
Short Report:

Saxo-Norman Settlement Remains at Fulbourn Primary School

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Recent excavations (c. 600m²) undertaken prior to development of the playing fields at Fulbourn Primary School have provided further evidence for the origins and early development of the village. Full details of the excavation are recorded in OA East report no. 2131 (Tsybaeva 2018). Fulbourn is recorded in a charter of AD 907 and as *Fuulburne* or 'stream frequented by birds' in the Domesday Book, by which time – with a recorded population of c. 90 peasant households – it was a substantial settlement (Wareham and Wright 2002, 136). Five separate landholders are recorded in 1086 (Williams and Martin 1992), but in the Late Saxon period there were two major estates, one belonging to Ely, which in the post-Conquest period developed into two parishes. Two churches, presumably built by rival (largely absentee) lords of the two manors to serve the sizable medieval population, previously stood within the churchyard located roughly a kilometre to the east of the site. Only St Vigor's church survives, the church of All Saints fell into disuse and collapsed in 1766 after which the fabric was reused in buildings around the village. Early settlement appears to have been focused in two areas, one close to the churches and the site of the present Fulbourn Manor (Fig. 1) and the other possibly further to the east near to two moated sites (Taylor 1998, 33–37).

Traces of earlier activity at the school site include a small quantity (27 sherds (118g)) of abraded Late Neolithic Grooved Ware, along with occasional sherds of residual Iron Age pottery and two possible Roman features (Phases 1–2). The most prolific and significant remains relate to the Saxo-Norman settlement (Phase 3; Fig. 2), within which three sub-phases of activity were discernible. Two adjacent rectangular post-built structures (Buildings 1 and 2) aligned NNW to SSE were revealed in the southern part of the site, each measuring about 5m wide and 7.7m long. The post-holes had diameters of between 0.16m to 0.37m and varied in depth from 0.05m to 0.34m. No finds were recovered, but their morphology combined with pottery and other finds found in nearby features suggest that these were the remains of Late Saxon or early medieval houses.

Contemporary features include two large circular

and steep-sided pits to the north of the buildings, both of which were filled with domestic refuse including burnt peat (possibly fuel), vegetables, legumes and cereal grains. It is likely that vegetables and herbs would have been grown in small plots close to the dwellings while the cereals appear to have been brought onto the site fully processed. A small number of burnt animal bones, mostly relating to cranial elements, were also found indicating consumption of sheep, cattle and pig. In addition to small abraded pottery sherds (Thetford ware), one of the pits produced a ceramic spindle whorl of possibly 9th or 10th century date along with 51 fragments (1460g) of baked clay fragments that may have derived from an oven/hearth or other structure. An undated four-post structure was positioned just to the north of the buildings and a large well (augured to a depth of over 2m) lay to the south-west, the fills of which produced mid-11th to mid-12th century pottery.

To the north of the buildings was a 'dog-legged' ditch that may have been a related boundary or enclosure although the alignment is more consistent with a later trackway that extended over the footprints of Buildings 1 and 2. This north-west to south-east aligned track or back lane was demarcated on its northern side by a narrow linear ditch. To the south of this was a series of parallel, shallow and segmented gullies measuring 0.32–0.53m wide and a maximum of 0.1m deep that were probably the remains of wheel ruts. The final phase of activity was indicated by a large (2.8m wide and 0.7m deep) boundary ditch to the west of the track that is not well-dated but appeared to have truncated the earlier well.

The two buildings and associated features clearly formed a north-westwards continuation of the more extensive 11th–12th century settlement excavated at Stack Yard Court, Hall Farm in 2007 (Bradley-Lovekin 2008; Fig. 1). At this site several post-built structures of broadly similar shape and orientation to Buildings 1 and 2 were recorded, along with rubbish pits, ditched enclosures and two wells. At least seven possible timber-framed buildings were also identified, although at least some of the gullies interpreted as beamslots are likely to represent the south-eastwards exten

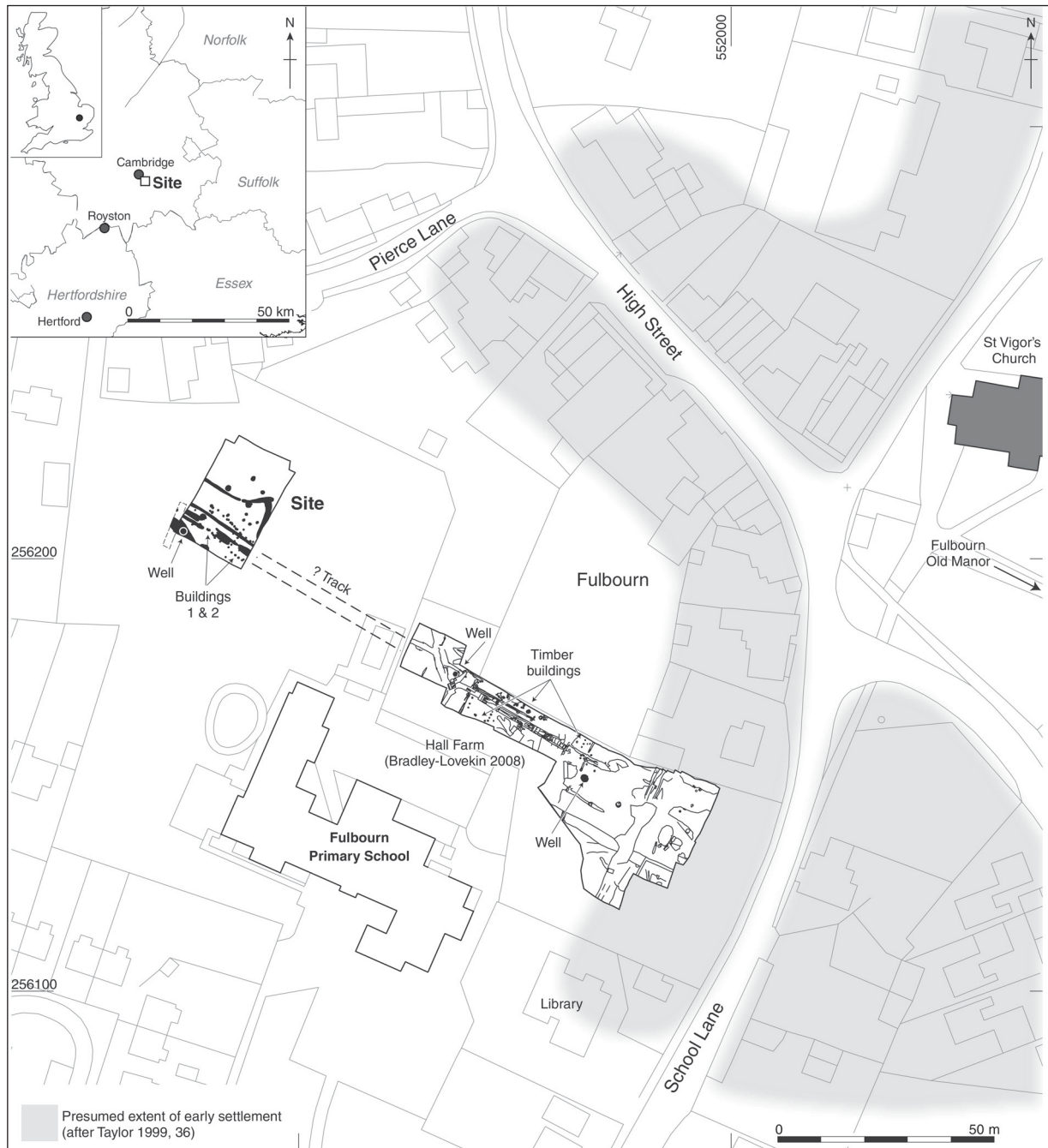


Figure 1. Site location showing site in relation to Hall Farm excavations (Bradley-Lovekin 2008).

sion of the trackway or lane revealed by the primary school excavation. This suggests that at some point there was a reorganisation of the settlement with houses abandoned and/or cleared when the track or lane was established, indicating that the focus of settlement shifted elsewhere.

Although a number of features at the primary school site produced only Thetford-type ware (AD 840–1150) the presence of Developed St Neots alongside these sherds in several contexts suggests the pottery was broadly contemporary and probably dates to the mid 11th to mid 12th centuries. No definitively

later pottery was recovered, indicating that although the Saxo-Norman settlement initially extended further westwards from the presumed centre around St Vigor's church than previously thought, this was relatively short-lived. Together the two excavations provide important detail for the early development of the village, corroborating the documentary evidence that *Fulburne* was a substantial settlement.



Figure 2. Site plan.

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