

Excavation of Late Saxon, Medieval and Post-Medieval Deposits on Land at Proctor's Yard, Bicester

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SUMMARY

An area at Proctor's Yard, in the heart of medieval Bicester, was excavated in advance of the construction of new housing. Archaeological features excavated fell mainly within the late Saxon, early medieval and post-medieval periods. Residual pottery indicates occupation from the 11th century. One ditch may mark the east boundary of the territory of the late Saxon minster church and was backfilled not long before the foundation of the adjacent Augustinian priory in the later 12th century. The site seems to have been abandoned from the end of the 13th to the 18th centuries.

The site at Proctor's Yard was situated at the north end of Priory Lane, some 30 m. east of the current parish church of St. Edburg, between Church Lane and the Causeway (NGR SP5837 2227) (Figs. 1 and 2). The land lay 69 m. above Ordnance Datum, with a slight slope down from west to east across the 0.08 ha. area, modern landscaping having emphasized this so that the western half lay on average *c.* 1 m. higher than the east. Underlying geology consisted of limestone brash with gravel patches across much of the site, although towards the eastern side this changed abruptly to alluvial sandy clay, possibly related to an early channel of a watercourse (Fig. 3).

Planning permission was granted by Cherwell District Council (99/01212/f) for the redevelopment of the site by Ruraldene Developments Ltd for residential use, conditional on archaeological recording of the site. The excavations were carried out to a specification approved by Mr. S. Weaver of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services, advisers to the District Council, and were monitored by him.

Prior to the excavations a modern barn and greenhouse alongside two post-medieval buildings occupied the site, which was used as a yard and store for a florists. In July 1999 an evaluation¹ was carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd (TVAS) as a response to the proposal to construct new housing. Three machine-excavated trenches identified medieval deposits including a gully, pits and postholes, with a range of finds suggesting that activity took place here from the early Saxon to the post-medieval period. The subsequent excavation of a larger, roughly rectangular area was also undertaken by TVAS in late January and early February 2000, supervised in the field by Graham Hull.

The project code was PYB99/44 and the finds and archive have been deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service (Acc. No. OXCMS 1999.99).

¹ G. Hull, 'Land at Proctor's Yard, Bicester, Oxfordshire; an archaeological evaluation' (Thames Valley Archaeol. Services report, 1999).

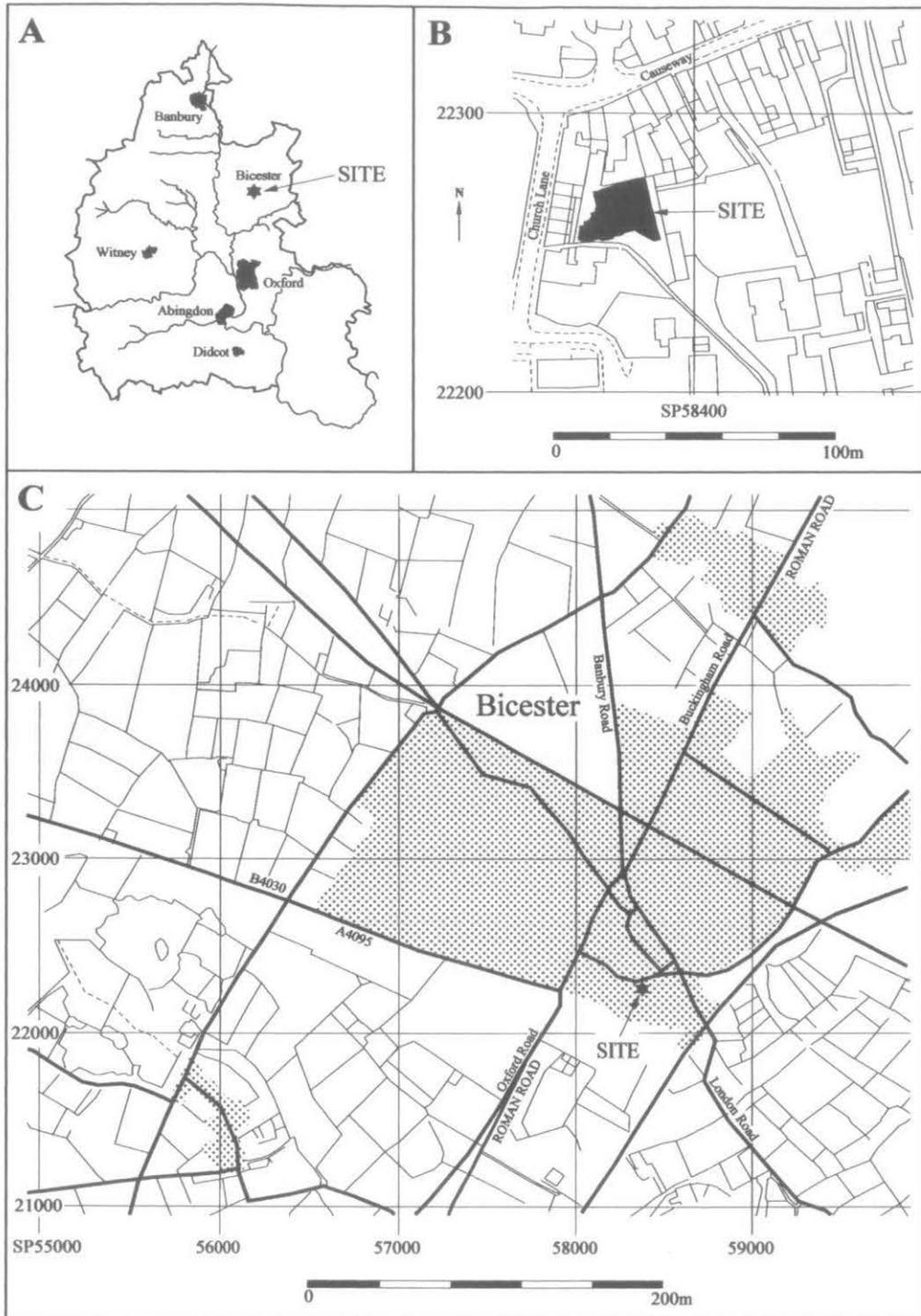


Fig. 1. Proctor's Yard, Bicester. Location of site within Bicester.



Fig. 2. Proctor's Yard, Bicester. Location of the site in relation to St. Edburg's church and the Augustinian priory (after Munby et al., 1975).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The development area lay within the heart of medieval Bicester (Fig. 2). The background has been discussed by Blair (above, pp.133–40) and is not repeated here. The parish church of St. Edburg is to the west, while adjacent to the site to the south was the Augustinian priory. To the north, the Causeway appears to be 13th or 14th century in origin, and linked the medieval manors of King's End and Market End.

AIMS OF THE EXCAVATION

The possibility was raised by the evaluation, in conjunction with other evidence from the area, that evidence might be uncovered to shed light on the Anglo-Saxon and later medieval development of the site. The relationship between the minster church and the Augustinian priory could also, potentially, be elucidated. Specific questions to be addressed concerned the date of occupation and abandonment of the site, the degree of continuity between Saxon and medieval occupations (as opposed to reuse after abandonment), and the nature of the activities represented. This report, accordingly, concentrates on these aspects of the site, although most of the features revealed were modern.

THE EXCAVATION

Methodology

An area of 465 m², covering just over half of the proposed development, identified as containing the most threatened archaeology (Fig. 3), was excavated by machine down to the first archaeologically sensitive layers. All archaeological deposits were cleaned and excavated by hand. All discrete features were fully excavated and linear features sampled to 20%. One gully (1001) was more fully excavated in an attempt to clarify its dating. Modern features were planned only, or excavated only so far as necessary to confirm their dating. To facilitate storage of spoil, the site was stripped in two stages with spoil from each stage being stored on the adjacent area. The lack of secure dating for almost all features meant that no bulk soil sampling for the purpose of recovery of environmental data was undertaken.

Results (Figs. 3–5)

There was almost no stratigraphy across the excavated area, except where modern features truncated those of medieval date. Few finds were recovered from the majority of features. In addition, the majority of the pottery recovered was extremely fragmented, and had almost certainly been subject to post-depositional disturbance before reaching the positions from which it was recovered. These factors militate against certainty in dating many of the features recorded. However, there is a degree of patterning which does allow conclusions to be drawn regarding the nature of the use of this site over the course of several centuries.

Phase 0: Roman and early Saxon

No site features could be assigned such early dates, but residual pottery of Roman (12 sherds) and early-to-middle Saxon date (1 sherd) was recovered from a number of deposits. In the absence of any further evidence, it would be rash to posit even limited occupation on the site from this evidence. The limited Saxon material is likely to derive from activities peripheral to the nearby site located in excavations at the King's Arms, Chapel Street² where Saxon settlement is attested.

Phase 1: Late Saxon to 12th century (Figs. 3–5)

The major pre-modern features on the site were a ditch (1000) and a gully (1001), accompanied by a few rubbish pits.

Ditch 1000 ran north from the southern edge of the excavation for 8.3 m. before swinging 25 degrees to the west and going beneath the northern baulk. Steeply and somewhat irregularly cut through the limestone brash, it varied from 1.65 m. to 2.12 m. in width and reached a depth of 0.50 m. to 0.65 m. (Fig. 4). Throughout, it contained a single yellow-grey silty clay fill with limestone lumps, which consistently yielded small amounts of pottery dated to the 11th century or perhaps the 12th. The northernmost slot (101) also contained two sherds of Shelly Coarse Ware (OXBK below) which should push the date into the 12th century. The pottery (as noted below, p. 192) was all extremely fragmentary and clearly can only provide the very earliest possible *terminus post quem*: the backfilling of the ditch could have been considerably later than the date of the pottery. Likewise, its original cutting could have been considerably earlier. However, the consistency of dating for this material along the length of the ditch suggests the time lag involved in the actual process of backfilling might not have been significant. A backfill date during the 12th century can thus be postulated, although the cutting and the use-life of the ditch as a boundary most plausibly began considerably earlier. The backfilling would appear to have been deliberate, as no significant variation in the fill material was encountered. This ditch provided the majority of the medieval finds from the site, including pottery and animal bone (below, pp. 190, 193).

Gully 1001 also entered the site from the southern edge, but ran ENE. before turning to run due east and exit the site along the east side. Its width varied from 0.60 m. to 0.80 m. and it was consistently 0.20–25 m. deep (Fig. 4).

Pit 132 was the only other significant feature (Fig. 4). Most of its extent lay beyond the limit of excavation, but as exposed it was 2.49 m. long, 0.63 m. wide and 0.43 m. deep, filled with a yellow-grey silty clay similar to that in ditch 1000. It is possible it may have been the terminus of another ditch, running west, but is regarded as a pit in the absence of any positive reason to believe otherwise. Its finds included four sherds of pottery corresponding to that in ditch 1000 and gully 1001; given the difficulties already raised concerning this material as dating evidence, it is unwise to assume too much, but the pit was probably contemporary with these two linear features.

² P. Harding and P. Andrews, see pp. 141–79 in this volume.

Some of the undated postholes undoubtedly ought to belong to this phase of activity (e.g. 143 and 148, which contained contemporary pottery and can be construed to have formed a fence-line perpendicular to the ditch), but the evidence is too patchy for certainty. One alignment of postholes (133, 201-3), all containing limestone packing, possibly dated to the 19th century based on the pottery in 203 and their typological similarity. However, it is perhaps more likely that 203 itself does not belong to this group and that the others can be related to a group of similar limestone-packed postholes (11-14) revealed by the evaluation³ running on a line more or less perpendicular to these further to the north, which had medieval pottery on their surfaces, although no date closer than 11th-13th century can be offered. If these two groups can be associated, they most plausibly formed a fence-line subdividing the plot marked out by ditch 1000.

Given the paucity of finds in the remainder of the postholes and the strong possibility that what little pottery derived from these features may be residual, dating for the others remains obscure.

Gully 1001 seems likely to have been for drainage. The more substantial ditch 1000 is less likely to have served such a purpose. Its fill sequence would surely have revealed natural silting if this had been the case, but it seems to have been deliberately backfilled in a single operation. It seems, therefore, that it was a boundary marker and, given its irregular profile, we might posit that the ditch was secondary to an associated upcast bank (of which no trace survived), which would have been the primary boundary. This may have marked the limit of the land around the minster church, but as it is between the church and the river and is relatively minor, it is more likely to have been an internal subdivision.⁴ Why it should have been filled in the later 11th or early 12th century is unclear. It is tempting to suggest that the finds dating may be misleading and that infilling took place in the last quarter of the 12th century at a time when the land changed hands, being granted to the Augustinian priory.

Phase 2: Later medieval (Figs. 3-5)

Features of 12th- and 13th-century date included only a handful of rubbish pits. These pits, whose few finds suggest a normal range of domestic activity, represent the last activity on the site until the 16th century at the earliest. There is no evidence of any continuity of use between the medieval and early modern periods.

A large subcircular pit 128 (1.55 m. diameter, 0.2 m. deep) was cut by a smaller pit 139 (0.64 m. diameter, 0.28 m. deep) (Fig. 4), with similar smaller pits 134 and 138 nearby. Small quantities of pottery and animal bone were recovered from all four. Also similar was pit 146, although this produced no finds and could not be dated. It is interesting that all of these features lay to the west of the presumably already defunct ditch 1000, suggesting perhaps that some form of boundary still existed along its line and continued to affect the use of the area.

As noted above, some of the undated postholes could belong to this phase as easily as to Phase 1.

Phase 3: Early modern, modern and unphased

Four sherds of 16th-century pottery were recovered from the site, only one from a feature (foundation slot 204). The slot, however, appears more likely to relate to the more intensive 18th- or 19th-century activity in its vicinity. The pottery could easily have arrived on site from some distance at any subsequent date. It seems more economical to suppose the site remained unoccupied from the end of the 13th century to the 18th.

Other features on site included rubbish pits (mainly of 19th-century origin), foundation trenches (19th and 20th century), drains, and numerous smaller 20th-century intrusions, along with a variety of postholes, few of which can be dated. Several of the 18th-century features, in particular, contained rather more substantial finds assemblages (pottery, clay pipe fragments, glass). Towards the north of the site a deposit of garden soil (178) overlay several features: it was not earlier than the 18th century. The western half of the site was also mostly covered by a modern (Victorian or later) made-ground deposit (150), which contained most of the site's finds. Finds from 150 must be regarded as likely to have been brought onto the site from elsewhere, along with the soil forming this artificial deposit, and need not have derived from the features below. No detailed analysis of these more modern features has been attempted.

³ Hull, *op. cit.* note 1, p. 4.

⁴ J. Blair *pers. comm.*

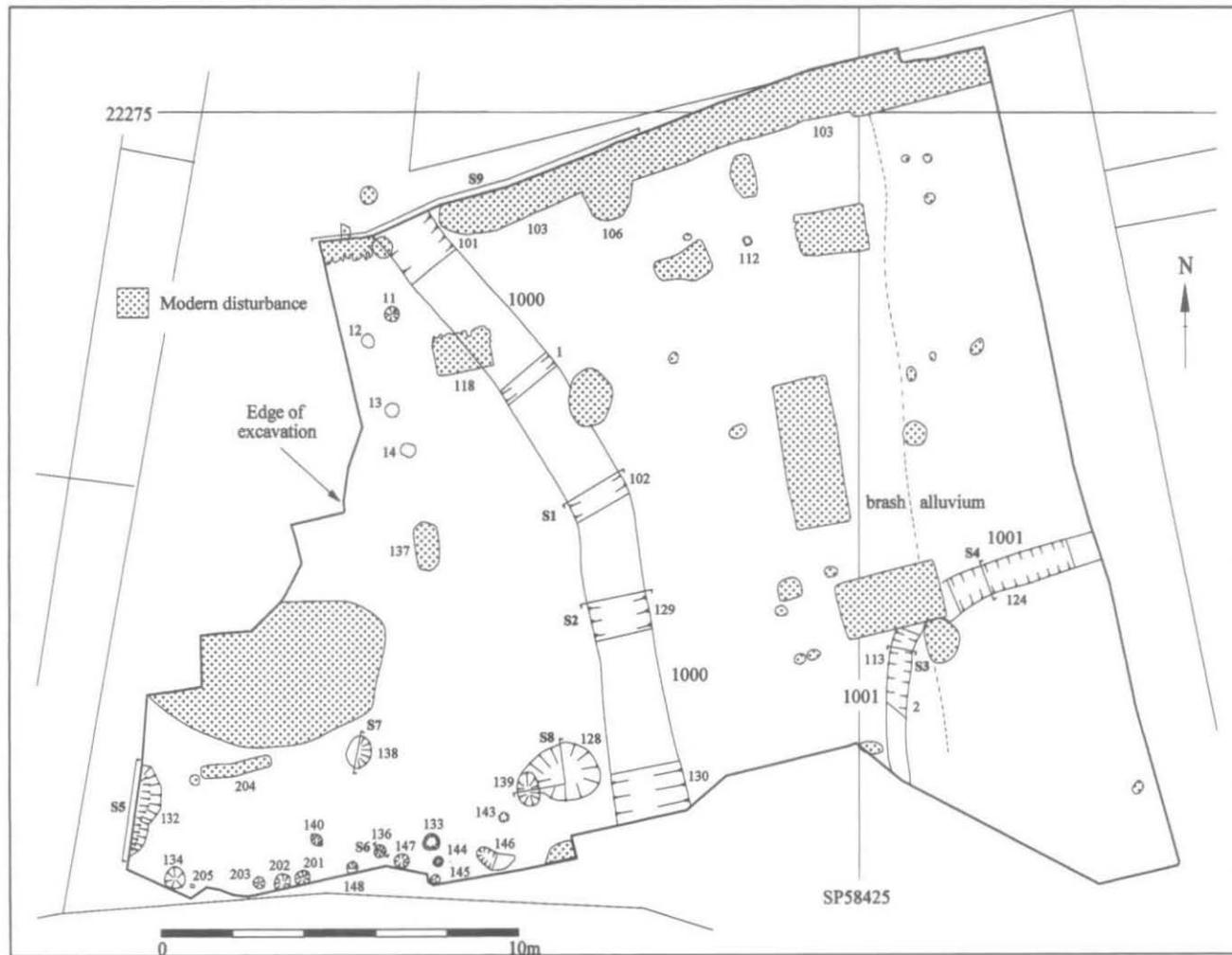


Fig. 3. Proctor's Yard, Bicester. Site plan.

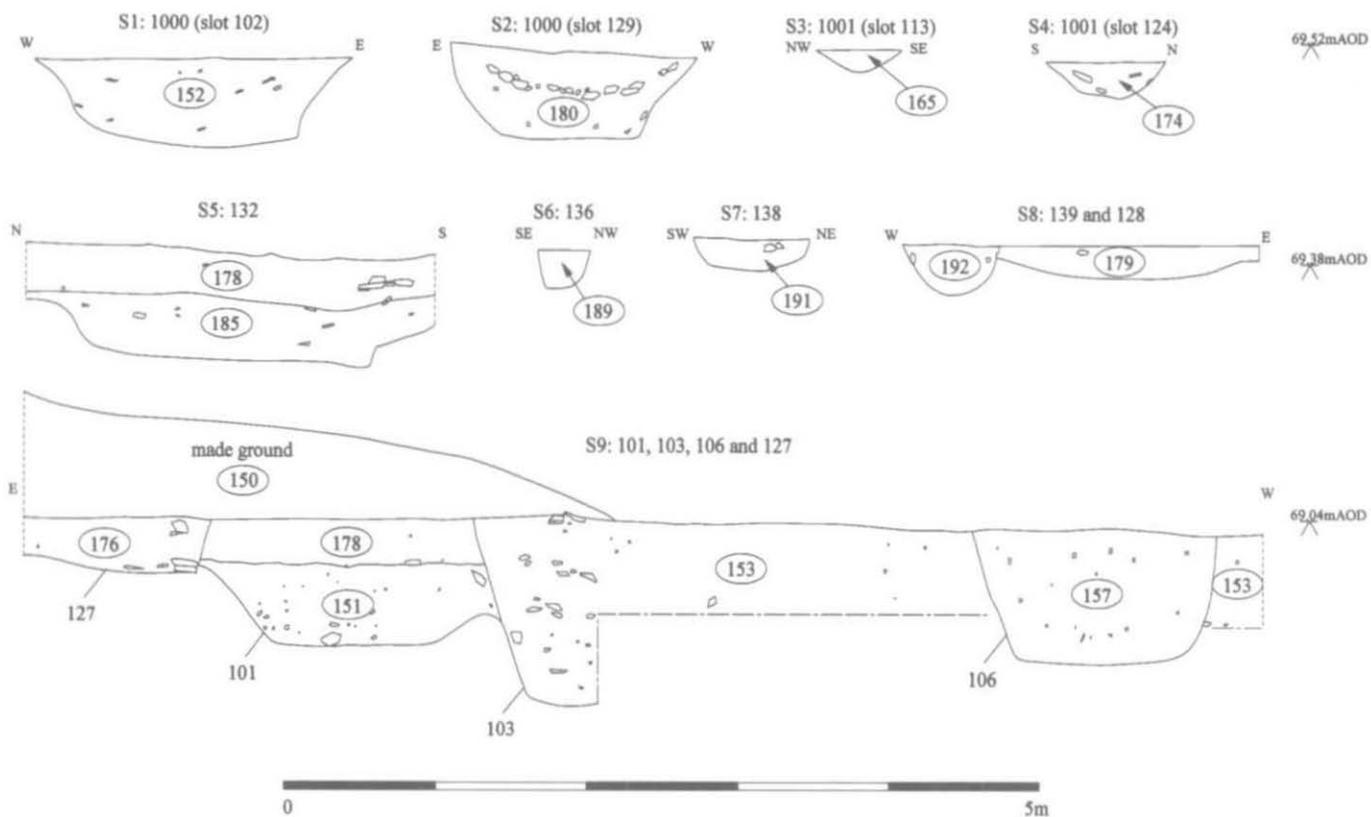


Fig. 4. Proctor's Yard, Bicester. Selected sections.

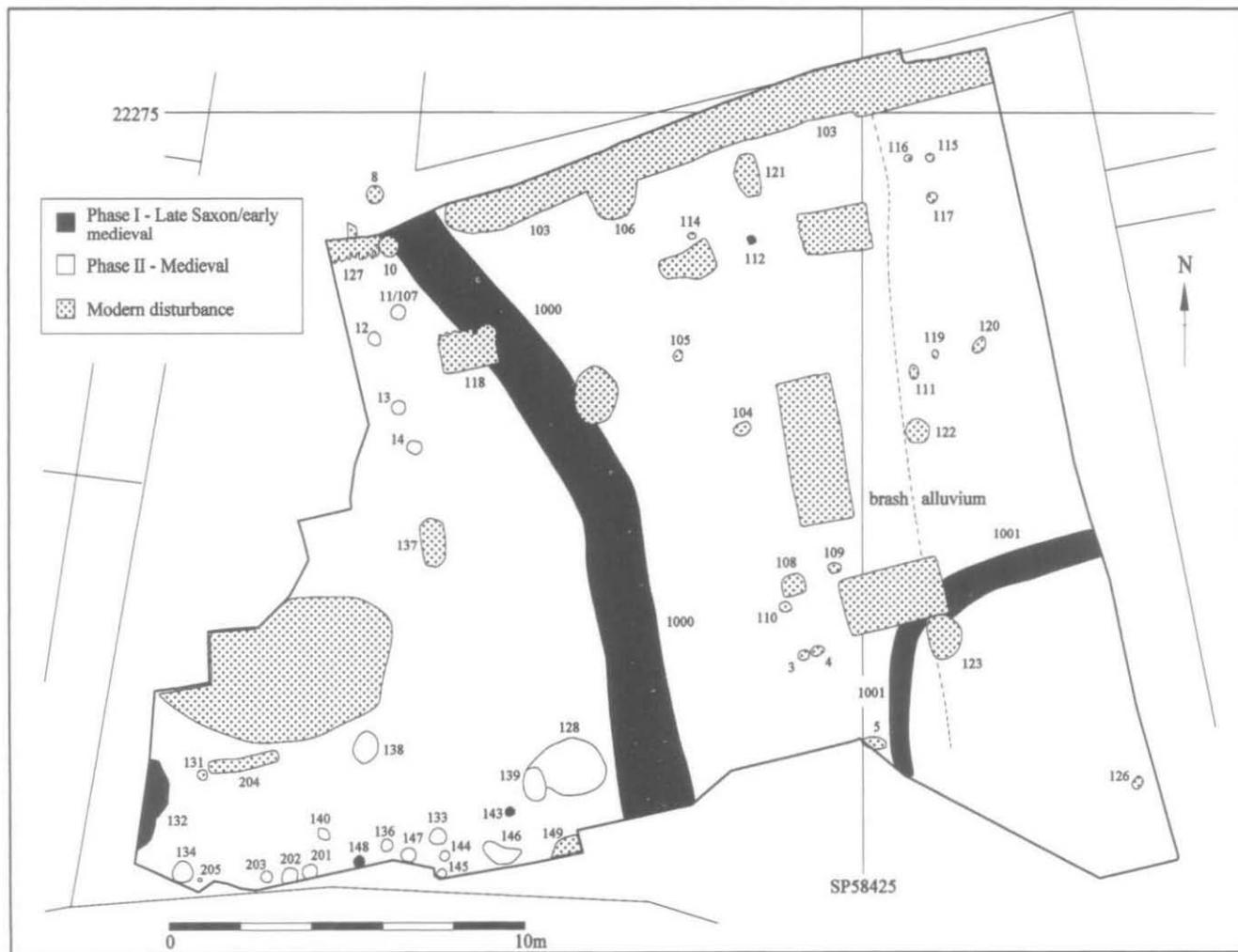


Fig. 5. Proctor's Yard, Bicester. Phased plan.

THE FINDS

Pottery by PAUL BLINKHORN

The pottery assemblage comprised 535 sherds with a total weight of 8682 gms. The minimum number of vessels (MNV), by measurement of rimsherd length, was 1.60. The range of pottery types present indicates activity at the site from the 10th century until the 13th, with something of an hiatus until the 16th century onwards. A few sherds of Anglo-Saxon handmade wares were also noted and, while these are probably early-middle Saxon in date, it is possible that they could be late Saxon.

The degree of pottery fragmentation and the chronology of the known wares also suggest that there may have been a major reorganization of the landscape at some point between the mid 11th and later 12th century. This all suggests that it is entirely feasible that the excavated area may have revealed features associated with the late Saxon minster church and also the early medieval Augustinian priory.

TABLE 1. POTTERY BY FABRIC

<i>Code</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Date (all AD)</i>	<i>Sherds</i>	<i>Weight (gms.)</i>	<i>MNV</i>
OXB	<i>Late Saxon Oxford Ware</i>	Late 8th-early 11th century	4	114	
OXR	<i>St Neots Ware type T1(1)</i>	850-1100	23	147	0.36
OXAC	<i>Cotswolds-type ware</i>	975-1350	95	840	0.70
OXBF	<i>North-East Wiltshire Ware</i>	1050-1400	6	50	
OXY	<i>Medieval Oxford ware</i>	1075-1350	68	495	0.30
OXBK	<i>Shelly coarseware</i>	1100-1400	7	41	
OXAM	<i>Brill/Boarstall ware</i>	1200-1600	30	286	0.44
OXDN	<i>Cistercian ware</i>	1475-1550	2	11	
OXST	<i>Frechen Stoneware</i>	1550-1700	1	14	
OXFH	<i>Border wares</i>	1550-1700	3	141	
OXDR	<i>Red Earthenwares</i>	1550+	48	1507	
OXCE	<i>Tim-glazed Earthenware</i>	1613-1800	7	366	
OXFI	<i>Chinese Porcelain</i>	c. 1650+	4	28	
OXDQ	<i>Staffordshire-type slip-trailed wares</i>	1640-1800	2	25	
OXDQ	<i>Staffordshire Manganese wares</i>	1700-1800	8	270	
OXFM	<i>Staffordshire White Salt-glazed Stoneware</i>	1730-1800	39	299	

Fabric

A total of 12 sherds (191 gms.) of Roman wares were noted. The rest of the material was early/middle Saxon or later. Where appropriate, the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series⁵ has been used, as shown in Table 1.

⁵ M. Mellor, 'A Summary of the Key Assemblages. A study of pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from 14 pits, dating from the 16th to the 19th century', in T.G. Hassall, C.E. Halpin and M. Mellor, 'Excavations at St Ebbe's, Oxford, 1967-76: Part II: Post-medieval domestic tenements and the post-dissolution site of the Greyfriars', *Oxoniensia*, 49 (1984), 181-219; M. Mellor, 'Oxford Pottery: A Synthesis of Middle and Late Saxon, Medieval and early Post-medieval Pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, 59 (1994), 17-217.

In addition, the following wares were noted:

Early/middle Saxon: Sparse to moderate sub-rounded calcareous material up to 1 mm. Sparse subrounded quartz up to 0.5 mm. Sparse chaff voids and fine silver mica. All sherds had 'wet-hand' finished surfaces with traces of burnishing; 4 sherds, 45 gms., MNV = 0.

Developed Stamford ware: c. 1150–1250. Slightly sandy white fabric, bright copper green glaze;⁶ 1 sherd, 2 gms., MNV = 0.

Nottingham Stoneware: 1690–1800 (Barker 1999). Hard, grey fabric with lustrous 'plain chocolate' glaze; 36 sherds, 265 gms.

Later English Stoneware: c. 1750+. Hard, grey fabric with a ferruginous wash. Commonly used for ink-pots, seltzer bottles, etc.; 6 sherds, 1111 gms.

Pearlware: 1775–19th century.⁷ Buff earthenware, similar to Creamware, but with cobalt added to the glaze, giving it a blue tinge, although later vessels are nearly white. Later examples with paler glaze and painted or transfer decoration; 5 sherds, 50 gms.

Miscellaneous 19th-century wares: Mocha Yellow wares, Mason's Ironstone China, etc.; 124 sherds, 2484 gms.

TABLE 2. POTTERY FABRICS BY CONTEXT (MEDIEVAL CONTEXTS ONLY)

F	Ctxt	E/MS		OXB		OXR		OXAC		OXBF		OXY		OXBK		DSW		OXAM		Date (century)	Phase		
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt				
1	50			2	70			19	167	1	8	9	90							11th	1		
2	51					1	1					2	5							11th	1		
7	58			1	17															10th	1		
8	59																	2	5	14th	2-3		
10	61											1	2							11th	1		
11	62											1	4					1	5	13th	2		
1000	surf					2	9	4	27												11th	1	
10	151							5	29			3	33	2	8						12th	1	
102	152					4	12	15	91			6	42								11th	1	
112	164			1	27																10th	1	
113	165							1	14												13th	1	
124	174					10	34	2	24												11th	1	
	178							1	4												11th	2	
128	179							5	22	1	11	4	52	1	1	1	2	4	19		13th	2	
129	180					2	24	20	196			12	87								11th	1	
130	181					1	40	10	127	2	19	17	124								11th	1	
132	185											4	14								11th	1	
133	186	1	7																		E/MS?	2	
134	187							1	5					2	24						12th	2	
138	191																			3	19	13th	2
139	192							2	8	1	9	3	8						2	23	13th	2	
143	196											1	2								11th?	1	
148	251							1	2												11th?	1	
		1	7	4	114	20	120	86	716	5	47	63	463	5	33	1	2	12	71				

⁶ K. Kilmurry, *The Pottery Industry of Stamford, Lincs c. AD 850–1250* (BAR 84, 1980).

⁷ D. Barker, *Information Sheets for the English Heritage Post-Medieval Pottery Training Days* (1999).

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 2. All the wares are types that are well-known in the region, and the range of pottery is typical of that from contemporary sites in the north of Oxfordshire and south Northamptonshire, comprising primarily Oxfordshire wares, but also small quantities of material from sources to the north and east, such as the shelly coarsewares from the kilns on the Northamptonshire-Bedfordshire borders⁸ and Developed Stamford ware.

The early/middle Saxon handmade wares and the Late Saxon Oxford ware are worthy of comment. The former are in a fabric typical of the region, and well-known at sites such as Radley Barrow Hills,⁹ whilst the latter, although a rare find in rural areas, is occasionally found at sites in northern Oxfordshire.¹⁰ The sherds from this site are therefore a useful addition to the known distribution of the ware.

Chronology

The known date-ranges of the pottery make it possible to divide the assemblages into seriated phase groups (Table 3).

TABLE 3. POTTERY OCCURRENCE BY NUMBER, WEIGHT AND MNV PER CERAMIC PHASE, ALL FABRICS

Date	Defining Wares	No	Wt (gms.)	MNV
10th century	OXB	2	44	0
11th century	OXR, OXBF, OXAC	157	1394	0.87
12th century	OXBK	13	99	0.12
early 13th – late 13th century	OXAM*	30	197	0.47
late 13th – early 14th century	OXAM*	3	9	0
16th century	OXDR, OXST	2	149	0**
17th century	OXCE	42	875	0**
18th century	OXDQ, OXFM	129	1243	0**
Total		378	4010	1.46

* defined by vessel and fabric sub-types

** MNV not calculated for post-medieval wares

The data in Table 1 indicate that there was activity at this site from the late Saxon period onwards, and perhaps even earlier. Late Saxon Oxford Shelly Ware (OXB) may be as early as the late 8th century, based on radiocarbon and thermoluminescence dates obtained from St. Aldates in Oxford,¹¹ although dated examples from the later 9th or 10th century are far more numerous, and the ware appears to have gone into decline by the early 11th century.¹² However, three of the four sherds derived from later features so the chances are that the fourth may also have been residual here.

The presence of the early-middle Saxon sherds suggest that there was activity at the site at that time. Certainly, recent excavations at the nearby King's Arms site to the east of Chapel Street¹³ produced early Saxon buildings and pottery, and so these sherds may be representative of peripheral activity from that settlement. However, Mellor¹⁴ has noted that handmade pottery has been found in Oxfordshire in direct association with St. Neots ware, and so the sherds from this site could be as late as the 9th or 10th century.

⁸ M.R. McCarthy and C.M. Brooks, *Medieval Pottery in Britain AD 900–1600* (1988).

⁹ P. Blinkhorn, 'The Anglo-Saxon Pottery', in E. McAdam (ed.), *Excavations at the Anglo-Saxon Settlement at Radley Barrow Hills, Oxfordshire* (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Mellor (1994), op. cit. note 5, p. 40.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Harding, op. cit. note 2.

¹⁴ Mellor (1994), op. cit. note 5, p. 36.

The main phase of activity at this site appears to be the 11th century. St. Neots ware is found throughout the south Midlands, but the chronology of the material depends very much upon competition from other, more localized pottery types. In Oxford, the material appears to have had a use-life which started in the 10th century, and ended some time around the middle of the 11th century.¹⁵ If the chronology of the material is the same at Bicester, then it would suggest that the main period of activity at this site started in the earlier decades of the 11th century. However, St. Neots ware was the dominant pottery type in Northamptonshire throughout the late Saxon period and well into the 12th century,¹⁶ and thus it is entirely possible that the material may have had a longer use-life in Bicester, as the town has a more northerly location than Oxford, and is thus nearer the postulated sources of St. Neots ware, and further from those of its main competitor in Oxford, i.e. OXAC. Certainly, all the St. Neots ware from this site was found in association with other pottery types, particularly Cotswolds-type ware (OXAC). Such material has a similar date range in Oxfordshire as St. Neots ware, but did not occur in large quantities in the city until after the middle of the 11th century, although it is known to have been used in Wallingford in large quantities during the early part of the century. In Northamptonshire, it is found from the later 10th century onwards. It seems likely, therefore, that the main period of activity at this site began around the middle of the 11th century, although it is not possible to say with certainty if it began before or after the Norman conquest.

However, the fragmentation analysis (below) suggests that most, if not all of this pottery is the product of secondary deposition, and that the events that led to the stratification of the material (but not the pottery itself) could be later than the 11th century. There is also the fact to consider that assemblages in this region can only be dated to the 12th century by the presence of shelly coarseware (OXBK) or, in the case of the later part of the century, by Minety-type ware (OXBB). Both are very much minor wares in this region of Oxfordshire, and thus it is entirely possible that many of the features which are dated to the 11th century may be of 12th century date. With this in mind, it may be that the features present are related to the ecclesiastical sites which the historical record suggests are in the vicinity. The features dated to the 11th century may, therefore, be related to the postulated late Saxon minster church, with the pottery present giving only a backfill date, and a slightly misleading one at that. Certainly, this is not without precedent. The 10th-century complex at West Cotton, Northamptonshire, was surrounded by a series of land-boundaries which were contemporary with the structure, but were backfilled with largely 12th-century material.¹⁷ In the case of this site, what we may be seeing is a major reorganization of the landscape during the 12th century, with the Augustinian priory replacing a late Saxon ecclesiastical complex.

By the end of the 13th century, very little pottery was being deposited at the site, which is unusual for medieval sites in the region, and there is something of an hiatus during the 14th and 15th centuries with activity (in terms of pottery deposition) only starting again in the 16th century. This may again relate to the area being a part of the Augustinian priory. The evidence from Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire, indicates that refuse disposal at such sites was tightly controlled until after the dissolution, when the dismantling of the structure led to widespread refuse dumping and redeposition.¹⁸ The pattern of pottery deposition at this site, the small assemblage size notwithstanding, demonstrates a similar pattern (Table 4).

TABLE 4. FABRIC OCCURRENCE PER CERAMIC PHASE, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE PHASE ASSEMBLAGE IN MNV, MAJOR WARES ONLY

Phase	11th century	12th century	Early 13th– late 13th century	Total MNV
OXR	28.7%	0	0	0.25
OXAC	57.5%	0	17.0%	0.58
OXY	13.8%	100%	12.8%	0.30
OXAM	-	-	70.2%	0.33
Total MNV	0.87	0.12	0.47	1.46

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 57.

¹⁶ V. Denham, 'The Pottery', in J.H. Williams, M. Shaw and V. Denham, *Middle Saxon Palaces at Northampton* (Northampton Development Corp. Monogr. Ser. 4, 1985), 46–64.

¹⁷ P. Blinkhorn, 'The Post-Roman Pottery', in A. Chapman, *West Cotton: A Study in Settlement Dynamics, Excavations at West Cotton, Ravunds, Northamptonshire, 1985–9* (Eng. Her. Monogr. Ser., in press).

¹⁸ P. Blinkhorn, 'The Post-Roman Pottery', in *Excavations at Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire* (OAU Thames Valley Monogr. Ser., in press).

TABLE 5. MEAN SHERD WEIGHT PER PHASE (IN GMS.) BY FABRIC TYPE, MAJOR FABRICS ONLY

Phase	11th century	12th century	Early 13th- late 13th century
OXR	6.0	0	0
OXAC	8.9	5.7	5.5
OXY	7.0	11.0	8.0
OXAM	-	-	6.6

Fragmentation analysis

The data in Table 5 show that the late Saxon and medieval assemblage is highly fragmented with little evidence of primary deposition and may indicate a deliberate back-filling of features during a major phase of reorganization of the site in the 11th century, although it could conceivably be later.

Animal bone by SHEILA HAMILTON-DYER

A total of 382 individual bones was recorded. A high proportion (191, 50%) of these were recovered from the medieval ditch 1000 and gully 1001. The bones are mainly well preserved with little erosion but some had been broken on excavation. Several bones had been accessible to dogs before final disposal and a few had been burnt. Most of the identified material is of the domestic ungulates; a few bones of dog, cat, rabbit and poultry are also present (Table 6).

Methodology

Species identifications were made using the author's modern comparative collections. Ribs and vertebrae of the ungulates (other than axis, atlas and sacrum) were identified only to the level of cattle/horse-sized and sheep/pig-sized. Unidentified shaft and other fragments were similarly divided. Sheep and goat were separated using the methods of Boessneck and Payne.¹⁹ Recently broken bones were joined where possible and have been counted as single fragments. The small number of bones from sieved samples is included. Measurements follow von den Driesch²⁰ in the main and are in millimetres unless otherwise stated. Withers height calculations of the domestic ungulates are based on factors recommended by von den Driesch and Boessneck.²¹ Archive material includes metrical and other data not presented in the text (including all data relating to post-medieval deposits) and is kept on paper and digital media.

Medieval phases

This is the largest group at 222 bones and mainly derives from ditch 1000. Cattle and sheep/goat, and fragments of these sizes are equally dominant in the assemblage. Pig is in third place. Horse, dog, fowl and duck are also present.

Dog is apparently as common as pig, but 12 of the 14 bones are from a partial skeleton in slot 50 (ditch 1000). These bones are from a medium to large animal of slim build. The other two bones are also from the ditch, but from different contexts. They are of similar size and could conceivably be from the same, disturbed, skeleton. It is interesting to note that an upper molar of matching size was identified in the unstratified material.

Although epiphysal fusion indicates that the sheep were adult when killed, one of the two jaws is of a lamb and a radius shaft is from a neonate. None of the cattle jaw fragments contained teeth. Most bones are fused and indicate animals of at least 18 months and several over 48 months. No bones of calves were identified. Pig bones and jaws represent both young and adult animals and include two of mature males.

¹⁹ J. Boessneck, 'Osteological Differences between Sheep (*Ovis aries* Linne) and Goat (*Capra hircus* Linne)', in D. Brothwell and E.S. Higgs (eds.), *Science in Archaeology* (1969), 351-8; S. Payne, 'Morphological Distinctions between the mandibular Teeth of young Sheep, *Ovis*, and Goats, *Capra*', *Jnl. Archaeol. Sci.* 12 (1985), 139-47.

²⁰ A. von den Driesch, *A Guide to the Measurement of Animal Bones from Archaeological Sites* (Peabody Mus. Bull. 1, 1976).

²¹ A. von den Driesch and J. Boessneck, 'Kritische Anmerkungen zur Widerristhöhenberechnung aus Längenmaßen vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Tierknochen', *Säugetierkundliche Mitteilungen*, 22 (1974), 325-48.

Very few bones from this phase are measurable but a complete cattle metatarsus offers an estimated withers height of 1.139 m. This small value is typical of medieval cattle in southern England.

Discussion

This assemblage is typical of small medieval excavations; most of the bone is of the main domestic ungulates with a few dog, cat, and bird bones. Considering the position of the site near religious houses there is a notable lack of fish, although it must be accepted that the sample is a small one. There is also no evidence of hunting (the birds are almost certainly all domestic poultry and the rabbits would have been warren kept, at least in the early period). The bones are a mixture of domestic and slaughter waste. For the post-medieval period (see archive), there is a suggestion of tanning waste.

Clay tobacco pipes by PAUL CANNON

The excavation and evaluation produced a total of 52 pipe fragments, consisting of 13 bowl, 37 stem and 2 mouthpiece fragments, ranging in date from *c.* 1660 to *c.* 1880. Detailed records of all the pipe fragments have been made using the recording system of Higgins and Davey.²² Copies have been deposited with the site archive; only a summary of the five marked pipes is presented here. All derived from contexts dating to the 18th century or from the modern made ground context 150.

It is not known if there was an established pipemaking industry in Bicester. To date there are no known pipemakers for the town. There is evidence of pipes possibly coming from Banbury and Oxford (see below). The close proximity of Bicester to Buckinghamshire and also Northamptonshire points to possible other sources for pipes.

Marked pipes:

E/C [x1] Mould impressed either side of a cylindrical foot on a London Type 25 bowl,²³ *c.* 1700–1770. Both letters are well formed, serif and upper case. The maker is unknown.

E/C or G [x2] Mould impressed either side of an oval shaped foot on a London Type 25 bowl, *c.* 1700–1770. The letters are sans-serif and upper case. The initial of the surname is problematical on both examples. A pipe with the same ambiguous mark was recovered from Adderbury, 3 miles south of Banbury.²⁴ The presence of a pipe of the same period and clearly marked 'E/C' (see above) may suggest that this is the likely correct reading. Either way, the maker is not known.

T/H [x1] Mould impressed either side of an untrimmed spur. The serif upper case letters are small and neat. Although the bowl is missing the pipe is clearly 19th century. Several pipes with this mark were found at St. Ebbe's in Oxford.²⁵ It can possibly be attributed to one of the several Thomas Huggins. Members of this extensive pipemaking family were working throughout the 19th century at Oxford but also at Banbury.

/ [x1] This unidentified 'stock' mark consisting of a star/flower is mould impressed either side of a pointed spur, *c.* 1830–1880. The bowl to which it is attached is decorated with oak leaves at the front.

Brick and tile by NICOLA POWELL

Fifty-two pieces of brick and tile weighing 4251 gms. were collected during the excavation. All are fragmentary and many pieces are too small for identification. The majority of the pieces are roof tile and some, for example from pit 106 (157), the soakaway/pit 118 (168) and pit 137 (190), have peg holes. Three pieces of tile, two from the foundation trench 103 (153) and a third from ditch 1000, slot 129 (180), are much thicker and may be the remains of floor tiles. Pieces of brick from ditch 1000, slots 102 (152) and 129 (180), and from posthole 140 (193) are too fragmentary to provide information as to their size and shape. All are catalogued in the site archive.

²² D.A. Higgins and P.J. Davey, *Draft Clay Tobacco Pipe Recording System* (1994).

²³ D. Atkinson and A. Oswald, 'London Clay Tobacco Pipes', *Jnl. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.* xxxii (1969), 179–80.

²⁴ P. Cannon, 'Clay Pipe', in S. Weaver, 'The Excavation of Post-medieval Buildings and Medieval Features at Adderbury House, Adderbury, Oxfordshire', *Trans. London & Middx. Archaeol. Soc.* (forthcoming).

²⁵ A. Oswald, 'Clay Pipes', in T.G. Hassall, C.E. Halpin and M. Mellor, 'Excavations at St Ebbe's, Oxford, 1967–76: Part II: Post-medieval domestic tenements and the post-dissolution site of the Greyfriars', *Oxoniensia*, 49 (1984), 260–1.

Burnt clay by NICOLA POWELL

Seven pieces of burnt clay and a fragment of daub were found during the excavation. All are catalogued in the archive. The burnt clay was examined to see if the fragments had formed part of an object, such as a loomweight or clay spindle whorl, but the pieces were too small to be identified. Small fragments of burnt clay from the pit or posthole 139 (192) and ditch slot 101 (151) may be pieces of brick. The imprint of wattle can be clearly seen on the piece of daub from the made ground (150).

Glass by NICOLA POWELL

Sixty-five sherds of glass with a total weight of 1746 gms. were recovered during the excavation. All derived from post-medieval contexts. A catalogue is contained in the archive.

Metalwork by NICOLA POWELL

Ten pieces of metalwork and a single lump of slag were collected during the excavation. Additionally, a piece of ?scissors blade was recovered from the surface of ditch 1000, slot 50, during the evaluation. There are four copper-alloy artefacts, two lead pieces, three iron fragments and a piece of silver spoon. All are catalogued in the archive. Only the blade and nail fragments from ditch 1000 derived from pre-modern contexts.

Shell by NICOLA POWELL

The shell found during the excavation is all oyster and comprises six halves and two broken fragments and is listed in the archive.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The site at Proctor's Yard, located in such close proximity to both the minster church and the site of the former Augustinian priory, was identified as having the potential to address some questions concerning the influence of the minster and priory on the development of the town, and the relationship between these two establishments. All the archaeological features that could be dated fell into the critical period from the 11th or 12th century to the 13th, but the area examined was small and the evidence remains equivocal.

Most of the information on the development of this site derives from the pottery assemblage and has already been explored above. There was no clear evidence of any substantial building earlier than the 18th century. Ditch 1000 and gully 1001 represent the only significant medieval features, and these can be dated only by their backfilling to no earlier than the late 11th or more probably the 12th century. Few of the remaining finds, other than animal bone, derived from contexts earlier than the modern period.

The testimony of the pottery leaves little doubt that early occupation on the site centred on the 11th century. However, little of the 11th-century pottery appears to have derived from primary disposal locations, being extremely fragmented and probably having suffered at least one and perhaps several episodes of disturbance and redeposition. It seems likely that its final deposition came about as a result of a reorganization of the landscape, involving the deliberate backfilling of ditch 1000 and gully 1001, probably during the 12th century, rather than contemporary with its circulation. It is very tempting to associate this reorganization with the transfer of land to the Augustinian priory in the late 12th century. This, in turn, would suggest that the majority of the early activity on the site related to the minster church, and that ditch 1000 may have been the east boundary of the land assigned to it, although a stone wall would have been more usual, so that it may instead have been an internal sub-division.

Moreover, it is notable that the few 13th-century features were all located west of ditch 1000 and thus *within* the area around the minster defined by this boundary feature. This might suggest continuing use of this part of the site into the 13th century for activities still centred on the existing church and thus that any shift of emphasis related to the transfer of control occurred only gradually. It may also be taken as a hint that the date proposed for the backfilling of the ditch is still too early and that this boundary remained in use until the same

time as these pits were being filled. The homogeneity of the pottery from the ditch fills, its evident residuality notwithstanding, appears to argue against the latter suggestion.

It is also possible that the distribution of medieval features reflects the local geology, avoiding the area overlain by alluvium at the east of the site. The land here sloped down gently, towards the river Bure. It is possible that an earlier course ran closer to the site or that this area was prone to flooding.

The postholes along the southern edge of the site may have been part of a fence line contemporary with the ditch, or suggest a timber building just outside the limit of excavation.

The absence of archaeologically-detectable activity from the end of the 13th century onwards (until at least the 16th and probably even not resuming until as late as the 18th century) must reflect changing priorities for land use at least in this small area, resulting from the replacement of the Saxon ecclesiastical complex by the priory. There were no clues within the excavated area that might allow the use of this area to be deduced, but total abandonment is not the only plausible explanation for a lack of subsurface features.

The animal bone remains recovered from medieval contexts indicate a normal domestic range of disposal, consistent with small-scale occupation. The lack of fish bones need not be surprising since no contexts were sieved for such remains, whose recognition by eye during excavation in winter conditions tends towards the impossible.

Post-medieval developments included minor modern buildings and pits and some raising of the ground level, with more extensive intrusion from buildings around the edges of the site. The post-medieval bone remains suggest the possibility that some tanning was undertaken in the immediate vicinity, so some of the pits and foundations could have been tannery vats/tanks. However, this material largely derived from the made-ground deposit 150 which, as noted above, was probably imported onto the site and thus could already have included these bones when brought in.

The site offers no evidence of any sort to suggest continuity between the medieval and post-medieval periods. Indeed, an apparent hiatus between the 13th and 18th centuries seems to have been identified. There would, however, appear to be a degree of continuity in use from the late Saxon to the early medieval period, albeit this transitional period is poorly dated here and few features can be securely assigned a late Saxon date. The (probably) late Saxon boundary ditch was infilled in the 12th century but the nature of land-use remained largely unchanged until the 13th. The chronology of the relationship between the minster church and the priory thus remains unclear, although it may be suggested that the changes which can be traced occurred only gradually and no immediate dislocation is evident. The small area investigated was in any case never intensively used until more recent times. More generally, the impression of accelerating activity in the 11th–12th centuries compares well with topographical change observed at other sites (e.g. Bampton) and this period seems to mark a starting point in the growth of small towns and pre-urban foci such as minsters.²⁶

²⁶ J. Blair pers. comm.

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