

Notes

AN IRON AGE AND ROMAN SETTLEMENT AT ISLIP

Fieldwalking along the route of the new Islip by-pass revealed a surface scatter of Iron Age and Roman pottery centred at SP 983786. Accordingly, an arrangement was made with Northamptonshire County Council Highways Department whereby a limited time would be made available to investigate the site during road construction. Conditions were difficult and in the event there was only time to plan part of the site and to sample excavate some of the ditches. The work was carried out by the writer and members of the Northamptonshire Field Group in the summer of 1981. It was undertaken on behalf of the County Council Archaeological Unit and the Department of the Environment. The illustrations are the work of Dorrie Orchard of the Northamptonshire Archaeological Unit.

The site lies to the south west of Islip village and the archaeological features were observed along the new roadway extending from 100m to 270m to the north of the A604 Thrapston to Kettering road. It is situated on rising ground (OD 61 m) and overlooks the Nene valley, ½ mile to the east, and the modern town of Thrapston. The underlying surface geology is mostly glacial clay with cornbrash outcropping to the south east.

The roadwork revealed a high density of archaeological features which appear to span a period from the early-middle Iron Age to the later Roman period. Iron Age and Roman sites are common in the region, but occupation on the same site over such a long period of time has not often been proved. Other Iron Age pottery has been found in Islip village at SP 985792 (information from B Bellamy) and extensive Iron Age settlements have been excavated at Aldwinckle, 1½ miles to the north east (Jackson 1977) and at Twywell, 2 miles to the west (Jackson 1975). A Roman crossroad settlement was situated in Titchmarsh parish

1½ miles to the ENE and amongst the other Roman sites in the area are villa-type buildings at Drayton (Lowick), 1¼ miles to the WNW, and in Woodford parish less than 1 mile to the SSE.

THE EXCAVATION

The clay subsoil quickly baked hard on exposure and made surface cleaning in the summer far from easy. With excavation limited, it is difficult to confidently divide the planned features into phases. However, the ditches flanking a possible trackway (FIG 1, Trench 10) had Roman as well as Iron Age pottery in their filling, so it seems likely that the trackway was in use in the Roman period, if not before. The plan also shows a number of ditches that ran parallel to the trackway so there may have been a planned enclosure system in association with the track. The appearance of wide and possibly deep ditches on the plan is misleading as they were generally found (where excavated) to be less than 1m deep and some had been re-cut several times. Few of the excavated sections yielded any Roman pottery and the curving ditches in the centre of the planned area, in particular, are almost certainly of Iron Age date (FIG 1, Trenches 2-7).

The pottery from Trenches 2 and 3 suggests that these ditches are also likely to date to the Iron Age period as does the pottery from the surface of the ditches at the extreme south end of the site. In the excavated sections ash or ashy loam was found in Section 4. Otherwise, the filling in the ditches was variable but not distinctive.

THE TRACKWAY

The probable trackway was some 3.5m wide — the surviving metalling consisting of small pieces of limestone and gravel. On the east side it lay in a hollow way and was not fully exposed.

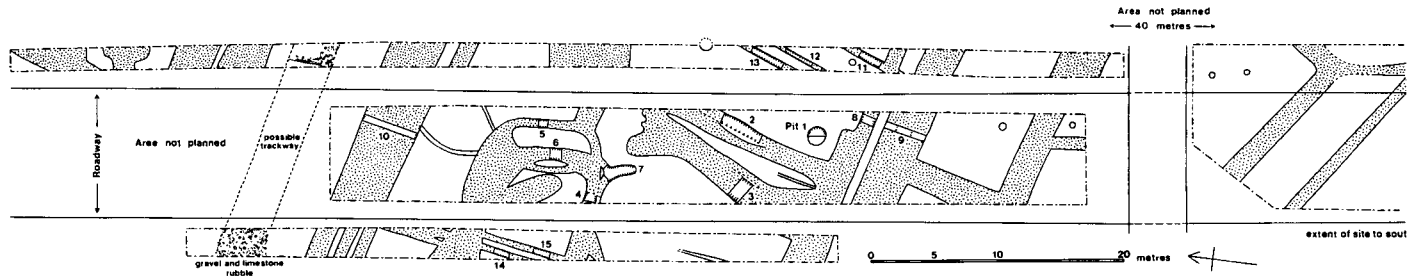


Fig 1 Islip: plan of features. Note; less overburden was removed on the eastern verge and some of the features were indistinct.

DATING EVIDENCE FROM THE EXCAVATED SECTIONS

Trench 2	26 sherds of middle Iron Age pottery
Trench 3	25 sherds of middle to late Iron Age pottery
Trench 4	7 sherds of middle to late Iron Age pottery
Trench 5	10 sherds of middle to late Iron Age pottery
Trench 6	2 sherds of late Iron Age pottery
Trench 7	4 sherds of middle to late Iron Age pottery
Trench 8	6 fragments of late Iron Age - early Roman pottery from upper filling
Trench 9	Machine cut trench. At least three phases. No dating evidence
Trench 10	Machine cut trench. Three distinctive phases. Fragments of Iron Age and Roman pottery
Trenches 11-15	No dating evidence
Pit 1	5 sherds of middle to late Iron Age pottery
Unstratified	This included sherds of both 'Belgic' and early Roman pottery, suggesting that activity was probably continuous

THE POTTERY

A selection of pottery has been illustrated to show the date range of the site (FIG 2).

No 1 has a zig-zag decoration of a type found in the Chinnor-Wandlebury group (Cunliffe 1978, A:10). It is rare in Northamptonshire, but examples have been found at Brigstock (report forthcoming) and at Wellingborough (Foster 1975, FIG 3). It is now thought to date to a period between the 9th and 4th centuries BC (information from D Knight). Decorated sherds from two different vessels were found on the site. Three other sherds (Nos 2-4) are also unlikely to be any later than the middle Iron Age. Nos 2 and 3 can be paralleled at Gretton (report forthcoming) and No 4 at nearby Twywell (Jackson 1975, FIG 21, Nos 12 and 14).

The illustrated rim sherds Nos 5-7 are of a type found locally in late Iron Age — pre Belgic contexts. The globular forms, in particular (Nos 5 and 6) are found on many Northamptonshire sites of this period. Two of the Romano-British forms illustrated are of late 1st - 2nd century date (Nos 8 and 10) whereas No 9 is a colour coated vessel of 3rd - 4th century date.

CATALOGUE OF THE POTTERY

1. Ext and int: smooth dark brown ware; section: dark brown; fine shell grits. Unstratified.
2. Ext and int: fairly smooth dark grey-brown ware; section: dark grey-brown. Fine shell grits. Trench 2.
3. Ext: dark grey-black ware, uneven bumpy surface; int: black-brown; section: brown; moderate shell grits. Trench 2.

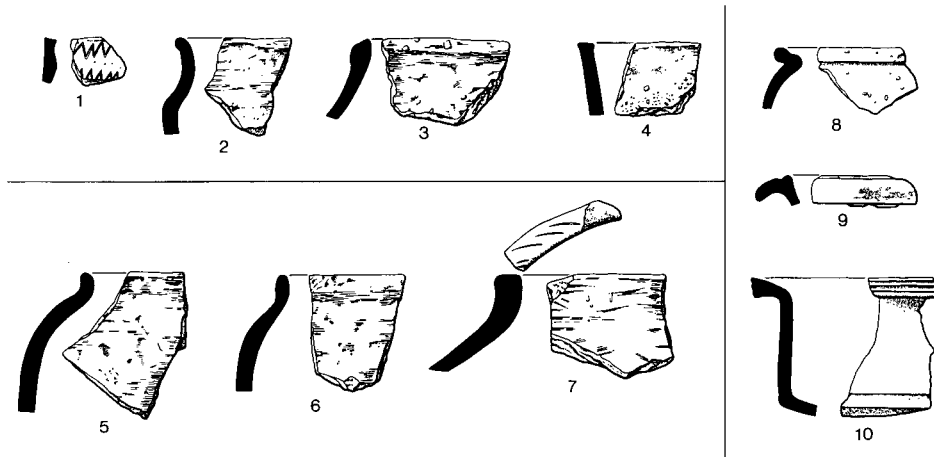


Fig 2 Islip: selection of pottery (¼).

4. Ext: light brown; int: brown; section: dark grey; moderately shelly. Trench 7.
5. Ext: smooth, black, burnished ware; int and section: grey-brown; sparse fine grits. Trench 3.
6. Ext and int: smooth dark brown to red-brown ware; section: grey; some moderate sized grits. Trench 3.
7. Ext and int: smooth but uneven dark brown ware, scratch decoration on rim; section: dark grey; sparse fine grits. Trench 3.
8. Channel rim vessel in light creamy-buff ware; grey core. Unstratified.
9. Bowl in Nene valley ware. Brown colour coat. Unstratified.
10. Bowl in dark grey ware. Unstratified.

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RAUNDS: EXCAVATIONS 1981/82 AN INTERIM NOTE

In the 1981/2 season of excavations off Brick Kiln Road, Raunds, a considerable area of Saxon and Medieval occupation was revealed. The site has been enlarged to an area of c 8,000 sq m, most of this area being to the west of the previous season's work. The remains of Saxon buildings have been discovered, associated with a ditched enclosure. During the late 10th century a replanning of the settlement led to the construction of a stone church (excavated 1979-80), adjacent to a series of secular structures, possibly manorial, which are currently under excavation. These were succeeded, probably during the 12th century, by a stone manor house. This manor house predates that erected over the remains of the churches, which was excavated by Andy Boddington during 1979.

Although the limits of the Medieval occupation are now fairly well understood, the full nature and extent of the initial Saxon occupation awaits further investigation. The season's excavations are due to close in April 1982, after a twelve month period, though further excavation will be required in advance

of and during housing development in the surrounding area.

On the basis of this season's work, a tentative re-appraisal of the site's development is possible. Dating is provisional and relies on pottery and the stratigraphic sequences. Excavation continues in the central part of the site, and findings here may alter the chronology advanced below. A complete site assessment must await a full study of the final Level 2 record.

PERIOD 1

A ditched enclosure (35 x 35m) and buildings A and B comprise the main features of this period, provisionally assigned a 9th and early 10th century date. These are bounded on all sides by other features. The trench edge to the north and east roughly delimits the extent of this occupation, though to the south and west features extend well beyond the limits of the present investigation. Not all the features are believed to be contemporary; for convenience they are grouped in one period at present.

Lying mainly on a band of limestone, and to the north of the enclosure, are buildings A and B. Both are represented by a series of rock-cut features. Building A is a bow-sided structure (19 x 6.8m), orientated north-south; the width across the ends of the building being c 1m narrower than across the centre. Survival is poor on the western and southern sides of the building, but the eastern side is well preserved. The walls were set in a series of trenches, whose width is c 0.60m and whose depth reaches a maximum of 0.5m. Within the trenches were stone packings placed at approximately 0.30m intervals. One possible entrance has been defined, off-centre in the eastern side, and there is also evidence of what may have been external buttress posts. Internal features are confined to four postholes.

Building B, set to the west of A, is 12m long by 6m wide, and is orientated east-west. Eight regularly spaced sets of double postholes, form the north and south long sides. Along each side

the two central postholes are considerably larger than their neighbours (being over 1 sq m in area), and must represent the entrances to the structure. The gable ends of the building are represented by three doubled postholes, with another set of three posts placed on the inside c 1m from the west end and 2m from the east end, suggesting that a hipped roof was in use. The eastern set of internal roof posts also formed the base for a partition. Placed between the two entrances and mid-way between the partition and the west end of the building, were four doubled postholes forming the base for a hearth, or a fire canopy. The siting of the hearth and the partition serve to break the structure up into three sections. The doubled postholes are thought to represent an initial strengthening for the upright posts and do not represent evidence of either cruck construction or rebuilding.

Building B would have been an imposing and sturdy structure and was almost certainly a dwelling house. It is interesting that it differs so greatly in construction from its contemporary, building A. Neither structure appears to have been substantially repaired or rebuilt. It is possible that the different construction technique and the lack of internal features within building A indicate a different function and internal organization from that of B. The evidence does not suggest a dwelling alone but perhaps dwelling and byre.

There is evidence of structures to the west of building B but these are small in comparison with A and B. Smaller, though incomplete, posthole structures N and C have also been excavated. South of the enclosure are further features, including a pit oven, but the area within the enclosure had a stock control function. A multi-phased entrance way has been located on the enclosure's south side and relates to other features yet to be excavated. The eastern side of the enclosure was strengthened by the addition of a second ditch, set to the east.

It is still too early to be sure whether the features described here represent a near complete settlement unit or a part of a large settlement, extending further south and west.

PERIODS II and III

During the latter half of the 10th century, a replanning took place. Buildings A and B, and the enclosure, were replaced by the construction of a stone church (Period II). During the 11th century the church was replaced and enlarged. The two churches of Periods II and III have been described elsewhere (Boddington and Cadman 1981) but until 1981 other buildings associated with the churches were unknown.

The Period II settlement, contemporary with the early church, has yet to be firmly located though it is suspected that it underlies the Period IV manor. Structures believed to be contemporary with the Period III church are currently under excavation. Three complete buildings, and one yet to be fully excavated, have been recorded (F, G, H, R). All buildings were constructed with a continuous wall trench, with traces of posthole impressions in the base, and in some cases set in the trench sides. Entrances are represented by short lengths of deeper set slots associated with postholes. Internal features are confined to occasional postholes. The largest structure, F, is 11.5m long by 6m wide, whilst structures G and R measure 4.64 x 4.90m, and 5.31 x 4.33m respectively. Building G cuts the backfill of the earlier enclosure ditch. The apparent confining of these structures within the boundary of the enclosure ditch suggests that although the ditch was by now backfilled, there was recognition of its previous extent. The same may be true of the north-south orientated ditches set on the western side of the excavation. Whilst these boundaries are largely 12th century and later, they may have been in use during Periods II and III, or possibly earlier.

PERIOD IV

During the latter part of the 12th century there was a further replanning. A stone and timber manor house was erected to the west of the graveyard. The bounds of the manor house of this period appear broadly similar to the Period III occupation. Until its abandonment

and demolition in the early 14th century this manor house went through a series of alterations with parts of the main structure being dismantled or appended. Several ancillary structures were erected both north and immediately west of the main structure, serving a variety of domestic and industrial functions.

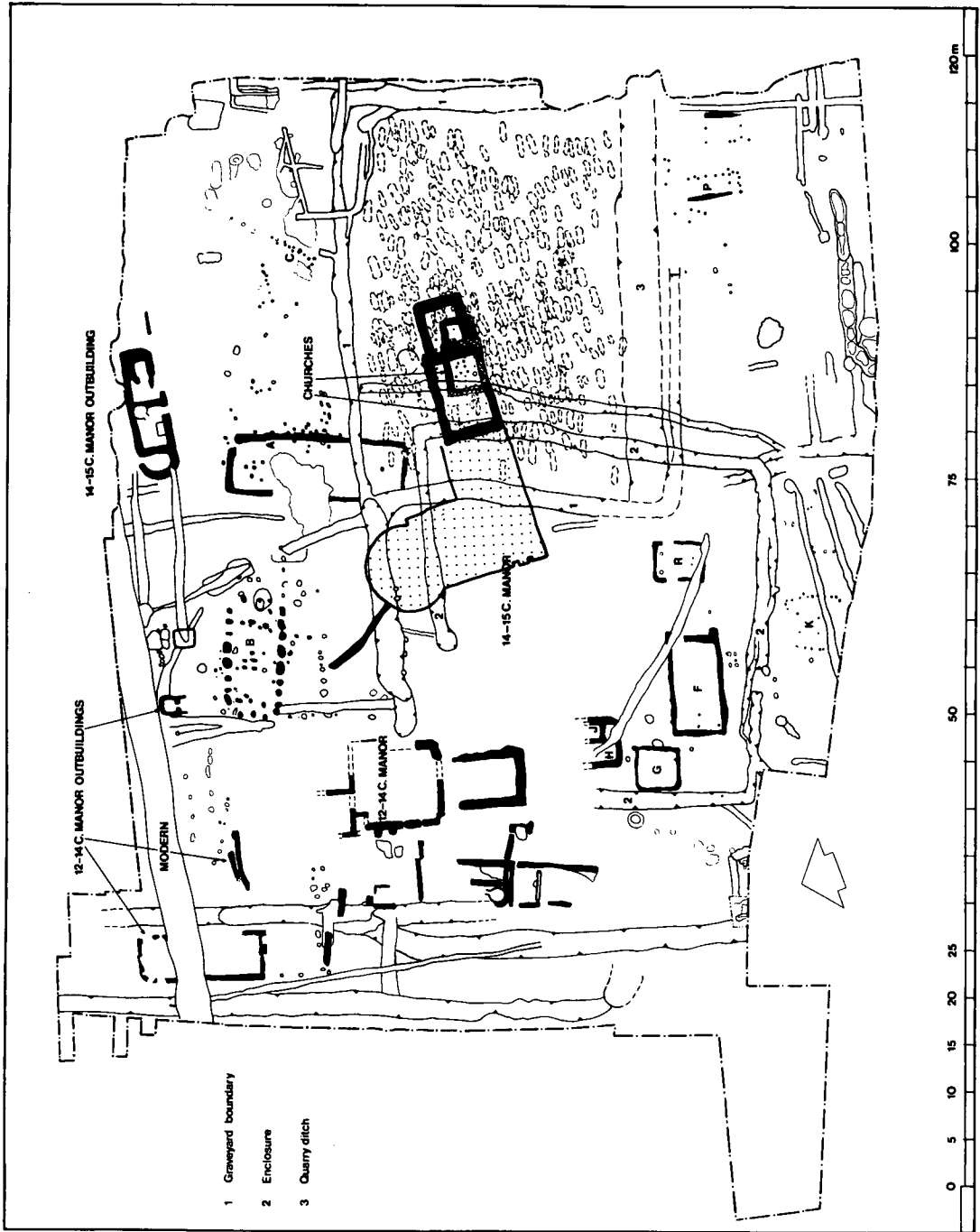
In the extreme south-east corner of the site a series of pits and gulleys indicate building-sand quarrying and possibly, an as yet unidentified, industrial process.

It seems likely that the manor house overlies structures of periods II and III, though these still await excavation. During at least the early life of the manor house, the church of Period III was still in use, but by c 1200, this had been abandoned. The eastern end of the church was re-used in the construction of a single roomed structure. The graveyard was abandoned with the possible exception of the erection and use of temporary small wooden structures.

With the construction of this manor house there was a consolidation of the line of the ditch and bank, separating the manorial buildings from the field system. To the west, the ditched boundary was moved slightly more to the west to accommodate an expansion of the manorial buildings.

PERIOD V

During the early 14th century there was further re-organization. The earlier manor house was abandoned and its materials used in the construction of a stone manor house (Boddington 1979), erected on the site once occupied by the two churches. Only one outbuilding, set to the north, has been identified as contemporary with the new manor house. With the building of this manor house over the church remains there was clearly a shift in the centre of the settlement towards the east. The area to the west, occupied by structures of periods I-IV, appears to have been largely abandoned. The outer manorial ditched boundary, to the west, was eventually



RAUNDS : GENERAL SITE PLAN

Fig 3

abandoned and its line marked by a small gully or fence.

PERIOD VI

The final period of occupation was marked by the abandonment and decay of the manor house during the early 15th century. A smithy made use of the ruins for a short while and thereafter the whole area reverted to pasture.

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Note: since this note was written new evidence suggests a substantial revision of the above development sequence is required. The earliest occupation dates from the 7th century with buildings F, G, H and R being contemporary with the enclosure, the latter being of 9th century date.

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