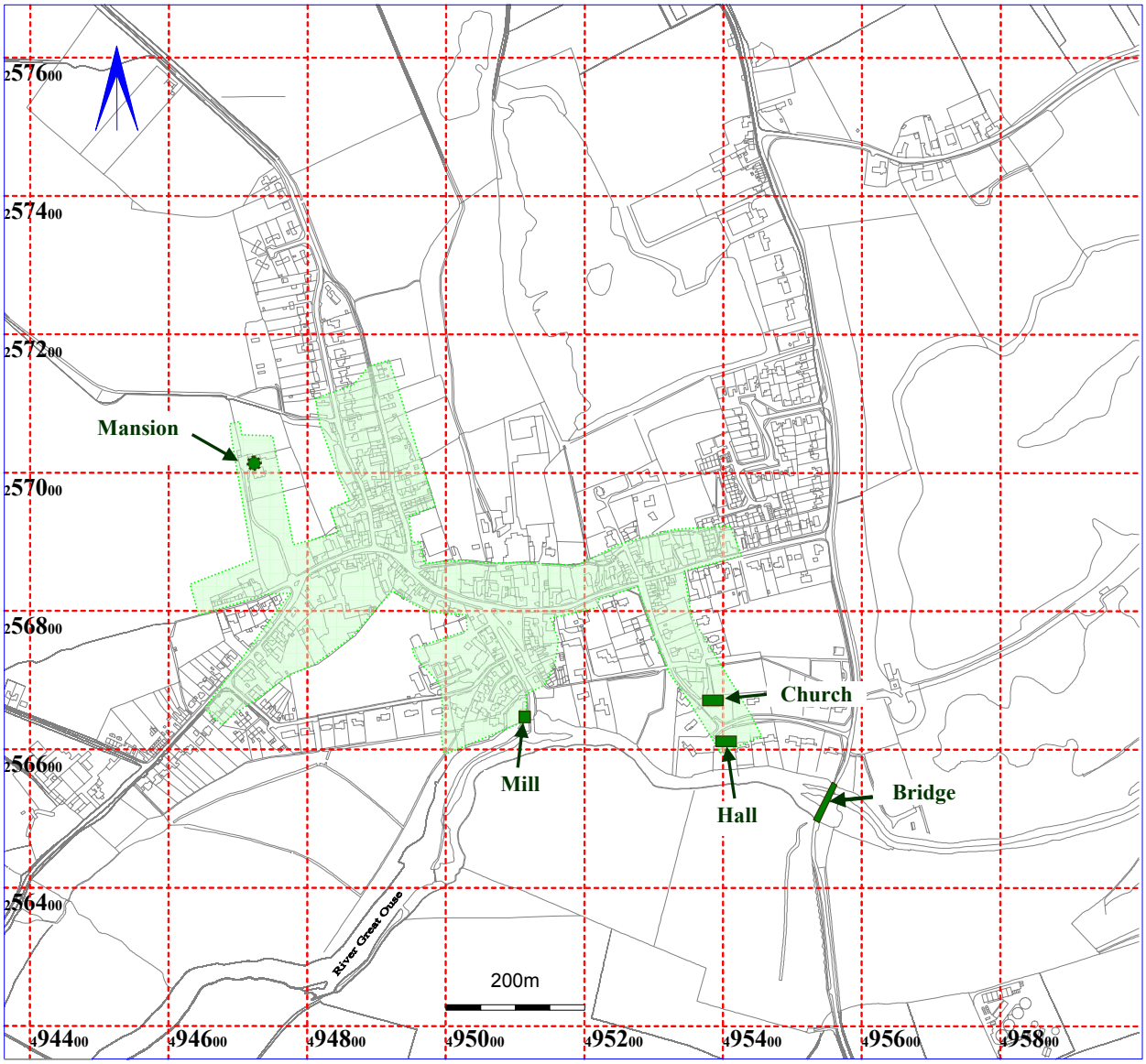

Figure 3: Extent of town in late 18th century, based on Inclosure maps of 1799

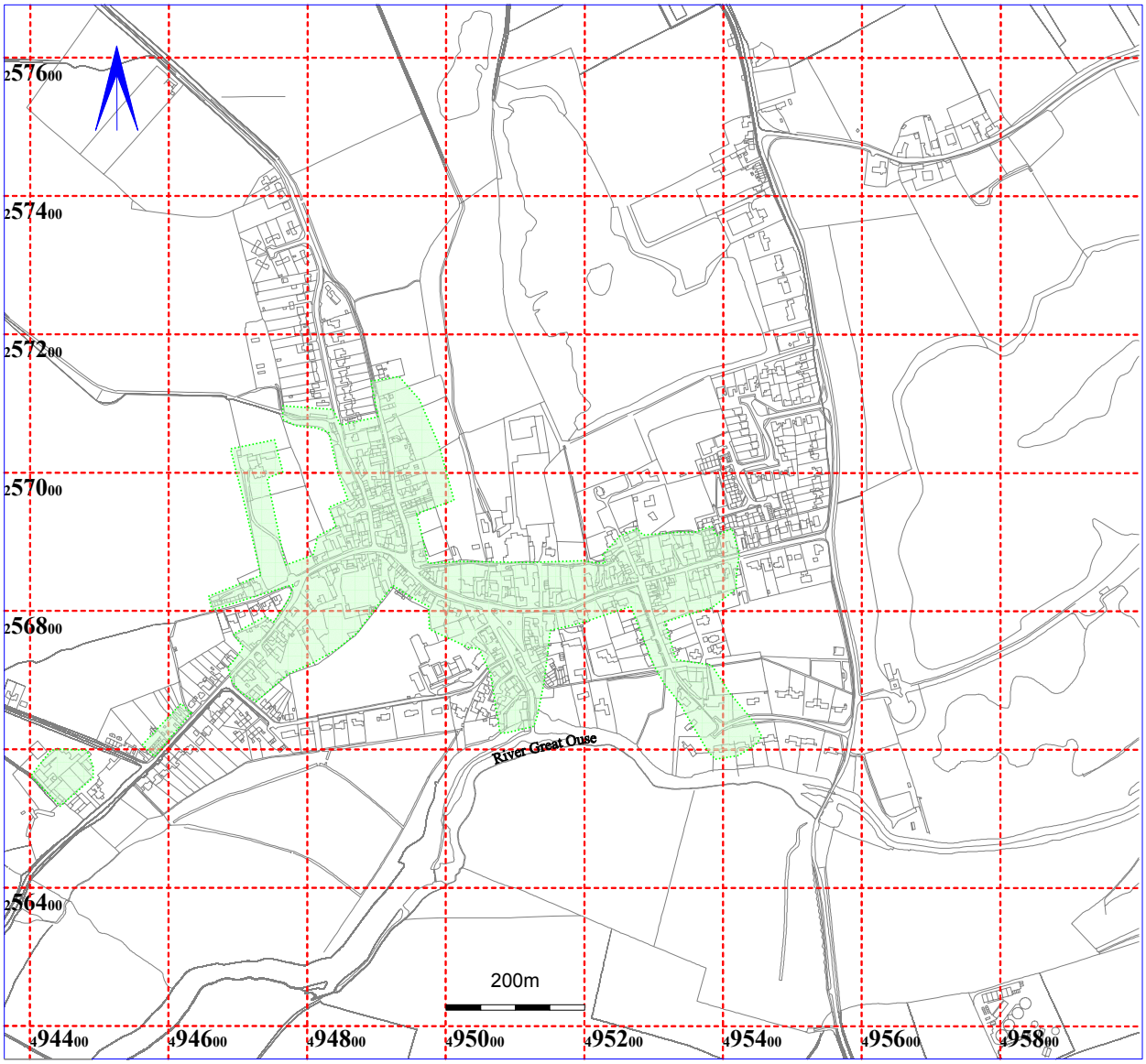

Figure 4: Extent of town in late 19th century, based on OS map of 1884

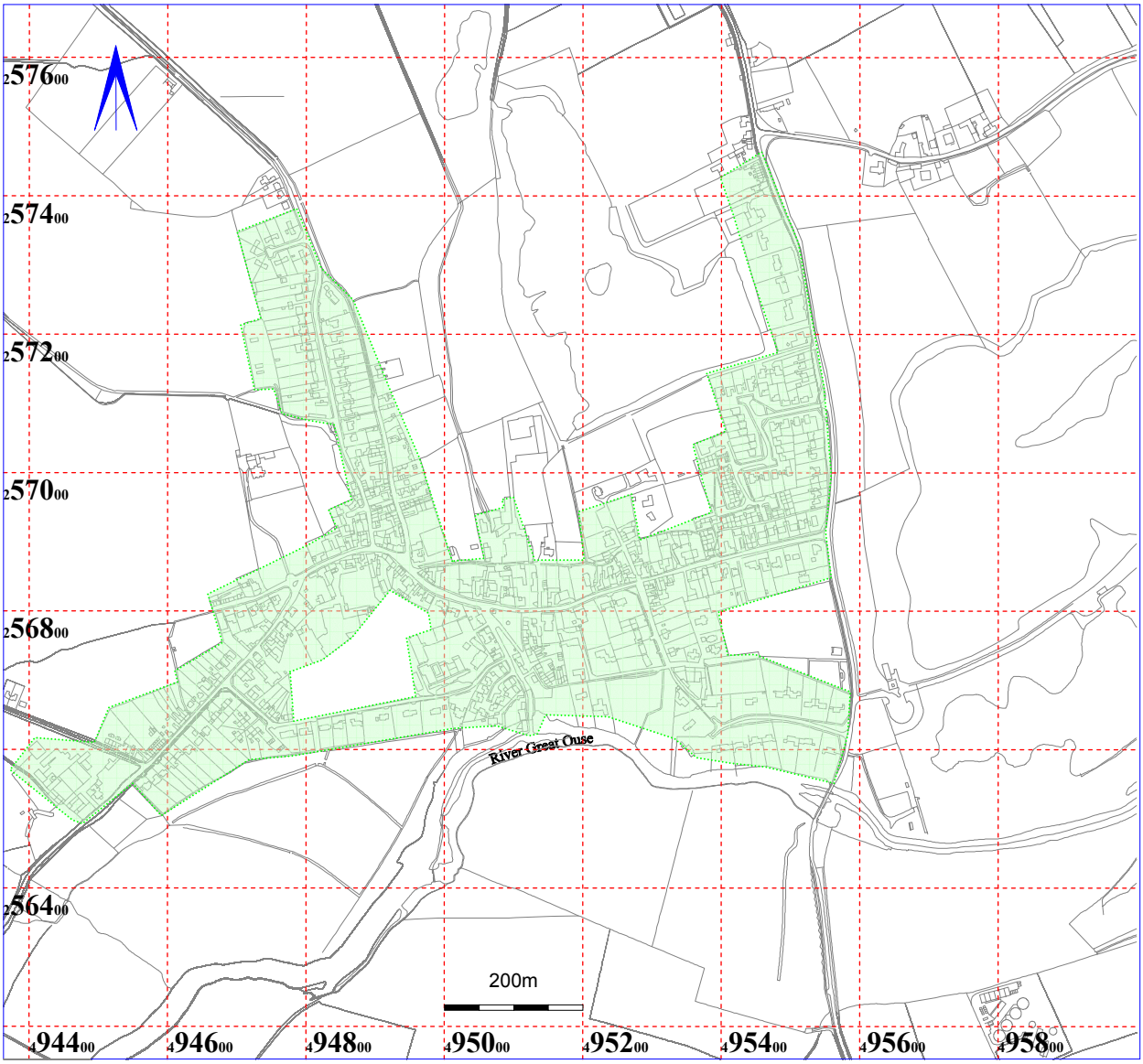

Figure 5: Extent of town in late 20th century, based on the OS map of 1997

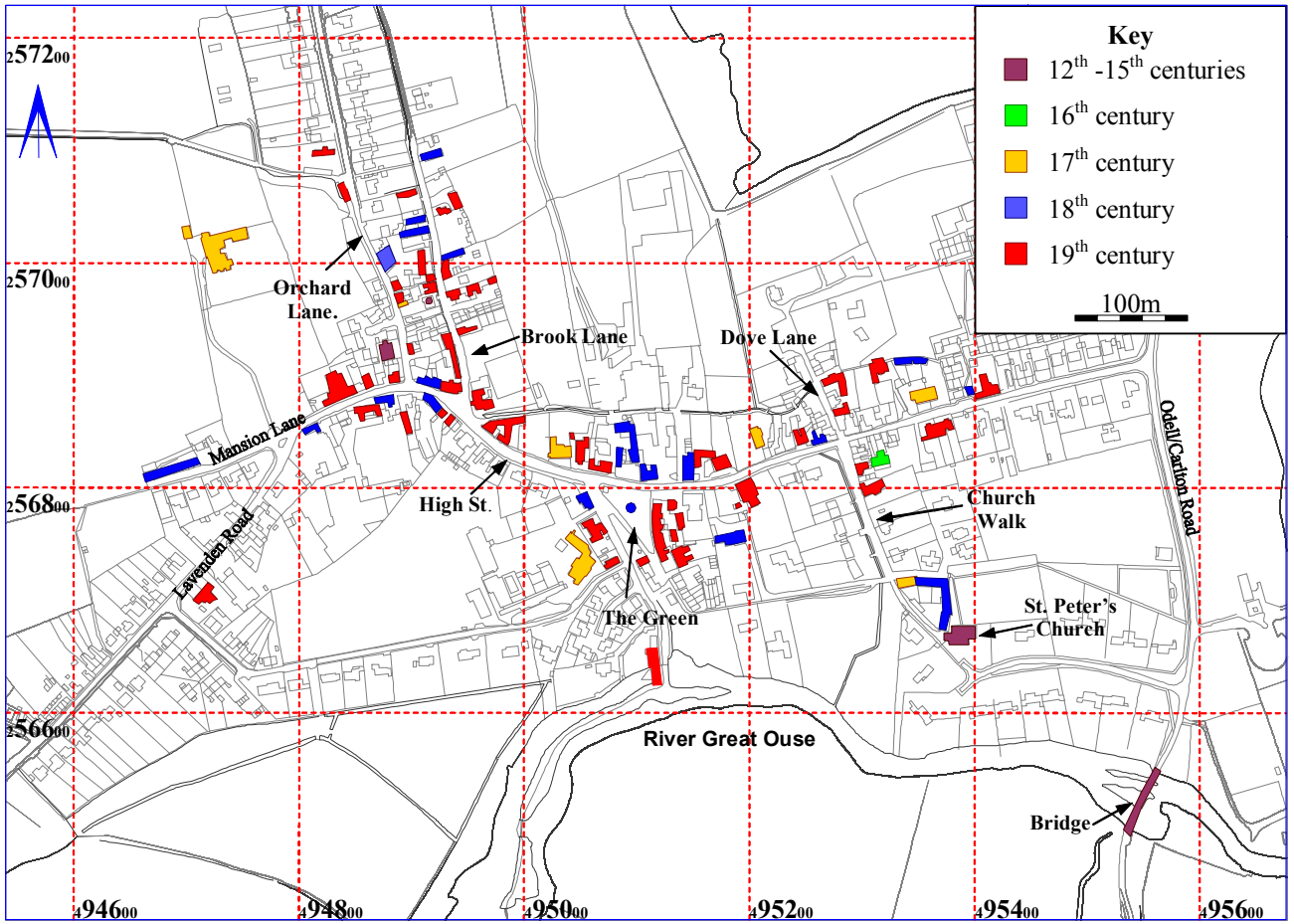

Figure 6: Historic buildings and streets

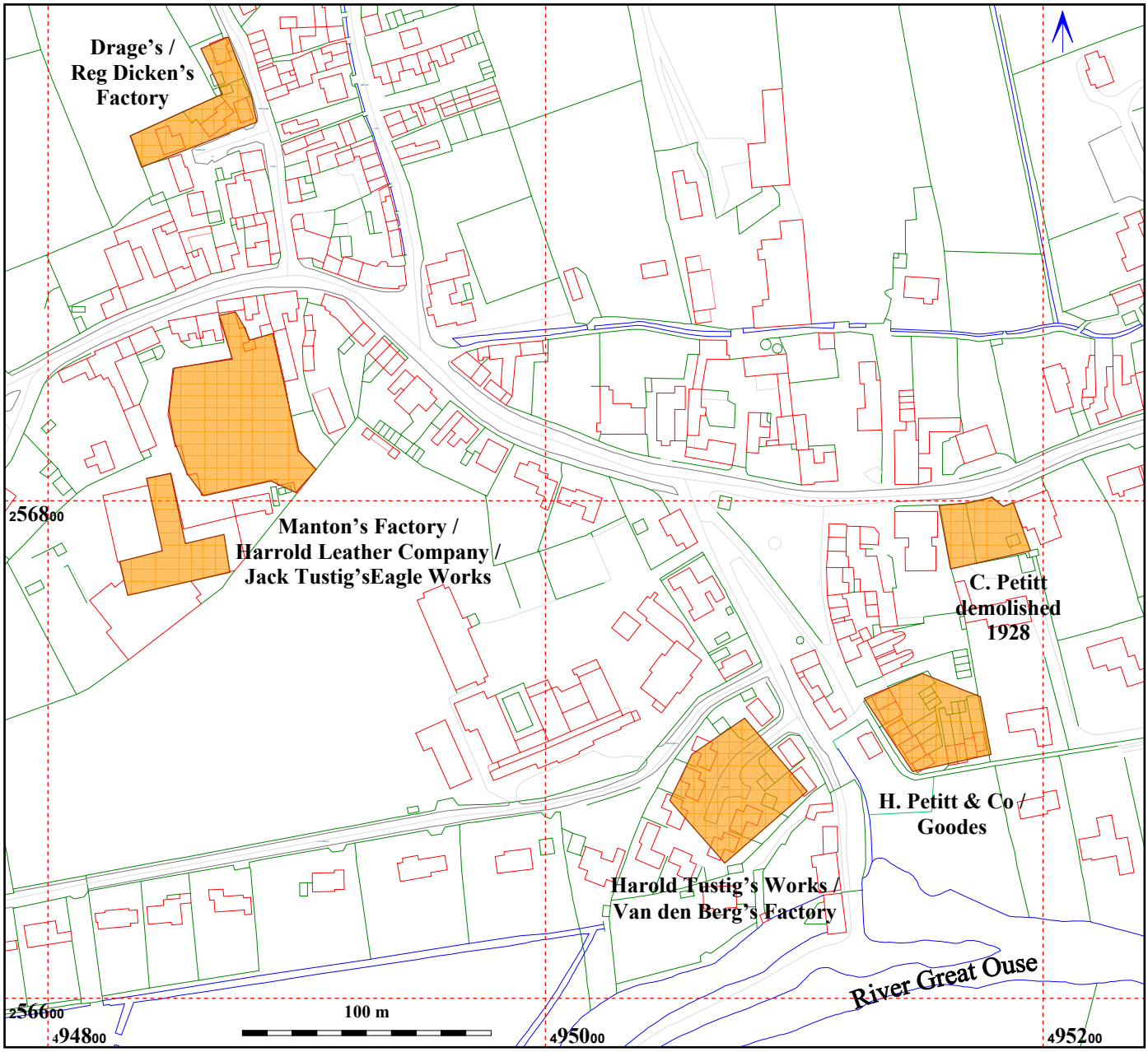

Figure 7: Sites of leatherworking factories 1880-1980

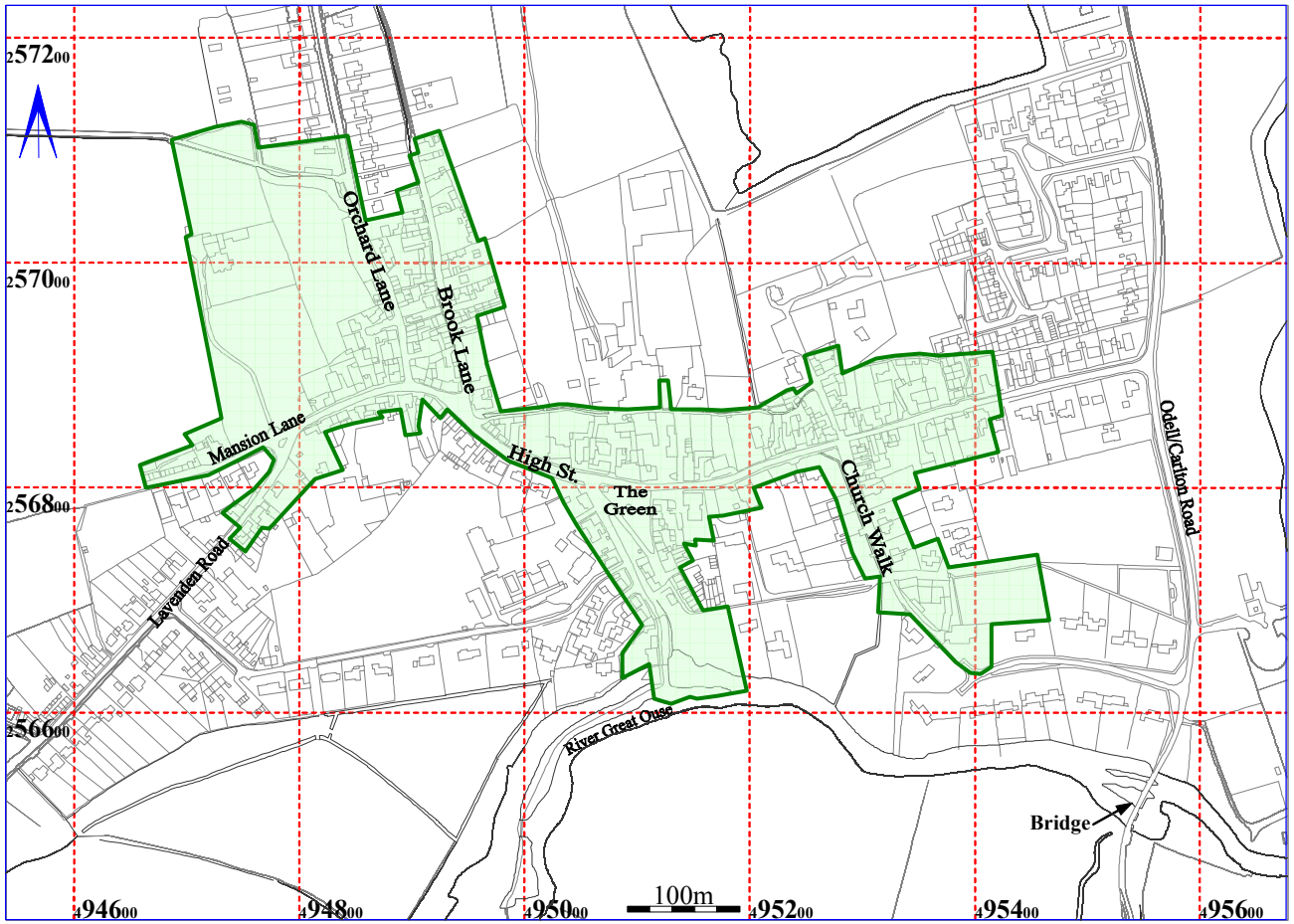

Figure 8: Conservation Area

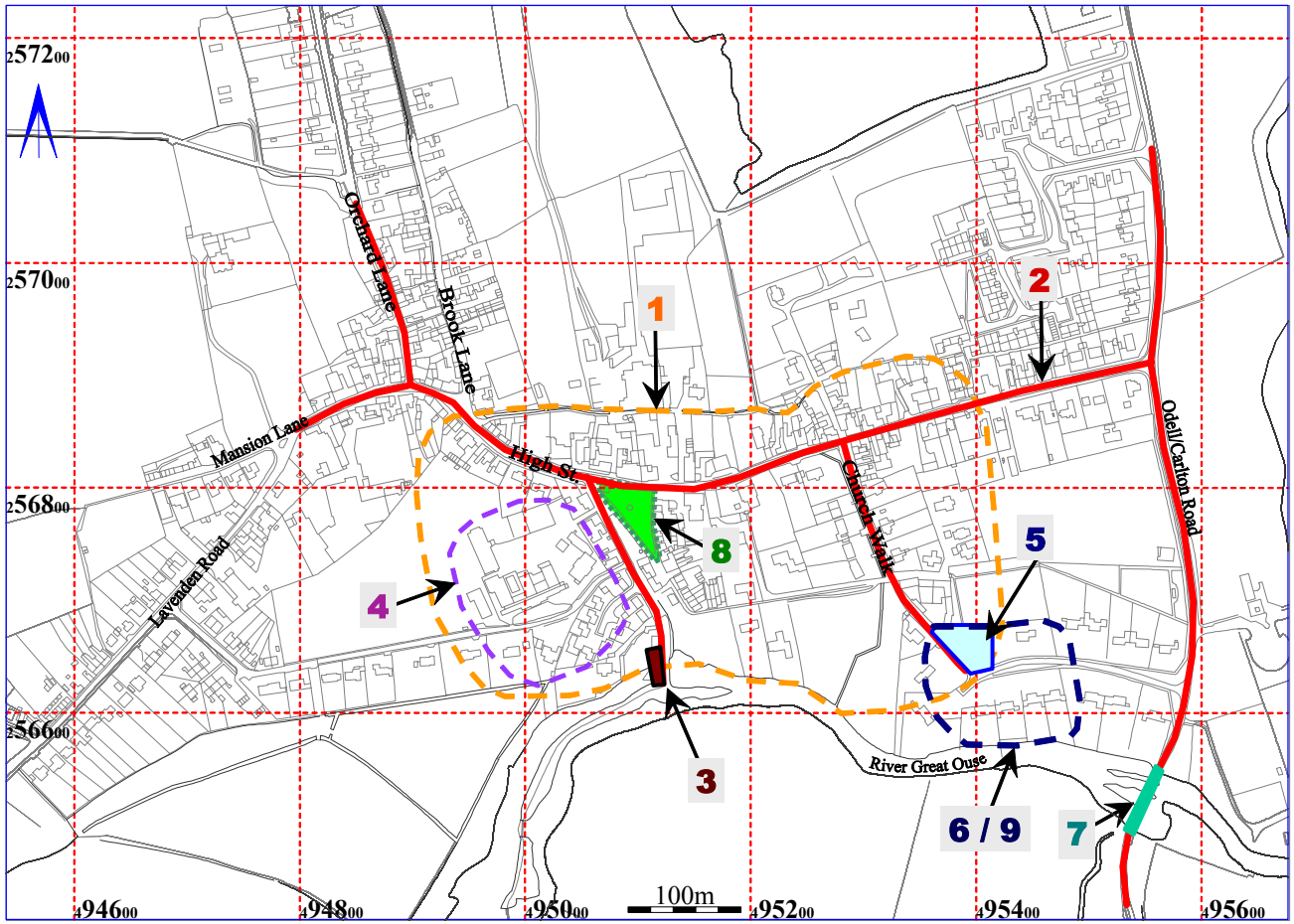

Figure 9: Archaeological components