



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Excavation and watching brief at Woodhouse Farm, Aldford, Cheshire October 2011-April 2012



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Grosvenor Museum
Accession no. CHEGM: 2011.37

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SITE NAME: Woodhouse Farm, Aldford, Cheshire

NATIONAL GRID REF: SJ 4176 5955

CLIENT: The Grosvenor Estate

CONTRACTOR: Northamptonshire Archaeology
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Accession code: The Grosvenor Museum, Chester –
CHEGM: 2011.37

QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	
Project title	Archaeological excavations and watching brief at Woodhouse Farm, Aldford, Cheshire, October 2011-April 2012
Short description	Archaeological excavations adjacent to Woodhouse Farm uncovered the foundations to a range of 19th-century farm outbuildings of unknown function. These had been constructed over the boundary ditch to a former orchard, which may have been planted as far back as the 1660s, but certainly by 1738. It was filled in probably in the 18th century and certainly by 1867. The buildings included a sunken pit or trough serving a specialist function. A pottery assemblage from the first fifty years of the farm's existence was dumped on the site after 1924, possibly after a pantry clear-out.
Project type	Excavation
Previous work	None
Future work	None
Monument type and period	Post-medieval landscape features and late post-medieval farm
Significant finds	19th and 20th century pottery
PROJECT LOCATION	
County	Cheshire
Site address	Woodhouse Farm, Aldford
Easting	SJ 4176
Northing	5955
Area ha	630 sq m of excavations
PROJECT CREATORS	
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology
Project Brief originator	Mike Morris, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Project Design originator	Anne Thompson, Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Consultant
Director/Supervisor	Iain Soden
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Sponsor or funding body	The Grosvenor Estate
Museum accession	The Grosvenor Museum, Chester: CHEGM: 2011.37
PROJECT DATE	
Start date	24 October 2011
End date	5 April 2012 (watching brief)
BIBLIOGRAPHY	
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AND WATCHING BRIEF
AT WOODHOUSE FARM, ALDFORD, CHESHIRE
OCTOBER 2011-APRIL 2012**

Summary

Excavations adjacent to Woodhouse Farm uncovered the foundations to a range of 19th-century farm outbuildings of unknown function. These had been constructed over the boundary ditch to a former orchard, which may have been planted as far back as the 1660s, but certainly by 1738. It was filled in probably in the 18th century and certainly by 1867. The buildings included a sunken pit or trough serving a specialist function. A pottery assemblage from the first fifty years of the farm's existence was dumped on the site after 1924, possibly after a pantry clear-out.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning background

Through their agents and architects Tweed Nuttall Warburton of Chester, The Grosvenor Estate has applied to Cheshire West and Chester Council for planning permission to build a block of commercial offices adjacent to the farmhouse of Woodhouse Farm, Aldford (NGR: SJ 4176 5955; Fig 1).

Without a foregoing evaluation, the applicant agreed through their agent and archaeological advisor, Anne Thompson, Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Consultant, to mitigate the loss of any archaeology present by means of a strip, map and record fieldwork strategy.

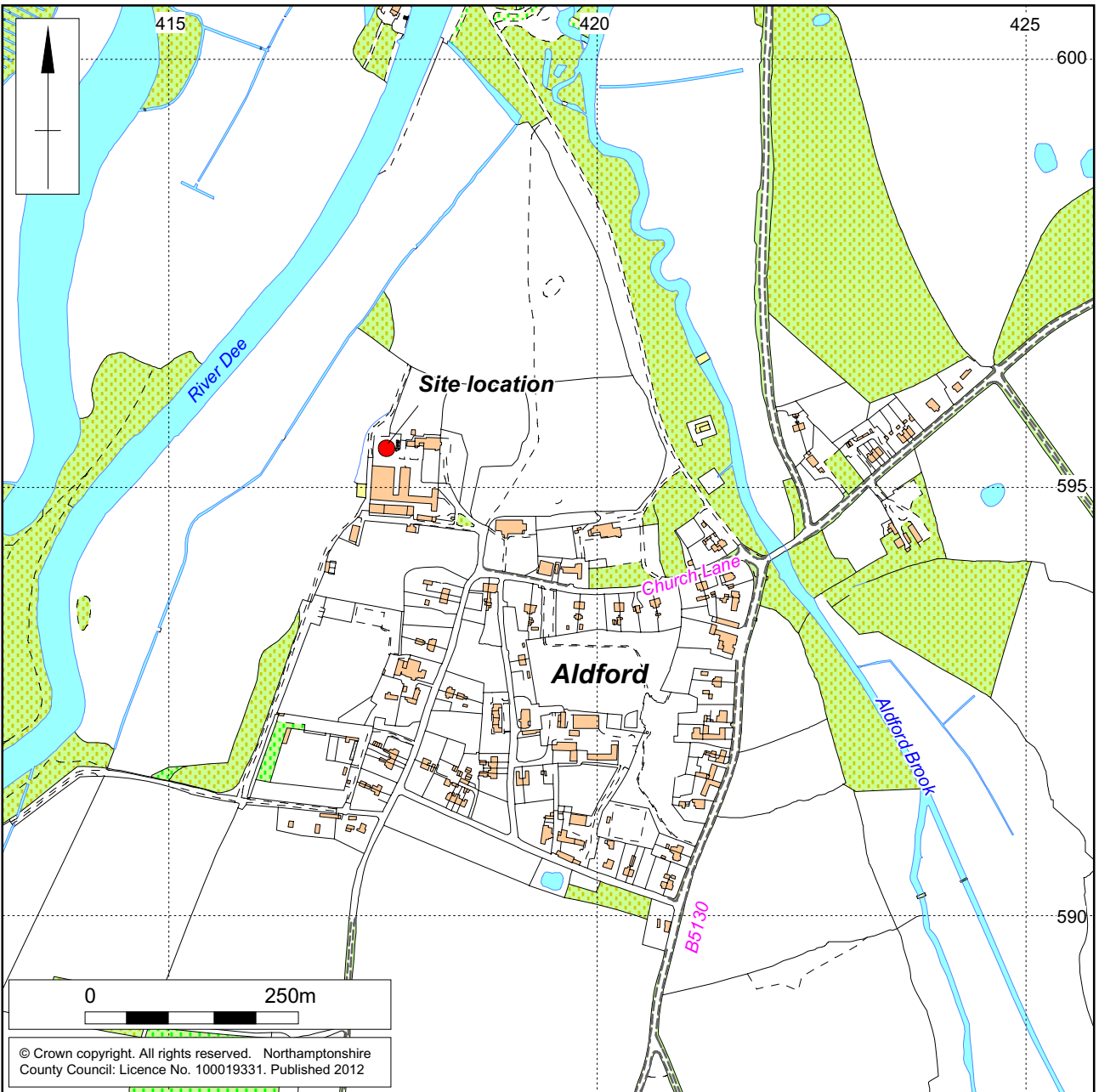
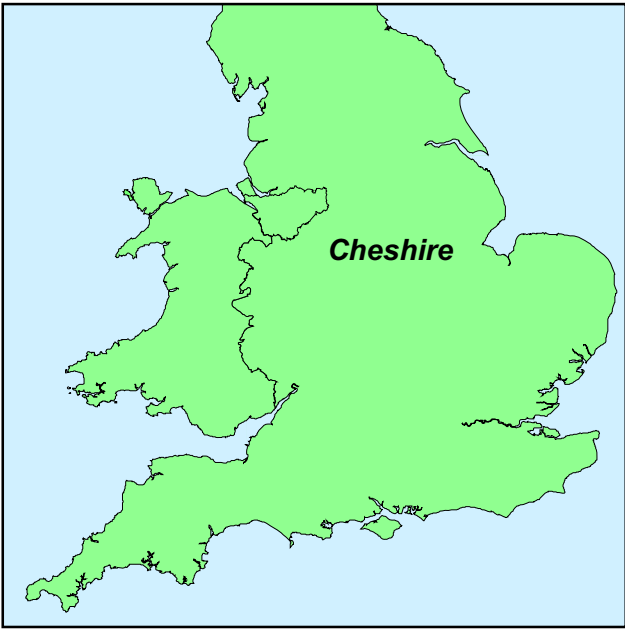
The fieldwork was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology, in accordance with an agreed mitigation strategy of 12 October 2011, compiled by the contractor, the archaeological consultant and Mike Morris of Cheshire West and Chester Council's Archaeology Section who, as archaeological advisor to the local planning authority, also monitored the fieldwork. A later watching brief was undertaken to safely bury selected parts of the site under the new development. The site archive will be deposited with the Grosvenor Museum, Cheshire Museums Service.

1.2 Location and topography

The site lies adjacent to the farmhouse of Woodhouse Farm in the north-west corner of the village of Aldford, Cheshire (Fig 1). Close to the present border of Wales, Aldford lies 7km south of Chester and sits on a local focal point on the spur of the confluence of the River Dee to the north west, and Aldford Brook to the east.

Locally known as Blobb Hill, Aldford castle is a motte and bailey earthwork, which was one of a number of Anglo-Norman strongholds of the barons and tenants of the Earls of Chester in Cheshire. Aldford parish church (St John the Baptist) and village lie to the south-east of the castle's bailey, with Woodhouse Farm abutting the castle's earthworks on their immediate west.

The land lies at approximately 12m above Ordnance Datum on level ground which falls away markedly to the west. The site at the commencement of excavations was a concreted farmyard. Aerial photos show that since the 1960s, it had supported a range of farm outbuildings and later, once these had been demolished, a silage clamp.



Scale 1:7500

Site location Fig 1

2 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

by Rachel Swallow MA (Visiting lecturer, University of Chester)

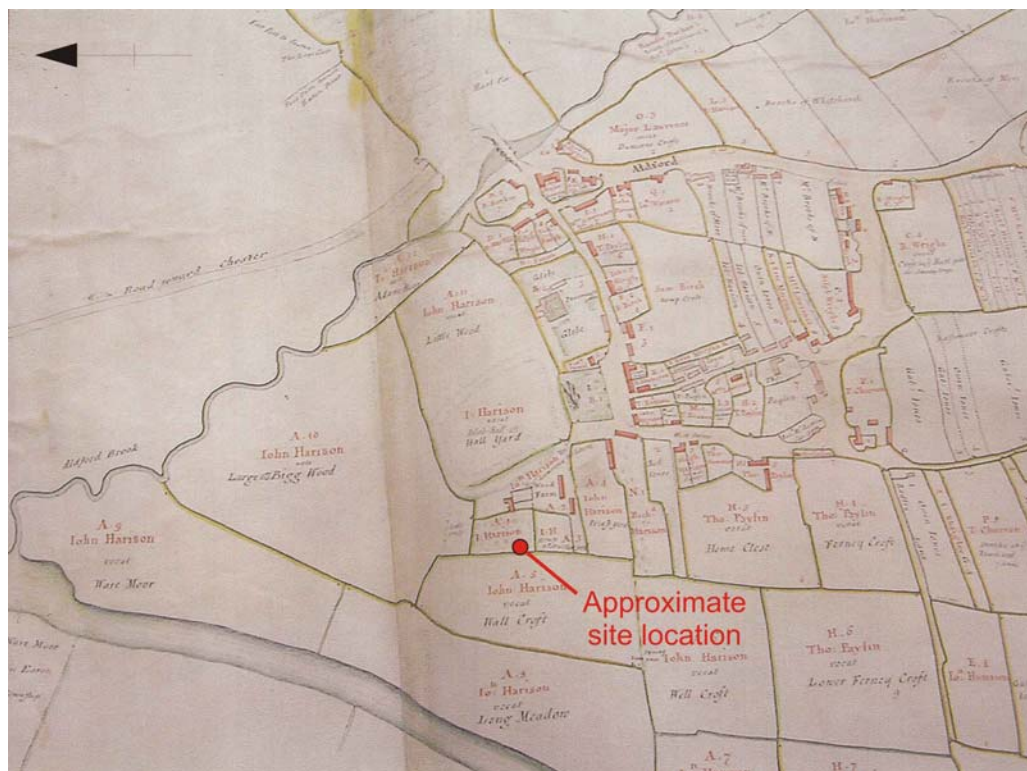
2.1 Historic maps

This site was not depicted in any reliable mapping before 1738, and enquiry at the Grosvenor Estate produced neither evidence of the phases of farm building in relation to the site, nor any building inventories. The archaeology of the site is depicted in the following four maps, in particular:

Badeslade, T 1738 (Fig 2)

The Grosvenor Estate (Eaton) map of 1738 of part of the Township of Aldford and Churton, shows Aldford castle as one earthwork entitled 'Hall Yard', rather than as a motte and bailey castle. Three buildings to the west of Hall Yard, and which pre-date the current Woodhouse Farm of 1867, are together entitled 'Wood Farm'. Hall Yard, with Little Wood field to its east; Large Bigg Wood field to its north; Wood Farm, Hall Croft and Well Croft to its west, are all indicated as belonging to John Harrison. Small field divisions, or crofts, are clearly marked on the map to the immediate west of the motte, and to the north of the Wood Farm buildings. These crofts fall within the archaeology of the Woodhouse Farm site.

Although the Estate map is dated 1738, it is here suggested that at least the field name annotations, if not the landscape features and boundaries themselves, might well refer to an earlier period: while Ormerod (1882) makes no mention of John Harrison within his description of Aldford, *The Cheshire Sheaf* (Anon 3rd Series, Volume XIV, 1917, 66) lists John Harrison of Aldford (with two hearths) within a transcription of the Hearth Tax returns in 1663. As the Marquise of Grosvenor held Aldford from 1729, it is possible that a previous estate map had been adapted for the new landholder's purposes.



1738 Badeslade Map

Fig 2

Ordnance Survey First Edition 6" map, sheet 46, surveyed 1869-74 (Fig 3)

This map indicates the newly-built (1867) Woodhouse Farm (which is named as such on the map), when there was no side range. To the immediate north of Woodhouse Farm building, and to the west of 'Blabb Hill' (the motte earthwork of Aldford castle), is a wooded field or croft, with a clearance in its the north-east corner, which would appear to indicate the area of a smaller croft within the larger one outlined. The map is not annotated in this area, but it is suggested that by 1875 the previous crofts depicted on the 1738 map had been replaced by an orchard, which falls within the archaeology of the Woodhouse Farm site.

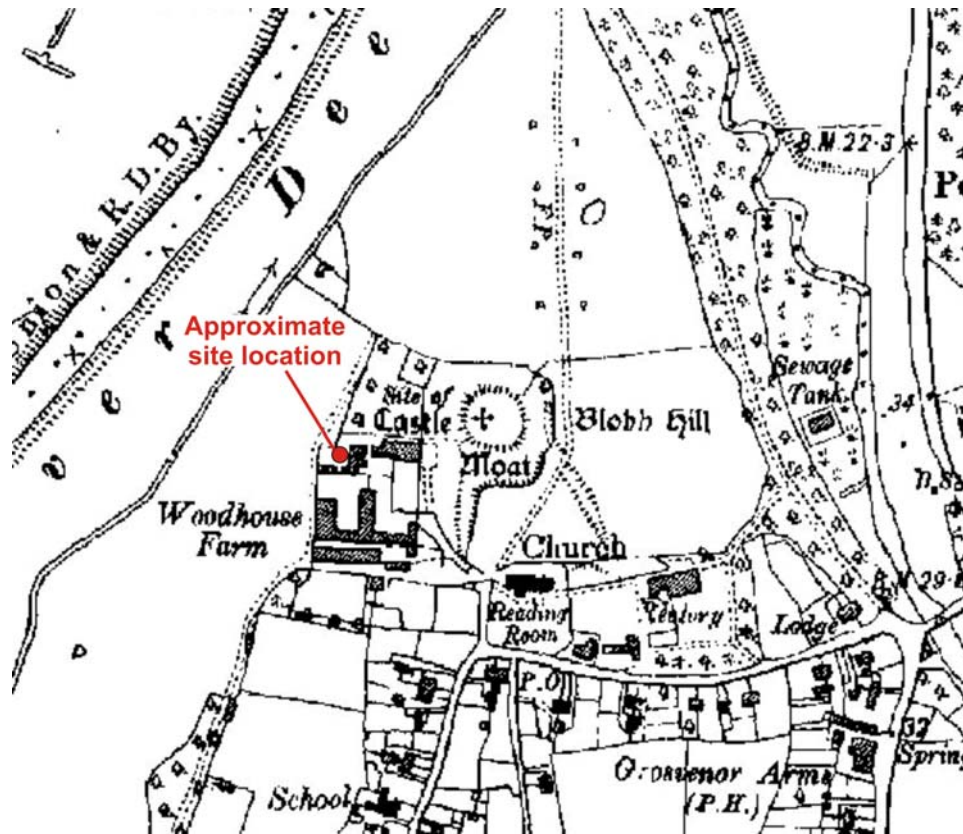


1875 Ordnance Survey Map

Fig 3

Ordnance Survey First Edition 6" map, surveyed 1910 (Fig 4)

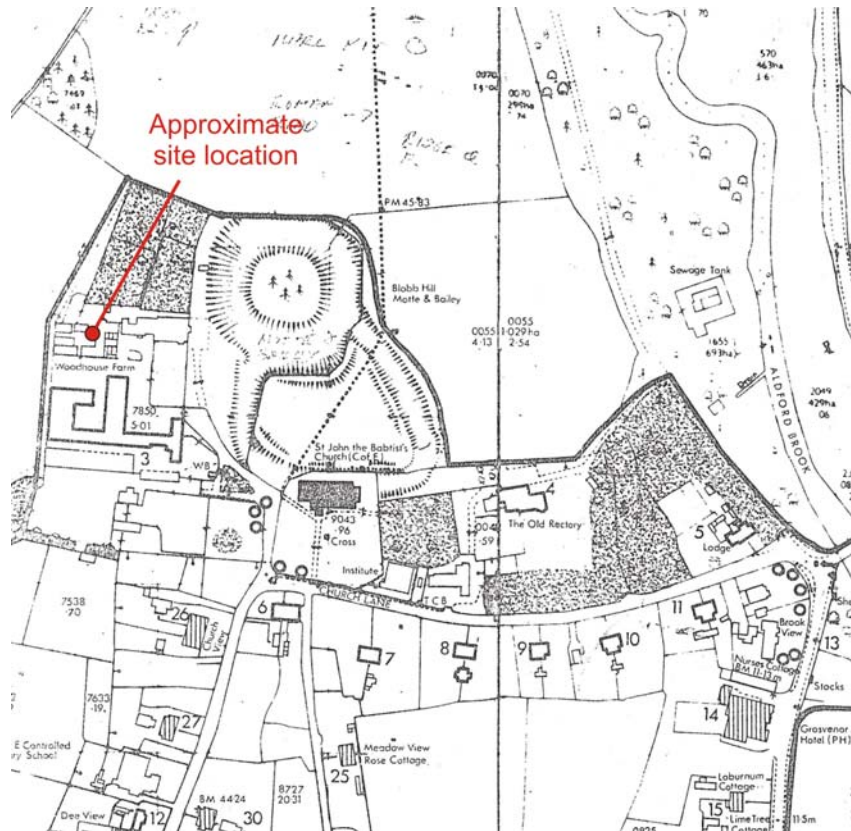
The Ordnance Survey map of 1910 depicts Woodhouse Farm with more detail, and with a side range and a building in the farmyard. The map more clearly indicates the divisions of the croft and orchard, as described above, and which fall partially within the archaeology of the Woodhouse Farm site.



1910 Ordnance Survey Map Fig 4

1970s map (unidentified) (Fig 5)

Probably produced in the 1970s, and possibly for a conservation report on the village properties, the Woodhouse Farm site is shown in greater detail and with the farm buildings at their fullest extent. The map pre-dates 1977, since it omits the at-cost shed dated 1977 to the south of the buildings. The previous divisions of the current orchard are clearly depicted.



1970s overlay to Ordnance Survey Map

Fig 5

2.2 Documentary evidence

The early history of Aldford and its hinterland in the context of Cheshire has been summarised by Ormerod (1882). What follows is a general overview of the relevant documentation, some, but not all of which, has been published.

Mesolithic

On the banks of the River Dee, two Mesolithic flint scatters have been identified about 1km south west of Aldford (CHER 2299/0/1 and Penney, 1993).

Roman

There is currently no evidence of Roman settlement, and, therefore, nothing to support the 19th-century identification of a Roman fort at Aldford (CSMR 1835). Watling Street, the Roman road that linked Chester with London, Caerleon and the nearest centre of civil administration at Wroxeter (CSMR 1700; Harris and Thacker 1987, 216), passed

through Aldford and crossed the river Dee immediately to the north (and see also CSMR 1839/1).

Anglo-Saxon

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (Swanton, 2000, 105) state that Edward the Elder died at Farndon in AD924. In addition, there is a later tradition that in AD973, King Edgar was rowed from Farndon to Chester by the kings of the north and west of Britain, in a gesture of submission (Crosby 1996, 32 *et al*). This suggests the possibility of a former royal palace in Farndon manor. Indeed, Dodgson suggests that Edward the Elder may have died at his palace, which was situated in Aldford, rather than Farndon, given that Farndon may have been primarily an ecclesiastical centre. (Dodgson 1972, 77) As yet, supporting archaeological evidence has not been forthcoming.

The earliest surviving documentary evidence for Aldford dates to 1276 (*castrum de Aldeford*). The Old English place name elements mean 'the old ford', which implies that the new route, being the line of the present B5130, which crosses Aldford Brook to the east of the castle, replaced the earlier Watling Street crossing of the River Dee at *Ettoneford*, immediately north of Aldford (Dodgson 1972, 77).

Domesday Book, 1066 and 1086

Aldford is not referred to explicitly in the Survey, although it is assumed that it fell within the manor of Farndon within the hundred of Broxton. Farndon manor was held by both the Bishop and Earl Edwin at 1066. Bigot de Loges later held Earl Edwin's share of Farndon, presumed to be Aldford, in 1086.

The manor of Farndon was the most prosperous of the 13 places in the county named in the possession of Bigot de Loges in 1086, who was possibly a relative of Roger Bigot, a prominent tenant of Early Hugh in East Anglia (Harris and Thacker 1987, 359-60; Barraclough 1988, 58).

Higham suggests that the double entry for Farndon manor implies that it was an early Mercian minster parish based on Farndon, which embraced the medieval parishes of Farndon, Aldford, Tilston and Coddington (Higham 1993, 133-4).

Anglo-Norman

The manor has been documented under the Lords of Aldford, probably a description of Bigot de Loges, first Norman tenant under Earl Hugh of Chester. By the 13th century, Aldford manor was in the hands of the Arderne family. It is not sure whether the change of name applied to the Aldford family, rather than to a change of succession. John de Arderne's (b. c1300) paternal grandparents were Gruffydd ap Madoc, Prince of Powys Fadog and Hawise (Amicia) de Kevelioc, daughter of Hugh de Kevelioc, fifth Earl of Chester (b. 1147). Hawise was the sister of Ranulf de Blondeville (b. 1170), sixth earl of Chester and founder of Beeston Castle, Cheshire.

Medieval

The earliest surviving documentary record of the castle is about 1215, when it is mentioned in a deed, and in 1254, Walkelyn de Arderne received royal grants to hold a market and fair at Aldford (Ormerod 1882, 755). A church at Aldford existed by 1300, when the first rector is recorded. The castle was still being maintained defensively in 1286 when a legal dispute refers to an earth wall being built (Ormerod 1882, 755). It appears to have been in use until the 14th century. Records for the church (St John the Baptist) date back to the early 14th century.

Later history

The manor of Aldford passed through a number of hands in the post-medieval period, including Sir William Brereton from about 1526 until his beheading in 1546 (for a

suspected involvement with Anne Boleyn). William was chamberlain of Chester and groom of the chamber to Henry VIII. For 30 years until the early 1690s, it had been granted by the Crown to Edward Peckham, the king's cofferer (Ormerod 1882, 757). Aldford was eventually sold to Sir Richard Grosvenor of Eaton in 1729. The village was largely rebuilt by the Eaton Estate in the latter half of the 19th century by John Douglas. The present church was completely rebuilt in 1866 by the second Marquis of Westminster, immediately to the north of the medieval church, the north aisle having been built over the fill of the bailey ditch. Of the medieval church, Ormerod records that 'the church of Aldford stands on the verge of the castle moat, and consists of a nave without side aisles, a chancel, and steeple, very picturesque but now ruinous (...)' (Ormerod, 1882, 758). Woodhouse Farm was built in 1867. It has been thought that the laying out of its garden led to the removal of an outer bank from the west of the motte, potentially with other earthworks as well. Today the village remains in the hands of the Grosvenor Estate.

2.3 Archaeological and landscape background

Aldford castle is a rare example in Cheshire of a motte and bailey later modified in stone as a shell keep castle. While the stonework is no longer extant, the earthwork remains are significant (Fig 1 and Fig 5).

Aldford castle and its landscape have been subject to limited archaeological survey and excavation, and nothing since 2002. The key results for each survey are summarised below:

Thompson (1960, 35-6)

The article records a small excavation in 1959 by two local school boys and visited by Thompson. Under consideration was a wall and whether or not it formed part of the shell keep, as well as a stone piscina of Norman date.

Sale and Turner (1985)

The survey and report suggest that the castle was constructed in the mid 12th century.

Reynolds and White (1995, 14–15), and White, Reynolds and Croft (SMR report 1836/110)

The survey of features at the castle and its landscape includes confirmation that evidence of ridge and furrow on the bailey could have damaged archaeological remains. In addition, the western side of the bailey adjacent to the Woodhouse Farm site is defined by a wide ditch, up to 17m in width.

Cocroft (1996)

The survey indicated that high resistance anomalies on the motte were suggestive of building remains, with some evidence of an enclosing wall. In addition, the results indicated that there was a large rectangular building with a tower at the corner, or possibly a range of buildings. However, no clearly defined anomalies of archaeological interest were detected within the bailey, although the possibility was highlighted of a rectangular structure running lengthways, approximately east to west at the north end of the bailey.

Ward (ed) (1999, 2000 and 2003)

The results of three interim survey reports (the final of which is awaited) suggest that a trench to the north side of the bailey revealed that the inner bank was probably constructed in the 13th century, below which the remains of a timber building and an extensive occupation layer were uncovered. Excavation at the east section of the bailey revealed that the inner bank was probably constructed in the 13th century, and that the

outer bank was much later (date not suggested). In 2002, the excavation at the summit of the motte revealed the remains of a D-shaped masonry tower or bastion. Parts of two courses of good quality ashlar masonry survived, the lowest being a chamfered plinth. The earliest pottery from the site is 13th century, despite documentary references that the castle was already standing by this time.

2.4 Summary

While the earliest surviving documentary evidence for the castle at Aldford is about 1215, and that Ward *et al*'s excavations (Ward 1999, 2000, 2003) would appear to support this date for a masonry build, the considerable increase in the value of the manor from 1066 to 1086 (Domesday Survey) suggests that Aldford was already of sufficient importance by that time to warrant the construction of a castle. The castle would have protected the crossing point of the River Dee and would have lain alongside the Roman road. It is reasonable to suppose that the Roman road had been replaced by the 1150s, when the name of Aldford appears in documentary sources. Therefore, the castle must have been founded before the mid 12th century, when the former Roman road and river-crossing it commanded were still in use. At this time, the castle could have been a timber construction, as the excavation reports do indicate (see above).

The banks to the east of the bailey at Aldford are suggested by Ward *et al* (1999, 2000, 2002) to be later than 13th century. If this is the case, the relationship with the Roman road running immediately adjacent to the east of these banks would need to be explained; it could have some relevance as regards the boundary of the Little Wood mentioned in the 1839 Tithe Map and Award. As regards the banks' dating, it is notable that designed landscapes at castle sites from the 14th century can be seen by the creation of extensive garden features at both Shotwick castle, Cheshire (Taylor 2000) and Whittington castle, Shropshire (Terra Nova 2002).

On the Tithe Map and Award (1839) there is to the north of the castle a field called Big Wood, and to the east, a field called Little Wood. The woods could indicate former parkland, where great and little parks often featured in landscapes of the élite and their castles (Swallow forthcoming). Although it does not provide conclusive evidence, deer bone located to the north of the motte (trench III in Ward (ed 2002)), and thus adjacent to the area of the Big Wood, could be significant as an indicator of a medieval (great) park to the castle.

Documentary evidence is lacking for the west banks of Aldford motte and bailey castle, and no previous archaeological survey has included the area of the Woodhouse Farm site. Cartographic and contextual landscape research establishes that the farm site respects, rather than encroaches, on the earthworks of the castle. The name of the farm (Wood Farm, and later, Woodhouse Farm) indicates that the farm and its orchard were established within the former area of Big Wood, as marked on the Tithe Map and Apportionment (1839). The Big Wood could well indicate the area of the castle's medieval great park to the west and north of the earthworks, the dating of which is unknown, although archaeological evidence, both at Aldford (Ward 1999, 2000, 2002) and elsewhere, would indicate that the eastern banks of the park existed by the mid 14th century, at the latest. The Woodhouse Farm site archaeology, subject of this survey, indicates the presence of a north-to-south ditch at the north of the excavated farm buildings, which is suggested to be one hedge or fence boundary of the former orchard enclosure. Cartographic evidence indicates that this boundary existed by the early 18th century at the latest. The suggested earlier dating of the 1738 estate map, above (Badeslade, 1738) could well indicate that the orchard dates back to the 1660s, when John Harrison held the land of the site, possibly under Edward Peckham, the king's cofferer who held Aldford at that time.

3 THE EXCAVATIONS

3.1 Methodology

The area of excavation comprised an approximate T-shape, measuring at its greatest extent 30m north to south and 21m east to west (Fig 6). On its east side it closely abutted the west end of the farmhouse complex. It was set out to mimic as closely as possible the footprint of the proposed offices to be built on the site but to stop short of known constraints on the site, such as a live service drain/sewer along the western edge of the excavations [6], while another, the nature and course of which was unclear, was thought to lie under the northern portion of the excavation area [5]. The former was successfully negotiated, while the latter, a 6-inch salt-glazed pipe was uncovered, damaged (previously damaged by a stanchion base) and repaired.

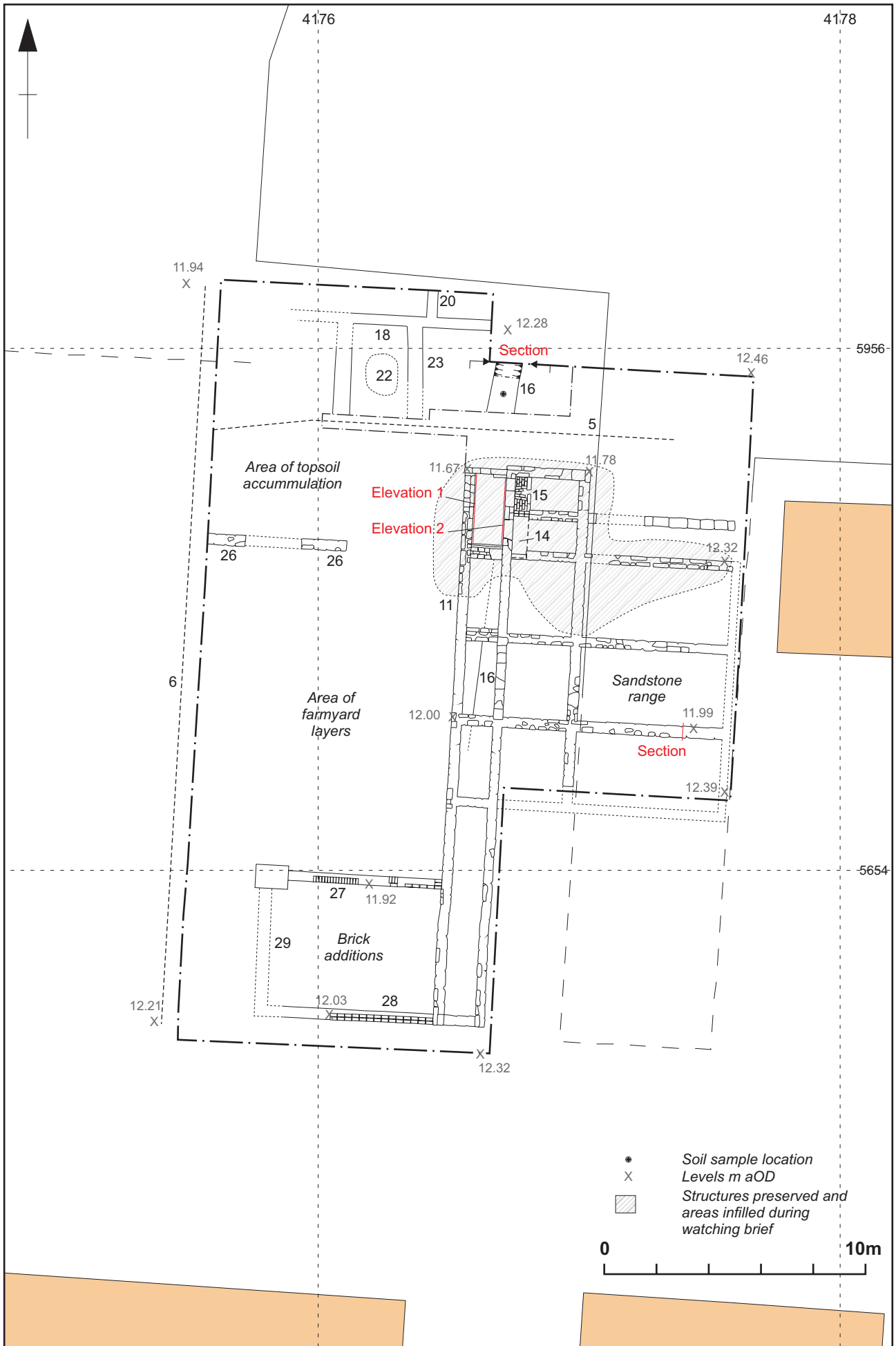
Previous geotechnical boreholes close to the farmhouse suggested the natural geology, comprising sands and gravels, lay between 1.3m and 1.9m below the modern ground surface.

The uppermost portion of the archaeological sequence comprised large quantities of 200mm-thick concrete hardstanding [1] and 24 1m-cubed concrete stanchion bases [2] from the former silage clamp, which were removed by a 360-degree mechanical excavator, fitted with a hydraulic breaker and a toothed bucket (Fig 7). Nineteen lorry-loads of concrete and related hardcore were removed to tip. Other spoil was stockpiled to one side for later reuse.

To achieve the necessary depth for hand excavation, the sides of the excavation on the west and north sides were stepped for safety. At the south and east, excavated foundations formed impromptu revetments to the excavation and such stepping was unnecessary.

Mechanical excavation ceased with the exposure of significant archaeology, which comprised upstanding structural mortared sandstone or brick foundations, or features cut into the natural geology. The geology hereabouts proved to be little more than 1.3m below the modern ground surface and was predominantly sand and sandy clay, with only localised patches of gravel to the eastern side of the excavation. Cleaning and excavation of the archaeology took place by hand. The work took two weeks to complete.

The majority of finds were found and retrieved by hand during the process of machining, notably a dump of pottery found in the topsoil (7) abutting the north side of the farm buildings. Only a few further sherds were found during subsequent hand-excavation. All finds were bagged by context on site and set aside for return to Northampton, where they were washed, marked and boxed for subsequent archive deposition.



Scale 1:200 (A4)

The excavation with levels Fig 6

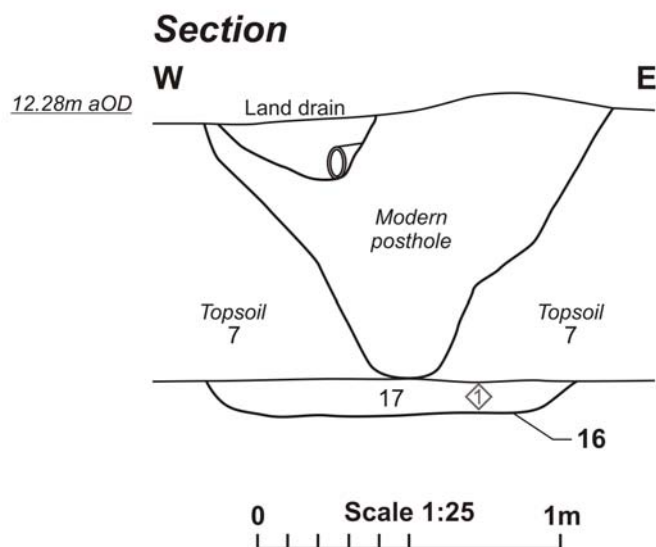


Breaking the concrete Fig 7

3.2 The excavated remains

The pre-farm landscape

The earliest feature on the site comprised a roughly north-south aligned 1m-wide flat-bottomed ditch [16] of which only the lowest portion, up to 300mm deep, survived undisturbed (Fig 8). It was seen in its entirety at the northernmost end of the site (Fig 6), extending beyond the excavation, and south of here underlay later foundations, where its soft sandy fill (17) left the ground much softer than the surrounding natural geology [10]. The ditch was excavated at the northern end and a 40-litre environmental sample taken for flotation to retrieve archaeobotanical remains. Its fills were lost at about the midpoint of the site, where the ground was slightly higher and subsequent ground-leveling had probably removed all trace. Hand excavation and the sample together retrieved three small sherds of 17th to 18th-century pottery from the ditch fill.



Section of base of ditch [16] Fig 8

The ditch, fully backfilled, had been sealed by a buried topsoil which had been much disturbed and worked over up until the 20th century. A later fence-line had mimicked the ditch for part of its length. While the base of the topsoil in places seemed undisturbed except by the deposition of household waste ([7]-at the north end of the site), it appeared in others to have been wholly taken off and re-introduced in the process of building Woodhouse Farm.

A range of farm outbuildings (Figs 6, 9, 10)

Over the eastern portion of the site lay a carefully laid-out network of mortared sandstone foundations which were almost all of a single build [11] (Figs 6, 9, 10). In most places these seemed to have been built up from the natural sand, into which had first been placed ceramic land drains (c1.3m down) and the areas between filled in with clayey sand and rubble afterwards, while in a few places the vestiges of a construction trench, almost fully-filled by the foundation seemed to present themselves, albeit fleetingly and without consistency. The foundations in places contained a wider offset portion near their base. They comprised un-coursed or poorly-coursed rubble, including a number of re-used blocks, previously pecked for the application of plaster in a previous location and use. They were all set in a very hard creamy white mortar. In only one place, the north-west corner, did a single course of ashlar masonry survive *in situ* to indicate the level of the former farmyard ground surface and the vestiges of the superstructure [12].



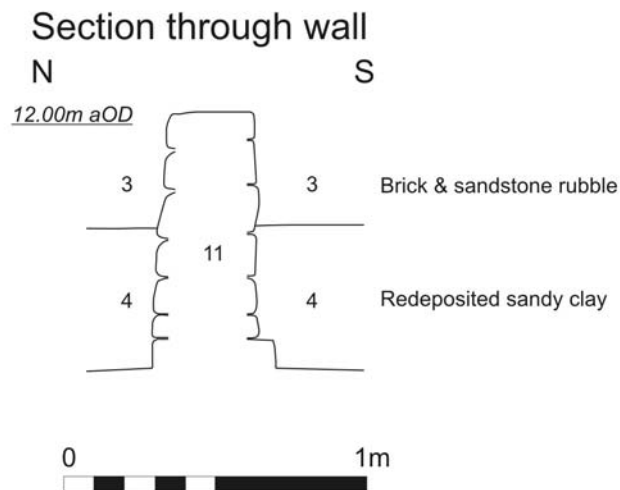
View across foundations, looking south Fig 9



View across foundations, looking north-west

Fig 10

Each compartment formed by the construction of the buildings, comprising the sub-floor of the outbuildings was filled with a short sequence of two materials. These comprised a widespread layer of grey and sticky (dirty) re-deposited natural sandy clay (4) up to 0.5m thick. Over this had been dumped a layer of equal thickness of mainly broken plain brick and some sandstone rubble (3). Neither layer contained finds. Both were removed by machine to enable the wall foundations to be fully inspected and cleaned over their entire depth (Fig 11).



Typical wall section with infill layers

Fig 11

The foundation compartments fell into three different types. At the east were three and a smaller fourth on a long rectangular plan aligned east-to-west (5.5m x 2.8m). To their west lay four which were almost square (2.8m x 2.4m), while west beyond them was a long row of narrow compartments aligned north-to-south, of various lengths but all only 1.2m wide.

There was nothing to suggest what each of these various compartment sizes signifies, but each is presumably related to the load-bearing walls which once stood above, and therefore reflects the size of the former rooms they supported. It is likely that the westernmost, narrow line formed an access corridor. Its narrow confines can surely have had little other use.

The 1910 and the 1970s Ordnance Survey Maps indicate that the largest compartments may have been open yards as they do not appear filled-in (Figs 5 and 6).

Because of the absence of any surviving superstructure, there were no vestiges of any door locations or indications of floors.

An agricultural pit or trough

Separated from the rest of the main sandstone foundation range was a single compartment which lay within the narrow western 'corridor'. It differed from all the others in that the interior walls were of neatly-coursed ashlar blocks, each with a slightly rusticated face [13] carried down below ground level to form a sub-surface pit or trough the entire area of the compartment (2.8m x 1.2m and c1.0m deep). Its floor was of neatly laid close-fitting flagstones [25] and it was filled with demolition rubble (Figs 12, 13 and 14). The western wall incorporated a salt-glazed drain just up from the floor, draining under the farmyard to the west. Spanning the width of the compartment, and socketed into the walls just above drain-level, were three equidistant iron bars at least one inch (25mm) in diameter, strong enough to support considerable weight (of which two had been bent and smashed out by the rubble infilling). The entire eastern side of the pit incorporated two large rectangular apertures which opened into the adjacent compartment on that side where the west end of the compartment contained two deep troughs [14], divided off from the rest of the compartment foundations by a wall of sandstone and brick. It is most likely to have been a manure pit, of increasing popularity in the middle of the 19th century (cf Wade Martins 2002, 114, 123 & 148).



Agricultural trough, looking north

Fig 12



Agricultural trough, looking south

Fig 13

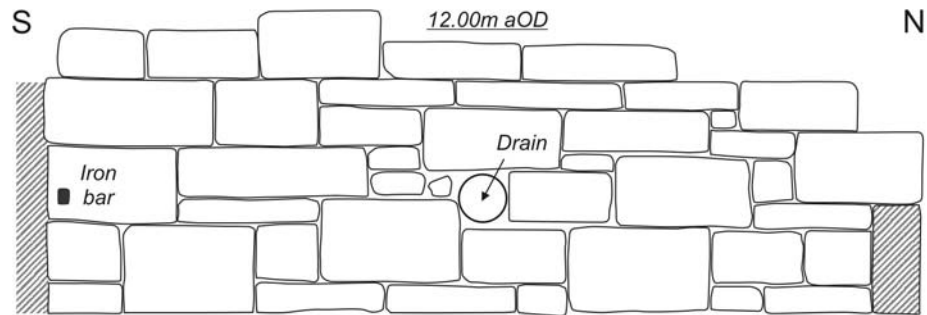
The two troughs had been part filled-in and then further altered by the insertion of carefully-laid brick chutes [15] leading down into and through the apertures (Fig 14).

These were designed to direct the flow of something down through the apertures, collecting it above the level of the iron bars.

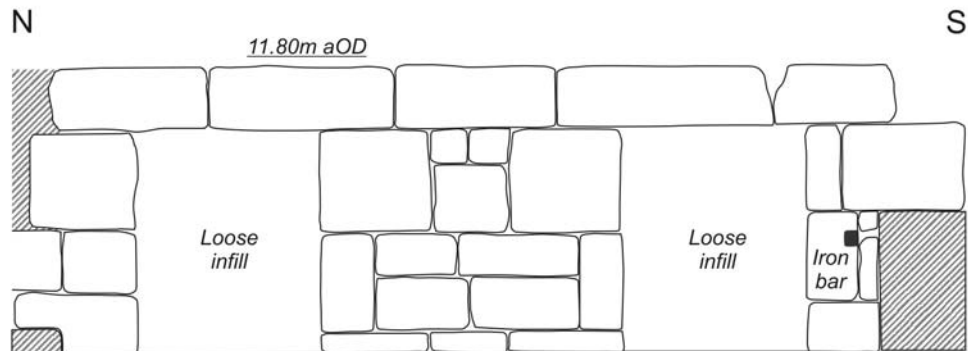


Chute on east side of agricultural trough Fig 14

Elevation 1



Elevation 2



Agricultural trough, internal side elevations Fig 15

Additions to the range

At the south end of the site lay a building which had clearly been added to the farm. It utilised the sandstone foundations for its east wall, but its north south and west walls [27, 28 and 29], the latter damaged by stanchion bases] were of mortared brick, neatly built and three-bricks in thickness, resting within the top 200mm of natural sand (Figs 6 and 16). Again about 1m or more of the foundation survived to just below the modern concrete hard-standing, including an offset at the base for stability. The building measured 6.5m east-west x 4.8m north-south. In the total absence of superstructure or distinguishing features, including floors, its use or uses are unknown. Within the footprint of the building the infill was similar to the sandstone range, being sandy clay overlain by mainly brick rubble.



Brick addition to the farm buildings Fig 16

The former farmyard (Fig 6)

Outside and to the west of the sandstone range and north of the brick addition lay about one third of the site, which contained no buildings. This area was mechanically reduced and was found to comprise a clear sequence of dumped layers over the natural clayey sand. The first, which retained at its base small patches of topsoil (the vestiges of what preceded the development) comprised a ubiquitous crush of sandstone rubble (9), put down as a blinding layer to both aid drainage and firm up the soft sandy geology, which here had been deliberately scraped away to form a flat area. This seems to have been the original farmyard surface. Over this sandstone crush had been dumped a variety of materials: further sandstone, brick, sand, soil and pebbles (8), all spreads of which were neither extensive nor coherent. They probably represent the regular and haphazard accumulations and dumps which characterise a working farmyard.

These layers, while they abutted the sides of the buildings to east and south, also stopped abruptly on the north side where they abutted a short length of mortared sandstone wall foundation [26]. This seems to have formed the northern limit of the farmyard. Ordnance Survey maps suggest that it once supported a building, possibly an insubstantial lean-to (in the absence of any further foundations being present).

Beyond the farmyard (Fig 6)

To the north of the farmyard wall lay a great depth of black topsoil up to 1.3m thick (7). This covered the entire northern quarter of the site where the surface of the natural geology was unmodified and which sloped gently away to the north. This soil accumulation may have been in two episodes, since, although largely indistinguishable in colour and texture, about half way down the layer incorporated a substantial deposit or spread of domestic 19th- to 20th-century pottery. It is suggested that this constitutes a farmhouse pantry clear-out, while the soil above it may be some of that dumped in the preparation of some aspect of the farmyard surfaces further south. In any case the pottery represents a roughly-datable episode in the life of the farm.

Sealed by the depth of topsoil and cut into the natural sand at the far northern end of the site lay a configuration of straight-sided, flat-bottomed slots [18, 20, 23]. Their fills were all re-deposited clayey sand and produced no finds (19, 21, 24). Nearby was an amorphous spread of similar re-deposited material (22). These slots lie on exactly the same alignments as the nearby buildings and may represent unfinished foundation trenches for buildings never constructed. Their fills were almost indistinguishable from the natural geology and incorporated no finds of any description, suggesting that they were hardly open for any length of time. They included none of the homogeneous black topsoil which overlay them, again suggesting this had been stripped off when they were originally dug and quickly back-filled.

4 THE POTTERY

by Iain Soden

A total of 190 sherds, weighing 9.35kg, of 19th- to 20th-century mass-produced pottery was recovered from the excavations, all but two sherds coming from one context, the deep topsoil deposit at the northern end of the site (7). The remainder, two small sherds, derived from the fill (17) of the north-south aligned pre-farm ditch [16].

4.1 The assemblage

The assemblage represented here is fragmentary, not least because it was hand-picked during machine-stripping of several tons of the topsoil overburden, but the sherd size and the relative completeness of a few vessels indicates that it was perhaps a primary dump of pottery. Rim-arcs, base-arcs and patterns were matched and even varieties of transfers counted to arrive at the vessel numbers given. Its date will be discussed later but the types represented and the vessels and numbers is as follows:

1x Press-moulded white salt-glazed stoneware bowl or jug (c1750-70) – 2 sherds / 22g

1x Blue shell edged pearlware plate (c1780-1820) – 1 sherd / 33g

1x Sprigged, porcellanous stoneware (c1800-15) – 1 sherd / 26g

Underglaze transfer printed earthenware, (19th-century) -97 sherds / 3184g

7x (blue transfer) willow-pattern plates, 5 x (blue) willow-pattern tureens

1x (blue) shaving bowl

1x (blue) bowl

3 x (blue) tankards

1x (brown transfer) plate

1 x (violet transfer) jug

1x (violet) tureen

Clear white-glazed earthenware – 40 sherds / 2187g

Ointment pot (complete, lid missing)

3xshaving bowls

1xplatter

3xtea cups, decorated with restrained gold painted decoration

1xplate

1xplatter

Stoneware – 3 sherds / 108g

Jug (spout only)

Jelly mould

Blacking bottle or ginger-beer/mineral water bottle

Caneware/yellow ware -14sherds / 1026g

Mixing bowl

Mocha/yellow ware -8 sherds /170g

Shaving bowl

Banded slipware-13 sherds / 540g (Thanks to Julie Edwards for identifying this material)

6x tankards or jugs

5 x Blackware pancheons (possibly made in Buckley area, Flintshire) – 11 sherds / 2050g

A single (complete) glass bottle present in the assemblage (Fig 17, bottom right, 280mm tall) is straight-sided and has a moderate kick and a tapering rim of a type produced throughout the period 1820-1920.

Fig 17 shows a selection of the few reconstructible vessels



Selection of pottery and a bottle from context (7). Scale internal 10mm Fig 17

4.2 Dating the assemblage from stamps

The earliest pottery predates the farm by two generations. It includes the ubiquitous 18th-century white salt-glazed stoneware. Most notable is a sprigged sherd of porcellanous stoneware jug of a type highlighted by Hildyard (2005, 142 and pl 76) and dated to c1800-15, probably from Longton, Stoke on Trent. Of the same era is a plate of blue shell-edged pearlware.

A number of sherds carry partial or complete stamps, either impressed (in one case) or in transfer form (all the rest). While few are complete, enough can be reconstructed for research to date the production range of the assemblage. Of inestimable use in this is the database in www.thepotteries.org.

Those reconstructible examples are as follows:

A lion passant 'Warranted S.E' on a willow-pattern plate is by S Elkin of Longton, Stoke on Trent c1856-69

Staffordshire Stone China around a crown and Stafford Knot, initialled H.N [...], again on a willow-pattern plate is Hulse Nixon and Adderley of Longton, Stoke on Trent 1853-68

A caneware mixing bowl stamped 'Cash, Woodville Potteries, Burton on Trent'. This is a classic type, often called yellow or Measham ware (although nowhere near Measham)

made near Swadlincote, Derbyshire from the mid-19th century and still in production today. It predates 1901, when the company began to be called 'Mason, Cash and Co'.

Thus while there is clearly pottery produced at the very start of the life of Woodhouse Farm in 1867, there is also clearly much later datable pottery.

The assemblage seems to be a clear-out of a pantry or similar, possibly in conjunction with a change in tenancy at the farm. The collection contained a few 'antiques'. It is all domestic and is typical of what would be found in a contemporary kitchen/scullery. An article in 1926 sets out just how popular older 19th-century designs still were in the choice of use in a 'modern' household well into the 20th century (*Homes and Gardens*, February 1926, 338-9). The pottery shows that ceramics were being sourced probably in Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Flintshire. Most would probably have been bought in Chester, nearby.

It has been suggested that the dump of pottery might derive from a clearance in preparation for the construction of Woodhouse Farm in 1867 (Julie Edwards pers comm.). While this is a slight possibility, it is to push the evidence further than it really ought to go, for the simple reason that everything else points to a later dump, demonstrably earlier material being very sparse by comparison with types which continued in popularity into the 20th century, not least willow-patterns. To have been dumped in 1867, the stamp-dated vessels would have been almost new at the moment of discard and the stamps do represent only a tiny portion of the dumped material. While interim dating of post 1924 may be too new and based on an initial erroneous identification of banded ware as Cornishware (Thanks to Julie Edwards for noting this), all of the structural evidence around about was 1867 or later. The site lacks any pre-1867 evidence of focus on which to pin the pottery. The presence of 18th-century and early 19th-century wares in small quantities in any kitchen in the 19th century should not alarm or concern the archaeologist any more than observing a house containing older furniture. Few houses contain all new or up-to-date material of any description.

In addition to the above material, two sherds were recovered from the fill of ditch 16 (17). These comprised a tiny sherd of blackware and a small sherd of Nottingham Stoneware. Since both are 18th-century in date, they indicate the ditch was filled in no earlier than then and, by reason of the stratification, before the farm was built in 1867.

In view of its modern, industrial nature, and its relative fragmentary nature, the pottery warrants no further analysis.

5 ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLE by Val Fryer

5.1 Introduction and method statement

A single 40-litre soil sample for the retrieval of the plant macrofossil assemblage was taken from the pre-farm ditch fill (feature 16; context 17; Fig 18).

The sample was bulk floated by NA and the flot was collected in a 300 micron mesh sieve. The dried flot was scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x 16 and the plant macrofossils and other remains noted are listed in Table 1. Nomenclature follows Stace (1997). All plant remains were charred. Modern fibrous roots and seeds were also recorded.



Environmental sampling Fig 18

5.2 Results

The recovered flot was largely composed of coal fragments and large pieces of a black cokey material. However, a limited number of cereal grains and weed seeds were also noted. Most were reasonably well preserved, although some grains were puffed and distorted, probably as a result of combustion at very high temperatures.

Oat (*Avena sp.*) and wheat (*Triticum sp.*) grains were recorded along with a small number of grains, which were too poorly preserved for close identification. Seeds of common segetal weeds, namely corn chamomile (*Anthemis arvensis*), brome (*Bromus sp.*) and small legumes (*Fabaceae*) were also recorded along with a single small grass (*Poaceae*) fruit, finely comminuted charcoal/charred wood fragments and a charred bud. Remains other than the coal and coke fragments were rare, although a small number of vitreous globules, possibly derived from the very high temperature combustion of organic remains, were noted.

Table 1: Environmental data

Sample No.	1
Context No.	17
Cereals	
<i>Avena sp.</i> (grains)	x
<i>Triticum sp.</i> (grains)	x
Cereal indet. (grains)	x
Herbs	
<i>Anthemis arvensis</i> L.	x
<i>Bromus sp.</i>	x
Fabaceae indet.	x
Small Poaceae indet.	x
Other plant macrofossils	
Charcoal <2mm	xx
Charcoal >2mm	xx
Charred root/stem	x
Indet.bud	x
Indet.seed	x
Other remains	
Black porous 'cokey' material	xxxx
Black tarry material	xx
Burnt/fired clay	x
Small coal frags.	xxxx

Vitreous material	x
Sample volume (litres)	40
Volume of flot (litres)	0.1
% flot sorted	100%

Key to table

x = 1- 10 specimens xx = 11 – 50 specimens xxxx = 100+ specimens

5.3 Conclusions

In summary, this assemblage is difficult to interpret with any degree of accuracy, as the date of the context (within the 17th- to 19th-century range) is uncertain and the density of material present is extremely low. However, it would appear most likely that the remains are derived from a very small quantity of either cereal processing or storage waste, which was either deliberately placed within the ditch fill after burning or accidentally incorporated in the form of wind-blown detritus. This material appears to have been mixed with a quantity of probable hearth waste, although whether the latter is contemporary, or part of the final infilling of the ditch, is unknown.

As the assemblage does not contain a sufficient density of material for quantification (i.e. 100+ specimens) no further analysis is recommended. However, a summary of this assessment should be included within any publication of data from the site.

6 CONCLUSIONS

No remains of the castle defences or of other medieval settlement remains were present in the excavation, nor pottery to indicate its proximity.

However, a single ditch was present which predates Woodhouse Farm. Map evidence indicates that this may be one shown on Bladesdale's map of 1738, for which an earlier date in the 1660s has been postulated. It once bounded an orchard. An environmental sample from its infilling suggests that general crop-processing was going on nearby when it went out of use as a boundary.

In structural terms the site has produced evidence of a range of farm outbuildings which Ordnance Survey map evidence suggests were in existence from the farm's earliest period (1867-74). The complex was built on a Regular Courtyard Plan, not atypical of Cheshire Sandstone Ridge and Cheshire Plain estate-farms of the period (www.Helm.org.uk: Historic Farmsteads Preliminary Character Statement, North West Region, part 3: 38-9, 48). A later addition in brick, also present, is noted on the 1910 Ordnance Survey Map for the first time. Nothing of the superstructure survived to indicate buildings' former uses. If, as maps suggest, the largest compartments were once open (as small yards) they may have begun life as piggeries (www.Helm.org.uk: Historic Farmsteads Preliminary Character Statement, North West Region, part 3: 68-9). These buildings were only demolished in the 1970s and survived long enough to appear on an aerial photograph (when they were all clearly roofed-over) (Fig 19). Their remains were plotted and surveyed.

Within the complex, a stone-lined sunken pit or trough was recorded which was probably a purpose-built manure pit (Wade Martins 2002, 114, 123 & 148).

Pottery of the period 1867-post 1924 indicates the general wares in use in the farmhouse kitchen in that period. The pottery included a few 'antiques' also cleared out at the same time, dating back to the 18th century.

It has been noted that the finds did not include much glassware or any clay tobacco pipes, unusual amongst contemporary assemblages (J Edwards pers comm.). Two explanations cover this. Firstly as a (probably) late 19th to 20th century assemblage, clay tobacco pipes were becoming relatively uncommon. Pipe smoking had begun to give way to cigarettes in the early 20th century, a change made most striking during the First World War. Unconverted pipe smokers themselves had also moved in larger numbers to the more robust briar pipes, with meerschaums at the upper end of the market. Secondly the absence of clay tobacco pipes and the paucity of glass is additionally explicable by this being a pantry clearance, not that of a beer or wine cellar, nor a general occupation deposit, nor rubbish accumulating over time.

Subsequent to the excavations a watching brief took place to monitor the construction of foundations across the site. While many of the old foundations to the farm buildings were unavoidably lost, it was possible to preserve an area around the agricultural tough, first by wrapping it in a geotextile membrane and then packing it around with inert crush and fill. This is depicted in Fig 6, above, and on the rear cover photograph.



Oblique aerial photo of the farm in the 1970s, looking north

Fig 19

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