

Excavations West of St Mary's Church, Black Bourton, Oxfordshire: Early, Middle, and Late Anglo-Saxon Activity

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with contributions by PAUL BLINKHORN

SUMMARY

An excavation of a small area to the west of St Mary's Church, Black Bourton, prior to the extension of the cemetery, was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services in June 2006, expanding upon previous work conducted in 2002. The excavation revealed an early to mid-Saxon domestic settlement, possibly with associated religious activity, suggested by two circular post-built structures that might have been shrines. The mid-Saxon period of settlement included sunken-floored buildings and post-built structures, with evidence of metalworking. It is notable for a small collection of Ipswich-ware pottery. Domestic activity on the site may have lasted until the eleventh century.

In October 2002 John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological evaluation of part of a field west of St Mary's Church, Black Bourton, over which an extension to the local cemetery was planned. Significant archaeological remains were discovered, so it was agreed that an area would be excavated in order to record these remains before grave-digging destroyed them. The excavation was carried out in June 2006 over an area approximately 30 m by 15 m. It was part of a community project, and six volunteers helped on the site, in addition to local schoolchildren.¹

The site of the proposed cemetery extension is on the edge of open farmland, adjacent to the existing churchyard and about 60 m west of the tower of St Mary's Church, on the west side of Black Bourton. The present west Oxfordshire village is small but fairly dispersed, and lies about 2 km west of the important medieval settlement of Bampton, with which it was closely associated, and 5 km north of the medieval Thames crossing at Radcot (see Fig. 1). Much of the village extends north to south along Burford Road, which is now cut off by Brize Norton airfield about 1 km north of the church. Burford Road provides access to the church and runs from the B4020 between Alvescot and Clanfield (NGR SP 28590421). The underlying geology of the site is Oxford clay in the northern part, with third terrace river gravels in the south. It lies at approximately 80 m OD. Most recently it was used for pasture.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Black Bourton is mentioned in Domesday Book of 1086 as *Burtone* (meaning settlement near a fortified place),² which suggests that it existed in the later Anglo-Saxon period, if not earlier. This is supported by the discovery of some undated Anglo-Saxon pottery, and an inhumation to the south-west of the cemetery extension, which was aligned west-east.³ It is not known whether

¹ 'An archaeological evaluation on the proposed cemetery extension, west of St Mary's Church, Black Bourton, Oxfordshire' (John Moore Heritage Services, TS report, 2002).

² Domesday Book, fols 160, 161.

³ A. L. Meaney, *Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* (London, 1964), p. 203, and on the alignment see the note in the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record (primary record no. 9116).

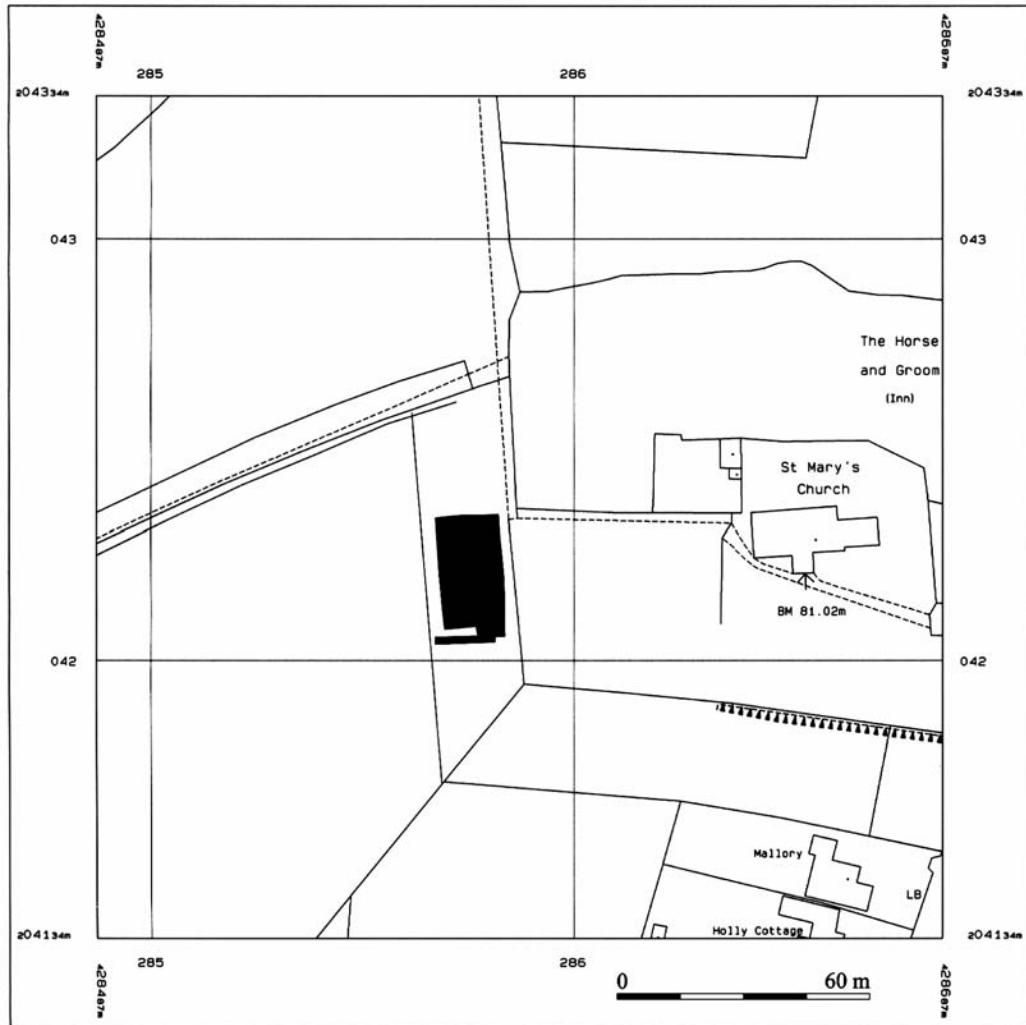


Fig. 1. Site location. (Drawn by E. Fitzsimons.)

it was an isolated burial or part of a larger group or cemetery.⁴ The church, however, dates back only to the early twelfth century in its present form and was remodelled in the thirteenth. It contains several monuments to the Hungerford family, who were the resident lords from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries.⁵ To the west of the cemetery a rectangular enclosure with possible building platforms has been identified from an aerial photograph. This may have been the one of the Hungerfords' manors, Bourton Winslow Manor, known as Bourton Place, which was demolished in 1784.⁶

⁴ Paul Blinkhorn, *Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Pottery from Yarnton*, in G. Hey *Yarnton: Saxon and Medieval Settlement and Landscape*, Thames Valley Monograph 20 (Oxford 2004), pp. 267–74.

⁵ *VCH Oxon.*, 15, pp. 80–2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

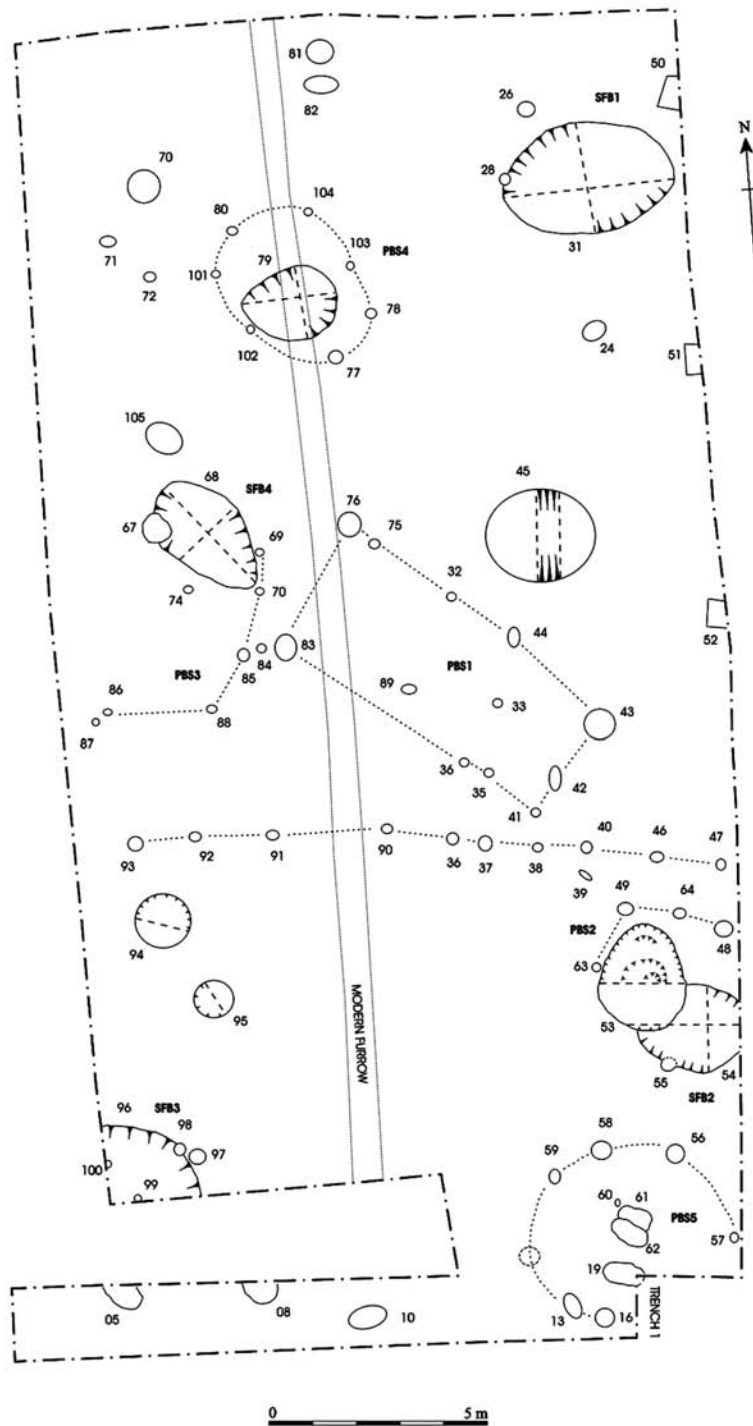


Fig. 2. Plan of excavation area. (Drawn by author.)

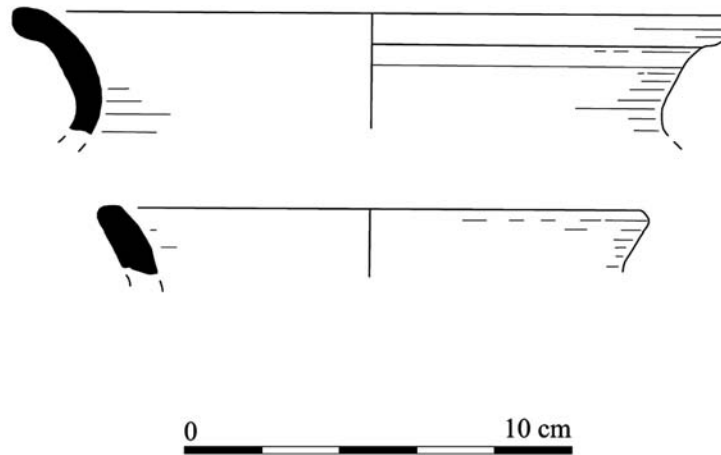


Fig. 3. Ipswich-ware pottery from context (30). (*Drawn by author.*)

The archaeological evaluation of 2002 revealed what was thought to be a Saxon sunken-floored building (sunken-floored building 1 – see Fig. 2) and a number of postholes. But the most interesting discovery was the pottery associated with the building. Apart from a single Romano-British sherd, it was all early or middle Saxon, and significantly included a group of six sherds of middle Saxon Ipswich ware, dated to between 720 and 850. This was only the fourth discovery of Ipswich ware in Oxfordshire. (See Fig. 3.) It seemed to suggest that the site was one of high status. The discoveries of 2002 were of sufficient importance to make an excavation of the proposed churchyard extension desirable.

DISCUSSION OF EXCAVATION RESULTS by DAVID GILBERT,
with contributions by PAUL BLINKHORN

A detailed description of the finds can be found below in Appendices 1–3. What follows is a summary and some tentative conclusions.

Both sunken-floored buildings and post-built structures were discovered at the site. Several postholes were found, including a row of ten, stretching east to west across the site, which could once have been a fence line. To the south of this was a well and a separate sunken-floored building, which contained worked-bone pins and needles, and a pit with metalworking debris. On the north side were the remains of buildings, and pits which appeared to be domestic and contained a variety of pottery of early to middle Saxon date. One contained an intricately worked bone hair-comb. The impression given by the Ipswich-ware pottery that the site as a whole was a high-status one was confirmed by the find of a gilded buckle on the first day of the excavation. (See Fig. 4.)

Although the field was pasture immediately before its conversion to a cemetery, it had been ploughed from the medieval period onwards, and there were slight traces of ridge and furrow. The base of one of the furrows was seen to cut across the site from north to south; this was uneven in depth and appeared to have been recorded in the evaluation of 2002 as feature [10]. The field was still being ploughed within living memory, and this may well have truncated features covered

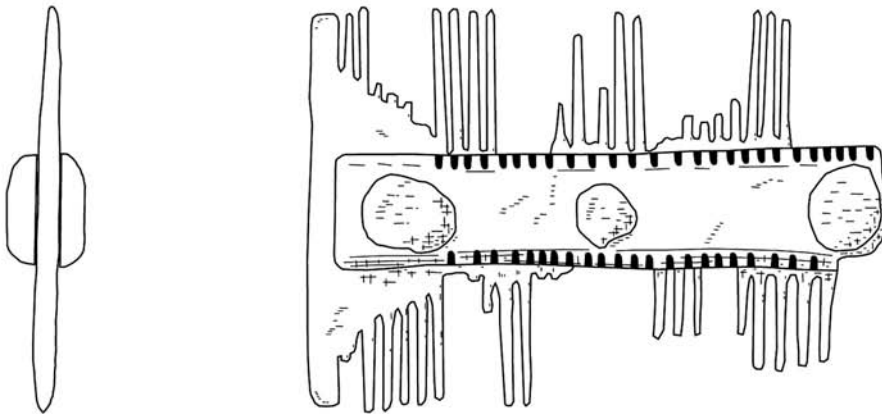
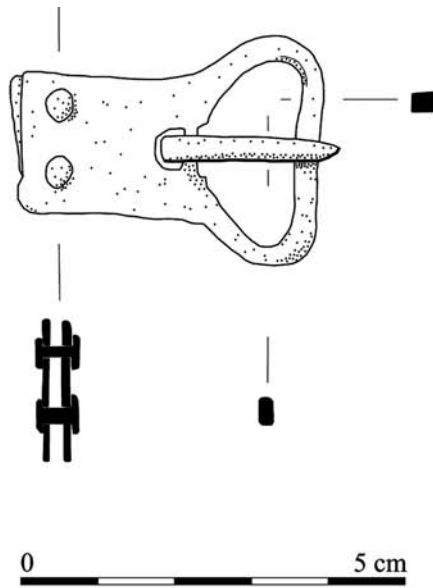


Fig. 4. Copper alloy buckle and bone comb. (Drawn by author.)

only by a shallow topsoil, especially to the west of the site. The upper portions of the cut features and any associated horizontal layers and shallow features have been destroyed. It is estimated that the truncation has removed up to 0.3 m of deposits.⁷ This destruction of the vertical stratigraphy has made phasing of the site difficult, except for the one or two instances of intercutting features. It has also made interpretation of the buildings difficult, due to the possible loss of particular postholes.

There is no direct evidence of occupation before the beginning of the middle Saxon period, although by inference it could have been as early as AD 450. It appears to have lasted until at least the eleventh century. The remains associated with the buildings give the clearest indication of this.

Four features have been interpreted as sunken-floored buildings (see below for description). Sunken-floored buildings 1 and 2 appeared to have only one associated posthole, although this is not uncommon,⁸ and truncation by ploughing may have resulted in the loss of other postholes. Sunken-floored building 3 may have been a more typical two-hole building and was larger than the others. The positioning of posthole [98] on the edge of sunken-floored building 3 conforms to the pattern seen with sunken-floored buildings 1 and 2. However, the proximity of posthole [97] to [98] may indicate a phase of rebuilding, with a larger, deeper set post replacing an earlier one. The two postholes [99] and [100] within sunken-floored building 3 appear to have been set round the centre, possibly forming a circle with other postholes not excavated. This may have been associated with the activity that took place within the building.

Sunken-floored building 4 possibly had no postholes associated with it. Again this is not unprecedented for this type of building, with several having been found at West Stow and some at Pennyland⁹ and Littlemore.¹⁰ It is equally possible that truncation from ploughing might have destroyed previously existing postholes.

Sunken-floored building 4 alone did not contain any pottery. The pottery that was recovered from the other buildings was of an early to middle Saxon date, of which six sherds of Ipswich ware, all from sunken-floored building 1, are by far the most significant.

Of the post-built structures, structure 1 consisted of twelve postholes of varying size and rather irregular spacing, forming a rectangle 7.5 m long by 3.5 m wide. Rectangular halls are a typical form of building on early to middle Saxon settlements, and if this interpretation is correct, the building was perhaps about average for this type of structure in the region, being double the size of those found at Dorchester,¹¹ and half the size of those at Barrow Hills, Radley.¹²

Little can be postulated about the size of post-built structures 2 and 3. If there were other postholes forming a structure, these did not survive later activity on the site.

It has been suggested that the circular structure, post-built structure 4, consisting of seven postholes surrounding an oval-shaped pit 2 m by 1.6 m, could be a latrine. But if so, one would expect the central pit to be smaller in diameter and deeper, with the fill having a more organic content. The possibility that it was an early pagan shrine (see discussion below) seems more likely. Early to middle Saxon pottery was recovered from the fill of one of its postholes [101]. Post-built structure 5 was another circular structure, with six postholes surrounding a cluster of three small intercutting oval pits. One of the outer postholes [58] contained a sherd of early to middle Saxon pottery.

⁷ 'An archaeological excavation at St Mary's Church, Black Bourton, Oxfordshire' (John Moore Heritage Services, TS report, 2006).

⁸ John Moore et al., 'Excavations at Oxford Science Park, Littlemore, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, 66 (2001), pp. 163–219.

⁹ R. J. Williams, *Pennyland and Hartigans: Two Iron Age and Saxon Sites in Milton Keynes*, Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society Monograph, 4 (Aylesbury, 1993), pp. 79–80.

¹⁰ Moore, et al., 'Oxford Science Park', pp. 163–219.

¹¹ Trevor Rowley and L. Brown, 'Excavations at Beech House Hotel, Dorchester-on-Thames, 1972', *Oxoniensia*, 46 (1981), pp. 1–55.

¹² John Blair, *Anglo Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994), pp. 18–23.

Across the centre of the site was a line of postholes, which may well have been a fence dividing the domestic from the industrial part of the settlement. It may also have prevented both people and animals from falling down the nearby well. Linear fence lines appear to have been a common feature on Saxon sites, such as at Barton Court Farm¹³ and Pennyland,¹⁴ where they formed internal divisions within a settlement. In this case a clear line of ten fairly regularly spaced postholes [36], [37], [38], [40], [46], [47], [90], [91], [92], and [93] crossed the site. Early to middle Saxon pottery was recovered from the fill of one of the postholes [37]. Two other lines of posts, one each side of the main line, ran parallel to it before curving away. It is not clear from the short lengths exposed what these represent, though perhaps the wider one might be the funnel end of a narrow (3 m wide) track.

The pits recorded did not appear to form a spatially coherent group, although the general character of each was similar (see below). One [95] was of early to middle Saxon date, another [45] was of a mid-eleventh-century date, and possibly a third [94] was modern. The majority remain undated. Due to their distribution, it seems possible that they were dug over a number of generations. A common trait for all, whatever their intended purpose, was that the nature of the fill, with its lack of silting, indicated at least an element of deliberate backfilling. A similar conclusion was drawn from the pits at the settlement of Pennyland, Milton Keynes.¹⁵

Metalworking was obviously taking place in the area, as the slag and debris in the fill of pit [95] shows. Pottery from the same fill indicates that it is very likely that this industry dates to the middle Saxon period.

THE WELL

A well [53] 2.5 m wide and at least 1.41 m deep was found to the south of the suggested fence line. Examination of the well indicates that there were at least three phases of occupation on the site. Firstly, there was post-built structure 2, the postholes of which were destroyed by the second building, sunken-floored building 2, which was early to middle Saxon. It seems that after sunken-floored building 2 was filled in, the well was dug where it had previously been.

Wells were common on Saxon settlements, either as the main supply of water or as an additional one. In the case of Black Bourton, this would have provided an additional source, as surface water is close by. Many Saxon wells produce waterlogged remains of ladders and wattle lining held by stakes, but the soil conditions were not favourable at Black Bourton for such preservation, although, as it was not 'bottomed', preserved remains could have survived further down. Pottery from the upper fill of the well indicates that the well had been filled in some time after the late eleventh century. The upper fill of this well was very homogenous, possibly indicating it was deliberately backfilled after a short period of silting.

The wells recorded at Pennyland and Hartigans¹⁶ had no associated posthole structures, and it may be that those postholes noted close to the Black Bourton well [53] were not connected with it but are part of a separate structure, identified as post-built structure 2 (see Fig. 2).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE POTTERY

The pottery evidence suggests activity from possibly the early Saxon period until the twelfth century, although not necessarily continuous. There could be at least two phases of Anglo-Saxon settlement as evidenced by the pottery – one early, and the other middle Saxon, featuring domestic activity and metalworking. There was also later Saxo-Norman activity nearby.

¹³ Ibid. pp. 12–33.

¹⁴ Williams, *Pennyland and Hartigans*, pp. 49–55.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 90–7.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 86–90.

While most of the pottery was very typical of the region, the presence of the six sherds of Ipswich ware may be highly significant, and suggest that at least some, if not all, of the handmade wares are likely to be of middle Saxon date. The material is rare in Oxfordshire, with the only other find-spots being the Sackler Library site in Oxford,¹⁷ Yarnton,¹⁸ and Eynsham Abbey.¹⁹ This group of material is as large as any from those three sites, and as they were discovered during major excavations, the finds at this small site may be important. The material is of middle Saxon date, with recent work²⁰ indicating that it can be firmly assigned to the period AD 720 to 850.

Ipswich ware has a uniquely wide distribution amongst middle Saxon wares, having been noted as far north as north Yorkshire and as far south as Kent, with the most westerly find being Lechlade, in Gloucestershire. While it can be found at sites of every status, the discoveries furthest away from Ipswich are often associated with higher status sites, such as those with minster churches. The three previous Oxfordshire finds are a possible fair site, a farmstead, and a monastery, respectively. Often the material is found near churches with middle Saxon origins, but at Black Bourton, St Mary's, at least in its present form, is twelfth century. The site could therefore be of any status, but the rarity of the material in Oxfordshire, the size of the assemblage, and the small scale of the excavations all suggest very strongly that the site may have been of high status.

OTHER FINDS

Amongst the noteworthy finds was an Anglo-Saxon gilded, copper-alloy buckle, which confirmed the high status of some of the inhabitants of the site. The buckle was recovered from context (01). It measured 41 mm long and 29 mm wide. It was fitted to a strap by two copper-alloy rivets holding a back plate to the tang of the buckle (see Fig. 4).

A single example of a modified pig fibula was recorded from building SFB3, context [96]. It is near complete, with a shaft modified to a point at the proximal end and a perforation cut into the distal end. The head is damaged and partially missing; the point is also damaged, and the object broken in halves. Its length is 86 mm.

Modified pig fibulae are common objects on Anglo-Saxon sites of all periods. They are generally regarded as objects used in weaving or basketry, or as textile implements.

A pointed bone implement was also recovered from the same building, context [96]. It is a 56-mm-long modified bird bone, showing some signs of work at the damaged proximal end. Similar items from other Saxon sites have variously been described as pins, awls, pegs, or bodkins.

An incomplete, double-sided, composite comb was recovered from context (30) during the evaluation in 2002. It consisted of an end segment and parts of the connecting plates with rivets.

A brass coin weight was also recovered from the topsoil (01). It is 28 mm in diameter and 3 mm thick. It has a raised border on the upper surface, with concentric marks from the mould on the other. These are partially obscured by course filing marks. Registered on the upper surface are three stamps of authentication by the London Founders' Company. One of the marks depicted is a sword, another a C and ornate III, while the third is less distinct, but possibly an ewer. It is dated to the reign of Charles I (1625–49) or Charles II (1660–85).²¹

¹⁷ Paul Blinkhorn, 'Pottery', in Daniel Poore and David R. P. Wilkinson, *Beaumont Palace and the White Friars: Excavations at the Sackler Library, Beaumont Street, Oxford*, OAU Occasional Paper 9 (Oxford, 2001).

¹⁸ Paul Blinkhorn, 'Anglo-Saxon Pottery', in Moore et al., 'Excavations at Oxford Science Park', pp. 189–97.

¹⁹ Paul Blinkhorn, 'The pottery', in Alan Hardy, Anne Dodd, and Graham D. Keevil, *Ælfric's Abbey. Excavations at Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire, 1989–92*, OA Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 16 (Oxford, 2003), pp. 165, 171.

²⁰ Paul Blinkhorn, *The Ipswich-ware Project: Ceramics, Trade and Society in Middle Saxon England* (MPRG Monograph, forthcoming).

²¹ Geoff Egan, *Material Culture in London in an Age of Transition: Tudor and Stuart Finds c.1450-c.1700 from*

ASSOCIATION OF BLACK BOURTON WITH BAMPTON

The proximity of the Black Bourton site to Bampton and the close association of the two places in the Anglo-Saxon period are of particular interest. They may even provide an explanation for the apparently high status of the site. It has been suggested that the place-name Bourton means the *tun* next to the *burh*. Such names often occurred within the districts of Anglo-Saxon minsters,²² and there is some evidence to suggest that Bampton may have been a minster.²³ A minster in this context would have been a central church housing a religious community of monks, clergy, or laity, or all of them, which provided pastoral care to the surrounding area. Before the development of the parish system, with its individual parish churches, the minster would have been the basic local unit. Black Bourton could have been a dependent chapel of Bampton, and indeed such claims were being made as late as 1318.²⁴ Bampton was also a royal centre, and it is likely that during the late Saxon period Black Bourton would have belonged to the royal manor of Bampton.²⁵

Given its importance as a royal centre, Bampton would almost certainly have been a trading-centre, as this seems to have been a common pattern in middle Saxon England.²⁶ The minster itself would probably have been the centre of trade, as was the case at Abingdon in 1087.²⁷

Bampton appears to have been linked with Black Bourton by a navigable canal, although this can be dated only to some time before 1317. Documentary evidence suggests parallels with a canal cut near Abingdon Abbey in 1050. The Bourton canal appears to have stretched as far as Shifford, for there is a reference to it there in 1005.²⁸ At Black Bourton the excavated settlement would have been within 200 m of the canal, although it is unlikely that this watercourse would have been in use as early as the eighth or ninth century.

No definite mid-Saxon features have been recorded at Bampton, although two sherds of imported North French Blackware of the eighth to ninth century were recovered as residual pieces from a twelfth-century ditch.²⁹ There is a close relationship between the finds of Ipswich ware at Black Bourton and the North French Blackware at Bampton. These are the most westerly occurrences of both types of pottery. The North French Blackware was presumably coming up the Thames, and the Ipswich ware would have been coming overland or possibly along the Nene-Ouse system via the east Midlands.³⁰ The Upper Thames region appears to have been very important in this period, because it was here that the two trade and transport routes converged, both being used to bring raw materials out of the west Midlands.

RELIGION AND SETTLEMENT

By the late Anglo-Saxon period, the tenth and eleventh centuries, the population would have been Christian and dependent upon Bampton. This would not have been the case in the early Saxon period of settlement. It is possible that the two circular buildings, post-built structures

Excavations at Riverside Sites in Southwark, Museum of London Archaeology Service, Monograph 19 (London, 2005), p. 162.

²² John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 251 and n. 21.

²³ Blair, *Anglo Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp. 63–73.

²⁴ *VCH Oxon.*, 15, p. 95.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁶ Paul Blinkhorn, 'Of Cabbages and Kings: production, trade and consumption in Middle Saxon England', in Mike Anderton, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Trading Centres: Beyond the Emporia* (Glasgow, 1999), pp. 4–23.

²⁷ John Blair, 'Bampton: an Anglo-Saxon Minster', *Current Archaeology*, 14 (1998), pp. 124–30.

²⁸ John Blair, 'Transport and canal-building on the upper Thames, 1000–1300', in John Blair, ed., *Waterways and Canal-building in Medieval England* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 254–94.

²⁹ Andy Mayes, Alan Hardy, and John Blair, 'The excavation of early Iron Age and medieval remains on land to the west of Church View, Bampton, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, 65 (2000), pp. 267–90.

³⁰ Blair, 'Transport and canal-building', p. 278.

4 and 5, rather than being latrines (see above), were, in fact, early Anglo-Saxon pagan shrines. Generally shrines were square rather than circular, but these two structures are on a similar scale, and it is not unknown for such enclosures to contain central pits.³¹ The nearby site of New Wintles displays an Anglo-Saxon landscape of the sixth to eighth centuries. Within this area is a square shrine, surrounded by sunken-floored buildings, some post-built structures, and the occasional inhumation. Although this long-lived site was spread over 450 m, only a single shrine was recorded.³² The proximity of two potential shrines in such a small area at Black Bourton would suggest that the site was a focus for religious activity in the early Saxon period. The number of shrines may indicate a site of some importance. The inhumation recorded to the south-west may well have formed part of a wider religious complex. None of the finds would indicate a shrine, unless the buckle was part of a votive offering. Although shrines have been located in proximity to settlements, the problems of dating the majority of early to middle Saxon pottery accurately has made it difficult to assess whether the religious and domestic activities at the site were contemporary. But it is possible that some of the less well-dated sunken-floored buildings may have been contemporary with the putative shrines.

Religion was central to Anglo-Saxon life. Although the twelfth-century church of St Mary is not within the excavation area, it is within 70 m of it, and it is likely that there would have been an earlier church nearby, if not on the same site. Pottery dated from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries has been found in the vicinity of the church. This, and the filling in of the well in or after the eleventh century (see above), may indicate that the settlement shifted, perhaps to the old churchyard area, before moving to the site of the present village.

Overall the evidence for settlement is confusing, and it is difficult to be certain about its successive phases. The evidence of the possible shrines suggests that occupation started in the early Anglo-Saxon period, that is, possibly as early as the mid-fifth century. The handmade pottery from the site cannot be firmly dated, although it could be as early as 450. The Ipswich ware, however, can be dated to the middle Saxon period, that is, 720 to 850, indicating a second phase of settlement. The well site revealed three possible phases. There were three successive structures there: post-built structure 1, which was early to middle Saxon, sunken-floored building 2, which was middle Saxon, and the well itself, which went out of use in the eleventh century. Altogether the evidence suggests activity in the early and middle Saxon periods, possibly as late as 850, and then again in the eleventh century. There is, however, no direct evidence of occupation in the mid-ninth and tenth centuries, although the filling-in of the well in the eleventh century may indicate that there was continuous domestic activity on the site until that time.

DESCRIPTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS AND FEATURES

[All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features, i.e., pit cuts. Due to time constraints some feature fills were recorded with the same number as their cut. However, significant deposits of material were given separate numbers and indicated thus (). For the sake of continuity, the numbering sequence follows on from the 2002 excavation, where previously recorded features have been relocated and their original numbers have been reassigned.]

All remains found were negative features cut into the natural gravel deposits. These were sealed by topsoil and ploughsoil 0.3 – 0.6m thick.

³¹ John Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon pagan shrines and their prototypes', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 8 (1995), pp. 1–28.

³² N. B. Clayton, 'New Wintles, Eynsham, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, 38 (1973), pp. 382–4.

SUNKEN-FLOORED BUILDINGS (SFBs)

Building 1 (SFB1)

The probable SFB [31] located by the previous evaluation in 2002 was reinvestigated. During the course of this excavation it was initially recorded in quadrants before total excavation. The fill was a homogenous brown sandy silt, with frequent gravel chips and charcoal flecks. It was oval, measuring 4 m by 2.5 m in plan and was 0.2 m deep. The associated posthole [28] had previously been completely excavated.

Building 2 (SFB2)

A second probable SFB [54] was located to the south of [31]. This appeared to be of a similar form, only smaller, measuring over 2.5 m by 2 m in plan. This was recorded in quadrants before near-complete excavation. It was shallow – only 0.1 m deep, with a flat base, and filled with a brown silt with frequent gravel. It was associated with posthole [55], which appeared to be contemporary. This posthole was 0.29 m in diameter and 0.12 m deep, with a rounded base. It was filled with a dark-brown silt and contained large pieces of limestone used as a packing material. This SFB had been truncated by a later cut [53].

Building 3 (SFB3)

Cut [96] formed the main part of a third SFB. This was only partially exposed during the excavation. Perhaps only a quarter was revealed, with the majority remaining under the baulk of the sections. The entirety exposed was fully excavated measuring at least 2 m by 1.8 m in plan and up to 0.2 m deep. Two postholes, [97] and [98], were set on the outer edge. The cut of [97] was circular, 0.5 m in diameter and 0.25 m deep, with vertical sides. It was filled with a mid-brown firm silt with some gravel inclusions. The cut of [98] was also circular; it was 0.26 m in diameter and 0.1 m deep, with vertical sides. Set internally round the presumed centre were two small postholes, [99] and [100]. Both were shallow, about 0.1 m deep and approximately 0.2 m in diameter. Both were filled with a dark-grey silt.

Building 4 (SFB4)

Cut [68] could be a possible SFB. This oval feature measured 3 m by 2 m and was 0.18 m deep. It was initially recorded by quadrant before total excavation. It was filled with a slightly clayey brown silt deposit, with some gravel inclusions and charcoal flecks. The southern end displayed a very shallow depression and significant narrowing, possibly indicating a post depression or area for a post-pad. The overall shape is similar to cuts [31] and [54], although there is no definite posthole as one would expect. However, postholes [69], [70], or [74] could be associated with it (see below).

POST-BUILT STRUCTURES (PBSs)

Structure 1 (PBS1)

A rectangular PBS with twelve associated postholes was recorded near the centre of the excavated area. The four corners consist of [41], [43], [76], and [83]. Six postholes appeared to be associated with the wall lines of this structure: [34], [35], [36], [42], [44], and [75]. The two internal postholes, [33] and [89], were also recorded. Posthole [84] was set into the ground at an angle, suggesting that it might have served as a prop against this structure. These varied from 0.15 m to 0.6 m in diameter and were up to 0.25 m deep.

Structure 2 (PBS2)

It is possible that the four postholes [48], [49], [63], and [64] form the corner of a PBS. These varied from 0.22 m to 0.3 m in diameter and were up to 0.15 m deep.

Structure 3 (PBS3)

The partial remains of a possible third structure are represented by six postholes [69], [73], [85], [86], [87], and [88], possibly forming a wall line and corner. Posthole [74] could possibly have been an internal feature associated with this structure. The postholes varied from 0.16 m to 0.35 m in diameter and were up to 0.14 m deep.

Structure 4 (PBS4)

This was a circular structure, consisting of a central pit surrounded by an irregular circle of seven postholes. The main pit [79] was oval in plan and measured 2 m by 1.6 m. It was initially recorded by quadrants before total excavation. Measuring 0.22 m deep, it was filled with a sandy silt loam with about 30 per cent gravel and occasional charcoal flecks. It had been slightly truncated by a later furrow.

The circle of postholes was formed by [77], [78], [80], [101], [102], [103], and [104]. These varied from 0.2 m to 0.3 m in diameter and were up to 0.2 m deep. Posthole [101] contained a sherd of early to middle Saxon pottery.

Structure 5 (PBS5)

A second circular structure of six postholes centred on three small oval pits. One of the central pits [19] was originally recorded by the evaluation in 2002. It measured 0.4 m by 0.7 m and was 0.2 m deep. The other two, [61] and [62], were located during this excavation. Pit [61] measured 0.75 m by 0.3 m in plan and was 0.2 m deep. It contained a mid-grey-brown sandy loam, with the occasional large pebble. It had been cut by pit [62]. This pit was 0.65 m by 0.3 m in plan and was also 0.2 m deep. The lower fill was a 0.14 m thick deposit of compact, light grey-brown silt, with some limestone blocks. Above this was a 0.06-m-thick deposit of orange-brown silt loam. A small stake-hole was also recorded in the interior of the structure, near to pit [61].

Two of the outer circle of postholes, [13] and [16], were also previously recorded during the 2002 evaluation. The other postholes [56], [57], [58], and [59] were located during this excavation. An oval patch of soil was noted in the area (see Fig. 2). Initially dismissed as too shallow to be a feature in retrospect, it may well have been the bottom of a truncated posthole. These varied from 0.2 m to 0.3 m in diameter and were up to 0.2 m deep. Posthole [58] contained a sherd of early to middle Saxon pottery.

Fence Line

A linear arrangement of ten postholes, [36], [37], [38], [40], [46], [47], [90], [91], [92], and [93], was recorded running east to west across the site. They were roughly spaced, at approximately 1.5 m. They ranged from 0.15 m to 0.33 m in diameter and were up to 0.13 m deep. Posthole [37] contained a sherd of early to middle Saxon pottery.

The Well

A large, sub-circular feature [53] was half excavated just south of the fence line. It measured 2.5 m by 2 m in plan and was 1.41 m deep. It had near-vertical sides near the top, which tapered in towards the base. This feature had been cut into the natural (23) and through layers of concreted gravel at approximately 1.1 m from the level of the top of the natural. The base of the feature was cut into a layer of loose gravel below the height of the water table at the time, which was a period of drought.

The lowest deposit within this feature was a grey silty clay (66), with some gravel that was 0.25 m thick. Above this was an orange-brown silty loam (65), with 25 per cent gravel and some charcoal flecks. It was up to 1.16 m deep.

Pits

Seven contemporary pits, [45], [67], [70], [81], [82], [95], and [105], were recorded during the excavation; these were considered too large to be postholes. Two pits were of note. The first pit [45] was roughly circular and 2 m in diameter and 0.5 m deep. It contained small quantities of animal bone and pottery. The second pit [95] was circular in plan and 0.9 m in diameter. It was 0.1 m deep, with flat base and concave sides. It was filled with ash, clinker, and metalworking slag.

THE POTTERY by PAUL BLINKHORN

The pottery assemblage from the 2006 excavations comprised 145 sherds, with a total weight of 1205 g. It comprised mainly early to middle Anglo-Saxon wares, along with a smaller assemblage of earlier medieval and post-medieval wares, and a single sherd of Romano-British material. This is in addition to 30 sherds with a total weight of 203 g from the 2002 evaluation, all of which came from a single feature, which is of middle Saxon date. The assemblage is of some significance, as it contains only the fourth group of middle Saxon Ipswich-ware pottery from the county of Oxfordshire.

It suggests that there were several distinct phases of post-Roman activity at the site. The first was in the middle Anglo-Saxon period, between about AD 700 and 850, the second in the earlier part of the medieval period, about AD 1050 to 1200, and the third in the early post-medieval period, the later sixteenth to seventeenth century.

Middle Saxon

Fabric. The following fabrics were noted:

F1: Shelly limestone. Moderate to dense angular shelly limestone up to 2 mm. 1 sherd, 7 g.

F2: Limestone and chaff. As F1, with moderate chaff voids up to 2 mm. 7 sherds, 44 g.

F3: Quartz. Moderate sub-angular quartz up to 1 mm. 29 sherds, 168 g.

F4: Chaff temper. 28 sherds, 283 g.

F5: Oolitic limestone. Moderate to dense oolitic limestone up to 1 mm. 45 sherds, 303 g.

F6: Quartz and limestone. Sparse to moderate angular limestone up to 1 mm, sparse angular quartz up to 1 mm. 2 sherds, 16 g.

F7 Coarse quartz. Moderate to dense sub-rounded quartz up to 3 mm. Occasionally rare calcareous material of the same size. 2 sherds, 12 g.

Ipswich ware.³³ Middle Saxon, AD 725–850, slow-wheel-made ware, manufactured exclusively in the eponymous Suffolk *wic*. All sherds were Group 1 fabrics: hard and slightly sandy to the touch, with visible small quartz grains and some shreds of mica. Frequent fairly well-sorted angular to sub-angular grains of quartz, generally measuring below 0.3 mm in size, but with some larger grains, including a number which are polycrystalline in appearance. Also present are flecks of mica, some small pieces of chert in the same size range as the smaller quartz grains, a little quartzite, a few small discrete grains of feldspar, iron oxides, and occasional fragments of ironstone and fine-grained sandstone. 6 sherds, 64 g.

Overview and Discussion

The range of fabrics is typical of sites of the period in the region, such as the material found during recent excavations at the Oxford Science Park.³⁴ The assemblage comprised sherds from a number of vessels, none of which was reconstructable to any great degree. Five small rimsherds were noted, all less than 5 per cent complete, and all were from closed jar forms, except for a single example from a small bowl.

None of the handmade pottery from this site was decorated. Plain pottery of this type is very difficult to date closely, unless accompanied by decorated sherds or datable imports, such as Ipswich ware or Continental wares. The Anglo-Saxons largely ceased decorating pottery in the early part of the seventh century, but such wares were rare even when they were used. Decorated wares usually comprise only about 3 per cent of the pottery from settlement sites of the fifth and sixth centuries, such as Mucking, in Essex,³⁵ and rarely occur in small assemblages. Thus a small assemblage of handmade pottery lacking decorated sherds, such as this one, cannot be given a date other than within the broad early to middle Saxon period, c.450 to 850.

Medieval and Later Pottery

The medieval and later pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type series,³⁶ as follows:

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD 975–1350. 17 sherds, 67 g.

OXBF: North-east Wiltshire Ware, AD 1050–1400. 8 sherds, 109 g.

OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD 1075–1350. 2 sherds, 31 g.

OXCL: Cistercian ware, 1475–1700. 1 sherd, 1 g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 10 sherds, 146 g.

WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, mid-19th-20th century. 14 sherds, 46 g.

It is of note that Brill/Boarstall ware (Oxford fabric OXAM) is entirely absent from the site, despite being extremely common in medieval contexts of the 13th century or later in the region. It is therefore highly unlikely that there was any medieval activity at this site after the later 12th century.

The majority of this material came from the topsoil or from around the church. One sherd each of OXAC and OXBF was recovered from context [45], one sherd each of OXAC and OXY was recovered from context [53], and one sherd of WHEW was found in context [94].

The range of medieval pottery types is typical of sites in the region. The entire assemblage comprised plain bodysherds, apart from two sherds of OXBF, which had combed decoration. This is not unusual for pots in this tradition.

³³ J. G. Hurst, 'The pottery', in D. M. Wilson, ed., *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge 1976), pp. 248–348.

³⁴ Blinkhorn, 'Anglo-Saxon pottery', in Moore et al., 'Oxford Science Park', pp. 189–97.

³⁵ Helena Hamerow, *Excavations at Mucking, 2: The Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (London, 1993), pp. 51–2.

³⁶ Maureen Mellor, 'A summary of the key assemblages. A study of pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from fourteen pits, dating from the 16th to the 19th century', in T. G. Hassall, C. E. Halpin, and Maureen Mellor, 'Excavations at St Ebbe's', *Oxoniensia*, 49 (1984), pp. 181–219.

This report is an edited version of the full report, which can be found in the Oxfordshire County Sites and Monuments Record. It is also within the archive that has been deposited at the Oxfordshire Museums Resource Centre, under accession nos 2002.251 and 2006.80

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