

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE PARISH OF WEST ACRE PART 2: THE DOCUMENTARY BACKGROUND

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with an appendix by Martin Allen

SUMMARY

Following on from the previous article on fieldwalking and metal-detecting results, the documentary evidence for the late medieval landscape of West Acre is examined here, together with surveys of surviving earthworks, including those of the post-medieval High House Park. The influence of the Priory upon the village is considered and the article concludes with a summary of what has been discovered about West Acre seen against the results of similar surveys elsewhere in Norfolk.

Introduction

The documentary evidence for West Acre begins with the somewhat enigmatic Domesday survey of 1086. Thereafter a rather general framework can be constructed from Subsidy lists and Communicant returns up to the end of the 17th century. This is relieved by a number of late medieval documents of which the most important are four fieldbooks, part of the Birkbeck collection in the Norfolk Record Office (NRO), which cover the years from 1432 until 1598. Though dealing with only part of the parish, and lacking the geographical exactitude of some surveys of places elsewhere in Norfolk, these give details of lands and tenure on the Priory manor and are supplemented by other documents of a more specific nature in the same collection, in the Bradfer-Lawrence collection in the NRO, and in the Cambridge University Library.

The general pattern 1086–1676

In 1086 Domesday recorded a number of holdings all called 'Acre'. By referring to feudal history it is possible to separate the entries which concern West Acre, held by Ralph de Tosny. Apart from three carucates (360 acres) on the demesne, with six villeins, eight bordars and two serfs, there were seventeen sokemen with 405 acres with thirteen bordars subordinate to them, and another holding of two carucates with thirteen bordars (held by Thorbern under Harold before 1066) and a further four sokemen holding 30 acres. On the demesne were three mills, one fishery and five salt pans. There was also a mill with Thorbern's old holding. It was said to be a berewick (outlying farm) of Necton. Associated with West Acre was a small portion of East Walton, where there were two sokemen with 30 acres and five bordars said to be 'in Acre'. Also linked with West Acre were one freeman in Gayton Thorpe with 60 acres, three bordars and half a ploughteam, three sokemen in 'Ketuna' (unknown, although 'Necton' has been suggested) who had 60 acres with one bordar and one ploughteam, five sokemen in Lynn with 80 acres and three bordars, five salt pans and two ploughteams, and two sokemen in East Winch with eight acres. The whole of West Acre had one league in length and in width and all these entries were valued in Necton (Brown 1984, 22, 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20). Custhorpe, now within the parish, was also held by de Tosny; here there were three sokemen, one bordar, one carucate of land and one ploughteam (Brown 1984, 7, 22).

The details given for West Acre mention five salt pans. The present configuration of the parish makes this rather unlikely, however, unless they were elsewhere. There were five salt pans with the

five sokemen in Lynn and it seems likely that a situation near there was the location of the ones belonging to West Acre.

It seems likely from a glance at the entries for Necton itself that West Acre and its associates formed part of a much larger estate in west-central Norfolk. De Tosny held Necton with 32 villeins, eleven bordars and six serfs, with four plough-teams on the demesne and ten among the men. There was woodland for 1000 swine, a mill, a saltpan and a church with 36 acres. There were five sokemen with five ploughteams. His holding extended into Bradenham and there were outliers in Pickenham, Great Cressingham, Little Cressingham and Caldecote, and in Carbrooke in Wayland Hundred (Brown 1984, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 22). Other places valued under Necton were Fransham, Dunham and Godwick in Launditch Hundred, while Shingham in Clackclose was said to appertain. Parts of Ickburgh (Grimshoe) and Breckles (Wayland) were also valued with Necton, while the three Wrethams in Shropham Hundred were outliers (Brown 1984, 11, 12–14, 21–3).

Assuming that de Tosny acquired an existing holding in 1066, as it would appear from the number of berewicks or outlying farms recorded, it is interesting to speculate on its possible antiquity. It is possible that this was the remains of an earlier Saxon estate and the numbers of sokemen on these lands — perhaps descendants of semi-free cultivators of the great Middle Saxon estates — do tend to support this suggestion (Williamson 1993, 94, 100).

The place-name 'Acre' is from the OE *aecer* (Mills 1991, 2) meaning 'newly cultivated land'. An alternative meaning given as 'plot of cultivated land' is relevant in the study of settlement names. The Norfolk Acres are the only simplex names, and the other English examples (Linacre, Ridgeacre, for example) all embody some descriptive addition. The term seems specially appropriate to arable surrounded by rough pasture and it does appear to be a term used for farms on the edges of cultivated areas, probably relatively new establishments. In this respect it is interesting to note that the three Acres are beside the River Nar and that to the north of them are lands which have been heathland (Massingham Heath), while a similar area lay to the south (Gelling 1984, 232–3). South Acre was part of a former royal manor, an outlier Of Sporle (Brown 1984, 1, 71). Castle Acre, although part of the large Warenne holding of 1086, does not seem to have been linked to any group of vills previously (Brown 1984, 8, 22); it had a very large number of bordars (56) as opposed to other persons (seven) and, unlike the other two Acres, a church with 30 acres was recorded. It might be assumed from this that a large area of land, margined by heathland on two sides, had been taken into cultivation relatively lately, two of the resulting settlements being outliers of existing estates, but this is speculation.

Medieval West Acre was dominated by the Augustinian priory. Details of the circumstances of its foundation will be discussed later. It should be remembered, when considering Lay Subsidy figures for the medieval period, that much clerical property and property of villeins of the clergy was exempt from the tax (Glasscock 1975, XVII–XXII) and this should result in a comparatively low figure for West Acre. The Subsidy payment made by West Acre in 1334 was £4–7–0, the 25th lowest payment in a hundred of 39 contributors; by contrast, Castle Acre, also with a large clerical presence, paid a contribution of £12. In 1449 West Acre was allowed only a 7% reduction while Castle Acre had one of 40% (Hudson 1895, 271–2). In 1524–5 West Acre seems to have had about half the number of contributors as Castle Acre but the sums paid per head appear much smaller (Sheail 1968).

At the Dissolution the Priory and its manor were granted to Mary, Duchess of Richmond and Somerset for life by Henry VIII in 1538–9 and Edward VI subsequently, in 1553, granted the reversion to Thomas Gresham. Afterwards it was purchased by Sir Horatio Palavicini who, in turn, sold

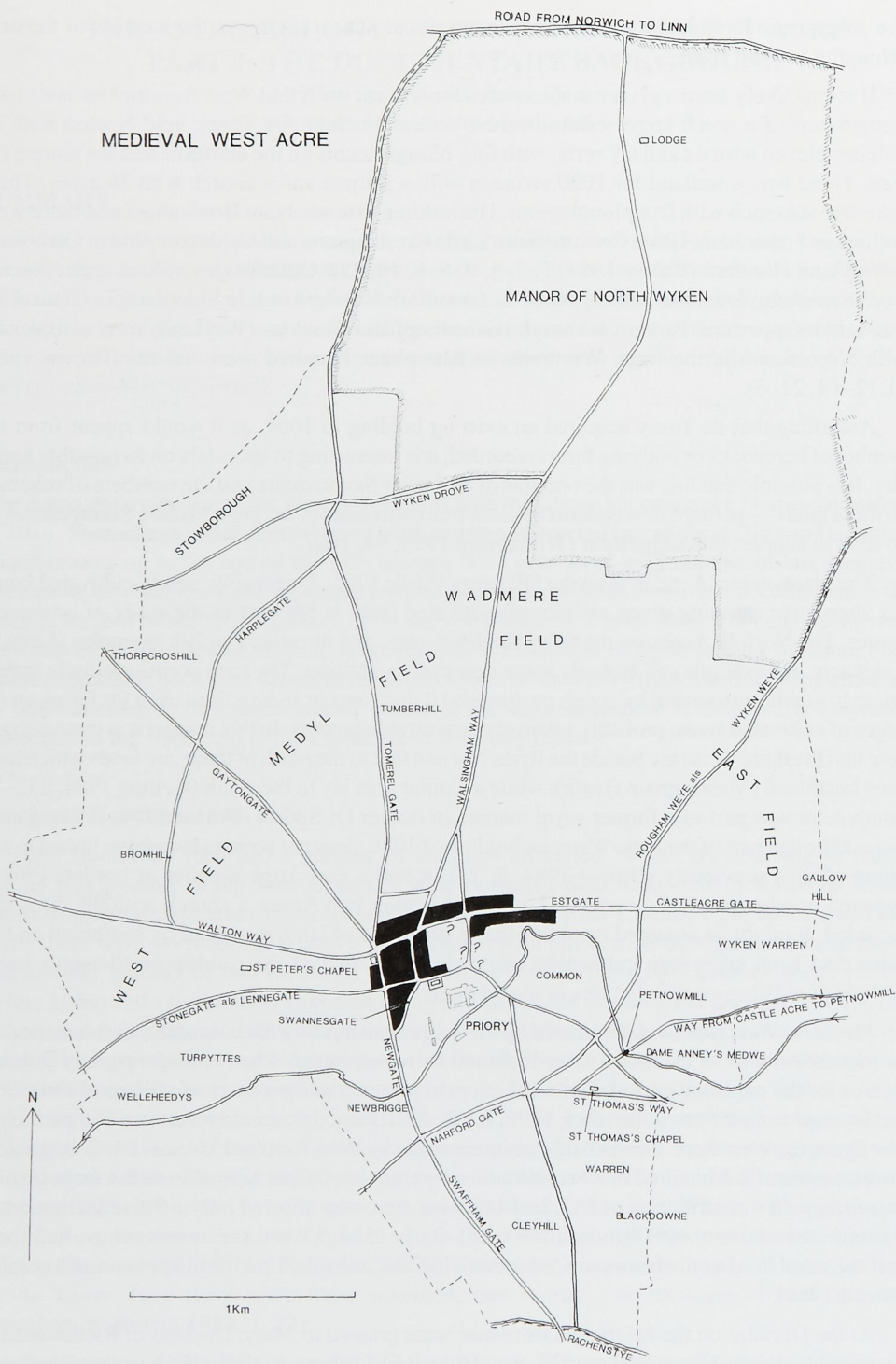


Figure 1. West Acre from 15th- and 16th-century field surveys

to Sir Edward Barkham in 1621. His heiress married Charles Yallop and their son, who took the name of Spelman from his grandfather, conveyed it to Richard Hamond in 1761. It was Edward Barkham who is credited with the building of a large house called High House in 1624 (Blomefield 1775, IV, 752–3).

Population figures for the 17th century in West Acre are interesting: in 1603 there were 120 communicants and six non-communicants which suggests a total of about 210. In 1676 the figures were 140 with one non-conformist, giving a probable total population of some 253 (Whiteman 1986, 229).

The 15th- and 16th-century field surveys

(Fig. 1)

The field books (NRO Birkbeck BIR/1, BIR/2, BIR/3 and BIR/4) are particularly useful in supplying details of the late medieval and post-medieval community. Surviving surveys date to 1432, 1529–30, and 1598–9, while there is a further undated 16th-century survey.

There are a number of drawbacks with the initial survey of 1432. The first lies in the form of the field book. It is not laid out on a geographical basis which would allow accurate tracing of recorded details, but is set out according to occupiers of lands. For example, the lands of the Priory (demesne) are cited followed by the holdings of each of the tenants. The second major problem is the absence of any reference to lands within the Priory precinct, or to the parish church. There is little or no reference to land to the north of the parish although Stowborough (Stowburgh) is mentioned in 1432, in 1529 (Stoneborowe, Stowborrowwynnysfurlong) and again in 1599 (Stowborowe). The heading of the 1432 field book has the addition 'except the manor of North Wyken' which may well be the name given to this area of the north part of the parish. Lastly, the land south of the river, Custhorpe, is almost entirely omitted. Information here has to be obtained from another source (NRO MS 11352) 'The Dragge of Custhorpe Betweene Swaffham Way and Narford feylde'; this is undated but refers to the 'late departed Prior', pointing to a mid 16th-century time. It is not particularly helpful.

The later field books are arranged according to furlongs and refer to landmarks, only a few of which can be safely identified. The unfortunate absence of early parish maps — even Enclosure and Tithe Maps — make location of houses, furlongs and roads particularly difficult.

The village in 1432 (NRO BIR/1)

The survey does not give a systematic account of the village. Information of a less than satisfactory nature has to be pieced together from the lists of holdings and the boundaries recorded for them. There were no less than 61 messuages described as 'built', two said to be not built upon, and two badly built. Four cases of two messuages made into one were recorded, and one of them was described as built upon. Twenty-five other messuages were listed without any reference to buildings; many of these had crofts adjacent and may well have had houses upon them at some point, if not in 1432. Eight messuages were said to be empty. Two other buildings were directly listed. One was a cottage with a building, presumably a smaller holding carrying a house. The other was a shop facing north onto the Green. One further building was referred to among the stated bounds of another; this was a messuage called 'le forge'. A puzzling entry was for a toft with a croft, part of a holding which included one messuage built upon and another empty. This was the only occasion in the whole survey that this term 'toft' was used and its meaning in this circumstance is not clear.

Several of the tenants had more than one messuage, built or not built, to their names. The largest holding was of a man called Robert Nabbes who held eight, three of them by right of his wife, and there were eighteen others, including Robert Randes, described as a gentleman, who held two. What this meant is uncertain; it can be assumed that the extra messuages, when built upon at least, were inhabited by sub-tenants whose names are unknown (Harrison 1979, 82–9).

So far as layout is concerned, some general details can be distinguished. Many of the roads mentioned are simply called common ways or more usually, 'regia via', with an indication of direction but with no further information. The general impression is of a somewhat loose grid pattern. One road which is identifiable is one which had messuages on its northern

side which, in turn, headed north onto the fields; this is almost certainly the road which is called Estgate on two occasions and Castleacregate elsewhere. Further east, messuages faced onto this road, headed south onto the river and east onto Calkepiyerd.

Various roads linked with this roughly at right-angles and extended southwards. Some of these had names such as Millewent, the Watergonge and the Priory 'calcetum' or causeway, probably a raised driveway. Newgate was first named in 1529 (NRO BIR/2).

To the west of the village the picture is a little clearer; Swaffham Gate was almost certainly the same as the way from Thorpe to Swaffham and must have crossed the river to the west of the Priory precinct. Swannesgate lay to the east of Swaffhamgate. However, its position is less clear since a messuage was said to head east on Gayton Gate and have its western head on Swaffham Gate. To the west of this area lay field land; to the east lay the Priory precinct.

There is no information about Cuthorpe in 1432. The nearest details are from MS 11352 which mentions seven tenants but only two messuages, one of them empty.

Roadways

In the absence of any map before Faden (1797) it is only possible to eliminate the lines taken by named routeways. With the addition of details from the later surveys (NRO BIR/2, BIR/3, BIR/4 and MS 11352) an approximate picture can be assembled. Castleacregate is clearly the continuation of Estgate to the parish boundary. To the south of this was another road, still followed by a pathway, which was the road from Petnowmille to Castle Acre (Petnowmille was close to the present mill house on the Nar). Working round in an anti-clockwise direction are several different ways, of which Wyken Drove was probably close to the present road leading north-eastwards; it was probably also known as Drovegate and Rougham Way or Rougham Sty. Also roughly identifiable was Tomerelgate, which must have made for the present Tumble Hill. Between these were other tracks named as Smalsty, Wadmeregat (or Wadmer), Fullersty, Sondgate and Doversygate, which are no longer identifiable. Further to the west was Harplegate, which must have once linked West Acre with Harpley, Gayton Gate and Thorp Waye, which are self-explanatory, and Walton Gate or Way, which must have followed close to the line of the present road to East Walton. Finally, to the south of Walton Way, following the course of the Nar above the flood plain, was Stoneway, also known less frequently as Lenneway or Lynnegate and still discernible as a footway.

South of the river Swaffham Way continued and Narfordgate ran from Cuthorpe towards Narford, while Marham Waye lay to the south of Narfordgate. Rachenstye was a road running along the southern boundary of West Acre parish in the direction of Bartholomew Hills or Racheness, the site of the Chapel and Leper Hospital of St. Bartholomew (Blomefield 1769, III, 419). Chapelgate was described as the way leading towards Marham, and it may be the same as the common way that led from the Chapel of St. Thomas towards Marham Waye. A path led from the Chapel towards Blackdunhill (Blakeneyhill). Swaffham Way crossed the river by what was known as Newbriggess in 1627 (NRO Bradfer-Lawrence Ixd(4)).

Fields

In West Acre proper there were four named fields subdivided into furlongs. The easternmost was known simply as the East Field and lay against the boundary with Castle Acre and extended south to the river as Petnowmilledameshend is mentioned together with Dame Anneyismedowe, both riverside locations, while the way called Rougham Weye (almost certainly the same as Wyken Way) crossed part of the field.

A second field was called Wadmerefield. It stretched from the vicinity of Wyken Drove, which ran from west to east, westwards towards Tomerelgate and Tinerelhille Pece, which must have been close to the modern Tumble Hill.

Medylfeld or le Mydylfeld extended south-westwards towards Walton Gate, which lay on its margins, up to Thorproshill which lay close to the Gayton Thorpe boundary, and round to Drove Gate *alias* Wyken Drove, an east-to-west track. Mentioned as crossing this field were Gayton Gate, Harplegate, Doversygate and Walsingham Way.

The fourth field was West Field which lay between Walton Gate and the river; Stoneway and part of Harplegate ran across this field.

Cuthorpe field consisted of 16 furlongs of which only four, Long furlong, Medylfurlong, Blackdonne furlong and Cleyhill furlong, were named (NRO MS 11352).

Other features

Mills

There were, apparently, several mills in West Acre. One of them was Petnowmille which stood close to the modern Mill House. Also recorded in 1432 was Harsykkes mille; a piece of land in East Field was said to head south onto the common of West Acre near the 'outshotys de Harsykkes mylle'. It was probably upstream from Petnowmille. Within the village there were references to

a mill in the forms of Millewent, which led to the Milledam, and also Millesty. A fulling mill is also recorded in the form of fullingmilledaam and fullersty, while Robert Nabbes, one of the tenants, was a fuller. In 1589 (NRO Bradfer-Lawrence Ixd(4)) a copyhold list referred to 'one house callyd the ffullyngmylle wth the orchard adjoyninge and le shott there'. In 1599 there was an incidental reference to the 'late fulling mill' (NRO BIR/4). There was yet another mill called Bryggemille which in 1432 was associated with the West Field.

Warrens

There were warrens although none were recorded until 1599, when one was mentioned. It lay to the north of the riverine lands between Petnow and Harsyk mills and the way from Petnowmille to Castle Acre seems to have run near or through it. Various holdings were then said to be within the ditches of the warren. This may be the Wyken Warren mentioned in 1553 (Blomefield 1775, IV, 752). The other warren seems to have been in Custhorpe. A Visitation of 1494 mentioned it as being near the Chapel of St. Thomas (Doubleday and Page 1906, II, 402) and it was mentioned in 1553. No reference appears in the *Dragge* of Custhorpe.

A curious field name — *les Claperys*, *Clapers* or *Clapper* — is recorded in the West Field. It may mean 'land with rabbit burrows', either a reference to a piece of land infested with rabbit holes or possibly an old warren (Field 1972, 46).

Crosses and boundary markers

A number of crosses, apparently at points outside the village envelope, were mentioned. One of these was variously called *Whyght crosse*, *Alba Crucem* or *Qwytherosse* and was probably somewhere in *Wadmerfield*; the name possibly referred to the chalky nature of the soil nearby. *Catereynescros* was in the West Field and *Stone Cross* lay to the south of *Walton Way*. *Thorpecrosse* was on or next to a hill near the *Thorpe* boundary on '*le Scoote*' (an odd Corner). It is possible that these served as boundary marks, although *Catereynescros* may have had some religious significance as there was an altar to the Saint in the parish church. In Custhorpe the *Boundstones* marked the boundary with *Narford*, which had a *Boundstone* furlong nearby (NRO MS 11353 T134D).

Chapels and gildhalls

Apart from the Chapel of St. Thomas in Custhorpe, there was also a Chapel of St. Peter between *Walton Way* and *Stoneway*. It is possible that there was also a Chapel of St. Nicholas at the east end of the village. These will be discussed later.

There were guilds of St. Thomas and St. John which had lands but there was no mention of halls. On the other hand the *Gildhall* of St. Mary, which stood at the junction of two roads on the western side of the village, had a site which may be equated with an identifiable building platform.

Other features

Few recognisable landmarks are mentioned. One of these was the interestingly named area *Stowburgh* (1432), *Stoneborowe* (1529) or *Stowborowe* (1599). This still appears on modern maps as *Stowborough Heath* and *Stowborough Heath Plantation* on the western boundary parish. *Thomerel Hill*, *Tomerel Gate*, *Tumberhill Weye* and *Tumberhill Piece* are versions of the modern *Tumbley Hill*. *Bromhill* (1529 and 1599) can be related to *Broom Covert* on the modern map, a sandy hillock supporting woodland. In Custhorpe, *Clayhole Plantation* and *Blakeneyhill Plantation* are present versions of *Cleyhill* and *Blackdonne* or *Blackdowne*.

Pits are numerous in the modern landscape. Some of them are of considerable antiquity. *Cleypit furlong*, *Cokkyspyt*, *Lampyttpece*, *Pytlond*, *Est Lampytts*, *West Lampytts* and *Turpyttes*, the latter close to the river, and *Cleyhill* and *Blackdowne pytts* in Custhorpe provide evidence of this.

Not all the field area was under active cropping. *Chymmyngesbuske*, *Drawswerdes qwynne bussch*, *Qwynebuske* and *les Whyynes* (all 1432) reveal the use of gorse or whin, probably as a fuel. Woodland is not mentioned apart from *Thornebuske* (probably a single bush) and *Okepytell furlong* in 1529.

Dedmansgrave — probably a tumulus no longer visible — appeared in 1529 and 1599.

The earthworks surviving in West Acre are varied in type, ranging from an obvious medieval extension of the village to some of varied origins within the *Priory precinct*. In addition there are various earthworks 'fossilised' within the park surrounding *High House*. They were all surveyed and described by *Brian Cushion* as part of the *Norfolk Earthwork Survey*. The surveys are reproduced here where appropriate, accompanied by descriptions based on these accounts.

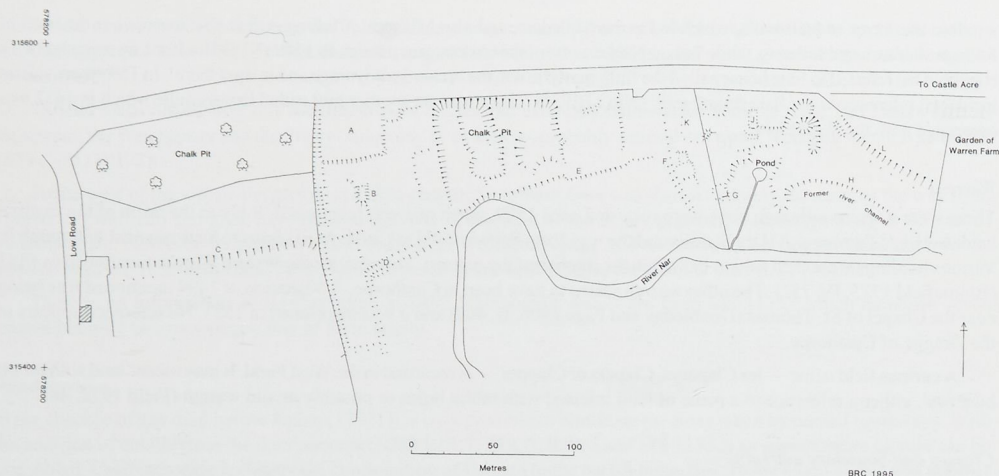


Figure 2. Medieval village earthworks

Medieval village earthworks

by Brian Cushion and Alan Davison

(Fig. 2)

These earthworks are probably the only substantial remains of a larger medieval village, apart from some possible sites within the Priory precinct to the east of the church (Fig. 4). To the east of the group is Warren Farm and to the west the remains of a post-medieval limekiln with a large pit. To the south are the low-lying lands by the Nar.

The enclosure **A** is the best-defined of a number of tofts, having a frontage of 40m on the road. Its western boundary is a ditch while at its north-eastern corner is a low raised area, probably the site of a building. The southern boundary is a prominent south-facing scarp; to the south is a platform (**B**), measuring 9.5 x 5.5m, with raised edges overlooking the valley floor.

The western boundary ditch of **A** is continued south until it changes line where a former field boundary scarp **C** extends westwards. There may have been a track to the south of **C** but it has been much degraded. Further scarps and banks to the south and east of **B** indicate subdivision into closes. One north-to-south scarp reaches a substantial ditch **D** which was a former drain leading to the Nar.

To the east is an old chalk pit, the boundaries of which are reasonably aligned, with north-to-south features on either side suggesting that the pit was worked within a plot similar to those to east and west. The southern boundary is partly formed by the natural river cliff but it also extends eastwards to join a straighter scarp **E**, which actually joins a north-to-south scarp so forming a further enclosure, perhaps another toft.

To the east again is an area containing definite evidence of buildings bounded to the west by a scarp and bank, **F**, which extends southwards to the flood plain.

Immediately to the east of **F** are the incomplete banks and scarps of a probable two-cell building, while to the south-east, beyond the existing fence, is an L-shaped section of flint and ashlar limestone masonry **G** barely protruding above the ground.

A sinuous natural slope extends northwards past a natural pond while the river cliff **H** overlooks a former course of the Nar, now superseded by a straight cut further to the south. A length of flint and brick masonry (medieval and post-medieval) marks a further building outline **J**. To the west is a very faint scarp **K** which marks a fence line shown on pre-War Ordnance Survey maps. To the east is a small irregularly-shaped pit and beyond that a linear scarp **L**, probably partly natural.

During the survey of these earthworks scattered finds of pottery were made which confirm the medieval dating of the features. Within enclosure **A** and on the feature at its north-eastern corner thirteen glazed Grimston Ware and fifteen unglazed sherds were found, while on and surrounding **B** two sherds of Thetford-type Ware, nine unglazed sherds and four glazed Grimston Ware sherds, all medieval, were collected. Other scattered finds included two unglazed medieval sherds immediately east-north-east of **B**, three unglazed medieval sherds around the edges of the chalk pit, two unglazed medieval sherds close to **E**, and two more unglazed sherds from the building east of **F**.

The presence of Thetford-type Ware on **B** suggests a Late Saxon origin for the western portion at least.

Because of the close proximity of road and river and the presence of the chalk pit, it is possible to identify parts of this group of earthworks. The chalk pit is described in 1432 as a close called 'le Calkepytyerd' with a meadow adjacent containing three acres in all, messuages to the east and west, its northern head abutting on a 'regia via' and its southern end in 'le ripam de Westacre'. It was in the hands of Robert Randes, a Gentleman. To the west, feature **A** corresponds with the messuage of Robert Hoo. This was described as a messuage built with a common went to the west, its northern head on the 'regia via' and abutting south on land of Robert Randes. It is possible that the ditch to the west of **A** may be all that remains of the common went, a lesser trackway.

Feature **B** was in the hands of Randes although it was said to be an empty messuage formerly in the hands of John Curteys. To the east was Calkepytyerd and its northern head was on the messuage of Robert Hoo. It headed south on the banks of the Nar. There was no mention of a common went to the west, indeed its western boundary is not mentioned at all. The remaining features remain unidentified as there is no further reference to Calkepytyerd in 1432, and it is not mentioned in the subsequent surveys. It is possible that the curiously regular scarp **L** may have been modified as some form of extended garden boundary to Warren Farm in post-medieval times. It is also possible that a mill, perhaps the fulling mill, was located to the east of Calkepytyerd.

The church and chapels

The parish church (SMR 3889) is one of only two buildings of medieval date remaining in use in West Acre, the other being the much modified Estate Office. No church was recorded in Domesday Book although it is likely that one was in existence. The foundation charter of West Acre priory (Vincent 1993, 492) records the dedication of the parish church in the early 12th century as All Saints. The wills of later medieval times give a tantalising picture of the church since developments in the liturgy seem to have led to possible confusion over the dedication and status of the parish church, complicated further by the presence alongside the very much larger priory church dedicated to All Saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Wills ranging from 1398 to 1546 (NRO NCC Harsyk; Craford 43-4) all refer to the church of St. Nicholas. However, a will of the parish priest, William Barnard, dated 1440 (NRO NCC Doke 133-4) requested burial in the churchyard of All Saints in West Acre and required William Walsingham to celebrate for him in the chapel of St. Nicholas: this at least would appear to refer accurately to dedications.

One interpretation is that an important side altar to St. Nicholas had been set up in the parish church, giving rise to confusion. One will of 1476 (NRO NCC Gelour 139) actually referred to the cemetery of the Chapel of St. Nicholas and All Saints of West Acre, introducing another uncertainty as to the status of the parish church so close to the Priory. A further possibility is discussed below.

If, as seems likely, there was a chapel of St. Nicholas within the parish church it was not the only one. There was certainly an altar to St. Katherine there in 1416 (NRO NCC Hyrnyng 15). There were also lights to St. Mary and to the Holy Sepulchre, probably in the parish church. Gilds of St. Margaret, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Peter and All Saints are mentioned in wills and a gild of St. John had lands in West Acre (NRO BIR/1). Of these, the gild of St. Peter would have centred their activities on the separate chapel of that name and the gild hall of the Assumption was mentioned in the survey of 1432. The others would have been associated with the parish church, or possibly with altars in the priory church.

Little of the earlier medieval fabric remains untouched; the western tower and the arch between nave and chancel are of the 14th century as is the nave. Much of the remainder is Perpendicular. There is one interesting medieval feature, a seated figure of the 13th century in the north porch which looks as though it was originally from the priory, probably a voussoir from an arch.

The signs are that after the Reformation the structure of the church received little attention until the arrival of Sir John Barkham (c. 1638) when there was a period of activity. The north porch entrance, the south doorway and priest's doorway were all restored. The Y-tracery window in the tower, the bell-openings and the north and south windows of the nave were all 17th-century. The southern windows of the chancel with Y-tracery are of 1638 and there is a cartouche and arms of the Barkhams on the ringing chamber. The communion rail is also of the 17th century. The eastern window is of the 19th century (Pevsner and Wilson 1999, 759).

The position of the church, inset into the priory precinct suggests a subordinate position in medieval times and may help to account for its small size and the uncertainty of dedication and status.

The Chapel of St. Thomas a Becket in Custhorpe (SMR 4010)

This site at TF 78811481 is well-known, although it is surprising that Allison (Allison 1955, 146) could find no remains of the building. Although flint footings only remain they are quite distinct and have Grade II listing.

It seems most likely that this chapel was built not long after the martyrdom of Becket in 1171, probably early in the 13th century. The chapel functioned as a cell of the priory. According to Blomefield (Blomefield 1775, IV, 724–5) two or three monks resided on the north-east side of the building, which measured 60ft by 30ft and had a burial ground. In 1479 the priory was granted the right to hold fairs here for three days annually at the Feast of the Translation of St. Thomas the Martyr (6th–8th July). St. Thomas was described as being venerated daily at 'St. Thomas's Chapel of West Acre' (Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1476–85, 158), presumably this chapel and not a side altar. The place was also visited by pilgrims, who used to pass on their way to Walsingham and also came to offer their devotion to St. Thomas. Their presence probably added to the commercial significance of the site (Blomefield 1775, IV, 754).

A scattering of finds to the north included a piece of Scarborough Ware and part of a late medieval/early post-medieval Flemish floor tile. The finds made suggest a gathering such as a fair rather than a settlement and are comparable to those near the Chapel of St. George at Great Cressingham, which also had an annual fair (Davison 1994b, 73–5). St. Thomas was a popular saint, and it is surprising to find that out of 22 wills only three made bequests to his chapel.

The Chapel of St. Peter (SMR 3886?)

This chapel lay in West Acre at some distance to the west of the village. It was recorded in 1432 as lying between the road leading to East Walton and Stonewey. The Field Book of 1529 (NRO BIR/2) referred to the Chapel of St. Peter with its cemetery associated with Stonecroft furlong and it is briefly mentioned in 1599 (NRO BIR/4). In 1432 William de Bergh, clerk to the prior and convent of West Acre, received licence to alienate properties in various Norfolk parishes to find a chaplain to celebrate divine service every Monday in the Chapel of St. Peter of Stone in West Acre (Cal. Pat. Rolls 1340–3, 503–4); this seems to be the earliest reference to the building. In 1432 there are references to Stonedyke, to areas under or near to Stone, and also to Chapeldyke, all in the same area. There is a patch of very stony ground in what may be the site of the chapel. Stonewey is the name of the neighbouring track and a large pit nearby is still called Peter's Pit. As late as 1599 land in the twenty-first furlong was described as lying at the west end of 'the chapel'. A Court Book entry of 1624 (NRO B-Lawrence Ixd(4)) referred to land in Petergate field and also mentioned 'Peter Loye'.

Blomefield (Blomefield 1775, IV, 752) seems to imply that this chapel was within the parish church, but it is clear that this was not so. Human remains were found c. 1972 when an electricity trench was dug at the approximate site and flints, cobbles and bricks were found on the surface (SMR 3886). During the recent fieldwalking survey, despite several searches in different years, no sign of it was found.

The confusion already noticed between All Saints and St. Nicholas probably does mean that the church had an important side altar to St. Nicholas. The Dragge of Custhorpe (NRO MS 31152) recorded land there belonging to the church of St. Nicholas, place unspecified. A will of 1438 requested burial in All Saints' churchyard and left money for the repair of the Chapel of St.

Nicholas and to the light of St. Mary in that Chapel (NRO NCC Doke 72) and this appears to clarify matters.

However, the field books of 1529 and 1599 (NRO BIR/2; BIR/4) both recorded the presence of a Chapelway or Chapelgate Way in descriptions of lands near the eastern edge of the village, apparently upstream of the Priory and the church. St. Nykeles Grene, mentioned in 1432 as being near Millsty, was again close to the eastern end. There is no sign of these features now and the existence of a free-standing chapel of St. Nicholas in that area, as opposed to an altar in the parish church, with or without its own cemetery, rests solely on this slender evidence. It is interesting that the dedication of the Augustinian priory of Great Massingham, which was united with West Acre priory in 1475, was to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Nicholas.

The priory and its precinct

by Brian Cushion and Alan Davison

(Figs 3 and 4)

The priory (SMR 3881) began as a small community led by Olivet, the parish priest, following the Augustinian rule, in All Saints' church (Vincent 1993, 490–1). Olivet had devoted himself and all his worldly goods to a life of religion on the lands of Ralph de Tosny, the son of the Domesday tenant. The charter of de Tosny described the rule (Vincent 1993, 492) under which they lived and confirmed to them the church and the tithe of his hall and of the vill of West Acre, together with gifts from the soke of Necton to which West Acre belonged, and a grant of the land which Olivet had from de Tosny. At some later date, probably after 1130, the community became a recognisable priory with its own buildings.

It is not proposed to describe the remains of the buildings at any length here. This has been covered in a paper based on excavations carried out in the late 1920s (Fairweather and Bradfer-Lawrence 1929, 359–94) and detailed reference should be made to that. The accompanying plan (Fig. 3) which is not to scale, shows the approximate dispositions of the major monastic

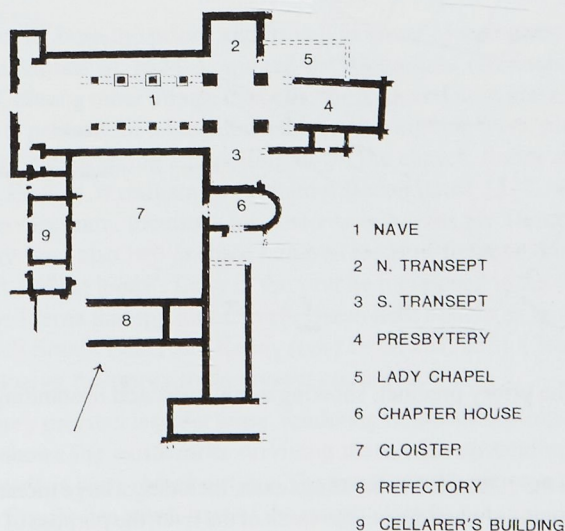


Figure 3. Plan of the priory and claustral complex (after Fairweather and Bradfer-Lawrence)



Figure 4. The priory precinct, showing earthworks and upstanding buildings

buildings identified in the 1920s. Other buildings exist, including a large monastic barn to the west, a gatehouse, and the remains of a building to the south of the river, the purpose of which is uncertain.

Since the 1920s only relatively minor investigations have been undertaken. The most important of these were some trenches within and in the vicinity of the late medieval barn and an excavation

in the building called the Cellarer's range. The first of these, in 1995, showed that a medieval building extended northwards from the existing barn but few other signs of the priory were present apart from possible demolition rubbish. The second, in 1997, recorded structural and architectural details of an undercroft (Gurney (ed.) 1996, 410–11; 1998, 208).

The priory in its heyday was comparatively large and wealthy and had *c.* 26 canons; later this declined to an upper figure of *c.* 20. When it was dissolved in 1538 the priory and its manorial lands in West Acre were granted to Mary, Duchess of Richmond and Somerset for life, with reversion to Sir Thomas Gresham.

A few details of the economic life of the priory in the later stages may be considered here. A Visitation made in 1494 commented critically on the activities of the sub-prior and stated that, among his other actions, he was giving too much attention to farming a rabbit warren near the Chapel of St. Thomas and to his swan-rearing concern on the water near the priory (Doubleday and Page 1906, II, 402). The swans were being given to gentlemen thus bringing no profit to the priory. It seems likely that this last activity was conducted not on the narrow channel of the Nar but on some form of pool nearby.

Although there is little or no reference to sheep-rearing in any of the field books it is clear that sheep were important to the priory. Lists of properties belonging to the priory during the years 1507–10 give details of flocks (Cambridge Univ. Library MS Dd 8042). At Michaelmas 1507 a flock of ewes at Wyken numbered 703, with a further 294 pastured at Rougham. The Stowburgh flock of ewes numbered 690. At Cuthorpe a flock of hoggets numbered 501. Further flocks were at Mawment in Massingham, the west pasture in Massingham, South More (Summer Common) in East Walton, 'Bartysmews' (Bartholomew Hills) in Southacre, the west pasture in Southacre, Bockyng in Southacre, South Pickenham and Fincham's Manor in Rougham. It is clear from the accounts that the size of flocks varied from year to year and it is uncertain whether the figures given are in 'long' or 'short' hundreds. In 1514 Bishop Nicke's Visitation showed that the prior was embarrassed by lack of money, was in debt and could not pay the canons' stipends; the stock of sheep was down by thousands and the prior had sold nine score at the last shearing (Doubleday and Page 1906, II, 402).

After the Dissolution, both the priory and its cell in Great Massingham suffered destruction; the Court of Augmentations of 1544–5, quoted by Blomefield (Blomefield 1775, IV, 754–5) recorded the value of, among other things, the bells, the lead, and iron, glass, stone and various old buildings. Payments to persons for taking down the bells, weighing them, plucking down, melting and weighing the lead and defacing and pulling down the church, dorter and other houses were listed. A letter from Francis Wyndham to Nathaniel Bacon dated 1577, when the property had passed to Sir Thomas Gresham, mentions his desire to buy from Sir Thomas's officers 100 oaks growing at West Acre 'and also two or three hundred loads of freestone there or at Castleacre ... They sell the stone at 20d the load'. Later in the year he mentioned in another letter: 'Towchyng the pryce of the stone I lerne that my lord Chyefe Baron hath bought as moch as he wod have for 20d the load' (Hassell Smith, Baker and Kenny (eds) 1979, 251, 253). Clearly a steady trade was being carried on, reducing the priory to its present condition.

The extensive priory precinct is under grass, rendering fieldwalking impossible. The accompanying plan (Fig. 4) shows the earthworks surviving there with upstanding buildings, including parts of the precinct wall, in heavy black outline. The position of the priory church and surrounding buildings (shown in Fig. 3) lies south-east of the parish church.

By Sandy Lane is a very well-defined section of the precinct wall. Within it is the outline of a post-medieval brick building (A) inside a banked enclosure bounded to the east by the northward extension of the north-to-south outer court range

including the medieval barn. Further to the south a mound (**B**), possibly the site of a mill, has a shallow causeway approaching from the east. Also, within the present cricket ground, a slight bank is terminated by the sewage works, as is a U-shaped feature (**C**) sufficiently distinct to be a remnant of a building outline.

To the east of the parish church are features which may be signs of a shrunken village. The churchyard extension has truncated an east-to-west bank which becomes, in more subdued form, the southern edge of a linear depression (**D**), most probably a hollow way. Three small closes or tofts lie between the hollow way and the present street, suggesting a possible enlargement of the precinct at some point.

To the south-east of **D**, near the ford, are two shallow rectangular depressions, the larger of which (**E**) has a degraded channel linking it to the river. The other depression (**F**) regularly contains water and is also linked to the river. Two smaller hollows lie between these; one of them with a leat may suggest a third fishpond. Ditches in this area imply drainage rather than linking channels. The presence of coppiced alder points to productive plantation, though whether contemporary or later awaits further expert examination.

South of the river and opposite the ponds a causeway leads from the river to a building platform (**G**) where fragments of ceramic roof tiles, medieval bricks and a piece of Collyweston slate and a flint and mortar building outline occur. There is a shallow ditch to the east while to the south-west a large boggy rectangular hollow has a leat into the former river course to the south. Further west are two roughly oval-shaped depressions (**H**). The southern one contains water and has a leat connecting it to the former river channel. A piece of flint masonry is on the ridge between the two. These hollows are tentatively identified as fishponds.

To the west again is a meandering linear hollow (**J**) which is linked to the old river course. Its profile suggests that it may once have served as a sluiced overflow from a canalised stream. Nearby is a shallow irregular depression with a slight raised central platform; this has been suggested as yet another fishpond but it is so degraded that it is difficult to support this contention.

Within the enclosure surrounding the major ruined building is a small rectangular mound, possibly a building platform (**K**).

The valley floor contains numerous channels, present and past; it is easy to visualise natural watercourses here but no single main channel can be discerned. There is no sign of a mill yet one may have existed, and the swan-rearing activities of the sub-prior in 1494 spring to mind.

Near the eastern boundary and to the south of the old channel is a length of flint masonry of unknown purpose (**L**). The eastern precinct boundary is well-marked by flint and ashlar masonry within a bank of over half a metre in height which extends, with some gaps, to the south-east corner of the precinct (**M**).

Two east-to-west banks stretch from the precinct boundary to a clearly-defined linear depression (**N**) much disturbed by the burrows of rabbits. This appears to be a hollow way which breaks the precinct bank to the south, suggesting a gateway. A further possibility is that it post-dates the precinct. The two banks, however, join the precinct bank and appear contemporary with it. To the west lie irregular banks, scarps and ditches, but no convincing pattern is apparent.

At the northern end (**N**) of at the junction with the more northerly bank a deep linear hollow leads to the valley floor near **L**. There are spoil heaps at the junction of **N** and **P** which indicate overdeepening, and it is possible that **P** is really just a modified extension of **N** adapted to form a drain after the roadway went out of use. There is a reference (Blomefield 1775, IV, 754) to a way which once went through the middle of the priory court being diverted outside. Bradfer-Lawrence (NRO Bradfer-Lawrence VIb (VIII)) thought that this referred to the hollow way; there is a right of way outside the precinct which follows the wall to the ford and which might have been the diversion. However, it was just as likely to concern a roadway at the western end of the precinct. This might have led more directly through the priory court, possibly from Sandy Lane which may have been the diversion.

The southern boundary of the precinct is largely a clearly-defined bank bordering the road from Narford to South Acre. A short length of flint masonry is visible at **Q**. North-west of **Q** a ridge with flanking ditches extends downslope, with one ditch entering the valley-floor drainage system. A brief extent of flint masonry (**R**) on a west-facing slope overlooks a series of banks and scarps forming a group of incomplete enclosures extending to the valley floor, where a later drainage ditch has cut through a north-to-south bank. It is possible, therefore, that this group of features may be contemporary with the priory. If so, it is just possible that they may have been associated with the settlement of Custhorpe and have been absorbed within the priory grounds. Some extension of the priory had been licensed in 1343 when the prior had been permitted to enclose, for the enlargement of the 'manse' of the priory, two acres of pasture in Custhorpe which had been common to the men of the town, provided that he compensated them with another two acres of pasture (Cal. Pat. Rolls 1343-5, 5). It is not obvious what was meant by 'manse'; it may be that the standing ruins south of the river were the subject of this license.

One remaining feature (SMR 16580) within the precinct has to be described. This is the mound and enclosing bank (**S**) in the south-east corner of the precinct. A gap in the eastern bank may be original while on aerial photographs (OS 76 020 183; NLA TF 7815/AM) a northward-projecting entrance-like feature may exist central to the northern bank. The feature

has been identified and scheduled as an Iron Age barrow and has been considered in the previous paper (Davison 2003). Its presence within the precinct requires some description in this section.

The presence of this large area of grassland so close to the existing village cannot be ignored, although it renders fieldwalking impossible. Over recent years a few sherds of medieval pottery have been recovered within the precinct but no finds of earlier date have been made. This does not mean that parts of the area may not have been occupied before the foundation of the priory but rather that evidence is, so far, lacking.

High House, its park and the northern portion of West Acre parish

by Brian Cushion and Alan Davison

(Figs 5 and 6)

The absence of firm information for the northern part of the parish is ended by the existence of a map dated 1726 (NRO Bradfer-Lawrence 14/28) entitled 'Manor of High-House in the Parish of West Acre' (Fig. 5). It shows a house of E-form with a northern projection and associated farm buildings and other structures, set in a landscape of large enclosures. These extended over the whole of the parish north of the apparent limits of cultivation of c. 1432. The names of some of them are indicative of the former nature of the area — Moorland Breck, Long Row Breck, White Orland Breck, Hoggherds Bank Breck, Sallow Pitt Brecks, Thieves Pitthole Breck, Mink Breck and Broom Breck are examples. Of other names Stoburrough Closes carries on an earlier name while Park Brecks and Lodge Hill Breck hint at the existence of an early park. Hoggherds Bank Breck may refer to sheep-rearing (hoggets) while 'breck' is said to mean 'land broken for cultivation, probably on an occasional basis' (Cameron 1996, 232).

This northern area may have served, in part at least, as grazing for some of the priory flocks, bearing in mind that they were described as those at Wyken and Stowburgh. The preamble to the 1432 field book recorded that it excepted 'the manor of North Wyken' and it seems quite likely that High-House Manor was a later name acquired by this area. Some indirect support comes from the Cartulary of Castle Acre, Charter 14/f3 dated 1146–8, where William 3rd Earl of Surrey granted at the head of Acre all heathland which belonged to Wicam to the monks of Castle Acre to break up and plough part of the heathland adjacent to Wicam (NRO MC 619/3,4782 x6 (transcript)). This refers to Wyken in Castle Acre but it does suggest the heathland character of the whole area, including neighbouring West Acre.

Around the house smaller enclosures are shown by the map, and from its date the house itself would appear to be the large house built by Sir Edward Barkham in the 17th century (Blomefield 1775, IV, 752–3). The 'High Road from Norwich to Linn' appears at the northern extremity of the 1726 map but there is no obvious road linking it with West Acre village, although one must have existed since High House would have needed contact with the outside world.

Much of the area shown on the map is now under permanent cultivation and has been fieldwalked (Davison 2003). However, a considerable proportion is grass- and tree-covered parkland surrounding the present High House, built on the site of the first house c. 1756 and refronted by Donthorn in 1829, who also built the stable block to the east (Pevsner and Wilson 1999, 761). The park was certainly in existence by 1797, when Faden showed one on his map of Norfolk. It seems that a park was in existence still earlier in 1756 when it was described by a visitor (Williamson 1998, 284). Further extension of the park had taken place by 1826 when Bryant showed a larger area subsequently confirmed by the Ordnance Survey 1st Edition map. This area is obviously not available for systematic fieldwalking.

Within the park a number of features survive from the landscape of 1726 and these are shown on Fig. 6. Some are fragments of former enclosure boundaries of which A appears to be the one named 'Sand-Pitt Close' in 1726. Within it are two pits, the easternmost being the deeper. Its eastern boundary is a ditched causeway, c. 3.5m wide, which extends from the present park



Figure 5. Northern West Acre after the 1726 survey

boundary ditch (B) towards the house as shown in 1726. However it does not align with the rectangular feature L to the north, which the map suggests it should. The western boundary is a triple feature with a west-facing scarp forming the actual boundary with a parallel partly-ditched causeway to the west extending further south. This feature was shown as a track on early 20th-century maps and continued north into garden woodland to the west of the house and southwards *via* farm buildings to West Acre village. The northern boundary of Sand-Pitt Close has been removed by the present drive and the ha-ha which bounds woodland south of the kitchen garden.



Figure 6. Earthwork features in High House Park

The park boundary ditch **B** is 2m deep and 10m wide and served as the boundary of an unnamed field in 1726, the fields to the south being Moorland-Breck and Moorland Closes. Faden seems to show it as the then park boundary with what appears to have been a pale, and with the western boundary of A and its track corresponding to the western boundary of the park. It extends only a little beyond a sand pit. After a gap of 150m a narrower and shallower ditch continues, broken by a small pit, up to the edge of the wood. The gap corresponds with a wood shown by Faden.

The boundary between Home Coverts and the grassland is a flint-faced ha-ha broken only by the drive and a woodland gateway, to the north of which is a chalk pit (**D**) protruding into the park. A linear feature (**E**) is a very slight ditched causeway 3m in width; if it is a former drive it must pre-date the two ha-has.

A further ditched causeway (**F**) lies to the east, in an area shown devoid of any such feature in 1726; the western ditch is partly banked. It seems to be part of an access way from the south to a field to the north. An east-to-west boundary at its northern end and the boundary ditch (**G**) could be parts of the park pale shown by Faden. To the west of **G** is a gently curving ridge, flattish-topped with gentle slopes (**H**), which fades out at each end. It may be the remains of a trackway or even an old headland; it is cut by a sinuous ditch (**J**) which continues east and which is cut by **G**, by a pit and by a curving depression (**K**) which closely follows the parish boundary. To the south **K** leaves the parish boundary and becomes a ridge with a broad flat top, stopping at the feature north of F. South of Castle Acre Covert, **K** continues alongside a hedge following the parish boundary. A bank is the most continuous feature here with a ditch and another bank to the west. It is possible that **K** may be part of an old processional way. The pit cutting **J** is an irregular quarry for clay used in the nearby brick kilns; each of these was marked by two linked depressions, one of which, in each case, indicated the position of the actual kiln. Other structures nearby are ridges which could have supported drying racks, while a rectangular outline to the east appears to mark the position of a building. The brick kilns may have been a source of bricks for the present house. There is a reference to brick kilns here in 1763 (NRO BIR/191) when a lease of High House Farm excluded the 'brick and lime kilns'.

To the south of High House are a short east-to-west ditch and some curving scarps which may mark an old drive and garden or pond features. The Kitchen Garden and the surrounding area, including the Ice House (SMR 3888), were within the enclosure called Cherry Close in 1726 and must all be of later origin.

The most upstanding earthwork of the whole site is about 100m north-north-west of the house. It is an angular U-shaped bank (**L**) opening to the house. Its south-east corner is ramp-like and curving and it is about 1.5m high, with a flat top *c.* 2m in width. A rectangular parch-mark has been noticed in the centre of the area within the bank, possibly a base for some feature related to the bank — a statue or fountain perhaps. The bank is outlined on the 1726 map and is probably the raised walkway surrounding a garden associated with the earlier house.

A broad east-to-west ridge (**M**) flanked by a northern ditch corresponds with a drive-like feature shown on the 1726 map leading to the rear of the house at that time. This would place the old building some 40m north of its successor. A well and water tank shown within a small fenced enclosure would have been near the eastern end of the first house.

To the north-east is a series of low scarps and shallow depressions which show as parchmarks in aerial photography (NLA TF 7918/E) and which match with three buildings shown in 1726. To the north is a near-rectangular pond on the southern edge of a wood containing the remains of two buildings; both are shown on Ordnance Survey County Series maps but are not thought earlier than the 18th century. The more northerly one was probably a house.

To the east of these features is a broken ditch (**N**) which represents the boundaries of the Ram Close of 1726 while the L-shaped boundary ditch and scarp (**P**) further south looks like the south-eastern corner of a small wood shown on the Ordnance Survey 1st Edition map. A short length of ditch at the northern end of **N** is probably the remnant of a flanking ditch to a roadway which once extended from east of Home Farm towards the present drive and is shown on the same map. A ditch extending from the larger pond into Stableyard Plantation must therefore be even later. A bank within the plantation may be earlier as it seems to lead towards the old park pale **G**.

To the north-west of the house are features within an area named Park Closes in 1726. It is uncertain whether 'Park' here means Closes near the park of 1726 or whether, more probably, it refers to an earlier (medieval) feature. None of the features in this area can be related to the park boundary of 1797 as shown by Faden.

An enclosure boundary (**Q**) is a well-defined bank which seems to be linked to a further curving extension north of the farm drive. It also appears to extend on a different alignment further south joining **M**. This all appears to be part of the eastern and northern boundary of one of the Park Closes of 1726. A further east-to-west ditch (**R**) to the north may be the boundary of another Park Close. South of the farm drive there is an east-to-west ditch and scarp (**S**), the eastern end of which turns to the south as a broader depression before it ends.

The western end of **S** joins a north-to-south series of ditches, scarps and ridges (**T**). From the east, they are a scarp with a shallow ditch, a more pronounced ditch, a wide (*c.* 5m) flat-topped ridge and a flanking ditch. This may have been a causeway broadening southwards and cut into by a ditch before being truncated by woodland. The easternmost ditch extends north of the farm drive which is itself a narrower modification of a broader way marked by parallel banks on both sides.

The eastern ditch of **T** is cut by **Q** which skirts the southern boundary of a large irregular pit. To the north of **Q** is a series of earthworks similar to a narrow version of **T**. However, as there is no northward continuation its nature remains problematic. There is evidence of disturbance here. A scarp and ridge (**U**) reaches in this direction from the farm cottages only to be truncated. There are scarps linking **U** to **Q** and to **R**. The most likely explanation of **U** is a roadway.

To the north of **R** are the remnants of what appear to be ridge and furrow 11m in width and 0.2m in height. The features are incomplete but are very straight. To the north of Home Farm is a further area of potential ridge and furrow with ridges 10–12m wide and 0.25m high. At the northern end is a fragment of an east-to-west series truncated to the east by small

wooded enclosures, the site of former dwellings shown on the Ordnance Survey One Inch 1st Edition. The main group of ridges vanish in rather indeterminate fashion. Very faint east-to-west marks in the former Sand Pitt Close (A), too subdued to be surveyed, appear under certain lighting conditions and have been tentatively suggested as further ridge and furrow.

It is clear from this lengthy description of features in the park that they are of several different periods, particularly pre-1726, of the late 18th century and of the 19th century. Whether any of them can be confidently identified as being medieval is questionable. The ridge and furrow, if that is indeed what it is, is rather straight and could be quite late. The medieval origins of these features is not supported by any finds of pottery of that period, which rather diminishes the case for medieval cultivation, although manuring by sheep would not have resulted in much pottery being scattered.

The names of fields suggest the existence of a good deal of heathland, used by 1726 as 'brecks', while the names 'Park Closes' and 'Lodge Hill Breck' may indicate a medieval deer park. Home Farmhouse (SMR 32149) is a further puzzling element. The building contains reused limestone as well as flint, has a portion of a timber frame and may be partly of the 16th century with a rear wing originally of 17th-century date. Refaced in the 18th century, it was heightened in the 19th century. If it was there in the 16th century, what was its function?

The present High House (SMR 3887) was built about 1756 to replace the earlier one of 1726. It was refronted in 1829 by Donthorn. It has a castellated brick facade which, together with the Doric pilasters and pillars, dates from 1829. The south front has a deeply recessed centre of five bays with two projecting wings. Further back are three-bay wings which extend east and west. The northern side is of thirteen bays, consisting of an inner section of seven bays which are original but were refaced in 1829, and two outer portions extending east and west of three bays each which were added in 1829.

To the east is an imposing stable block designed by the same architect in 1829. It consists of a small single-storey courtyard with higher corner towers. It is entered from the east by way of a barrel-vaulted archway (Pevsner and Wilson 1999, 760-1).

The ice-house lies to the west of the kitchen garden and is egg-shaped. It is constructed of pinkish-red brick which appears to be of different origin to that used in 1756 and 1829. It is entered by a passage eleven feet in length, about six feet in height and 3ft 6ins in width. The ice may have come from the ponds near Hall Farm.

The priory and the village

The priory must have had an unusual influence on what would otherwise have been a normal community. At least two additional chapels were established, one of these certainly with a graveyard, while analysis of entries in the 1432 field book seems to show that the Priory kept a hold on the way the land was worked. Demesne holdings were of over 755 acres distributed throughout the four fields. Of the 61 tenants listed all had at least one messuage apart from one who was said to have a toft and croft. Fourteen had more than one. The chief of these, Robert Nabbes, described as a fuller, had eight messuages, three of them held on behalf of his wife; one messuage of his own was formerly two, and two were not built upon. Robert Narburgh had three (one of them vacant), Will Blyk four, Thomas Barker four (one of them vacant), John Barber four (two of them vacant) and John Curteys three (one vacant). There were others with two or three. The existence of messuages listed as formerly two now one suggests some contraction before 1432. The multiple holding of messuages by single tenants is interesting. Not all were 'vacant', and presumably the others were occupied by

unrecorded sub-tenants. One entry does refer to sub-tenancies. Only two other craftsmen were mentioned: Geoffrey Crophe who was a tailor and Walter Smythe who had the smithy.

The size of tenants' holdings is revealing. Some five or so were not credited with any apart from a very small fraction of an acre described with the messuage, while one had only a pigstye. At the other end of the scale big tenants who held several messuages had large acreages, though parts may have been sub-let. Robert Randes, listed as a gentleman, had over 75 acres in 72 different portions, Robert Nabbes 55 acres in 73 parts, Robert Narburgh had 43 acres in 63 pieces, and John Walsingham 64 pieces totalling 38 acres. Randes had interests elsewhere: according to his will (NRO NCC Aleyne 113) he had lands in East Walton and wished to be buried in a chapel in St. Faith's Priory to which he made various bequests. The size of pieces varied although the greater number were less than an acre in area, 1½ roods being a very common size. This is certainly true of the tenants' holdings. The demesne had a few large holdings of considerable size which appear to have been marginal to the four fields. One of them was called 'Brekeplowe'. The remainder of the demesne holdings appear to have been somewhat larger than those of the tenants.

The total number of messuages said to have been built upon in 1432 was 61 with an additional cottage; 25 others were simply listed as 'messuages', eight were 'vacant', two were 'not built' upon and there was another described as a toft and croft. In 1529–30 (NRO BIR/2) there were 51 messuages built upon and 35 said to be empty, together with an enclosure in which were 'divers' empty messuages. Two others were simply described as 'messuages'. This survey was conducted just under ten years before the Priory was dissolved and, allowing for variations in terminology, indicates a good deal of shrinkage of housing in the village. Sampling a selection of the fields suggests that they remained largely open in similar dimensions to those of 1432, most pieces being less than an acre. In 1598/9 (NRO BIR/4) there were 55 messuages built upon, two other messuages, and 37 described as empty. Twelve of the empty messuages were said to be on Estgate, giving a named area of decline within the village. This survey was carried out during the ownership of Sir Horatio Palovicini, who had obviously let the manor to someone by the name of Fuller. The fields remained open in roughly the same way as in 1432.

The influence of the Priory can be noted in other ways. The village community was from time to time enlarged by people who were from much further afield. In 1310 (Cal. Close Rolls 1307–13, 339) Benedict de Watford, a servant of both Edward I and II, was sent to the Priory to receive, in the house, necessaries of life in food and clothing; in 1377 (Cal. Close Rolls 1374–7, 520) Thomas Hampton, a palfreyman, was sent there in similar circumstances. Besides these obvious additions there was also William Fullake, born in 'Brucell in Brabant', who was dwelling at West Acre (Cal. Patent Rolls 1429–36, 579). There was also an annual influx to the fair held at St. Thomas's Chapel (Cal. Patent Rolls 1476–85, 185). The fair near the 'solitary chapel', apparently granted in 1479, went on for three days at the Feast of St. Thomas and a court of pie powder was held. This was a court, named *pie poudre* after the dusty feet of the chapmen who travelled from fair to fair, by which the Priory could settle disputes, regulate measures and maintain order. The grant of such rights in 1479 may merely have confirmed matters already established. The sequence of coins here (see Appendix) continues well into post-medieval times, indicating prolonged activity. The fair may account for the surge of later finds accompanied by the small amount of pottery. One other interesting metalwork find to the north of West Acre was a piece of lead struck with dies of Stephen. This was probably the work of a forger, an unusual person to find in a village.

After the Dissolution the removal of the Priory and chapels provided a lucrative source of stone, although in 1599, 'John Fuller houldeth the Scite of the late Priorye of West Acre in farme of the lorde as the same lyeth wthin the auncient walls there cont' (NRO BIR/4). The fulling mill

remained in use in *c.* 1600 while a gildhall yard was referred to as 'message void' (NRO Bradfer-Lawrence Ixd(4)). There is a first reference there to a camping close in 1627 and to a hempland; it is possible that they were present earlier but escaped mention. Warrens certainly were in existence earlier — witness the Visitation of 1494 — although only one, presumably the Wyken, was mentioned in 1598/9 (NRO BIR/4).

The manor of West Acre post-Dissolution remained in the hands of lords who seem to have drawn revenue from it but lived elsewhere, and little appears to have been done to alter the way in which the land was worked from the last days of the Priory. It seems likely that major changes to the landscape of West Acre took place after the manor was bought by Sir Edward Barkham in 1621. He built the first High House, restored the church, and was probably responsible for the development of the northern part of the parish.

General conclusions

It is most unfortunate that, apart from the 18th-century map of High-House Manor (Fig. 5), there are no maps of West Acre earlier than Faden's Map of Norfolk (1797).

Moreover there is no Enclosure Map and no Tithe Map. The map of High House Manor shows field boundaries which appear quite different from those on modern maps, and it is by no means impossible that there have been many unrecorded changes in the layout of the remainder of the parish. More importantly, because of the absence of early maps, it is impossible to make more than rough identifications of the courses of some roadways and the positions of a few landmarks mentioned in 1432. Those shown on Fig. 1 are presented with appropriate reservations.

It has to be remembered that neither a fieldwalking nor a metal-detector survey is a perfect instrument. Most fields in this survey have been fieldwalked only once. Fieldwalking is a comparatively rapid search technique; metal-detecting is a slower, more intensive form of search. The plough may reveal fresh discoveries at any time. However, this survey, the first to present results from both methods, can be relied upon to give a general impression of the disposition of activity at successive periods.

A number of fieldwalking surveys have now been completed elsewhere in Norfolk. The first of this kind was of the Launditch Hundred by Peter Wade-Martins (Wade-Martins 1980, 2–91). This was restricted to those parts of parishes which seemed likely to produce settlement evidence and therefore may explain why Romano-British or Early Saxon sites are often lacking. This survey, conducted in west-central Norfolk on the boundary of the Good Sands region with mid-Norfolk's heavier soils, showed that in many cases a Middle and Late Saxon concentration near the church was followed by a medieval movement to the edge of a green or common. A much more penetrating survey confined to two parishes within the same hundred was carried out by Andrew Rogerson (1995, unpub. UEA Ph.D. Thesis). This revealed a number of small Iron Age and Romano-British sites, the Iron Age being rather more dispersed and showing no apparent correspondence with the latter. The one small Early Saxon site was near Great Fransham church and was on a ridge. Middle Saxon activity was on a site away from the church, which grew larger in Late Saxon times. This site began to collapse and was succeeded towards the end of the Late Saxon period by the start of a move to the common-edge which reached its peak in the medieval period. In Little Fransham, apart from a scatter of Middle Saxon finds, the first marked settlement was Late Saxon and near the church. Other fieldwalking surveys include those at Hales, Loddon and Heckingham in south-east Norfolk (Davison 1990) at Bodney and the Stanta Extension on the northern margin of Breckland (Davison 1994b, 57–79), at the Wolterton and Mannington Estates

in north-east Norfolk (Davison 1995, 160–84), at Illington in Breckland (Davison, Green and Milligan 1993, 1–10), at Barton Bendish on chalky soils to the west of Breckland but within its soil zone (Rogerson *et al.* 1997), on Norfolk portions of the Fenland (Silvester 1988, 1991), and on the Hargham Estate on the margin of Breckland with the boulder clay of central Norfolk (Davison with Cushion 1999, 257–74). Limited areas have been similarly examined at Morley in central Norfolk (Davison 1994a) and in the Stanford Training Area in Breckland (Davison and Cushion, forthcoming). Any attempt at drawing broader conclusions from these surveys is hampered by the absence of significant surveyed areas on the heavier clays of central Norfolk.

The distribution of worked flints in West Acre is interesting. The virtual absence of such material from the belt of land to the north of the village separates a major area of finds, including potboiler sites, to the north, apparently related to dry valley systems, and a much smaller group located near to the Nar. This contrasts quite forcefully with find distributions in other areas such as south-east Norfolk, the Hargham Estate, Illington and the Wolterton/Mannington area, where present surface water appears to have been a more powerful attraction. This may be something peculiar to dry valley-chalk areas but more systematic work in other parishes near West Acre is necessary for any firm conclusion to be drawn.

In West Acre possible Iron Age and Romano-British settlement sites occupy higher ground but metal-detecting has revealed a further concentration, mainly coinage, on what appears to have been uninhabited low terrace ground near the Nar. This sets West Acre somewhat apart from other areas. Elsewhere sites of these periods are almost always located on relatively high ground although there are exceptions, particularly in Breckland where, at Illington, Cressingham and Langford, low-lying settlement sites were sought on terraces in river valleys. This is probably characteristic of Breckland where surface water is confined to river valleys. Even here, however, recent fieldwalking has revealed a site at Tottington, far distant from surface water, where Iron Age pottery is mingled with Romano-British sherds. Generally speaking Iron Age pottery seems to have occurred much more frequently on the surface in the surveyed areas of western Norfolk, especially in Barton Bendish. In south-east Norfolk it has been relatively scarce although some may be concealed beneath later Romano-British deposits, a suggestion made at Fransham. Generally, however, Iron Age and Romano-British sites are quite distinct, as at West Acre.

The Fenland, a distinctly different landscape, has been partly obscured by post-Roman silts but many Romano-British sites appear close to roddons (fossil watercourses now marked by silt deposits) in Marshland and the Nar valley (Silvester 1988, 152, 156). In the southern portion of Fenland Romano-British settlements seem to be confined to the line of the Fen Causeway and to the islands and skirtlands of the Peat Fen (Silvester 1991).

Only one Early Saxon site, apart from the two cemeteries, has been found in West Acre, over the river in Cuthorpe. During field survey elsewhere in Norfolk, too, finds have been negligible although there are small sites in Barton Bendish unrelated to later ones, but with a fairly noticeable scatter around the village. At Wickmere and at Mannington there is a slight presence near the early centres while at Morley there seems to have been a sequence from Early Saxon through to Late Saxon times on virtually the same spot, nowhere near a church but not far from a green. At Loddon and Heckingham three distinct sites lay close to Romano-British sites but appear to have been abandoned soon after. Illington has a cemetery but no visible settlement, while at Fransham the settlement was close to Great Fransham church. There is little sign of Early Saxon activity in Marshland.

Peter Wade-Martins's suggestion that Middle Saxon activity is usually found close to what later became the site of the church is partly borne out by the results of these surveys. At West Acre,

however, the distribution of Ipswich Ware is suggestive yet no firm conclusion can be made. In Wickmere and Heckingham well-marked sites were close to the church whereas at Morley (already noted) and, to a lesser extent, Hargham (where the Middle Saxon site lies well to the west of the church) this is not so. At Fransham Middle Saxon settlement developed on a new site clear of an earlier one which was close to Great Fransham church. At Barton Bendish the evidence is strongly supportive of a site near a church, and less so at Bodney and Mannington. A faint indeterminate presence near the present village might be discernible at Langford and Illington, but no sign of Middle Saxon activity was found at Wolterton or at Hales. In the differing Marshland landscape Middle Saxon sites are associated with roddons; only one of these, at West Walton, was close to a church site.

Of the Late Saxon period little needs to be said. Most of the places mentioned, apart from Great Fransham, are, like West Acre, close to the present church although at Hargham the previous site seems merely to have expanded at some distance from the church. Only Wolterton (where evidence near the church is doubtful) and Hales (where none has yet been found near the church) appear to be marked exceptions.

The medieval period in Launditch Hundred saw, in many villages, a movement away from the church towards the edges of greens or commons. Much the same is true of many of the sites examined elsewhere. Hales and Loddon certainly developed greenside settlement to a marked degree. Wickmere moved south towards a low-lying common; at Hargham there was a slight eastward movement to the edge of a green, where a church and a moated site were established. Little Cressingham appears to have developed at least one greenside settlement in addition to the surviving main concentration; at Fransham there was a movement to greens after Late Saxon times; and in Marshland settlements expanded along droveways leading to grazing areas. In Breckland the topography meant that the high dry heathlands did not attract expanding settlement. Here expansion took place laterally as simple valley-side extensions or even detached hamlets as seen in Illington and other villages. In this way such settlements secured access to riverine pastures. In Barton Bendish, which is not truly Breckland, a separate hamlet developed facing lower ground by a tributary stream.

West Acre, on chalk covered by variable boulder clay, followed the Breckland pattern by confining itself to limited expansion east and west on riverside terraces. Apart from a very small specialist site, no settlement was established on higher ground, despite Romano-British predecessors which indicate that it was possible to settle there. There seems to be no adequate explanation for this unless it reflects some decision made by the Priory. It would be interesting to test this theory by looking at other settlements in the Nar valley: several, such as Narborough, Narford, the other two Acres, Newton-by-Castle Acre and the Lexhams appear superficially similar. In the century succeeding the Dissolution Sir Edward Barkham built the first High House about 1638, thus departing from the medieval pattern and practice. Some evidence of this post-medieval activity is given by the spread of Glazed Red Earthenware and Stonewares which, though most intensive near the village, is generally widespread compared with that of medieval wares.

The comparison of finds from fieldwalking and from metal-detecting has been interesting and has posed a number of questions. What is the explanation for the absence of coinage from some Romano-British sites? Why were the settlement areas of this period on higher ground while the main area of coinage was on lower land? Was there a focus on the Nar as a waterway? Was such a focus still in existence in Early Saxon times? Did the relative scarcity of Early Saxon finds really reflect a small population, or were there many more who lived a ceramic lives and are thus unrepresented in the collections? Documentary evidence explains the concentration of medieval coinage,

although the finds indicate a greater timespan than the written evidence suggests. What is truly remarkable is that two unusually large concentrations of coinage, one Romano-British and one medieval, should be found within the same parish, an occurrence so far unique in Norfolk.

The influence of the Priory is, perhaps, less obvious as might have been expected. A portrait emerges of a compact Late Saxon village overshadowed later by a large monastic precinct within the settlement and it seems likely that some degree of constraint on developments in the parish existed, though evidence for this is not overwhelming. The undoubted advantages of the late medieval–early post-medieval documentary coverage has been heavily offset by the absence of early maps and the poor survival rate of field and other names, making precise location of more than a few names very difficult if not impossible.

The survey has also been successful in so far that it has given an insight into developments within a parish in south-west Norfolk. It has provided something which can be compared with the results of similar surveys elsewhere in Norfolk, even though it has added one more western case study to the list. More surveys are needed in north, central and south-central Norfolk to give greater validity to such comparisons.

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Appendix: coins, tokens and jetons found at West Acre

by Martin Allen

In 1988 large numbers of coins, tokens and jetons were found on agricultural land in the vicinity of the Chapel of St. Thomas a Becket at Custhorpe, by a Norfolk detectorist, Mr Stephen Brown (SMR 3983). Through the agency of Dr Andrew Rogerson of the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (now of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology), 207 finds were deposited at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, where they have been studied by the author of this Appendix. These finds are summarised in Table 1. A full catalogue will be published in the *British Numismatic Journal*.

The finds begin with one coin each of Stephen (1135–1154) and Henry II's *Cross-and-Crosslets* (*Tealby*) coinage (1158–1180), but there is a dramatic increase in the finds during 1180–1247. This may be compared with the results of S.E. Rigold's analysis of coin finds from 100 English and Welsh sites, which included data from 33 religious sites (monasteries, pilgrimage chapels and rural parish churches, excluding coins of greater value than the half groat (2d) and finds from fieldwalking, metal-detecting and beachcombing; Rigold 1976). The comparison between the West Acre finds and Rigold's data in Table 2 suggests that the absence of finds before c. 1123 may represent real if limited evidence of a low level of activity before the foundation of West Acre Priory in the early 12th century, and that the increase in 1180–1247 is normal for English sites. The relatively high percentage of finds at West Acre in 1247–79 might indicate increased activity after the building of the Chapel of St Thomas a Becket. The Chapel was on the pilgrimage route from the Cistercian nunnery at Marham to West Acre Priory, Castle Acre and Walsingham (Fairweather and Bradfer-Lawrence 1929, 368) and many of the coins may have been lost by pilgrims. The percentages of West Acre finds are lower than the Rigold data for 1279–1412, and higher for 1412–1544. The figures might indicate a relatively high level of monetary activity at the West Acre site after the grant of an annual fair at West Acre and Custhorpe in 1479, but the percentage of finds of 1464–1544 from Rigold's religious sites is almost as high as the West Acre percentage.

Coins of 1180–1247 and 1247–79 were removed from circulation by recoinages at the ends of their periods of production, but there was no general recoinage between 1279 and 1544, and a coin minted in 1279 could in principle have remained in circulation until Henry VIII's debasement in 1544. Consequently, the statistics for finds of coins produced between 1279 and 1544 in Table 2 do not provide direct evidence of the numbers of losses in each of the four periods of 1279–1544. However, the divisions between the periods in 1351, 1412 and 1464 were each marked by reductions in the weights of the English coinage and a partial recoinage of earlier coins (Archibald 1988, 286–93), and it is possible to make a provisional assessment of the probable periods of loss of the West Acre finds of 1279–1544, based upon their weights and states of wear. This analysis, which is summarised in Table 3, is consistent with the assumption that there was a sharp increase in economic activity on the site after the grant of a fair in 1479.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the finds of 1279–1544 are estimated to have been lost in 1464–1544, and the estimated number of losses per annum increases from 0.25 in 1412–84 to 0.65 in 1464–1544. A relatively high level of activity seems

	<i>4d</i>	<i>2d</i>	<i>1d</i>	$\frac{1}{2}d$	$\frac{1}{4}d$	<i>other</i>	<i>total</i>
<i>England</i>							
Anglo-Saxon	-	-	0	0	0	0	0
1066-1158	-	-	0	1	0	0	1
1158-1180	-	-	0	1	0	0	1
1180-1247	-	-	2	6	4	0	12
1247-1279	-	-	0	4	14	0	18
1279-1351	-	-	4	5	6	0	15
1351-1412	0	1	11	0	0	0	12
1412-1464	0	0	8	10	1	-	19
1464-1544	0	1	18	0	0	0	19
1544-1642	3	13	13	0	0	0	38
Royal farthing tokens	-	-	-	0	47	-	47
C17 token	-	-	0	0	1	-	1
<i>Ireland</i>	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
<i>Scotland</i>	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
<i>Continental</i>	-	-	2	1	0	3	6
<i>Jetons</i>	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Total	3	15	72	30	73	14	207

Table 1. Summary of coin finds

<i>Period</i>	<i>Rigold: all sites</i>	<i>Rigold: religious sites</i>	<i>West Acre</i>
<i>c.</i> 973- <i>c.</i> 1053	18 (3.4%)	3 (1.8%)	0
<i>c.</i> 1053- <i>c.</i> 1123	17 (3.2%)	1 (0.68%)	0
<i>c.</i> 1123-1180	26 (4.9%)	3 (1.8%)	3 (2.7%)
1180-1247	60 (11.3%)	17 (10.1%)	12 (10.8%)
1247-1279	39 (7.4%)	8 (4.7%)	20 (18.0%)
1279-1351	196 (37.1%)	51 (30.2%)	16 (14.4%)
1351-1412	69 (13.0%)	33 (19.5%)	13 (11.7%)
1412-1464	40 (7.6%)	12 (7.1%)	18 (16.2%)
1464-1544	48 (9.1%)	33 (19.5%)	24 (21.6%)
1544-1551	16 (3.0%)	8 (4.7%)	5 (4.5%)
Total	529	169	111

Table 2. Rigold's data and West Acre compared

N.B. The data in Table 1 include foreign coins that can be assigned to one of the periods with reasonable confidence. The West Acre data does not include twelve finds of 1294-1544 that cannot be allocated to one period of production, because they are too worn or damaged. Rigold's second period terminated with coins of Henry I BMC type XIII. Blackburn (1991, 71) tentatively dates the end of type XIII and the introduction of type XIV to *c.* 1123.

<i>Period</i>	<i>Estimated losses</i>	<i>Estimated losses per annum</i>
1279-1351	9 (11%)	0.13
1351-1412	7 (9%)	0.11
1412-1464	13 (16%)	0.25
1464-1544	52 (64%)	0.65

Table 3. Estimated periods of loss of West Acre finds, 1279-1544

to have continued after the dissolution of West Acre Priory in 1538, as there are 38 finds of silver coins produced in the period 1544–1662 and 47 royal farthing tokens issued between 1613 and 1644. The silver coins of 1544–1662 could have been lost at any time until the Great Recoinage of 1696–8, but the number of finds per annum in the period 1544–1698 (0.56) is still almost as high as the estimated rate of loss in 1464–1544 (0.65). Unfortunately, this analysis cannot be taken beyond the 17th century, as no coins minted after the introduction of the machine-made ‘milled’ coinage in 1662 were included in the material deposited at the Fitzwilliam Museum.

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