

Excavations at The Paddock Rectory Lane Fringford

By Paul Blinkhorn, Chrissy Bloor and Dave Thomason

OAU Occasional Paper Number 6



MAKING SENSE OF THE
PAST

EXCAVATIONS AT THE PADDOCK,
RECTORY LANE, FRINGFORD 1997

By Paul Blinkhorn, Chrissy Bloor and Dace Thomason

*with contributions by
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Excavations at The Paddock, Rectory Lane, Fringford

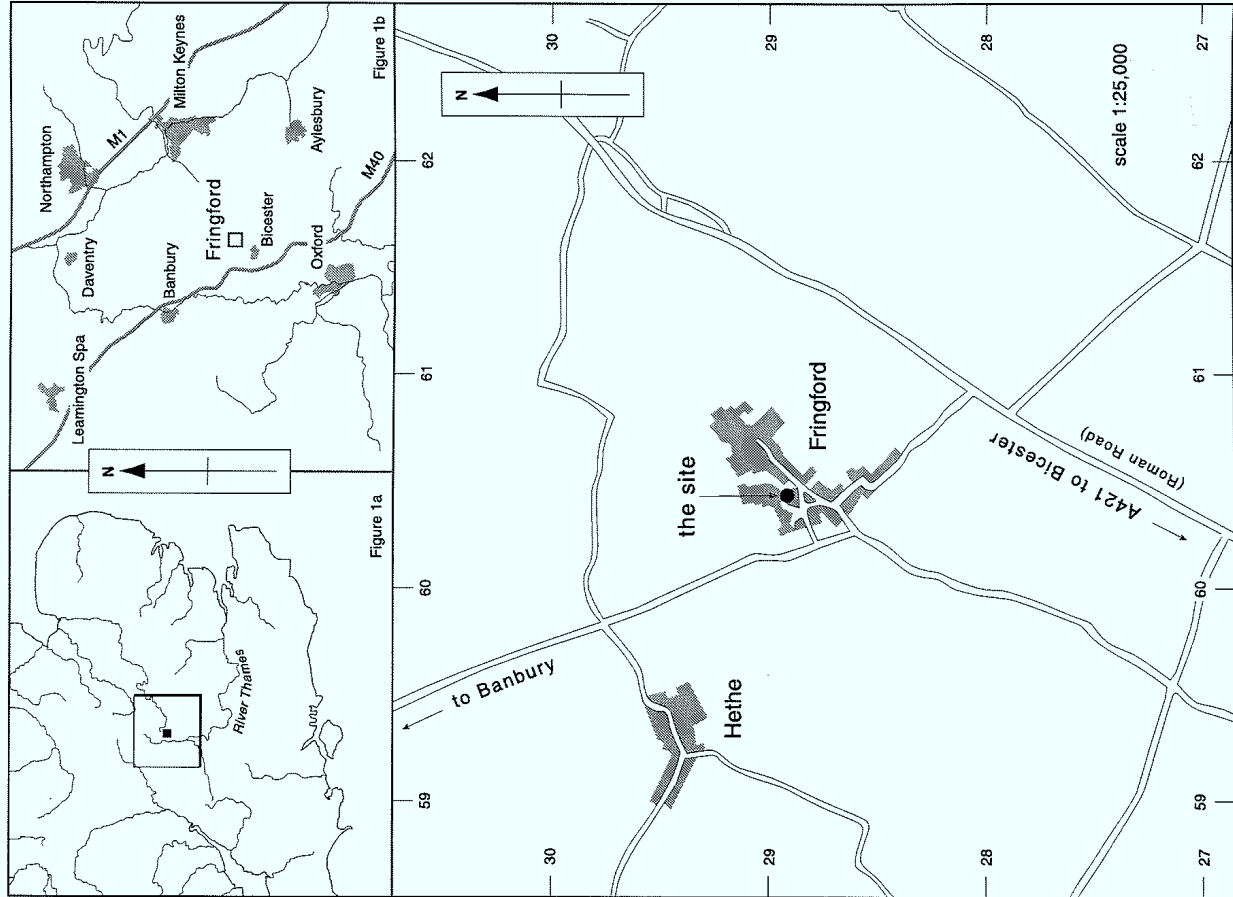


Figure 1 Site location

SUMMARY

Excavations by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on a site of proposed development in the core of the village of Fringford, Oxon revealed evidence of medieval occupation in the form of 11th /12th century enclosures and field boundaries, and 13th century stone buildings and associated yards, ditches and pits. Evidence was also revealed of Romano-British field boundaries relating to a possible settlement to the north-east.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the excavation

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out an area excavation at The Paddock, Rectory Lane, Fringford, near Bicester, Oxfordshire during 1997 (Fig. 1). The work was carried out on behalf of Brandon Gate Homes Ltd, who were developing the site for housing. The recording action was requested by Oxfordshire County Council, owing to the known presence of archaeological remains adjacent to the development area. A prior geophysical survey, and a field evaluation by the OAU (Cook 1997) had indicated the presence of a complex of archaeological features, some of which could possibly relate to the adjacent Crosslands site to the east (Mudd 1993).

On the basis of this evidence, an archaeological brief (no. 97/00348) was issued by Oxfordshire County Council with the aim of obtaining sufficient evidence to establish the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and chronology of any archaeological remains within the affected area, and to preserve any remains through a full recording action, particularly those of Iron Age, Roman, Saxon or medieval date. Structures and activity areas were to be identified, and, if present, their date and duration established. In addition, finds and other evidence for the economic basis of the settlement were to be recovered so that its social and economic position in the local and regional settlement pattern could be ascertained.

Site location, topography and geology

The site, which covered an area of approximately 0.51 ha, is located at c 107 m OD, and lies within the core of the medieval village of Fringford (SP 604 289), approximately 6 km west of Bicester, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The site is bounded to the north by Rectory Lane, and by private gardens on the other three sides. It slopes gently to the north, and appears to have been under pasture since the late medieval period. The underlying geology of the site is Oxford clay.

Historical background

by Janio Waitt

The first documentary reference to the village of Fringford occurs in Domesday Book (1086) although the Victoria County History (VCH) argues that the place name, which means 'ford of the people of Fera' suggests that Fringford was among the earlier settlements made by the Anglo-Saxons (VCH VI 128). Domesday Book describes the village as containing two estates, comprising 10 hides in all. One estate was probably centred around the village core and the lands closest to it (Blomfield 1890, 9) and had land for eight ploughs and included two mills. The estate supported 30 villagers, comprising 4 serfs, 18 villeins and 8 bordars. The second, far smaller, estate was probably located in the more distant wild pastures towards the west (ibid.) and comprised land for 1 plough and was worked by three bordars.

The 1279 Hundred Rolls lists 30 villagers (slightly fewer than were listed at Domesday) of whom 27 were villein tenants belonging to the two manors, and 3 were free tenants (VCH VI 129). The names of these villagers are listed by the document which is printed in its entirety in Blomfield (1890, 11-13), although unfortunately it does not allow an estimation of the locations of their holdings. Those listed would seem unlikely to represent the full population of the village at that time. The Taxation Records of 1316 list thirty-one property holders, although, once again, these taxpayers almost certainly do not represent the total number of households within the village. Ten of the thirty-one were fairly substantial men. By 1525 the number of property-holders had shrunk to 25, although the average size of holding of these men had risen considerably (VCH VI 129).

Further information about the medieval village is provided by a series of extents (manorial surveys) relating to the two manorial estates located within the village. In 1288 the principal estate is described as comprising a house and garden, holding 120 acres of arable and 2 acres of meadow. This house almost certainly lay on or close to the present day site of Manor Farm which lies to the north of the church (Blomfield 1890 16; VCH VI 126). In the 16th century the manor changed hands and a new manor house was built on a site described by Blomfield as lying 'on some ground close to the present School Building' (1890, 18). In the 19th century the house fell into bad repair and during the early 19th century was used as a parish poor house and sometime school. The house was pulled down in 1830 and a new school building constructed on its site in 1863. This building lies to the west of the excavated site on the land adjacent to the Fringford Study Centre.

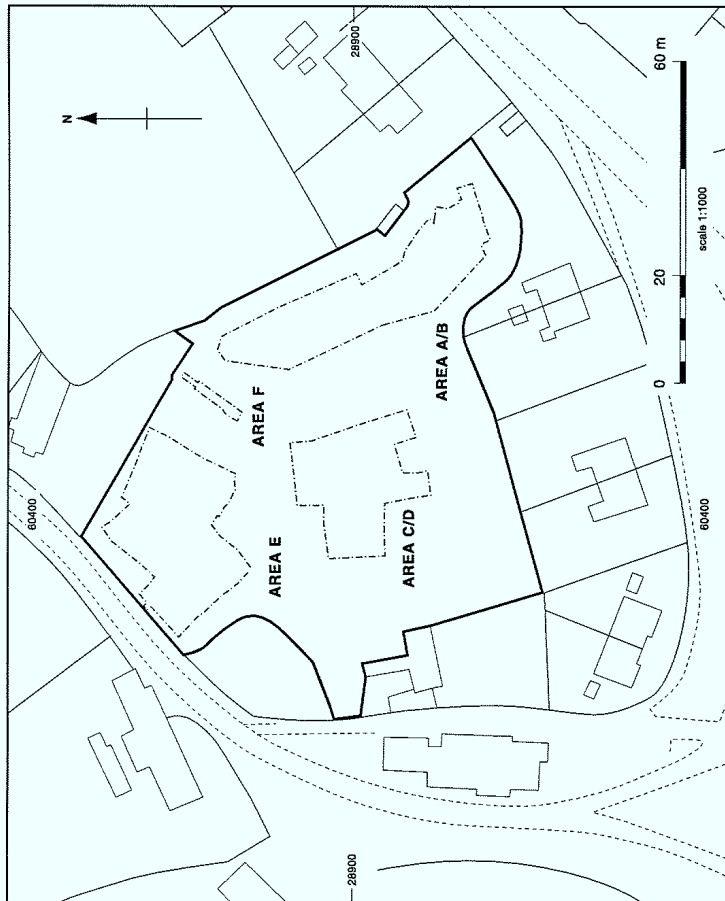


Figure 2 Plan of site and archaeological trenches

Little is known of the medieval or post-medieval ownership or occupancy of the development site, although some information can be deduced from a study of the various cartographic and documentary sources. Although Davis's 1797 map of Oxfordshire shows little real detail of the layout of the village, it is sufficient to show that the development site lies within an area of pasture (rather than arable land) lying between the buildings that ring the Village Green, the Green itself and a small area of arable land to the south of the church.

The Tithe Map of 1848, which is the first detailed map of the site, delineates the development site as a roughly circular piece of land, bounded on two sides by the Village Green. The southern and western sides are cut by a number of small fields/properties. The 19th century property boundary is identical to the modern boundary of the site, although now the small properties contain a row of houses (nos 1-6 The Green). The accompanying Tithe Award gives an insight into the 19th century land ownership of the area, which is likely to reflect the earlier ownership of the fields in question. The development site is described as grass (presumably pasture).

Archaeological background

In 1993, an excavation was carried out in Fringford at the Crosslands site (Mudd 1993). The site lay immediately to the east of The Paddock and covered an area of approximately 1700 m². It revealed a complex series of Romano-British and later features, with evidence of

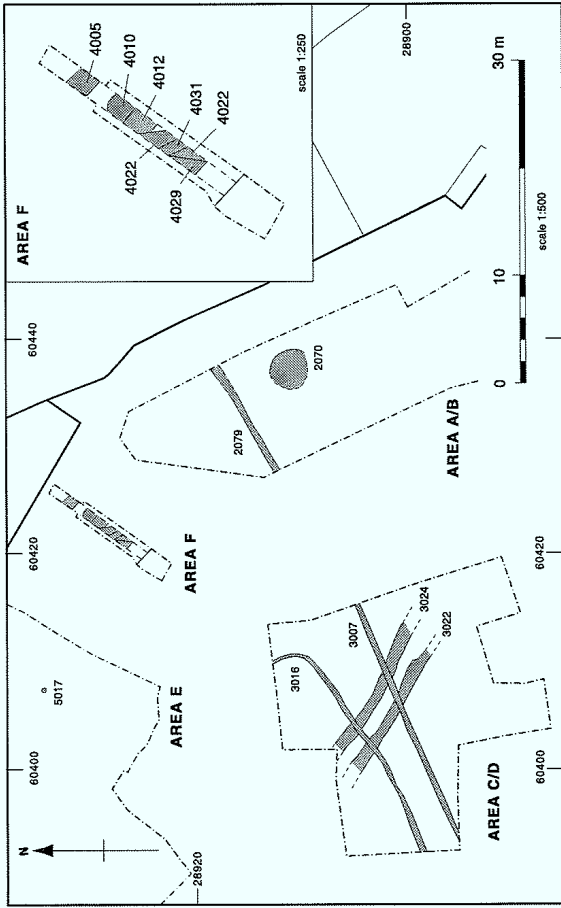


Figure 3 Phase 1 - Late Iron Age and Romano-British

occupation from the late 2nd to 4th century AD, and enclosure ditches of 10th-11th century date. A series of low-status agrarian settlements were indicated, but the full extent of the occupation could not be ascertained as it clearly extended beyond the boundaries of the development area (*ibid.*).

Other work, at Fringford Lodge, some 3.5 km to the north of Bicester centre (SP 5960 2585), produced evidence of a possible Romano-British villa with a hypocaust (OAU 1994), and excavations at Fringford Manor in 1996 (OAU 1996) provided evidence of significant remains of medieval date. This site was located on the north-eastern edge of the village (SP 6068 2918) opposite St Michael's Church, and revealed evidence of a medieval moated site with an associated boundary and fish pond.

Excavation methodology

The excavation comprised a series of machined trenches, supplemented by hand excavation of archaeological features and deposits. The machine excavation was carried out by a 360° excavator with a 1.5 m wide toothless bucket. Six trenches (A - F) were originally intended, their exact boundaries to be determined by the perceived extent of archaeological deposits. Ultimately, three major areas were stripped (see Figure 2). Trenches A & B were combined, as were C & D. Area F remained as an evaluation trench.

The central part of Area A/B had to remain unexcavated due to torrential rain and resultant flooding during the last few weeks of the excavation, which rendered the area unworkable, although the initial strip of the area suggested that there were very few features present.

All changes to the original brief were made after consultation with the County Archaeologist. All archaeological recording was carried out in accordance with the OAU's standard field manual (Wilkinson 1992).

Report structure

Phasing

The phasing was determined by stratigraphic relationships where possible, augmented by ceramic dating with support from typological dating of other finds.

Finds

Significant assemblages of pottery or notable small finds are mentioned in the archaeological description. While a low-level scatter of animal bone was present in almost all areas of the site, and in most extramural contexts, its poor condition has severely reduced its analytical potential (see Charles, below). Therefore only the principal assemblages of bone are mentioned in the description. All finds tables are contained in Appendix 1.

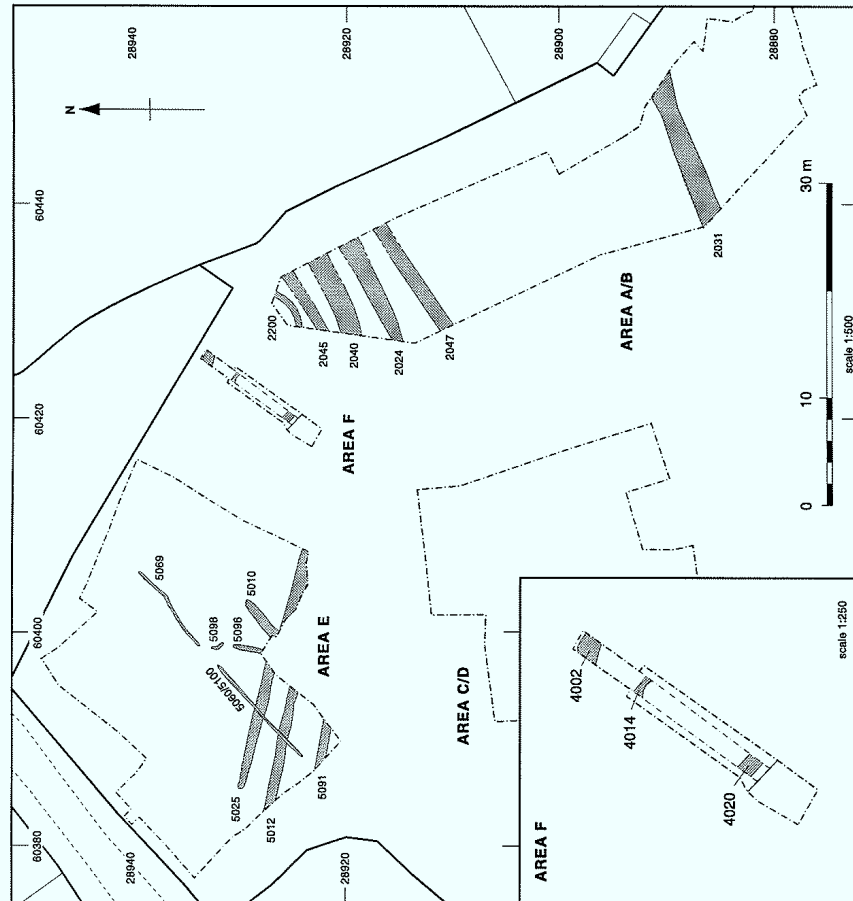


Figure 4 Phase 2 - 11th century

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

General

A natural deposit of dirty yellow silty clay occurred across the whole of the site, although it had a somewhat sandier component in localised areas. The overburden, including modern turf/topsoil, varied between 0.20 m and 0.35 m in depth. The feature fills were generally mid- to dark-grey/brown silty clays, with occasional inclusions of flint gravel.

Phase 1: Late Iron Age and Romano-British (Fig. 3)

Area A/B

A large spread of pinkish-grey daub (2070), within a greyish brown clay-silt matrix was identified in the

Area C/D

Two parallel features, 3022 and 3024, were noted running NW-SE across the trench. Both were of similar

central area of the trench. It was 2 m wide and 0.2 m deep. It produced a largely Romano-British pottery assemblage, although 2 small sherds of intrusive 11th century pottery were also noted.

Gully 2079 was noted running NE-SW across the trench. It had moderately sloping sides, and a regular, concave base. It been truncated, but the surviving portion was 0.68 m wide and 0.25 m deep. It contained a single fill (2078) which produced a large quantity of Romano-British and Iron Age pottery. The gully was noted running on through trench C/D, where it was recorded as feature 3007.

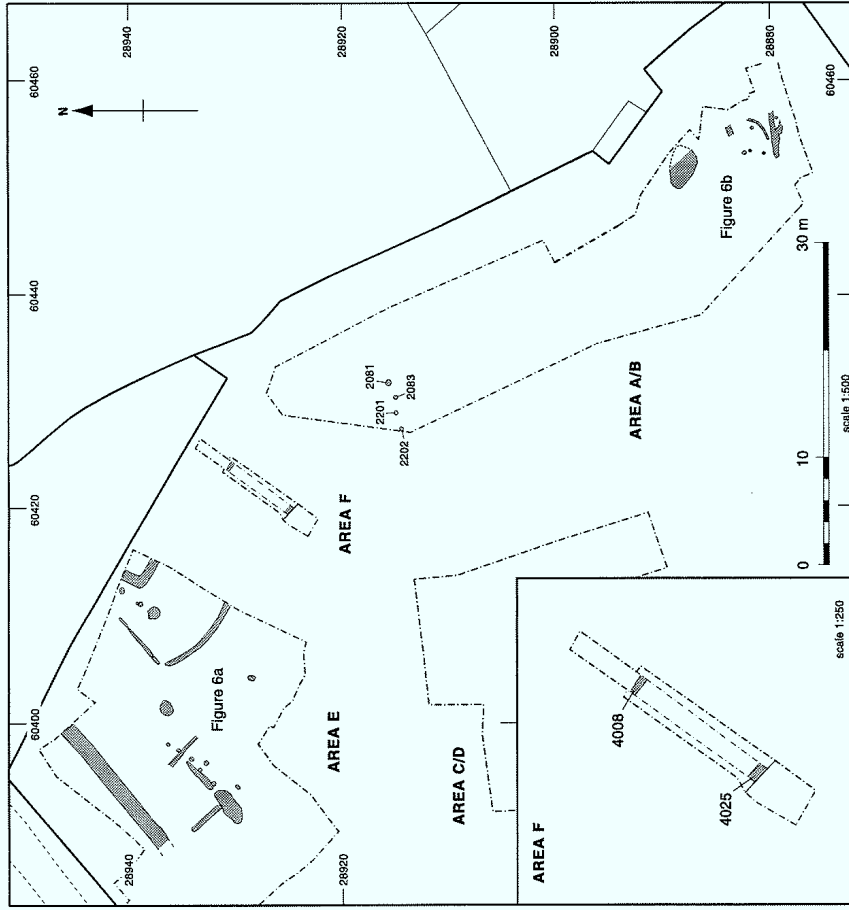


Figure 5 Phase 3 - 11th - 12th century

dimensions, being 1.0 m wide x 0.12 m deep and had gradually sloping sides and a shallow concave base. Neither produced any datable artefacts. They were cut by two parallel linear features that extended NE-SW across the length of the trench. The northern gully [3016] ran eastwards for about 22 m before turning north for a further 2.50 m, into the edge of the trench. It had a smooth concave profile with a width of about 0.66 m and a depth of 0.16 m, and was filled by a single deposit (3006) that produced 3 small abraded sherds of Romano-British pottery.

The other ditch [3007] a continuation of [2079] in Area A (see above), continued across the entire trench, and showed no evidence of turning north. It was of

similar profile and dimensions to 3016 and its fill (3008) produced a small abraded sherd of Romano-British pottery.

Area E

A heavily truncated Romano-British cremation in an irregular, sub-circular feature [5017] was located in the central southern area of the trench. The cut was very shallow, 0.04 m in depth, and had a maximum diameter of 0.48 m. It was filled by the single deposit of a friable greyish brown clayey silt which contained significant amounts of charcoal, charred wood, iron nails and human bone fragments (see Boyle, below).

Area F

A series of broadly NW-SE aligned ditches [4005, 4010, 4012, 4022, 4029, 4031] were noted. They were generally 0.80-1.2 m wide and between 0.25 m and 0.40 m deep, with shallow 'V' shaped profiles, and appeared to represent the repeated definition of a field or plot boundary. Assemblages of Romano-British pottery were recovered from all but one of the ditch fills.

Phase 2: 11th century (Fig. 4)**Area A/B**

Four parallel plough furrows were noted at the northern end of the trench. All were roughly aligned W-E, and were approximately 2.0 m wide and 0.5 m deep. The most northerly [2045] contained a single fill (2044). Furrows 2024 and 2040 produced modest amounts of 11th century pottery from their fills (2025 & 2038, 2039).

A short length of a curving gully [2200] was noted at the most extreme northerly point of the trench. It did not produce any datable artefacts, but appears to have been part of the enclosure noted in the south-eastern corner of Area E (see below).

Ditch 2031 (=2134) ran W-E across the southern end of the area. Two sections were excavated. The western section had a fairly flat base with sloping sides and measured 1.80 m wide x 0.86 m deep. A mixture of 11th century and Romano-British pottery was recovered from the fills (2135-8). The southern edge of the feature was cut by a 13th century pit [2139] (see below).

Area C/D

No features of this date were noted in this area.

Area E

Three parallel plough furrows were noted running NW-SE in the western area of the trench, probably representing continuations of the furrows identified in Area A/B. Pottery from the 11th to the 13th century was recovered from the fills, indicating a degree of intrusion caused by later activity.

A series of ditches defining a possible droveway was located in the western half of the trench, running NE-SW. They were stratigraphically later than the furrows, but the pottery recovered from them suggests that they pre-date the building sequence in Phase 4 (see below). Ditch 5010 was located in the south of the area, extending from the bank for approximately 2.5 m before terminating at a butt-end. It was 0.50 m wide and 0.21 m deep and its fill (5009) produced a sherd of 11th century pottery. Gully 5060/5100, located c. 5.0 m to the north, ran parallel to 5010 across the main area of the trench. A significant assemblage of animal bone was recovered from the gully fill (5061).

A linear cut [5069] appeared to represent a continuation of the ditch 5060/5100 to the north-east, although it was badly truncated, and filled with a late medieval rubble dump (5026). It extended approximately 12.0 m, and varied in width from 0.18 m - 0.28 m and in depth

from 0.15 m - 0.26 m, with a profile which varied from a shallow 'U' to a sharp 'V', although this may have been due to the compression of the rubble dump into the natural.

Gully 5096, oriented N-S, was situated between features 5060 and 5010. It was not possible to say how it relates to the other two ditches, but its existence could suggest that this part of the droveway was reorganised at some point during its use-life. Feature 5098, a heavily truncated linear cut to the north of 5096, may have been an extension of 5096. Sherds of 11th century pottery were recovered from the fill (5097) of feature 5096.

Area F

Three gullies were identified, all oriented approximately NW-SE. Gully 4014 had straight sides and a sharp V-shaped base, and was located 4.0 m from the eastern end of the trench. It was 0.66 m wide and 0.18 m deep. It had been disturbed by animal action. At the eastern end of the trench, feature 4002 was a linear, V-shaped cut with gradual sloping sides, measuring 0.97 m wide by 0.24 m deep. Finally, linear feature 4020 cut the natural at the western end of the trench. It was 0.78 m wide by 0.15 m deep, with concave sides and a rounded base. All three features produced a mix of 11th-century and residual Romano-British pottery from their respective fills (4015, 4003, 4021).

Phase 3: 11th - 12th century (Fig. 5 & 6a/6b)**Area A/B**

Four possible post-holes, [2081, 2083, 2201, 2202] oriented in a NW-SE line, were identified in plan immediately to the north of Phase 2 furrow 2024, during the initial stripping of the area. A few 12th century sherds were recovered from the upper fill (2080) of one of the features [2081] but the flooding in the area rendered further investigation impossible.

Ditch 2161 (see Figure 6b) was revealed through a metre-wide sondage through cobbled surface 2181, located immediately to the north of the north wall of the medieval building (below). The feature ran NE-SW, had a concave base and steeply sloping sides, and measured 0.46 m wide, 0.24 m deep. Its single fill (2160) produced a small group of 12th century pottery.

A gully [2119] oriented W-E and measuring 0.38 m wide and 0.10 m deep, was located close to the southern edge of the site. The butt-end of the feature was approximately 0.42 m wide, 0.28 m deep, and filled by a single deposit (2166) which produced a small assemblage of large sherds of 12th century pottery. The feature extended beyond the limits of excavation in the extreme south-eastern corner of the site. It may represent an earlier field boundary which was backfilled prior to the construction of the building. It was cut on its south side by the terminal of another gully [2175]. It was 0.60 m wide and 0.30 m deep, with steeply sloping sides and a flat base. It did not produce any datable artefacts, but was similarly sealed under the building make-up layers. Both these ditches were cut

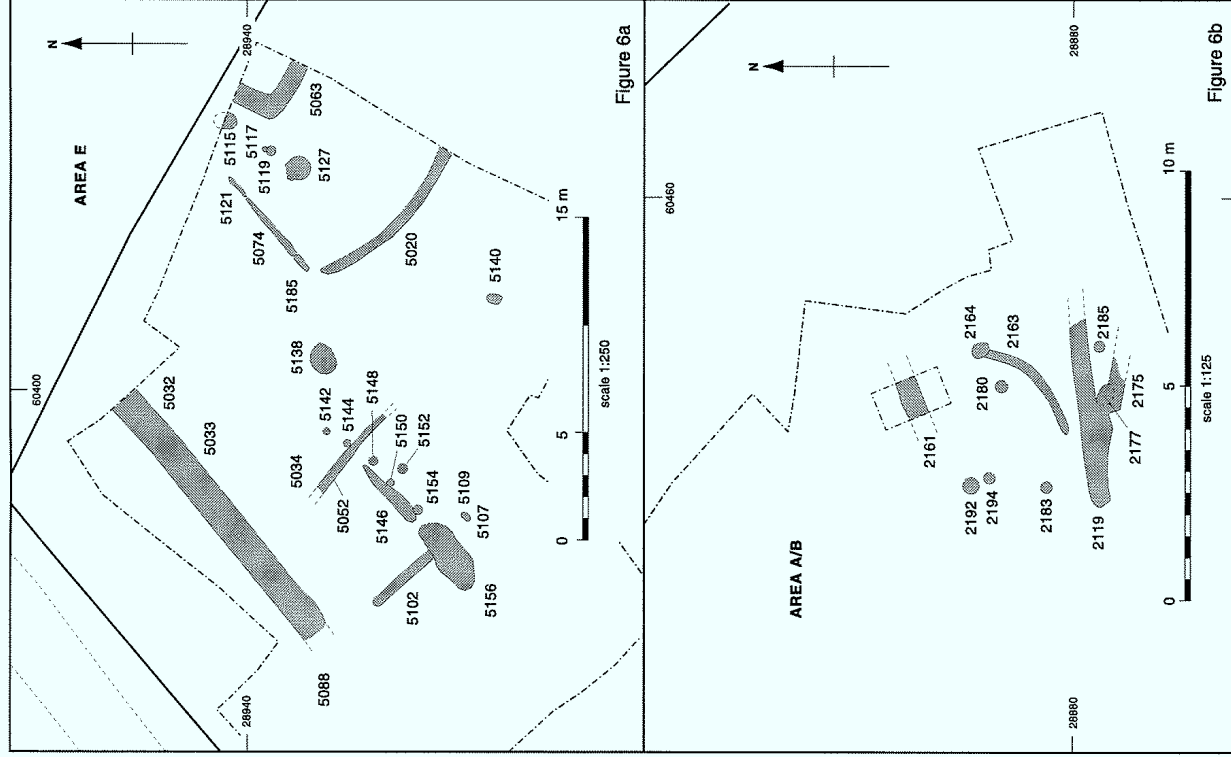


Figure 3 - Details of Areas A/B & E

by posthole 2177, which produced pottery of the same date.

A curvilinear gully [2163] was situated between ditch 2161 and gully 2119. It had a U-shaped profile with steeply sloping sides, and was 0.24 m wide and 0.2 m deep. It contained a single fill (2150) that produced a small assemblage of 12th century pottery, and was cut to the north-east by pit 2164, which was of the same date.

Five post-holes, [2180, 2183 2185, 2192 and 2194] were located in the same area as the linear features. Their dimensions varied from 0.25 m to 0.45 m in width and 0.12 m to 0.25 m in depth.

Area C/D

No features of this phase were noted in this trench.

Area E (Fig. 6a)

Two short lengths of a heavily truncated gully, [5146] and [5156] were identified 1.50 m to the north of the possible Phase 2 droveway ditch [5060]. They were oriented NW-SE and were 0.15 m deep by approximately 1.0 m wide, although feature 5156 had been heavily disturbed by later activity. Gully 5146/5156 was cut by 5102, a NW-SE linear feature with an uneven base and slightly sloping sides. It was 0.72 m wide and 0.06 m deep, with a single fill (5103) which produced a fairly large sherd of 12th century pottery. This feature also had been heavily truncated. A similar shallow gully [5052] was noted approximately 5.0 m to the north-east, but it too had been heavily truncated, to the point where its precise definition was impossible. Both 5146 and 5156 produced 11th and 12th century pottery from their respective fills [5147, 5157]. Along the south-eastern side of these features were a line of postholes, [5107, 5109, 5142, 5144, 5148, 5150, 5152 and 5154] representing a possible fence-line. Their dimensions varied slightly, being between 0.30 and 0.50 m wide and 0.10 m to 0.20 m deep. Each contained a very similar, single fill and together yielded a few sherds of 12th century pottery.

To the east of the possible fence line, a series of small interrupted gullies formed part of a sub-rectangular enclosure extending beyond the south-east corner of the trench. The NE-SW arm comprised three sections, [5074, 5185 and 5121], each approximately 0.35 m wide and between 0.15 and 0.25 m deep. Substantial assemblages of 12th century pottery and animal bone were recovered from the fills (5073, 5122) of gullies 5074 and 5121 (see Figure 10, no. 6).

The NW-SE arm [5020] of the enclosure was 0.80 m wide and 0.30 m deep, and of similar profile dimensions. It began close to the south-western end of gully 5185, and extended beyond the south-eastern baulk. 12th century pottery and a significant quantity of animal bone were recovered from the gully fills [5021, 5022].

An 'L' shaped ditch [5063] was identified in the extreme south-east corner of the trench measuring 0.50 m wide x 0.25 m deep. It appeared to echo the alignment of the enclosure, and had been re-cut at least

once. Small quantities of 12th century pottery were recovered from the fills (5065, 5066).

A series of pits and postholes were noted within the enclosure, although no obvious structural pattern could be discerned. Pit 5115 was partially revealed against the east baulk, approximately 2.50 m to the SE of gully 5121. It was sub-circular, 0.80 m wide and 0.32 m deep, with an uneven base and steep, almost vertical sides. It had a single fill (5116) which produced a large group of 12th century pottery.

Pit 5127 was located approximately 3.0 m to the SW of 5115. It was a large sub-circular feature with near-vertical sides and a fairly flat base that dipped into a post setting at the centre, and had posthole cuts [5162, 5164, 5136, 5166 and 5170] incorporated into the north-eastern edge. Their dimensions ranged from 0.20–0.24 m wide by 0.10–0.12 m deep. Both the pit and the postholes were filled with the same deposit, a dark grey-brown silty clay, with the postholes appearing to have been an integral part of the feature. A large assemblage of 12th century pottery was recovered from the fill (5128) of the pit (see Figure 10, no. 5) but no other evidence was found to illuminate the possible original function of this feature.

Features 5117 and 5119 were a pair of possibly associated post-holes located between pits 5127 and 5115.

A scatter of features were identified between the fence-line and the enclosure, including a pit [5138] which was circular in plan, approximately 1.0 m wide and 0.22 m deep, with a concave base and uneven sides. It had a single fill (5139) which produced 15 small sherds of 12th century pottery. A small pit or posthole [5140] was located some 7.5 m to the south.

A ditch [5088] was identified running W-E along the northern edge of the trench, parallel to the modern road. The original cut was up to 1.50 m wide and 0.40 m deep, and its lower fills (5089, 5090) contained 12th century pottery. At least two re-cuts were noted [5182] and [5183], and further quantities of 12th century pottery were recovered from their fills. The fills were capped by dumped deposits of limestone rubble and clay up to 0.16 m deep (5032). A layer of clay and rough stone re-cuts of ditch 5038 at the northern end of the trench. It produced a small group of sherds of 12th century pottery, and also an iron leather-working awl (SF 2357).

Area F

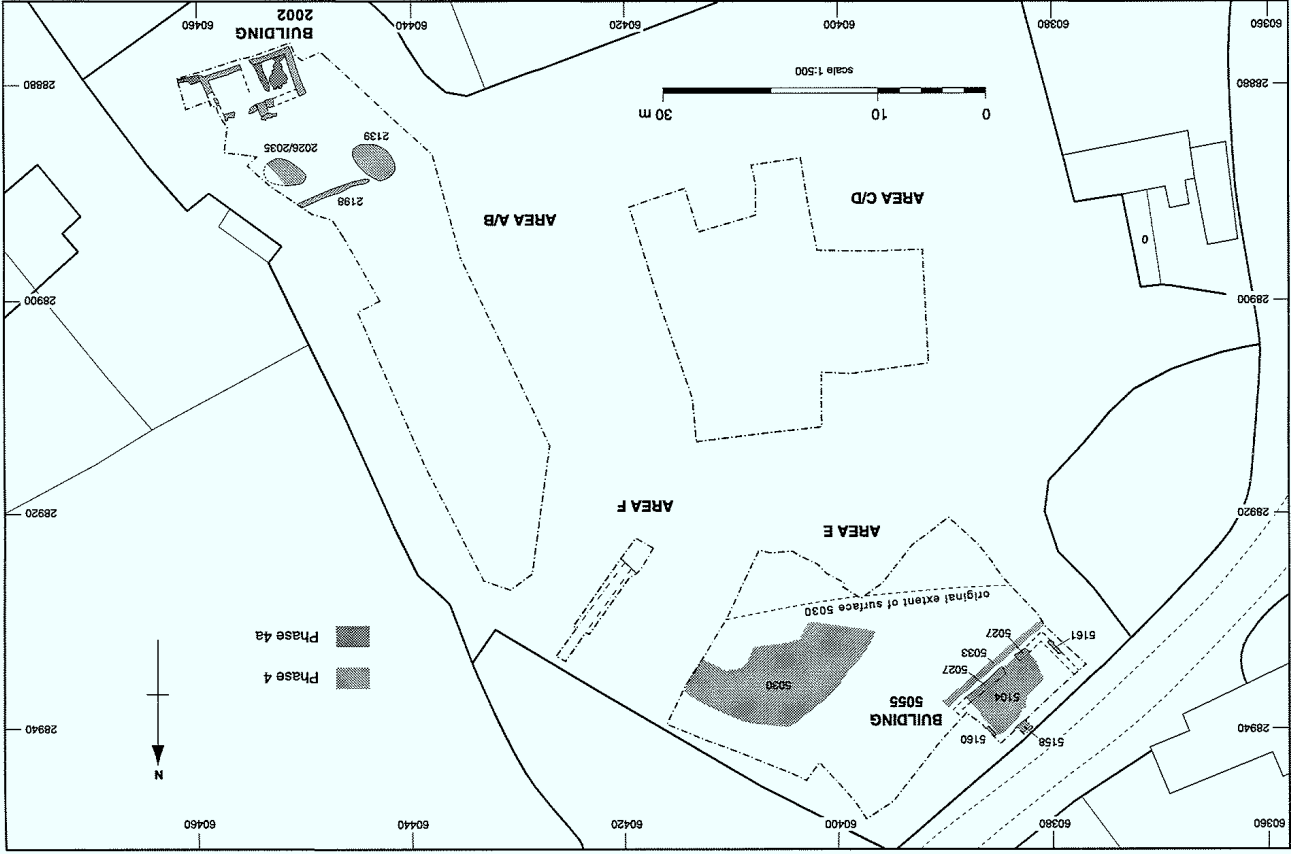
Two small gullies were identified [4008] and [4025]; both were cut into Phase 2 features, although only the fill (4009) of gully 4008 produced any finds, a quantity of mixed Romano-British, 12th century, and 13th century pottery.

Phase 4; Early-mid 13th century (Figs 7, 9)

Area A/B

Building 2002 (Fig. 9)

A rectangular building, oriented approximately NE-SW was constructed at the southern end of the trench.



It was situated on a low platform, which comprised a series of dumped clay make-up layers (2154, 2158, 2153, 2151, 2199). Only layer 2151 produced any datable artefacts, a small group of pottery with a *terminus post quem* of the 12th century. Despite this, it seems more likely to belong to this phase, as other constructional features produced pottery of the early-mid 13th century. The building consisted of the remains of several walls made of unmortared, roughly hewn limestone slabs with an average size of 0.35 m x 0.25 m. None of the walls had obvious construction cuts, but appear to have been laid directly onto the clay platform; the internal floors subsequently built up on a series of make-up layers.

The southern external wall (2011) was orientated roughly W-E. It survived to five courses (0.5 m) high, and was 0.70 m wide and approximately 9.0 m long. A doorway was located roughly mid-way along the wall. It was just under 1.0 m wide, and was associated with a threshold comprising several upright limestone slabs. An iron key (SF 2197) was found in the demolition spread within the entranceway. The wall produced a small pottery assemblage with a *terminus post quem* of the 12th century.

The eastern external wall (2062) was orientated roughly north-south. It measured 0.7 m wide and was keyed into wall 2011, and which point it survived to a height of five courses (c. 0.30 m). It survived for a distance of 1.2 m to the north, from which point it had been completely robbed out except for a few internal facing stones. It did not produce any datable artefacts.

The north wall had been largely robbed out, but two short lengths (2146 and 2147) survived, and there was also evidence of a doorway and threshold (2148) located directly opposite that in the south wall. This consisted of a platform, measuring 1.1 m N-S by 0.9 m W-E, of laid limestone slabs up to 0.40 m x 0.20 m x 0.10 m. A scatter of pitched limestones (2149) was noted immediately to the north of the northern doorway, and probably represents the remains of a cobbled surface. The stones were situated within a dark brownish grey clay silt matrix that produced a very small group of 12th century pottery. The construction cut [2181] for the cobbles extended approximately 3.5 m NW-SE and was 0.16 m deep with a varying width (0.55 – 0.86 m). The full extent of this feature was unclear due to subsequent robbing.

The western external wall (2008) was keyed into wall 2011 and measured 4.80 m long, but was robbed at the northern end where it would have met the north wall. It survived to a maximum of four courses (c. 0.3 m) and was 0.70 m wide. It did not produce any datable artefacts.

Following the construction of the above walls, a primary floor make-up layer (2021) was deposited inside the building. It comprised compact, brownish orange silty sand and coarse grit, and had a maximum depth of 0.10 m. It was observed throughout the interior of the structure, and produced a fairly large group of early-mid 13th century pottery.

Features 2113 and 2162, both small burnt patches of clay, were noted in the central area of the building, sealed beneath internal wall 2009 (below). They probably represent the remains of early hearths.

Quarries
Two pits which may have served as quarries for the make-up of the platform for Building 2002 were identified approximately 7 m north of Building 2002. Pit 2139 was located on the western side of the trench. The pit had a flat base, with a steep northern side and a more gently sloped southern side, and measured 2.92 m wide and 0.66 m deep.

Pit 2026 was revealed close to the eastern bulk of the area, east of 2139. It was approximately 2.7 m wide and 0.5 m deep. Both features produced early 13th century pottery from the lower fills. The upper fill (2143) of 2139 produced a concentration of animal bone, suggesting that the pit was used as a domestic rubbish tip, presumably by the occupants of Building 2002. The backfilled feature was finally capped by a layer of dumped limestone (2007).

Evidence was also found of the levelling and consolidation of the area to the north of the pits in the form of a roughly linear dump of limestone rubble (2198) in the top fill of the Phase 2 ditch 2031.

Area E

Building 5055 in the north-west corner of the trench was probably constructed at this time, although there were no datable finds from anywhere within the walls or the construction deposits, except for a small group of probably redeposited 12th century material within one of the make-up layers. However, there were two phases of cobbled stone flooring within the structure, with the make-up layers for the second phase producing a small group of later 13th century pottery. The associated yard surfaces, which were also datable to the early 13th century, respected the structure.

The building was rectangular, oriented NE-SW, with external measurements of approximately 11 m x 6 m and an entranceway near the west end of the south wall. The structure was located on a slightly raised clay platform (5106), c. 0.3 m thick. The internal floors and make-up layers had been partly removed by modern stone-robbing, and also damaged by root-action. Where the wall fabric survived, a shallow construction trench was evident.

The east wall (5160) had been largely robbed-out, although a few larger blocks remained *in situ* within a linear cut [5174]. The cut was flat-based with steep, straight sides and was 0.50 m wide by 0.30 m deep, with a single fill.

The south-eastern wall (5027) was approximately 6.5 m long, and located within a construction cut [5176]. The cut had straight sloping sides, was 1.20 m wide and 0.35 m deep. The wall, which was c. 0.75 m wide, was constructed of entirely unworked stones, averaging 0.25 m in length, with the largest stones used on the outer face. No bonding material was evident and the coursing pattern was irregular.

The north-west and north-east walls (5158 and 5161) were of similar dimensions and construction to the south and west walls, although they were only revealed by small extensions to the north and east of the trench.

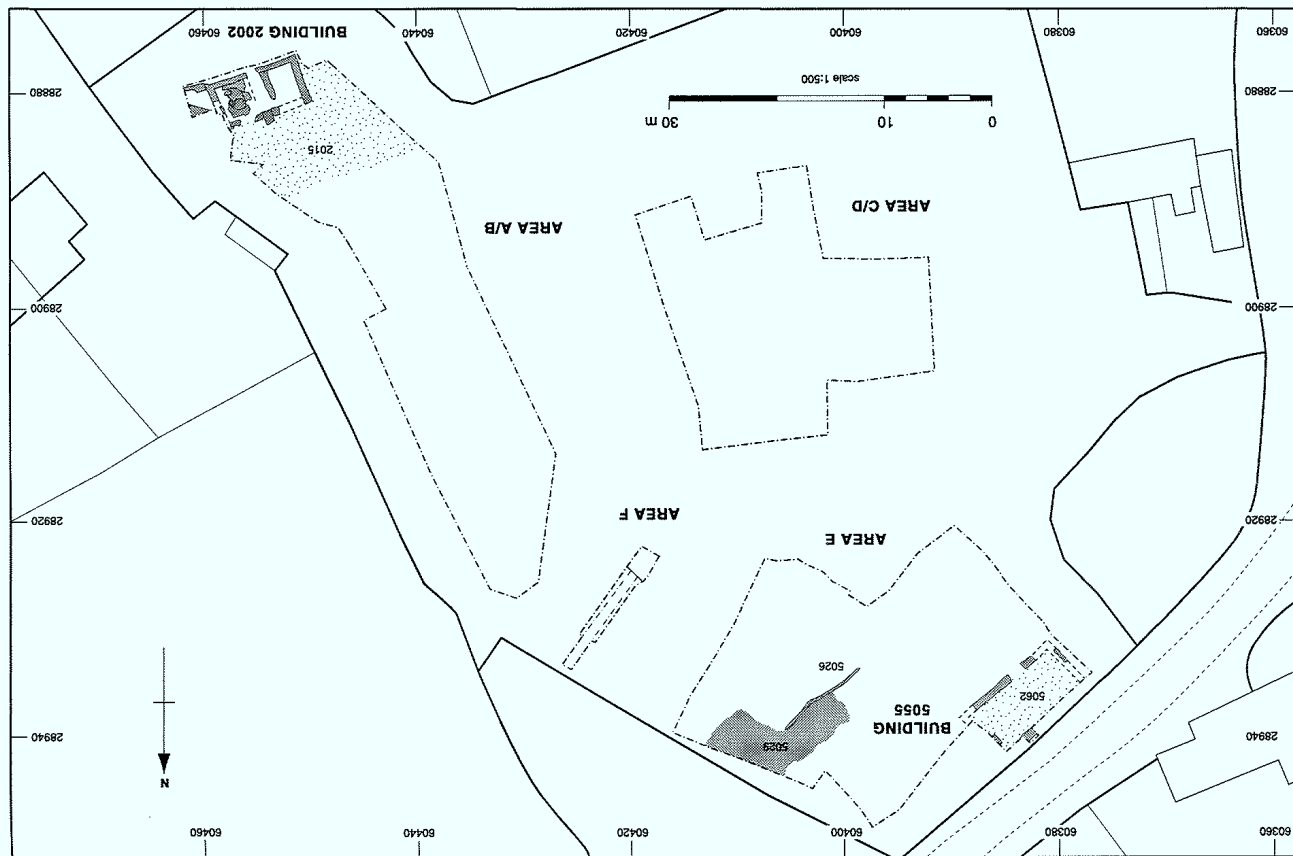


Figure 8 Phase 5/5a - later 13th - early/mid 14th century

hearth debris was found. It may originally have been circular, as it was cut by a subsequent hearth (2109) immediately to the east.

Hearth 2109 was situated to the east, and comprised a series of 3 burnt limestone slabs (c. 0.22 m x 0.2 m), 0.5 m long and 0.32 m wide. They were partly overlain by a floor level, a light, mixed greyish blue to yellowish orange clay silt (2020) that extended into the south-eastern corner of structure. It produced two fairly large sherds with a *terminus post quem* of the early-mid 13th century, and two horseshoe nails and a blade (SF2273) from a scale-tang knife of broadly the same date. Surrounding, and slightly overlapping this and hearth 2109 on its western half was a burnt clay floor deposit (2108). This was dark reddish-orange with patches of black, containing 10% charcoal flecks.

Hearth 2108 and associated floor make-up layers 2017 were situated within a construction pit [2127]. This pit was only visible in a section through the north-west quadrant of the hearth and floor layers. The pit measured 1.5 m east-west x 2.0 m north-south. It had a concave base and gradually sloping sides. Within the western extent of pit 2127 a layer of blackish brown clay silt (2133) was noted. It contained occasional patches of charcoal, and had a maximum depth of 0.14 m. Overlying this, and filling the rest of the pit, was a layer of very mixed brownish yellow silt with blue clay mottling (2086). It produced a small group of early-mid 13th century pottery. Hearth 2108 itself was surrounded by a dark greyish brown clay silt (2019) containing 15% charcoal flecks, representing a scattering of hearth debris.

Hearth 2108 was cut by a small oval pit (2111). It was orientated east-west and had a slightly concave base with gradually sloping sides. It measured 0.78 m long, 0.43 m wide and had a maximum depth of 0.15 m. It contained four fills, the latest of which (2116) produced two small sherds of presumably residual 12th century pottery.

A greyish brown clay silt deposit (2022=2046) extended along the inside of wall 2011. It extended for 1.5 m along the wall and 0.5 m into the room, increasing to 0.8 m at the western end. It separated the floor make-up layer (2017) from wall 2011. It was quite different in composition from the flooring in the main area of the room, and may have been situated under a minor internal structure where substantial floor layers would not be necessary. It produced five very small sherds of later 13th century pottery.

In the eastern extension of the structure, a dark yellowish brown clay silt (2066) partially overlaid layer 2084 and continued beyond the excavation limits. Neither layer produced any datable artefacts.

Area C/D

No medieval structures were identified in this area. The Romano-British features and natural subsoil were overlaid by layer 3025, a friable mid grey brown clay silt with occasional flecks of manganese. It was c. 0.08 m thick. It was overlain in the north-west corner of the area by layer 3020, a compact mid grey brown clayey silt containing inclusions of sub-angular/rounded pebbles, grit and gravel. It covered an area of 20 m x

5 m on a north-east - south-west alignment, and was up to 0.15 m deep. Patches of similar material (3017 and 3019) were noted in other areas of the trench. They all produced reasonably large assemblages of later 13th century pottery, and appeared to represent the base of an eroded late medieval ploughsoil.

Area E

The first cobbled limestone floor (5104) in Building 5055 was overlain by a second phase. The older floor was initially covered with a thin levelling layer (5095), an orange brown sandy loam, then overlaid with limestone cobbles (5062) of a similar size and shape to those in the first floor. Layer 5095 produced a small group of later 13th century pottery.

A deposit of pitched limestone (5026) was revealed along the south edge of the hard-stand (5033). It produced an assemblage of later 13th century pottery.

Phase 5a: Later 13th - 14th century (Fig. 8, 9)

Area A/B

Building 2002 (Fig. 9) A further series of floors and hearths were constructed along with a series of post-settings which may have supported an internal structure. The patchy nature of the floor deposits suggest that they were the result of an ongoing programme of repair rather than a single event.

A layer of brownish orange silty sand (2128) 0.5 m x 0.4 m ran along the northern edge of floor layer 2017, and partially overlaid hearth 2086. Layer 2128 was partially covered by a burnt and hard-baked clay deposit (2085), which also extended around the southern half of the hearth 2108. It varied in width between 0.2 m - 0.5 m and had a maximum depth of 0.4 m. It did not produce any datable artefacts.

To the south-west of the floor layer 2017, there was a small area of similar material (contexts 2121, 2091, 2090) situated above the primary floor layer 2021. Layer 2091, a brownish yellow silty clay, was very similar in colour and composition to make-up layer 2020. It was covered by a black/red burnt clay deposit (2090) which was very similar to burnt clay surface 2085. Layer 2121 produced two sherds of later 13th century pottery.

In the eastern extension, layers 2084 and 2066 were overlain by an area (0.86 m x 0.9 m) of greyish red clay silt (2065) containing patches of burnt clay and ash. Immediately to the north of this deposit was a setting (2067) of unevenly laid, small limestone fragments. These stones surrounded a large limestone hearth-slab. Both 2065 and 2067 produced small groups of later 13th century pottery. A small irregular hearth pit [2101] (not illustrated) was identified against the east side of wall 2062. Its fill (2068) produced fragments of a 13th century jug (see Fig. 10 no.7).

Posthole Structure (2106) (Fig. 9)

The final phase of activity within the building was the construction of an upper storey, represented by twelve regularly spaced shallow postholes (group number

2106; post-holes 2071, 2094, 2095, 2096, 2097, 2098, 2099, 2105, 2100, 2103, 2122, 2124) which cut the internal floors and make-up layers within the building. All except 2071 and 2098, which were situated to north of the main row, formed a double row east-west, and were spaced 1.5-1.7 m apart west-east and 1 m apart north-south. Additionally, posthole 2098 was located 1.6 m to the north of 2094, and 2071 was 0.84 m north-east of 2095. The dimensions of the postholes were reasonably consistent, averaging 0.35 m in diameter x 0.15 m deep. All apart from 2071 contained limestone post-packing.

Phase 6: Later medieval - modern (Later 14th - 20th century)

Area A/B

The final phase of activity was the abandonment and robbing of Building 2002, and the subsequent build-up of modern soils.

The building footprint was sealed by a layer of greyish-brown silt loam which varied in depth from 0.07-0.13 m. It was recorded as 2016 over the eastern room, 2023 over the western room, and 2077 over the north-eastern extension. All three contexts produced large pottery assemblages of late 13th-14th century date, and layer 2023 produced a thimble which is dated to the 14th century at the earliest (SF 2270) and a sheet-metal bell of 15th - 16th century type (SF 2263). Layer 2077 was cut by a small hearth-pit (2101) suggesting some level of post-abandonment activity. Several robber pits were noted at the north and eastern sides of the structure, and are thought to be the result of the robbing of walls 2147, 2148 and 2062.

The whole building footprint and the loamy layer 2016=2023=2077 was sealed by a rubble deposit (2013=2014=2037=2061=2069). It comprised 50% small-medium limestone. It produced a large assemblage of pottery, the majority of which was later 13th - 14th century in date, but a few sherds of mid-late 15th century material were also present. The rubble deposit also produced a number of metal finds which indicate a date of the later 14th to 15th centuries for the collapse or demolition of the structure (see Cropper, below).

Finally this rubble spread was sealed by the modern turf/topsoil.

Area C/D

The remnant medieval ploughsoil was sealed by the topsoil (4000), which had an average thickness of 0.25 m. It produced a range of finds from the Roman to modern periods.

Area E

Building 5055 was sealed by 5003, a layer of limestone rubble. It was around 0.12 m thick and spread beyond the building footprint, producing a large assemblage of pottery which was mainly of later 13th or 14th century date. All the walls and surfaces within the building were disturbed by modern stone-robbing, the dating

of which was supported by a small quantity of Victorian pottery.

The whole area was overlain by a friable mid brown silty loam subsoil (5001) between 0.18 m and 0.28 m deep, and a topsoil layer (5000) with an average depth of 0.25 m. It produced a wide range of post-medieval and modern artefacts.

ARTEFACTS

Iron Age and Romano-British pottery (Tables 1, 2) by Kaye Brown

Introduction

The assemblage comprised 544 sherds weighing 3044 g, with nine vessels represented by rim count (EVE - Estimated Vessel Equivalent = 1.25). The material was in relatively poor condition, with an average sherd weight of less than 6 g. The assemblage appears to range from the late Iron Age/early Roman period to the early 3rd century, although the majority of the material can be dated to the late 1st century BC to 2nd century AD.

Fabric and form

Fabrics were recorded following the OAU guidelines for recording later prehistoric and Roman pottery from the Upper Thames Valley. Late Iron Age/early Roman (LIR) and Roman fabrics are grouped by alpha-numerical codes in a hierarchical system which allows for three levels of precision in identification. In this report most fabrics are only defined at the intermediate level of precision - specific individual coarse ware fabrics are not usually identified. LIR fabrics are assigned E ware codes, identifying material which is recognisable as belonging to a distinct ceramic tradition showing 'Belgic' affinities, defined by vessel typology and decoration as well as inclusion types. The material is distinct both from the preceding Iron Age traditions and from later, 'Romanised' oxidised (O) and reduced (R) coarse ware groups which make up the majority of the material present. The wares within this assemblage are listed below and, where possible, OAU codes are followed by the equivalent codes in the national Roman fabric reference collection (Tomber and Dore 1998):

Late Iron Age/early Roman:

E80 General code for grog-tempered fabrics
E86 Oxidised fabric with abundant grog temper

Roman:

Samian:
S20 (LGF SA) South Gaulish

Fine wares:

F52 (LNV CC) Nene Valley colour coated ware

Table 1: Late Iron Age and Roman pottery by number and weight (in g) of sherds and EVE per fabric type

Fabric	No. Sh	% Sh	Wt (g)	%Wt	EVE	%EVE
S20	1	0.18	2	0.07		
F52	2	0.37	6	0.20		
M50	1	0.18	7	0.23		
W10	1	0.18	29	0.95		
W20	53	9.74	274	9.00		
'Fine and specialist' sub-total	58	10.65	318	10.45		
E80	41	7.54	482	15.83		
E86	36	6.62	426	13.99	0.36	
E sub-total	77	14.15	908	29.82	0.36	29.75
O10	5	0.92	6	0.20		
O20	3	0.55	8	0.26		
O sub-total	8	1.47	14	0.46		
R30	60	11.03	366	12.02	0.25	
R60	234	43.01	514	16.89	0	
R sub-total	294	54.04	880	28.91	0.25	20.65
B30	107	19.67	924	30.35	0.6	
B sub-total	107	19.67	924	30.35	0.6	49.59
TOTAL	544	100.00	3044	100.00	1.25	100.00

Mortaria
M50 Oxidised mortaria

White wares:
W10 General code for fine fabrics
W20 General code for sandy fabrics

Oxidised 'coarse' wares:
O10 General code for fine fabrics
O20 General code for sandy fabrics

Reduced 'coarse' wares:
R30 General code for medium/fine sandy fabrics
R60 Fabrics with organic inclusions

Black burnished ware
B30 Black burnished type/imitation fabrics (wheel-thrown)

The assemblage is dominated by Roman coarse ware fabrics, namely black-burnished ware and Romanised oxidised and reduced coarse wares, which in total comprise over 75% of the assemblage by sherd count (59.7% by weight). Grog-tempered E wares form 14.5% of the assemblage by sherd count. The fine and specialist wares - samian, colour-coated wares, mortaria and white wares - comprised just over 10% by sherd count (likewise by weight), though this figure is skewed somewhat by the presence of a large number of W20 sherds from context 2078 (see Table 1). The fine wares represented comprise single sherds of South Gaulish samian and fine white ware, and two sherds of Nene Valley colour-coated ware. There were no amphorae,

and mortaria were represented by a single sherd in an oxidised fabric.
The oxidised and reduced coarse wares are probably local in origin, and the R30, O10 and O20 groups are most likely to be products of the Oxford industry. The organic tempered coarse ware fabric, R60, however, does not appear to be an Oxford product as such fabrics are only occasionally encountered in this industry. The sherds of black-burnished ware are not the characteristic Dorset products, but rather a more local imitation, although it is unclear where these imitations were produced, despite being frequently encountered within the region. Grog-tempered wares are characteristic of the late Iron Age-early Roman period and again, are likely to be local products.

Few vessels were recovered, and all those represented by rim sherds were jars. Nine vessels were recorded by basic rim count, totalling 1.25 EVE. Of these, six could only be assigned to a broad jar class (C), with the others being two necked jars and a single black burnished type everted rim jar. Sooting was observed on the exterior of E86 sherds in context 4013 (the fill of ditch 4012), although no other direct evidence of vessel use was present.

Chronology

The dating of this assemblage is primarily based on fabrics, given the paucity of featured sherds. Two fabrics are characteristic of the late Iron Age/early Roman period, the grog-tempered fabrics E80 and E86 (14.5% of the assemblage by sherd count, 16.7% by weight). At the nearby sites of Oxford Road (Booth 1996) and

(Booth 1993) was 23 g (the weight of the 235 sherds from the evaluation of that site was not recorded), which even allowing for the presence of large jar sherds of pink grogged ware which were not present at Fringford Paddock (below), suggests quite a difference in the character of the two sites.

In other respects the two assemblages were broadly similar, both being dominated by grog-tempered, oxidised and reduced coarse wares, but the Crosslands material also included Dorset black-burnished ware, small amounts of white wares, Nene Valley and Oxford colour-coated wares, samian and both early and late Roman shell-tempered fabrics. Thus, despite the proximity of the Fringford Paddock and Crosslands sites, there are differences between the two assemblages. Three different pink grogged ware jars were present at Crosslands, yet, as noted above, no pink grogged ware was present within the Paddock assemblage. This ware, for which a production centre has recently been identified at Stowe Park, Buckinghamshire (Booth *pers comm*), was in production at least from the early 2nd century, but was more common in the later Roman period. In addition, shell-tempered wares were not represented at the Paddock, but formed 6% of the Crosslands assemblage. The Crosslands assemblage does have some similarities to that recovered from Fringford Lodge, some 3 km SSW of the village. This site also produced shell-tempered and pink grogged wares, but no 1st century material was noted, and at Crosslands only one group was assigned a 1st century date. Some later material was present at Fringford Paddock, although the majority of the pottery here appears to be earlier than that from these neighbouring sites. However, it is uncertain if the earliest material (fabrics E80 and E86) was sufficiently plentiful to indicate a pre-conquest phase of settlement here. The overall balance of the assemblage suggests that activity on the site may not have commenced until the middle of the 1st century AD, as these wares survived in use up to the beginning of the Flavian period and at the nearby A421 sites, fabric E86 seems to have been largely if not entirely post-conquest in date.

The Paddock and Crosslands assemblages, despite having differences, are consistent in suggesting a generally fairly low status settlement throughout the Roman period. While the different chronological ranges of the two sites imply some shift in the focus of activity, particularly in the late Roman period, there is no indication of any significant change in the status of the site at the same time.

Post-Roman Pottery (Fig 10, Tables 3-5) by Paul Birtwhorn

Introduction

The post-Roman pottery assemblage comprised 7,883 sherds with a total weight of 59,225 g. The minimum number of vessels (MNV), calculated by summation of rimsherd circumference, was 36.5. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds and minimum number of vessels per ware type per ceramic phase is shown in Tables 3-5.

Table 2: Late Iron Age and Roman Pottery: Vessel occurrence by EVE per fabric and vessel type

Type	B30	E86	R30	R60	Total
C		0.18	0.2	0.04	0.42
CE		0.18	0.05		0.23
CI	0.6				0.6
Total	0.6	0.36	0.25	0.04	1.25

Bicester Fields (Brown forthcoming), such 'Belgic' type fabrics dominated the assemblage (64.9% by count and 38.8% respectively). Within the pottery assemblage from the A421 (Evans forthcoming) only a relatively small amount of grog-tempered fabrics was recovered, but fabric E86 was nevertheless the most important fabric (12.2% by count) in the earliest Roman period (period 3, mid-late 1st century AD) falling to 3.5% by period 5 (mid-late 2nd century AD). Similar dates were assigned to this material at Oxford Road, where, based on ceramic criteria alone, Booth placed them in his phase 1 (c AD 20/30 - 60/70). The Romanised coarse ware groups R30, O10 and O20 can only be assigned a broad date of 1st-4th centuries AD, due to the absence of featured sherds. The heavily organic-tempered, reduced coarse ware R60 occurred at the A421 sites during the early Roman period, falling to 1.4% by the end of the 2nd century (Evans forthcoming).

Black-burnished ware sherds at Fringford were restricted to a single (non-Dorset) vessel, an everted rim jar, typologically late 2nd-early 3rd century AD. Dorset black-burnished ware was not observed at the A421 in contexts prior to the mid-late 2nd century AD. Its absence, alongside that of Central Gaulish samian, and characteristic Oxford products, was used to indicate a terminal date for the Oxford Road assemblage of before the mid-2nd century. Close dating is not possible for most of the Fringford groups, which can only be assigned to a broad 1st-3rd century date range. Conjoining sherds in two ditch fills, 4024 and 4032, can be confidently assigned to the mid 2nd-late 3rd centuries AD. The absence of late shell-tempered material, Oxford colour-coated ware (and other products dated after AD 240) and later samian ware would suggest that there was little Roman activity on the site beyond the mid-3rd century AD.

Discussion

All the pottery was recovered from ditch fills, with the exception of three sherds from layer 2006 and ten sherds from a medieval furrow, 4019. The location of the material in ditches and the low average sherd weight (c 6 g) might suggest that the pottery does not derive from *in situ* settlement activity. The average weight of the 183 Roman sherds from the nearby Crosslands site

Table 3. Post-Roman pottery occurrence, expressed as a percentage of the MNV per ceramic phase

Ware Type	LSAX	S/N	EMED	LMED	LMT
Cotswolds-type	100%	52.5	4.8	7.7	9.8
East Wiltshire		3.9	7.2	4.7	4.4
Sandy Coarsewares		41.2	59.7	42.6	30.4
Shelly Coarsewares		2.3	5.6	2.7	0
Brill/Boarstall			22.7	23.4	35.7
Potterspuary				18.9	19.6
Total MNV	0.48	2.57	100.00	100.00	99.9

Fabric

The fabrics are all types which are well known in the region. Because of Fringford's location near the Northamptonshire/Oxfordshire border, most of the wares are in the type-series of one or both counties. Consequently, in the data tables and the descriptions below, where appropriate, the codes from both type series are given. The Oxfordshire codes (Mellor 1994) are invariably prefixed 'OX', while those of the Northamptonshire type-series (Blinkhorn 1994) are a three-digit number prefixed by 'F'.

The main fabric types were as follows:

Major Wares

West Oxfordshire ware (OXAC; F207). 9th - 15th century. 628 sherds, 5726g, MNV = 4.15.
 East Wiltshire Ware (OXBF). 11th to 13th century. 467 sherds, 5083g, MNV = 1.53.
 Sandy Coarsewares (OXAM; OX234; F301; F360). 12th - 15th century. 3220 sherds, 22386g, MNV = 14.19.
 Shelly Coarsewares (F330). 12th - 15th century. 202 sherds, 1574g, MNV = 0.91.
 Brill/Boarstall (OXAM; F352). 13th to the 17th century. 1963 sherds, 13723g, MNV = 10.30.
 Potterspuary ware (OX68; F329). mid/late 13th to the 17th century. 1171 sherds, 9153g, MNV = 5.42.

Minor Wares

St Neots ware (OXR; F100). 11th - 13th. Two sherds, 9g.
 Stamford ware (F205). Late 9th - late 12th centuries. Four sherds, 28g.
 Developed Stamford ware (F331) Early 13th century. One sherd, 1g.
 Grimston ware (F328). 14th century. Three sherds, 40g.
 Minety-type Ware (OXBB). 13th - 16th centuries. Two sherds, 4g.
 Late Medieval Oxidized ware (F401). Mid-15th century+. 28 sherds, 275g.
 Cistercian wares (F404). 15th - 16th century. Two sherds, 13g.
 German Stonewares (F405). 15th century +. One sherd, 15g.

Chronology

Each ceramic group was given a seriated phase date based on fabric types present. These were as follows:

LSAX: Late Saxon. c 11th century.

The main pottery type in this phase, OXAC, had a currency of AD 875-15th century (above). However, as also noted, the small quantities of St Neots ware at the site are of a type which did not come into use until around c AD 1000. The earlier forms of St Neots ware, which were first made in the 9th century are not present at the site, despite Fringford being located in a region where the material is plentiful on late Saxon sites, such as Northampton (Denham 1985) or Oxford (Mellor 1994). St Neot's ware was in decline in Oxford by c AD 1040 (ibid., 57), and as the relatively large quantities of OXAC and OXAQ at Fringford suggest a closer affinity with the Oxfordshire ceramic tradition than that of Northamptonshire, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the late Saxon phase at Fringford began in the earlier part of the 11th century.

S/N: Saxo-Norman. c 11th-12th century.

This phase saw the introduction of early medieval sand-tempered wares, such as Banbury ware and Oxford ware (Mellor 1994). Both wares appears to have been first used in the later part of the 11th century (ibid. 71 and 84).

EMED: Early Medieval. E13th - M/L13th century.

The EMED phase is defined by the introduction of glazed Brill/Boarstall ware, which is known to pre-date AD 1231 in Oxford (ibid. 117).

LMED: Late Medieval. M/L13th - M15th century.

This phase saw the introduction of Potterspuary ware. Such pottery occurs in small quantities in mid-late 13th century contexts at Northampton and Brackley, but does not become common until the 14th century. (ibid. 143).

LMT: Late Medieval Transitional. M15th - 16th century. The latest medieval phase sees the introduction of pottery such as Late Medieval Oxidized and

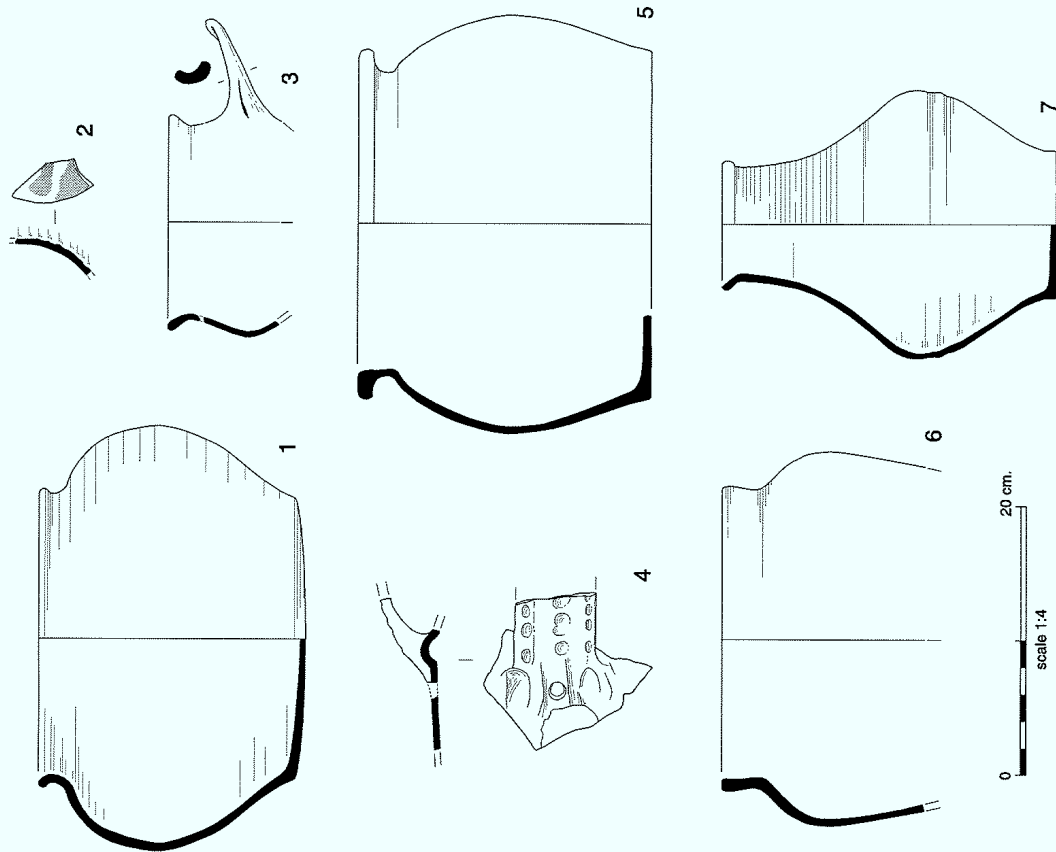


Figure 10 Post-Roman pottery

Table 4: Post Roman pottery; vessel use, expressed as a percentage of the total MNV per site phase

Phase	Jars	Bowls	Jugs	Total MNV
LSAX	100%	0	0	0.48
S/N	94.1%	5.9%	0	2.57
EMED	73.3%	8.0%	18.7%	3.75
LMED	69.9%	13.1%	17.0%	23.64
LMT	70.5%	13.4%	16.1%	1.12
Total MNV	4.078	0.404	0.518	31.56

Cistercian wares, although the small quantities present (above) suggest that the site was largely abandoned by this time.

The chronology of the ceramic assemblage suggests that the post-Roman activity at Fringford Paddock lasted from the 11th century until the 14th century.

The earliest pottery indicates that there was domestic occupation in the very near vicinity. The Saxo-Norman enclosure gullies at the eastern side of Area E produced large sherds of pottery, many of which were sooted, suggesting that there were domestic buildings very close by, most probably beneath the existing houses and gardens beyond the edge of the excavation.

Very few assemblages of early 13th century date were noted, other than in the occupation horizon around Building 2002, and these are likely to be later 13th or 14th century groups which lacked Pottersbury ware (see below). The others comprise the make-up of the platform beneath the building, the stone floor in the west room of the same structure, and the backfill of ditch 2119, which was sealed by the make-up layer for the building. This indicates that the building was constructed during the early-mid 13th century, before the advent of Pottersbury ware.

The most substantial medieval assemblage came from Building 2002 and its surrounding occupation horizon. The latter produced an assemblage that appears mainly later 13th century in date, although a few vessels were noted which are likely to be 14th century. These comprised a few sherds from internally-glazed Brill/Boarstall bowls, a fragment of a bottle in the same fabric, and sherds from a Pottersbury skillet (Fig. 10.2&3). Brill/Boarstall bottles first appear during the late 13th - early 14th century, and numerous examples of that date are known from Oxfordshire (eg. Mellor 1994, 178 and fig. 55). Internally glazed bowls also appear to be 14th century or later (ibid. 176-7 and fig. 53).

Vessel Use

The data in Table 4 are useful on two accounts. They demonstrate that vessel use during the late Saxon and earlier medieval periods is absolutely typical of contemporary settlements in the region, and can be paralleled with sites in the area such as Banbury Old

Grimsbury (Blinkhorn in prep). The major difference is in the later medieval period. At Old Grimsbury, jars had fallen to 31.6% of the assemblage by the 15th century, whereas at Fringford, 70.5% of the later medieval transitional assemblage is jars. This is most unusual for a 'living' site, and suggests that most of the pottery in that phase is residual, as a much wider range of vessel forms was in use throughout southern England at that time, and even allowing for the largely industrial nature of the site, such pottery would certainly have occurred if the buildings were still in use. The amount of pottery deposited during each phase supports this. The ware chronologies (above) indicate that the site was probably abandoned during the 14th century, and Table 3 shows that little pottery was deposited during the 15th/16th centuries or later.

Vessel Fragmentation

The data in Table 5 confirm the general chronological picture for the site. The mean sherd weights of all the major unglazed wares decline throughout the later medieval period, as would be expected, as most had fallen from use by the 14th or 15th century, and thus most of the material is residual. The exception is OXAQ, which shows a considerable increase during the LMED phase, although this is almost certainly due to distortion caused by several vessels which were left in Building 2002 after its abandonment, and were discovered crushed in or beneath the rubble. During the LMT phase, when all the unglazed wares had fallen from use, the mean sherd weight shows an increase, with the exception of OXAC, although it is still larger than during the EMED phase. This is almost certainly due to redeposition during stone robbing. The Brill/Boarstall wares also show decline during the later medieval period (Phase 6), despite the ware being current, further suggesting that the site fell from use during this period, and that most of the material from this phase is redeposited.

The Assemblage in its Regional Context

The pottery occurrence at this site indicates that there were definite changes in the pottery supply during the 11th and 12th centuries. As noted, the earliest phases comprised wares which are typical of the Oxfordshire tradition, but by the 13th century, more local wares, such as Banbury ware and Brill/Boarstall, came to dominate the assemblage. This is almost certainly due to the growth of the market at nearby Brackley, which was granted its charter in 1217 and the establishment of the Banbury ware industry. It should be noted that despite its name, the production centre for these wares is still unknown. The Fringford assemblage has many similarities with those from sites in Brackley, such as that at Castle Lane (Blinkhorn in prep b). By the 12th century, they were dominated by sandy wares, particularly Banbury ware, with the shelly wares typical of the Northamptonshire tradition and the oolitic and flint-tempered wares generally found in Oxfordshire very much minor components of the assemblage.

Table 5: Post Roman pottery; mean sherd weight per major fabric type per phase

Phase	OXAC	Sandy	OXAQ	Brill	Pottersbury
LSAX	11.3g	-	8.5g	-	-
S/N	22.6g	9.5g	7.0g	-	-
EMED	11.7g	8.2g	11.4g	15.7g	-
LMED	6.0g	6.3g	10.0g	6.0g	7.8g
LMT	7.8g	7.2g	10.0g	8.4g	7.8g

The assemblage can also be paralleled with examples from Banbury. The pottery from the site at Old Grimsbury dates from no earlier than the 12th century, so it is not possible to compare the Saxo-Norman pottery, but the medieval material has exactly the same range of major ware types as Fringford. Sandy unglazed pottery, such as Banbury ware and OXAM, dominate the assemblage, then gradually fall off in popularity in favour of Pottersbury and Brill/Boarstall wares as the medieval period progresses. Oolitic and shelly wares are once again a minor component. The same general pattern was noted at other excavations in Banbury, such as those at 27 Cornhill and the Castle Street car park (Pasham 1973).

This therefore shows that the pottery from Fringford is very typical of the traditions of north-east Oxfordshire and south Northamptonshire. There are no imports, other than a few sherds of the ubiquitous German Stoneware in the early post-medieval period, giving a picture of a small village obtaining its pottery from local markets.

Illustrations

Fig. 10.1: F300, context 2003. Jar. Grey fabric with paler core.

Fig. 10.2: OXAM, context 2105. Fragment of bottle neck. Buff fabric, grey core. Dark greyish-brown outer surface, with thick glossy green glaze on the lower part.

Fig. 10.3: OX68, Skillet, context 2015. Orange fabric with grey core. Outer lower body and the underneath of the handle are sooted.

Fig. 10.4: F330, context 2015 Curfew handle. Orange fabric with dark grey core, sooted and scorched on inner surface.

Fig. 10.5: OXAM, context 5128. Full profile of jar. Pink-buff fabric with grey core. Lower body sooted.

Fig. 10.6: OXAC, context 5122. Jar. Grey fabric with reddish brown outer surface. Lower body sooted.

Fig. 10.7: OXAM, context 2068. Jug. Pink-orange fabric with apple-green glaze over most of body.

Metalwork by Cecily Cropper

The assemblage comprised 42 copper alloy objects, 403 iron objects (plus c. 300 nails from the Romano-British cremation - see below) and one lead object. One hundred and four of the objects (not including nails)

are identifiable. Of these, three were from Saxo-Norman contexts, one from an early medieval context, 41 from late medieval contexts and 20 are from late medieval transitional contexts. Forty objects are from contexts with no associated pottery. The identification, provenance and date of the objects from each of the categories are summarised in tables in archive.

Copper Alloy

Nineteen copper alloy objects were recovered from late medieval contexts. A badly corroded coin, two strap ends / points (SFs 2349, 2311), a hook / pin, a flat, circular 'mount with rivet and a domed mount (SF 2346) were all from occupation horizon 2015, as was a small round-headed rivet (SF 2209), a hook-like object and a second badly corroded coin came from context 2016, the loam layer sealing structure 2002. Context 2023, part of the same layer, produced a pair of chain links (SF 2279), a buckle pin (SF 2268) and fragments of a thumb (SF 2270) with indentations. Most thumbles from the 14th century onwards are made of copper alloy and nearly all have characteristic indentations (Biddle and Elmhurst 1990, 804). The remaining objects comprised a small hook / pin of copper wire, six miscellaneous strips and fragments of fittings.

Eight objects were found in association with late medieval or transitional pottery, including an incomplete decorated buckle plate (SF 2111) from context 5006, a post-occupation deposit in area E, an oval buckle with plates (SF 2034) and a possible buckle plate (SF 2261) from context 2014, the rubble demolition layer over Building 2002. The ?composite plates attached to the small buckle (SF 2034) appear undecorated and can be compared to an example from Billingsgate Lorry Park, London, which was dated to the mid to late 14th century (Egan and Pritchard 1991, 113, fig. 73, no. 519). The buckle itself was probably oval and is similar in style and size to early 14th - 15th century examples from London, such as those from Billingsgate Lorry Park and Swan Lane (Egan and Pritchard, 1991, 78-9, fig. 48, nos 322-4). No parallel is yet known for the decorated plate (SF 2111). The remaining objects included a fitting, two strips, one miscellaneous fragment and an unidentified object.

Eleven items came from contexts not associated with pottery. A penannular ring (SF 2366) came from context 2114, three post-medieval / modern coins, two buttons, and a decorated object fragment (SF 2079) all came from

context 5001, a topsoil deposit. The ring (SF 2366) may well be a binding ring (Goodall and Margeson 1993, 74, fig. 40, nos. 449-51). The decorated fragment (SF 2079) may come from a buckle or other accessory; although no parallels have been found. A pin (SF 2090) and a double buckle frame (SF 2062) from context 5002 (=5001) and a strap end (SF 2112) from context 5007 (=5001) were also recovered. Double buckle frames (SF 2062) are known from London from contexts dating from the 13th century but are more common in the late 14th and early 15th centuries (Egan and Pritchard 1991, 53). The pin (SF 2090) has a wound-wire head. Examples from London come from late 14th-century contexts (Egan and Pritchard 1991, 301, fig. 200), whilst in Winchester, it appears that such pins were in use from the 13th century onwards (Biddle and Barclay 1990, 560-71). An undecorated strap end (SF 2112) also came from context 5007 and a strap end plate (SF 2260) came from context 2022.

Four objects were unstratified: an oval shoe buckle (possibly pewter?) with a central bar, a possible buckle plate with single rivet hole, a miscellaneous strip and an early 19th-century coin.

Iron Objects

A total of 403 objects were recovered, of which 258 were post-Roman nails, tacks or fragments thereof.

Objects from contexts associated with Saxo-Norman pottery

These comprised four objects and three nails. These included a horseshoe (ctx. 5128), a staple (SF 2367) probably associated with a structure, a possible blade fragment (SF 2364) and a fiddle-key horseshoe nail (SF 2353). The horseshoe has a rounded nail hole that is associated with earlier types of shoe (Clark 1995, 85-6). This is supported by the fiddle key nail which is a type associated with Type 2 shoes predominantly dating from the mid 11th to the mid 12th centuries. This type however does carry on into the mid 14th century (Clark 1995, 86). Two other nails (SFs 2371 and 2374) are structural.

Objects from contexts associated with early medieval pottery

These comprised seven nails, one blade, three unidentified objects (SFs 2275, 2375, 2376) and a miscellaneous fragment (SF 2272). Five nails are horseshoe nails including fiddle key types (SFs 2271, 2278). A nail with expanded head and ears (SF 2274) found with Type 3 shoes dating from the 13th-15th centuries (Clark 1995, fig. 66, 87) and a nail with a square head (SF 2277) associated with Type 4 shoes dating from the mid-13th century onwards (Clark 1995, 89, fig. 70), are also present. Both occurred in context 2020, a floor layer within structure 2002. The three other nails (SFs 2276, 2323, 2377) are of uncertain function. The blade (SF 2273), also from context 2020, is from a scale-tang knife, a type introduced in the 13th or 14th century and continuing into the 15th and 16th centuries (Goodall

1993a, 128-9, fig. 94).
Objects from contexts associated with late medieval pottery

These included 94 nails, four horseshoes from context 2015, one (SF 2356) from context 5029, four blades (SFs 2012, 2224, 2330, and from sample 5118), 1 key (SF 2197), 4 buckles (SFs 2234, 2269, 2360, 2370), as well as other pieces of structural or functional ironwork.

The physical characteristics of one of the horseshoes (SF 2333) indicate an example of Clark's (1995, 86) Type 2A, which date predominantly from the mid 11th to the mid 12th centuries but continued up to the mid 14th century. Three blades came from context 2015 and one from the initial cleaning within Building 2002. Both diagnostic blades (SF 2012 and from sample 118) are whittle-tang knives common throughout the medieval period (Goodall 1993a, 124-8, figs. 92-3). The buckles are all D-shaped, although they vary in size and form. These are common throughout the medieval period from London sites, from the mid 12th to the mid 15th centuries (Egan and Pritchard 1991, 89-94). Their precise functions are uncertain. The remaining identified objects include a pinned hinge (SF 2358), possibly from a door or a large piece of furniture, a decorative bar (SF 2296), and a large, functional sheet-metal bell (SF 2263) which compares to an example from Winchester dating from the 15th to 16th centuries (Luif 1990, 728-9, fig. 209, no. 2278). An object (SF 2359) from context 5029 may be a padlock key (see Rogers 1993, 1421, fig. 696, nos. 5240, 5242).

Other objects included three staples, four strips and two fittings from doors or windows. Thirteen objects were unidentifiable and a further six were miscellaneous fragments. The nails comprised 31 obvious horseshoe nails of types described above and 39 nails or fragments of nails not obviously associated with farriery.

Objects from contexts associated with late medieval/transitional pottery

Sixty-two objects came from late medieval/transitional contexts, including 44 nails. A possible Jew's Harp (SF 2011) came from topsoil context 2001. These are relatively common finds from medieval and post-medieval contexts (Lawson 1990, 724).

Three blades (SFs 2000, 2019, 2040) were recovered, two of which are scale-tang knives dating from the 13th or 14th century and continuing into the 15th and 16th centuries (Goodall 1993a, 128-9, fig. 94). One buckle (SF 2003) from context 2001 is a square example with a roller plate and can be compared with an example from Swan Lane, London dating from the late 13th to mid 14th centuries.

A gouge (SF 2303) and a small wedge (SF 2305) associated with wood-working both came from context 2014, the demolition rubble over Building 2002. A possible heckletooth fragment (SF 2250)

from the same context indicates the possibility of spinning. These are known from pre-Conquest contexts for example from Theford, Norfolk (Goodall 1984, 79, fig. 119, nos. 20-1). However, the majority date from medieval contexts, such as 11th- to 13th-century deposits in Winchester (Goodall 1990, 214-6, fig. 44) and from 11th- to 17th-century deposits in Norwich (Goodall 1993b, 182, fig. 133, nos. 1423-9).

Also present were four horseshoe fragments (SFs 2195, 2251, 2254, 2307) all from context 2014. Six objects are unidentifiable. The remainder were nails comprising both horseshoe nails of the types discussed above and others or fragments.

A double-pronged pitchfork (SF 2362) came from context 5070, and is similar to examples from Moulsham Street Chelmsford, Essex (Goodall 1985, 51-2, Fig. 31, no. 11) and from the forge at Sandal Castle, West Yorkshire (Goodall 1983, 242, Fig. 5, nos. 57-9), though the latter is 17th century in date.

Objects from contexts unassociated with pottery or unstratified

One hundred and forty-six objects (including 106 nails) were unstratified or came from contexts unassociated with pottery. The majority of were found in contexts 5001 and especially 5007 the initial cleaning layer within Building 5055. Three blades (SFs 2123, 2124 and 2177) all from context 5007, included one whittle-tang and one scale-tang. Two buckles were recovered. A rectangular example (SF 2171) with a revolving bar came from context 5007. These buckles are traditionally associated with horse harness (Egan 1995, 57, figs. 42, 45, nos. 29-32, 40, 47) and are known from contexts dating from the 11th to 14th centuries. The second buckle (SF 2078) from context 5001, is an oval, decorated and angled shoe buckle. The buckle can be dated from the mid 17th to the 19th centuries (Whitehead 1996, 94-103).

Other objects include a small ring or chain link (SF 2132), a hook (SF 2098), a fragment from a vessel (ctx. 5001), and a curved and looped object possibly associated with horse harness. A leatherworking awl (SF 2357) occurred in context 5032 (=5033) (see Biddle and Keene 1990, 248-9, fig. 53b, no. 332).

There were six strips, one of which is perforated, nine unidentified objects and six miscellaneous fragments. A total of 106 nails were present in undated/unstratified contexts, of which at least were twelve horseshoe nails, and the rest structural nails or fragments. Four nails came from a 19th-century deposit (ctx. 5003), and included a horseshoe nail.

Lead Objects

A perforated lead strip (SF 2188) occurred in context 2014.

Bone Objects

A bone point (SF 2347) came from context 2015. The bone is unidentified.

Discussion

The size and the identifiable contents of the iron assemblage indicate the potential for a localised, light-weight iron-working industry. The number of horseshoe nails, and also horseshoes, may point towards the site being a farriery for much of the associated structure's life. The remaining objects (such as the buckles) may represent products of an area of more diverse activity than would be associated with a general smithy. However, there were no obvious iron-working tools, and no evidence of hammer-scale was recovered.

There was some evidence for woodworking, represented by the gouge (SF 2303, ctx. 2014) and various wedges (eg. SF 2305, ctx. 2014) for splitting wood, and the numerous nails indicate the presence of wooden structures. An awl (SF 2357, ctx. 5032) indicates industries such as leather-working and the heckletooth (SF 2250, ctx. 2014) indicates the processing of fibres prior to spinning. The bell (SF 2263, ctx. 2023) is a type associated with animals. Other tools include the various knife blades that may have been used for domestic purposes.

Objects associated with structures include the staples, nails, hooks, and fittings and other furniture is indicated by the padlock key (SF 2197), the possible lock fragments and the keys (SF 2022, SF 2197, ctx. 2016).

Personal items present are mainly copper alloy, and predominantly buckles, although larger buckles are represented in iron. The thimble (SF 2023, ctx. 2270) and pin (SF 2090, ctx. 5002) indicate sewing.

Glass by Cecily Cropper

The assemblage comprised 22 fragments, of which 7 were from bottles, 11 were fragments of window glass, 2 were from undiagnostic vessels and 1 fragment was completely unidentifiable. A glass bead was also recovered.

One fragment (from the initial cleaning layer in Building 2002) is of Roman date, possibly from a prismatic bottle. Such bottles were common in the earlier part of the Romano-British period, c. 1st-3rd centuries AD. The remaining fragments are all post-medieval, and no earlier than the late 17th century.

Whetstones by Torá Hjylton

The assemblage of 9 stones for sharpening ferrous metal knives and tools consisted of both hones and sharpening stones. Hones were sharpening stones deliberately fashioned into smooth faced elongated rods, and sharpening stones were irregular pebbles or stone fragments.

There are 7 hones, with 6 of micaceous schist and one of micaceous sandstone. All were found in contexts in or around Building 2002. The schist hones are all

incomplete, measuring up to 110 mm in length. The assemblage provides evidence for reuse or perhaps continued use with examples with well-worn breaks. Schist, often referred to as Norwegian ragstone, was mined in southern Norway and traded in great quantities during the medieval and post-medieval periods. It is a quartz-muscovite-biotite-calcite and ore-bearing schist; the petrology of the rock is discussed by Moore (1978; 1983).

The two sharpening stones were from pieces of unidentifiable sandstone and each bore a single smooth surface.

The detailed catalogue is included in the archive.

Animal Bone (Table 6) by Bethan Charles

A total of 2075 fragments of bone were retrieved from the excavation. The majority had suffered attritional damage due to the acidic nature of the soil and, consequently, were very friable. As a result, approximately half had suffered post-excavational damage. Less than 5% of the bones had clear signs of butchery, although this figure may be misleading because the fragmentary state and the attritional damage may have erased such evidence.

Only 344 bones could be identified, although the poor preservation meant that a single bone was often represented by numerous fragments, such as a horse skull, which was broken into 182 small pieces. The totals in Table 6 are for numbers of fragments after reassembly.

The low number of identifiable fragments meant that all bone types were included in the fragment count, including vertebrae, ribs and teeth. From this, it is clear that sheep dominate the assemblage, although a quarter of the fragments counted were loose teeth. The only other species whose number count is greatly affected is horse, of which three quarters were teeth, some of which were found in association with three fragmented mandibles and two fragmented skulls.

Due to the condition of many of the bones it was not possible to assess the age of the majority of the animals. However, all of the complete sheep and horse bones had fused epiphyses and fully developed teeth, many of which were worn. This indicates that the animals were

not juveniles. Only one juvenile cattle metapodial occurred. The data may be biased by the poor preservation, as the porous bones of younger animals may not have survived. It is also probable that pigs were under-represented in the assemblage due to their similarly high porosity (Grant 1975, 386).

Other mammals and birds were represented by individual fragments, except for 14 partial fragments of a dog's foot.

The assemblage suggests that the majority of farm animals were kept until maturity, indicating that sheep were kept in the main for their wool, and cattle for draught purposes in addition to being a source of meat.

Human Bone by Angela Boyle

Introduction and quantification

A single Romano-British cremation burial (5008) was recovered. It had been placed in an irregular pit [5017] and was associated with charcoal and a large number of iron nails. The pit had a maximum depth of only 0.04 m, and it is likely to have been truncated in the medieval period.

The entire cremation burial weighed only 88 g (+698 g unsorted residue incorporating a very small quantity of human bone) and has been identified as the partial remains of an adult individual of uncertain sex. The bone was white and well-calcareous and identifiable fragments included skull vault, dentition and long bone shaft fragments.

Discussion

The association of the charcoal and iron nails is of significance and is suggestive of a Roman date. At least three different nail types were present, including hobnails. It is likely that the individual had been wearing hobnailed boots and was placed in a wooden coffin before being subsequently burnt on a cremation pyre. The resulting deposit was then placed in the pit. Philpott refers to a concentration of cremation burials with footwear in the south-east of England, although there are no other known examples from Oxfordshire (1991, fig. 11).

ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

Charred plant remains (Table 7) by Ruth Peeling

Introduction

A series of soil samples were taken for the extraction of charred plant remains. Samples were taken from hearths and layers within Building 2002, ditches and pits, the cremation deposit and the occupation horizon (2070). The last-mentioned was sampled in three transects in order to investigate horizontal spatial patterning within the deposit. The volume of soil sampled ranged from 8 to 48 litres. Samples were processed using a bulk water separation machine. Flots were collected onto a 500 µm mesh. A total of 46 flots were submitted for the assessment.

Method

Each flot was examined. They were first put through a stack of sieves, ranging from 500 µm to 4 mm, to remove the bulk of the modern roots present in most samples and to separate the flots into manageable fractions. Each fraction was then scanned under a binocular microscope at x10 to x20 magnification. Any charred seeds and chaff were provisionally identified and an estimate of their abundance was made. Fragments of charcoal were fractured and examined in transverse section. This is an appropriate means of identification of ring porous

wood (*Quercus* sp.) although the identification of diffuse porous wood (Pomoideae sp) should be taken as tentative. The summary results are displayed in Table 7.

Results

Of the 46 samples submitted for assessment 45 contained charred remains. The cremation fill (context 5009) produced no charred material. Six samples of occupation layer 2015 and one sample of the Roman daub deposit (2070) contained more than 100 items. The majority of samples contained large quantities of modern roots and rootlets and small quantities of grain and pulses.

The principle cereal represented in all phases and feature types is free-threshing *Triticum* sp. (wheat). Occasional *Triticum* sp. rachis nodes were present in the daub sample and in occasional midden samples. Grain of *Hordeum* sp. (barley) was present in the majority of samples, although in much smaller quantities than *Triticum* sp. Occasional *Avena* sp. (oats) were identified in samples from hearth deposits, layers within Building 2002 and the occupation layers to the north. Grain of *Secale cereale* was noted in the daub (2070), while rachis was recognised in occasional midden samples.

Large cultivated legumes were noted in several samples, and were frequent within the occupation horizon. The better preserved legumes include a possible *Vicia faba* (broad bean) in a hearth sample and *Vicia sativa* subsp. *sativa* (fodder vetch) in some of the occupation deposits.

Table 7: Charred plant remains

Date Feature	Saxon Daub	11-13thC				12-13thC		12-13thC	
		Ditch/Pit	Hearth	Layer	Midden	Ditch	Layer	Midden	
No. Samples	1	5	1	5	7	25			
Total Volume	25	91	5	63	140+	866			
Samples with >100 items	1	0	0	0	0	6			
Free-threshing wheat grain	++	+	+	++	++	++	++	+++	
Barley grain	+	-	+	++	++	++	++	++	
Oat grain	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	++	
Rye grain	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	
Indet. grain	++	+	+	++	++	++	++	+++	
Free-threshing wheat rachis	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	
Barley/Rye rachis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	
Rye rachis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	
Fodder Vetch	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	
cf. Broad bean	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	
Large Legume	+	+	+	++	++	++	++	+++	
Grape seed	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	
Plum, sloe, cherry stone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	
Weed seeds	+	+	+	++	++	++	++	++	
Oak charcoal	++	++	++++	+	+	+	+	++	
Hawthorn, apple, pear etc.	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	

+ = present, 0-10 items; ++ = common, 11-100 items; +++ = abundant, >100 items

Table 6: Animal bone; number and percent of identified fragments by species

Animal	Number of fragments ID (after reassembly)	% fragments from total ID
Sheep	180	52.3
Cattle	67	19.48
Horse	43	12.5
Pig	31	9.0
Dog	16	4.7
Rabbit	1	0.3
Domestic Fowl	1	0.3
Unidentifiable Bird	5	1.5

In addition to the cultivated cereals and legumes, a fragment of fruit stone of a *Prunus* sp. (plum, cherry, sloe etc.) and a single charred *Vitis vinifera* (grape) pip were recognised in the occupation deposits. Weeds were very rare, with the majority of samples containing less than 10 seeds. Common arable species such as *Atriplex cotula* (stinking mayweed) were present and also ruderal species such as *Rumex* sp. (docks), *Chenopodium* sp. (fat hen, goosefoot). Occasional grasses and wild leguminous weeds were also recognised.

Charcoal was generally infrequent, although occasional fragments of *Quercus* sp. (oak) and, less frequently, *Panicum* (hawthorn, apple, pear etc.) were identified.

Conclusion

The cereal species represented were all well-established in southern Britain by the late Saxon/early Norman period. The occurrence of free-threshing *Triticum* sp., hulled *Hordeum* sp., *Avena* sp. and *Secale cereale* is therefore to be expected in samples of this period. There is very little evidence of cereal processing either in the form of cereal chaff or weed seeds.

However, given the paucity of well-sampled rural medieval sites in Oxfordshire the results are of interest although the quantity and quality of remains were not sufficient to merit detailed analysis.

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Site Development

The Romano-British settlement

As is suggested by the pottery report, the evidence broadly indicates a fairly low-status occupation of the site from the mid-1st century AD to sometime in the 3rd century AD. The focus of such occupation seems likely to have been situated to the north-east of the site, and as such the archaeological features revealed in this excavation appear to represent activity on the periphery of the settlement, consisting of paddock or field boundaries, repeatedly defined (as in Area F), and a possible trackway defined by the later gullies. No structural evidence was forthcoming, although the daub deposit (2070) is a possible indicator of structures nearby. The presence of an apparently isolated cremation is also indicative of settlement close by, but not in the immediate vicinity.

The Medieval settlement

The earliest post-Roman activity at Fringford is indicated by a series of ditches which suggests that the site was exploited as part of an agricultural complex consisting of fields and droveways, at some time in the 11th century. The enclosure at the eastern side of Area E appears to be the outside edge of the focus of the settlement, which may lie beneath the Victorian cottages that are presently located to the north of the site. This is supported by the relatively large amounts of pottery

of factors, both local and general. The period was a time of both social and economic change in England. There were several major plagues, in particular in 1348-9, 1361-2, 1368-9, and 1375 (Ormerod 1996, Appendix 1), and famines caused by bad weather, during the years 1315-17 (Holmes 1976, 137) and during the 1360s (Bolton 1996, 44). These resulted in large-scale depopulation and a corresponding rural labour shortage. These events prompted the Commons to pass the Statute of Labourers which, from 1351, set maximum wages and required all able-bodied men to work (Holmes 1976, 141). A local example of the labour shortage is that the Abbot of Eynsham Abbey was forced to lower rents in the village of Woodcote in Oxfordshire in an effort to persuade peasants to remain there (ibid. 140).

However, village desertion appears to have been somewhat random; Coleshill in Berkshire was deserted between 1395 and 1424 whilst surrounding villages survived (Bolton 1996, 56).

The expansion of sheep farming in this period, in part stimulated by the depopulation of the first half of the 14th century, may also have been a factor, although the specific bone evidence from Fringford Paddock was rendered inconclusive by the physical condition of the bone and the circumstances of its retrieval.

Wool had always been an important part of the rural economy in medieval England, and an increase in cloth production, much of which took place in a rural context (Holmes 1976, 36), offered greater rewards than agricultural labour. Certainly, it is known that English cloth-production doubled between the second half of the 14th century and the mid-15th century (ibid. 151). At the same time, the Cotswolds region became the focus of English wool-production by the end of the 14th century, displacing the great Cistercian estates of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire (ibid. 149). The rise in importance of Brackley as a wool-market could also have been a stimulus to a change of local land use.

It was also a time when larger estates came into being. The surviving gentry were able to considerably increase their holdings, both by buying up land which had become derelict, and marrying into families who had lost their male heirs. Even peasants began to buy up derelict land (Bolton 1996, 61).

This may have been the situation at Fringford Paddock, as the historical record shows that the number of property-holders in the village fell between 1316 and 1525, while the holdings of those who remained rose considerably in size. Thus the abandonment of the buildings and the creation of pasture may have been due to a major change in the agricultural regime in the village, with the accent switching from arable to animal husbandry, and the creation of larger estates due to an increase in available land as a result of depopulation caused by the events of the 14th century.

Post-Roman Fringford in its regional context

The medieval remains from Fringford Paddock are a useful addition to the small number of medieval village

sites to have been excavated in the south midlands. They have also provided an insight into the development of the village itself, and perhaps revealed part of the settlement mentioned in Domesday Book.

The earliest remains including the droveway, enclosures and pits in Area E suggest that the earliest settlement at Fringford was a 'greenfield' development, representing the development of land which, since the abandonment of the Romano-British settlement, had been unexploited.

The structures at Fringford Paddock compare with those from other sites in Oxfordshire. The excavations of the deserted village of Copt Hay, Teisworth (Robinson et al. 1974), revealed a small number of medieval buildings, probably from a farmstead. None was as well preserved as those from Fringford. Of particular relevance at Copt Hay was Area 1, which revealed a house with associated barn (ibid. fig. 6). The house was partially surrounded by a thick occupation deposit containing large quantities of pottery and bone, indicating that a similar refuse disposal regime was in operation as at Fringford. The barn, although heavily eroded, showed many similarities with Building 5055 at Fringford, although only a single wall and part of the internal cobbled floor survived. The Teisworth structures, like those at Fringford, were dated to the 13th century.

Another single cell structure was noted in Area 2 at Teisworth. It too contained a single hearth, but is mainly notable for the fact that it was built on top of a layer of gravel (ibid. 63), which although not as substantial as those beneath the Fringford structures, shows a similar construction technique.

One of the largest medieval villages excavations in the region was that of Seacourt, near Oxford (Biddle 1963). The site comprised a medieval street, several hundred metres long, with tenements and stone buildings laid out along its length, and, in addition, there was some evidence of an earlier timber phase comprising ditches and post and/or beam-slot buildings. The pottery from the timber features suggests a sequence of events with similar chronology to Fringford, with the timber structures and their associated enclosures replaced by stone buildings during the early to middle part of the 13th century (ibid., 86-7).

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Location of the archive

The records and finds from the excavation will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museum.

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The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out an excavation at The Paddock, Rectory Lane, Fringford, near Bicester, Oxfordshire during 1997. The work was carried out on behalf of Brandon Gate Homes Ltd, who were developing the site for housing. The excavations revealed evidence of medieval occupation in the form of 11th /12th century enclosures and field boundaries, and 13th century stone buildings and associated yards, ditches and pits. Evidence was also revealed of Romano-British field boundaries relating to a possible settlement to the north-east.



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