

## SHORTER NOTICES

### THE DISTRIBUTION OF MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT IN WEST HARLING

by A. J. Davison, M.A., F.S.A.Scot.

Documentary work on the parish of West Harling<sup>1</sup> has established the time of desertion and the previous existence of a number of named streets or localities within the settlement. Although one of these, Thorpe, could be identified with some certainty (TL 9470 8420), another, Middle Harling, presented a problem as an existing place of that name at TL 9845 8550 is some distance from the site of St. Andrew's church which served medieval Middle Harling. The names of other streets – Storkisey, Stocsey or Storc Street, and Thursmore, Thursemer or Thrussemer Street – were known but not their locations. Since 1978 the writer has, as opportunities arose, carried out a programme of field-walking on substantial portions of the areas which remain under cultivation. Certain others under grass or woodland plantations have been examined also.

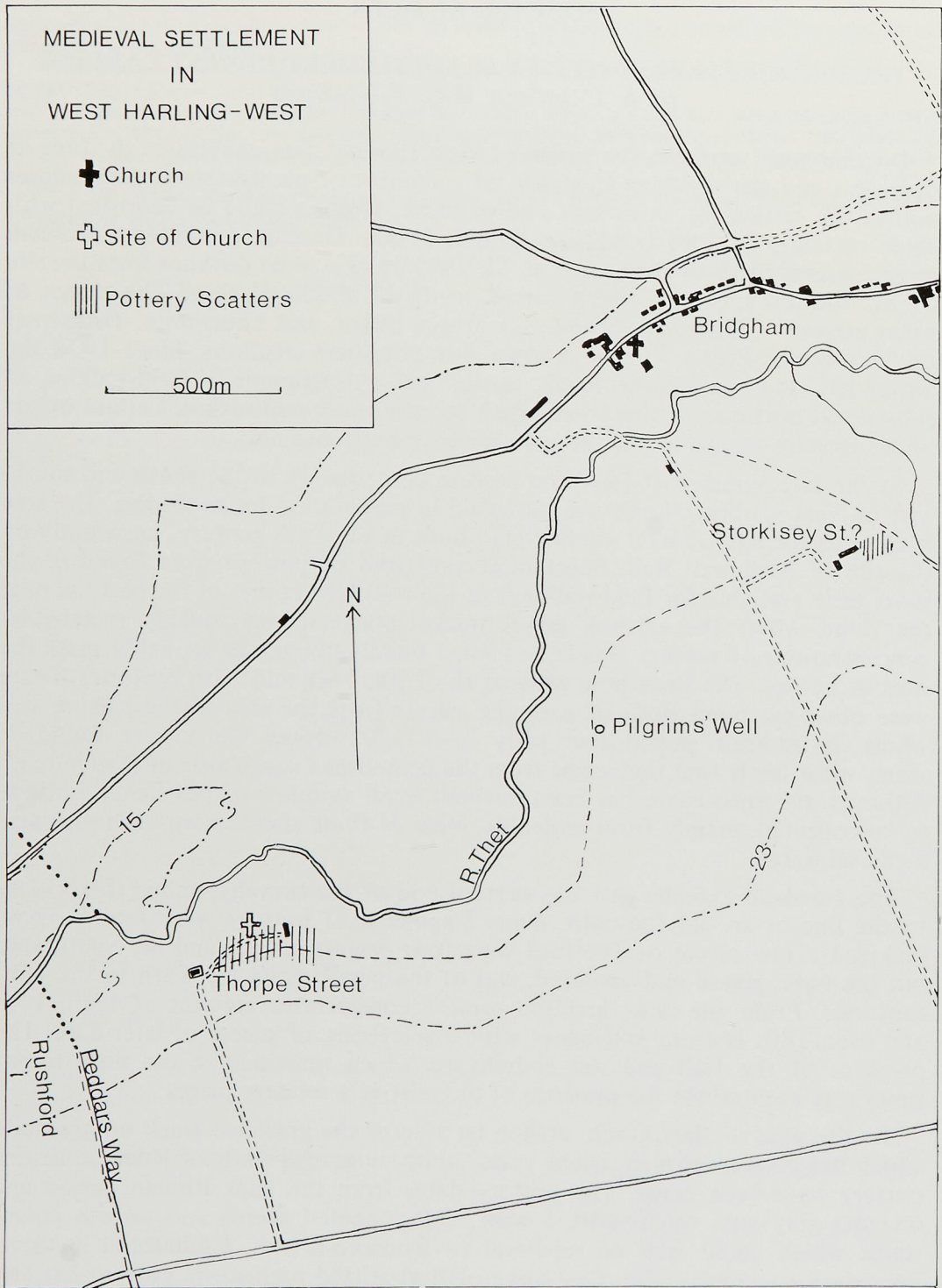
In the late summer of 1978 the pasture immediately to the south and south-east of West Harling church was ploughed in preparation for re-seeding. The area is close to the site of West Harling Hall built in the 18th century, apparently on the site of Berdewell Hall. Substantial quantities of pottery were found in the short time available for field-walking. In the southern corner of the pasture, near the point where the existing gravel tracks intersect, two roughly rectangular concentrations of pottery sherds and some building materials probably mark the sites of houses. The finds here were of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. There were other scattered finds of a similar nature from the area of the pasture as a whole; in addition portions of early brick and worked stone were found. It seems most likely that they came from the demolished south aisle of the church.<sup>2</sup> Although the grass cover has been restored small amounts of potsherds continue to be collected, mainly from molehills; most of these sherds have been of coarse medieval wares.

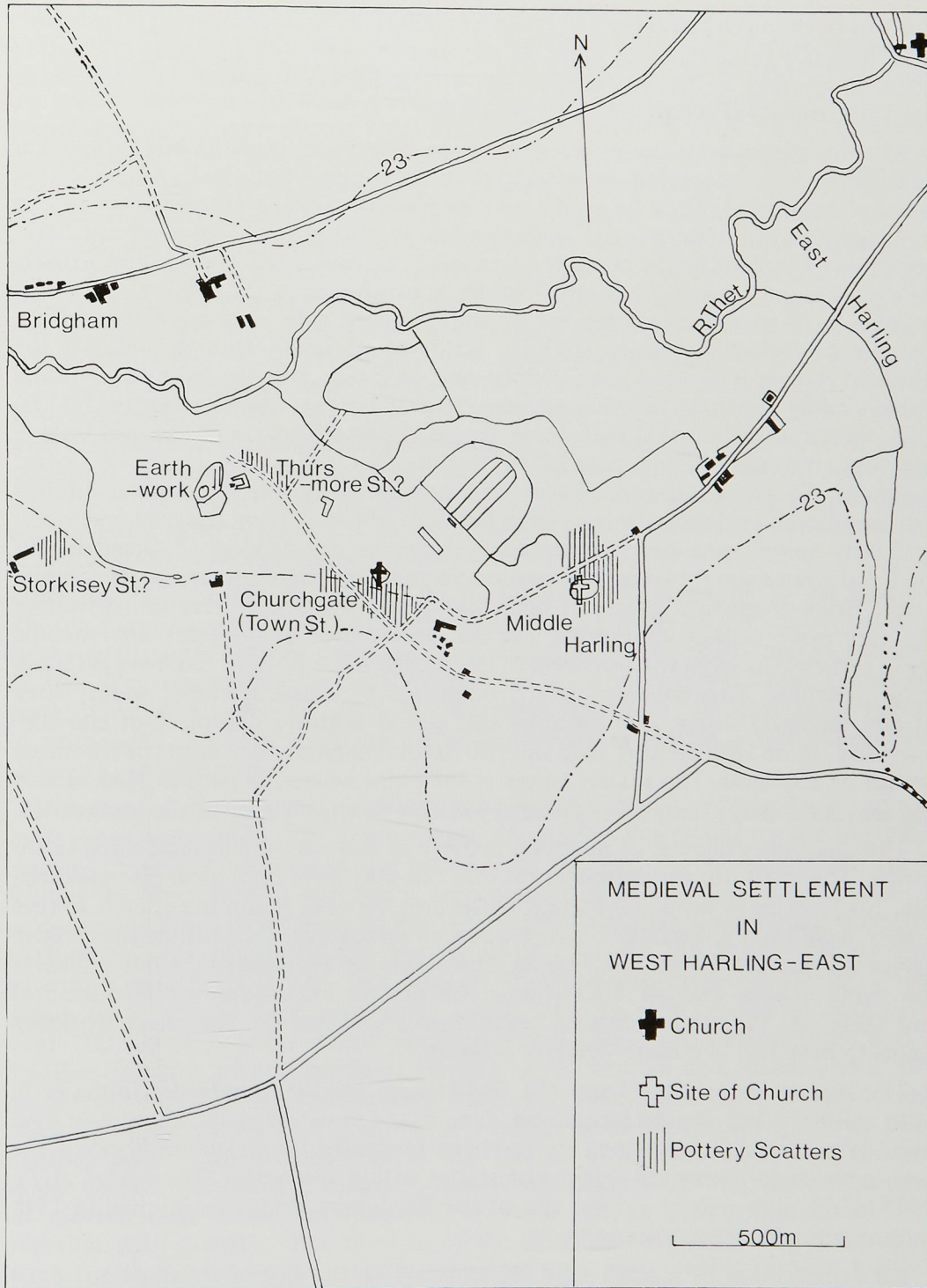
The grassland extends past the western end of the churchyard and there, close to the line of an old footpath, many fragments of pottery were found. These included a few pieces of Thetford ware (one was rouletted) and St. Neots ware but the bulk, glazed and unglazed, was of the period from the 13th to the 15th centuries. From the same location came a considerable amount of 16th, 17th and even 18th century fragments with a scattering of pieces of later date. The presence of the Hall and the churchyard which remained in use until recent times may account for the presence of the relatively modern pieces.

To the west of the church, on the far side of the gravelled track on grassland which has been resown in recent years, quite numerous finds of Romano-British pottery have been made. The pottery dates from the later Roman period and includes greyware, calcite-gritted ware, colour-coated sherds and various coarse wares which could well be medieval or Romano-British. Undoubted medieval fragments are present also. One piece of flint-gritted prehistoric pottery has also been found.

The existence of a medieval site which survived near All Saints' Church until the early years of the 18th century is thus established. It seems very likely that









this was the Church Street (or Churchgate) mentioned in documents. The presence of a Romano-British site so close to the church is one of the most interesting features, another is the absence, so far, of Middle Saxon pottery. Pottery from the 12th century is apparently lacking as well.

At some distance to the north-west of the church, at TL 9695 8545, there are earthworks now concealed by a plantation of conifers but clearly visible on an aerial photograph.<sup>3</sup> They lie at the very edge of the flood plain and appear to be an adaptation of a small natural projection into marshy ground. The more northerly portion of the earthworks consists of an irregular oval ditched enclosure with its greatest extent (about 70 metres) along a south-west – north-east axis. It is entered by a narrow causeway on its south-eastern side. It is associated with a circular pit which normally contains water at its south-western end. To the south of this pit is another five-sided ditched enclosure, sub-divided by an internal ditch leading north-eastwards and separated from the other enclosure by the ditch which surrounds that feature. In the north-eastern corner of the oval feature are two trenches roughly parallel to one another and about 15 to 17 metres in length. To the south-east of the whole system is a group of irregular ditched features. Some evidence of occupation has been obtained from the oval enclosure; a slightly raised area near the causeway entrance has yielded 13 fragments of medieval coarse ware, two of late medieval/transitional ware and one post-medieval piece. Brick fragments, pieces of bone and oyster shells were also found despite the very poor surface conditions. On the eastern side of the track approaching these earthworks from the direction of the church some pottery has been gathered from molehills. This consisted of 16 fragments of coarse medieval wares, three of late medieval wares, one piece of salt glazed pottery, one piece of late slipware of 17th or 18th century date and two or three sherds which might be Romano-British or medieval. The scatter began at the point where the path to Micklemoor Hill leaves the main track and extended virtually to the vicinity of the earthworks.

There is thus evidence of medieval activity at least on and around these earthworks. The most obvious suggestion is that this may have been an earlier manorial site. No finds have been made so far in the area between it and the church so that it may have been a separate concentration of settlement. Of possible sites whose names are known Thursmore (earlier Thursemer or Thrussemer) is not unlikely; the name echoes that of Micklemoor Hill (earlier Micklemere or Micklemore) and there are superficial physical resemblances between the two sites. Storkisey seems to have lain in a more westerly position.<sup>4</sup>

The former Stonehouse Farm (TL 9640 8520) was first mentioned in the early 18th century<sup>5</sup> but the old farmhouse, demolished in recent years, appears to have been of earlier date.<sup>6</sup> Judging by surviving footpaths the neighbourhood of the farm appears to have been a focus of routes within the parish. The bridge at TL 9575 8553 may well be on the site of the Brydgham Bridge mentioned in 17th century churchwarden's accounts.<sup>7</sup>

An examination of a small field immediately to the east of the position of the old farmhouse showed traces of occupation on the northern side of the ploughed land. There were still to be seen remains of the foundations of three or four buildings which still offer noticeable resistance to the plough. Bricks, tiles and



flints litter the surface together with pieces of ironwork, bone fragments and potsherds. The pottery finds were quite numerous but thinned out eastwards to the end of the field. There was a substantial quantity of medieval wares among the pieces collected (55 coarsewares and five of glazed Grimston ware) but the preponderance of later sherds from the 15th to the very early 18th centuries, but mainly of the 16th and 17th centuries, is interesting (127 pieces of various glazed wares and four of stoneware). It is possible that earlier pottery is actually present in greater quantity but masked by the resistant building remains – some medieval sherds were apparent on the southern side of the field where later buildings seem to be absent. Some of the brick and tile fragments in the northern portion were medieval or early post-medieval. One Romano-British greyware rim was found in this field and there were also some pieces of lava querns. The evidence points to this site being inhabited at least as early as the 13th or 14th centuries with activity continuing until the late 17th or very early 18th centuries when it contracted leaving the farmhouse and associated buildings. This is in accord with the pattern of documentary evidence for the village as a whole. This small nucleus of settlement seems to have been in the form of a short street and could have been Thursmore Street or Storkisey; because of the westerly position of the site the latter identity appears to be the more probable. A message was surrendered as late as 1733 in Stocsy Street – a later form of the name.<sup>8</sup>

As has been stated elsewhere<sup>9</sup> the earthworks which remain to the east of Thorpe Farm on either side of Thorpe Cottages (TL 9485 8415) also represent a street settlement. Pottery collected from molehills on the grass-covered surfaces of this site was mainly medieval coarseware (*c.*30 pieces) with four sherds of glazed Grimston ware and eight post-medieval fragments. Another three sherds of micaceous greyware could be medieval or Romano-British – not improbable so near to Brettenham.

A search of the area surrounding Middle Harling church produced some of the most interesting finds. The approximate site of the church lies on the northern margin of a small wood and the arable land between the wood and the track leading to West Harling still has a convincing scatter of human bones. Here a considerable amount of pottery has been found including a significant quantity of Ipswich ware mainly of the 'pimply' type but with the 'sandy' variety also present. Other finds in this area were of Thetford ware (over 50 pieces), a few pieces of St. Neots ware, very much coarse (mostly early) medieval pottery – over 100 pieces – some glazed medieval sherds (one of Grimston type) and a smaller quantity of post-medieval pottery. A portion of lava quern and a few pieces of probable Romano-British wares completed the tally. North of the track the land slopes very slightly to marshy ground. According to an 18th century note<sup>10</sup> the foundations of the church were removed at that time to make up soft ground and human bones were scattered in the process. Remains of mortar, large flints and fragments of bone are, indeed, to be found here together with pottery. Here the bias of the finds was definitely later than those from the area closer to the church; there was only one possible piece of Ipswich ware of the 'sandy' type and only small quantities of Thetford and St. Neots wares. The bulk of the remainder was of coarse medieval wares with a small quantity of glazed pieces including Grimston ware. There were also a late medieval



glazed skillet handle, a portion of a limestone mortar and a few sherds of post-medieval pottery. The extent of the distribution is limited to the north by the marshy ground: on the northern side of the track the occurrence of potsherds dies away eastwards quite rapidly.

South of the track the distribution extends further eastwards and also southwards and to the south-west of the small wood. The proportion of Romano-British sherds becomes significant particularly to the south and south-west of the wood and finds included two pieces of large storage jars and two pieces of colour-coated ware, various greywares and three pieces of a buff oxidised ware which might, alternatively, be medieval. Ipswich ware was also present in both 'sandy' and 'pimply' forms; there were other pieces which were more doubtfully identified as being of this type. A quantity of Thetford ware was found here and included a rim from a bowl with rouletted decoration and there was also some St. Neots ware. A very large proportion of the remainder of the finds was miscellaneous greywares — largely medieval but possibly including some Thetford ware or Romano-British sherds. Later medieval and post-medieval pottery also occurred.

The large area of arable land lying to the south of the Middle Harling concentration and to the north of the track leading from West Harling church to Paper Houses carries a scatter of potsherds of various periods with some slight increase in frequency of occurrence towards West Harling. Again, the bulk was coarse medieval wares — possibly including some Romano-British largely indistinguishable in the mass. Romano-British pieces definitely identified provided the second largest total. One fragment of 'pimply' Ipswich ware was also found. The land between this faint concentration and the vicinity of West Harling church is covered by buildings and the garden of a house; it is possible that this may conceal finds. A few pieces of medieval and post-medieval pottery have been found from time to time to the south of the Paper Houses track where stony and chalky patches of soil have been noticed.

The zone of finds at Middle Harling seems to be separated from West Harling by an area from which no notable discovery has been made. Although it is now arable it contains pits, some of which are water-filled in wet seasons. It is likely that this land would have been unattractive to settlement, probably remaining as pasture. A search of the area between modern Middle Harling and the destroyed church revealed an almost total absence of pottery until the ground near the farm was reached where some fragments of very late glazed wares were found. The evidence from field-walking suggests a settlement around Middle Harling church dating from Mid-Saxon times which may have lingered into the post-medieval period; the later pottery was found mainly on the eastern and south-eastern edges of the site. As the church suffered demolition in the early 16th century decline is apparent but some occupation near the site may have continued. By the beginning of the 18th century the name of Middle Harling was certainly associated with the modern site and it is quite likely that this had been so much earlier than this.

The finds so far made support the impression that settlement by medieval times consisted of a number of nucleated groups of dwellings located at varying intervals on the river terraces close to the edge of the flood plain. There is a



considerable gap between Stonehouse Farm and Thorpe Farm which is now largely covered by coniferous plantations and is thus masked from systematic examination. A footpath, in linking the two modern clusters of buildings, follows the line of the terraces. It is possible that there may have been settlement at some point close to this track. The 'Pilgrims' Well' shown as an antiquity on the 1:25000 map at TL 9570 8475 is uncertain evidence: Pilgrim was current as a surname in West Harling in the early 18th century<sup>1 1</sup> and thus offers a plausible alternative explanation of this place-name. Another problem is the position of Town Street; this West Harling street name was first mentioned in the 17th century. A reconsideration of the documentary evidence and the name itself point to a location in or near what was by later medieval times the largest nucleus near All Saints' church and it appears likely that it was either close to Church Street or an alternative name for it.

The evidence for post-Roman settlement so far accumulated indicates a Middle Saxon site at TL 9795 8515 as the oldest inhabited locality though finds of this period may yet be made elsewhere in the parish. The Domesday entry<sup>1 2</sup> for the settlement here indicates a recorded population and a degree of wealth which may represent the momentum gained by an early foundation. The frequent appearance of Romano-British sherds may point to the existence of a place of some size in the vicinity; the site near the church (All Saints') from the grassed surface of which potsherds continue to be collected, is close to the margins of coniferous plantations and these could well conceal more extensive traces of this period.

*September 1981*

Postscript:

Since this account was written further evidence has come to light. Mr. Tony Frost has reported finding pottery, including medieval wares, at sites on either side of Middle Harling Farm on the northern side of the road. This suggests that, besides the nucleus around Middle Harling church, there were, in medieval times at least, other settled points distributed along the low natural terraces above the level of the marsh, and that modern Middle Harling may well be the descendant of one of these.

Recent forestry operations to the west of the track to the earthworks north-west of All Saints' church revealed very small patches of bare ground. From these some 40 pieces of medieval pottery, mainly greywares, have been collected as well as one piece of flint-gritted fabric, tentatively identified as Iron Age. This strengthens the evidence for another nucleus of settlement around the earthworks, especially when the limited opportunities for fieldwork are considered.

This account was based on the finds produced by a thorough reconnaissance. There is little doubt that prolonged field walking as soil conditions and land use vary, or the employment of other techniques will give more detail and supplement or modify the picture. Recently the Norfolk Archaeological Unit, on



behalf of the British Museum, has conducted an excavation, directed by Mr. Andrew Rogerson, at a site close to Middle Harling church. Interesting discoveries have been made including signs of Middle and Late Saxon settlement.

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### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Mr. Andrew Rogerson of the Norfolk Archaeological Unit for examining and commenting upon the finds and to Messrs. C. C. Barker, J. H. Rich and H. N. Bell for kindly permitting access to their fields.

<sup>1</sup>A. J. Davison, 'West Harling: a village and its disappearance', *Norfolk Archaeology*, XXXVII, (1980) pp. 295-306.

<sup>2</sup>Davison, p. 303.

<sup>3</sup>R.A.F. Photo Ref. CPE/UK/1801 3153 of 25th October 1946.

<sup>4</sup>Davison, p. 302.

<sup>5</sup>N.R.O., MS. 6687 6E.6 BRA 63.

<sup>6</sup>See C. J. W. Messent, *The Old Cottages and Farm Houses of Norfolk*, 1928, p.50 for a description and p.57 for a drawing of this house. Unfortunately, the description does not include the interior of the building and the only suggestion of a date is a reference to windows 'of late Tudor type'. There is a photograph of 'Stonegate Farm, originally Manor House of Middle Harling' (Colman & Rye Library, Illustration Collection, Class C/HAR 9682) said to be of about 1908. Messent's drawing shows that this was Stonehouse Farm, though its suggested status seems rather unlikely.

<sup>7</sup>Davison, p. 300.

<sup>8</sup>N.R.O., MS. 6703 6E.6 BRA 63.

<sup>9</sup>Davison, p. 304.

<sup>10</sup>N.R.O., Frere MSS., DS 594 352 x 3.

<sup>11</sup>Davison, p. 302; also the Parish Register (N.R.O., PD 27/3, p. 32.) where it is recorded that Thomas Morris was buried July 16th, 1709, and Thomas (an infant) son of Thomas and Lidia Pilgrim was buried in the same coffin with him.

<sup>12</sup>A. H. Doubleday and W. Page (eds), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, Norfolk* (1901/06), II, p. 74.

## SAXLINGHAM PLACE or HEYDON HALL, SAXLINGHAM A Description and the Results of some Recent Excavations by Edwin J. Rose

The remains of the building known variously in its history as Saxlingham Place, Saxlingham Hall and Heydon Hall, Saxlingham, lie in the hamlet of Saxlingham which is nowadays included within the civil parish of Field Dalling. It stands at National Grid Reference TG 0267 3966 and is Norfolk Archaeological Index county number 3167, scheduled ancient monument number 126. A distant view may be obtained from the lane to the north but there is no public access without the consent of the landowner, Mr. King of Hunworth. The ruins are for sale at the time of writing.

### 1. Brief History

Cozens-Hardy (1960) quotes a survey of c.1580 to the effect that Sir Christopher Heydon in 1550 appropriated the parsonage house and 34 acres of glebe from the rector of Saxlingham in preparation for the construction of the hall, but died the same year leaving his son Sir John to complete the building. The hall was a