

LAND TO THE REAR OF FRANKLINS FARMHOUSE, ICKFORD ROAD, SHABBINGTON

Excavations to the rear of Franklins Farmhouse, Ickford Road, Shabbington revealed two phases of ditches apparently representing part of an enclosed croft. This form of roadside medieval landholding generally included a toft with at least one domestic building and a cobbled surface in association with the croft. No firm evidence for any buildings associated with the croft was revealed, suggesting that the remains recorded at Shabbington may represent a departure from the pattern of crofting identified elsewhere in Buckinghamshire. Limited evidence for prehistoric activity in the area and a possible medieval routeway were also recorded.

INTRODUCTION

In March 2010, Archaeological Solutions Ltd carried out an excavation on land to the rear of Franklins Farmhouse, Ickford Road, Shabbington (NGR SP 6659 0687, Fig. 1). A previous evaluation had revealed a boundary ditch and a pit dating to the 10th to 11th century, and a series of later parallel gullies running approximately at right angles to the boundary ditch (Williams 2008). The excavation revealed features dating from the prehistoric period through to the 15th-16th century (Adams *et al.* 2010, Tweedie 2010).

RESULTS

The earliest phase of activity at the site was represented by Pit F2021 (Fig. 2). This feature contained two sherds of very coarse flint-tempered pottery (40g), which were undiagnostic in form and decoration. The pit is most likely to date to the Late Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age when flint-tempered pottery was commonly used, although an earlier Neolithic date cannot be excluded (Thompson 2010). Prehistoric activity in Shabbington had not been documented previously, but a single pit does not allow any firm conclusions to be drawn regarding the character of this activity.

The other recorded archaeological remains at the site appear to represent part of an enclosed croft; a plot attached to peasant holdings and used as paddocks or gardens, for growing crops on a small scale, or for over-wintering animals to avoid larger pasture fields being trampled. Three ditches (F2005, F2007, F2034; Fig. 2), dated to the 11th to 13th century (Phase 2), ran approximately east-west, parallel to the Ickford Road, suggesting that they may have acted as the rear boundaries of plots facing onto the road. Faunal remains recorded from the ditch fills comprise mainly food and butchery waste, resulting from the exploitation of cattle at the site (Curl 2010). The Phase 2 ditches were narrow, so they would have been incapable of preventing the movement of animals unless the ditch was supplemented by other features, such as a fence, for which no evidence exists. An alternative interpretation recognises that the ditches may have simply demarcated areas of land or property, rather than acting as a physical barrier. The 11th to 13th-century ditches were close together, often enclosing very narrow spaces for which it is difficult to suggest a function, perhaps indicating that the ditches were not all contemporary, but rather represent the continued reorganisation of space.

Later 13th to 14th century (Phase 3) activity comprised five ditches and a gully (F2003, F2009, F2036, F2047, F2049 & F2045; Fig. 2) aligned approximately north-south, at right angles to both the Ickford Road and the Phase 2 ditches, suggesting a reorganisation of space between these two phases. Archaeobotanical remains recovered from Phase 3 features, Ditches F2009 and F2036, include remains of cereal grains including free threshing wheat, barley, rye, a legume and some wild plants, indicative of refuse resulting from food preparation and cooking at the site (Livarda 2010). The faunal remains suggest the increased importance of pastoral husbandry; butchery and food waste from cattle, sheep/goat and a single pig were recorded from ditch fills at the site, and evidence of

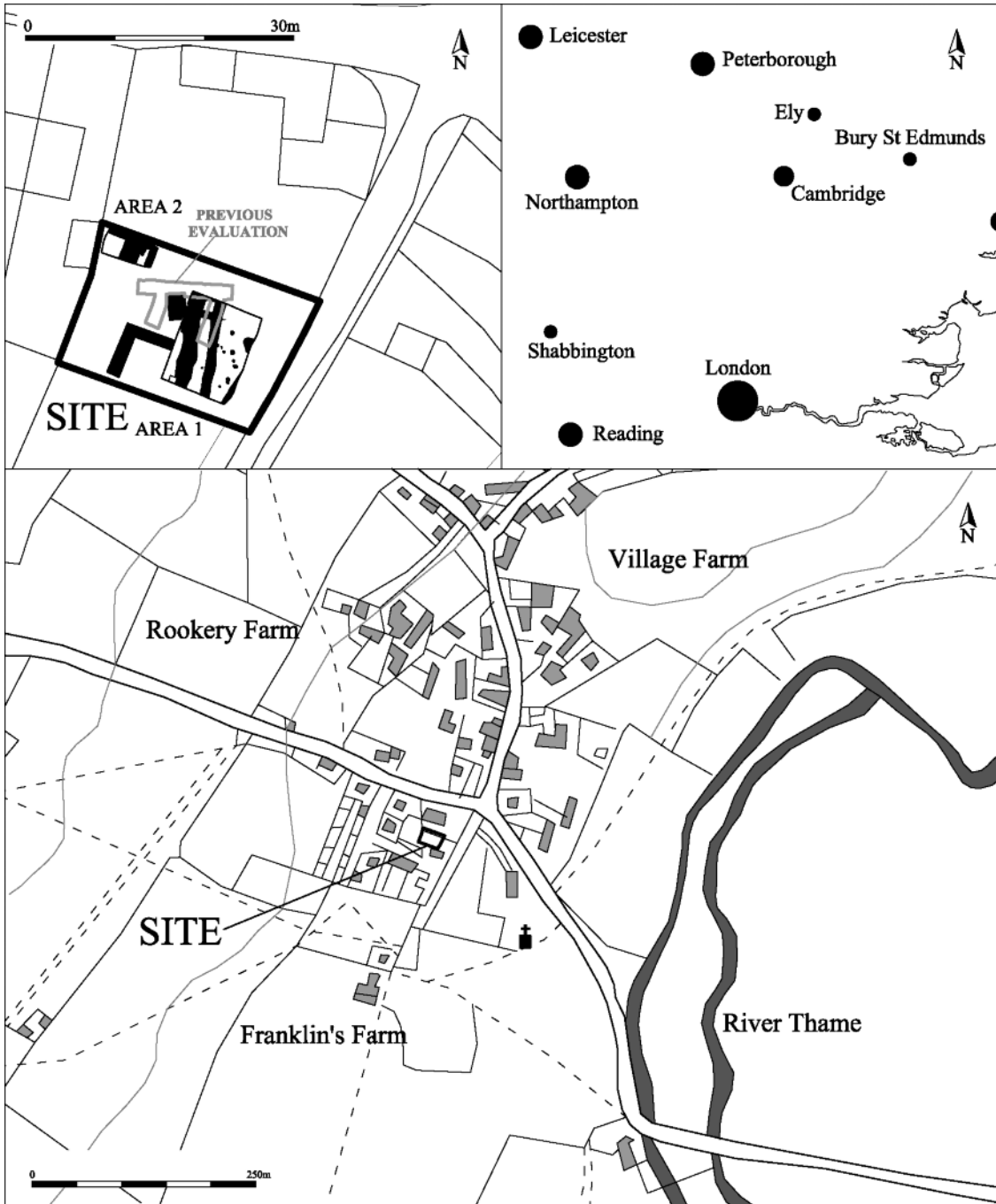


FIGURE 1 Site location

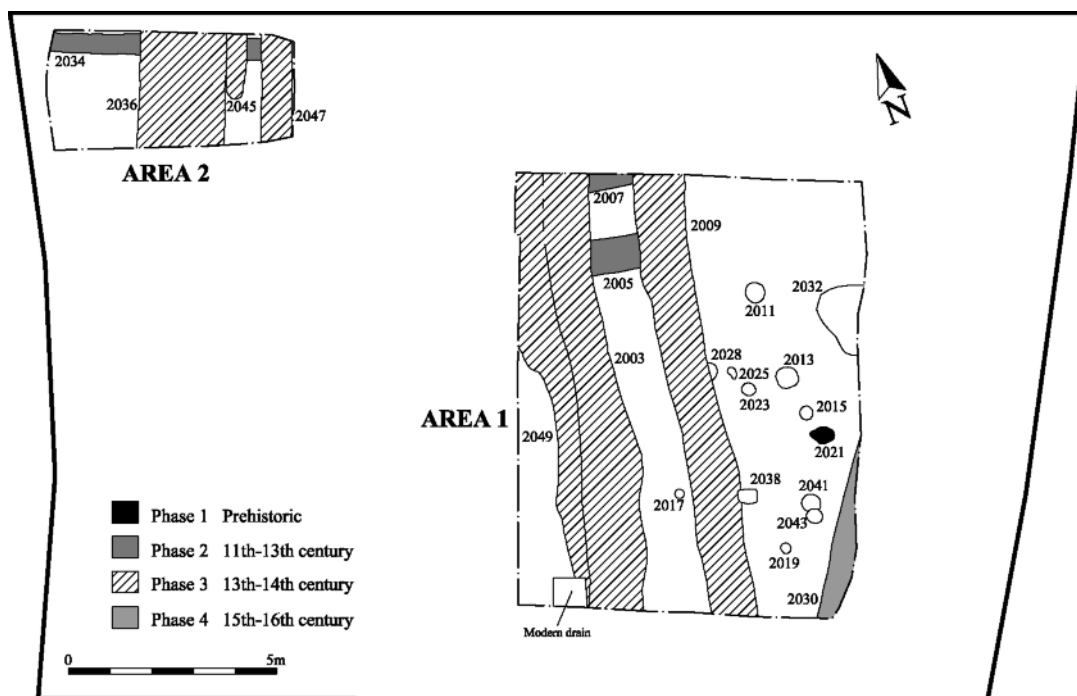


FIGURE 2 PHASE PLAN

horn-working waste from both sheep/goat and cattle was present in Ditch F2036. England was suffering the effects of a climatic downturn during the late 13th and 14th centuries, along with successive outbreaks of plague from 1348 onwards, and it has been suggested that in Buckinghamshire the countryside may have taken longer to recover from this than the towns (Ziegler 1982, 146). Urban demand for rural produce decreased due to the contraction of towns and this in turn affected the organisation of agricultural production (Campbell *et al.* 1996, 178). A shift from arable farming towards pastoral husbandry was in many areas the product of the social and economic changes caused by plague outbreaks (*ibid.*), and the new arrangement of ditches in Phase 3 can be understood as an indication of such changes. The 11th to 13th century ditches were wider and more substantial than the ditches of the previous phase, making them more suitable for the enclosure of animals. The ditches were close together, making it unlikely that they were all contemporary and suggesting that several different spatial arrangements must have existed at the site during this period. The repeated redevelop-

ment and reorganisation of space within crofts was common at this time and is presumed to have given small peasant crofts an advantage, allowing inhabitants to more easily adapt their agricultural outputs in response to changes in the economic climate (Astill 1988, 50).

Excavation of similar sites such as at Great Linford, c.50km to the north-east, revealed a series of medieval peasant landholdings, each comprising a toft with at least one building and a cobbled surface, with an associated croft to the rear used for small-scale agriculture (Mynard and Zeepvat 1992). Similar arrangements of probable domestic buildings and associated crofts have been identified at Caldecotte (Zeepvat, Roberts and King 1994) and Woughton on the Green (Mynard 1994). This may be considered to suggest that the remains identified to the rear of Franklin's Farmhouse are likely to have been associated with a former dwelling fronting onto Ickford Road. However, although the pottery assemblage points to domestic activity on the site, there is no definite evidence for a contemporary building or structure within the immediately surrounding area; small quantities of

peg tile were recovered from Phase 3 Ditch F2036 but this material could be derived from manuring or other agricultural activities.

Later Phase 4 activity is limited to Ditch F2030 (Fig. 2), which contained four sherds (112g) of mid 15th to 16th century pottery, as well as CBM and an iron nail fragment. The ditch was only partially revealed as it ran outside the limits of the excavated area, but from the limited evidence available it seems likely that it might have lain parallel to the footpath or trackway which is depicted on historic cartographic sources from 1881 (Fig. 3). The ditch might therefore provide evidence for a medieval precursor to the depicted path or trackway.

CONCLUSION

The identification of possible roadside crofts in Shabbington increases the corpus of information regarding the character and morphology of the medieval settlement and provides further information to enhance understanding of settlement form and the division of the landscape during the medieval and early post-medieval periods.

The ‘toft and croft’ agriculture thought to be represented at this site was common throughout most of England during the medieval period. It was, however, subject to regional variations (Muir 2004, 258). The organisation of rectilinear plots flanking a through-road is also typical of the period. It appears likely that the roadside crofts represented in Shabbington would have been very similar in nature to crofts identified elsewhere in the county such as the sites at Buckingham Road, Bletchley (Newton and Sparrow 2009), Great Linford (Mynard and Zeepvat 1992), Caldecotte (Zeepvat, Roberts and King 1994) and Woughton on the Green (Mynard 1994). However, domestic buildings associated with the crofts have been identified or postulated at all of these sites. At Shabbington, sufficient evidence for such buildings does not exist possibly suggesting that the associated cottage may not have lain adjacent to the enclosed plot of land. If this is the case the site may represent a variation to the pattern of crofting identified elsewhere in Buckinghamshire.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Solutions would like to thank Prothero Country Homes for commissioning and

funding the excavation, in particular Mr Huw Prothero for his kind assistance. The assistance of the staff at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies and the Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Record is also gratefully acknowledged, as is the input and assistance of Ms Ruth Beckley of Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (BCAS).

The excavation was directed by Matthew Adams. The finds were coordinated by Martin Brook. The pottery was analysed by Peter Thompson, the burnt flint and CBM by Andrew Peachey, the charred plant remains by Alexandra Livarda and the faunal remains by Julie Curl. Figures were produced by Charlotte Davies.

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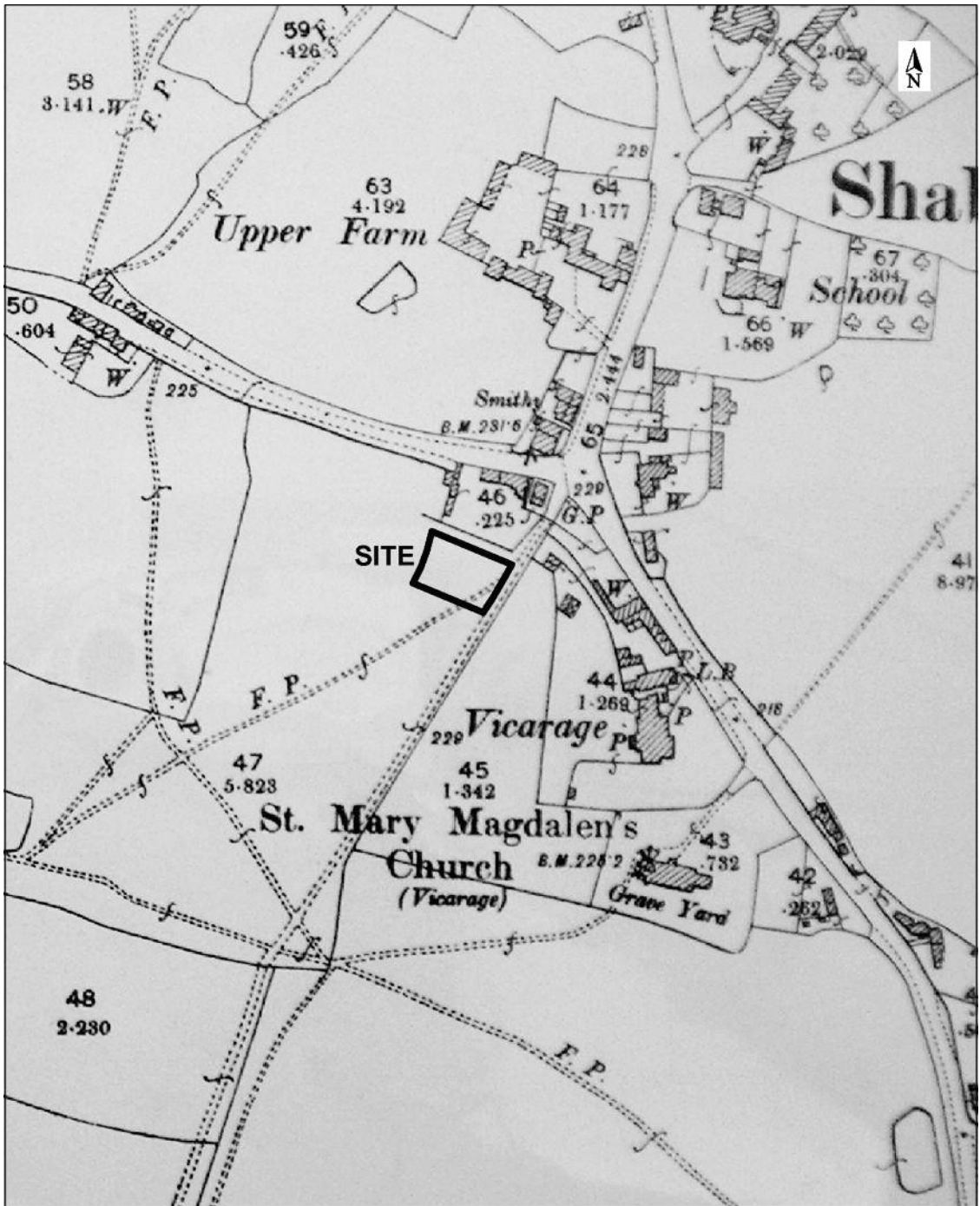


FIGURE 3 Ordnance Survey 25" sheet, 1881

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