

Metal-detector survey of land south of Sand Lane, Torksey, Lincolnshire 2020



**Julian D Richards and Dawn M Hadley
Department of Archaeology, University of York**



Metal-detector Survey

Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 Project Background	3
1.2 The Site	4
1.3 Archaeological and historical background	4
1.3.1 Roman	4
1.3.2 Anglo-Saxon	4
1.3.3 Medieval	7
1.3.4 Post-Medieval	9
2 AIMS OF THE METAL-DETECTOR SURVEY	13
3 METHODOLOGY	14
4 RESULTS	15
4.1 Finds recovery	15
4.2 Period breakdown	16
4.3 Categories of finds	17
4.3.1 Roman	17
4.3.2 Early Medieval	17
4.3.3 Medieval	18
4.3.4 Post-medieval	18
5 DISCUSSION	19
Acknowledgements	20
References	21

Department of Archaeology
University of York
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

The survey reported here was undertaken as part of the wider University of York ‘Tents to Towns’ project. The project aims to uncover new evidence for the impact of the Vikings on England, specifically with respect to the emergence of towns and industry. It focusses on Torksey, Lincolnshire, where the Viking ‘Great Army’ spent the winter of AD 872–3, and where in a previous project we identified the site of a camp of c. 55ha to the north of the village, and extensive evidence for trade and manufacture (Hadley and Richards 2016). We have subsequently targeted fields south of the modern village of Torksey including one adjacent to the River Trent, where 9th-/10th-century pottery kilns and burials have previously been identified, as well as the only pre-Viking occupation evidence known from Torksey (Barley 1964). This presents a unique opportunity to trace the impact of the Army as it made the transition from overwintering to permanent settlement, and to investigate the contribution of the Army and its followers to the origins and growth of one of the most important pottery industries in later Anglo-Saxon England (Perry 2016). The medieval town of Torksey is also known to have shrunk in size from the 14th century, but the extent and layout of the town remain unclear (Barley 1964, 167–72).



Figure 1: The location of the site. Courtesy DIGIMAP. © Crown Copyright and database rights 2020 Ordnance Survey (100025252)

1.2 The Site

The site comprises a single triangular field approximately centred on NGR SK 84300 78450. It lies to the south of the village of Torksey, between Sand Lane (formerly known as Common Lane) and the Foss Dyke (HER no. 1034549) (Fig. 1). It comprises agricultural land, bounded to the south by a caravan park, and to the north by Sand Lane, with two fields to the west, between it and the A156 Gainsborough Road. It is approximately 750m east of Torksey Castle.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 Roman

The Foss Dyke, connecting Lincoln to the River Trent, and around 11km long, is believed to be of Roman construction. It is, in part, a canalised version of the River Till (Rogers 2012, 332-3). A Roman copper-alloy statue of the god Mars was recovered from the Foss at Torksey in 1773 and is now in the British Museum (BM registration no. OA.248). To the south-west of the site, Roman pottery kilns were excavated by Adrian Oswald in the 1930s on the southern banks of the Foss Dyke and near a farmhouse known as Little London (Barley 1964, 165; Fig. 2).

1.3.2 Anglo-Saxon

According to *Domesday Book*, Torksey was a thriving urban settlement by the mid-11th century, described as a *suburbium* of Lincoln, with 213 burgesses in 1066, although this figure had fallen to 102 by the time of the survey in 1086 (Foster and Longley 1924, 11). By the 12th century, it possessed a court for the burgesses known by the Old English term *burwarmoot*, which suggests earlier origins (Barley 1964, 167), and by the turn of the 11th century Torksey possessed a mint, another marker of local administrative status (Dolley and Strudwick 1956). It has accordingly been suggested that Torksey was one of the ‘seven boroughs’ referred to in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 1015, thought to have included the ‘five boroughs’ of Derby, Lincoln, Nottingham, Stamford and Leicester named in the *Chronicle* entry for 942, along with two others (Whitelock 1961, 71, 94), although this is merely speculation. Nonetheless, Torksey was at a strategically important location at the point where the River Trent meets the Foss Dyke, and where transport routes from the south to York were able to make the transfer from road to river. This may explain the context for the reference in *Domesday Book* to its inhabitants having the special responsibility of accompanying royal messengers to York ‘with their ships and their means of navigation’ (Foster and Longley 1924, 11).

Torksey is also well known for its late Saxon pottery industry. In the 1960s, Maurice Barley (1964; 1981), of the University of Nottingham’s Department of Continuing Education, excavated seven pottery kilns in Torksey, dating to between the late 9th and late 11th century. Two of these kilns were excavated in the Castle Field to the west side of the A156 (Fig. 2), and the other five were on the east side of this road, three to the north of Sand Lane (labelled as Common Lane on Barley’s plan; Fig. 3), and two to the south. The latter two were in a field that was under the plough in the 1960s, and attention was drawn to the possible location there of the pottery kilns by scatters of Torksey ware on the surface (Barley 1981, 273). A magnetometer survey was conducted and this located two anomalies at the north end of the field, *c.* 5m apart. Excavation in February 1968 revealed two kilns (numbered 6 and 7 in the sequence of pottery kilns in the village). The remains of Kiln 6 survived to within 0.53m of the surface. A central pedestal survived, but the upper part of the kiln had been destroyed to below

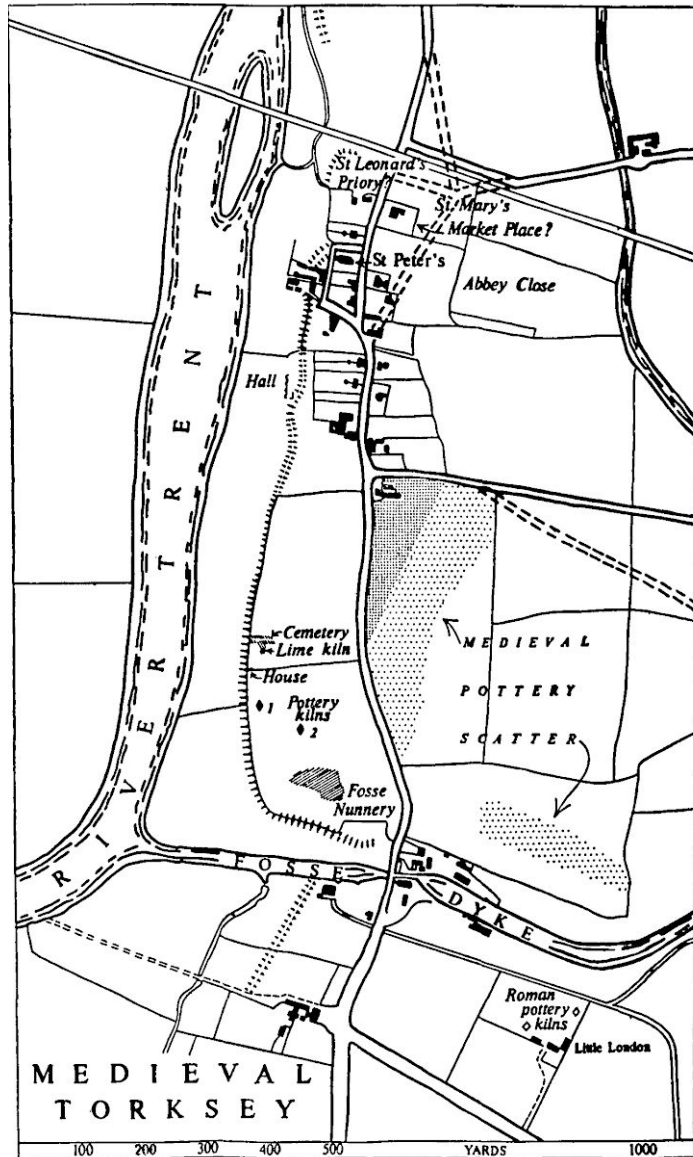


Figure 2: Map of medieval Torksey from Maurice Barley's 1964 paper on his excavations on the site; this shows the locations of two late Anglo-Saxon pottery kilns as well as the locations of scatters of medieval pottery.

That the Foss Dyke was in use in the 10th century is suggested by the appearance of Torksey ware pottery of this date in Lincoln, with the canal likely to have provided a means to transport the vessels. However, a decline in Torksey ware in Lincoln by the 11th century suggests that the canal may have silted up by then.

the level of any firebars. Barley (1981, 273–5) noted traces of fingerprints on the walls of the kiln, and the marks of a human heel and hooves of a young pig in the base. The flue and part of the stokehole were also excavated (Fig. 4). Kiln 7 was of similar plan to that of Kiln 6, but dug deeper and it survived to within 0.48m of the surface. Barley was unclear as to why one of the kilns had survived better than the other and suggested that it may have related to differences in the history of ploughing of the field, with Kiln 6 subject to greater plough damage. Kiln 7 seems to have experienced more use than Kiln 6, as there is evidence of relining, and much more pottery was found in the immediate vicinity than around Kiln 6. The structure of the kiln differed slightly in having two large stones forming the cheeks of the flue, and with smaller stones on the floor at the neck of the flue (Fig. 4). The two kilns had produced a similar range of plain and thumb-decorated cooking pots, plain and thumb-decorated bowls, spouted pitchers and storage jars.

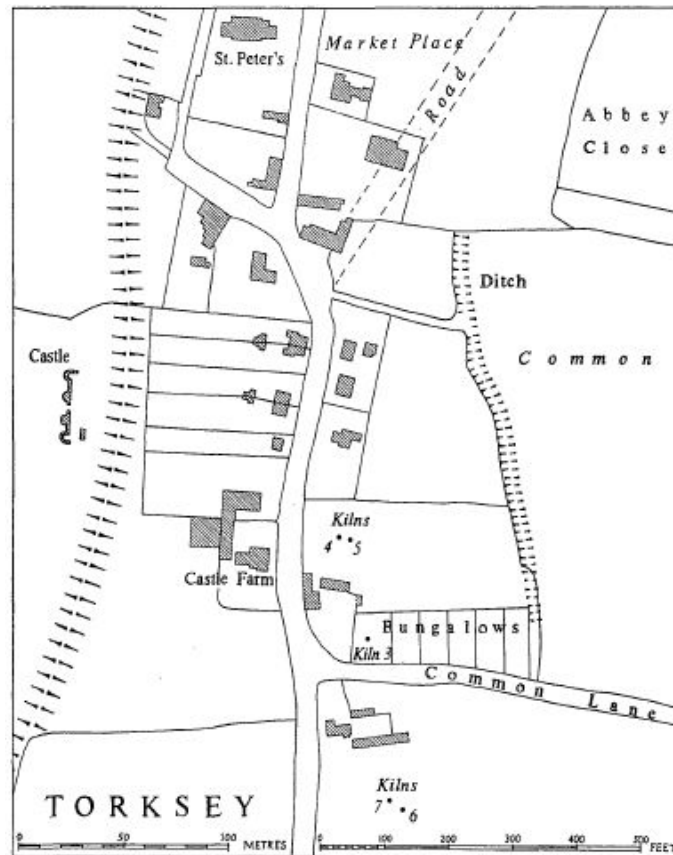


Figure 3: Map showing locations of five late Anglo-Saxon pottery kilns excavated in Torksey by Maurice Barley between 1963 and 1968; Common Lane is now known as Sand Lane (Barley 1981).

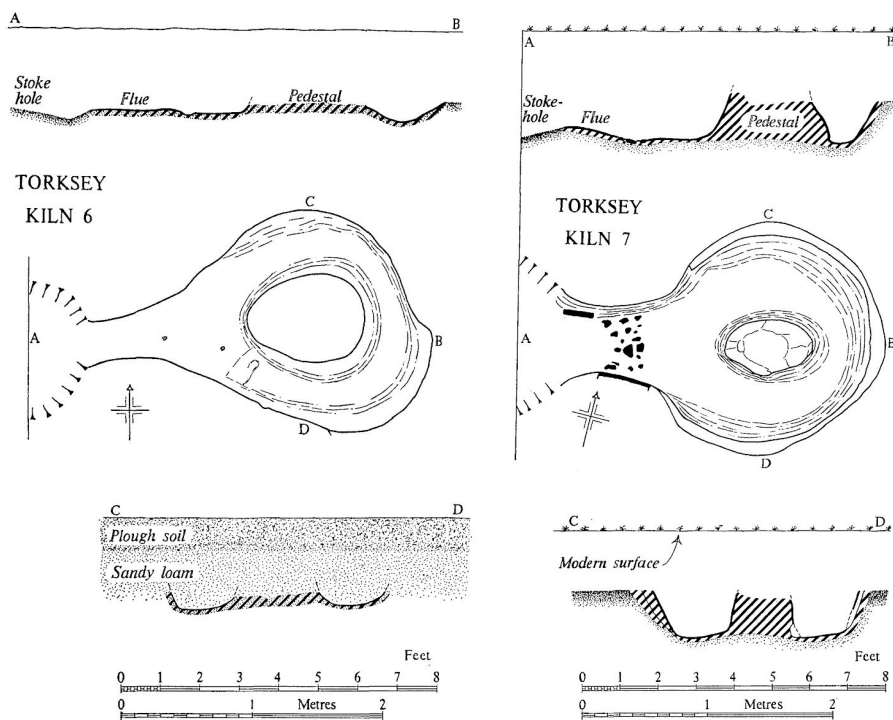


Figure 4: Kilns 6 and 7, excavated by Maurice Barley in 1962. They were located to the south of Sand Lane, in the field immediately to the east of the A156.

1.3.3 Medieval

In his 1964 paper, Barley reported having seen late medieval pottery in the field to the east of the A156 and also to the south of this near to the Foss Dyke (Fig. 2). He also noted that the fields to the east of this did not produce medieval pottery and were on a heavier and ill-drained soil, which had only been brought under the plough recently (Barley 1964, 186). Barley's excavations on the north side of Sand (Common) Lane revealed a late medieval ditch running north-south to the rear of the properties facing on to the A156 (Fig. 3). At the time of his investigation the ditch was 1.2m deep, but excavation revealed that it had previously been another 1.2m deeper. Three further cuts were found to the west of this ditch, suggesting that the ditch had been recut on several occasions and had resulted in the extent of the property it enclosed being extended eastwards by around 6m. The ditch was cut into sand and must have easily silted up. Barely deduced that the ditch defined the boundaries of the properties from the common to the east, and was perhaps intended to keep cattle out.

Metal-detecting within around a kilometre to the east of the site, on either side of Sand Lane, has been conducted in previous years and reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme. This shows a concentration of later medieval finds, on what would have been part of the medieval common land of Torksey, with most collected during a metal detector rally in early 2016. The finds include 30 late medieval coins, dating to between the early 12th and mid-15th century, many cut into halves or quarters, a lead spindle whorl, seal matrices, and a papal bulla of Pope Urban VI (1378–89).¹

To the north and east of the site was the medieval common of Torksey; and map evidence suggests that the south-west area of the site incorporated part of the former common (see Section 1.3.4).

In the 12th century there were three parish churches and two monasteries in Torksey (Barley 1964, 172–74; Cole 1906). One of these is the present parish church of St Peter, located in the heart of the modern village to the north-west of the site. The church of St Mary is believed to have been in the vicinity of St Peter's, probably immediately to the east where the priory of St Leonard was located. Both late Anglo-Saxon and late medieval burials have been excavated to the east of Main Street in the centre of the village, along with remains of ecclesiastical buildings (Williams and Field 2002). Other late Anglo-Saxon and medieval burials have been excavated in the Castle Field, adjacent to Castle Farm, and to the north of the village, respectively (Field 1990; Palmer-Brown 1995; Rowe 2008; Barley 1964, 172–3; Hadley and Richards 2020). A Cistercian nunnery is believed to have been located at the southern end of the Castle Field. There is currently no evidence for any medieval burials or churches in the immediate vicinity of the site.

An inquisition held during the reign of Henry III in 1227 lists the liberties and boundaries of Torksey, uses and customs, and the rights and privileges of the burgesses. This reveals that the 13th-century boundaries reflect the current parish boundary. The inquisition also records the tolls due to the lord of Torksey, at this time John de Balliol, from goods passing through the town along the Trent between Kinnards Ferry and Butterwick to the north and *Hameldod* to the south, between Clifton and Newton, and thought to be the boundary between Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. The list of the tolls reveals

¹ (LANCUM-12F454; -12BE3E; -AECC5C; -AE9D6D; -AE810D; -AE451F; -ADE72D; -4DF24B; -1B5D0A; -1B43CC; -1AF9AA; -B63868; -B61152; -B5B527; -B59CE1; -B580F2; -B562B6; -B54163; -B4CB46; -B47554; -B30A86; -130C82; -12B77C).

something of the goods that must have been passing through Torksey on a regular basis, including fish (e.g. herrings, lings, milvel and cropling), corn, wine, lead, iron, timbers, millstones, and materials related to textile working (e.g. wool, woad, teasels and alum). Tolls were also due on wagons and carts passing through the borough by land. The profits from providing passage across the Trent by ferry were also due to the lord, as he provided the keel or ferry boat and ferryman. The ferry is likely to have been close to where Torksey Castle was later built, given the presence of Ferry Lane on the opposite side of the Trent in Rampton, and because the inquisition states that the Lord of Rampton was entitled to free passage (Cole 1906, 474–5). In 1286, John de Balliol the Younger and his wife Isabella were granted the right to hold a weekly market by Edward I, and an annual fair of 15 days. That Torksey was still a major centre of trade in the mid-14th century is shown by the fact that in 1340, after Edward III had gained permission from Parliament to receive a grant of 20,000 sacks of wool to fund his foreign wars, Torksey was chosen as the place to which the wool from the midland counties was to be taken. However, when the levy of a ninth part of the value of movable property was issued in that same year, it is clear from the amount to be paid by the burgesses of Torksey that it had by then fallen behind Grimsby in wealth (Cole 1906, 496–7). As the 1340s progressed, the status of Torksey had clearly declined further. By 1342 it had come into the hands of John, Lord Darcy of Knaith, hence the lord of Torksey was no longer someone of the status of the king or some of his great nobles, but rather a man whose holdings and influence were very local. In 1346, the burgesses of Torksey were struggling in the wake of a local plot to divert the course of the River Trent by digging trenches and gutters up river at Averham in Nottinghamshire, preventing ships passing as usual between Torksey and Nottingham.

At the time of the dissolution of the monasteries in the early 16th century, the priory of St Leonard's disappeared, although the nunnery continued to house nuns until at least the 1550s (Cole 1906, 512-16). Moreover, when the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* was compiled in 1535 to ascertain the scale of ecclesiastical benefices one of the three parish churches (not named, but clearly All Saints) was said to be 'in ruins' (Cole 1906, 512). The antiquarian John Leland visited Torksey some time between 1538 and 1545 and his comments reveal the state of decline of the town by the mid-16th century:

The old buildings of Torksey were on the south of the new town, but there now is little scene of old buildings, more than a chapel, where men say was the parish church of old Torksey, and on Trent side the earth so balkith up that it showeth that there by likelihood hath been some wall, and by it is a hill of earth cast up: they call it the Windmill Hill, but I think the dungeon of some old castle was there. By old Torksey stands southley the ruins of Fosse Nunnery, hard by the stone bridge over Fosse Dyke; and there Fosse Dyke has his entry into Trent (Toulmin Smith 1907).

By 1556, an episcopal visitation reported that the chancels of both of the remaining parish churches of St Peter and St Mary were in ruin.

According to the early 12th-century Durham author Simeon of Durham, Henry I ordered the Foss Dyke to be recut in 1122 (Cole 1906, 461). As we have seen (Section 1.3.2), the canal seems to have ceased to be used to transport Torksey ware to Lincoln by the late 11th century and this recutting of the dyke may have been to enable waterborne trade links to resume. However, complaints about the state of the Foss Dyke were common between 1335 and 1432, after which efforts to maintain it seem to have stopped, perhaps reflecting the decline of the borough (Barley 1964, 167).

1.3.4 Post-Medieval

The site today comprises a single field, and there are two other fields immediately to its west. However, analysis of 18th- and 19th-century maps reveals that these field boundaries replaced a series of earlier closes, as well as partly extending on to the former common land of Torksey. The earliest relevant map is an estate map of Alexander Hume from 1751, which shows that the modern field immediately east of the A156 then comprised five smaller fields, or closes, running west-east from the road (Fig. 5). Only the northernmost close (no. 53) is depicted as containing buildings, in its north-western corner. Around 20 years later, a monochrome copy of this estate map shows a pathway running from the north of this northernmost close, from roughly on the line of the later Sand Lane, heading south-eastwards behind the rear property boundaries of the closes, and then turning to the east (Fig. 6). Immediately to the east of the southernmost closes (nos 56 and 66) were six further closes (nos 57-62), running north-south, with the aforementioned pathway running along their northern edges. Immediately to the north of these closes was Torksey common, although on the 1770 estate map, the pathway divides the closes from the common. The eastern three of these closes comprise roughly the southern part of the site under investigation in the present report, and the map evidence reveals that the site had been previously divided between closes, mainly in its south-western corner, and the common.



The 1751 map shows a bank and ditch along the southern side of the eastern block of closes (nos 57-62), and heads to the west towards the A156. A ditch is still present along the southern edge of the site on an estate map from 1851, but by now its western extent towards the A156 has disappeared (Fig. 7).

Figure 5: Estate map of Alexander Hume Esq. of

1751. This shows that the modern field to the east of the A156 comprised five closes in the mid-18th century. To the east of this are six further closes (this view shows only five closes). Along the southern edges of these closes is a bank. Lincolnshire Archives

By the time of the earliest Ordnance Survey map of 1885, the fields had been reorganised and the five remaining closes along the A156 had been amalgamated into a single field, incorporating at least one of the closes to their east (no. 57). The other closes to the east (nos 58–62) had been amalgamated into two fields, the northern boundaries of which roughly respected the former division between the closes and the common. The common land was now divided into two fields, the westernmost of which had a

smaller enclosure on its northern edge (Fig. 8). While the various closes are first recorded on 18th-century maps, it seems likely that these represent the locations of late medieval enclosures and reflect the extent of the medieval town of Torksey, bounded to the west by the Trent, the south by the Foss Dyke and to the east by the common.



Figure 6: Section from A Map of Torksey in Lincolnshire an Estate Belonging to Alexander Hume Esq. This copy of the estate map in Fig. 5 is believed to date to around 1770. A pathway is shown running from the location of the later Sand Lane, south-eastwards behind the rear of the boundaries of the closes facing on to the later A156. This then turns to the east and runs to the north of the six closes to the east, through the southern part of the site. Lincolnshire Archives.



Figure 7: Estate map of 1851. By now the two northernmost closes along the later A156 (nos 53 and 54 on the 1751 map) have been merged into a single field. The eastern most two closes in the area of the site have also been merged. The ditch running along their southern side is still visible, but it is no longer apparent running further west towards the A156. For the first time a road is shown running from the east of the A156, but it is not on precisely the same alignment as Sand Lane was later to be, as it runs slightly to the south and has a gently curving profile unlike the straight alignment of Sand Lane. Lincolnshire Archives.



Figure 8. Ordnance Survey map of 1885. By now the closes along the eastern side of the A156 had been amalgamated into a single field. The closes to the east had also been amalgamated. The field boundaries now broadly respected the former divisions between the closes and the former common land.

2 AIMS OF THE METAL-DETECTOR SURVEY

The ‘Tents to Towns’ research project aims to gain a fuller understanding of the Viking Great Army c.865-878, and its impact on the development of Anglo-Saxon England. The impact of Scandinavian raiders and settlers on urbanisation is a major research question for our understanding of the society and economy of later Anglo-Saxon England, and forms Research Objective 6E of the *Updated Research Agenda and Strategy for the Historic Environment of the East Midlands* (Knight *et al.* 2012, 88) which is to ‘undertake further research on urban development in the Anglo-Saxon and Viking periods’, where it is recommended that ‘further archaeological investigations may be proposed to elucidate the growth of the important riverside trading centre and pottery production site’ at Torksey. While there has been much debate about the influence on urban origins of palaces, minster churches, and Mercian/West Saxon burh foundations of the late 8th/9th centuries, archaeological evidence from West Saxon and Mercian towns currently cautions against assuming a linear development from any of these antecedents, with fully urban activities typically not visible until the late 10th century. However, in contrast, dynamic urban expansion in regions of Scandinavian settlement further north and east is becoming apparent from the later 9th century, especially through evidence for industrial processes, such as pottery production. This typically occurs at newly founded sites or following relocation of earlier trading and manufacturing activities, but the impetus for these developments now needs investigation. We are therefore currently undertaking a wide-ranging study of urban development in northern and eastern England, and of the new pottery industries that emerged there.

Our previous research into the winter camp of the Viking ‘Great Army’ in 872–3 at Torksey analysed over 2000 metal-detected finds, and undertook geophysical and geomorphological survey to reveal extensive evidence for trade and manufacture across a c. 55ha island, accommodating thousands of people (Richards and Hadley 2016). We suggested that the Army was virtually a town on the move (Hadley and Richards 2016). However, in transforming understanding of the Great Army, our work raised questions about its role as a catalyst for urban development. Torksey presents a unique opportunity to examine the contribution of Viking armies, and those following in their wake, to industrial and urban development. The Viking camp lay to the north of the modern village, but by the turn of the 11th century there was an extensive burh to the south, with a mint, and at least four cemeteries, while by the 12th century there were three parish churches. However, the most important evidence for incipient urbanism at Torksey comes from its pottery industry, which saw new manufacturing technologies introduced by continental potters, arriving in Torksey with the ‘baggage train’ of the Great Army. Since Torksey was in decline by the 13th century, shrinking in size, much of the former town is unencumbered by later occupation.

As part of the fieldwork undertaken in 2020, excavation and a metal-detector survey were undertaken in the Castle Field (Hadley and Richards 2020; Richards and Hadley 2020), and a second metal-detector survey focussed on a field to the east of the A156. Very little archaeological investigation has been undertaken in this part of the parish of Torksey and it was hoped that the survey would (a) further illuminate the extent of the medieval town, and (b) provide a range of dated artefacts which might be linked with the known archaeology further west and north-west in the village.

3 METHODOLOGY

Two experienced metal-detector users undertook the survey: Dave Stanley and Neil Parker. These were the same detectorists who had undertaken the survey of the winter camp, and were detecting the land south of Torksey Castle to the west of the A156, so the results would be comparable. Neil Parker was equipped with a XP Deus multiple frequency detector, whilst Dave Stanley used a XP Gold Maxx Power detector, which can be sensitive to targets which can be difficult to detect, such as thin coins. Hand-held GPS were used to record the coordinates of all finds. These were written on the individual finds bags, and later transferred to a database by the authors.

The survey took place during May 2020. Conditions were good as the site was under grass and was relatively dry. All obviously modern items were discarded, as well as all nails. The detectorists focussed on non-ferrous metals. No items of treasure were recovered. The artefacts were all given the site code of TORKSL and classified according to broad types, material, and periods. All finds were weighed and measured and recorded in a dedicated metal-detector finds database.

The finds will be deposited at the Collection Museum in Lincoln, under the accession code TORKSL. The digital archive will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service, as doi:10.5284/1083529, and made available under a CC BY open licence.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Finds recovery

In total 40 finds were recorded, split between Neil Parker (17) and Dave Stanley (23). Although almost all finds were recovered from the south-west part of the field (Figure 3) this distribution is apparently real, as both detectorists worked the whole field, but only recovered finds in this area, apart from a single object adjacent to Sand Lane (Fig. 4). The area from where most of the metal-detected finds came coincides with the locations of three closes recorded on the mid-18th-century estate maps (closes 60–62 on the 1751 map).

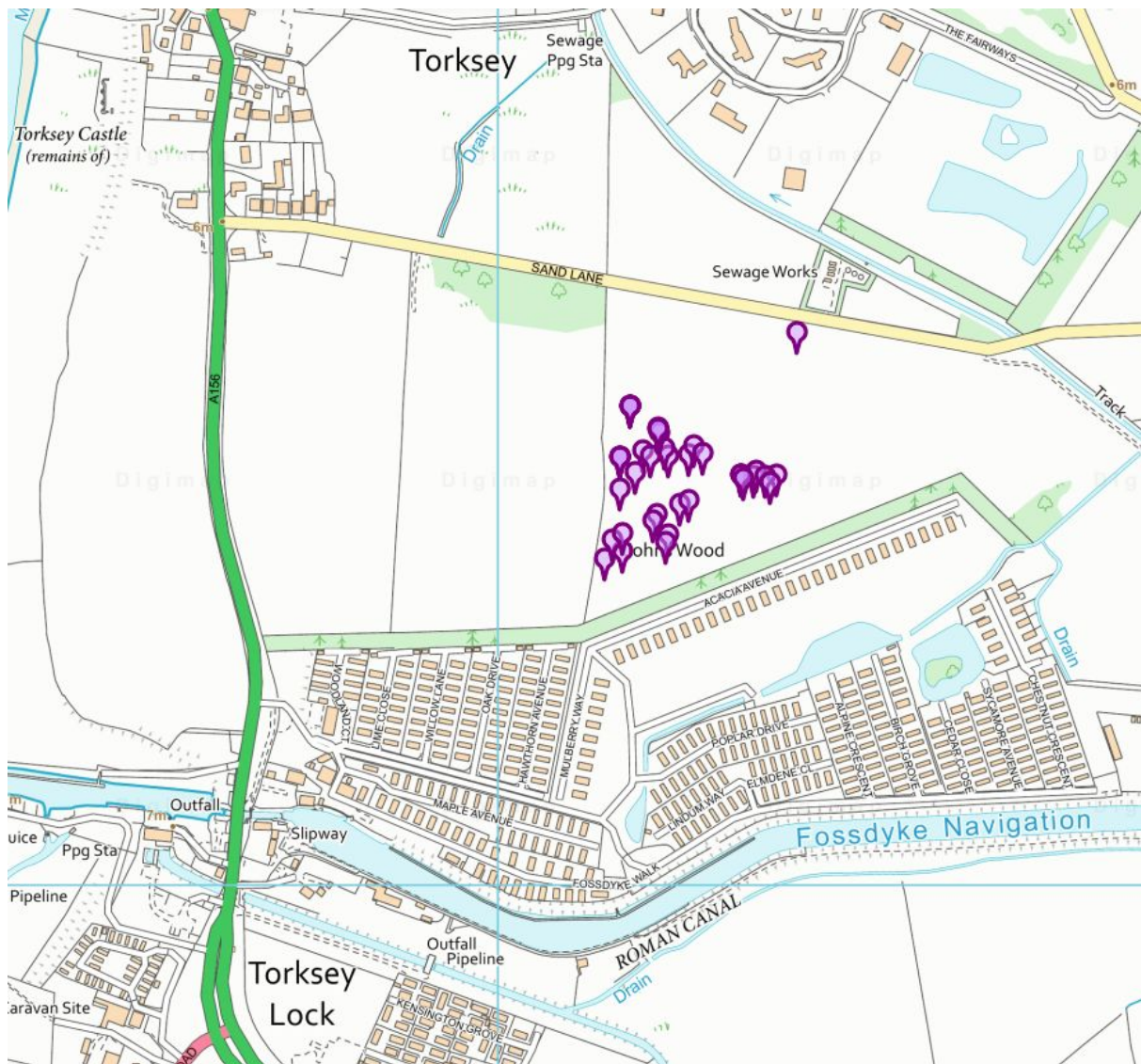
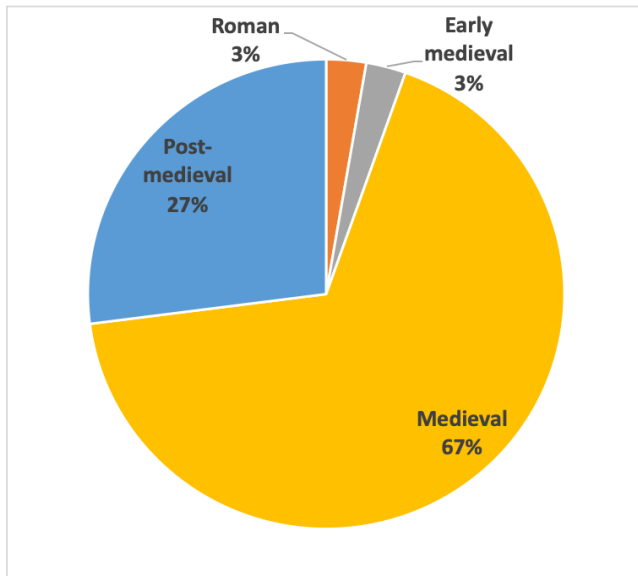


Figure 3: Distribution map of all finds from the site. Courtesy DIGIMAP. © Crown Copyright and database rights 2020 Ordnance Survey (100025252)



Figure 4: Finds recovered by Neil Parker (purple) and Dave Stanley (red). Courtesy DIGIMAP. © Crown Copyright and database rights 2020 Ordnance Survey (100025252)

4.2 Period breakdown



A total of 37 finds could be categorised according to broad period, with single Roman and early medieval finds, 25 medieval finds, and 10 post-medieval finds. Although this is a very small sample the scarcity of Roman finds, compared with the Castle Field is notable. As was the case for the Castle Field, the medieval and post-medieval finds are the largest components of the assemblage, but there is a higher proportion of medieval finds from this field, perhaps reflecting the fact that it is further away from the 16th-century Torksey Castle, and because the 18th-century maps suggest no evidence of post-medieval occupation in this area until the 20th century.

Figure 5: Proportions of finds from the site, by period

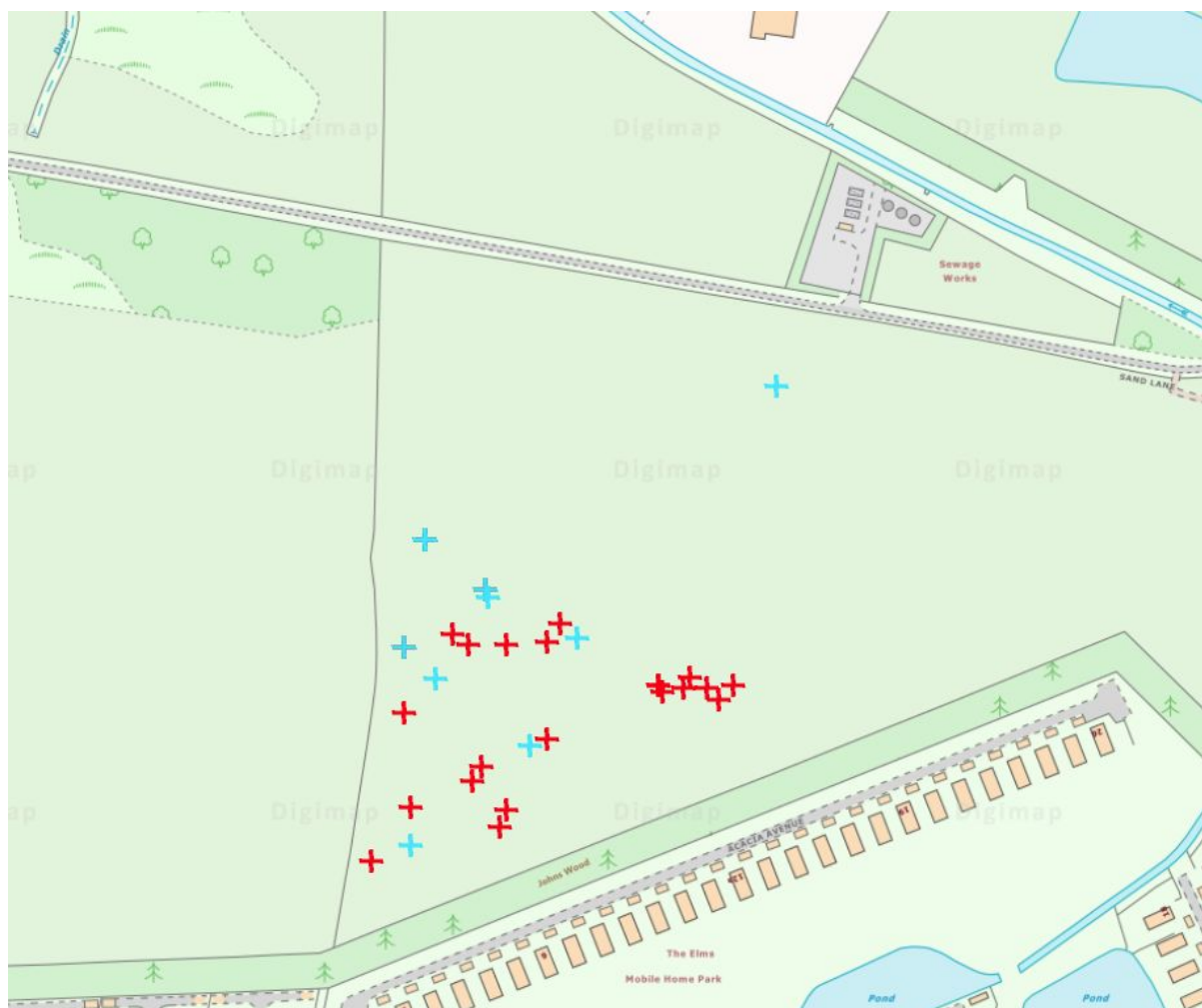


Figure 6: Distribution map of medieval finds (red) and post-medieval finds (blue). Courtesy DIGIMAP. © Crown Copyright and database rights 2020 Ordnance Survey (100025252)

The distribution of medieval and post-medieval finds is largely coterminous, although there is a cluster of medieval finds to the east of the main cluster.

4.3 Categories of finds

4.3.1 Roman

The single Roman find comprised a very worn and illegible copper-alloy coin. It indicates that, compared with the Castle Field, there was little Roman activity this far from the Trent and Foss Dyke.

4.3.2 Early Medieval

The only early medieval find comprised part of an Anglo-Saxon ansate brooch, with ring-and-dot decoration on the bow. These appear in the 7th century and continue in use until the 10th century. Small quantities of Middle Anglo-Saxon finds have been found elsewhere in Torksey, but with no obvious concentration.

4.3.3 Medieval

Medieval finds are the largest fraction recovered. They include 3 silver pennies, with 1 short cross variety and a very worn long cross penny and a long cross quarter penny. Four lead cloth seals were also recovered, reinforcing the importance of the wool trade, as well as two lead spindle whorls, providing evidence for local production. The remaining finds were mainly casual losses of dress accessories, including 7 copper-alloy buckles, 2 small plain strap ends, a garment hook, and a dress pin with a hexagonal knob and small finial.

4.3.4 Post-medieval

A small group of post-medieval finds were recovered. They included 2 musket balls, a much smaller number than in the Castle Field. There were also 3 possible trade tokens, part of a small copper-alloy spoon, a small decorated openwork hinge from a casket or similar object, as well as a possible casket key, and a decorated and gilded copper-alloy shoe buckle.

5 DISCUSSION

It is not possible to draw firm conclusions from this small assemblage, but it does demonstrate medieval and post-medieval activity south of Sand Lane, which is outside the previously known extent of the medieval town. On the other hand there is little evidence for Roman or early medieval activity here. The distribution of the finds is significant, however, as it coincides with the locations of three closes recorded on the mid-18th-century estate maps (closes 60–62 on the 1751 map), and there is a clear contrast in the presence of finds in the area of the closes and their absence from the area of Common land (Fig 7). The distribution, which includes medieval finds, also indicates that these closes go back into the medieval period.

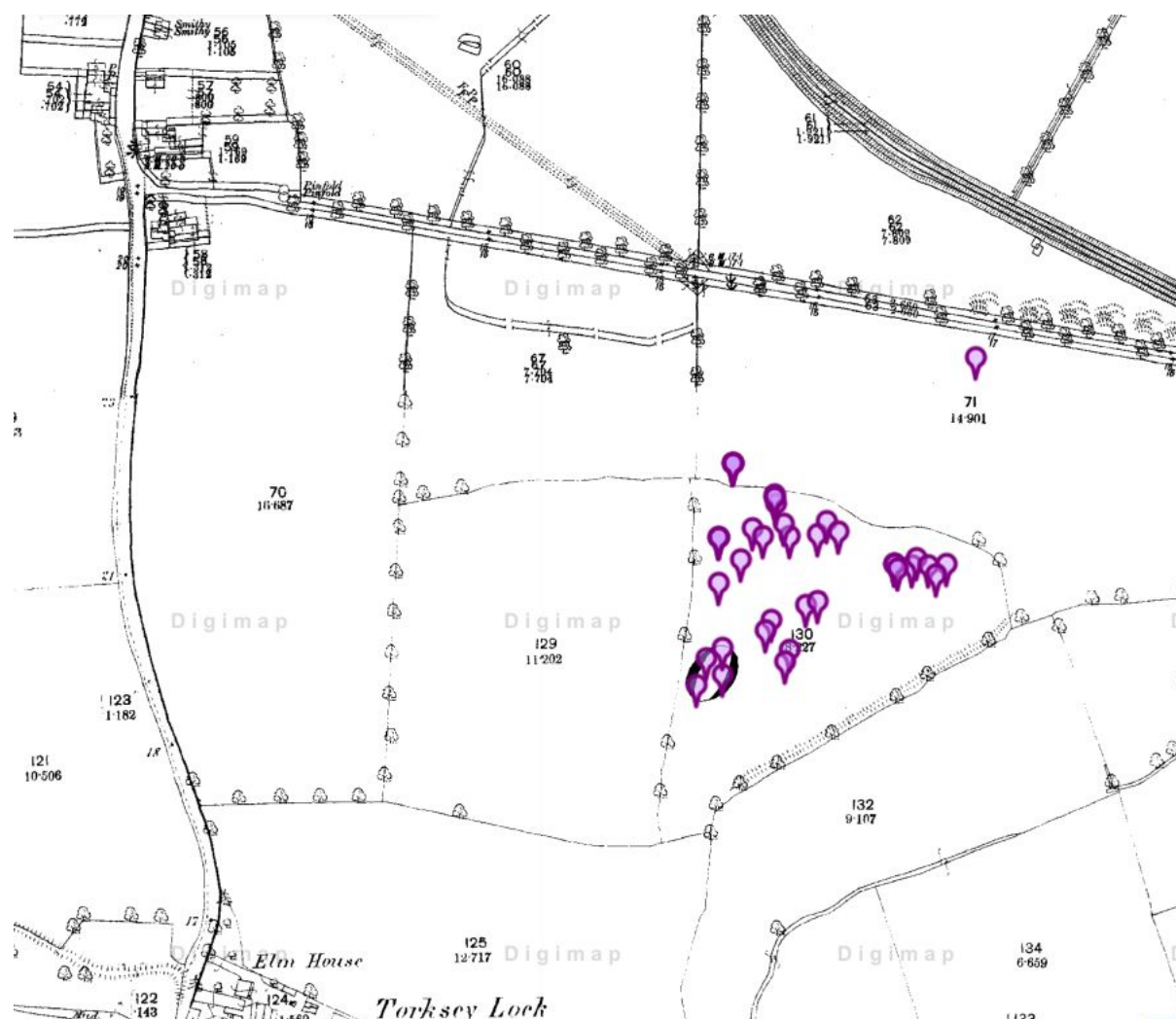


Figure 7: Distribution of all finds overlaid on 1880 Ordnance Survey map. Courtesy of DIGIMAP © Landmark Information Group and Crown Copyright 2020

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our two metal-detectorists: Dave Stanley and Neil Parker for detecting and recording the finds described in this survey. We would also particularly like to thank the landowner, Edward Dickinson, for permission to undertake the survey on his land. Funding was provided by the British Academy and Society of Antiquaries of London.

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