

whittlewood_{project}

Report on Test Pits in and around
Akeley village: June-August 2002

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The following is a gazetteer of test pits dug in and around Akeley in the summer of 2002. Each entry carries the following information:

- Location
- Research questions
- Table of pottery by spit/feature (italized entries represent undisturbed medieval or earlier deposits; shaded entries identify early medieval pottery)
- Individual conclusions and issues raised by the results

The location of all test pits is indicated on the accompanying map.

The pottery was recorded in Dbase IV format using the coding system and chronology of the Northamptonshire County type-series. For the material from Buckinghamshire, the equivalent codes of the Milton Keynes late Saxon and medieval type-series (where they exist) are in parentheses (prefixed 'MK'). The early and middle Saxon wares have no equivalent codes.

F2: Early-middle Saxon Handmade wares, AD450-850.

F95: Ipswich Ware, c.AD725-850.

F100 (MK SNC1): T1(1) type St. Neots Ware, AD850-1100. F200:

F200 (MK SNC1): T1 (2) type St. Neots Ware, AD1000-1200.

F207 (MK MSC1): Cotswolds-type Oolitic ware, AD975-1150

F330 (MK MC1): Shelly Coarseware, AD1100-1400

F345 (-) Early Medieval Oxford ware, late 11th – 14th century

F360 (MK MS3 etc): Miscellaneous Sandy Coarsewares, AD1100-1400

F324 (MK MC9): Brill/Boarstall Ware, AD1200-1600

F320 (MK MSC4) Lyveden/Stanion 'B' Ware c. AD1225-?1400.

F329 (MK MC6): Potterspury ware, AD1250-1600

F364 (MK MS29): East Wiltshire ware, Early 12th – early 15th century

F365 (MK TLMS3): Late Medieval Reduced ware, AD1400-?1500

F371 (-) Unprovenanced medieval glazed ware

F401 (MK TLMS18): Late Medieval Oxidized ware, ?AD1450-?1500

F403 (MK PM14) Midland Purple ware, AD1450-1600

F404 (MK PM15): Cistercian ware, AD1470-1550

F406 (MK PM38): Midland Yellow wares, AD1550-1700

F407 (MK TLMS12): Red Earthenwares, AD1500+

F408 (MK PM29): Rhenish Stonewares, AD1450+

F410 (MK) Tin-glazed earthenware, 17thC

F411 (MK PM16): Midland Blackware, c AD1550-1700.

F413 (MK) Staffs Manganese Glazed ware, 1680 – 1760

F420 (MK) Westerwald/Cologne stoneware, 17thC +

F425 (MK PM2): Staffs trailed slipware, L17th – 18thC.

F426 (MK) Iron-glazed earthenware, L17th – 19thC

F429 (MK PM22): Staffordshire Salt-Glazed Stoneware, 18thC

F451 (MK PM18): Border Ware, late 15th/early 16th century

F1000: Miscellaneous 18th -19th century wares: Late English Stoneware, Iron-glazed Earthenware, Staffs Manganese wares, etc.

F1001: All Romano-British wares

Most of the medieval sandy wares have been grouped together as one code (F360), as they are all broadly dateable AD1100-1400, and have very similar petrological compositions. They were also made at numerous unknown sources in the region, and so it is considered that individual identification of such wares, which would be extremely time-consuming, would impart little information which would be of use at this stage of the project.

Gazetteer of Test Pits

AK TP 25

The Cottage, Daisy Bank

Placed in the orchard, in the SW quarter of the garden. Designed to test the possibility of medieval occupation fronting onto the modern line of the A413.

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	1000	1
F1	407	21
F1	1000	4
F2	1000	1
F4	1000	5

There is nothing in the assemblage or the stratification to suggest medieval activity on this site. It is interesting to note that similar negative evidence can be derived from AK TPs 6 and 7 sunk in the beer garden at the Bull and Butcher. Whilst some medieval material was forthcoming from AK TP 38 this does not suggest close proximity to medieval occupation. Taken together, these TPs suggest that the current course of the main street was not a focus for medieval occupation and the probability remains that the course of the main street was altered to its current location in the post-medieval period.

AK TP 26

Manor Farm, Leckhampstead Road

Manor Farm is one of the oldest standing buildings in the village. A series of four test pits was located in the paddock behind the property, as close to the formal garden and thus the house as was feasible. These test pits were designed to establish whether this parcel of land had been occupied continuously from the medieval period, to establish a possible date for the foundation of a building on this site, and to understand the nature of occupation. Is Manor Farm the success to the original demesne farm?

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	329	2
2	329	1

The four TPs sunk at Manor Farm can be taken together. Three produced medieval material from deposits which appear to have been undisturbed since their creation. The levels of medieval pottery (in total 28 sherds), however, indicate that these TPs were not located on the occupation site, but perhaps immediately behind the living area. The assemblage is made up of the usual range of coarse fabrics, and would appear to reflect no particular importance or social elevation of occupation. The recovery of a single sherd of Iron Age pottery from AK TP 28 may suggest prehistoric activity in this area at a very early date.

AK TP 27

Manor Farm, Leckhampstead Road

See AK TP 26

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	407	1
2	1000	7
3	329	1
3	407	1

4	329	1
5	360	4

AK TP 28

Manor Farm, Leckhampstead Road

See AK TP 26

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
3	329	1
3	360	1
3	1002	1
4	329	4
4	360	2
5	324	1
5	360	1

AK TP 29

Manor Farm, Leckhampstead Road

See AK TP 26

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	1000	3
3	329	2
3	407	1
4	360	1
4	407	1
5	324	1
5	360	4
6	360	1

AK TP 30

Willows Farm

Located in the middle of a large pasture field at the junction of interlocking medieval furlongs, a small platform was visible. The TP was located at the edge of this to ascertain its function and date. Is it related to the medieval field system or does it post-date the abandonment of strip farming?

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
2	360	1
5	324	1
5	360	2
5	1002	1
6	1002	1
F1	1001	1

No post-medieval intrusive material was recovered by excavation. The stratification appears to suggest medieval ploughland overlying earlier deposits. It is possible that the charcoal-rich deposit (F1) was laid down in the Romano-British period. The recovery of two sherds of Iron Age pottery indicate activity in the late prehistoric period. The possibility that the location of the medieval furlongs, interlocking and meeting at this point, was dictated by an earlier feature or boundary is suggested by these findings. As such this may be the first time that this association has been recognised in the Whittlewood area.

AK TP 31

The Leys

Following excavations in 2001 which suggested proximity to medieval settlement, a further five TPs were sunk in the field to the east of the original five. The intention had been to locate these along the hedgeline fronting onto the Leckhampstead Road. The creation of a paddock meant that these TP had to be located away from the road.

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	329	3
1	1000	1
2	360	5
2	1000	1
2	1001	1
3	329	7
3	360	17
4	324	1
4	329	8
4	360	19

Evidence from AK TP 31-35 is taken together. The recovery of significant quantities of medieval material from AK TP 31-33 place these TPs within an occupied zone. The discovery of 166 sherds from a single stratified deposit in AK TP 32 is unparalleled from elsewhere in the village, or in the villages of Whittlebury and Leckhampstead, both subject to the same investigation. All three TPs provide good evidence for short-lived occupation, spanning little more than 100-150 years along this part of the Leckhampstead Road. Significantly, the drop off of material, experienced in AK TPs 34 and 35 suggests that these fell outside the occupied zone. This places the croft boundary between AK TP 33 and 34, backing onto an area which appears to have been cultivated during the medieval period. These TPs have added essential information to our understanding of the medieval form of the village and provides good evidence for the creation of settlement along this axis.

AK TP 32

The Leys

See AK TP 31

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	329	5
1	360	4
2	329	4
2	360	8
2	407	1
2	1000	1
3	329	5
3	360	19
4	330	2
4	360	164
5	360	71

AK TP 33

The Leys

See AK TP 31

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	360	5
2	329	2
2	330	1
2	360	35
3	360	39
4	324	1
4	360	13

AK TP 34

The Leys

See AK TP 31

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
2	329	1
2	360	2
2	407	1
2	1000	1

AK TP 35

The Leys

See AK TP 31

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	1000	1
2	360	2
2	407	1
2	1000	1

AK TP 36

The Leys

It was possible to locate two TPs close to the Leckhampstead Road, within the stable complex. These two TPs were designed to assess the possibility of settlement along the Leckhampstead Road axis, to establish a date for their construction and a date of abandonment

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	329	1
1	330	2
1	360	1
1	429	3
1	1000	1
2	329	8
2	360	4
2	1000	2
2	1001	1
3	329	9
3	330	2
3	360	8
4	324	1

4	329	33
5	330	3
5	360	14

In addition to the series of five TPs dug away from the Leckhampstead Road, AK TP 36 and 37 were located immediately next to the hedge line. Both produced significant quantities of medieval pottery from undisturbed deposits. In both cases, the levels of pottery recovery is large enough to postulate occupation at this point. Critically, two sherds of Early-Middle Saxon handmade wares (AD 400-800) came from AK TP 37. This material has not been recovered elsewhere in the village, although pre-conquest material has been recovered from both Hilberry and the school. A pattern thus appears to be emerging of a very dispersed settlement pattern now subsumed below the modern nucleated village.

AK TP 37

The Leys

See AK TP 36

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	2	2
1	329	1
1	330	3
1	360	4
1	407	2
2	324	4
2	329	5
2	330	9
2	360	20
3	330	16
3	360	48
4	330	5
4	360	7

AK TP 38

3 Daisy Bank Cottages

Another opportunity to investigate the Main Street Axis, this TP was designed to answer the same questions as AK TP 25

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	407	1
1	1000	25
2	329	2
2	360	1
2	1000	51
3	329	4
3	360	5
3	407	7
3	1000	23

Lack of medieval pottery of any quantity from this test pit argues against its location close to medieval occupation and again backs the theory that the current position of the main street has changed and could thus not act as a magnet for medieval settlement as suggested by TPs at The Cottage and in the garden of the Bull and Butcher.

AK TP 39

Hathaways Court, Leckhampstead Road

Located south of the village in a paddock within which faint earthworks suggest ridge and furrow. This was a control TP, designed to lie outside the occupied area, against which others could be assessed.

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	1000	4
2	1000	6

The negative results from this TP provide not insights into medieval Akeley, but reinforce the interpretation of the recovery of medieval pottery as a sign of occupation in other parts of the village.

AK TP 40

Inleys, Church Hill

Inleys lies at the centre of the village, close to the T junction formed by Church Hill and Leckhampstead Road. The garden backs onto the Leys. Church Hill is probably late road (eighteenth century?), but the TP was designed to add more information about the central heart of the village.

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	329	3
1	407	1
1	425	1
1	1000	4
2	329	1
2	360	1
3	1000	2

The assemblage from this TP is reminiscent of those recovered from AK TPs 34 and 35, placing these areas behind the crofts fronting onto the Leckhampstead Road and within the medieval arable fields. It should be noted that recent use of the property as a market garden, involving much manuring (often taken from Hillside Farm in the north of the village) may have resulted in considerable contamination. That all deposits had been recently disturbed undermines any significance placed on the recovered assemblage.

AK TP 41

Rose Cottage, Duck End

Duck End lies to the north of the village. The TP was located in the front garden of the property close to Chapel Lane. Excavation behind the property in 2001 suggested that the field system terminated at some distance from the road. How was this area used in earlier periods. Was it simply waste, or was it the location of medieval buildings?

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	1000	41
2	1000	29
3	1000	45
4	1000	19
5	1000	1
F1	403	1
F1	407	4

F1	1000	3
F2	1002	1
F4	1000	4

The deposits at Rose Cottage have resulted primarily from activity associated with the present house, and involved significant disturbance for the laying of a field drain for instance. The lack of medieval pottery, however, is striking and may well suggest that this part of the village lay outside that of its medieval precursor. A single sherd of Iron Age pottery adds further to our knowledge of prehistoric activity in the area.

AK TP 42

The Piece, Willows Farm

Located as close to Leckhampstead Road, this series of three TPs was designed to establish the extent of occupation along this axis to the east.

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
2	329	2
2	407	3
3	360	1
3	407	2

AK TP 42-44 may be taken together. All produced low levels of medieval pottery from predominately disturbed deposits. All thus look as though they may have lain within the fields of Akeley and outside the zone of occupation.

AK TP 43

The Piece, Willows Farm

See AK TP 42

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
2	329	3
2	360	1
2	1000	1
3	329	2
3	360	1

AK TP 44

The Piece, Willows Farm

See AK TP 42

<i>Spit/Feature</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>
1	407	3
2	407	12
3	329	1
3	360	1
3	407	21

Conclusions

Over 1000 sherds of pottery of all periods were recovered from the 20 TPs excavated in 2002. These are detailed in the table below. Over 60% of the total assemblage is made up of medieval pottery. Very small amounts of Iron Age, Roman and Early Medieval pottery were recovered, and the range of post-medieval fabrics is remarkably small compared with other villages such as Leckhampstead and Whittlebury. Of interest and surprise was the recovery of more sherds of Iron Age date than those of Romano-British date, a trend which appears at odds with TPs excavated in 2001.

<i>Fabric</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>	<i>% total</i>
2	2	0.2
324	10	0.9
329	122	11.3
330	43	4.0
360	512	47.6
403	1	0.1
407	85	7.9
425	1	0.1
429	3	0.3
1000	290	27.0
1001	3	0.3
1002	4	0.4
	1076	

Taking evidence from 2002 together with that from 2001 (44 test pits), the following developmental model for the village may be present:

- Iron Age activity appears to spread over a wide area from Duck End to Manor Farm, although it may have been restricted to the eastern part of the village. Whether it represents settlement or simply agricultural exploitation cannot be answered at present
- Romano-British pottery has been recovered from a number of locations. The main focus of activity appears to be at the back of Duck End and there is evidence to suggest that the northern line of the churchyard enclosure was established at this date.
- Early-Middle Saxon material comes from a single location. Interestingly this lies close to the crossing of the original course of the main street (east of its current line) with the Leckhampstead Road. This may indeed have been the location of early medieval settlement
- Later material, although still pre-conquest suggests activity zones to the north of the churchyard and close to the church. The absence of this material from TPs located between these zones implies an absence of activity and may suggest a loose confederation of farmsteads forming the core of the medieval village
- The village was to expand rapidly in the aftermath of Domesday. Clearly the eastern side of the main street opposite the church was occupied at this date, and expansion took place along the Leckhampstead Road. This was to be abandoned, however, as the village went into retraction in the early fourteenth century, a date based on the homogenous nature of the pottery assemblage.
- Only in the post-medieval period did the line of the main street shift to the west onto its current course, probably to facilitate transport along the main street from Buckingham north, and the cut through Church Hill established, leading to the modern morphology of the village.

