

Test pit excavation within currently occupied rural settlements: results of the HEFA CORS project in 2009

By Carenza Lewis¹

This paper reports on the fifth year of the University of Cambridge Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA) project run by Access Cambridge Archaeology (ACA) which combines education and university outreach (particularly within the secondary school sector) with the archaeological investigation of currently occupied rural settlements (CORS) by the excavation of 1-metre square test pits in open spaces within existing rural villages and hamlets. The programme was directed by Carenza Lewis, with Catherine Ranson supervising. Paul Blinkhorn reported on the pottery for all sites except Castleton. Summaries of the results of the HEFA CORS project in 2005–8 have been published in earlier volumes of MSRG Annual Report (Lewis 2006, 2007a, 2008), while the aims and methods have been outlined elsewhere (Lewis 2007b) and can also be viewed on the ACA website (<http://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/aca/>). The website also includes copies of the pottery reports from each site, and distribution maps showing the distribution of pottery period by period from the prehistoric to the modern era for every site where test pit excavations have been carried out by ACA since 2005.

2009

In 2009, test pit excavation was carried out under ACA direction within sixteen parishes in eastern England

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(Fig. 1), and also in Castleton (Derbyshire) and Kibworth (Leicestershire). Nine of the settlements investigated during 2009 by the HEFA CORS programme were new additions, the other nine having been excavated during the HEFA programme in previous years.

A total of 246 test pits were excavated during ACA HEFA CORS activities in 2009, nearly 100 of which were dug by members of the public during community test pit excavation weekends run by ACA. Seven settlements investigated in East Anglia in 2009 (Mill Green, Chediston, Hindringham, Thorrington, Thorney, Ufford and Wisbech St Mary). This was mostly for logistical reasons, and does not necessarily mean that further HEFA CORS test pit excavation will not be carried out in these places in the future.

This report provides a summary review of the results of the HEFA CORS test pit excavations in 2009: sites are listed in alphabetical order by county and then by site name. In the case of those places previously visited by the HEFA CORS programme, the summaries presented here provide an update to those published in earlier Annual Reports of the Medieval Settlement Research Group (Lewis 2006; 2007; 2008) and the reader is referred to these for introductions to each settlement, which are included when reporting on that place for the first time. Archive reports have been prepared for each settlement investigated in 2009 and data passed to HERs in each county. Fuller formal publication will take place at a later stage in the project.

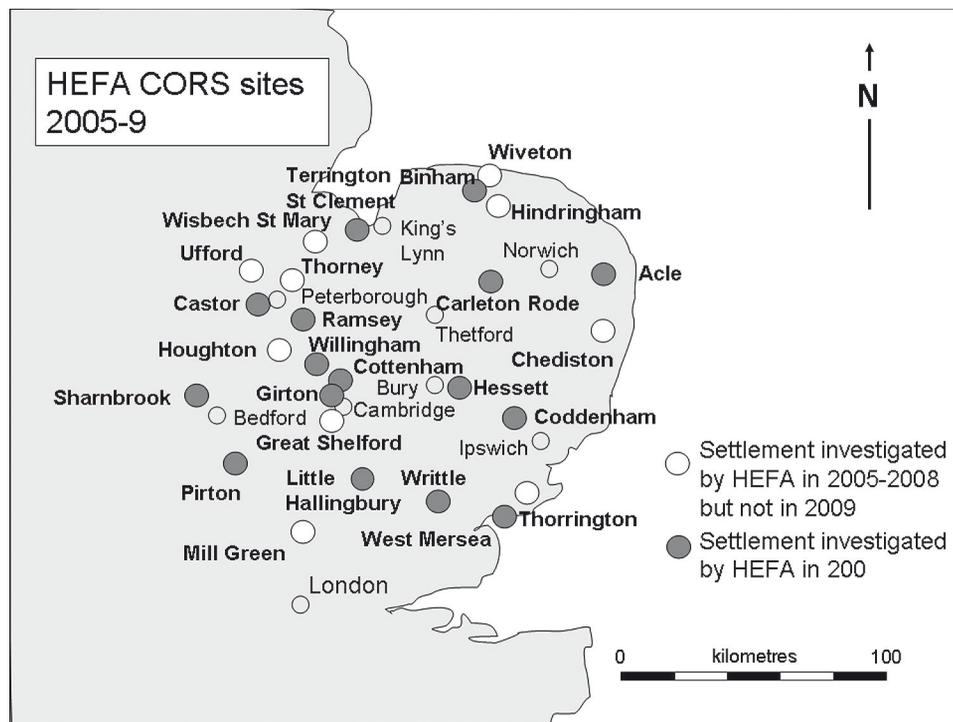


Figure 1 Map of Eastern England showing the locations of the 16 CORS investigated by the HEFA project in East Anglia in 2009

Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire (NGR SP 995595)

Ten test pits were excavated in Sharnbrook in 2009 (Fig. 2), bringing the total to date to twenty-six. New sites excavated in 2009 included several on the north side of the High Street, between this and the Sharn Brook, and three beyond the limits of the present village near the present railway line, an area presently known as Barleycroft.

As in previous years, no Roman material was recovered from any of the test pits and no further pottery of Iron Age date was recovered. Two test pits contained material dating to 850–1100 AD, supporting the inference made in 2008 that the northern part of the present High Street was a focus of activity in the later Anglo-Saxon period. 2009 excavations also hinted at the presence of a second area of late Anglo-Saxon activity immediately south-west of the church, although as only two sherds were found, both weighing less than 5g, this interpretation must be regarded as somewhat tentative at present. It is however possible to infer with a greater degree of confidence that there is at present no sign of a large nucleated village here in the late Anglo-Saxon period, as fifteen of the twenty pits excavated in the centre of the present village have now produced no evidence for occupation at this date. In contrast, all but five of these twenty pits have produced pottery dating to AD 1100–1400, suggesting that the settlement expanded in this period, and it was probably then that it took on a more nucleated form. That said, it should be noted that several of the pits did in fact only produce a small number of sherds for this period. Notably, there is no sign of any marked post 14th century contraction, with all areas in use before this time continuing in use afterwards, including the outlying sites at Manor Farm and Barleycroft, which have been tentatively interpreted as outlying homesteads in the medieval period.

Castor, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 125985)

Castor today is a small village lying at c. 24m OD on the north-facing slope of a limestone ridge 8km west of Peterborough. It has been known since the 19th century that the village contains substantial Roman remains, possibly of a small town (Wilson, 1870–2). A nunnery, founded at Castor in the seventh century, is thought to have been located near the present church and was reputedly destroyed by the Danes in AD 1010.² Castor today is arranged either side of two approximately parallel streets, which diverge at the eastern end, possibly originally in order to respect a precinct enclosure around the area of the present church. More recent settlement extensions lie to the north, south and west of the earlier village core. To the west, Castor is now almost conjoined with the neighbouring small village of Ailsworth.

Five test pits were excavated in 2009 in Castor, widely spaced across the present village (Fig. 3). With so few pits dug to date, it is of course impossible to make any meaningful observations regarding the disposition or development of the settlement in the past, but the presence of some finds of Anglo-Saxon and medieval date can be noted. One sherd of Early/Middle Saxon hand-built ware (AD 450–650) was found in the pit near Manor Farm. Sherds of St Neots ware and Stamford ware were found in four of the five excavated pits in quantities likely to be indicative of settlement nearby. The exception is CTR/09/05, which appears to lie beyond the limits of both the later Anglo-Saxon and the medieval settlement. A similar pattern was apparent in pottery dating to AD c. 1100–c.1400. Notably less material was found dating to the later medieval period (c.1400–c.1540), hinting at the possibility that Castor may have

² http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/place_page.jsp?p_id=7646

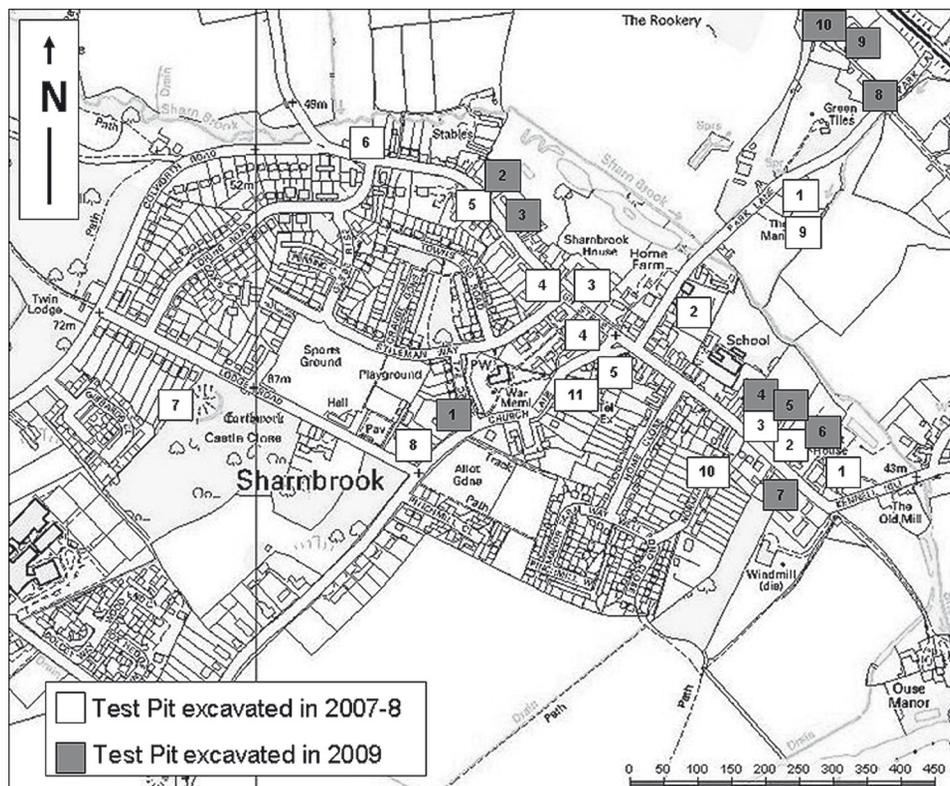


Figure 2 Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire, showing approximate locations of HEFA excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

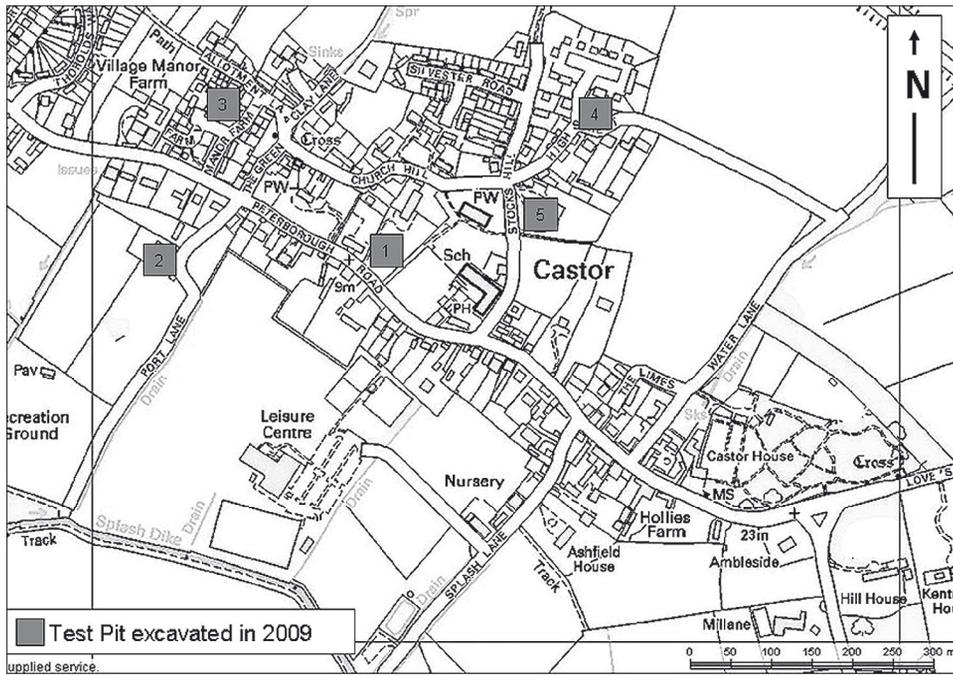


Figure 3 Castor, Cambridgeshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

experienced some significant level of decline in this period.

Cottenham, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 455675)

Cottenham is today a large village nearly 1.75 km. long lying at c. 10m OD on a low greensand ridge surrounded by fenland, c. 8km north of Cambridge. The church of All Saints contains 12th-century masonry and is set apart from the core of the present village, whose main centre, containing a range of local shops and both primary and secondary schools, lies nearly 1km to its south. It has been suggested that a second church may have existed closer to the centre of the present village at Church Hill near the moated site of Crowland Manor House (Cambs HER 01118) (CEAS Cottenham), although no archaeological evidence for this has been found to date. The present church lies immediately east of a road which kinks around its churchyard as it makes its way to Wilburton, some 10km to the north. Properties either side of the road south of the church are notable for their long narrow gardens, which may preserve earlier, possibly medieval, boundaries whose form may be determined by having been laid out over strip fields. To the south, the main part of the present village within the area defined by High Street, Rooks Street and Denmark Road has a marked rectilinear plan and it has been suggested (Ravensdale 1974) that the medieval village grew from a nucleus in this area, a suggestion supported by excavations off Denmark Road and High Street (CEAS 2003). Excavations in 1996-7 on Lordship Lane (immediately south-east of Lambs Row) revealed evidence of settlement from the seventh century, abandoned in the 12th to 15th centuries (CEAS 2003, 11-12).

18 test pits were excavated in Cottenham in 2009 (Fig. 4) during two episodes of activity, one a standard HEFA event with secondary school pupils and the second a special weekend event funded by the University of

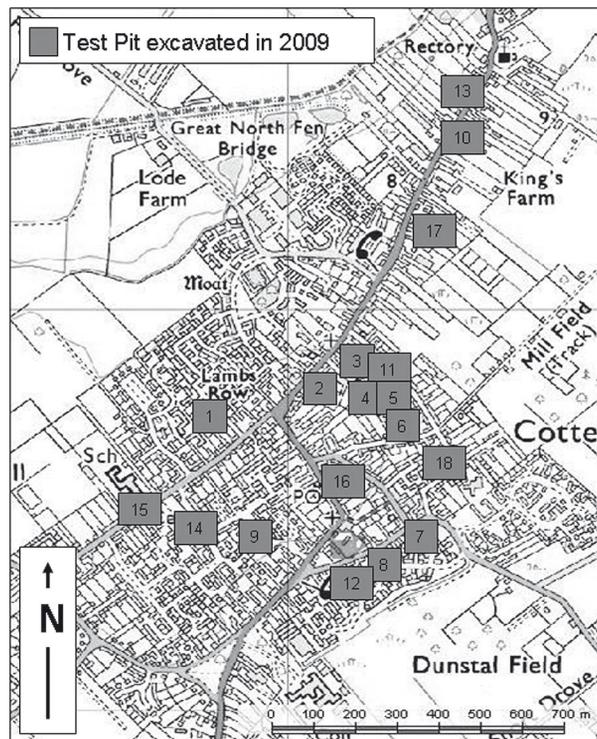


Figure 4 Cottenham, Cambridgeshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

Cambridge as part of a wide-ranging programme celebrating the 800th anniversary of the founding of the University in 1209. The aim of the latter event was to give local residents and other members of the public the chance to look for archaeological evidence in their own locality which could reconstruct the development of the village during the centuries of the university's earliest origins. Most of the test pits were sited in the centre of the

present village, with just three along the road towards the church.

Four pits, sited in three locations separated by c. 400m, all in the southern part of the present settlement, produced pottery of Roman date, although in only one instance was more than a single sherd found. Together, this pattern hints at the possibility of scattered low-intensity activity in the Roman period.

Four test pits produced handmade pottery of early Anglo-Saxon date (450–650AD), but the distribution of these appears more likely to indicate settlement as three of these pits (COT/09/02, COT/09/04 and COT/09/05) were sited close together in the same part of the settlement, immediately south-west of Rooks Street. This same area (COT/09/04 and COT/09/06) also produced pottery of middle Anglo-Saxon date, suggesting that settlement persisted in this area, possibly shifting its location somewhat. Test pits in the same area (COT/09/04; COT/09/05 and COT/09/06) also produced pottery dating to the later Anglo-Saxon period, as did two further pits to the south (COT/09/12 and COT/09/16), suggesting that the settlement was expanding at this time. If settlement was continuous between the areas where these pits were excavated, it would be reasonable to infer the presence of a nucleated village at least 400m in extent from north to south, although further test pitting in the intervening areas would be required to test this hypothesis. It is interesting to note that these pits all lie within the Rooks Street/Denmark Road/High Street area suggested by Ravensdale as the early core of Cottenham: the evidence from the test pits appears to support this hypothesis, but suggests that its origins are considerably earlier than he suggested.

Girton, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 410615)

Girton today is a large village of about 4,500 people,³ situated to the north-west of the city of Cambridge, around 5km south-west of Cottenham, also part of the HEFA CORS project in 2009 (see above). It lies at c. 20m OD on gault clay overlain in places by gravel. The village today is arranged along either side of two parallel streets, Church Lane and High Street, which are oriented south-west/north-east and lie approximately 500m east of the Washpit Brook. Cambridge Road runs diagonally away from the north end of Church Lane and provides access to several smaller closes on either side. This appears to be a more recent feature of the settlement plan. To the south of the High Street, Duck End contains a number of older houses and may have previously been a separate end or hamlet: it lies more than 500m from the church. Manor Farm lies a similar distance north of the church, separated from it by areas of predominantly modern housing development.

Previous archaeological work in Girton has been of limited extent, although in 1880 a cemetery was found with at least 225 burials, including 130 cremations. This was in use from the second century AD to the early Anglo-Saxon period. This was sited close to Girton College, to the south-west of the present village.⁴ The

³ <http://www.girton-cambs.org.uk/home.html>

⁴ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=15351&strquery=Girton>

church of St Andrew was so named by 1240 and contains herringbone masonry of 12th-century date in the lower west wall of the tower.

Six test pits were excavated in Girton in 2009 by pupils from Tower Hamlets in London attending a residential HEFA course (Fig. 5) Pottery dating to 900–1100 AD was found in GIR/10/01 and GIR/10/03 (near the church and along High Street), with material dating to the 12th to 14th centuries found on these sites and also on Church Lane (GIR/10/04). Medieval pottery post-dating the 14th century was almost entirely absent, with only a single sherd found. Although it is impossible to make any firm inferences from with such a small number of pits excavated, it is interesting to note that historical sources also hint at the possibility of late medieval contraction, with the number of taxpayers recorded at 56 in 1327 and 196 in 1377, dropping to 45 in 1524 and just 34 in 1563.⁵ It is hoped that further test pits will be excavated in Girton in 2010

⁵ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=15351&strquery=Girton>

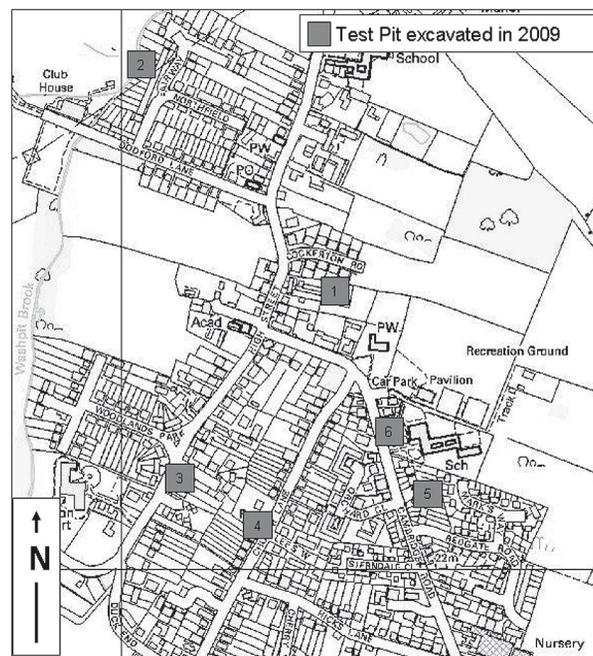


Figure 5 Girton, Cambridgeshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

Ramsey, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 285855)

Ramsey is today a small town on the former border between Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire, occupying an 'island' of slightly raised land within the surrounding fenland at between 3m and 8m OD. Ramsey Abbey, founded in the 10th century (CEAS 2004, 5), lies on some of the highest land to the east of the island. The medieval settlement, which appears to have grown up to the north-west of the abbey and its precinct, is not named in the Domesday Book, but was by AD 1200 granted a charter for a market to be held at the junction of High Street and Great Whyte (CEAS 2004, 5) and subsequently a grant for an annual fair to be held on the

green near the church and the Abbey gatehouse. Ramsey did not, however, achieve borough status, seemingly remaining throughout the medieval period a market settlement occupying the cusp of the divide between large village and small town.

Ramsey today is quite extensive, with significant amounts of 20th century housing, especially in the north of the present village and along Hollow Lane, which skirts the southern side of the presumed monastic precinct boundary. The pre-modern settlement appears to have been arranged along two parallel streets, High Street (the main street leading to the abbey gatehouse) and Little Whyte, which ran either side of the market place. At the west end of this is Great Whyte, a wide street either side of a stream which is now covered over and runs underneath the street. Several 17th century houses at the south end of Great Whyte are unusual in having survived fires which are documented as having destroyed other buildings in Little Whyte (in 1636) and Great Whyte and High Street (1731). Most excavation to date in Ramsey has focused on the remains of the abbey, with relatively little attention given to the town. Four minor watching briefs in the town, mostly along Great Whyte, produced limited evidence for medieval activity including two ditches interpreted as plot boundaries (CEAS 2004, 12–13).

Ten test pits were excavated in Ramsey in 2009 (Fig. 6). No pottery pre-dating 850 AD was found in any of the excavated pits. Just a single sherd of late Anglo-Saxon pottery was found, perhaps rather surprisingly, on the south side of Hollow Lane (RAM/09/01), on the very edge of the present settlement and in an area of exclusively modern housing. In contrast, nearly all the test pits produced material dating to the 11th to 14th century. While the limited number of pits excavated to

date makes it difficult to make any firm inferences, it does seem to indicate that the 11th to 14th century saw considerable expansion in activity in Ramsey. On current evidence, post-14th century medieval material seems to be of more limited extent, almost entirely limited to the area west of the Abbey, with the only pits producing more than a single small sherd of pottery of this date being RAM/09/01, RAM/09/02, RAM/09/04, RAM/09/08.

Willingham, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 405705)

Willingham is today a large village located on the fen edge north of Cambridge, about 5km north-west of Cottenham (also excavated under the aegis of ACA for the first time in 2009, see above). Willingham lies between 7m and 9m above OD, with gravels underlying the more elevated, southern end of the village and clay underlying the lower, northern end. Like Cottenham, the street pattern today takes a predominantly rectilinear form, with the only sinuous streets being those providing access to 20th century housing developments. Recent excavations in advance of development revealed evidence for a substantial settlement of middle Anglo-Saxon date (R Mortimer, pers. comm.) in the centre of the present village c. 200m south of the present church.

A total of twenty-six test pits were excavated in Willingham in 2009 (Fig. 7) funded, like those at nearby Cottenham, by the University of Cambridge as part of the celebrations of the 800th anniversary of its foundation. Roman pottery was found zoned in two distinct areas, one north of the church and the other in the far south of the present village, with no finds of this date in between, hinting at the presence of two separate settlements at this date. A fragment of box flue tile in the south (WIL/09/14) suggested settlement here may have been of some

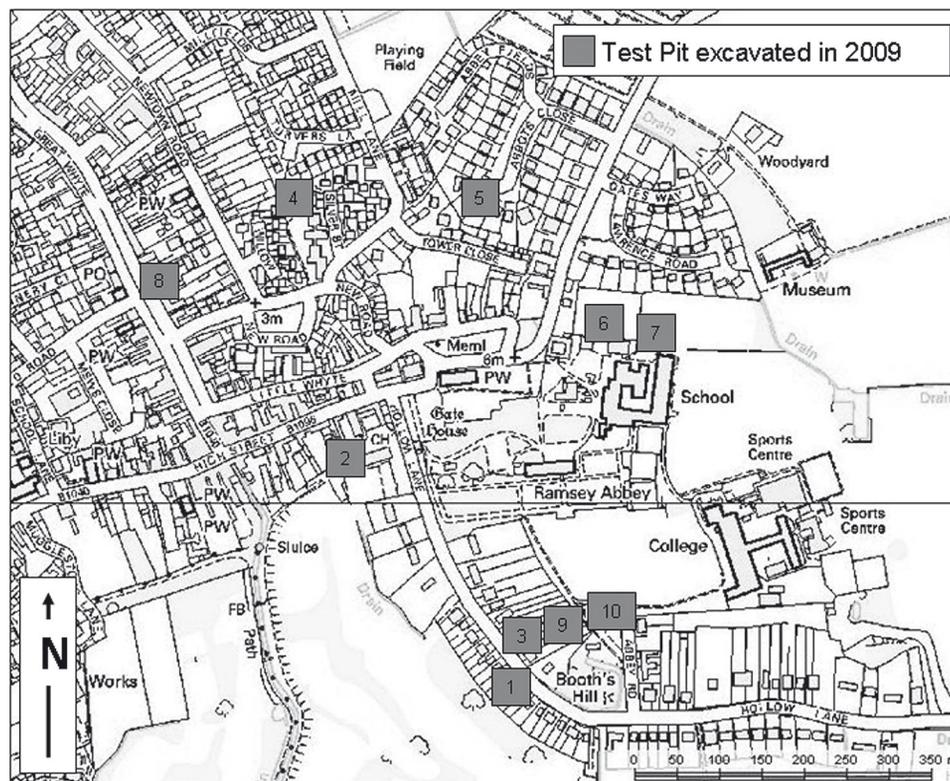


Figure 6 Ramsey, Cambridgeshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

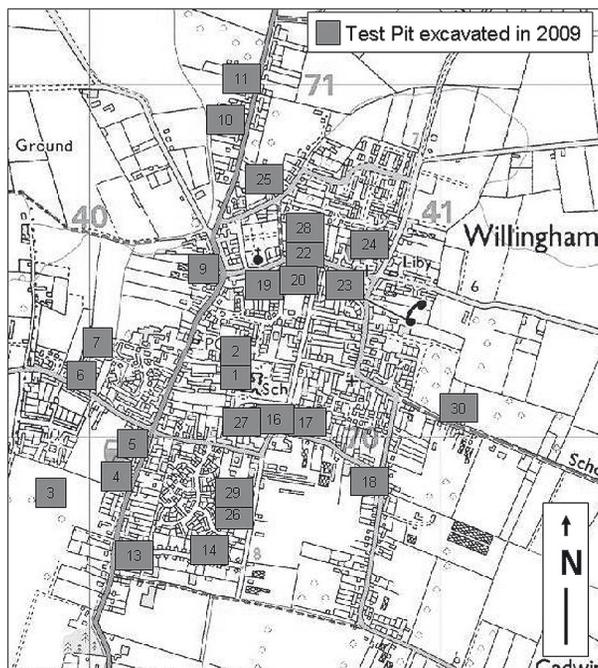


Figure 7 Willingham Cambridgeshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

pretension. Two pits, both in the centre of the village, produced several sherds of pottery dating to mid-5th to late 7th century AD near to the known excavated early/middle Anglo-Saxon settlement. Surprisingly little pottery of late Anglo-Saxon date was found, with just one pit immediately south of the church producing (WIL/09/19) a single, albeit very large (52g) sherd of Thetford ware. No other material dating to the period between AD c. 850 and 1050 was recovered from any of the excavated pits. It seems unlikely, on current evidence, that there was a nucleated settlement of any size here at this date. In contrast, thirteen pits produced material dating to the 12th to 14th centuries, including nearly all of those to the east of the present main north-south road through the village, suggesting that this period saw a major expansion in settlement in this part of Willingham, and probably the appearance of a nucleated settlement. Most of the pits which produce high medieval pottery also produced material of post-14th century medieval date, tentatively indicating that the village did not experience any severe contraction in the later medieval period.

Castleton, Derbyshire (NGR SK 151829)

Four more test pits were excavated in Castleton in 2009 (Fig. 8) bringing the total to ten. The pottery was examined by Chris Cumberpatch and Jane Young, who concluded that one small fragment of shell tempered ware recovered from CAS/9/01 was of late Saxon or early post-Conquest date and another no later in date than the 12th century (Jane Young, pers comm). A single unidentified splash glazed Sandy ware sherd from CAS/9/02 (1.4m below the present ground level and immediately above a cobbled stone surface) is of similar date, splash glazing as a technique belonging, in this area

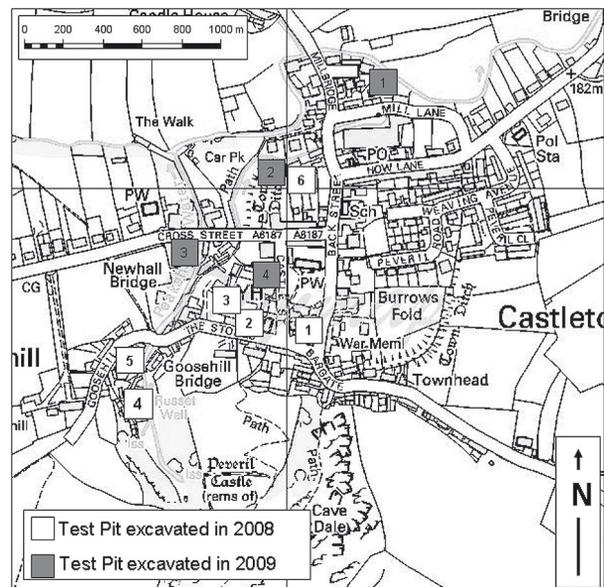


Figure 8 Castleton, Derbyshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

at least, to the high medieval period (later 11th to early 13th century). The association of this sherd with the stone surface suggests that the latter may be a medieval feature, but further work on a larger scale would be required before its precise character and its relationship to the town ditch can be resolved. Two other sherds of medieval pottery, from CAS/09/03, are likely to be slightly later date than those from the other pits excavated in 2009 (Cumberpatch 2004).

As in 2008, there was very little pottery of pre-18th century date found in any of the test pits. It is likely that the increase in pottery in the 18th century relates to the creation of a turnpiked road through the village in 1759, which became an important early route linking Manchester and Sheffield.⁶ This must have opened the village up to a much greater flow of traffic and traded material: this certainly seems apparent in the test pit data, where a transformation in the quantity and quality of the material culture of the settlement is clearly evident. With respect to the paucity of earlier material, it is also notable that later medieval (13th to mid 15th century) and particularly post-medieval (c.1550–c.1700) activity was not represented in any of the test pits discussed here. The majority of the small medieval assemblage that has been recovered dates to the likely period of the construction of the castle, but it is somewhat surprising that it has not been found in larger quantities. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of excavated rural settlement sites in the area with which the assemblages from Castleton could be compared (Ken Smith, pers. comm.) in order to establish whether such a limited amount of material could be compatible with a settlement of the supposed status of Castleton, with its town walls and castle. Given that a total of ten test pits have now been excavated in the village, together with the inconclusive results of a

⁶ <http://www.peakdistrict-nationalpark.info/studyArea/factsheets/07.html>

programme of limited excavation on the presumed site of the medieval hospital (Colin Merrony pers. comm.) it seems that this lack of medieval material is a real pattern which requires further investigation.

Little Hallingbury, Essex (NGR TL 503175)

Sixteen test pits were excavated in 2009 in Little Hallingbury (Fig. 9), bringing the total to forty-four. Most of the 2009 sites were sited in order to fill gaps in between previously excavated areas, with a particular focus on Gaston Green and the area around the church, where little

evidence for medieval activity was found in previous years. As in 2008, no further evidence of occupation dating to the middle Anglo-Saxon period (AD c. 650–850) was found and, as in all previous years, no pottery of late Anglo-Saxon date was found in any of the pits. Although extrapolations made from negative evidence from test pitting across a large area must always be regarded with great caution, the fact that nearly fifty test pits have now been excavated in Little Hallingbury with none producing as much as single sherd of pottery dating to the 9th to 11th centuries does suggest that activity in the later Anglo-Saxon period in the area occupied by the present village was minimal or non-existent. Evidence for the high medieval period (11th to 14th century) suggest the settlement pattern then took the form of a dispersed pattern of at least six thinly scattered small hamlets or farmsteads. The disposition of these, in an area of extensive woodland in the 11th century,⁷ suggests they may have originated as a result of assarting. The area immediately around the church is largely devoid of finds of this date: settlement in this area appears instead to favour the current main road which leads north-west to the small town of Bishops Stortford. Three of the high medieval hamlets at Little Hallingbury have no evidence for activity in the 15th and 16th centuries, possibly as a result of late medieval contraction. In the post medieval period settlement appears to be arranged as four separate hamlets, including Gaston Green, a probable interrupted row arrangement along the main road and, for the first time since the early Bronze Age, a cluster of settlement in the area immediately around the church.

⁷ Darby, H. C. *Domesday England* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press), 193.

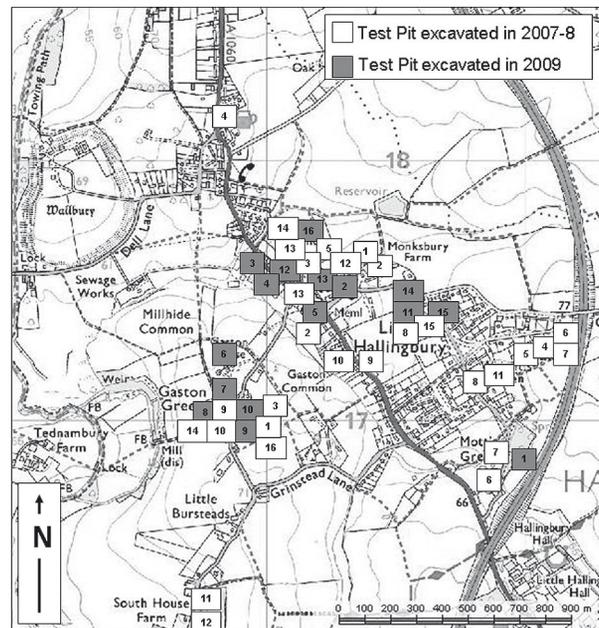


Figure 9 Little Hallingbury, Essex, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

West Mersea, Essex (NGR TM 009125)

Ten test pits were excavated in West Mersea in 2009 (Fig. 10), bringing the total to forty-eight. These were sited to

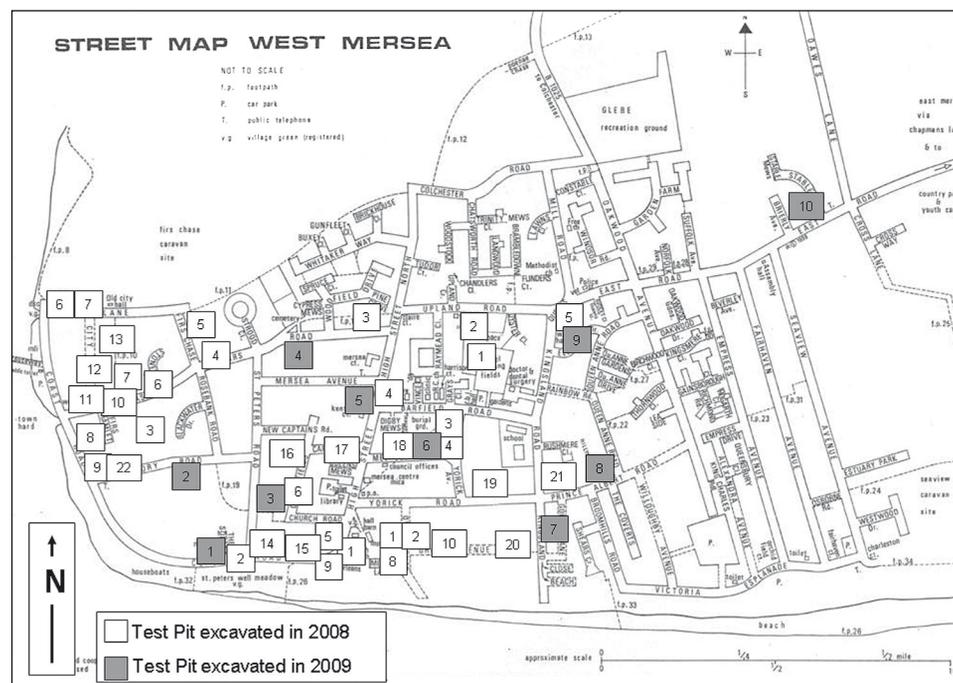


Figure 10 West Mersea, Essex, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits.

fill gaps not previously excavated, and also to focus on the eastern part of the present village which had seen little previous test pitting. Two test pits produced pottery of prehistoric date: to date, Bronze Age material has been derived from three pits, all in the area around WME/09/09, in the higher part of the present village further from the present coastline, and Iron Age pottery from around WME/09/03, nearer to the present shoreline, in an area which has also produced Roman pottery and is the site of the existing medieval church. The absence of any Ipswich ware, especially from WME/9/05 and WME/9/06 suggests that the middle Anglo-Saxon settlement indicated by Ipswich ware from two pits in this area in 2008 may not have been very extensive. As in earlier years, no pits produced any material of late Anglo-Saxon date. Pits WME/09/07, WME/09/08 and WME/09/10 each produced just a single sherd of pottery dating to the period between 1600–1750, and no earlier material, suggesting this area was in low-intensity use, possible as arable fields, at this time rather than settlement.

Writtle, Essex (NGR 675065)

Writtle is a former market town lying at c. 50m OD c. 4km south-west of Chelmsford. The settlement pattern today is complex, primarily arranged around two greens: Writtle Green, which today takes a large triangular form c. 200m in length, and St John's Green, a much smaller, rectilinear area c. 80m long sited to the east of the first, with more recent development beyond these. Most of the older houses in the village lie around the periphery of these greens. The church of All Saints contains some

evidence for Norman origins and is located c. 70m south of the Writtle Green. It is possible that it was originally sited on the edge of an open area, suggesting that the green may formerly have been larger than it is today. Writtle was a royal manor, and a priory or hospital was established near the church by 1230 AD as a gift of King John to the hospital of the Holy Ghost in the church of St. Mary in Saxia in Rome.⁸ More tangible surviving evidence of Writtle's royal associations take the form of the remains of a moated hunting lodge (Essex HER 18580), built by King John in 1211 (Wickenden 1996, 192) and excavated by Philip Rahtz in 1955–7 (Rahtz 1969), which are visible north of the present village.

Seven test pits were excavated in Writtle in 2009 (Fig. 11), all sited in plots around the two greens. No Roman material was recovered from any of the pits, and indeed nothing was found that could definitely be dated to before the Norman Conquest. The earliest pottery found was a single sherd from a Badorf ware jug of probable 10th to 12th century date, found in WRI/09/07 on the western edge of the triangular green. Badorf ware is very rare at sites other than ports such as Ipswich and London, and is usually otherwise only found at high-status sites with royal or ecclesiastical connections. It is likely to reflect royal interest in Writtle and it is interesting to note that this sherd predates the early 13th century construction of King John's Hunting Lodge. By contrast, all the excavated pits produced pottery of high medieval date (mid 11th to mid 14th century). The earliest of this came from WRI/09/04, in the form of two sherds (one weighing 20g) of Essex Shelly Ware, which dates to AD

⁸ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=39875>

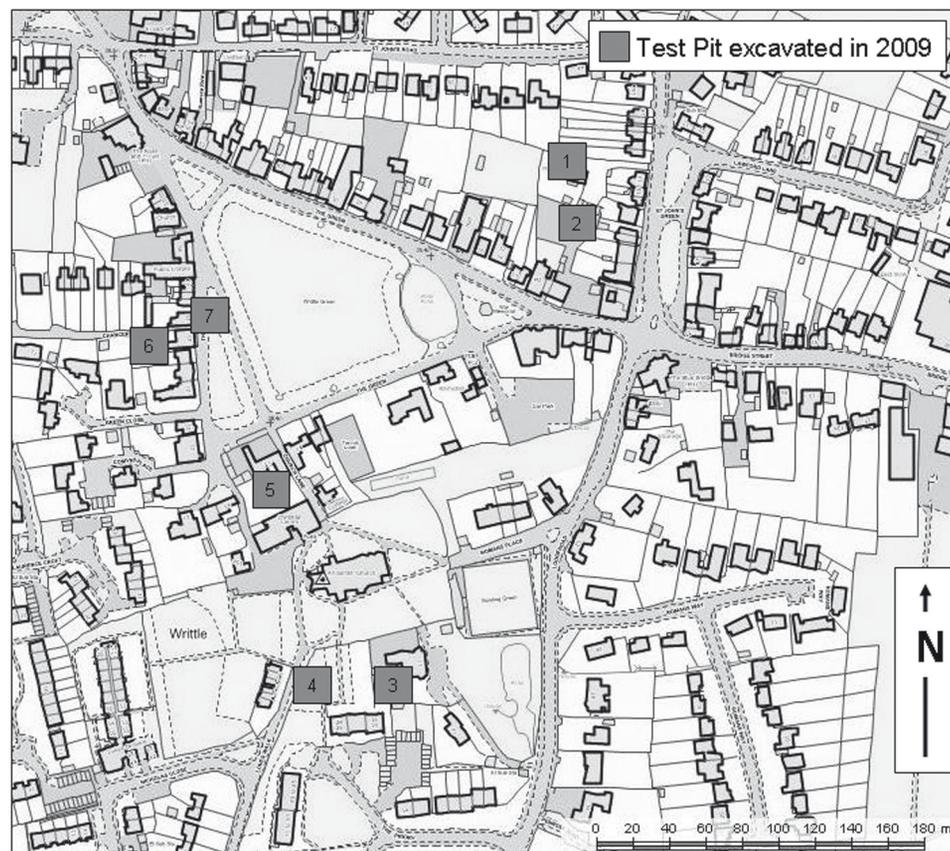


Figure 11 Writtle, Essex, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

1050–1200, contemporary with the construction of the church. Observations regarding the distribution of pottery based on such a small number of test pits must inevitably be made with considerable caution, but it was interesting to note that the test pits north of Writtle Green and west of St John's Green produced very much smaller quantities of post-14th century pottery than those on the south-west of Writtle Green, hinting that this area may have been differentially affected by late medieval settlement contraction at Writtle. It will be interesting to see if this tentative observation is supported or contradicted by further test pit excavation in Writtle in 2010.

Pirton, Hertfordshire (NGR TL 145315)

Twenty-eight test pits were excavated at Pirton (Fig. 12) in 2009, bringing the total to fifty-six. As in 2008, many of these were excavated by local residents and members of the North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society, once again using the same methods and under the same ACA supervision as the HEFA test pits. On the basis of this large number of excavated pits, it is now possible to make, with some confidence, a number of inferences regarding the likely development of the settlement. Two main foci of activity in the Roman period can be seen, one in the north of the present village in the area of Hammonds Farm and Burge End Farm and the other to the north of Walnut Tree Farm. This later area has also produced the only evidence of fifth to 9th century date, a single sherd of Early/Middle Saxon hand-built ware from PIR/09/05. Found in a pit which also yielded pottery of Roman date, both apparently residual in medieval contexts, this may indicate a continuation of activity from the Roman to early Anglo-Saxon periods, although it is difficult to say this with certainty. The site then appears to have been abandoned until the later part of the late

Saxon period. Settlement at this time appears to be widespread across the eastern side of the present village, focussed in particular on Burge End Farm, the area south of West Lane and the area north of Walnut Farm. The absence of material from test pits in between these areas may possibly indicate that the settlement was of polyfocal form, with three separate foci of settlement separated by less intensively used areas.

Almost all the excavated pits have produced pottery dating to the mid 11th to mid 14th centuries, suggesting that the village at this time had become larger, more fully nucleated and more densely settled. In particular, the western part of the present village appears to be in intensive use for the first time, probably reflecting the expansion of settlement in this area as the motte and bailey castle was constructed. In contrast to this period of growth and expansion, there is a dramatic drop-off in the volume of pottery of post-14th century medieval date, apparent in nearly all the excavated test pits, suggesting considerable contraction of settlement at this time. In particular, the centre of the present village north-east and south-west of the church has produced almost no pottery of this date. On current evidence, it seems that the formerly large nucleated village was reduced to perhaps no more than five islands of occupation, farmsteads or small cottage clusters, within an otherwise largely deserted landscape. Recovery does not seem to have been established until the 17th or even 18th century, and even then the volume of pottery recovered does not match that of the high medieval period.

Kibworth, Leicestershire (NGR SP 685935)

Kibworth today is large village located approximately equidistant between Leicester c. 14 km to north-west Leicester and Market Harborough 13 km to the south-

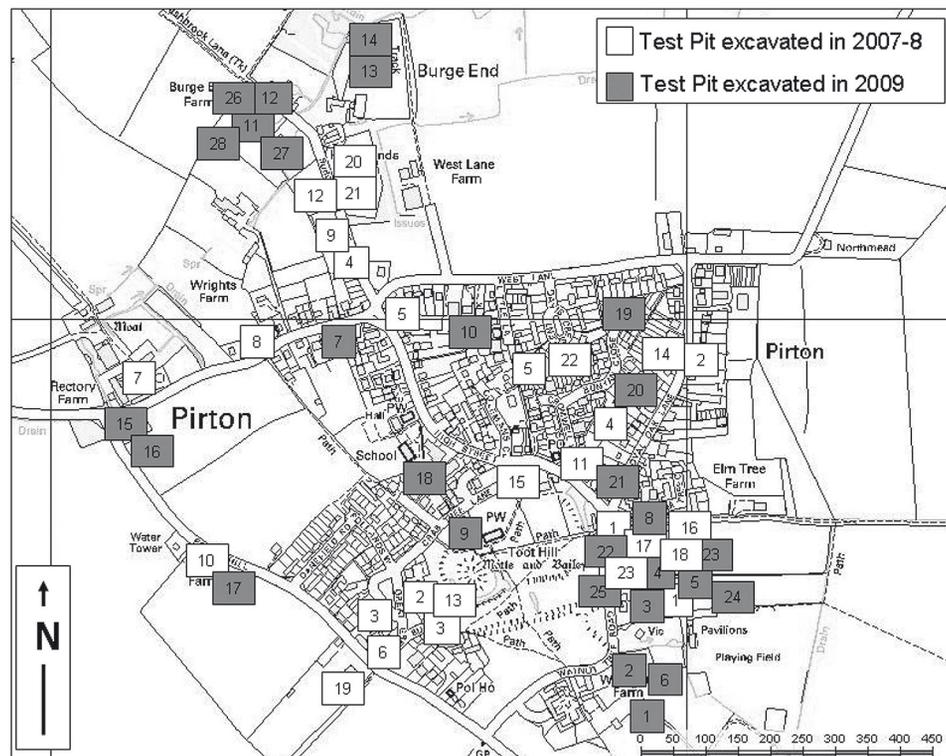


Figure 12 Pirton, Hertfordshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

east. Located c. 100m OD the parish includes the formerly separate settlements of Kibworth Harcourt (in the north, now straddling the A6), Kibworth Beauchamp (to the south of Kibworth Harcourt and the railway line), and Smeeton Westerby (the southernmost of the settlements, separated from Kibworth Beauchamp by c.0.5km, and comprising the formerly separate settlements of Smeeton to the north-east and Westerby to the south-west). The 13th-century church of St Wilfrid lies in Kibworth Beauchamp, with the church of Christ Church in Smeeton Westerby. The history of Kibworth Harcourt, with excellent documentary records surviving from a variety of sources, has been examined in detail and included one attempt to reconstruct the medieval layout of the settlement from documentary and cartographic evidence (Howell 1983). This suggested that the settlement recorded in Domesday Book lay long the east-west oriented street north of the A6 (comprising the western end of Main Street and Albert Street, which leads into Langton Road).

Forty-three test pits were excavated in 2009 in Kibworth by members of the public digging under ACA direction (Fig 13) over a single weekend, as part of a television documentary to be presented by Michael Wood exploring the history of England through the experiences of the people of this single place. These were sited in all four of the Kibworth settlements, although rather fewer sites were offered for excavation in Kibworth Beauchamp than in the other settlements, so observations regarding the development of this part of the settlement

landscape are necessarily more tentative than for Kibworth Harcourt, Smeeton and Westerby.

Roman pottery was found in just two of these test pits, one (KIB/09/02) at the junction of the A6 and Main Street in Kibworth Harcourt, the other in Smeeton Westerby, just north of the point where the east-west road through the southern part of the village turns north. Neither pit produced more than a few sherds, probably residual in later deposits., although more substantial Roman remains were identified by geophysical survey away from the present village (Peter Liddle, pers. comm.). Pottery of early Anglo-Saxon date (AD 450–650) was found in only one test pit (KIB/09/13), but this produced a total of seven sherds along with a fragment of a bone comb from undisturbed deposits, and it is thus likely that this relate to intensive use, probably settlement at this date in the immediate vicinity (although a disturbed burial cannot definitely be ruled out, it is less likely as no human bone was identified). This pit produced no later material, and indeed over the entire area targeted in 2009 only one of the pits, more than 1km to the south of KIB/09/13, produced any pottery of middle Anglo-Saxon date (AD 650–850): a single small sherd of Ipswich ware weighing just 6g. Although small, this was noted as the first find of Ipswich ware in Leicestershire, and as such is of considerable interest, possibly indicating a site of some status in the vicinity (Paul Blinkhorn pers. comm.).

Later Anglo-Saxon pottery was found in greater quantities, but not as widely as might have been expected had there been an extensive nucleated settlement at this time. A single pit (KIB/09/02, the same one which produced small amounts of Roman material) produced forty sherds of St Neots ware and six of Stamford ware, indicating intensive use of this plot in this period. None of the other test pits along Main Street produced any contemporary material. Although negative evidence from test pits must inevitably be cited with caution, this does cast some doubt on Howell's hypothesis that this street was the main axis of a regular, planned nucleated settlement by 1086. In contrast, four pits in Smeeton Westerby produced Stamford ware, three of which were sited close together along the west side of the main street. Although these produced smaller amounts of pottery (none yielded more than four sherds), they do seem likely to indicate settlement in this area in the late Anglo-Saxon period.

In the medieval period, the pattern is very different, with most pits producing significant numbers of sherds dating 1100–1400. These include nine of the twelve pits along Main Street, Kibworth Harcourt, supporting Howell's suggestion that there was settlement along this street in the High Medieval period, quite possibly arranged as a regular planned row either side of the street as she suggests. Smeeton and Westerby also produced large amounts of pottery dating to 1100–1400 and activity here appears to have increased significantly in the centuries after the Norman Conquest. In contrast, only around half the pits excavated in Kibworth Beauchamp produced medieval pottery: however, it is clear whether this indicates less intensive settlement here, or whether it is simply due to sampling bias across a small number of pits in this less thoroughly test pitted part of the settlement

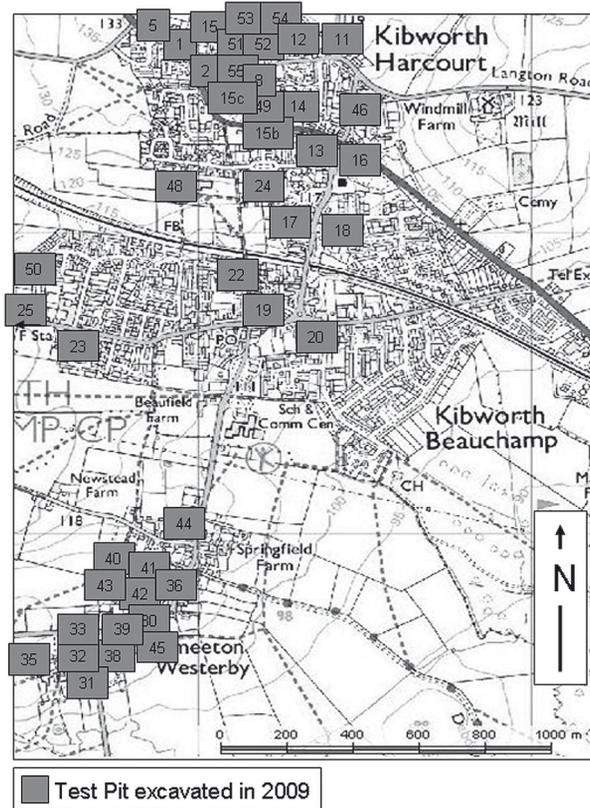


Figure 13 Kibworth, Leicestershire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

However, one pattern that is consistent and remarkably striking across all the Kibworth settlements is the dramatic decline in activity in the later medieval period (post-14th century). Only ten of the forty-three excavated pits produced any material at all of this date, only two of which yielded more than a single sherd and none more than four sherds. Three pits in Smeeton Westerby produced a single small sherd each, while only two of the five pits excavated in Kibworth Harcourt produced later medieval pottery, also in minimal quantities. Documentary evidence suggests that the population of Kibworth Harcourt dropped by around 40% in 1348–9 and, after a weak rally in the 1360s and 1370s, dwindled further throughout the first half of the 15th century, to less than a quarter of the pre-Black Death level, almost to vanishing point (Postles undated). The pottery evidence from the excavated test pits clearly seems to reflect this: it seems that those few families who lived in the former villages in the 15th century must have done so in an otherwise almost deserted landscape. In the post-medieval period, however, there is a marked recovery, with nearly all test pits producing material of 16th to 18th century date.

Acle, Norfolk (NGR TG 405105)

Acle is today a large village c. 20km east of Norwich lying at 0–10m OD on sand overlying recent deposits. Although it is now c. 10km from the east Norfolk coast, in the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods it would have been on the edge of a wide navigable estuary which extended far inland and is now mostly occupied by the Norfolk Broads (Williamson 1993, 11–13). The extent of the former marshland which developed as the land silted up and was drained in indicated by the network of drains and channels which surround the present village on the north, east and south. A settlement of Roman date underlies playing fields on the eastern margins of the present village and it has been suggested that there was a trading port here in the Roman period (Grint 1989). The church of St Edmund contains fabric of late Anglo-Saxon or Norman date, and lies towards the south of the present village (adjacent to test pit ACL/09/08). In the centre of the village a small green may be the remains of an earlier larger open area, which would place the church on its west side. It is likely that this area is the centre of the medieval settlement, but no significant excavation has been carried out on the village against which to test this hypothesis. The village is separated from Damgate, a smaller area of settlement to the south, by low-lying marshy land, and today by the main A47 road to Great Yarmouth. Acle has seen much recent development, particularly on its north-western side, where most settlement is of 20th century date.

Ten test pits were excavated in Acle in 2009 (Fig. 14), sited widely in Acle and Damgate. No Anglo-Saxon material was found in any of the pits, and only two of the pits in Acle itself (ACL/09/08 and ACL/09/10) produced pottery of medieval date. Neither of these produced more than a couple of sherds, but one of those from ACL/09/08 was a fragment of imported stoneware first made around 1350 in Siegburg in Germany, a relatively rare find of a ware mostly imported into large British towns and ports, hinting at the role of maritime trade in the economy of

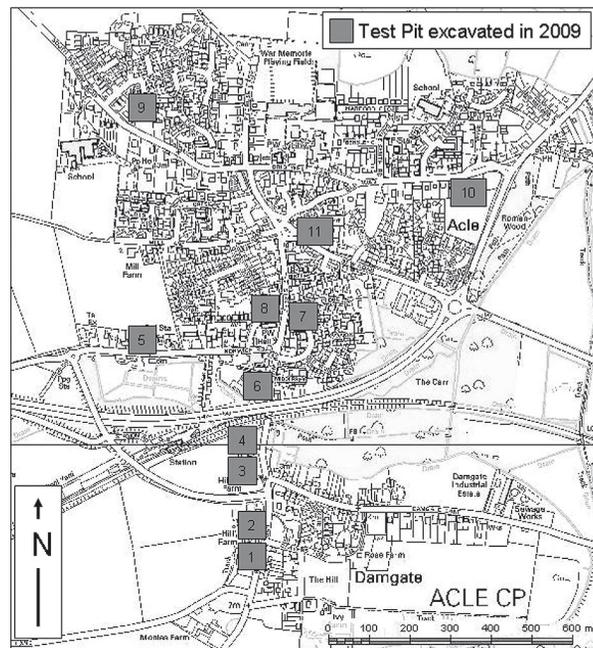


Figure 14 Acle, Norfolk, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

medieval Acle. In contrast with the paucity of medieval pottery from Acle itself, it is notable that three of the four pits in Damgate produced medieval ceramic material (ACL/09/01, ACL/09/02 and ACL/09/03). Each of these produced a larger number of sherds than any of the pits in Acle itself. Slightly less material of later medieval date was recovered from Damgate, but in Acle the area around the church actually produced more pottery of post-14th century medieval date than of high medieval date. More excavation will be needed to assess whether this is significant, although it is interesting to note that it has been suggested that Acle did not see any significant post-14th century contraction (Grint 1993).

Binham, Norfolk (NGR)

Binham is a small, rural village more than 50km from the county town of Norwich, located about 17km north-east of Fakenham and around 6km inland from the present north Norfolk coastline. Also likely to have been of significance in the medieval period is the proximity of Binham to Walsingham, a major destination for pilgrims in the middle Ages just 5km from Binham. Binham lies at c. 25m OD on sand and recent geological deposits. The priory, whose impressive remains dominate the village today, was founded c. AD 1104, and a market charter was also granted in the reign of Henry I, along with a four-day annual fair.⁹ After the priory was suppressed in 1539 the nave was retained in use by the parishioners as a parish church, an arrangement which continues today. There is some speculation whether there was ever another church in the village which would have functioned as the parish church while the monastery was still in operation (Carolyn Wright, pers. comm.). Unlike at Ramsey, the

⁹ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=38265>

present settlement at Binham does not seem to have developed immediately outside the priory gate, but at some distance from it. Binham village today lies either side of the remains of the Priory precinct, in two distinctly different parts. To the south and east the village is currently arranged as a nucleated cluster around a triangular arrangement of streets. The space within the triangle defined by these streets is devoid of buildings on the north and east sides, and appears to be the remains of a formerly larger green, if so, this is likely to be where the market was held. Manor Farm, a holding of uncertain date, lies to the south of this triangular area, and modern development to the west of Manor Farm. To the north of the green, the road bifurcates with one part leading north to the lowest-lying part of the present village along the south side of a small stream. To the west of the priory lies Westgate, a linear area of settlement arranged either side of the Wharram Road, which has a distinctly interrupted row character towards its western end. Metal detecting has produced a large number of finds, indicating Roman activity and an early/middle Anglo-Saxon cemetery in the vicinity (Andrew Rogerson, pers. comm.), probably located to the south-west of the priory remains.

Fifteen test pits were excavated in Binham in 2009 (Fig. 15), six in the Westgate area and the rest in the northern part of the eastern village. Three of these (BIN/09/08, BIN/09/11 and BIN/09/14) produced Roman pottery, two of which were in undisturbed Roman contexts and the third residual in later Anglo-Saxon/medieval levels. These three pits are all clustered together around 150m south of the priory church, and constitute good evidence for Roman settlement in the immediate vicinity. BIN/09/02 produced handmade pottery of early/middle Anglo-Saxon date, a single sherd residual in later Anglo-Saxon levels, indicative of some

level of activity in the Westgate area at this time. BIN/09/15 revealed the more substantial discovery of a beam slot containing two large sherds of Ipswich ware, clear evidence of a timber-framed building dating to AD c. 720–850. The proximity of this to the later priory gatehouse may be a coincidence, but does prompt intriguing questions as whether the middle Saxon structure may be a previously unknown pre-10th century high status building or possibly even an antecedent to the Norman priory, 11th-century memories of which may have determined the siting of the later priory. Notably, this middle Anglo-Saxon building also lies close to the putative early-middle Anglo-Saxon cemetery inferred from the metal-detected finds.

In the late Anglo-Saxon period, pottery was found in pits both east (BIN/09/04, BIN/09/08 and BIN/09/11) and west (BIN/09/02 and BIN/09/03) of the later Priory, but, interestingly, not in the area closest to its entrance, which seems to have been unoccupied open space at this time. Again, it is interesting to note that settlement in the late Anglo-Saxon period seems to respect the area around the entrance to the Norman Abbey, although no documentary evidence exists to indicate that it was in existence before the early 12th century.

Pottery of 12th to 14th century date was found widely in the 2009 test pits, mostly in some quantity, indicating considerable growth in the extent and possible the intensity of settlement in the post-Conquest centuries. It seems reasonable to infer that the presence of the Priory acted as a stimulus to growth in the settlement. Whether the settlement at this date took the form of a nucleated village or a more attenuated interrupted row, or a combination of the former around the green with the latter along Westgate, is impossible to say based on the number of test pits excavated in 2009, but such a hypothesis is not contradicted by the evidence to date.

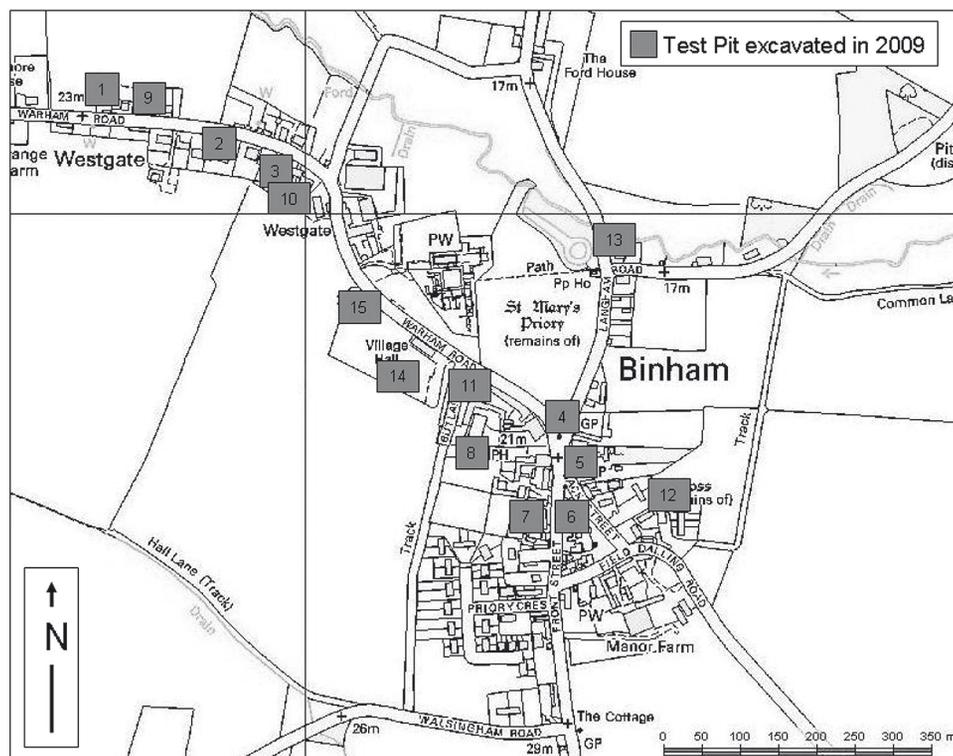


Figure 15 Binham, Norfolk, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

A marked downturn is evident in the later medieval period: hardly any pottery dating to the later 14th to mid 16th centuries was found, with only three pits producing any material of this date. The village east of the priory produced pottery of this date from just a single pit (BIN/09/08) and this yielded just two sherds totalling 3g in weight – hardly indicative of significant activity in the area which otherwise produced no post-14th century medieval material at all – on present data, it would appear that Binham was almost completely deserted at this time.

Carleton Rode, Norfolk (NGR TM 115925)

Another nine test pits were excavated in Carleton Rode (Fig. 16) in 2009, bringing the total to thirty-four. These included one additional pit in the village near the church, three in the Flaxlands area of the village and five in the gardens of a string of outlying farms along Rode Lane and Ash Lane, c. 1km south-west of the church and up to 3km south of Flaxlands. Today, settlement in this part of Carleton Rode parish takes the form of an attenuated interrupted row, with farms or cottages both sides of the road interspersed with paddocks and larger areas of field.

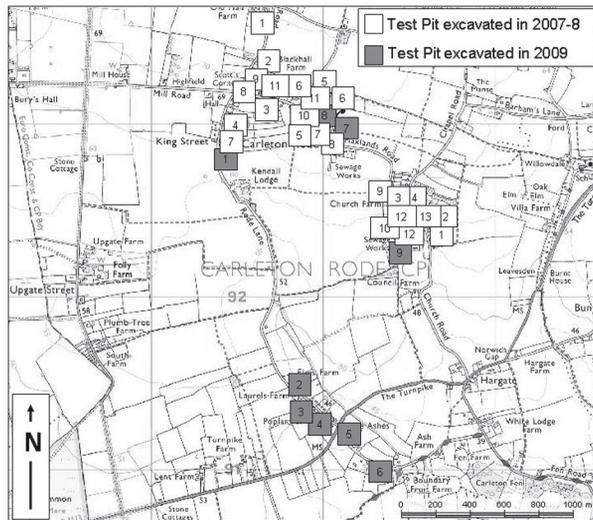


Figure 16 Carleton Rode, Norfolk, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

As in previous years, no pottery of Roman or early/middle Anglo-Saxon date was found in any of the excavated pits in Carleton Rode parish, suggesting that the excavated areas are unlikely to have seen intensive use during these periods. Likewise, no further pottery of high medieval date was found in the pit excavated near the church, supporting previous inferences that this area was not occupied until well after the end of the medieval period. By way of contrast, however, it was particularly interesting to note that two of the pits in the Rode Lane/Ash Lane area (CRO/09/04 and CRO/09/06) produced pottery of late Anglo-Saxon date, suggesting that this part of the present settlement pattern is likely to have been in existence before the Norman Conquest. Four of the five pits in this area (CRO/09/03–CRO/09/06 inclusive) also produced pottery of 12th to 14th century

date, suggesting settlement here was sustained after the Conquest and increased in intensity in the high medieval period. CRO/09/04 and CRO/09/05 in particular produced in excess of five sherds from undisturbed medieval levels, highly likely to indicate settlement in the immediate vicinity. Only one of these pits produced pottery dating to the post 14th century medieval period, however, and this was limited to a single 6g sherd of late medieval transitional ware. It seems from this that the marked post-14th century contraction in settlement, noted in the Flaxlands area from test pit excavations in 2007 and 2008, was replicated in the Rode Lane/Ash Lane settlements which appear to have been almost completely deserted. Revival here is clearly apparent in the post-medieval period, however, with all pits in this area producing glazed red earthenwares and other wares dating to the 16th and 17th centuries.

Terrington St Clement, Norfolk (NGR)

Eight test pits were excavated in Terrington St Clement in 2009 (Fig. 17), focussed on areas of the present village which had not previously seen test pit excavation by the HEFA CORS programme, in particular in the central-eastern part of the village, 100–600m south and west of the church.

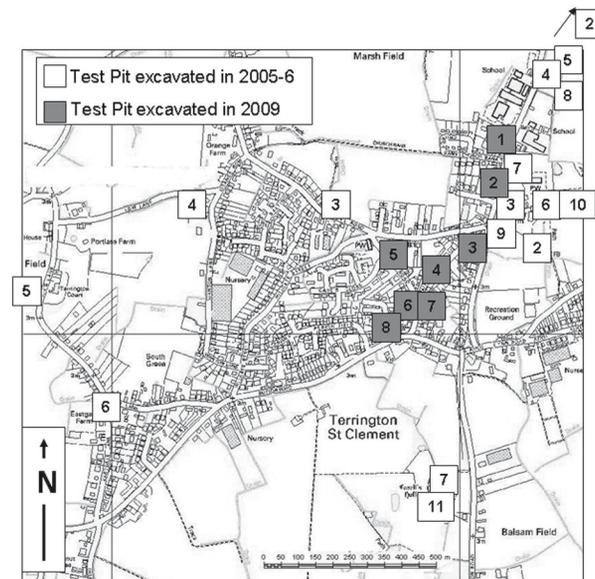


Figure 17 Terrington St Clement, Norfolk, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

As in most previous HEFA excavations at Terrington St Clement, no material pre-dating the late Anglo-Saxon period was found, unsurprising in an area where the Roman and sub-Roman occupation horizons are mostly covered by recent inundation deposits up to 2m deep. Pottery of late Anglo-Saxon date was found in one 2009 pit (TSC/09/08), near the southern edge of the present village, where a total of six sherds, mostly from undisturbed levels, constitute good evidence for contemporary settlement on this site. It is interesting to note that this area is some distance from any other sites which have produced pottery, of 9th to 11th century date,

with several in between them having produced no material of this date. This invites speculation that the late Anglo-Saxon settlement in the area of the present village of Terrington St Clement may have taken a rather dispersed form. In contrast, all but one of the 2009 pits (the exception being TSC/09/07) produced 12th to 14th century pottery, pointing towards an expansion of settlement at this time. This settlement, on evidence from all pits excavated in 2005–9, seems to have extended for nearly 1km, as there is evidence for high medieval activity extending from TSC/09/08 right up to more than 500m beyond the church. At this length it seems unlikely that this represents a single nucleated village, although there is little evidence from the test pits excavated so far for any unoccupied areas within this spread, apart from in the area immediately south of the church.

Coddenham, Suffolk (NGR TM 133545)

Twelve test pits were excavated in Coddenham in 2009 (Fig. 18), bringing the total to date to forty-two. These were sited to fill in gaps in the coverage of previous HEFA CORS test pit excavations. Roman pottery was found in two pits (COD/09/04 and COD/09/05) on the extreme southern margins of the present village and in COD/09/09, on the west side of the village close to the valley bottom. Hand-made Anglo-Saxon pottery dating to c. 450–700 AD was found in COD/09/04, COD/09/05, suggesting that activity at this date extended further south than has previously been shown, with Ipswich ware (c. 720–850 AD) in COD/09/05 indicating that this settlement continued well into the middle Anglo-Saxon period. Thetford ware at COD/09/04, COD/09/06 and COD/09/09 reinforced earlier inferences of a later Anglo-Saxon settlement in the area of the present church. Both pits around Ivy Farm (COD/09/01 and COD/09/08) produced significant amounts of 12th to 14th century pottery, clearly indicative of settlement here at this date.

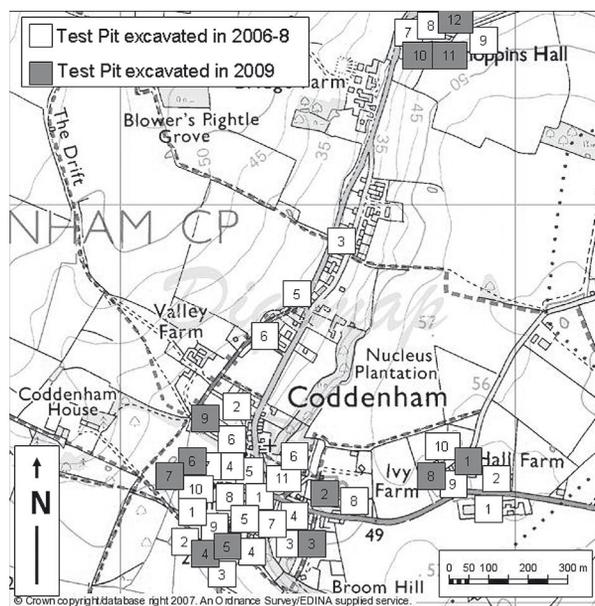


Figure 18 Coddenham, Suffolk, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

No pottery which could be firmly dated to the post 14th century medieval period was found in any of the pits excavated in 2009, confirming earlier indications of a severe contraction in the extent and intensity of settlement at this time. Also confirming previous observations, evidence from pits along the High Street (COD/09/02 and COD/09/03) suggested this part of the settlement is of essentially post-medieval origin.

Hessett, Suffolk (NGR TL 936618)

Nine test pits were excavated in Hessett in 2009 (Fig. 19), bringing the total over three years to thirty-six. The focus was on filling in gaps in between previous test pit excavation sites and in targeting some new isolated sites beyond the present village. Most of these are now single farms, two of which are surrounded by moats. A further test pit (HES/09/06) was sited immediately north of an unoccupied moated site of unknown date.

No new Roman material was found in 2009, and it remains the case that there is no evidence to suggest that any of the present areas of settlement in Hessett parish were in existence in the Roman period. Only one site produced any pottery of Anglo-Saxon date, this being HES/09/03, on the northern edge of Hessett Green, which yielded a single 6g sherd of Thetford Ware. No pre-12th-century pottery has been found in any of the sites beyond Hessett and Hessett Green, a pattern in marked contrast to those in other areas of dispersed settlement investigated by the HEFA CORS programme, such as Carleton Rode and Chediston where the dispersed pattern of settlement clearly does seem to be developing in the later Anglo-Saxon period. Three of the new outlying sites produced pottery of 12th to 14th century date (HES/09/05, HES/09/07 and HES/09/08), although only at Lawney's Farm did this amount to more than a single small sherd (very small quantities of small sherds are likely to be indicative of manuring rather than intensive occupation). Some evidence for late medieval contraction remains apparent at Hessett, with Lawney's Farm and Hessett Green apparently deserted and Hessett itself seeing a marked reduction in the volume of material from the southern end of the present village and to the north-west of the church. This decline appears to have been reversed in the post-medieval period, although there remains little sign of activity in most of Hessett Green until the 19th or even 20th centuries.

Conclusion

HEFA test pitting in 2009, excavating more than 250 test pits in eighteen settlements, was the busiest yet in terms both of the number of pits excavated and the number of different parishes within which work was carried out. In parishes newly-incorporated into the HEFA programme excavation focussed mostly on the centres of the present settlements, but in other places, where HEFA excavations have been taking place for several years, attention has also been given to expanding out from existing settlement cores to outlying more dispersed elements of the present settlement pattern, including excavating on the sites of several farms.

Overall, the HEFA CORS excavations to date seems to be beginning to hint firstly that many elements of these

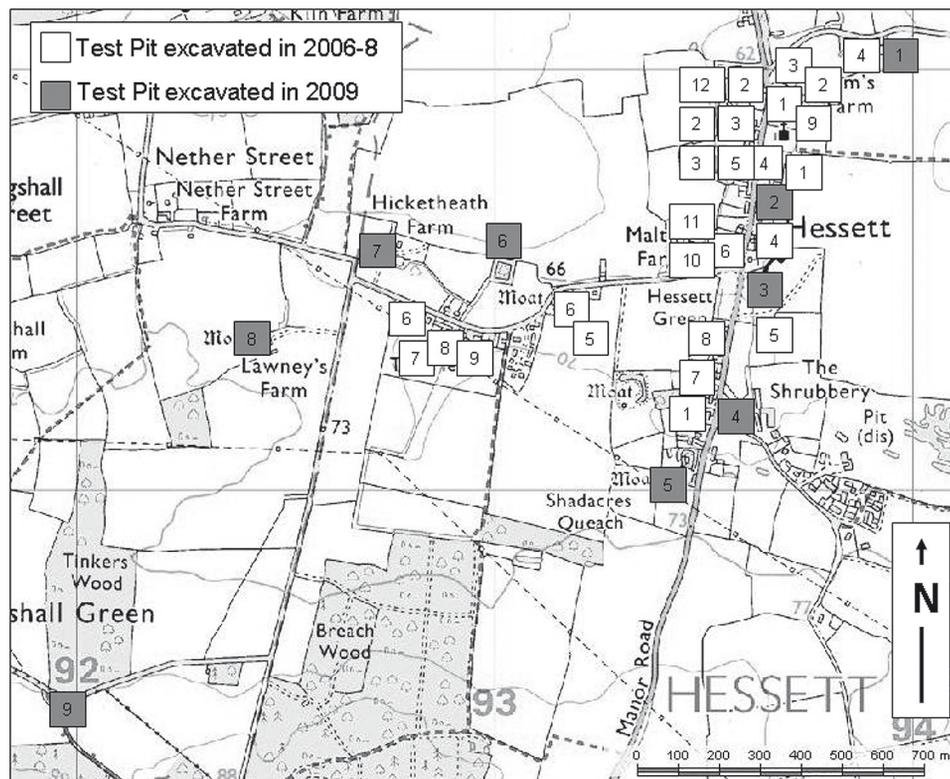


Figure 19 Hesselton, Suffolk, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits. (© Crown copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

dispersed settlements can now be seen to be of late Anglo-Saxon or high medieval origin. In addition, increasing numbers of sites are revealing sharp declines in activity in the later medieval period, including sites such as Carleton Rode and Binham which appear to have been almost entirely deserted, but which do not appear on maps of deserted settlements as they did not remain permanently abandoned but were resettled in the post medieval period. These observations are all 'work in progress' thoughts rather than final conclusions, as in most of the settlements excavation will continue in the future, and new evidence unearthed which may support, refute, add detail or unexpected nuances to the patterns which appear at this date to be emerging.

Archive reports (held by the ACA at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge) have been prepared for each settlement, and details of the HEFA 2009 test pit sites and the pottery reports for each of the sites investigated to date are available on www.arch.cam.ac.uk/aca/fatpf/evidence.html.

Test pit investigation in most of the settlements excavated in 2009 will be continued in 2010. The results of these excavations, and those on any other sites investigated as part of the University of Cambridge CORS project will be reported in the next MSRG Annual Report.

Acknowledgements

The HEFA project in 2009 was funded by Aimhigher, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), English Heritage and the University of Cambridge (including the 800th Anniversary Fund), and the HEFA programme is very grateful to them for their support which allows so many people to benefit so much

from getting involved in archaeological excavation with ACA. In a project such as this the number of individuals involved includes scores of people at each settlement whom space cannot allow to be named individually here. First of all, however, thanks must be given to the school pupils and teachers who carried out the test pit excavations in 2009, for all their hard work and the enthusiasm they brought to it. Thanks also go to the owners of all the sites where test pits were dug in 2009 for generously offering their property for excavation during the HEFA project and for the hospitality above and beyond the call of duty which many provided for the digging teams. Local coordinators in each settlement arranged access to sites to excavate, and thanks for this go to June Barnes, John Stanford, Adrian Wilkinson, Jane Yardley, Will Adam, Angela Stafford, Sue Meyer, David Gallifant, Wendy Hibbitt, Gil Burleigh, Pat Graham, Carolyn Wright, Brian Grint, Sally Garrod, Sylvia Bickers and Alison Jones for this, and for service to the project now extending into several years in most cases. Paul Blinkhorn was the pottery consultant for the project and the archaeological supervisor was Catherine Ranson. Chris Cumberpatch reported on the pottery from the Castleton excavations. Natalie White and Jessica Rippengal provided much-appreciated support, while Dave Page, Matt Collins and Jon Clynych deserve credit for helping on several 2009 Field Academies. Thanks are also due to many other volunteers including numerous students (graduate and undergraduate) at the University of Cambridge, who helped with the 2008 HEFAs, to the many staff in the Department of Archaeology and in particular to Professor Graeme Barker and Dr James Barrett at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research for their valuable support for the work of the project.



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