

**CHURCH WILNE DESERTED MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT, DERBYSHIRE  
DERBY CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY ACCESSION CODE:  
DBYMU 1997-75/6**

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**INTRODUCTION TO THE ARCHIVE AND PROJECT SUMMARY**

**Introduction**

Details are provided here of a project aimed at disseminating more widely the results of unpublished excavations of a deserted medieval village in the floodplain of the River Derwent at Church Wilne, Derbyshire (SK 449 318). Three stages of post-excavation work were conducted between April 2009 and April 2014, with the aims of:

1. securing and enhancing the site archive (Stage 1)
2. providing an assessment of the site's research potential (Stage 2)
3. creating an on-line resource facilitating access to archive data for researchers interested in the development of medieval and post-medieval settlement in the Trent Valley (Stage 3)

The original documentary archive has been reorganised and repackaged, while finds retrieved during the excavations have been repackaged and conserved as appropriate. Most of the ironwork has been discarded, and the radiographs prepared by Kent County Museums Service and York Archaeological Trust now form the primary archive for this class of material (see Section 11 of this digital archive). All other finds have been retained and may be accessed by application to Derby City Museum and Art Gallery. The digital resource, which may be accessed from this website, includes copies of the following (with appropriate catalogues and supporting information):

- Integrated assessment report, including description of excavation methodology, synthesis of structural remains, discussion of palaeochannel evidence and specialist finds reports (Knight 2014).
- List of contents of site archive in Derby Museum (Appleton and Markoulaki 2009; updated March 2014).
- Scans of Site Notebooks and index of Context Codes, feature numbers and drawings.
- Large format plans and sections (A3 and larger), including catalogue
- Excavation photographs and catalogue.
- Database of Context Codes (including details of artefact and ecofact associations).
- Harris matrices (Areas I-IV,V, VI and VII).
- Finds drawings: scans of pottery and small finds drawings, including catalogue.
- Metalwork condition assessments (Mildwaters 2009a, 2009b) and report on investigative cleaning (Kenward 2010).
- Radiographs of metal artefacts.
- List of slag and other metalworking waste.

This work was funded by the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund administered by English Heritage and was managed by David Knight under the guidance of

Paddy O'Hara and Buzz Busby of English Heritage. Work on the site archive was conducted on behalf of Trent & Peak Archaeology by Eileen Appleton and Panagiota Markoulaki between April and July 2009 (Appleton and Markoulaki 2009). Alison Wilson (TPA) compiled the original Context Code database. Scott Lomax (TPA) prepared the Harris matrices and updated by reference to these the Context Code database, while Scott Lomax (TPA), Laura Binns (TPA) and Jim Priest assisted with scanning the site notebooks, original drawings and photographs. Particular thanks are also extended to Rachel Atherton of Derby City Museum and Art Gallery for providing access to archive material and for advice on the curation and storage of material, and to Peter Hammond, Anne Irving, Howard Jones (TPA), Kate Kenward (York Archaeological Trust), Nyssa Mildwaters (YAT), James Rackham (Environmental Archaeology Consultancy) and Petrus de Rijk for their specialist contributions to the Stage 2 Assessment Report. Ian Panter (YAT) advised on the ironwork condition assessments and the preparation of digital copies of the radiographs, while Mags Felter (YAT) helped with preparation of the digital radiographs. Lee Elliott (TPA) and Richard Sheppard (TPA) provided helpful comments on the metalwork and other small finds from the site.

## **Background**

The small medieval village of Church Wilne was located on marginal land in the broad alluvial floodplain of the River Derwent, close to its confluence with the River Trent and several kilometres upstream of the confluence of the Trent with the Rivers Soar and Erewash (Fig.1). All that survives today is the parish church of St Chad's. This is an isolated building, located some 200m north of the modern river. The church may originally have been enclosed on three sides by a meander of the Derwent, the medieval course of which may be reconstructed from topographic, documentary, cartographic and excavation evidence. The last dwellings in the village were demolished in the 1960s, while the area adjacent to the church was converted after quarrying to a large reservoir (St Chad's Water) within a water sports centre.

### *History of archaeological investigations*

Faint earthwork traces near the church were identified in the late 1960s as evidence of a deserted medieval village (Beresford and Hurst 1971, 185). Medieval sherds were recovered from the ploughed fields adjacent to the church during the succeeding decade, providing further evidence for extensive medieval occupation.

Threats from gravel quarrying prompted more extensive archaeological investigations in 1974 and 1975 by the Trent Valley Archaeological Research Committee, assisted by funding from the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (England). This work was directed by Hazel Salisbury (née Wheeler) and supervised by C. Drage and D.Bawden, with the assistance of other TVARC staff and local volunteers.

Excavations presented an opportunity to study the relationship between the church, settlement and riverine landscape, and in particular to investigate the impact of changes in river course and flood frequency upon settlement development. Very few deserted or shrunken medieval villages elsewhere in the Trent Valley have been excavated, notable exceptions including Thurstaston in Derbyshire and Adbolton in Nottinghamshire (Elliott *et al* 2004, 170-174). The excavation results provide a valuable opportunity, therefore, to research the development of a small settlement precariously located alongside the high-energy and flood-prone Derwent, and thereby to elucidate the important issue of

medieval settlement desertion and shrinkage in the East Midlands (Lewis 2006, 192-193, 212).

#### *Results of 1974-75 archaeological excavations*

Archaeological work commenced with a contour survey of the site and continued with excavations to the south and east of St Chad's church. Trenches across a possible house platform to the south of the church revealed the ground plan of a rectangular building dated by associated finds to the fifteenth century (Fig. 2) and traces of structures dated from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. The fifteenth century building overlay an infilled river channel, which from sections excavated across it could be shown to have migrated progressively southwards away from the church. These sections revealed multiple water courses and abundant timber stakes (some sharpened), stratified beneath finds-rich deposits interpreted as most likely evidence for an artificially raised surface intended to provide a dry and level foundation for the rectangular building. Further changes in river courses and extensive flooding may be postulated in later periods from studies of old maps, documentary records and parish boundaries, and may have been important factors in the abandonment of the site for settlement. The excavations included a wide variety of finds, including a copper alloy Anglo-Saxon strap end (Fig. 3) and iron slag, bone and pottery dated to between the 12th and 19th centuries, which it is suggested in the assessment report would merit more detailed study and publication (Knight 2014).

#### *Post-excavation analysis*

Funds could not be stretched to cover full post-excavation archiving and analysis, and the site was not carried forwards to publication. An unpublished draft summary report by Christopher Drage is available in the Derby City Museum archive, together with the finds and other archive data, but a full discussion of the site and specialist reports were not completed. The documentary archive and finds were deposited in Derby Museum in 1995 (Accession No. 1997-75/6) but no further work was carried out until the present project.

#### **References**

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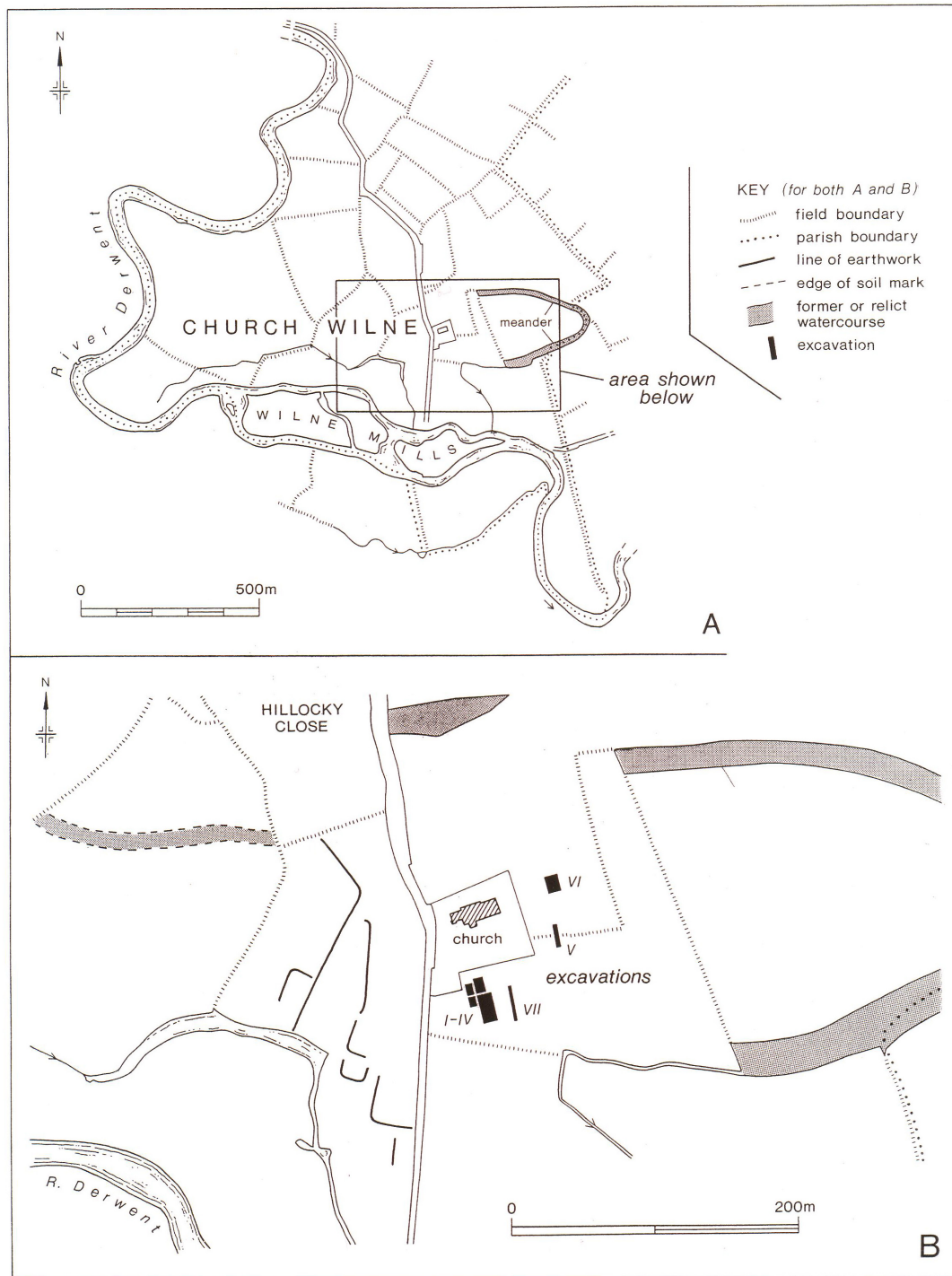


Fig. 1 Church Wilne, Derbyshire: location of 1974-75 excavations. © Trent & Peak Archaeology

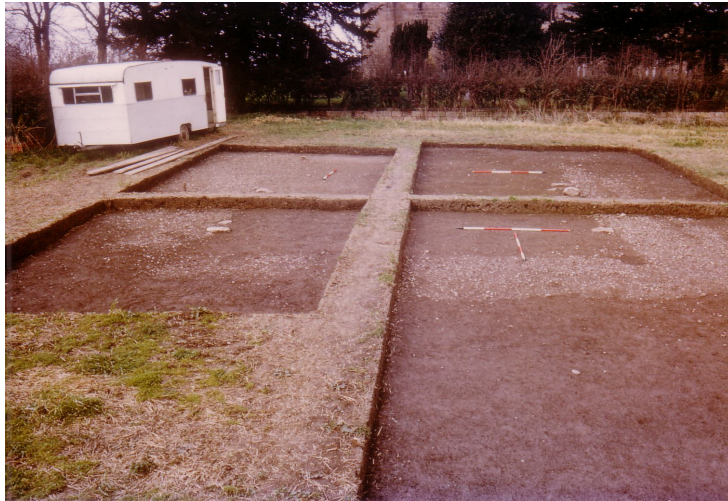


Fig.2. Church Wilne, Derbyshire: linear spreads of pebbles marking the foundations of a late medieval rectangular building (Structure 1); St Chad's Church in background. © Trent & Peak Archaeology

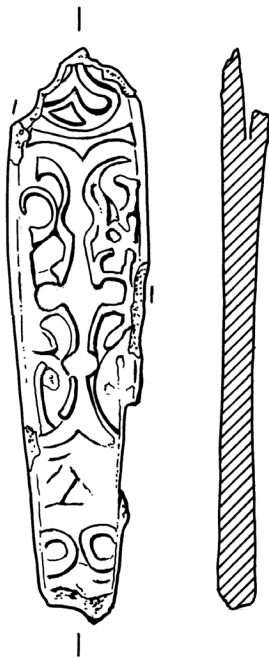


Fig.3. Church Wilne, Derbyshire: Late Saxon copper alloy strap end (length 35mm). © Trent & Peak Archaeology; drawn by Richard Sheppard