Archaeological Field Unit

Evaluation of the Medieval Village of Botolph Bridge, Orton Longueville, Peterborough.

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SUMMARY

The site of the medieval village of Botolph Bridge, Orton Longueville, Peterborough is presently under threat from housing development. During the 1980s an earthwork survey and excavations within the manorial enclosure highlighted the importance of the site and suggested occupation from the middle Saxon period onwards.

This report describes recent evaluations by the Archaeological Field Unit (CCC) which have identified two areas of major archaeological significance, separated by a hollow way which appears to have been a well-maintained medieval routeway, paved and bounded by fences, with cobbled yards from adjacent properties backing straight on to the road boundaries. In earlier times the hollow way was demarcated by ditches.

On the southern side of the hollow way are the remains of a medieval house with hearths, rubbish pits and yards. Artefacts recovered from this part of the site suggest that there is good preservation of activity areas and workshops.

On the northern side of the hollow way lies the enclosure of the medieval manorial site. Here rubbish pits offer comparable information from a high status property. The remains of a barn which lay in this enclosure was excavated in 1987. Boundary ditches within the enclosure suggest the expansion of the manorial site during the medieval period and the possible displacement of other village remains, implying settlement shift.

A number of Roman features, including rubbish pits, have also been recognised.

Further excavation of this well-preserved site may assist in the study of Roman-Saxon-Medieval continuity, whilst there is great potential to investigate the medieval site economy, internal hierarchy and general settlement history including the procedures of site abandonment.

The housing development is continuing at pace and the whole area is under immediate threat. Westbury Homes have indicated that any archaeological work on the southern area needs to be completed by the beginning of January, whilst excavations within the manorial complex need to be undertaken within the next twelve months.
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INTRODUCTION

The Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) undertook evaluative excavations at the site of the medieval village of Botolph Bridge following a request by Peterborough Museum for archaeological assistance. The evaluations were funded by English Heritage and were undertaken in accordance with a brief prepared by the Archaeological Officer for Peterborough City Council on the 19th July 1999. The archaeological methodology to be used by the AFU was outlined in a Project Design presented to English Heritage on the 4th August 1999.

The site of the medieval village of Botolph Bridge is contained within an area outlined for housing in the 1980s and is presently being destroyed by Westbury Homes construction works (Figure 1). The importance of the site has been recognised for some time with limited excavations and a comprehensive earthwork survey of the site made in the 1980s. The earthwork survey recorded the remains of the church, manorial enclosures, field systems and village earthworks which made up the settlement of Botolph Bridge (Figure 2). Much of the medieval village has already been lost to the development within the Botolph Green Estate.

Limited excavations in the late 1980s by Ian Meadows and the Nene Valley Research Committee focused on the manorial enclosures and highlighted the survival of medieval buildings within the development area (Figure 1). At this time Botolph Bridge was rated as one of the top six deserted medieval village remains in Cambridgeshire by the Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) assessment for the Monument Protection Programme.

In preparation for the further expansion of the building areas Westbury Homes have already stripped the topsoil from the southern side of the development area. A window between now and the beginning of January is available to complete any excavation work on the southern side of the development area. This has resulted in the preparation of an evaluation report which does not at present contain completed specialist reports or an in depth discussion of the excavated deposits. It has been submitted in advance of these being available to enable an early decision to be made regarding the funding of further work.
METHODOLOGY

Prior to the 1999 evaluations limited excavation work and an earthwork survey had been undertaken by the Nene Valley Research Committee. Evaluative excavations therefore were designed to clarify the position of these earlier excavations and assess the extent, date and condition of remains elsewhere in the development zone.

The archaeological evaluation consisted of machine excavation of linear trenches supplemented by an on-going metal detector survey. Trenches were cut using a 360° excavator with a 2m wide ditching bucket. Machine excavation removed topsoil and subsoil to expose either the natural sediments of sands and gravels or clays or the top of the archaeological layers where they were present at a higher level.

Trench locations were surveyed using a total station and rectified to the Ordnance Survey landline maps. Pre-excavation plans of the archaeological features were drawn by hand at a scale of 1:50. These were supplemented by excavated feature plans as archaeological work progressed. Sections were drawn at 1:10. Slides, colour, and monochrome prints were taken to supplement the written record.

RESULTS

Trenches were machine-excavated down to natural or to the archaeology depending on which was encountered first. Trenches on the northern side of the development area were targeted on known remains which largely survive as earthworks. As no previous work had been undertaken on the southern side of the development area trenches were set either to evaluate areas close to the hollow way or on high points surrounding the presumed quarry which occupies an area around Trench 5.

To aid description and assessment of the archaeology the site has been divided into four. The quadrants of the site are demarcated by the road which runs through the site from north to south and the hollow way which runs east to west.

SOUTHEAST

TRENCH 1 (Figure 4)

Trench 1 was 34m long and excavated to assess both the next area of construction within the development scheme and assess for archaeological deposits close to the course of the hollow way.
Three pits, of which one was excavated (4), an intermittent cobbled surface of over 12m in length, which was disturbed by two irregular linear features, and a modern ditch (2) which is the remnants of a ditch excavated around the site to obstruct travellers, were identified. All of these features were found directly below the topsoil and subsoil with the only stratigraphic relationship being where one of the pits cut through the cobbled surface.

The pit (4) was circular in plan 1.57m in diameter and 0.24m in depth. Pottery found in this pit is probably Roman date, although the sherds may be post-1200 and locally made.

RESULTS

Archaeological remains from this area suggest Roman and/or Medieval activities along the course of the hollow way which runs east-west through the site and on towards the river.

SOUTHWEST (Figure 3 and 4)

TRENCH 2 (Figure 3)

Trench 2 is a 36m long trench located on a high point of land within the development area. Exposure of the archaeology revealed the remains of a medieval building including postholes, stone built walls and a hearth. To the east of the remains of the building lay a large pit and a cobbled surface. All of the features were discrete in location.

The medieval building consisted of a layer of lose subsoil (6) containing disturbed wall remains, occasional fragments of daub and charcoal overlay the wall and hearth. A fragment of red glass and sherd of hand made shelly ware dating to between 650 and 850 AD were recovered from this deposit. Below this spread lay an area of 1 sq.m. consisting of irregular burnt limestone laid flat (31). Frequent flecks of charcoal and daub occurred amongst olive brown sandy silts. This feature has been interpreted as a hearth and was delineated by a limestone wall (32).

The limestone wall (32) was orientated east-west and also extended north-south along the western side of the hearth. The wall was 0.35m wide and composed of unbonded rough limestone fragments of approximately 0.10m by 0.15m in size.

To the west of the hearth lay an area of approximately 1 sq. m of limestone fragments (33) similar to 31, although not burnt. These limestone fragments appeared to lie within a feature which cuts through the wall (32).

A single post-hole lay either side of the wall which suggested the presence of a building made partially of timber and un-mortared stone.
To the east within Trench 2 and extending into Trench 14 there was an area of pitting. The pit within Trench 2 was over 7m in diameter, with smaller pits identified in Trench 14. Finds collected from the surface of this pit (fills 9 and 10) suggest a date of around 1450-1650, although sherds of St Neots Ware (900-1150 AD) and two glazed sherds of Lyveden-Stanion (1200-1300 AD) were also recovered. Smithing slag was also found in the upper fill of this pit (10).

At the northern end of Trench 2 lay a cobbled surface (34) composed of frequent small to medium (up to 0.10m in diameter) cobbles and fragments of limestone. The cobbled surface was at least 7m in long and extended northwards beyond the trench and probably into Trench 3 where a similar surface was identified. Finds from the cobbled surface included 2 medieval knife blades.

**TRENCH 14 (Figure 3)**

Trench 14 was placed to assess the southern extent of the building identified in Trench 2. The trench was opened at a time when all of the trenches were in the process of being backfilled to meet the development’s health and safety objectives. Investigations were therefore restricted to cleaning and the drawing of a plan of archaeological features.

The trench was 9m long and set at 5m to the south of the wall seen in Trench 2. Removal of topsoil and subsoil unexpectedly did not expose the wall. It did however expose a continuation of the pits and cobbled surfaces seen in the central and northern parts of Trench 2. Three inter-cutting pits were found which were approximately 3.5m in diameter. A cobbled surface lying on the northern margin of the trench appeared to have been disturbed by the cutting of the pits. No finds were recovered from either of these archaeological features.

**TRENCH 3 (Figure 4)**

Trench 3 was 16m long and located adjacent to a large depression which was assumed to be the remains of a quarry pit (see Trench 5). Removal of the topsoil and subsoil exposed the continuation of the cobbled surface seen at the northern end of Trench 2. Finds from this surface included one sherd of Roman pottery and slag from a smithy.

**TRENCH 4 (Figure 4)**

Trench 4 was 19m long and was located as close as possible to the hollow way. The presence of a traveller’s ditch to the east of the trench restricted access to the hollow way and the trench was set back about 4m from the existing path. No archaeological remains were visible in the travellers ditch, however, the collapsed sides of the ditch and rich vegetation hindered inspection.

Trenching revealed an area of laid limestone fragments, bounded on the southern side by a ditch and posts. The limestone paving is presumed to be part of the road surface of the
hollow way. On the southern side of the paving the remains of a cobbled surface similar to those found in Trenches 2, 3 and 14 was identified.

Both the cobbled surface and the limestone paved road lay beneath the topsoil and subsoil. The road surface (17) was made up of fragments of angular limestone of up to 0.30m in maximum length which were laid flat. Within the trench the paved surface was 3.90m in width. On the western side of the surface the placement of the fragments was apparently much more haphazard with fragments of limestone pitched at an angle (37). These fragments partially infilled ditch 36 which runs along the western side of the road and seemingly underneath the paved road surface. Sub-circular areas devoid of limestone fragments were identified and have been interpreted as indicators of posts and fencing along the course of the paved roadway (38). Excavation of the ditch (36) was incomplete; on the northern side of the ditch early ditch fills extended beneath the road surface (17). The southern side of the ditch showed irregularity and the form of the ditch suggests that it was recut in phases which are probably relate to the re-laying of the road surface. On the southern side of the ditch lay the remains of a cobbled surface (18).

The road surface produced a sherd of post-1800 pottery, however, this is most likely to have been recovered from the initial cleaning and finds collections. The pottery may therefore be a contaminant or simply show the survival of this routeway into modern times. A sherd of shelly ware dating to between 1150-1350 was found on the cobbled surface 18 and may also support the longevity of use of the routeway.

**TRENCH 5**

Trench 5 was excavated within a depression assumed to be an indicator of quarrying within the development area. The trench exposed a thin topsoil and subsoil of 0.35m in depth which is not dissimilar to findings elsewhere. No archaeology was found in this trench even though it seems probable that the road surface identified in Trench 4 ran into this area. The absence of earthworks indicative of spoil heaps associated with quarrying activities suggests that this is a natural depression within the clay and gravel terrace.

**TRENCH 15 (Figure 3)**

Trench 15 was 15m long and was excavated 20m to the northwest of Trenches 2 and 14, in order to assess the northern extent of the activity zone associated with the medieval building. No archaeology was found. This was confirmed by the examination of newly excavated service trenches dug by Westbury Homes.

**RESULTS**

Trenching within the southwestern corner of the development site shows the presence of a medieval building set back some distance from the east-west paved road or hollow way. The building was of timber and stone and a single hearth has so far been identified. Yards
laid with cobbles extend between the house and up to the hollow way and a series of large pits lay close to the building. Slag found on the surface of these cobbled yards indicates that smithing occurred close by.

The road and hollow way appears to have been initially bounded by ditches. The final stage is of a limestone paved roadway bounded by a series of closely set posts onto which backed the cobbled yards of the village or farm complex.

The results suggest the presence of a complex of buildings and yards which could be part of a larger village or farm complex set against the roadway and lying adjacent to the manorial site. The small amount of pottery recovered suggests that activity in the area began around the 10th century and continued into the seventeenth, although sherds of Maxey Ware provide evidence for middle Saxon occupation in the vicinity.

**NORTHWEST (Figures 5 and 6)**

**The Manorial and Church Enclosures.**

Part of the work in the northeastern side of the development area was to confirm the location of the 1987 excavations. The very loose bank deposits which were the remains of the spoil heaps and disturbed soils gave a clear indication of the location of the earlier excavations, although two open trenches for which excavation information is missing survive within the manorial complex. The extension of the 1999 excavations into the previous excavation area has shown that many important archaeological deposits remained untouched by the 1987 excavations.

**TRENCH 6 (Figure 5)**

Trench 6 was 17m long and crossed a bank which lay on the northern side of the hollow way.

Excavation revealed the remains of an north-south wall (16) crossing over the bank. The wall was unmortared and set directly onto the bank deposits. The wall was free-standing with no foundation trench. Demolition rubble (24) lay on the northern side of the wall from which 4 sherds of Stamford Ware (1000-1200 AD) and two sherds of local Roman sandy wares were recovered.

Beneath the wall lay a made-up bank (24, 25, 26) limited excavation of which retrieved sherds of shelly ware cooking pots likely to date to between 1100-1200 AD and Stamford Wares (1000-1200 AD). Two sherds of Roman pottery and a sherd possibly early to middle Saxon in date (Maxey Ware ?) indicate a degree of contamination, but also provide tantalising evidence for early origins and possible continuity of settlement.

A post-hole (29) on the western side of the bank suggests a boundary fence alongside, which presumably replicates the boundary seen in Trench 4.
The patchy remains of a cobbled surface lie to the south of the bank and within the hollow of the hollow way. This represents either a cobbled surface to the hollow way, or the remains of yards similar to those seen on the western side of the lane.

Three pits lay on the eastern side of the bank and within the 1987 excavation area. None of these have been excavated and no finds were recovered when the features were cleaned.

**TRENCH 7 (Figure 5)**

Trench 7 was L-shaped and 39m in total length. The trench was located to assess for archaeology in proximity to the northern hedge boundary and located the northern extent of the 1987 excavation area.

Removal of the topsoil and subsoil revealed a complex series of inter-cutting pits and ditches, investigation of which was not possible given the time restrictions on the evaluation. A total of 7 ditches and 6 pits were identified. No structural remains were found although some of the ditch alignments suggest boundaries running north-south off the road and may indicate early property boundaries.

Pottery and butchered and burnt animal bone found during cleaning and excavation suggest the disposal of domestic refuse into pits and ditches in this area. One sherd of pottery was found in the ditch 21, this was of Roman date. It is more likely that the feature is of medieval date given the situation of the trench within the manorial enclosure and the results of the 1987 excavations which recovered the remains of a medieval post-built building. A sherd of Bourne A (1200-1300) pottery is probably a more accurate representation of the date of the archaeological activities expressed in the trench.

**TRENCH 8**

Trench 8 lay on the southern side of the 1987 excavation area and was presumably close to the site of the medieval building found in 1987. The Trench was L-shaped and totalled 25m in length. The trench cut through a bank deposit of very loose sediments presumed to be one of the 1987 spoil heaps. One feature was identified, following removal of the topsoil and subsoil, the fill of which was very much like the existing topsoil and therefore presumed to be modern. As this feature was outside the 1987 excavated area it is unlikely that this is one of features excavated by the Nene Valley Research Committee.

**TRENCH 9 (Figure 6)**

Trench 9 was situated close to the northwestern corner of the development area and as close to the site of the former church as was possible. The trench was L-shaped and 51m in total length.

Topsoil and subsoil removal exposed a made-up bank on the eastern side of the trench adjacent to a former pond. On the western side of the trench a cobbled surface and
boundary ditch were identified. Importantly this showed that the cemetery associated with the church did not extend into the development area.

The infilled pond appeared to be a continuation of a surviving area of wet ground which lay in the northern corner of the development area. The pond area which was over 10m in diameter was bounded on the southern and eastern sides by the made ground of a bank which was recorded on the earthwork survey of 1982. Beneath the topsoil and subsoil the pond was capped by a layer of redeposited clays, presumably to stabilise the landsurface. Beneath the clays were layers of sands and gravels and organic silts (30). Although no finds were recovered from the pond to date the infilling of the feature bulk samples for pollen and flotation were taken to assess environmental potential of the deposit.

On the western side of the trench there was no evidence for the bank completing a circuit around the pond. Instead a ditch (14) of 0.15m in depth and 1.20m in width survived and was partially excavated. Apart from a small piece of daub no finds were recovered. A narrow band of cobbles lay on the northern side of the ditch which could represent the remains of a path.

The course of the ditch and cobbled path would have been interrupted by the pond and the ditch sediments were dry and not as highly organic as the pond sediments. This suggest that both sets of features are not contemporary and it is possible that the path and ditch mark a former boundary to the churchyard, whilst the pond sediments will record more recent landuse.

TRENCH 13 (Figure 6)

Trench 13 was 15m in length and was located on the eastern side of the bank which delineates the eastern boundary of the pond.

Removal of topsoil and subsoil exposed two small circular pits and the terminations of two small linear features. No finds were recovered and no excavation occurred.

RESULTS

Excavation within the manorial enclosures and adjacent to the churchyard has demonstrated the presence of a complex series of land divisions which took their alignment from the course of the hollow way. Close to the main house platforms of the manorial enclosure lay a waste disposal area which was encountered in Trench 7. Although no burials were found within Trench 9 the boundary ditch and cobbled pathway may have delineated the graveyard. The pond is likely to have been a more recent feature, however, it could trapped environmental remains as the use of the site came to an end. Alternatively if earlier in date the pond may provide important evidence about the types of plants growing within gardens around the manorial house or churchyard.
The 1987 excavations indicate the presence of a large building, possibly a barn, within the manorial enclosure. No evidence for this building was found in Trench 8, however the trench does suggest a rapid fall off in the density of archaeological features to the east.

NORTHEAST
Medieval field system.

The earthwork survey of 1982 suggests that medieval cultivation remains, ridge and furrow and a headland, survive in this area. At the time of the evaluation no such remains were visible at the surface.

TRENCH 10

Trench 10 was 25m long. Removal of topsoil and subsoil exposed an east-west orientated furrow of about 4m in width which cut earlier north-south orientated ditch. No finds were recovered and neither of the features were excavated.

TRENCH 12

Trench 12 was 10m long and contained no archaeology.

TRENCH 13

Trench 13 was 12m long. The excavator was unable to penetrate the dumps of modern material along the north eastern boundary of the development area.

RESULT

The trenching supports the idea of medieval field systems formerly occupying this area. However, as the earthwork survey suggests that the field is only some 50m in length it is possible that the manor and/or church have at some point been relocated to occupy areas of the former field system. Alternatively the village may have migrated or been moved onto the Oundle Road.

FINDS

Finds from the site include the pottery described in the previous sections, metal finds and animal bone. The pottery dates from the Roman period to post-1800. Excavated features have consistently yielded 11th to 17th century pottery as expected, however, the presence of Maxey and St Neots wares has implications for understanding the early foundations of the village.
Metalwork recovered during a detector survey similarly has a wide date range. The earliest object is a 1-2nd century AD Trumpet Brooch. A number of medieval lead spindle whorls two knives, a 15th or 16th century bowl and a number of nails suggests that the area contains deposits representing the domestic and economic activities of the village. A Saxon small long brooch of late 5th to 6th century date found in the same area could possibly indicate the presence of a small pagan Saxon cemetery within the development zone.

The majority of the animal bone recovered has been butchered and in cases burnt. In the main this was recovered from Trench 7, however, as hand excavations have been restricted the occurrence of such deposits may be more extensive. Cow bone and a number of small ribs, probably representing sheep/goat, were recovered.

ENVIRONMENT

Samples for pollen and carbonised remains were taken where appropriate in order to verify the survival of such remains. The flotation samples have been flotated and will shortly be sent to Pete Murphy for analysis. An inspection for the survival of pollen from samples taken from beneath the bank in Trench 6 and from the pond in Trench 9 will be undertaken by Pat Wiltshire.

When the results are available an appropriate environmental sampling strategy for the next stage of works will be devised.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation has shown the survival of important medieval archaeological remains within the development area which we hope will allow an understanding of the process and procedures of village growth, shift and desertion in the medieval period as well as providing substantial economic data.

On the southern side of the development area lies the remains of a medieval building. As the wall remains are upstanding it is probable that floor surfaces survive elsewhere within the building. Cobbled surfaces indicating the presence of yards extend northwards up to the east-west road (hollow way) which extends through the village remains. The road was paved, bounded by ditches and fenced at varying stages in its use, and must have been a significant routeway to require such investment.

On the northern side of the road lies the manorial site and church. The evaluation confirmed the survival of medieval remains identified during the 1987 excavations. Land divisions running at right angles to the road cross the manorial enclosure suggesting the
expansion of the manorial site by the acquisition of adjacent properties. Rubbish pits lie against the western boundary of the development area and close to the earthwork platform which marks the site of the Manor house. In addition during the 1987 excavations a large post structure was found within the manorial site, however, the evaluation failed to verify its location.

Within the development area and close to the churchyard lay a large infilled pond which may contain important environmental evidence for local gardening and farming activities. A boundary ditch and cobbled pathway suggests that the churchyard extends into the development area, however, no graves were present within Trench 9.

Lower intensities of archaeology were found in Trenches 10-13, with surprisingly no features recorded in Trench 8. Excavations in 1987 found a stone-built barn at the northern end of Trench 10; no evidence for such remains were found in 1999. These trenches support the earthwork survey in indicating that this part of the site was not in the occupation zone and was formerly part of the medieval field system.

Further archaeological work, particularly on the building and yards on the southwestern side of the development area could provide additional information on the form of local vernacular buildings in the Peterborough area during the medieval period. Importantly we may also gather information on the use of space internal and external to the buildings at this time. The presence of slag and spindle whorls suggests that within the southern complex we may be able to define workshop areas and assess their involvement within the wider community. Comparative evidence about deposit structuration can be gained from the presumed higher status and contemporary manorial site which lay on northern side of the hollow way.

The maintenance of the hollow way shows that for a long time this was an important routeway through the village; being a route to the nearby river crossing. It is important to understand this role and the influences this may have had over the orientation of boundaries, location of high and low status buildings and the organisation of land around the village. The short length of the medieval field system may even indicate that the manorial site was at some point relocated to be closer to the church and river crossing.

On the northern side of the hollow way additional excavation is required in order to understand the extent and variety of activities occurring within the manorial enclosure and particularly in comparison to the developments occurring on the southern side of the road. Excavation may also shed light on the location and development of the manorial site and its relationship to the church.

An additional aspect which requires further research and is highlighted by the artefactual evidence recovered by metal detectors and excavation is the Roman and Saxon components to the settlement. Roman pottery and metalwork, pagan Saxon brooches and Maxey Ware pottery, indicate continuity of activities in the immediate area from the 1st Century AD. The appearance is of a shifting settlement pattern which stabilised in the late
Saxon/early medieval period, presumably adjacent to the crossing of the River Nene. However, at present the location of the early/middle Saxon settlement has not been defined, but could given the 1999 findings potentially be located within the development area and along the course of the hollow way. The Pagan Saxon small long brooch (late 5 to 6th century) found by metal detectorists is commonly an indicator of a cemetery, the location of which requires further investigation.

Excavation within this area therefore provides us with a unique opportunity for recovering comparative materials across different social spectrums within the medieval period. In addition evidence for land use practices in around the settlement can be extracted from this site. It is also believed that this site can provide special information of both the formation of medieval settlements and the processes and procedures of abandonment.

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I also wish to thank Steve Chritchley for the metal detector survey and the members of the Field Unit who excavated and recorded the archaeology.
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