2.6 The Later Saxon and medieval valley

by I Meadows

Introduction

This period sees the origin of the landscape of towns and villages, together with their churches, which we still see today. In the Nene Valley the pattern had changed from the Roman period to one with hardly any settlement on the floodplain but with villages and towns developing along the flanks of the valley. Many of the main towns of the county are arranged along the valley suggesting that aspects of the valley were a significant consideration in location; the attraction, however was not directly communication as the river was not, as far as can be seen, navigable in this period. The desire to locate a town by the river might reflect a need for water either for industry, motive force or even waste disposal. In the case of the lesser settlements, location on the valley sides allowed access to the widest range of agricultural resources.

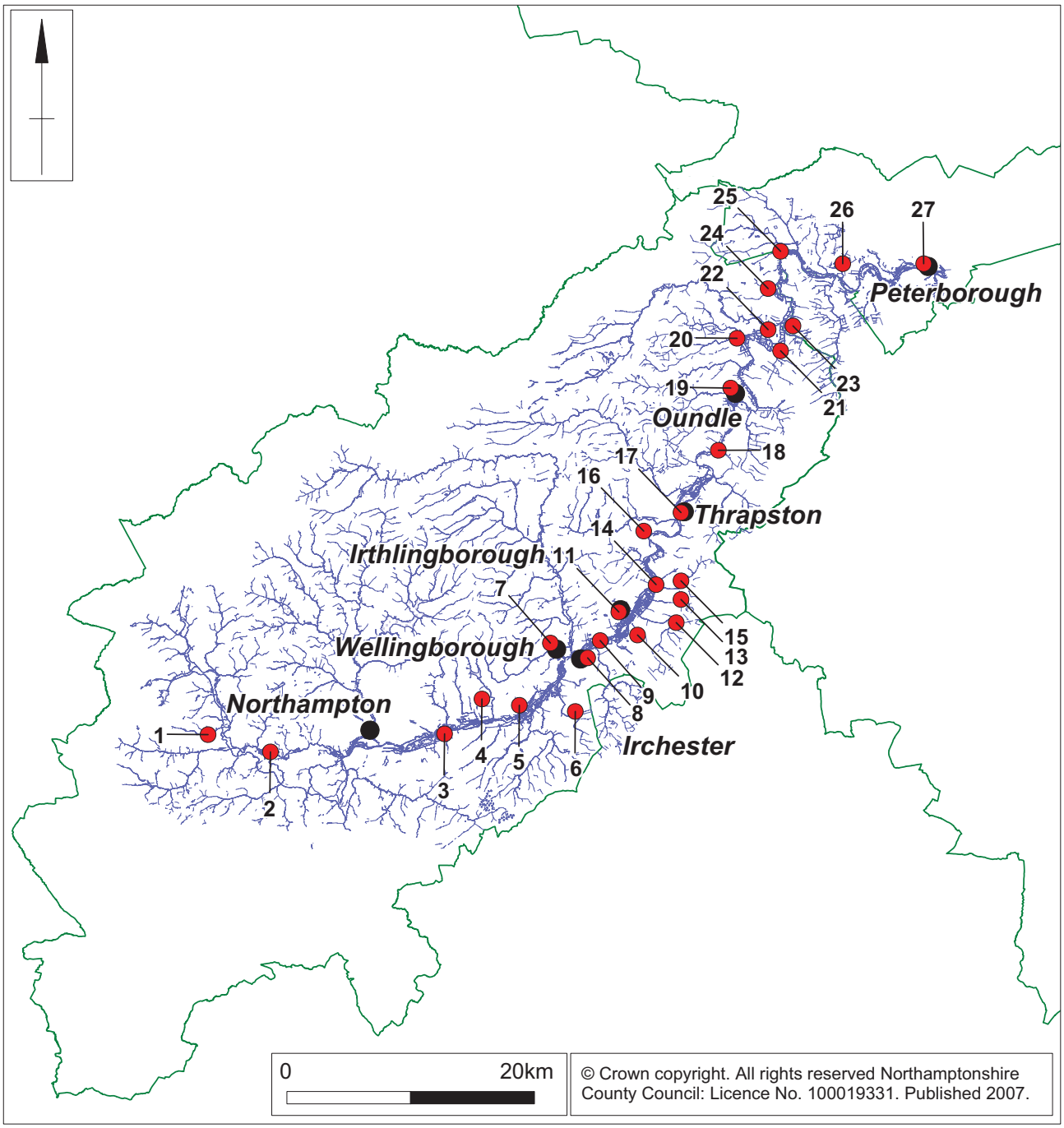
This period began essentially with the re-establishment of Christianity, which brought with it a new form of monument in the landscape; the monastery. The monastic foundation in Peterborough beside the Nene dates to the third quarter of the seventh century (Mackreth 1994, 3-5). The site was selected for its then isolation, as well as the accessibility to resources both in the fen and higher ground. Other monastic foundations along the valley include the nunnery at Castor, probably established about the same time as Peterborough, and Oundle, where St Wilfrid died (Johnston 1994, 99). No foundations further up the valley are known for this period.

The towns along the valley were undoubtedly established during the late Saxon period, although in most instances no evidence other than documentary sources survives (Fig 2.6.1). The same is likely to be true for many of the villages, but archaeological evidence is limited to Raunds and Warmington, where large-scale excavations have recovered evidence for settlement from the Middle Saxon period onwards.

Towns

None of the towns along the Nene Valley were sited directly on the floodplain of the river, but most are located close to it and, in some instances, subsequent expansion in the post-medieval period encroached on the floodplain. Between Northampton and Peterborough there are a series of smaller towns; Wellingborough, Irthlingborough, Thrapston and Oundle, all of which are located close to the river. Whilst some have produced small amounts of Saxon material, most probably did not achieve urban status, let alone form, until the medieval period. As settlements, their locations were due to a combination of features and all, with the exception of Oundle, are at places where north-south routes would have crossed the Nene.

The origin of Peterborough, at that stage known as Medeshampstede, is firmly intertwined with the monastic foundation in the seventh century; the town probably evolving in the first instance to service the monastic foundation and then later enveloping the monastery within the defended burh, erected in the 970s. Continued expansion is demonstrated by the existence of an established market (Mackreth 1995, 13), which required coinage to be minted in its name. The town was already more extensive than the walled area, and an industrial vill lay to the northeast. Excavations within the burh have produced extensive dumps of material predating the burh, and evidence for timber and stone structures as well as substantial deposits of animal bone. The occupation of the burh continued until 1116 when a great fire razed the monastery and burh and, following that, the town was laid out in an area that had previously been open fields.



Scale 1:500,000

1 Dodford
2 Upper Heyford
3 Cliffords Hill
4 Earls Barton
5 Earls Barton, Thorpe
6 Wollaston
7 Wellingborough
8 Chester-on-the-Water
9 Ditchford
10 Higham Ferrers
11 Irthlingborough
12 Chelveston
13 Denford
14 West Cotton
15 Raunds
16 Woodford
17 Thrapston
18 Lilford
19 Oundle
20 Southwick, Perio
21 Warmington
22 Fotheringhay
23 Elton
24 Nassington
25 Wansford
26 Peterborough, Castor
27 Peterborough

Saxon and Medieval sites mentioned in the text Fig 2.6.1

The new town was to lie west of the monastery and was composed of a number of streets around a market place that lay outside the monastic gate. The town and monastery were further separated by the course of the town ditch, a brook that flowed along the western edge of the newly expanded monastic precinct and had to be crossed by bridge to enter the monastery. There has only been limited survival of medieval Peterborough in the archaeological record, but where it has occurred it has shown a small developing urban community. The work by Cambridgeshire Archaeological Field Unit at the Still (Spoerry and Hinman 1998) and on Long Causeway by Birmingham University has demonstrated the development of the town. At the Still the site was dominated by quarry pits in which there was the first evidence of occupation spreading back from the Westgate and Cumbergate frontages in the thirteenth century. On Long Causeway the transition from temporary structures to permanent shops as the new town and its market evolved, was observed. Work in the 1970s in Bridge Street produced deeply stratified urban remains flanking the road leading to the medieval river crossing (see below). The available market of Peterborough would also have acted as an impetus to rural growth with much land owned by the monastery.

In the Middle Saxon period Oundle was an important centre for the administration of part of the Mercian Kingdom (Foard 1985). It was also possibly the location of the monastery where St Wilfrid died in 709AD. To date, no structures that can be identified as forming part of the monastery have been recognised and, if it had been at Oundle, it would almost certainly have been destroyed in the Danish conquest of the later ninth century. The significance of Oundle as a religious centre was re-established in the early tenth century following the retaking of Oundle from the Danes, and in 957 Archbishop Wulfstan was buried there. A few years later St Aethelwold started to erect a monastery in Oundle but soon abandoned the site in favour of Peterborough. Although only a few sherds of Middle Saxon date have been recovered from observations in Oundle, a ditch was found which contained a large assemblage of Late Saxon pottery, including exotic imported wares, some of continental origin, underscoring the significance of the town as a settlement. This importance is again reflected by the fact that after the Norman Conquest the town was one of only four in the county with a recorded market, and all the other examples are known important Saxon administrative centres. The abbots of Peterborough encouraged Oundle's medieval growth with the substantial expansion in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Thrapston was probably a Late Saxon settlement although the evidence is tantalisingly slight, comprising a few sherds of pottery and a group of inhumations probably of early Christian date, found near the Manor House. As they are some distance from the medieval church they may imply the presence of an earlier focus. Thrapston was essentially a village until its promotion to town in the twelfth century, and in 1205 it gained a market charter. The growth may in part be as a result of the construction of a castle to control the important river crossing.

Wellingborough, like Thrapston, has limited evidence for early settlement and, although the place name might suggest the existence of a defended burh, no firm evidence has yet been found. The town seems to have a polyfocal origin that started to agglomerate. In 1201 it was granted a market charter, but its location between Northampton to the west and Higham Ferrers to the east may always have hampered its economic development.

Northampton has demonstrable Middle Saxon occupation, including a massive timber hall that has been interpreted as a middle Saxon palace (Williams *et al* 1985). An extensive defensive burh, with a bank with a timber revetment, was erected either by the Danes or by the kings of Wessex following Northampton's reconquest (Chapman 1998-99). It appears that following the construction of the burh Northampton took on a much more urban character and, it is suggested, a sub-urban character to the settlement on the east side of the burh. The rectilinear form of some parts of the suburbs that developed after the Norman Conquest presumably derives from a level of planning and control. In the medieval period the town was given a circuit of walls that enclosed a much larger area, which was

probably not densely occupied. The town was a very prosperous market centre until the later thirteenth century when it went into decline, paralleling the decline in usage of the royal castle.

Villages

Northamptonshire lies in two of the sub provinces defined by Roberts and Wrathmell (Roberts and Wrathmel 2000, 49). The west of the county lies just into the inner midlands sub province (CINMD) but the bulk of the county falls within the East midlands sub province (CEMID). In terms of the present study area, the initial catchment of the river lies in the inner midlands but the bulk lies in the east midlands. The settlement pattern for the east midlands is described as being dominated by villages and hamlets, with regular row settlements common in the river valleys (Lewis *et al* 1997, 67). This area is perhaps one of the classic areas of 'champion country', comprising nucleated villages surrounded by extensive open fields.

Almost all villages of the Nene valley are in positions off the floodplain that ensure access to the water and the associated rich land but are away from the risk of regular flooding. This selection of locations away from the floodplain surely means that any villages that either encroach upon or elect for a floodplain location should be considered exceptional and be explored to ascertain why they chose that position. In most villages opportunities for excavation are limited owing to the constraints of the current landuse, but at a number of points along the valley either settlement desertion or movement has left areas accessible.

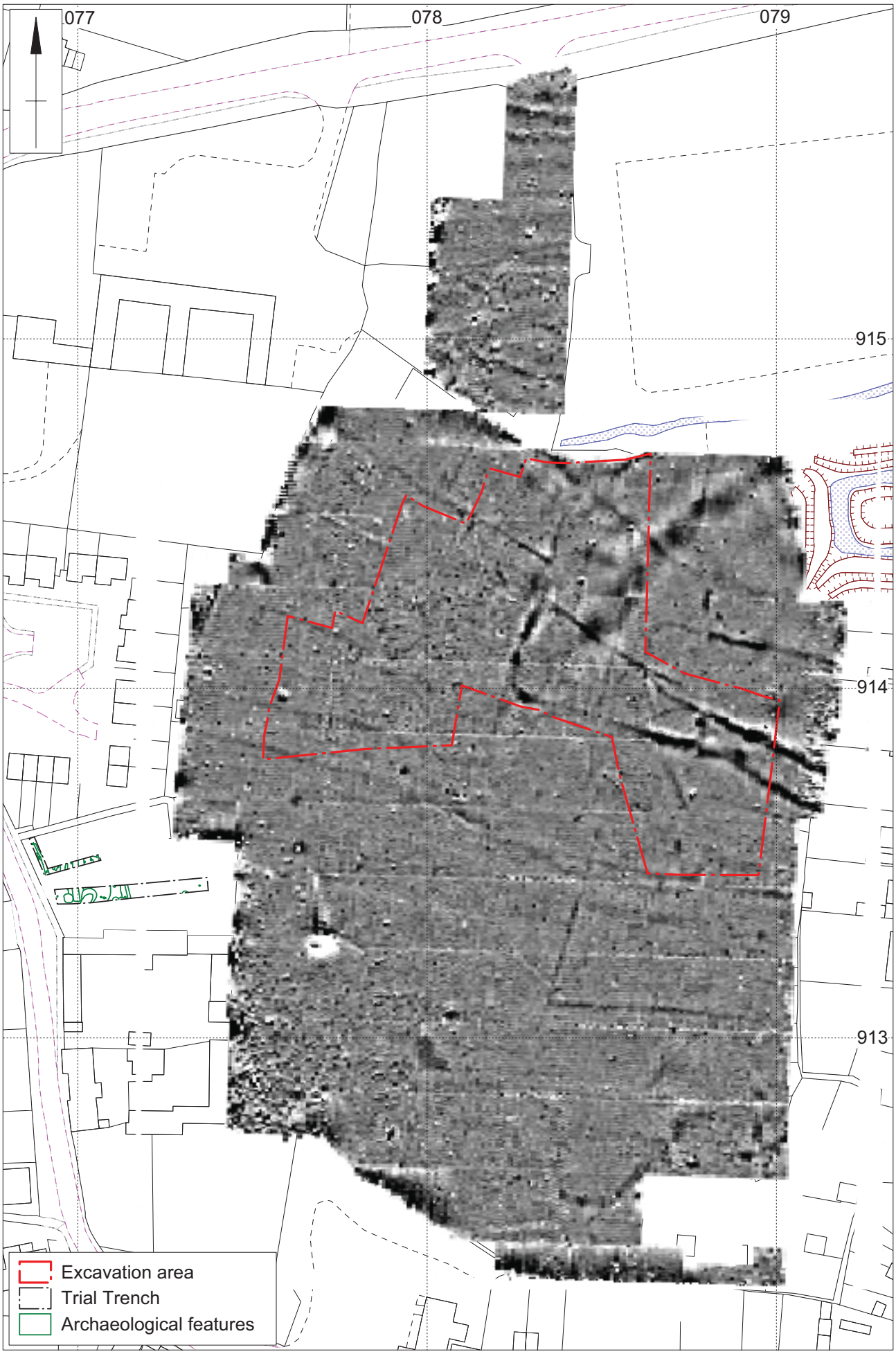
At Warmington, which is 500m from the river and between 19-20maOD, clusters of postholes, probably successive timber structures (Figs 2.6.2 and 2.6.3), were in association with a series of small ditched enclosures probably flanking a droveway (Meadows 2002). The main period of occupation was from the eighth to eleventh/early twelfth centuries. The excavations revealed what was in essence a small settlement focus with the individual buildings rebuilt a number of times before being abandoned. Subsequently, a short-lived funnelled ditch system, which contained Stamford ware, probably formed part of a stock management system, either post-dating settlement in this area or associated with a new nearby focus of settlement.

The site was clearly linked into the broader Late Saxon economy of trade, as is attested by the recovered pottery and the lava quern fragments. The inhabitants practised a mixed pastoral and arable agricultural regime, with annular clay loomweights and spindlewhorls indicative of the processing of wool into thread and fabric. There was little evidence for any non-agricultural practices on the site, and its final abandonment may have been a reflection of either tenurial or social changes brought about at around the time of the Norman Conquest or slight changes in the nature of the agricultural practise which rendered the site too marginal due to its risk of flooding.

The establishment of ridge and furrow cultivation over this area following the abandonment of the enclosures suggests that in terms of the medieval village this location had become peripheral by the thirteenth century, as indicated by the presence of Brill/Boarstall pottery in the furrows. However, as a block of ploughing it is likely to have gone out of use prior to the establishment of the later medieval lanes and their frontage developments. When the open fields of Warmington were mapped by D Hall, the area examined in the excavation was absent from his documentary and cartographic sources.

Another hamlet of about ten houses within Warmington parish has also been excavated, and here a malt oven and barn are dated to the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, suggesting further marginal activity (Parry forthcoming).

At Elton, earthmoving by Anglian Water Authority to construct a flood bank exposed the remains of the Abbot of Ramsey's manor (Mackreth 1995). It would appear to have been constructed in the late



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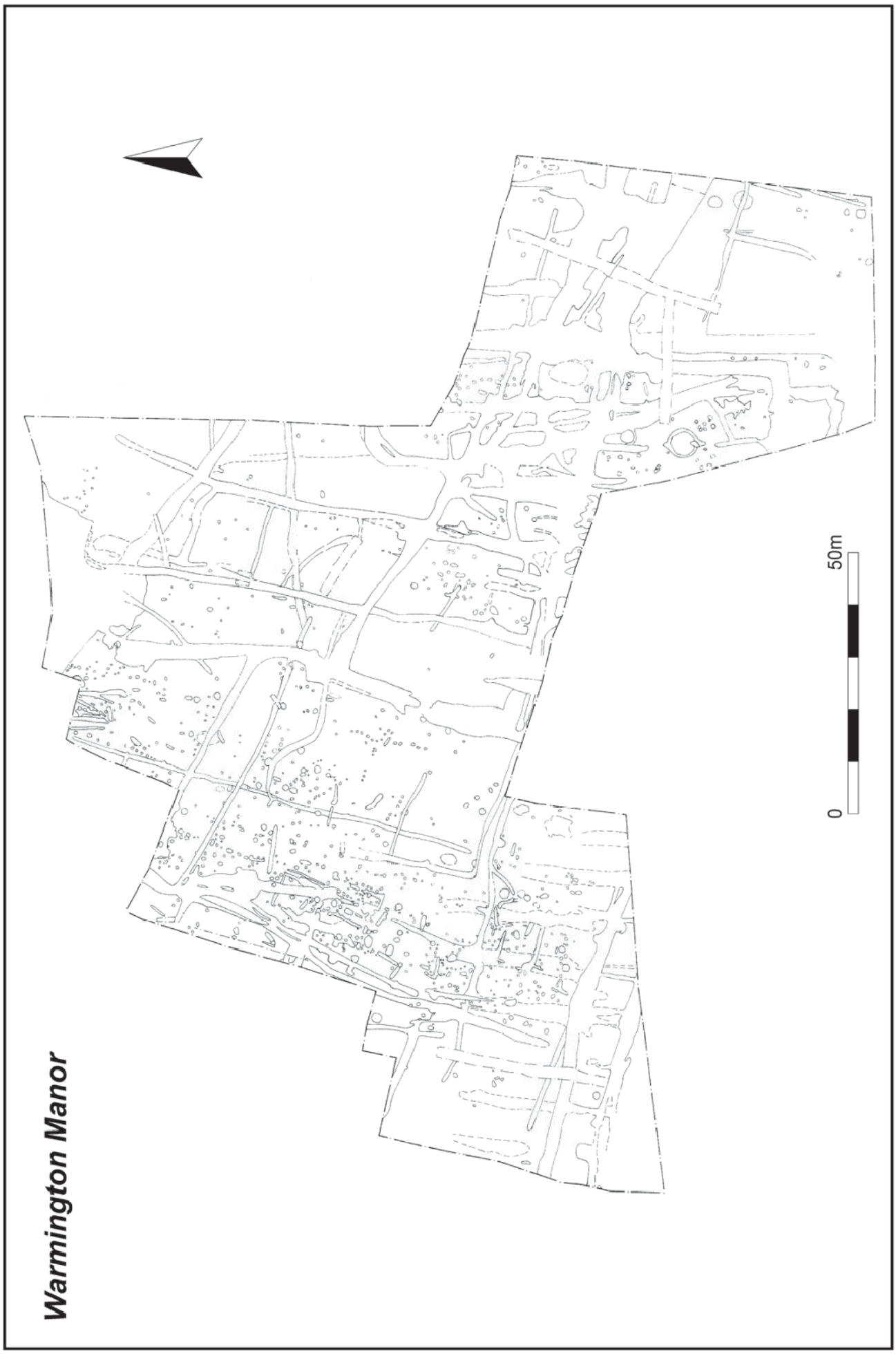
Magnetometer survey of Warmington Manor Fig 2.6.2



Excavated results at Warmington Manor Fig 2.6.3

twelfth century, but dating evidence was limited. The number and complexity of structures appears to have increased through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, unfortunately the limited character of the excavation and the removal of some floor levels during the initial stripping precluded secure dating of the development.

The western half of another minor settlement, West Cotton, was excavated between 1985 and 1989 as part of the Raunds Area Project (Chapman in press) (Plates 2.6.1-2.6.5). It comprised a planned layout of regular rectangular plots occupying in total about 2.5ha (6 acres). The settlement was established in the middle of the tenth century; the decades immediately following the reconquest. It was set on a slightly higher piece of ground in an angle between a contemporary channel of the River Nene and a tributary stream, the Raunds or Cotton Brook. The timber buildings occupying the northernmost plot, adjacent to the river, comprised a timber hall, 13.5m long and 5m wide, with ancillary buildings attached to the end of the hall. In the original arrangement the buildings were given an appearance of defence, by being flanked on two sides by a large ditch, but this was soon filled in and new buildings were added to form a courtyard arrangement. To the north of the hall there was a watermill (see below). This complex was occupied until the mid-twelfth century, when it was replaced by stone-built ranges that included a probable two-storey hall, a malt house and barn, a dovecote and a detached kitchen/bakehouse, all still set around a central courtyard. However, during this same period flooding and the consequent deposition of deep deposits of alluvial silts resulted in the silting of the adjacent river channel and the abandonment of the mill. Thereafter, the survival of this particularly low-lying settlement was dependant on the protection provided by a flood embankment, and at the time of excavation the village earthworks lay a metre below the level of the adjacent floodplain.

By the mid-thirteenth century the manor had relocated to the east, away from the river and now set beside the Cotton Lane, which ran northward from the market centre of Higham Ferrers. It was given a more expansive arrangement, with the domestic ranges, which were not excavated, standing on the lane away from a ancillary ranges, which included a barn, malt house and a kitchen/bakehouse. The old manorial ranges were levelled and replaced by two tenements. By the beginning of the fourteenth century the manorial ranges had been subdivided to form further tenements, with this most vividly evidently in the narrowing of the barn doors and the insertion of partition walls. The process of manorial abandonment left a small hamlet behind, but this began an immediate decline with tenements abandoned one by one over the next century. The final phases of usage of some tenement buildings was as agricultural ranges, with the floor levels raised with rubble, perhaps partly in response to repeated flooding of the central yard. A drainage ditch excavated around the margins of the yard was a vain attempt to maintain the area, but by the mid-fifteenth century all of the central tenements had been deserted, although the documentary evidence records the survival of a single cottage for a further century.

West Cotton was the smallest of three deserted hamlets on the margin of the floodplain within the Raunds area. All three are likely to have had an origin in the late Saxon period as manorial centres that controlled a watermill. Mallows Cotton lies about 500m downstream of West Cotton, and retains well-preserved earthworks at about 38mOD on the side of the valley, adjacent to the confluence of the Oak Ditch and the River Nene (Parry 2006, 177-86). It appears to have contained a manor set around a courtyard, with an adjacent dovecote, and at least a further four tenement plots, 50-60m wide, with ridge and furrow to their rear. A small group of ill-defined earthworks on the Oak Ditch might denote the presence of a watermill.

About 1km downstream lay Mill Cotton, at about 33maOD, which was largely lost to quarrying in the early 1970s with only limited excavation. This site also had a Late Saxon origin and in its medieval heyday it contained the moated manor house of the Chamberlain family, with an associated chapel (op cit 186-95). It declined following the departure of the Chamberlain family at the end of the fifteenth century, although a few cottages were still occupied at the time of enclosure in 1839-41. A watermill stood here until the early twentieth century.

A further small hamlet, Chester on the Water (Fig 2.6.4), in Irchester, first appears in documentary records in 1236, when it is listed as part of Higham Ferrers manor as a holding of William de Ferrers. It remained part of Higham Ferrers manor until 1428. It is unclear how large Chester ever was but one earlier owner, William Coope, who acquired it in 1494, appears to have tried to clear the settlement, which comprised at least 5 or 6 dwellings (Brown 1978 16-17), and was of similar size when the estate was acquired by John Godbould and Thomas Ekins in 1616.

Other deserted sites along the river include the hamlets of Thorpe in Earls Barton (RCHM(E) 1979 42-3) and Perio in Southwick (RCHM(E) 1975 87-8). Both of these were small and appear to have been deserted at some time in the later medieval period. Both survive as low amplitude earthworks and neither has been subjected to significant excavations, so their organisation and dates of origin and demise are unknown.

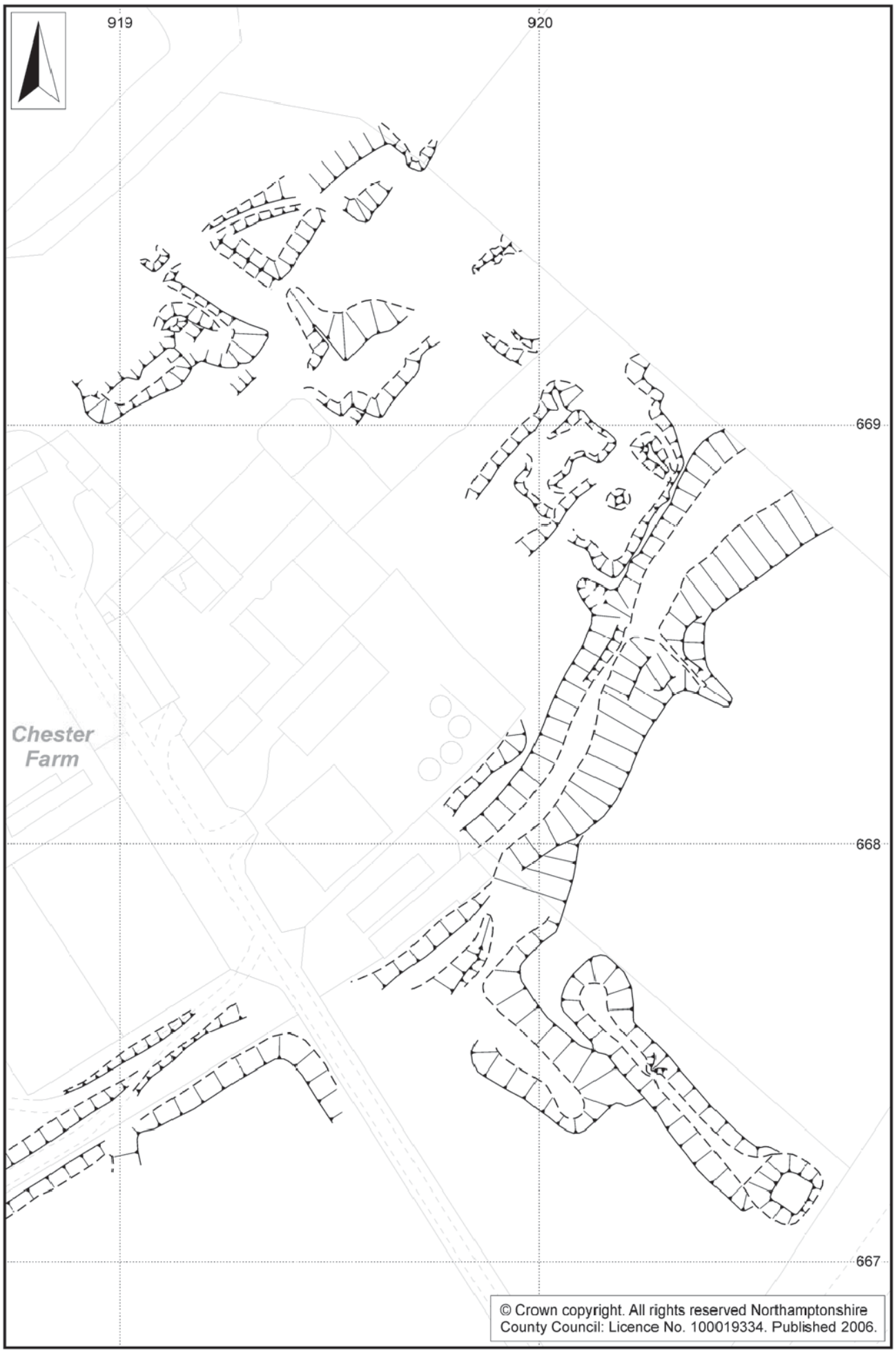
It is perhaps noteworthy that each of the sites that lay in the valley has produced evidence for one or more watermills. The uncertainty of riparian location appears to have been off set by a desire to harness the motive power of the water as a source of direct financial revenue. The individual hamlets were also all small. In most instances this probably does reflect a subordinate relationship with larger more prosperous sites away from the river, although in Raunds the moated manor of the Chamberlain family within Mill Cotton would appear to be an exception to this pattern.

Those villages in the valley that have survived to the present day appear to have consciously selected locations that place them at sufficient distance from the river that they avoid flooding and yet are close enough to be able to exploit the unique conditions of the flood plain for rich pasture and hay meadow. Many of the parishes extend away from the river thereby allowing the exploitation of a broad range of agricultural resources. This pattern has been noted along a number of rivers, for example the middle and lower Trent (Knight and Howard 2004, 166) and in the middle Thames upstream of Oxford. The significance of access to the river and the land of the immediate flood plain can be seen in the present study area by the long tongue of ground extending out from Chelveston parish, which otherwise lies on the watershed of the valleys of the Nene and Great Ouse (RCHM(E) 1975, map of NE Northamptonshire showing parishes described). This tongue of ground provided a link between the main body of the parish and the river where they had a mill and meadow-land (Hall 1995, 232-3). The desire for even small river frontages for milling or water is well illustrated by the narrowness of the frontages of the parishes of Castle Ashby, Whiston and Brafield on the Green to the river (RCHM(E) 1979, map of Central Northamptonshire showing parishes described).

Fields

David Hall in his work on the open fields of Northamptonshire saw one of the primary characteristics of the county as ‘its open field land, stretching almost unbroken over the uplands and along the Nene Valley. Within this region nearly all the ground was cultivated, having very little woodland, heath or pasture’ (Hall 1995, ix). The agricultural utilisation of the flood plain would always be trying to deal with seasonal inundations, as the river flooded, and it is therefore not unsurprising that there is only limited evidence for ridge and furrow on the floodplain. The actual flood plain is likely to instead have been extensive pasture and hay meadows, which leave little in terms of tangible archaeological evidence.

The significance of the hay meadows should not be underestimated as it was a commodity required to support livestock through the winter, and this is reflected by the lengths that settlements would go to in order to be able to reach it. The thin extension of the Chelveston parish to link its watershed location to a short length floodplain and river has already been mentioned. The landlocked parish of Croughton, well away from the valley, had a detached parcel of meadow in Aynho (NRO map 2815B, D Hall pers comm), and a detached meadow belonging to Bozeat manor lay on the river in



Scale 1:1250 Hachure Survey of earthwork remains of Chester-on-the-water Fig 2.6.4

Grendon (NRO YZ1463, D Hall pers comm). Sadly, the lack of tangible remains and only limited medieval documents generally means that to understand pasture and hay meadows, possibly largest of all land uses in the valley floor, one is reliant on a strand of negative evidence: it is where the ridge and furrow was not. Individual parishes are documented in Northamptonshire as employing a variety of devices; stones, sticks or holes to define the meadow lands (Hall 1995, 96) but it is unusual for these to have survived.

The work done by David Hall on the open fields of the county (Hall 1995) was the culmination of many years of survey from both documentary and archaeological sources. His work in many of the valley parishes identified the extent of the meadow, as at Wollaston where the meadow lands formed the north-western edge of the village land and run up to the course of the river, comprising about one fifth of the agricultural land; occupying 566 acres while the open fields covered 2168 acres (Hall 1977, 142). The names of some of the plots of meadow suggest specific functions or links such as Priestes Meadows and horsehay (op cit, 161). At Wollaston, as at other villages, the meadow lands were divided and marked by sticks or stone markers. It was the duty of the two meadowmen to ensure these markers were in place in specific holes between the individual strips. This service earned them a fee as well as an allotment of meadow. Because Wollaston lies at a wide part of the floodplain it has more meadow than most of the parishes, which would enable the keeping of more livestock, as once the meadows had been mown they would be grazed. No tangible remains of these extensive meadows exist and even some of the larger marker stones that were in existence until the 1970s were buried during dredging works (op cit, 143).

The extent of the open fields and the exact date of their origin will vary parish to parish. The date of establishment is suggested as post-Middle Saxon by David Hall, on the grounds that only a single Late Saxon site can be seen to have been overlain by the open fields (in a field called Hardwick in Oundle) while Middle Saxon sites are regularly overrun. Work in the Raunds area also supports this hypothesis, with Late Saxon manure scatters appearing to cease at furlong boundaries (Parry 2006, 132-3 and fig 5.6). At Wollaston, apparent continuity of boundaries and trackways from the Iron Age through to the Middle Saxon can be suggested, and the Middle Saxon princely burial lay alongside a route that originated in the Iron Age and continued to be used in the Roman period, with the grave situated between road junctions a short distance in either direction, thus maximising the visibility of the grave and the postulated barrow (Meadows 2004). The ridge and furrow however disregarded all the previous alignments and overlay the burial, although the furlong name Cringle might be a vague reference to a circular barrow.

At West Cotton the ridge and furrow extended under the alluvial coverage, indicating the maximum extent that the open fields extended into the flood zone (Parry 2006, 36). Evidence for subsequent re-establishment of ridge and furrow onto at least the margins of the alluvial cover comes from examination of maps produced by David Hall, which show open field strips extending to beyond the flood/alluvial extent. At Wollaston the open fields north of Hardwater Road extended almost precisely to the limit of flooding indicated by the alluvial extent line and observations to the south would suggest a similar situation prevailed. The layout and composition of the open fields within the valley do not display any unusual traits.

Place names

Placename evidence can provide an indication of the character of a landscape or features within it. Examination of the place names of and within the parishes adjoining the river not surprisingly produces several examples that reflect such a position (Gower *et al* 1933). Whilst most of the names do not acknowledge the river, those that do are either indirect references to the topography or landform, or more often to the existence of a crossing.

None of the village names containing elements related to crossings referred to bridges but seven include a 'ford' element: Wansford, Lilford, Denford, Woodford, Upper Heyford, Lower Heyford and Dodford. Of these place names the two Heyfords and Denford and Woodford face each other across the river, probably reflecting the same crossing but from opposite sides. The first documented occurrence of these place names, with the exception of Wansford and Dodford, is in the Domesday survey. Wansford appears first in 972 and Dodford in 944, the former in a spurious charter (Sawyer 1968, S68) and the latter is mentioned in passing in a land grant from King Edmund to Aelfric Bishop (ibid, S495). At Ditchford a 45m long causeway made of limestone ran across the floodplain to what was presumably a ford across the river. Radiocarbon dates and medieval horseshoes suggest a twelfth-century date (GU-5439 980-1230 cal AD; 940± 60 BP: GU-5440 1270-1410 cal AD ; 640±50 BP Keevil and Williams 1995).

River crossings

That fords are referred in so many place names is almost certainly a reflection that almost all river crossings at the time of the Domesday survey would have been by ford or ferry. Even the larger towns of Northampton and Peterborough did not have bridged river crossings at that time. In the case of Northampton the first bridge, Southbridge, was probably erected in about 1100 at the instigation of Simon de Senlis (Goodfellow 1980, 140). There is, however, little documentary proof until the beginning of the thirteenth century.

At Peterborough the first bridge was not erected until 1307, near, it is believed, the site of the present Town Bridge, replacing a ferry. This was a timber bridge that was replaced, again in timber, after the initial structure was lost in the first winter. The subsequent bridge continued in use until the nineteenth century. Both of these bridges were erected by the monastery who handed the second bridge to the town when it was completed in order to avoid ongoing costs or obligations. It is possible that prior to the erection of this second bridge the monastery may have straightened the course of the Nene as the original north bridgehead would have lain at the tip of a meander where it would have been prone to the greatest erosion.

Recent excavations (Meadows 2008) identified part of a deep palaeochannel infilled in the post-Conquest period, and fronting onto the contemporary river course there was an alignment of upright posts and planks, radiocarbon dated to the fifteenth century (OxA-17656 1391-1433 cal AD; 543 ±22 BP). This alignment may have been inserted to stabilise the line of the river and minimise the erosive effects on the palaeochannel fills. The timber planks were perhaps derived as a by-product of squaring large timbers such as would have been used in the building works of the monastery (Maisie Taylor pers comm.).

Other bridges are known to have spanned the river in the medieval period, for example Ditchford Bridge, first mentioned in 1235 in the records of Peterborough Abbey (McKeague 1989, 179) and Irthlingborough Bridge. Other crossing places such as fords and ferries would, however, still have continued to be used to negotiate what was probably for most of the year a shallow river.

Mills

This period saw the exploitation of the river as motive power to operate watermills. The examples of Late Saxon date excavated at West Cotton drew water along a system of leats from the Cotton Brook, not the main course of the Nene (Chapman in press) (Plates 2.6.6 and 2.6.7). It is probable that the first mill was provided with an undershot wheel, while subsequent structures appear to have had horizontal wheels; probably of similar form to the mill at Tamworth, Staffordshire (Rhatz and Meeson 1992). Over two hundred fragments of broken millstone were recovered. The early mill

utilised stones in lava, and those from the later mill are mostly of Millstone Grit, with diameters of around 0.9-1.1m.

At the time of the Domesday survey, 284 mills were listed in Northamptonshire, most (197) were valued at 10/- or less and were perhaps peasant-owned horizontal mills (Courtney, in Chapman in press). Of the twenty-four mills worth more than 20/-, all but three were on the Nene, the highest value mill in the Soke of Peterborough was worth only 8/- which reflects the slower flowing waters of the lower river.

The number of mills on the river would appear to have declined during the medieval period with most of the low value ones vanishing by 1300, perhaps due to replacement by the new technology of the windmill. The number of watermills recorded in the estate of Peterborough Abbey remained the same between Domesday and 1125-8, at 21, but by 1321 there were 10 watermills and 10 windmills. Three of the watermills were double mills, at Oundle, Ashton and Warmington, presumably on a stretch of river with sufficient flow that was closest to the Abbey. At the dissolution, the Abbey only had seven watermills.

Weirs, perhaps associated with providing sufficient head of water for the mills, could also have provided fisheries, as depicted in the early fourteenth-century Luttrell Psalter (F181) (Backhouse 1989, 31). Unfortunately documentary records are limited for the medieval period, perhaps reflecting the relatively static nature of the river channels when compared to the Trent. Isolated finds of fishing weights have been made on archaeological excavations at Wollaston and Raunds (Parry 2006, 160) suggesting the use of nets or traps.

Churches

As a result of the avoidance of the floodplain for settlement, no churches are sited directly on the floodplain, although the settlements on the higher ground contain churches including some with Late Saxon masonry. The churches at Earls Barton and Nassington both in villages overlooking the river valley both incorporate substantial Late Saxon masonry, reflecting a level of wealth in these riparian parishes (Audouy *et al* 1995).

Another type of ecclesiastical complex existed at Fotheringhay, the college founded by Edward of York in 1411 (RCHM(E) 1975, 46). The site comprised a cloister with a range of chambers, kitchens, barns, stables and a library constructed on a series of terraces, some natural. The site was dissolved in 1539. Limited excavations took place on the site in the 1920s (Brown and Hadman 1976) and recorded a number of lengths of wall and green-glazed floor tiles.

Castles

While the Nene Valley has several castles dating to either the years after the Norman Conquest or the Anarchy period of the twelfth century, the general distribution of castles is more widespread with a number of significant earthworks located in the west of the county. The castles in Northampton and Peterborough were erected onto pre-existing settlements after the Conquest. In Northampton it occupied much of the north-west quarter of the Saxon burh overlooking the junction of the Brampton branch with the main river. At Peterborough the castle straddled the earlier burh defences, dominating both the area within the defensive circuit and also the industrial vill beyond.

The reasons for constructing castles even in the period after the Conquest are complex (Lowerre 2005), while some castles were erected to control river crossings, other routes were not closely defended. The location of the late eleventh or twelfth-century castles at Thrapston and Cliffords Hill,

Little Houghton may have been in part influenced by the nearby crossing points of the river. At Thrapston the castle was erected at a point where the road from Huntingdon to Leicester would have crossed the river. Cliffords Hill was also positioned so that it used the natural topography and the river cliff of the south bank of the Nene to create a steep rampart. The site has suffered landslips and ploughing and despite excavations in 1900 no remains 'worth recording' were noted (RCHM(E) 1979, 87). As a monument little is known of it from documentary sources despite its large size, although it was clearly built to control the ford from which it took its name. An eleventh or twelfth-century date is presumed.

At Fotheringhay a castle was erected in the eleventh century beside the river probably to protect a crossing, although the location appears of little strategic value (RCHM(E) 1975, 43-6). The initial site is thought to have comprised an earthen motte surmounted by a stone tower with what was subsequently the inner bailey. It became a royal palace from the later thirteenth century and subsequently the prison and execution place of Mary, Queen of Scots.

Conclusion

The examination of the archaeology of the Late Saxon and medieval periods within the valley shows that during this period activity within the flood range of the river was limited. Despite a number of small hamlets being present, most settlements were located close to, but off, the floodplain, perhaps indicating that there was a greater risk of flooding than had been the case in preceding periods. The dynamic nature of these floods is further reflected in the archaeological record by the depth of alluvial material that has built up in places on the valley floor, blanketing the pre-Late Saxon land surface.

It is apparent that whilst the valley floor was not selected for settlement, being treated almost as a hostile environment, a number of other activities did gravitate to the river, especially milling. This interaction and the economic importance of the floodplain is shown by the way the wider countryside accessed the valley floor to exploit the hay meadows, in order to provide fodder for livestock.

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Plate 2.6.1: The late Saxon manor at West Cotton, Raunds.
(Northamptonshire Archaeology)

Plate 2.6.2: A reconstruction of Furnells Manor, Raunds in the thirteenth century.
(Drawn by Alex Thompson)

Plate 2.6.3: A reconstruction of West Cotton, Raunds at the beginning of the fourteenth century.
(Drawn by Alex Thompson)

Plate 2.6.4: A fourteenth to fifteenth-century courtyard tenement at West Cotton, Raunds.
(Northamptonshire Archaeology)

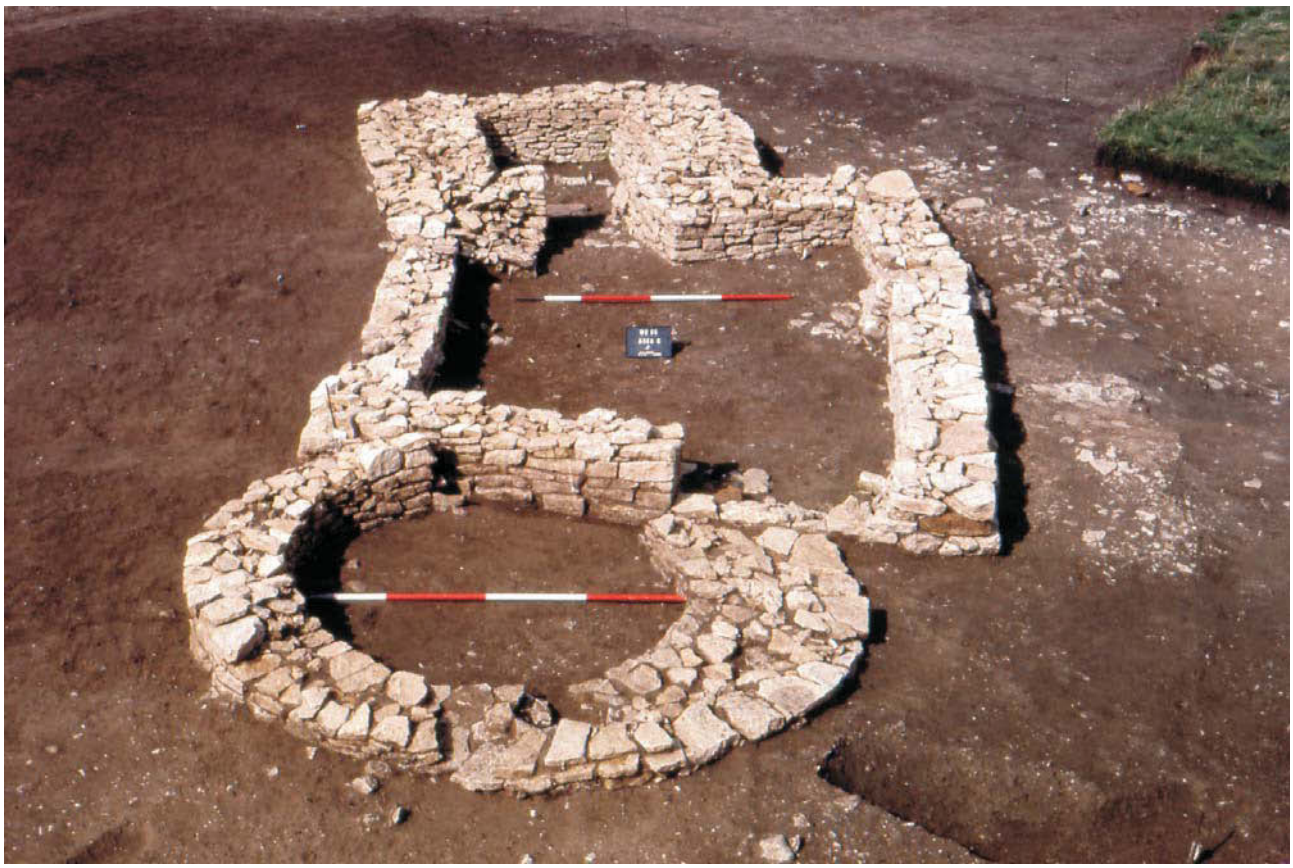

Plate 2.6.5: A thirteenth to fourteenth-century malt house at West Cotton, Raunds.
(Northamptonshire Archaeology)

Plate 2.6.6: Tenth to eleventh-century watermill at West Cotton, Raunds.
(Northamptonshire Archaeology)

Plate 2.6.7: The eleventh to twelfth-century watermill at West Cotton, Raunds.
(Northamptonshire Archaeology)