

Middle Saxon Occupation at Hay Green, Terrington St Clement (Fig.4)

by A. Rogerson and R.J. Silvester.

It has generally been assumed that the post-Roman recolonisation of the west Norfolk silt fen, otherwise known as Marshland, occurred in the middle Saxon period, although in H.C. Darby's words the historical evidence is 'obscure and baffling' (1983, 5).

The first archaeological evidence of this Middle Saxon occupation was found at Hay Green (centred at TF 536185), a hamlet in the southern part of Terrington St Clement parish, where, over a nineteen-year period, Dr Paul Walpole collected a vast amount of pottery from the surface of two arable fields (Fig. 4, E & F). This material, ranging in date from Middle Saxon to post-medieval, included twenty-two sherds of Middle Saxon Ipswich-type ware. The collection was donated to the Norfolk Museums Service in 1979. Fourteen more sherds of Ipswich-type ware were found by Dr Walpole in upcast from a new and straightened dyke cut between fields E & F in 1981, and subsequent fieldwork by one of the writers (A.R.) with members of the King's Lynn and District Metal Detecting Club in 1983/4 produced a further fifty-two sherds from field F.

Fieldwork over the whole parish of Terrington St Clement was carried out for the Fenland Project by the other writer (R.J.S.) in the winter of 1985/6. The rapid method of fieldwalking and the significance of the silted watercourses known as roddons have already been discussed in relation to West Walton, another Marshland parish (Silvester 1985, 103). Preliminary fieldwork south of Hay Green demonstrated that the spread of Middle Saxon pottery was considerably larger than had been anticipated. Forty-three sherds of Ipswich-type ware were collected from fields B, E, K, L and M, but many fragments were left on the surface awaiting more detailed fieldwork by A.R. This later work, which was carried out over ten days as part of the Norfolk Archaeological Unit's contribution to the Survey of the East Anglian Kingdom (West and Wade 1983), involved walking at 2 metre intervals over and well beyond the areas identified by R.J.S. Sherds of Ipswich-type ware, readily distinguished from pottery of other periods, were placed in polythene bags and the find-spots then measured in to the nearest metre. Eleven fields were examined in this manner. The surfaces of all the fields were well-weathered and in ideal condition for the recovery of artifacts, except C and G where conditions were not ideal and H where they were poor. Field D, on the line of the medieval drove-road, has not yet been walked.

Initial fieldwork revealed a network of roddons which now show as silt ridges achieving a height of no more than 0.6 metres above the surrounding silt levels. The main roddon is more obvious in fields E, F and G, can be traced with difficulty in most of the remaining fields and fades out in A and L. In field M containing one of the major concentrations of Ipswich-type ware the roddon was not visible, but the farmer confirmed that coarser silt could be detected during ploughing.

The detailed survey recorded a spread of Ipswich-type ware closely related to the roddon system and stretching over at least 1.5 kilometres and covering about 7 hectares. Nine hundred and ninety-nine sherds have been plotted; these were often associated with spreads of animal bone far more dense than those observed on sites of Late Saxon and medieval date in Marshland. The pottery and bone occurred for the most part along the tops of roddons and were in some areas found in dark soil, presumably stained grey



Fig. 4

Hay Green, Terrington St Clement: the distribution of Middle Saxon pottery in relation to the roddon system (based on Ordnance Survey map — Crown Copyright reserved)

by intense occupation. Late Saxon and medieval settlement sites also occur on the roddon system at Hay Green, paralleling the situation at West Walton (Silvester 1985, fig. 3). However, this later occupation appears spatially discontinuous, consisting of a series of small discrete sites.

Two outstanding problems need interpretation: the enormous size of the Middle Saxon occupation and the unusually prolific incidence of Ipswich-type ware. The huge area occupied, surely the result of a favourable environment coupled with a strong agrarian economy, can only be interpreted in the light of the other Middle Saxon sites now identified in Marshland by the Fenland Project. While none of these is of comparable size to the Hay Green complex, more specific comparisons must await publication after the completion of the Survey. The abundance of Ipswich-type ware cannot be explained by the unusually clear visibility of potsherds in the stone-free Marshland soil, because sites of other periods do not produce exceptionally large quantities of sherds. The explanation must lie in a large population sometime within the seventh to ninth centuries as well as in the easy availability of Ipswich-type pottery. The significance of the total of nearly 1000 sherds, which were derived from only a single examination of each field, is highlighted by a comparison with totals recovered by surface collection from the Norfolk upland: c.200 sherds were found in the survey of Launditch Hundred (Wade-Martins 1980), 134 in the survey of Hales, Heckingham and Loddon parishes in south-east Norfolk (Davison: forthcoming) and twenty-eight in the parish of Witton in the north-east of the county (Lawson 1983, 70-1).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the farmers who have permitted access to their land and shown considerable interest in our work: Messrs B.W. Collison, T.E. Gadsden, M.G. Goose, D. Neave, H. Simmons and J. Smart, and above all Dr P. Walpole who discovered the site and who has been a valued source of information throughout the survey.

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