

## Notes

### LATE SAXON DITCHES AT BROOKFIELD, NUTCOTE, NASEBY

An evaluation, followed by a small excavation, were undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit in February and October 1994 on a development site in Naseby. The site occupied 0.7 ha within the modern village (SP 68757775), and contained earthworks which have been recorded by the RCHME as part of the medieval settlement of Nutcote and Naseby (RCHME 1981). Part of the survey is reproduced in Fig. 1. The earthworks at Naseby indicate a relatively complex village development. It is thought that the village had a polyfocal development, with Naseby and Nutcote (to the south of Naseby) having distinct settlement foci. 'Sow Green' is shown on the 1630 plan of the village adjoining the site on the south side and has been suggested as being the focus of Nutcote (RCHME 1981, 143). The site itself, which is known as 'Brookfield', lies just south of a hollow-way which was thought to be the boundary between the villages of Naseby and Nutcote. The hollow-way used to be occupied by a stream which presumably gave its name to the plot of land.

Accordingly, when Haddon Developments proposed a scheme of residential development for the site, a brief for archaeological investigation was prepared by Northamptonshire Heritage. This report comprises the final phase of a staged programme of work. The archive of the evaluation and excavation reports, post excavation assessment, and site records (OAU 1994 and 1995) are temporarily with the OAU pending a decision by Northamptonshire Heritage on long term storage. The finds are also with the OAU. Acknowledgements are due to Haddon Developments who funded all the work.

The main earthwork elements on the site were two sub-rectangular features in the eastern area. The southern earthwork stood proud at a little over one metre while the northern earthwork was a slighter lynchet. These may represent the rear of medieval tenements fronting High Street. The plot probably had not been built on since at least 1630.

At the time of the investigation the land was used as a paddock. The underlying geology is Upper Lias clay.

Six evaluation trenches were positioned to investigate the earthworks, the 'Sow Green' frontage, and other areas. Archaeological features were absent from Trenches 4, 5 and 6. The main features of interest were a series of late Saxon ditches in Trench 1, dated by a small quantity of St Neots-type ware. The ditches ran NE-SW but subsequent excavation showed them to be unrelated, at least directly, to the earthwork enclosure here. There was no evidence for earthwork construction either in Trench 1 or Trench 2 and it is assumed the banks were of earth or turf. Minor ditches in Trench 1 and to a lesser extent in Trench 2 suggested two or three phases of activity, but their date and nature remained unclear. There was little surviving stratigraphy and no indication of a buried land surface. In Trench 3 a shallow ditch yielded 1st-2nd century Roman pottery.

The subsequent area excavation was designed to elucidate the nature of the possible late Saxon enclosure and other features. An area of 20 m × 10 m was mechanically stripped towards the north and east of Trench 1. The excavated area (Fig. 2) showed a moderately complex sequence of features. Four main phases of ditches can be distinguished stratigraphically and on the basis of alignments. The earliest group of gullies (143 and 147) were aligned north-south. They were replaced by gullies on a NW-SE alignment, 148, 142 and perhaps 149. This pattern was succeeded by the major ditches which appear to form the corner of a sub-rectangular enclosure. Three sub-phases are shown on Fig. 2. The larger ditches (110, 144, 145 and 146) were generally of similar form, up to 800 mm deep with moderate or gradual sides and a gently rounded or flattish base. Ditch 74 was rather smaller and is only tentatively suggested to be a terminal opposed to 144. Phase 4 (ditch 141) is represented by two arms of a ditch of unknown size. It is probably unrelated to the Late Saxon occupation.

Forty-one sherds of late Saxon pottery were

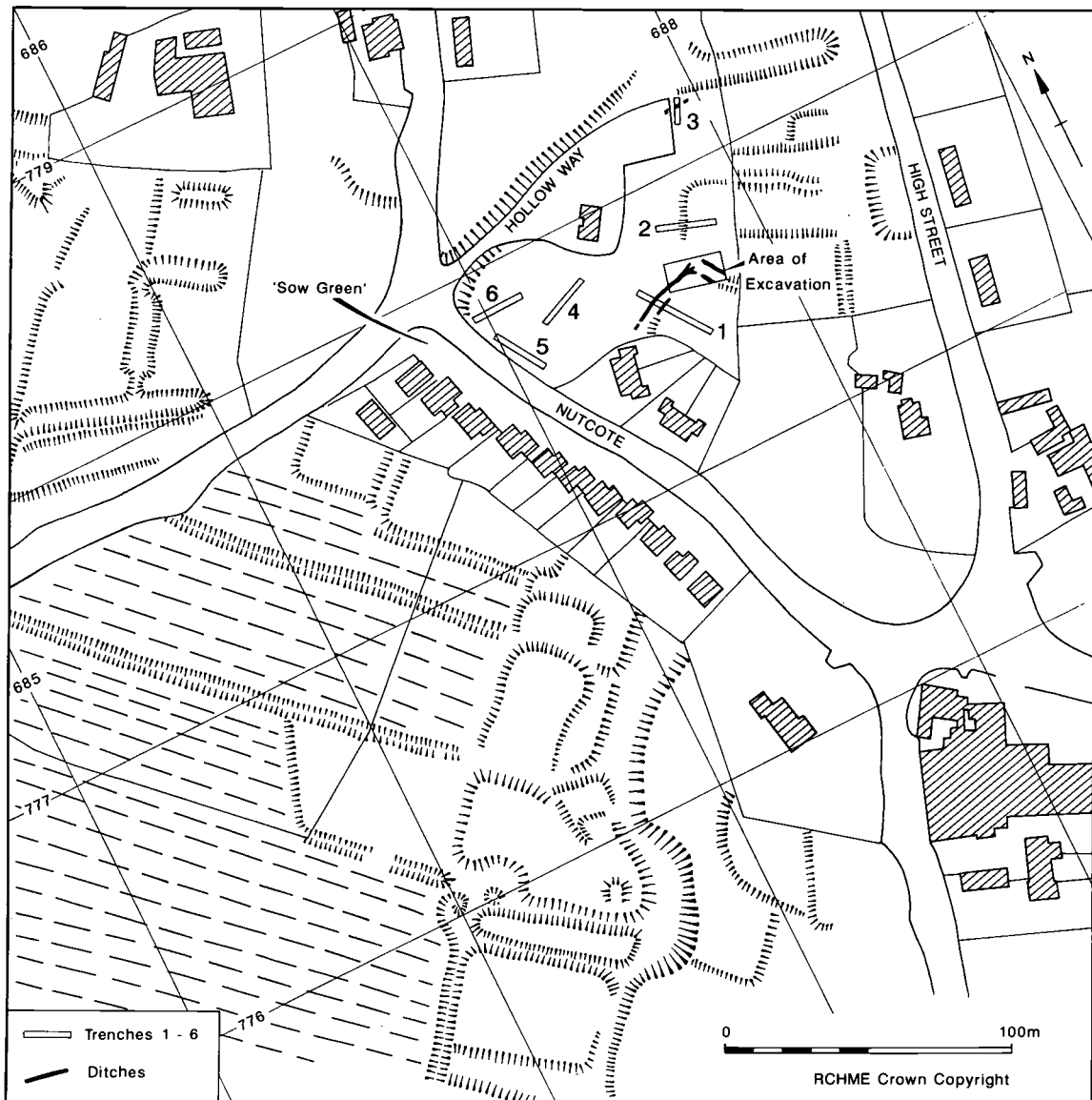


Fig 1 Nutcote, Naseby: Location of evaluation trenches and area of excavation in relation to earthworks at Nutcote.

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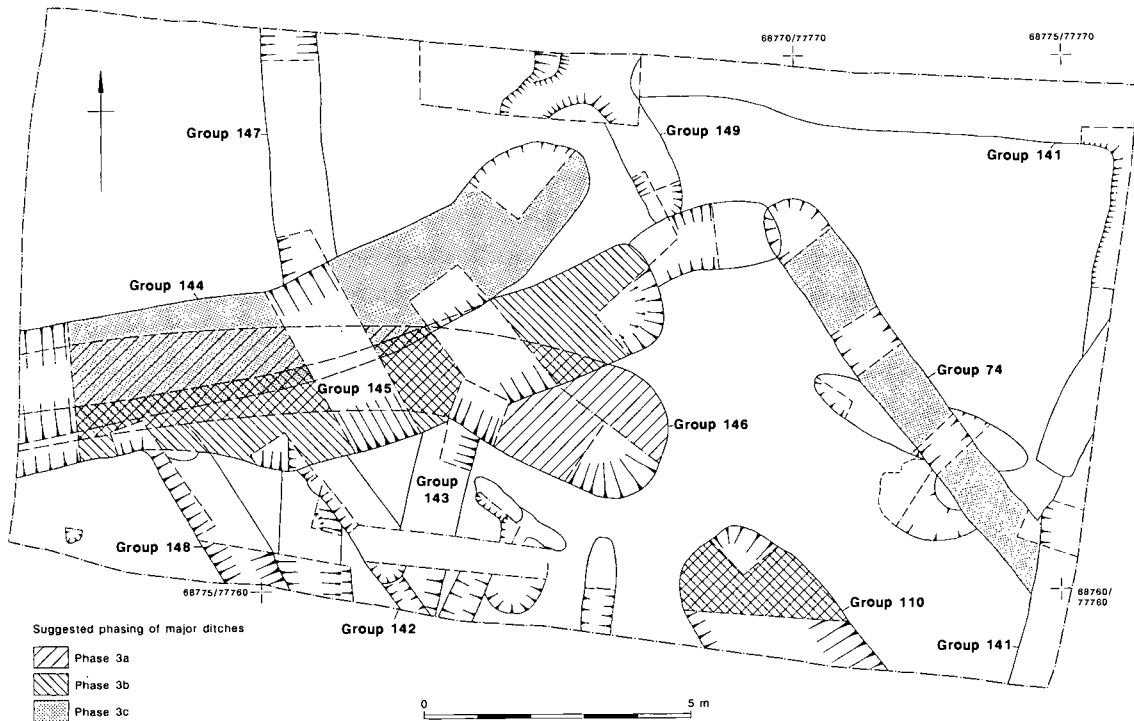


Fig 2 Nutcote, Naseby: Summary plan of excavation.

recovered, most of it St Neots-type ware dating from the 10th to 11th century. Preservation was poor and a fabric type progression for the St Neots-type material was not possible. Only four rim sherds were present. St Neots-type pottery was found in ditches 142, 110, 144, 145 and 148, but was too scarce and undiagnostic to aid the chronological interpretation. A sherd of Stamford ware, datable from the late 11th to mid 12th century, came from the upper fill of ditch 145 as did an everted, rolled rim sherd of St Neots-type which can be dated to the late 11th century. The dominance of St Neots-type ware is similar to the late Saxon T1 horizon in Northampton where the assemblages have been dated to the early 10th century before the influx of sandy Northampton ware in the mid-10th century (McCarthy 1979, 227). If this premise is correct, the earlier ditches can be dated to the 10th century. Four redeposited Roman sherds also came from ditches 110 and 145.

Samples taken for charred plant remains from ditches 146 (Phase 3a) and 145 (Phase 3b)

contained a mixture of mainly oak charcoal with relatively clean charred seeds of *Triticum* (wheat), some of it free-threshing, *Avena* (oats) and *Hordeum* (barley).

Little can be said regarding the interpretation of the site. The excavation was of insufficient scale to elucidate the function of the features or the overall pattern of activity. The nature of the late Saxon 'enclosure' therefore remains uncertain. However, the investigations have indicated an early focus of settlement in Nutcote – one with its origins in the 10th century – whose presence may provide a clue to the polyfocal nature of the village's development. It is also evident that 'Sow Green' can be discounted as a nucleus of settlement, at least on its northern side. The general paucity of finds from the excavations suggests that the ditches may have been marginal to the actual occupation and it is possible that the main focus of settlement lay further towards the east, perhaps with a frontage on High Street. It is to be hoped that further archaeological work is

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forthcoming to help clarify the extent and nature of this late Saxon occupation in Naseby and provide further evidence for the development of the village.

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