

13-21 OLNEY ROAD, LAVENDON, BUCKS: DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE VILLAGE

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Investigations near the centre of the village of Lavendon revealed a sequence of development at the site. The earliest features were a series of ditches. Into these were dug the pitched limestone footings of a building, of which only the south-west corner was revealed. This development may have been associated with the terracing of the area. After the building had been systematically demolished, others were built adjacent to the present street frontage. These in turn underwent several modifications but were finally demolished in the post-war period - when the site became a Highways depot.

The investigations suggest that from being a peripheral area of the village, defined by ditches, the Olney Road street frontage became increasingly important, the previous terracing of the formerly steep slope providing an expanse of flat land suitable for development.

BACKGROUND

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Shenley Park Homes Ltd to undertake the archaeological evaluation of a site within the medieval core of Lavendon. Three trenches, dug in November 2004, revealed stratified remains sealed beneath deposits associated with a former Highways depot. In consultation with the Milton Keynes Archaeological Officer, the results of the evaluation were used in conjunction with the development plan to formulate a mitigation strategy. This focused on the investigation of areas that would be disturbed by construction of the new buildings. The initial stage, pre-emptive excavation of the footing trenches, was undertaken in mid June 2005. It was not possible to investigate the southern part of the site at that time because of the proximity of the adjacent building. These footings were monitored during construction in late June. The results of all stages of fieldwork are summarised below. The project archive is held by Buckinghamshire County Museum under Accession Number 2004.129; it includes a more detailed report on the archaeological remains (Albion report 2007/48). This can be viewed by

going to <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library>, and searching for the Albion 'grey literature' report.

The village of Lavendon is located near the northern edge of the Borough of Milton Keynes, within a tributary valley of the Great Ouse. The investigated site was roughly rectangular, c. 25m by 21m. It fronted the eastern side of Olney Road, centred on National Grid Reference SP 9164 5351 (Fig. 1).

The Domesday survey (1086) indicates that Lavendon was heavily wooded, but not part of the royal forests of Buckinghamshire and Northants. This woodland was an important resource.

The main features of the area were the castle (a ringwork or motte) 0.5km north of the village and the abbey, c 1km to the west. The castle later had a park added to it emphasising the status of its owners. South-west of the village on the Ouse is the mill.

The village had a market and fair, indicating good links to the adjacent area. Its main features were recently discussed by Brown and Everson (2005). The village is bisected by two main routes, which link the main features of the medieval land-

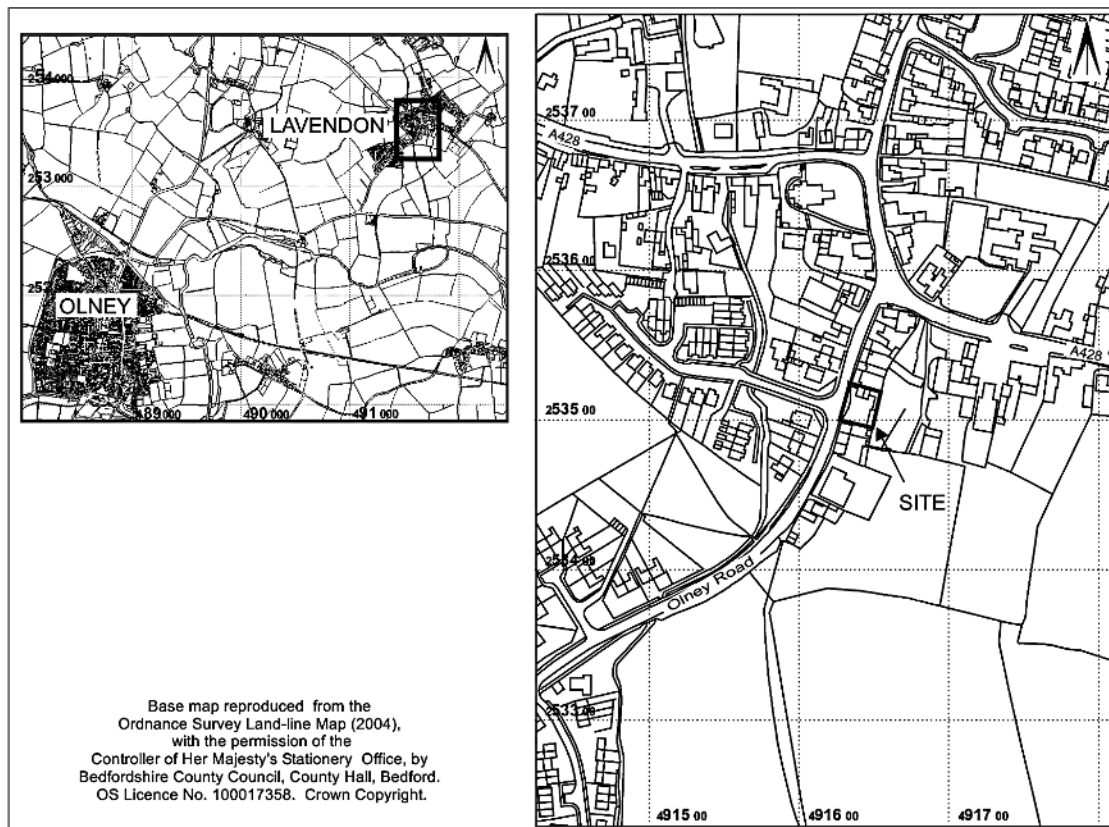


FIGURE 1 Site of 13–21 Olney Road, Lavendon.

scape. A roughly north-south route, linking the woodland in the north to the castle and on to Lavendon mill in the Ouse valley, is reflected in the present Olney Road. It passes the excavated site on the west, and Brown and Everson suggest that it is an early route. The NE-SW route, linking Northampton to Bedford – which at present passes the church on the north side – may have previously passed closer to the abbey and entered the village south of the church before continuing along the present High Street.

The church is the oldest standing structure in the village. Jefferys map of the county of 1770 (BAS 2000) does not show any buildings on the Olney Road south of the church, but Bryant's map of 1825 shows a few, and late 19th century Ordnance Survey maps show a block of cottages on the site fronting the street, with associated outbuildings to

the north and open space and another outbuilding to the east. These buildings survived until the 1950s, when they were demolished to make way for the Highways depot. There are a number of listed buildings in Lavendon village. All are of stone and the majority (of seventeenth-eighteenth century date) are on the High Street. The three on Olney Road, also of stone, are of eighteenth-nineteenth century date.

RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

A complex sequence of change was revealed by the investigations. Each time the site was redeveloped, considerable truncation of earlier remains occurred.

a) Earliest features

The earliest features were undated (Fig. 2A). They comprised a sequence of at least four ditches in the centre of the site, orientated roughly north-south. Only the western extent of the ditch sequence was identified towards the southern limit of the site. The continuation of the ditches was only revealed intermittently to the north when later deposits were removed. The ditches were between 0.56m and 1.9m wide, with 'V'-shaped to concave profiles, which ranged from 0.65 to at least 0.8m deep. There was a progression in the recutting sequence from west to east. The earliest ditch was the smallest. Its recut was considerably larger and deeper with evidence for a bank to the west. Subsequently a clay lining was added, which could have retained water. The ditch fills contained no finds. Several pits of uncertain function, also undated, were located further to the west.

b) The first building

Dug into the infilled ditches were the pitched limestone footings of a building (Fig. 2A). The footings were up to 0.7m wide and 0.42m deep, with the limestone bonded in a red brown sandy clay. Only its south-west corner was revealed but since it was on a different alignment to the later cottages fronting Olney Road, it is unlikely to be an associated outbuilding. It is possible that the terracing of the area and creation of a limestone raft, which was recorded in the southern part of the site, were contemporary with this (Fig. 2B). The raft was generally between 0.2 and 0.25m thick, though increasing to 0.5m thick in the south. Systematic demolition later removed all traces of the walls except the footings. Limestone fragments up to 0.12m across, probably derived from demolition of the building, were spread to create an external surface. Into the compact upper surface, a stone-lined drain, and a possibly associated soakaway were constructed (Fig. 2A). No finds were recovered from these features.

c) Third phase

Partial survival makes understanding of the next phase difficult (Fig. 2B). Traces of a worn limestone surface up to 80mm thick were severely truncated by the curving drain and footings of the subsequent fourth phase. This surface defines an external yard. The small amount of pottery recovered from the upper part of the

deposit suggests a 17-18th century date. However, given the degree of later truncation, this pottery could have been intrusive. The surface was cut through by a well-constructed limestone drain, which would have originally been capped. This drained to the south-west, towards the street frontage, though its continuation was truncated by the substantial footings of the fourth phase. Medieval Lyveden pottery recovered from the drain is presumed to be residual.

d) Fourth phase

A series of substantial footings was constructed parallel to the street frontage. The footings defined a roughly rectangular building, possibly with three rooms (A-C on Fig. 2B). One of the internal walls had a distinct curve, suggesting it may originally have been a gable wall. No dating evidence from construction trenches or walls was recovered. The walls were up to 0.86m wide and survived to a maximum depth of 0.74m. They were well-faced with horizontally coursed, limestone slabs, with traces of yellow clay bonding and a rubble core. This method of construction contrasts with the subsequent cottages. No internal floor levels survived to indicate the function of the building. There is no evidence to indicate if the external surface of the Third phase was retained. Subsequently these walls were demolished to at least ground level.

e) Cottage construction

Subsequently a row of cottages was built on the site (Fig. 2C) – originally comprising three cottages (1-3 on Fig. 2C), but later 1 and 2 were merged into one. They are shown on the 1882 first edition Ordnance Survey map and survived until demolition in the 1950s. The cottages utilised some of the previous fourth phase footings, but were different in construction being no more than 0.5m wide and lacking a rubble core. Evidence for tiled floors survived in cottages 1 and 3, with slight traces in cottage 2. Two sequential floors survived in cottage 1. Below the lower floor, a stone capped drain ran along the inner face of the eastern wall. Over the lifetime of the cottages, the floors were raised, possibly as the adjacent, improved road was raised. Rising damp had left calcium deposits on the terracotta tiles of the lower floor of cottage 1.

The internal layout of the cottages changed over time. A partition between the northern (1)

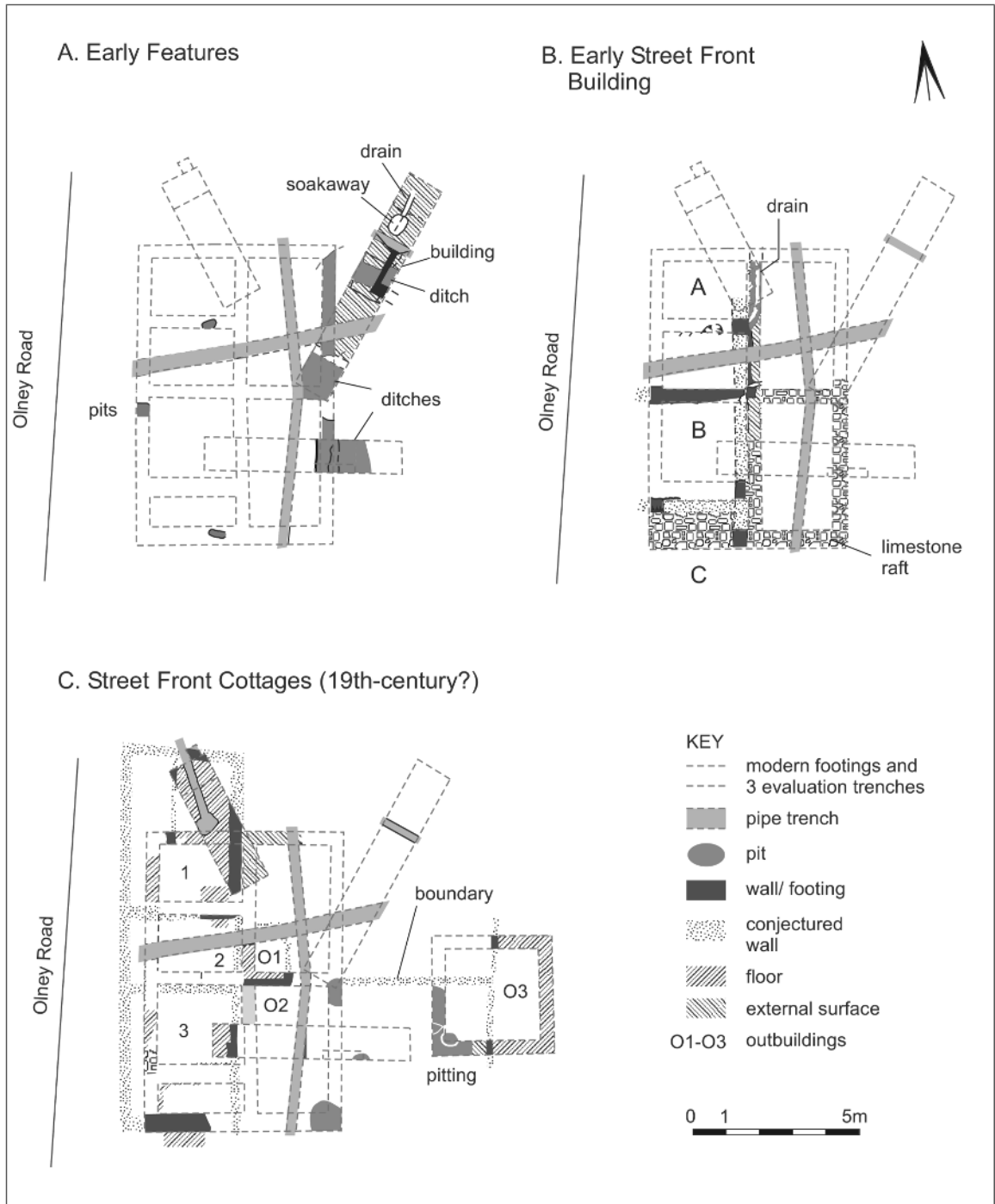


FIGURE 2 Site Phasing.

and middle (2) cottages was removed to make one unit, and the resultant, larger floor space was reorganised. The rear of the cottages also changed with the addition and removal of outbuildings (O1-O3 on Fig. 2C) and changes to the external surfaces, probably associated with changes in use. Garden soil was brought in to the northern part of the site, while a series of rubbish pits was dug to the rear of the southern cottage (3). These pits contained a variety of domestic debris, including pottery, bone and rakings from fires. The sherds were small but included mocha ware and English stoneware dateable to the nineteenth century; recognisable forms included plates, cups and saucers.

The cottages were demolished in the 1950s, but the peripheral buildings were generally retained and modified for use in the Highways depot. In places, the remains of the earlier buildings were well preserved beneath the depot's tarmac surfaces.

OVERVIEW

Initially, the site appears to have been peripheral to the village, the sequential ditches probably defining a focus of activity on the higher ground to the east. Subsequently the site was occupied by a sequence of buildings. This change may have been due to a combination of the growing importance of the adjacent Olney Road, and to the terracing of the formerly steep slope – which provided an expanse of flat land. It was not possible to determine when the site was

terraced. It may have been associated with the cottages shown on the late 19th century maps, but is more likely to have been undertaken earlier – possibly when the earliest building identified, with pitched limestone footings, was constructed.

Digging the terrace would have provided building stone, as bedded limestone is visible in the terrace face to the rear of the tannery workshop south of the site. The subsequent importance of the street-front location is emphasised by the two successive phases of construction.

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