

# MEDIEVAL ACTIVITY ON LAND AT HIGH STREET, KIBWORTH BEAUCHAMP, LEICESTERSHIRE

*Daniel Stansbie*

An archaeological strip, map and sample (SMS) excavation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology on land to the rear of High Street, Kibworth Beauchamp, Leicestershire, in advance of residential development. The excavation targeted possible features identified in a previous evaluation, and recovered small quantities of prehistoric and Roman finds, along with evidence for four main later episodes of settlement activity, comprising boundary ditches, later pits and evidence for quarrying, occurring between the tenth and twelfth centuries AD.

## INTRODUCTION

Between March and April 2014, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological strip, map and sample (SMS) excavation on behalf of Barwood Homes on land to the rear of High Street, and adjacent to Weir Road at Kibworth Beauchamp, Leicestershire (centred on NGR: SP 6830 9363; Figs 1 and 2). The work followed a previous evaluation (Henshaw 2013) and was carried out to fulfil an archaeological condition attached to planning consent for the residential development of the site by Harborough District Council. This report presents a summary of the excavation results: a detailed report is available to download via the Cotswold Archaeology website at: <http://reports.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk> (CA 2015: report no. 14287). The archive is held by Leicestershire County Council Museums, accession number: X.A31.2013.

## RESULTS

Evidence of occupation relating to four main phases of activity was recovered during the excavation (Fig. 3). These phases all dated to the medieval or post-medieval periods, and comprised enclosure boundaries and pits dating to the tenth century (Period 1); a trackway and pits dating to the eleventh century (Period 2); toft and croft boundaries, post-holes and rubbish or quarry pits dating to the twelfth century representing urban reorganisation (Period 3); and finally post-medieval boundary ditches, pits, post-holes, animal burials, a well and a cultivation soil dating to between AD 1540 and 2000 (Period 4). In addition, there were residual prehistoric and Roman artefacts consisting of small quantities of worked flint and pottery, suggesting some form of non-settlement activity dating to these periods.

The three tenth-century (Period 1) enclosures 1, 2 and 3 (Fig. 3) probably represented settlement or field boundaries associated with one or more farmsteads. The ditches of all three of these enclosures were recut on multiple occasions during the course of their use, and all three produced moderate assemblages of

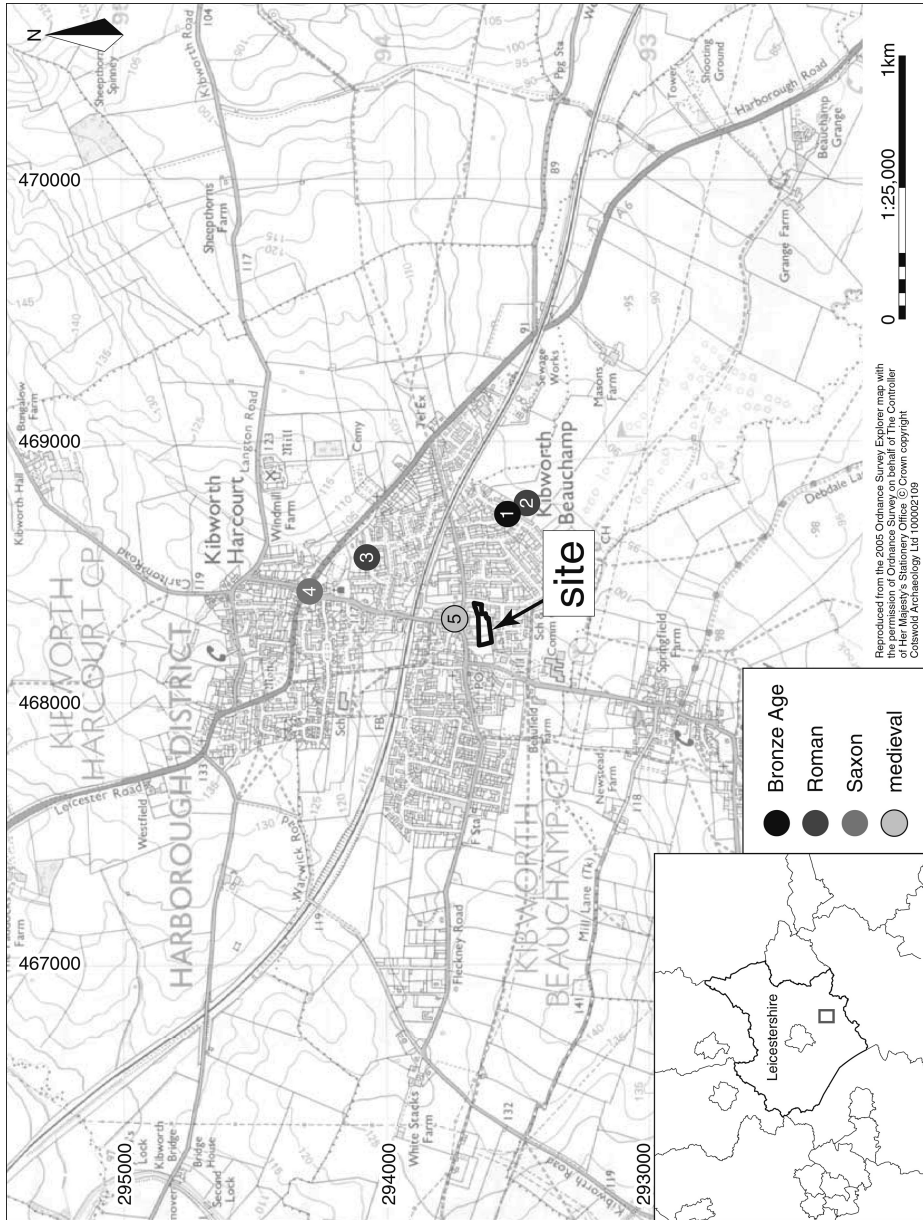


Fig. 1. Site location plan.

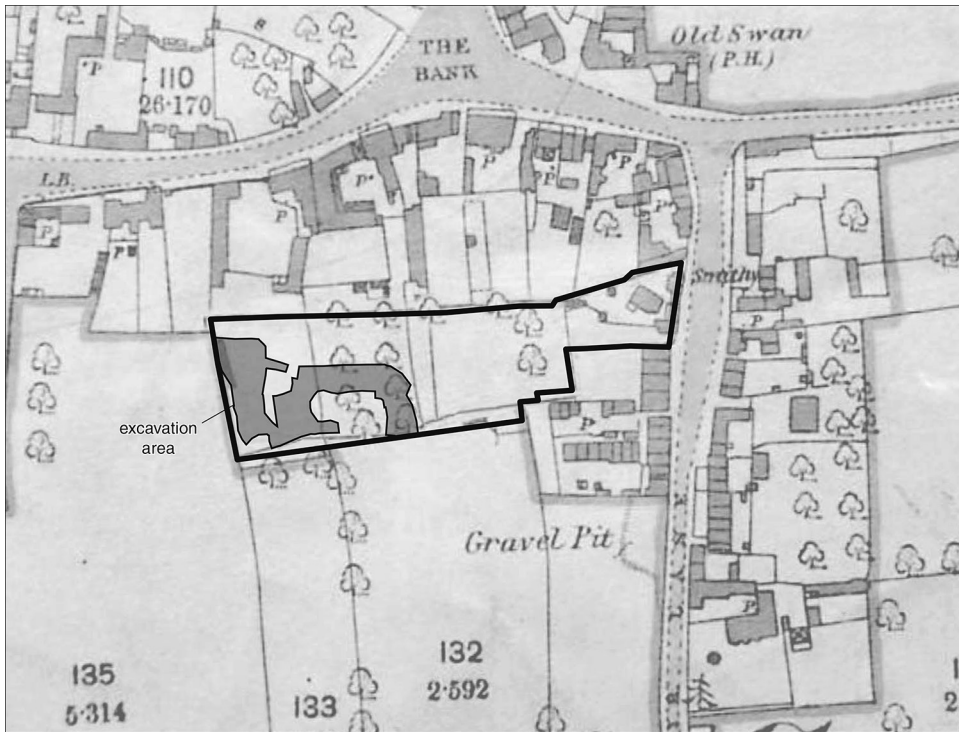


Fig. 2. Extract from the Ordnance Survey 25" map, 1886.

tenth-century pottery and animal bone. During the eleventh century (Period 2) the easternmost enclosure (Enclosure 3) appears to have been cut across by a trackway, suggesting that it had gone out of use; however, the presence of a group of pits lying largely outside of Enclosure 1, immediately to its west, suggests that Enclosures 1 and 2 may have continued in use during this period. The fills of the trackway ditches produced moderate assemblages of animal bone and ceramics; however, the fills of the pits produced an assemblage indicative of relatively intensive domestic occupation, including ceramics, animal bone, a dump of charred grain and part of an iron wall anchor.

By the twelfth century (Period 3) all three Period 1 enclosures had been superseded by a single large enclosure on the same alignment, probably representing a burgage plot defining a toft or croft. The boundary ditches of this enclosure, like those of its antecedents, were repeatedly recut throughout its life, and produced moderate quantities of ceramics. Three groups of pits, two within the enclosure and one outside it, also belonged to this phase and probably represent quarry pits and rubbish pits respectively, although neither produced particularly significant assemblages of material culture or biological material. Post-medieval activity (Period 4) comprised a thick cultivation soil which overlay the entire site, along with a boundary ditch, aligned on and recutting a tenth-century boundary bisecting the excavation area from north to south. In addition, there were several smaller ditches,

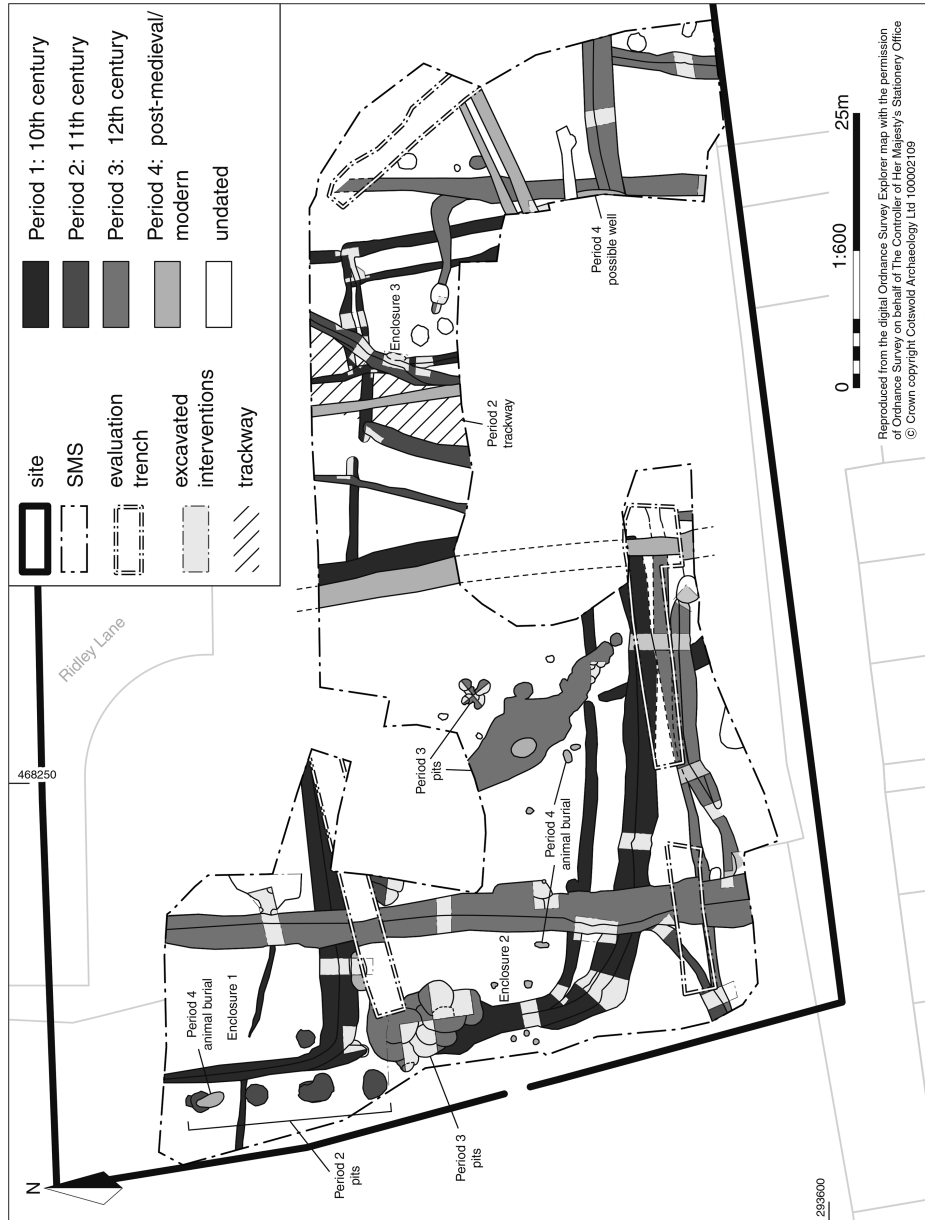


Fig. 3. Phase plan of the medieval and post-medieval occupation.

pits and post-holes, and a possible well, along with a number of animal burials cut into the cultivation soil.

## DISCUSSION

The evidence produced by this excavation suggests three medieval phases of either small-scale domestic occupation or agricultural activity on the margin of a settlement. All three phases were characterised by enclosure ditches, with scattered pits and post-holes belonging to the later two phases. Settlement/agricultural activity began in the tenth century and continued into the twelfth century, after which the area appears to have reverted to cultivation (although small assemblages of Roman pottery and flint are indicative of transient Roman and prehistoric activity too).

It would appear that the earliest phases of enclosure belonged to the Late Saxon settlement of Kibworth, which was previously investigated through a programme of test pitting carried out by members of the public under the direction of Access Cambridge Archaeology for the television programme 'Story of England' (ACA 2009), while the later phase perhaps represents croft or toft boundaries relating to a post-Conquest expansion of the settlement. The absence of evidence for settlement/croft boundaries after the twelfth century suggests a contraction of settlement activity linked to the reorganisation of the village around the main roads (Fig. 2).

Finds assemblages from the medieval enclosure ditches and pits suggest a variety of routine activities related to village life. These included the consumption of domestic animals such as cattle, sheep/goats and pigs, and cereal crops such as free-threshing wheat, barley, and oats, using a standard range of ceramic jars and bowls for cooking and eating. There was also a small quantity of red deer bone, which in a medieval context is more suggestive of higher status consumption. Evidence was also recovered for the consumption/cooking of peas, broad beans and lentils. In the post-medieval period the evidence suggests that the area was given over to marginal agricultural activities, along with the disposal of animal remains.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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