

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEYS AT PARK FARM, SNETTISHAM AND COURTYARD FARM, RINGSTEAD

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### SUMMARY

*This report describes the results of two archaeological surveys, carried out at Park Farm, Snettisham by Mark Leah (TF 6933, Fig.1) and Courtyard Farm, Ringstead by Myk Flitcroft (TF 7240, Fig.2) between 1988 and 1990. The projects were funded by English Heritage, as part of a wider, national scheme designed to investigate the archaeology of individual farms and present the results to the public.*

### Introduction

At Park Farm some archaeological information was already available, prior to the start of the survey, from earlier fieldwalking and a number of small-scale excavations. The fieldwalking, however, had been carried out by a number of groups and individuals and was largely unsystematic. The excavations were carried out by H.C. Sheringham, and others, during the 1920s, 1930s and 1950s and took place on the site of the Snettisham Roman villa, now a scheduled ancient monument, at c. TF 688 336 (Site 1514) and on an Early Saxon domestic site at c. TF 692 332 (Site 1531). In addition, the medieval chapel of St. Thomas's (Site 1535) was also excavated. None of these sites has been fully published and the exact locations of the trenches are in some doubt.

At Courtyard Farm, the only previous recorded archaeological activity was the casual find of a Neolithic flint axe in 1954 (Site 1329), though the Peddar's Way, an important Roman road, is situated about 2km to the west.

It was hoped that the results of a programme of systematic fieldwork, coupled with analysis of the documentary and aerial photographic evidence and a consideration of the earlier work, would allow the pattern of settlement history on the farms to be deduced.

### Topography and Geology (Figs 1, 2, 3 and 11)

Park Farm covers an area of c. 130 hectares, of which c. 92 hectares are, at present, under arable. The rest of the land is given over to grassland; with a number of small woodland belts and plantations. The farm lies on the extreme western edge of the chalk escarpment, with the geological boundary between the chalk and the lower greensand running along the western boundary of the farm. It is this factor which accounts for the difference in height between the western edge of Park Farm, which lies at c. 26m OD, and the village of Snettisham, lying at c. 11m OD, c. 300m to west. At the eastern end of the farm, higher up on the chalk, the land reaches a maximum height of c. 40m OD.

The soils on the farm are classified as belonging to the Newmarket 2 Association and consist of shallow, well-drained, calcareous, coarse loamy and sandy soils, directly overlying chalk (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983). The soil is deeper where the river Ingol runs in a shallow valley, along the southern edge of the farm. The land is classified as Grade 2 agricultural land on the higher parts of the farm but only Grade 4 in the low-lying valley of the river

Ingol (Agricultural land classification of England and Wales, 1972). The prehistoric Icknield Way passes through Park Farm, its course being marked by St. Thomas's Lane.

Courtyard Farm covers 300 ha. of undulating countryside 2km east of the village of Ringstead. More than 90% of the farm area was farmed as arable land during the period of the survey; the remainder comprised plantations and rough scrub. The topography of the area consists of high land to the south and north of the farm, sloping gently to a slight valley in the centre where the minor road from Ringstead to Burnham Market runs from west to east across the farm. The land varies in height from *c.*50m OD at the north end of the farm, to *c.*20m OD along the road, to *c.*60m OD in the south-east corner of the farm land.

The soils of the farm are also classified as belonging to the Newmarket 2 Association (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983), and consist of a light sandy loam containing large numbers of flints, above a chalk bedrock. Nowhere on the farm does there appear to be any great depth of soil. The land is classified as Grade 3 Agricultural Land (Agricultural land classification of England and Wales, 1972).

### Survey Methods (Figs 3 and 11)

At Park Farm fieldwalking was carried out during the winters of 1988-89 and 1989-90 and involved a total of eight weeks' work in the field. During this time all the arable land was walked under, as far as possible, optimum conditions. In the majority of the fields a 20m square grid was established and a 2m wide transect walked through each square. The material from each square was bagged separately. Where significant amounts of material were encountered the whole of the 20m square was walked. In those areas where large, dense concentrations of material were encountered a 10m grid was substituted for a 20m one, in order to define the nature and extent of the scatters more closely.

In addition, an earthwork survey was carried out at the southern end of the farm, in an area of grassland, on the site of a former mill (Fig.10). In the same field the elevation of a wall, visible in the southern side of a large pond, was also recorded (Fig.10).

Funding for the survey at Courtyard Farm made a more rapid, less detailed survey the only viable option. It was intended to provide a general picture of the artefact distribution, and then to concentrate on areas of perceived interest. Over six weeks' work in February-March 1989, and February 1990 more than 240 hectares were walked in variable weather conditions.

In each field the area was divided into a number of separate blocks, and the finds collected within each block; where adjacent fields were walked the pattern of blocks was continued over the field boundary, but finds were grouped according to the field in which they were found. In other areas the blocks were aligned with a convenient axis of the field. The blocks were marked out using a tape to measure the start and end of each strip to be walked, block divisions along each strip were paced out. It was felt this method provided suitable accuracy for a rapid survey.

In the first season each block was walked as a series of five 2m wide strips, 100m long, and spaced 20m apart; finds from all strips were bagged together to form a 10% sample of each hectare unit. In the 1990 season it was decided to use larger unit-blocks of 100m x 150m walked in five 2m strips 30m apart in order to complete the survey within the budgeted period, while still covering the same area within each unit.

Due to the large area to be walked and the restricted time available, many of the fields had to be walked in conditions well below optimum. This was particularly a problem in the first

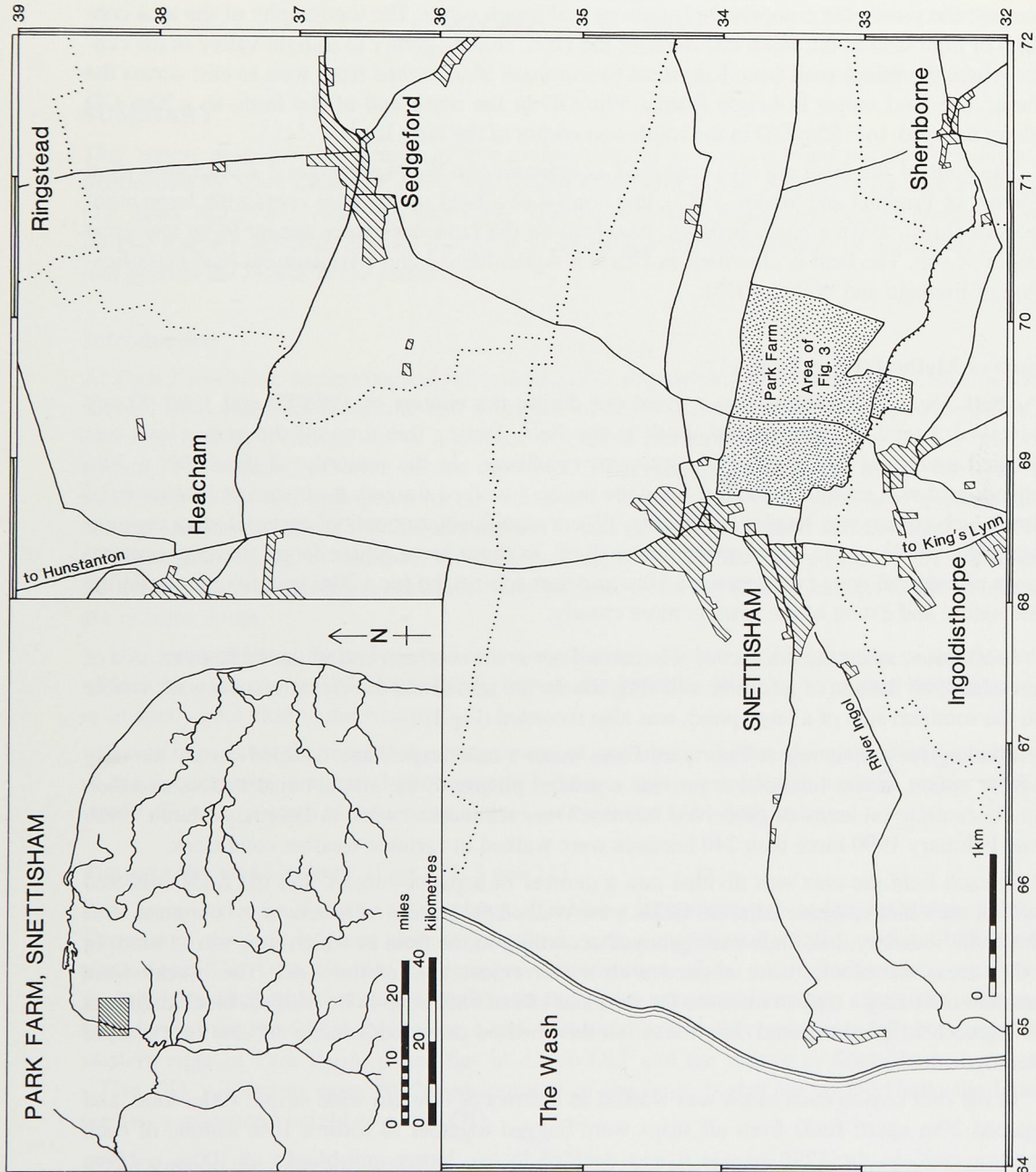


Fig.1 Park Farm, Snettisham

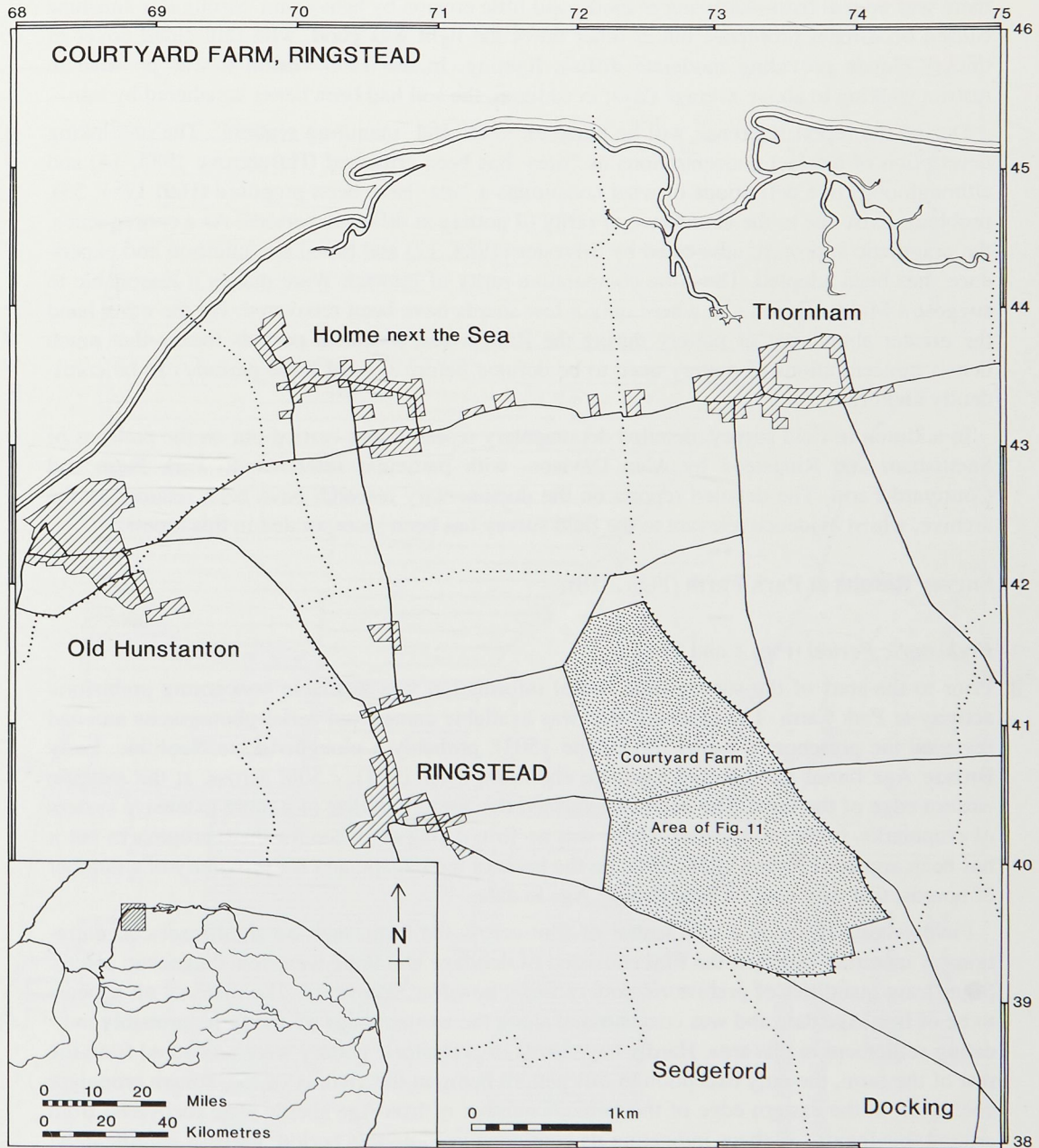


Fig.2  
Courtyard Farm, Ringstead

season: the unusually mild winter meant that very little weathering had occurred in the field; there was no real frost-shattering of clods, and little erosion by heavy rain. Strong low sunshine caused occasional problems, but at other times the light was good, with thin cloud cover or thicker clouds providing moderate diffuse lighting. In the 1990 season it was possible to restrict walking to above average days; in addition, the soil had been better weathered by rain.

During the report reference will be made to 'sites' and 'manuring scatters'. The unthinking description of artefact concentrations as 'sites' has been criticised (Haselgrove 1985, 14) and although objective definitions of what constitutes a 'site' have been proposed (Hall 1981, 53), problems exist due to the abundance or rarity of pottery at different periods. As a consequence, the pragmatic approach, advocated by Silvester (1988, 12) and based on 'intuition and experience' has been adopted. Thus, the comparative rarity of Ipswich Ware makes it reasonable to suggest a Middle Saxon site where only a few sherds have been recovered. On the other hand the greater abundance of pottery during the Roman and medieval periods means that much denser concentrations of pottery need to be defined before sites of these periods can be confidently identified.

In addition to field survey, detailed documentary research was carried out on the parishes of Snettisham and Ringstead by Alan Davison, with particular reference to Park Farm and Courtyard Farm. The detailed reports on the documentary research have been retained in the archive, whilst evidence relevant to the field survey has been incorporated in this report.

### **Survey Results at Park Farm (Figs 2-10)**

#### *Prehistoric Period (Figs 4 and 5)*

Prior to the start of the survey little useful information was available concerning prehistoric activity at Park Farm. The evidence that was available came from aerial photographs and had revealed the presence of a ring ditch (Site 1503), probably a ploughed Late Neolithic, Early Bronze Age burial mound, and a square enclosure (Site 1691), c.50m across, at the extreme eastern edge of the farm. The enclosure formed the western outlier of a more extensive system of cropmarks, further to the east. There was no firm dating evidence for these cropmarks but it has been argued (Lawson 1980, 281), on the basis of their shape and the proximity of a number of hoards, that they may be Late Bronze Age in date.

Fieldwalking revealed a thin scatter of flint across the farm, with no significant concentrations of material. Much of the flint consisted of debitage and there were few diagnostic pieces. Significant quantities of prehistoric pottery were, however, recovered. The material all appears to be of Iron Age date and was concentrated along the western edge of the farm, probably indicating settlement in this area. Hardly any sherds of prehistoric pottery were recovered from the rest of the farm, the only exception to this pattern being in the vicinity of the square cropmark enclosure, at the eastern edge of the farm. A number of Iron Age sherds were recovered from around this feature, perhaps indicating its continued use into this period. Perhaps significantly, no sherds or flints were recovered from within the cropmark.

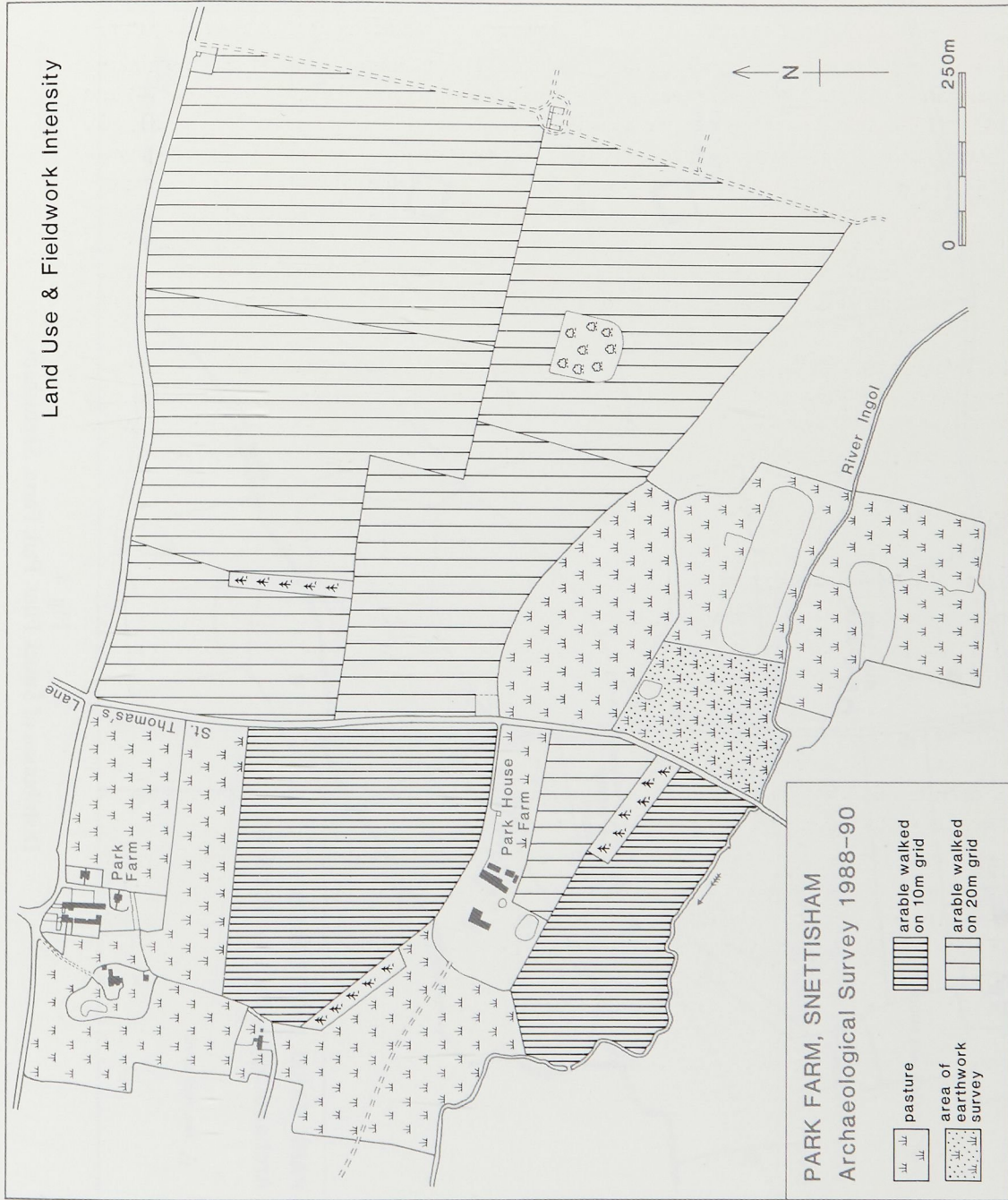


Fig. 3  
Land Use and Fieldwork Intensity, Park Farm, Snettisham



Fig. 4  
Distribution of Struck Flint, Park Farm, Snettisham



Fig. 5  
Distribution of Iron Age Sherds and Sites, Park Farm, Snettisham



*Roman Period (Fig.6)*

The most important evidence for the Roman period consists of the Snettisham Roman villa (Site 1514), a scheduled ancient monument, which lies on the western edge of Park Farm and is now partially sealed beneath a small plantation. A tessellated floor is visible in the side of the lynchet, which forms the western boundary of the plantation. The site was partially excavated by H.C. Sheringham in the 1930s but was never published. The available records, however, show that the excavations revealed a walled yard with chalk and carstone floors, furnaces, quantities of slag, wall plaster and a mosaic floor. The pottery indicates a 3rd- and 4th-century date for the occupation of the site (Gregory 1982, 357).

Fieldwalking revealed a dense scatter of Roman pottery, immediately to the north-east of the plantation, and still within the scheduled area. The area is shown blacked in on the distribution map and represents 20m squares from which more than 20 sherds were recovered. Numerous oyster shells occurred within the scatter. It is likely that this dense but well-defined spread of material indicates an element of the villa complex. Across the remaining arable a light spread of Roman pottery was revealed (c. 2 sherds per hectare), suggesting the manuring of arable fields.

It has been suggested (Gregory 1982, 357) that the villa represents the centre of 'a single estate, with upland grazing on the high chalk, arable on the valley slopes and in the valley basin, and water meadow along the Ingol'. It is important, however, that the Snettisham villa is not viewed in isolation and Gregory has also drawn attention (1982, 360) to its place in a pattern of seven villas, extending for a distance of 11km, along the western line of the Icknield Way. St. Thomas's Lane preserves the line of this trace through Park Farm and the villa lies c.300m to the west of it. The villas are all located on the junction of the greensand and chalk, close to watercourses and appear to date to the 3rd and early 4th centuries.

*The Early and Middle Saxon Periods (Fig.7)*

Only one Early Saxon site is known from Park Farm (Site 1531) and this was excavated in the 1950s, but remains unpublished. The available records, however, show that the site was domestic in character and produced pottery and animal bone. The precise location of the trenches is in some doubt and it may be that the site lay under what is now a small plantation. Certainly no trace of the site was discovered during fieldwalking. Occasional sherds of possible Early Saxon pottery were recovered from other parts of the farm during fieldwalking, but no significant concentrations were located.

Middle Saxon activity at Park Farm was demonstrated by a sparse spread of pottery totalling 51 sherds, along the western edge of the farm. The pottery was almost exclusively Ipswich Ware, although the occasional sherd of local Middle Saxon pottery was also recovered.

This pattern confirmed what had been suggested by earlier, non-systematic fieldwalking. There are also records of c.40 sherds of Ipswich Ware having been recovered from the area immediately to the south of the Park Farm outbuildings (Site 12547). This area is now under grass but this evidence suggests that the band of Middle Saxon settlement continued right along the western edge of the farm.

*Late Saxon Period (Fig.8)*

Late Saxon activity occurred in the same fairly restricted area as during the Middle Saxon period, along the western edge of Park Farm, and was evidenced by a scatter of Thetford-type pottery sherds. Within the general scatter, two particularly dense concentrations of material



Fig. 6  
 Distribution of Roman Sherds and Sites, Park Farm, Snettisham

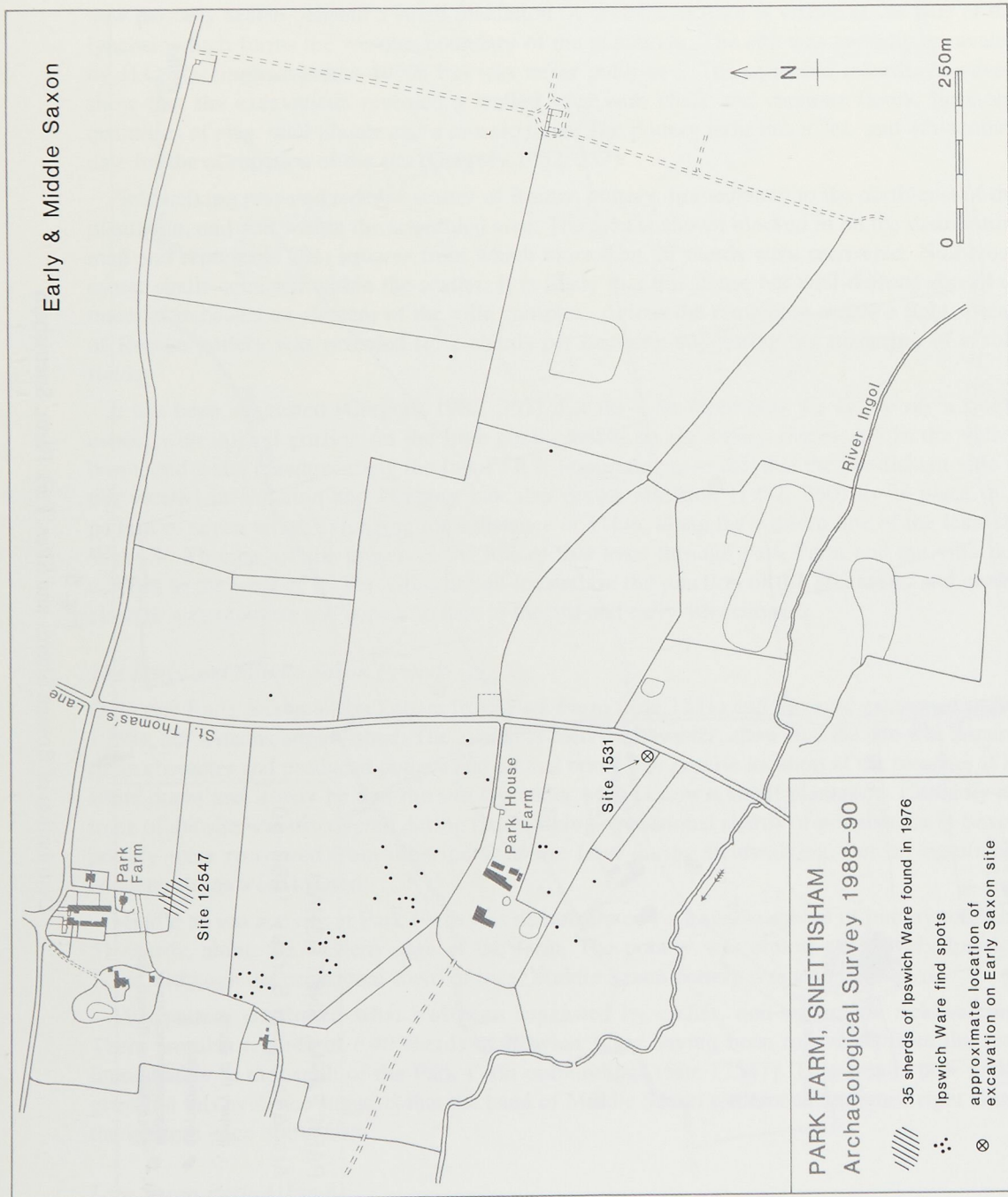


Fig. 7  
 Distribution of Early and Middle Saxon Sites and Sherds, Park Farm, Snettisham

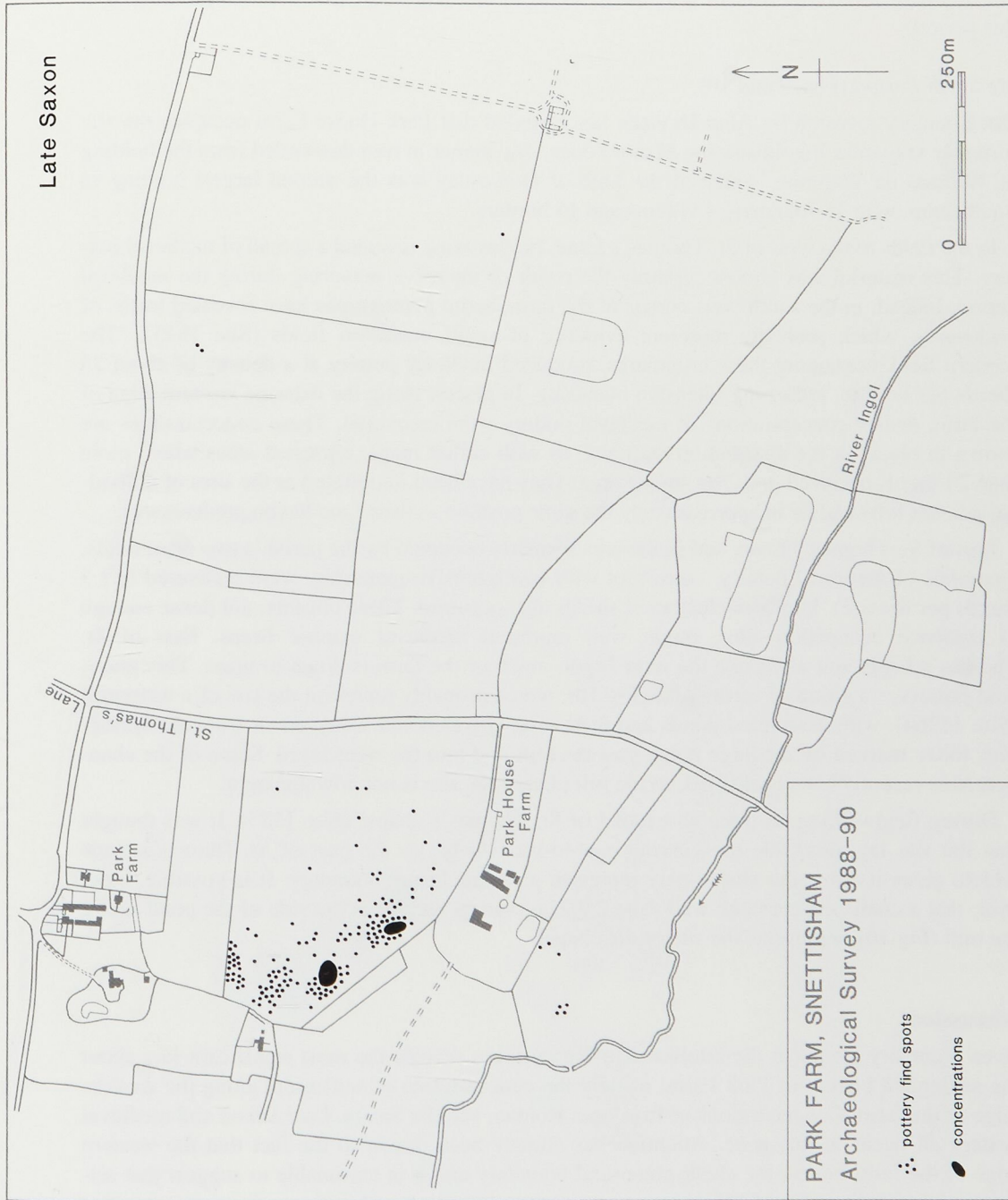


Fig. 8  
Distribution of Late Saxon Sites and Sherds, Park Farm, Snettisham

stood out. These concentrations are shown blacked in on the distribution map and represent areas where more than 20 sherds occurred in a 20m square. These areas have been interpreted as representing the location of individual tofts within the settlement. Outside this area the number of sherds recovered was so few that it seems unlikely that the area was being manured in this period.

#### *Medieval Period* (Figs 9 and 10)

Documentary research by Alan Davison has revealed that Park House Farm occupies the site formerly known as Ingoldisthorpe Manor house. The manor in turn descended from the holding of William de Warenne, which at the time of Domesday was the second largest holding in Snettisham, with 18 sokemen, 4 villeins and 15 bordars.

In the fields to the west of St. Thomas's Lane, fieldwalking revealed a spread of medieval pottery. This material was almost certainly the result of intensive manuring during the medieval period. Indeed, in the south-west corner of the farm, aerial photographs have revealed traces of enclosures, which probably represent evidence of small, medieval fields (Site 1545). The modern field, containing these cropmarks, produced medieval pottery at a density of about 25 sherds per hectare, indicating intensive manuring. In places, along the extreme western edge of the farm, denser concentrations of medieval pottery were recovered. These concentrations are shown in black on the distribution map and, as with earlier maps, represent areas where more than 20 sherds occurred in a 20m square area. They have been interpreted as the sites of individual peasant tofts and lie in approximately the same position as their Late Saxon predecessors.

East of St. Thomas's Lane, and in the area formerly occupied by the parish's two open fields, quantities of medieval pottery, consistent with less intensive manuring, were recovered (*c.* 1.5 sherds per hectare). In places clusters of sherds also occurred. These clusters, not dense enough to evidence occupation sites, might well represent medieval manure heaps. East of St. Thomas's Lane, and alongside the river Ingol, much of the farm is down to grass. This grassland preserves a group of earthworks (Fig. 10), which probably represent the site of a watermill (Site 11264), with associated ponds and leats. The channels fed water down from the spring-line, today marked by the large pond, past the mill and into the river Ingol. Some of the channels have recently been backfilled, so the full plan of the site is not now apparent.

During fieldwalking no trace was found of St. Thomas's chapel (Site 1535). It was thought that the site lay alongside the curving east-to-west hedge to the east of St. Thomas's Lane which, given its irregular shape, may represent a pre-enclosure boundary. It is possible, however, that a chalk and carstone wall (Site 25922), seen in section in the side of the pond above the mill (Fig. 10), represents the site of the chapel.

#### **Discussion**

Even a cursory glance at the artefact distribution maps reveals the most significant fact about the settlement history of Park Farm; namely the concentration of settlement along the western edge of the farm. Concentrations of Iron Age, Roman, Middle Saxon, Late Saxon and medieval pottery all occur in this zone. Attention has already been drawn to the fact that the western edge of the farm lies on the chalk-greensand boundary and it is reasonable to suggest that settlements located here would be most conveniently situated to exploit the various opportunities offered by upland, lowland and riverside environments. Certainly this is the model advanced by Gregory (1982, 357) with reference to the Roman period and it can be applied to both earlier and later periods with equal conviction.



Fig. 9  
Distribution of Medieval Sites and Sherds, Park Farm, Snettisham

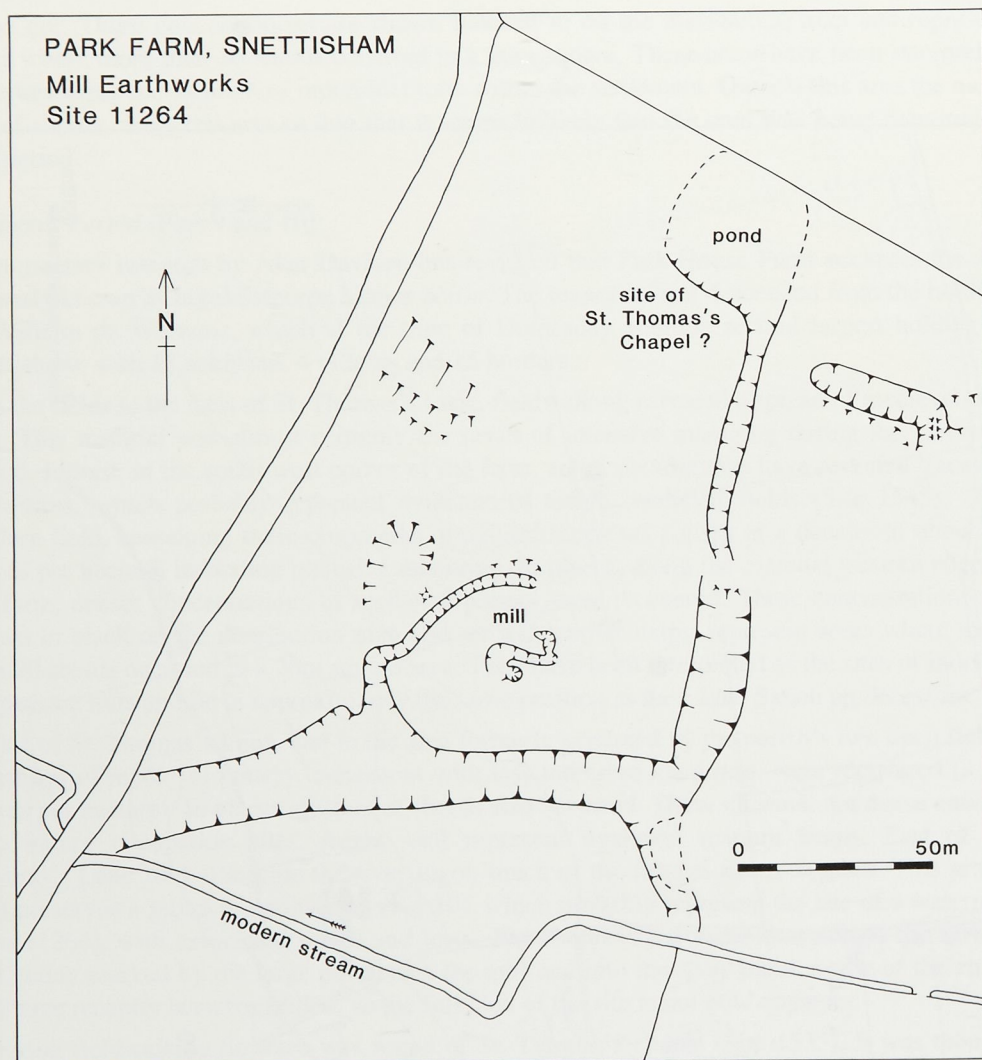


Fig. 10  
Mill Earthworks, Park Farm, Snettisham

Although a full consideration of the area's settlement history is beyond the scope of this report, it is important that the archaeological evidence from the farm is not viewed in isolation. Mention has already been made of the discovery of several Late Bronze Age hoards from the area and the suggestion that they may provide a clue as to the date of the cropmark at the east end of the farm. In addition attention has been drawn to the place of Snettisham Roman villa in a pattern of such sites along the edge of the chalk escarpment.

Also of interest was the recovery of a quantity of Middle Saxon Ipswich Ware from the farm. If the material collected during earlier work on the farm is included, over 100 sherds of Middle Saxon pottery have now been recovered from Park Farm. This cannot compare with some of

the Middle Saxon sites discovered in Marshland during the Norfolk Fenland Survey, such as the exceptional site at Hay Green which has produced over 1000 sherds of Ipswich Ware (Silvester 1988, 37 and 158) but it still represents a significant concentration for upland Norfolk. At Sedgford (TF 710 630), 4km north east of Park Farm, a further concentration of Middle Saxon material is known and excavations have revealed evidence of domestic Middle Saxon occupation and a cemetery (Sites 1607 and 1609) (Wilson 1959, 298). Perhaps the field-walking evidence indicates at least a domestic site of similar importance at Park Farm.

The evidence for Middle and Late Saxon settlement at Park Farm provides a contrast with that from the Launditch Hundred in central Norfolk, where Wade-Martins (1980, 84-86 and 1989, 160) was able to show that Middle and Late Saxon settlement was often concentrated around the churches, with settlement drifting away from these original foci during the medieval period. At Snettisham the Middle Saxon focus lay 0.5km south of the church, at Park Farm, and settlement appears to have continued on this site beyond the Late Saxon period, into Medieval times. There is, at present, no evidence that the church of St. Mary's at Snettisham was surrounded by Middle or Late Saxon settlement, although scatters of medieval pottery are known from its immediate surroundings. Like many Launditch Hundred churches, however, the church at Snettisham is now isolated and the modern village of Snettisham has developed c.0.5km to the west.

#### **Fieldwalking Results at Courtyard Farm (Figs 11 and 12)**

The quantities of material recovered during this survey were very small compared with those from Park Farm. There were no real concentrations of finds which could, even optimistically, be described as 'sites', and much of the farm produced an interesting lack of finds. The nature of the finds north and south of the modern road seemed to differ.

##### *The Northern Fields*

Relatively large quantities of material were recovered from these fields. There was a general scatter of medieval sherds, of which virtually all the identifiable pieces were local unglazed wares and Glazed Grimston Ware, though one sherd from Hatchet Breck was probably of Yorkshire origin.

A few sherds of Romano-British coarse pottery were found in the north-western fields, and a larger concentration was recovered from the fields on the east side of the farm, north of the road. This comprised Grey wares, colour-coated wares, Samian (one piece stamped, though illegible) and one possible amphora sherd.

There were also a few worked flints, all waste flakes.

##### *The Southern Fields*

These fields generally contained fewer finds. The fields in the central-western part of the farm had a widespread light scatter of medieval Grimston Ware, the one nearest the modern farm centre also producing a concentration of pottery on the brow of the slope to the road; individual fields in the east and south of the farm produced similar spreads of Romano-British material, but otherwise there were no real concentrations. There was a notable lack of any medieval finds from the south-eastern area of the farm. Two possible Iron Age sherds were found in separate fields in the central portion of the farm, and two Early Medieval sherds were recovered in the field nearest the modern farm. The little worked flint that was recovered during the survey came mainly from the south-eastern fields.



### Discussion

The absence of concentrations of finds, 'sites' and the general lack of finds are the most obvious and possibly significant feature of the survey. There are no real clusters of finds which can definitely be described as 'sites', and the general levels of recovery are below those usually considered to be the normal background scatter on any farmland. This suggests that the land was not manured intensively and/or the land was only farmed for short periods. As the soil is not of particularly good quality the latter would seem to be a reasonable model – short, intensive cultivation of an area of heath-type land, then a shift to another area of land, leaving the old field strip to be recolonised by the heath.

As a general picture this may be accurate, but there is also evidence for continued cultivation, and manuring, in some of the fields: the area north of the modern road on the east side of the farm produced more Romano-British sherds than the rest of the farm, and may have been farmed semi-permanently in the first two centuries AD; the same may have been true of the central-western part of the farm in the 12th to 14th centuries (and possibly earlier), but these two areas seem to be the exceptions.

It would appear that this area was cultivated throughout its history as a series of 'breaks' or 'brecks' in marginal heathland, but with some evidence for longer-term cultivation in selected areas.

This description, based on the archaeological evidence, for the past history of Courtyard Farm correlates well with the documentary research of Alan Davison into the area.

He suggests that such peripheral land is unlikely to have been intensively cultivated in the past, though it is probable that some agriculture was practised from the 13th century, or earlier. However the present field pattern is likely to date to the late 18th or early 19th century.

One record preserved in the Norfolk Record Office is an undated map of the 17th century showing the area of the modern farm (NRO LeStrange OB5); in this the northern, larger, part of the farm appears to have been cultivated open-field land, while the southern area was heath land called The Sheep's Ling. It should be noted that this Sheep's Ling area covers the part of the farm from which no Medieval pottery was recovered. There is no sign of settlement on this map, or on another of c.1700 (NRO LeStrange EH8). Where field names are known from any record, they bear little resemblance to each other, or to the modern names, which appear to date to the late 19th century.

This would seem to be in agreement with the archaeological conclusions and suggests a refinement to the model advanced of past land usage: lengthier cultivation of the open fields could be sustained without recourse to external manuring if sheep were folded on the land; this would result in little or no archaeological material being incorporated into the fields.

### Conclusions

At first site the radically different results from the two survey areas might be thought strange, but a closer consideration of their respective environments provides an explanation for this apparent anomaly. Thus, whilst both farms lie almost wholly on the chalk upland it should be remembered that Park Farm lies right on the edge of the chalk and that the archaeological evidence indicates that settlement, in all the periods visible in the archaeological record, was largely concentrated on the boundary between the chalk and the greensand to the west. Courtyard Farm lacks such a geological boundary within its limits and, consequently, does not possess an obvious focus for settlement. Indeed it is very noticeable that the archaeological evidence from Courtyard Farm mirrors, almost exactly, that from the true upland parts of Park

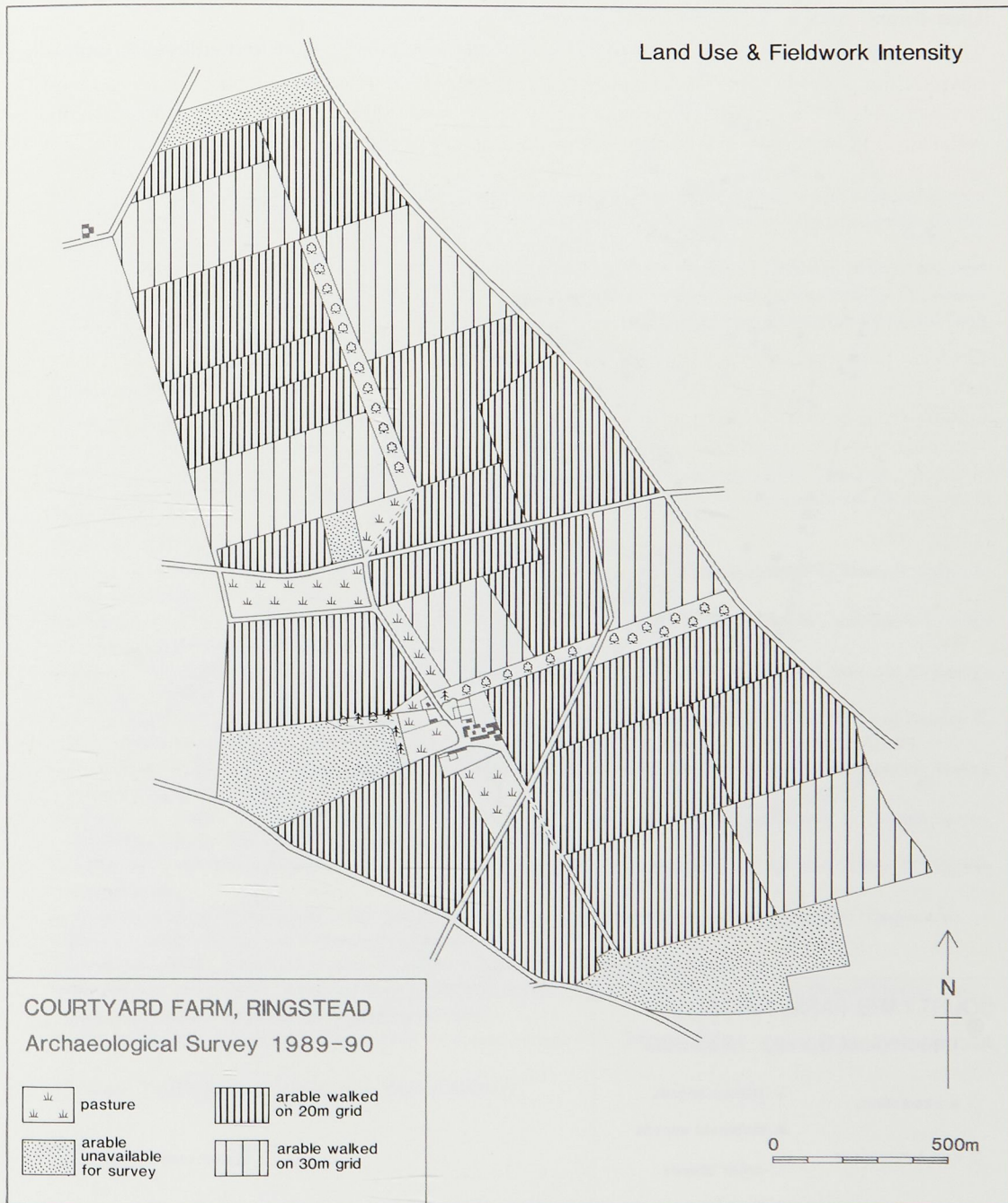


Fig. 11  
Land Use and Fieldwork Intensity, Courtyard Farm, Ringstead



Fig. 12  
Fieldwalking Results at Courtyard Farm, Ringstead

Farm. This is most convincingly illustrated by the medieval manuring scatters which equal about 1-2 sherds per hectare from Courtyard Farm and the upland parts of Park Farm.

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