

THE WINSCOMBE PROJECT 2010

Research in the Winscombe Project in 2010 (Aston and Hall 2009) concentrated on documentary research, map regression analysis, test-pit digging (Figs 1 and 2) and vernacular building surveys.

Using the long series of *compotus* or account rolls, transcribed and translated by Martin Ecclestone, it has been possible to locate and map over 20 separate medieval settlements, mainly from the surnames of medieval peasants recorded in the documents (Aston *et al.* 2010). The major discovery in 2010 from this research is the previously unrecognized deserted medieval hamlet called Wyke or Wick. This seems to have had two or three families at most, together with a number of *garciones* (or landless labourers) and seems mainly to have existed from the 12th to the mid 14th century. It is not recorded after about 1400 AD and so may be a candidate for a Black Death desertion. John Gater of GSB carried out a geophysical survey and James Bond will be conducting a topographical survey to record the earthworks on the site.

The study of medieval settlements in the parish confirms the dispersed and varied patterns of settlement within the parish, with one village (with the medieval church, Winscombe), some large hamlets (Sandford, Woodborough), several of which were probably planned when they were developed in medieval times (Sidcot, Barton and Winterhead) and a number of smaller farmsteads, one or two of which were moated (Hale, Max, Nye).

Other discoveries from the *compotus* rolls include the former existence of a windmill on a mill mound (at the Lynch) which lasted from the 14th to the 16th century. It is likely that the watermill at Max dates from the Domesday Survey of 1086, but it may well be earlier, possibly dating from the 10th century (Aston *et al.* 2010).

Continuing research on other documentary sources is still proving to be valuable. The second watermill in the parish, at Woodborough, can now be shown to be of 13th-century origin at least, as it is associated with grants of land by Henry Lovestheft whose mill it was. A small settlement, probably a farmstead, is implied in the surnames of Ralph de Lincumbe (after 1226) and Walter de Lyncumbe in 1256 (Bird 1907, 360–1). This probably stood where the springs for the Sandmead Rhyne emerge rather than at the present Lyncumbe Lodge which is the modern Avon Ski Centre.

The medieval farm site of Plested, first recorded

in 1276, has also been identified. Although the place is often mentioned as a surname, and the place-name is itself of considerable interest, its location was unknown (Aston *et al.* 2010, 69, 72). The 1799 enclosure map for Winscombe records a ‘Plaisters Way’ near Dinghurst where today there is a narrow path – a small holloway in places – leading down to earthworks and a ruined limekiln in the bottom of a steep sided combe. Ironically earthworks nearby were recorded before 2009 for the Northern Mendip Hills archaeological survey by English Heritage as ‘a possible medieval settlement or field system to the north of Lyncombe Lane’, but it has proved impossible to contact anyone about this or other potential sites in this area (Priest and Dickson 2009). These earthworks seem to have been part of an early, prehistoric? field system.

Documentary research has now begun on the medieval land uses of the parish beginning with woodland. It is becoming clear that Winscombe was a parish with a wood-pasture economy where arable farming was of minor significance. There is good evidence for assarting (or woodland clearance) and it is proving possible to identify the medieval woodlands in the parish, ‘Brownridge’ or ‘Brimridge’, ‘Warn Hill’ ‘Moorham’ and ‘Frith’, which were part of the royal forest of Mendip from the 12th to the 14th century (see Aston this volume pp 71–118). The royal forest, centred on Cheddar, where the royal palace (or hunting lodge) was excavated by Philip Rahtz (1979), seems never to have been totally wooded.

The Somerset Vernacular Buildings Research Group, under the direction of John Rickard, have begun a survey of the buildings in existence by the time of the tithing map (1840) and earlier (see pp. 206–9 this volume)). So far 13 buildings have been examined and this includes several 16th/17th-century farmhouses, one or two of which have smoke-blackened timbers in the roof indicating that they are probably of late-medieval date (Wellage Cottage, The Myrtles, both in Sandford). Research has also begun by Ann Brooks on the 50 or so ‘Victorian villas’ (c. 1830–1930) in the parish and the historical and sociological reasons for their construction. Research, particularly on the rich post-medieval documentation as background to the buildings research, has continued by Maria Forbes.

As well as the Wyke site, geophysical survey has

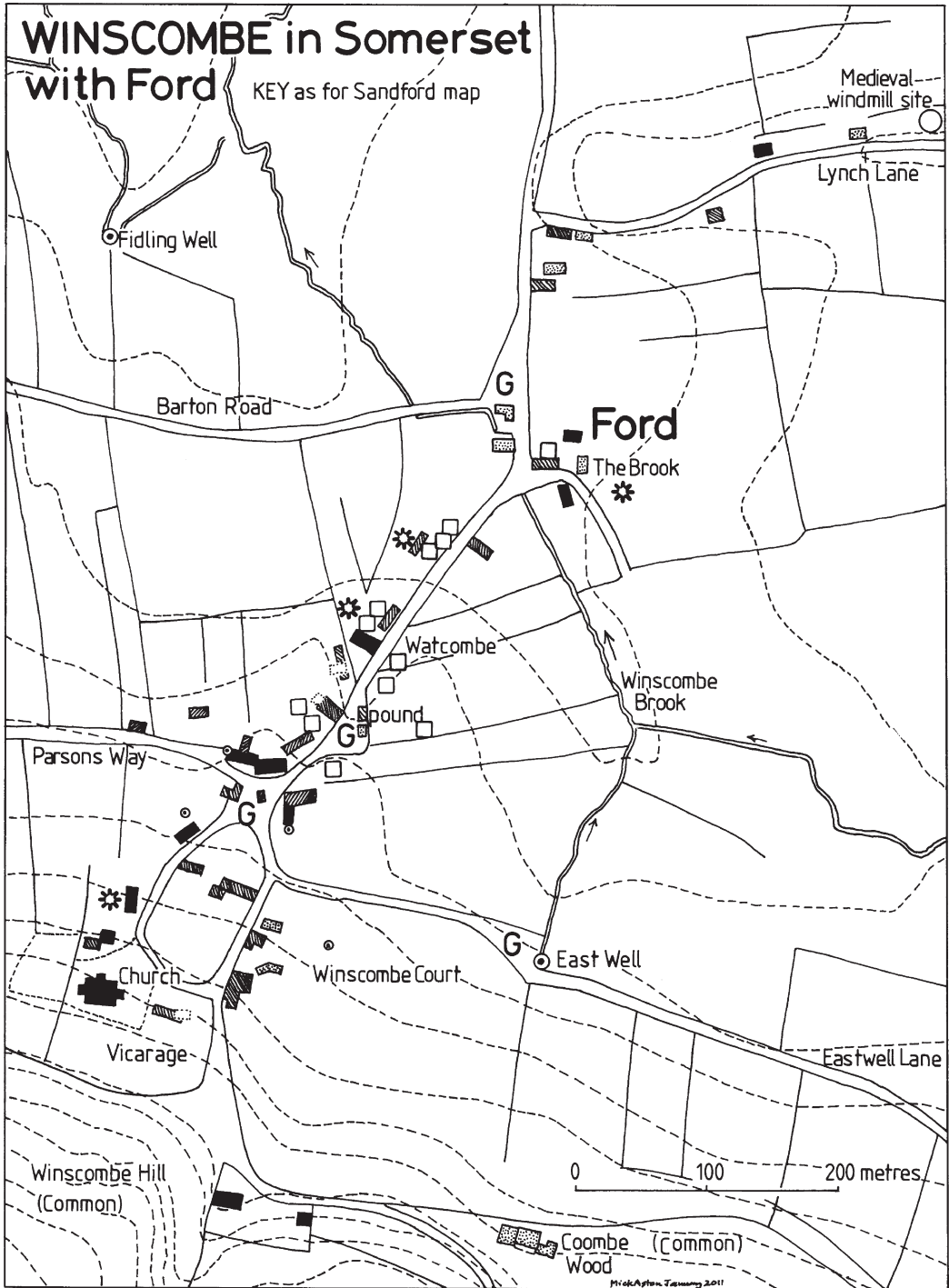


Fig. 1 Winscombe – showing test pits dug in 2010 and vernacular buildings surveyed in 2010. For key see Fig. 2

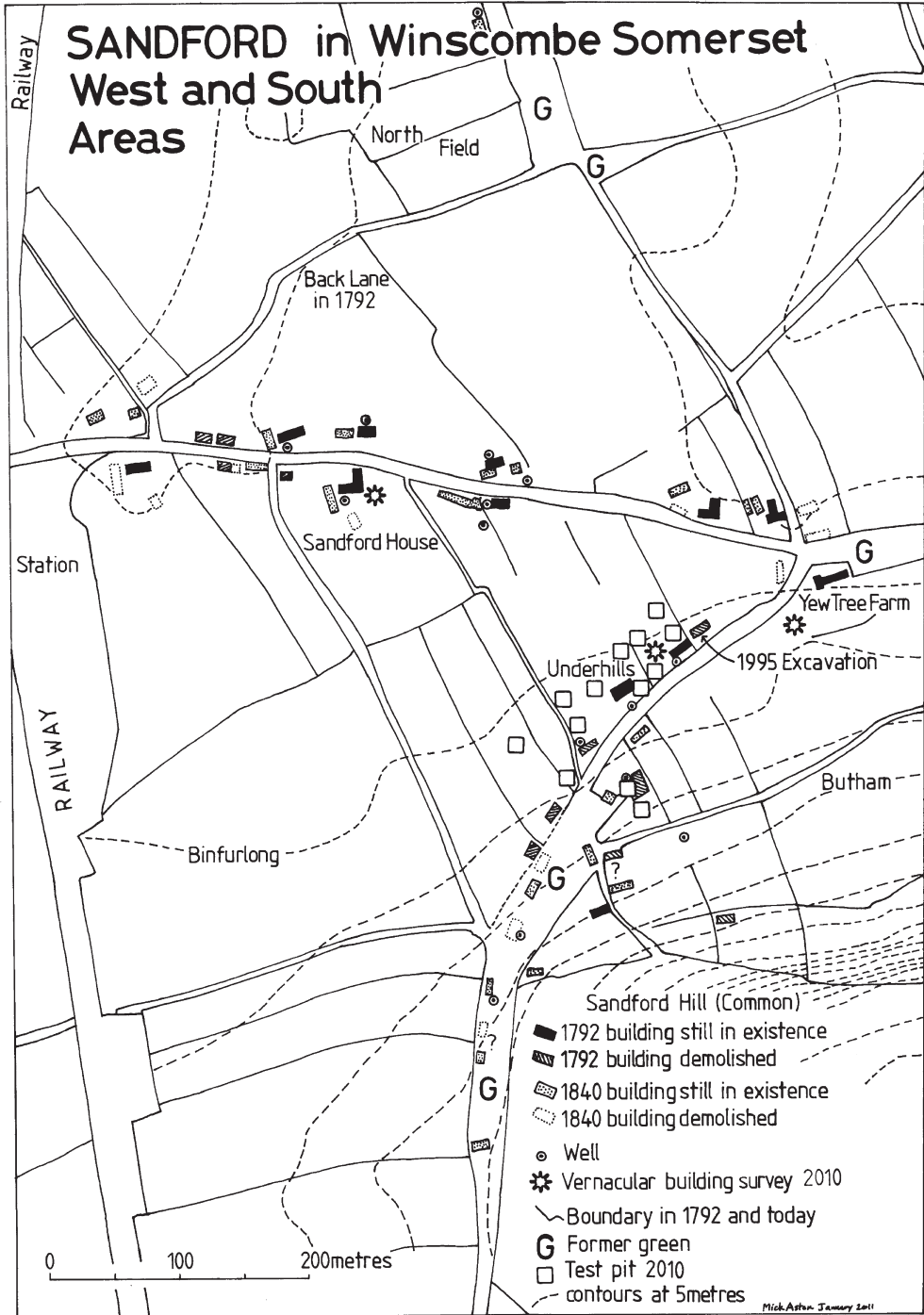


Fig. 2 Sandford – western and southern part of the hamlet showing test pits dug in 2010 and vernacular buildings surveyed in 2010

been undertaken over the earthworks of the shrunken hamlet of Barton, the earthworks of which have been surveyed by James Bond.

Analysis of the map sources for the parish has continued. Using the 1792 William White map, the 1799 enclosure map and the 1840 tithe map, together with the large-scale Ordnance Survey maps of the 1880s, early 1900s and 1930s, it is possible to see which of the present buildings date from at least 1792 or 1840. The position of wells in the settlements can be located and the field and property boundaries that are of at least of 18th-century date can be defined. The number of small 'greens' and areas of roadside waste is noticeable. Something of the early topography and layout for each of the settlements can thus be seen and a context provided for the test pits and building surveys that have been undertaken so far (Fig. 1 – Winscombe village, Fig. 2 – the south and west parts of Sandford).

The main fieldwork in 2010, however, consisted of the digging of further 1m by 1m test-pits, under the direction of the authors, mainly in Winscombe (Fig. 1), Woodborough and Sandford (Fig. 2). Thirty-three of these have been dug so far in the parish (this compares with 81 in Shapwick village, and 55 in Kibworth in Leicestershire – claimed by Michael Wood and Carena Lewis to have the most test pits!). These revealed many alterations in the 18th to 20th centuries in a process of 'gentrification' whereby former farmsteads and small holdings were converted into 'polite' gentlemen's residences. Farmyards were grassed over, yards, drains and walls buried, buildings upgraded and unfashionable collections of pottery dumped in the gardens. It is clear from the compliment of finds from the test pits, that one test pit per property is not always adequate to locate evidence of medieval and earlier occupation. The laying of cobbled surfaces, in particular, seems to have entailed the removal of the soil overburden and any early artefacts contained

within it. Therefore, large numbers of test pits are needed in any settlement, to provide even a partially reliable indication of the archaeology that can indicate the history of a place. As noted above, in Shapwick 81 test pits were dug but it was still not enough to fully understand the development of the village. A minimum number of 100 is probably needed to begin to understand any sizeable settlement such as Winscombe, Sandford or Woodborough.

The finds from the test pits in Winscombe, which include 12th/13th-century pottery, are being sorted and analysed by Teresa Hall, Sue Fitton and Phil Knibb. Further test pits will be dug in 2011, mainly in Sandford and Barton, and the survey of early buildings will continue.

References

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