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EAST ANGLIAN
ARCHAEOLOGY

REPORT NO.4

NORFOLK

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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The Late Saxon Town of Thetford

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL
SURVEY

by

Stephen Dunmore with Robert Carr

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REPORT No. 4

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EDITORIAL

Report No. 4 of East Anglian Archaeology is an archaeological case study of a single town. Thetford was a comparatively well preserved major Late Saxon town which has in recent years seen considerable large-scale redevelopment. The archaeological response over the last thirty years has salvaged a considerable amount of information, but there have been many lost opportunities; and a large part of the results which have been collected still await adequate publication.

While this report was being prepared the Unit made arrangements to take over responsibility for publishing the excavations carried out by the late Group Captain Knocker between 1948 and 1952 and to organise excavations to define the area of settlement in the south eastern part of the town.

The purpose of this study has been to bring together the archaeological and early documentary evidence to provide an interim survey of the Late Saxon town and to emphasise those areas where further work is needed. At a later date when the 1948-52 and 1964-70 excavations have been published some of the ideas put forward in this survey may have to be reviewed. The historical and archaeological evidence for the development of Thetford within the context of urban origins in East Anglia has been assessed. The report also identifies for the County and District Planning Authorities those sites where there ought to be the closest possible cooperation between the Archaeological Unit, the Planning Authorities and owners of sites when redevelopment is considered in the future.

It is essential that archaeologists should make available to other land-users the necessary information regarding the density, type and distribution of archaeological sites. In particular, the archaeological dimension must be established as an integral part of planning procedures. This is nowhere more important than in an urban situation, such as Thetford, where the pressures on land and the complex demands made on the planning process have often led to widespread destruction of archaeological layers and standing buildings without prior recording.

Recognition of the need for this cooperation can only be beneficial, since a townscape or landscape which has lost the tangible evidence of its history, both above and below ground, is hardly an environment which future generations will wish to inherit.

Peter Wade-Martins

July, 1976.



Plate I. Vertical aerial view of Thetford taken in 1946 before major urban expansion. Many of the important topographical features of the town can be identified with reference to Fig. 3.

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I. SUMMARY

In the eleventh century Thetford was a major Anglo-Danish town. It possessed a mint, and between 1071 and 1095 was the seat of the East Anglian bishopric. Population estimates based on the Domesday survey place Thetford among the six most important towns in England. However, both documentary and archaeological evidence suggest that by c. 1100 Thetford was undergoing a rapid decline which persisted throughout the twelfth century. At the same time, the town began to move from its site on the south side of the Little Ouse to the north bank. From the twelfth to the nineteenth century, the abandoned site of the Late Saxon town was left virtually free of buildings.

General explanations for the prosperity and importance of Late Saxon Thetford are readily available but the reasons for its decline are obscure. An attempt is made here to analyse the evidence both for growth and decay, and to suggest potential areas where archaeology may help to fill the considerable gaps remaining in our knowledge of the town in the Late Saxon and early medieval periods.

II. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are very grateful for the cooperation and advice given by many individuals in the preparation of this report. Our thanks are due in particular to Miss Barbara Green, Alan Carter and Keith Wade. Valuable information regarding proposed redevelopments and planning schemes was provided by Peter Tollhurst of Breckland District Council Planning Department, and in the early stages by Barry Joyce, then of Norfolk County Council Planning Department. Thetford Moulded Products Limited kindly allowed us to excavate prior to redevelopment in 1973. Finally, the contribution made by the late Group Captain Knocker to the archaeology of Anglo-Saxon Thetford cannot be over-emphasised.

III. HISTORY

The first documentary reference to Thetford occurs in 870, when the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records: 'In this year the host rode across Mercia into East Anglia and took winter quarters at Thetford; and the same winter came King Edmund and fought against them, and the Danes won the victory, and they slew the king and overran the entire kingdom' (Whitelock, ed. 1961, 46). In 871 the Danish forces moved on to Reading. By 878 Alfred had arrested the progress of the Danes across England and the Treaty of Wedmore was concluded. A Danish kingdom was established in East Anglia, within the area which later became known as the Danelaw. In 917 the Danes in East Anglia submitted to Edward the Elder and Thetford fell once again under English political control.

The earliest surviving coins bearing the name of the Thetford mint date from Eadgar's reign (959-975). However, the origin of the earlier East Anglian coins is in most cases unknown, and it is reasonable to suppose that Thetford was a production centre in the reigns of Aethelstan and Edward the Elder or even earlier (Dolley 1964, 14-24). Blunt regards it as one of the obvious locations for the St. Edmund memorial coinage (c. 890-910), and stylistic characteristics of the Thetford mint have been identified on a number of St. Edmund coins, such as the penny excavated recently at Lincoln (Blunt 1969, 252; Collyer 1975). Several hundred coins minted in Thetford, from Eadgar to Edward the Confessor, occur amongst the thousands of Anglo-Saxon coins discovered in Scandinavian hoards (Knocker, unpublished).

In the written sources, the next reference to Thetford occurs in 952 when King Eadred: 'ordered a great slaughter to be made in the borough of Thetford in vengeance for the abbot Ealdhelm whom they had slain' (Whitelock, ed. 1961, 73). The *Liber Eliensis* describes an incident which took place when Abbot Brihtnoth of Ely (abbot 970 until c. 996) demanded

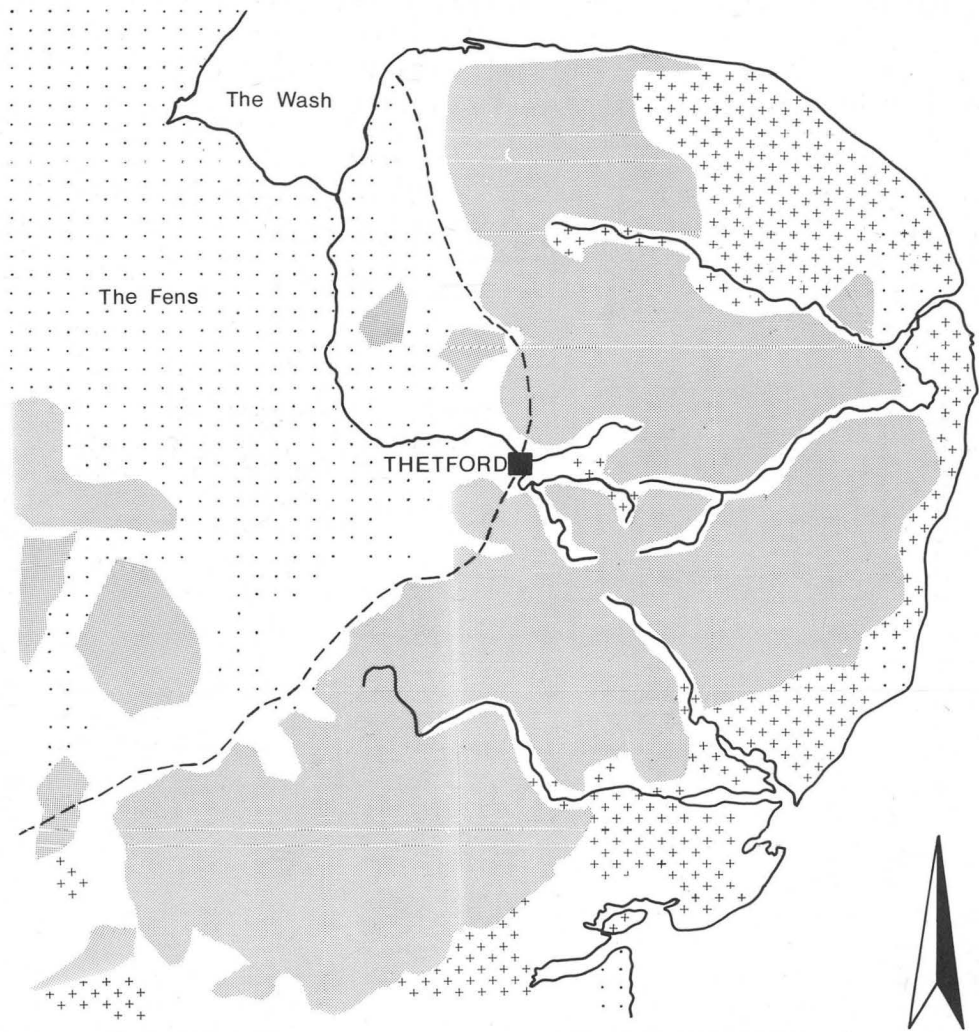
sureties for a land purchase in Cambridge. He was informed that: 'Cambridge, and Norwich and Ipswich and Thetford were of such liberty and dignity that if anyone bought land there he did not need witnesses' (Blake 1962, 100). After 980 the Danish raids began again in earnest. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records how in 1004 Sweyn Forkbeard sacked Thetford before a hard battle with the East Anglian levies, and in 1010 the town was again burnt by the Danish armies (Whitelock, ed. 1961, 87 and 90). On the first of these two occasions, the Chronicle mentions that the Danes 'remained inside' Thetford, suggesting a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the town defences. In 1013, Thetford was the centre for collecting the tribute and winter supplies from east Norfolk demanded by Sweyn for his host (Whitelock, ed. 1961, 93; Stenton 1947, 380 footnote). A writ of Harthacnut (1041-42) to all the burgesses of Thetford, declared that: 'Abbot Aethelstan of Ramsey shall have his *mansus* (house or messuage) in Thetford as fully and freely as he had it in the days of Cnut' (Hart 1966, 83). In 1042, Thetford was one of the nine English boroughs where six or more moneyers were at work at one time (Stenton 1947, 529; Carson 1949). Evidently the town had recovered swiftly from the Danish raids of 1004 and 1010.

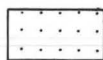
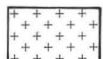

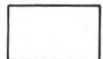

In the second half of the eleventh century, written record of Thetford is almost entirely confined to the Domesday survey which, although enigmatic in detail, indicates the status of the town before 1066 and again c. 1086 (Doubleday, ed. 1901, 47, 48 and 94; Darby 1952, 140-141). At Domesday, Tetford was assessed as a separate Norfolk hundred. In the time of Edward the Confessor Thetford possessed 943 burgesses, suggesting a probable population of between four and five thousand: this placed the town in a category, after London and York, with Norwich, Lincoln and Oxford. By 1086, there were 720 burgesses and '224 vacant messuages'. The division of borough lands between the king and the earldom on both sides of the river, is described: 'Of the king's land in Tetford, on the Norfolk side of the river, is one league of land in length and half (a league) in breadth, of which the king has two parts and a third part belongs to the earldom. Of this land, one half is arable and the other half is pasture ... On the other side of the river towards Suffolk, there is half a league of land in length and half in breadth; of this land, a third part belongs to the earldom with four acres of meadow. All this land is arable and four ploughs can till it'. This extract also gives some idea of the importance of agricultural activity, even within a borough. In total, Domesday refers to land for ten plough-teams. Thirty-four acres of meadow, substantial pasture and seven and three-quarter mills were recorded. It seems that Thetford had more agricultural land within its limits than Norwich, and that its royal render, which in 1066 included honey, goat-skins and ox-hides, increased from £30 to £76 between 1066 and c. 1086. To complete the picture of an extensive community, thirteen churches are mentioned within the borough and this need not be the total. The locations and dedications of eleven of the thirteen are either known or have been postulated. Ten of these churches were certainly pre-Conquest, and it is probable that most of the twenty churches recorded in Thetford in the thirteenth century were Saxon or Norman in origin (Appendix I). The church of St. Mary the Great became the cathedral of Herfast, the new bishop of East Anglia, when in 1071 he transferred his see from Elmham to Thetford. The status of Thetford as a bishopric, however, was short-lived, and in 1095 the see moved again, this time to Norwich.

The end of the eleventh century also marked the beginning of the end for the Thetford mint. Domesday records that the mint rendered £40 to the king, and during William I's reign Thetford still possessed as many as six moneyers at one time. However, after the Conquest, output was beginning to decline, and contraction continued steadily throughout the twelfth century. The last surviving coins date from the reign of Henry II. Four moneyers are recorded at Thetford early in the reign of John, but the mint apparently ceased to function soon afterwards (Blomefield 1739, 132).

The decline of the town in the twelfth century is further reflected in the list of borough aids in the Pipe Rolls of 1130 and 1156 (Darby 1969, 220-221). As Darby points out, although the lists have many omissions, they do indicate some of the leading towns of the twelfth century arranged in what may be approximate order of wealth. In 1130, Thetford paid only £10 and ranked below fourteen other towns. In 1156, it was not mentioned at all.

EAST ANGLIA



-  Alluvium & fen
-  Glacial sands, gravels & loams
-  Boulder clay
-  Drift-free areas
-  Icknield Way

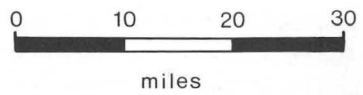
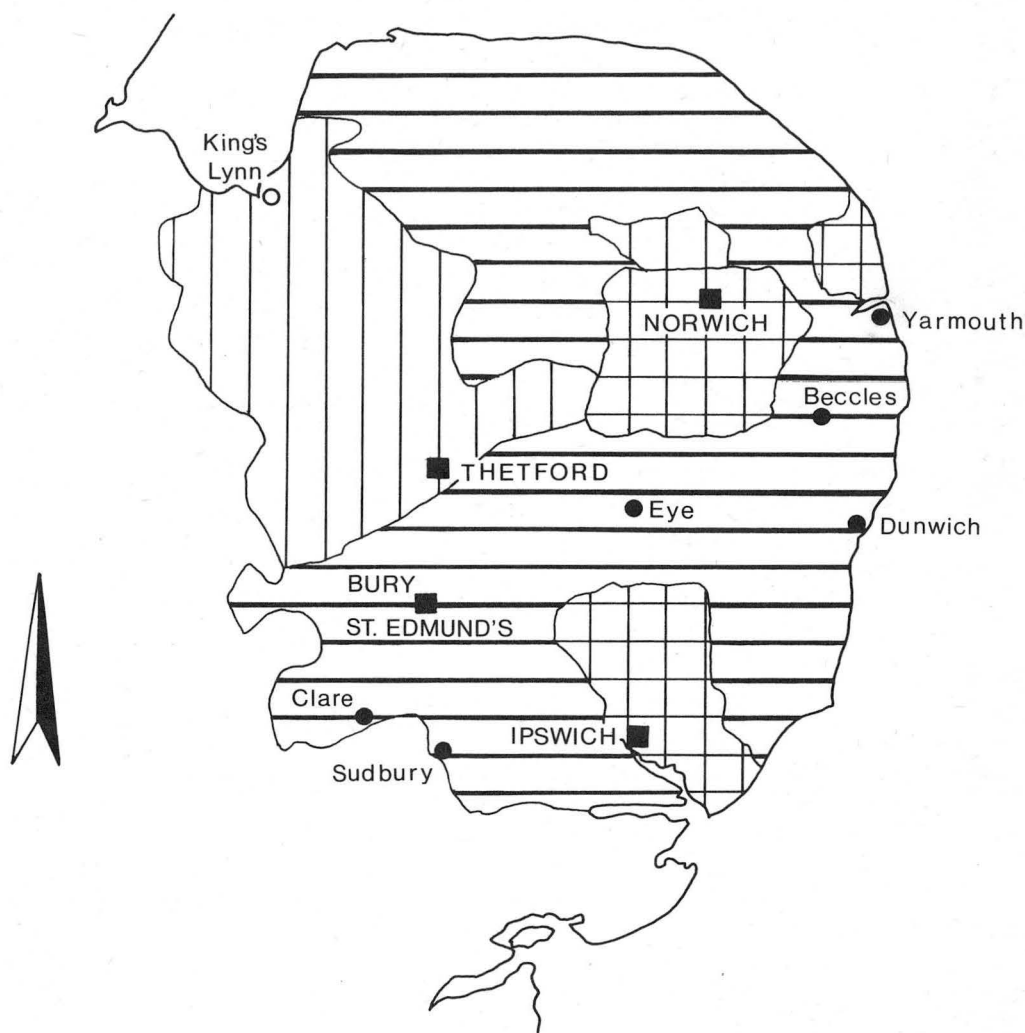


Fig. 1. Thetford: Location and Regional Geology.

EAST ANGLIA



POPULATION AT DOMESDAY
Adults per 1000 acres



30 & over



16 - 29



15 & under



TOWNS AT DOMESDAY

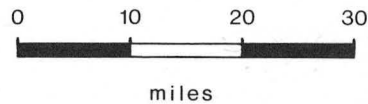


Fig. 2. East Anglia: Population Distribution and Towns at Domesday (based on Darby 1969).

IV. ARCHAEOLOGY

At the close of the second world war, it was already known that Thetford had been a Late Saxon town of major importance, but it was not always appreciated that this town had been largely situated south of the Little Ouse. There had been various random archaeological finds but these had led to little overall understanding of the pattern of settlement.

The first recorded archaeological discovery in Thetford was in 1748 when two Iron Age weaving combs were found in the castle bailey (Clarke 1939, 34-35, and fig. 7). The histories published by Francis Blomefield and Thomas Martin in 1739 and 1779 respectively provide further information (Blomefield 1739; Martin 1779). Both of them were aware of the existence of the town bank and ditch stretching south-east from Red Castle, and both maintained that the eastern end of this defence was still visible adjacent to Nuns' Bridges (the Anglo-Saxon crossing-point at the east end of the town). Blomefield also recorded a substantial earthwork (Weever's Close) immediately south of Nuns' Bridges although Martin, commenting that this had been largely removed to consolidate nearby marshes, appears to have been sceptical. At Red Castle, Martin discovered foundations and a stone coffin with bones: the site, since established by excavation, of a pre-Conquest church, perhaps St. Martin's. Both Blomefield and Martin could see the foundations and remains of many of the disused churches in Thetford; St. Andrew's, St. Margaret's, All Saints', and St. Ethelred's for example, all long since vanished. Blomefield described a number of Roman coins found in Thetford, while Martin mentioned the discovery of many Anglo-Saxon coins, ranging from Aethelstan of England to Edward the Confessor. Furthermore, in 1772, Martin recorded the removal in Friars' Close of part of the castle earthwork which apparently revealed traces of stone walling.

In the nineteenth century most of the discoveries in Thetford seem to have been of Pagan Saxon date. The tumulus in St. Margaret's cemetery was 'excavated' in 1855 and again in 1869, and Pagan Saxon inhumations were found, one with a shield boss and an iron spearhead. In 1911, another Pagan Saxon inhumation was found, probably under the present golf course south of Brandon Road. A further Pagan Saxon inhumation was discovered in St. Margaret's cemetery in 1929.

The process of housing expansion on the south side of the river began in 1912, when Corporation houses were built along the Bury road. Large quantities of Late Saxon pottery were unearthed during this operation, and again between 1920 and 1927 when the Newtown estate was built between the angle of the London and Bury roads. By the 1930's Thetford had spread back across the river to reclaim almost half of the original Late Saxon site. Housing redevelopment on behalf of Thetford Borough Council continued through the 1950's and in 1964 the then London County Council, in conjunction with Thetford Borough Council, initiated another major housing scheme affecting some seven acres in the western area of the Late Saxon town. In 1967, Mr. Brian Davison estimated that only one-eighth of the Late Saxon settlement remained untouched by redevelopment, and this fraction had diminished further by 1975 (Davison 1967, 189). The expansion of Thetford to its original site south of the river presented a threat of archaeological destruction which provided a unique opportunity to investigate a Late Saxon town undamaged by medieval and post-medieval occupation. Unfortunately, the story of the archaeology of Thetford is, so far, with the exception of the excavations listed below, one of lost opportunities.

The archaeological response began in 1947 when Mr. T. C. Lethbridge recovered Late Saxon pottery and evidence of occupation during the digging of house foundations for the St. Mary's estate. As a result, between 1948 and 1952, Group Captain G. M. Knocker carried out excavations on several sites in the Late Saxon town, due to be developed under the St. Mary's estate housing programme (Fig. 3, Sites 1-6) (Knocker, unpublished; Knocker and Hughes 1950a; Knocker and Hughes 1950b; Clarke 1960, 169-172; Dunning 1951).

Sites 1-4

This area revealed Anglo-Saxon occupation of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries. Three superimposed flint roads (Site 2) were discovered overlying earlier ditches, pits and huts. A memorial coin of St. Edmund (minted c. 890-910) was found on the lowest road surface and a coin of Cnut (1016-1035) on the uppermost. Along both sides of the road were the sites of numerous huts, constructed of timbers with wattle and daub or turves, and over 180 pits. The period of the intermediate road (probably late tenth century) was one of great industrial activity, including iron and bronze working and pottery making. Evidence of three Thetford ware pottery kilns, dated to the eleventh century, was recovered.

Site 5

This site included part of a burial ground where forty Late Saxon and perhaps medieval interments were excavated. The church with which these burials must have been associated remains unknown, although the site of St. Margaret's lies nearby beyond the town defences.

Site 6

A probable extension of the triple road discovered on Site 2 was revealed, with similar evidence of huts and pits.

Site 7

In 1957, Knocker excavated a small area within the gas works enclosure on Bury Road, and discovered several Late Saxon burials and wall footings which may have belonged to St. Edmund's church.

Site 8

In 1957-8, Knocker excavated at Red Castle (Knocker 1967). The existence of Romano-British, Pagan, Middle, and Late Saxon and medieval occupation in the area was established. The chancel and part of the south wall of a small Late Saxon church, possibly St. Martin's, and a burial ground were also found. At some period, very probably soon after the Norman Conquest, an earthwork with ditches (Red Castle) was thrown up over the settlement, and also across the Late Saxon town ditch. The line of the town ditch suggests that the Late Saxon church was extra-mural.

Site 9

In 1956 Mr. R. R. Mackay excavated the foundations of the twelfth century chapter house apse of the Cluniac Priory, in order to complete the laying out of the Priory site under Ministry of Works guardianship (Mackay 1957). Limited excavations at the Cluniac Priory have continued at intervals up to the present day.

Site 10

In 1962, the late Mr. Rainbird Clarke and Miss Barbara Green excavated at Thetford Castle (Green and Clarke 1963). Evidence of late Neolithic and early Bronze Age occupation was discovered beneath the first Iron Age phase of fortification. Thereafter, there was little sign of occupation between the first century and the late eleventh century, when the motte was constructed and the Iron Age defences remodelled.

Site 11

In 1964 Mr. W. F. Edwards and Mr. A. B. Whittingham excavated the foundations of the cloisters and west range of the Dominican Friary (Domus Dei) built in, or soon after, 1335, and lying between the site of St. Mary the Great and the river (Wilson and Hurst 1965, 181).

Between 1964 and 1970, Davison excavated three sites in the Late Saxon town, in advance of housing development (Fig. 3, Sites 12-14) (Davison 1967; Wilson and Hurst 1970, 162; Wilson and Moorhouse 1971, 130-131). Site 12 represents the only large-scale area excavation so far undertaken in Thetford.

Archaeology

Site 12

Nearly three acres were excavated. The area was densely occupied and included two Late Saxon metalled roads, with buildings, boundary ditches and pits. These Late Saxon features were overlain by corn-drying ovens and chalk-built walls of farms established in the thirteenth century. A single circular hut of the first century A. D. was discovered. At the western end of the site, four grubenhauser of the Pagan Saxon period were excavated.

Site 13

In a peripheral area just inside the town defences, six single-oven kilns and an area interpreted as a kiln-yard were excavated, producing Thetford ware pottery and dating from the early eleventh century.

Site 14

A small area was excavated in the south-east corner of the town, immediately north of St. Barnabas' Hospital. The site of the church of St. Michael's revealed a sequence of three church buildings, the earliest Late Saxon structure being timber built.

Site 15

In 1969, Mr. J. Hare excavated areas immediately east and north of the surviving nave of the Augustinian Priory of the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre founded in 1139 (Wilson and Hurst 1969, 169). In addition to the south range of the cloisters, he discovered Late Saxon pits, overlain by the chalk footings of the earliest twelfth century church.

Site 16

In 1973, the Norfolk Archaeological Unit excavated a small area in advance of warehouse redevelopment in Mill Lane, adjacent to the site of St. Ethelred's church. The pits and pottery discovered indicated intensive occupation in this part of the town in the eleventh century, and continued occupation on a reduced scale in the twelfth century.

Other Sites

In the 1950's Knocker also carried out a number of minor excavations. In 1952 sections taken across the town bank and ditch at various points between Red Castle and London Road indicated that the ditch was c. 40 ft. wide and 11 ft. deep. The bank had apparently been slighted at some stage and the remains appeared to be lying on top of the ditch, a little east (on the town side) of centre. The dating evidence was enigmatic. In 1957 Knocker dug seventeen trial holes in the area immediately south of Nuns' Bridges: these revealed some medieval occupation and evidence of a ford across the river, but no Anglo-Saxon occupation. Four trial holes dug nearby on the raised area (supposedly an earthwork) known as Weever's Close, produced no Anglo-Saxon material.

Apart from planned excavations, between 1948 and 1952 Knocker, with the assistance of building contractors and householders, attempted to keep a close watch on building operations and drainage trenches in Thetford. The drainage scheme of 1950-52 produced Late Saxon material to the south of the river but very little Late Saxon or even medieval pottery to its north; several sherds of Late Saxon pottery had, however, previously been discovered in Guildhall Street. Drainage trenches in the open area known as School Plain, just north of Brandon Road, uncovered a flint road associated with tenth and eleventh century pottery. In 1953, during the digging of foundations on the Bury Road housing estate opposite St. Barnabas' Hospital, along the crest of the old river terrace, three Pagan Saxon burials with a knife and spearhead were discovered.

This summary of previous archaeological work by no means includes all the chance discoveries of significant material made by interested individuals at various times. Each discovery has led to a better understanding of the type and density of occupation in Late Saxon Thetford. However, our knowledge of the origins and development of urban settlement remains limited.

V. THE GROWTH OF THE LATE SAXON TOWN

The initial conditions for urban development in Thetford during the Anglo-Saxon period lay in the geography of the region. Thetford stands on the sand and gravel deposits of Breckland, at the confluence of the Little Ouse and Thet rivers. The Late Saxon town occupied the gentle sand and gravel slopes of the river terrace south of the Little Ouse, but the urban centre since the twelfth century has stood north of the river, where the ground rises more sharply on a ridge of chalk. The location of the town explains its strategic significance in terms of communications by land and water (Fig. 1). It lay at the critical point of land access into East Anglia. To the north-west of the town lay the Fens which between the Roman period and the Middle Ages provided a damp and largely uninhabitable physical barrier. To the south-east, the boulder clay of the uplands would have been considerably more densely wooded a thousand years ago. The Icknield Way, the prehistoric land route from southern England to the north-west tip of Norfolk, followed the narrow ridge of chalk downland between fen and forest and crossed the two rivers at Thetford, where the earthworks of the Iron Age fort next to the suggested fording point (at the medieval Nuns' Bridges) indicate its pre-Roman importance (Fig. 3). It is possible that this major route remained in use during the Roman and perhaps the Anglo-Saxon periods. The general absence of Roman occupation at Thetford may be attributable to the proximity of major Roman settlements at Santon, Wilton and Brettenham. The continuing importance of the fording point is reflected in the Anglo-Saxon place-name - Theodford, first recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in 870, and meaning the 'people's ford', 'chief ford', or 'public ford' (Ekwall 1960; Cameron 1963). It is possible that the earthwork referred to by both Blomefield and Martin, immediately south of the Nuns' Bridges crossing, dates from the Danish military occupation in 870, although the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle does not mention any building of fortifications during the Danish raids of 865-878 (Sawyer 1962, 129-131). Martin's eighteenth century map of Thetford described this area as 'the camp' which, if Danish, would provide further evidence of the strategic significance of the Icknield Way crossing point in the Anglo-Saxon period. It is also probable that the principal medieval road from Norwich to London, which passed through Thetford, was in part of Roman origin. What is certain is that the Danish armies, when they turned their attention to East Anglia in 870, moved eastwards from Mercia and chose Thetford as their natural base, initially for raiding operations, and later as the 'jumping-off' point for colonisation of the region.

The importance of the water route from Thetford to the North Sea, via the Little Ouse and the Wash, appears to have been considerable. The close trading connections between England and the Continent in the Late Saxon period have been convincingly demonstrated, on the basis of occasional documentary references and archaeological evidence from various ports in eastern and southern England (Stenton 1947, 533-536; Sawyer 1962, 177-201; Dunning 1956; Grierson 1959). For the eastern ports, Flanders and Germany were undoubtedly the principal trade partners, but the coin hoards of Scandinavia represent not only plunder, the payment of mercenaries and of Danegeld, but also the existence of trade relations, which flourished in particular under the Danish maritime empire of Cnut (Lloyd 1961, 128; Lewis 1958, 424-429). This trade with the Continent may have made a large contribution to Thetford's wealth between the ninth and the eleventh centuries. Archaeological investigation has produced imports which include red-painted pottery, glass beads, a bracelet, pieces of Niedermendig lava querns, and schist whetstones from Norway. Connections with the Continent are confirmed by the role of Thetford as a major production centre of Thetford ware pottery which, closely modelled on Rhenish prototypes, dominated the Late Saxon ceramic market in eastern England. Furthermore, many of the small finds from the town indicate close cultural affinities with settlements along the North Sea coasts of Schleswig and Frisia. Given this evidence, it seems reasonable to suppose that shallow-draft trading vessels may have been passing up and down the Little Ouse providing Thetford with a satisfactory if somewhat arduous access to the Continent in the Late Saxon period. The location of Thetford inland on a navigable river is comparable with that

The Growth of the Late Saxon Town

of other major Anglo-Saxon ports, such as London, Norwich, Ipswich, York and Lincoln. The nature of Thetford's foreign exports is unknown but wool and wool products probably formed an important element. In the eleventh century the wool towns of Flanders were already assuming importance, and expansion in eleventh century England appears to have been concentrated on the sheep-farming areas (Sawyer 1965). Domesday records a very high concentration of sheep in the sparsely populated Breckland area around Thetford, and archaeology has revealed considerable evidence of spinning and weaving activity (Knocker, unpublished; Darby 1952, 144-146 and 200-202).

It is difficult to assess the relative significance of continental and domestic trade in the growth of Thetford as a major urban centre. The spatial distribution of towns in East Anglia in relation to general demographic spread in the eleventh century suggests a possible definition of the optimum economic hinterland dependent on Thetford at the height of its prosperity (Fig. 2). It seems likely that Thetford provided a market, consumer goods and services for an extensive area of west Norfolk, geographically larger than that served by Norwich, but with less diversity of agricultural potential and less heavily populated. This hinterland may at one time have stretched from the point where the Icknield Way meets the North Sea to the edge of the Breckland in Suffolk, south-east of Thetford. No doubt Thetford required cattle, surplus food and seed, as well as wool, from its rural hinterland. In return, pottery, metalwork, and wool products were probably supplied, but the relative demands of the market for these products imposed by Thetford itself and by the hinterland are impossible to estimate. That Thetford's domestic trade was by no means confined to this immediate hinterland is witnessed by the recovery of Stamford ware from archaeological levels in the town and of Thetford mint coins from many parts of England.

When in the ninth century Thetford can first be regarded as urban is uncertain. Pre-urban Anglo-Saxon occupation was represented in the 1964-66 excavations by four grubenhauser at the western extremity of the site. Davison interpreted these as outliers from the sixth to ninth century village excavated by Knocker at Red Castle. This Pagan and Middle Saxon settlement lay close to the more westerly ford across the Little Ouse, referred to as Ditchenford by Blomefield and Ditchingford by Martin, who described it as 'the principal passage over the river into the (Anglo-Saxon) town which then stood on the Suffolk side' (Fig. 3). It has been tentatively suggested by Knocker that this river crossing and its attendant settlement were originally called Redford, possibly derived from the Old English Hreod-ford, meaning the 'ford at the reeds' (Knocker 1967, 121). Evidence for this suggestion is contained in the thirteenth century Chronicle of Roger of Wendover, which twice refers to a place called Redford (in one instance marginally glossed Thetford) in connection with the Danish invasion of 870 and the death of King Edmund (Hervey 1907, 179 and 185). The hypothesis receives some support from the fact that the post-Conquest earthworks erected on the same site and presumably guarding the ford, came to be known in the medieval period as Red Castle.

It has been maintained that the wording of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describing the Danish invasion of 870 implies that Thetford was already an important, probably urban, centre (Knocker, unpublished). Unfortunately, archaeology provides no convincing evidence to support or deny this hypothesis. At some stage after the mid-ninth century, as a result of Rhenish contacts, Thetford ware, thrown on a fast wheel and representing a major technological advance in pottery manufacture, replaced the more primitive Ipswich ware in East Anglia. However, the dating of the transition between the two wares remains imprecise, and at Thetford it is impossible to say whether Knocker's huts, pits and ditches containing Thetford ware and sealed beneath the road of c. 900, represent in part occupation before 870. All that can be said is that the agricultural community at Red Castle used only Ipswich-type ware, whereas in the urban area Thetford ware had completely superseded the earlier pottery. The case for the introduction of the fast wheel technique by the Danes after 870 has been put most recently by Campbell (Campbell 1975, 5). If right this would conveniently date urban origins in Thetford. On the other hand, there seems no reason why, given the known trading contacts with the Rhineland, Thetford ware should not have emerged in East Anglia in the two decades before the Danish arrival (West 1963, 279-286; Hurst 1957). In the absence of more precise archaeological evidence, it seems likely that at some time in the second half of the ninth century, the town of Thetford began to grow out of the riverine hamlet at Red Castle; a process involving,

as Davison has suggested, the amalgamation of hamlets adjacent to other nearby fords further east.

The overall pattern of urban development in East Anglia was substantially different from that of southern and central England (Biddle and Hill 1971, 84). Campbell has suggested that the scarcity of towns in East Anglia in proportion to the high population revealed at Domesday was probably political in origin, since the swiftness of both the Danish conquest in 870 and of the submission to Edward the Elder in 917 prevented the creation of an extensive system of burhs for either defensive or offensive motives (Campbell 1975, 6). Certainly, Edward the Elder's policy towards the Danelaw, reflected in his astute manoeuvres to achieve the submission of Danish East Anglia without a full-scale military invasion, allowed for 'separate development' within the Anglo-Danish areas while insisting on royal control exercised through the boroughs.

Within this regional context, the geographical location of Thetford enabled it to take advantage of economic developments and emerge as a thriving town. The precise origin of this economic impetus remains uncertain, although it was no doubt stimulated by the Danish settlement and the subsequent unification of the English kingdom. The result was urbanisation - that is, the production of consumer goods on a new and more specialised scale in a protected environment, involving a large, settled population, and leading to the increasing use of a stable coinage to facilitate trade. Aethelstan's Grately decrees of 928 indicate the privileges and responsibilities that accompanied urban status: the exclusive right both to mint coinage for taxation and trade; to hold a market for all goods worth over 20 pence; and the necessity to secure these advantages with a properly maintained defence (Whitelock, ed. 1955, 381-384). The extent to which the Grately decrees were relevant to East Anglia, which was only nominally 'English', is uncertain, and the urban characteristics which they outline were not in any case applicable without exception: some Anglo-Saxon boroughs never possess mints, some mints were never urban, and Aethelstan later relaxed his strictures on trade. However, they provide a useful yardstick, and illustrate that royal control of trade operated through the twin institutions of borough and mint. There is indirect evidence that Thetford possessed one of the trappings of urban status, a mint, by the tenth century, and if this is the case the bank and ditch, which defended the town on the landward side for almost a mile, may well date from the same period. Royal economic interest based on a stable urban network was expressed in political control, and it is reasonable to suppose that Thetford, after Edward the Elder's 'reconquest' of East Anglia in 917, became a centre of royal administration. Direct evidence of Thetford's political role is lacking. However, in both 1004 and 1010, Ulfcetel, described in the twelfth century Chronicle of Florence of Worcester as 'ealdorman of the East Angles', appears to have organised his resistance to the Danish onslaught at Thetford (Whitelock, ed.: 1961, 87 footnote 1; 1955, 305)¹. Both Florence and Old Norse Poems place the decisive battle of 1010 at Ringmere which was almost certainly either the present-day Ringmere just north of Thetford, or Rymer (originally Ryngemere) four miles south of the town (Whitelock, ed.: 1961, 90 footnote 2; 1955, 305).

The pattern of urban expansion in Anglo-Saxon Thetford has emerged almost entirely from archaeological excavation. On the basis of his excavations between 1964 and 1966, Davison proposed a fairly sudden growth of the western part of the town in the tenth century, which may 'even have been part of a programme of planned expansion' (Davison 1967, 194). Large open areas were apparently taken over and divided up into properties by narrow boundary ditches. Overall planning did not extend, however, to any rigid arrangement of roads and street frontages. Rather, the town seemed to have been roughly zoned. The western area excavated by Davison was residential and included evidence of an impressive timber aisled hall and numerous other buildings. However, the properties and boundaries did not seem to have a regular relationship to the roads. The number of rubbish pits cut into the soft gravel subsoil was smaller than might be expected after some 200 years of urban occupation. Davison suggested that a central authority may have been responsible for removing the spoil and rubbish from pits and ditches in the town. The industrial zone seems to have lain in a peripheral position by the town bank and ditch, as indicated by Davison's discovery of the eleventh century kiln-yard. Knocker's excavations between 1948 and 1952, adjacent to the town defences and a little further east, support this hypothesis: he discovered what appeared to be an artisan quarter, where

bronze and iron-working, pottery making and other industries were carried out. The poor quality buildings straggled irregularly alongside a succession of ninth to eleventh century roads.

The particular pattern of settlement revealed in Thetford, a town lying open to the river, may well have been characteristic of a Scandinavian town, and Davison suggested Birka and Hedeby as parallels. However, the variations in form and layout within even a small excavated area of Late Saxon Thetford make it very difficult to predict the nature of immediately adjacent parts of the town, let alone the largely uninvestigated eastern areas.

VI. THE DECLINE OF THE LATE SAXON TOWN

The watershed in the fortunes of Late Saxon Thetford is difficult to pinpoint. Documentary and coin evidence suggest a continuation of prosperity after 1066, but imply that a reversal was setting in by the end of the eleventh century. Certainly, the Domesday description of Thetford's royal render, which increased between 1066 and 1086 in almost the same proportion as that of Norwich, gives no indication of stagnation, although the extent to which this represents an increase in wealth or merely heavier demands imposed by William I remains uncertain. However, circumstantial evidence points to a possible slowing down of urban expansion before 1066. The wealth of coinage minted in Thetford in the reign of Edward the Confessor was not achieved again. It seems reasonable to suggest that an initial setback, caused by economic competition from Bury St. Edmund's, lying only twelve miles south of Thetford, may have begun to take effect (Carr 1975, 51 and 55). Bury grew dramatically throughout the eleventh century. Between 1066 and 1086, for example, Domesday indicates that Bury doubled both in population and acreage. The basis for this expansion was laid in 1044, when Edward the Confessor granted to the Abbey of Bury St. Edmund's the Liberty of the soke of eight and a half hundreds, enabling the town to exercise previously royal rights, both fiscal and judicial, over a large area. These consisted of the right to collect the Danegeld and socage land dues, and to hold the hundred courts (Davis 1954; Douglas, ed. 1932, xv-clxxi; Stenton 1947, 510-511)². This consolidation of economic power may have prepared the ground for a direct challenge to Late Saxon Thetford which, to the south of the Little Ouse, lay adjacent to the eight and a half hundreds. In the borough of Thetford itself, as Domesday records, the king retained 'all the custom'. Twenty-one burgesses, however, held of the king six ploughlands and sixty acres of land which lay within the soke of St. Edmund (perhaps in Lackford hundred). Even if Thetford did not actually fall within the Liberty of St. Edmund, the considerable array of rights, customs and property in the town enjoyed by the Abbey of St. Edmund in the Norman period is witnessed by a writ of Henry I (Douglas, ed. 1932, 79). The probable boundary between the borough of Thetford and the Liberty of St. Edmund has survived to the present day, and now constitutes part of the county boundary between Norfolk and Suffolk. In places along this boundary, a bank, probably dating from the Anglo-Saxon period, and called Londmere in the thirteenth century, remains as a witness to the two rival jurisdictions (Clarke 1974, 63). The conflict between Thetford and Bury may have been an extension of the well-attested process whereby the Abbey of St. Edmund used its powers, supported by royal favour, to monopolise trade and suppress the development of other markets in the Liberty. Royal support for the Liberty of St. Edmund may have had a political flavour: Sawyer has suggested that 'the Sokes of the Danelaw, as they existed in the eleventh century and later, could have been the result of the English royal government's attempts to create some jurisdiction and personal obligations to replace traditional bonds destroyed in the Danish conquests' (Sawyer 1962, 254 note 64).

The establishment of the East Anglian bishopric at Thetford in 1071 does not necessarily detract from the argument for increasing difficulties caused by the nearby Liberty. The choice of Thetford, as Dodwell has pointed out, was not based predominantly on the town's merits, but was, rather, a temporary step in Bishop Herfast's design to establish his bishopric at the wealthy Abbey of Bury St. Edmund's, which was exempted from his jurisdiction (Dodwell 1957). Indeed, the quarrel between Herfast and Abbot Baldwin, resolved by the king in 1181 in the abbot's favour, may itself have been a reflection of the conflict between the two towns.

If this hypothesis of damaging competition with Bury St. Edmund's is correct, it may explain the related problem of when and why Thetford began to move to the north side of the

river. The Thetford minted coin of Cnut, found by Knocker in the make-up of the three super-imposed roads, suggests that Thetford was still maintaining its position south of the river by 1035. Even if the population began to move across the river after 1044, there is no clear evidence of how far the process had gone by 1066. Domesday provides no answer since the description of the lands on both sides of the river gives no indication of the proportion of houses on either side. However, at least nine of the thirteen churches mentioned in Domesday, including the cathedral still lay on the south bank. North of the river, St. Peter's existed before 1066, and on the evidence of dedication, St. Laurence's, St. Cuthbert's and St. Andrew's could all be pre-Conquest (Appendix I). Very little Anglo-Saxon pottery has been found north of the Little Ouse. Nevertheless, this does not rule out the possibility of Anglo-Saxon occupation, since the scarcity of archaeological finds extends through the medieval period, when the location of the town on the north bank is certain. The pre-Conquest church of St. Peter's lies on the medieval Briggegate leading to the principal medieval bridge across the Little Ouse. The name Briggegate may or may not indicate a pre-Conquest origin for the street, but the location alone lends weight to the hypothesis of a bridgehead on the north bank protecting this crossing point before 1066 (Smith 1956, 196 and 198-199; Martin 1779)³. Ipswich and Norwich both show a similar arrangement of settlement on both sides of a river in the Anglo-Saxon period.

Barbara Green and Rainbird Clarke have suggested that the perimeter of a Late Saxon and Norman settlement north of the Little Ouse, may be reflected on maps pre-dating the A.11 by-pass; represented by a line from the river north up Water Lane, along Painter Street to the top of White Hart Street (previously Briggegate), along Earl's Street to the present market place, and then via Guildhall Street back to the river at the south end of Nether Row (Fig. 3) (Green and Clarke 1963). St. Peter's and the other supposed Anglo-Saxon or early medieval churches north of the river all lie within this suggested perimeter, which may have been delineated by a bank and ditch. Access to the town from the north would have been at three points: at the junction of St. Nicholas Street and Painter Street for the road from the north-west, at the top of White Hart Street, where roads from the north-west; north-east and north meet; and at the north-east corner of the present market place, for the junction of roads from the north-east and north (Plates I and II).

Given these hypotheses regarding Anglo-Saxon settlement north of the river, the two great Norman additions to the town (the motte-and-bailey castle and the Cluniac Priory) fall neatly into place, abutting the east and west of the urban area respectively. The Cluniac Priory was, in fact, founded in 1104 on the Suffolk side of the river, with St. Mary the Great as its church, but was removed in 1107 to its permanent site on the north-west edge of the town. The motte-and-bailey castle, occupying the area of the Iron Age fort adjacent to the eastern ford, was probably constructed by Ralf Guader, Earl of East Anglia after 1066, or by Roger Bigod after Guader's downfall in the abortive revolt of 1075.

The question of the northward migration of Thetford remains open. The process may have been well underway by 1066, and the Norman settlement policy a natural consequence of the pre-existing shift in emphasis. Alternatively, re-location on the north bank may have been a direct result of the Normans' political and military demands.

Whatever the details, archaeological evidence suggests that by the early twelfth century the original site of Thetford south of the river was largely deserted and that by the thirteenth century the land was being farmed (Davison 1967, 195). Most of the Anglo-Saxon churches on the south bank, although surviving longer, were abandoned during the medieval period (Appendix I).

It seems likely that the Norman Conquest in some measure contributed to the decline of Thetford. The Domesday survey records 224 empty messuages in the town in 1086. Since the Norman motte-and-bailey castle occupied the site of the Iron Age fort, it is most improbable that the waste dwellings were a result of its construction. They may, rather, have been devastated in retaliation to Guader's rebellion against William I in 1075, although it is possible that they simply represented decay and desertion on the south side of the river. Indeed, it has been argued that the Domesday account of waste dwellings in boroughs, particularly marked in eastern England, reflected a depression in foreign trade between 1066 and c. 1100 (Lewis 1958,



Photo by: J. K. St. Joseph

Plate II. Thetford: a view of the medieval town on the north side of the river looking east, with the site of the principal medieval bridge centre right. The pattern of medieval streets radiating from the bridge is particularly noticeable. The castle lies centre background.

(Cambridge University Collection: Copyright Reserved: No. BU13)



Photo by: J. K. St. Joseph

Plate III. Thetford: the motte and bailey castle looking west, showing the course of the southern defences preserved in the street pattern.

(Cambridge University Collection: Copyright Reserved; No. PT13)

455-489; Stenton 1951, 172-175). Such an economic setback may have been closely connected with William I's hostile relations with Denmark, Norway, and, after 1071, Flanders. During this period, documentary and coin evidence of trade with these areas is virtually non-existent. Eastern boroughs such as Thetford, Lincoln, Torksey, and probably York, with strong Flemish and Scandinavian trading relations, would have suffered most severely from this dislocation. However, the trade depression was only temporary, and provides no simple cause for Thetford's decline.

More profound factors may have been at work. In the second half of the twelfth century, the development in western Europe of trading vessels with deeper draughts and heavier loads may have led to increasing difficulties in negotiating the Little Ouse inland to Thetford (Brogger and Shetelig 1951, 233-238). In this respect, it is interesting that, in contrast to their inland predecessors of the Late Saxon period, the expanding eastern ports of the twelfth century - for example, Lynn, Boston, Hull and Yarmouth - sprang up on or near the coast.

In the case of Thetford, the Norman plantation of Lynn may have been particularly significant. At the Conquest, Lynn was only a vill, but following the foundation of the priory church of St. Margaret's in 1095, it swiftly became the principal Wash port, and replaced Thetford as the market centre for west Norfolk and perhaps as the gateway to North Sea trade, with the additional advantage after c. 1250 of good water communications with midland England (Carus-Wilson 1962-3; Darby 1940, 94-98)⁴. Economic contraction involved the disappearance of the pottery industry, a basic element in Thetford's urban prosperity, at some stage in the twelfth century. It is possible that, beginning in the eleventh century, the urban production of Thetford-type ware had been suffering competition from early medieval wares or Thetford-type ware produced rurally at sites such as Grimston in north-east Norfolk (Clarke 1970).

The decline of Thetford was in sharp contrast to the continuing growth of Norwich as the economic centre of eastern Norfolk. Consequently, Norwich became the natural choice as the administrative capital of East Anglia: Norman policy established there the only royal castle in East Anglia and, as a continuation of Edward the Confessor's arrangement, the headquarters of the sheriff of the two shires (Campbell 1975, 5).

As a thriving town, Thetford barely survived the eleventh century. The domestic and international economic functions of the town and its accompanying privileges as a centre of administration, were squeezed dry by the expansion of Bury St. Edmund's, the growth of Lynn, and the increasing predominance of Norwich in East Anglia.

VII. ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

In spite of the information already accumulated, many problems remain regarding the development of Thetford in the Anglo-Saxon and early medieval periods. Archaeological investigation may provide the answers to some of these problems, particularly in the following areas of study:

1. The nature and extent of Pagan and Middle Saxon settlement in Thetford and the relationship of such settlement to the Late Saxon town.

In this context, attention should be paid to the process of expansion of the Middle Saxon settlement from Red Castle, and the stages by which the Late Saxon town developed.

2. The characteristics of a Danish town in Late Saxon England.

The suggested pattern of growth in Thetford may well be Danish in origin. A Danelaw town seems to have differed substantially from the planned boroughs of Wessex, such as Wallingford, Cricklade and Winchester. In view of the fact that other Danelaw towns are now being investigated archaeologically (for example Norwich, Ipswich, Stamford, Lincoln, Tamworth and York) Thetford retains considerable importance for reasons of comparison. Large parts of the Late Saxon town, particularly in the eastern segment, and the central areas immediately south of the river, have not been studied.

3. The limits of the town as defined by the bank and ditch running south from Red Castle. (Fig. 3)

The bank can be traced as far as London Road adjacent to the Grammar School playing fields and further along the north-eastern edge of St. Margaret's cemetery, where Blomefield could see it in the eighteenth century. Beyond this point, the line is uncertain, but it may follow the crest of the river terrace to the site of St. Barnabas' Hospital and beyond towards Nuns' Bridges. In addition, the relationship of the town bank and ditch to the later Red Castle earthwork and its subsequent course north to the river are still dubious. It is possible that Ditchingford, alternatively spelt Ditchenford, means 'ditch-end ford', and was situated near the point where the Anglo-Saxon defence met the river adjacent to Red Castle.

4. The development and usage of the Anglo-Saxon river front.

The trade with the Continent in the Late Saxon period would naturally require quay-side facilities. Nothing is known of the arrangements for receiving and loading alongside the river. Using techniques of flotation, sieving and pollen analysis, the excavation of waterlogged deposits may provide valuable evidence regarding the agriculture, diet and environment of the Late Saxon town.

5. The transfer of the Late Saxon town to the north bank and the extent of the Late Saxon and medieval town north of the river.

The hypotheses regarding the process of migration and the line of the northern perimeter remain unproven.

6. The development of Thetford ware pottery.

Knocker's report on his excavations between 1948 and 1952 has not been published. In conjunction with future selective excavation of stratified deposits, the publication of this report could provide positive evidence about the early development of Thetford ware. So far, only Ipswich has produced evidence of tenth century kilns making Thetford-type ware; the kilns in Thetford itself appear to date from the eleventh century. Knocker discovered road surfaces well dated by coins, and these roads sealed stratified deposits containing Thetford ware groups which are in consequence dateable within an early sequence. The study of this pottery may throw light on the evolution and distribution of Late Saxon pottery in East Anglia and assist in the dating of other sites where Thetford-type ware occurs.

7. The nature of the medieval town.

Street frontages and the remains of medieval structures which may lie alongside them provide vital evidence of urban growth. In Thetford, the street frontages have probably remained static north of the river from the medieval (or even the Late Saxon) period until very recently. Water Lane, however, has now largely disappeared under the new by-pass, while construction of the new shopping centre, although generally respecting the medieval road lines, sealed a large part of the archaeological street frontages along Tanner Street and Well Street without archaeological investigation. In view of the almost complete lack of evidence for the vernacular buildings and everyday life of medieval Thetford, examination of street frontages such as these before and during development is essential. Within the medieval town, there has been no recording of archaeological sections across roads. Such sections may not only reveal evidence of the make-up and dating of successive road levels, but may also give important information on any alteration in the lines of the street frontages.

8. The medieval development of the castle area.

The outer defences have disappeared on the west, south and east sides. The street pattern represented by Old Market Street and Ford Street may reflect the original course of the southern defences (Fig. 3). Ford Street was in fact previously called Baily End, and on the west Pike Lane was called Pyke Street-le-Fantditch, which may mean 'wet ditch', in the thirteenth century. Part of the eastern earthwork was removed in 1772, but it is impossible to be certain about the date of destruction of the southern circuit. This must, however, have taken place after 1172-73 when a pipe roll reference mentions the pulling down of the Castle at Thet-

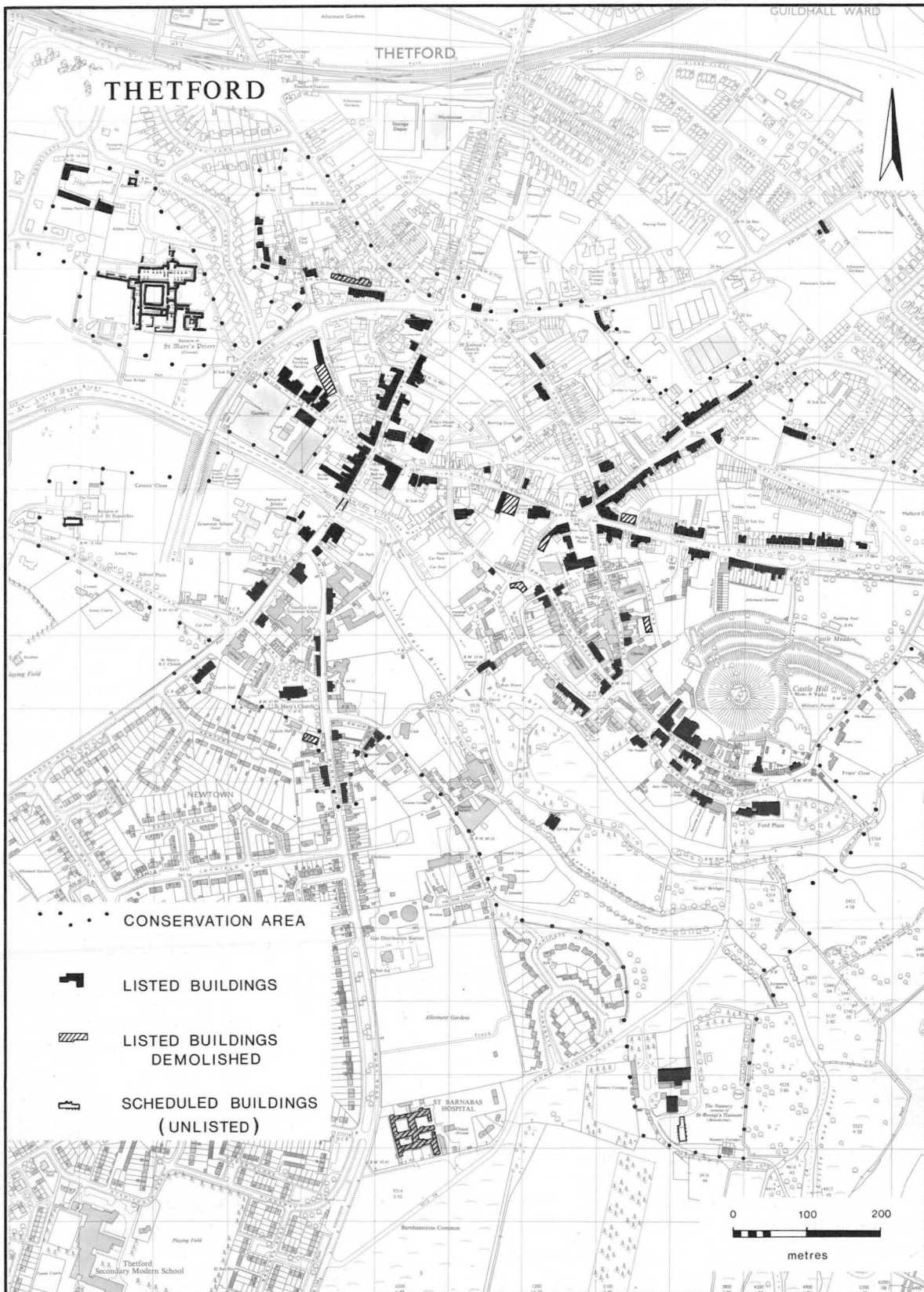


Fig. 4. Thetford: Listed Buildings and Conservation Area.
 Underlay based on O. S. map 1:2500 revised 1968. Crown Copyright Reserved.

ford and before 1519 when the Dolphin Inn stood on Old Market Street (Pipe Roll 19 Henry II, Pipe Roll Society Publications 1884, r 8 m 1, 117). At some stage after 1172, it seems likely that the area of the southern defences became an important market place. Martin's eighteenth century map of Thetford placed the 'Old Market' at the eastern junction of Old Market Street and Ford Street (Plate III).

9. The standing buildings of Thetford. (Fig. 4)

The style and date of a town's buildings, viewed as a whole, are a tangible representation of more recent urban history. They reflect a town's periods of growth and localised areas of stagnation. As Rodwell and others have pointed out, the study of the standing fabric is as important to the understanding of urban development as the below-ground archaeology, from which it must not be divorced (Rodwell 1975, 25). The historical potential of the standing buildings of Thetford for the later periods is considerable, and, although these buildings have no direct bearing on the Late Saxon and early medieval town, the recording of structures above and below ground should be an integrated process (Appendix II).

VIII. ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

In spite of the archaeological excavations in Thetford listed above (p.6-7), lack of resources has allowed the large-scale destruction or sealing of archaeological evidence by re-development on both sides of the river, without provision for archaeological recording (Fig. 6). However, future redevelopments should still provide opportunities to investigate the archaeological problems which remain.

At present, archaeological policies concerning Thetford must be viewed in the light of the following considerations:

1. The Town Centre Map, originally drawn up by Norfolk County Council in 1969, envisages several extensive redevelopments and road schemes on the north side of the river. These proposals are at present being reconsidered by Breckland District Council in the light of changed circumstances, and this could lead to significant modifications of the existing plan. In particular, the recent decision to review the planned expansion of Thetford may involve a significant reduction in the redevelopment areas and road provisions outlined on the Town Centre Map. Of the redevelopments listed below, those followed by (TCM) should be considered in this context.
2. Since the creation of the Norfolk Archaeological Unit in 1973 and the Breckland District Council in 1974, consultation regarding archaeological provision has been established at the planning stage. This consultation is based partly on the selection of areas of archaeological importance recommended to the Norfolk County Planning Department by the Unit (Fig. 5). The County Planning Department has accepted that the preservation of these 'Category A' areas is highly desirable, and that they will not be damaged or destroyed unless it is absolutely unavoidable. In such an event, opportunity will be given for archaeological excavation prior to, and observation during, redevelopment.
3. Many 'Category A' sites, principally open areas on the south side of the river, were already protected by Department of the Environment schedules (Fig. 5). While this procedure ensures that, if redevelopment takes place, archaeological considerations will be recognised in good time, the legislation remains inadequate in many respects and does not contain machinery suited to the complexities of urban archaeology.

With this background in mind, a number of sites of archaeological potential, subject to redevelopment proposals or where redevelopment is likely, should be considered (Fig. 6).

South of the river

Two sites may provide information on settlement patterns in the Late Saxon town: the triangle of open ground enclosed by the old London Road, the new by-pass and St. Mary's Road: and the area of the former gas works in Bury Road, which is close to

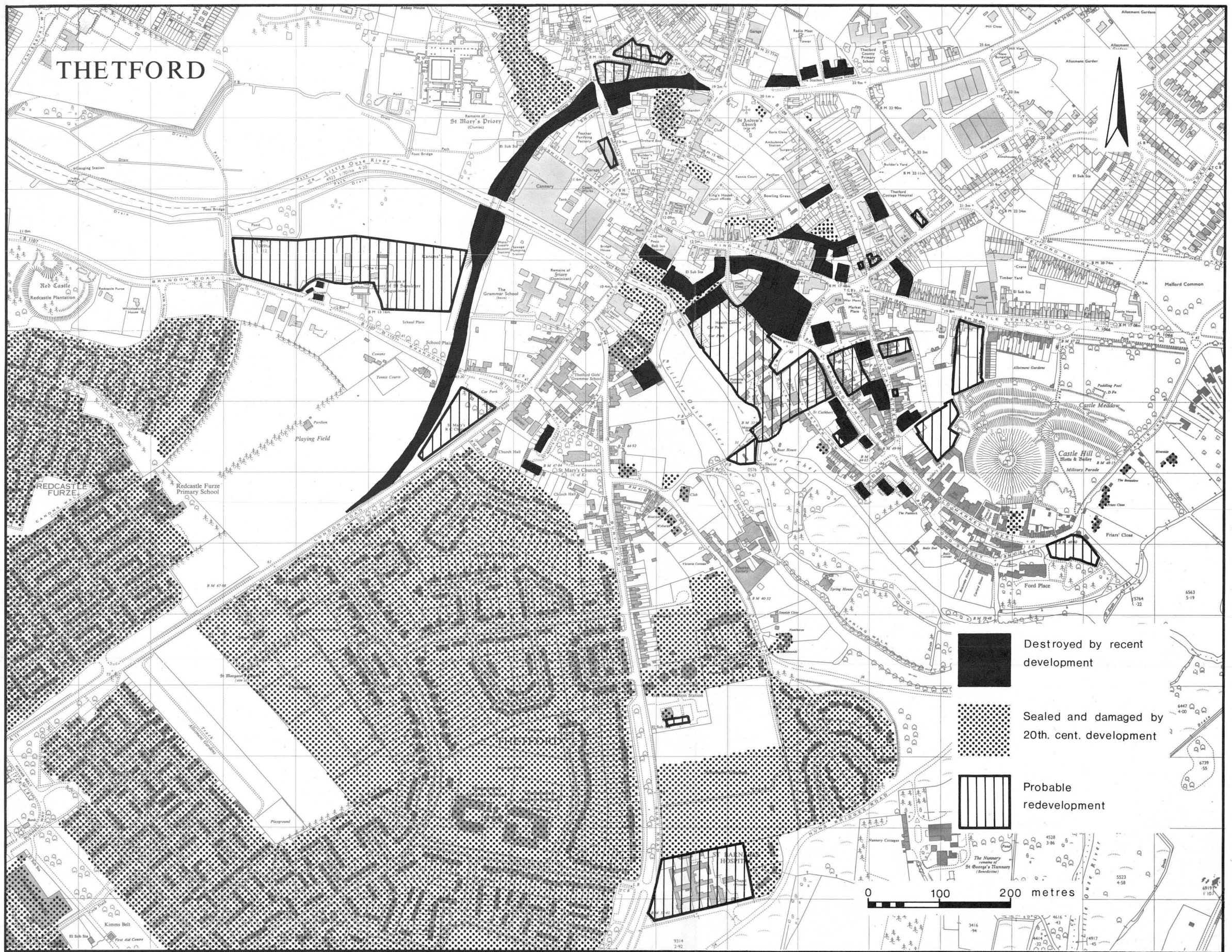


Fig. 6. Thetford: Archaeological Potential; the situation up to January 1976. Underlay based on O.S. map 1:2500 revised 1968. Crown Copyright Reserved.

the site of the Anglo-Saxon church of St. Edmund's.

A large site, between Brandon Road and the river, adjacent to the Priory of the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre, may reveal hitherto untouched areas of the Anglo-Saxon waterfront along the edge of the river terrace.

The site of St. Barnabas' Hospital, a Victorian workhouse demolished in 1973, may lie across the conjectural course of the Anglo-Saxon defences enclosing the eastern part of the town. In 1967-8, Davison, excavating immediately north of St. Barnabas' Hospital (Fig. 3, Site 14), found no trace of the defences. A north-south excavation across this site might clarify the extent of the eastern part of the town, the nature and date of the defences, and the intensity of Late Saxon occupation in this peripheral area.

North of the river

Investigation of the supposed northern perimeter may be possible at four points: on the north side and at the south-west end of Painter Street; at No. 2 Earl's Street and Nos. 1 and 3 Magdalen Street (TCM); at No. 1 Earl's Street, immediately adjacent to the site of St. Laurence's church (which partly survives in the cellar of No. 1 Market Place); and on the south-east side of Pike Lane, where the suggested northern perimeter may meet the defences of the Iron Age fort and Norman castle.

Redevelopment may affect the castle area at three other points: a site at the rear of Nos. 32-34 Castle Street, which lies very close to the defences of the fort and castle; an area adjacent to the western defences of the fort and castle, where a north-south access road has been proposed between the south end of Guildhall Street, across Pike Lane and Castle Street and beyond to the Norwich road (TCM); and in the south-east area of the castle, where, as part of the relief road scheme, a north-south link road crossing the river in the area of Nuns' Bridges has been outlined. This road would pass across the line of the removed eastern earthworks and also disturb the area within the earthworks occupied by the Augustinian Friary after 1387. Alternatively, a redevelopment (in the path of the link road) has been proposed in the grounds of Ford Place, which lie on the suggested line of the southern defences and adjacent to the site of the 'Old Market'.

Information regarding the pattern of early urban growth on the north bank may be revealed on four sites: on the west side of St. Nicholas Street, where a warehouse has been demolished; an area north and south of Tanner Street, and further east to Raymond Street, which would affect a considerable part of the medieval (and Late Saxon?) town and waterfront (TCM); an area involving the demolition of Nos. 1-7, 21-23, and 32-38 (with Point House) Guildhall Street, which would open up extensive medieval street frontages and associated backyards; and at No. 13 Magdalen Street, which lies a little east of the supposed early perimeter.

The large-scale nature of proposed redevelopment in Thetford, and the limitations of finance, present considerable problems of archaeological policy, in the selection of sites for excavation or for observation. If the present Town Centre Map, and other redevelopment proposals are implemented, most of the areas of archaeological potential will have been destroyed, severely damaged, or sealed by 1978. If the archaeological opportunities are not taken, the loss of historical evidence, both for Thetford itself and for East Anglia, will be considerable.

APPENDIX I - THETFORD CHURCHES ⁵

The ten pre-Conquest churches identifiable in Thetford are: on the evidence of Domesday, St. Mary the Great, St. Peter's, St. John's, St. Martin's, St. Margaret's, St. Helen's (lying three miles north-west of the urban area on the edge of Methwold hundred) and a church, probably St. George's, associated with the Benedictine monastery founded by the Abbot of Bury; on the evidence of archaeological excavation, St. Michael's and St. Edmund's; and on dedication evidence alone, St. Ethelred's. The eleventh church identified in Domesday, Holy Trinity, was founded by Bishop Herfast some time after 1071 to act as a parish church in place of his

cathedral, St. Mary the Great. The dedications of St. Cuthbert, St. Laurence, All Saints, and St. Benet, strongly suggest a pre-Conquest foundation (Wormald, ed. 1934; Brooke 1975, 122-148). It seems likely, given the stagnation of Thetford by the thirteenth century, and the Norman propensity for founding small proprietary churches, that the remaining churches in Thetford date from the twelfth century and, in some cases, even earlier. The feast-day of St. Nicholas first appears in English calendars in the mid-eleventh century, and the church, which certainly belonged to the Cluniac Priory, may have been part of the original endowment by Roger or Hugh Bigod. St. Mary Magdalene emerges as a dedication at about the same time, but the peripheral location well to the north-east of the northern perimeter of the town may suggest a twelfth century date. St. Giles was a popular early Norman dedication, and St. Mary the Less contains Norman stonework. St. Andrew's lies just inside the supposed northern perimeter, and, on evidence of dedication, may have been either pre- or post-Conquest.

The disappearance of the Thetford churches after the early medieval period was a gradual process. The taxation of Pope Nicholas in 1291 includes only five churches: St. Cuthbert's, St. Giles', St. Edmund's, St. Nicholas', and a St. Mary's but which one is not known. These were assessed for a total of £9.10s. (Hudson 1910). The remainder may have been too poor to be taxed, which, in view of the small endowments of urban churches generally, is not surprising. St. Mary Magdalene lost its parish status in the thirteenth century, and was turned into a leper hospital. St. John's, St. Martin's, St. Helen's, St. Margaret's and St. Benet's were not mentioned in an inventory of church goods in 1369 (Watkin 1948). St. John's and St. Edmund's had ceased to function as parish churches by the end of the fourteenth century. Excavation by Clarke on the site of St. Helen's church (Wilson and Hurst 1962-3, 320), Knocker's excavation of what was probably the site of St. Martin's at Red Castle, and Davison's excavation of St. Michael's, indicated that all these churches were disused by the late medieval period. St. Giles' lost its parish status in the late fifteenth century, and St. Mary the Great (which became the church of the Dominican Friary after 1335), St. Nicholas', St. Ethelred's, All Saints', St. Andrew's and Holy Trinity disappeared in the wake of the Dissolution. Only St. Cuthbert's, St. Peter's and St. Mary the Less have remained in use.

APPENDIX II - STANDING BUILDINGS

Medieval survivals are rare in Thetford. Apart from the ecclesiastical remains and standing churches there are only two: the Ancient House in White Hart Street and the Bell Inn on King Street. There are groups of small sixteenth and seventeenth century timber-framed houses adjacent to the Market Place in Castle Street and Magdalen Street, and on the east side of White Hart Street near to St. Peter's church, together with isolated examples in Tanner Street and Old Market Street. Several eighteenth century buildings are scattered about the town, with a slight emphasis on the areas adjacent to the castle, and some particularly fine examples in Bridge Street and White Hart Street.

The bulk of the buildings in the core of the town are of early and mid-nineteenth century date, concentrated particularly along the roads radiating from the Market Place and from the bridge area. Between these two focal points, the urban centre has been overwhelmingly colonised by modern structures.

The buildings of the town are protected by two types of legislation. The Conservation Area, designated by Norfolk County Council in March 1974 (Fig. 3), is designed to preserve the historical character of Thetford as an entity, by the restoration of buildings, the enhancement of other physical features and the prevention of incongruous redevelopment. Since September 1974, listed building consent has been necessary for the demolition of any building in a conservation area. It is important that the preparation of conservation areas takes into account topographical and archaeological features, such as earthworks, street patterns, urban boundaries, and burgage plots. A second safeguard is provided by the list of buildings of architectural and historic interest drawn up by the Department of the Environment, to ensure that the value of existing buildings is carefully considered when planning applications are received. Two lists have been produced for Thetford, in 1947 and 1972. The 1947 list included 291 individual properties of which twenty-eight (approximately 10%) were demolished between 1947 and 1972.

Archaeological Potential

The 1972 list contained 347 properties, one of which has since been demolished (Fig. 3). The small proportion of listed buildings lost after 1947 is, however, misleading. The real measure of architectural and historical loss is the number of demolished buildings, unlisted in 1947, which would probably have been listed in 1972. How many of these there were will never be known, but some indication is given by the plan (Fig. 6) of buildings destroyed for modern re-development or car parks, particularly in the areas of St. Nicholas Street/Painter Street, Well Street/Tanner Street, St. Giles Street, and Guildhall Street/Raymond Street. The character of these streets, and of the Water Lane area affected by the by-pass, has been totally altered.

A major problem when assessing buildings is that later facades in many cases hide earlier structures. It is essential that the Department of the Environment listings, normally a result of external assessment only, are not regarded as definitive, and that detailed surveys of all those buildings in the urban core pre-dating recent redevelopment are initiated. Breckland District Council has begun a study of all the properties in its ownership in Thetford as a first step towards an effective buildings conservation policy within the town (Breckland District Council, unpublished 1975). However, for the retrieval of historical information, a complete programme of recording buildings by drawing and photographic survey is essential. The last-minute recording of individual buildings in a rescue situation does not meet these requirements.

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1. An Old Norse poem describes East Anglia as Ulfcetel's land.
2. Socage dues were a collection of customs, including rents in money and kind and various services owed by the owners of sokelands to the king or other lord designated by the king. The sokelands and the revenues attached to them were essentially hundredal and not manorial, and may reflect Anglo-Saxon administrative and economic units reaching back into the eighth century or even earlier. It has been argued that by the Norman Conquest the relationship of lord and sokeman had hardened into a permanent jurisdiction, both territorial and personal. However, such jurisdiction, for example in the Liberty of St. Edmund, in no sense meant that the Abbey owned all the land in the eight and a half hundreds, or even (in theory) the sokelands.
3. Briggegate is mentioned in 1291, and West-gate, Middle-gate, Nether-gate and Raymund's-gate, all lying north of the river, are recorded in the early fourteenth century. It seems probable that in these cases gate is derived from the ON gata, meaning street. This would prove only Danish influence rather than pre-Conquest origin, since gata was used in street naming as late as the thirteenth century. In the less likely event that this group of names derived from the OE geat, convincing evidence would be provided for the hypothesis of an early northern perimeter.
4. At some time during the first half of the thirteenth century, as a result of natural silting and developments in Fen drainage, the outfall of the Great Ouse was diverted from Wisbech to King's Lynn.
5. Previous work on the churches of Thetford has been done by A. B. Whittingham and appears in *Knocker*: 1967, 129-130; unpublished. Useful information is contained in Blomefield 1739.

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