INTRODUCTION

Between 1952 and 1954 Eric Holden, on behalf of the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society, and John Hurst, for the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, undertook rescue excavations on the site of the deserted Medieval village of Hangleton (Holden 1963; Hurst and Hurst 1964: 964) (Fig. 1.1). Construction of a new housing estate threatened the remains of the buildings which, to that date, had remained undisturbed under rough pasture.

The Medieval buildings were situated either side of two tracks leading north on to the open downland. One of these is now followed by the modern road, Hangleton Way, but it has become known in archaeological literature as Port’s Way through a misinterpretation of the place-name, Portslade (Curwen 1926; Holden 1976, 1980). The road ran northwards from the former village in the direction of Devil’s Dyke between a field system marked by lynchets (Holleyman 1935a).

The proposed line of the Brighton Bypass threatened the area to the north of the excavated remains of the village and would cut the line of the double-lynchet trackway, Port’s Road. The two aims of excavation in this area were to determine whether the village extended to the north of the area already examined and to date the field banks on either side of the double-lynchet trackway.

Thirteen parallel trenches (A to M) were cut by machine using a 1.5m toothless ditching bucket at 13m intervals. Five further trenches (N to R) were excavated at 20m intervals in an area where remains were considered less probable (Fig. 4.1). The only features found in these trenches were the remains of a dew pond located in Trench J, a slight sub-circular feature (Context 415) and a field drain in Trench I. Two trenches were cut at right angles to the axis of Trench J.
to determine the dimensions of the dew pond. A pond is shown in this position on the first-edition six-inch Ordnance Survey plan.

No Medieval remains or Medieval pottery was found during the course of these excavations. It is clear that this area lies beyond the Medieval settlement. The absence of Medieval pottery so close to the site of the village is significant, for it suggests that the area was unmanured pasture. The chalk of the downland in the area examined is covered with a mantle of Clay-with-Flints and would have been difficult to cultivate. The Clay-with-Flints disappears nearer the village site and the arable cultivated from the village presumably lay on the light chalk soils to the south.

Trenches T and U

Trenches T and U were excavated to examine the remains of the field system adjoining Port's Road. The fields are now under plough and recent arable cultivation has partially destroyed the lynchets, although the extent of the field system surviving in the 1930s has been indicated by Holleyman (1935a). Sections approximately 2m wide were cut through the lynchets by machine and the face of one section in each trench was cleaned up and drawn. The section was then cut back 0.5m by hand and the position of all finds recorded.

Trench T was cut through a lynchet running at an oblique angle to the trackway (Fig. 4.2). The original lynchet (413) was only 0.2m high and had evidently developed during the course of continuous cultivation since the material below the lynchet bank and that behind it was indistinguishable. After its formation flint nodules, presumably gathered from the surface of the field, had been dumped beyond the field edge in the negative lynchet (412, 414). Two separate dumped layers could be distinguished. A layer of almost stone-free soil had formed on the top of the dumped flint (411). This had presumably been washed through or over the flint bank. The whole lynchet was overlain by modern plough soil (410).

The distribution of pottery is shown in Table 4.1 (see Appendix 4). Two sherds of Fabric 11 (East Sussex Ware) were found in the lowest level of the lynchet, suggesting that this layer (413) was not sealed until the Roman period. The presence of prehistoric sherds throughout the profile suggests probable agriculture in this area, but the greater accumulation of the soil within the lynchet did not take place until the first centuries AD.

Trench U was excavated in two parts above and below the double-lynchet trackway, Port's Road (Figs 4.1 and 4.3). No section was cut through the track which is a public right of way. The method of excavations was similar to that used for Trench T. Layer 435 at the base of the profile evidently predates the formation of the lynchet. It is overlain by layer 417 which quite clearly rises to the west and must be a bank rather than simply an accumulation of plough soil. The shape of the bank is clearly picked out by a thin band of soil lying on its surface with a high proportion of small chalk and flints (436). The succeeding layer (416) may represent a plough soil which accumulated and later overtopped the bank. There was a notable concentration at the base of the lynchet bank where flints were either dumped, or more probably had rolled down the slope.

The pottery from the lynchet is summarised in Table 4.2 (see Appendix 4). The basal deposit (435) contained only three sherds of pottery from the Late Bronze or Early Iron Age. The greater number of sherds from the lynchet bank (417) were Romano-British and all the sherds from the layers above (416, 436) were of a similar date.

DISCUSSION

The two lynchets both date from the Roman period and appear to have formed, at least in part, behind dumped...
material against which the colluviated ploughsoil came to rest. The lynchet sections confirmed the absence of any evidence for Medieval cultivation. During the 1920s the Curwens attempted to date the formation of the double-lynchet trackway called Port’s Road by excavating a barrow which stood upon an adjacent lynchet some distance to the north of Hangleton. The barrow was found to date from the Roman period, and by extrapolating backwards they suggested that the lynchet may have begun to form in the Early Iron Age (Curwen 1926: 35–7). It is equally possible that the lynchet might have been created through cultivation in the Roman period and the barrow subsequently constructed upon it. Although the area may have been cultivated in the prehistoric period, the sections excavated through the lynchets have suggested a considerable intensification of agriculture in the Roman period and the field system that Holleyman recorded to the north of Hangleton may all be of this date.