

(02)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

ELMS CLOSE, TETSWORTH

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

OCTOBER 1988

TETSWORTH ELMS CLOSE 1988  
Archaeological Evaluation October 1988

Introduction

An Archaeological assessment was carried out in the field just to the south-west of Elms Close in Tetsworth on behalf of M.T. Davies Ltd. in respect of a planning application for housing. The Field contained six 12th. to 13th. century ditches running north-south and four running east-west and two 19th. century walls and a 19th. century well. These are consistent with a series of medieval crofts or enclosures near to a medieval occupation area (presumably centred around the church), and limited evidence of Victorian agricultural and domestic use.

Location

The site is located to the north-west of the church and north of the vicarage. It is a small field of an irregular oval shape and about half a hectare in size. The M40 runs through a field to the south. The site is on the north facing slope of the small hill on which Tetsworth church stands. The slope is quite steep although the bottom spur of the field is flat (see plan).

National Grid Reference:- SP46862015

Assessment Strategy

An excavation at Copt Hay in 1971-2 on the line of the motorway, before it was constructed, revealed medieval activity with a large 11th. century boundary ditch presumably marking the edge of the village of Tetsworth. The close proximity of the present site to the church suggested the possibility of finding medieval dwellings of the shrunken medieval village, although an assessment carried out in Silver Street just to the north of the site revealed only 19th. century deposits.

A pattern of 9 evenly spaced 1.5m wide, 20m long trenches representing just over 2% of the area of the site was used. These were supplemented by 1 further trench and some extensions. This sample quite satisfactorily covered various undulations on the site which do not constitute clear earthworks, but could have been related to medieval occupation. There was a reasonable chance that if the large 11th. century ditch found in 1972 extended into the site its position and line would be established. All features of potential archaeological interest were planned, sectioned and their sections drawn.

Soils

Topsoil

The topsoil and turf is a dark chocolate brown clay loam about 30cm thick across all the site. It lies on top of a dark grey/green clay loam with layers of gravelly flint, representing the interface between the topsoil and subsoil. This interface layer also made the fill of the excavated ditches and pits which were difficult to trace above the natural clay as a result.

## Subsoil

The subsoil is a clay which varied only in colour, probably due to chemical changes induced by differences in water content. It was light grey at the bottom of the hill, a yellowish green in the middle of the slope and a darkish grey at the top of the hill.

## Trenches

### Trench I

This contained 17th. century finds and a rubble and hard-core path (feature 2) leading from the cottage in the direction of the church. There were also two field-drains with clay pipes at the north end.

### Trench II

This contained no features but produced two sherds of medieval pottery.

### Trench III

Towards the east end of the trench were two small walls (features 4 and 5) overlaid by clay and surrounded by 17th. century finds at the same level. There were no recognisable floor layers or any medieval pottery to suggest medieval dwellings. The rest of the trench had a natural flint layer on top of the clay and there were two late medieval sherds some 10m west of the walls.

### Trench IV

The subsoil/topsoil interface layer was very thick. There were two ditches (features 6 and 7) running north-south. They were very difficult to see above the natural clay, but were indicated by a clay lens in the interface of the topsoil and subsoil. They were dug to 1.2m below modern ground surface, this would suggest an original size of around 1m deep and 1m wide. Feature 7 contained a sherd of late 12th. to 13th. century pottery and 7 bones. 6 further sherds came from the topsoil.

### Trench V

This had one ditch (feature 10) at the west end running north-south presumably a continuation of feature 8, a ditch in trench IX. The ditch was relatively shallow being only 0.7m from the top of the modern topsoil to the bottom of the feature. It also contained 4 sherds of late 12th. to early 13th. century pottery. 3 further sherds came from the topsoil.

### Trench VI

This had a layer of natural flints on the natural clay. There were two gullies (features 12 and 13) about 0.6m deep from the modern surface running north-south a small pit (feature 14) with a flat bottom of the same depth and about 0.7m in diameter where it cut the natural clay. There was also a smallish ditch (feature 15) running east-west and then turning to run north-

south at the east end of the trench. The pit contained a sherd of late 12th. to early 13th. century pottery and 9 bones.

#### Trench VII

This was similar to trench VI, it had one large ditch (feature 19) about 1m deep running north west-south east at the west end of the trench, a small pit (feature 11) about 0.8m deep and two gullies (features 20 and 21) running east-west at the east end of the trench, which were 0.8m deep. These features contained late 12th. to early 13th. century pottery: Feature 11 one sherd and a few bones; feature 19 one sherd and 5 bones; feature 20 2 sherds and 3 bones; feature 21 3 sherds and a bone.

#### Trench VIII

This trench had nothing except a rough 0.5m wall (feature 6) and a well lined with unfaced stone rubble (feature 17). These could be associated with the nearby cottage. 19th. century finds came from the top of the fill of the well and the surface of the subsoil next to the lining pit and from the base of the wall.

#### Trench IX

This had two ditches. One runs north north east-south south west (feature 8) cutting another feature (feature 18) to the east. There was also a gully (feature 9) at the south end of the trench running east-west. Ditch 8 was 1.4m deep so is probably not the ditch in trench V, although it could have shallowed before it reached that trench. Feature 18 was 1.2m deep and the gully was 0.8m deep. Ditch 8 contained 20 sherds of late 12th. to early 13th. century pottery and a similar number of bones. The topsoil interface layer also contained medieval pottery.

#### Trench X

This was dug to see if the flattish area on the top of the hill had a medieval domestic debris spread. No archaeological features or finds were recovered from this trench.

#### General Comment

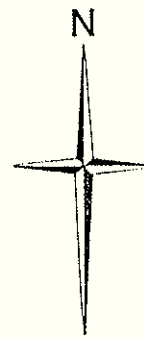
Apart from 19th. century deposits, the features contained exclusively pottery similar to that found at the site under the motorway, and is likewise late 12th. to early 13th century. Some animal bones, some of which had been butchered were also recovered. The intersections of ditches on different alignments suggest more than one phase of medieval activity on the site. The overall layout is not clear, though several of the ditches run roughly north-south down the slope. The ditches suggest a pattern of small somewhat irregular enclosures or paddocks.

No clear cut evidence of in situ domestic activity was found in the form of distinct structures, hearths, occupation layers or rubble spreads such as were recorded at Copt Hay in 1971-2. However two, possibly three pits were found and there was a scatter of medieval pottery across the site. There was a distinct concentration of pottery in ditch 8 (Trench IX) otherwise little was recovered from the ditches, and the general scatter was sparse. The machine was watched continuously and the spoil-heaps were

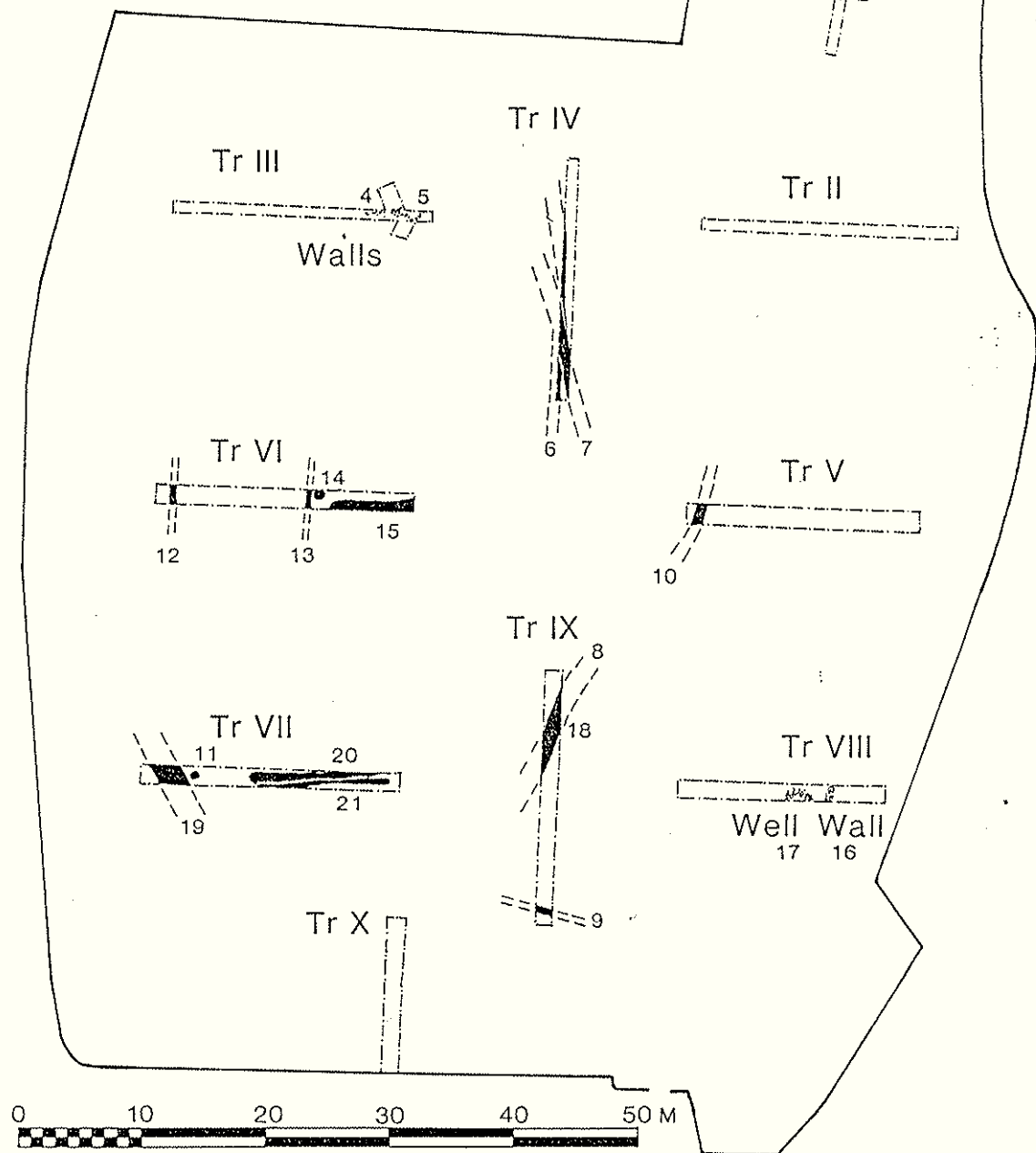
checked to gather as many finds as possible. Most of the medieval material came from trenches IV,VI,VII and IX. 19th. century remains were found in trenches I,III and VIII, with only sporadic medieval sherds.

Mark Roberts BA  
George Lambrick MA FSA MIFA  
Oxford Archaeological Unit  
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- Trench
- Ditch / Gully
- Wall
- Estimated line of ditch



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