



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**Paddocks, backyards and a local quarry
industry:
Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave,
Northamptonshire 2012-13**

01327 843586

iain@isheritage.co.uk 07742 901760
charlotte@isheritage.co.uk 07840 334082

www.isheritage.co.uk

Paddocks, backyards and a local quarry industry

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave, Northamptonshire 2012-23

Iain Soden BA MifA

Summary

Against a background of a poorly-documented part of this medieval village with late Saxon beginnings, excavations found evidence for a medieval stone quarry of considerable size, probably after the street was laid out with burgage plots to attract entrepreneurs and incomers to settle. After the scars on the land were made good, it was used for paddocks or gardens and put to low-level backyard use. Any occupation focus probably lay at some distance.

Background

In December 2012, an archaeological evaluation was carried out by Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd on land at c150m above OD, behind the property 'Belmont', Little Street, Sulgrave, Northamptonshire (NGR: SP 5866 5446). The work was commissioned by Watson & Cox Construction of Wellingborough in accordance with a Planning Condition attached by South Northamptonshire Council (Application S/2012/0489/FUL). Planning permission had been granted for the erection of four new houses and associated garaging and access.

The scope of required works was outlined in a staged brief issued by Northamptonshire County Council's Assistant Archaeological Advisor and thereafter detailed in a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Iain Soden. The results of the evaluation were set out in a foregoing interim report (Soden 2012). Further fieldwork was requested to take place as a consequence, again in accordance with an enhanced Written Scheme of Investigation. Those works, together with the evaluation now in its greater context, are now the subject of the present report.

All works were carried out in accordance with agreed methodologies. The prevailing weather for the evaluation was freezing fog with sub-zero temperatures down to -7 degrees centigrade. The uppermost surface 4cm of the archaeological deposits froze and did not thaw during those works.

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave



Fig 1: Frozen ground of Trench 3 in evaluation, looking west features right to left [12,10,8] ; scale 1m

The wider, open-area excavations began in clear cold winter conditions, but these were soon overtaken by heavy snowfalls and once more, sub-zero temperatures. Fieldwork was able to continue, since a site grid had been set out and a pre-excavation scale plan prepared before-hand. Thus features previously identified could be carefully retrieved and investigated once the snow had been locally cleared back.



Fig 2: resuming hand-excavation after a 10cm snowfall, looking south

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Rachel Swallow, Danny McAree and Tom Soden for their site skills. To Watson & Cox generally and Site Manager, Matt Cooper specifically, goes my gratitude for making everyone feel at home despite the inhospitable weather and ground conditions. Thanks to Marta Sledz of Sledz Conservation, Northampton for cleaning and identifying the WI brooch. Also thanks to Helen Clark, Archivist at Sulgrave Manor, for her help with the collections there.

Background

Consultation of historic maps shows that in 1885 the plot now occupied by the house named Belmont was entirely empty, with no indication as to the date at which it had been laid out. A building was constructed hard up against the frontage between 1885 and 1900 (since lost) to which was added the house called 'Belmont', probably sometime in the 1930s.

The site lies mid-way between the two main focal points of the village (at least in archaeological and cultural terms). To the west lies the site of the Parish Church, St James', and the earthwork of the former timber castle. To the east, lies the standing building of the renowned Sulgrave Manor. In terms of frontages it lies between Manor Road and Little Street. The former may be a principal medieval thoroughfare, with Little Street being a back lane.

While the manor house retains its own charms, it is the castle/church focus which is more valuable in understanding the development of the village and the site in its context. Excavations by the Royal Archaeological Institute in the 1960s and 1970s showed that the Norman earthwork castle, hard up against the churchyard, overlies the excavated remains of a late-Saxon administrative centre, which pushed the village origins back into the tenth century and threw light upon the administrative upheavals which marked the Norman Conquest and the introduction of the castle into England (Davison, 1967, 1977; Higham and Barker, 1992, 50-51).

It is clear that the village was sufficiently important to need administrative oversight as early as the tenth century and any plot which fronts the circuitous village road, has the potential to originate at this very early period. The site is sandwiched directly between both village foci, little more than 100m from either. To some extent the potential of the village, in the light of previous excavations, has been summarised by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments for England (RCHME 1982, 138-41). This synthetic work suggests that the northern side of Little Street contains medieval house-platforms and related closes of that period (141), an assertion untested by concerted fieldwork.

Geologically the village sits upon two formations, the Whitby Mudstone formation (Upper Lias) and the Marlstone Rock formation (Marlstone rock bed). Also present beneath is the Taynton Limestone formation, a strong sparry oolitic limestone with varying amounts of shell. It makes relatively good building stone, although locally it has been held that Helmdon stone was always used locally (Clifford-Smith 1933, 32).

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

Historical documents

Received wisdom is that there are no large-scale historic maps surviving of Sulgrave before the 1st edition Ordnance Survey of the 1880s and its successors. The much smaller 1814 Ordnance Survey Surveyors map (British Library online catalogue) shows the village, along with its distinctive east-west-aligned figure-of-eight plan, and Little Street is shown, but the scale is too small for the site to be distinguished from the background, and it is unclear which or how many of the frontage buildings is, or are, intended to be depicted. It is not represented here.

Sulgrave lies in the old Chipping Warden Hundred division of Northamptonshire, and during the medieval period was a village in multiple ownerships. There were two principal manors, known as the Elington Manor and the Culworth Manor. That of the Elingtons descended into the 16th century to become that of the Washington family with its later transatlantic links with the USA, while the Culworth Manor descended via the de Montalt stewards of the Earls of Chester to the Arderns, Danvers and Crewe family by the end of the 16th century (Clifford-Smith 1933).

There was also a considerable patchwork of medieval monastic ownership, notably comprising the manor and grange of St Andrew's Priory Northampton, and the 1535 *Valor Ecclesiasticus* lists its 13 landed tenants in the village, including Lawrence Washington (ibid 40-43). Other monastic houses owning land and property in the village included Canons Ashby (Premonstratensian) and Catesby Nunnery (Cistercian Nuns). It seems that the monastic properties may have been kept from the King's Commissioners when compiling the documents pursuant upon the Dissolution of the Monasteries until the Washingtons brought these omissions to the notice of the crown surveyors, something for which they may have been rewarded, rising from monastic tenant to Lords of the Manor within the same generation.

Adjacent to the excavation site the large (5 acre) open paddock/field west of the Washington manor house was known as *Madam's Field* (op cit, 163). There has been some speculation as to its use and the derivation of its name but this is unclear. It may have been brought to the manor as part of a dowry. There is no indication as to the historic name of the land-plots or properties of which the current excavation site is part.

The buildings which line the western end of Little Street's northern frontage are noted as comprising a row of four (formerly five) 18th-century cottages with a 19th-century house before coming to Belmont on the excavated plot; Chestnuts, further east is of the 18th century and was formerly thatched. It was once a private school (Sulgrave village appraisal 1995, 81-2). No historic deeds have been found for these properties and no maps show the layout of plots before the 1880s, by which time the basic layout pertaining today had become established.

A large estate in and around Sulgrave was owned by the Viscount Annesley family, for some time Earls of Anglesey, and whose principal local seat was Eydon Hall. There are 93 documents relating to the family's post-medieval Sulgrave ownerships and some of their dealings, in the Oxfordshire History Centre, Oxford (E6/9). None is catalogued by recognisable address or location. This was noted after the extent of the excavation results became known and so the documents have not been further consulted. In addition, a considerable number of 16th-17th century deeds and other indentures are held both as originals and transcribed in the archives of Sulgrave Manor. These do not apparently identify the plot in particular.

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

In those archives is a manuscript history of the village by gentleman-resident Jeremiah Henn (Henn 1789; Sulgrave manor archives, SULGRM: 1340), which apparently drew partly on the original 1720s notes by the county historian John Bridges, since it would be another two years before Bridges' famous county history would be published posthumously (1791).

Included in Henn's work is a map of the village, giving the lie to the received wisdom that there exist no earlier maps of Sulgrave than the Ordnance Survey:

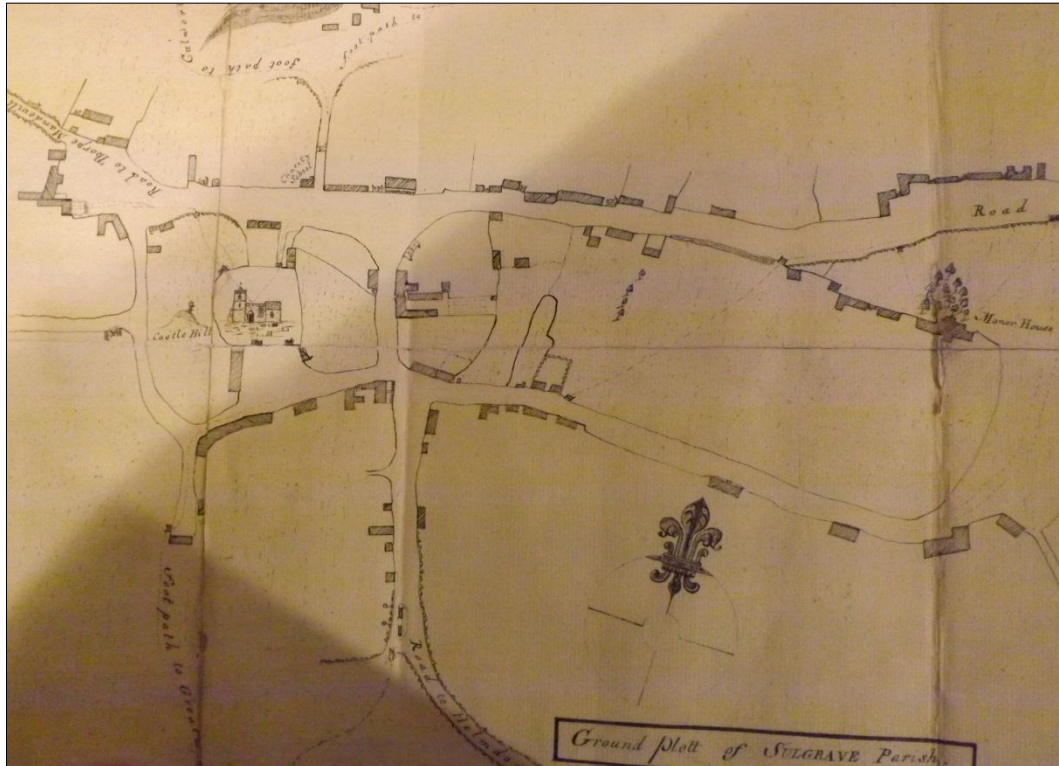


Fig 3: Map of Sulgrave 1789, as fold-out frontispiece to Jeremiah Henn's MS; scale unstated

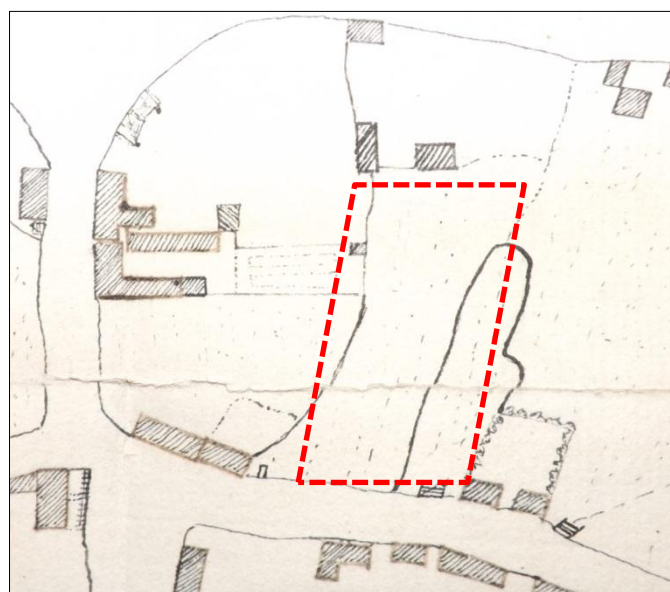


Fig 4: Detail from the 1789 map showing the site very approximately

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

Henn (1789) described the village in his day with no particular fondness:

'The buildings in general are pretty decent and are kept in good repair, but being situated in a deep hollow, the town is consequently extremely dirty and unpleasant in the winter season' .

Such was the backdrop for an archaeological excavation in mid-winter.

The excavations

Methodology

Following the evaluation in December 2012, it was agreed to concentrate further excavations in an area where the various linear and other features known from evaluation appeared to converge or form a concentration. Accordingly an area of 17.5m north-south by 10m east-west was selected within the centre of the site. This work was the subject of an updated Written Scheme of Investigation, approved by the Northamptonshire County Council Assistant Archaeological Advisor on behalf of the Local Planning Authority.

The chosen area was stripped by a 6-ton 360-degree mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching blade. Topsoil and subsoil were stockpiled separately to one side pending their re-use during development. Soil stripping was carried out under archaeological control, down to the first significant horizon, or the natural geology, whichever was the higher, while most of evaluation trench 3 was re-emptied of almost all of its backfilling of the month before (with the exception of the blank ends). Thereafter works were carried out by hand in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation. Works overall were restricted to a maximum 0.9m depth from the modern ground surface, in accordance with JPP drawing Q6314/T5 F02 Rev A. The surface of the archaeology in the open area lay at a relatively consistent depth of 149.7m at the south sloping almost imperceptibly to 149.0m at the north end. The overburden was usually no deeper than c500-600mm, varying only according to the former gardening regime practiced in the previous few years.

The sudden fall of snow in the middle of the allotted excavation period made feature sampling difficult but the laying in of a site grid and preparation of a pre-excavation plan straight after machining meant that already-planned features could be retrieved through the snow to be sampled.

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave



Fig 5: Mechanical site strip in operation



Fig 6: The site, machine-stripped before any hand-excitation, looking north; pegs down centre-line at 5m intervals with scales each 1m

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

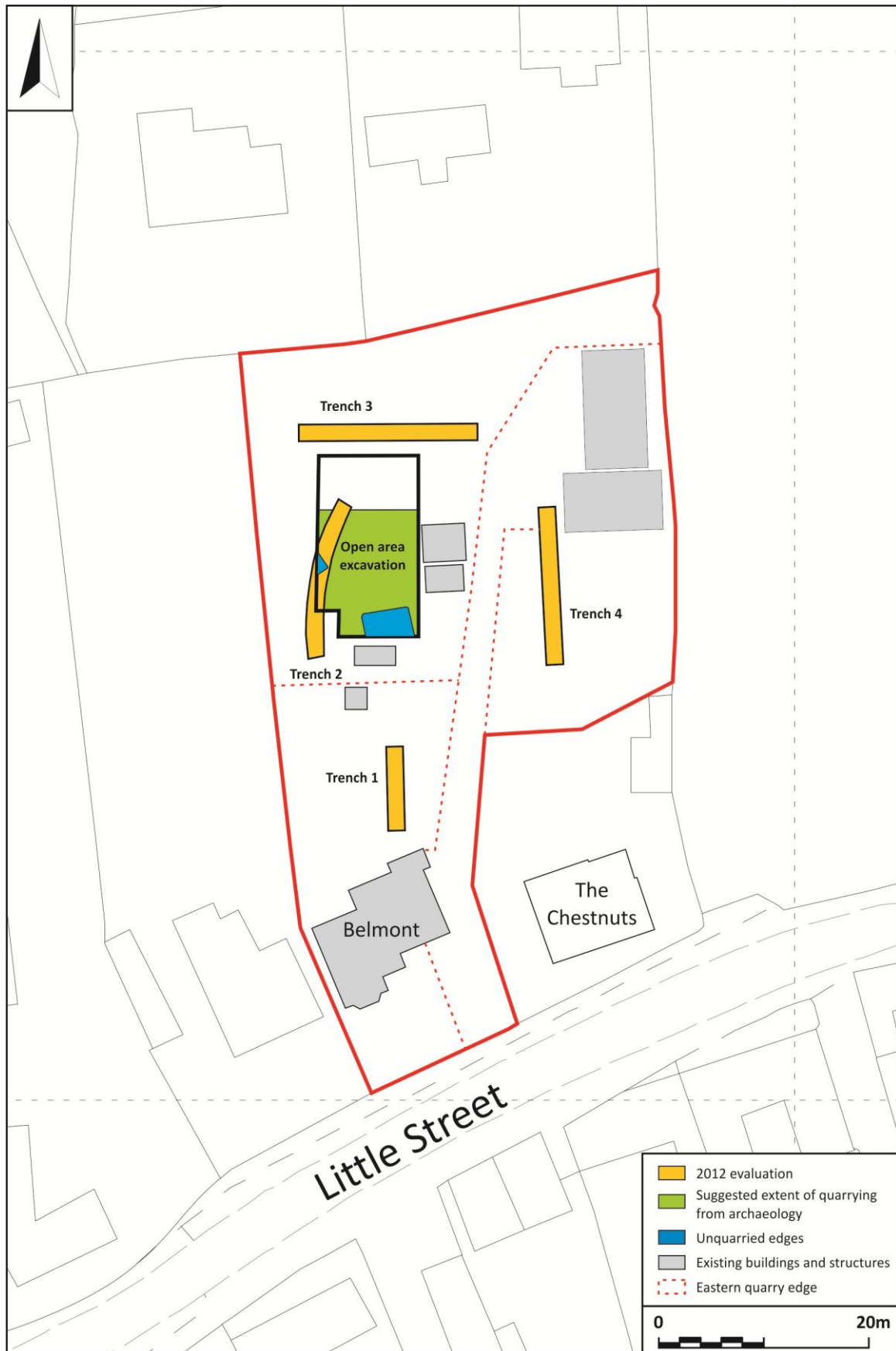


Fig 7: All excavations 2012-13 with the medieval quarry shown.

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

Mechanical stripping showed that, as had been indicated by evaluation, the coverage of very dark grey/brown topsoil (1), was relatively uniform across the site, at 300-400mm thick. This homogenous layer was virtually free of stone or detritus and was simply a very well cared-for horticultural tilth. This layer was at its thickest at about the middle of the excavation area. It produced pottery of the 19th or early 20th century.

Beneath this was a lighter, more clayey subsoil, some 200-300mm thick (2). It was not universal across the excavation but appeared to thin out at the middle of the site where the topsoil thickened above it. It produced Slipware and Manganese-glazed pottery of later 17th and early 18th century date, to add to the medieval Potterspury Ware sherds found in the same layer in the evaluation (Trench 4). Together these show that the subsoil was being formed or subsequently disturbed in the early post-medieval period.

Cut into the natural geology (3) and a re-deposited version, not immediately recognised, were a variety of linear and pit-like features and post-holes. With the darker exception of the most modern features, the fills of these were almost all very similar, if not identical to the sub-soil.

Finds from the fills of the features were very few, but there were numerous stratigraphic relationships to ensure that a site sequence was readily forthcoming and this was relatable to features found in evaluation.

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

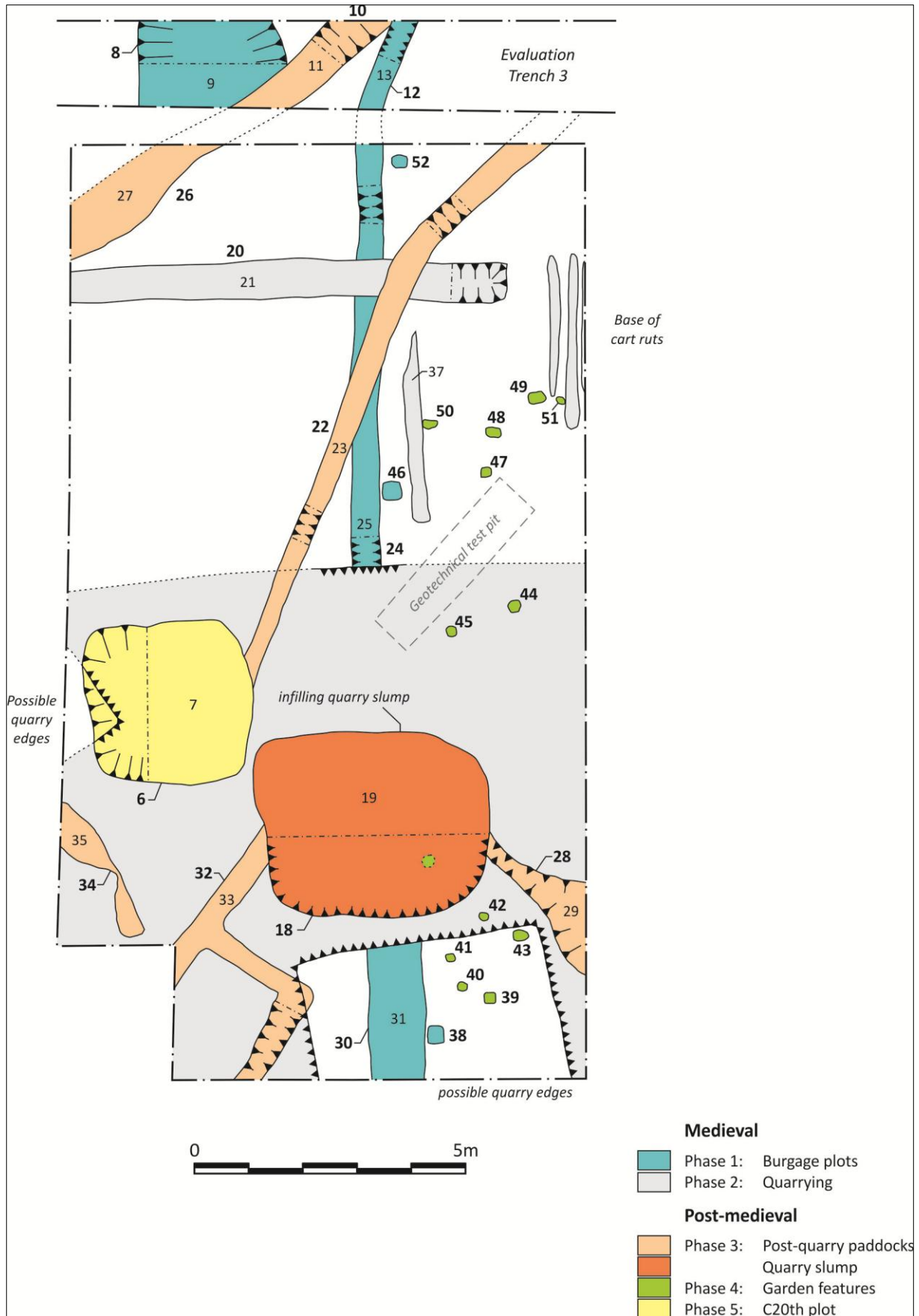


Fig 8: All features, coloured by phase

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

Phase 1 – medieval burgage plots

Only one linear feature belonged to the earliest phase. This comprised a 300mm-deep flat-bottomed or slightly v-profiled gully or small ditch already located in evaluation trench 3 (12). Much more of it was now uncovered and it could be seen to have been aligned the whole length of the excavations but had been lost across the middle of the site, having been cut into two (24, 30; Fig below). It survived wider (c1m) at the south end of the site, where the ground was slightly higher. At the north end, where it entered the evaluation trench 3, its course veered off to the north-east, for reasons unknown. No pottery was forthcoming from any of the sections dug across this gully, perhaps suggesting that it was either dug well away from existing occupation, or that when filled-in, it remained at some distance from any focus of occupation.



Fig 9: Ditch [24] and its v-bottom, where truncated vertically at the middle of the site, looking south; scale 300mm, up against quarry-fill

Alongside this ditch to its east, and closely respecting its course, lay a distantly-spaced row of three large sub-square stake holes, each some 200mm across (38, 46 and 52). These closely respect the ditch, each being only a few centimetres away from its eastern edge and are believed to be part of an accompanying fence-line. They appear to be the survivors from a more numerous well- and closely-spaced row, at 3-4m intervals, three of which have probably been lost in later features.

At the north-western extremity of the area lay a filled-in hollow [27], possibly a natural hollow, or an animal wallow, part of which had probably already been noted in evaluation trench 3 [8]. The infilling produced medieval pottery in evaluation and the northern change of course made by gully [12] may indicate that the gully respected the presence of this other, rather amorphous feature.

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

Phase 2 – Exploiting opportunities: a medieval quarry

This phase saw a massive and intensive use of the area, which sliced through the pre-existing gully. The destruction involved the digging of a vertical-sided quarry, which in extent spanned a minimum of 7m north-south, with its western limit unknown (due to tree-preservation requirements restricting excavation). The eastern extent shows the quarry to stretch at least 10m east-west, potentially much more.

The quarry back-fill, where noted, contained no finds but was composed of sand and sandy clay with pieces of limestone, variously compacted or friable. In places it resembled undisturbed natural geology, before the discovery of charcoal or bands of subsoil interleaved within it.

The edge of the quarry became most obvious where it was seen to have been backfilled against its vertical edge where it had cut through and divided the Phase 1 gully [24, 30]. The resultant stony backfill here was actually harder than the surrounding sandy/clay natural geology, although of disconcertingly similar colour.

The quarry was most apparent where, upon excavating the mixed interleaved layers of quarry-fill, a tongue of un-quarried ground protruded into the area and its vertical sides, together with two right-angled turns in plan.



Fig 10: The vertical quarry edge and a corner of un-quarried land to top and left, looking south-west. The sectioned post-hole in the centre [43] is much later in date; scale 1m

A further corner of un-quarried ground was found protruding into the excavated area at the far west of the site, beneath a later pit. The full extent of both un-quarried tongues remains unclear.

Since the excavations were restricted in depth to 0.9m by plans for the re-development of the site, it was not possible to ascertain the depth of the quarry, but an earlier geotechnical test-pit close to its northern edge suggests it may be in excess of 4m.

Related to this phase was a pronounced boundary gully which was aligned east-west [20]. This was some 0.4m wide and relatively shallow where it was sectioned at its eastern terminal. It probably

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

demarked the northern edge of the quarried area, with an easement for access between them. The terminal produced no finds.

At right angles to the gully was a shallow 200mm-wide timber slot, some 3.5m long [37]. This may represent the sole-plate of a wind-break or other barrier, placed to prevent cart-access along the side of the quarry, which would have been unstable if approached too closely with a cart. A gap of about 0.7m at either side left room to bypass it carefully on foot.



Fig 11: Terminal excavated of gully [20]. South to top of picture; scale 300mm

At right angles to the boundary gully [20] and in open space beyond its terminal, lay three short insubstantial parallel marks aligned north-south and appearing as merely discolouration. They had no physical fills but appeared to represent particularly hard lines of natural geology. At first they were thought to be the bases of garden planting trenches but, in view of the quarry and their location next to the gully terminal, it seems likely that they represent the weight-rammed bases of wheel ruts left by fully laden stone-carts. The area south of the quarry sloped downhill, the sensible direction to take fully-laden carts out, simply for the benefit of the labouring draught animals.

Phase 3 – Making good and re-using the land: 17th-19th century paddocks

Where sampled, the quarry-fill produced no finds to date it. The features which cut into it were however, better provided with a few finds. This phase may be medieval, but the size of (exclusively medieval 13th-15th century) pottery sherds present suggest that features cut into it are probably post-medieval. The deposition of 17th-18th century pottery in the subsoil shows that foregoing activity must have taken place in the period in between the 13th and the 17th centuries at the longest.

In this phase the alignments of linear features across the site appear to adopt a different trend, becoming more south-west to north-east. They comprise most obviously two long gullies, [10/26] and [22]. The former was previously noted in evaluation trench 3 and its continuation seen in the current area; it cut into a bigger, earlier backfilled hollow [8/27] (Fig 1, above). The other, [22], was relatively insubstantial, of a similar 400-500mm width, but its value to the site's story was in making

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

a clear stratigraphic relationship with the previous phases, cutting the principal features of all three preceding phases on the site. Neither gully produced any finds.



Fig 12: Section through hallow gully [22]

The two alignments seem to converge slightly before travelling parallel to the north-east. It seems possible that they demark the edges of some 3m-wide topographic feature, perhaps a pathway or a green/back lane heading towards or from the manor to the north-east of the site.

At the south end of the site was an alignment of gullies and slots, in places very regular [32], in others lacking clear form [28]. One [34], in an area previously within the 'blank' area of evaluation trench 3, was felt to be a vestige of un-stripped subsoil pressed into the earlier quarry fill and so was not investigated further.

The regularity of [32] was notable, with vertical sides and flat base. It may represent the robbed-out sole-plate to a small structure, but it produced no finds to indicate its possible function or longevity within that period. Stratigraphically it ought to be post-medieval, with its demise perhaps in the 18th century.

Feature [28] was much more amorphous, lying at right angles to [32]. It lacked consistent shape or form, perhaps being more akin to a massive root disturbance, filled with a sandy clay very similar to the subsoil above. It may have been an interleaved layer within the quarry fill. It produced tiny quantities of medieval pottery.

Dominating the south end of the site was what appeared at first glance to be a massive 4m x 3m pit [18]. However, when sectioned it proved to have uniform vertical sides, but was surprisingly (to the excavators) and consistently only 150-200mm deep with a gently undulating base of mixed quarry fill. The fill of this pit (19), produced small sherds of medieval pottery and a medieval-type whittle-tang knife. However, its make-up was essentially that of the subsoil which overlay it. It is considered that this represents the making-good of an area of settlement or slump within the quarry fill, which took place some considerable time after the end of the quarry's life and its initial backfilling. Its appearance in the immediate landscape had the effect of losing the ends of the near-contemporary features [32 and 28]. Its infilling may have been effected by shovelling in soil from nearby, which

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

might explain why the subsoil was exceptionally thin towards the midpoint of the site, the thickness of overburden being made up by additional topsoil.

Phase 4 – Modern gardens

Cut into the natural geology, the old quarry backfill and the probable quarry slump was a seemingly random scatter of stake-holes and small post-holes [39-43, 44-5, 47-51]. These were visible cut high up though the subsoil and their fills were uniformly akin to the dark brown topsoil covering the site. They make no obvious coherent pattern on the site and are felt to probably represent plant or tree-stakes within the 19th-, or 20th-century gardens here.

Phase 5 – A garden plot with a 20th-century pit

At the west of the area lay a very large 3m x 3m square pit, averaging some 500mm deep [6], previously located in evaluation Trench 2 and which had produced what seemed to be good dating comprising large sherds of medieval pottery. This was now re-emptied for the current work. After removal of the evaluation backfill from the earlier sampling episode, it was fully sectioned. However, while it produced a few more medieval sherds, it also produced from deep within its fill a distinctive enamelled copper alloy brooch bearing an inscription in relief on either side. It was sent away to be professionally cleaned by a conservator. The brooch turned out to be commemorative, issued by the Women's Institute, whose WI monogram lies in the centre. The main inscription reads 'For home and country' while that on the reverse records its Birmingham maker who made it between 1933 and 1939. The pin had been replaced and the enamel was damaged, the gilding gone, so it seems that the brooch had seen considerable wear or poor treatment.



Fig 13: WI enamelled gilt-bronze brooch, 1933-9. Ellipse, 26mm x 21mm

Since this brooch came from deep within the pit fill (7) its presence makes all the medieval pottery there residual and of no relevance. It does however represent the last intervention on the site, potentially as late as the 1950s or 60s. At the base of the pit was identified what is thought to be a second tongue of un-quarried land, although depth-restrictions prevented further investigation.

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave



Fig 14: Pit [6] half-sectioned.

An aerial photograph found in the Sulgrave Manor archive and dated 1922 is instructive in considering this pit. The photo shows the site from the east, without 'Belmont', which had not yet been built, and without any structures on the plot at all. The terrace which characterised the modern garden had not yet been constructed. However, isolated in the plot at about where the pit lay is a huge tree. It is very possible that the pit represents the successful attempt to remove the stump of this tree after it had been felled.



Fig 15: detail from the 1922 Aerial photograph showing the plot, the mature tree marked; reproduced by permission of Sulgrave Manor archives

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

Watching Brief

A final phase of fieldwork comprised a programme of observations during initial development groundworks, in order to determine the location of the eastern edge of the quarry. This took place in April 2013.

Finds

There were few finds in either the foregoing evaluation or the current works. The best few sherds of the pottery found in the evaluation have been shown by the wider works to have been residual, and therefore not even of value for dating purposes. The dating of the site is therefore largely dependent upon those found in evaluation. Similarly, the tiny amounts of food-bone present are largely residual in their contexts and of no value in either species-based or socio-economic comparison.

Only the 1930s brooch is presented here for these reasons of overwhelming residuality. The residual food bone has been discarded and the residual pottery will be deposited in archive for future ceramic comparison in relation to any further works in the village.

Discussion

The significance of this excavation lies in the massive intervention made into a relatively newly laid-out burgage plot in serving a quarrying industry in the village. Previously it was assumed that all stone in Sulgrave had come from surrounding villages, particularly Helmdon, where the medieval quarrying industry is already well attested and documented.

Here at Sulgrave the Phase 1 fence and boundary suggests that the north side of Little Street was laid out in a series of burgage plots, a form of economic land use preferred in small settlements of all sizes in the 13th century, often because in a period of growing population, many people preferred to move into the already hard-pressed cities to make money quickly. The laying-out of burgage plots, with 'tax incentives' was a common answer to attract entrepreneurs and settlers to both stay in or come to these smaller settlements and help them flourish. Since at least part of the village fell under the control of the de Montalt family in the 13th century, this seems to have been the most likely regime; the de Montalts, until 1237 Stewards of the Earls of Chester, became based at their *caput* (their chief house or principal manor) at Cheylesmore, Coventry (granted to them after the Chester line died out in that year) and burgage tenure has been noted at a number of their properties, not least Coventry itself, where they controlled half of the city. It was also a method of settlement espoused by more enterprising monastic landlords, so may have pertained on lands owned by (for instance) St Andrew's or Canons Ashby Priors or Catesby Nunnery.

Any influx of people needs buildings in which to house them and it seems likely that the quarry which dominates the site began to be dug not long after wider burgage tenure was set up, and indeed may be seen as a suitably entrepreneurial use of a burgage plot (or in this case two, since it straddles and cuts through the probable boundary). The presence of such a feature in the landscape

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

means however that ordinary domestic occupation may have been located some way off. Certainly the small amounts of finds present suggest occupation was not close by, or that (possibly) prevailing rubbish disposal was elsewhere.

Although quarry-pits, for clay, or sand or stone for lime burning are not uncommon on excavations, usually wreaking havoc with pre-existing archaeological remains, actual clean-cut medieval quarry edges, so called '*delphs*', often to dig for freestone or good building stone, are found more rarely. Examples in Northamptonshire have previously been found at St George's Street, Northampton in the 1990s and at the Market Square, Daventry (Soden et al 2005). In Northampton the pits were square and concentric, resembling inverted step-pyramids or giant jelly-moulds, with the waste from each being used successively to backfill its neighbour when it was exhausted. At Daventry, as here at Sulgrave, a tongue of land or pillar/pylon was all that was left un-quarried, when the area was exhausted or the demand for stone ceased (Soden et al 2005, 122-3). In both those examples, the demand probably came from monastic building projects, namely St Andrew's Priory and Daventry Priory, both of the Cluniac Order and both within the town settlement. Generally such quarries were abandoned, not because the stone source was exhausted, but because either the demand ceased with the completion of a project or because the natural water-table prevented deeper intervention, at a time in which pumping was rudimentary and lacked the power necessary to drain the base of the pit. This only came effectively with the Industrial Revolution. It is interesting to note that Sulgrave has been observed in recent times as having noticeably poor natural water sources (Clifford-Smith 1933, 27-8) and this lack of water supplies may have contributed to Henn's 1789 unsavoury description of the village as 'dirty and unpleasant'. While such an absence may have been of help to medieval quarrying, if it had always been the case, it is conversely also possible that the observation could have resulted from numerous deep quarry pits acting as sumps and draining off the village's supplies before they could be tapped for domestic purposes.

It is not possible to state what building or complex the Little Street Quarry was dug to build. While there is no evidence, one way or another, the list of medieval candidates is long. Any one of the manor houses and monastic granges of the village is possible, as is the parish church of St James. Additionally there was a second chapelry at nearby Stutchbury, a dependent township, which also had a church, now long gone. It is not known how many domestic houses in medieval Sulgrave and Stutchbury were built of stone. Any one or more of these buildings might have been constructed with stone from this plot. Most have now gone.

The tiny amounts of finds deposited in the features which followed the back-filling of the quarries suggest that the quarry had been exhausted and was fast receding as just a hollow in the landscape by the late seventeenth century. The Henn map of 1789 has no indication of the former quarry.



Fig 16: A medieval stained glass window in nearby St Mary Magdalene Church, Helmdon, showing William Campion, Mason; nationally this is a rare survival

There seem to have been other quarries in and around the village at slightly different times since two are attested in the area, one of them possibly in the village (Sulgrave village appraisal 1995, 65); one was certainly not for freestone as it lay just outside the village in a field known both as 'clay pits' (clay extraction) and 'mortar pits' (limestone for lime burning). In the later 18th century, the county militia lists record 9 quarrymen in the Chipping Warden Hundred in 1777 (amongst men aged 18-45 and therefore eligible for military service) but none in Sulgrave. There was one mason recorded, Thomas Petifor, among hundreds across the county, but the term mason was also used for all workers of stone, not necessarily at the quarry face and not always denoting their skills (Hatley 1973). It seems that whatever industry there had been in Sulgrave had left no personal trace by the later 18th century, whatever part-healed scars may still have marred the landscape.

It is unfortunate that the excavation has shed no light upon the pre-Conquest landscape or on the origins of the village and its castle, although the expansion and consolidation of the village is certainly indicated by first the possible burgage boundary and then the choice to exploit two of these plots by quarrying across them. This is the first occasion that evidence of a medieval quarrying industry has been found in Sulgrave, to complement their better-known cousins at nearby Helmdon.

Excavations off Little Street, Sulgrave

Bibliography

Clifford-Smith H, 1933 *Sulgrave Manor and the Washingtons*

Davison B K, 1967, The origins of the castle in England. The Institute's Research Project, *Archaeol Jnl* **124** 202-11

Davison B K, 1977 Excavations at Sulgrave, Northamptonshire, 1960-76, an interim report, *Archaeol Jnl* **134**, 105-14

Hatley, V, 1973 Northamptonshire Militia Lists 1777, *Northamptonshire Record Society* **XXV**

Henn, J, 1789 History of Sulgrave (unpublished MS in Sulgrave Manor Archives; SLGRM:1340)

Higham N, and Barker P, 1992 *Timber Castles*, 50-51

Royal Commission on Historic Monuments for England (RCHME) 1982, *An inventory of the Historic Monuments in the County of Northampton; IV: archaeological sites in South-West Northamptonshire*, 138-41

Soden I, 2012 *Archaeological evaluation at 'Belmont' Little Street, Sulgrave, Northamptonshire, December 2012*

Soden I, Brown J, and Blinkhorn P, 2005 Excavations at the Cluniac Priory in Daventry, Northamptonshire, *Northamptonshire Archaeology* **33**, 113-130

Sulgrave Village Appraisal Group, 1995 *Sulgrave: the chronicles of a County Parish; a parish appraisal carried out between 1989 and 1994 as part of Northamptonshire's Project 2000*



ISHeritage