

Excavation at the Moat House Hotel, Northampton, 1998

by

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with contributions by Paul Blinkhorn, Tora Hylton, Iain Soden and Alex Thorne

SUMMARY

The area of a new swimming pool at the Moat House Hotel, Northampton, adjacent to King Street, was excavated in advance of development. Earlier deposits had been severely truncated, but two pits of 10th century date attested to late Saxon activity in this north-eastern corner of the early town. In the mid-13th century there was a distinct change in use, with the digging of much larger pits, presumably as quarry pits to obtain ironstone for building. They had been infilled by the 14th century, when one was sealed by a laid stone surface.

By the mid-17th century a garden soil had accumulated over this area, when the site lay to the rear of properties fronting onto King Street. A steady increase in activity from the late 17th century onward relates to the progressive development of this frontage. The western half of the site was a yard until the late 19th century; it contained three wells and several pits. The eastern half of the site was occupied by the rear wing of the former No. 12 King Street.

INTRODUCTION

Queens Moat Houses UK Ltd applied to Northampton Borough Council for planning permission to erect a single storey swimming pool extension to their hotel at King Street in central Northampton (Fig 1, NGR SP 75266060). On the advice of Northamptonshire Heritage an archaeological evaluation, comprising a desk-top survey and trial excavation, was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology in February 1998 prior to the determination of this application (Chapman 1998). Planning permission

for the swimming pool was granted but Northampton Borough Council requested the implementation of an archaeological recording action over the whole area of the proposed building.

The excavation, and an accompanying watching brief on service trenches, was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology in July 1998 during the initial site preparation prior to the construction of the swimming pool. Work was coordinated by NBF Partnership, under Geoffrey Flint, and involved the cooperation of the main contractor, Thomas Vale Construction Ltd. The excavation was directed by Andy Chapman, with the assistance of Rob Atkins, Steve Hayward and Richard Jennings. The Saxon and medieval pottery was analysed by Paul Blinkhorn, the post-medieval pottery by Iain Soden, and the clay tobacco-pipes by Tora Hylton. The present report summarises the evidence presented in the full report, which is available in archive (Chapman 1999a). The illustrations are by Alex Thorne.

BACKGROUND

The Moat House Hotel is bounded to the south by King Street, to the west by Horsemarket and to the east by Silver Street (Fig 1). This block of land lies within the north-eastern corner of the double street system that has been assumed to be a fossilisation of intra- and extra-mural roads respecting the northern and eastern defences of the late Saxon town (Fig 2, RCHME 1985, 45-46 and Chapman 1999b). The Moat House swimming pool is therefore the most north-easterly point within the presumed area of the late Saxon town to be examined by archaeological excavation.

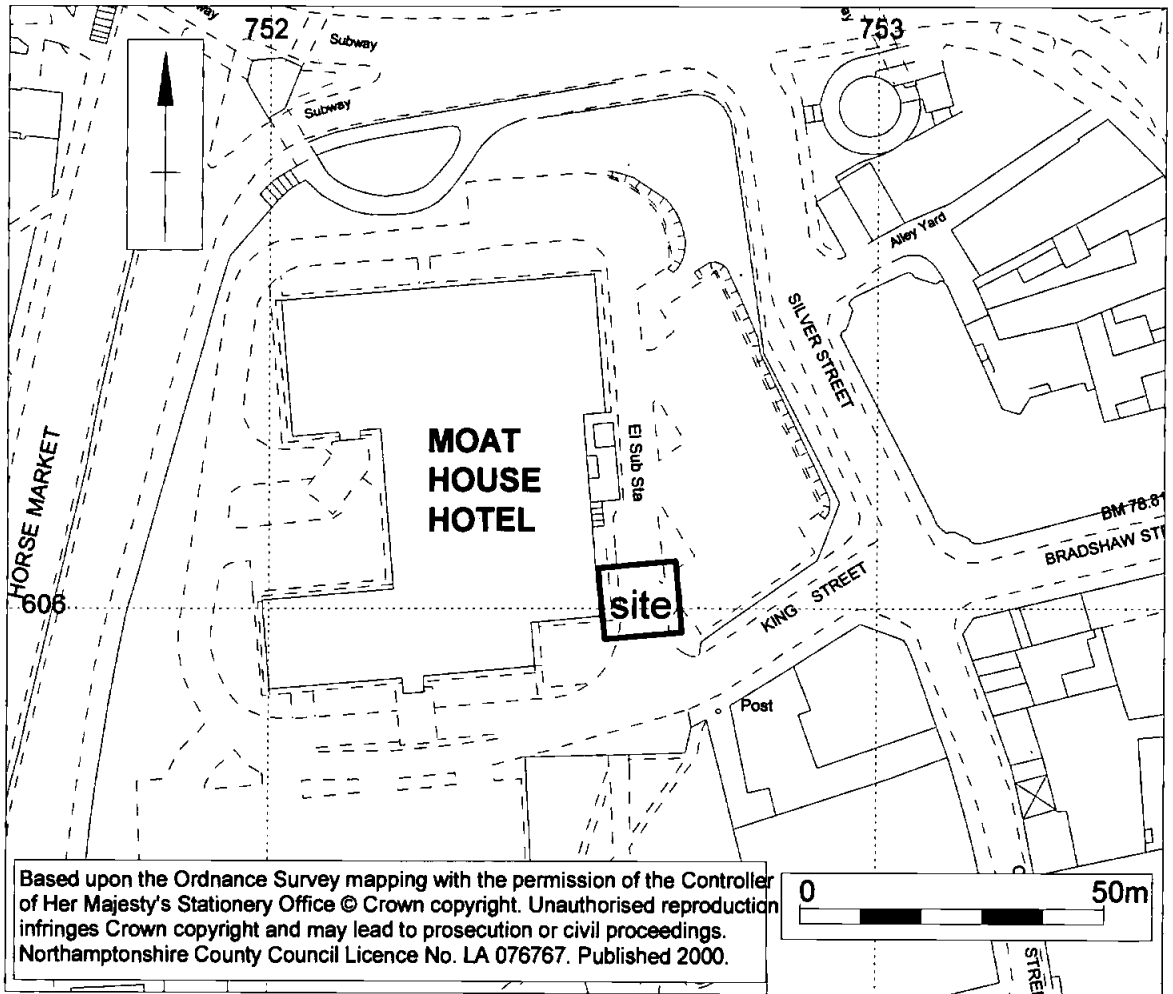
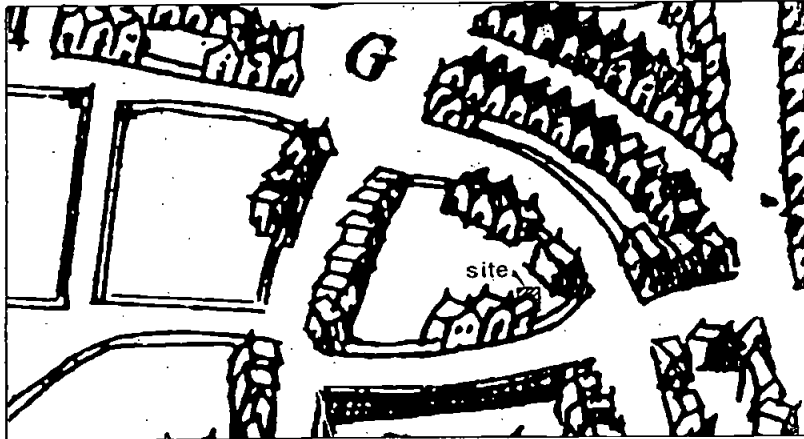


Fig 1 Site location

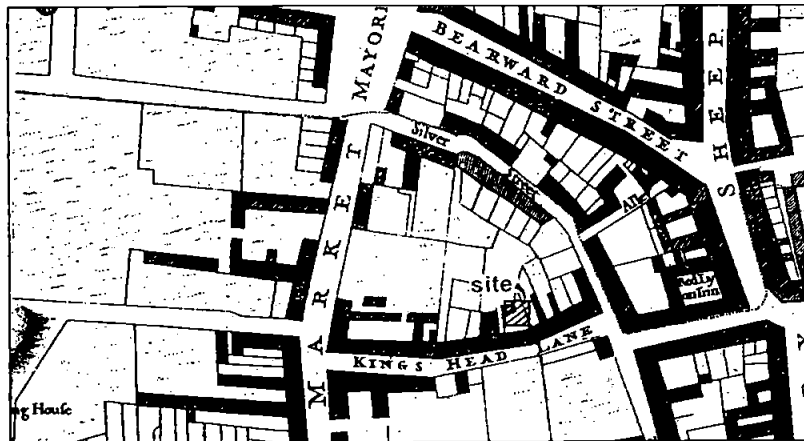
The Dominican Friary was established c 1230 and was surrendered in 1538, following the Dissolution (RCHME 1985, microfiche 340). Its position has not been established and Welsh (1998) has argued that previously suggested locations, either to the west of Horsemarket or near the corner of Gold Street and Horsemarket (RCHME 1985, fig 7) can be refuted on the evidence of 17th and 18th century property deeds held in the Northamptonshire Record Office. It is also argued by Welsh that further 17th and 18th century property deeds can be interpreted as indicating that the precinct of the former Dominican

Friary may have extended from Horsemarket eastward, with one part touching College Lane in the east. It is suggested that this included a large block of land south of King Street and also land to the north of King Street, described, in part, as a Cherry Orchard, which would include the excavated area.

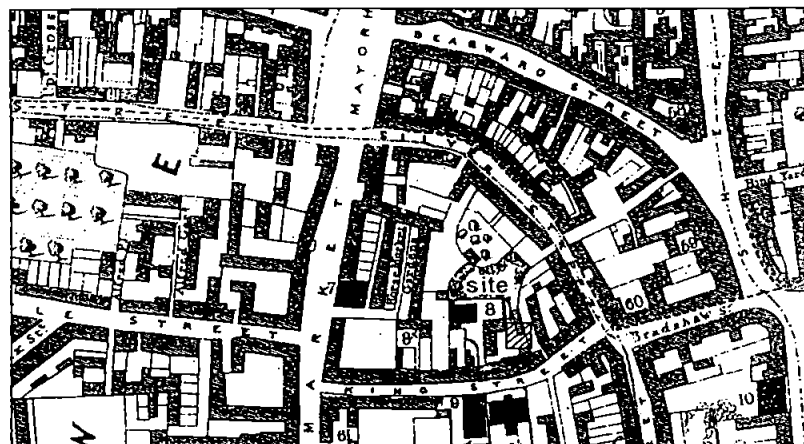
Access to the Moat House Hotel lies at the western end of the present King Street (formerly known as Kings Head Lane). This is now a cul-de-sac but, prior to the building of the hotel, it continued westward to the Horsemarket, as shown in the sequence of historic maps from 1610 onward (Fig 2).



a



b



c

Fig 2 Historic maps:
a) John Speed 1610,
b) Noble and Butlin 1746
c) Wood and Law 1847
(Northamptonshire Libraries)

The origins of the road are unknown. It may either have been a planned street within the late Saxon settlement or a product of subsequent growth in the late Saxon or medieval periods.

Speed's map of 1610 shows tenements along part of the northern side of King Street, but only to the west of the swimming pool area (Fig 2a). The northern frontage was fully developed by the middle of the 18th century (Fig 2b, Noble and Butlin's map of 1746). There were few buildings behind the frontage at this time, but one may have stood within part of the swimming pool area. Little had changed by the early 19th century (Roper and Coles map of 1807, not illustrated), but by the middle of the 19th century larger areas of the backage had been developed, including at least part of the area of the swimming pool (Fig 2c, Wood and Law's map of 1847).

By the later 19th century the area had been more extensively developed, as depicted on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887 (not illustrated). The western half of the swimming pool area was then occupied by a large hall used as a Sunday school. These buildings are also shown on the Insurance Map of April 1899 and revised versions of 1912 and 1956 (held by Northamptonshire Libraries). The former Sunday School hall was later used by St. Johns Ambulance Brigade, and buildings at the rear of No. 12 King Street, which was a shop at this time, extend into the south-eastern part of the pool area.

GEOLOGY

The natural geology is of Northampton Sand with Ironstone, which occurs at a level of around 75.00m aOD.

PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

No archaeological excavations had taken place in the immediate vicinity of the Moat House Hotel. However, during construction work on the present hotel in 1971 the sides of the excavated pit for the basement were examined and drawn, and pottery of 12th century and later dates was collected (SMR No. 1160/194/1 and /2; Mynard 1976, 137).

THE EXCAVATION

INTRODUCTION

The site evaluation comprised a test pit measuring 3.30m by 2.30m (Fig 3, trial excavation). There was extensive disturbance from post-medieval pits, a well and post-medieval to recent building levels. However, large pits of 13th century date still partly survived, with their upper levels at a depth of 1.20m below present ground level.

The full excavation area measured 13.0m E-W by 12.0m N-S, taking in the extent of the proposed deep ground disturbances for the wall foundations and the swimming pool itself. The pool building extended a further 2.5m to the north, but in this area the wall foundations were not deeply founded and lay fully within post-medieval deposits.

The stripping of the swimming pool area was carried out using a JCB working under archaeological supervision. A toothed bucket was used to remove the tarmac, kerbstones and underlying concrete foundations, while the remainder was excavated with a toothless bucket. The site was stripped to a depth of 1.1m below ground level to the north and 1.5-1.7m below ground level to the south, the differences arising from the slope of the modern surface. This involved the removal of post-medieval soil horizons and the upper parts of the post-medieval pits, wells and building levels.

Following cleaning, it could be seen that there were two areas of intact medieval or earlier deposits in the southern part of the trench, and a small area of medieval deposits in the north-western corner. The features located in the evaluation trench lay at the northern limit of excavation and were not fully re-exposed. The rest of the area comprised post-medieval walls, building levels and wells. The early deposits were examined by opening arbitrary boxes centred on the two areas of best survival in the southern part of the trench. Following the completion of this limited excavation, trenches were excavated both around the margins of the site and across the site from north-south to take the foundations for the building and the swimming pool. The observation of the cutting of these trenches confirmed the basic nature and sequence of the activity, but the depth and instability of the sides prevented any closer examination.

To the south and east of the pool area service trenches were excavated to depths of up to 2.0m below modern ground level, and records of the exposed stratigraphy were made from the trench sides.

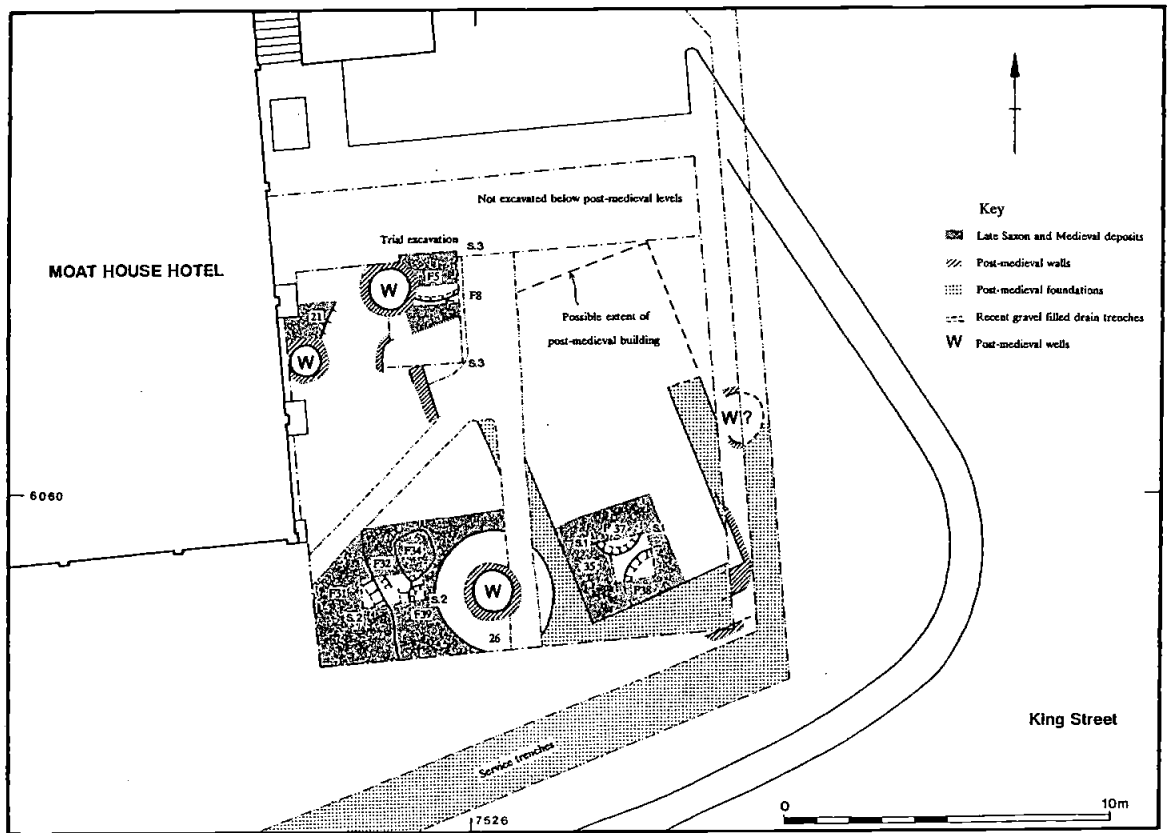


Fig 3 The excavated area, medieval and post-medieval features

LATE SAXON FEATURES

The only area of late Saxon activity that had survived undisturbed occupied a 3.0m square in the south-eastern corner of the site. It lay 1.70m below ground level, at 74.60m aOD, and was bounded to the south and west by post-medieval wall foundations, to the east by ash and cinder cellar fill, and to the north by loams containing stone rubble from the same building. A 1.30m square test pit was excavated in the centre of this area (Fig 3).

Undisturbed natural of clean sand and shattered ironstone was overlain by 350mm of brown sandy subsoil (Fig 4, S1, 36). Above this there was a 150mm thick layer of light brown, friable sand containing some ironstone chips and sparse charcoal flecking (35). It contained four sherds of St. Neots type ware and one of Northampton ware, suggesting a probable 10th century date.

Two circular pits (F37 and F38) were cut into layer (35), although they had not been defined on the surface due to the similarity of the respective soils. Pit (F37) was at least 1.6m in diameter by 1.0m deep. The steep-sided lower profile and the eroded upper edges indicate that it had been left open to silt naturally. The lower fill was a light brown silty sand containing sparse ironstone chips (41), and the upper fill was a light greyish brown sand containing ironstone chips and some charcoal flecks

(37); it was slightly greyer and more charcoal flecked than layer (35). Pit (F38) was similar in form and fill, but was only partially excavated to a depth of 0.60m.

These pits produced four sherds of St. Neots type ware and three sherds of Northampton ware. This, and their distinctive leached fills, derived by erosion from an early soil horizon, suggests that they are most likely to be 10th century in date (AD 900-975).

The earliest activity within the complex sequence of intercut pits in the south-western corner of the site was also of a relatively early date. A steep-sided pit, in excess of 0.70m deep (Fig 4, S2, F40), was filled with steeply tipping, yellow brown and light grey brown sands (40 and 43). These fills were sealed by a layer of light brown sand (30), denoting a period of soil accumulation or deposition. This layer produced eight sherds of Northampton ware and two sherds of St. Neots type ware, but the presence of a single sherd of later style St. Neots type ware indicates an 11th century date (AD 1000-1100).

MEDIEVAL FEATURES

Areas of intact medieval deposits lay in the south-western and north-western corners of the site.

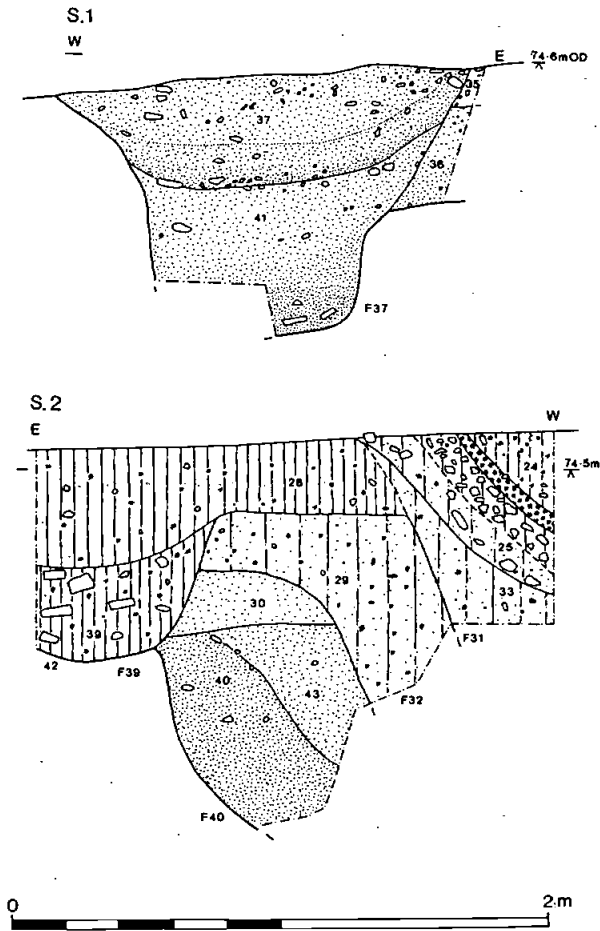


Fig 4 Sections of late Saxon and medieval pits

To the south-west the medieval deposits lay 1.50m below ground level. The earliest pit cutting layer (30) was steep-sided and filled with light greyish brown charcoal flecked loam (Fig 4, F32). It contained a small assemblage of St. Neots type ware and shelly coarsewares which date it to the earlier 12th century (AD 1100-1150). A later pit (F39) was sub-square in plan, steep-sided and 0.55m deep. The fill of grey brown clayey loam contained small pieces of ironstone and moderate charcoal inclusions.

These pits were sealed by a 300mm thick soil horizon of grey brown sandy loam (28) containing small pieces of ironstone and moderate charcoal flecking. The pottery from this layer is dominated by shelly coarsewares dating to the mid-13th century (AD 1225-1250).

The next stage of pit digging appears to have been on a much larger scale. There was a near linear eastern edge to a large, steep-sided pit (Figs 3 and 4, F31). The steeply tipping upper fills (24 and 25) indicate that it was much deeper than the 0.70m excavated. The fills comprised brown loams with varying densities and

sizes of ironstone fragments, and a single well defined layer of dense charcoal pieces. The pottery assemblage was again dominated by shelly coarsewares, although this must include residual material from the earlier pits, but small quantities of later ceramics, including a single sherd of imported Pingsdorf-type ware, date the feature to the later 13th century (AD 1250-1300).

The two medieval pits partially excavated in the trial excavation (Fig 3, F5 and F8) were similarly dated to the 13th century (Chapman 1998). Pit (F5) was excavated to a depth of 0.70m, and its near vertical, partly undercut sides and the shallow curvature to the exposed southern edge suggested that it was several metres in diameter. Within the subsidence hollow over this pit there was a laid surface of ironstone slabs on a bed of clean sand. It included a fragment from a millstone, and a small pottery assemblage from around the stones was of 14th century date.

In the north-western corner of the trench there was a small area of surviving medieval soils (Fig 3, 21). A small pottery assemblage recovered from the surface of this layer is dated to the later 13th century (1250-1300).

EARLY POST MEDIEVAL ACTIVITY

The medieval deposits were sealed by a brown friable loam, up to 0.40m thick, which appeared to be a "garden" soil. The only dating evidence was a clay tobacco-pipe bowl dated to the mid-17th century.

An upper soil horizon, a grey-brown compact loam, flecked with charcoal and mortar, and a pit cutting this layer, produced substantial quantities of pottery dating to the late 17th to mid-18th century. This denotes a marked intensification in domestic activity in the area, no doubt coinciding with development of the frontage onto King Street.

POST MEDIEVAL BUILDINGS

From the mid-18th century the eastern half of the site was occupied by a building measuring c 11.0m north-south by c 7.0m east-west (Fig 3). The southern wall, in ironstone, was still standing to over 1.0m high and was sealed by recent levelling layers, as was a stub of the eastern wall. To the north the walls had been demolished and the entire area was covered with a layer of mixed loams, ironstone and brick rubble. The depth of these deposits indicated that they were filling a former cellar at the rear of the building.

Both faces of the southern wall were whitewashed, and to its south there was a narrow, internal passage, 0.85m wide, with a further, whitewashed ironstone wall in the very corner of the excavated area. The passage was filled with loose stone and brick demolition rubble. More of this same building was encountered in the excavation of a service trench to the immediate south, where the loose fill of brick and stone rubble indicated the presence of a cellar under the frontage.

This building can be identified as No. 12 King Street. It appears on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887, and on the 1912 revision of the Insurance Map of 1899 the building is listed as a shop. It had been demolished prior to the compilation of the 1956 revision of the Insurance Map.

Of the Sunday school building (latterly the St. John's Ambulance Brigade offices), which dated to the late 19th century

and occupied the north-western part of the site, no trace was found even in the machine removal of the upper levels of the archaeology.

In machine excavation for the provision of the new hotel access off King Street, to the east of the new swimming pool, the contractors reported encountering a backfilled cellar with tiled walls. This would be the cellar of the former Mitre Inn.

POST MEDIEVAL WELLS AND PITS

From the mid-18th century the western half of the site was evidently an open yard (Fig 3).

The three wells were all lined with courses of roughly squared ironstone blocks. The two to the north had been backfilled and were not excavated to any depth. Their shafts were 1.0m and 1.3m in diameter. One had some upper courses in brick and the other lay beneath loose brick rubble, suggesting that the upper parts of both wells had been rebuilt in brick in the 19th century. The well to the south had been constructed within a pit 3.7m in diameter (Fig 3, 26). At the time of excavation the shaft was open to a depth of some 5.0-6.0m, and had a capping of arched brickwork. The top of the shaft was 1.20m in diameter but it expanded below this to a diameter of 1.8-2.0m.

In the trial excavation a stone-lined pit lay to the south of the well, but was partly cut away by later features, including a brick-lined drain (Chapman 1998, fig 8). In the area between the three wells there was a "garden" soil of medium greyish brown loam, but with areas of grey ashy silts and scattered disordered ironstone rubble suggesting the presence of a series of pits, although these were not investigated. To the south there was a near linear boundary with the area of intact medieval deposits, and a concentration of ironstone rubble might suggest that this a foundation trench for a former boundary or yard wall.

THE FINDS

THE SAXON AND MEDIEVAL POTTERY

by Paul Blinkhorn

INTRODUCTION

The Saxon and medieval pottery assemblage comprised 219 sherds with a total weight of 2678g. The group comprised pottery that is typical of the late Saxon and medieval periods in Northampton and its environs.

FABRICS

The pottery was quantified using the chronology and coding system of the Northamptonshire County Ceramic Type-Series (CTS). The fabric codes of the Northampton (NDC) type-series are in parentheses. The pottery types which occurred at the site were as follows:

100: (T11) St. Neots Ware,	AD850-1100.	16 sherds, 103g.
102: (W2) Thetford-type Ware,	AD850-1100.	1 sherd, 11g.
205: (X11) Stamford ware,	AD850-1250.	1 sherd, 9g.
130: (W1) Northampton Ware,	AD900-11th C.	12 sherds, 67g.
200: (T12) St. Neots Ware,	AD1000-1200.	14 sherds, 117g.

111: (Y5) Pingsdorf-type Ware,	11th-13thC.	1 sherd, 8g.
302: (V3) Reduced Sandy Coarseware,	AD1100-1400.	7 sherds, 103g.
330: (T2) Shelly Coarseware,	AD1100-1400.	111 sherds, 1,433g.
360: (W73) Banbury Ware,	AD1100-1400.	3 sherds, 53g.
319: (T6) Lyveden/Stanio 'A' ware,	AD1150-1400.	28 sherds, 448g.
331: (X12) Developed Stamford ware,	L12th-E13thC.	1 sherd, 2g.
324: (W14) Brill/Boarstall Ware,	AD1200-1600.	2 sherds, 10g.
320: (T22) Lyveden/Stanio 'B' ware,	AD1225-1400.	11 sherds, 145g.
329: (W18) Potterspurys ware,	AD1250-1600.	9 sherds, 144g.
322: (V10) Lyveden/Stanio 'D' ware,	AD1400-?1500.	1 sherd, 4g.

All these wares are common finds in Northampton, with the exception of the Pingsdorf ware. This Rhenish ware is a rare find in the town, most likely due to Northampton's inland location. It is a far more common find in ports and coastal towns such as Southampton and London (D Brown pers comm; L Blackmore pers comm). Its occurrence at this site cannot be taken as a signifier of status, as there is evidence from elsewhere that suggests that imported pottery was not held in any more regard than locally-produced types during the medieval period (Brown 1997). The fact that finds of the ware in Northamptonshire are limited to the county town is, however, a reflection of Northampton's importance as a market centre in the earlier medieval period.

CHRONOLOGY

A few groups comprised a very small number of earlier sherds, and on archaeological grounds they are seen to represent the sparse survival of a phase of 10th century activity. However, most of the recovered activity is no earlier than c AD1000.

The chronology of the medieval pottery is typical of that from the more marginal areas of the town, suggesting a peak of activity between the 12th century and the later 13th century, followed by a rapid decline during the 14th century.

VESSELS

The small size of the assemblage meant that detailed analysis of the vessel types present was not attempted. Those that could be identified suggested that a typical range of Saxo-Norman and medieval forms were present. The group comprised mainly jars, including a fragment of a cylindrical jar, or 'Top Hat Pot', a specialist medieval cooking vessel type which are common in the south-east midlands. The rest of the assemblage comprised a small number of jugs and bowls, and a single bodysherd from a large storage jar with thumb-impressed applied strips. A full profile of a large shelly coarseware (F330) bowl was also noted.

THE POST MEDIEVAL POTTERY

by Iain Soden

The post-medieval pottery assemblages derived from the trial excavation have been dated on the basis of the overall balance of

the fabric types represented, and they have not been quantified to the CTS fabric codes. The material includes groups ranging in date from the 17th to 20th centuries.

THE MILLSTONE

by Andy Chapman

The millstone was in a coarse sandstone, most probably millstone grit (not illustrated). It represents a quarter of a lower, or bottom, stone with a diameter of 700mm. The grinding surface was dimpled and had groups of parallel radial grooves. Blackening on the grinding surface indicates that the stone had been reused as a hearth base, and the blocking of the rynd hole with a trimmed cylindrical stone held in place by a hard black substance, possibly pitch, probably occurred at this time. Stratigraphically, the stone may be dated as early as the 14th century and is certainly no later than 17th century in date.

CLAY TOBACCO PIPES

by Tora Hylton

A clay tobacco-pipe bowl from the "garden" soil layer is an early type with a small bulbous bowl rouletted around the lip. It conforms to Oswald's type G5, dated to the mid-17th century, c 1640-1660 (Oswald 1975, 37).

DISCUSSION

The excavations were limited in scope as a result of the extensive damage caused by post-medieval buildings, wells and pits. However, it was still possible to characterise the broad nature of the use of this area between the 10th and 14th centuries, and to confirm the nature of the post-medieval to recent occupation.

Direct evidence for late Saxon activity survived in a very limited area and comprised two pits, dated by small quantities of St. Neots type ware and Northampton ware to the 10th century. A similar pit of 11th century date lay to the west, where it had been truncated by later medieval pits. It is difficult to provide any detailed interpretation of such a sparse survival, but the very existence of these pits does attest to some form of late Saxon activity in this area of the town. They may have been pits lying at no great distance from associated houses, perhaps in a similar fashion to the extensively excavated area of late Saxon occupation at Chalk Lane in the west of the town, which comprised timber buildings, sunken-featured buildings and associated pits (Williams and Shaw 1981).

The significance of this evidence for the broader understanding of late Saxon Northampton is that the

site lies close to the north-eastern corner of the late Saxon town, as postulated from the theory of the double street system. This theory has formed the backdrop for the archaeological interpretation of the development of the town, but its validity has recently been challenged (Welsh 1997). The excavated pits can therefore be seen as providing clear evidence of late Saxon occupation of the area, and they therefore lend some additional support to the double street theory, unless it is to be argued that they represent late Saxon activity lying beyond the 10th century defences.

Pits were also being dug in the earlier 12th century on a similar scale, perhaps suggesting that there had been little change in the use of this area for domestic settlement. However, around the middle of the 13th century there was a major change in the scale of the pit digging. This event seems to be dated quite precisely; a layer sealing the earlier pits is dated to the mid-13th century (AD1225-1250) while the fills of the large pit in the south-western corner of the site are dated to the second half of the century (AD1250-1300). This pit was near vertically sided, and clearly much deeper than the 0.80m to which it was excavated, and the pits in the trial excavation to the north also appeared to be of similar proportions. Although only partially investigated, all of these pits do seem most likely to have been deep and extensive quarry pits most probably excavated to obtain ironstone for building works.

The nature of the buildings for which this stone was obtained is unknown. The mid-13th century date does closely coincide with the foundation of the Dominican Friary in c 1230 and, as it has been argued that the site may lie within the precinct of the Friary (Welsh 1998), it is possible that the quarry pits provided stone for its buildings. However, there is no evidence to provide any more direct connection and it is also likely that contemporary secular houses of substance would also have been in local ironstone.

The quarry pits appear to have been infilled by the 14th century, and the presence of a laid stone surface, incorporating part of a millstone, over one pit suggests that there may have been some nearby, but unlocated, building. By at least the mid-17th century an homogeneous soil horizon, probably a "garden" soil, appears to have covered most of the site, indicating that the area was open ground with minimal domestic usage. This is also consistent with the map evidence, which indicates that there had

been only minimal building along the King Street frontage by 1610 (Fig 2a). The evidence for the greatly increased incidence of the deposition of domestic debris from the late 17th century onward is also consistent with the historic map evidence, which shows a steady increase in the density of buildings along the frontage, with subsequent expansion onto the backage (Fig 2b and 2c). The presence of the wells and pits demonstrates the domestic character of the associated courtyards set behind the frontage and between these rear ranges.

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