
The early history of Commercial End, Swaffham Bulbeck, a small hamlet on the Cambridgeshire fen edge

Rob Brooks* and Michael Green

With Ruth Beverton, Anthony Breen, Julie Curl, Val Fryer and Richenda Goffin

**Unfortunately Rob Brooks' name was inadvertently omitted from the printed volume.*

Recent fieldwork beyond the northern edge of the village of Swaffham Bulbeck in south-east Cambridgeshire provided an opportunity to investigate the history of the adjacent hamlet of Commercial End. Excavation established that the main activities on the site occurred during the medieval and post-medieval periods, although some earlier material was identified. The archaeological evidence suggests that the site was used primarily for the exploitation of the natural deposits of chalk and clunch, together with limited signs of occupation. The investigation uncovered a significant pottery assemblage of medieval and early post-medieval date indicative of settlement nearby.

Introduction

The excavation of a small site on land between 48 and 54 Commercial End, a hamlet located just north of the village of Swaffham Bulbeck in south-east Cambridgeshire, which lies 4.2km to the south-west of Burwell and 2.1km north-east of Bottisham, was undertaken by Suffolk Archaeology (SACIC) in June 2015, following an evaluation in the spring of the same year. The village is a conservation area where until recently little development had taken place, so this excavation, in advance of the development of a vacant plot, was a valuable opportunity to provide archaeological evidence for the history of the village and its subsidiary settlement. The site is on the eastern side of the main road through Commercial End. No houses are shown on this plot in the 1800 enclosure map. The area is labelled 'Commercial End' on the first edition of the OS 1:2500 map published in 1887. On this map, the site is shown with two cottages or houses fronting the street to the west and a well located immediately behind the properties. To the east, behind the buildings, a garden extends to a common boundary with the adjoining field marked 199 on the map. The plot, together with those of all the other houses, lacks an Ordnance Survey parcel number or separate measurement expressed as a decimal acreage. The same buildings are shown on the subsequent editions of 1902 and 1926.

The well, together with most of the other pumps and wells situated behind the properties to the north

and south of the site, is no longer shown on the 1926 map. Between 1926 and 1971 the buildings were removed, possibly under the Housing Confirmation Orders of 1936 (Breen 2017). However, the map in the Royal Commission volume on North-East Cambridgeshire appears to show the site as occupied. This is based on the 1952 OS six inch map, which also shows the site as occupied, with, instead, a vacant plot to the north (RCHM 1972, 96 fig.85). Demolition of the buildings therefore seems to have happened since 1950. In recent years the plot has been used as a garden or allotment.

The excavation covered c. 25m², most of the western part of the plot, close to the street frontage. It revealed evidence dating mainly to the medieval and post-medieval periods. The earliest features were mostly chalk extraction pits which exploited the Grey Chalk subgroup that dominates the local area (British Geological Survey 2017); these were dated by pottery to the 12th–14th century. More intensive quarrying of marl and clunch followed during the late medieval/early post-medieval period, providing the raw materials for local building construction and possibly for trade. In addition, a change of landuse in this period is shown by evidence of structural features, including clunch foundations and postholes, together with a number of ditches. Significant quantities of late medieval and early post-medieval pottery and ceramic building material were recovered from these features. The later post-medieval phase included four large structural postholes along with clunch foundations, whilst 19th–20th century levelling activity and a cobbled surface possibly related to buildings on the street frontage, as seen on historic maps, was also recorded.

This article summarises the results of the excavation and discusses them in the context of the development of Commercial End in relation to the main village of Swaffham Bulbeck. It is based on the full analytical excavation report (Green 2017) which is available digitally <<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library/greylit>>

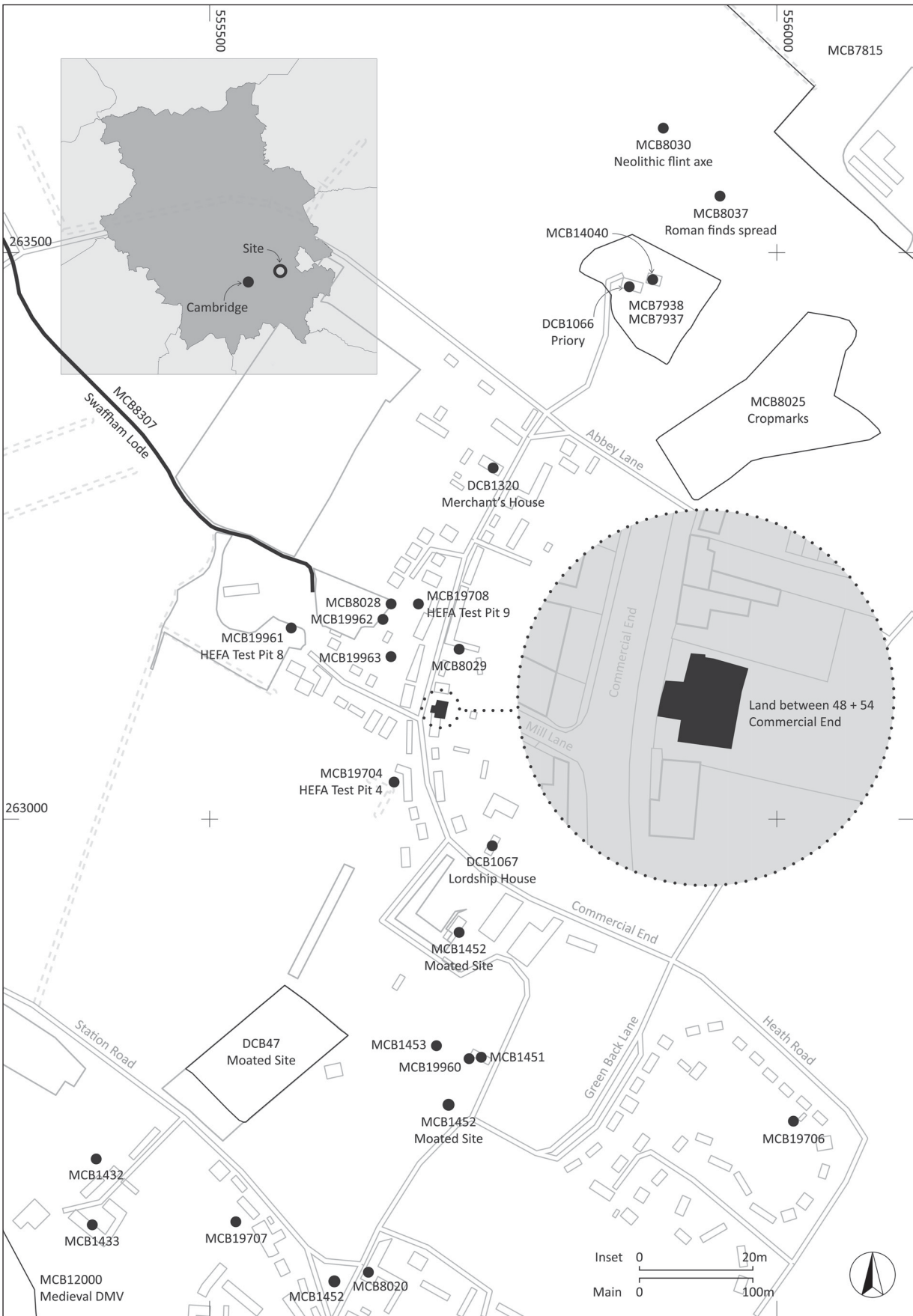


Figure 1. Site location showing HER entries discussed in text.

Historical and Archaeological background

Little excavation had previously been undertaken in the area around Commercial End, probably because of building constraints within the conservation area. However there has been detailed analysis of the landscape (Taylor 1972 210–22, 238–9) and standing buildings (Historic England records, RCHM 1972, 96–115). Several individual find spots and sites are recorded in the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Records (CHER). A test-pit survey of Swaffham Bulbeck was undertaken in 2012, with three of the pits located in this vicinity (Lewis *et al.* 2013).

Limited evidence for prehistoric activity includes a Neolithic flint axe (MCB8030) found 400m to the north of the site. Spot finds (MCB8037) suggest that a Roman settlement lies immediately north-east of Swaffham Bulbeck Priory (*c.* 500m north of the site) on chalk marl on the edge of the fens. Deep ploughing revealed large quantities of Roman pottery, mostly Nene Valley colour-coated and Horningsea-type ware and some pieces of samian. Flint, clunch and roofing tiles were also found. MCB17347 (570m south-west of the development area, not shown on Fig. 1) is the location of a possible Roman settlement identified by crop marks and documentary evidence. Swaffham Bulbeck Lode (MCB8307), an artificial watercourse of probable Roman origin, directly links this area to the River Cam.

In 1087 Swaffham (Bulbeck and Prior) was recorded as consisting of a ‘very large’ settlement of forty-seven households (Open Domesday, 2017). A priory of Benedictine nuns founded in the mid-twelfth century lay just to the north-east (DCB1066), with a surviving building known as ‘the Abbey’. Excavations here (ECB348) revealed finds of decorated tile, glass and fine pottery and features including walls, floors and pits. Moated medieval to post-medieval sites in Swaffham Bulbeck (DCB47 and MCB1452) are also recorded, as are undated but possibly medieval or post-medieval crop marks and earthworks, located nearby (MCB8025 and MCB7938). A possible deserted medieval settlement (MCB12000) was found 600m to the southwest of the development. Other significant local buildings include Lordship House (DCB1067), 300m to the south, which incorporates a 13th century chapel. Finds of medieval and post-medieval pottery were located within 170m of the development.

The post-medieval history of the hamlet is reasonably well documented. Between the draining of the local fenland in the seventeenth century and the building of the railways in the nineteenth waterways were the main means of local and long distance transport, especially of bulk goods. A network of canals connected to the rivers to bring goods to and from small fenland ports, like Commercial End. At the end of the 14th century the area was referred to as Newnham Street and Newnham End, but by the mid/late 19th century it had become Bowyer’s End, named after Thomas Bowyer (d.1824), an influential merchant who is listed as one of the owners of property in Commercial End, along with James Rickard

Barker, on the 1800 Enclosure Map listings. The name Commercial End is recorded on maps from as early as the 1880s (Wareham and Wright 2002, 251). Bowyer lived in the Merchant’s House (DCB1320), a heavily modified 17th century structure which was located close to the lode and included an additional counting house. He was responsible for the construction of over fifteen buildings along the street. The new houses followed a standard design and were constructed for Bowyer’s workmen. For his more senior staff, grey brick two-storey houses were erected. Opposite the Merchant’s House, an early 19th century warehouse, with cobbled yard, drying ground and a hoist opening, lies just 10m south of the lode dock basin (Heritage Gateway 2017, List Entry Number: 1127047), with a mill recorded on historic mapping in the late 19th century. Clunch quarries were discovered 800m to the south at the primary school (ECB250, not shown on Fig. 1), producing finds from the Roman to post-medieval periods.

The land which the site occupies may have been held by the manor of Mitchell Hall or Mickle Hall in the 1800s; no structures were recorded at that time on the enclosure map (Breen 2017). This contrasts with the surrounding plots, where houses were present. Ordnance Survey maps show two structures on the excavated site from 1887–1926, demolished after 1950.

Excavation Results

Prehistoric and Roman evidence

Neither the evaluation nor the subsequent excavation identified any features dating to prehistoric or Roman periods. Small quantities of Roman pottery and ceramic building material were recorded from the excavation phase. A single sherd from the base of a Nene Valley beaker dating to late 3rd–4th C was a residual find in a pit, and six pieces of Roman brick and tile including part of an abraded tegula were re-deposited into two pits also containing later material. The small amount of Roman artefactual evidence suggests that it is unlikely that there was settlement in close proximity, although there was more substantial Roman activity *c.* 500m to the north of the site and also to the south (MCB17347).

The Late Saxon/early medieval period (9th–12th century)

The Domesday survey records a settlement of considerable size at Swaffham Bulbeck and Prior, but this activity is not reflected on the site at Commercial End, which lies to the north of the nucleus of the main village. The lack of Late Saxon pottery or finds suggests that the site lay beyond the original area of settlement and only eight sherds of medieval wares dating to the 11th–12th century were identified as residual finds.

Quarrying activity: The medieval period (12th–14th century) (Fig. 2a)

The earliest features on the site are dated by ceramics to the 12th–14th century, and consist of four possible shallow quarry pits, a simple posthole structure and a small number of other features. 21 fragments of pottery, comprising mostly body sherds of medieval coarsewares including Ely wares, were present in three of the pits, together with small quantities of animal bone. The medieval features were severely truncated by later archaeological activity. Not all of them produced dating material; in this case they were phased by their stratigraphy and their similarities with, and proximity to other features. Two parallel shallow channels thought to be wheel ruts, which were stratigraphically early, may indicate a trackway running to the east associated with the quarrying. One of these features produced a small fragment of medieval coarseware dating from the 12th to the 14th century.

The material evidence

218 sherds of medieval pottery (total weight 1,699kg) were recovered from both phases of the excavation, mostly residual in later groups of finds. A summary of the quantities by main fabric type is shown below (Table 1). The majority of the medieval assemblage consists of coarsewares, a collective term used to describe a variety of wheelthrown unglazed wares dating to the 12th–14th centuries which are predominantly sandy but which contain other types of inclusions such as additional quartz, mica and shell. The range of these fabrics includes fine sandy micaceous wares typical of the Essex production sites, Heddingham coarsewares, and Bury medieval coarsewares from further east in Suffolk. A number of unsourced coarseware fabrics are also represented, many of which are likely to have been produced

locally. The next largest fabric type is medieval Ely coarseware such as the jug illustrated (Fig. 3, No. 1). Individual sherds were not separated into the different fabric variants A–F described in Spoerry (2008) in case of mis-assignment. A number of Lyveden-Stanion shelly coarsewares from Northamptonshire were also present.

The small quantity of medieval glazed wares includes a fragment of Developed Stamford ware from Lincolnshire, Heddingham fineware, and a sherd of Mill Green ware, both from Essex, and Ely Glazed wares. Several other glazed sherds were not fully identified; some of these contained calcareous inclusions and are likely to be products from the fenland area. No Grimston Glazed wares were present, perhaps suggesting that the main routes of local ceramic trading were to the south, west and east rather than the north. However, part of a rod handle with deeply impressed grooves and a full copper glaze made in a hard, off-white fabric with a pale pink/orange margin is probably a Scarborough jug, if not another type of Yorkshire glazed ware. A fragment of Siegburg stoneware from the Rhineland was also identified.

Medieval ceramic building material was also recorded from both phases of the archaeological work, albeit in small quantities. Ten possible medieval brick fragments made in poorly-mixed estuarine clays were identified. Although commonly thought to date to the 13th–15th centuries, this tradition may have been more long-lived in the area around the fens, continuing into the early post-medieval period or beyond. Three roof tiles made in a fine sandy fabric with abundant fine calcareous material and with reduced cores date to the medieval period. These were probably locally made, perhaps in the Ely area, and are similar to fabric types found at the Jewson's site in Ely (Cessford *et al.* 31, table 4).

Small amounts of animal bone were present in four of the pits, the most diagnostic being fragments

Table 1. Summary of medieval pottery fabrics by count, weight, and percentage by count and weight

Fabric type	No of sherds	Weight (g)	% by sherd count	% by weight (g)
Early medieval ware	9	41	4.1	2.4
Bury medieval coarseware	14	106	6.4	6.2
Heddingham coarseware	14	72	6.4	4.2
Medieval coarsewares	90	605	41	35.6
Medieval Ely wares	59	613	27	36.0
Lyveden-Stanion coarseware	4	46	1.8	2.7
Heddingham fineware	16	63	7.3	3.7
Mill Green ware	1	7	0.5	0.4
Unprovenanced medieval glazed wares	8	58	3.6	3.4
Scarborough ware	1	63	0.5	3.7
Stamford C	1	1	0.5	0.1
Siegburg stoneware	1	24	0.5	1.4
Total	218	1699	99.6	99.8



Figure 2. Site plan by major phase.
 a. Medieval activity (12th-14th century); b. Late medieval to early post-medieval activity (14th-16th century);
 c. Post-medieval activity (16th-18th century); d. Late post-medieval activity (19th-20th century).

of sheep/goat in fill 0194 of pit 0193.

The earliest datable small find from the site is a single silver long cross penny of Edward I dated to 1272–1307. It is very worn and was recovered from the topsoil.

Increased activity: Late medieval to early post-medieval (late 14th–16th century) (Fig.2b)

Evidence of archaeological activity at Commercial End increased in the period spanning the late medieval to early post-medieval period. The main features include wells, ditches, and pits but some structural evidence in the form of postholes was also recorded. The pitting once again is likely to have been for quarrying, both for clay marl and clunch, with large areas covering much of the north-west and southern edges of the site. Other features such as the wells and small posthole structures are also probably related to the extraction processes.

Quarry pits and related features

Many of the pits seen on site can be loosely dated by their associated finds to the 14th to 16th century. The northern area of pitting was possibly for the extraction of the clay marl which overlaid the clunch. These pits were typically shallow (0.3m deep) with irregular, broad cuts. Other shallow pits along the southwest edge of the site were similar in character and date and are probably also linked to this activity.

An unusually large extraction pit excavated on the southern edge of the site was at least 2m deep, and contained multiple fills, some of which had been waterlogged. These fills contained moderate quantities of residual medieval ceramics and brick and tile, accompanied by pottery and ceramic building material dating to the 16th century or later. It seems likely that the pit was left open at times (possibly for retaining water), and that it may originally have been an earlier feature. A similar pit was recorded in the evaluation to the east of the excavation area and the plant macrofossils from this feature showed evidence of cereal processing waste, as well as material probably imported from the fen for use as bedding or thatch.

Two deep unlined wells contained finds predominantly dating to the 15th–16th century. One of these had near vertical sides and was excavated to a depth of 1m. It was further augured an additional 0.5m before an impenetrable clunch fill was encountered. These wells may have originally provided the water source for workers on site or for aiding the extraction processes of clunch, in order to stop it from drying out. The backfilling of this well contained de-watered seeds of ruderal weeds, particularly those commonly found associated with dung heaps or other forms of ordure. Although this could indicate that pastoral activities were occurring nearby, it is thought more likely that the material accumulated when the site was poorly maintained and that the well was subsequently probably largely used for the deposition of various forms of refuse.

Other features and possible structures

Other possible building remains were represented by two disturbed deposits of clunch blocks which ran parallel to one another for a short length in the north-west corner of the site, which were both set within small construction cuts. These structural features are earlier than the main quarry pitting described above but their truncation makes their interpretation difficult. Another set of structural remains, consisting of a short length of construction slot with a square cut profile and a possible associated clunch block surface set into a clay matrix was located by the street frontage. These features may represent further structural remains, though it is also possible that they may be a consolidation or levelling deposit.

A pit recorded in the evaluation, east of the excavation, is most likely to have been used for waste disposal due to the dark organic fill, mixed finds and burnt waste from the environmental sample, although its primary purpose may have been for quarrying. The upper two of its three fills contained pottery dating to the 15th–16th centuries or slightly later.

Two ditches ran broadly north to south across the centre of the site; these may represent evidence of an enclosure ditch for livestock or crops, or early property boundaries. Although they belong to this broad phase stratigraphically, the fill of one of these features contained seventeen fragments of medieval pottery and a single sherd of prehistoric date. Environmental samples from both produced unusual wheat glume bases more typical of the Middle Saxon period or earlier, and these may be remnants of redeposited material representing relics of earlier activity in the vicinity.

The material evidence

A significant element of the late medieval/early post-medieval finds assemblage consists of ceramics. The group consists of 188 sherds of pottery weighing 2.988kg, which is made up for the most part of a range of glazed and unglazed redwares. A list of the fabrics and their quantification is shown in Table 2.

The most readily identifiable transitional fabric is Late Ely ware, which is consistently found in these pottery groups. Several vessel types are present in the assemblage; bowls and panchions are the most commonly represented forms with six examples identified (Fig. 3, Nos. 2–3). One particularly large bowl or panchion with a diameter of between 400–440mm has an almost flat-topped flanged rim and is sooted externally, with a lightly splashed internal lead glaze (Fig. 3, No. 4). There are three examples of jugs, with both upright and squared rims (Fig. 3, Nos. 5–6). The Late Ely ware jug with the upright rim is similar to jug forms from Potters Lane (Spoerry 2008, 23, fig. 10 43–44). There are also two jar/pipkins in the assemblage and one fragment of a storage vessel.

In addition to non-specific Late medieval and transitional wares, a number of discrete redwares were grouped under the collective term of LMTC (Late medieval and transitional Cambridgeshire type). One fabric which was commonly found is a hard orange-

Table 2. Summary of late med/early post-medieval pottery fabrics by count, weight, and percentage by count and weight.

Fabric type	No of sherds	Weight (g)	% by sherd count	% by weight (g)
Bourne Ware Type D	14	689	6.5	19.8
Late Med Ely	71	1330	32.8	38.2
Late med transitional	41	478	19.0	13.7
Late med transitional Cambridge type	42	350	19.4	10.0
Late med transitional Essex type	27	330	12.5	9.4
Post-med redware (16th C)	11	124	5.1	3.5
Bichrome redware	3	11	1.4	0.31
Late Colchester type	2	10	0.9	0.28
NLLM Unprovenanced late medieval	1	36	0.46	1.03
Dutch-type redware	1	8	0.46	0.23
Raeren/Aachen stoneware	2	74	0.9	2.12
Frechen/Cologne stoneware	1	35	0.46	1.00
Total	216	3475	99.8	99.6

pink fabric which is uniformly fired throughout; it is fine but has sparse sub-angular quartz and sparse red clay pellets, as well as calcareous material which in particular shows as shallow elongated voids on the surface of the vessel, giving it a slightly pock-marked appearance. The unglazed surface of the ware is a dull matt, but some vessels have a thin, patchy lead-glaze. Identifiable forms include a small pipkin or jar, and the rim of a possible bowl. It is possible that this ware is the same as one of the Broad Street fabrics from the Ely production centre, perhaps the Plain Red/Pink ware or Broad Street fineware (Cessford *et al.*, 48), but equally it may have been made elsewhere in the region. The rim of a jug with a dark orange, overfired fine sandy fabric is of transitional date (Fig. 3, No. 7). A number of other transitional redwares are more micaceous and have similarities to the Essex redware tradition.

One example of a bichrome redware was present in one of the fills of the large extraction pit. It consists of three small bowl sherds, made in a soft buff, sandy fabric (with sparse red clay pellets) with a rounded rim. The vessel has a clear yellow internal glaze and a green external glaze with copper. This could be another Broad Street product, as Bichrome Glazed wares are known to have been made in Ely, with a clear glaze internally and a green glaze on the outside (Cessford *et al.* 56). However, the fabric of this particular bichrome ware is not a red earthenware and it seems likely that it was made elsewhere.

A single jar fragment remains unidentified, although it is distinctive in its appearance. It has a flat-topped rim and is unglazed (Fig. 3, No. 8). It is made in a buff slightly micaceous fabric with red clay pellets, and some calcareous inclusions, as well as quartz. It has a transitional appearance and was found with other late medieval/early post-medieval wares.

Ten sherds of Bourne type D were recovered from the excavation. The best-preserved vessel is a large slipped panchion (diameter 400mm) with a thin external slip (Fig. 3, No. 9). The other identifiable form is a bung-hole cistern from the same feature (Fig. 3, No. 10). Although this fabric continued to be made into the seventeenth century it has been included as transitional because of its form, and by association with the wares which accompany it.

Late medieval/early post-medieval imported wares are sparsely represented. They consist of two fragments of Raeren/Aachen stoneware dating to the late 15th–early 16th century and a sherd of a Koln/Frechen globular jug with small cordon which dates to the later part of the 16th century. A small sherd of Dutch-type redware of a similar date is likely to be a local product rather than a genuine import.

In addition to pottery, there is evidence for late medieval/early post-medieval brick and roofing tiles (70 fragments weighing 7.994kg). Many of these are made of poorly mixed fabrics which contain calcareous inclusions and grog; they cannot be closely dated beyond the transition spanning the medieval/post-medieval period.

Most of the metalwork of late medieval/early post-medieval date was collected from topsoil deposits from the excavation phase. The objects include a 15th century copper alloy trapezoidal-shaped buckle, a folding strap clasp which dates to the late 13th to early 15th century, and a cast copper alloy spherical-headed pin with an incised five-pointed petal decoration dating to the 15th–16th century. A complete Nuremberg 'ship penny' jetton dates to between 1490–1550.

Considerable quantities of animal bone could also be attributed to this period, but the mixed dating of the pottery and ceramic building material in many of the features has limited the potential for detailed

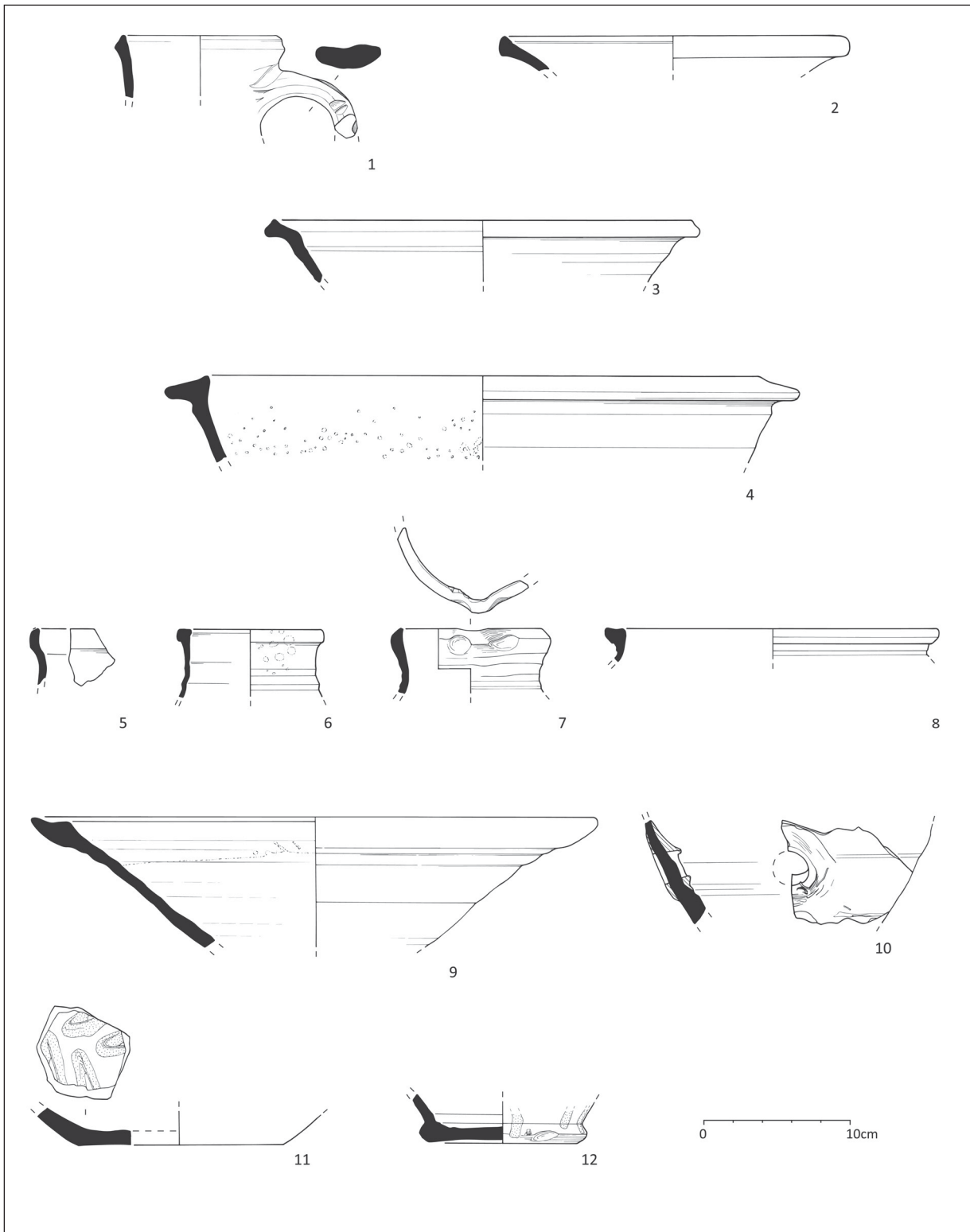


Figure 3. Medieval and post-medieval pottery.

1. Ely coarseware strap-handled jug
2. Late Ely ware bowl
3. Late Ely ware bowl
4. Late Ely ware flanged bowl
5. Late Ely ware jug with upright rim
6. Late Ely ware jug with squared rim

7. Late medieval and transitional ware
(Cambridgeshire type) jug
8. Transitional jar with flat-topped rim
9. Bourne type D panchion
10. Bourne D bung-hole cistern
11. Base of slip-decorated redware bowl
12. Base of slip decorated redware vessel

study. However, the following general comments can be made on the assemblage overall (spanning 14th–16th C).

Cattle were the most frequently recorded species, with remains including both primary and secondary butchering and food waste, suggesting a range of cuts of meat consumed. Most of the cattle bones are from adults, with juveniles seen in three fills, most coming from one of the quarry pits. The animal bone from one of the unlined wells includes a cattle metatarsal showing a pronounced asymmetry of the distal end, suggesting that the beast had been used for traction such as ploughing, probably in heavy soils.

Sheep/goat are the second most common species. Generally, they are seen in relatively small numbers in each fill, with more from pit and well fills. Most ovicaprid bone is from adults, spanning the ages up to 6–8 years old, although juveniles were also seen. The elements from the sheep/goat, as with the cattle, suggest a range of cuts of meat. One large sheep horn-core had been chopped at the base, which might suggest some interest in hornworking, albeit on a small scale.

Pig/boar was recorded in small quantities, the majority from juveniles. This is typical of this species, which is kept primarily for meat, having little or no other uses in life (such as milk or traction), but young adult remains were seen in two fills. As with the other main food mammals, a range of porcine bones were recorded, indicating a variety of cuts consumed. Equid bones were seen in three features. One of these is a tibia which had undergone extensive butchering or possible attempts at working.

Back to the land: Post-medieval (16th–18th century) (Fig. 2c)

Agricultural and domestic features

This phase marks a distinct change in land-use with the end of much of the quarrying activity that had dominated the early history of the site. It is during this period that better drainage management of the fens led to a sustained improvement in agricultural yields and prosperity from better communications via water transport.

Most features dating to the late 16th to early 18th century were shallow channels indicative of agricultural or horticultural activity; these were reminiscent of allotment beds, although it is possible that they too represented shallow quarrying events. Such channels or 'lazy beds' were also recorded during the evaluation. There was in addition a number of small domestic rubbish pits, with organic and charcoal-rich fills, which were not abundant in finds but were dated by the presence of small quantities of post-medieval ceramics such as Glazed red earthenware and ceramic building material spanning the period of the 16th–18th century.

A cesspit dating to the 16th–early 17th century identified in the north-east corner of the site was the earliest feature from this phase. It had two fills, only

one of which contained finds, consisting of six fragments of late medieval/early post-medieval ceramics including a sherd of a German stoneware globular jug dating to c. 1575–1600.

A large pit forming part of an intercutting pit complex in the south end of the site had a single fill which contained medieval pottery, together with a considerable quantity of animal bone. The presence of an iron rotary key of probable 17th century date together with a fragment of post-medieval roof tile in the fill suggests that the pit is post-medieval, although containing earlier material.

A single ditch containing post-medieval finds which ran at 90° to the road possibly represents a plot boundary, or agricultural activity.

The material evidence

Four worn copper alloy farthings of Charles I (1625–1649) were associated together in the fill of a ditch whilst three complete Nuremberg 'rose/orb' jettons were recovered from topsoil, all from the evaluation. One of these was issued by Hans Krauwinkel II, c. 1586–1635. Such evidence of commerce predates the known counting house which was added to the Merchant's House to the north of the site in the second half of the 18th century, although the house itself is late 17th century in origin (Historic England 2017, List Entry Number 1331453).

A total of 215 fragments of pottery of post-medieval date weighing 4.634kg was collected from the evaluation and the excavation. This part of the assemblage includes a number of wares dating to the 16th–18th century, but a large component of ceramics belongs to the late 18th and nineteenth centuries. A breakdown of the major fabrics is shown in Table 3.

As can be seen in Table 3, Glazed red earthenwares form by far the greatest element of the post-medieval assemblage. It is likely that a proportion of this pottery belongs to the transitional period of the 16th century, although all of this fabric has been included in the full post-medieval phase. Some of the glazed redwares were no doubt produced at the Broad Street kilns in Ely (Cessford *et al*, 2006). These have not been separated into different variants, but one particular fragment is a likely candidate for originating from this production site. It is a body sherd, with large shallow thumbing impressions and a scar where a handle was attached. The fragment is very similar to a nearly complete large pipkin with pressed on thumb handle from the Broad Street kiln (Cessford *et al*, 63, fig.45, no.3). Forms represented are jars, storage jars, bowls with flanged and hooked rim and pipkins. A deep bowl with a rolled rim from one of the ditches has a thin clear glaze on the upper part of the exterior of the vessel with a thicker glaze internally. It is made in a fine buff/light pink fabric with sparse red pellet inclusions. The bowl is relatively thin-walled and likely to be a later Glazed red earthenware product, probably dating to the 18th century or thereabouts. The unglazed base is worn through usage.

Several fragments of Post-medieval slipped ware were recovered (11 fragments weighing 213g). Some

Table 3. Summary of post-medieval pottery fabrics by count, weight, and percentage by count and weight

Fabric type	No of sherds	Weight (g)	% by sherd count	% by weight (g)
Glazed red earthenware	99	2713	46.0	58.5
Iron-glazed ware	2	8	0.93	0.17
Post-med slipware	11	214	5.11	4.61
Tin-glazed earthenware	3	51	1.40	1.10
Chinese porcelain	2	40	0.93	0.86
Speckle glazed ware	1	8	0.46	0.17
Staffordshire slipware	1	2	0.46	0.04
Staffs salt-glazed stoneware	1	11	0.46	0.24
Porcelain	1	14	0.46	0.30
Creamware	22	380	10.2	8.20
Pearlware	5	73	2.32	1.57
Red stoneware	1	3	0.46	0.06
English stoneware	7	177	3.2	3.81
Yellow ware	12	210	5.58	4.53
Ironstone china	9	103	4.18	2.22
Late glazed red earthenware	4	243	1.86	5.24
Lustreware	1	7	0.46	0.15
Industrial slipware	5	30	2.32	0.64
Refined white earthenware	28	347	13.0	7.5
Total	215	4634	99.8	99.9

of the more poorly-made vessels may have been produced as part of the repertoire of the potters from Broad Street Ely who were manufacturing slipped Glazed red earthenwares in the seventeenth century. Two sherds from the excavation resemble published examples from the Ely production site (Cessford *et al*, 82, fig. 58 no. 2). The sherds are made in a uniformly fine-medium orange/dark orange fabric with occasional calcareous inclusions, also with sparse ferrous and flint inclusions and some voids. One fragment from the fill of a ditch is from the base of a bowl (Fig. 3, No. 11). The inner surface has a curvilinear slipped design which has adhered poorly to the body of the pot and has broken off, leaving just the shapes of the design showing between areas of lead glaze. A second sherd of a vessel with a flat splayed worn base was found in the same context (Fig. 3, No. 12). The external surface is decorated with diagonal slipped decoration under the lead glaze and once again the slip has come away from the body of the vessel.

The most notable elements of the bone assemblage found in the large pit at the northern end of the site were three pig mandibles of different ages, one of approximately six to ten months old, one of around three months of age and one young neonatal, suggesting continuous breeding of pigs in the vicinity.

Very small quantities of clay tobacco pipe and glass dating to the 17th–18th centuries were recovered, although most of these finds date to the nineteenth century. Sherds of high quality ceramics such as tin-glazed earthenware and decorated Chinese

porcelain belonging to the late 17th/early 18th century were also present; these tablewares were found as residual elements in one pit together with nineteenth century wares and are likely to have originated from a nearby property.

Commercial ventures: Later post-medieval to modern (19th–20th century) (Fig. 2d)

Posthole structure and possible related features

The 19th century historic maps show a house on the street frontage; some features recorded on site from this phase may be linked to this building, although not all are typical of a domestic structure. Four large square postholes containing finds of 19th–20th century date are almost certainly associated with each other (or are evidence for a similar type of activity), although these postholes are not typical of post-medieval building practices, as houses at this time tended to have shallow below-ground foundations. They also did not form a fully square form in plan. It seems likely that these postholes are evidence of an ancillary building for storage, such as a warehouse or barn.

Two rectangular brick-built drains were recorded, dating from the late 19th to early 20th century. One was located within the evaluation, whilst the other was at the north end of the site. These are most likely to be associated with the properties seen on the historic mapping, together with a brick-lined well.

Outhouse and possible yard

A structure consisting of a clunch foundation was seen running beyond the excavation area to the north. It was recorded as late in the stratigraphy and contained 19th century finds. The foundation could well be part of the structure seen on the historic mapping of 1902 as a possible outhouse for the property to the north which was demolished some time before 1926. A cobble layer abutting the structure may have been a small yard associated with the clunch building, but as the cobbles were poorly laid and very patchy in places, it is more likely that they were a dump or consolidation layer rather than a more formal surface.

Pits

Two large irregular pits located towards the centre/east side of the site contained 19th to 20th artefactual evidence; although they may have originally been quarry pits they were later used as refuse pits containing mainly demolished building material.

Material evidence

The majority of the later pottery from this period comprises plain, banded and decorated Creamwares, Pearlware, Yellow wares, Ironstone china with transfer printed decoration and Refined white earthenwares dating to the end of the 18th century into the 19th century. These are all common industrially-produced wares dating from the late Georgian period through to the Victorian era.

The remains of two iron pattens were recovered from one of the pits; these would have formed part of the underframe of a wooden clog or overshoe, which could be attached to the wearer's shoe by straps, raising the foot to enable the person to walk above the dirt and mud without getting their shoes and garments so dirty. Pottery from the fill of the pit dates mainly to the late eighteenth to nineteenth century, with a few earlier wares.

The bones of a goose and two other fowl recovered from one of the large square postholes described above are thought to have been cooked whole, perhaps as part of a sizable meal! The lower legs of each bird were missing, so presumably some trimming of the birds had occurred.

Discussion

With contributions from Michael Green, Richenda Goffin and Val Fryer

In view of the limited archaeological investigation in this area previously, the recent excavation and the accompanying finds assemblage has contributed significantly towards a better understanding of the development of the medieval and post-medieval settlement at Commercial End. This report represents an interim statement of the archaeology pending further investigative work in the vicinity, which may clarify some of the issues discussed below.

Interpretation of many of the features is not straightforward due to the difficulties of establish-

ing the phasing and in some cases the function of the pits and other features which often contain artefactual material of mixed dates. The stratigraphy and levels of truncation also made phasing of some of the features extremely problematic. In spite of these difficulties, the recent work has been able to suggest a somewhat ephemeral site in the medieval and early post-medieval period, used in a piecemeal fashion whenever it was required, with material dumped on it from nearby.

The evidence from the site partly correlates with that of a test-pit survey in the village, which found mid-9th to mid-11th century habitation near the church, 900m to the south, with 12th to 14th century pottery sherds recovered in one of the test-pits at Commercial End, suggesting that the main settlement had been expanding north at this point (Lewis *et al*, 37). These findings were confirmed by the recent excavation, where no Late Saxon sherds were identified, and only eight sherds of earlier medieval pottery in addition to much greater quantities of medieval ceramics dating to the 12th–14th centuries.

The four probable medieval quarry pits and the trackway identified in the excavation provide evidence that building material such as clunch was being removed during the medieval period. This is supported by the documentary record which shows that clunch was being dug for sale by 1258 when the Earl of Oxford in granting his manor reserved a quarry, which was also worked c. 1350–80 (Wareham and Wright 258–265).

Transportation of such heavy material would have been undertaken by river/canal whenever possible, to avoid the high costs incurred from slow road travel, and it is very probable that some of the clunch and marl would have been shipped on the nearby lode. Clunch quarrying is known elsewhere in the parish, as well as across Cambridgeshire. The medieval industry has been studied in some detail at Isleham, ten miles to the north of Swaffham Bulbeck. Here it is suggested that such quarrying was significant enough to supply the local market, rather than simply serving piecemeal building construction, and it is probable that the site at Fordham Road, Isleham supplied clunch to Isleham Priory and its estate buildings (Newton 2010, 111). Whether this was also the case at Commercial End is unclear, but the 13th century Priory undercroft at Swaffham Bulbeck is clunch-built (Historic England 2017, List Entry Number 1165597) and it is likely that clunch was used in other priory buildings which did not survive the Dissolution or any post-Reformation quarrying activities. It was also used in the church of St Mary at Swaffham Bulbeck along with fieldstone (Wareham and Wright 266–270). The source of the clunch was convenient and accessible, and the nearby villagers could provide the necessary labour force for the extraction, building construction and any subsequent repair work.

The hamlet which is now known as Commercial End lies close to the site of the former Benedictine priory, with the main street leading up to the crossing at Abbey Lane and a track running northwards

towards the remains of the priory (Fig. 1). The street is recorded as having 'led towards the gates of the late 12th-century priory, near which dwellings stood by 1395' (Wareham and Wright 2002, 247–252).

The recent excavations revealed evidence of medieval backyard activities, or perhaps activities taking place in neighbouring fields, as no major structural evidence was recorded. Yet by the late 14th century there was occupation close to the priory itself, and further away from the main village, according to the records.

The site itself lies some distance from the location of the priory (*c.* 500m to the south). Neither the features or finds showed evidence for any connection to it aside from the presence of 'medieval CBM [which] suggests ... a relatively high status structure in the vicinity ... perhaps the most likely being the nearby abbey' (Anderson 2015, 32). However, the dispersion of building materials from religious houses following the Dissolution for local re-use was widespread and commonplace.

The lack of artefactual evidence on site which could be identified as relating to the nearby priory is probably not surprising. The documentary records show that the house was small and not wealthy, and that the nuns periodically struggled to find the finances to repair the buildings and maintain their community. Not only was the priory some distance from the site, but the priory buildings were contained within the bounds of the precinct. Access was via the gatehouse, which was accidentally burnt down in 1368 'by the carelessness of a servant sleeping there, who left a candle burning, which fell on his bed and burnt him and the gatehouse' (Salzman 1948, 226–9).

The location of a priory site would originally have been chosen for its seclusion so that it could be set apart from areas of habitation, although in time this could be eroded through village expansion. Such a separation was not just physical, but spiritual as well; the religious community was dedicated to following St Benedict's Rule and a life of devotion, hard work and study. In spite of this, the Victoria County History notes 'the nuns were, however, by no means out of the world, for within 50 yards of their gatehouse lay the wharf communicating with Swaffham Lode, by which until about 1870 a brisk ship-borne trade was carried on with London, Newcastle-on-Tyne, the east coast ports, and Amsterdam. The nuns, 'as ladies of the manor, had an active interest in the traffic by this waterway' (Salzman 1948, 226).

If the priory itself was not always flourishing, the proximity of such an active lode would have created the ideal conditions for the settlement beyond the precinct to grow and, as has been noted, dwellings are recorded in the area from 1395 (Wareham and Wright 2002, 249). This expansion of the settlement is reflected in the increased artefactual evidence for activity dating to the 15th–16th centuries that was recovered from the excavation. This is especially apparent in the ceramic assemblage dating to this period, which demonstrates a range of domestic kitchen and tableware, presumably from households nearby. This

substantial evidence of material culture of this date contrasts with the pattern in other fen edge villages, such as Isleham, where initial evidence of Anglo-Saxon and medieval settlement then saw a decline from the 14th century (Schofield 2016).

Overall, neither archaeological features nor material culture belonging to the 17th to 18th centuries are plentiful from the excavation, although documentary evidence suggests that 'trade, run from the Merchant's House at the modern Commercial End, reached its apogee in the 18th and early 19th centuries, said in 1824 to have been carried on for 200 years' (Wareham and Wright 2002, 258–65).

There are a few hints in the ceramic record of the existence of more wealthy consumers through the presence of sherds of polychrome Chinese porcelain and tin-glazed earthenware, which were expensive and fragile tablewares and indicators of both taste and fashion.

During the late 18th century the records indicate that the chief export from the businesses at Commercial End was "corn by barge and lighter along Swaffham Lode and the Cam to King's Lynn and then on ships ... into the North Sea trade. Some corn was sold to Lynn merchants. The main destinations were Newcastle and Rotterdam, but cargoes also went to Liverpool and, sometimes by road, to London. Benjamin Barker [the merchant at Commercial End] travelled through East Anglia, buying corn to add to the produce of his Swaffham farms and tithes. The chief crops traded were barley, often as malt, and wheat, much of it milled into flour, presumably at the Swaffham water mill, supplemented after 1800 by that at Bottisham Lode. Much rye was also sold both to Newcastle and through Rotterdam for the German market. The bulkiest import was coal from the Tyne, but salt, timber, and Baltic iron were also largely dealt in, and wine and such goods as soap and candles were distributed among the local gentry and shopkeepers" (Wareham and Wright 2002, 258–65).

The excavation has shown that activities such as the extraction and processing of clunch and marl were being undertaken during the medieval and early post-medieval periods on the site at Commercial End. The presence of so much pottery, ceramic building material and animal bone of this broad date range strongly suggests that there was domestic occupation in the vicinity, beyond the site itself. The nearby fenland would have provided grazing for livestock, the remains of which are amply represented in the finds from the excavation. The plant macrofossil assemblages support this view, confirming the peripheral character of the location at this time. Some of the environmental material represents scattered refuse, from domestic or agricultural activity or both which derived from the nearby fen, to be used as fuel, flooring, litter or thatch. There is evidence that cereals were probably being grown locally on the fertile fen edge soils, but the presence of molluscs appears to suggest that the site itself may have been situated within an area of grassland or pasture. Many elements of the examined plant macrofossil assemblages had been

subjected to high temperatures through combustion, and there is evidence of post-depositional disturbance of the features and in addition, episodes of flooding on more than one occasion.

It has not been possible to confidently define the form and function of any structures on the site, save the probable outhouse on the northern edge of the excavation. At least five structures have been tentatively identified, but the evidence for each is incomplete, with some likely to be little more than fence lines or lean-tos. The final two structures are likely to be 19th century from finds evidence, with one also possibly depicted on historic maps, although the structure(s) made up of large postholes is difficult to interpret as it does not fit well with late post-medieval house-building practices. It may be part of a non-domestic building such as a storehouse or barn, or other kind of ancillary building, perhaps associated with the expansion undertaken by Thomas Bowyer.

Considered together, the evidence suggests a site which was marginal to the main area of settlement in the northern part of Swaffham Bulbeck in the medieval and late medieval period and which could be vulnerable to the effects of fenland inundation. During the post-medieval period however, with an improvement in fenland drainage, the character of the hamlet changed; because of its proximity to the lode it greatly expanded and became a centre for trading activities organised substantially from the Merchant's House, with the resulting construction of business premises, warehouses and houses, and probably an increase in the value of land in that vicinity. At this time its character was mainly commercial rather than residential, unlike the southern area of settlement around Swaffham Bulbeck itself. Today few of the earlier houses survive, as most of the buildings in the main street were rebuilt in the early 19th century.

This report represents an interim statement of the recent work at Commercial End, and, it is hoped, has provided a small but useful contribution towards a better understanding of the early development of this rural settlement. In addition, the findings have contributed to the growing body of information on the history of clunch-working in Cambridgeshire.

The theme of understanding and defining the patterns of rural medieval settlement in south Cambridgeshire is one which is increasingly being explored, with more opportunities for excavation arising following the increase in housing development in some areas of this part of the county (Taylor 2002). Due to the nature of such developer-funded work, excavations often consist, as in this case, of small piecemeal interventions, which provide tantalising but limited glimpses into past activity. As has been observed elsewhere, it is rather through the cumulative results of successive interventions in specific areas that it is possible to make progress in furthering our understanding of the complex issues of settlement patterns (Cessford and Slater 2014), and it is hoped that this will be the case at Commercial End.

In spite of the new work, it is not yet possible to determine whether the hamlet developed separately from the main nucleus of the village of Swaffham Bulbeck itself, or whether the settlement which was originally centred around the church of St Mary expanded northwards towards the priory during the medieval period. It is possible that growth happened bifocally, albeit later at the northern end. It is only in recent years that it has coalesced into a single settlement. The proximity of the Swaffham Lode with its trading opportunities, coupled with resources of readily available building material, and to a lesser extent, the existence of the priory, may have provided sufficient impetus for the emergence of a second, smaller focus of settlement. The quantities of finds dating to the 14th–16th centuries certainly suggest the presence of a flourishing settlement of a slightly later date in this area, evidence of which was not found in the finds from the three test-pits at Commercial End that were dug in 2012 (Lewis *et al.* 2013). The lack of late medieval pottery in the 2012 test-pits has led to speculation that the settlement at the northern end of Swaffham Bulbeck may have contracted during this period, although the main core of the village was flourishing, a feature which has been noted in other villages in the area such as Great Shelford (Lewis *et al.* 2013). The recent excavation suggests that this was not the case at Commercial End, because of its location so close to the Lode. The lack of substantial structural evidence of this date on the site shows that the settlement itself was elsewhere, although it is clearly in the vicinity; evidence of it could be masked under existing properties in the streets nearby or lie in the fields between the two settlement nuclei. An additional factor is likely to be the presence of the moated site recorded *c.* 300m to the south (MCB1452), which is medieval or post-medieval in date) and its relationship with the village. A second moated site lies further to the south-west (DCB47).

The recent work has provided new evidence which has enabled a preliminary discussion of the origins and development of this nucleated village. Such work by its nature has limitations; the site was small and the stratigraphy itself created difficulties with phasing and interpretation. However, although little other archaeological work has been undertaken in the immediate vicinity a larger framework for discussion has been provided by historical evidence and existing analysis of the architectural and topographical character of the settlement. Further targeted work is required to understand the morphological processes which contributed to the formation of this apparent bifocal rural settlement, and to compare its history with other villages on the fen edge.

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The report illustrations were created by Ryan Wilson and Eleanor Cox, with the pottery illustrations undertaken by Sue Holden. The report was edited by Richenda Goffin and Stuart Boulter.

Abbreviations:

Codes for entries in the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record:

DCB Designated site

ECB Event number for archaeological investigation

MCB Monument number, includes any datable material including listed building, metal-detected find, excavated site.

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