

Archaeological investigation of land adjacent to 'The Cottons', Rockingham

by

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with contributions by

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SUMMARY

In advance of the erection of several dwellings, near the northern limit of the village of Rockingham, a programme of archaeological investigation was undertaken. The site extended from Main Street in the west to a curving lane, 'The Cottons', in the east. The earliest evidence for occupation of the site was a possible prehistoric pit containing an animal burial associated with flint artefacts. A small sherd of late Bronze Age - early Iron Age pottery was also recovered from the site. An indication of Roman activity in the vicinity was implied by the presence of a small assemblage of residual pottery, recovered from the fills of later features.

In the medieval period the eastern part of the site was within an arable field, indicated by ridge and furrow earthworks. A ditch separated this area from the land parcel bounding Main Street in the west. In the western land parcel perpendicular ditches with a slightly diverging alignment to the present land boundaries were identified. Pottery and animal bone recovered from the recent northern boundary ditch indicated activity in the vicinity.

The majority of the archaeological features identified in the western area were post-medieval or later in date. Most of this area had been disturbed by landscaping associated with construction of a Victorian gas works. However, beneath the disturbance traces of at least one substantial stone building were revealed. This would appear to have been erected in the 17th-18th centuries, a similar date to other buildings in the vicinity. The building, which was probably domestic in function, is not depicted on any surviving historic maps. Traces of two wells, and walls near the street frontage in the western part of the site were also revealed. Until recently the western land parcel was a farm yard, whilst the paddock in the east preserved the ridge and furrow earthworks.

INTRODUCTION

As part of a planning application to Corby Borough Council in 1999 for the erection of sheltered accommodation on an area of land located at the northern limit of Rockingham, Northamptonshire Heritage advised that an evaluation was necessary to determine the archaeological potential of the site. In plan the site extended from Main Street in the west to a sinuous lane known as 'The Cottons' in

the east (Fig 1), centred on SP 8665 9187. Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS) undertook the evaluation which comprised desk-based assessment, earthwork survey and trial excavation (BCAS 1999).

As part of the planning permission, Corby Borough Council required that an archaeological recording action be undertaken. This comprised a combination of open area excavation in advance of construction and monitoring of construction work in less archaeologically sensitive areas. The archaeological investigation was undertaken by Albion Archaeology (formerly BCAS) between early November 2002 and mid-April 2003. The project was funded by Deejak Builders (Rushden) Ltd on behalf of Orbit Housing Association. Albion would like to acknowledge the assistance provided by Mr S Titmuss and Martin Woodward of Deejak, and the Historic Environment Team Leader for Northamptonshire, Mr Myk Flitcroft in particular. The investigation project was managed by Gary Edmondson with the phases of site investigation supervised by Ian Beswick, Tracy Preece and Julian Watters, assisted by Mick Garside, David Ingham, Adam Lee, Chris Mallows, James Pixley and Chris Thatcher. Jackie Wells examined the ceramic and non-ceramic artefacts. The animal bone was studied by Dr Mark Maltby. The project was under the overall management of Drew Shotliff. Joan Lightning produced all the illustrations. This article summarises the evidence contained in the full report which is available in the site archive (Project code COT 847).

BACKGROUND

Approximately 0.12 hectares of land was investigated as part of the archaeological recording action. At the time of the investigation the site consisted of two land parcels, comprising a disused farmyard in the west and a paddock to the east, which contains ridge and furrow earthworks. At c60m above Ordnance Datum, the site is situated on the basal portion of the very steep southern side of the valley of the River Welland, the ground sloping gently down to the north and east.

In the Victorian period the western part of the site was dramatically remodelled, with a raised terrace in the south and a lowering of the ground level in the north. This work was associated with the construction of a gas works in the area immediately south of the site.

The available aerial photographs clearly define the



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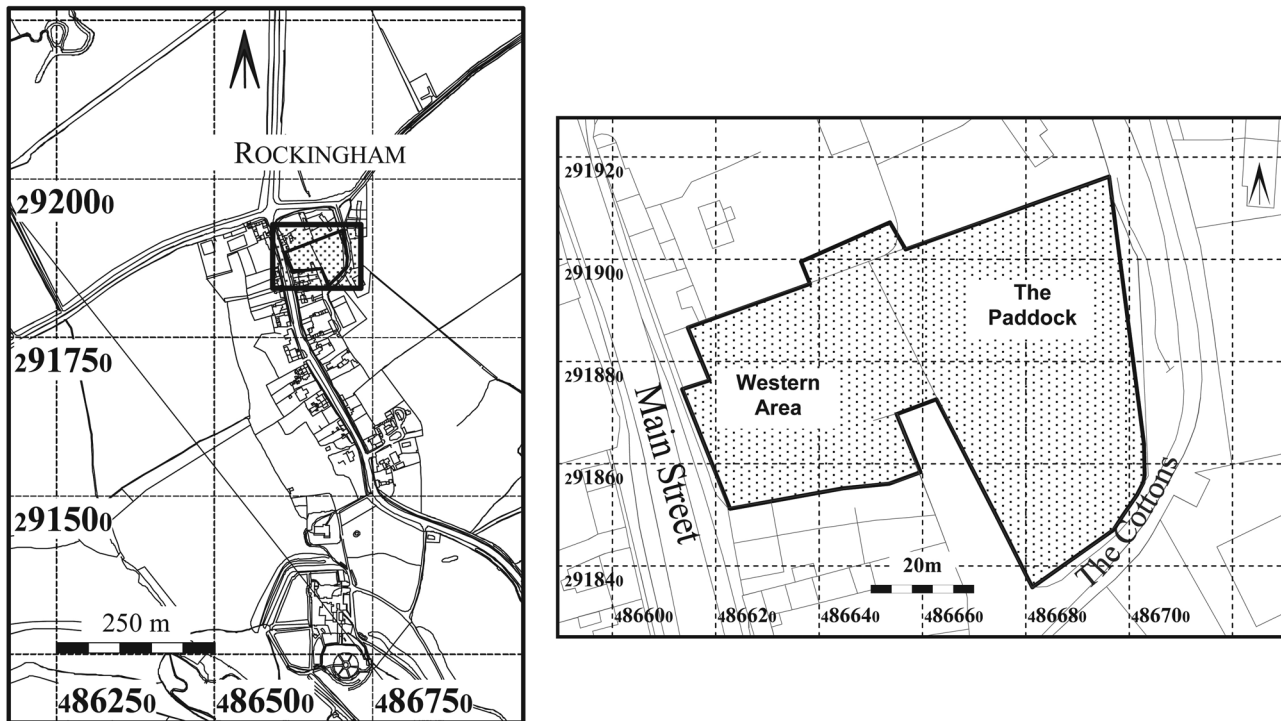


Fig 1 Site location

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pattern of medieval fields in the area adjacent to Rockingham. Generally these follow the slope of the ground down towards the river to the north. Main Street has a sinuous form suggesting that it follows the pattern of the medieval fields. The ridge and furrow earthworks in the paddock area have a similar alignment to those visible in the area upslope to the south and in the area to the east, suggesting that originally, they may have been elements of one field.

The majority of the available maps for the area date from the 19th century. However, the Mansell map of 1615 provides a view of the town, with market prior to the Civil War, and the loss of this status.

This map defines one road entering and leaving the settlement, though dividing into two south of the castle. The eastern route skirts the backs of properties, and appears to correspond to 'The Cottons' in the north. The southern part of this route survives in the landscape as an intermittent hollow-way. Beyond the junction with Gretton Road, the well defined continuation survives as a deep hollow-way, offset to the west of 'The Cottons', avoiding an enclosure to the east.

The western routeway corresponds to Main Street and would appear to be the most significant, as it is lined by buildings, with linear plots of land extending to the rear (Fig 2, Map A). Several boundaries shown on the 1615 map cut across the medieval fields, indicating enclosure of the former fields.

The site is shown as part of a large block of land delimited by routeways (Fig 2, Map A). This land parcel is widest in the north, adjacent to Gretton Road, tapering in

width to the south. Four subdivisions of the land block are defined, with no buildings present within the plot which encompasses the majority of the site (Fig 2, Map A). This block of land is relatively sparsely developed compared to the adjacent areas, with evidence of a building situated south of the site. The land to the east is identified on the map as 'cowpasture', indicating a change from arable cultivation in the medieval period.

The next available map dates to 1806 (Fig 2, Map B). This indicates that in the intervening period considerable building had occurred in the northern part of the settlement. However, the site only contained one building, which corresponds to the present ruined barn. Unlike the adjacent areas, there were no buildings fronting Main Street. The site had undergone subdivision with several boundaries depicted. In the second quarter of the 19th century, there was some encroachment of buildings into the southern margin of the Main Street frontage. Further subdivision of the western area occurred. By 1886 the gas works with associated circular gasometer, had been established to the south of the site, with the line of the brick-faced terrace clearly defined (Fig 2, Map D). This wall appears to utilise a boundary depicted on an 1856 map (Fig 2, Map C).

GEOLOGY

The geology of the site is characterised as Charmouth Mudstone Formation by the British Geological Survey.



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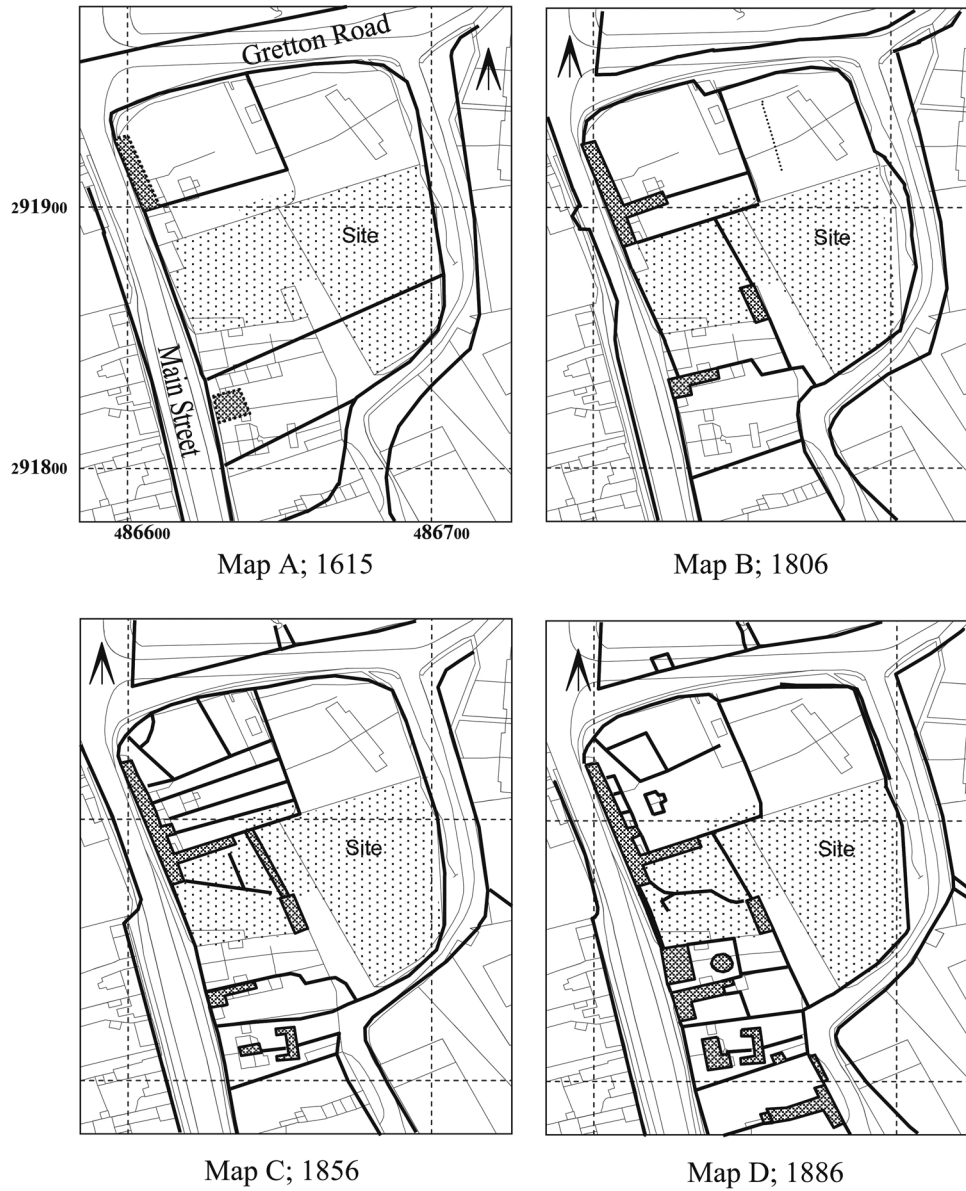


Fig 2 Transcription of historic map information onto Ordnance Survey base
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PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The Northamptonshire Sites and Monuments Record identify numerous sites of historic and archaeological interest in Rockingham, including the former royal castle. The known archaeological sites mainly belong to the medieval and post-medieval periods, though occupation in earlier periods is suspected.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

In early 1999, Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS - subsequently renamed Albion Archaeology) evaluated the site (BCAS 1999). This revealed significant post-medieval disturbance in the western area (Fig 3).

Fragments of undated stone wall were exposed on the western margin of the site adjacent to Main Street, with one pit of possible medieval date further to the east. A second, possibly prehistoric pit, contained several worked flints and animal bone. This was truncated by a medieval boundary ditch, apparently separating the western land parcel from the paddock to the east, which contained traces of ridge and furrow cultivation. These earthworks were surveyed as part of the evaluation. Trial excavation of the paddock revealed thick deposits above the undisturbed geological stratum.

The archaeological recording action involved open area excavation in the western land parcel, with a watching brief to monitoring of stripping of the access route and insertion of services through the paddock in the east. A



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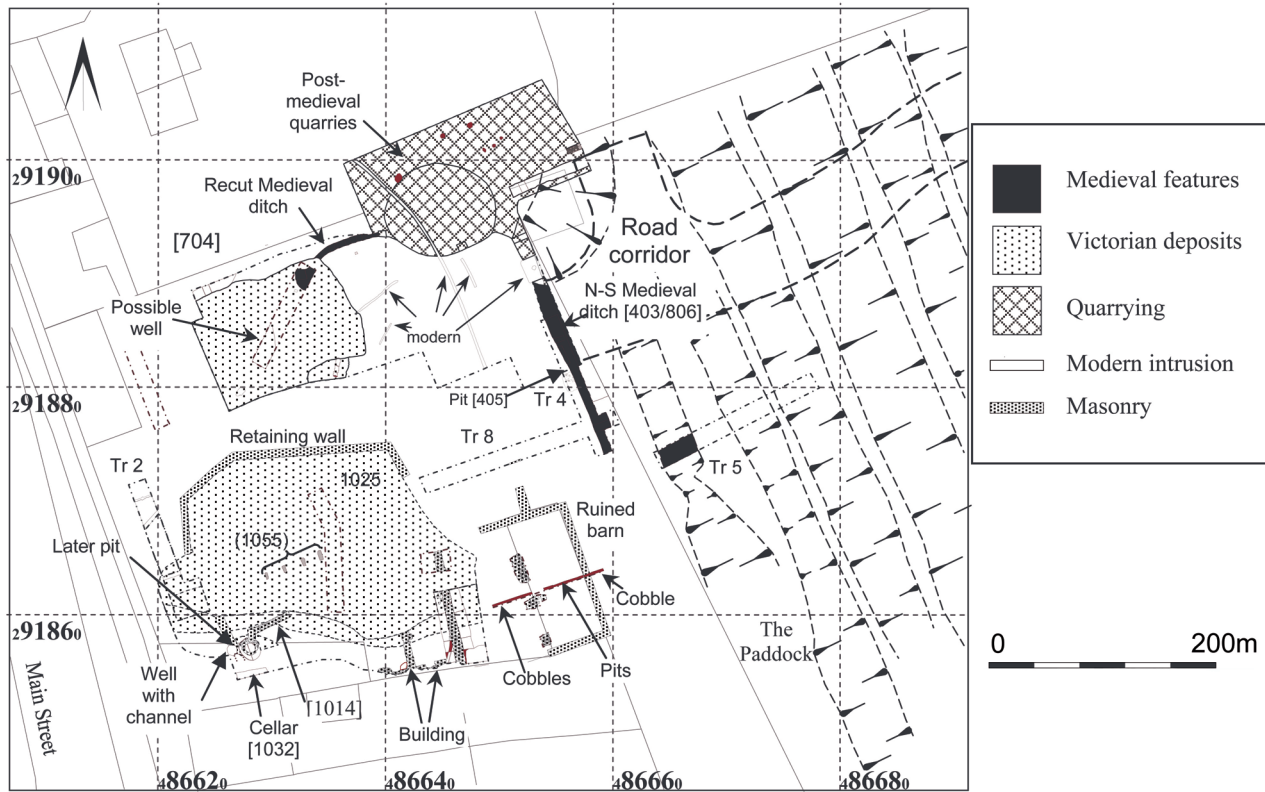


Fig 3 Selected features identified during the investigation

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watching brief also monitored the insertion of services along adjacent roads. In the following summary, the features will be discussed spatially and chronologically. Datable artefacts will be discussed within the relevant chronological period, irrespective of whether they were residual in later deposits. In all areas, the overburden was removed by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, operating under archaeological supervision.

PREHISTORIC

The evaluation identified a substantial pit, 405, adjacent to the boundary between the two land parcels (Fig 3). In plan the feature was roughly rectangular, 1.5m long north-west to south-east by at least 0.95m wide, with a square northern limit and a curving southern extent. The pit was at least 0.75m deep, continuing below the limit of excavation during the evaluation. The upper fill, 406, was mid red-brown silty clay, 0.72m thick. This deposit contained three flint blade cores and a blade. Below this deposit was mid greyish-green clayey silt, 407, at least 0.03m thick, which was exposed in the central and northern part of the pit. This contained two discernable clusters of articulated animal bone, with a skull located against the northern edge of the pit. After recording, the bones were left *in situ*. The contrast in colour between the fills and the adjacent undisturbed geological stratum suggests that the pit fills were the product of deliberate infilling.

As this feature was not exposed by ground disturbance associated with the development, following consultation with the Northamptonshire Historic Environment Team Leader, it was decided to leave the feature *in situ*.

An undiagnostic, abraded sherd (13g) of coarse flint tempered late Bronze Age/early Iron Age pottery was recovered from colluviums, 1201, within the paddock. A flint core and a flint flake were recovered from later deposits.

ROMAN

Roman activity is sparsely represented by three abraded pottery sherds of 3rd-4th century date. Two derive from the fill of a possible post-medieval quarry in the western area, and a third was residual within the northern recut of the medieval ditch. Diagnostic forms comprise a small jar and flanged bowl, deriving from Oxfordshire and the Nene Valley (one and two sherds respectively).

MEDIEVAL

The evidence comprised ditches situated to the margins of the western area, which had alignments similar to the present land divisions (Fig 3). There was, however, no indication of any associated activity within the western land parcel. In contrast the eastern parcel seems to have originally been part of a larger block of land, as indicated by the continuation of the ridge and furrow earthworks beyond the present boundaries.

BOUNDARIES

In the western land parcel, a recut slightly curving ditch situated towards the northern margin of the area, was at least 6m long and generally c0.55m wide, being truncated to the west and stopping at the limit of excavation to the north. The more substantial form of the boundary was characterised by an asymmetrical profile up to 0.21m deep.

The ditch fill was mottled grey-brown silty clay with frequent orange-brown patches. The nature of this deposit may suggest that it formed in wet conditions. A total of 122g of pottery was recovered from the fills of the recut ditch. It comprised predominantly Lyveden/Stanion ware of later 12th–14th century date. A sherd of Roman pottery and over 400g of fragmented animal bone was also recovered from the ditch. These finds are comparable to the assemblage from pit, 704, identified in the evaluation (Fig 3). It is possible that the pit may have actually been either associated with or was even a continuation of the ditch, rather than a discrete feature.

The animal bone assemblage from this ditch, which had a combined weight of 433g, was subject to full analysis. Species identified include cattle, sheep/goat, pig, horse, cat and dog. The assemblage consisted of both of species that were contributors to the meat diet (cattle, sheep and pig) and other domestic animals rarely consumed by humans in this period (dog, cat and horse). This admixing indicates that the ditch was probably used as a depository for both food waste and the carcasses of pets and working animals. However, the disarticulated and fragmentary nature of the bones together with the evidence for scavenging suggests that much of the material was originally dumped elsewhere, rather than indicating primary disposal into the ditch.

The form and alignment of the recut medieval ditches diverged slightly from the present boundaries, suggesting a degree of realignment. A significant quantity of occupation debris was recovered from the ditch, though no associated features were revealed. This may indicate that the site was peripheral to the main focus of activity, possibly providing a suitable place to dispose of waste.

Adjacent to the present boundary between the two land parcels, the evaluation revealed a north-south aligned ditch, 403/806, orientated roughly north-south (Fig 3). In section the ditch was up to 1.5m wide and 0.4m deep, with a steep western side and a wide flat base. The cut was filled by reddish-brown silty clay, which contained two sherds (15g) of pottery dated to the 12th-14th centuries and small quantities of animal bone and oyster shell. Later quarrying had removed the northern continuation of this ditch.

MEDIEVAL FIELD

Within the paddock, a series of well defined parallel ridges and associated furrows were visible, orientated north-north-west to south-south-east. A minimum of six furrows were present within the paddock. The spacing between the crests of the ridges varied from 6-8m. To the southern margin of the paddock, the earthworks faded out, with no obvious headland, suggesting that the southern

continuations had been truncated by the south-western element of 'The Cottons'. In the north-west corner of the paddock, the pattern of furrows was disturbed by later quarrying.

Two trenches (Tr 5 and Tr 6) were opened during the evaluation to investigate the furrows. These indicated that associated deposits extended up to 1.1m below the present ground level, with a sinuous basal element of a plough scar visible against the undisturbed geological stratum. A small artefact assemblage was recovered from this area comprising residual material and medieval pottery.

Monitoring of ground reduction associated with the road corridor confirmed the soil profile recorded in the evaluation with topsoil and subsoil having a combined thickness of up to 0.44m, above an undifferentiated red-orange brown slightly silty clay, 1201, between 0.4 and 0.7m thick, with occasional small fragments of ironstones and flint. This material is considered to be a colluvial deposit derived from cultivation in the area upslope to the south. The undifferentiated nature of the deposit suggests that it was constantly mixed during formation, probably due to ongoing cultivation. A small quantity of medieval pottery was recovered from these deposits. These furrows were orientated down the slope, probably for drainage, though this would have also encouraged the movement of soil downwards to the north.

The Mansell map of 1615 defines a relatively small L-shaped land parcel which includes the paddock. This was bounded to the east and south by a routeway – corresponding to 'The Cottons' (Fig 2, Map A). However, if this process of soil accumulation is correctly interpreted, the downslope movement of soil was not apparently impeded by the routeway, suggesting that the routeway was a later encroachment into a former field.

MEDIEVAL FINDS

Artefacts dating to the medieval period comprise a small assemblage of pottery and animal bone, recovered mainly from features in the western land parcel. A total of forty-five sherds were recovered from medieval features, with a total weight of 738g, of which seven sherds were residual. The sherds were generally small, having an average weight of 16g, exhibiting varying degrees of abrasion. Sherds recovered are mainly of local origin, the majority being of Lyveden/Stanion type, datable to the late 12th-14th centuries. Shell tempered wares of Harrold/Olney Hyde type and quartz tempered sherds of Potterspury, Oxford and Stamford ware, the latter a Lincolnshire import, are also present. Forms are mainly jars and glazed jugs. Late medieval reduced and oxidised wares constitute the remainder of the assemblage. A single kiln site producing reduced wares is known in Northamptonshire at Higham Ferrers (Northamptonshire Heritage 1996, 38). Most of the medieval pottery derived from features in the western land parcel, although all contained less than 100g of pottery. A small, assemblage (10 sherds, weighing 98g) was recovered from the paddock. Excluding the animal bone from the northern boundary ditch, discussed above, a total of 214g was recovered from medieval features on the site, mostly from the paddock.



POST-MEDIEVAL

The majority of features revealed during the archaeological investigations are dated to this period, based on artefactual and stratigraphic data, with the western land parcel being the focus of activity.

In the Victorian period the topography of the western land parcel was altered dramatically, severely disturbing earlier remains. This involved the creation of a raised terrace in the south of the land parcel, whilst reducing the level of the northern area. This activity was probably associated with the former gasworks, situated immediately to the south of the site (Fig 2, Map D). The terrace consisted of a series of deposits which were retained behind a brick-faced wall. Large stones, reused from earlier structures, were utilised to form the core of the wall. Within the backfilled deposits, a series of large horizontal stone slabs forming a north-east to south-west alignment were exposed (1055, Fig 3). The regular spacing and isolated nature of the slabs suggests that they were elements of the base for a wheelbarrow run, associated with the infilling of the cavity. The retaining wall may follow an earlier boundary (Fig 2, Map C).

To the north, a roughly rectangular area, extending at least 13.5m east-west by at least 10m wide, had been disturbed by excavation of a cavity. Artefacts recovered from the deposit indicate a late 18th to 19th century date. It is likely that this was associated with the creation of the terrace to the south.

BUILDING

Extending from the southern margin of the western land parcel, were the severely truncated stone footings of a probable domestic building. The surviving footings extended approximately 10m north-north-west to south-south-east by at least 8m. The eastern wall was most substantial, 0.8m wide comprising a rubble core with ironstone facing, set in a wide construction trench (Fig 4, 1004/1003). This would appear to define the eastern extent of the building. The footings appear to have been dug into a slope, with the ground rising to the south, as the northern continuation of the footing was considerable deeper. Approximately 4m west of the gable wall was a less substantial parallel wall, which is considered to be an internal partition. At the southern limit of the investigation a perpendicular wall was revealed, having a slightly divergent alignment to the present boundary wall. Traces of an internal stone surface were identified in the west. Victorian disturbance had removed the western and northern continuation of the building. Associated artefacts were scarce, with 89g of pottery being recovered, ranging in date from medieval to post-medieval, with the latest sherd dating to the 17th -18th centuries. A fragment of stone roof tile was also recovered.

This building was probably similar in appearance and date to buildings to the south-west, which line Main Street. It is not depicted on any of the historic maps consulted. The contrasting alignment to the barn, situated approximately 6m further east, indicates that they were not built at the same time.

OTHER STRUCTURAL FEATURES

A short distance to the east of the building, on a slightly contrasting alignment was a ruined barn. At the time of the investigation, three sides of the barn were standing, with the western long wall not surviving above ground level (Fig 3). The structure had undergone considerable modification, with evidence for a brick structure being added to the north. Originally the barn would appear to have had opposed narrow entrances which were cobbled, with cobbling extending parallel to the long axis of the barn. Within the barn a series of shallow pits were defined. No artefacts were recovered from the fills and the purpose of these pits is uncertain. Subsequent settling of the fills preserved traces of the later wooden floor of the barn, which had subsided into the depression. The historic maps indicate that this building was constructed before 1806.

To the west of the building, close to Main Street, a well and associated L-shaped channel, 1014, were exposed (Fig 3). Below a large slab of ironstone, the circular stone lined well was exposed, having a width of *c* 1.8m, defining a shaft 0.95m across; with only the upper part of the shaft being lined. At *c* 1.2m below the present ground level, the construction cut for the well shaft tapered to an oval form, 0.8m north-south by 0.7m wide. The lower part of the well was unlined. The L-shaped channel, 1014, constructed of ironstone, would have directed water into the well rather than acting as an overflow.

Immediately west of the well, was the severely disturbed remains of a roughly north-south wall. The junction with the well was severely disturbed by roots and a post-medieval pit, preventing the sequence of events being determined, though it is unlikely that the wall and well were contemporary.

At the limit of the excavation, immediately below the garden soil, the northern extent of a substantial vertically-sided feature was exposed, 1032, extending at least 2.75m east-west by *c*0.85m deep with a flat base (Fig 4, 1032). No datable artefacts were recovered from the exposed fill. The function of the feature is uncertain, though it may have been a large pit or possibly a cellar.

The remains of a possible second well were identified in the north-west of the site. This consisted of a large pit which had been deliberately infilled with brick, ironstone blocks and clay, possibly following robbing of the postulated stone-lined shaft.

OTHER FEATURES

A sequence of post-medieval and later features was identified in the north-eastern part of the western land parcel. Below a group of small pits including animal burials, located within a former orchard, extensive probable quarries were revealed. The fills contained a mixture of medieval and post-medieval to modern artefacts, as well as clusters of butchered animal bones, which were concentrated to the edges of the feature. Two sherds of Roman pottery were also recovered from the fills – though these may have been brought into the site as part of the infilling of the quarry void. The eastern continuation of this activity was detected in the

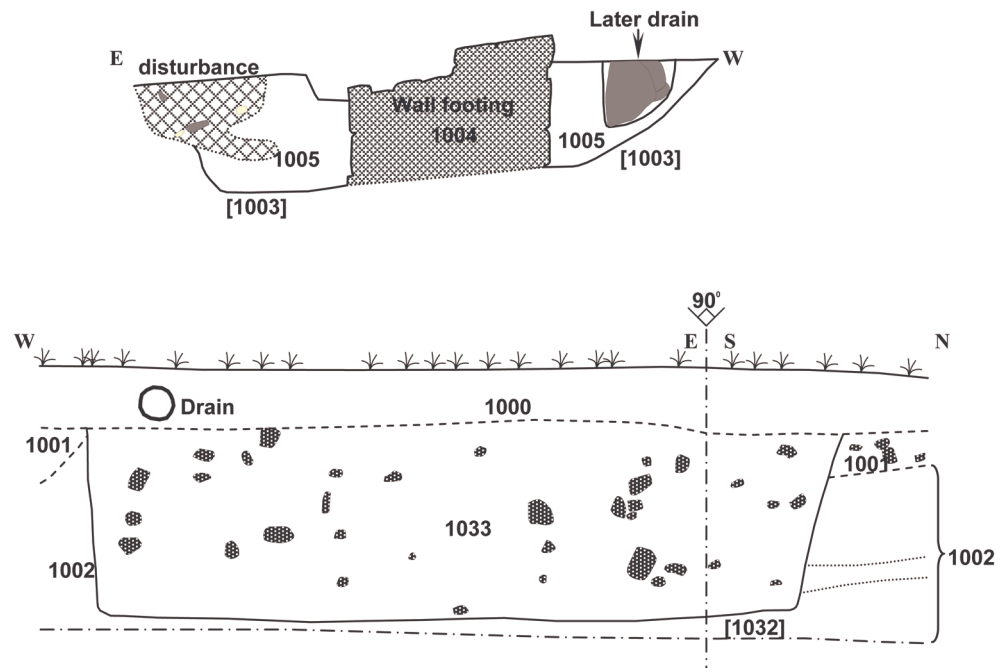


Fig 4 Section of eastern wall, 1004 (top) and Section of cellar, 1032 (bottom)

earthwork survey as an interruption in the pattern of ridge and furrow cultivation within the paddock (Fig 3).

ROUTEWAYS

One of the objectives of the investigation focused on the postulated road network, particularly the line of the eastern routeway shown on the 1615 map. To this day, the southern continuation of this route remains clearly visible as a distinctive hollow-way. The Mansell map suggests that 'The Cottons' was the continuation of the old road. This is supported by the fact that the evaluation did not detect a continuation of the route across the site. In order to test this hypothesis, the excavation of various service trenches extending along Gretton Road and the northern area of 'The Cottons' were monitored, as was a trench dug across Main Street.

In the 18th century the routeway north of the settlement was relocated further west to form a direct continuation of Main Street. Monitoring of the narrow service trenches along the three roads bounding the site

indicated that deposits associated with the modern road were distinctive, with a combined thickness of between 0.5 and 0.7m. Traces of possible hollow-ways were identified along Main Street and Gretton Road. Below deposits associated with the modern road, mixed deposits of stone and dark yellow brown clay were identified filling defined depressions extending up to 1.3m below the present road surface, with the deepest example being on the Gretton Road (Fig 5). The results of the watching brief suggest that the line of the present Gretton Road diverged from an earlier routeway in the east. The northern part of Main Street is set within a distinctive depression with raised verges. The observations in this area suggest that the former routeway was wider than the present road, extending further to the west. The well-defined depression was up to 0.5m deep, with a stony fill, which is indicative of deliberate infilling. No trace of a possible hollow-way was identified in the trench opened along the northern section of 'The Cottons'. However, this road is within a slight depression, which may be the basal portion of the former routeway.

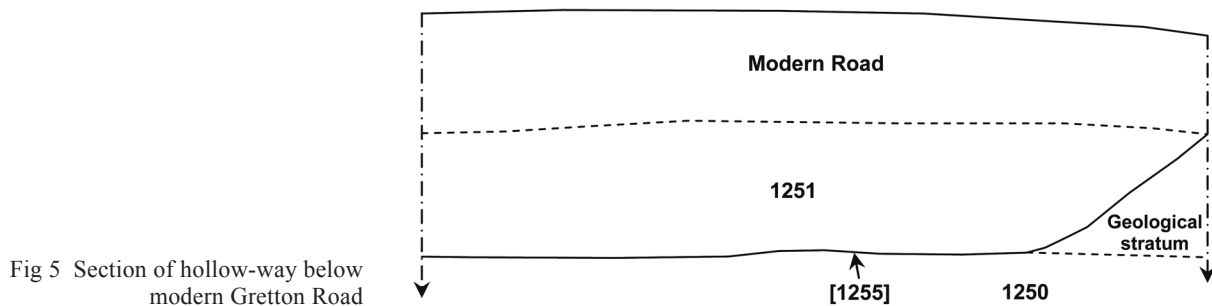


Fig 5 Section of hollow-way below modern Gretton Road



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POST-MEDIEVAL FINDS

A variety of post-medieval artefacts were recovered comprising pottery, ceramic building material, stone roof tile, vessel glass, clay pipe and animal bone, which were almost entirely from features in the western land parcel. Seventy-one sherds, weighing 1.1kg were recovered. Sherds are of comparable size (average weight 15g) to the medieval pottery, although are largely unabraded. The assemblage includes 14th to 16th-century Midland Purple ware, 15th to 16th-century Cistercian ware, 17th to 18th-century glazed earthenwares, Staffordshire slipware, 18th to 19th-century English stonewares, Creamware and Mocha ware, and 19th-century Pearlware and transfer-printed wares. Forms are restricted to large plates, bowls and dishes.

A small quantity of ceramic building material, weighing 413g, consisted of three fragments of brick, a flanged roof tile and two pieces of flat roof tile. The latter have black glazed surfaces, achieved by the addition of iron to the standard lead glaze. All fragments were recovered from the western area.

Six fragments of stone roof tile occur in sandstone and limestone, both of which are locally obtainable. Two sandstone pieces have drilled nail holes set slightly off-centre towards one end. The limestone fragments have no diagnostic features, although one retains traces of mortar. They are likely to date to the late / post-medieval period.

DISCUSSION

The archaeological investigation of an area of the northern margin of the present settlement indicates that this part of Rockingham was apparently utilised intermittently over an extended period of time, with the most extensive activity and associated disturbance being in the post-medieval to modern period.

Early activity on the site was indicated by a probable prehistoric pit, identified in the evaluation and flint artefacts recovered from later features. The presence of articulated animal bone in the pit suggests the deliberate burial of an animal, though the purpose is unclear.

Residual Roman pottery, especially material recovered from a medieval ditch, suggests activity in the area, though no archaeological features could be associated with this period.

Even in the medieval period, which saw Rockingham flourish as a royal centre and market town, archaeological features associated with this period were scarce. The only definite medieval features were boundary ditches, with the recut northern ditch containing a variety of artefacts

suggesting human activity in the vicinity. Whilst it is possible that later disturbance especially in the south-western part of the site had removed other features, it is possible that the location on heavy clay at the base of a steep slope had resulted in wet conditions, which were particularly acute in this low-lying area of the medieval town. Activity may have been focused on the adjacent areas of higher ground to the north and south. This would appear to be supported by the 1615 map, which shows buildings both to the north and south of this enclosed area. The medieval boundaries were the basis for land divisions which survive to the present day, though with a degree of realignment.

In the post-medieval period activities included quarrying, and the construction of a building, probably domestic, which was erected on the higher ground in the south. Prior to the archaeological investigation, the existence of this building had been lost, as it was not depicted on the available historic maps of the area. This area was subsequently used as a farmyard with two stone barns being erected. In the mid 19th century the area was terraced, probably to consolidate and raise the level of the ground, in an area still at risk from groundwater accumulation during periods of wet weather.

Despite the apparent advantages of the location, being surrounded by roads, and a Main Street frontage, the site does not appear to have been utilised intensively in a manner which leaves archaeological remains. The site appears to have mainly been utilised for primary (extractive) activity such as medieval cultivation, or subsequent pasture in the east and quarrying in the north. Whilst it is possible that the combination of post-medieval and more recent disturbance may have destroyed insubstantial traces of earlier phases of activity, the historic maps seem to support the suggestion of this being a marginal area within the settlement. This may be due to a combination of topography and geology, resulting in a particularly high groundwater table in periods of wet weather.

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