Archaeological investigations at Stanbridge Manor, Stanbridge, Bedfordshire

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SUMMARY

An excavation by Albion Archaeology at Stanbridge Lower School in 2006 revealed the remains of several early medieval enclosures. They lie in land which belonged to Stanbridge Manor, and form part of a network of rectangular enclosures identified by aerial photography in the mid-20th century, prior to the levelling of many earthworks in the area. Ceramic evidence indicates the enclosures were in use between the mid-11th and the 13th/14th centuries. This date range tallies with that already documented for the manor, which was created in the early 12th century and survived throughout the medieval period. Small assemblages of charred plant remains and animal bone provide further limited insight into the economic basis of the manor.

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, Albion Archaeology investigated the proposed construction site of a single storey extension to Stanbridge Lower School (Fig. 1). Bedfordshire County Council's Archaeological Officer had requested a programme of investigation prior to construction work at the site, which lies within land formerly associated with Stanbridge Manor (Fig. 2, HER 10959), and the identification of archaeological remains during trial trenching led to a small excavation.

The site lies within the northern half of Stanbridge parish, which is dominated by a ridge of chalk that rises to *c*. 130m OD. Several springs issue from this ridge, at the southern foot of which lies the village. One such spring (HER 10898) lies *c*. 200m north-west of the investigation area, which was centred at SP 9674 2432 on the northern side of Tilsworth Road, at a height of 109m OD. To the south of the village, the land continues to drop into a slight valley formed by a tributary stream of the River Ouzel (Fig. 1). The underlying geology comprises calcareous gleyed soils overlying deposits of Lower Chalk.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Most of the find-spots and sites of archaeological interest within the village of Stanbridge and its environs date to the medieval and post-medieval periods. Earlier evidence includes a number of find-spots of Roman pottery: at Stanbridge Hill, 1km north-west of the village, a spread of Roman pottery, tile and oyster shell (HER 1434) suggests occupation during this period. A number of other find-spots of Roman pottery have been recorded on the plateau of higher ground to the north of the village, while Roman Watling Street lies 2km to the east.

Stanbridge is not mentioned in Domesday Book because it was recorded under the royal manor of Leighton, along with Eggington, Billington, and Heath and Reach. However, prior to 1118, Henry I used a substantial portion of land around Stanbridge to create a separate manor for his wife, Queen Matilda (Coleman 1982, 50). This manor appears to have remained under royal control until the late 12th century. When it passed from John de Gatesden to the Chamberlain family in 1291, it was described as '*a messuage with garden,*

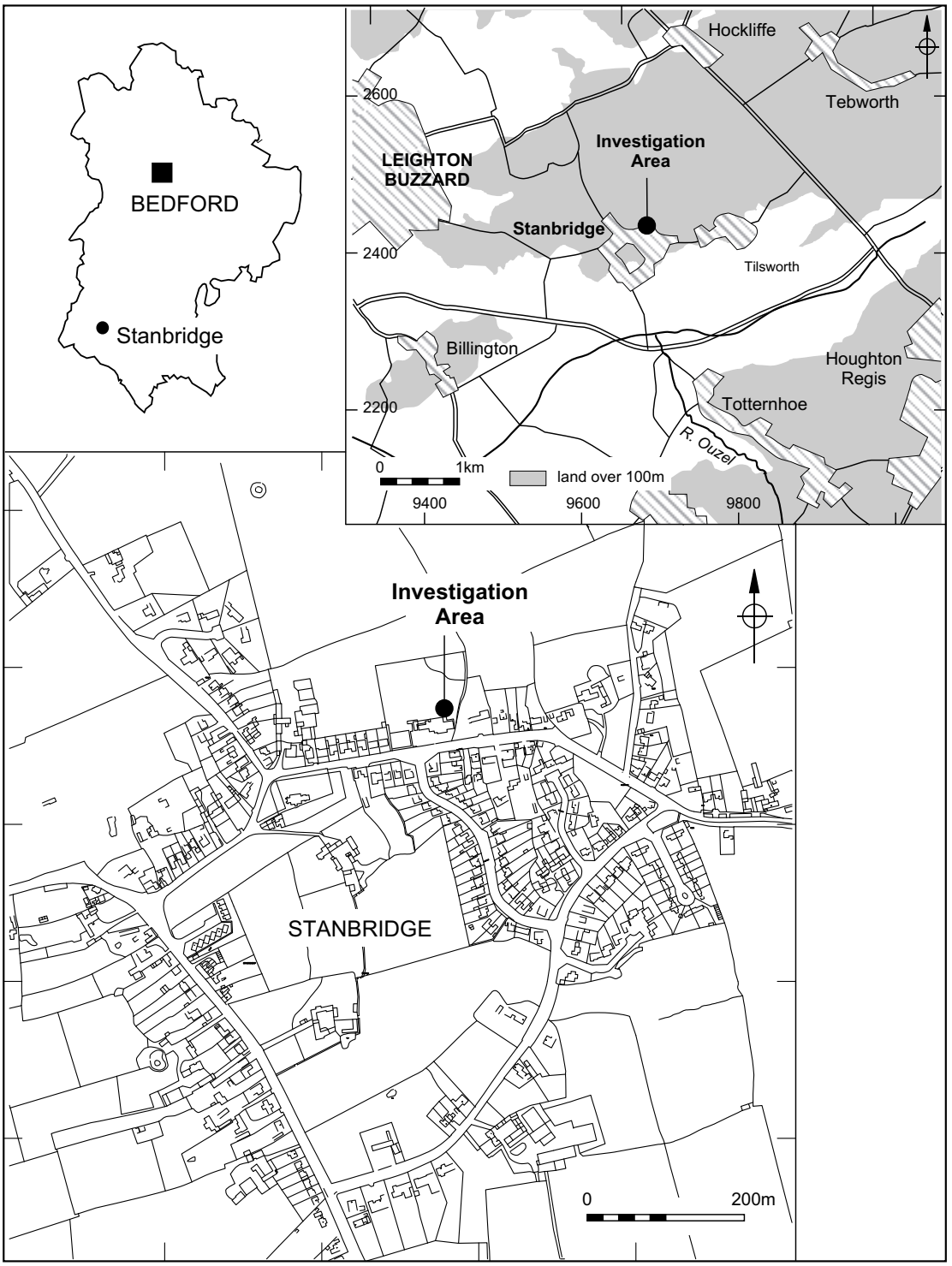

Figure 1: Site location and local topography

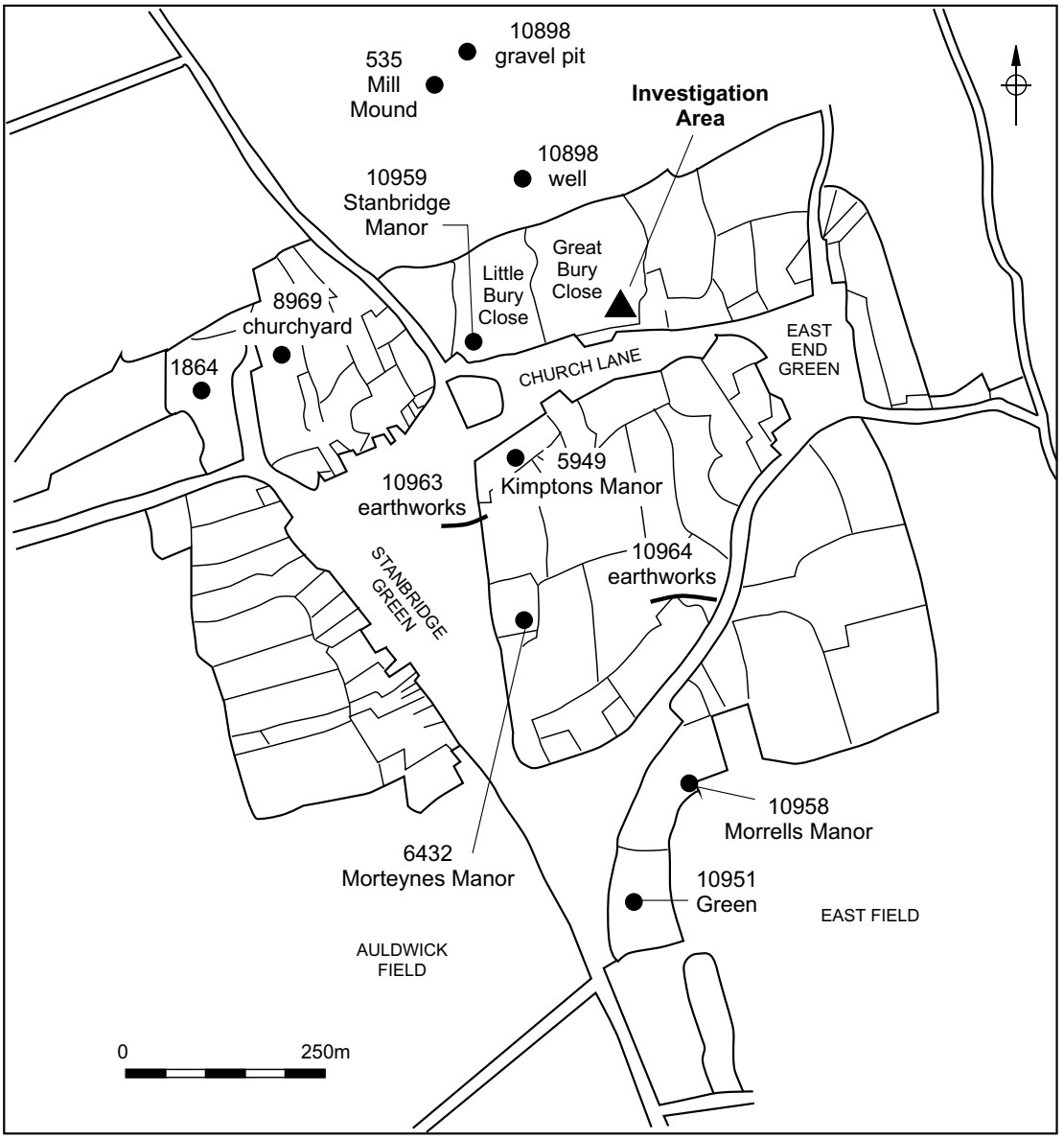

Figure 2: Selected components of medieval Stanbridge (after Coleman 1982)

herbage, fishpond and dovecot, 170a. arable, 8a. meadow, pasture, 118s. 1½d rents of free tenants, 1lb. pepper, 1lb cumin, pleas etc., and two parts of a windmill, held of the King in chief by serjeanty, rendering 60s. yearly at the King's exchequer; and there are due 4li yearly to the prior of Neuham for the King's alms and 7s. to Richard Grusset' (Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem III, 12; quoted in Coleman 1982, 50).

This passage of text links in with several extant earthworks and sites of archaeological interest around the investigation area (Fig. 2). The putative site of Stanbridge Manor is located *c.* 120m to the west, in a plot of land referred to in post-medieval documents as Little Bury Close (Schneider 1989, 3). The name 'Bury' was often applied to manorial sites in the Middle Ages. This plot is presently occupied by a farmhouse (HER 10959), which is

thought to sit on the site of the medieval manor house (Coleman 1982, 51). The investigation area itself is located in the south-east corner of a plot of land called Great Bury Close. Earthworks visible on a 1946 aerial photograph show square and rectangular plots of land within the immediate vicinity of the investigation area, although none survived at the time of fieldwork. Analysis of the photograph has indicated that the enclosures formed part of a series of closes which were attached to the manor house.

A mill mound (HER 535), known as Windmill Hill, is located *c.* 300m north-west of the investigation area, and a possible fishpond or natural spring lies close by (Fig. 3). The aerial photograph shown in Figure 3 shows that these features lay amongst, rather than beneath or over, the still extant ridge and furrow field systems, suggesting that the mill and possible pond were in use at the same time as the fields were under cultivation. The photograph also offers relative dating evidence for the possible quarry pit HER 10898: it was clearly overlain by ridge and furrow, and must therefore have been backfilled prior to the creation of the field.

The investigation area lies within the historic core of Stanbridge, albeit on its northern edge. The bulk of the medieval settlement 'would seem to have been confined to an irregular row of buildings along the northern side of the original green' (Coleman 1982, 98). The survival of extensive medieval earthworks to the north of Tilsworth Road until the latter half of the 20th century confirms that this area survived as largely open land, outside the settlement core, until the present day. However, earthworks within the curtilage of Stanbridge Lower School, constructed in 1968, were levelled to create a playing field, and it is the sub-surface remains of some of these earthworks which were revealed by the construction of the school extension.

RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATIONS

Colluvium

A colluvial deposit G1 of mid-orange-grey silty clay overlay the undisturbed geological deposits across the whole of the excavated area. It contained a small amount of heavily abraded late Iron Age/early Roman and early medieval pottery. The site's location — downslope of a natural spring — would have made it susceptible to colluviation.

Enclosures 1 and 2

A T-shaped arrangement of boundary ditches was revealed within the excavated area, with two episodes of ditch-cutting apparent (Fig. 4). Little evidence remained of the earlier ditch G2 after it had been re-cut by G3 (Fig. 4, Sections 1 and 2); the surviving portion was up to 0.9m wide and 0.6m deep. The more substantial re-cut G3 was *c.* 2m wide and 0.57–0.9m deep. Both ditches were generally U-shaped in profile, with minor variations — probably the result of the collapse of the sides during use. The primary deposits in both ditches were similar in character, deriving from erosion of the colluvium and underlying clay through which they were cut.

Overlying the primary fill of ditch G2 was a thicker deposit (G2.1) of brown-grey clay, which contained a slightly larger proportion of topsoil. The uppermost fill G2.2 comprised orange-grey clay.

A similar sequence of fills was present in ditch G3. Deposit G3.1 comprised a grey-brown silty clay and produced the bulk of the artefacts and the animal bone, which probably represent dumped domestic refuse. A significant variation was noted on the north side of the east–west arm of the ditch, where a slumped, mixed deposit of orange-grey sandy clays and blue-grey clays is suggestive of material derived from a bank along the north side of the ditch. The uppermost fills G3.2 were grey to dark grey-brown silty clay. These, as with all the deposits in both ditches, contained a significant proportion of colluvial clay.

Pit G4 was the only other feature identified (Fig. 4). It was 2.9m long, 0.75m wide and 0.9m deep, with a lower fill G4.1 of mid-blue-grey sandy clay. The upper fill was a grey-brown silty clay G4.2. The function of this pit is uncertain, although artefactual material recovered from it confirms it was broadly contemporary with the enclosure ditches.

Pottery

The investigations produced an assemblage of 260 sherds (2,002g) of pottery, representing a maximum of 215 vessels (0.99 estimated vessel equivalents (EVEs)). Diagnostic vessels total twenty, represented by thirty-eight sherds, 14.61% of the total sherd count. The assemblage dates from the mid-11th to the 13/14th centuries, with

Figure 3: Earthworks in and around Stanbridge in the mid-20th century (shown on Aerial Photograph RAF1946 3265_3)

the bulk of it probably dating to the mid to late 12th century. Little is known about the acquisition and use of pottery in the early medieval period on rural sites in this part of Bedfordshire. Therefore, this is an important assemblage, despite its small size and fragmentary nature. It is described below using fabric codes from the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series (see Appendix).

Fabrics

The assemblage can be divided broadly into two periods (Table 1). The earlier — *c*. mid-11th to mid-12th centuries — is defined by the presence of handmade fabric types B13, C59A and C59B (66.27%:1,312g) as well as wheel-thrown fabric types B01A and B07 (51%:138g). The later — mid-13th to 14th centuries — is defined by the presence of wheel-thrown fabric types C60, C09 and C11

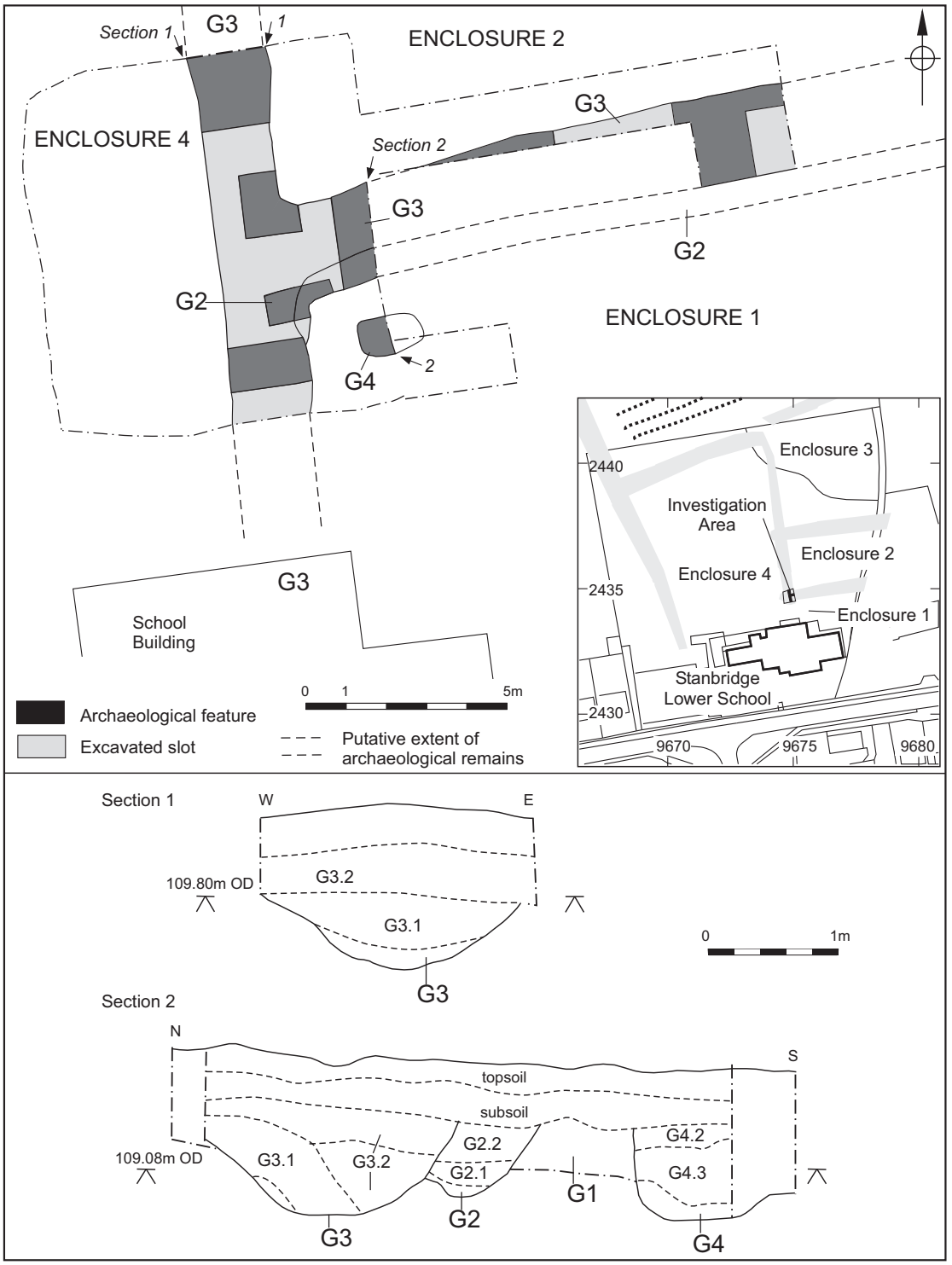

Figure 4: All-features plan and selected sections

Fabric	Description	Quantity	% of total	Weight (g)	% of total
B01A	St Neots type	4	1.61	51	2.63
B07	Medieval Shelly	11	4.42	87	4.48
B13	Early Medieval Chalky	42	16.87	388	19.98
C02	Red Quartz tempered	13	5.22	80	4.12
C09	Brill/Boarstall type	2	0.80	7	0.36
C11	Brill/Boarstall type	1	0.40	16	0.82
C10	Potterspury type	1	0.40	2	0.10
C59A	Coarse Sandy type	43	17.27	306	15.76
C59B	Fine Sandy type	80	32.13	618	31.82
C60	Hertfordshire Reduced ware	39	15.66	303	15.60
63	Flint-tempered ware	13	5.22	84	4.33
Total		**249**	**100**	**1,942**	**100**

Table 1: Quantity and weight of pottery by fabric type

Group	Romano-British (residual)	Mid-11th to mid-12th centuries							12th to 14th centuries	Mid-13th to 15th centuries	
		B01A	**B13**	**B07**	**C02**	**C59A**	**C59B**	**C63**	**C60**	**C09**	**C11**
1	2:6		1:8				1:142		1:1		
2						1:30	2:4				
2.1						1:12					
3	1:2		6:71	1:7		6:26	4:9	6:21	4:27		
3.1	6:51	3:49	32:301	9:78	10:75	24:170	53:351	6:56	24:203	2:7	
3.2			1:4			2:13	5:42		1:7		1:16
4						6:40	3:30		4:29		
4.1		1:2	1:1	1:2	3:5	2:14	10:26	1:7	4:27		

Table 2: Pottery quantified by sherds:weight (g). Pottery from topsoil omitted

(16.86%:326g). Hertfordshire Reduced ware type C60 and the Brill/Boarstall types C09 and C11 overlap in date, with C60 beginning in the 12th century and going out of use in the 14th century, while types C09 and C11 begin later, in the mid-13th century, and continue into the 15th century.

The two early medieval sandy fabrics, Coarse Sandy type C59A and Fine Sandy type C59B, both also occur at Grove Priory (Baker in prep.) and are likely to be the dominant local type. The Early Medieval Chalky ware B13 is a new addition to the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series (CTS). Significantly, it does not occur at Grove Priory, although it has been found on other sites in the area which are of comparable date and status (Moore *et al*. 2007).

Forms

The assemblage is dominated by domestic vessels — primarily jars, with a smaller number of bowls and hardly any jugs. These vessels are plain and utilitarian with sparse and simple decoration, including combing (Fig. 6.4), comb-impressions (Fig. 6.7) and applied thumbed strips (Figs 6.6 and 6.7). There are only two instances of glaze and even these are on later jugs in Brill/Boarstall types C09 and C11 (Fig. 6.12). This is a ceramic profile typical of a low-status, medieval, rural assemblage.

Provenance

Pottery of all dates was recovered in greatest quantities from ditch G3 (Table 2). Ditch G2, little of which survived re-cutting, produced only mid-11th to mid-12th-century material, whereas its re-cut G3 was the only feature to contain sherds from the mid-13th to 15th centuries.

Petrological analysis

Six samples were selected for analysis (Table 3): five sherds of sand-tempered, handmade wares

Sample	Thin Section Fabric (TSF)	Feature	Context	Pottery Fabric
1	1	4	316	MEDLOC
2	1	3.1	312	MEDLOC
3	1	3.1	332	MEDLOC
4	1	4	316	MEDLOC
5	2	3.1	106	MEDLOC
6	3	3.1	106	EMCH

Table 3: Thin-section analysis samples

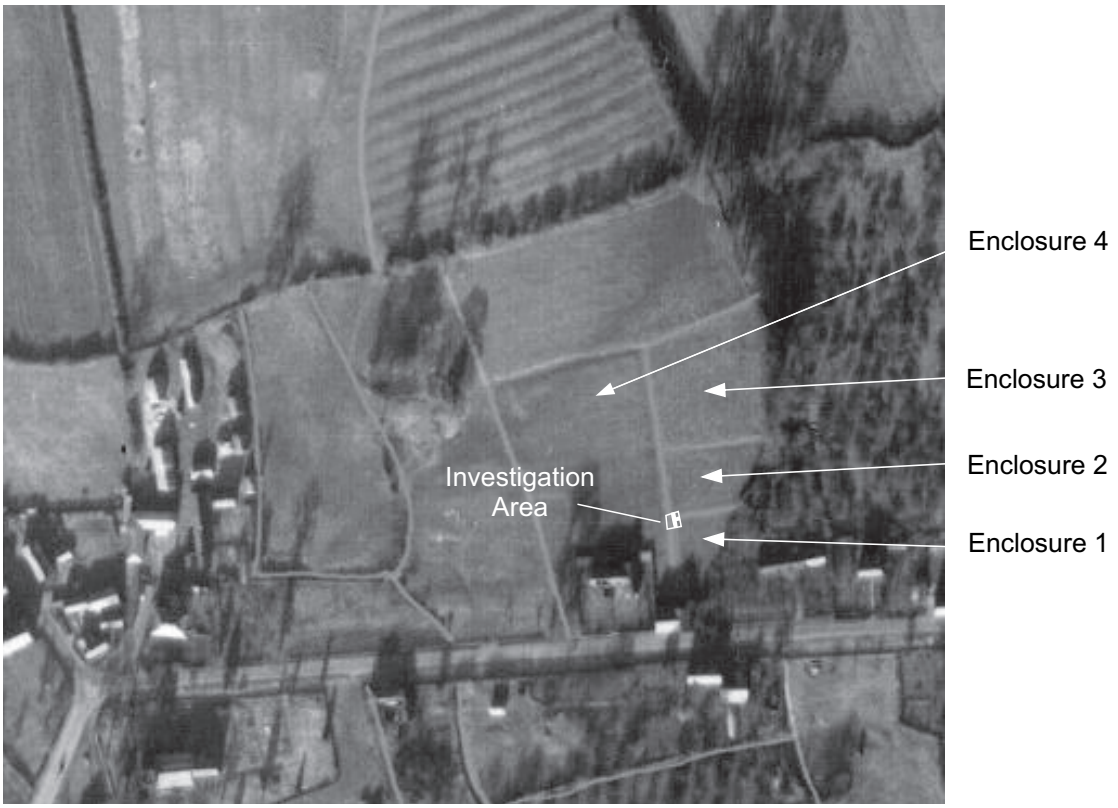

Figure 5: Enclosures 1–4 overlain on Aerial Photograph RAF1946 3265_3

(MEDLOC) for comparison with pottery from Chelmscote, c. 8km west-north-west of Stanbridge (Moore et al. 2007, 51–4); and one sherd as a possible example of Early Medieval Chalky ware (Vince and Jenner 1991, EMCH). Each was thin-sectioned and a chemical composition analysis obtained, using Inductively-Coupled Plasma Spectroscopy.

The six samples probably come from several sources and have three distinct fabric groups recognised in thin section. The four samples of TSF 1 match those from Chelmscote in chemical

No.	Fabric type	Description	Group
1	B13 Early Medieval Chalky ware	Jar rim and body, sooted exterior (3 sherds, 33g)	3
2	B13 Early Medieval Chalky ware	Jar rim (2 sherds, 30g)	3
3	B13 Early Medieval Chalky ware	Jar rim, particularly thin, sooted exterior (1 sherd, 10g)	3.1
4	B13 Early Medieval Chalky ware	Body sherd and part of base angle with combed diagonal lattice decoration (3 sherds, 31g)	3.1
5	C02 Red Quartz-tempered ware	Bowl with hammerhead rim (8 sherds, 67g)	3.1
6	C59A Coarse Sandy type	Jar neck with horizontal applied thumbed strip (1 sherd, 30g)	2
7	C59B Fine Sandy type	Bowl with hammer-head rim, vertical applied thumbed strips on body, comb stabbing on top of rim, reduced fabric (1 sherd, 142g)	1
8	C59B Fine Sandy type	Jug rim (1 sherd, 14g)	3.1
9	C63 Flint-tempered ware	Jar rim (2 sherds, 14g)	3.1
10	C60 Hertfordshire Reduced ware	Jar rim (2 sherds, 16g)	3.1
11	C60 Hertfordshire Reduced ware	Jar rim (1 sherd, 13g)	3.1
12	C11 Coarse Brill/Boarstall type.	Jug handle decorated with thumbed edges and deep vertical grooves down length (1 sherd, 16g)	3.2

Pottery illustration catalogue

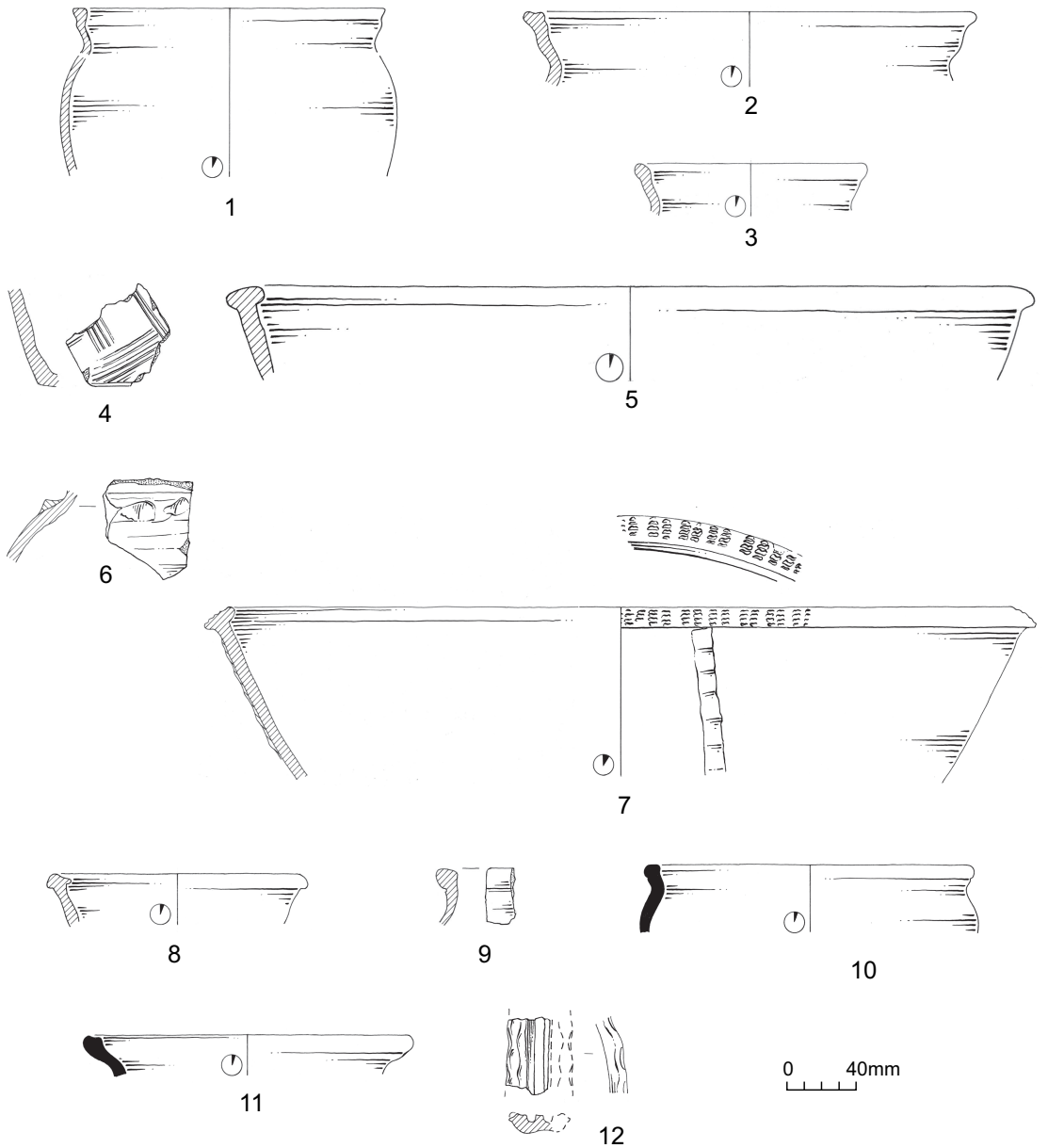

Figure 6: Selected pottery

composition and could come from the same source. The single samples of TSF 2 and 3 are less similar to the Chelmscote samples and may come from a separate source. However, a similar source area may be shared by all the samples (this would cover much of southern Bedfordshire and neighbouring counties).

The putative EMCH sample compares well in thin section and chemical composition with samples from Chelmscote and the City of London. The range of inclusions in thin section suggests that the source is in an area of Lower Cretaceous rocks. This ware could also, therefore, have been produced in south Bedfordshire or neighbouring counties.

Discussion

The lower fills of enclosure ditch G2 produced the earliest, albeit small, assemblage, comprising only

local, handmade sandy wares, C59A and C59B. These could be as early as mid-11th-century in date, although they are just as likely to be mid/late-12th-century. The primary deposit within the re-cut G3 produced pottery of the same date, along with sherds of Hertfordshire Reduced ware C60, which dates to the 12th–14th centuries. Pit G4 produced a similar assemblage and is likely to have gone out of use at broadly the same time. The latest pottery comes from the secondary and uppermost fills (G3.1 and G3.2) of ditch G3, suggesting it was still in use until at least the mid-13th century. No late medieval pottery was recovered, suggesting a cessation of activity on the site before the end of the medieval period.

Grove Priory (Baker in prep.), located only *c*. 5km to the west-south-west, was contemporary in date; certain similarities in the types of pottery appearing at both sites would therefore be expected. This is borne out by the presence of handmade sandy types, which appear to have been the local wares supplying both sites. However, the absence of Early Medieval Chalky ware (B13) at Grove Priory (despite extensive excavation of the site) and its presence at both Stanbridge and Chelmscote suggest different marketing patterns and acquisition strategies on these sites.

Despite its royal origins, Stanbridge was never more than an average south Bedfordshire manor. Small, lower-status rural settlements, like Stanbridge and Chelmscote (Moore *et al*. 2007, 53–4) would have got their pottery either from the local potter or from the local market, probably in relatively small quantities. Grove, on the other hand, was a relatively high-status site, catering for occasional but large numbers of visiting dignitaries and officials, including royalty. Large quantities of pottery would have been acquired as and when needed, probably directly from the potter. The potter supplying Grove, however, need not have been the local person, but possibly one with tenurial or other connections which were of more importance than distance. It appears that the handmade sandy types were the immediate local wares supplying both high and low-status sites, but the source for the chalky ware may have lain beyond the tenurial boundaries and obligations of Grove Priory, supplying only the lower-status sites, including both Stanbridge and Chelmscote.

Ceramic building material

Nearly all of the 369g of ceramic building material that were recovered came from the lower fills of ditch G3, in particular from the secondary fill G3.1 (266g) The bulk of it comprised pieces of clay roof tiles, which only became common in the 13th century. A post-13th century date for the infilling of this ditch is consistent with that suggested by the pottery.

Animal Bone

A total of 125 animal bone fragments were recovered, 101 of which were from ditch G3. Of these, only fifty-two were identified to species (Table 4). The sample is too small to derive more than basic information about the species present. However, bone-surface preservation is generally good, with only one sheep/goat bone being recorded as eroded. Fish bones also survived. Five sheep/goat and five cattle bones have gnawing damage, indicating they were accessible to dogs prior to deposition. Only one unidentified fragment is burnt.

Forty-four mammal bones were identified (Table 4), of which twenty-nine (66%) are sheep/goat. Two of these definitely belonged to sheep, whereas no elements of goat were positively identified. The high percentage of sheep/goat may imply that sheep were the most common suppliers of meat, although the sample is very restricted in size. As usual, denser elements such as loose teeth and shafts of tibiae and metapodials survived in larger numbers than more fragile elements; a minimum of four sheep/goat tibiae are represented. A fragment of sheep/goat skull was the only mammal bone identified from the sieved assemblage. The discrepancies in element counts are likely to have been caused by differential destruction by taphonomic factors, and gnawing in particular. A sheep/goat astragalus bears incisions on the anterior aspect near the distal end made during initial skinning and dismemberment of the carcass.

Two sheep/goat mandibles have tooth-ageing evidence. One has all three molars in wear and belonged to an adult. The second has only the first two molars fully erupted and still possesses deciduous premolars in an advanced state of wear. This belonged to a sheep aged about 18–24 months old, a common age for culling for meat. Epiphyseal fusion data are minimal. There is no evidence for

Element	Cow	S/G	Pig	Equid	Dog	Goose	Eel	Her	Cyp	Stb	**Total**
Maxilla	1										**1**
Skull frag		1									**1**
Mandible	2	4	1								**7**
Loose Teeth		6	1								**7**
Furcula						1					**1**
Humerus	2										**2**
Radius		2									**2**
Pelvis	1	1									**2**
Femur		2			1						**3**
Tibia		6									**6**
Fibula					1						**1**
Astragalus	1	1									**2**
Metacarpal		3				1					**4**
Metatarsal	1	2		1							**4**
Phalanx 1		1									**1**
Phalanx 2	1										**1**
Wing phalanx						1					**1**
Thoracic V	1										**1**
Precaudal V							2	1	1		**4**
Basipterygium										1	**1**
Total	**10**	**29**	**2**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**52**

Counts are of number of individual specimens (NISP)
S/G: sheep/goat; Eel: common eel (*Anguilla anguilla*); Her: herring (*Clupea harengus*); Cyp: Cyprinid; Stb: 3-spined stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*)

Table 4: Identified animal bone element counts: Mammal bones

the presence of young lambs, whereas sub-adult or fully adult animals are represented by two fused distal tibiae and a fused distal femur. The only measurable bone is the astragalus, which has a lateral length of 27.8mm, a medial length of 26.4mm and a distal breadth of 17.8mm. This specimen belonged to a relatively small animal.

The ten cattle elements include a thoracic vertebra of an adult animal. None of the elements are porous, indicating that no bones of calves are present. No tooth-ageing or butchery evidence was obtained. A metatarsal has a proximal breadth of 44.3mm, and an astragalus has a lateral length of 57.8mm and a medial length of 52.7mm. Both belonged to quite small cattle, typical of the size of stock from this period.

Pig is represented by two elements only. These include a mandible, which possesses a third molar in an early stage of wear. This belonged to a sub-adult, animal probably culled around two years of age. The breadth of the anterior cusp of the tooth measures 14.0mm. Its small size suggests that it was from a domestic animal. Equids are represented by a single third metatarsal, probably from a horse rather than a mule. It has a distal breadth of 47.5mm. The two dog bones consist of fragments of a femur and fibula found in the same context and conceivably from the same animal.

Bird and fish bones

Three bones, all from ditch G3, were identified as goose. Their size indicates that they probably belonged to domesticated birds. Their presence on medieval sites is not unusual. More surprising is the absence of domestic fowl bones, which are usually the most abundant avian species represented on sites of this period. However, this could be simply a quirk of the small sample recovered.

Sieving produced the only evidence for the presence of fish, mostly in the form of small precaudal vertebrae. Four species were identified, three from pit G4 and the fourth (herring) from ditch G3. Two vertebrae belonged to eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), from fish about 30cm in length. These could have been caught locally in traps. Such fishing techniques may also account for the presence of a bone from a 3-spined stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*). It is unlikely that this small species was a resource that was sought after, and it could have been caught by default in the same traps as the eels. Alternatively, it could have been removed along with other gut contents from a larger freshwater species such as a pike. The cyprinid vertebra could not be further identified, but represents another freshwater species that could have been captured in a local river. The herring is the only marine fish

represented and indicates the exploitation of preserved fish brought to the settlement.

Charred plant remains

Six archaeobotanical samples were taken from discrete datable contexts identified as having the potential for the preservation of plant remains (Table 5). No sample produced more than fifty charred items, however, and the results may not be representative. Thus, only very limited interpretation of the material is possible.

Results

In general, the charred/carbonized remains are in a poor state of preservation, being relatively intensely burnt and distorted. A total of 128 charred items were identified, as well as three uncharred elder (Sambucus nigra) seeds from samples 1 and 10. The wheat grain present in the assemblages was identified as being a free-threshing variety, although due to the poor quality of preservation and the lack of cereal rachis, identification could not be made to species level. Bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) was common in the medieval period, but rivet wheat (*T. turgidum*), a productive and tall growing wheat which is also useful for thatching, is known from an increasing number of sites in the Midlands (Monckton 2006). It has been suggested that from the early medieval period onwards, rivet wheat was mainly used to make biscuits or pottage, whereas bread wheat was favoured for milling to use as flour for bread (Grieg 1991). However, in the absence of chaff, the presence of rivet wheat could not be confirmed. Two grains of six-row hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) were identified in sample 10, while barley was also tentatively identified in samples 1, 11 and 13.

Weeds and wild plants

All six samples contained seeds from weeds and/or wild plants (Table 5). The New Flora of the British Isles (Stace 1997) and the tables of weed occurrence (van der Veen 1992) were used as reference guides. A total of forty charred/carbonized weed seeds were found, including goosefoot

	Sample No	1	10	11	12	13	14	**Total**
	Group	4.1	4.1	3	2	3.1	3	
	Feature type	Pit	Pit	Ditch	Ditch	Ditch	Ditch	
	Sample vol. (l)	10	10	20	20	30	20	
	Flot vol. (ml)	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	
	Items/litre	3.5	2	1.7	0.35	1.1	0.1	
	Weed/grain ratio	0.4	1.7	0.1	2.5	0.4	0.0	
Grains								
Triticum free-threshing	Free-threshing wheat			2	1	16		**19**
Triticum cf. free-threshing	?Free-threshing wheat	2		7				**9**
Triticum sp(p)	Wheat			7	1			**8**
cf. *Triticum*	?Wheat	10						**10**
Hordeum vulgare	Barley		2					**2**
cf. *Hordeum*	?Barley	1		1		4		**6**
Cerealia indet.	Cereal	12	5	13		3		**33**
Chaff								
Culm node	Cereal stem		1					**1**
Wild Plants								
Chenopodium sp.	Goosefoots	1				1		**2**
Rumex sp.	Docks	2		1				**3**
Rumex acetosella L	Sheep's Sorrel					1		**1**
Hypericum sp.	St John's-worts	1	1	1	1	2	1	**7**
Vicia sp(p).	Vetches	1	5	1		4		**11**
small legumes	Small legumes	5			2	1		**8**
Lamiaceae sp.	Dead-nettle family		1					**1**
**Sambucus nigra* L.	Elder	1*	2*					**3***
Asteraceae sp.	Daisy family					1	1	**2**
Anthemis cotula L.	Stinking Chamomile		4	1				**5**
cf. *Avena* L.	Oat (wild)				2			**2**
small grass	Grasses		1					**1**
Total	**Items**	**35**	**20**	**34**	**7**	**33**	**2**	

* uncharred

Table 5: Plant remains

(*Chenopodium* sp.), docks (*Rumex* sp.), sheep's sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*), vetches (*Vicia* sp.) and stinking chamomile (*Anthemis cotula*), a weed common to ploughed clay soil. All of these species are typical plants of disturbed ground and are common arable weeds that could have grown locally. It was concluded that the uncharred elder seeds (Sambucus nigra) found in samples 1 and 10 were modern contaminants.

Summary and conclusions

The majority of the samples (1, 10, 11 and 13) are proportionately rich in cereal grain (low weed to grain ratio). Due to the limited numbers of grain and weed seeds present, it can only be surmised that their deposition was associated with domestic waste — most likely stemming from the preparation and consumption of cereals as opposed to cereal-processing residue. Such low density scatters are usually associated with the slow accumulation of material over time. The low ratio of weeds to cereal grain also suggests that cereals had been subjected to a degree of crop-cleaning or hand-sorting to remove extraneous material prior to food preparation. The cereals present in the samples — free-threshing wheat and barley — are characteristic of medieval assemblages.

DISCUSSION

Land boundaries defined by ditches can be very long-lived; some modern boundaries have been traced back, using archaeological investigation and cartographic analysis, to the Iron Age and Roman periods (Abrams and Ingham 2008, 116–7). However, the ceramic assemblage recovered from the boundaries investigated at Stanbridge suggests that they were only in use between the mid-11th century and the 13th/14th centuries, falling into disuse before the end of the medieval period. This date range fits well with that documented for Stanbridge Manor, which was created in the 12th century and survived throughout the medieval period. The boundaries were certainly not recorded on 19th-century maps of the area, even though the earthworks would have been visible at this time (Figure 5 clearly shows earthworks in existence in the mid-20th century). Therefore, despite being partially extant, they were no longer considered relevant as markers in the landscape. Instead, one large plot, Great Bury Close, encompassed all the earlier, smaller plots during the 19th century (Fig. 2).

Given the essentially agricultural function of this land during the medieval period, no evidence for settlement contraction has been recorded as a result of this investigation. Indeed, the case for continuity of use has been strengthened. Farmhouse HER 10959 (Fig. 2) sits on the putative site of Stanbridge Manor, and this land remained an open field until the latter part of the 20th century.

The purpose of these medieval boundaries was to enclose land into plots, and separate those plots from others in the vicinity. Several enclosures are visible both within, and in the vicinity of, the investigation area (Fig. 4). Enclosure 4 (*c*. 5,000 m^2 in size) occupied the western part of the investigation area, while the eastern part was split between Enclosures 1 and 2 (*c*. 250m^2 and *c*. 500m^2 respectively. Enclosure 3 (*c*. 1,400m^2) is visible as a crop-mark (Fig. 5) to the north. The period of use of these enclosures and, by association, several others visible adjacent to them has been confirmed by the small-scale investigation of ditches G2 and G3, which correspond exactly with those shown in Figure 5. This provides an excellent example of how a small excavation area can be used to augment our knowledge of a much larger landscape, when aerial photographs, maps, and local knowledge are utilised alongside contextual, ecofactual and artefactual data.

Exact functions for these plots of land to the east of the manor house are unknown, although it is likely that they served as agricultural plots for livestock and/or cultivated crops, and that they provided food for consumption within the manor. The animal bone and plant assemblages are typical of settlement sites of the period. Neither dataset suggests a particularly high status; the remains are typical of those commonly found on rural farmsteads and small settlements of the period. The faunal remains suggest the predominance of sheep/goats, while the archaeobotanical assemblage is characteristic of the arable cultivation of clay soils.

The presence of a bone from a marine fish (herring) in a securely dated deposit within ditch G2, dating to the 11th to 12th centuries (Tables 2 and 4), offers a glimpse into the diet being enjoyed at a relatively early date for this county, and country. It also sheds light on the trading connections of the manor. Barrett (2004, 21) describes a medieval fishing revolution 'in the 11th and 12th centuries… that seems to be the big one. If there was a moment in time when herring and cod consumption, and therefore sea fishing, took off, it was in the 11th century, not later'. Barrett's study covers 127

English archaeological sites with assemblages dating from AD 600 to 1600. Interestingly, from the perspective of Stanbridge, these tend to be from towns and/or coastal sites. The Manor at Stanbridge was located in rural Bedfordshire, a long way from the coast. It was, however, close to the regionally important town of Leighton Buzzard and to the relatively well-connected Grove Priory; it also lay just south of the Thede Way, a long distance route running into East Anglia. Clearly, Stanbridge Manor had connections which stretched beyond local food markets. Further investigation of the site could potentially yield a rich assemblage of ecofactual and artefactual remains, augmenting our knowledge of the medieval period in this part of rural Bedfordshire.

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The Albion management team comprised Joe Abrams (Project Manager) and Mark Phillips (Project Officer); all Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager). Fieldwork was supervised by Alison Bell, with excavation carried out by Gareth Shane. Processing and preliminary recording of the finds were undertaken by Jackie Wells, while soil samples were processed by Sharon Gerber-Parfitt. Analysis was undertaken by the following specialists: pottery — Anna Slowikowski (Artefacts Manager); ceramic building material — Jackie Wells; charred plant remains — Alistair Hill (University of Leicester Archaeological Services); animal bone — Mark Maltby (Bournemouth University); and fish bones — Shelia Hamilton-Dyer. The illustrations were produced by Cecily Marshall. Special mention is made of Alan Vince (Alan Vince Archaeology Consultancy), who undertook the thin-section analysis; his death in February 2009 has deprived archaeological science of one of its leading practitioners.

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APPENDIX: POTTERY TYPE SERIES

The pottery was divided into fabric types using the common names and codes in the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series (CTS), which is currently maintained by Albion Archaeology. Only fabric types new to the CTS have been fully described below.

B01A St Neots type (4 sherds: 51g)
Usually a shade of orange, with an occasional dark grey core, the surfaces may be characteristically 'chocolate brown' in colour, as they are here. The only diagnostic form on the site is a wide, shallow bowl.

Comparable to Denham's category T1(2) at Northampton, this type is dated to the 11th–12th centuries, towards the end of the St Neots date range (Denham *et al*. 1985, 54). It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between this and the medieval shelly ware B07 into which it almost imperceptibly merges.

B07 Medieval shelly (11 sherds: 87g)
This is a development of the earlier St Neots ware. Only small, undiagnostic body sherds were found.

Known kilns producing this type have been excavated at Olney Hyde, Buckinghamshire (Mynard 1984) and Harrold, north Bedfordshire (Hall and Hutchings 1972). Both have been dated to the 12th–13th centuries. Based on the proximity to Stanbridge of these production sites, Olney Hyde is the most likely source for the sherds found here. It was also thought to be the source for the shelly pottery at Chelmscote, Bucks. (Moore *et al*. 2007, 49).

B13 Early Medieval Chalky (42 sherds: 388g)
Fairly smooth, buff-orange to grey-brown, often in patches. The chalky inclusions are clearly visible on the surfaces as white sub-rounded speckles, although they are occasionally dark grey in colour, especially in the break, varying in size from 0.2 to 1.5mm. Moderate amounts of rounded quartz, approx. 0.5mm and occasional black elongated voids where organic matter has incompletely fired out.

All recognisable vessels are jars with similar, slightly flaring rims (Fig. 6, 1–4). This similarity of form suggests the same production site, if not the same potter. Decoration is sparse but occurs on a single example, in the form of lattice combing on a body sherd close to the base angle (Fig. 6, 4).

In London, Early Medieval Chalky ware is well dated to the mid-11th to mid-12th century, after which date it ceased to be used (Vince and Jenner 1991, 70–2). The type B13 pottery from Stanbridge could be of a similar date, although at Chelmscote a mid-12th-century date was suggested (Moore *et al*. 2007, 49).

This type has been frequently picked up in molehills in the Leighton Buzzard area and also in Buckinghamshire (A. Vince pers. comm.)

C02 Red Quartz tempered (13 sherds: 80g)
Characterised by abundant, well-sorted, sub-rounded red quartz. The only recognisable form is a plain bowl with a hammer-head rim (Fig. 6, 5).

At Bedford, this fabric type was dated to the 11th–13th centuries and was presumed to be a type local to the town (Baker and Hassall 1979, 171). This cannot be confirmed, although few examples have been found elsewhere. The sherds from Stanbridge do not help resolve this as only a single bowl and five undiagnostic sherds were found.

C09 Brill/Boarstall type (2 sherds: 7g)
This fabric type equates to Ivens's Fabric 2 (1982, 144). Two small sherds were recovered, from an olive green glazed jug. This type originates in the two potting villages of Brill and Boarstall, Bucks., as does type C11. The earliest documentary evidence for the potting industry at Brill is 1254–5 (Ivens 1982, 151). The sherds from Stanbridge, therefore, date to the mid-13th century at the earliest, with the medieval industry continuing into the 15th century.

C11 Brill/Boarstall type (1 sherd: 16g)
Coarser than C09, this fabric equates to Ivens's Fabric 3 (1982, 145). A single handle sherd was recovered, probably from a jug (Fig. 6, 12). It has deep grooves running down its length and thumbed edges, an unusual style of decoration for this pottery type. Dating is as for type C09 above.

C10 Potterspury type (1 sherd: 2g)
The type has been fully described by Mynard (1970, 49–55). One unglazed sherd was found in topsoil. Originating in Northamptonshire, the date range for this pottery is from the late 13th–15th centuries.

C59A Coarse Sandy type (43 sherds: 306g)
This type was first recognised at Chalgrave, 6km from Stanbridge, and is described by Brine (1988, 43). A date of late 11th–12th centuries was suggested for the pottery at Chalgrave, as well as that from nearby Grove Priory (Baker in prep.). The assemblage from Stanbridge is made up largely of plain, undiagnostic body sherds, but a single jar was found with a thumbed strip applied to the neck (Fig 6, 6).

There is a particularly coarse version of this fabric found at Stanbridge, with abundant rounded quartz, 0.5–2.5mm, in a background of finer sub-angular quartz. Black streaks and patches indicate where organic matter has not completely fired out.

C59B Fine Sandy type (80 sherds: 618g)
This type is described by Brine (1988, 43), who suggests that, at Chalgrave, both C59A and C59B are part of the same industry. Identifiable forms from Stanbridge are two jugs (Fig. 6, 8) and a bowl with hammerhead comb-impressed rim and vertical thumbed strips applied to the body (Fig. 6, 7). Date as C59A above.

C60 Hertfordshire Reduced ware (39 sherds: 303g)
Although a wide variety of forms were produced in a number of production centres in Hertfordshire (Havercroft, Turner-Rugg and Rugg 1987), the only recognisable forms at Stanbridge are jars (Fig. 6, 10 and 11). There is a single body sherd with an applied thumbed strip, but otherwise the vessels are plain.

There is a suggestion that, at Chelmscote, jugs in this fabric type, with handles springing directly from the rim, may date to the mid-12th century, but in London and St Albans, this type is generally dated from the late 12th to early 13th century,

continuing well into the 14th century (Moore *et al*. 2007, 51; Hurst 1961; Havercroft, Turner-Rugg and Rugg 1987, 31). At Stanbridge, there is no evidence of handles springing directly from the rim, so the later date is most likely.

C63 Flint-tempered ware (13 sherds: 84g)
This coarse flint- and quartz-tempered fabric occurs in small quantities. It has been found at Chalgrave and Grove Priory, but appears to be absent from Chelmscote. Two jars (Fig. 6, 9) and a single possible bowl were recognised.

Brine (1988, 43) suggests that this fabric type is part of the Hertfordshire Reduced ware industry. A flint-tempered fabric type was found in the Chapter House at St Albans Abbey, in levels predating Hertfordshire Reduced ware (Alison Turner-Rugg pers. comm.).