

ON THE FRINGE? MEDIEVAL GREEN-SIDE SETTLEMENT AT FOX LANE, DARSHAM, SUFFOLK

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Introduction

This paper presents the results of a recent archaeological excavation on land adjacent to Fox Lane, Darsham (Suffolk). The site in question sits close to a previously published project at Mill House (Mustchin *et al.* 2015) and incorporates elements of the same medieval agricultural landscape, broadly spanning the eleventh or twelfth to fourteenth centuries AD. The results of the Fox Lane excavation, in conjunction with findings from Mill House, provide a useful insight into the medieval rural economy of Darsham, as well as adding to our current knowledge of rural settlement emergence, development and abandonment in northeast Suffolk. The site's position, on the edge of a probable medieval green, also contributes to studies concerning the origins of greens and green-side settlements (Medlycott 2011, 70).

The site

The Fox Lane site was excavated by Archaeological Solutions Ltd ahead of residential development in 2017. The site is located within Darsham, towards the western periphery of the modern village (Fig. 1), on the southern side of The Street. The Minsmere River passes some 1.6km to the southeast of the site, flowing into the North Sea at Minsmere Sluice 7.5km further downstream. A minor watercourse also passes to the east of the village centre (Fig. 1). Geologically, the site occupies slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged, clay-rich soils suitable for permanent grassland and the cultivation of winter cereals (*Soil Survey of England and Wales* 1983, 17). The superficial geology constitutes the Lowestoft Formation. At the time of excavation, the site was laid down to pasture.

Archaeological and historical background

Darsham is situated within 6.5km of the Suffolk coast and within easy reach of medieval market centres, including Saxmundham and Halesworth. Saxmundham was granted its first market charter by King Edward I in AD 1272, while the right to hold a market and fair at

Halesworth was granted to Richard de Argentein in AD 1223 (Fordham 2005, 17).

Darsham itself is recorded three times in Domesday Book and included six individual manors, with holdings by the King and two of his stalwarts. Holdings by the Augustine Priory at Blythburgh, located some 6.4km to the northeast, are also recorded in the parish from the twelfth century (Harper-Bill 1980, 122–135), while the wealthy Cistercian Abbey at Sibton is located 5.9km to the west. Other than the twelfth-century parish church, extant medieval built remains are absent within the village.

Hodkinson's 1783 map of Suffolk furthermore contains a reference to 'China Green' (Figs 2, 3). The area of the green is located immediately northwest of the Fox Lane site and may, at least in part, account for its location and development, with both the Fox Lane and Mill House sites emerging as green-side settlements, independent of the medieval village. Medieval settlement expansion in the east of England is often characterised by a dispersion or 'overspill' from a traditional core, with independent settlement around the edges of greens being widely recorded from around AD 1100 (Williamson 2005, 19). In contrast to the Midlands, where nucleated medieval settlements are commonplace (Munby 2014, 237), rural settlement patterns in Suffolk tend to be more dispersed, with farmsteads either occurring individually or grouped around greens (Martin 1999a, 88). Hodkinson's map includes a second green, labelled 'Bristle Green', to the northeast of the site (Fig. 3).

Until recently, the rural, undeveloped character of Darsham caused a dearth of archaeological investigation. Three medieval moated sites, one of which encloses a possible croft, were recorded locally, forming part of a broad swathe of such sites recorded across southern East Anglia and the East Midlands (Aberg 1978, 2, fig. 1; Coveney 2014, 449) (Fig. 1). Contemporary finds from the village include medieval coins (SF-C8AA93), part of a sword scabbard with twelfth-century parallels (NMS-D8205C), and a lead alloy seal matrix of thirteenth- to fourteenth-century date (SUSS-1435E5) (Portable Antiquities Scheme).

Recent projects at Mill House and Station Garage/Railway Cottage, both to the west of the parish church and modern village core (Fig. 1), have substantially expanded knowledge of the locality, revealing parts of a

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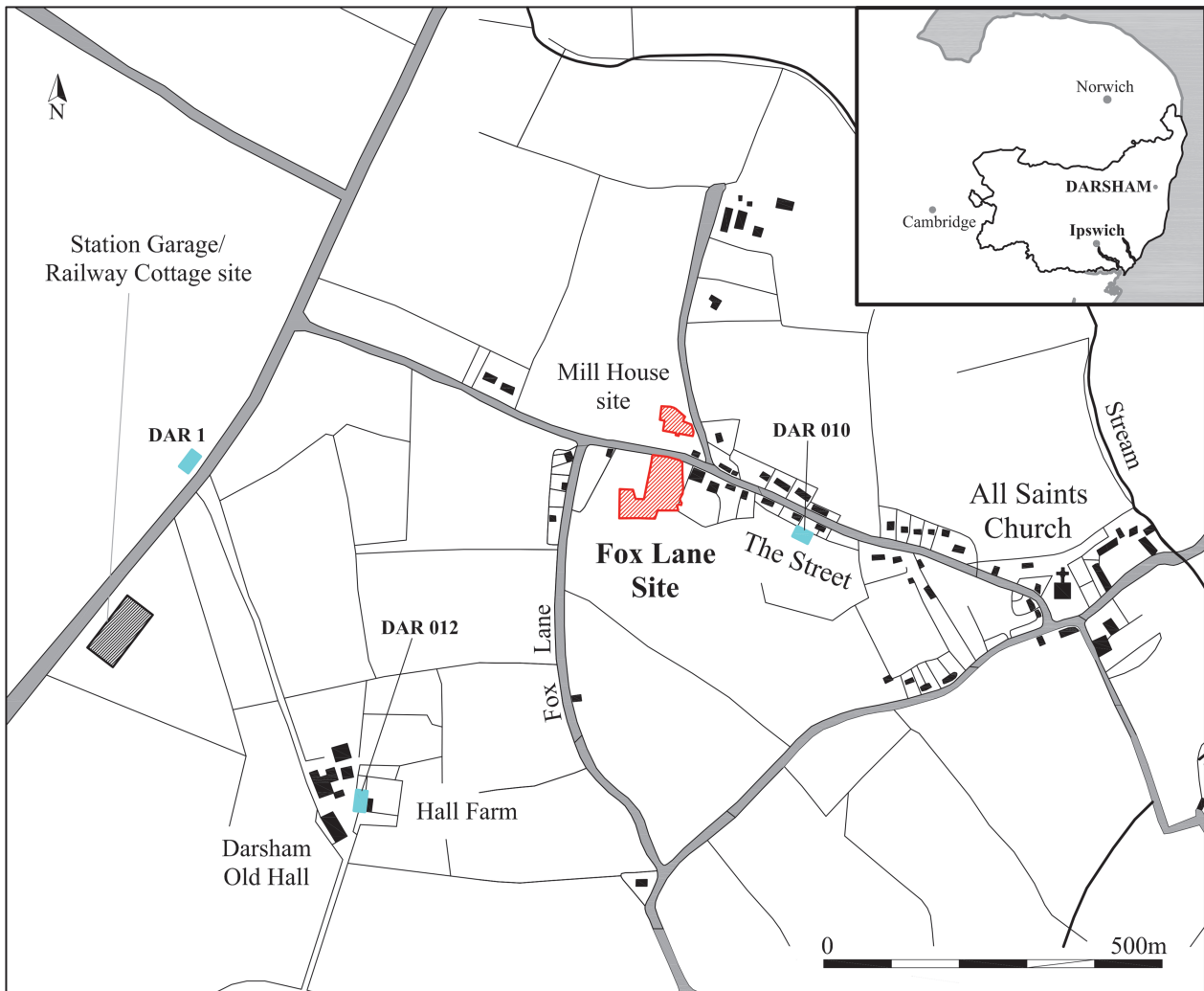


Figure 1 Locations of the Fox Lane and Mill House archaeological sites, and nearby site at Railway Station Garage/Railway Garage, Darsham, Suffolk, as well as three medieval moated sites indicated by their Historic Environment Register numbers DAR1, DAR010 and DAR012.

medieval rural landscape dating between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries AD (Meredith 2012, 19; Mustchin *et al.* 2015, 10–11). The Mill House site is located immediately north of the current site and forms part of the same enclosed medieval landscape (Fig. 2). A single enclosure and part of a possible second enclosure were identified at Mill House, in addition to a short length of trackway, thought to provide access between the medieval site and adjacent Priory Lane (Mustchin *et al.* 2015, 4) (Fig. 2). A possible pond and a quarry pit were also present, while recovered finds and environmental evidence indicated local domestic occupation, interpreted as an isolated farmstead or toft and croft type smallholding (Mustchin *et al.* 2015). At Station Garage/Railway Cottage, *c.* 830m to the southwest of the current site, a series of medieval ditches and evidence of nearby domestic occupation were reported (Meredith 2012, 1 and 4, fig. 2). The excavations at Fox Lane, presented below, add further detail to the emerging picture of the medieval rural landscape in this area.

Results from the Fox Lane excavations: the site

Site layout

The medieval site formed part of a more extensive, enclosed landscape also including the previously reported site at Mill House (Mustchin *et al.* 2015; Fig. 2). Both sites were characterised by rectilinear systems of ditched enclosures, the alignments of which mirrored those of adjacent roads. This suggests that the road alignment already existed in the Middle Ages, and that the activity at the Fox Lane and Mill House sites represents a linear expansion of settlement along the line of The Street, away from the parish church and traditional settlement core of Darsham (Mustchin *et al.* 2015, 10). Such medieval ‘ribbon development’ has been proposed for other settlements in the vicinity, including the market town of Debenham and the villages of Long Melford and Peasenhall, the latter just 6.3km to the west of Darsham (Bailey 2007, 127; Beresford and St Joseph 1979, 139; Gardner 2004).

Enclosures were identified in the central, northern and south-western areas of the Fox Lane site (Fig. 4). Owing to the generally homogenous nature of the pottery

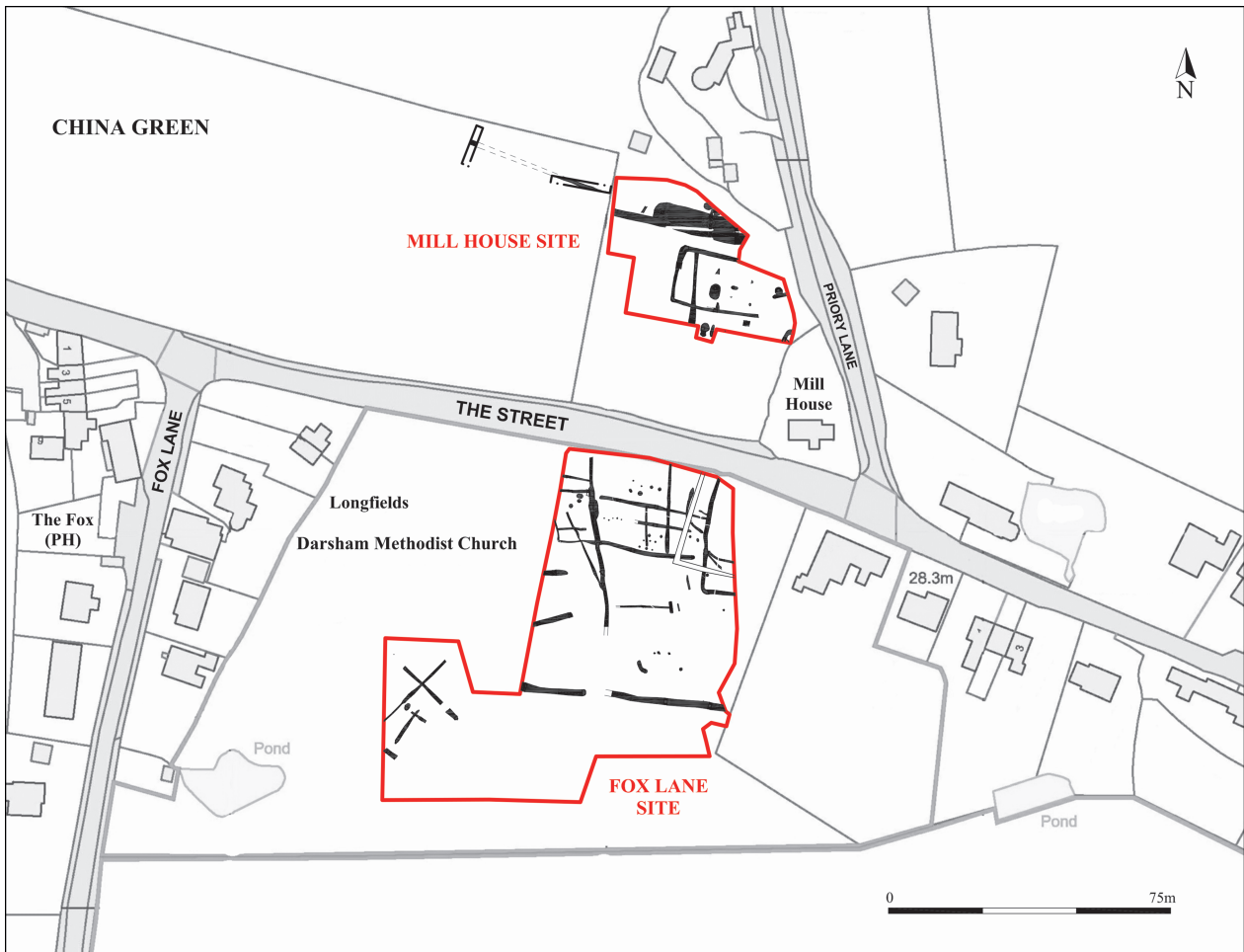


Figure 2 Plan showing archaeological features at the Fox Lane and Mill House sites, Darsham, Suffolk.

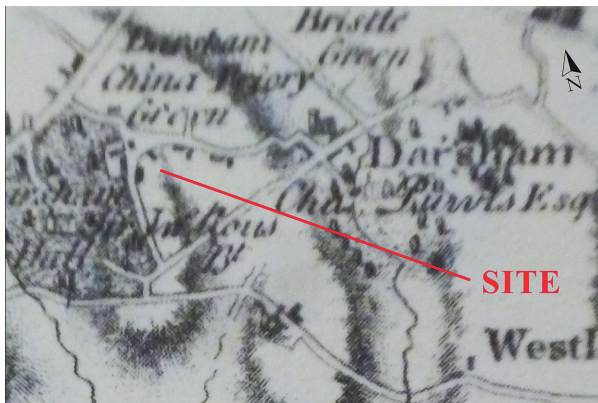


Figure 3 Extract from Hodkinson's 1783 map of Suffolk with the location of the Fox Lane site indicated.

assemblage (see below), our understanding of the chronological development of the medieval site's layout was based solely on the stratigraphic sequence and spatial patterning of individual enclosure boundaries. However, this was only possible for the northern enclosures, where useful stratigraphic relationships existed. Two phases of

enclosure were recognised, constituting eight individual enclosures overall (Fig. 5).

Phase 1 was characterised by the partially surviving boundaries of at least two separate enclosures and possible strip fields. Enclosures 1 and 2 were at least 0.04ha and 0.09ha in area, respectively, and were intersected by a short section of delineated trackway, running approximately east to west and mirroring a similar trackway at nearby Mill House (Figs 2, 5). Part of the trackway's southern edge was formed by a line of five postholes, thought to represent a fenceline (Fig. 5). Fencelines of eleventh- to twelfth- and thirteenth- to fourteenth-century date have also been excavated at Cedars Park, Stowmarket (Woolhouse 2016, 28, 48 and fig. 26), while vertical posts forming the base of a medieval wattle and daub fence were found close to the River Dove in Eye, Suffolk (NGR TM 1603 7583). Both enclosures at the Fox Lane site extended beyond the excavation; the line of The Street may have originally marked the northern edge of Enclosure 1.

To the west of both Phase 1 enclosures, the remains of at least four possible strip fields were identified, the ditches of which all ran approximately east to west and were spaced between c. 3.2m and 12m apart. All but one ditch continued beyond the excavated area running towards the line of Fox Lane; both the lane and adjacent

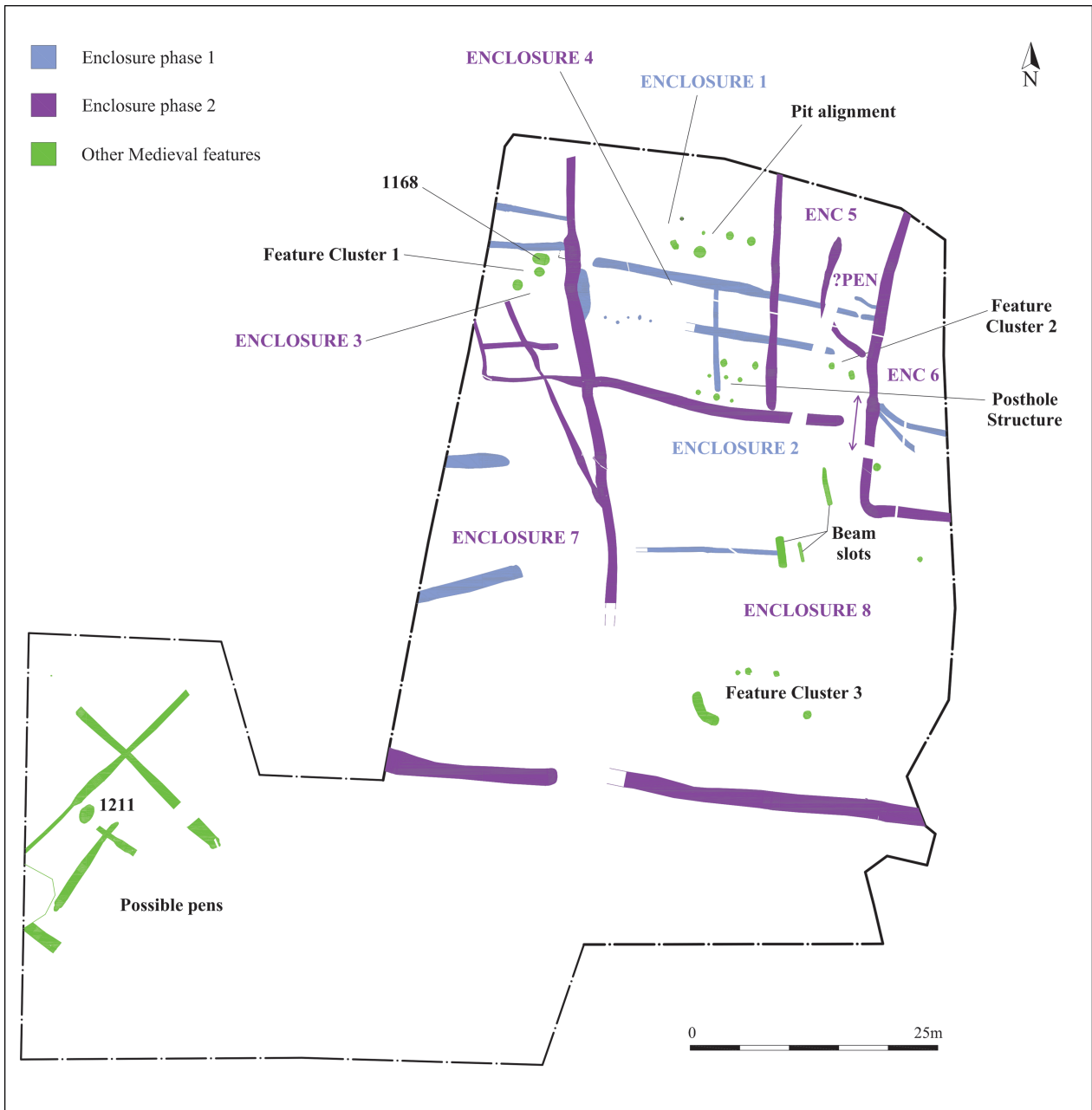


Figure 4 The medieval features recorded at the Fox Lane site.

buildings are shown on Hodkinson's 1783 map (Fig. 3), while the extant western site boundary is depicted on the 1843 tithe map. One of the existing houses in this area is called 'Longfields' (Fig. 2), although whether this name derives from any particular form of historical land use is unclear.

The second phase of medieval land use at Fox Lane included the remains of six enclosures, extending further to the south of The Street (Fig. 5). The earlier trackway was abandoned by this time, as were the strip fields, although overall there was a general continuity of boundary orientations. However, no Phase 1 boundary is thought to have persisted in use. The Phase 2 enclosures ranged in size between 0.02ha and 0.13ha, and two are thought to have survived to near their original size (Enclosures 4 [0.05ha] and 5 [0.02ha]).

While almost certainly agricultural in function, it is difficult to associate any one enclosure with a particular farming strategy. However, the recovered terrestrial mollusc assemblage, which included species like *Discus rotundatus*, *Oxychilus* sp. and *Trichia hispida*, is typical of rough grassland habitats (Kerney 1999, 51, 118, 143–146 and 197).

Medieval ditches in the southwest of the excavation area (Fig. 4) were aligned differently to those in the central/northern site area and do not appear to have formed coherent elements of the identified enclosure systems. However, they broadly respect the alignment of the extant property boundary, some 45m to the northwest, possibly suggesting an early date for the latter. Although no enclosures *per se* were identified in this area, the ditches formed a clear pattern of gridded



Figure 5 Enclosure phases. Plan to left shows Phase 1 enclosures and strip fields; plan to right shows Phase 2 reorganisation of enclosures overlain on Phase 1 ditches and gullies.

boundaries, and may well represent small animal pens such as sheepfolds. Sheep pens are recorded from across medieval England, including Roystone Grange (Derbyshire) and Broughton North (Buckinghamshire) (Greene 2005, 143; Thompson and Zeevat 2013), while contemporary pictorial evidence for the penning of sheep using hurdles is also recorded in manuscripts including the Luttrell Psalter, a devotional book of the mid-1300s produced in East Anglia (Kalof 2007, 49–50).

Other evidence of activity

The excavated features suggested a typical rural site, probably used for agricultural purposes, in the vicinity of a settlement. In addition to the enclosures discussed in the previous section, features principally consisted of pits and postholes. Several clusters, alignments and structural outlines, including beam-slots, could be identified. These included a short section of a fence (see below) and a loose alignment of four pits within the confines of either Enclosure 1 or 4 (Fig. 4). Although the function of this alignment is unclear, the absence of intercutting between features is thought to indicate that they were dug at around the same time, possibly for a single purpose. However, finds – comprising only small amounts of pottery and ceramic building material – do not suggest focussed refuse disposal. This pattern is perpetuated in the non-linear feature clusters, finds from which were generally scarce. The exception is Pit 1168

(Feature Cluster 1), the fill of which yielded 72 sherds (683g) of pottery.

Pit 1211, located in the southwest of the site (Fig. 4), was also of interest; environmental sampling of its fill yielded abundant charcoal, thought to represent domestic fire debris. Species included oak (*Quercus* sp.) and diffuse-porous types, most probably gathered for domestic consumption from the local landscape. Similar wood species, albeit in small quantities, were represented in the environmental assemblage from Mill House (Summers 2015, 43). The deposition of domestic waste strongly suggests the nearby presence of a dwelling, possibly a toft or small farmstead.

A clear structural outline constituting eight pits or postholes was present in the southeast corner of Enclosure 4 (Figs 4, 6). The majority of the component features (1051, 1053, 1055, 1057, 1059 and 1061) were regularly spaced, forming two almost east-west aligned rows of paired post settings, running parallel to the adjacent boundary. Two larger pits were located to the north of this main group and may have constituted outliers (Fig. 6). This cluster was interpreted as a sub-rectangular footprint measuring roughly 8.5m². Regionally, a medieval agricultural structure of this type was recorded at Church Farm, Brettenham (Mustchin *et al.* 2015, 5, fig. 4), while similar thirteenth-century farm buildings were excavated at the A12 Interchange at Chelmsford in Essex (Lavender 1999). Like the

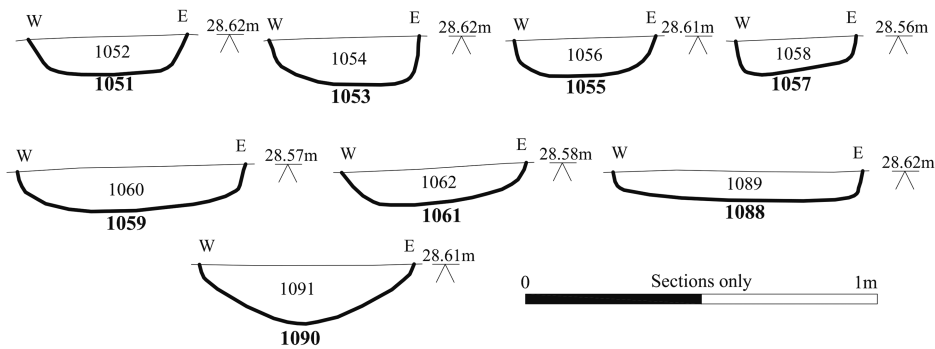
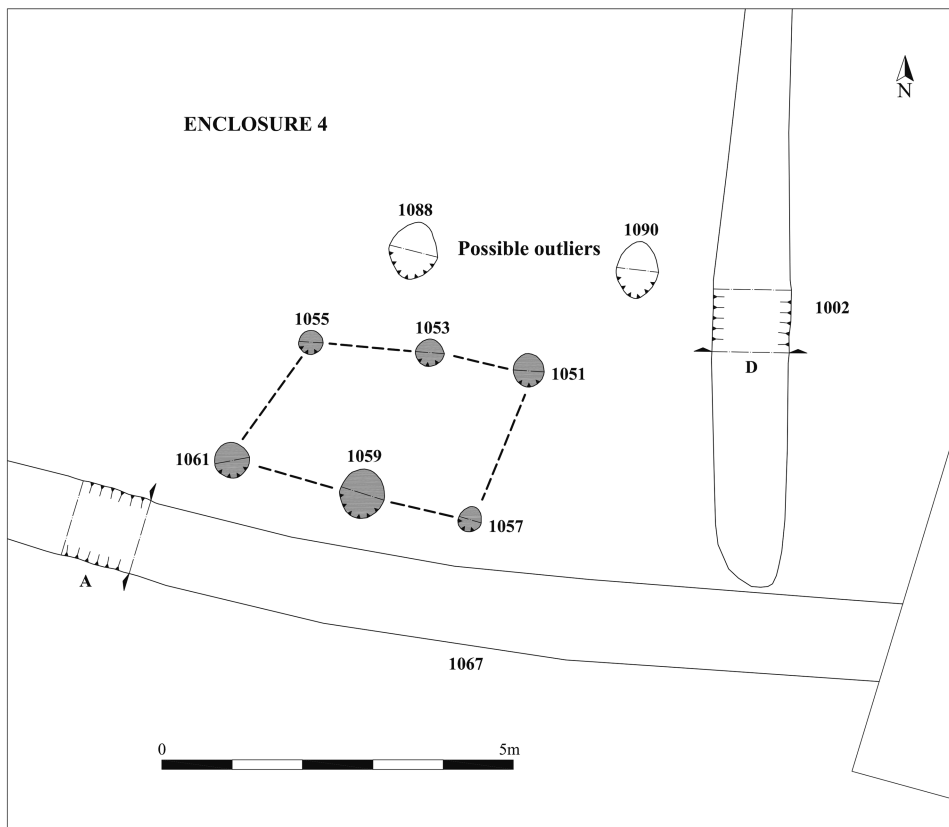


Figure 6 Posthole structure at the Fox Lane site.

gridded boundaries in the southwest of the site, the current posthole structure is likely to represent a small livestock pen.

Two closely spaced beam slots were encountered within the confines of Enclosure 8 (Fig. 4). Beam-slot construction was commonplace during the medieval period, at least up to the thirteenth century (Crabtree 2001, 77), although it is unclear what type of structure is represented in this case. While unlikely to relate to a domestic building, the slots might have supported some form of small shed or shelter – possibly another animal pen – or the base of a ‘stack’. An interesting comparison exists at Priddy in the Mendip Hills of Somerset, where horizontal beams still support a stack of wooden hurdles, topped with thatch (*Thatching Info*; Fig. 7). This structural form is recorded in Somerset from AD 1348, when an annual sheep fair moved to Priddy from Wells as a result of the Black Death. The existing Priddy stack is supported by a rectangular base of heavy, wooden beams (*Priddy Parish Website*), and it is conceivable that the beam-slots at Fox Lane supported a similar kind of covered, seasonal structure.

The pottery

The Fox Lane assemblage is typical for a medieval rural settlement in east Suffolk. The medieval assemblage, mostly derived from ditch fills, is largely of local origin, comprising 1,426 sherds (8,729g) (Thompson 2018). It constitutes a homogenous group of vessels in fine to medium sandy fabrics with similarities to Hollesley ware, manufactured 26km to the south of Darsham. Documentary evidence for the Hollesley industry places production between c. AD 1279 and 1303/1330, which is supported by thermoluminescence dating of the kilns (Anderson in prep.). A total of 127 sherds including 17 glazed examples can be attributed to the Hollesley kilns. An additional 821 coarseware sherds display a greater variation in surface colour and are generally of a poorer quality, strongly suggesting that they represent a regional variant deriving from local sources (Hollesley-type ware). The remainder consist largely of coarseware sherds from other regional industries (Anderson *et al.* 1996, 7).

The assemblage is typical for a rural medieval settlement, with an absence of high-status and glazed



Figure 7 The Priddy hurdle stack; note the arrangement of beams supporting the base of the stack. Photographer Graham E. Cook.

tablewares. Cooking pots/jars are the predominant form type, followed by bowls and jugs, all with rounded or ‘sagging’ bases and of fairly standard sizes. The largest bowl, in Hollesley ware, measures 48cm. One bowl includes the remains of a possible suspension hole (Fig. 8.1). Handles – or scars from their attachment – were uncommon, comprising two strap handles in Hollesley-type ware, and three rod handles, two in Hollesley-type ware and a third in Hollesley ware, confirming the notion that Hollesley-type ware was a regional variant of Hollesley ware. Only two sub-circular ‘spouts’ – both of Hollesley-type ware – were identified (Figs 8.2, 8.3). Their function is uncertain and they could either be costrel spouts, handles from socketed bowls or ‘spigot’ spouts from cisterns.

Decoration is sparse. Of particular note is the absence of thumb-impressed applied clay strips that are often present, at least in small amounts, in medieval coarseware assemblages of modest size. There is a single example of a crude finger/tool-impressed vertical line applied directly to the body of a vessel. Most common are horizontal lines of impressed dimples or hollows caused by a thumb or tooling, above the shoulder of bowls, characteristic of Hollesley bowls (Fig. 8.4). Two such decorated Hollesley bowls also display incised wavy lines on the inner rim (Figs 8.1 and 8.5).

The pottery from Fox Lane compares well to the assemblages from Mill House and Station Garage/Railway Cottage (Meredith 2012, 14). Overall, the Fox Lane and Mill House sites have produced some of the largest medieval pottery assemblages from the region, and support the view that local pottery production sites existed between those of Hollesley and the Waveney Valley. The main difference with the Mill House assemblage is the presence/absence of finer glazed wares: whereas only nineteen glazed sherds were recovered from Fox Lane, at Mill House, the assemblage included 153 glazed Hollesley ware sherds (over ten per cent of the medieval total), plus seven imported fine ware sherds from Grimston (Norfolk) and Hedingham

(Essex), placing the Mill House site almost on a par with some urban sites (Anderson 2005). This could reflect the presence of a permanent dwelling to the north of The Street, where finer tablewares were in use. Differential deposition of different pottery types may also be an influencing factor, with the current, slightly more abraded coarse ware assemblage possibly deriving from manuring of agricultural land with ‘waste from kitchen and table’ (Jones 2009, 215).

Small finds

Small finds from the site are few and predominantly utilitarian in nature, being dominated by ferrous nails. There is little to suggest settlement of a high-status or affluent nature in the near vicinity, confirming the suggestion raised by the pottery assemblage. Of particular note, however, is a silver coin and copper alloy button. The coin is in good condition, representing a complete short-cross penny (Class 5b2) of King John, dated to AD 1205-1210. It was minted in Canterbury by the moneyer Goldwine (spelled as ‘Coldwine’ on the coin). The button is a neat biconvex copper alloy example, similar to those illustrated by Read (2005, 21–22), which are of thirteenth- to fourteenth-century date.

Chronological phasing

Based on the recovered pottery assemblage, medieval activity at Fox Lane was dated to between the eleventh to twelfth and fourteenth centuries AD. Although the earliest pottery pre-dates activity recorded at nearby Mill House (Mustchin *et al.* 2015, 2), the fourteenth-century cessation of settlement is common to both sites and is also evident at nearby Station Garage/Railway Cottage (Meredith 2012). Moreover, this pattern can be recognised at numerous medieval sites across the wider region and beyond (*e.g.* Mustchin *et al.* 2018; Woolhouse 2016, 121). Although limited evidence of fifteenth- to seventeenth-century and later deposition was recorded at the Fox Lane site, activity during this period was on a much-reduced scale, comprising just

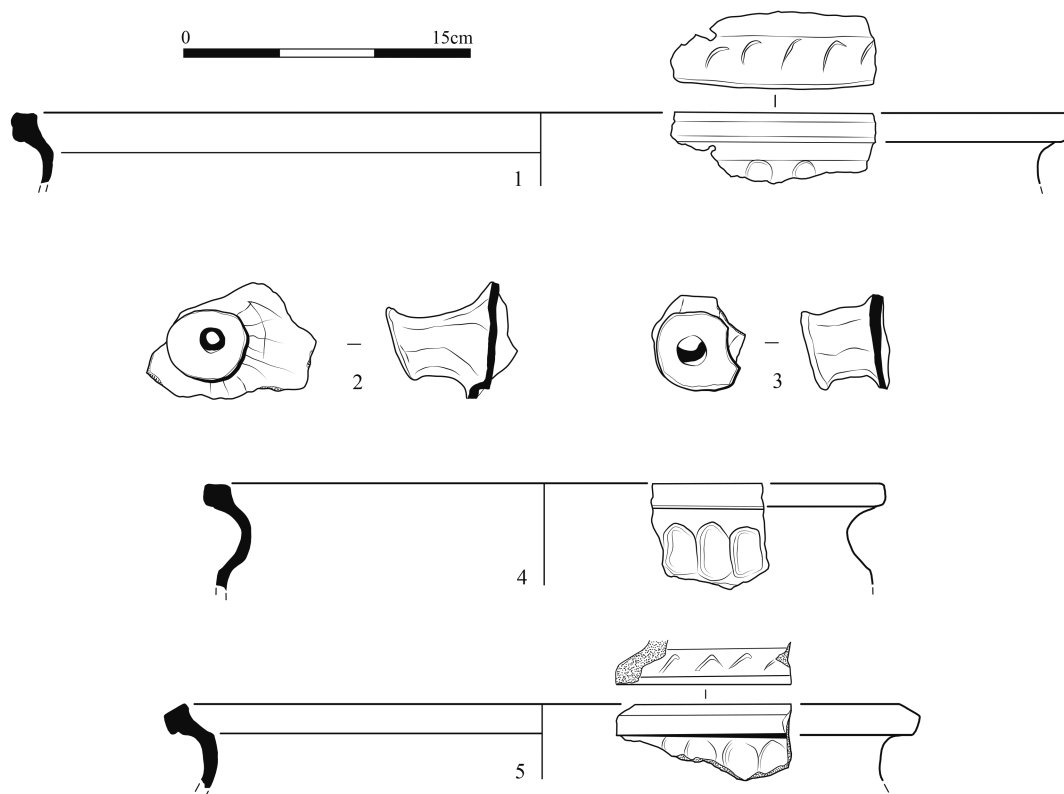


Figure 8 Selected pottery illustrations from the Fox Lane assemblage. 1) Hollesley bowl rim with incised wavy lines and impressed decoration above shoulder, and a suspension hole; Ditch 1153 (Fill 1155A). 2) Hollesley type ?spout; Ditch 1002 (Fill 1003D). 3) Hollesley type ?spout; Ditch 1137 (Fill 1138A). 4) Hollesley bowl rim with impressed decoration above shoulder; Pit 1168 (Fill 1169). 5) Hollesley bowl rim with incised wavy lines and impressed decoration above shoulder; Ditch 1153 (Fill 1155A).

a single enclosure boundary and modern pit. Material immediately pre-dating the medieval occupation included individual sherds of early and middle Anglo-Saxon pottery, collectively spanning the seventh to tenth centuries AD.

Results from the Fox Lane excavations: environment and economy

Environmental evidence

The environmental assemblage is consistent with findings from Mill House (Mustchin *et al.* 2015) and is typical of the period. Environmental bulk sampling produced a modest but relatively diverse floral assemblage revealing aspects of medieval diet and economy. Free-threshing wheat was dominant, while barley, oat and rye also appear to have been locally cultivated as part of a mixed agrarian economy. Wheat was the preferred cash crop, being used for the highest status bread (*cf.* Stone 2006). Barley was significant for brewing, as was the crop dredge (mixed barley and oats), while oats were also important as fodder and poorer quality malt (Stone 2006; Straker *et al.* 2007, 886). Rye was often used as a lower status winter cereal (see Campbell and Overton 1993, 57–58), as well as being cultivated as maslin (mixed wheat and rye).

While primary evidence of crop processing (such as chaff) was absent, possibly suggesting that such activities were carried out elsewhere, this conflicts

with the occurrence of lava quern fragments in the finds assemblage. It is possible, however, that the high economic utility of chaff and other processing by-products as fodder may have prevented them from entering the archaeological record. Therefore, while the recovered assemblage gives the impression of a fully cleaned cereal product, local cultivation – very likely associated with the identified strip fields – and processing cannot be ruled out.

Non-cereal taxa include goosefoot (*Chenopodium* sp.), wild radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum*) and stinking chamomile (*Anthemis cotula*), all of which can occur as arable weeds. Stinking chamomile, furthermore, is characteristic of heavy loam and clay soils, which were ubiquitous in this area.

Other cultivars include flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) – a probable oil or fibre crop – pea (*Pisum sativum*) and horse bean (*Vicia faba* var. *minor*), while the occurrence of great fen sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) in the environmental samples is possibly indicative of thatching, floor covering and/or fuel (*cf.* Rowell 1986). This fenland species does not grow on cultivated land (Stace 2010, 950) and was most probably gathered from local river/stream margins such as the wetlands around the Minsmere River.

The relatively high incidence of pulses from some features is notable and suggests that they may have been carbonised in a domestic hearth during day-to-day food preparation and cleaning activities. They were an

important dietary component used for pottages and low status bread (Stone 2006); Dyer (2006, 36–37) notes that peas were an important source of dietary subsistence for the poorer classes, particularly at times when cereals were in short supply and therefore expensive.

In addition to supplementing diet, the nitrogen-fixing properties of legumes made them an integral part of medieval crop rotation (Mate 1997, 268; Stone 2005, 62–63; Whitney 2004, 115). Their importance for soil preparation in medieval Suffolk is indicated by the fact that approximately 75 per cent of demesne land was cultivated each year (Bailey 2007, 111). At Akenham, some 34km to the southwest of Darsham, approximately fifteen per cent of demesne crops were legumes in AD 1250 (Bailey 2007, 111). Vetches, particularly common vetch (*Vicia sativa*), were also commonly grown for fodder (see Moffett 2006, 53; Straker et al. 2007, 886).

Animal bone

A small assemblage of animal bone was recovered from medieval contexts. Cattle (*Bos* sp.), accounting for more than 50 per cent by number of identified specimens (NISP), dominated the assemblage. The dominance of cattle is in keeping with other sites in the region, not least the Mill House site, where this species was also predominant (Cussans 2015, 30). On both sites, the age profile suggested primary exploitation of cattle for meat, although the presence of older animals also suggested a possible role for traction (Mustchin et al. 2015, 9).

Other domestic species in order of abundance are sheep/goat (*Ovis aries/Capra hircus*), pig (*Sus scrofa*), equid (*Equus* sp.) and dog (*Canis familiaris*). Pigs, which account for 16 per cent of the medieval assemblage, also seem to have been largely slaughtered at prime meat age. Horse bones accounted for only just over five per cent of the assemblage, with no particularly young or old equids present. Compared to oxen, horses are more expensive to feed and maintain (Langdon 1982, 31 and 36), and their low occurrence suggests that they were primarily kept as pack animals (Grant 1984), although possible skinning of horses was evidenced at the adjacent Mill House site (Mustchin et al. 2015, 9). Domestic fowl were identified in bulk sample residues (Curl 2015).

The comparatively low representation of sheep/goat at the Fox Lane site – making up less than 20 per cent of the identified assemblage by NISP – also echoes their low occurrence at Mill House (Cussans 2015, 36), and is considered atypical of a period when the increasing economic importance of wool saw the widespread expansion of flocks across large areas of England (Ryder 1983, 457). Indeed, Sykes (2006, 58) notes that sheep often dominate medieval assemblages, reflecting their increasing economic utility from the eleventh century. In this light, the profusion of head bones and lack of forelimbs in the Fox Lane assemblage may reflect the export of more valuable, meat-bearing elements away from the site, suggesting that local sheep husbandry was geared primarily towards food production, although recorded age data do suggest some local wool production. Indeed, from the latter part of the eleventh century, meat-bearing elements tend to occur in greater numbers on high status sites, reflecting their acquisition and consumption by the higher social classes (Sykes 2006).

A small number of pathological/abnormal elements are present, although these cannot confidently be linked to any particular condition or trauma. Butchery evidence is dominated by chop marks, although poor preservation of the assemblage has probably resulted in an under-representation of cut marks. Available age data indicate the exploitation of cattle for meat, with pigs having a similar use, while the farming of sheep/goat for wool and meat is probable.

With the exception of three fish bones (large gadid) – almost certainly representing food waste –, marine shellfish (see below), and a single butchered hare bone recovered during the trial trench evaluation of the site (Curl 2015), wild fauna are absent.

Marine molluscs

The local consumption of oysters and other shellfish was also attested. The marine mollusc assemblage is modest in size and dominated by native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) with lesser quantities of mussel (*Mytilus edulis*) and only a single fragment of cockle (cf. *Cerastoderma edule*). The oyster shells are small for the period, at the smaller end of the range recorded for medieval Stowmarket (Cussans and Philips 2016), and considerably smaller than recorded at Poole in Dorset (Winder 1992). Human modification in the form of opening notches is well represented, clearly indicating local consumption. Oysters were widely traded and consumed across medieval Europe (Adamson 2004, 44), and were probably imported to Darsham via one of the local market centres such as Saxmundham. If kept cool and moist, this species can be kept alive for transportation for up to two weeks (Monckton 2015, 6), although the proximity of Darsham to the North Sea coast, where there is a widespread modern distribution of oyster beds along the coast between Southend and Orford Ness (*National Biodiversity Network*), suggests that this is unlikely to have been necessary here.

Discussion

Settlement form and function

The Fox Lane site, with the adjacent site at Mill House, formed part of a broader agricultural landscape, characterised by ditched enclosures and trackways. In conjunction with the posthole structure, interpreted as a livestock pen, close to the southern edge of Enclosure 4, this suggests a primarily pastoral function. Evidence of other activity within the medieval enclosures is scarce, although includes at least two instances of domestic refuse disposal. As domestic waste is unlikely to have been transported over large distances, it is therefore likely that a settlement existed nearby.

A landscape of rough grassland, as indicated by the terrestrial mollusc assemblage, supports this interpretation, while a footing of paired beam-slots is thought to represent another type of agricultural structure – perhaps the base of a ‘stack’ (see Fig. 7). While China Green was probably the main focus of local livestock grazing, any pastoral system would also have required ‘infield’ areas, close to farmyards and almost certainly including livestock pens for activities such as shearing and, possibly, putting ewes to the ram (Page 2003, 147).

The landscape context of Darsham, within easy reach of the Minmere River and Suffolk coast, is fundamental to understanding its economic history. Access to different local environments and resources had a significant influence on past activities. However, while the animal bone and environmental assemblages reflect the suitability of the local soils for both pastoral and arable exploitation, the terrestrial mollusc assemblage is dominated by taxa indicative of rough grassland habitats, and it remains uncertain how much of the excavated site was actually under the plough.

The economic and political dynamics of land ownership are less clear, although the pottery – some of which may derive from manuring with domestic waste – would tend to suggest that the site did not form part of a demesne holding. In this context, it is interesting to note that Suffolk was amongst the most ‘free’ areas of medieval England, where much of the peasantry was made up of freemen or sokemen (Postan 1972, 165; Williamson 2005, 21). Although circumstantial, this evidence complements the presence of possible strip fields in the north-west of the site; strips of this type would have been cultivated by individual peasant farmers on a subsistence basis.

Settlement development

The earlier excavations at Mill House attempted to understand its development in terms of village expansion during the early to high medieval period (Mustchin *et al.* 2015). While numerous causal factors are thought to have shaped the development of medieval settlements (*cf.* Jones 2010, 25), a prime candidate in this instance would seem to be a straightforward increase in population size. Already a ‘densely settled and populous region’ by around AD 1100 (Bailey 2007, 68), Suffolk witnessed steady population growth over the course of the next two centuries. This was sustained by high agricultural output and reliable harvests resulting from a climatic optimum, widely termed the Medieval Warm Period, dated *c.* AD 950–1250 (Mann *et al.* 2009; Williamson 2005, 21). Associated settlement expansion was often characterised by ‘overspill’ from a traditional core, with new, independent settlement around the edges of greens being widely attested from the start of the twelfth century (Williamson 2005, 19).

The Fox Lane site – in conjunction with the results of the Mill House project – presents an interesting case study of medieval green-side settlement, its emergence, development and decline. Within Suffolk, medieval greens are particularly associated with areas of heavy clay soils (Martin 1999b, 62; after Atkins 2015, 382), while settlement around their fringes is often characterised by modest farmsteads, individually or in groups (Martin 1999a, 88). Warner (1987) noted a bi-partite pattern of rural settlement in the east of the county, with primary, often nucleated settlements occupying valley gravels, and green-side settlements (on heavier soils) being a secondary emergence (after Atkins 2015, 382). While the heavy clays of the Fox Lane site appear to fit this model well, it is also interesting to note that the parish church and probable core of medieval Darsham are located downslope to the east, straddling the boundary between clay deposits and lighter sands/gravels (*British Geological Survey*) The spatial separation of Suffolk

greens and churches – most of which pre-date Domesday – was also noted by Martin (1999b, 62).

One obvious attraction of greens and commons during this period of expansion would have been the availability of established grazing, albeit within a secondary settlement landscape (Muir 2002, 181, cited by Woolhouse 2016, 121). Another green-side settlement at Cherry Tree Farm, Wortham, was established on the edge of Wortham Green or Long Green around the end of the eleventh century AD and was abandoned by the fourteenth century, during which time the principal focus of its economy shifted from arable to pastoral (Atkins 2015, 375, 383). While the importance of arable agriculture to the medieval economy of the current site is difficult to gauge, evidence of animal husbandry is better defined, and would appear to agree well with its green-side status.

The juxtaposition of the Fox Lane site, Mill House and China Green (Fig. 2) strongly suggests that Fox Lane represents part of a larger green-side settlement, constituting either a small farmstead or incorporating elements of a toft and croft type smallholding. The greater occurrence of finer tablewares at Mill House is notable, and is thought to indicate that the farmhouse or toft in this instance was located to the north of The Street. Within this region, settlements of a similar type include a roadside toft at Cedars Park, Stowmarket (Woolhouse 2016, 55) and a ninth- to thirteenth-century settlement fronting the Old Great North Road at Water Newton, Cambridgeshire (Newton *et al.* 2013). A possible moated croft has also been recorded some 650m to the west of Fox Lane. While the broad date of the Fox Lane pottery assemblage, spanning the eleventh or twelfth to fourteenth centuries, does not support an in-depth chronological analysis of settlement development, the earlier part of this range agrees well with the established date for the emergence of green-side settlement in Suffolk (*cf.* Williamson 2005, 19).

Settlement decline

At the neighbouring Mill House site, a cessation of activity was noted at some point during the fourteenth century (Mustchin *et al.* 2015, 12). This pattern is also evident at other local and regional sites, including the Station Garage/Railway Cottage site, on the western edge of Darsham (Meredith 2012). However, unlike some rural settlements in Suffolk and further afield (*e.g.* Hunger Green in Earl Soham; Bailey 2007, 239), the village never suffered complete depopulation. This is clearly demonstrated at the current site, where fifteenth- to seventeenth-century deposition was recorded, albeit on a massively reduced scale compared to the medieval evidence. It would appear, therefore, that there was decline in activity on the edge of China Green in the fourteenth century, rather than that the settlement disappeared altogether.

The fourteenth-century decline of green-side settlements is a common theme in Suffolk, in part reflecting depopulation as a result of the Black Death (Bailey 2007, 239). Indeed, the arrival of the Black Death in AD 1348 resulted in major social upheaval and population decline (Lewis 2016), and was a catalyst for widespread economic change. The abandonment of green-side sites, in particular, is thought to reflect their

secondary or 'late-settled' status (Bailey 2007, 239): population decline and 'agrarian retrenchment' from the fourteenth century onwards meant that these sites, many of which occupied marginal locations, were readily forsaken in favour of more economically attractive prospects (Bailey 2007, 239). This may well have been the case at the current site, which is thought to represent a secondary settlement, distant from the parish church and medieval core of Darsham. However, while the plague almost certainly contributed to a downturn in the fortunes of the Fox Lane/Mill House sites, settlement abandonment across the county as a whole usually occurred over the course of many centuries as a result of multiple contributory factors (Bailey 2007, 239).

Mid-thirteenth-century climate change may also have contributed to this settlement decline. Activity at Fox Lane straddles the interface between the Medieval Warm Period (dating c. AD 950–1250) and the Little Ice Age (c. AD 1300–1850), with worsening conditions from this time resulting in cooler, wetter summers and a restricted growing season (Fagan 2000; Grove 2004, 419, table 15.3; Mann *et al.* 2009). While the environmental data are insufficient to investigate the impact of these changes at Fox Lane, any significant increase in precipitation is likely to have made the site's slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged soils almost impossible to farm. A similar point has been made at Goltho in Lincolnshire, where the seasonal waterlogging and compaction of soils of the Ragdale Association makes them difficult to cultivate, even now (*cf.* Grove 2004, 629–630). Beresford (1981) noted similar soil conditions at a number of deserted medieval villages in the surrounding area (after Grove 2004, 630).

Conclusions

The results of the Fox Lane excavation, in conjunction with previous findings from Mill House, Darsham, provide a valuable insight into the appearance, development and decline of green-side settlement in this part of Suffolk. The site forms part of a wider, enclosed medieval landscape on the periphery of China Green, which is thought to have developed in response to local population increase and the resultant need to settle and farm more marginal areas. The commencement of activity at the site, dating to the late eleventh or early twelfth century, fits well with the established date for the emergence of green-side settlement in the wider county (Williamson 2005, 19). A fourteenth-century decline in activity would appear to reflect, at least in part, the arrival of the Black Death and commencement of the Little Ice Age. However, potential local influences on settlement contraction and changes in land use at this time cannot be ruled out.

Previous consideration of the Mill House site inferred a linear expansion of medieval Darsham, along the Line of The Street (Mustchin *et al.* 2015, 10). Indeed, a commonality of boundary alignments at Mill House and Fox Lane, most of which appear to respect the orientation of the modern road, strongly suggest that the latter was established by the medieval period. However, the evidence is now thought to indicate a more dispersed picture of expansion (*cf.* Williamson 2005, 19), with

both the Fox Lane and Mill House sites emerging independently of the traditional core of the village. Their subsequent fourteenth-century decline is also in keeping with the general regression of green-side settlements across Suffolk.

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