
EVIDENCE FOR THE MEDIEVAL HAMLETS OF PYKESASH AND ASH BOULOGNE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT ASH

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SUMMARY

Excavations at two housing developments have shown that the modern village of Ash developed from two small hamlets lying north of the present through road along the ridge south of the River Yeo. A scatter of flaked stone suggested prehistoric activity on the hill upon which Ash lies and there was strong evidence, in the form of pottery, for settlement on its eastern slope in the Romano-British period beneath the eastern hamlet of Pykesash. Evidence of later settlement began in the 10th century, on the hill overlooking the western hamlet, Ash Boulogne, though a formal division of land into strips based on the pre-existing roads and trackways seems likely to have followed the Norman conquest. Both sites showed evidence of strips of land defined by ditches running back from the existing roads. These were redefined and altered in the 12th and 13th centuries ending as larger enclosures in the 14th and 15th. On the basis of the sparse artefacts, the main period of activity on both sites is 12th and 13th century, although evidence of a substantial Tudor house was found on the frontage of Back Street in Ash Boulogne.

INTRODUCTION

The South Somerset village of Ash stands on a low hill overlooking the wide, flat valley of the River

Yeo to the north, one of a number of medieval villages and hamlets along the ridge to the south-west of Ilchester (Fig. 1). Today it comprises ribbon settlement along a through road running east-west, with much recent housing along the two streets to the north. The 19th-century maps of the village show the ribbon settlement along the main road but only limited settlement on the streets to the north, in each case centred around farms – Ivy Farm on Back Street and Manor and Ash Farms on Burrough Street (Fig. 2). It is these two areas, however, that have been identified as the likely areas of medieval settlement (Ellison 1983, 69), being respectively the hamlets of Ash Boulogne and Pykesash. Two housing development sites lay in old orchards within these areas of archaeological interest, being almost the only plots as yet undeveloped – Site 1 on the north-west side of Back Street, Site 2 on the northern side of Middle Leaze Drove, close to its junction with Burrough Street (Fig. 2). In accordance with Planning Policy Guidance for Archaeology and Planning, the County Council recommended evaluation trenches on both sites. These revealed significant archaeological deposits and in each case a full excavation was carried out prior to building.

Site 1, on Back Street, was excavated in April 2002 following an evaluation excavation carried out in December 2001 (Hollinrake and Hollinrake 2002). Site 2, on Middle Leaze Drove, was excavated in May 2003, expanding evaluation trenches carried

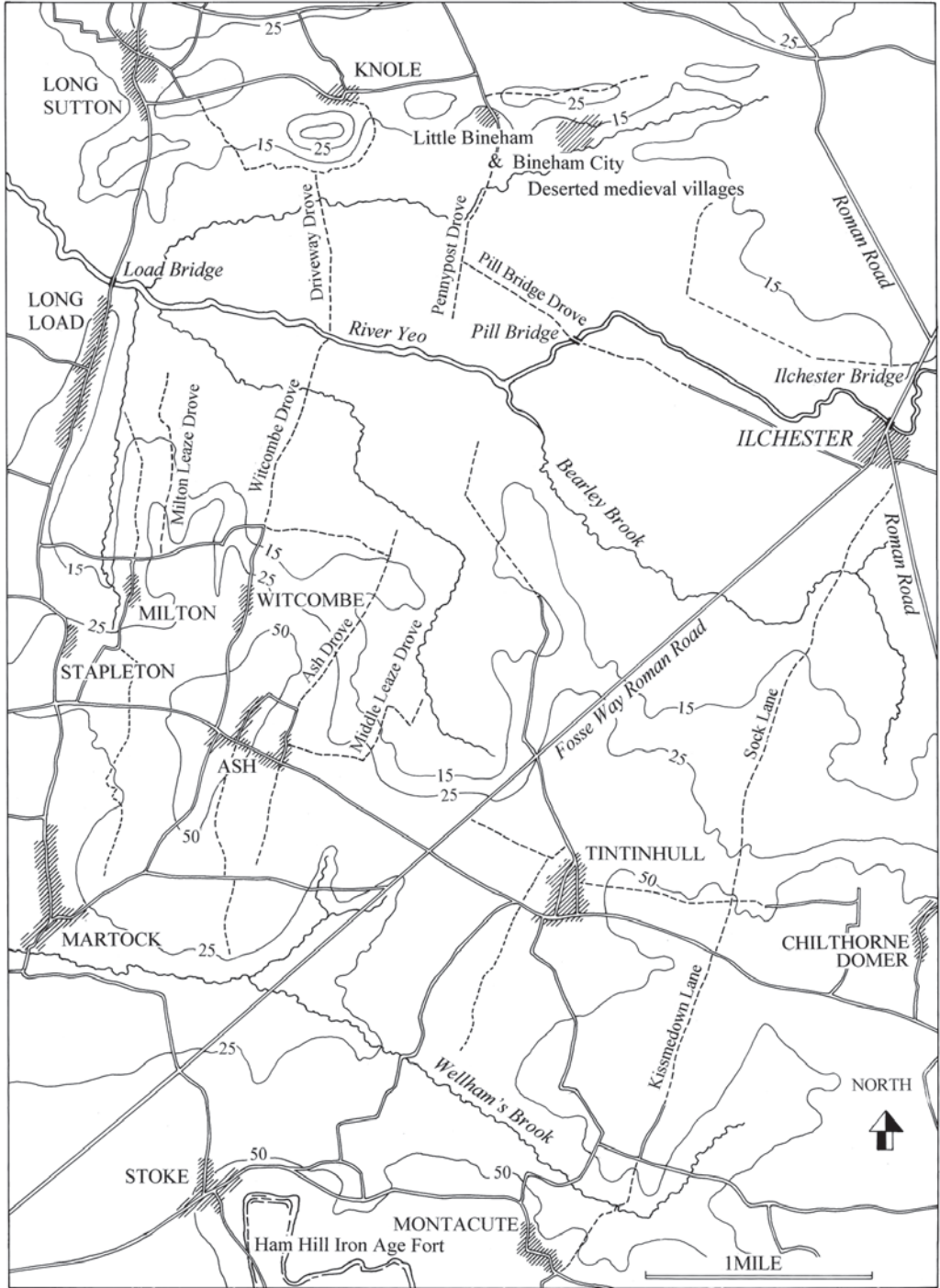


Fig. 1 Location map. Broken lines indicate selected droeways and tracks, many of probable ancient origin; contours are in metres.

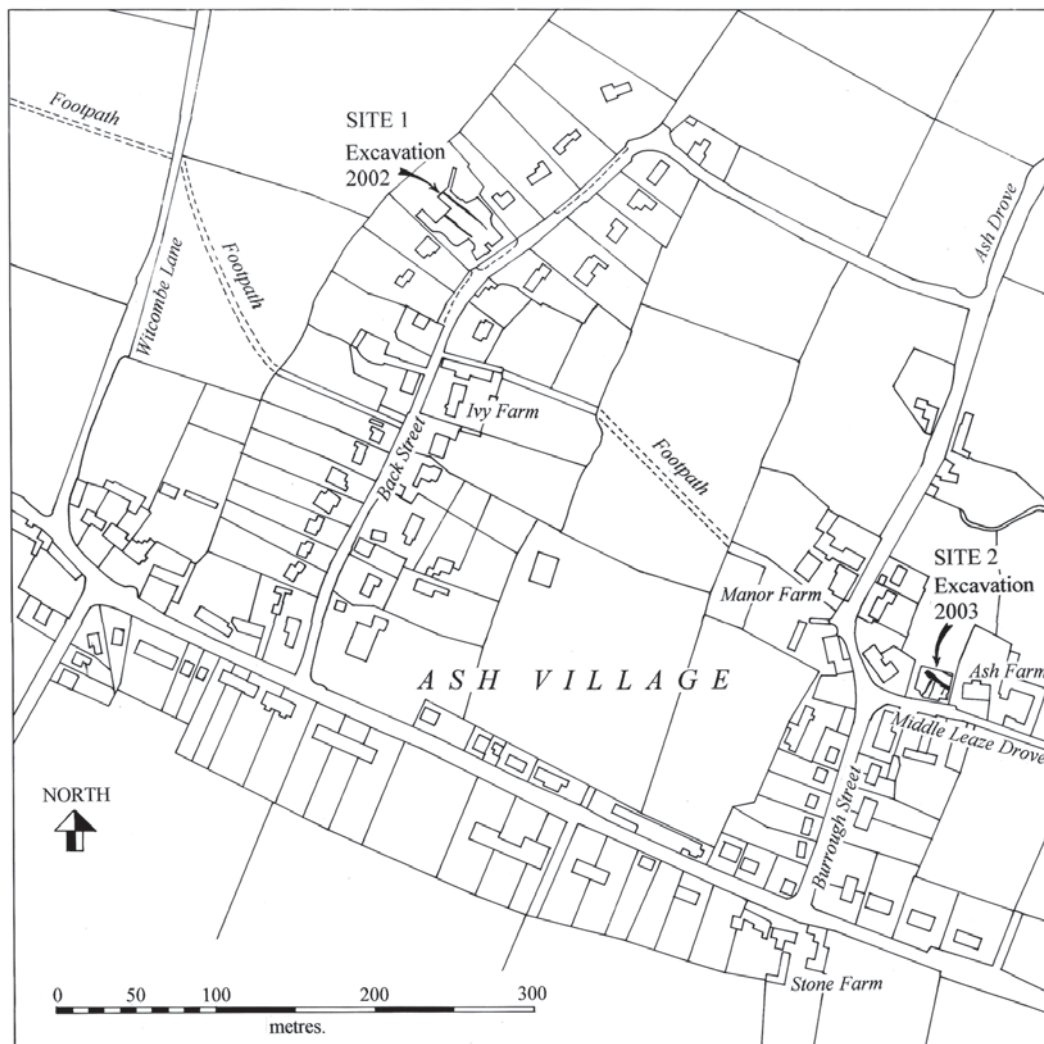


Fig. 2 Site locations. The footpaths are shown on a map of 1755

out earlier that month. On both sites the excavation area was limited to the outline of the proposed buildings. Field records and finds from both sites have been deposited with the County Museum and detailed reports for each site have been lodged with the County Sites and Monuments record.

The village of Ash occupies the eastern slopes of a hill, rising to almost 60m above sea level (Fig. 1) and being one element of a ridge running north-west from Yeovil and overlooking the Yeo valley to the north and the smaller valley of the Wellham's Brook to the south. Ash is one of a number of small settlements along the ridge on or close to the present

road following its crest. Tintinhull lies about a mile and a half to the east of Ash, and within a mile to the north-west are the small hamlets of Witcombe, Milton and Stapleton. The larger village of Martock lies just over a mile to the south-west. At Stapleton Cross, the east-west road meets the main road leading north from Martock to cross the Yeo valley to Long Sutton and Somerton via the medieval bridge at Long Load. On the north side of the Yeo valley there is a similar scatter of settlement – the hamlet of Knole and the now deserted settlements of Little Bineham and Bineham City. All these settlements are likely to have medieval or earlier origins and

there is still evidence in the form of droeways and paths of the routes that once connected them. It is possible that the present 'High Way' east–west along the ridge is not on the line of the medieval route which may have followed a less direct course, linking these numerous hamlets.

There can be little doubt that the south-east Somerset landscape around Ash has ancient origins which can be traced in many of its extant boundaries and trackways (Barker 1987). The Iron Age hillfort of Ham Hill lies only two miles to the south, with a large Iron Age settlement in the flood plain of the Yeo only three miles to the north-east, just south-west of Ilchester. The ancient route connecting these two sites survives in the line of Sock Lane and Kissmedown Lane (Fig. 1), the north–south line of which is reflected by the boundaries of the cluster of hamlets around Ash. The tithing boundaries of Milton, Witcombe and the two Ash hamlets – still visible as tracks and droeways – all form long strips running down from the ridge onto the flood plain of the Yeo (VCH 1978, 80) and a similar situation is evident east of Ilchester (Barker 1987, fig. 5). The antiquity of these boundaries cannot be proven but they are an indication of the potential organisation of an Iron Age landscape for which archaeological evidence is slight, in the hinterland of the larger known settlements.

In the Romano-British period, the town of *Lindinis*, Ilchester, was established in the valley floor only three miles distant and the Fosse Way ran south-west from the town crossing the ridge about one mile to the east of Ash. As with the Iron Age, the likely density of rural settlement in the hinterland of the town is under-represented archaeologically. A village settlement is known at Catsgore (Leech 1982; Ellis 1984), north-west of the town, and other village type settlements have more recently been revealed in the valley east of the town (Leach 2001, 91–2). With the exception, however, of the villa at Lufton, close to the source of the Wellhams Brook (Fig. 1), less is known about the hinterland to the west, though Romano-British activity has recently been found close to the deserted medieval settlement at Little Bineham, across the valley from Ash (Robinson 2003, 142).

The present village of Ash (Fig. 2) is thought to have developed from two separate medieval hamlets, on the parallel streets of Back Street and Burrough Street, north of the present east–west road along which ribbon settlement later developed (Ellison 1983, 69). Their location is shown by the surviving farms, all no longer working, but shown on the

Ordnance Survey map of 1887. The historical evidence for the village of Ash is collated in the *Victoria County History of Somerset* (1978). Ash was one of ten tithings of Martock and is first named as *Esse* in a document of 1225. There was no medieval church but the manor of Ash Boulogne is referred to from the late 13th century and a second manor of Pykesash from the early 15th century, located respectively on Back Street and on Burrough Street. The earliest map of the village, an estate map of 1775 (SRO T/PH/vch48 S/57) shows these hamlets, and both streets continuing north as lanes or droeways into the valley. It also shows an east–west track joining the two hamlets directly and continuing westwards to Witcombe Lane and beyond to Milton and Stapleton, which survives today as a footpath (Fig. 2). None of the historic maps shows the excavation areas as other than field or orchard.

The ridge upon which Ash stands is made up of the silts and marls of the Pennard sands, the geological strata of both sites being hard, laminated clay, grey or brown in colour, with striations of mudstone. Site 1 lay just below the crest of a hill facing broadly south-east. The northern part of the site was relatively level at a height of about 55m. South-eastwards, the area of the excavations lay across the slope of the hill, falling to about 52.75m at the street frontage with Back Street itself at about 52.45m (Fig. 3). Along its south-west boundary was a holloway or track (Fig. 7) surviving as a broad earthwork up to 0.7m deep. Site 2 lay on more level ground at a height of about 42m, overlooking ground sloping gently away to the north and east. Though the development area was confined to the frontage along the Drove, the orchard was an L-shaped piece of ground, extending about 150m to the north and was divided into two by a holloway running east–west across it, approximately 75m north of the Drove frontage (Fig. 4). This is a significant earthwork, up to 5m wide and 1m deep. There was a comparable drop from the excavation site to the present road surface of the Drove to the south.

Acknowledgements

Excavations on Site 1, Back Street, were funded by the developer, Propco (South-west) Ltd. Those on Site 2, Middle Leaze Drove, by the then landowner, Mr. P.J. Look. Peter Bellamy of Terrain Archaeology gave extensive help throughout both the excavation and the preparation of this report. The site work was carried out by Jo Best, James Brigers, Rod Brook,



Fig. 3, Site 1; view north

Alan Graham, Lorrain Higbee, Paul Martin, Rebecca Montague, Paul Pearce, and Steve Tatler. Illustrations were produced by Peter Bellamy, Alan Graham and Steve Tatler, with the pottery drawn by Christopher Chaplin.

PERIOD 1 PREHISTORIC AND ROMANO-BRITISH

On both sites evidence for prehistoric activity was limited to a scatter of flaked stone recovered from the infill of much later features. There were no concentrations of this material; no pottery was recovered and no prehistoric features were identified. A total of 30 pieces of flaked stone was recovered from Site 1. The raw material was predominantly flint with four pieces of Greensand chert also present. The assemblage contains five small blades and two blade cores which are likely to be Mesolithic or possibly early Neolithic in date. The rest of the material is from an undiagnostic flake industry. Five tools were recovered – a flaked knife and four scrapers, one of which may be of Mesolithic or early Neolithic date. Site 2 produced only three fragments being debris from an undiagnostic flake industry. The greater quantity of material from Site 1 could suggest that prehistoric activity or settlement may have been located on the upper part of the hill and it is interesting to note that there is likely to have been a Mesolithic or early Neolithic site in the vicinity.

A single clay slingshot from Site 2, comparable to those from Danebury Hillfort (Poole 1991, fig. 7.42), is likely to be an Iron Age artefact.

For the Romano-British period, there is stronger evidence of settlement. On Site 1, five small fragments of Romano-British pottery and half a shale spindlewhorl were found, all residual in medieval features. In contrast, the pottery recovered from the excavations on Site 2 included a significant proportion of Romano-British material; 79 Romano-

British sherds compared to 98 medieval sherds. Generally small, and in some but not all cases very worn, they were recovered from the infill of ditches and gullies on all parts of the site. Some sherds were clearly residual, having been incorporated into the fill of later features along with early medieval pottery sherds. Other sherds, however, came from the infill of a group of ditches and gullies which were stratigraphically a primary period of activity on the site, clearly predating those features which contained medieval pottery (Fig. 4, Site 2, Primary Ditches). This quantity of Romano-British pottery alone suggests settlement in the vicinity during that period, but whether this group of features is of that date is uncertain. A single sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from the upper fill of one of the ditches (Fig. 14, 13) and a large stone object from another (Fig. 14, 18), which appears to be the handle of a mortar (Fig. 17) of a type usually dated to the medieval period.

None of the features on Site 2 contained large quantities of medieval pottery and its absence from these primary ditches need not be surprising. It is possible therefore, that the Romano-British pottery, though originating from a nearby settlement, had lain as a scatter in the land surface for a long period of time, to be finally incorporated into the infill of the earliest medieval boundary ditches. The possibility that the features are of Romano-British date must, however, remain.

Romano-British pottery from Site 2

A total of 55 Romano-British pottery sherds weighing 1065g was recovered from the infill of the ditches and gullies of the Primary Ditches (Fig. 4). Sherd size is generally small but of this group, 20 sherds, weighing 695g, comprise the larger sherds from Feature 115. In addition, 24 Romano-British sherds, weighing 260g, were recovered from the medieval ditches on the site.

As a group, the pottery dates to the 2nd and 3rd centuries rather than later. It comprises a standard range of forms and fabrics, mainly Black-burnished and grey wares which included several joining sherds from the neck of a 2nd-century flagon (Greyhound Yard type 29; Seager Smith and Davies 1993). Two sherds of samian pottery and fragments of both British and imported colour-coated finewares were also found, as well as a single amphora sherd. Sherd size is generally small, but there is a range of wear on the sherds, even between sherds of the same vessel, suggesting that some have been moved

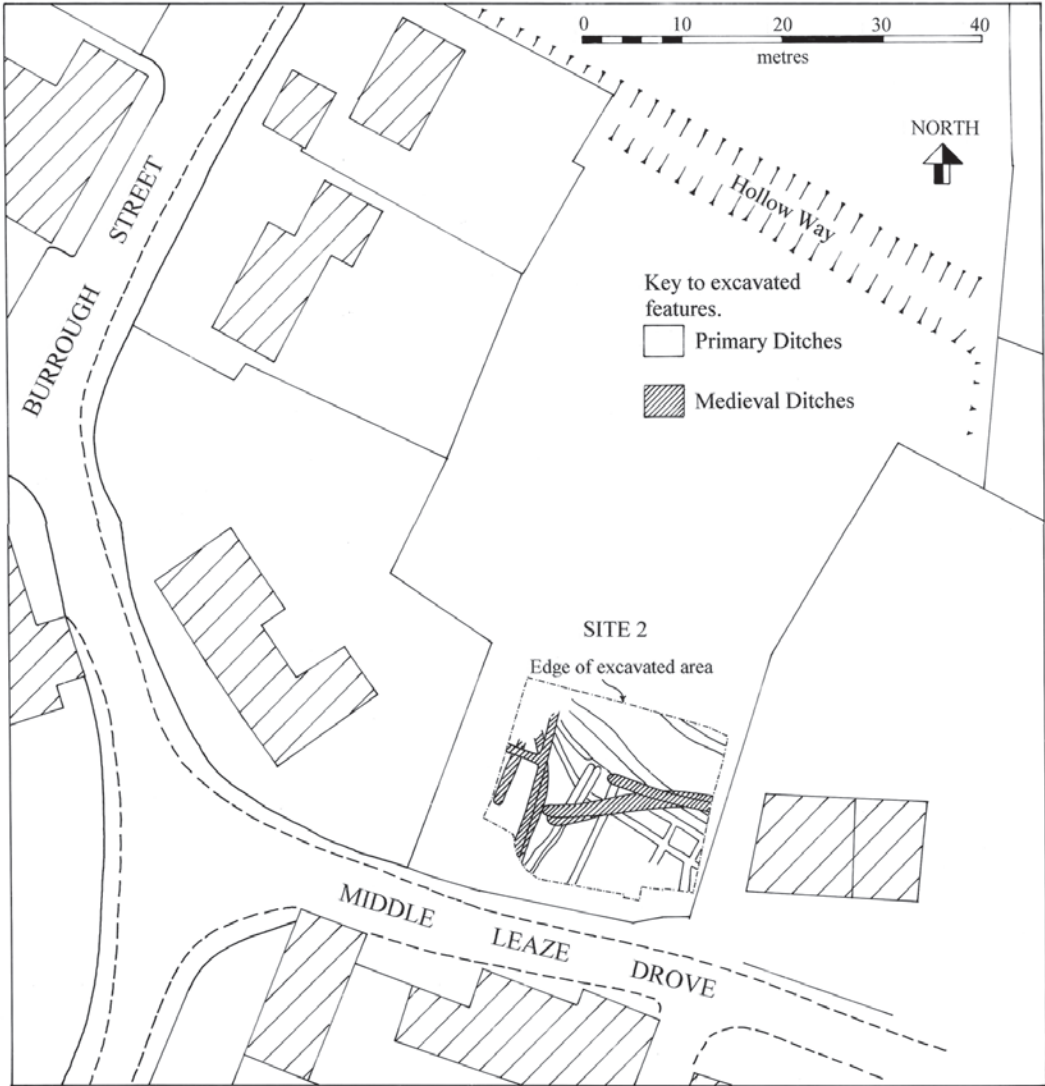


Fig. 4 Site 2, main features

around in the ground prior to final deposition more than others. The collection could therefore be largely material that has lain in or on the land surface for many years before being incorporated into features cutting through it. Much larger sherds were, however, recovered from the infill of Feature 115 (Fig. 14), including parts of two large storage jars in a fairly friable fabric (as found at Catsgore, Leech 1982, fig. 106, 320). This material could strengthen a case for the pottery being in features of Romano-British date, though the feature also contained the usual background of small, often abraded sherds.

Either way, the group of pottery itself is strong evidence of settlement in the immediate vicinity in the Romano-British period.

PERIOD 2 LATE SAXON

Evidence of activity or settlement of this period was confined to Site 1, on the upper slopes of the hill to the north-west of Back Street. A scatter of pottery of 10th-century date and parts of at least three fired clay loomweights were found, and though some of

PERIOD 2 AND 3a

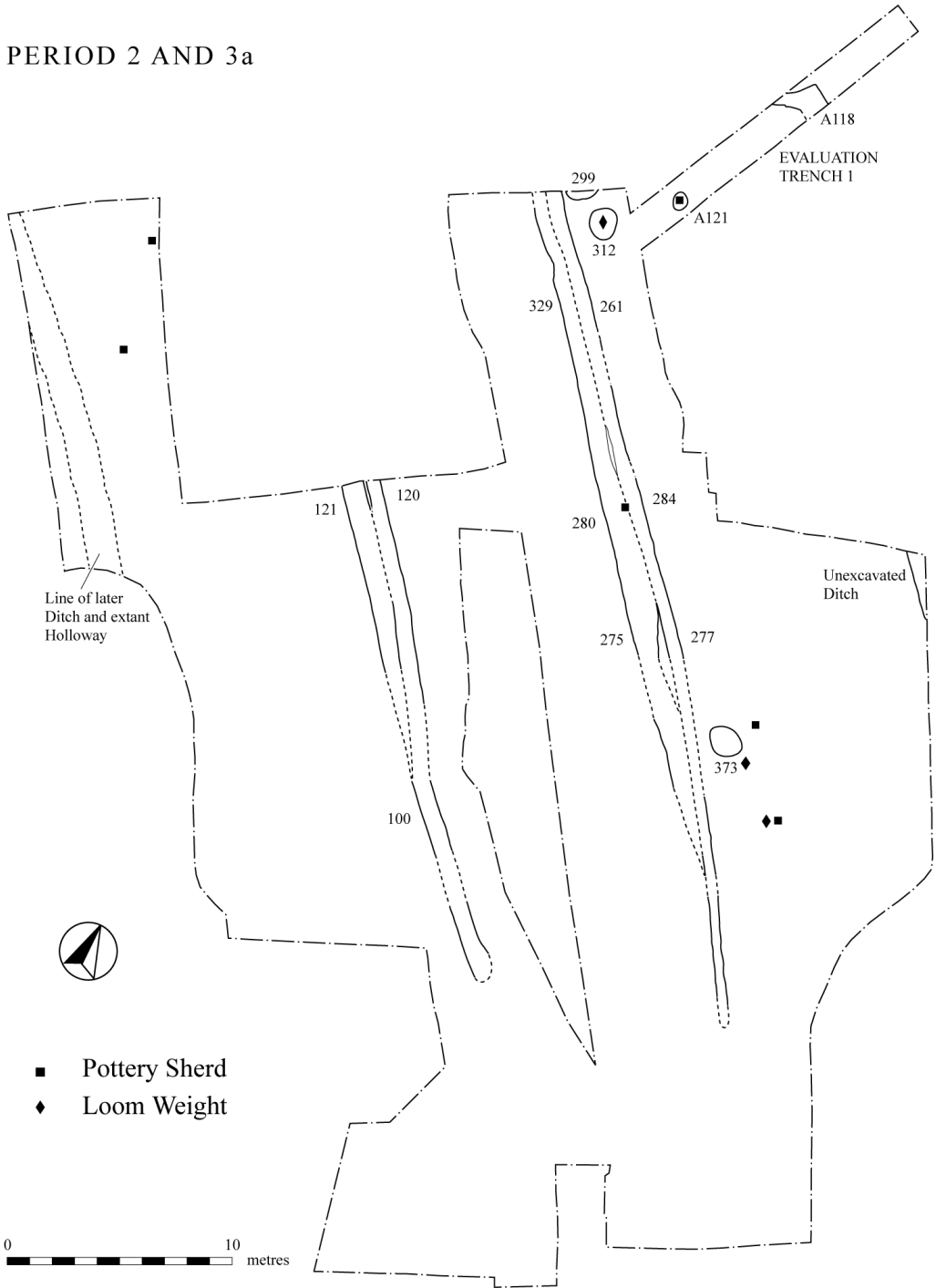


Fig. 5 Site 1, Period 2 late-Saxon pits and artefacts and Period 3 primary ditches

this material was clearly residual in the infill of later ditches, some of it occurred in features that may be Saxon in date, most conclusively, four small pits.

Two of these were excavated in the northern part of the site (Fig. 5, 299, 312). These were circular, up to 1.2m across and with generally rounded profiles no deeper than *c.* 0.75m. Their fills comprised weathered clay banded with concentrations of charcoal flecks, and often many fragments of burnt clay daub. From the secondary fill of pit 312, half of a fired clay loomweight was recovered (Fig. 6.1) and both pits contained animal bone fragments. No pottery was recovered from either feature, but a third, smaller pit a short distance to the east (A121), contained four sherds of late-Saxon pottery and a concentration of fragments of burnt clay daub. A fourth pit was excavated about 24m to the south (373). This was comparable to the larger pits, with a fill containing a high proportion of charcoal, as well as fragments of burnt clay daub and animal bone. In the fill of a ditch (320) immediately to the south of this pit, four fragments of a clay loomweight were found (Fig. 6.3) and a complete example (Fig. 6.2) was found in a ditch (358) 4m to the south. Both these ditches fit into the medieval ditch systems on the site (though no medieval pottery was recovered from them) and these objects are likely to have derived from the old land surface through which the ditches were cut. A small number of sherds of Saxon pottery were also recovered from the fills of the medieval ditches. Two sherds were identified in the north-west part of the site and two sherds from ditches close to pit 373.

Figure 5 shows the late Saxon pits and artefacts in relation to the primary ditches of the site. None of these ditches contained medieval pottery and though they seem clearly to represent the origins of the subsequent medieval land divisions of the site, how early they may have been dug is unknown. The larger pits all lie along the eastern side of ditch 277 and it is certainly possible that they are contemporary with it. Though the loomweights are likely to have been associated with a dwelling no evidence of a structure was found. Burnt clay daub in the pits and its frequent occurrence in many of the later medieval ditches suggests that it was common in the land surface through which the ditches were cut. There was a concentration of this material in the north of the site, some of it with rounded wattle impressions on it. It may have derived from a decayed late Saxon timber-framed building in the vicinity, perhaps north of the excavations.

Late-Saxon pottery

Nine sherds of pottery were recovered; four of these came from pit A121 in the evaluation trench in the north of the site; the other five were widely scattered (Fig. 5). Generally the material is comparable to that from Glastonbury and dates to the late-Saxon period, probably the 10th century. Pottery from the pit comprised a rim and three body sherds of a single vessel, comparable in form and fabric to examples from Glastonbury (Kent 1996, fig. 2, fabric 1). The other sherds, which included a rim fragment and a base angle, were in a granular, probably sandy fabric, though clearly distinct from the later medieval fabrics.

Late-Saxon loomweights

The excavation yielded one complete, and two incomplete baked clay loomweights (Fig. 6). All are roughly made, bun-shaped weights with a circular perforation, which is not necessarily centrally placed. The weights are formed from sandy clay with frequent ferruginous, and clay pellet inclusions. The incomplete examples have reduced cores and oxidized surfaces and it is presumed that the complete example (weight 464g) was similarly fired. This kind of weight is characteristic of the 5th to 10th centuries and was used with warp-weighted looms to tension the warp threads. Current evidence suggests that the warp-weighted loom went out of use in towns in the 10th century (Pritchard 1984, 66). Excavated evidence from a small group of rural and suburban sites including suburban York (Walton Rogers 1993, 1269) suggests that the warp-weighted loom continued in use in these areas until the late 11th, or perhaps even into the 12th century. There is little secure independent dating for the loomweights from Ash, but they could be contemporary with the small group of 10th-century pottery that was found.

PERIOD 3 MEDIEVAL

Overview

On both excavation sites evidence for medieval land-use took the form of numerous ditches and gullies, which criss-crossed the excavation areas (Figs. 4 and 7). With the exception of the few sherds of late-Saxon pottery on Site 1, the earliest medieval pottery from these features dates to the 12th–13th century, and

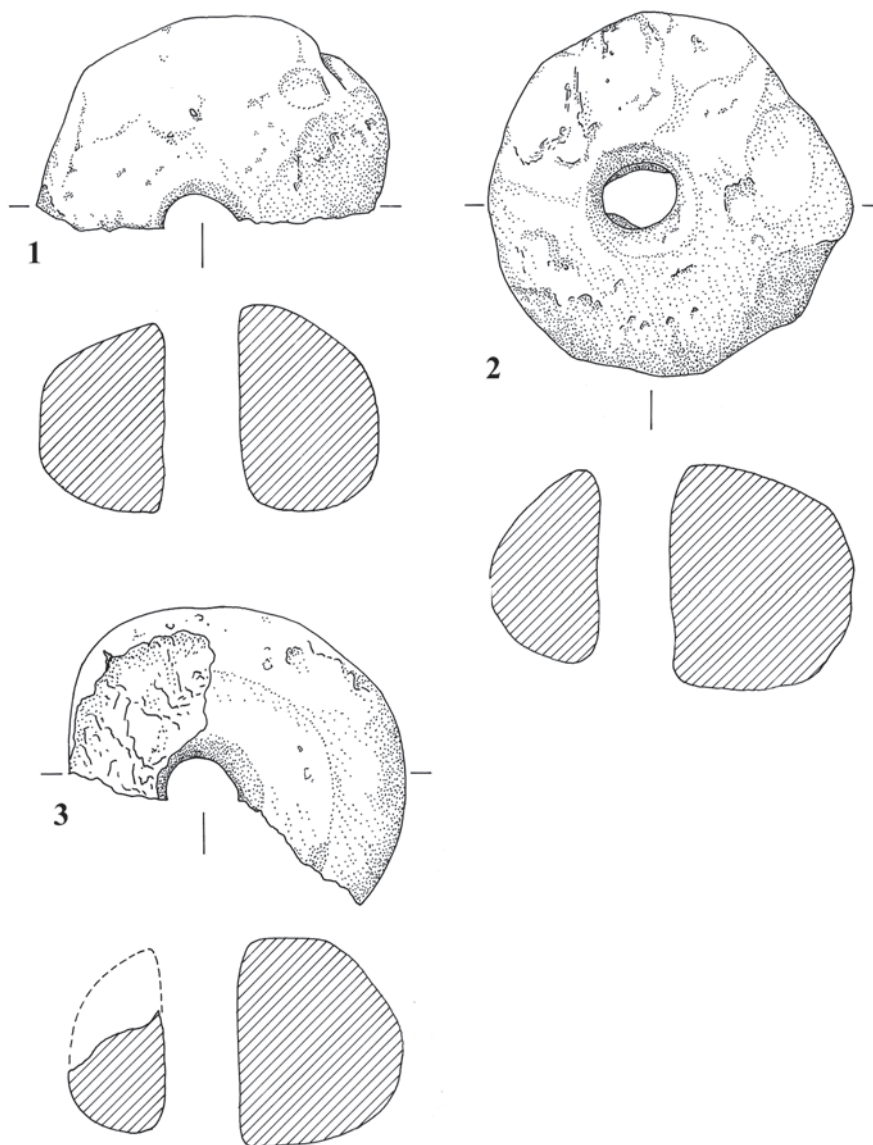


Fig. 6 Late-Saxon loomweights; scale 1:2

the absence of material of 11th or earlier 12th-century date might suggest a lack of activity on the site in those centuries. On both sites, however, the primary ditches, representing the initial sub-division of the land, contained no medieval pottery. Their date is therefore uncertain, and it is possible that they were dug in the later Saxon period, contemporary with the settlement evidence found on Site 1, or that they represent the ceramically absent 11th century.

The ditches appear to define the boundaries of small fields, enclosures and possibly trackways. The alignments established by the primary ditches tend to be maintained throughout the medieval period, most markedly on Site 1, but changes to the enclosures and the access to them are evident. On both sites there was evidence of frequent recutting or cleaning out of the ditches, frequently with a slight shift in position. It is likely that the boundaries of

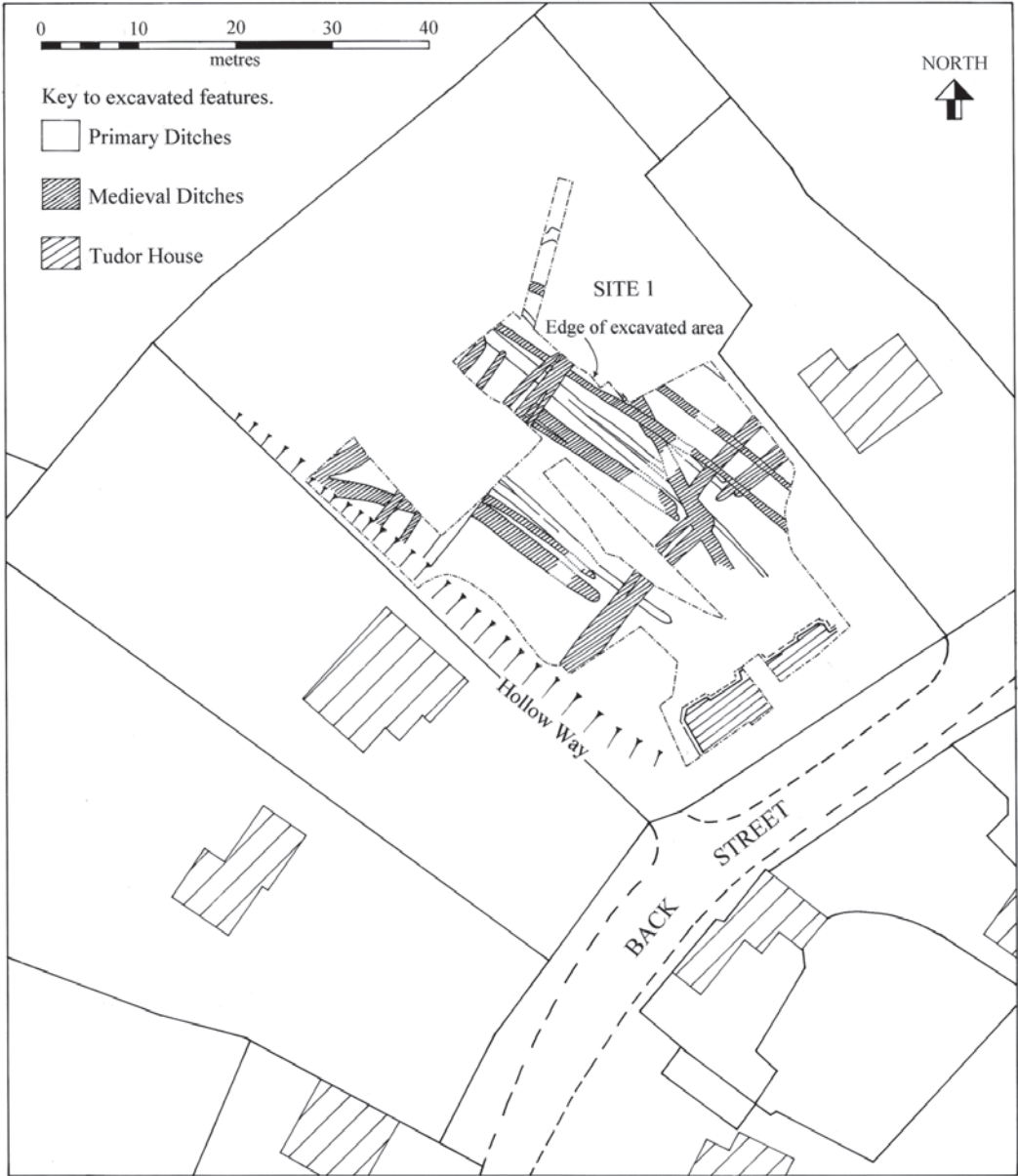


Fig. 7 Site 1, main features

this period had banks as well as ditches and the spreading of these banks may have necessitated the recutting and caused the shift in line. There was very little variation in the form of the ditches, though size and depth varied; all appeared to have been originally steep-sided features, cutting the hard clay strata of the hillside, becoming variously weathered to a

wider, more angled profile. Pottery and other artefacts tended to be concentrated in specific ditches and most of the excavated features contained very little settlement debris in the form of pottery, bone or charcoal. On both sites the bulk of the medieval pottery can be dated to the 12th and 13th century, but in each case the latest ditches contained a small



Fig. 8 Site 1, Phase 3a ditches 120 and 121; view north



Fig. 9 Site 1, Phase 3a ditches 120 and 121 with Phase 3b ditches 132 and 138 beyond; view west

amount of later pottery, continuing the sequence into the 14th or even 15th century. The ditches on Site 1 can be divided into three periods a–c (Figs. 5, 10 and 13) as can those on Site 2 (Fig. 14) showing the development of land plots and trackways from at least as early as the 12th century. These are described below.

The frontage of neither site showed much evidence of structures of this period, though their presence along Back Street seems likely. A cluster of postholes close to the Site 1 frontage suggested a structure, and the base of a small pit (Fig. 13, pit 54) which contained substantial sherds of a single vessel could indicate a dwelling. This was a cookpot dated to the 14th century (Fig. 18.9), distinctly different to the bulk of the medieval pottery from the boundaries excavated to the north. A small gully lay west of the

postholes, running at right angles to Back Street, perhaps separating two house plots. On Site 2, evidence was sparse, confined to several postholes of uncertain date. Three pits were, however, found (Fig. 14, pits 29, 63 and 123) indicating activity of some sort on the edge of the enclosures, though their function was unclear. Pit 29 contained large fragments of a single vessel dating to the 12th–13th century (Fig. 18, no. 7) comparable to sherds from the earlier of the medieval boundaries on both sites.

Changing land boundaries

SITE 1

Period 3a

Two pairs of parallel ditches, aligned north–south (Figs. 5 and 8), appear to be primary. These features did not contain medieval pottery, though fragmentary animal bone and burnt clay/daub were recovered from some sections. The pairs of ditches probably represent recutting with, in each case, the later ditch being slightly east of the original line. The ditches lay approximately 10m apart, that is, about 30', and both terminated to the south, one with a clear butt-end, the other fading out on the downward slope of the ground. About 10m east, at the eastern edge of the excavation area, there was evidence for a comparable ditch (not excavated), and to the west, the existing holloway and the ditch beneath it (extant into the 18th century) lies also at 10m distant.

These ditches define strips of land to the north-west of Back Street. There appear to have been three such strips within the width of the site, each being about 10m/30' wide (approximately two rods and the standard width for most modern allotments). They are a formal division of the land along Back Street and appear to take their line from the alignment of the southern rather than northern part of this street (Figs 2 and 7). The date of their establishment is however difficult to define. Much of the material in them may be derived from the land surface into which they were dug, being debris from the late-Saxon activity on the site.

Period 3b

A group of similar ditches can be recognised which have a clear spatial cohesion and on the basis of pottery date to the 12th/13th century. Most of them have evidence of recutting and/or replacement, and the boundaries they represent may have been regularly cleared and redefined. Generally, these ditches were larger and deeper than those which

PERIOD 3b

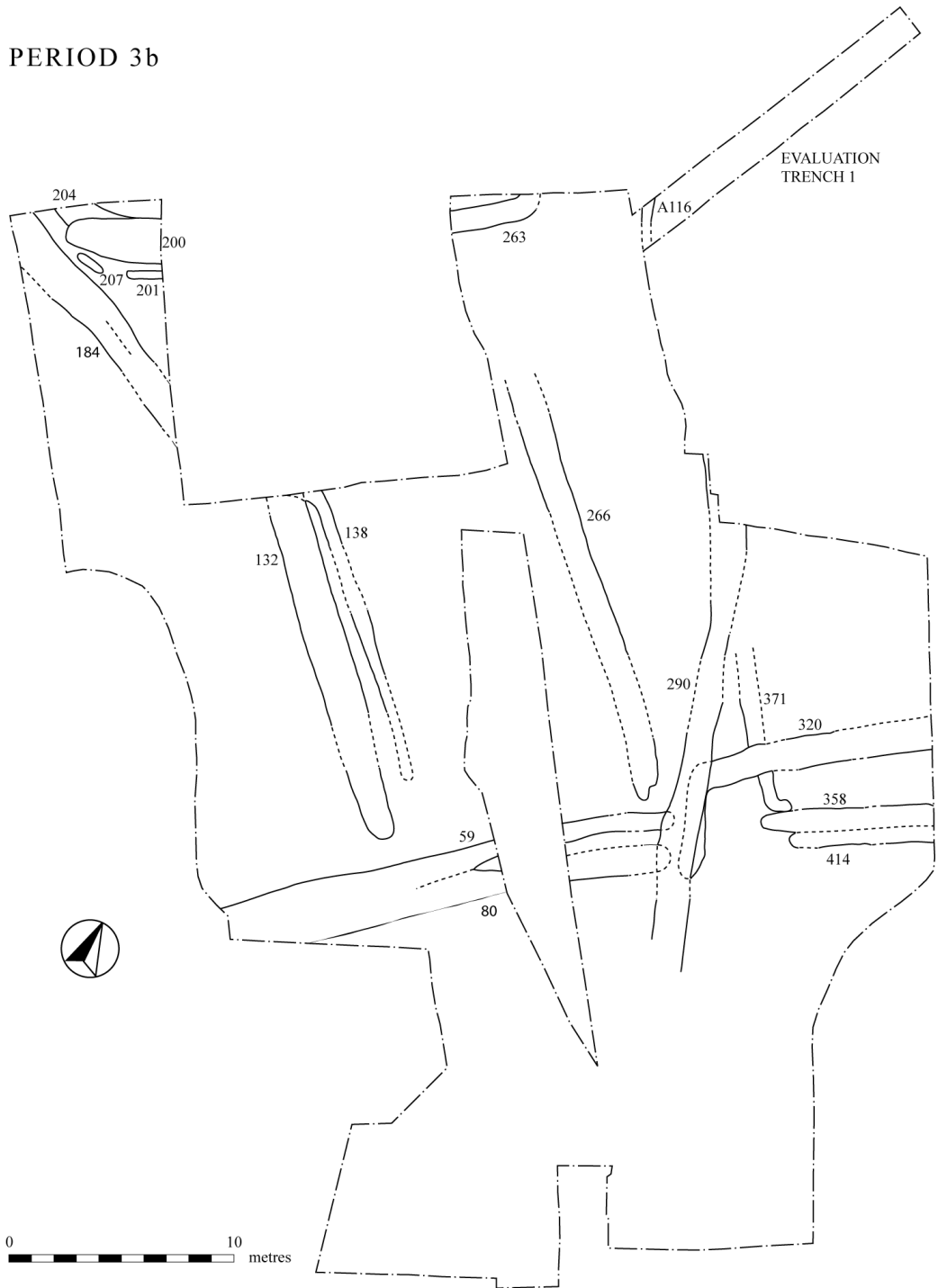


Fig. 10 Site 1, Period 3b



Fig. 11 Site 1, Phase 3b ditch 290; view north



Fig. 12 Site 1, junction of ditches 290 and 320 (right); view north

defined the primary strip plots of Period 3a (Fig. 9).

In the central part of the excavation area, two parallel ditches mirror the earlier boundaries, redefining the strip plots but shifted west (Fig. 10, ditches 132 and 266). To the north, however, the strip plots appear to have been changed and ditch 132 veered towards the north-west, continuing as the sinuous ditch 184. This ditch appears to be a recutting of an earlier smaller ditch evident beneath its eastern side, which to the south appears as ditch 138, parallel with 132. To the east, ditch 266 did not continue northwards to the excavation edge, and a ditch along the north-west edge of the excavation (ditch 204, recut as 200, and ditch 263) may be defining an enclosure to the north-west of the site imposed across the primary strips. The line of ditch 184 may indeed reflect the existence of this enclosure, though its nature is unclear. Along the outer lip of ditch 200 were two shallow gullies. Though all these features produced similar pottery dating to the 12th–13th century, a noticeable concentration of pottery, other artefacts and animal bone was recovered from the ditches in the western

corner of the excavation area (ditches 132, 184 and 200), but whether this indicates the proximity of a dwelling is unclear.

To the south, the parallel ditches have a clear butt end on the line of two east–west ditches (Fig. 10, ditches 59 and 80). These ditches cut across the line of the earlier strip boundaries, in effect moving their southerly end northwards and defining a strip of land along the Back Street frontage. It is likely that one ditch replaced the other and the pottery evidence suggests that ditch 80 was the later. This east–west boundary may indeed be long-lived, with two sherds of 15th-century pottery coming from the upper fill of ditch 80. Both ditches appeared to have a butt end on the line of ditch 266, continuing after a gap of up to 5m as ditches 358 and 414, representing an opening into the enclosed strips from the south.

This opening across the east–west boundary underwent a number of changes (Fig. 11). The small ditch 371 suggests that at some stage it had led into a trackway along the western side of the field which was subsequently shifted to run along its southern side as defined by ditch 320; the realigning of the east–west boundary may have taken place at this time, the shorter ditch 414 maintaining the width of the opening and trackway. The latest ditch in this complex sequence appeared to be ditch 290 (Fig. 12). Though preserving the original opening, it appears to redefine and realign the boundary between the fields to the north of it but also sub-divides the area to the south.

Period 3c

Two groups of ditches are apparent; those aligned east–west and those aligned north–south (Fig. 13). They appear stratigraphically to be later than those of Period 3b and are generally smaller and more gully-like. Where they cross, a sequence was not apparent but it seems unlikely that they were all contemporary, instead representing shifting boundaries often recut. These features contained very little pottery or other artefacts compared to the much larger group from the Period 3b ditches. The majority of the pottery dated to the 12th–13th century, although sherds of 14th or 15th-century date were recovered from the top of ditch 355, and 16th-century material from ditches 150 and 406. Two sherds of 15th-century pottery lay within the top of ditch 80 and this feature may have remained extant as a boundary longer than the others of its group.

Four east–west gullies were found in the northern part of the excavation and though it is possible that some defined a trackway, they may simply be

PERIOD 3c

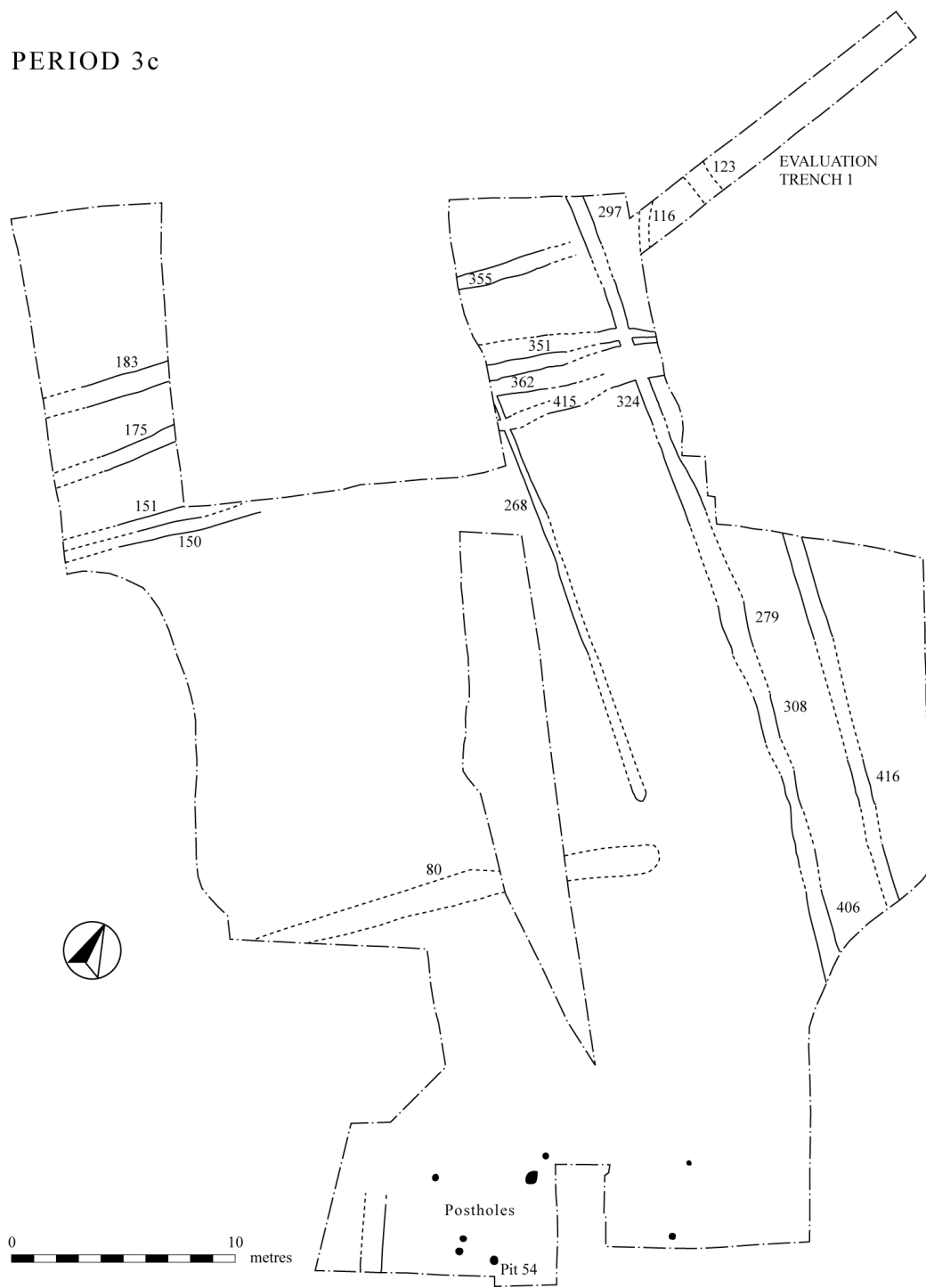


Fig. 13 Site 1, Period 3c

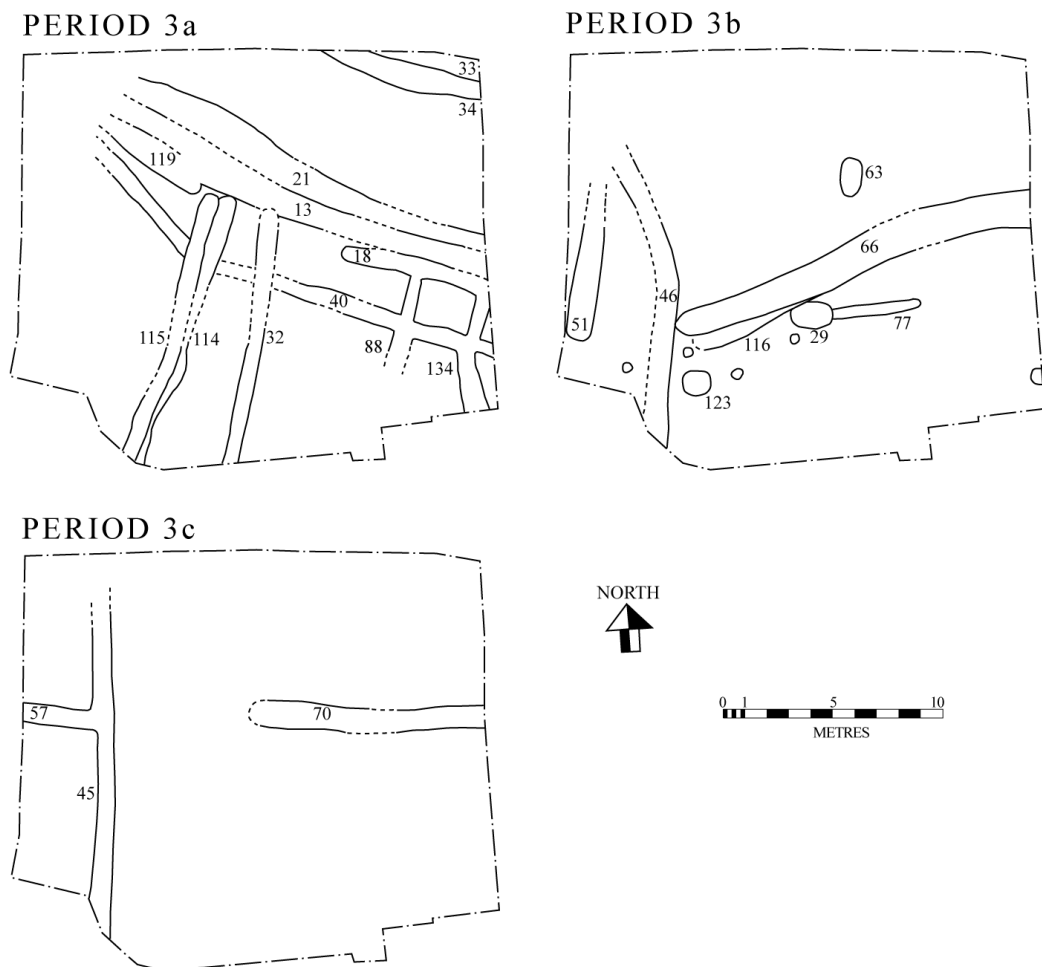


Fig. 14 Site 2, Period 3

successive boundaries between two fields. A north-south trackway is more evident, defined by ditches 406 and 416, generally reflecting the line of the earlier trackway and opening of Period 3b. A general impression of this period of boundary ditches is that the enclosures they define have become larger and fewer.

SITE 2

Period 3a

The features that belong to this earliest period of land division comprise a number of gullies and ditches aligned approximately east-west, to the south of which are a number of probably contemporary north-south gullies (Fig. 14). Several of the features

had been recut at least once with a resultant shift in their line. It is possible that the east-west ditches defined a trackway, up to 5m wide, whose curving line marked the northern boundary of a series of strip plots. It could be an early line of Middle Leaze Drove and its projection westwards fits with boundaries on Manor Farm and the old footpath to Back Street (Fig. 2). The north-south gullies may represent more than one period of boundary setting out. If they are taken in pairs (32 with 134, and 115/114 with 88) they can be seen to define plots or strips about 10m wide, the whole plot shifting either east or west with its redefinition.

The date of these features is, however, uncertain as they contained only Romano-British pottery, with the exception of a single medieval sherd from the



Fig. 15 Site 2, ditches 13, 18 and 21 cut by ditch 66; view east

upper infill of ditch 13 and the handle of a large stone mortar (Fig. 17), probably medieval, from the infill of ditch 18. The quantity of medieval pottery from Site 2 is generally, however, very limited, and its absence in these early features does not have to mean that they are not early medieval. In addition, though most of the ditches contained only fragmentary animal bone, a larger group of bone from ditches 21 and 13 is very akin to material from the later, demonstrably medieval ditches in this area. Their medieval date is therefore probable, as with the primary ditches on Site 1, though how early in the medieval period they might be is unknown.

Period 3b

The ditches of this period (Figs 14 and 15) clearly cut across those of Period 3a and can be assigned to the medieval period on the basis of the pottery within them which dates to the 12th–13th century. Generally larger than the earlier ditches, ditch 116, recut as 66, obliterated the earlier north–south strips, defining a strip of land along the drove (or perhaps at this stage the northern side of the wider drove itself) and separating it from land to the north. Ditch 51, along the west edge of the excavation defined the back of an adjacent plot, possibly in the angle of Middle Leaze Drove and Burrough Street. The gap of about 4m between the butt ends of the two ditches formed a gateway into the land to the north of the Drove, and the end of ditch 51 could also have been the side of a second gateway either to the west or the south.

Period 3c

The three plots of land formed in Period 3b – though one of them could be the Drove itself – were altered and redefined in Period 3c. At some stage, the western boundary of the two areas defined by ditch 66 was

realigned as ditch 46, extending southwards and evidently blocking the former gateway (Fig. 14). Its curving line could reflect the line of Burrough Street to the west, defining the back of plots along that street (Fig. 4). This boundary ditch was subsequently straightened as ditch 45, with the ground to the west of it subdivided by ditch 57. Perhaps at the same time a recutting and straightening of ditch 66 took place, as ditch 70, redefining the two areas to the east of the frontage ground and re-establishing a gateway between them. Pottery from the earlier ditches, 66 and 51, comprised sherds of coarse cooking pots typical of the earlier medieval period, 12th–13th century, and comparable to pottery from ditches of Period 3b, whereas the infill of the latest ditch, 45, included sherds of a glazed jug dating to the later 14th or early 15th century. The pottery gives, therefore, a reasonable time span for the ditches and the use of the enclosures they defined.

The finds

SITE 1

The range of artefacts of the medieval period was limited. Pottery was sparse and the main group, which comes from the north-west part of the site, shows a limited range of forms, with an absence of jugs. The material is dated to the 12th–13th centuries. The range of fabrics is also limited, though in the southern (frontage) part of the site a small number of sherds of later 14th or 15th century fabric types was found. Other artefacts were few – post-medieval contexts at the frontage of the site produced a copper-alloy buckle, a long pin and a glass-headed iron pin, which are likely to be medieval in date. Of these the glass-headed pin is unusual in being of iron. Fine copper-alloy pins with glass heads dated to the late 12th century (Pritchard 1991, nos 1468, 1469) are known from London but there appear to be no parallels for similar pins with an iron shank. A total of only seven iron objects was recovered from medieval layers, which included a timber cleat, a saw fragment and part of a possible blade. These last two fragments could be derived from the late-Saxon occupation of the site, both being found with loomweights of that date. Conspicuous in the assemblage, however, are hone-stones. Six of these were found in medieval layers (with another four which could be medieval in later layers close to the frontage) all of fine-grained sandstone probably from the Mendip Hills. In addition, two joining fragments of a Greensand quern (possibly from Penselwood in

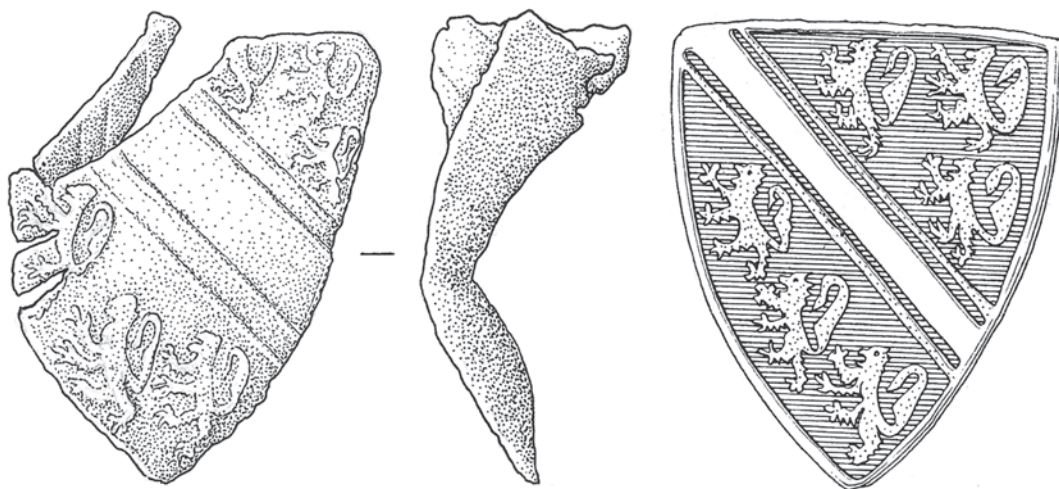


Fig. 16 Copper-alloy shield with heraldic design; scale 1:1; illustration N. Griffiths

eastern Somerset) were found. One fragment of this came from the primary ditch 261 at the north end of the site and may have derived from the period of late-Saxon occupation.

The assemblage is consistent with a small rural settlement and with excavations that are away from the main area of dwellings. One object stands out, however, though it was clearly a chance loss on the site and possibly brought in at a much later date. This was a small enamelled copper-alloy shield with a heraldic design. Though now badly damaged, traces of a raised edge and the recessed ground show that the shield was once enamelled. The coat of arms consists of a diagonal stripe with thin bordering lines, all flanked by six small rampant lions which can only represent the de Bohun family, Earls of Hereford and Essex (Foster 1984, 27). The use of enamels on heraldic metalwork perhaps commenced during the second half of the 13th century (Griffiths 1995, 63) and was common throughout the 14th, diminishing in the 15th. Since the male line of the de Bohuns became extinct in 1372, a shield with their arms unconnected with any other is unlikely to have been made after that date. Such shields may have had a number of uses; there are no rivet holes or other means of attachment; the lack of a loop precludes its use as a horse pendant. It may have been glued onto a solid backing, perhaps a casket or box, or possibly attached to leather harness by a metal frame which was itself riveted in place (Griffiths 1991, 2–4, fig. 10). In summary, the shield belonged to one of the great magnate families of medieval England. The number of finds of the de Bohun's

metalwork is second only to that of the royal household, and are found all over England, as befits a family with a large number of scattered estates and manors. The likely dating for the object is *c.* 1275–1375. The presence of the shield on the site need not imply any specific link between Ash and the de Bohun family.

In the medieval period, there is a clear concentration of artefacts and animal bone in the upper infills of the ditches in the north-west part of the excavation. Almost 100 sherds of pottery were recovered from the fills of ditches 184, 132 and 138 with a further 51 sherds from ditches 204 and 200 (Fig. 10). These features also contained a significant proportion of the animal bone from the medieval features of the site as well as a quernstone fragment, two objects of iron, one of which was a timber dog, and three whetstones. Burnt Ham Hill stone also occurred in these layers. The pottery is consistently 12th–13th century, with a uniform fabric and a limited range of forms, jugs being completely absent. Comparable pottery was recovered from the infills of the ditches to the east and south but in much smaller quantities.

The overwhelming majority of the animal bone from medieval contexts was recovered from the excavated sections of the ditches in the north-west part of the site. It presumably reflects the level and proportion of animal use and consumption in the contemporary settlement, showing cattle as dominant but with mutton and pork also important. Butchery of horse carcasses was also evident. Dog bones and a single bone of a roe deer were also found, indicative

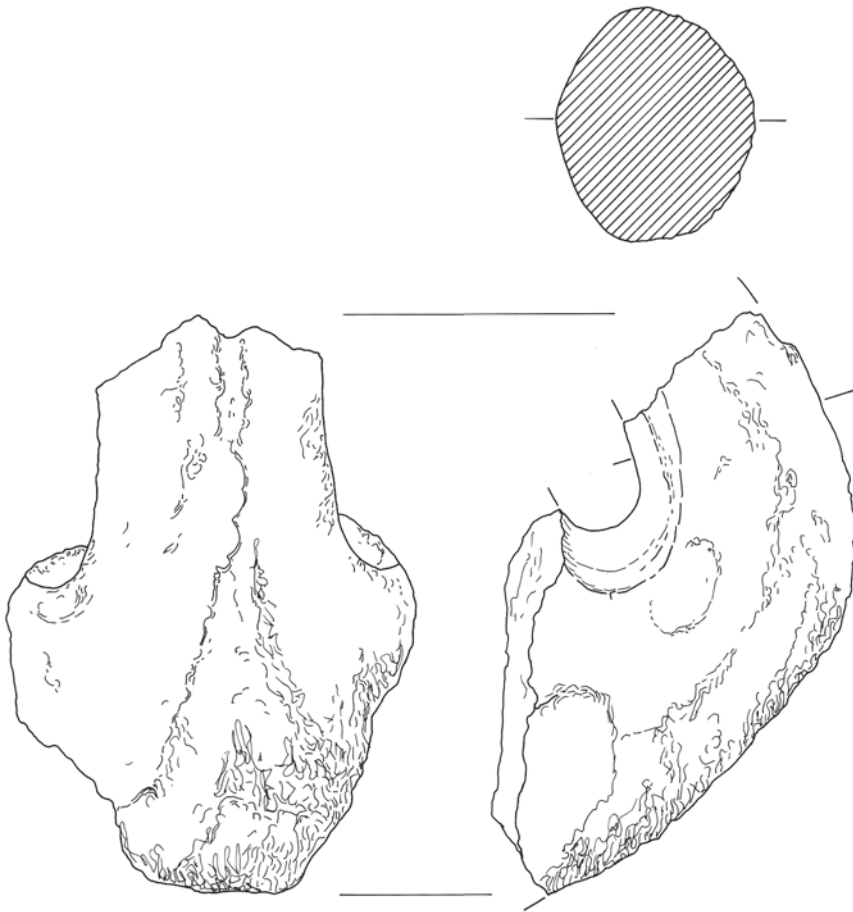


Fig. 17 Pierced handle from a stone mortar; scale 1:2

of hunting. In terms of species, butchery techniques and size of domestic species, the assemblage is generally comparable with those from other sites of this period in western England for example at Ilchester (Levitan 1982) and Trowbridge (Bourdillon 1993).

SITE 2

The range of medieval material from Site 2 was comparable to that from Site 1, but if anything even sparser. Pottery was absolutely comparable in fabric, forms and date range with a total of only 99 sherds, 24 of which were from a single vessel found in pit 29. Six fragments of iron were recovered; all nails except one possible blade fragment. Hone-stones were again an element of the assemblage, with one

from each of the pits 29 and 63, being fine sandstone comparable to those from Site 1. In addition, a grit grindstone fragment was found in ditch 66, together with a fragment of a Mayen Lava quern or millstone. These were imported from Germany in the Romano-British, late-Saxon and medieval periods and could date to any of these. In addition, part of the pierced handle of what appears to be a large stone mortar (Fig. 17) was recovered from the infill of ditch 18, one of the primary ditches. This was a large, eroded and probably burnt fragment of coarse, shelly limestone. This type of mortar is usually of medieval date. Dunning has noted that only Caen and Purbeck marble mortars have pieced handles or ribs (1977, figs 154, 158, 163). The perforation is angled in from each side as if drilled or carved from both sides. Large mortars are not uncommon on

medieval sites and a medieval date is suggested for this example.

Animal bone from the site was limited, but the main groups came from the east–west ditches (Fig. 14, ditches 13, 66 and 70 which may have defined the edge of the Drove), in which there were concentrations of animal bone, including near complete long bones and the skulls of an ox and of a pig. The assemblage is comparable with that from Site 1, with cattle bone common and most parts of the beef carcass represented. Mutton and pork were also used and again there was evidence of horse butchery. A single cat bone and two bones of a crow, a common scavenger around settlements, were also found.

MEDIEVAL POTTERY

All the earlier medieval vessels (Fig. 18), except nos 1 and 8 are cookpots, with no jugs or tripod pitchers present. All are in superficially similar coarse, well-fired and rather heavy fabrics. In fact the fabrics do vary in their inclusions and can be compared to fabrics found in several places in Somerset. At Taunton (Burrow 1988, 115) in the 12th and 13th centuries the pottery consists almost entirely of cooking pots and storage jars, although tripod pitchers were also present. The fabrics were all coarse (ibid. 117–18). Stoke-sub-Hamdon pottery (Mephram 1992) shows the same pattern, with a variety of coarse fabrics and mostly cookpots in the earlier 12th–13th century contexts (ibid. 109–10). Ilchester has more published medieval pottery than anywhere else in the county (Pearson 1982; Ellis 1991; 1994), and along with the Taunton pottery (Pearson 1984) confirms the early medieval date of these fabrics.

In the absence of jugs and tripod pitchers, it is difficult to give a more precise date than 12th–13th century for this small group of pottery. There is no scratch-marked ware or stamped decoration, and only one vessel with simple combed decoration. The lid, no. 8, is an uncommon vessel, but not closely dateable. The ‘tray’, no. 1 is even more unusual, and difficult to parallel.

Very few sherds of later medieval pottery were found on Site 1 and these were generally confined to the frontage area. Part of a single cookpot (Fig. 18.9) has a hard, sandy fabric and probably dates to the early or mid 14th century and is a product of the Donyatt kilns (Coleman-Smith and Pearson 1988, fig. 47). A small group of 15th-century material was also found, but this is described below as an element

of the Tudor building, Period 4. On Site 2, a total of six sherds of later medieval pottery were found, being fragments of glazed jugs in a hard sandy fabric probably dating to the 14th or earlier 15th century.

Illustrated vessels (Fig. 18).

1. Tray-like vessel, smooth-based and better finished on the inside surface, so probably that way up. Possibly oval, as otherwise very small for its thickness. Hard, heavy and coarse fabric, with frequent very varied inclusions: angular white mostly *c.* 1.5mm; very dark brown same size but one <6mm; rounded reddish white to 2mm, less frequent; one rounded visible part 9mm by 5mm. These massive inclusions suggest that the fabric was mixed especially for these thick-walled vessels, as the largest inclusion is thicker than the wall of a cookpot. Dull reddish surfaces, not very smooth, with slight indentations on the top of the rim, and greyish core. Site 1, ditch 184
2. Cookpot, hard and heavy. Coarse fabric, but different to no. 1; angular white inclusions 1–3mm; rounded white inclusions mostly 1mm, occasionally; very rare bright dark red rounded 1mm; occasional both angular and rounded almost black *c.* 1mm. Reddish surfaces, grey core, surfaces a bit rough. Site 1, ditch 184
3. Cookpot, fabric very like no. 2, but with more angular almost black inclusions, and no red. Buff to greyish surfaces and grey core. Site 1, ditch 184
4. Cookpot, coarse fabric but with more uniform-sized inclusions; rounded and angular white; and almost black round 1mm or less. Harsh surfaces red externally, greyish internally, grey fabric. Site 1, ditch 200
5. Body sherd from a cookpot with combed decoration; fabric etc as no. 3. Combed decoration is found reasonably commonly on these earlier cookpots. Site 1, ditch 138
6. Cookpot, rather thinner in the body than those already illustrated, but similarly coarse, like no. 3, but subtly different, perhaps because the fabric and internal surface is black, reddish externally. Site 1, ditch 138
7. Cookpot, thin-walled, hard-fired vessel with black to dark grey to orangey-red surfaces, like no. 6. Site 2, pit 29
8. Almost certainly a lid, as the top is not suitably flat for a bowl, and the better finish is external. Top very chipped away. Fabric very like no. 6, reddish externally, buff internally and grey fabric. Site 1, ditch 290
9. Cookpot, completely different fabric to nos. 3–8; hard, sandy, reddish surfaces grey core. About half the vessel is present, not all fitting together. 1368g. Site 1, pit 54

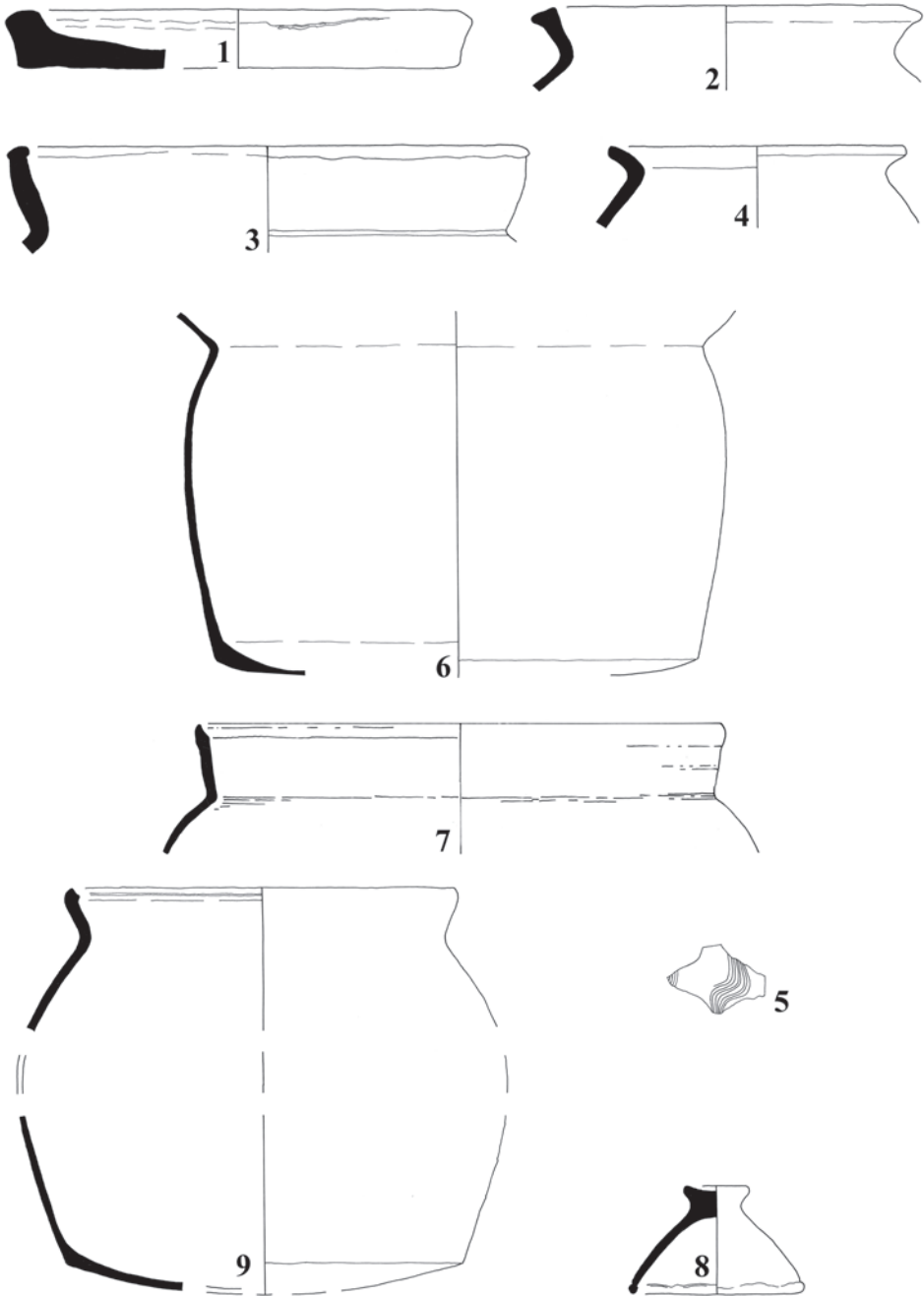


Fig. 18 Medieval pottery; scale 1:4

PERIOD 4 FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Evidence of activity in this period was confined to Site 1. It is not known for how long the latest boundaries and enclosures of the medieval period may have remained extant; even though ditches may be infilled, banks and hedges could have remained. By the later 15th century, however, existing boundaries may have been disrupted and a very large, east–west boundary ditch divided the site, contemporary with a large, stone-built structure on the frontage (Fig. 7), which continued in use into the 17th century.

The Tudor building

Only the northern side of this structure was found (Fig. 19) and it is likely to have extended up to the then frontage of Back Street with which it lay parallel. The north-western part survived best, though denuded, and eastwards it was very incomplete, having been heavily quarried for stone. Though the position of a north-east corner was located, a narrower form of the structure may have continued eastwards. Overall, it was at least 18m long and 5m wide but probably extended another 4m to the street frontage giving a width of up to 9m. On the north and west (and ?east) it was surrounded by a shallow ditch (69) into which the base of the external face of the walls had been built. The nature of this was best seen on the north-west (Fig. 20). The profile of the ditch varied from broad and shallow along the north to steeper and narrower on the north-west and west, with a deeper gully along the base. The walls comprised a single face formed of substantial blocks of squared stone, with infill of rubble and mortar behind, against the inner edge of the ditch cut. A mixture of stone was used – Ham Hill stone and oolitic limestone were most common, with at least one slab of blue Lias in the northern part of the wall. Within the ditch the extant walling was up to 0.4m wide, but above this level it must have been wider, comprising two faces with rubble infill between. The corner facing did not remain, but the evidence of the cut indicated that the corner was angled across and not square, a feature mirrored at the north-east corner. The line of the northern side of the building also appeared complex with indented areas between the corners and a central projection.

No internal floors were extant and the platform of the building is probably much reduced. Whether the building was completely stone-built is unknown. A

number of large blocks and slabs of Ham Hill stone, often reddened by fire, were recovered from the top of the surrounding ditch, but clearly the overwhelming majority of the stone had been removed before the structure became obscured. The ground plan seems elaborate and the building may have had some architectural embellishments, perhaps enhanced by the surrounding ditch, though this is rather obscure.

To the north of the building a compact surface of loamy clay was found (Fig. 19, layer 75) which was retained along the west side by a kerb of stones set on edge. Few of these remained in situ, but their position was shown by indentations in the clay beneath and they showed a distinct curve, within which the surface lay (Fig. 21). The surface had a very slight fall from north to south and lay within a broader terrace (112) cut into the slope of the hill. Southwards it extended to within a short distance of the line of the wall of the building, from which it appeared to have been separated by a narrow culvert in the line of ditch 69. The extent of the surface to the east remained undefined beneath the debris and disturbance of a later field barn, but the curve of the east side of the terrace (112) was evident. Within the make-up for the surface, numerous sherds of pottery were found which represent a distinct group of vessels from the excavation, dating to the 15th century (Fig. 23.10–12). This pottery gives a *terminus post quem* for the laying of the surface and by association, perhaps the building to the north of which it lay.

Running just to the west of the surface was feature 110, a steep-sided gully 0.6m wide with a flat base 0.3m deep and a square terminal at its southern end (Fig. 21). It was perfectly aligned to meet a stone-lined culvert (Fig. 19, feature 238; Fig. 22) which was found in the base of the bigger ditch to the north. There clearly seems to be an element of water collection and use here; the deep stone-filled area of ditch 274 acting as a water collection and storage point, with the culvert channelling it to a point close to the external surface at the back of the Tudor building. It may have been a covered culvert for its whole length; stone slabs being removed after its disuse. A very large group of pottery was found in the fill of the feature, suggesting a deliberate dump, which included large fragments of several vessels, together with an iron U-staple and a fragment of a Norwegian Ragstone hone.

The large group of pottery from gully 110 (Fig. 23.15–21) can be dated to the earlier 16th century and the lower fills of ditch 69, north-west and west

PERIOD 4

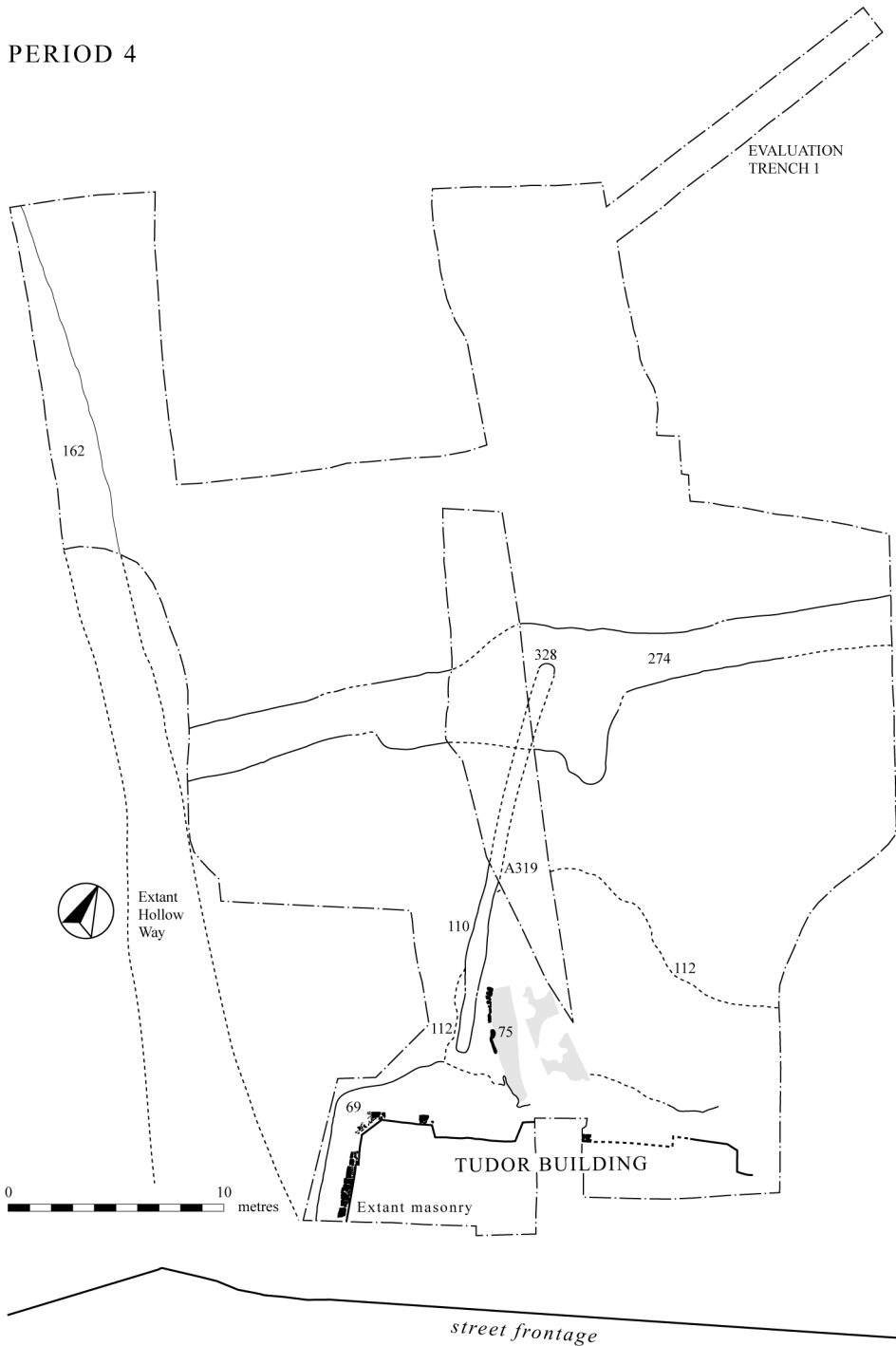


Fig. 19 Site 1, Period 4



Fig. 20 Site 1, north-west corner of the Tudor building; view east

of the Tudor building, contained pottery of a similar date (Fig. 23.13, 14). Lying in the base of the wider ditch to the north of the building, however, was a layer of dark, charcoal-rich, loamy clay. This contained a large quantity of pottery, seven fragments from two glass vessels, three fragments of iron strip, possibly from the same object and a small iron gouge, all of which may represent the clearing out of debris from the building into a partly silted-up ditch. The presence of charcoal could be evidence of damage by fire. The pottery group (Fig. 24.22–6) can also be dated to the earlier 16th century though perhaps slightly later than the material noted above. The glass vessels, however, English-made *façon de Venise* beakers (pers. comm. John Allan), date to the later 16th or early 17th century, and the reason for this contrast in date is unclear. It would appear that the pottery was generally much older than the glass when discarded.

All this material has a bearing on the period of use of the building, the pottery putting it firmly into the earlier 16th century. The glass, however, would suggest the use of the building continuing into the later years of that century if not into the 17th. The glass vessels could also indicate a certain level of wealth, which may be at odds with the pottery which is exclusively local, from Donyatt, with no finewares present at all.

The final disuse and demolition of the building is represented by layers in the top of the surrounding ditch which overlie the remnants of the demolished walls, as well as slabs of Ham Hill stone, including a small number of dressed blocks, and other rubble lying along the north side of the ditch. These layers were continuous with much wider spreads of dark loams containing scattered rubble that spread northwards over the external surface, filling the terrace 112. They contained a large group of pottery that can be dated to the first half of the 17th century, and an almost complete absence of finewares was again evident. The layers contained a range of iron work, comprising four knives (Fig. 25), one of which is 17th century, a socketed tool, possibly a weedhook, two horseshoe fragments, a small arrowhead of late or post-medieval type and six fragments of structural iron including two large studs, a hinge pivot and cleats. Up to 18 iron nails were also found. Copper-alloy objects comprised three small wire twists (probably dress fastenings), a thimble, two fragments of sheet metal and a decorative tack in the form of a heart (Fig. 25.7). The heart is not usually a medieval motif, but became common in the Tudor period along with flowers, especially the rose. The whole range of material could be derived from the clearing out and subsequent demolition of the Tudor building



Fig. 21 Site 1, surface 75; view north



Fig. 22 Site 1, stone-lined culvert 328; view south

some time in the early or mid-17th century, and as with the fancy glass vessels, reflects something of the status of its occupants.

East–west boundary ditch

A single large ditch (274) lay about 20m to the north of the building (Fig. 19). It was not parallel with it or with Back Street but was clearly a major boundary cutting across the line of many of the earlier, by now infilled, ditches of the site. It is comparable to the large ditch found beneath the existing holloway that runs up the western boundary of the site and the two may be at least in part contemporary. At the east and west sides of the excavation the ditch was straightforward – excavated sections showed a steep-sided feature up to 2m wide and 0.8m deep. In the central area of the site, however, the feature became generally broader and deeper, stepping down from the west to a depth of about 1.4m. East of the central baulk, the feature widened out on its southern side and became generally a steep-sided hole. The lowest infill of this wider area, which was up to 1m deep, contained a high proportion of rubble of Ham Hill

stone and oolite overlain by iron-stained clay, suggesting at least periodic standing water. The rubble was found to lie as packing around a stone-lined culvert 328, the sides constructed of Ham Hill stone slabs set on edge (Fig. 22), which probably ran south to link up with gully 110, adjacent to the Tudor building.

The deeper fills of this part of the feature were overlain by the layers of loamy clay that filled the whole length of the ditch. Pottery and other artefacts were sparse and included sherds of both medieval and 16th-century date. In addition, however, a single sherd of Westerwald stoneware dating to the 18th century was found, clearly stratified in the middle fills of the central, wider part of the feature. The presence of this sherd (there was no indication that it was intrusive into the layer) could emphasise the potential longevity of this feature as a boundary across the site, though its origins were earlier.

Pottery

A small group of 15th-century pottery came from surface 75. There are no finewares and all the vessels probably come from the Donyatt kilns. The simple slip decoration on no. 12 is difficult to parallel exactly at Donyatt, but the style of the jug and other vessels would fit the 15th century, and the lack of fine wares would support that. More precise dating is difficult.

All the 16th-century vessels, unless otherwise described, are in a uniform well-made slightly sandy fabric usually described as Donyatt (Coleman-Smith and Pearson 1988). In west Somerset it has recently been demonstrated by analysis that some of this ‘Donyatt’ pottery actually comes from other kilns in that area although it is visually indistinguishable (Allan 1998). However, given the site’s proximity to Donyatt, it seems likely that much of the pottery actually came from there. One exception to this is the flared base of a Border Ware cup (as Pearce 1992, fig. 31 no. 195T, pl. 8 second from left) with a good dark green glaze internally. Though found in a later context, it dates from the early 16th century, and may well relate to the groups described below.

The first group came from gully 110. This largish group contains no finewares whatsoever, not even a sliver of stoneware. The range of forms (jugs, jars, bowls and dishes) and the good potting and fairly fine fabric compare with early 16th-century groups from Exeter (Allan 1984, 154–63) and Cleeve Abbey (Allan 1998). The Exeter and Cleeve material is well

dated by imported wares. On the basis of their fabric and general style, all the pots probably come from the Donyatt kilns (Coleman-Smith and Pearson 1988), although the heavily decorated jug (no. 15) is difficult to parallel exactly there.

The second group, from ditch 69, appears to date to the earlier 16th century and though broadly comparable with the group from gully 110 has a slightly different range and could be a shade later.

Illustrated sherds

Fig. 23

10. Jug, fine grey fabric, red surfaces and orangey glaze externally. Surface 75
11. Bowl, slightly coarser than no.10, blackened externally, buff, dull red elsewhere. Surface 75
12. As no.10 but grey fabric and internally; olive green glaze externally and band of white slip with sgraffito externally. Surface 75
13. Jug, or possibly bowl, with big thumbled strip under the rim; grey fabric, red surfaces with brownish-olive glaze virtually overall. Like Coleman-Smith and Pearson 1988, fig. 60.4/48, 4/73, early 16th century. Base of ditch 69
14. Jug, as no.13 but unglazed inside and with incised lines and a tiny amount of slip. Probably early 16th century. Base of ditch 69
15. Jug with slip and combed decoration. 90% of rim present, fading to very little towards the base. External orangey glaze at the top varying to dark olive green. Gully 110
16. Jug, or just possibly a jar, with incised lines and rather random seeming slip. Dark olive green glaze externally. Gully 110
17. Possibly a cistern top, with very wide handle. Small patches of wet-looking glaze varying from brown to green, and with an 8mm long ?kiln scar on one patch. Gully 110
18. Jar, two-thirds present and with enough rim to say no handle. Mostly glazed inside, very dark olive, externally dull black. Gully 110
19. Bowl, very high-fired, metallic-looking dark olive green glaze internally, reddish-buff externally. Gully 110
20. Pancheon, dry-looking pale olive glaze internally. Gully 110
21. Bowl, glazed lower part, internally buff — nearly black surfaces. Gully 110

Fig. 24

22. Bowl, wet-looking dark orange glaze internally

reddish to buff surfaces. Ditch 69

23. Mug, dull dark brown glaze virtually overall, possibly iron glaze. Ditch 69
24. Orangey glaze internally, orangey surface. Ditch 69
25. Jar, darkish olive glaze externally. Ditch 69
26. Dish, pale olive green glaze internally, with orange splotches, reddish externally. Ditch 69

Metalwork

All the following are from terrace 112 (Fig. 25).

1. Large whittle-tanged knife with back and edge almost parallel; back angled down to tip. Tang in line with back. Large ferrule in situ; tang ?clenched at end to secure handle (now lost). Similar large, wide-bladed knives from excavations in London date to the late 13th to mid 14th centuries (Cowgill *et al.* 1987, nos 35, 55), although both these examples have a steeper end to the blade tip and have centrally set tangs. Without secure contextual dating it remains possible that the knife from Ash could be post-medieval in date.
2. Scale tang knife with copper-alloy cap at end of handle; three non-ferrous rivets through tang; short bolster. Length 143mm, blade width 12mm. Probably 17th century.
3. Socketed object, probably a weedhook although the 'blade' is rather straight and at 90° to the socket, rather than the more curved style which is usual. A single nail remains in situ within the socket for attachment to the handle. Socketed arm: 107mm long, 26mm diameter, 'blade' arm: 59mm long, incomplete. Medieval or later.
4. Small gouge. Complete. A type of tool with many uses in several crafts and industries and cannot be closely dated. Length 98mm. Medieval or later.
5. Incomplete square or trapezoidal buckle frame; pin missing. X-radiograph shows traces of non-ferrous coating. Poor condition. Could be personal or harness buckle. Width 42–50mm. Medieval.
6. Small conical ferrule or simple arrowhead. Similar arrowheads were recovered at Baille Hill, York (Addyman and Priestley, 1977, nos 41–9), the majority of this type deriving from post-medieval levels. Baille Hill was used as a butt in the late medieval and early post-medieval periods, and it has been suggested that these simple arrow tips were used during practice. Length 40mm.
7. Small tack with a heart-shaped head made from a single piece of copper alloy.

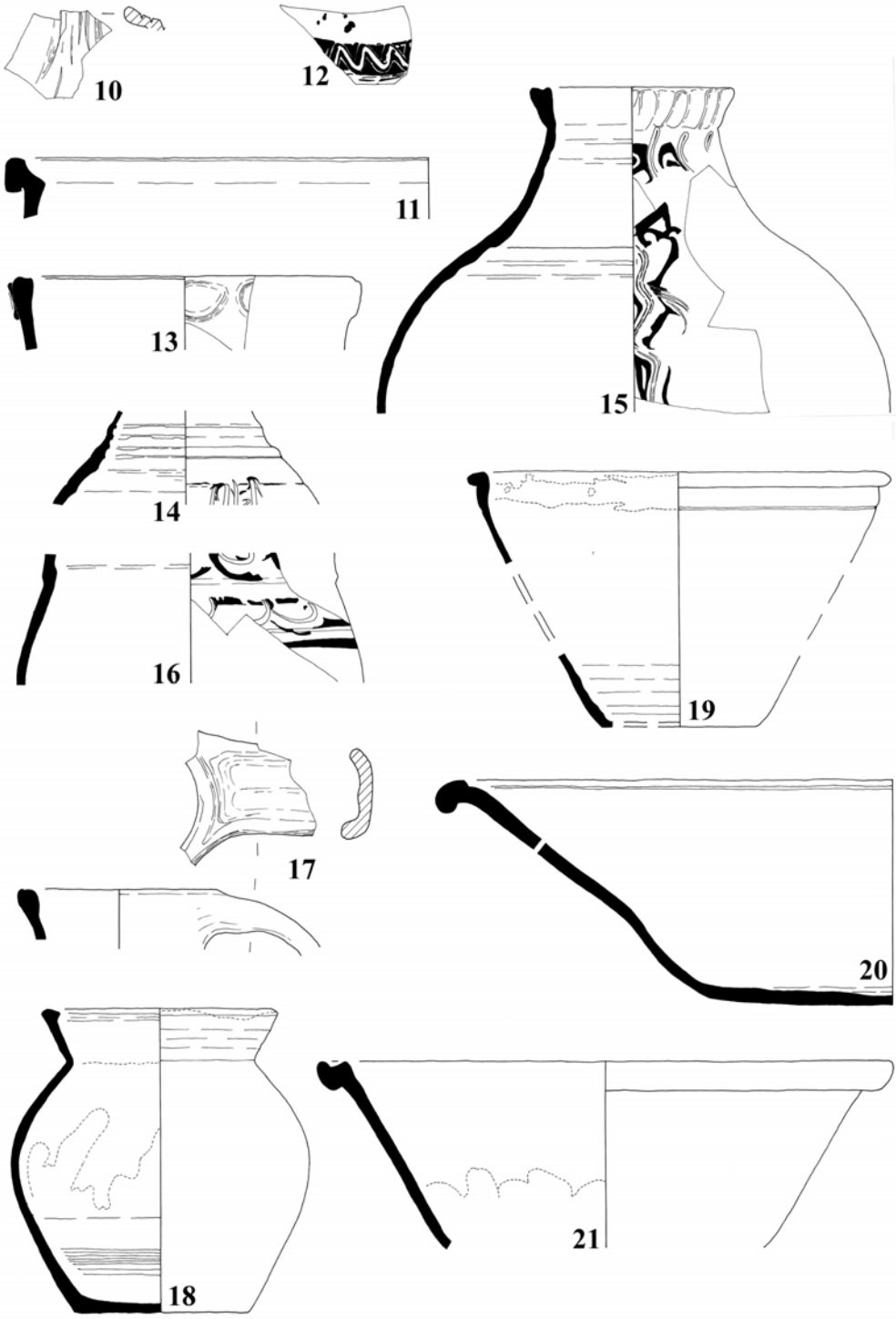


Fig. 23 Later medieval (10–12) and Period 4 (13–21) pottery; scale 1:4

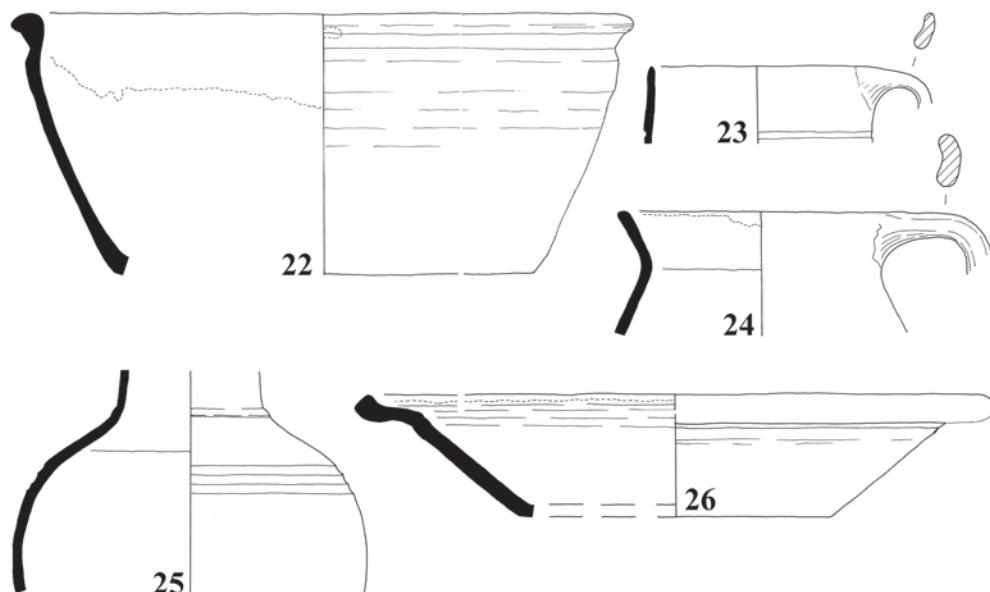


Fig. 24 Early post-medieval pottery; scale 1:4

PERIOD 5 POST-MEDIEVAL

On Site 1, the Tudor building at the frontage appears to have been demolished some time in the mid-17th century. A mid 18th-century estate map of Ash (SRO T/PH/vch48 S/57) shows a number of buildings along the northern frontage of Back Street, but none need be on the excavation frontage. Traces of a later building were, however, found, represented by a single length of rubble footing aligned on Back Street and about 10m north of it. Very little is known about this structure or its extent and only a single course of the footing remained, cut into the debris of the earlier building. On maps from 1810 onwards the whole site is shown as an orchard, a situation not changed until the 1950s. The excavated footing is likely therefore to be part of an 18th-century structure, built over the site of the earlier house. It may as easily have been a barn or other agricultural building as a dwelling.

On Site 2, no trace of activity later than the medieval ditches of Period 3 was found with the exception of a large area of infill, possibly the site of a pond, in the north-west corner of the site. Pottery from this feature dated to the 18th century but it is not shown on any of the maps of the area, which show open ground and orchard from 1755 on.

DISCUSSION

Both excavation sites were located on the slope of a low hill on the ridge overlooking the Yeo valley, Site 1, on gently sloping ground just below the crest of the hill, and Site 2 on level ground just above the scarp (Fig. 1). Both lay near existing or former springs. A copious spring is reported as rising in the back of gardens to the north of Site 1 and the northern boundary of the Site 2 orchard is along a deeply indented stream which rises somewhere close to Burrough Street (Fig. 2). Though the subsoil is clay, the location would have been ideal for settlement from the earliest times and the whole of this landscape is likely to have been well occupied and farmed at least as early as the later Iron Age. Evidence of a large thriving population at that time can be seen in the large hillfort at Ham Hill, 1.3km south of Ash and in the contemporary settlement known just south of Ilchester (Leach 2001, 14–15). Though the excavations at Ash produced no evidence of prehistoric structures, a scatter of flaked stone on Site 1 points to earlier prehistoric activity towards the top of the hill with an Iron Age clay sling shot from Site 2 suggesting activity at that time lower down its slopes. The survival in the modern landscape of what may be late prehistoric boundaries may be marked by the north–south tracks and

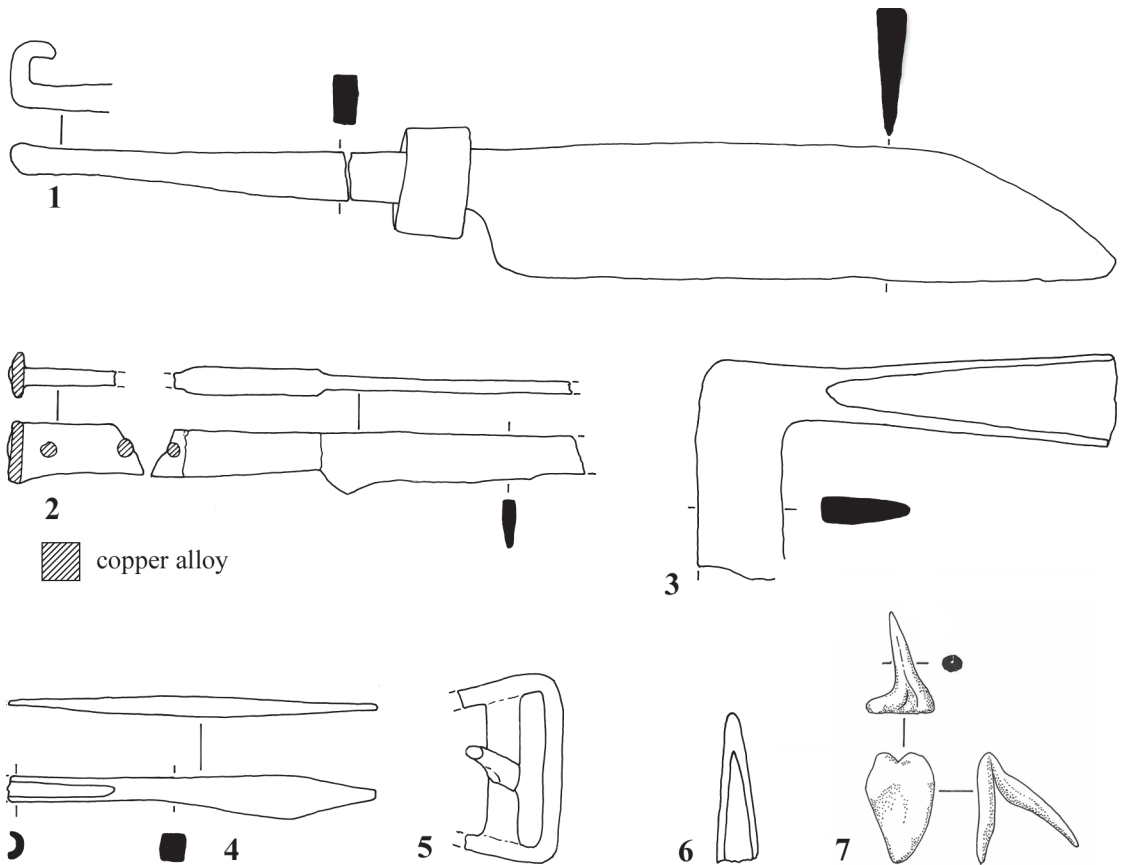


Fig. 25 Period 4 metalwork: nos 1–6 iron, scale 1:2, no. 7 copper alloy, scale 1:1

droveways (Fig. 1) running from the ridge onto the river flood plain to the north and in the characteristically long land plots of the tithings of Ash, Witcombe and Milton (Barker 1987, Fig. 5; *VCH* 1978, 80).

In the Romano-British period, there is strong evidence of settlement in the immediate vicinity of Site 2 and continuity between the late Iron Age and Romano-British land use and settlement in the whole area is probable (Leach 2001, 84). A significant group of Romano-British pottery was recovered from Site 2, and though the primary ditches in which most of the sherds lay (Fig. 4) seem on balance likely to be medieval, the possibility that they are much earlier does remain. Any Roman site at Ash should be seen in the context of the hinterland of *Lindinis* where a complex and highly developed rural landscape in both the later Iron Age and Romano-British period is evident.

Ash was one of ten tithings in the much larger parish of Martock, which had its origins as a Saxon Royal estate. Along with Milton and Witcombe, Ash occupied the north-east corner of the parish, which was characterised by long strips of land running down from the ridge into the flood plain of the Yeo to the north. The present village of Ash developed from two separate hamlets (Ellison 1983, 69), an eastern hamlet of Pykesash, at the junction of Burrough Street with Middle Leaze Drove and a western hamlet of Ash Boulogne on Back Street (Fig. 2). In common with the nearby hamlets of Witcombe and Milton to the north-west (Fig. 1) these settlements lay on well defined north-south routes leading onto the floodplain to the north and probably to crossing points of the river Yeo, linking these settlements with those on the north side of the valley. The potential antiquity of at least some of these routes has been mentioned above. The existence of

a medieval east–west route directly linking the hamlets is also likely to be marked by the footpath that joins Burrough Street with Back street (Fig. 2). This route continues westward beyond Witcombe, and, as Middle Leaze Drove, eastwards towards Tintinhull (Fig. 1).

The excavations on Site 1 produced evidence in the form of pottery and other artefacts of occupation in the later Saxon period, probably in the 10th century, with the likelihood of at least one domestic building close to the excavation site. Several pits were also excavated, probably of this date, which had an evident spatial relationship with the primary ditches on the site (Fig. 5). How early were these ditches, which represent the beginning of what were fairly long lasting medieval strip plots to the west of Back Street? As with the primary ditches in Site 2, those on Site 1 contained no sherds of medieval pottery, though they were eventually replaced by ditches whose infill contained pottery dating to the 12th–13th century. If these strip plots were not contemporary with the late-Saxon activity on Site 1, then they could have been established either in the period following the Norman conquest or a century later following a period of disuse of the site. In either case the establishment of these plots could be seen as a shift from an open, late-Saxon landscape of scattered farms and dwellings to the nucleated, feudal hamlets of the early medieval period.

The land divisions established by the primary boundaries on each of the sites underwent redefinition and changes over the years, though the basic alignments, particularly on Site 1, were maintained. Within the areas of excavation, however, it was not always possible to understand the nature of the enclosures that the complex of intercutting ditches defined. That they were stock pens, garden or burgage plots close to the village seems, however, probable, with trackways between them allowing for the movement of stock to and from pasture, and people to and from the open fields. The deserted settlement known as Bineham City, on the north side of the River Yeo is known from aerial photography (Leech 1978) and excavation (Dewar and Seaby 1951) and comprised buildings along a trackway with paddocks and garden enclosures to the north. Similar evidence of buildings at Little Bineham, aligned with the north–south track leading to Pennypost Drove (Fig. 1) has been found more recently (Robinson 2003, 148) with a date range from the 12th to the 16th century. Excavations on the northern edge of Stoke-sub-Hamdon (Montague *et al.* 1992)

revealed evidence of a similar nature to Ash, with activity in the form of ditches from the 12th–15th century.

On both Ash excavation sites, the majority of medieval pottery dated to the 12th–13th century, and displayed a very limited range of forms and fabrics. Pottery and other artefacts were not, however, plentiful, with hone-stones being important in the collection – the evidence consistent with a small, rural settlement. Animal bone and other domestic refuse was not common in the ditches, but the bone reflected the usual range of domestic animals, comparable with other west country sites of this period. On both sites, a small amount of later medieval pottery was found, up to the 15th century, in the latest infills of the final ditches, indicating continued activity. Whether the hamlets had shrunk by this time is not certain, but the effects of the Black Death in 1348 may have been felt.

The construction of a large house on the Back Street frontage of Site 1, probably in the later 15th century marks a change. Though the form of this building is not fully known, it was a large stone-built structure, with evidence of architectural embellishments, suggesting a well-to-do house set along the street frontage as at Bruton (Penoyre and Penoyre 1997). The later 15th century in England is known as a time of new building projects, and was a period that saw the end of the medieval form of vernacular architecture (Mercer 1975). In use throughout the 16th century, and probably into the 17th, the building at Ash was eventually demolished and the site levelled, with much stone removed for re-use.

For the last three centuries both sites have been open land, latterly planted as orchards. The earliest map of Ash, dated 1755, shows the two small hamlets of Pykesash and Ash Boulogne, centred around the farms on Back Street and Burrough Street, north of ribbon settlement along the through road of that time. Ordnance survey maps of the 19th and earlier 20th century show a similar situation and it is only since the Second World War that the village has expanded, with new housing along the whole of Back Street and much of Burrough Street (Fig. 2) on what had previously been orchard plots. The two excavations at Ash, though limited in scope, are important not only in revealing something of the development and ancient origins of the settlement, but also in emphasising the importance and potential of the archaeological examination of the rapidly diminishing number of undeveloped sites within the ancient villages of South Somerset.

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