

ANGLO-SAXON SETTLEMENT AT COSTON HALL, LEICESTERSHIRE

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with contributions from:

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An excavation undertaken by Wessex Archaeology, on land off Grange Lane, Coston, Leicestershire, revealed evidence for activity from the prehistoric period onwards on the east bank of the River Eye. Residual worked flint is probably of Neolithic or Bronze Age date, whilst the ceramic assemblage indicates possible Romano-British occupation in the area during the third and fourth centuries AD. The main focus of activity dates, however, to the early to mid-Saxon and late Saxon periods. A sequence of ditched enclosures, post-holes (but no clear structures) and probable rubbish pits reflect agricultural settlement, possibly established in the seventh century, with some evidence for textile working, iron-smithing and trading links that extended beyond the local area. Occupation appears to have continued into the early eleventh century, with a subsequent Saxo-Norman and medieval settlement established on the west bank of the river, within the core of a known deserted (shrunken) medieval village. Evidence of ridge and furrow ploughing, surviving as extant earthworks, suggests the site on the east bank may have largely reverted to open fields at this time, prior to the construction of Coston Hall probably in the eighteenth century.

INTRODUCTION

In 2010–11, Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by CgMs Consulting, on behalf of Buckminster Estate, to undertake an archaeological evaluation and subsequent mitigation excavation and watching brief on land off Grange Lane, Coston, Leicestershire (NGR 484778 321976), prior to the development of a house and out-buildings (Fig. 1). The village of Coston lies within the parish of Garthorpe, close to the eastern edge of the county, approximately 10km north-east of Melton Mowbray and 15km south-west of Grantham.

The area evaluated lay on either side of the River Eye, immediately to the south of Coston, but the excavation which followed was confined to the 0.2ha development site located east of the river and south of Grange Lane (Fig. 1). The site and immediate surrounding area comprised fields under pasture, sloping gently from c.108.5m OD in the east to c.105.5m OD on the western side of the site. The underlying geology of the area is Middle Pleistocene diamicton till overlying Charmouth Mudstone Formation (British Geological Survey 1971).

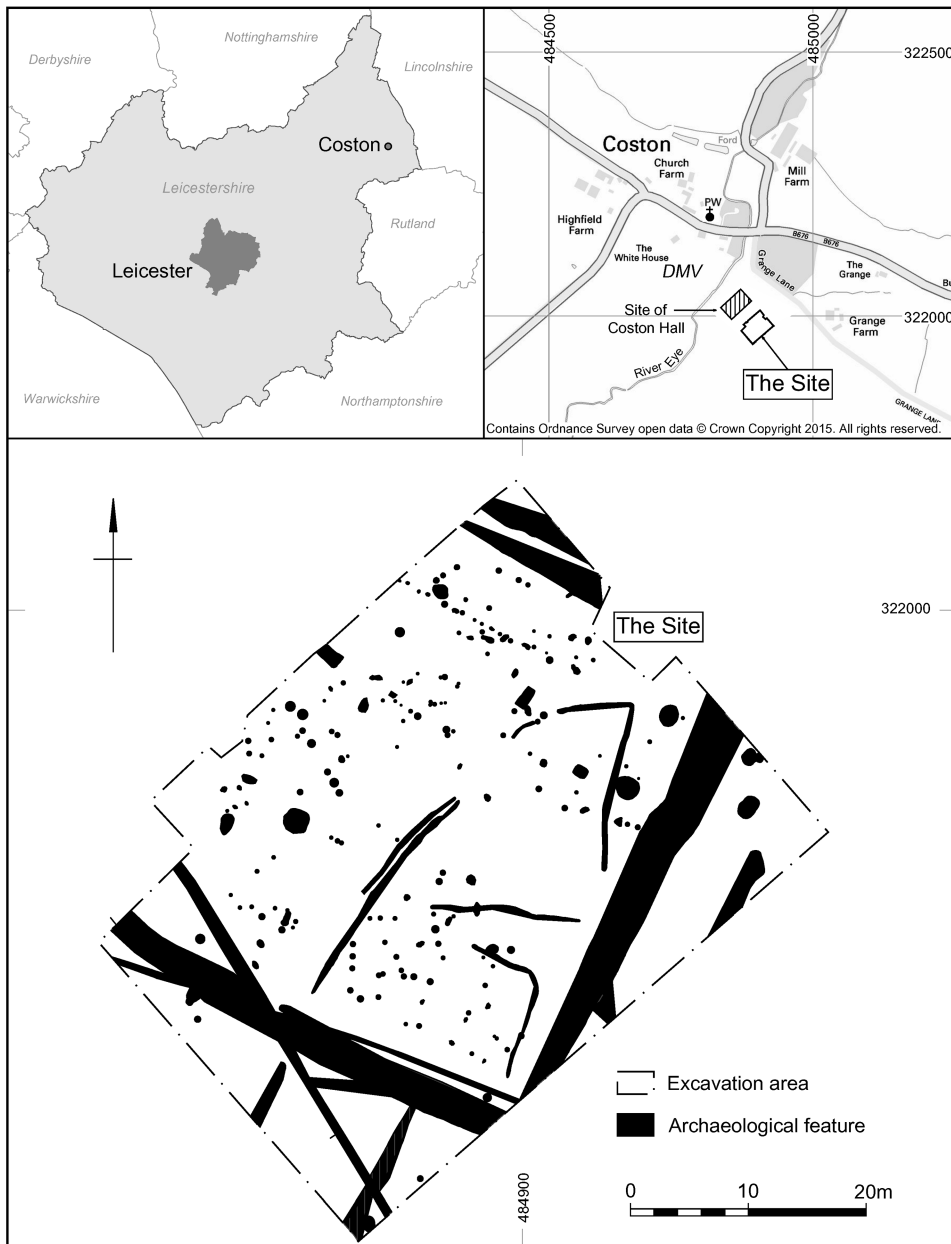


Fig. 1. Site location plan.

Historical and archaeological background

An archaeological desk-based assessment (Sumpter 2004), earthwork survey (Hartley 1987) and geophysical survey (Archaeological Services Durham University 2010) documented extant earthworks, and identified the potential for medieval (and possibly earlier) remains to survive within the proposed development area immediately to the south of Colston and either side of the River Eye.

There is very little direct evidence relating to Coston and the surrounding area prior to the medieval period. The settlement is first listed in *Domesday* (1086) as Castone, held by Henry de Ferieres and totalling nine carucates (over 1,000 acres) in area. The name means 'Katr's Farmland', a hybrid derived from a Scandinavian personal name with an Anglo-Saxon root, which implies its existence prior to the Danelaw of AD 878 (Sumpter 2004). The Church of St Andrew (Grade I listed) is Norman in origin and lies approximately 200m to the north-west of the site, at the centre of the surviving village (Figs 1 and 2).

By the reign of Edward I (1272–1307), two serfs, 12 sochmen (free men), ten villeins (free peasants) and a mill with 100 acres of meadow are recorded (Page 1907). The mill may have been on the site of a mill adjacent to Mill Farm, which was demolished in the nineteenth century. Croxton Abbey began acquiring land around what is now Grange Farm, to the north of Grange Lane and north-west of



Fig. 2. General view of the site looking north-west towards the present village of Coston; the excavation area is upper right, with post-medieval earthworks in the foreground.

the site, in about 1332, and a grange was still held at the Dissolution. Population listings indicate a steady increase through to the seventeenth century, but a marked population decrease shown in the Hearth Tax of 1670 suggests that Coston suffered heavily during the nationwide plague of 1603.

Coston is a shrunken rather than deserted medieval village (DMV; Fig. 1) and a large number of extant features have survived, with the surveyed earthworks evident on both east and west banks of the River Eye (Hartley 1987). Medieval house platforms, enclosures, trackways, and the remnants of ridge and furrow cultivation, are present on the higher ground on the western bank, with further ridge and furrow along with some earthworks, some of these associated with post-medieval landscaping, on the east bank. The geophysical survey (Archaeological Services Durham University (ASDU) 2010) recorded numerous anomalies, many corresponding with earthworks visible on aerial photographs and still extant, particularly in the fields to the south of Coston.

The village and lands went through many different owners during the medieval and post-medieval periods, with the current major landowners, the Tollemache family (Earls of Dysart), first mentioned in White's 1846 Directory (Page 1907; Sumpter 2004).

It is unclear when Coston Hall was constructed, though its location is clear from geophysics, the now demolished hall occupying a platform on the east bank of the river, immediately north-west of the excavation site, with associated terraces extending to the east and south (Wessex Archaeology 2010). The house is first mentioned in 1795 when it belonged to Captain Phelps (the major landowning family at that time) (Hartley 1987; Sumpter 2004), but the earliest map of the area (Boyce's 1815 map of Corby) does not show Coston Hall and White's 1877 Directory records that by that time it lay in ruins. Previous archaeological monitoring in this area (in 1999, by University of Leicester Archaeological Service) did not identify any remains relating to the building.

2010–11 fieldwork

The site evaluation undertaken in 2010 comprised eight 20m × 1.8m trenches (Wessex Archaeology 2010), with their locations largely based on the results of the geophysical survey. Four trenches (1 and 5–7) lay along the western bank of the River Eye within the Deserted Medieval Village, and revealed, primarily, evidence for Late Saxon, Saxo-Norman and medieval occupation up to around the end of the fourteenth century. The remaining four trenches lay on the eastern side of the river and three (Trenches 2, 3, and 4) recorded features of generally earlier Saxon date than those to the west, though with some overlap in the Late Saxon period, but no Saxo-Norman or medieval material.

The subsequent mitigation excavation encompassed Trenches 2–4 and covered an area measuring 53m by 40m (approximately 0.2ha), aligned south-west to north-east. Topsoil, up to 0.6m thick, overlay natural sandy boulder clay into which archaeological features were cut.

Features lying higher up the slope to the north-east showed heavier truncation as a result of subsequent ridge and furrow cultivation and landscaping, but in at least

one place a low earthwork of probable post-medieval date appeared to correspond with a cut feature (Fig. 2).

Stratigraphic relationships were relatively few and, therefore, dating of the various phases depends largely on the ceramic sequence, supplemented by a small number of other finds, environmental indicators (i.e. the presence of free-threshing wheat) and three radiocarbon determinations. Some elements of the proposed sequence remain uncertain, and a relatively large number of small discrete features, particularly post-holes, remain undated, though it is thought likely that most of the latter belong to the Anglo-Saxon period.

The results presented below focus on the excavation but take account of the evaluation, and their overall significance is considered in the concluding discussion.

RESULTS

Phase 1: Prehistoric

Eighteen pieces of worked flint were recovered, all probably residual, and none particularly diagnostic, though at least some may be of later Neolithic or Bronze Age date. The only piece of note is a small, single-platform flake core from post-hole 1436, and although this was the solitary find from the feature, it is still considered to be residual.

Phase 2: Romano-British (third–fourth century AD)

Four features have been assigned to this phase on the basis that they contained only Romano-British ceramics (Fig. 3). These features, and the presence of a small number of residual Romano-British ceramics in several later contexts, indicate a low level of activity in the area at this time, possibly beginning in the late second century. The focus of this appears to have been in the northern half of the site, with post-holes 1367, 1373 and 1438 all containing third- to fourth-century pottery. Pit 1178 also contained Romano-British pottery, though a later date for this feature seems most likely given its similarity in form to late Saxon pits in this area.

Phase 3: Early–mid-Saxon (fifth–mid-ninth century AD)

The features assigned to this phase are all relatively securely dated by ceramics within a fairly broad range extending from the early fifth to the mid-ninth century, although a sixth or possibly seventh century start date for this sequence can be suggested with some confidence.

Some details of the sequence remain uncertain and what is presented below provides one reading of the evidence; other possibilities are suggested where there is doubt. This mainly concerns the unclear chronological relationship between the two groups of enclosure ditches and also the date of the large number of post-holes, many of which are unphased.

PHASE 3I

Gullies 1305 and 1555–9 may represent the earliest group of Saxon features, perhaps forming a roughly D-shaped enclosure measuring approximately 40m



Fig. 3. Phase plan showing all features.

north-south by 25m east-west (Fig. 3), but this cannot be demonstrated with certainty. Alternatively, the gullies could all be internal divisions associated with the rectilinear layout of ditches (see phases 3ii-3iv below); differences in form, size and layout suggest they may pre-date them.

Feature and context	Identification	Lab. code	$\delta^{13}\text{C}\text{‰}$	Determination BP	Calibration AD (2 sig. 95.4%)
Post-hole 1407 (1408)	Grain 2 × free-threshing wheat grain	SUERC-45387	-22.6	1,098 ± 45	cal AD 780–1030
Post-hole 1458 (1460)	Grain 2 × free-threshing wheat grain	SUERC-46065	-22.0	1,169 ± 45	cal AD 720–990
Gully 1305 (1306)	Grain 2 × free-threshing wheat grain	SUERC-45389	-19.6	1,186 ± 45	cal AD 690–980

Table 1. Radiocarbon dates, calibrated following Bronk Ramsey (1995; 2001) and Reimer *et al.* (2009), quoted in the form recommended by Bayliss *et al.* (2008).

The six narrow, shallow gullies had been heavily truncated and only survived to depths of up to 0.1m. Towards the north end of the site was gully 1020, of similar shallow depth and possibly also part of this complex of features. Further to the south, however, were gully 1168, which may have been a continuation of 1305, and gully 1106, which ran east–west and may have marked the southern extent of the putative D-shaped enclosure. The gullies were somewhat larger, perhaps because they had been less truncated than the gullies upslope to the north-east, and both were cut, or appeared to be cut, by ditches (1298 and 1280 respectively) associated with the later rectilinear enclosure. Ditch 1168 contained only third-century grey ware pottery; however, it is thought this was most likely residual.

Two of the gullies, 1557 and 1558, appeared to define smaller areas within the D-shaped enclosure where there was a concentration of post-holes, most likely representing built structures, although it could not be demonstrated that the gullies and post-holes were contemporaneous.

Small quantities of early–mid-Saxon pottery were recovered from the various gullies assigned to this group, and charred cereal grain from gully 1305 provided a calibrated date of cal AD 690–980 (SUERC-45389) (Table 1). Radiocarbon dates on material from two post-holes in this area spanned the early eighth to early eleventh centuries (see below).

PHASE 3II

This sub-phase saw the initial construction of the rectilinear enclosure ditch complex which, it is suggested, post-dated the D-shaped enclosure described above. Three sides of the west-north-west to east-south-east aligned enclosure were exposed, that to the west, as well as all of the corners, lying outside the excavation area. The ditch to the south (1280) was at least 36.5m long and that to the east (1298) an estimated 48m long (of which 38m was exposed); only 10.5m of the northern ditch (1018) was uncovered (Fig. 3).

Ditch 1280 was 1.35–1.5m wide, 0.55m deep with moderate concave sides and a flat base (Fig. 4), and sloped gently down to the north-west towards the river. In addition to pottery, a small piece of a bone comb toothplate was recovered from one of the ditch fills. Ditch 1297 was 2.5–3.5m wide, 0.5m deep and had a similar profile to ditch 1280 (Fig. 4). Relatively little of ditch 1018 was exposed, but this

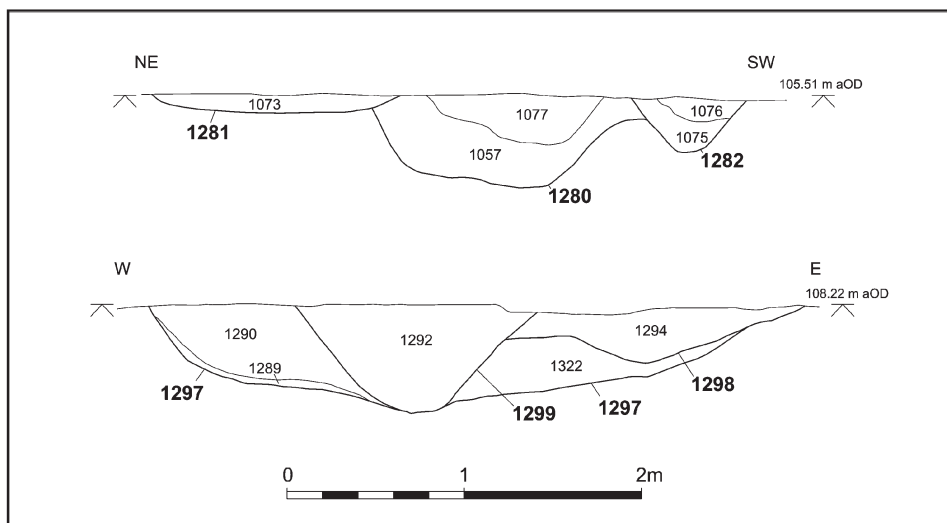


Fig. 4. Sections through the southern (1280) and eastern (1297) enclosure ditches.

showed it to be of broadly similar dimensions and profile to ditches 1280 and 1297; no datable material was recovered from its fill.

Apart from pottery, finds mainly comprised small amounts of animal bone, reflecting the disposal of domestic debris which also included charred cereals and other plant remains.

PHASE 3 III

The southern enclosure ditch (1280) appears to have filled quite rapidly. However, a shallow replacement (1281) was cut along the northern edge (Fig. 4). Similarly, the line of ditch 1297 to the east was re-established by the addition of a smaller ditch (1298) along its eastern edge (Fig. 4), and it is possible that another narrow, shallow ditch to the north (1012) represents a corresponding replacement along the inside of ditch 1018 (Fig. 3). In addition to pottery, two worked bone pinbeaters of Saxon type were recovered from ditches 1281 and 1298 respectively.

PHASE 3 IV

Later modifications to the southern enclosure boundary comprised a narrow ditch (1284) cut through the two earlier ditches (1280 and 1281) (Figs 3 and 4). The new ditch followed the same alignment as its predecessors, though it terminated to the north-west, within the excavation area, with no evidence for a continuation. A subsequent ditch (1282), cutting through the earlier ditches at an oblique angle, is suggested to have been part of a much later, post-medieval phase of activity, contemporary with ditch 1299 on the east side (see below).

POST-HOLES AND OTHER FEATURES

A total of 179 post-holes were recorded across the site, many heavily truncated by subsequent activity, and most unphased. A relatively large number (44 per cent of the total), predominantly located in the central part of the site, ranged between

0.2m and 0.3m in diameter, and appear to have housed posts rather than stakes. Those towards the northern corner of the site, however, were more closely spaced, and it appears that they consisted mostly of driven stakes. A number of possible alignments were apparent, including one putative fence line that ran parallel to the north-east side of the rectilinear enclosure for a distance of at least 10m (Fig. 3). None of these post-holes contained any datable material, but they appear likely to have been contemporary with either the D-shaped or rectilinear enclosures.

Some post-holes in the southern half of the site contained evidence for post-pipes, which indicated posts *c.*0.15 to 0.2m across, though it was not possible to determine whether the posts were rounded or rectangular in cross-section. At least some of these may have related to more substantially built domestic buildings, rather than fence lines and similar structures, but no coherent plans could be discerned. Nevertheless, the recovery of a few pieces of daub with wattle impressions from several of the surrounding features confirms the presence of clay-walled structures in the vicinity, probably of more than one phase.

Only a very small number of the post-holes contained pottery, whilst 1486 produced a small triangular fragment of copper alloy, probably a mount or fitting. However, free-threshing wheat grains, recovered from post-holes 1407 and 1458, produced radiocarbon dates of cal AD 780–1030 (SUERC-45387) and cal AD 720–990 (SUERC-46065) respectively (Table 1), placing them in the mid- to late-Saxon period.

Amongst this spread of post-holes was a possible hearth, 1503, measuring 0.9m by 0.75m and 0.08m in depth. It comprised fire-reddened clay (1505) associated with some charcoal and cereal remains.

A second burnt feature, 1094, lay less than 20m to the west. This was aligned north–south and was approximately 1.5m long, with a relatively deep bowl-shaped pit at the southern end rising up to a shallower funnel shape at the north, the latter containing an area of burning (1109). Given its form and size, the most likely interpretation for feature 1094 is a crop drier, or malting oven, rather than a domestic oven.

None of the pits have been assigned to this phase and most, if not all, are more likely to be of late Saxon date.

Phase 4: Late Saxon (late ninth–eleventh centuries)

The number of features assigned to this phase (Fig. 3), primarily on the basis of containing late Saxon ceramics, is somewhat less than the preceding phase, which may in part be indicative of a shift in the focus of activity rather than its reduction. There also appeared to be a change in the nature of features in this area, with pits but no ditches certainly identified.

At least eight pits (307, 1031, 1308, 1346, 1383, 1388, 1441 and 1442) which lay across the northern half of the site belong to this period (Fig. 3). Most were sub-circular or sub-oval in plan, relatively shallow with rounded profiles (Fig. 5), and ranged in size from 1.2m × 0.8m × 0.11m deep (1346) to 1.9m × 1.7m × 0.65m deep (1388). Two of the pits, 1441 and 1442, less than 8m apart, were markedly rectangular in shape, and possibly another (1131) – or the squared terminal of a

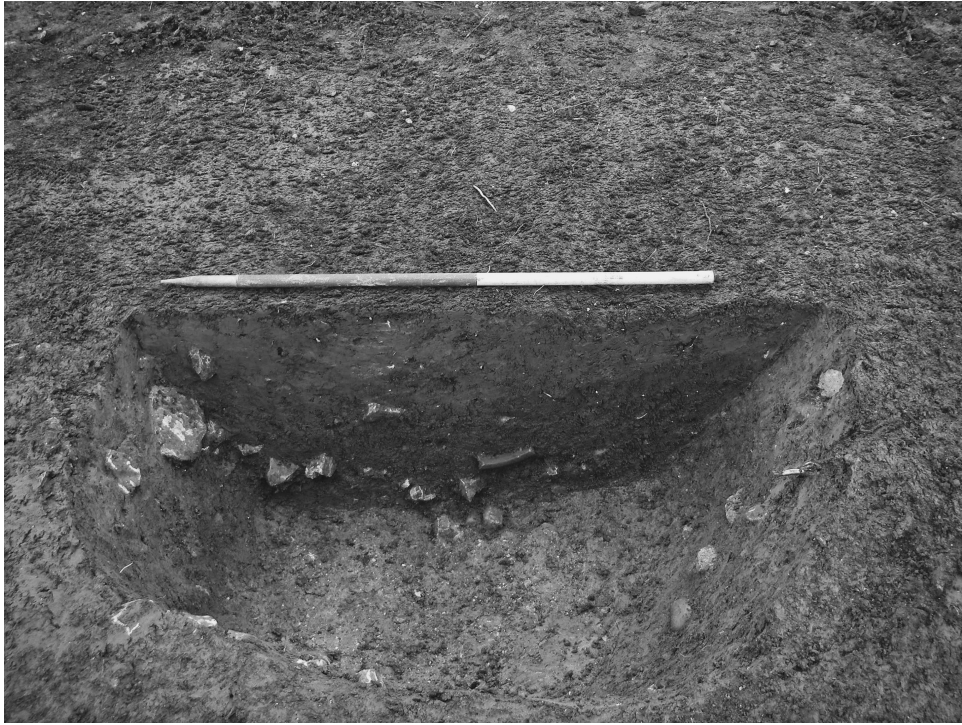


Fig. 5. Section of pit 1383, facing south (1m scale).

ditch – with a single post-hole (1133) within, was partly exposed along the north-west edge of the site. These pits may have served a more specific purpose, but what this may have been is unknown. The pits generally contained what can be interpreted as domestic debris, mainly pottery and some animal bone.

A small cluster of post-holes (1037, 1040, 1082, 1140 and 1148), located along the north-western edge of the site, all contained late Saxon pottery. The post-holes were relatively large, and may have been elements of one or more substantial structures, but no putative building footprints were evident. Towards the southern corner of the site was post-hole 1405, which was substantially larger (0.75m diameter) than the other post-holes in this area, and the fill (1406) contained daub with wattle impressions.

Phase 5: Medieval (eleventh–fourteenth centuries)

The complete absence of Saxo-Norman and medieval settlement features and pottery suggests that the area covered by the excavation had been abandoned by the late eleventh century, and possibly as early as the late tenth century. The focus of settlement appears to have moved at this time to the western bank of the River Eye, the known site of the Deserted Medieval Village, and this was confirmed by the recovery of ceramics of mid-eleventh to late fourteenth-century date in this area during the evaluation (Wessex Archaeology 2010).

The site on the east bank of the river may have reverted to open field agriculture following the Norman Conquest; this is attested by three broad, shallow linear features, aligned north-east to south-west, and interpreted as remnant ridge and furrow (Fig. 3). These furrows did not extend into the area earlier occupied by the Saxon rectilinear enclosure, and it is suggested below that all remains of ridge and furrow here had been completely obliterated by later landscaping.

Phase 6: Post-medieval and early modern (seventeenth–nineteenth centuries)

Activity associated with this phase was probably broadly contemporary with the construction and use of Coston Hall, thought to have lain on a flat platform or terrace just to the north-west of the excavation area. The watching brief here, during topsoil stripping along the line of an access road for the new development, recorded the heavily truncated remains of several stone walls, a stone-lined drain and a cobbled track.

To the south-east, within the excavation area, a narrow ditch, 1299, 1.3m wide and 0.6m deep, followed a similar north-east to south-west line as Saxon enclosure ditches 1297 and 1298 (Fig. 3). At right angles to the west of 1299 was a slightly narrower ditch, 1282, which cut obliquely across Saxon enclosure ditches 1280, 1281 and 1284 (Fig. 4), and corresponded with an extant earthwork extending to the east as well as down the western bank of the River Eye. These two later ditches are thought to have been associated with the landscaping arrangements around Coston Hall. Ditch 1282 was subsequently cut by a trench (1283) containing a ceramic land drain.

Prehistoric, Romano-British and Saxon ceramics

Jane Young and Ian Rowlandson

In total, 305 sherds of pottery, representing 251 vessels, were recovered, ranging in date from the prehistoric to early modern periods, with an emphasis on the Saxon period, and the assemblage includes possible local and regionally imported wares. The pottery is mostly in a slightly abraded to fairly fresh condition, with sherd size mainly falling into the small to medium range (up to 30g).

Recording of the pottery has followed appropriate national guidelines (Slowikowski *et al.* 2001; Darling 2004), and reference has been made to the Roman (Pollard 1999) and post-Roman Leicestershire Pottery Type Series held at Leicester University, correlated with Lincolnshire fabric code names (Young *et al.* 2005). Excluding the post-medieval pottery (16 sherds), a range of 46 identifiable pottery ware types was identified, and the type and general date range for these fabrics are shown in Table 2. This report is an edited version of the original reports on the evaluation and excavation assemblages, which are held in the project archive.

PREHISTORIC POTTERY

Two sherds from a single handmade vessel are probably of prehistoric date (Bronze Age to Iron Age). The sherds are thick-walled and are in a granitic fabric. These sherds were the only pottery to be recovered from hollow-way 409.

Lincolnshire code name	Leicestershire code name	Full name	Earliest date	Latest date	Total sherds	Total vessels
BOUA	BO2	Bourne-type Fabrics A, B and C	1150	1400	2	2
CHARN	SX	Charnwood ware	450	800	3	3
CHCOT	CC1	Chilvers Cotton-type	1240	1350	1	1
EMX	MS	Non-local early medieval fabrics	1150	1230	1	1
ENGS	SW	Unspecified English stoneware	1750	1900	2	1
ESAXX	SX	Non-local Anglo-Saxon fabrics	400	700	2	2
ESGS	SX	Early to mid-Anglo-Saxon greensand quartz tempered	550	800	1	1
EST	ST3	Early Stamford ware	870	1010	72	62
FERQ	SX	Handmade iron and rounded quartz- tempered	400	870	2	2
IPS	IP	Ipswich-type ware	730	850	2	2
LIM	SX	Oolitic limestone-tempered fabrics	700	1070	1	1
LIM/SST	SX	Oolitic limestone and sandstone tempered	550	800	1	1
LKT	LI1	Lincoln kiln-type shelly ware	850	1000	25	23
LSH	LI2	Lincoln shelly ware	850	1000	15	14
LSLOC	LI3	Late Saxon local fabrics	850	1050	8	7
LSLOC	SN ?	Late Saxon local fabrics	850	1050	1	1
LSX	CG	Non-local late Saxon fabrics (shelly)	870	1080	2	1
LSX	TH	Non-local late Saxon fabrics (sandy)	870	1080	1	1
MAX	SX	Northern Maxey-type ware	680	870	2	2
MEDX	MS	Non-local medieval fabrics	1150	1450	2	2
MISC	SX ?	Unidentified types	400	1900	2	2
NOTGL	NO3	Light-bodied Nottingham green-glazed ware	1220	1320	9	9
PREH	?	Prehistoric wares	4500	50	2	1
R	C3	Roman: Colour coated with a light oxidised core	175	400	1	1
R	GW4NV	Roman: Nene Valley greyware	130	270	1	1
R	GW5	Roman: Greyware	50	400	5	4
R	GW6	Roman: Moderately coarse wheel made greyware	50	400	6	4
R	WW	Roman: Whiteware unspecified	50	400	1	1
R	C2NV	Roman: Lower Nene Valley colour coat	275	400	2	2
R	C3NV	Roman: Lower Nene Valley colour coat	275	400	1	1
R	GW7	Roman: Lower Nene Valley greyware	150	250	1	1
R	WW4	Roman: Whiteware – medium sandy	40	400	1	1
RMAX	SX	Southern Maxey-type ware	650	950	1	1
RMSF	CG?	Rutland medieval shell and iron	1180	1300	11	1
RQCL	SX	Central Lincolnshire early to mid- Saxon rounded quartz fabric	450	750	2	2
RSNQS	CG?	Rutland Saxo-Norman quartz and shell	950	1150	3	1
SLBTOX	BO	South Lincolnshire Baston-type oxidised	1170	1400	1	1
SLOOL	OL	South Lincolnshire oolitic (generic)	1050	1500	1	1
SLOQ	OL	South Lincolnshire oolitic and quartz	1000	1250	6	4
SLSNT	SN	South Lincolnshire St Neots-type	980	1100	1	1
SLSQ	CG?	South Lincolnshire shell and quartz (generic)	1200	1500	1	1

Lincolnshire code name	Leicestershire code name	Full name	Earliest date	Latest date	Total sherds	Total vessels
SNEOT	SN	St Neots-type ware	870	1200	1	1
SST	SX	Early to mid-Saxon sandstone-tempered	450	850	20	14
SSTCL	SX	Central Lincolnshire early to mid-Saxon sandstone-tempered	450	750	3	1
SSTMG	SX	Early to mid-Saxon sandstone-tempered (carboniferous sandstone)	450	850	6	6
ST	ST2	Stamford ware	970	1200	48	41
STANLY	LY4	Stanion/Lyveden ware (shelly fabric A)	1150	1250	2	2

Table 2. Pottery code names and date ranges with total quantities by sherd and vessel count.

ROMANO-BRITISH POTTERY

The Romano-British pottery, although only a small group (18 sherds), suggests Roman occupation in the area. The date range of this small group spans the Romano-British period, but the majority of the pottery present dates to the third or fourth century AD, and includes a colour-coated, wide-mouthed bowl from context 1292 and an unusual parchment ware sherd, probably from a dish, from ditch 1165. Most if not all of the Romano-British sherds can be regarded as residual finds.

HANDMADE SAXON POTTERY

Thirty-three handmade vessels in nine different ware types are of probable Anglo-Saxon to mid-Saxon date. The pottery was divided into 11 different site-specific sandstone fabrics (see Appendix 1) and eight other broader fabric types for the purpose of this report. The fabrics are mainly sandstone-tempered (LIM/SST, SST, SSTCL and SSTMG). No decorated sherds were recovered and few sherds have burnished external surfaces. Many of the vessels are thick-walled and clumsily manufactured, with coil construction being evident in the larger sherds. One vessel is obviously lugged (pit 1388; Fig. 6, 1), although the lug is missing and another vessel has a post-firing hole just below the rim (pit 1442; Fig. 6, 3). These two vessels, although in a sandstone-tempered fabric (SST), are very similar in appearance to mid-Saxon shell-tempered Maxey-type lugged jars; they are probably of eighth to mid-ninth century date. None of the other vessels (including a convex bowl and jar with simple rounded rim: Fig. 6, 2, 4) are chronologically diagnostic, and the dating here is based on known occurrences of the wares in the local and regional areas.

Charnwood-type ware (CHARN) has been the subject of much discussion (Williams and Vince 1997), and appears to be distributed over a wide area on sites mainly dating from the fifth to seventh centuries, but possibly overlapping into the early eighth century. Two basal sherds, tempered with grains of rounded quartz sand as the main inclusion type present (RQCL), appear similar to vessels found mainly on early Saxon sites in central Lincolnshire and north Nottinghamshire, but has also been found on sites that continue into the middle Saxon period. The oolitic-tempered fabric (LIM) is common in southern Lincolnshire on sites of both early and mid-Saxon date (Vince and Young 2009). A small greensand-tempered sherd

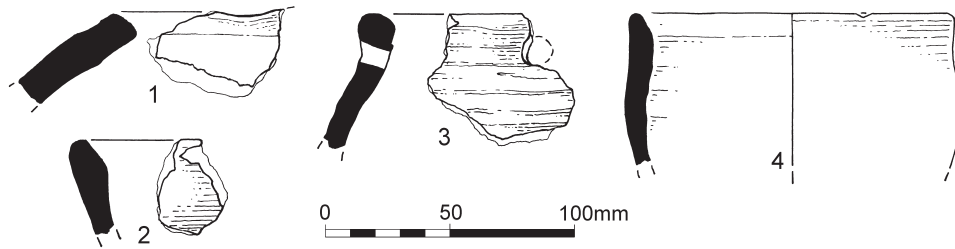


Fig. 6. Anglo-Saxon pottery.

List of illustrated vessels

1. Jar rim, flat-topped, showing base of lug; fabric SST (Fabric 1). Context 1390, pit 1388.
2. Jar rim, simple rounded; fabric SST (Fabric 2). Context 1068, pit 1067.
3. Jar rim, simple rounded, with post-firing perforation below rim; fabric SST (Fabric 1). Context 1443, pit 1442.
4. Bowl part profile; fabric SST (Fabric 4). Context 1472, gully terminal 1471.

(ESGS) may have originated in the Lincolnshire Wolds, fens, or have come from a source further to the south, since similar wares were in use in Bedfordshire and parts of Cambridgeshire. The sherd, which is probably from a jar, could either be of early Saxon or mid-Saxon date. Two sherds are in a distinctive iron and rounded quartz-tempered fabric (FERQ); this is a newly defined type that could either be of early Saxon, or more likely mid-Saxon, date.

Two of the handmade sherds are in fabrics that are unlikely to be of local origin (ESAXX). One sherd is from a jar in a fine reduced fabric similar to, but slightly coarser than, fine Ipswich ware. This sherd could be of Ipswich ware-type and therefore of mid-Saxon date, or just be an unusually fine early Saxon type. The second sherd is an exceptionally crude basal sherd, possibly of prehistoric date, but it is more likely that it belongs to the Saxon period.

Middle Saxon pottery

Five vessels recovered from the site are of Middle Saxon type (eighth to mid-ninth century). These include two Ipswich ware (IPS) and three Maxey-type ware vessels (MAX and RMAX). The two Ipswich ware sherds were both recovered residually from the main fill of pit 1442. Both sherds are from jars in a fine fabric, one of which has shoulder grooves. Ipswich ware is rarely found in Leicestershire – it does not feature at all in a recent survey of findspots (Blinkhorn 2012, fig. 36) – and it is unlikely that these vessels date to before the mid-eighth century. Two of the Maxey-type vessels are of northern Maxey-type Fabric B (MAX). This type is the major mid-Saxon pottery type found in northern and central Lincolnshire, but also occurs as a minor type in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. The occurrence of the type at Coston is highly unusual. The jar/bowl sherd found in the lower fill of pit 1383 appears to be of late type and is probably of late eighth to mid-ninth century date. The sherd recovered from the main fill of pit 1388 is from a large jar or bowl of general eighth to mid-ninth century date. A single southern Maxey-type sherd (RMAX), also found in pit 1388, also comes from a large jar or bowl of general

eighth to mid-ninth century date. This is the main Maxey-type ware found in southern Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire.

The incidence of three regionally imported mid-Saxon types, within an area where such types are exceptionally rare, may hint at the importance of the settlement, or may just be a reflection of the current state of knowledge of the use of mid-Saxon pottery in Leicestershire.

Late Saxon pottery

There are 109 vessels of late Saxon type (late ninth to mid-eleventh-century), and the assemblage shows the reliance during this period of ceramic supply from kilns in Lincolnshire. Most vessels are early Stamford products (EST) in Fabric A, but the group also includes 37 Lincoln shell-tempered vessels of late ninth to late tenth century date (LKT and LSH), and ten further shell and quartz-tempered vessels of Lincolnshire/Rutland/Nottinghamshire type (LSLOC) or non-local type (LSX). The earliest identifiable sherds come from a Lincolnshire shell-tempered jar (LSLOC Fabric A) of late ninth to early tenth century date, found in pit 1308 (a type rarely found outside urban centres), and a Lincoln kiln-type dish (LKT) of similar date (from topsoil in evaluation trench 2).

The early Stamford ware (EST) vessels are mainly unglazed jars in Fabric A, but the group also includes unglazed bowls, two glazed pitchers, and a sherd from a large glazed bowl, storage jar or pitcher with applied thumb-pressed strips. A few of the vessels are in hybrid fabrics (A/D and A/E/F) and these vessels are all likely to be of early date (mid-/late ninth to tenth century). The remaining vessels are mainly chronologically undiagnostic, but are probably of tenth to early/mid-eleventh century date.

The 21 shell-tempered Lincoln kiln-type (LKT) and ten Lincoln shelly ware (LSH) vessels are mainly identifiable as jars, but two inturned-rim bowls are also present in the assemblage. These bowls are of early/mid-tenth to late tenth century date. Some of the shell-tempered vessels appear to have been burnt or overfired, and one LKT jar has the typical iron-rich internal slip associated with liquid containment (Young *et al.* 2005).

The fossil shell-temper in the single shelly LSX jar suggests that it may not be a Lincolnshire product, but it could have been manufactured in Rutland. A single non-local jar in a fine sandy fabric (LSX) may be an East Anglian Thetford-type product.

SAXO-NORMAN POTTERY

Saxo-Norman pottery was recovered only during the evaluation of the site, and amounts to 50 vessels, dating between the mid-tenth and mid-twelfth centuries. Of these, 38 are Stamford ware products (eleventh–mid-twelfth century) in fabrics A, B and G, and include a range of unglazed jars and glazed pitchers, as well as a single possible burnt bowl sherd. Stamford ware is the most common type to be found on sites of this period in Leicestershire, but other Cambridgeshire (SNEOT), Lincolnshire (SLOOL, SLOQ, SLSNT and SLSQ) and Rutland (RSNQS) calcareous types are also present here. At least four of these types (RSNQS, SLSNT, SLSQ and SNEOT) have their origins in the tenth century.

The largest group of Saxo-Norman pottery (26 vessels) was recovered as residual material in evaluation trench 6, in a layer overlying ditch 604 (a further 17 vessels) and ditch re-cut 607 (four vessels). The absence of Saxo-Norman pottery from the excavation area indicates a shift in the focus of activity to the west of the stream at this period, possibly by the mid-eleventh century, but certainly by the early post-conquest period.

MEDIEVAL POTTERY

Medieval pottery was likewise confined to the evaluation trenches to the west of the stream, and amounts to 19 vessels. The earliest of these are probably a jug in a south Lincolnshire Baston-type oxidised fabric (SLBTOX) of mid/late twelfth to early/mid-thirteenth-century date, and a splashed-glazed jug from an unknown production site (EMX). Other known production sites or areas supplying the site are Nottingham (NOTGL), Bourne (BOUA), Chilvers Coton (CHCOT) and Stanion/Lyveden (STANLY). Three jars are from unknown centres in the East Midlands (MEDX and RMSF). All of these vessels are of thirteenth to fourteenth century date.

Fired clay

Lorraine Mephram

The fired clay assemblage comprises 22 fragments. The three largest pieces, from post-pit 1405, are in a coarse, poorly mixed fabric containing chalk or limestone; two of these fragments carry wattle impressions. Other fragments in similar coarse fabrics, from gully 1284, ditch 1298, pit 1388 and pit 1441, are probably also structural in origin; some of these have flat surfaces, but there are no other identifiable wattle impressions.

Metalwork

Lorraine Mephram

Two metal objects were recovered. Post-hole 1486 contained a small triangular fragment of copper alloy with perforations close to the basal edge, possibly a mount or fitting of some kind. An iron object, from the fill (1292) of ditch 1299 (phase 6), took the form of a circular or square-sectioned shaft, widening to a flat, ovoid terminal at one end, broken at the end, and with the opposite end also expanding, but broken off close to the shaft. This can probably be identified as a padlock slide key of medieval date (e.g. Margeson 1993, fig. 117, no. 1262).

Metalworking slag

Rod Mackenzie

The very small assemblage predominantly consists of slags that are undiagnostic in terms of their production origin. Two fragments (from post-hole 1078 and ditch 1284) have been identified as probable fuel ash slags, although it is impossible to determine whether these relate to domestic ovens/hearths or metal production.

However, several pieces do appear to be associated with metalworking, including possible smelting slags which have an unusual purple surface colour (from ditch 1280 and post-hole 1228), and likely iron smithing/smelting slags (from post-hole 1453 and gully 1555).

The XRF analysis suggests that the three pieces of possible smelting slag relate to the production of iron, but it is unclear whether they derive from iron smelting or smithing. On balance, and given the small quantities present, it is more likely that these and the other pieces derive from iron smithing, of probable Saxon date.

Worked bone

Lorraine Mephram

Five objects of worked bone or antler were identified. These include parts of two cigar-shaped, double-ended pinbeaters of a typical Saxon form, usually associated with warp-weighted looms (from ditches 1281 and 1298), and an incomplete needle (pit 307).

There is part of a toothplate from a Saxon double-sided comb (ditch 1280). All the teeth have broken off, but show a similar spacing on both sides; part of one rivet hole survives.

A short length (45mm) of antler (unstratified), polished through use, with one end broken and the other end cut across and partly hollowed out, and with a single perforation through the side, is similar to an Anglo-Scandinavian object from York interpreted as an amulet (MacGregor 1999, 1941, no. 7696).

Worked flint

Lorraine Mephram

Only 18 pieces were recovered, 13 of which are un-retouched flake debitage. Of the remainder, one (from post-hole 1436) is a small single-platform flake core made on a flint pebble; one (gully 1557) is a thermally split cobble tested as a core; one (ditch 1298) is a fragment of a secondary flake which has direct retouch; and two (ditches 1280 and 1299) are flakes with marginal retouch.

None of the material is chronologically diagnostic, though the prevalence of flakes and the use of hard hammers indicate a post-early Neolithic date.

Animal bone

Chris Harrison and L. Higbee

A total of 851 fragments of animal bone was recovered from the site, approximately 27 per cent of which can be identified to species (Table 3); 88 per cent were from contexts assigned to phases 3 (early-mid-Saxon – 45 per cent), 4 (late Saxon – 41 per cent) and 6 (post-medieval/early modern – 2 per cent). Most of the unphased material was from post-holes which are most likely to belong to phases 3 or 4.

The method used is a modified version of that outlined by Davis (1992), and Albarella and Davis (1996), using ‘countable’ fragments identified to species or species group.

Species	3	4	6	Unph	Total
cattle	39	36		12	87
sheep/goat	50	30	1	8	89
pig	11	14	1	2	28
horse	3	3		1	7
dog	4	2			6
cat		1			1
roe deer		1			1
domestic fowl	3			3	6
crow		2		1	3
human	1				1
Total identified	111	89	2	27	229
<i>Per cent identified</i>	29	26	13	26	27
large mammal	8	9		3	20
medium mammal	9	7		8	24
small mammal	2	2		1	5
mammal	250	240	12	66	568
bird	3				3
fish			1		1
amphibian		1			1
Total unidentified	272	259	13	78	622
Overall total	383	348	15	105	851
<i>Per cent total</i>	45	41	2	12	100

Table 3. Summary of animal bone by phase.

PHASE 3 – EARLY TO MID-SAXON

A total of 383 fragments of animal bone were recovered from ditches, gullies and post-holes assigned to phase 3. Sheep/goat and cattle bones are common, and account for c.80 per cent of identified bones, and both are represented by a small range of body parts, with a clear bias towards cranial fragments and foot bones – i.e. elements that are generally left attached to the hide of an animal when it is skinned. The evidence does not, however, mean that hides were processed at the site, merely that the assemblage includes more primary butchery waste than domestic refuse. Age information is limited, but does at least suggest that sheep/goat were managed for a range of commodities, while cattle appear to have been primarily managed for secondary products, such as milk, manure and traction.

The phase 3 assemblage also includes a small number of pig, horse, dog and domestic fowl bones, and a human molar tooth. The tooth was recovered from gully 1559, and has a large caries on one side, perhaps an indication that it was pulled to relieve toothache ante mortem rather than having come from a disturbed grave somewhere in the vicinity.

PHASE 4 – LATE SAXON

The phase 4 assemblage includes 348 fragments of animal bone, the majority of which are from pits, in particular 307, 1178 and 1388. It is worth noting that some of these features were located in the evaluation trenches on the west side of the River Eye.

Cattle (40 per cent) and sheep/goat (34 per cent) bones are common, and account for 74 per cent NISP (Table 3). As with the phase 3 assemblage, cranial fragments and foot bones are more common than other body parts, which suggest that most of the animal bone originates from the initial stages of carcass processing rather than domestic consumption. Less common species identified from the phase 4 assemblage include pig, horse, dog, cat, roe deer and crow. The single roe deer bone, a pelvis, is from pit 307 within the main excavation area. Its presence in the assemblage suggests that the meat diet, which was primarily based on beef and mutton, was supplemented with the occasional piece of venison procured through hunting.

UNPHASED

A small amount of bone was recovered from various unphased post-holes, all of these features are likely to be associated with phases 3 or 4. The 27 identified bones are mostly attributable to cattle and sheep/goat, and again cranial fragments and foot bones appear to be more numerous than other body parts. Other identified species include pig, horse, domestic fowl and crow.

SUMMARY

The assemblage is dominated by sheep/goat and cattle bones, and these animals appear to have been slaughtered and butchered on or near the site, presumably for local consumption. However, given the under-representation of bones from the meat-rich parts of the carcass, it seems plausible to suggest that consumption took place outside the area of investigation.

Charred plant remains

Sarah F. Wyles and Chris J. Stevens

The initial assessment of all the bulk samples showed a degree of variation in the quantity of material produced, though, generally, the larger assemblages were recovered from the mid- to late-Saxon features, whilst the Romano-British features were notably poorer in charred remains (Wessex Archaeology 2011). On the basis of the assessment, 12 samples were selected for further analysis (Table 4).

ROMANO-BRITISH

The small assemblage from post-hole 1438 was dominated by cereal remains including emmer or spelt (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*), free-threshing wheat (*Triticum turgidum/aestivum* type), and a single identifiable grain of barley (*Hordeum vulgare*).

EARLY TO MID-SAXON

The material from the enclosure ditches comprised predominantly cereals, particularly free-threshing wheat. Barley and hulled wheat were also present. Other remains included a pulse of celtic bean (*Vicia faba*) and a small number of hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*) shell fragments. In addition, there was a small number of weed seeds, of several species.

MID- TO LATE SAXON

Again the plant assemblages were dominated by cereal remains, in particular those of free-threshing wheat, along with barley, emmer (*Triticum dicoccum*) and spelt wheat. Calibrated radiocarbon dates on the free-threshing wheat indicated a date

Period Group	Romano-British/		Early-mid-Saxon		Mid-late Saxon		Late Saxon		Pit	Pit	Pit	Post-hole
	Post-hole	Ditch	Ditch	Gully	Gully	Post-hole	Hearth	Ditch				
<i>Group number</i>			1280	1477	1559		1298					
<i>Feature type</i>			Ditch	Gully	Gully	Post-hole	Hearth	Ditch	Pit	Pit	Pit	Post-hole
<i>Cut</i>	1438	1105	1056	1473	1305	1523	1503	1293	1383	1388	1442	1405
<i>Context</i>	1440	1106	1057	1474	1306	1524	1504	1294	1385	1390	1443	1406
<i>Vol (L)</i>	5	10	30	16	25	4	20	20	34	38	38	30
<i>Flot size</i>	7	10	60	35	120	850	140	30	80	250	100	80
<i>Per cent roots</i>	15	10	8	7	8	1	2	15	20	7	5	5
Cereals												
<i>Common Name</i>												
<i>Antibemis cotula</i> L. (seeds)	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	6	5	45	14	13
<i>Tripleurospermum inodorum</i> (L.) Sch. Bip.	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Juncus</i> seed capsule	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
<i>Eleocharis cf. palustris</i> (L.) Roem. & Schult.	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Carex</i> sp. L. trigonous seed	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	30	1	-
<i>Carex</i> sp. L. flat sedge flat seed	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
<i>Carex flacca</i> Schreb	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	-	-
Poaceae (small indet.)	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Lolium/Festuca</i> sp.	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	-	5	1	5
<i>Poa/Phleum</i> sp. L. meadow grass/cats'-tails	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	1	9	3	3
<i>Avena</i> sp. L. (grain) oat grain	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	80	18	12
<i>Avena</i> sp. L. (awn) oat awn	-	1	1	1	-	1	-	-	4	-	-	1
<i>Avena</i> L./ <i>Bromus</i> L. sp. oat/brome	7	1	13	14	20	5	14	17	30	114	31	25
<i>Bromus</i> sp. L. brome grass	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	2	2
Small Seed indet.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Monocot. Stem/rootlet frag	-	1	2	1	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	-
Parenchyma/Tuber	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	2	-
Triangular capsule frag	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Tuber/Rhizomes	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
?Coal fossilised remains	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-
Mineralised nodule	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	-

Table 4. Charred plant remains.

range of seventh to eleventh century (Table 1). It is noteworthy that two tetraploid wheat rachis fragments resembled those of rivet wheat (*Triticum turgidum*), but could possibly be those of emmer.

Other remains included small numbers of hazelnut shell fragments, pulses, a wild strawberry seed, a variety of weed seeds and grains of oat (*Avena* sp.), which may be of the cultivated or wild variety. A large number of hawthorn/sloe (*Crataegus monogyna/Prunus spinosa*) thorns/twigs were recorded in post-hole 1523.

LATE SAXON

A similar pattern was observed in the late Saxon material, namely the predominance of free-threshing wheat with lower numbers of barley, spelt and rye (*Secale cereale*). Other remains included hazelnut shell, sloe (*Prunus spinosa*) stones, pulses, seeds of flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) and a possible flax capsule fragment (post-hole 1405). Pit 1388 produced a large weed assemblage, dominated by oats and oats/brome grass.

DISCUSSION

The charred plant remains fit with the general pattern of assemblages from rural sites of the period. They are consistent with settlement waste, and indicate that the site economy and agricultural practices remained essentially unchanged throughout the duration of Saxon occupation.

Free-threshing wheat became common in England only during the Saxon and medieval periods, and, with barley, marked a clear change across the country from the Romano-British cultivation of spelt (Greig 1991). Similar assemblages were seen from Bonner's Lane, Leicester (Monckton 2004), Anstey, near Leicester (Monckton 2006), Saxby (Monckton 2006) and Sherrard Street, Melton Mowbray (Monckton 2005). The small numbers of hulled wheat glumes on the site may be residual from earlier activity, although larger deposits of glumes of emmer have been dated to the Anglo-Saxon period from sites in the Thames valley (Pelling and Robinson 2000; Pelling 2003; Wyles *et al.* 2012). Also, there is some evidence to suggest that spelt continued to be cultivated in East Anglia until the seventh century (Murphy 1997).

The presence of possible rivet wheat would be an early occurrence of this species, as it is generally thought to have arrived on sites in the south around the time of the Norman Conquest and slightly earlier in the Midlands and East Anglia (Ruth Pelling pers. comm.). Moffett (1991) suggests that rivet wheat is present south of a line between Ipswich and Chester from the twelfth century onwards.

The weed seed assemblages from the Saxon deposits are generally typical of those from arable habitats and field margins. Stinking mayweed becomes more common in Anglo-Saxon and medieval times (Greig 1991), and is characteristic of the increased cultivation of heavier clay soils in the late Saxon period (Green 1984), associated with the change to mouldboard ploughs from ards (Jones 1981; Stevens with Robinson 2004; Stevens 2009). The terrestrial mollusc remains are indicative of a generally open landscape with some areas of long grass.

There were also a few remains of species more indicative of wetter environments, as well as those which prefer lighter sandier soils, which may indicate that vegetation resources were being exploited across a number of different areas. Other species indicate that this also included wild resources.

	<i>Phase</i>	<i>Mid-late Saxon</i>			<i>Late Saxon</i>	
		Feature type	Gully	Hearth	Post-hole	Pit
		Feature number	1305	1503	1523	1388
		Context number	1306	1504	1524	1390
<i>Quercus</i> sp.	oak	18h	9hr		9	
<i>Corylus avellana</i> L.	hazel	4		5r	8	
<i>Alnus/Corylus</i>	alder/hazel	2				
<i>Populus/Salix</i>	poplar/willow			4r		
<i>Prunus spinosa</i> L.	blackthorn	1		6r		
<i>Prunus</i> sp.	cherry type		3r		3r	
Maloideae	hawthorn group	1	12r	11r	9r	
<i>Acer campestre</i> L.	field maple	2	3	2		
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> L.	ash		1	1r	1r	
Indeterminate	diffuse porous	2	2			
Indeterminate	bark			1		

r = roundwood; h = heartwood

Table 5. Charcoal by fragment count.

Charcoal

Dana Challinor

Four Saxon samples produced remains of wood charcoal. Each was abundant in quantity, but the condition and size of fragments varied considerably. Seven taxa were positively identified (Table 5), all of which were consistent with native taxa.

The majority of the *Quercus* fragments showed some evidence of ring curvature. The diameter of the stems and the age ranges clearly showed that branch wood of small diameter and twiggy material had been utilised.

The material probably derived from domestic fires, and the general character of the assemblage is consistent with domestic assemblages at other mid- and late Saxon sites (e.g. Challinor 2007). The relatively high component of hedgerow/scrub taxa, along with small to medium trees, is appropriate for the use of brushwood from managed woodlands and/or hedgerow trimmings. A slight suggestion for the use of resources from wetter environments supports a similar indication from the charred plant remains.

DISCUSSION

The worked flint hints at some later Neolithic or Bronze Age activity in the vicinity of the site, but little more can be deduced, and the first evidence for settlement is in the middle-late Roman period, though the nature of this is unclear from the few features assigned to this period and the small assemblage of pottery recovered.

There was no evidence for any continuity between the late Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, and it is not certain that there was any early Saxon settlement in the area. Two of the pottery wares are primarily found on early Saxon sites, but they do occasionally occur on sites which extend into the mid-Saxon period; none of the three radiocarbon dates fall within the earlier period; and no sunken-featured buildings were present which might also support an early date. It is suggested,

therefore, that Anglo-Saxon settlement on the site may not have begun until the seventh century, possibly in the mid-Saxon period after *c.*AD 650.

The focus of the Anglo-Saxon settlement apparently lay within the vicinity of the excavation area on the east bank of the River Eye, though some pottery from the evaluation suggests a small-scale presence on the west bank prior to the late Saxon period.

The evidence is equivocal, but the earliest features may have been the gullies which appeared to define a somewhat irregular D-shaped enclosure, with a single radiocarbon determination indicating a late seventh century date at the earliest. The arrangement of gullies might be indicative of stock control, with possibly contemporary post-built structures of uncertain form within the southern part of the enclosure.

The proposed sequence sees the D-shaped enclosure replaced by a rectilinear layout of ditches, probably defining one or more larger enclosures which extended to the west beyond the limit of excavation. The ditches were re-cut on at least one occasion, and some of the post-holes lying within the enclosed area were probably related to its use. Again, no coherent building plans were apparent, but an undated fence line lay parallel to its northern side and two post-holes produced radiocarbon dates, together spanning the early eighth to early eleventh centuries. Undated features, possibly associated with this or the D-shaped enclosure, include a hearth and what may have been a crop dryer, though all of the datable pits have been assigned to the late Saxon period. The rectilinear enclosure may have been more directly related to settlement rather than, for example, animal husbandry, and the pottery and limited number of other finds from the ditch fills are likely to reflect this.

The pottery is entirely domestic in nature, with many of the jars having been utilised as cooking pots. The presence of several vessels in three regionally imported wares (northern and southern Maxey types and Ipswich ware), however, is noteworthy as these are relatively rare in Leicestershire, particularly all three together. This may indicate a rural settlement of some importance, perhaps a market, though there is nothing in the finds assemblage to indicate a high-status site, and metalwork is poorly represented.

There is some indication for weaving and a modicum of evidence for iron smithing, all crafts commonly found on rural Saxon sites. Animal husbandry and arable agriculture are well represented, reflecting a mixed economy at this time. The animal bone suggests that slaughter and butchery took place on or near the site, but consumption, or at least the disposal of food refuse, took place away from the area excavated, perhaps on the higher ground to the north-west. Sheep/goat probably provided a range of commodities, while cattle appear to have been utilised mainly for secondary products. The charred plant assemblage comprises mainly cereal remains, with free-threshing wheat dominant, as might be expected for this period, whilst the weed seeds are consistent with arable cultivation and species growing in the field margins. No quernstones were found, but it is likely that cereals and other crops were processed nearby, and the probable crop dryer, although undated, provides some evidence for this. The charcoal indicates the presence of possibly both hedgerow trimmings and brushwood from managed woodlands, used as fuel for domestic hearths, ovens and crop dryers, for example.

The late Saxon features appear to show a change in nature (or possibly focus) of the site, but there is no evidence that might indicate that there was a formal break in the sequence, occasioned perhaps by the Viking incursions into Mercia in the mid-ninth century. However, the earlier ditches were allowed to silt up and not recut, and a series of small, shallow rubbish pits dug across the northern half of the site. The sub-rectangular examples may have had a more specific purpose, but this can only be surmised. The cluster of post-holes on the western edge of the site suggests the presence of what may have been a moderately substantial post-built structure, but again the plan and form of this putative building remains unclear.

The late Saxon finds assemblage is unremarkable, but indicates continued domestic settlement. Jars again appeared to have been used as cooking pots, with pitchers and bowls also present, with many of the vessels coming from Lincolnshire, particularly Stamford and Lincoln. The meat element of the diet was primarily based on beef and mutton, occasionally supplemented by venison through hunting, and the charred plant remains were generally similar to those present in the mid-Saxon period. However, there is clear evidence for the increased cultivation of heavier clay soils, this expansion facilitated by the use of mouldboard ploughs rather than ards.

It is also apparent, from the evaluation, that late Saxon settlement was established on the west bank of the River Eye, and the relative quantities of pottery recovered suggest that it may have been denser than to the east, or at least more pottery was disposed of there. However, little more of the nature of this settlement can be established from the evaluation trenches.

The hybridisation of Coston's name, along with the archaeological evidence, points to an unbroken sequence of mid- to late Saxon occupation in the area, perhaps with the focus of settlement possibly shifting to the west of the River Eye in the ninth century. The ceramic evidence suggests that activity could have ceased on the east bank as early as the late tenth century and had almost certainly ended by the mid-eleventh century. This probably marks the nucleation of the village early in the late Saxon period, focused around the location of a church, with a mill nearby. The settlement shift is emphasised by the complete absence of any Saxo-Norman pottery from the excavation on the east bank, whereas the relatively small-scale evaluation to the west produced a minimum of 50 vessels.

This pattern was repeated in the medieval period, with 19 vessels from the west bank and none from the east. Remnant ridge and furrow were the only features recorded in the excavation, although it is worth noting that the earlier earthwork survey (Hartley 1987) recorded at least two house plots along the south side of Grange Lane, which developed as a hollow way to the north. The medieval pottery from the evaluation appeared to contain nothing which dated to beyond the end of the fourteenth century, and this is likely to reflect the extensive desertion of the village around this time, perhaps resulting from a combination of adverse economic conditions and one or more outbreaks of the Black Death in the second half of the thirteenth century.

In conclusion, the relatively small excavation undertaken at Coston has contributed significant new evidence related to rural settlement development in the mid- to late Saxon and medieval periods. Liddle (2006) and Vince (2006), in their resource assessment and research agenda for the Anglo-Saxon period in

the East Midlands, have highlighted that until recently Leicestershire had largely only antiquarian cemetery excavations and more recent fieldwalking programmes to rely on for evidence for this period. It largely lacks charter evidence which is available elsewhere and relatively little research had been done to reconstruct estate patterns.

Some larger excavations have been undertaken in recent years to supplement the earlier work, and, overall, the pattern of settlement appears to be largely one of dispersed and, initially, impermanent farmsteads or small settlements which generally avoided the heavier clay soils. Understanding the settlement chronology in the early to mid-Saxon periods is hampered by the difficulty in sequencing the pottery, but it appears that most of the dispersed settlements had gone by the late ninth or tenth centuries at the latest, and by the late Saxon period the process of nucleation was largely complete, probably contemporary with the establishment of open field systems and the shift to a market economy. Associated with this change was the appearance of coinage, the use of water mills, new cereal species, the adoption of the mouldboard plough and the production of animal surpluses. The reasons for this change are likely to be found in the higher levels of taxation and an increase in trade, which together probably led to a more complex settlement hierarchy, and in which the Anglo-Saxon church had a strong interest, whether taking advantage of or controlling these developments.

Archive

The complete site archive will be deposited in due course with Leicester Museum, under Accession Number X.A114.2010. This archive contains the full technical reports produced by the project specialists.

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APPENDIX 1: DETAILED HANDMADE SAXON FABRIC SERIES

Fabric type	Description	No. sherds/ No. vessels	Details
Fabric 1 (SST)	Abundant subround to round quartz grains, mainly <0.3mm; moderate grains <1.5mm, including occasional subangular grains; sparse to moderate, mainly fine aggregated sandstone including rare iron-cemented clusters; moderate iron-rich grains including large rounded examples <1.8mm; sparse carbonised vegetable voids; sparse flint.	5/5	Four sherds from large coil-built jars, at least one lugged (Fig. 6, 1). One rim has post-firing hole beneath rim (Fig. 6, 3). Fifth sherd probably from small jar. Vessels probably eighth–mid-ninth-century date.

Fabric type	Description	No. sherds/ No. vessels	Details
Fabric 2 (SST)	Similar to Fabric 1, but aggregated clusters are common; fabric also contains some calcareous material, including punctate brachiopod fossil shell.	2/2	Rim sherd from jar with simple rounded rim (Fig. 6, 2). Not chronologically diagnostic.
Fabric 3 (SST)	Background of abundant, fine, subround to round quartz, mainly <0.3mm, some red-tinged; sparse to moderate, fine, aggregated sandstone, including iron-cemented clusters; moderate iron-rich grains; moderate carbonised vegetable voids; sparse calcareous grains; sparse flint.	2/2	One sherd from large jar; odd red-coloured surfaces with roughened external surface. Second sherd probably also from jar. Not chronologically diagnostic.
Fabric 4 (SST)	Background of common, fine, subround to round quartz <0.2mm; mixed subround to subangular quartz <1.0mm; sparse mixed aggregated sandstone grains; moderate iron-rich grains; sparse acid igneous rock fragments; sparse carbonised vegetable voids; sparse flint.	1/1	Rim sherd from bowl with upright rim (Fig. 6, 4); externally burnished. Not chronologically diagnostic.
Fabric 5 (SSTMG)	Moderate coarse, subangular to angular quartz, moderate to common iron-rich grains; moderate calcareous grains; moderate carbonised vegetable voids.	2/2	Unusual red external surface; from jar or bowl. Not chronologically diagnostic.
Fabric 6 (SST)	Abundant, very mixed quartz, mostly subround to rounded (0.4–0.6mm); moderate coarse, subangular to angular quartz <2.0mm; sparse aggregated sandstone grains, moderate iron-rich grains, including coarse rounded (<2.5mm); organic voids.	7/1	Large jar with flared rim; attrition suggests may have been used for fermenting alcohol or for milk containment (Perry 2011). Not chronologically diagnostic.
Fabric 7 (SSTMG)	Very mixed, subangular to angular quartz, mainly coarse size; moderate aggregated sandstone grains; moderate iron-rich grains; sparse flint.	2/2	One from jar or bowl; one tiny flake. Not chronologically diagnostic.
Fabric 8 (SST)	Abundant subrounded to rounded quartz (0.4–0.6mm); very variable, subangular to angular coarse quartz; sparse to moderate aggregated sandstone grains; moderate iron-rich grains, including coarse rounded. Similar to Fabric 6, but less mixed and lacks organic voids.	1/1	From large jar with internal attrition. Not chronologically diagnostic.

Fabric type	Description	No. sherds/ No. vessels	Details
Fabric 9 (SST)	Mixed, but mainly coarse subangular to angular coarse quartz grains; moderate to common calcareous grains; moderate iron-rich grains, including coarse rounded; sparse fine aggregated sandstone.	2/2	Neck of jar; rim of jar or bowl. Not chronologically diagnostic.
Fabric 10 (SSTMG)	Very fine quartz background; moderate coarse, subangular to angular quartz grains; iron-rich grains, including coarse rounded; carbonised vegetable matter.	2/1	Jars or small bowls with internal carbonised deposits. Not chronologically diagnostic.
Fabric 11 (SSTMG)	Moderate mixed, but mainly coarse subangular to angular quartz, moderate mixed aggregated sandstone; moderate iron-rich grains.	1/1	Jar or bowl, internal carbonised deposit. Not chronologically diagnostic.