

**Test Pit Results from Wicken (formerly Wyke Hamon and Wyke Dyve), Northamptonshire  
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## Introduction

During July and August 2003, 24 test pits measuring 1 x 1m and excavated to natural were opened in and around Wicken (formerly Wyke Hamon and Wyke Dyve). Whilst this sample size remains small, the recovery of quantities of pottery dating from the Romano-British period (AD43-400) through to the present day, together with the identification of a number of historic features including walls and floor, provides the opportunity to propose a tentative reconstruction of the origins and subsequent development of the two medieval villages. A further 12 test pits were excavated at Dagnall outside the village. These results are complemented by earthwork survey and geophysical survey undertaken in the field immediately south of the church, and the results from systematic fieldwalking in the fields surrounding the village. Other areas of earthworks, notably east of Home Farm, remain to be fully investigated. It should be borne in mind, therefore, that the archaeological research remains unfinished and thus carries the potential to alter the current hypotheses should further areas be opened in the future. It is our considered opinion, however, that this work would add to the detail of the developmental story of the village, but would be unlikely to alter fundamentally the basic picture as it is presented here.

## Megadata

Archaeological research is based on the recovery, analysis and interpretation of physical evidence, lost, discarded or abandoned by past societies. At best archaeological evidence provides a fragmentary record of this earlier activity. Materials were reused and recycled and thus did not enter the record; other artefacts will not have survived deposition, for example objects made of organic matter such as wood or bone if conditions are not appropriate. This partial view of the past is further exaggerated by decisions to investigate some areas and not others, decisions which may be imposed upon the excavator due to current conditions. This is particularly the case when investigating living villages. Those very areas where evidence for past activity is to be sought are those areas which are presently occupied by the houses and gardens of the latest generation of village inhabitants. Valuable evidence will remain buried and inaccessible below these houses, other evidence will have been destroyed in their construction. Access will be granted to some areas of the village and not others. And the need to respect private property dictates the use of a sampling method rather than the investigation of extensive areas. There are, therefore, severe limitations to the archaeological evidence. It is thus important to establish the quality and quantity of the information on which any interpretation will be based. This is the megadata, to adopt modern jargon, the database of information on which the grander broad brush hypotheses are based

The following pottery was recovered from the test pits:

<b>Period</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>No. of Sherds</b>
Romano-British Wares	AD43-400	8
Early Medieval Wares	AD400-1100	12
Medieval Wares	AD1100-1400	466
Late Medieval Wares	AD1400- 1550	4
Post-Medieval Wares	AD1550-1699	89
Modern Wares	AD1700-present	608
<b>Total</b>		<b>1187</b>

This can be further broken down into individual fabric types:

<b>Period</b>	<b>Fabric</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>No. of Sherds (n = 1187)</b>
Romano-British Wares	All	AD43-400	23
Early Medieval Wares	St Neots Type 1	850-1100	2
	Oxford Ware	1075-1300	10
Medieval Wares	Shelly Sandy Ware	1100-1400	33
	Shelly Ware	1100-1400	206
	Sandy Ware	1100-1400	46
	Banbury Ware	1100-1400	2
	Brill/Boarstall Ware	1200-1600	2
	Potterspury Ware	1250-1600	177
Late Medieval Wares	Midland Purple Ware	1450-1600	1

	Cistercian Ware	1470-1550	2
Post-Medieval Wares	German Stoneware	1450-1699	1
	Red Earthenwares	1550+	89
Modern Wares	Misc. 18 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century Wares	18 <sup>th</sup> -present	227

Any analysis of this ceramic material relies on its distribution across the village. Pottery of various periods and individual fabric types were found in the following number of test pits:

<b>Period</b>	<b>Fabric</b>	<b>No. of TPs (n = 24)</b>
<b>Romano-British Wares</b>		<b>2</b>
<b>Early Medieval Wares</b>		<b>2</b>
	St Neots Type 1	2
	Oxford Ware	4
<b>Medieval Wares</b>		<b>22</b>
	Shelly Sandy Ware	8
	Shelly Ware	15
	Sandy Ware	9
	Banbury Ware	2
	Brill/Boarstall Ware	2
	Potterspury Ware	17
<b>Late Medieval Wares</b>		<b>3</b>
	Midland Purple Ware	1
	Cistercian Ware	2
<b>Post-Medieval Wares</b>		<b>13</b>
	German Stoneware	1
	Red Earthenwares	8
<b>Modern Wares</b>		<b>23</b>
	Misc. 18 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century Wares	23

#### Description of Test Pits

The location of each test pit is named after the modern property name or street number. Test pits that were located the open space south of the church are named after the field name appearing on the 1717 estate survey. Each entry begins with the questions each test pit sought to address. A description of the actual results follows.

#### WI TP 1

The Warren

*Two areas of earthworks are preserved within the modern village envelope. The first of these lies to the south of the brook in Wyke Hamon, opposite Home Farm. The second area lies in historic Wyke Dyve, within 100m of and to the south of the church of St John the Evangelist. This is large open space is now under rough pasture, dog-legging around the current 'Manor House', in reality the converted and extended gatehouse of the former Manor which now lies under Pound Close. It is difficult to interpret these earthworks on typological grounds alone. Detailed earthwork survey and a geophysical survey was undertaken to elucidate their original function. In addition a series of six test pits (WI TPs 1-6) was located along the hedge line north of Cross Tree Road, numbered sequentially from east to west, and a further two test pits (WI TPs 7-8) excavated on the northern side of the paddock, numbered from west to east. These keyhole excavations were designed to establish the presence of below-ground structures and to provide dating evidence, in the form of ceramic material, for activity in this part of the village.*

#### WI TP 2

The Warren

*The rationale for locating this test pit follows WI TP 1.*

#### WI TP 3

The Warren

*The rationale for locating this test pit follows WI TP 1.*

WI TP 4  
The Warren

*The rationale for locating this test pit follows WI TP 1.*

WI TP 5  
The Warren

*The rationale for locating this test pit follows WI TP 1.*

WI TP 6  
The Warren

*The rationale for locating this test pit follows WI TP 1.*

WI TP 7  
The Warren

*The rationale for locating this test pit follows WI TP 1.*

WI TP 8  
The Warren

*The rationale for locating this test pit follows WI TP 1.*

WI TP 9  
Shillingworth Cottage, Leckhampstead Road

*Shillingworth Cottage stands at the corner of Cross Tree Road and Leckhampstead Road. The drive to the Old Rectory represents an original continuation of the main village street westwards. The 1717 map marks the position of a row of crofts located to the south of this extension, although these appear to be unoccupied at that date. WI TP 9 was located close to the modern road in the south-eastern corner of the modern plot. The test pit was designed largely to establish the nature of any past activity in this area, though the quantities of pottery found in excavation, or in the recovery of any structural remains.*

WI TP 10  
Glebe Cottage, Leckhampstead Road

*There appear to have been significant changes to the property boundaries south of the Leckhampstead Road since 1838. At this date, the back of the homestead plots appears to run parallel with the current road axis. Today, by contrast, the boundary arcs further south of the road. Glebe Cottage fronts the Leckhampstead Road in at the northern end of this part of Wyke Hamon. Within its paddock, various terraces and other features are visible as earthworks. The first test pit sought to establish whether these earthworks did indeed relate to underground structures, in particular a roughly circular mound. WI TP 12 was located 15m north of this mound on a shallow terrace, and like its near neighbour sought to establish the presence of any structure and to provide dating evidence for any activity here.*

WI TP 11  
The Reading Room, 50 Cross Tree Road

*Both the modern topography of the village and its depiction in the early eighteenth century suggest that Cross Tree Road, formerly Kings Street, was the primary village street for Wyke Dyve, along both sides of which were located regular crofts, probably of medieval date. To the south, these crofts appear to share common dimensions, possibly indicating that they had been laid out in a single action and were occupied by people of similar status (virgate or half-virgate holders?). WI TP 11 as located in the easternmost of the five regular crofts. Ceramic evidence, discarded from any nearby domestic building and spread or buried in the garden might provide terminal dates for the use of these plots.*

WI TP 12

Glebe Cottage, Leckhampstead Road

*The rationale for locating this test pit follows that for WI TP 10.*

WI TP 13

Park Cottage, Wicken Park Road

*Park Cottage lies east beyond the regular crofts depicted on the 1838 Tithe Map. However, this map makes clear that this part of the village lay outside the area of field. Indeed, whilst not regular in shape, the plot within which the new house now lies is shown to contain a building in its northernmost corner in the nineteenth century. WI TP 13 thus sought to establish the nature of occupation here and to provide dates for this use. Did the crofts develop over time along Cross Tree Road, beginning at the historic core close to the church, were added to over time, only to reach the eastern limits of the modern village at the end of a long period of expansion? Or were all the crofts laid out in a single phase and occupied contemporaneously?*

WI TP 14

8 Deanshanger Road

*Deanshanger Road seems to have been an integral part of the road pattern of Wyke Dyve in 1717. Whether this represents an earlier arrangement, however, is unclear. It may be that Deanshanger Road between Cross Tree Road and St John's Road, at least, is a late addition. In order to establish this, test pits along this length of road might provide the evidence for activity in this zone. Here, the presence or absence of ceramic evidence would be crucial.*

WI TP 15

12 Deanshanger Road

*The rationale for the location of this test pit follow that for WI TP 14. However, the post-medieval history of this area, used as a stone quarry, must be borne in mind. The test pit was thus located away from most disturbed parts of the garden.*

WI TP 16

5 Pound Close

*Pound Close has been constructed on the site of Manor Farm as depicted on the 1838 Tithe Map. The circumstantial evidence and the juxtaposition of this complex with the church is strongly indicative of the fact that this was the site of the manor of Wyke Dyve. Test pits thus sought both the physical evidence for structures and ceramic evidence prove or contradict this hypothesis. In examining any finds, therefore, not only would quantity be a significant factor, but their quality too. As a high-status site, the artefacts and vessels used at the manor house might be distinguishable from those used by the peasantry.*

WI TP 17

Halcyon, 3 Pound Close

*The rationale for locating this test pit follow that for WI TP 16.*

WI TP 18

Wykeleys, Leckhampstead Road

*Wykeleys lies on the northern side of the Leckhampstead road south-west of Home Farm. The property itself is clearly of some antiquity and the identification internally of the remains of a cruck frame suggest that it may have late medieval origins. Lying to the north-east of the modern property is the location of the former church of St James which served the parish and village of Wyke Hamon before its unification with Wyke Dyve in 1587. The excavation of a test pit here, thus served two purposes: to investigate the potential historic core of Wyke Hamon; and to reveal ceramic evidence that might help to establish a date for the construction of buildings on this side of the Leckhampstead Road..*

WI TP 19

22 Cross Tree Road

*The rationale for locating this test pits follows WI TP 11. WI TP 19 was located immediately to the west of the last regular croft south of Cross Tree Road as depicted on the Tithe Map of 1838.*

WI TP 20  
5 Cross Tree Road

*Just as regular crofts appear on the Tithe Map of 1838 south of Cross Tree road, a similar arrangement can be detected on the northern side of the road also. The rationale for locating this test pit, and WI TP 21, thus follows that for WI TP 11, an attempt to establish a probable date for the planning of this part of Wyke Dyve. If numbered from the west, WI TP 20 lies towards the front of the third regular croft, while WI TP 21 lies towards the back of the second croft. The coupling of these test pits, thus affords the opportunity to contrast assemblages deriving from two parcels of land formerly in different ownership or occupancy.*

Deposits within this test can all be dated to the nineteenth century. The only evidence for earlier activity came in the form of a single sherd of Sandy Ware. This is poor return for a test pit located towards the front of the plot and in such close proximity to the current house, itself of some age. It is probable that areas further away from the house might have been less affected by landscaping and terracing.

WI TP 21  
5 Cross Tree Road

*The rationale for locating this test pit follows WI TP 20.*

There had been no great build-up of deposits here, natural limestone bedrock encountered at 350mm below the modern ground level. Despite this, the test pit produced six sherds of Potterspurry Ware and a single sherd of Sandy Shelly Ware. This suggests that the lower layers date from the mid-thirteenth century. A clear indicator of occupation is often the number of sherds recovered: the larger the number of sherds, the more confident one can be that the deposits are occupational. In this instance, however, the number of sherds falls between that that might be expected from a settlement zone (generally higher than six) and that from an agricultural or other zone (generally lower than six). On the basis of the cartographic evidence, which places this test pit with a regular croft, it might be justifiably argued that in this assemblage has indeed derived from a domestic house within the croft, but that the particular part of its garden had received little by way of composting, nor had it been used as a zone within which rubbish pits had been dug.

WI TP 22  
44 Cross Tree Road

*The rationale of locating this test pit follows WI TP 11. If numbered from the west, this test pit was located halfway back within the fifth of the regular crofts towards the western limit of the plot.*

The upper deposits of this test pit had been severely disturbed by a Victorian dump, which accounts for the presence of so much nineteenth-century material. Despite this, the test pit contained a sizeable and valuable medieval pottery assemblage deriving from deposits which had not been affected by later activity. The total assemblage comprised 15 sherds of Potterspurry Ware; 7 sherds of Sandy Ware; 6 sherds of Shelly Ware; and a single sherd of Sandy Shelly Ware. The quantity of pottery indicates that this plot was occupied from the twelfth century through to the fourteenth century. Such findings are further borne out by the results from WI TPs 23 and 24 located within the same historic property boundary.

WI TP 23  
46 Cross Tree Road

*The rationale for locating this test pit follows WI TP 11. Two test pits were dug in this modern property. Both lies within the fifth regular croft depicted on the 1838 Tithe Map.*

The compact nature of the clay encountered in this test pit meant that it was impossible to excavate the whole area down to natural. Colluvium was encountered, however, in the lower strata at 620mm. Whilst the upper layers had all been subject to recent disturbance, the lower levels appear to have remained untouched. Thus from 420mm below the modern ground surface the deposits contained exclusively medieval pottery. The assemblage comprised a single sherd of sandy shelly ware, three sherds of Potterspurry Ware and seven sherds of Shelly Coarseware. Complementary to these non-disturbed deposits, those above contained a further one sherd of Shelly Coarseware and eight sherds of Potterspurry

Ware. That Shelly Coarseware was found isolated below layers containing Potterspury Ware is a clear indication of a pre-1250 origin for activity here, and more probably should be dated inside the twelfth century. The dominance of Potterspury Ware, however, indicates that the main occupation of the site – for the quantity of pottery is synonymous with settlement rather than any other activity – dates to the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A single residual sherd of Romano-British pottery was found in the upper layers.

WI TP 24  
46 Cross Tree Road

*The rationale for locating this test pit follows WI TP 23.*

All deposits were chronologically mixed and no *in-situ* features were identified. However, between 370 and 470mm a layer of limestone rubble and brick might be associated with the visible remains of a small stone building close to the test pit. This rubble contained mid-sixteenth century sherds together with a single sherd of Sandy Shelly Ware. The deposits above this spread were equally disturbed but the presence of a single sherd of Shelly Coarseware points to activity around the twelfth century. The absence of Potterspury Ware differentiates the results of this test pit from WI TP 23, however, there remains the possibility that ground movement in advance of the construction of what appears to be a post-medieval building may have removed the relevant deposits, leaving only those dating to the twelfth century.