

**EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY
FOR
BEDFORDSHIRE
POTTON ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

Document 2000/29
Project 510

March 2003
(edited January 2005)

Produced for:
Bedfordshire County Council and English Heritage

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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.

This document has been written by Matt Edgeworth. The Extensive Urban Survey project was managed for Albion by Sean Steadman, Matt Edgeworth and Drew Shotliff under the overall management of BCC's County Archaeological Officer Martin Oake and Roger Thomas of English Heritage. Figures were produced by Joan Lightning. Among those Albion would like to thank are Stephen Coleman (the Historic Environment Officer with the BCC Historic Environment Section), the staff of the Beds and Luton Archive and Record Service, Potton Library, and the Local Studies Section of Bedford Library.

Albion Archaeology,
St Mary's Church,
St Mary's Street,
Bedford, MK42 0AS
☎: 01234 294000
Fax: 01234 294008
e-mail: office@albion-arch.com
website: www.albion-arch.com

March 2003



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 Potton and forms part of the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) for Bedfordshire. This 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). The survey is being jointly 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 Potton 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 Potton'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

Potton is in Mid Bedfordshire District. It is located c.17km to the east of Bedford at TL 2225 4940. The historic market towns of Sandy and Biggleswade lie to the west and south-west, respectively (Fig 1).

The town is located at the junctions of six roads:- Biggleswade Road, Wrestlingworth Road, Gamlingay Road, Sandy Road, Everton Road and the road east to Cockayne Hatley. A stream known as Potton Brook flows from north to south just outside the eastern boundary of the town, and between the town and the church.

For the main streets of Potton, see Fig 7.

The underlying drift geology comprises Gault Clay overlying Lower Greensand. An alluvial deposit about 250m wide has been deposited along the valley of the Potton Brook.

The Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales, Sheet 147, shows the area of the town to be predominantly in urban use with the surrounding land mostly classified as Grade II or Grade III. The richest land, Grade I, is the area immediately to the south-east of the church. The low hills 1-2 kms to the south of the town are primarily in non-agricultural use.



3. THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

3.1. *Previous Archaeological Investigations*

Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS) carried out five projects in Potton parish. These consisted of three watching briefs, an evaluation and a full scale excavation at Myers Road. None were in the centre of the old town. No other organisations have excavated in the area. Excavations are shown in are shown in Fig 2.

A watching brief (WB17) during garden alterations in 1985 at Warren Farm Cottages, 2km to the west of Potton, revealed six Romano-British cremations. Further work in 1986 and 1987 revealed another eight cremations, bordered by an enclosing boundary ditch to the north. The cemetery was dated by artefacts to the 1st-2nd century AD, and was probably situated adjacent to a small agricultural settlement (Dawson and Slowikowski 1988).

Two watching briefs (WB90 and WB186) during sand extraction at Deepdale pits revealed only post-medieval remains - a brick well, some sewage bed soakaways and coprolite pits.

None of the above are shown in the figures because they are too far outside the historic core of the town

An evaluation in 1996-8 (436) and full excavation in 1999 (599) at Myers Farm in the north of Potton revealed a complex of pits and ditches representing a series of enclosures, dating from the Saxo-Norman to the post-medieval period (Fig 2).

Note that BCAS changed its name to Albion Archaeology in 2001. Albion retains the database and many of the records and finds of BCAS excavations, although some have been archived in Bedford Museum.

Modernisation of a building in Sun Street off the market square in Potton town centre enabled a building survey and detailed structural analysis to be carried out. This showed the building to be of the hall and crosswing type, probably dating originally from the 15th century. A smaller and separate building (now demolished) on the west side of the Market Square was shown to be of similar date (Bailey 1980).

3.2 *Historical Evidence*

Volume II of the VCH, published in 1908, gives a history of the Biggleswade Hundred, which includes Potton. Annette Edwards produced a Potton Town Survey for Bedfordshire County Council in 1974. Rob White wrote a much more extensive and detailed Parish Survey in 1981. A Potton History Society Research Report by Ibbett (1983) describes the great fire of 1783. Another PHS report by Parry (1996) is useful for an understanding of land use and the effects of the enclosure acts. A small book by O'Connor (1998) gives a detailed account of the coprolite industry which centred on Potton in the late



19th century. A good photographic record of the streets and buildings of Potton from the late 19th century on is provided in the PHS reports by Yates (1998). Joyce Godber's 'History of Bedfordshire' (Godber 1984) provides a general background to all of the above.

The County Record Office holds large amounts of material about Potton, including manorial documents, but most of this relates to the post-medieval period. There is an extensive series of parish registers, dating from 1602 on. Census returns from 1801-1991 are also held here. Documents such as the claims for compensation after the fire of 1783 (CRO 1217), listing trades and social composition of the King Street/ marketplace area of Potton, are particularly useful. A collection of newspaper cuttings and magazine articles relating to the history of the town is kept in Potton Library.

The map evidence for the parish of Potton is good, but poor for the town itself. The earliest map to show the town is the pre-enclosure Survey of the Estate of the Hon. Admiral John Byng, surveyed by Joseph Cole in 1754 (CRO W2/9). The road layout of the town is clearly shown but there is little detail of buildings. The first complete map of the town is the Plan of Potton in the County of Bedford 1832, surveyed for the second Enclosures Act (CRO MA58), although the scale of the map is small. The 1st edition OS map was surveyed in 1882, with subsequent editions in 1901, 1920 and 1937.

The Historic Environment Record maintained by Bedfordshire County Council's Historic Environment Group lists over a hundred historic buildings ranging in date from the 13th century parish church of St Mary's (HER 1100) to the Potton library building (HER 7076) of the mid-20th century.



4. HISTORICAL SUMMARY

“Pottun” is mentioned in three Anglo Saxon charters, c960, 969 and 1062. (Fowler 1920, 47-49). The name is generally believed to mean pot-farm. The OE form *tun* means an enclosure, estate, farmstead, or village. The form *pot* may refer to a pottery industry, although no archaeological evidence of one has been found. Wares were produced during the medieval period, however, in neighbouring Everton parish. Alternatively *pot* may refer to a deep hole or pit and could refer to early quarrying in the area (Mawer and Stenton, 1926, 106).

At the time of the Domesday survey Potton, ‘Potone’ was mainly within the Half Hundred of Weneslai, and assessed at 10 hides. There is mention of a mill, valued at 5s. A further half a virgate of land was listed as being within the Hundred of Barford. Prior to the Norman conquest Potton was held by Tostig, Earl of Northumbria, Northampton and Huntingdon, as part of one of the largest holdings of land in the country. When Tostig was outlawed in 1065, the land passed to Waltheorf, who married Judith, niece of William the Conqueror. Waltheorf, however, was executed for treachery in 1075 and the land was regranted to Countess Judith.

By 1094 part of the manor (Potton Rectoria) and Potton church was given to St Andrews Priory in Northampton as a result of Judith’s daughter Matilda’s marriage to Simon de Senlis. After the death of Simon, Matilda - now Maud - married David the future king of Scotland, who through the marriage became Earl of Huntingdon. All the remaining Potton land therefore passed to the Scottish royal family, who held it for over a century. When John le Scott Earl of Huntingdon died without issue in 1237, the manor was divided between his three sisters - Margaret, Isabel and Ada. From this time on there were four manorial estates in Potton:-

1. Potton Regis, the principal manor
2. Potton Much Manured
3. Potton Burdetts (named after a 13th century tenant)
4. Potton Rectoria

The rights to hold markets and fairs within the town belonged to the lord of the principal manor. A weekly market was first mentioned in 1202, when the market day was changed. A churchyard of St Swithins, which apparently fronted onto the east side of the marketplace, was referred to in 1373. This chapel may have been founded at the same time as the planned development of the market (White 1981, 13).

The subsequent history of the manors is traced in detail by VCH. Three of the manors, with the exception of Potton Burdetts, reverted to the English Crown and became part of the Duchy of Lancaster, a holding unit for royal land, at the close of the 14th century. All four manors were eventually united in the 16th century when they came into the hands of the Burgoyne family, and since that time have shared a common descent. The Potton estates were bought by



Admiral Byng in 1752. Following his execution in 1774 these passed to his nephew, George Viscount Torrington, who sold the estate to Samuel Whitbread in 1795. The estate remained in the Whitbread family until 1934, when it was sold to Sir Malcolm Stewart.

A large part of Potton town centre was destroyed by fire in 1783. Potton nevertheless became the principal market town of east Bedfordshire during the 18th century, overshadowed by Biggleswade only with the advent of the railways in the Victorian era. In the late 19th century Potton was a main centre of the coprolite extraction industry as well as being an important market gardening town. Census returns show that the population of the town doubled from 1103 in 1801 to 2033 in 1901. The present population is about 4000.



5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

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

There are no known prehistoric sites within the town itself. An unpolished greenstone axe of Neolithic date (HER 14799) was found 1km to the south-west of Potton. A barbed and tanged arrowhead probably dating from the Bronze Age (HER 512) was found in Brook End to the east of the market square. Some Iron Age gold coins of Cunobelin (HER 513) were found near Potton, exact location unknown. Ring-ditches (HER 661 and 2812) were observed as cropmarks about 1km to the east of the town on the other side of the brook. Cropmarks roughly 1km to the north of Potton include linear, circular and sub-rectangular features (HER 657, 658, 660), some of which may be prehistoric in date.

5.2 The Roman Period (AD43 - AD410)

There are no known Roman sites within the town. Some Roman finds (HER 2016) are reported to have been found near Potton; these included a 3rd century urn. A silver coin of Roman date (HER 11307) was found just to the east of the town.

A Romano-British cremation cemetery was partially excavated at Warren Farm Cottages, 2km to the west of Potton. This was dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD and indicates that a small settlement must have been situated nearby at that time (Dawson and Slowikowski 1988).

The Roman town of Sandy 5km to the west may have brought some Roman activity to the Potton area. A Roman road linking Sandy with Ermine Street and passing through Potton was suggested by the Viatores (1964). This would have included parts of the Sandy Road, Meeting House Lane and Church Causeway. However, the Victoria County History states that there is no evidence for such a road further to the west, between Cockayne Hatley and Ermine Street. It has subsequently been shown by Simco and others that many of the apparent straight lengths of road around Potton are in fact the results of enclosure or post-enclosure improvements (Simco 1984, White 1981).

5.3 The Anglo-Saxon Period (AD410 - AD1066)

There are no known Anglo-Saxon sites within the town, although some ditches and pits of the Saxo-Norman transitional period were excavated at Myers Farm on the north side of Potton (BCAS project no 599). Domesday Book indicates, however, that a sizeable settlement belonging to Earl Tostig existed here prior to the Norman conquest. There are also earlier references to 'Pottun' in Anglo-Saxon charters of 960, 969 and 1062 (Fowler 1920). It has been suggested that the position of the church outside of the town may indicate an earlier settlement site, which has since shifted over to the west (Edwards 1974), although there is at present no archaeological evidence for such a view.



5.4 The Medieval Period (AD1066 - AD1550)

At the time of the Domesday survey 'Potone' was mainly within the Half Hundred of Weneslai. Assessed at 10 hides, there was land for 12 ploughs, extensive meadowland and a watermill. There were 2 sokemen, 18 villeins, 13 bordars and 3 serfs. In all it was worth 12 pounds.

Pits and enclosure ditches dating from the Saxo-Norman through the medieval to post-medieval periods were excavated at Myers Farm (BCAS project no 599), on the northern outskirts of Potton. An assemblage of 14th-15th century glazed jugs (HER 10829) was found somewhere in the town, exact location unknown; these are now in Letchworth Museum. Two shoes of Tudor date (HER 10834) were found built into the walls of old cottages, the location of which is not recorded.

The features of the medieval landscape still obvious today are the church, the marketplace, and the principal elements of the system of streets.

5.4.1 Manor Houses

The location of the manor houses in medieval times is not clear, though some inference is possible. The recently demolished property known as The Manor House (HER 4334) to the north-east of Potton dated to rebuilding in about 1870 and it has been suggested that it occupies a moated site (HER 3130). However, there are also cropmarks to the west of this site (HER 3551). White considers the documentary and map evidence for the Manor House being on or near the site of a former manor, but draws no conclusion (White 1981, 12). Parry argues that a farmhouse demolished in 1874 facing the north end of King Street was the former headquarters of the Potton Regis manorial estate (Parry 1996). It is possible that there was only ever one manor house in Potton, with the others being manorial holdings held by non-resident landlords. But it has been suggested by Parry that earthworks just south of Home Farm (HER 10802) may represent the site of one of the three other manor houses, probably Potton Much Manured (Parry 1996). Home Farmhouse itself (HER 2210) dates from the 17th century.

5.4.2. Mill

A mill worth 5 shillings is listed in the Domesday survey, but there are no further definite references to it. The 1754 Cole map calls the present Royston Street by the name of Mill Lane, perhaps indicating that the location of the watermill was somewhere close to the site of the present bridge over Potton Brook, although the lane also leads in the direction of a Windmill Field. The existence of the watermill may have been crucial to the siting and economic functioning of the early town. From 1316 on, there are documentary references to windmills situated within the parish, and a number of possible windmill sites are visible in the fields outside of the town (White 1981, 19).

5.4.3. Church

St Mary's Church (HER 1100) is the oldest surviving building in Potton. Its position so far out of town is not fully explained, but is paralleled in other Bedfordshire towns such as Harrold. It seems likely that the site of the church



is older than that of the town, though there is no evidence of early medieval settlement in the vicinity. One obvious reason for its location is the advantage afforded by high ground. Edwards suggests that a lower site was chosen for the town to take advantage of routes and crossings of Potton Brook (Edwards 1974).

Parts of the chancel and the north transept date from the first half of the 13th century. The nave was added and the north transept widened in the 14th century. The tower and north porch are 15th century additions. The south-east chapel and the exterior features of the church are 15th-16th century, with further repair and refitting in the late 19th century (VCH vol II, 239). A significant possibility, of course, is that the present church may be built on the site of an earlier one.

5.4.4. Chapel

A churchyard of St Swithin (HER 10833) within the town of Potton is mentioned in 1373. The position of the chapel is described in a grant as “abuts one head on the forum, abuts one head on the river”. White suggests that the term ‘forum’ means ‘market square’. The land of St Swithins would therefore be located between the east end of the marketplace and Potton Brook. A chapel of St Swithins is also mentioned in an indenture of 1394. In 1550 Robert Thomas and Andrew Salter, merchant tailors of London, bought property in Potton including “the late chapel in Chappell Grove... with its stones, timber, glass, tiles, buildings and iron”. The area north of the Chequers Inn was still referred to in a deed as Chapel Green in 1798. White argues that the location of the chapel next to the market square indicates that the chapel was founded at the same time as the planned development of the market (White 1981,13).

5.4.5. Market

No market is mentioned in the Domesday survey; it was possibly established by Judith. A weekly market was first recorded in the Eyre Rolls of 1202, when it was moved from Sunday to (blank-) day. The rights to hold a market belonged to the principal manor after the fragmentation of the manor in 1237. In 1501 Henry VII granted the profits and tolls from Potton market to John Burgoyne for 14 years. In 1544 a Saturday market was granted in perpetuity to Thomas Burgoyne.

The rectangular marketplace was the principal focus of the medieval town. As White points out, its position on level ground to the west of Potton Brook and away from the church indicates a planned origin. He considers various possibilities, concluding that it was probably established prior to the fragmentation of the manor in 1237, and probably at the original foundation of the market at some time before 1202 (White 1981, 15). Ibbett suggests that the square began as an open space where a market was held, around which buildings and roads were constructed (Ibbett 1980). The development of the market almost certainly went hand in hand with the development of the town, and is a central component of the town street layout.



5.4.6. Streets

It is clear from the topography of the town that the four streets forming the rectangle of the market square - King Street, Brook End, Sun Street and Bull Street - were in existence in medieval times. There is documentary evidence for Churchweye Street, presumably the Church Causeway, in 1274. Other references to Horselow Street in 1351 and the 'forum' or market square in 1373 indicate that for much of the medieval period the street layout was not too different from that shown on the Cole map of 1754 (CRO W2/9). On this map the present Royston Street is called Mill Lane, perhaps giving a clue to the former location of the watermill on Potton Brook. It seems probable that the pattern of medieval streets was based partly on the convergence of three routeways - the north-south route from Gamlingay to Biggleswade and east-west routes from Everton to Cockayne Hatley and Sandy to Wrestlingworth - with some deliberate planning of the market square area on this basic framework. The street now known as Chapel Street would have marked the western limit of the town in medieval times

5.4.7. Buildings

White and other authors have stated that the church is the only surviving medieval building in the parish of Potton (White 1981, 12). Although many must have been destroyed by the fire of 1783, there are in fact a few medieval buildings within the town. The fire started in King Street and spread to the Market Square, burning down a total of about 50 houses, which Edwards estimates to be roughly half the number of houses in Potton at that time (Edwards 1974). Damage was probably worst on King Street, Church Causeway and the north and east sides of the Market Square. Pre-1783 buildings do survive on the south and west sides of the Market Square as well as in Sun Street, however. The HER sheets assign a 16th century date to 27 and 28 Market Square (HER 2200) and also to 4 Sun Street (HER 2205). This latter building is known as Sun House and was formerly the Sun Inn. The first known documentary record to it is in 1689, when it was described as a common ale house. It was the subject of a detailed structural survey and analysis by Bailey, who identified it as a hall and crosswing building and dated it to the 15th century (Bailey 1980). No 19 King Street (HER 7069) is also described in the HER as being of 15th century date.

Surviving buildings of medieval date in the town are shown in Fig 3 and briefly described in Table 1 below.

HER No.	Address	Comments
2200	27 and 28 Market Square	16th century
2205	4 Sun Street	15th-16th century, formerly Sun Inn, now Sun House
7069	19 King Street	15th century

Table 1. Medieval buildings (from HER)



5.4.8 Trades

Documentary evidence is sparse for occupations and trades during the medieval period. Most occupations would have been agricultural, but Elizabethan lay subsidies also give an idea of the range of urban occupations in late medieval times. In the 1581-2 lists a baker, a butcher, a draper, 3 gentlemen, 2 haberdashers, 6 husbandmen, 4 maltsters, a miller, a tanner and 2 yeomen are listed. The tannery would have been located near to Potton Brook, probably close to the bridge known as 'Tannery Bridge' (HER 10681) and to 'Tan Yard' (HER 7898), the deeds to which date from 1711 but the tannery itself may be much older. Horne Lane may derive its name from an early horn-working industry. Milling, too, would have been a thriving trade throughout the medieval period. A watermill is listed in the Domesday survey and the first reference to a windmill is in 1316. Warreners would have bred and managed rabbits at Potton Warren (HER 10832) on land to the west of Potton, first recorded in 1540.

5.5 *The Post-Medieval Period (AD1550 - AD1850)*

5.5.1 Market

In 1670 Richard Burgoyne was granted four yearly fairs by Charles II. These included a horse fair in January, a Statute fair for the hiring of servants in September and a sheep fair in October, all of which were still current in the middle of the 19th century (White 1981, 17-18). A hog market was held on Hogg Hill to the east of the marketplace. Much of the dealing was carried out in the inns around the marketplace. The horse fair lasted for three days and attracted buyers from all over the midlands and eastern counties. In addition to the fairs the weekly market continued to be held on Saturdays.

The Cole map of 1754 shows the Market Square with Sun Street, Bull Street and King Street much as they are today, but with a more open aspect onto Hogg Hill and at least one inn - the Dogg Inn - on the eastern side. Two further inns - the Crown and the George- were sited on the northern side. All were destroyed by fire in 1783. The map shows that the Dogg Inn was part of the manorial estate, perhaps indicating that the Inn was an encroachment onto what was formerly a much larger marketplace, which once extended further to the east (White 1981, 15).

The map also shows that the centre and southern parts of the marketplace were occupied by three parallel rows of buildings or sheds, orientated east-west, separated into six sections by paths. These probably comprised a market house, shops and two rows of butcher's stalls, known as the Shambles, all of which are thought to have survived the fire of 1783, though they are recorded as being in need of repair in 1795. A clock tower was added to the market house in the late 18th century by Lord Torrington (Godber and Glazier 1956).

5.5.2. Streets

Settlement in the post-medieval period continued to be centred on the areas of King Street, Horselow Street, Market Square and Sun Street, with little outlying settlement except for farm buildings and small closes with cottages.



The southern end of Horslow Street, now Chapel Street, was known as Back Street in 1754. The 'back' of the town can be taken as the approximate limit of the town at a given time. Some expansion of the town westwards is indicated by the fact that a road roughly parallel with Horslow Street and Back Street, but further to the west, was named Back Lane in 1774 (this is now known as Willow Road). Expansion of the town to the east was limited by Potton Brook and the meadowlands either side. The system of streets was not really affected by the fire of 1783.

At the north end of Back Lane was Bayard's Green, with a group of 'home closes and cottages' being shown just to the east on the map of 1754. Another green, Chapel Green, was located at Brook End and is mentioned in a deed of 1798. A third, Farthing Green, mentioned in 1575 and 1622, is unlocatable (White 1981, 24).

The Parliamentary Enclosure Act passed in 1814 attempted to rationalise the complex system of roads and trackways shown on the 1754 map. What remained was the modern road and footpath system shown on the Enclosure Award map of 1832. The two east-west roads were straightened and a new road was constructed from near the church south to Sutton. The existing turnpike road from Biggleswade to St Ives remained unaltered (Parry 1996, 34; White 1981, 31).

Fig 4 shows the approximate limits of development of the town based on the 1832 map.

5.5.3. Buildings

The fire of 1783 destroyed much of the town centre buildings, with over 50 dwelling-houses burnt down. A contemporary account by the Rev Berridge (quoted in full by White 1981, 22) describes how a smoking hay-stack set fire to "half the town" with many of the "best houses" falling victim to the flames. The fire started in King Street, where it "cleared a stack of houses away" on or near the footpath to the church. All the houses except one down one side of King Street were destroyed, together with (according to Berridge) the whole of the market square except the eastern side; "to the east and the south of the market there was not a house standing." However, it should be noted that there are in fact pre-1783 buildings on the south side of the market. Numbers 21 (HER 2196), 22-24 (HER 2197), 25 (HER 2198) and 26/26a (HER 2199) are all thought to be late 17th or early 18th century in date, with the second of these actually bearing the date 1697. Numbers 27-28 (HER 2200), as already discussed, are even earlier in date. White points out that Berridge's orientation is likely to be at fault.

The relatively open aspect of the market square to the east onto Hoggs Hill probably prevented the spread of the fire onto the south side of the square and into Sun Street. The two inns on the northern side, the Crown and the George, as well as the Dogg Inn on the eastern side, were all burnt down. Other ancient inns elsewhere in the town did survive the flames. In particular the former Sun Inn (HER 2205), described in the HER as 16th century, has been



shown on detailed analysis to be a hall and crosswing house of the 15th century (Bailey 1980). This building, along with others of the 16th and 17th centuries, is timber-framed. Thatched buildings include the 17th century building at 52 Everton Road on Bayards Green (HER 7054).

Surviving buildings of post-medieval date are shown in Fig 3 and briefly described in Table 2, 3 and 4.

HER No.	Address	Comments
2175	28 King Street	17th-18th century features
2181	26 Horslow Street	17th century
2189	22-24 Horslow Street	17th century
2196	2 Brook End / 21 Market Square	17th-18th century
2197	22-24 Market Square	1697
2198	25 Market Square	17th century
2199	26/26a Market Square	17th century
2201	3-5 Sun Street	17th century
2204	1-2 Market Square	17th century
2207	The Cottage, 2 Biggleswade Road	17th century
2208	Royal Oak, 4-6 Biggleswade Road	17th century
2209	6 Biggleswade Road	17th century
2210	Home Farmhouse, 5 Horne Lane	17th century
2215	9 Blackbird Street	17th-18th century
2216	6-8 Chapel Street	17th-18th century
2218	10 Sun Street	17th century
5869	47-51 Horslow Street	17th-18th century
5871	57-59 Horslow Street	17th-18th century
7050	2 Bull Street	17th-19th century
7054	52 Everton Road	17th century
7057	4 Horne Lane	17th-18th century
7086	14-20 Sun Street	17th-18th century

Table 2. 17th century buildings (from HER)

Many of the 18th century buildings listed below were built from a deep red brick which is the dominant building material in the town. Those buildings in the area of King Street and Market Square were largely built after the fire of 1783. Little is known about the post-fire re-building of the town, which according to White proceeded in a haphazard manner depending on the inclinations of the individual property owners (White 1981, 23). A collection made for those who suffered losses raised over £6,000 (Ibbett 1983). The 1785 Merchants Miscellany describes Potton as containing “a few houses that escaped the conflagration of August 1783 and a few built since, the liberality of the subscription and the considerableness of its markets having given animation to the exertion, and the new buildings have the advantage of greater convenience with the beauty of improvement”. Bailey (1980) has shown, however, that behind the 18th century brick facades may survive structures of earlier date. In his appendix he describes 3 Sun Street which he dates to the



late medieval period; this is almost certainly 3-4 Market Square (HER 2203), now demolished.

HER No.	Address	Comments
1685	23 Horslow Street	dovecote, timber-framed, pre-1760
2174	28 King Street (back of)	dovecote, 18th century
2176	20-22 King Street	18th century
2177	6-8 King Street	18th century
2178	George and Dragon, 2-4 King Street	18th century
2179	16-17 Market Square	18th century
2180	St Mary's House, Hatley Road	former Vicarage, 18th century
2182	41 Horslow Street	18th century
2183	37-39 Horslow Street	18th century
2184	31-33 Horslow Street	18th century
2185	Chigwell House, 2 Horslow Street	18th century
2186	8-10 Bull Street	18th century
2187	Green Man, 6 Bull Street	18th century
2192	18 Market Square	18th century
2193	19-20 Market Square	18th century
2194	Rose and Crown, 12-13 Market Square	18th century
2195	6 Market Square	18th century
2202	5 Market Square / 1 Bull Street	18th century
2206	6 Sun Street	18th century
2212	8 Brook End	formerly The Chequers, 18th century
2213	5 Blackbird Street	18th century
2214	7 Blackbird Street	1703
2217	12 Sun Street	18th century
2858	Cottages, Meeting Lane	18th century
5870	53-55 Horslow Street	18th century
5872	The Hollies, 14 King Street	18th century
5873	3 King Street	18th century
5874	5-7 King Street	18th century
5875	Linden Lodge, 9 King Street	18th-19th century
7056	2 Horne Lane	18th century
7058	1 Horslow Street	18th century
7060	15-21 Horslow Street	18th century
7072	59 King Street	18th century
7073	65/67 King Street	18th century
7075	26 King Street	18th century
7077	7/8 Market Square	18th century
7119	48 King Street	18th century

Table 3. 18th century buildings (from HER)



There are a number of buildings in the town described in HER as dating to the early 19th century. In addition, numerous 17th and 18th century buildings were altered in the 19th century.

HER No.	Address	Comments
7059	Baptist Chapel, Horslow Street	early 19th century
7062	4 Horslow Street	early 19th century
7066	14/16 Horslow Street	early 19th century
7067	18/20 Horslow Street	early 19th century
7070	23 King Street	early 19th century
7089	Baptist Chapel, off Horslow Street	1802
7559	Vicarage Farmhouse, Gamlingay Road	early 19th century

Table 4. Early 19th century buildings (from HER)

5.5.4. Baptist Chapel

Nonconformists were meeting in Potton from at least the later 18th century, when a meeting house certificate for a barn was applied for. The first chapel to be built in Potton for non-conformist worship was the Baptist Chapel (HER 7089) off Horslow Street. The chapel was built in 1802.

5.5.5. Trades

Eighty occupations are listed in the parish registers of 1602-1812. The level of detail of recording is inconsistent, however, and most of the listed occupations are for the period 1698-1706. These include locksmiths, blacksmiths, cutlers, coopers, fellmongers, carpenters and waggoners. Trades connected with dress include tailor, collarmaker, shoemaker, cobbler, glover and draper. Tanning would have continued in the area of Tannery Bridge. Urban occupations such as clerk, apothecary and barber are mixed with rural occupations such as shepherd and farm-labourer. Trades concerned with processing of agricultural produce include 'wool-kemmer', wool-stapler and butcher. Wool was an especially important commodity in the town. Market gardening was also an important provider of work for local people.

Occupational names from the 17th century registers provide another window into the range of occupations practised: Barber, Butcher, Carter, Cooper, Farmer, Miler, Sheppard, Smyth, Stocker, Taylor, Threader, etc.

Many apparently specialised tradesmen practised more than one occupation, or balanced their particular trade with agricultural activity. The inventory of a baker named John Hall in 1619, for example, records not only his breadhouse and bakery but also his 4 horses, 3 bullocks, 2 steers and 75 sheep (White 1981:21).

The claims for compensation after the fire of 1783 (CRO 1217) record information on trades of claimants and provides a snapshot in time of the building use and the social composition of the King Street and marketplace area. In this core part of town there were, for example, 2 innholders, 5 victuallers, 3 mealmen, 2 schoolmistresses, 4 shoemakers, 2 waggoners, 4



tailors, a maltster, 2 brewers, two woolstaplers, a mat-maker, a basket-maker and an ostler, to name but a few of the occupations recorded. There were 15 labourers and over 40 servants. The Directory of Bedfordshire of 1785 (CRO 1/17) lists, in addition to the trades mentioned above, a breeches-maker, a grocer and chandler, a builder, a currier, a milliner, a plumber, a saddler and two surgeons.

5.6 The Industrial Period (AD1850 - AD1914)

The population of Pottton doubled in the nineteenth century. Census returns show that the main period of expansion was in the first half of the century, with an increase from 1103 in 1801 to 1922 in 1851. There was a further more modest increase to 2033 in 1901, and 2156 in 1911.

5.6.1. Market Square

The market continued to be the central focus of town life throughout the 19th century, though somewhat reduced in size. In addition to the weekly Saturday markets there were also the four annual fairs listed in Kelley's Directory of 1847. It is recorded that the whole parish had dinner on the market square to celebrate Queen Victoria's jubilee. A decline in the prosperity of the market in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was paralleled by gradual decay of the market buildings. By 1920 only the Horse Fair and the Statute or 'Statty' Fair are mentioned in the directories. The wooden covered stalls or shambles were eventually demolished in 1941, and the market house was demolished in 1956, to be replaced by the present market building.

Ibbett (1980) provides an account of the market square shops and their occupants from the early 1800s through to 1980, based on analysis of census returns and trade directories. This shows both the changing use and the continuity of use through time of particular premises. One shop on the east side of the square has been an ironmongers for the last 150 years.

5.6.2. Streets

There are few differences in the basic street pattern between the Enclosure map of 1832 and the 1st edition OS map of 1882. On the 1882 map, the western limit of the town is still marked by Back Lane, later called Willow Street, the northern part of which was diverted slightly to follow the course of the new railway line. Station Road undoubtedly came more into use as a result of the arrival of the railway, and the station gave a new focus for activity in the town. But, the settlement still clustered around the medieval street pattern, formed largely of the intersections of the two east-west and one north-south roads together with the market square. Between 1882 and the 3rd Edition OS map in 1920 there was little further expansion of the town, and the street pattern stayed more or less the same.

Fig 5 shows the approximate limits of the development of the town based on the 1884 map.



5.6.3. Buildings

The growth in the town's population and prosperity is reflected by several Victorian terraces along Biggleswade Road and Station Road, particularly in the area of the Royal Oak inn. In many cases 'hovels' were demolished to make way for new buildings. The railway station (HER 7084) was built in 1857. To the west of the station, the Bricklayers Arms (HER 7078) and some terraces of houses were constructed (e.g. HER 7081), but this was very much an outlying settlement, later to become a part of the Newtown estate. Sandstone started to be used as a building material in the mid-19th century, especially for public buildings such as the Congregational Chapel (HER 7085) and the Church Hall (HER 7055). A fire station (HER 7048) was built in 1887; this yellow brick building is now used as a community centre.

HER	Address	Comments
1752	Potter Almshouses, Horslow Street	1863
1753	Methodist Chapel, Chapel Street	1840
1944	Railway Engine Shed, off Biggleswade Road	1857
2188	9-11 Market Square	19th century
2191	Graville House,, 33-35 Royston Street	19th century
2211	Brook House, 24 Royston Street	19th century
2219	2 Sun Street	19th century
4809	Timber Yard, Willow Road (house)	prior to 1882
6547	Westbury Lodge, 22 Chapel Street	19th century
7047	3 Brook End	19th century
7048	Old Fire Station, Brook End	19th century
7049	15 Bull Street	19th century
7052	2 Chapel Street	19th century
7055	Church Hall, Hatley Road	19th century
7063	6 Horslow Street	19th century
7064	8 Horslow Street	19th century
7065	Cross Keys, 10 Horslow Street	19th century
7068	Stables to Linden Lodge, 9 King Street	19th century
7071	41 King Street	19th century
7074	24 King Street	19th century
7078	Bricklayer's Arms, 1 Newtown	19th century
7080	11 Station Road	19th century
7081	61-87 Station Road	19th century
7082	14 Station Road	19th century
7083	26 Station Road	19th century
7084	former Potton Railway Station, Station Road	1862
7085	Congregational Church, Sun Street	1848
7087	2 Willow Road	19th century
9260	Parish Room, Brook End	19th century

Table 5. Late 19th century buildings in Potton (from HER)



5.6.4. The Methodist Chapel

The Methodist Chapel (HER 1753) in Chapel Street is described as late 19th century, but is said elsewhere to have been built in 1840 (White 1981, 26).

5.6.5. The Congregational Church

The Congregational Church (HER 7083) on the corner of Station Road and Back Lane (now Willow Road) was built in 1848.

5.6.6. Locomotive Shed

A remarkable building is the old railway shed (HER 1944), at the back of houses on the west side of Biggleswade Road in the south of Potton. It was built in connection with the light railway that used to run between Potton and Sandy from 1857 to 1862 (see discussion below). Since 1862 it has been used for other purposes, but amazingly the small tank locomotive it used to house has also survived. “The Shannon” is kept in working order at the Didcot Railway Centre in Oxfordshire.

5.6.7. Trades

The first industrial activity emerged in Potton in the mid-19th century. The Post Office Directory of Beds, Bucks and Hunts by Kelly and Co in 1854 lists Thomas Kitchener as an engineer and manufacturer of steam thrashing machines. A large engineering workshop was built by Kitchener off Willow Road in the west of Potton at some time prior to 1882. Other new trades listed include land-measurer, auctioneer, gunsmith, postmaster and town-crier. Inland Revenue and insurance agents premises were opened on the Market Square.

In Kelly’s Directory for 1885 it was said of Potton that “there is a manufactory of shoes and leather leggings and a large business is done in wool-stapling and fellmongery. There are agricultural and engineering works which also employ a numerous body of artizans”. Braybrookes were the manufacturers of leather and parchment whose tannery works were situated on or near the site of the old tan yard already mentioned. Potton Gas and Coke Company was formed between 1854 and 1861 on a site in Brooke End, with gas production continuing up to 1933.

The Sandy and Potton Railway was opened in 1857. This closed down when the Bedford and Cambridge railway was opened in 1862. The railway brought with it new jobs such as stationmaster, but it also had the effect of taking custom away from Potton market, which was now inferior to markets at Sandy and Biggleswade, both of which were situated on main lines. However, at the same time it also stimulated the market gardening industry, with a daily two-way traffic developing between Potton and London - vegetables going down to London to be sold on the city markets and manure coming back for spreading on the fields. Many inhabitants of Potton would have worked on the market gardens, or have been involved in the transport of vegetables and manure to and from the station.



Another important industry to emerge in the late 19th century, with Potton at its centre, was coprolite extraction, or the quarrying of phosphate-rich fossils for use as chemical fertiliser. This provided a source of employment for labourers, including women and children, from the 1860s through to the turn of the century (O'Connor 1998). As well as providing a detailed account of the coprolite industry, O'Connor also provides a breakdown of all trades and occupations advertised in Kelly's Directory from 1850-1903. This shows the changing number and variety of occupations, which can be taken as a rough barometer of the prosperity of the town. There were 31 different occupations listed in 1850, 35 in 1877 but only 22 in 1903, illustrating the fact that the 1860s/1870s was a period of economic growth and prosperity, in Potton as in the rest of East Anglia. The principal area of work was concerned with the production and selling of alcohol. In 1869, for example, there were 2 maltsters, 3 brewers, 4 coopers, 20 beer retailers, 12 landlords or landladies and 2 wine and spirit merchants. Market gardening was a close second, with 16 market gardeners, 5 gardeners, 5 farmers and 2 seedsmen. The presence of a bookseller, photographer, watch and clockmaker, bookmaker and jeweller are also indicators of increasing prosperity (O'Connor 1998, 61).

Potton may have been affected to some degree by the agricultural depression of the 1880s and 1890s, but the Kelly's Directory of 1903 shows that there was still considerable commercial activity in the town. As well as a brewery, a mineral water factory, a steam plough works, a tan yard and a gas company, there were also clockmakers, millers, coal-merchants, ironmongers, saddlers and wheelwrights. Shops included a confectioner, a fishmonger, a newsagents and a fruiterer. There were over 30 inns. Potton had its own police sergeant and constable, and a volunteer fire brigade. Professional occupations included auctioneer, solicitor and doctor.

5.7. The Modern Period (AD1914 - present)

Census returns show that the population of Potton declined from 2156 in 1911 to 1955 in 1931, but increased to 3026 in 1971. This latter increase was paralleled by the building of housing estates at Bury Hill and Oak Crescent in the period between the wars. Further building activity in the 1950s saw the construction of the Newtown estate to the west of the railway line and another estate along the Everton Road, followed in the 1960s by developments at Manor Way, Catharine's Close and Judith Gardens. Houses were also being built at this time along Back Lane, now renamed Willow Road. This general expansion of the town to the west was not reflected by similar expansion to the east, apart from some development along Bury Road, because of the constraints on building that have always been imposed by Potton Brook and the meadowland on either side. There has been considerable development, however, within the space of the old town, infilling the empty spaces, formerly gardens and paddocks, between King Street and Horselow Street. The market shambles building was largely demolished in the 1950s, though the mock Georgian replacement retains the older (late 18th century) clock tower. The buildings on the west side of the market square were demolished and replaced with residential flats. The railway line closed in the 1960s, and the importance of roads and dependence on motor transport increased. The number of inns in



the town has reduced to about 7. There has been some change in employment patterns, with many inhabitants, who would formerly have been employed in local industry or in the market gardens, now commuting to work elsewhere. The present population is about 4000, with current housing developments extending the boundaries of the town to the north and the east. The historic core of Pottton town centre was designated a Conservation Area by Bedfordshire County Council in 1971. The limits of the Conservation Area are shown in Fig 6.



6. ASSESSMENT OF POTTON'S CHARACTER, IMPORTANCE AND POTENTIAL

6.1. *Character of the Present Town*

Potton is often described as the quintessential country market town, and it is probably the market square that best encapsulates its character. Certainly the prosperity of the town has been closely linked to that of the market from medieval times. The Georgian buildings to be seen surrounding the Market Square, and also in Horselow Street, Sun Street, King Street and elsewhere in the town are perhaps the most obvious reminders of the historical nature of Potton. But it is the rectangular enclosed space of the Market Square itself, and the pattern of streets leading to and from the market that represents the most enduring feature of the old medieval town.

Another enduring feature is the relationship between the town and the outlying church, together with the Church Causeway which links them. The position of the church on the other side of Potton Brook to the north-east of the town might suggest that there was earlier settlement around the church, and that the present town is a later development. Alternatively, the church may simply be sited on the higher ground, perhaps on the site of an earlier building. Dating from the 13th century, the church is the oldest building in Potton.

A topographical feature which has affected the location and development of the town is Potton Brook. The watermill mentioned in the Domesday survey must have been important to the prosperity of the early town. The brook would have supplied water for tanning and other industrial processes, as well as for domestic use. The rich alluvial soil on either side of the brook provided rich meadowland for grazing and haymaking, but this small floodplain also had the effect of limiting expansion of the town eastwards. The brook, now straightened from its former course into an artificial channel, also gave Potton an orientation in space. The relatively open aspect on this side meant that it was always the front of the town, facing the church and the fields to the east. Back Lane and Back Street, significantly, were on the expanding western limits of town development.

6.2. *Archaeological Potential*

Potton is almost a blank slate archaeologically in the sense that no excavation work has been carried out within the historic core of the town. Recent excavations at Myers Road on the northern outskirts of town hint at Potton's potential for archaeological investigation, particularly with regard to finding evidence of the Saxon settlement known to have existed here. Potton is relatively undisturbed by development and retains much of its medieval plan, as well as some of its late medieval buildings. Any excavation within the historic core or in the vicinity of the church will be important by virtue of being the first opportunity to look at urban deposits here.



6.3 Archaeological Components

The main components of the town's development identified in this survey are described below and shown in Fig 8.

- **Component 1** *Medieval town (including market and streets)*

The medieval town developed around the enclosed market square, away from the church. The grid of main streets, with the possible exception of Church Causeway (Component 3), shows signs of having been planned – possibly in the 12th -14th centuries. Many medieval buildings were lost in the fire of 1783, but there may be more surviving structural evidence than generally thought. Late medieval structures are almost certainly hidden behind the Georgian facades and Victorian shopfronts of buildings in Market Square, Sun Street, Bull Street, Horslow Street and King Street. Work on Sun House and a now demolished building on the Market Square (Bailey 1980) demonstrated the great potential of building survey work.

The remains of St Swithin's Chapel and its graveyard must lie beneath later buildings on the eastern side of the marketplace. A medieval bridge or ford must have existed over Potton Brook, although its course has since been moved to the west. The location of the mill likewise remains to be discovered. Tanning pits may also be found near the old course of the brook.

- **Component 2** *Church*

The earliest surviving building in Potton is St Mary's Church, which dates from the 13th century, but almost certainly stands on the site of an earlier church. The siting of the church is on a spur of high ground overlooking the town. It stands beside the road (Component 3) which links the church with the rest of Potton. It has been suggested that the original early medieval settlement (Component 6) may have been situated near the church, although no earthworks or other evidence has been recorded.

- **Component 3** *Church Causeway*

Church Causeway and Meeting House Lane form part of an ancient routeway running east-west across the floodplain of Potton Brook, linking the town with the church. First mentioned in a 13th century document, it is likely (as its name suggests) to have been raised up as a causeway or path across the floodplain when the stream was in flood. It almost certainly linked up with the Old Bedford Road coming in from the west and carries on to Cockayne Hatley in the east. The Viatores group suggested that it was a Roman road running east-west and linking Sandy with Ermine Street (Viatores 1964), although doubt has been cast on this interpretation by White (1981) and Simco (1984). Whatever its origin, it seems oddly separate from the rest of the street pattern.

- **Component 4** *Earthworks*

The earthworks south of Home Farm (HER 10802) may represent a former manorial site.



- **Component 5** *Manor*

The area to the north-east of Potton, flanked by Gamlingay Road on the east, is the site of the recently demolished Manor House (HER 4334), thought to be on the location of a former moated site (HER 3130). Local tradition associates this area with the principal manor of Potton Regis, which may have been situated facing the top end of King Street. The 1999 excavations at Myers Farm, just to the west, showed that there was good survival of features (mainly pits and boundary ditches) from Saxo-Norman times through the medieval period.

- **Component 6** *Possible early Saxon settlement*

The area around the church may have been the site of the Saxon settlement implied by the Domesday Book entry, although there is no archaeological evidence as yet to support this view.



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