

Test pit excavation within currently occupied rural settlements – results of the University of Cambridge CORS project in 2012

By Carenza Lewis¹

2012 saw the eighth year of test pit excavation within currently occupied rural settlements (CORS) in East Anglia, carried out under the supervision of Access Cambridge Archaeology (ACA) directed by Dr Carenza Lewis at the University of Cambridge. As in previous years, this project involves members of the public in the academic archaeological investigation of currently occupied rural settlements (CORS) with the aim of advancing knowledge and understanding of the historic development of non-deserted rural settlements, while inspiring members of the public and raising academic aspirations among teenage school pupils (Lewis 2007a). Short summaries of the results of the University of Cambridge CORS excavations are published annually in *Medieval Settlement Research* (Lewis 2005; 2006; 2007b; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2012), and online as they become available (at <http://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/aca/excavationreports.html>). The ACA website includes pottery reports and maps showing the distribution of pottery for every period from the prehistoric to the modern era, for every settlement where test pit excavations have been carried out by ACA since 2005. Anyone wishing to explore the summaries in this paper further is advised to visit the website and read the text in conjunction with the maps.

2012

In 2012, test pit excavation was carried out under ACA direction within 15 parishes in eastern England (Fig. 1). Eight of these were new additions to the ACA programme, with work in the others building on that carried out and reported in *Medieval Settlement Research* in earlier years. Some communities where test pitting programme has taken place in previous years but which were not included in the 2012 programme may be returned to in the future.

2012 was something of a transition year for the University of Cambridge CORS project, as new opportunities arose for members of the public of all ages to become involved in the test pit digging programme while at the same time, the closure of Aimhigher by the coalition government reduced opportunities for secondary school pupils to do so via the HEFA (Higher Education Field Academy) programme. Happily, after a period of some uncertainty, in February 2102 ACA learned its bid to the Cambridge Admissions Office for help to run the HEFA programme for three years from 2012–15 had been successful.

A major addition to ACA's programme of community test pit excavations in 2012 was the *On Landguard Point* project (Lewis 2013). This was an arts project funded

by the Arts Council England as part of the Cultural Olympiad for the London 2012 Olympic Games. An archaeological element within *On Landguard Point* was called 'Dig and Sow' and involved hundreds of members of the public in the excavation of archaeological test pits in one of six communities in the eastern region counties: Ashwell (Hertfordshire, 2011), Clavering (Essex, 2012), Potton (Bedfordshire, 2012), Peakirk (Cambridgeshire, 2012), Paston (Norfolk, 2012) and Ipswich (Suffolk, 2011). Other ACA community test pit excavations were funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund via its *Managing a Masterpiece* programme in Bures Hamlet, Essex and Nayland, Suffolk; and its *Time Detectives* project in Swaffham Bulbeck, Cambridgeshire.

Overall 243 test pits under ACA supervision were excavated in CORS in 2012. Summaries of the results of the excavations in 2012 are presented below. Sites are listed in alphabetical order by county and then by parish. Short introductions to settlement in each community are included when reporting on that place for the first time. In the case of those places visited by the HEFA CORS programme and reported on previously, the account presented here provides an update to earlier reports.

Data on pottery finds from the test pits are submitted by ACA each year to HERs in each county. Archive reports are prepared for each settlement each year which include the finds from each test pit. Conclusions and an overall summary are added when the decision is made that no further test pitting will be carried out in that settlement. These reports will constitute the basis for fuller formal publication which will take place at a later stage in the project. The aims and methods of the HEFA CORS project have been outlined elsewhere (Lewis 2007b; <http://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/aca/cors.html>).

Potton, Bedfordshire (NGR TL 225495)

The small town of Potton is situated close to the eastern Bedfordshire border with Cambridgeshire, c. 17 km east of Bedford and 6 km north east of Biggleswade. Potton lies on the crossroads of the A1040 between Biggleswade and St Ives and the B1042 between Sandy and Croydon on the A1198. The historic town of Sandy lies c. 6km to the west.

Potton today is a small market town, the historic core of which displays a rectilinear layout centred on a square, planned market place. The right to hold a market was established before the 13th century (VCH 1908). A mix of building types are noted from the town, ranging from 15th and 16th century in date through to the modern day. In 1783 a fire destroyed much of the town centre, and many fine Georgian buildings which were subsequently erected survive to this day. Potton has seen considerable expansion in the 20th century, especially north and west of the market square. A church is documented at

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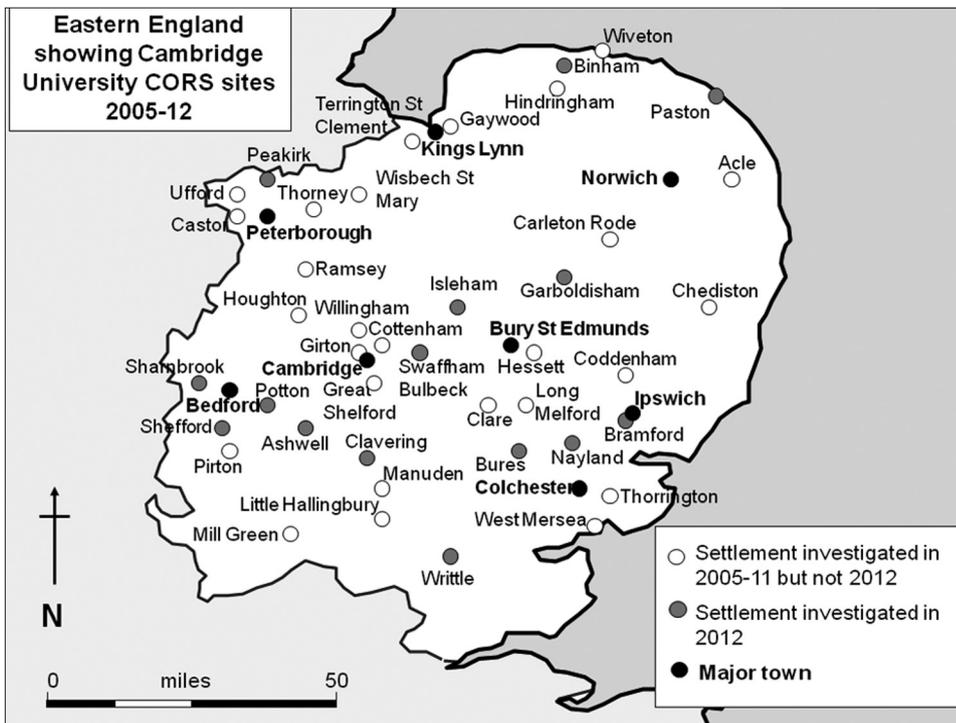


Figure 1 Map of Eastern England showing the locations of the CORS investigated by the HEFA project in East Anglia in 2012

Potton in 1094, with the chancel of the existing building dating to the 13th century. This building is sited more than 400m from the market place. By 1107 the presence of a separate chapel of ease in Potton suggests that the church was some way out of town at that date.

Medieval land holdings at Potton was divided between four manors. Potton Regis was the largest, Potton Much Manured and Potton Burdetts were created by dividing the main manor in 1237, and Potton Rectory originated from a grant made about 1094 (VCH 1908). All manors were united under single ownership by the early 17th century.

28 test pits were excavated in Potton over a single day on the 26th May 2012 (Fig. 2) funded by Arts Council England as part of the *On Languard Point* 'Dig and Sow' project. The majority of the pits were excavated in residential gardens, but pits were also dug in allotments, on school playing fields and on public open grassed areas. Excavations were undertaken by residents of Potton, members of the Potton History Group and other members of the public.

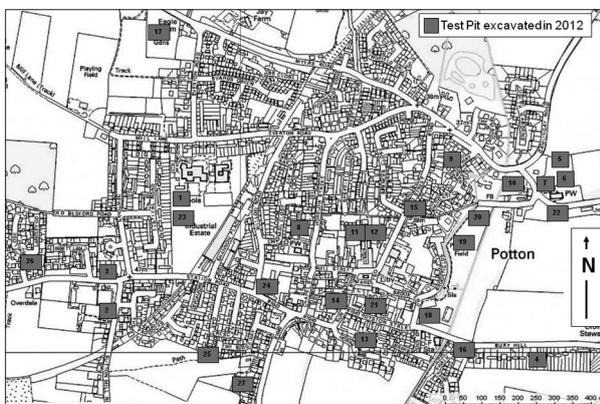


Figure 2 Potton, Bedfordshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

The test pit excavations revealed a distinct lack of early material, with no pottery of prehistoric, Roman or Anglo-Saxon date recovered from any of the excavated pits. This may be due at least in part to not all of the pits being excavated to natural. Pottery of high medieval date (mid 11th–mid 14th century) was recorded from a number of test pits particularly around the central planned market place (POT/12/12, POT/12/11, POT/12/8, POT/12/24, POT/12/13 and POT/12/21), near the river (POT/12/19 and POT/12/10) and around the church (POT/12/5). None produced particularly large quantities of sherds of this date. Even fewer sherds were found on the possible southern and western fringes of the medieval town (POT/12/24, POT/12/21 and POT/12/13), suggesting that at this time these areas were predominantly utilised for agriculture. It seems likely that settlement in Potton in the medieval period was focussed on at least two separate sites. One of these was evidently around the market place, presumably related to the Potton Regis holding whose Latimer lord held the rights to the market in the 13th century. Another settlement focus is indicated near the church, possibly related to the Potton Rectory holding which is documented from the 11th century. The location of any settlement which might have been associated with the intriguingly named Potton Much Manured holding is not certain, but it would be interesting to see if this could be identified by archaeological field-walking. The area around Home Farm in the south of the present town produced a small number of high and late medieval sherds from test pits in 2012 which may indicate settlement of some sort associated with one of the other manors, while test pit excavations in the south-west of the present town (west of the industrial estate north of Station Road) produced a small number of late medieval sherds which may indicate intensive manuring or possibly settlement in the general area, although probably not in the immediate vicinity.

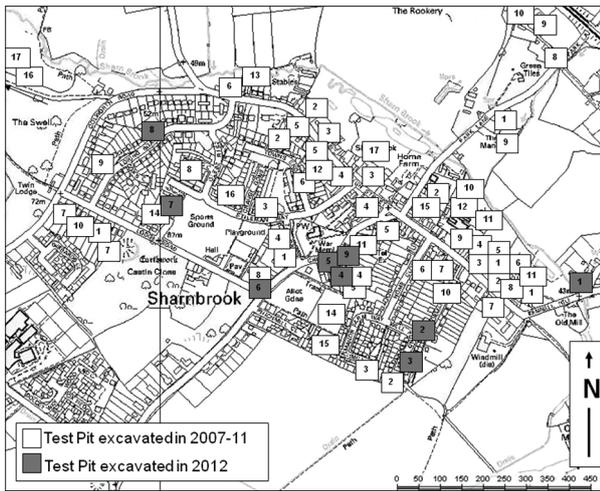


Figure 3 Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire (NGR SP 995595)

Nine test pits were excavated in Sharnbrook in 2012 (Fig. 3), bringing the total to date to 68. The 2012 pits were sited across the village, favouring the southern side of the present settlement where fewer test pits had previously been excavated.

Very little pottery was found from any of the test pits excavated in Sharnbrook in 2012. Pottery of Roman date was recovered from SHA/12/02 and SHA/12/03, both from gardens within a modern housing estate adjacent to arable fields on the south-east of the present village. These complemented finds of the same date in 2011, and it now seems clear that there is a Romano-British site of some sort in this area. SHA/12/03 also produced a large sherd of Iron Age pottery, as did one of the pits in this same area in 2011, suggesting that a LPRIA/RB settlement is likely to have been present near here. A very small sherd (1g) of Romano-British greyware was also produced from SHA/12/07, near Castle Close, but such a small, heavily abraded sherd is unlikely to indicate intensive activity in the vicinity at this date.

SHA/12/02 and SHA/12/03 were the only pits producing any pottery of medieval date. The small numbers of sherds is suggestive of manured arable rather than settlement in the immediate vicinity.

Shefford, Bedfordshire (TL 142391)

Shefford in Bedfordshire lies in the parish of Campton cum Shefford which contains the village of Campton as well as the market town of Shefford, which is arranged around the junction of the Bedford to Hitchin Road with the Ampthill Road/High Street, in the lowest-lying part of the parish. Shefford High Street takes the form of a wide linear market place, which lies at right angles to the Northbridge and Southbridge roads which run along the valley of the River Flit. The south end of Northbridge Street is also wide, suggesting use of this also for market trading. It is plausible that the area between this and Duck Lane to its west was formerly part of a larger rectangular open market place. The earliest standing buildings in Shefford date to the 16th century but generally the town's buildings are considered 'in no way

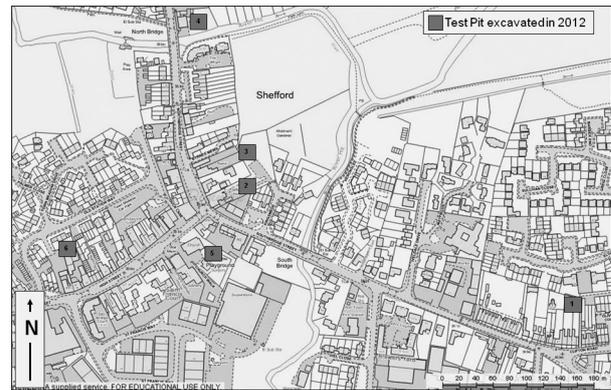


Figure 4 Shefford, Bedfordshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

remarkable' (VCH 1908). The parish church is located on the south side of the High Street and was until 1812 a chapel of ease for Campton Church. Shefford Church has been extensively rebuilt in 19th century. The oldest surviving structural element is the tower which dates to the first half of the fifteenth century. Windows in the nave are of 13th century style and may or may not imitate 13th century originals.

Despite its apparent insignificance as a minor holding within a larger estate lacking its own church, Shefford had the right to hold a market from at least 1225 (VCH 1908). At this time, Shefford's market was of sufficient size to be considered a threat to that at Bedford, although these allegations were successfully refuted on investigation. The market at Shefford may have benefited from the presence nearby of Chicksands Priory, which was part of the same estate in Domesday Book.

Six test pits were excavated in Shefford in 2012 (Fig. 4). With such a small number of pits excavated it is impossible to make any but the most superficial observations. In particular, it is not possible to draw any conclusions based on negative evidence, such as the absence of pottery of Anglo-Saxon date. The recovery of a single small (4g) sherd of Romano-British pottery from SHE/12/02 may indicate some sort of contemporary activity in the vicinity, although this was residual in a high medieval deposit.

It is of more interest to note that pottery of high medieval date was recovered from POT/12/02 and POT/12/06, both from plots which face onto the wide market places of the High Street and the southern end of Northbridge Street. POT/12/02 in particular produced considerable quantities (24 sherds) of high medieval pottery clearly indicative of settlement in the immediate vicinity. This pit also produced several sherds of later medieval pottery, unlike POT/12/06 which yielded no material of this date.

Isleham, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 640737)

Eleven test pits were excavated in Isleham in 2011 (Fig. 5) by pupils from the nearby secondary school in Mildenhall as part of their History GCSE, bringing the total number of pits excavated here to 22. Seven of the pits excavated in 2012 were sited in the east of the present village, where fewer pits had previously been excavated, with ISL/12/05, ISL/12/06, ISL/12/07 and ISL/12/08 all

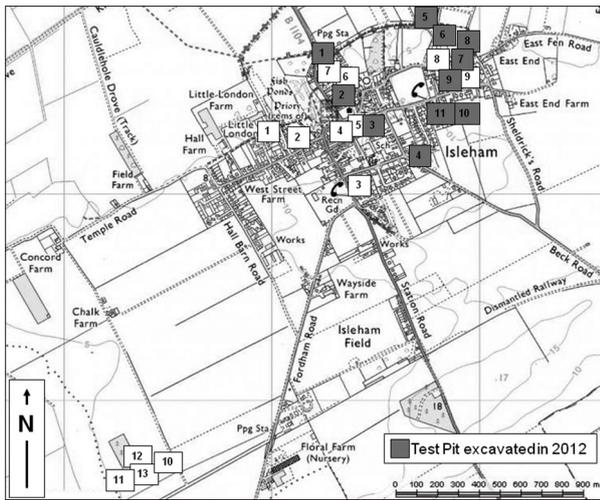


Figure 5 Isleham, Cambridgeshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

near the hythe identified by Sue Oosthuizen (Oosthuizen 1995).

Little material of identifiably early date was found, with no Romano-British or Anglo-Saxon pottery recovered. This may be explained by the fact that none of the 2012 pits were in the Little London area where prehistoric and Roman pottery was found in test pits in 2011 (Lewis 2012). The 2012 pits also produced relatively little medieval material, with ISL/12/08 and ISL/12/10 the only ones to yield more than a single sherd of high medieval pottery. Even these produced just three and two sherds respectively, not enough to infer settlement in the immediate vicinity. Rather unusually, test pits ISL/12/01 and ISL/12/10 both produced more pottery dating to the later medieval than to the high medieval, although numbers of sherds of this date are also low. Overall, the picture which is emerging of medieval settlement at Isleham seems to be one in which activity in the late Anglo-Saxon period is restricted in extent, focussed in the area north of the church closer to one of the hythes, with activity in the high medieval period thin around the church but more intensive in the area of the hythes on the north side of the present village, and also in East End. In later medieval period this general pattern continues, but the settlement seems to thin out into three discrete separate foci, one at East End, one near the hythe north of the church and one in Little London.

Peakirk, Cambridgeshire (NGR TF 169066)

The village of Peakirk is situated in north-west Cambridgeshire close to the border with Lincolnshire, 4km south of Market Deeping, 8km north of Peterborough City and 12km east of Stamford (Fig. 6). Peakirk lies on the B1443 between Glinton and Newborough, with the A15 to the west and fenland to the east.

The modern village of Peakirk is broadly linear in layout along a street roughly parallel with the present path of the Folly River dyke, which meets with the River Welland just to the NE of the village. While both these rivers have been straightened and canalised in recent times, the positioning of Peakirk village historically

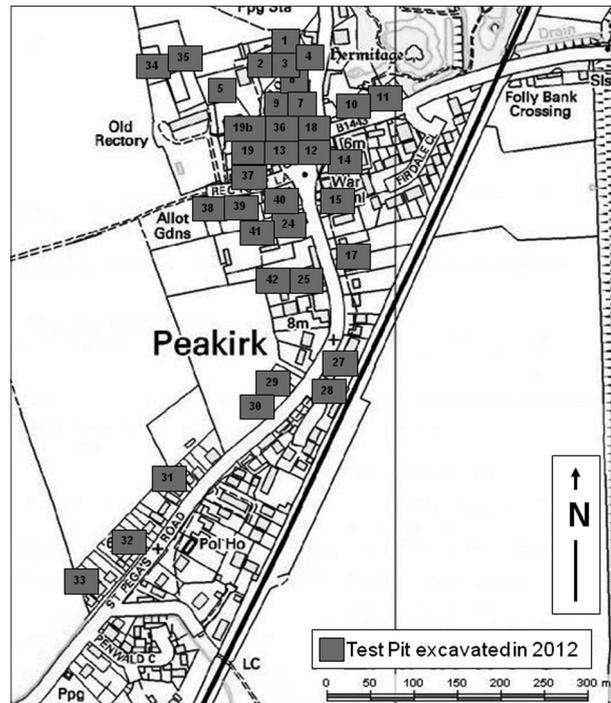


Figure 6 Peakirk, Cambridgeshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

reflects the line of Car Dyke, a Roman canal of late 1st or early 2nd century AD date. This ran for c.140km along the western edge of the fens between Waterbeach on the River Cam and Washingborough on the River Witham (a few miles south of Lincoln). Peakirk lies inside the apex of a former bend in Car Dyke, to the south and west of the dyke on land protected from flooding (PSPCC 2010).

In Peakirk today there is a single major junction at the centre of the town, at the meeting of three roads linking Peakirk with Glinton to the west, Newborough/Thorney to the east and Market Deeping to the north. The heart of Peakirk today falls in this area, around Rectory Lane which formerly continued as a direct pathway to Glinton, and Chestnut Close where the Church of St Pega and now stands. This area also includes a small green with a stone-built war memorial, and the larger Chestnut Green, located beside the junction. The existing church was mostly built during the 12th century AD.

The name Peakirk derives from 'Pegas's church' (formerly *at Pegecyrcan* in 1016 and *Paycherch* at least until 1249), and is the reputed home of St. Pega, a local saint reputed to have founded a church there in the 8th century AD (Jones 2010).

27 pits were dug as part of the 'Dig and Sow' project in Peakirk in April, with nine more dug in July as part of a HEFA course, bringing the total to 36 (Fig. 6). The majority of the pits were excavated in residential gardens, but pits were also dug on the village green in the centre of the village.

The pottery data from the 2012 test pitting shows a clear spike in activity during the Roman period, clearly associated with the Car Dyke: 14 of the pits produced pottery of Roman date, more than a third of the total excavated. Virtually all of the test pits near the church produced Romano-British material, with further

Romano-British sherds found along the approximate line of the Car Dyke through the village. The greatest numbers of sherds came from PAS/12/25, PAS/1224 and PAS/1219b, located in a line of properties to the west of St Pega's Road. Together with the Roman-era finds already reported from Peakirk (one Roman burial urn uncovered somewhere near the village; a concentration of Romano-British pottery, rubbish pits, amphora and oyster shells recovered from the Rectory garden in 1919; and a Roman field system identified from crop marks using aerial photography), these new pottery assemblages provide convincing evidence of settlement in the vicinity of St Pega's church and Rectory Lane during the Roman period. This may have been a village or possibly a rural villa complex.

Despite historical hints of habitation at St Pega's church in the 8th century, no pottery dating to this period was found in any of the pits in 2012. It is possible that any occupation associated with this church was of very limited extent, and may have been slighted during Danish raiding in the 9th century: with good waterborne connections to the North Sea, any establishment at Peakirk would have been particularly vulnerable.

In contrast, 15 of the test pits produced late Anglo-Saxon pottery (AD c. 850–1100), indicative of a sudden increase in activity over a large part of the modern village in this area. This may derive from settlement around a 10th century re-establishment of St Pega's church, as happened with many pre-9th century religious foundations destroyed by Danish or Viking raiding. But the overall impression is of a new settlement clustered around the village green at Chestnut Close, the centre of the modern village: in this area, PEA/12/07 produced especially large quantities of late Saxon sherds.

The high medieval period sees a continuation of the clustered nucleation around the present village green near the church, with some more intermittent settlement to the south suggested by high medieval pottery from pits in gardens along St Pega's Road. There is little indication of any later medieval contraction, with nearly as many pits producing pottery of this date as for the high medieval period. It does seem, however, that the area nearest the Hermitage, in the very north of the present village, sees some marked diminution in the intensity of activity.

Swaffham Bulbeck, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 555625)

Swaffham Bulbeck is today a large bi-focal nucleated village lying on the edge of the Fens about 10km north-east of Cambridge. It is divided into two parts, with a southernmost linear row settlement near the parish church of St Mary primarily arranged either side of the north-south orientated High Street. Quarry Road extends east from the High Street and, a little to the north, Station Road runs north-west towards the fen edge. The High Street runs approximately parallel with the Gutter Bridge Water, a stream or lode possibly first cut in the Roman period which would have provided water-borne access to the settlement from the Cambridgeshire Fens. At its northern end beyond Station Road, the High Street (at this point called Green Bank Road) forms a dog-leg around an area of earthworks including at least one

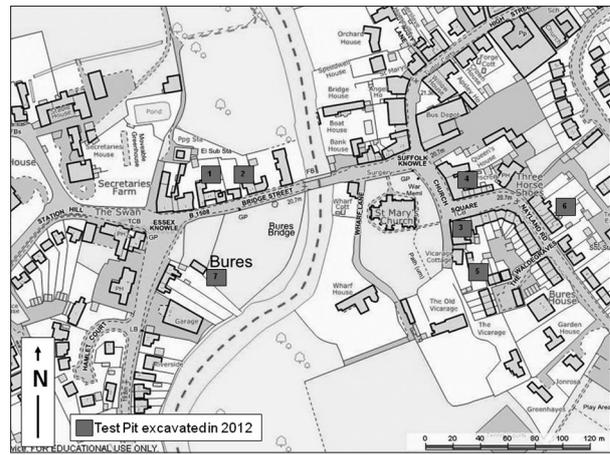


Figure 7 Swaffham Bulbeck, Cambridgeshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

moat: the street appears to be avoiding this complex by diverting at this point.

The second, northerly part of Swaffham Bulbeck is today called Commercial End and lies about 600m north of the parish church. Before the late 19th century this part of the village was called Newnham End, a name which is first recorded in the 14th century (VCH 2002). This part of the settlement lies closer to the Gutter Bridge Water, which would have facilitated trade. The medieval settlement was surrounded by open arable fields to the south and east, and by fenland mostly given over to rough grazing to the north and west, where the land drops sharply in level. A dispersed scatter of outlying farms and cottages may never have accommodated more than a very small percentage of the population of the parish (VCH 2002).

10 test pits were excavated in Swaffham Bulbeck in 2012 (Fig. 7), funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund 'Time Detectives' project carried out in collaboration with local charity Red2Green, who are based in the village. Red2Green provide support for adults affected by autism, and the key aim of the excavations was to provide an opportunity for pupils from Swaffham Bulbeck primary school and nearby Soham Village College secondary school to work with people attending Red2Green to enable everyone to develop new skills and for the pupils to develop a greater understanding of autism through working alongside people affected by it (Lewis and Muir, in preparation). Five of the 2012 pits were sited around the church, one along Station Road, three in Commercial End and one in an area of predominantly modern housing east of Green Bank Road.

Despite the small number of pits excavated to date, some interesting observations can be made. The earliest datable find was a sherd of flint-tempered pottery of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age date (800–500 BC), from SBU/12/10, c. 100m east of the present church. This pit also produced the only material of Roman date recovered from the 2012 excavations, a small sherd weighing just 2g. On present evidence, it does not seem likely that a Romano-British settlement was present in the area of the excavations to date.

It does seem clear, however, that a nucleated settlement was in existence around the site of the present church

post-medieval pottery, with glazed red earthenwares dominating the assemblages, although several pits also produced a range of less utilitarian wares imported from Staffordshire and Germany.

Clavering, Essex (NGR TL 475315)

The village of Clavering is situated close to the north western Essex border with Hertfordshire, 11km north of Bishops Stortford and 26km south of Cambridge. Clavering lies on the B1038 between Newport and Buntingford, between the A10 to the west, the A120 to the south and the M11 to the east.

Settlement in the parish of Clavering today is highly dispersed, with seven 'greens' (Hill Green, Stickling Green, Starlings Green, Roast Green, Sheepcote Green, Birds Green and Deers Green) and three 'ends' (Mill End, Ford End and Further Ford End) scattered through the parish. There are also several isolated manor houses, farms and other houses scattered across the parish, several lying on or adjacent to moats (RCHME 1916). The largest area of settlement is Clavering itself, which takes the form of a linear settlement now nearly 2km long, following the route of the B1038 (Pelham Road/Clatterbury Lane). The western end of this village is mostly arranged either side of a small stream valley which the road follows, but at its eastern end the road and its flanking settlement rises up out of the valley as it runs into Hill Green (the latter may formerly have been a separate settlement.) The core of Clavering village today is at Church End, towards the western end of the present village, centred on the church and nearby 'castle' moated site, immediately west of Middle Street and the point where two small stream valleys meet. Houses east and west of Middle Street are set back from the north-south orientated road and this area may formerly have been a market place. Clavering has experienced some expansion, particularly from the 20th century onwards with many new houses infilling the linear settlement and clustered on a recent estate at Colehills.

29 test pits were excavated over a single day in Clavering in 2012, funded by The Arts Council England as part of *On Landguard Point* (Fig. 9). The majority of the pits were excavated in residential gardens, but pits were also dug in fields and on school playing fields.

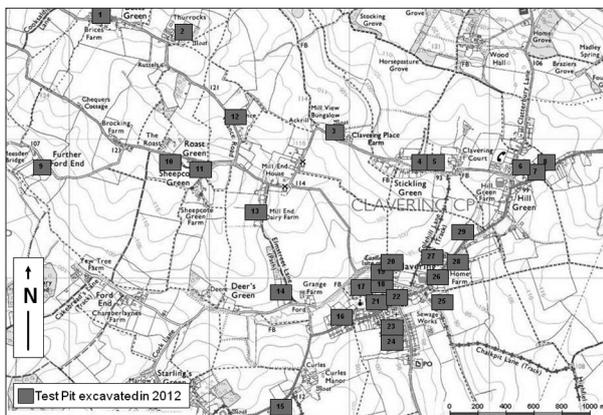


Figure 9 Clavering, Essex, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

Excavations were undertaken by residents of Clavering with their friends and families, members of the Clavering Landscape History Group and other members of the public, with Access Cambridge Archaeology providing on-site instruction and supervision.

The test pit excavations showed that the landscape around Clavering appears to have been extensively but lightly used by humans in the prehistoric period, with activity perhaps focussing more on the valley in the Roman period. No evidence at all was found dating to the Anglo-Saxon period, even from around the area close to the site of the supposed Anglo-Saxon castle mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for.

By way of contrast, the high medieval period (11th–14th century) appears to have seen an explosion of settlement across the landscape of Clavering. Pottery from the test pits indicates appears that this was the time when the settlement pattern as it is today was established. A small nucleated village is indicated around the core formed by the church and manor, surrounded by numerous even smaller dispersed settlements scattered along lanes throughout the parish. Many of these are named as 'greens' or 'ends' while others are likely to have comprised little more than single homesteads. A significant number of these sites are complimented by moats. This energetic expansion of settlement in the 11th–14th centuries saw the volume of pottery recovered from across the parish of Clavering climb from zero in the Anglo-Saxon period to above average for the eastern region in the high medieval period.

This process of high medieval settlement expansion was abruptly arrested in the later medieval period, which saw the dispersed settlement pattern particularly severely scaled back, with most sites outside the village producing no pottery of later medieval date (mid 14th–mid 16th century) at all. The nucleated settlement around the church seems however to have fared much better with little sign of contraction. Recovery in the wider dispersed settlement landscape was not established until after the end of the medieval period. However, when this did occur, the dispersed character of the settlement pattern which the test pit excavations showed to have existed in the high medieval period persisted: all but one of the test pits produced pottery of 16th–18th century date. The settlement pattern remains largely dispersed today, despite 20th century development around the valley-bottom settlement village and string development along roads out of it which have creating a large village at the centre of the parish.

Writtle, Essex (NGR TL 675065)

13 test pits were excavated in Writtle in 2012 (Fig. 10), bringing the total to 36. Excavation in 2012 targeted sites in the west of the present village and the area around Oxney Green, where no test pit excavation had previously been carried out.

Two pits, WRI/12/07 and WRI/12/08, sited close together near Bulimers Farm both produced pottery of Roman date, suggesting that settlement of some sort is likely to have been present nearby. No pottery of Anglo-Saxon date was found in any of the 2012 test pits, suggesting it is unlikely that this area was used for settlement at this time. It thus remains the case that

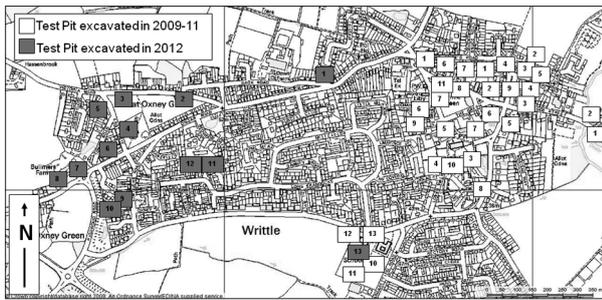


Figure 10 Writtle, Essex, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

just two of the 36 pits excavated in Writtle to date have together produced just three sherds of pottery of this date, all dating to the later Anglo-Saxon period.

Only two pits excavated in 2012 produced pottery of high medieval date, and in each case only a single sherd was recovered. Although the sherd from WRI/12/07 was large (20g), these finds are nonetheless more likely to indicate that this area was used for arable fields which were being manured in the high medieval period, rather than for settlement. Neither of these sites produced any late medieval pottery, possibly indicating that manuring was no longer being carried out after the 14th century, but interestingly one site, WRI/12/12, in the ground of Longmeads house (dating to the 1880s), which produced no earlier material yielded five sherds of late medieval pottery, from an apparently undisturbed deposit 30cm below the surface. This is enough to suggest the presence of settlement of some sort in the immediate vicinity, perhaps a newly established farm or cottage, as undisturbed natural was encountered immediately below the late medieval deposit.

Six of the 13 pits excavated in 2012 produced post-medieval pottery, suggesting that this was the period when settlement developed around Oxney Green. These pits (WRI/12/5, WRI/12/7, WRI/12/8, WRI/12/9 and WRI/12/12) are not particularly tightly clustered around the present green, with others closer to it not producing pottery of this date, suggesting that if the post-medieval settlement was arranged along the margins of the green, as might be expected, the medieval green may then have been larger than is the case today.

Ashwell, Hertfordshire (NGR TL 265395)

A total of 17 test pits were excavated in Ashwell in 2012 (Fig. 11), five during a HEFA in May and 12 as a community excavation in September, with local residents keen to carry on the excavation programme in their village which started with the *On Landguard Point* Cultural Olympiad ‘Dig and Sow’ project in 2011 (Lewis 2012). The 2012 excavations brought the total number of pits excavated in Ashwell to 50, a very creditable achievement over a period of little more than 12 months.

Four of the pits excavated in 2012 produced Romano-British pottery, but only ASH/12/06 did so in quantities likely to indicate settlement in the vicinity. As in 2011, none of the excavated pits produced any pottery of Anglo-Saxon date. Given the textual evidence indicating

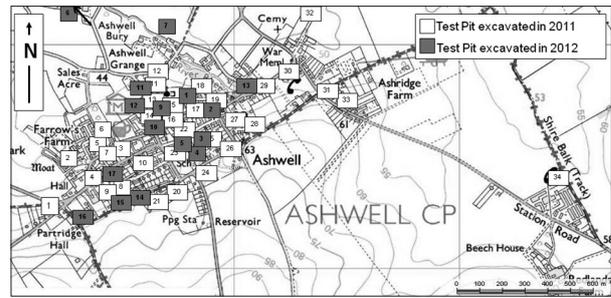


Figure 11 Ashwell, Hertfordshire, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

a settlement of apparently urban status in the 11th century (VCH 1912), the absence of pottery of this date remains extremely puzzling: it must be inferred on the present evidence that the Domesday Book settlement must be located somewhere away from the site of the present village. In 2013 a field-walking project is being carried out which may provide clues as to where this may have been. The area of Ashwell Bury and Ashwell Grange, immediately north of the church and present village alongside the Rhee Stream, would seem to be a plausible possibility. The recovery of a few sherds of Romano-British pottery and one of medieval shelly ware (AD 1100–1400) from ASH/12/07, just north of Ashwell Grange, provides some tentative support and is noteworthy in this respect. Alternatively, the area north-east of the present village (east of the stream, going towards the war memorial) produced one sherd of middle Anglo-Saxon date in 2011 and this may be a hint that the later Anglo-Saxon settlement lay in this area, although it should be noted that this sherd may have been brought to the site relatively recently as part of a collection. Further archaeological investigation, including test pitting and field-walking, will be needed to explore the mystery of the currently ‘lost’ Anglo-Saxon town of Ashwell further.

Very few of the pits excavated in Ashwell in 2012 produced any high medieval pottery. ASH/12/14, ASH/12/15 and ASH/12/16 are all on the margins of the present village and clearly lay beyond the medieval settlement in areas probably used as arable. It is more surprising that pits ASH/12/01–ASH/12/05, all in the centre of the present village near the church also produced no pottery of this date. Those few pits that did produce high medieval pottery did so in very small quantities with only ASH/12/12 and ASH/12/13 yielding more than a single sherd. ASH/12/13 is now the second pit east of the spring to produce significant quantities of high medieval pottery, possibly suggesting that settlement at this time extended some way along the spring line, perhaps taking in a more dispersed form than has hitherto been assumed. It remains to be seen if this is location of the 11th-century town.

A larger number of pits excavated in 2012 produced pottery of late medieval date, although mostly also in small quantities unlikely to indicate settlement in the vicinity. Exceptions are ASH/12/03, ASH/12/04, ASH/12/12 and ASH/12/13 which all produced more than five sherds and probably do indicate settlement in the immediate vicinity.

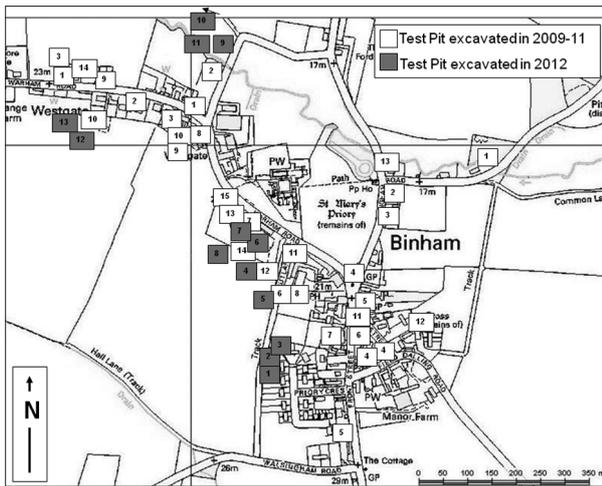


Figure 12 Binham, Norfolk, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

Binham, Norfolk (NGR TF 981396)

A total of 13 test pits were excavated in Binham in 2012 (Fig. 12), five during a HEFA in May and eight as a community excavation in July–September, bringing the total number of pits excavated in Binham to 47.

Test pits BIN/12/07 and BIN/12/08 both produced large numbers of sherds of later prehistoric pottery, indicating settlement in the immediate vicinity, just southwest of the village hall along Warham Road. These pits, along with others nearby, also produced Romano-British pottery, suggesting that the later prehistoric settlement persisted and expanded in the Roman period. However, BIN/12/01–BIN/12/03 all produced very much less pottery of this date than BIN/12/05–BIN/12/08, enabling the southern limits of this settlement to be approximately drawn: it does not seem as if this extended as far south as the present Priory Crescent area. BIN/12/08 also produced a single sherd of Ipswich Ware, showing how much further Anglo-Saxon activity previously identified near the village hall (Lewis 2011) extended to the south. BIN/12/05 produced a couple of small sherds of Thetford Ware, supporting evidence from earlier years of late Anglo-Saxon activity in the area c. 150m due south of the priory church. Very little pottery of high medieval date was recovered from any of the 2012 pits, indicating these were all on or beyond the margins of the medieval settlement. Likewise, little late medieval pottery was recovered, but overall the pattern from the medieval data increasingly emphasises the severity and extent of late medieval contraction of settlement at Binham.

Garboldisham, Norfolk (NGR TM 005815)

11 test pits were excavated in Garboldisham in 2012 (Fig. 13), bringing the total to date to 23. Several pits were sited in order to investigate new areas. GAR/12/01 was located more than 1km north of the church at Hall Farm and GAR/12/07 along a track running north from Smallworth. Pits GAR/12/08 and GAR/12/09 were sited near Garboldisham Mill with GAR/12/10 and GAR/12/11 in the area where the present road south of the village runs between Garboldisham Common and Broomscot Common, c. 1200m south of the church.

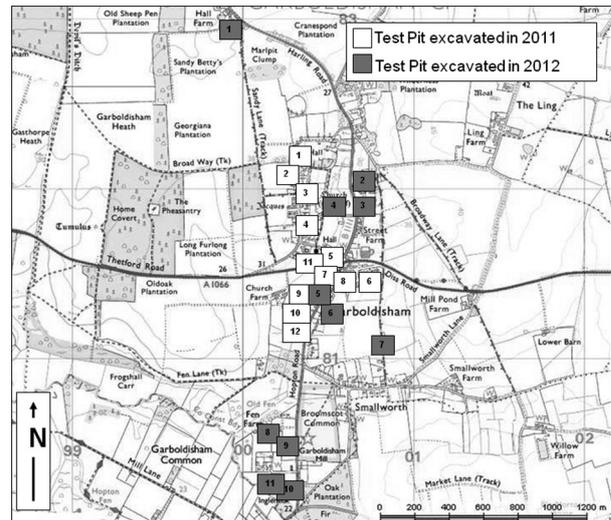


Figure 13 Garboldisham, Norfolk, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

GAR/12/10 produced a single very small sherd (3g) of Romano-British pottery, indicative of low-intensity activity of some sort on this area. A much larger sherd (16g) from GAR/12/06 was found c. 60cm below the surface in a deposit that contained no later material and seems more likely to tentatively indicate settlement in the vicinity. Taken together with last year's data, there now seems to be a clustering of pits producing Romano-British pottery (mostly in small amounts) either side of the east–west orientated Thetford–Diss road which currently bisects the village.

GAR/12/05 was the only pit to produce Thetford Ware (AD 850–1100) in 2012, but this is interesting as it represents the first find of material of this date south of the Thetford–Diss road. This pit and GAR/12/06 were the only ones to produce pottery of high medieval date, but these reinforced the indication from 2011 that there was settlement of some sort in this area at this time. None of the 2012 pits produced any pottery datable to the late medieval period, possibly indicating that decline at this time may have been more severe than previously indicated, although with such small volumes of pottery, this cannot be confidently inferred.

None of the areas investigated for the first time in 2012 produced any pottery of medieval or earlier date. The test pit at Hall Farm encountered recent disturbance associated with 19th-century structures which prevented this from extending to any great depth. However, the other pits (those at the Mill, on the common and north of Smallworth) were all excavated to natural, but the earliest pottery recovered dated broadly to the 17th–18th centuries. In no cases were more than a couple of sherds of this date found, suggesting that use of this area was limited until the 19th century.

Bures, Suffolk (see report above under Bures, Essex)

Paston, Norfolk (NGR TG 322345)

The village of Paston in NE Norfolk lies c. 1km inland from the North Sea coastline, 12km SE of Cromer and

26km NE of Norwich. It is famous as the home of the 15th century Paston family whose letters chronicle life during the Wars of the Roses. As such, it was particularly interesting to have the chance to excavate test pits in the village as part of the *On Landguard Point* 'Dig and Sow' project.

Settlement in Paston today is highly dispersed with three small hamlet clusters and a scatter of farms and cottages. The small cluster in the south-east lies along Bacton Road and includes Paston Hall, the Great Barn and the parish church of St. Margaret. The second cluster lies 300m northwest of the first, in the area where Mundesley Road, Chapel Road, Bears Road and Vicarage Road intersect. This cluster is today composed entirely of closely spaced residential housing. More dispersed settlement extends northwards along Mundesley Road, giving way to fields for c. 450m before reaching a handful of properties clustered around Stow Mill, an area of the village referred to as 'Stow Hill'. The third main area of settlement today, known as Paston Green, lies southwest of Paston Hall and is now solely occupied by Green Farm and associated farm cottages. South of Paston Green, the settlement pattern is one of fields interspersed with the occasional farm cottage. The village lies on the pilgrims' route between Bromholm Priory (in modern Bacton), and Walsingham and a hostel and medieval chapel once existed at Stow Hill. The church dates from the early 14th century, and contains notable 15th-century wall paintings.

One of the details recorded in the Paston Letters relates to the settlement pattern, as they record that in the early 15th century the main road was diverted away from Paston Hall to reduce disturbance to the family. This moved the road from south of the church to its present route to its north and left a lasting impact on the layout and development of the village. The settlement appears previously to have lain south of the church but moved to its north when the road moved. However, previous finds from this field, including those made during the digging

of an electricity supply trench near St Margaret's church do not seem to have been very copious, including one rim sherd of 11th–12th century type and some stoneware dating to the late 15th–early 16th century (NHER 6894; 6895). 15th century tenants were also moved to other sites, including Green Farm (Paston Green), The Limes Farm (Bears Road) and Poplar Farm (now named Dayspring, near PAS/12/20). This may, at least in part, explain the very dispersed settlement pattern at Paston, and raise the possibility that archaeological evidence for the earlier Medieval settlement at Paston may survive under the fields to the south of Paston Hall.

24 test pits were excavated at Paston in 2012 (Fig. 14). Nine were sited around Paston Hall, barn and church, nine around Mundesley Road, Chapel Road, Bears Road and Vicarage Road, four in Stow Hill and two in the outlying southern part of the parish.

In general, relatively little pre-modern pottery was discovered. This may be partly due to the fact that only four of the pits were excavated to natural, three of which were in the Stow Hill area where most of the Roman and late Anglo-Saxon pottery was discovered. Another factor may be the fact that no pits were sited in Paston Green or south of the church where the village was supposedly located until the 15th century (Care and Earl 2009, 8).

The earliest pottery recovered from the 2012 test pits dated to the Romano-British period, with at least five sherds of this recovered from PAS/12/21 and PAS/12/24, both located at Stow Hill. This echoes previous finds of similar material nearby (NHER 6880), and it seems highly probable that there was settlement of some sort here in the Roman period. It is less easy to interpret the single sherd of Romano-British pottery from PAS/12/07, the only other pit to produce any material of this date in 2012, which probably simply relates to low-intensity use of the area, perhaps for arable. The same Stow Hill pits which produced Romano-British material (PAS/12/21 and PAS/12/24) also produced significant volumes of Thetford Ware, with seven large sherds recovered from PAS/12/21 and two very large sherds found in PAS/12/24 in a deposit entirely free of any later material. It seems clear that habitation of some sort was present here in the late Anglo-Saxon period, and this is particularly interesting given the Stow element in the place name, derived from the Old English word meaning 'place', 'holy place' or 'assembly place' (Ekwall 1936, 427; Mills 1991, 440–1, 526). No pottery of this date was found in any other pits, including those around the present church.

Stow Hill produced very much less pottery of high medieval date, suggesting that settlement here at this date was on the wane, or of very limited extent. In contrast, larger amounts were recovered from several of the pits in the Mundesley Road/Chapel Road/Bears Road/Vicarage Road area, indicating that there was settlement present in this area at this time. Considerably fewer pits further south, near Paston Hall and immediately north of the church, produced pottery of this date, giving some support to the accounts in the Paston Letters which suggest that this area lay beyond the pre-15th century settlement south of the church.

The pattern indicated by the test pit excavations for the later medieval period is strikingly different. None of the pits north of the church along the Mundesley Road

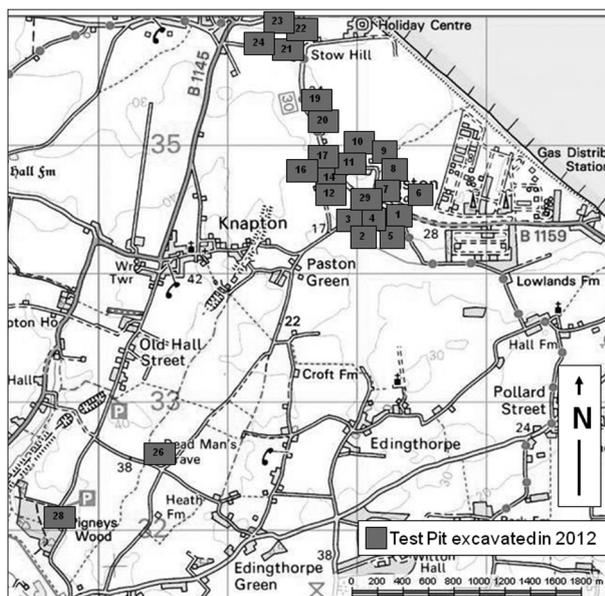


Figure 14 Paston, Norfolk, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

produced any pottery of late medieval date at all, while the area south of the church actually produced more pottery of this date than for the high medieval period. This seems to indicate severe contraction associated with a southward shift of settlement: this seems to be at variance with the documentary evidence which indicates that the village was relocated northwards away from this area in the 15th century. However, no pits produced very much pottery of this date, and that which was recovered (from PAS/12/01 and PAS/12/05) may derive from occupation at Paston Hall rather than tenant plots, as both pits were sited within the present gardens of the hall. Overall however, the impression does seem to be of contraction in the later medieval period in Paston.

Bramford, Suffolk (NGR TM 124466)

Bramford today is a small nucleated village on the west bank of the River Gipping just over 1km west of Ipswich and about 0.5km west of the A14. The village today is arranged either side of the A1067, named The Street as it comes into the village from the north and Ship Lane after it turns east to cross the river. Most of the older housing in Bramford today lies along Ship Lane, which runs immediately north of the church. Although the settlement today forms a single block, this is due largely to recent development. Most notably, with the exception of properties facing directly onto The Street, the area between The Street and the river is of almost entirely recent date. In the 19th century the first edition Ordnance Survey map shows settlement to be limited to a cluster of houses at the east end of Ship Lane (north of the church, close to the river crossing) which extended for 70m or so to the north along Mill Lane. There was little housing along Ship Lane to the west of this cluster and none on its south side, although most of the land on its north side was occupied by small paddocks mostly planted with trees. The Street (then called Bramford Street) was occupied by densely packed housing arranged on both sides. This terminated at the junction with Ship Lane, but c. 150m to the south, three properties clustered around the junction with Vicarage Lane. The church of St Mary (SHER BRF 024) is recorded as a possible Domesday minster (Dymond and Martin 1999). A number of findspots in and around the village have produced medieval pottery

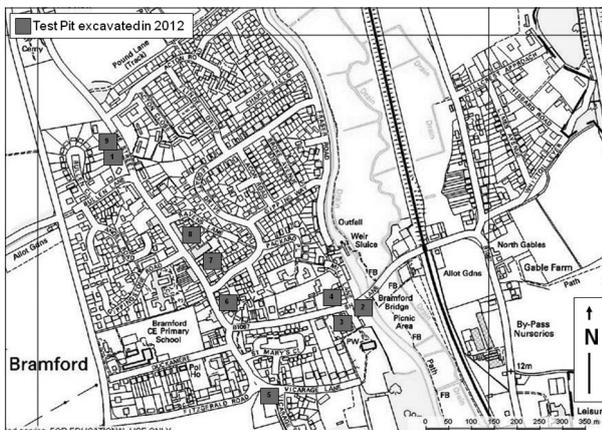


Figure 15 Bramford, Suffolk, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

ranging in date from Thetford Ware to the 16th century (e.g. SHER MSF12413; BRF 054; BRF 040; BRF 021; BRF 005).

Nine test pits were dug in Bramford in 2012 (Fig. 15), five in gardens along The Street, three in the area north of the church and one at the west end of Vicarage Lane. The earliest pottery dated to the Roman period, recovered from BRA/12/05, at the southern end of The Street. There was only a single sherd found, so although this was of some size (32g), it is considered more likely to indicate low-intensity use such as arable rather than settlement. Two pits produced Thetford Ware, with BRA/12/06 yielding two sherds from contexts which had not suffered recent disturbance, hinting moderately strongly at the presence of settlement nearby. BRA/12/04 produced a single very small (3g) sherd of Thetford Ware, a less strong indicator of settlement, although it is interesting to note that this came from the eastern end of Ship Lane, near the church. Two of the three pits in this area (BRA/12/03 and BRA/12/04) produced pottery of high medieval date, suggesting that settlement may have clustered in this area at this time. Neither pit produced very large amounts of his material, however (five sherds from BRA/12/04 and just two from BRA/12/03). Similarly small volumes of high medieval pottery were recovered from BRA/12/06, off Vicarage Lane, hinting at settlement in this area, while BRA/12/09, right at the north end of The Street, produced just a single sherd (albeit quite large at 11g) probably indicating that this area was in use as arable fields at this time.

The only pits to produce significant amounts of later medieval pottery were BRA/12/03 and BRA/12/04, indicating that habitation on these sites, both immediately north of the church, seems to have continued and even flourished as both pits produced more material of this date than for the high medieval period. Settlement along The Street, if it was indeed absent in the late medieval period, was clearly re-established later, in the post medieval period, along at least the southern half of its present extent.

Nayland, Suffolk (NGR TL 975345)

Nayland today is an elongated nucleated settlement arranged parallel with the River Stour, along the B1087, just east of the main A134 road connecting Colchester and Sudbury. Today, the older core lies close to the river, including a small number of houses on an island in the Stour, clustered around St James' Church, whose fabric dates to the 14th century. Newer estates are located along the north side of the river valley and in the eastern extremity of the village. Nayland parish has over 100 listed buildings including many timber-framed structures dating back to the 13th–16th centuries. These are concentrated in Nayland village itself, with a scattering across the rest of the modern parish. The medieval site of Court Knoll lies in the SE of the village. This appears to have been a manorial site from the later 11th century onwards (Everett and Anderson 2001; Halliday *et al.* 2003). Field walking and excavation here in the 1920s revealed large quantities of Roman tile re-used as foundations for a manor building, and although virtually none of the pottery found at the site pre-dated the later medieval period (Everett and Anderson 2001),

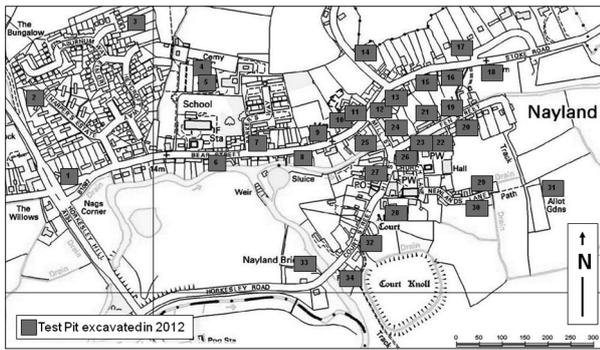


Figure 16 Nayland, Suffolk, showing approximate locations of excavated test pits

documentary evidence, pottery finds and geophysical survey of building features confirm the presence of buildings on the site from the 14th century onwards.

34 test pits were excavated in Nayland in October 2012 (Fig. 16) funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the ‘Managing a Masterpiece’ scheme. The earliest material recovered were two sherds of Roman-British pottery from NAY/12/1 (close to the A134 bypass) and ten from the opposite end of the village over 1km east (NAY/12/15, NAY/12/17 and NAY/12/18). This is suggestive of two separate areas of activity at this time, with the easterly cluster in particular considered likely to derive from settlement in the vicinity.

Very little archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement was recovered from the test pits excavated in 2012, suggesting the area of the modern village was mostly unused for settlement until around the beginning of the 12th century. While it has previously been suggested that there may have been an Anglo Saxon settlement on Court Knoll and in the vicinity of present-day Nayland (e.g. Halliday *et al.* 2003), the test pit excavations in the village produced no evidence to support this. The evidence from the test pit excavations suggests that the pre-Domesday population was not concentrated into a nucleated village in this area at this time. It is interesting to note that a series of test pits excavated in 2012 under the aegis of Suffolk County Council in neighbouring Stoke-by-Nayland also produced Roman-era and high/late medieval sherds but no Anglo-Saxon pottery, suggesting a very similar pattern to that seen in Nayland (John Newman *pers. comm.*). This suggests that the population in Stoke-by-Nayland was also probably dispersed in the Anglo Saxon period rather than clustered in a nucleated village at the site of the present-day settlement.

A large volume of pottery of high medieval date was recovered from the 2012 test pits in Nayland and is indicative of a nucleated settlement centred around Birch Street, Fen Street, Mill Street, High Street and the eastern end of Bear Street. Test pits NAY/12/13, NAY/12/14, NAY/12/25 and NAY/12/34 revealed evidence for recent disturbance, and the pottery distributions and finds from these pits are unlikely to be representative of the history of activity at the sites. Interestingly these test pits represent four of just six test pits from the central village area that did not produce sherds of high medieval pottery, contrasting sharply with the seventeen pits in this area that did.

By contrast, the western part of the village produced hardly any evidence of human activity prior to the 15th century. The lack of 12th–14th century pottery in pits NAY/12/06, NAY/12/08 and NAY/12/25 may also imply that the houses between Bear Street and Mill Stream were a later addition to the settlement arranged north of the road, which all have better evidence for occupation during this period. It thus appears that this western arm of the village appeared during a secondary phase of village expansion and development.

Perhaps the most striking observations to come from the 2012 test pit excavations in Nayland is the very large quantity of later medieval pottery recovered. It is clear that Nayland grew significantly in size and in intensity of occupation. This is in marked contrast to the pattern observed in most settlements within which test pit excavations have taken place as part of the University of Cambridge CORS project (Lewis in preparation), around 90% of which display contraction in the later medieval period (mid 14th–mid 16th century), mostly of some severity. Nayland clearly bucks this trend, with 76% of the excavated pits producing at least a couple of sherds of this date, considerably higher than the regional average (*ibid.*).

Conclusion

2012 did not see the decline in the number of test pits excavated which was anticipated at the end of 2011 due to the closure of Aimhigher. This was because while the number of school excavations was sharply reduced, opportunities arose to carry out a number of community projects involving local residents in carrying out the test pit excavations. As in previous years, the test pit excavations carried out under the aegis of the University of Cambridge were all conducted using the same methods, with volunteers using the same instruction manuals and recording pro-formas whether they were excavating as part of a school HEFA programme or as a community project. The results can thus be compared both within and between settlements.

By the end of 2012, the total number of pits excavated since 2005 topped 1,300. As well as enabling the historic development of a large number of individual settlements to be reconstructed, this large number is beginning to allow statistical assessment of wider patterns of change, over time and across the region, in the recovered data (Lewis, in preparation). This will form the basis of ongoing investigation.

Archive reports have been prepared for each test pit excavated in each settlement and are held by ACA at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge. Details of the HEFA 2012 test pit sites and the pottery reports for each of the sites investigated have been sent to county HER curators and are also available to view with maps at <http://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/aca/excavationreports.html>

Test pit excavation in CORS settlements in the eastern region will continue in 2013, with funding for the Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA) supported by the university of Cambridge Widening Participation fund. It is hoped that further opportunities for community test pit excavation programmes will also continue to arise. The results of all test pit excavations carried out in 2013 as

part of the University of Cambridge CORS project will be reported in the next volume of Medieval Settlement Research.

Acknowledgements

The University of Cambridge CORS excavations in 2012 were funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Arts Council England and by many families and schools who enabled pupils to attend HEFA courses after the cessation of Aimhigher funding. ACA is very grateful to these organisations 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 in each community whom space cannot allow to be named individually here. First of all, however, thanks must be given to the members of the public and the school pupils and teachers who carried out the test pit excavations in 2012, 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 2012 for generously offering their property 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 in particular to staff at Red2Green and to Mike Horgan, Lee Thomas, June Barnes, Vernon Place, Carolyn Wright, Avril Lumley Prior, Leigh Alston, Jackie Cooper, Wendy Hibbitt, Sarah Talks, Pauline Hinton, Lucy Care, Beryl Sims and Andora Carver, for this. The archaeological supervisor for ACA is Catherine Ranson and the programme administrator is Clemency Cooper. Paul Blinkhorn is the pottery consultant for the project, and Andrew Rogerson, Carole Fletcher and John Newman also provided help with on-site pottery identification. Jessica Rippengal assessed the faunal remains. Chris Burton and Dan King helped immensely with 'Managing a Masterpiece' excavations, and Ellie Carter provided similarly invaluable support for the *On Landguard Point* excavations. Thanks are also due to many other volunteers including numerous students (graduate and undergraduate) at the University of Cambridge, who helped with the 2012 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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