

# The Early Topography of Northampton and its Suburbs

by

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## SUMMARY

*This article provides modern mapping of the medieval and post-medieval suburbs of Northampton, based upon the earliest available historic maps, and represents the first attempt to accurately define their extent and morphology. The suburbs cannot however be understood in isolation and so a topographical analysis of the walled town is also presented. Building upon previous studies, a sequence of evolution of the Saxon and medieval town is suggested. At least four main phases are defined: the early/middle Saxon, which is associated with the 'palace'; the late Saxon burh; the Norman new borough and later the medieval suburbs. Consideration is given to the evidence of large scale regular planning in the late Saxon and Norman periods. An alternative explanation for the apparent regularity, that it was the pattern of the pre-existing roads and furlongs which determined the layout of the medieval town, is also considered. Seven distinct medieval suburban areas are identified and briefly described. The major monuments in each suburb, mainly ecclesiastical sites, are identified and where possible located, as are the isolated suburban monasteries of St. James and Delapre. Consideration is also given to the likely chronology and reasons for the development and demise of each suburb. The article is intended as a broad summary which sets a topographical framework for future detailed documentary and archaeological research.*

## INTRODUCTION

There has been a great deal of historical and archaeological information published about medieval and post-medieval Northampton. It is

therefore puzzling to find that there has been no accurate definition of the extent or character of the suburbs of the town. This is all the more surprising given the fact that those suburbs formed a quite substantial proportion of the built up area of Northampton in the medieval period and contained a number of important properties, including six monastic establishments, at least five churches or chapels and a Jewish cemetery. This paper is a modest first step in developing a better understanding of the suburbs of the town. Certain specific monuments within the suburbs have however been discussed in some detail elsewhere and so that evidence is not repeated here.

The present analysis is based on the principle, well established elsewhere in the county, that where an extensive open field system survived into the 18th or 19th century, as it did in most Northamptonshire townships, the careful analysis of the old enclosures, with certain exceptions, provides a reasonable guide to the extent of the occupied area during the medieval period (Foard, in preparation). All pre-Inclosure and Inclosure maps were examined for Northampton and for each of the surrounding townships, supplemented, where appropriate, by evidence from the Inclosure Awards. A high priority has been given to accurate mapping as this is essential for effective topographical analysis. The information has been transferred to a 1:2500 scale, using the first edition Ordnance Survey (OS) maps of the 1880s as a base, to enable direct correlation with modern maps. Because of the inconsistency of linear scaling on most of the early maps, correlation of known features has been attempted and wherever possible the mapping of individual features has been taken from the latest and hence generally most accurate map on which they appear. However, for a significant proportion of the detail the early maps have been traced and

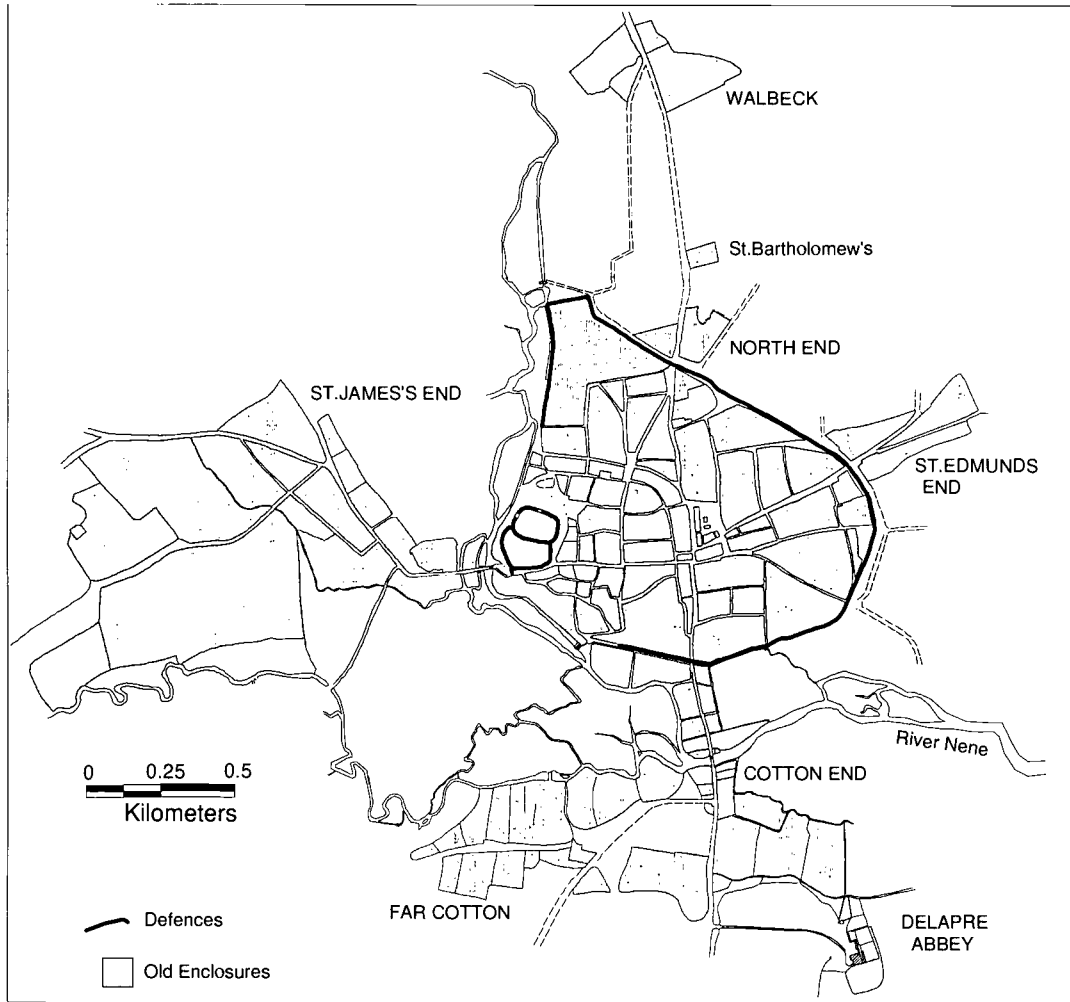


Fig 1 Northampton: The historical topography of Northampton based on maps of 17th and 18th centuries. The extent of old enclosures around Delapre Abbey could not be defined and on the north-east side of St. James's End the boundary is probable but not certain, as extensive enclosure in both areas had occurred before the first maps were drawn. The detailed mapping in Fig 1 can be consulted on GIS within the Northamptonshire Sites and Monuments Record.

photographically enlarged in small sections to give as close a fit as possible to the OS 1st edition 1:2500, to enable direct tracing of features which are not present on the first edition OS maps. The major roads have been identified from Ogilby (1675), the earliest reliable mapped source, in the absence at present of adequate earlier documentary evidence. What has not been attempted is a comprehensive analysis of medieval and post-medieval documentary sources. All documentary references, unless

otherwise stated, derive from the Victoria County History and the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (RCHM) volumes covering the town (Page, 1930; RCHM, 1985). For a town plan with street names see RCHM, 1985, fig 6.

#### THE SAXON AND MEDIEVAL TOWN

Before we can explore the suburbs it is essential to understand the layout and possible evolution of

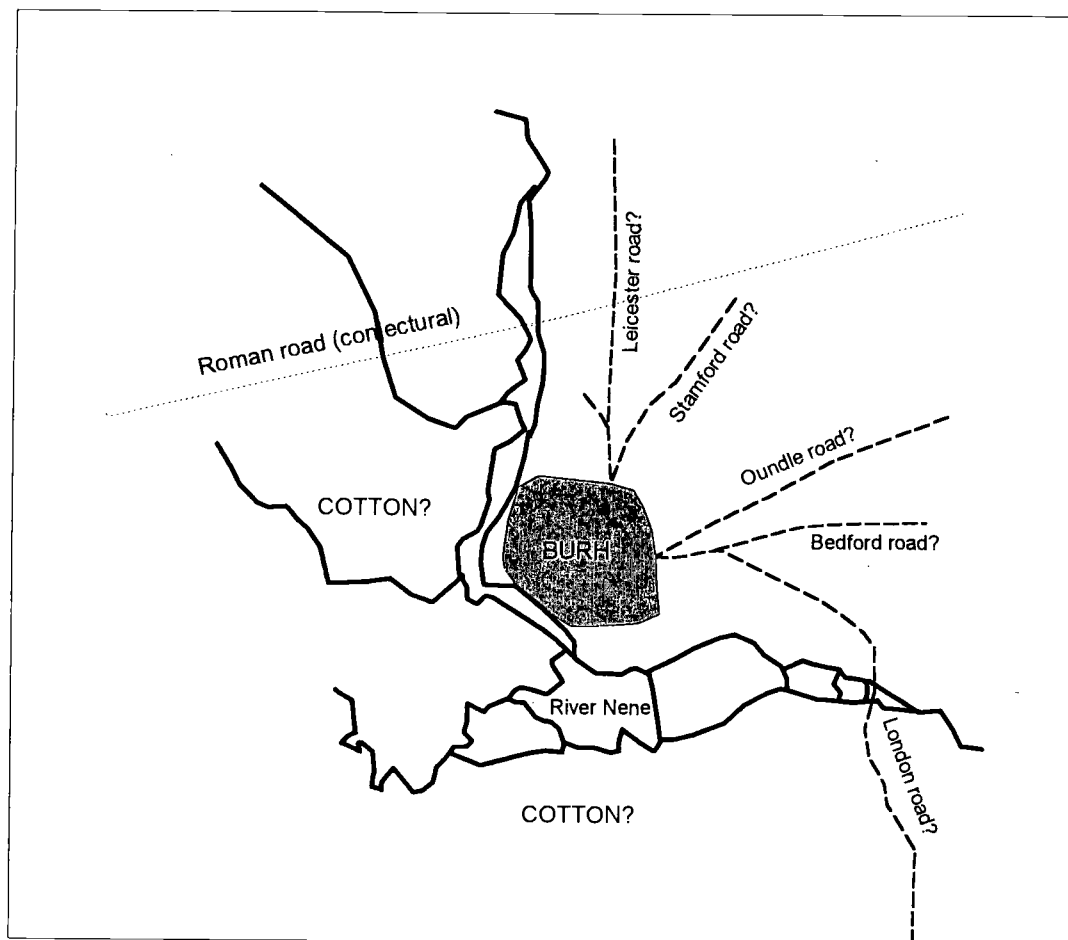


Fig 2 Northampton: 3 schematic plans suggesting the development of the town:  
2.1. Burh: circa 920

the town itself. Since the 1950s there has not been a comprehensive re-evaluation of the plan form of early Northampton and so a re-assessment is presented here (Lee, 1954).

Topographical analysis might suggest four main phases in the development of the town. Firstly there is the small area with a relatively irregular plan adjacent to St. Peter's church, to the east and west of The Green, on land sloping gently southward towards the river. This irregular plan form, including the presence of a green, may have Saxon origins and even pre-date the construction of the *burh* in the late Saxon period. It may be no coincidence that this is the area that

has produced the main concentration of early-middle Saxon evidence, with the so called middle Saxon 'palace' at its heart (Williams, 1985). The latter may have been the administrative centre of a middle Saxon province (Foard, 1985) or, if Blair's re-interpretation of the site is correct, a minster (Blair, forthcoming). Some of the irregularity in the plan form, notably the changes in alignment of Gregory Street, Palmer Street and Green Street, might even relate to a 'precinct' boundary enclosing the 'palace', just as some later road alignments change as they cross the late Saxon and medieval defences of the town. Alternatively it might be argued from the

alignment of buildings and boundaries on the 'palace' site, which follow the rectilinear layout of the rest of the late Saxon settlement, that a rectilinear plan form was primary and that any irregularity was a result of later distortion. Recent excavations at Woolmonger Street have also revealed at least one structure of probable late Saxon date which seems to be aligned more closely with Gold Street than the irregular alignment of medieval Woolmonger Street (Iain Soden, pers. com.). Similar conclusions might be drawn from the Black Lion Hill excavation to the west of St. Peter's, although here the irregular layout was certainly in existence by the 12th century (Shaw, 1985). If the latter interpretation is correct then the question to be answered is why only this part of the town saw such a major decay of its rectilinear plan.

The rest of the area within the late Saxon *burh* defences appears to have had a rectilinear plan form. Even in the north-west corner, where the medieval castle destroyed the earlier road pattern, excavation has revealed several late Saxon buildings which are roughly aligned with the rectilinear layout, although others on this site are not (Williams, 1981 and 1985). Though Blair argues that the *burh* defence may reflect a precinct boundary of a middle Saxon minster, the area covered is unusually large and much of it so far lacks any evidence of middle Saxon activity. It seems far more likely that it was either the Danes in the early 10th century, or the kings of Wessex after reconquest in 917, who constructed a completely new circuit of *burh* defences around a much smaller and more ancient Saxon core. This was a time not only of major replanning of the rural landscape, best seen from the various excavations in the Raunds area in Northamptonshire, but also of major urban development. It would appear that it was with the creation of the *burh* that Northampton was transformed into an urban settlement, the second major phase of the site's evolution (Hodges, 1985, 150–185; RCHM, 1985, 44).

Lee (1954) suggested that the *burh* defences were fossilised in the curving alignment of two sets of roads, Bath Street to Kingswell Street and Scarletwell Street to Bridge Street. Several minor excavations have failed to find the Saxon defences and further work is required to determine the exact location and character of

these fortifications. The road system leading out of the *burh* can be clearly discerned despite later changes. Horsemarket / St. Andrew's Street has long been recognised as the original major road running north from the *burh*. Projected north it follows the small road which in 1632 ran along the township boundary between Northampton and Kingsthorpe, rejoining the present road alignment at Walbeck. It is surely no coincidence that this road runs directly towards Brixworth, the site of the major middle Saxon monastery. It also passes close by the late Saxon royal manor of Kingsthorpe, a township ecclesiastically dependent upon St. Peter's, Northampton's principal church. As the name 'thorpe' would suggest, the ecclesiastical relationship probably reflected a secular dependency in the Saxon period upon the king's manor of Northampton. It has been argued that this road originally continued through the *burh* southwards to cross the river and join the Towcester road immediately to the east of Far Cotton, but no evidence has yet been recovered to confirm this hypothesis. The other main axis of the *burh*, running at right angles to Horsemarket, is Marefair / Gold Street, which is continued eastward outside the defences by St. Giles Street and Billing Road. It has been suggested that this was a Roman road connecting the Roman small towns of Duston and Irchester. In fact the evidence of alignment, together with a 'Streetway furlong' name at Great Doddington and the course of the Northampton road at Doddington in 1675, would suggest it is more likely that the Roman road ran further north within the town, passing close to what was later the site of St. Andrew's Priory (Foard, 1976; Ogilby, 1675). The main road running east from the *burh* is more likely to have led to a crossing of the Nene at 'Clif' ford, where the great Norman motte was to be constructed after the conquest within the estate of the Earl of Northampton. Shaw postulates a late 9th or early 10th century date for the development of intensive settlement along Marefair (Shaw, 1985). Though it has been argued that the rest of the regularity of the plan of the *burh* may have been a result of organic growth constrained by these two primary routes, an initial grid plan for the whole *burh* still remains a possibility to be tested by excavation.

Beyond the defences there are several roads which run askew to the rectilinear pattern of

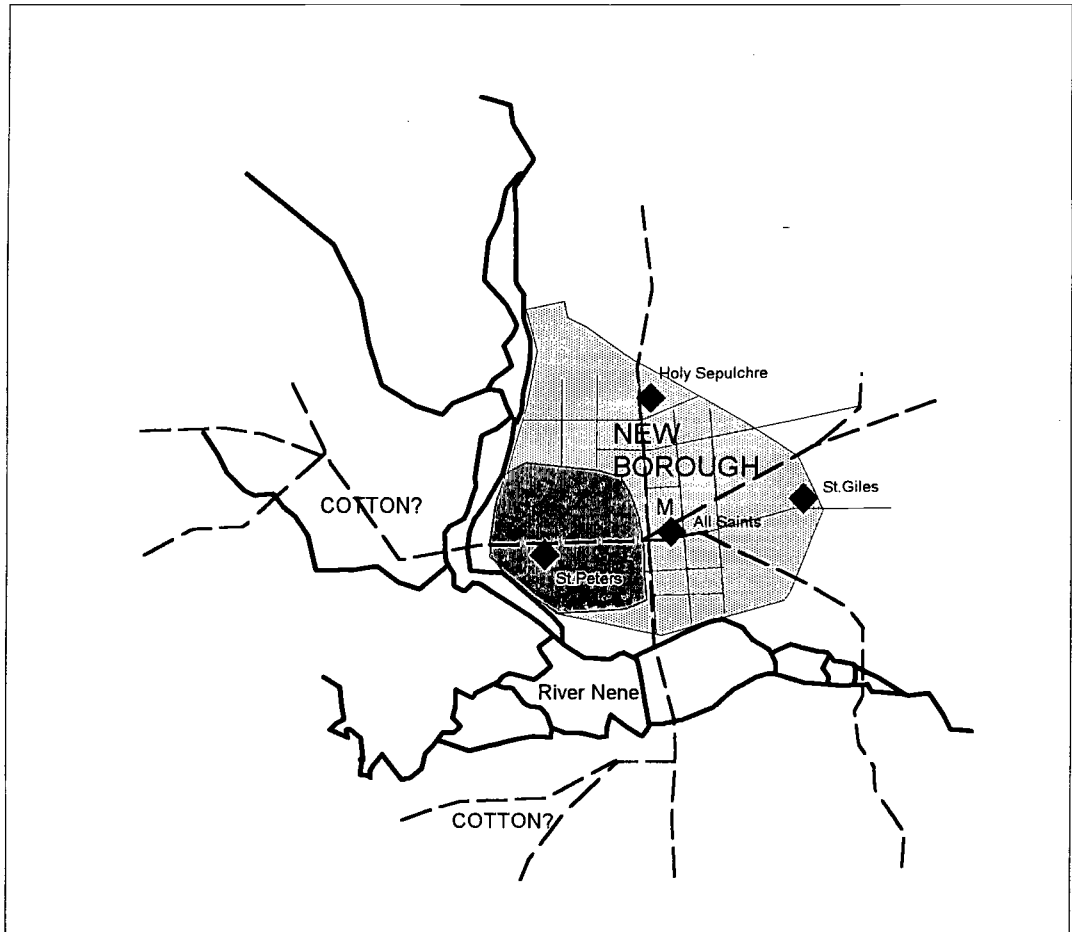
streets in the later, medieval, town (Fig 2.1). These are Derngate, Abington Street, Broad Lane and Bell Barn Lane. Derngate ran to Hardingstone, crossing the river at Nunn Mills. This may have been the primary river crossing at Northampton, possibly the only easily fordable location close to the Saxon settlement. Indeed, this important early-middle Saxon settlement may have been placed in the corner by the junction of the two rivers, with their multiple channels and marshy margins,<sup>1</sup> for the very reason that the site was highly defensible because neither river could be easily crossed. When Delapre Abbey was created in 1145 the Derngate to Hardingstone road was perhaps still a major route, because the abbey was placed not on the present London road in Cotton End but adjacent to the old road, close to where it crossed the east/west valley road from Far Cotton to Houghton. A possible indicator of the age of the road is the fact that it formed the boundary between the two separate medieval field systems in Hardingstone parish. However by 1204, when Edward I brought his wife's body through Northampton, the present London Road seems to have been the main route, for Edward later constructed the Eleanor Cross adjacent to that road. We have seen that St. Giles Street was probably the primary road running eastward from the *burh* and near the gate it was joined not only by Derngate but also by Abington Street, which also runs obliquely across the later, medieval town.

A similar pattern is seen outside the north side of the *burh*, where two roads converge upon St. Andrew's Street just before it enters the presumed north gate. Broad Street, which was continued beyond the medieval defences by a road beginning on the east side of North End, ran on in 1632 to join the present course of the Kettering road on Northampton Heath. This was presumably superseded as the main Stamford road during the medieval period by the road leading from St. Edmund's End. The primacy of Broad Street as the original Stamford road may be supported by the topography of the field system, because outside the medieval town the road sits very comfortably within the furlong pattern whereas the later Kettering Road from St. Edmund's End seems to run at odds with the furlong pattern. The other curving street, Bell Barn Lane, may originally have been the main

route out of the *burh* to the west, perhaps running north to cross the river at the putative crossing of the Roman road from Irchester, if the hypothesis is correct that there was originally no road crossing the river immediately west of the *burh*. This would give a pattern which mirrors that argued above for the southern approach to the *burh*, even down to the positioning of St. James's Abbey, which would lie adjacent to the conjectural Roman road from Irchester. Such a configuration, if continued into the early medieval period, might even explain why the castle gate looked north rather than south onto Marefair. This is however at present mere speculation.

The pattern of convergence of the curving roads near the *burh* defences on both the north and east would suggest that these roads are contemporary with, but do not predate, the *burh*. It is possible that suburban development occurred along these roads in the later 10th or 11th century, but this can only be determined by excavation. There may even have been markets established at either focus, just as is seen outside the defences of Oxford and some other medieval towns (Schofield and Vince, 1994, 52).

By 1086 a new borough had been created at Northampton in addition to that which had existed before 1066 (Domesday Book, 219a). There is a considerable degree of rectilinearity in the plan of that part of the town beyond the *burh* defences, which might indicate that the crown, or the Earl of Northampton who acquired the town at the end of the century, had initiated a major piece of urban planning soon after the conquest (Fig 2.2). The majority if not all of the new borough must have been laid out over furlongs of the pre-existing open fields, because evidence from elsewhere suggests that open field systems had been laid out over most of the area of the townships of Northamptonshire by around the beginning of the late Saxon period (Hall, 1995, 125–139). The roads of the new borough appear to have fossilised the boundaries of the furlongs over which the town expanded. Streets like Lady's Lane and Church Lane clearly continue furlong boundaries seen in the fields to the east in 1632, with others, such as Newlands, having a very clear reverse S form, reflecting the curve of the original lands. A very similar phenomenon is seen at Brackley in the mid 12th century, while



2.2. New borough: *circa* 1100. M denotes Market square.

the name Newlands often represents medieval expansion of settlement over open field furlongs, as for example at Kettering (Foard, in preparation). Either at this time or soon after, a new river crossing was apparently established, the South Bridge, with a new road, Bridge Street / Sheep Street, being created just outside the Saxon defences. It ran from South Bridge to Walbeck, supplanting the original route north from the *burh*. Even this new road respects the earlier furlong pattern, for it changes alignment at fossilised furlong boundaries. If a regular grid of streets was imposed as part of the planning of the new borough then the planners certainly took account of the pre-existing features of the

landscape. If there had been no road leading west from the *burh* in the Saxon period then one must have been created at this time, with a new bridge leading into what later became St. James's End.

It has been suggested that the Newlands represents King William's new borough (RCHM, 1985, 50), with the implication that the town grew organically in the succeeding decades, but the evidence is equivocal. It is equally possible that there was a major phase of planning in which an extensive grid of streets was laid out over a wide area which was only gradually occupied thereafter. The remarkably regular spacing of the major churches of the borough would certainly support the case for large scale planning at

Northampton. All were built or rebuilt in the 12th century: St. Peter's, All Saints and St. Giles along the primary east–west road with Holy Sepulchre along the new north–south road. One block of the new town, comprising half of one group of former open field strips, was also allocated as the new market square. It was created just outside the *burh* gate and adjacent to All Saints, the major church of the new borough. In the medieval period reference was made to the moving of the market to the 'waste' ground to the north of All Saints and it has been suggested this marks the establishment of the market on its present site. This represents a misunderstanding of the significance of the term waste (RCHM, 1985, 52). Market places, like roads, were typically described as part of 'the waste', as for example in the case of Brackley and Oundle (Foard, in preparation). The market place was almost certainly an integral, indeed the central, element of the new borough because, whereas late Saxon towns tended not to have market places, they were an essential part of medieval town planning (Schofield and Vince, 1994, 51). If a regular grid was established as part of the Norman town planning then it must have suffered major decay and distortion in succeeding centuries. For example, several roads must have been lost in the south-east corner of the medieval town, later called Tower Close, and interestingly recent evaluation in this area has shown early medieval occupation well away from any known streets (Shaw *et al.*, 1992). A context for such losses would be the massive decline in wealth and population which probably began in Northampton well before the Black Death. Alternatively, the apparent regularity in the town plan may simply have been imposed by the two major pre-existing north–south and east–west roads, with small areas of the town being separately planned in rectilinear fashion in relation to these routes.

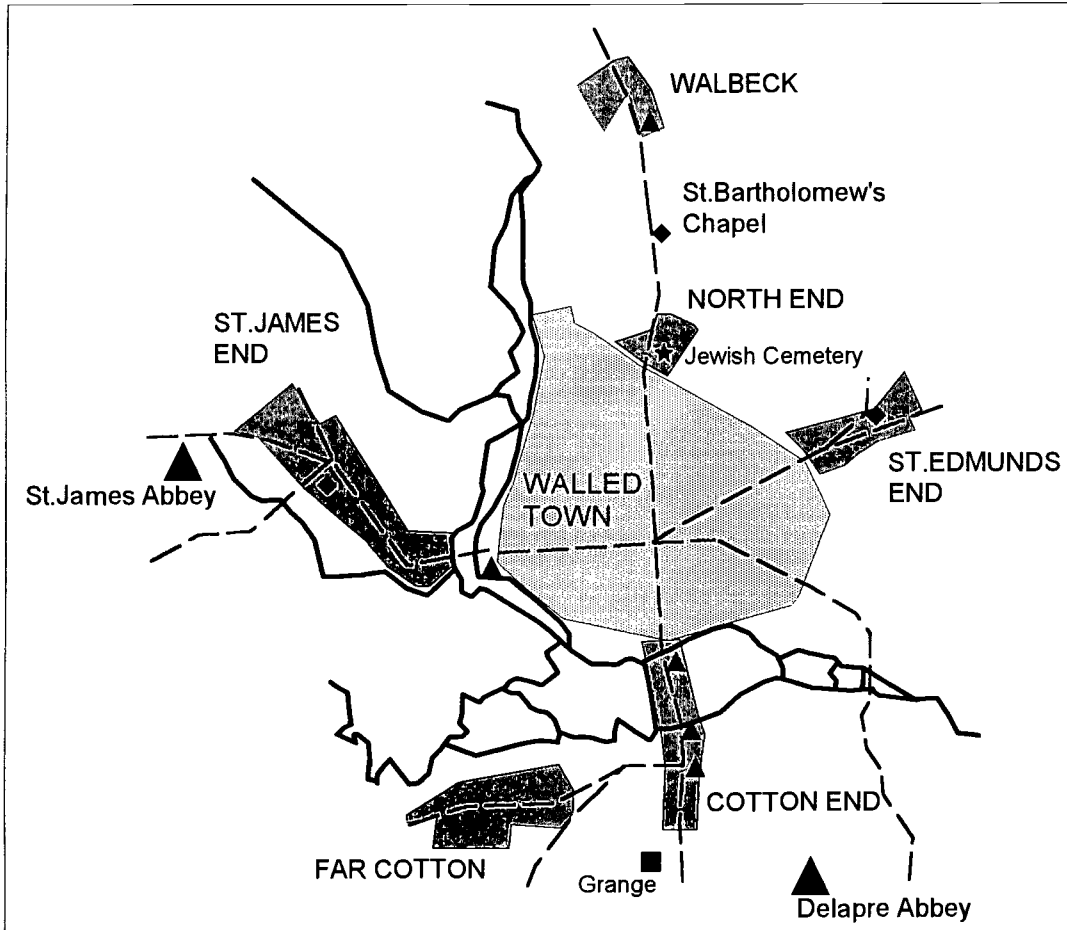
The Norman development of the town included the construction of the castle across several streets in the western part of the *burh*, presumably replacing the Clifford Hill castle at Houghton, and the construction of town defences, both probably around 1100 A.D. The line of fortification was drawn very wide to create the most effective defensive circuit, especially on the north-east side where they encompassed the high ground to ensure that a besieging force could not

take up a commanding position overlooking the town. For this reason it is likely that the defences enclosed all the pre-existing occupation. Interestingly St. Giles Street, the east–west road which had apparently formed the primary route of the town and had attracted one of the major churches, was now, or soon after, downgraded such that it only warranted a postern gate.

## THE SUBURBS

The final phase in the expansion of the medieval town was the growth of the suburbs. There was extra-mural development on all four sides of Northampton in the medieval period, lining each of the major routes out of the town. Only the roads leading out of Derngate, towards Hardingstone, and from the postern gate by St. Giles, towards Billing, did not apparently have suburban development. Both of these routes had presumably declined in importance well before the phase of suburban expansion began. There were two other postern gates, that on the south-west side of the town, leading to Cotton Mill, and that at the bottom of Cow Lane, leading to Cow Meadow and, in the 17th century, to the gunpowder mill. Neither of these gates served through roads and, as the river onto which they led was not navigable in the medieval period, there were no wharves and hence no suburban development is to be expected there. The only other medieval buildings outside the defences were apparently the mills: Nunn Mills on the Hardingstone road, Cotton Mills on the south-western edge of the town and St. Andrew's Mill just beyond the north-west corner of the defences in Kingsthorpe township. By the 17th century other structures existed outside the town, all shown by Marcus Pierce in 1632. They comprised two conduit heads, one at Nine Springs on the Billing Road and the other at the north end of the township close to the present St. George's Avenue, and an isolated building on the Kettering road, near the edge of Northampton Heath.

The walled area of medieval Northampton was exceptionally large and some parts may never have been built up, even at the height of urban development in the early 13th century; this may have limited the degree of extra-mural development which occurred in the medieval

2.3. Walled town and suburbs: *circa* 12th–14th century

period. However, the lightly-populated areas will have been in the least accessible parts of the walled town, as was the case when John Speed mapped the town in the early 17th century, areas such as Cow Lane, where recent excavation revealed what may have been low status occupation of the late 12th and 13th centuries (Shaw and Steadman, 1993). It was clearly far more desirable to have a tenement with a frontage onto a major street, even if it lay outside the defences, than to occupy a tenement on a back street within the defences.

Northampton went into decline in the later 13th century; its population and wealth were further affected by the famines of the earlier 14th century

and most dramatically by the successive plagues from 1348 until the later 15th century. This decline had a significant effect on the number of tenements in the town, especially perhaps in the suburbs. When Leland visited the town in the 1530s he recorded that there were just two suburbs (Toulmin Smith, 1907–10, part 1, 7). By the early 17th century many tenements in the suburbs were still deserted but the decline was not uniform, for some areas had suffered far more than others. To the north of the town, Walbeck and North End had been completely abandoned while on the east St. Edmund's End retained only a handful of buildings, all of which were finally demolished during the Civil War. In contrast a



substantial number of houses still stood in St. James's End while in the South Quarter, between the defences and the South Bridge, almost the entire area was still intensively built up in 1610. A few buildings also remained in Cotton End just across the South Bridge. Despite a continuing economic recovery during the 17th and 18th centuries, the suburban areas of Northampton did not see extensive redevelopment until the 19th century when, released from the restrictions of the open field system following Inclosure in 1779, industrial and housing development engulfed them all.<sup>2</sup>

The western suburbs of the town comprised St. James's Abbey and St. James's End, known as Brodende of St. James in 1285 and later, in 1381, as Seyntiamesende (Gover *et al.*, 1975, 8).<sup>3</sup> It lay on either side of the road running from the West Gate towards Coventry, within the parishes and townships of Duston and Dallington. It lay wholly on the west side of the West Bridge. In addition, when Speed mapped the town in 1610, a small group of buildings called the Hermitage lay in the Northampton parish of St. Peter's, immediately outside the West Gate, between the latter and the West Bridge. Speed also shows a building on the bridge at its west end, which may be a chapel, also apparently within St. Peter's parish. The very small area on the west side of the bridge which lay within St. Peter's parish may simply reflect a change in the course of the river, with the original main course, followed by the parish boundary, having been altered in the medieval or post-medieval period, to run along or immediately outside the town ditch. The Duston / Dallington boundary followed the Coventry road, dividing St. James's End into two.<sup>4</sup> The extent of the suburbs can be suggested from the extent of old enclosures and particularly the small closes recorded in the 18th century.<sup>5</sup> Judging by the pattern of small closes, medieval tenements probably lined both sides of the main road at least as far as the major junction. More detailed documentary analysis of medieval and post-medieval sources is however required to refine this information, because when this area was first mapped there were other enclosed lands surrounding St. James's End, some of which were clearly meadow and others which are likely to represent the post-medieval enclosure of open field land. It has been suggested that St.

Margaret's Chapel, a dependency of Duston church, which is first recorded *circa* 1227 and lost by the 16th or 17th century, might have lain in Churchyard Close but Bridges states that it lay in the close later occupied by the toll house, which was adjacent to the main road junction (RCHM, 1985; Bridges, 1791, I, 503). Bridges is surely correct for Leland records that St. James's Abbey, where the Churchyard Close stands, was 'a little distant from the extreme part of the west suburbe', yet he also says 'there be in the suburbes 2. paroshe chirches, whereof I saw one yn the west suburbe'. In the 1530s St. James's End still contained at least one substantial residence, 'a very pratie house ex lapide polite quadrato...', and was still significant but 'lesse' than the southern suburb of the town (Toulmin Smith, 1907-10, part I, 7-8). It had clearly shrunk enormously since the high medieval period and when recorded by Speed in 1610 the built up frontage on south western side of the street was even less extensive than that on the north east side.<sup>6</sup>

It has been suggested above that the road through St. James's End was a creation of the medieval period, several roads converging a little to the east of the Abbey before crossing the floodplain to enter the western gate of the town. However, the presence of a Cotes Close within St. James's End in the 18th century may indicate the presence of a hamlet here in the late Saxon period, prior to the growth of the suburb. Such 'cot' settlements existed in a number of Nene valley parishes in broadly similar topographical situations, on the edge of the floodplain, in peripheral areas of townships where the main village was set at a distance from the river, as for example with Far Cotton in Hardingstone. However, St. James's End apparently lay on alluvium. A floodplain situation would be unlikely to be chosen for settlement in the late Saxon or medieval period without the special circumstances created by the presence of a major road immediately outside Northampton. Roman finds have however been made in the area between St. James's road and the stream to the south west, indicating that this area may have been more suitable for settlement than one might otherwise believe. Perhaps the geological survey has failed in this urban location to identify a small area of river gravels.

St. James's Abbey lay 'a little distant from the extreme part of the west suburbe' in the 1530s and was probably founded in the first half of the 12th century (Toulmin Smith, 1907–10, part 1, 7; Serjeantson, 1905–6). The old enclosures of the monastery adjoined those of the suburb, but some of these closes may never have been occupied. The abbey lay on Northampton Sand and Ironstone, just above the floodplain, immediately to the south of the road to Upton. This is a better topographical location than St. James's End and might indicate that the Abbey was established before any other occupation existed on this side of the town, rather than it being placed at the outer edge of a pre-existing settlement. Indeed it is possible that the Abbey, like some monastic establishments elsewhere in Northamptonshire, took an active role in promoting urban development on its own land (Foard, in preparation). In the 18th century there was extensive old enclosed land between the site of the abbey and the river, much of it in the same ownership as the abbey site, making it difficult to define the exact extent of the monastic precinct. However, the land to the south of the Banbury Lane was all on the floodplain and is likely to have been old enclosed meadow. According to Bridges the site of St. James's fair was where the abbey had once stood (Bridges, 1791, I, 503) but this has been questioned (RCHM).<sup>7</sup> The abbey, which had stood in a precinct enclosed by a 'high, faire, and large' stone wall in the 1530s, was replaced by a mansion house of the Giffard family after the dissolution and the abbey barn still stood in 1715 (Toulmin Smith, 1907–10, part 1, 7; Bridges, 1791, I, 503).

The southern suburbs of the town lay on both sides of the river, lining the London road which, as we have seen, was probably a creation of the late 11th or early 12th century. The South Quarter would appear to have been the most continuously and densely occupied of all Northampton's suburbs.<sup>8</sup> It took the form of two regular, parallel rows of tenements fronting on to Bridge Street, between the South Gate and the South Bridge. This area did suffer some desertion of tenements in the late medieval period, but in the 1530s Leland saw 'a faire suburbe withoute the South gate...' and by the early 17th century almost the whole of the frontage was still built up (Toulmin Smith, 1907–10, part 1, 7). It was, at least in the

post-medieval period, treated as a part of the town and described as the South Quarter. It is not perhaps surprising that this was the most densely built up of the suburbs for, unlike all the others, it had a limited degree of security because of the presence of the river on its south and west sides. Certainly during the Civil War it was defended by the construction of a drawbridge on the South Bridge (Foard, 1994). The area was, in effect, a group of small islands on the alluvial floodplain between the multiple channels of the Nene. The main river channel bounded the suburb on the west and the south, while on the north a subsidiary channel of the Nene, followed by the town ditch, separated it from the walled town. Several buildings, including St. Thomas's Hospital, lay on the bridge across the latter stream. Various subsidiary channels, crossed by lesser bridges, cut through the suburb to join a back brook, which separated the suburb from the meadow to the east, and thus ran back into the main river. It seems likely that there was substantial infilling of this land during the medieval period, given its low lying position, and hence it is perhaps the area of the town with the greatest potential for survival of waterlogged medieval deposits.

Cotton End or East Cotton was a relatively small area of occupation and, although within Hardingstone township, it should perhaps be viewed as an extension of the South Quarter. It lay on either side of the London road, immediately on the south side of the South Bridge.<sup>9</sup> The first reference to Cotes was in 1199 and in 1289 it was called Cotes extra Northampton. The first reference to Cotton End does not occur until the 17th century and so it is not always clear whether the references are to this End or if they refer to Far Cotton (Gover *et al.*, 1975, 147). Elsewhere in the county hamlets called Cotes have been shown to have Saxon origins but Cotton End was undoubtedly a creation of the medieval period, for it lies in an unfavourable topographical location on alluvial floodplain. Far Cotton is more likely to be the primary Saxon settlement with Cotton End gaining its name because it lay with the fields of (Far) Cotton.

Within Cotton End there was a hermitage, which lay on the south side of the South Bridge (Goodfellow, 1980), but the only substantial

property within the suburb was St. Leonard's, which lay on the east side of the London road. This was a leper hospital founded before 1150, which apparently acquired parochial rights in the 13th century. St. Leonard's bridge, apparently crossing a small stream next to the hospital, is recorded in the 13th century (Serjeantson, 1915–16). Towards the southern end of the settlement two roads diverged from the London road, one leading to Towcester and the other, now lost, running past Delapre Abbey towards Hardingstone and Houghton. A grange, presumably that of St. Andrew's Priory, identified by Hall (1980, 119), lay to the south of Cotton End, for an area of old enclosures called Grange Close and Dovehouse Close lay immediately west of the London road at the time of enclosure. Cotton End would appear always to have been a fairly small suburb, though it is difficult to accurately define its exact extent due to the presence of extensive old enclosures, most of which may prove to be simply enclosed field or meadow land. Tenements survived in Cotton End throughout the post-medieval period, but the plan form of the suburb was almost totally disrupted in the 19th century, first by the construction of the canal with its wharfs, and then by the building of the railway.

Delapre Abbey lay a short distance to the south east of Cotton End, beside the road which led east from the London road towards Houghton, far closer to the old road from Derngate to Hardingstone than to the medieval London road.<sup>10</sup> It lay on river gravels just above the floodplain, adjacent to or on meadow land, judging by the name, for in 1217 the abbey was known as Sancte Marie de Prato.<sup>11</sup> The monastery was transferred to this site from Fotheringhay in about 1145. Old enclosures lay between Delapre and Cotton End in the 18th century, along the line of the former road. Although there was no intermediate occupation in the post-medieval period it is unclear whether any of these closes were occupied during the medieval period, but it is likely that Delapre was separated from Cotton End by meadow land. The exact extent of the abbey site in the medieval period and the exact course of the associated roads cannot be easily reconstructed as the whole area had been enclosed and emparked well before the first maps were drawn in the 18th century.

The primary settlement on the south side of the river was undoubtedly Far Cotton, otherwise known as West Cotton. It appears to have comprised two rows of tenements fronting the east-west road on the edge of the valley floor, although the exact layout of the settlement is difficult to reconstruct due to various inadequacies in the 1767 map.<sup>12</sup> By the 18th century there were only a handful of buildings on either side of the road, but this was probably the result of decline in the late medieval and post-medieval periods. Though much of the land between it and Cotton End was old enclosure in the 18th century, these all appear to have been meadow closes and so it is likely, as the names suggest, that the two settlements were always quite separate.

Far Cotton lies in a good topographical location along a narrow terrace of river gravel just above the floodplain and is undoubtedly the original Cotton, probably an agricultural settlement originating in the Saxon period. As such it may not be strictly correct to call it a suburb of Northampton. However, if Lee is correct that there was a Saxon road crossing the Nene from the Towcester road at Far Cotton to the Horsemarket in the *burh*, then it is possible, though unlikely, that the origins of Far Cotton are connected with the development of Northampton in the late Saxon period.

The eastern suburb of Northampton, known as St. Edmund's End, lay immediately outside the East Gate of the town.<sup>13</sup> The maximum possible extent of the settlement is clearly defined by the old enclosures recorded in 1779. It comprised tenements fronting south onto the Kettering road and north onto the Wellingborough road. St. Edmund's church itself lay on the island of land at the junction of the two roads, where burials were found early in the 20th century. Immediately east of the church it is possible that further tenements fronted south onto the Wellingborough road. A tenement belonging to the Gobion manor is recorded in the suburb in the early 13th century while St. Edmund's church is first mentioned in the late 12th century. The church had probably gone out of use by the mid 16th century but a handful of houses still existed in the suburb in the early 17th century, finally being demolished during the Civil War (Foard, 1994). There has been small scale excavation and observation

during recent development in St. Edmund's End, revealing evidence of stone buildings, but there is still very little information as to the character and chronology of the suburb.

The northern suburbs are the least extensive and the most unusual, comprising three distinct elements separated by open field land. The reason for the small extent and the fragmentation of activity on this side of the town is not clear, for this was certainly a major route, as Ogilby's seventeenth-century itinerary confirms. North End lay immediately outside the North Gate of the town.<sup>14</sup> The maximum possible extent of the suburb is accurately defined by the old enclosures recorded in 1779. The area was already deserted when Speed mapped the town in 1610 and it seems clear from Leland's description that the North End had already been deserted by the 1530s (Toulmin Smith, 1907–10, part 1, 8). It is likely to have comprised tenements fronting either side of the Market Harborough road, bounded on the west by the lane to St. Andrew's Mill and on the east by the old Kettering road. It is however possible that some tenements also existed fronting eastward onto the Kettering road. This suburb was the location of the Jewish cemetery, created in 1259 and destroyed in 1290, together with associated houses recorded as lying outside the North Gate in the second half of the 13th century, (Roberts, 1993). Mid to late thirteenth-century burials which undoubtedly belong to the Jewish cemetery have recently been discovered on the east side of the main road (Graham Cadman, pers. com.). Judging from the location of the burials and the evidence of similar sites, such as that at Winchester, it seems likely that the cemetery lay behind the main frontage, in the centre of the old enclosure.

Some 400 metres beyond the North Gate, on the hill top immediately to the east of the main road, lay St. Bartholomew's church.<sup>15</sup> This isolated medieval church, first recorded in the late 12th century, had declined to the status of chapel by the dissolution and indeed according to Leland, who visited at exactly this time, all he saw outside beyond the North gate were 'the ruins of a large chapelle' (Toulmin Smith, 1907–10, part 1, 8). By 1632 the chapel had gone and the site had become known as 'Lawlesse Churchyard', the dedication possibly having changed at some time to St. Lawrence's (Lee,

1931–2). The extent of the churchyard is accurately defined on the enclosure map of 1779.

A kilometre to the north of the North Gate lay the suburb called Walbeck, just beyond the boundary of Northampton, within Kingsthorpe township.<sup>16</sup> The extent of the settlement is defined by the old enclosures recorded in 1767, called Wall Bank closes. They lay in the small valley of the Walbeck stream in what is now known as Kingsthorpe Hollow. No old enclosures existed on the Northampton side of the boundary in 1779, confirming that the settlement did not extend into Northampton township. The closes lay on both sides of the Market Harborough road and for a short distance on both sides of a side road which ran from Walbeck towards the town defences and then to St. Andrew's Mill. It has been suggested above that this street, now called Semilong, was the original main road running North from the Saxon *burh*.

Walbeck was established during the 12th or 13th century, on the main road, as close as possible to Northampton but within the township of Kingsthorpe, to exploit the economic opportunities offered by proximity to the town. It may have grown up around the leper hospital which existed at Walbeck in the medieval period and which, like other such hospitals, had been intentionally placed at a distance from the town. The hospital lay adjacent to the township boundary on the east side of the Harborough road.<sup>17</sup> Inhumations, almost certainly related to the hospital, were found in the clay pit on the east side of Kingsthorpe Road at Walbeck early in the 20th century. The first reference to the leper hospital is in 1301 and houses are also mentioned in Walbeck in 1300 (Willis, 1916), but by 1643 it would appear that the settlement had been wholly deserted (Foard, 1994).<sup>18</sup> Further north still, immediately east of the village of Kingsthorpe, another hospital and a chapel lay on the east side of the road to Market Harborough. Although undoubtedly owing its creation here to the traffic using this major route into Northampton, it cannot be considered part of the suburbs of the town.

It can be seen from the evidence presented here that by at least the mid 12th century Northampton was experiencing large scale suburban development, even though the defences encompassed an area exceeded in size only by London and Norwich. In this it mirrored the

experience of other major towns throughout the country, for this was a time of massive urbanisation and Northampton was, in the 12th century, one of the foremost towns in England. By 1300 it seems likely that the suburbs covered an area more than half the size of the walled town itself. In later centuries, and probably beginning even before 1348, the suburbs saw massive depopulation, shrinking to only a shadow of their former extent. The scale of suburban development is generally viewed as a good indicator of the success and prosperity of a town and so it would seem that there may be much to be learnt about Northampton from a study of its suburbs. Detailed documentary analysis will have much to contribute to such a study, but it is probably to archaeology that we should look for the greatest advances in our understanding. Over the last twenty years, despite intensive excavation within the Saxon *burh*, there has been little work outside the *burh* defences and almost none beyond the medieval defences. This paper has provided sufficient information to demonstrate where such work should be carried out and hopefully it will encourage a greater interest in what has been the most neglected aspect of the history of medieval Northampton.

## NOTES

### Abbreviations:

NRO : Northamptonshire Record Office.

PRO : Public Record Office.

<sup>1</sup> The name 'mor' or marsh appears in several areas on the floodplain immediately adjacent to the town, as in Moor Field in Hardingstone (Hall, 1980, 124) and the Moor in Dallington (infra n.3).

<sup>2</sup> Wood and Law's map of 1847; OS 1st edition 1:2500.

<sup>3</sup> Sources: Dallington Tithe Map, NRO T122; Dallington Inclosure Map c. 1725, NRO Map 2884; no Inclosure Award exists for Dallington. Duston pre-Inclosure Map, a 1780 copy of a 1722 estate map, NRO Map 2883 (other copies are Maps 3004 and 583). This map is small scale and inaccurate. Duston Inclosure Award.

<sup>4</sup> That the township boundary followed the road might imply that the road was in fact in existence in the late Saxon period.

<sup>5</sup> No pre-enclosure map exists for Dallington. However, on the earliest map small rectilinear closes line the north-east side of the road while beyond them larger closes (not mapped here), almost all with the name Moor, suggest the division between old enclosed and new enclosed land. Two at least of these small closes were identified as tithable on the Tithe map, tending to support the interpretation presented here.

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately the plan of the town in Ogilby (1675) cannot be used as independent corroboration of Speed as his detail for major towns appears to be sketched directly from Speed.

<sup>7</sup> NRO map 4387 re. Churchyard Close and Fair Yard Close.

<sup>8</sup> Sources: maps of the town in 1610 by John Speed; in 1746 by Noble and Butlin; in 1807 of Roper and Cole, which draws heavily upon Noble and Butlin; in 1847 by Wood and Law; also the map of the Freeman's Commons drawn at enclosure in 1779, NRO.

<sup>9</sup> Sources: Hardingstone estate map of Edward Bouverie, 1767, NRO; Hardingstone Inclosure Award, NRO; map by Wood and Law, 1847. For a brief time during the early 17th century Cotton was within the liberties of the Borough of Northampton but it soon reverted to Hardingstone parish.

<sup>10</sup> Sources: Hardingstone estate map of Edward Bouverie, 1767, NRO; Hardingstone Inclosure Award, NRO; estate map of Edward Bouverie showing Delapre Farm, post 1767, NRO Map 1286. Serjeantson, 1909.

<sup>11</sup> De Prato derives from 'pratum', latin for meadow.

<sup>12</sup> Sources: Hardingstone estate map of Edward Bouverie, 1767, NRO; Hardingstone Inclosure Award, NRO.

<sup>13</sup> Northampton Inclosure Map, 1779, NRO; Northampton Inclosure Award, NRO; map of Northampton town and fields in 1632 by Marcus Pierce; map of Northampton in 1610 by John Speed.

<sup>14</sup> Sources: op. cit. n. 13. Though Noble and Butlin show North End as the area inside the gates, the Inclosure Map names the closes outside the gate as North End closes.

<sup>15</sup> Sources: op. cit. n. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Sources: Kingsthorpe Map, 1767, NRO Inclosure Map 43; Kingsthorpe Inclosure Award, NRO; Kingsthorpe Field Name Map 1932, NRO.

<sup>17</sup> 'Lazar House' is identified on the 1932 Field Name map as lying in the southern part of Gt. Wall Bank Close.

<sup>18</sup> In 1619 reference is made to 'le great close' of 2.5 acres at Walbeck and to Walbanke meadow, PRO LR2/221. This source may contain other detail relevant to Walbeck.

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