Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Settlement at Chapel Street, Bicester: Excavations 1999-2000

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SUMMARY

A rare opportunity to undertake excavations within the town revealed three sunken-featured buildings of probable 6th- to early 7th-century date, perhaps representing the earliest occupation in Bicester. Evidence of mid-Saxon settlement remains elusive, possibly reflecting a shift in the focus of occupation. An important group of five late Saxon timber buildings along with a small number of other structures, ditches and pits were largely confined to the west half of the site. The buildings were not all contemporaneous, employed various construction techniques, and one was unusually large (23 m. long and up to 6.25 m. wide) and bow-sided. They were probably part of a lay settlement associated with the Saxon minster across the river, and it was this that provided the economic stimulus for the development of a proto-town. The restricted range of finds was of little assistance in determining the functions of the buildings, although the charred plant remains are of some interest. The site became 'backlands' from the later 12th century, behind burgage plots within what developed as a small but successful, partly-planned medieval new town.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 1999 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by McCarthy and Stone to carry out an archaeological excavation on an area of land behind the King's Arms Hotel, Bicester (centred on Ordnance Survey grid reference SP 45855 22225). The excavation was undertaken between November 1999 and January 2000 before redevelopment of the site for residential accommodation and office use, and followed an earlier desk-based assessment and field evaluation.[1] These had highlighted the potential of the site to contain important deposits of medieval date relating to the foundation and early development of the town. The Anglo-Saxon potential was less clear, but the evaluation revealed a 'slot' which produced a single sherd of Saxon pottery.

Previous archaeological research within Bicester has been very limited and largely restricted to building recording and the investigation of the medieval priory.[2] However, medieval pottery and several post-medieval pits were discovered in 1978 during demolition of buildings formerly within the site and fronting London Road (information from Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record).

The site lies in Market End, in the south-east part of the historic core of Bicester, immediately to the rear of the King's Arms Hotel which faces northwards on to the Market Square (Fig. 1). It covers approximately 0.8 hectares and is bounded to the west by Chapel

[1] 'Land behind the King's Arms, Bicester: Archaeological Field Evaluation and Desk Based Assessment' (Wessex Archaeology unpubl. client rep. ref. 44235, 1998).

[2] D.A. Hinton, 'Bicester Priory', *Oxoniensia*, 33 (1968), 22-52; D.A. Hinton, 'Excavations at Bicester Priory', *Oxoniensia*, 34 (1969), 21-8.

Fig. 1. Site location plan.

Street and to the east by the outbuildings of the King's Arms Hotel, which themselves front onto London Road. A residential estate lies to the south. The site represented the largest area of undeveloped land in central Bicester, and was formerly occupied by walled gardens and derelict outbuildings of the King's Arms Hotel.

Bicester lies on the southern edge of the Jurassic Cornbrash at its junction with the poorly drained Oxford Clay. The local soils on the Cornbrash are calcareous brown earths. The development site lay on the eastern bank of the River Bure, a small stream on the west side of Chapel Street, that flows south into the River Ray, a tributary of the River Cherwell which joins the River Thames at Oxford. The ground within the site is relatively flat (at *c.* 70 m. OD), but slopes gently downwards to both the south and the west towards the River Bure which separates the area of King's End to the west from Market End to the east.

THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

The 1997 evaluation trenches, subsequently subsumed within the main excavation areas, comprised five machine-excavated trenches, all of which contained archaeological features.[3] A 'slot' containing a single sherd of Saxon pottery, a flat-bottomed ditch and a series of shallow gullies were identified adjacent to Chapel Street on the west side (Trench 1). Features relating to the backs of medieval properties fronting the Market Place were found in the north of the site (Trench 3), and probable medieval boundary ditches were recorded in the east, close to London Road (Trench 5), in an area which also contained several pits of 17th- and 18th-century date. Various undated features were found towards the centre of the site (Trenches 2 and 4).

Further investigation of the site was recommended by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (OCAS) on the basis of the evaluation results, and the specific requirements for an excavation and subsequent watching brief were provided in the 'Brief'.[4] However, the design of the development was subsequently altered which resulted in a change to the areas requiring excavation. These were revised as required by, and after consultation with OCAS, and set out in the Project Design.[5]

A range of research issues was identified in the Brief and the Project Design which may be summarised as follows:

- To obtain a plan of archaeological activity in all its phases;
- To attempt to identify structures and activity areas;
- To establish the date and duration of this settlement;
- To obtain evidence (including artefactual and ecofactual material) for its economic basis so that its social and economic position in the Saxon and medieval settlement pattern can be ascertained.

The proposed excavation comprised an area in the west adjacent to Chapel Street (Area A), an area in the north (Area B), and two areas in the eastern part of the site (Areas C and D). A large part of the central area of the site (Area E) was designated for a watching brief, as was a smaller area (Area F) adjacent to London Road in the east. These areas (see Fig. 2) were broadly defined by the proposed building footprints and associated new access roads.

The stripping of Areas A and B revealed significant archaeological deposits, in particular the remains of three buildings provisionally assigned to the early and late Saxon periods (one sunken-featured building and two rectangular buildings respectively) and one ditch of possible mid-Saxon date. These were considered to be of at least regional importance. Additional stripping was therefore undertaken in Areas B, C and D, and also within Site E which had previously been designated for a watching brief. This additional stripping was carried out after discussions with OCAS, CgMs Consulting and English Heritage in order to allow as extensive an area as possible to be investigated.

[3] Wessex Archaeology report, op. cit. note 1.

[4] Oxon County Archaeol. Services [OCAS], 'Land behind the King's Arms Hotel, Bicester: Brief for Archaeological Recording Action' (1998).

[5] 'King's Arms Site, Bicester, Oxfordshire: Archaeological Excavation - Written Scheme of Investigation: Planning ref. CHS.LBCA/7/90' (Wessex Archaeology ref. 44236.01 / 02, 1999).

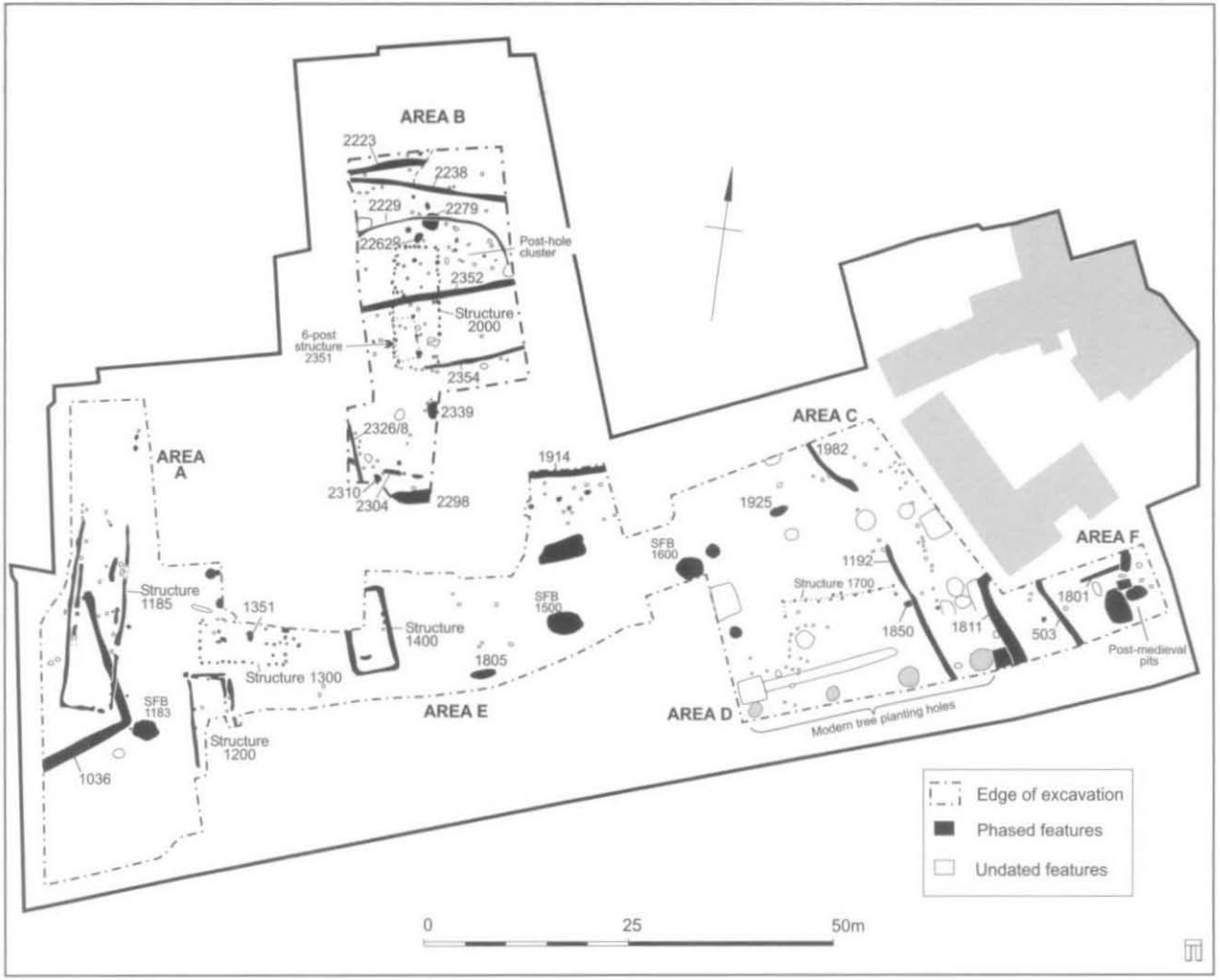

Fig. 2. All features plan.

The topsoil was stripped using a 360° mechanical excavator and the spoil stockpiled within the boundary of the development area. All archaeological features and deposits were planned and excavated by hand in accordance with the Brief.[6] Sunken-featured buildings were quadranted and finds were three-dimensionally recorded. Post-holes within post-built halls were excavated in plan, although a representative sample was half-sectioned. Sufficient samples of the foundation trenches of the three remaining halls were recorded to recover details of construction. All other post-holes, ditches and intercutting features were sectioned. Some features which were demonstrably post-medieval or modern were left unexcavated with the agreement of OCAS. The shallow nature of many of the features and the general absence of well-sealed deposits resulted in comparatively few samples being taken for environmental analysis.

Summary of results

The site was covered by dark grey silty loam topsoil which averaged 0.30 m. thick, but which increased to 0.60 m. adjacent to Chapel Lane. Near London Road and the north end of Area B were quantities of made-up ground which increased the depth of overburden to over 1 m. The topsoil/overburden directly overlay a weathered surface of cornbrash which varied from dense horizontally-laid plates of limestone to areas where it was poorly bedded or pitched. Elsewhere, patches of rubbly cornbrash were present in a yellow silty clay matrix. Most of the excavated features were filled with a homogeneous dark brown silty clay loam. The durability of the cornbrash imposed a direct influence on the depth and survival of archaeological features. Post-holes in particular were often only dug to the upper surface of the cornbrash and were, therefore, very shallow; the majority of features survived to less than 0.25 m. depth. Some features were apparent as and survived only as spreads of pea grit, and post-holes in the north of Area A may have been removed completely by the clearance of the weathered limestone surface during the construction of a 19th-century house. There were, however, few modern disturbances other than several treeholes.

The preliminary results of the excavation and proposals for analysis and publication were presented in an assessment report prepared shortly after the fieldwork was completed.[7]

Site sequence

The archaeological features and finds have been assigned to five phases: Romano-British, early Saxon, late Saxon, medieval, and post-medieval/modern. The earliest, Roman phase was represented only by pottery sherds residual in later contexts, although the 43 sherds might suggest some activity in the vicinity. The phasing is based almost entirely on the dates provided by the pottery, with additional information coming from stratigraphic relationships where these existed. However, pottery was often present in only very small quantities (if at all), particularly in post-holes, and in some contexts is likely to be residual and in others intrusive. No floor or yard surfaces survived at the interface between the cornbrash and the topsoil and, in consequence, there were comparatively few securely dated contexts and most features producing pottery contained small and frequently mixed assemblages.

All features, including numerous undated post-holes, post-medieval pits and modern treeholes are shown in Fig. 2. Individual phase plans for the early Saxon, late Saxon and medieval period are included as Figs. 3, 7 and 11 respectively. Many of the late Saxon structural features contained no dating evidence, but have been assigned to this phase because of their clear association with a particular building.

Early Saxon (6th–7th century AD) (see Fig. 3)

Three sunken-featured buildings (SFBs 1183, 1500 and 1600) lay in the southern half of the site. These are likely to represent only a fraction of a larger number of buildings of this form, and may have been associated with timber halls as at, for example, Barrow Hills, Radley.[8] The sunken-featured buildings were all of two-post type, and their fills were relatively rich in pottery but produced few other finds and only small quantities of animal bone. The fills and finds are likely to derive from midden material deposited in the pits of the sunken-featured buildings after the structures had been dismantled and abandoned.

The few other features assigned to this phase include two ditches, two small pits, a post-hole cluster and a tree-throw, most of which lay in the northern half of the site.

6 OCAS, op. cit. note 4.

7 'King's Arms, Bicester, Oxfordshire: Archaeological Excavation Assessment Report (Wessex Archaeology unpubl. client rep. ref. 44236.05, 2001).

8 A. Barclay and C. Halpin, *Excavations at Barrow Hills, Radley, Oxfordshire, vol. 1: The Neolithic and Bronze Age Monument Complex* (Oxf. Archaeol. Unit, Thames Valley Landscapes, Rep. 11, 2001), Fig. 1.9.

Late Saxon (9th/10th–11th century) (see Fig. 7)

Five rectangular timber buildings lay in the west half of the site and, with one exception, were aligned approximately N.-S. It is clear, however, that the five buildings were not contemporaneous, and there were also clear differences in the methods of construction represented in their ground plans. Two (Structures 1300 and 2000) comprised entirely post-holes, two (Structures 1185 and 1200) comprised discontinuous or interrupted foundation trenches, and one (Structure 1400) a continuous foundation trench. Their sizes varied considerably with the largest (Structure 1185) measuring approximately 23 m. by 6 m. and the smallest (Structure 1400) 10 m. by 5 m.

The ground plans of the buildings were either fully or almost fully recovered, and some internal and external features also survived. It is suggested below that the two post-built buildings (Structures 1300 and 2000) may have been the earliest of the group and Structure 1185 the latest. However, the evidence to support this is very limited and other sequences are possible. Furthermore, the possibility that post-built Structures 1300 and 2000 were early or even mid-Saxon rather than late Saxon cannot be entirely discounted.

Two other post-built structures have been assigned to the late Saxon period, but again based on very meagre dating evidence. Six-post structure 2351 lay on the site of an earlier timber building (Structure 2000) and Structure 1700 to the east is of uncertain form and function.

Several ditches are also of late Saxon date, though not necessarily in contemporary use. The most substantial was 'L'-shaped ditch 1036 which was on a different alignment to the earlier SFBs and some of the later buildings. Of the latter, Structure 1400 was the most closely aligned to it. The corner of ditch 1036 clipped the edge of SFB 1183 and was itself cut by Structure 1185, thereby providing the best stratigraphic sequence on the site. Elsewhere, ditch 2229 appeared to respect Structure 2000 whereas ditch 2352 cut through it, but no other useful relationships could be established. Few other features could be assigned to the late Saxon period and the durability of the underlying cornbrash might explain, for example, the paucity of pits.

Medieval (12th–13th century) (see Fig. 11)

A series of shallow ditches probably lay to the rear of medieval buildings fronting onto Market Square and London Road. These ditches are likely to have defined parts of burgage plots or enclosures/fields. No medieval structural remains were present in the area close to London Road to the east or adjacent to Chapel Street to the west, and it is clear that virtually all of the excavated area lay within backlands.

Post-medieval (17th–20th century) (see Fig. 2)

There was a dearth of late medieval and early post-medieval features and finds, and the greatest concentration of later post-medieval and modern features was in the east of the site at the rear of the King's Arms Hotel. These included several square or sub-rectangular rubbish pits and numerous post-holes. To the west of these were several circular features, *c.* 2 m. in diameter, spaced approximately 10 m. apart, probably reflecting trees around the bowling green which are indicated on the 1881 OS map. The foundations of a 19th-century house fronting onto Chapel Street lay in the NW. corner of the site.

Finds

Few finds other than pottery were recovered. The pottery assemblage comprises 718 sherds (7246 g.), ranging in date from Romano-British to post-medieval, and includes significant groups of early Saxon and late Saxon/early medieval date (see Table 1). Romano-British material is represented by a small quantity of residual sherds (43 sherds; 258 g.). Later medieval sherds (12th century onwards), similarly sparsely represented (36 sherds; 218 g.), are all in wares well known within the Oxfordshire type series (e.g. Mellor 1994). Only the Saxon and early medieval material (569 sherds; 6318 g.) will be discussed in any detail here, with the aim of contributing chronological and economic evidence for the settlements of these periods.

Pottery of all dates has been quantified by fabric type or ware group; for Saxon and early medieval pottery, details of vessel form, surface treatment, decoration and manufacture have also been recorded, following the standard Wessex Archaeology recording system[9] and nationally recommended nomenclature for vessel forms;[10] all details are available in archive.

[9] E.L. Morris, *The Analysis of Pottery* (Wessex Archaeology Guideline 4, 1994).
[10] *A Guide to the Classification of Medieval Ceramic Forms* (Medieval Pottery Res. Gp. Occas. Paper 1, 1998).

THE EARLY SAXON SETTLEMENT EVIDENCE

The early and late Saxon structures uncovered at the Chapel Street site represent important discoveries not just in terms of the early history of Bicester, but also for the development of other small towns in Oxfordshire as well as further afield. Before the 1999/2000 excavations no early Saxon features were known from the town, though this is not perhaps surprising given the limited amount of work undertaken, most of which has been focused on the priory.[11] However, attention had been drawn to the place name, originally *Bernecestre*, 'of early type and the only evidence to suggest pagan Saxon settlement'.[12] Evidence for this early settlement has now been found at Chapel Street, lying on the gently rising ground immediately east of the River Bure, and perhaps adjacent to a crossing point – the principal medieval crossing point lay only 100 m. or so to the north.

Early Saxon settlement at the Chapel Lane site (Fig. 3) was indicated by three sunken-featured buildings (SFBs 1183, 1500 and 1600), and these are likely to represent either a small, nucleated and relatively short-lived settlement, or a linear, longer-lived, shifting settlement strung out along the east bank of the river. Whichever was the case, the buildings appear to have been haphazardly distributed, a characteristic of settlements of this time which show little or no evidence for any form of regular layout.

Sunken-featured buildings are often found in association with post-built 'halls', for example at New Wintles Farm, Eynsham,[13] Barton Court Farm[14] and Barrow Hills, Radley,[15] but no early Saxon halls have been identified at Bicester. One cluster and several isolated, relatively deep post-holes have been assigned to the early Saxon period, but these cannot be interpreted convincingly as representing halls, although one group of four (amongst the 'post-hole cluster') were approximately 0.3 m. deep, 1 m. apart, and formed an L-shaped arrangement. The apparent absence of halls may be because none lay within the excavated area, or perhaps because the two post-built halls assigned to the late Saxon period (Structures 1300 and 2000) were in fact much earlier. The difficulties of phasing the structures has been alluded to above, but a detailed study of the pottery and its distribution supports a late Saxon rather than early Saxon date for these two halls. A further possibility is that the settlement included no post-built halls and comprised entirely sunken-featured buildings. This arrangement is unusual but by no means unknown either in Oxfordshire or elsewhere in the country. Excavations in and around Yarnton, for example, indicate that the earliest phase of Saxon settlement, assigned a late 5th-/early 6th- to late 7th-century date, comprised almost entirely sunken-featured buildings, whereas the subsequent mid-Saxon phase included a mixture of sunken-featured buildings and timber halls.[16]

Some interpretations see timber halls as providing domestic accommodation, whereas sunken-featured buildings functioned as ancillary buildings, perhaps 'workshops' for weaving or other craft activities, or stores. However, other interpretations see at least some of the sunken-featured buildings serving as domestic accommodation, particularly on sites where timber halls appear to have been absent. Whether this was the case at Bicester is uncertain (there were, for instance, no remains of hearths), and if the sunken-featured buildings did serve ancillary functions it is not clear what these were. However, an awl and needle came from SFB 1183 and three loomweights, probably redeposited, were recovered from late Saxon ditch 1036 immediately to the west.

The few other features assigned to the early Saxon period were mostly confined to the northern part of the site and included two shallow pits (1850 and 2339), a probable tree-throw (2279) immediately west of the post-hole cluster, and two ditches (2238 and 2304). Ditch 2238 was the most substantial of the two, but was only 0.14 m. deep, and may have marked a boundary. It ran E.-W. for at least 20 m., with tree-throw 2279 and the post-hole cluster less than 5 m. to the south, an arrangement that may have been more than coincidental. Ditch 2304 was much more ephemeral comprising at least three

11 Hinton, op. cit. note 2.
12 K. Rodwell (ed.), *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire: A Survey of the New County* (1975).
13 N.B. Clayton, 'New Wintles, Eynsham, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 38 (1973), 382-4.
14 D. Miles (ed.), *Archaeology at Barton Court Farm, Abingdon, Oxfordshire* (CBA Res. Rep. 50, 1986).
15 Barclay and Halpin, op. cit. note 8.
16 G. Hey, *Yarnton: Saxon and Medieval Settlement and Landscape. Excavations 1990-6* (forthcoming).

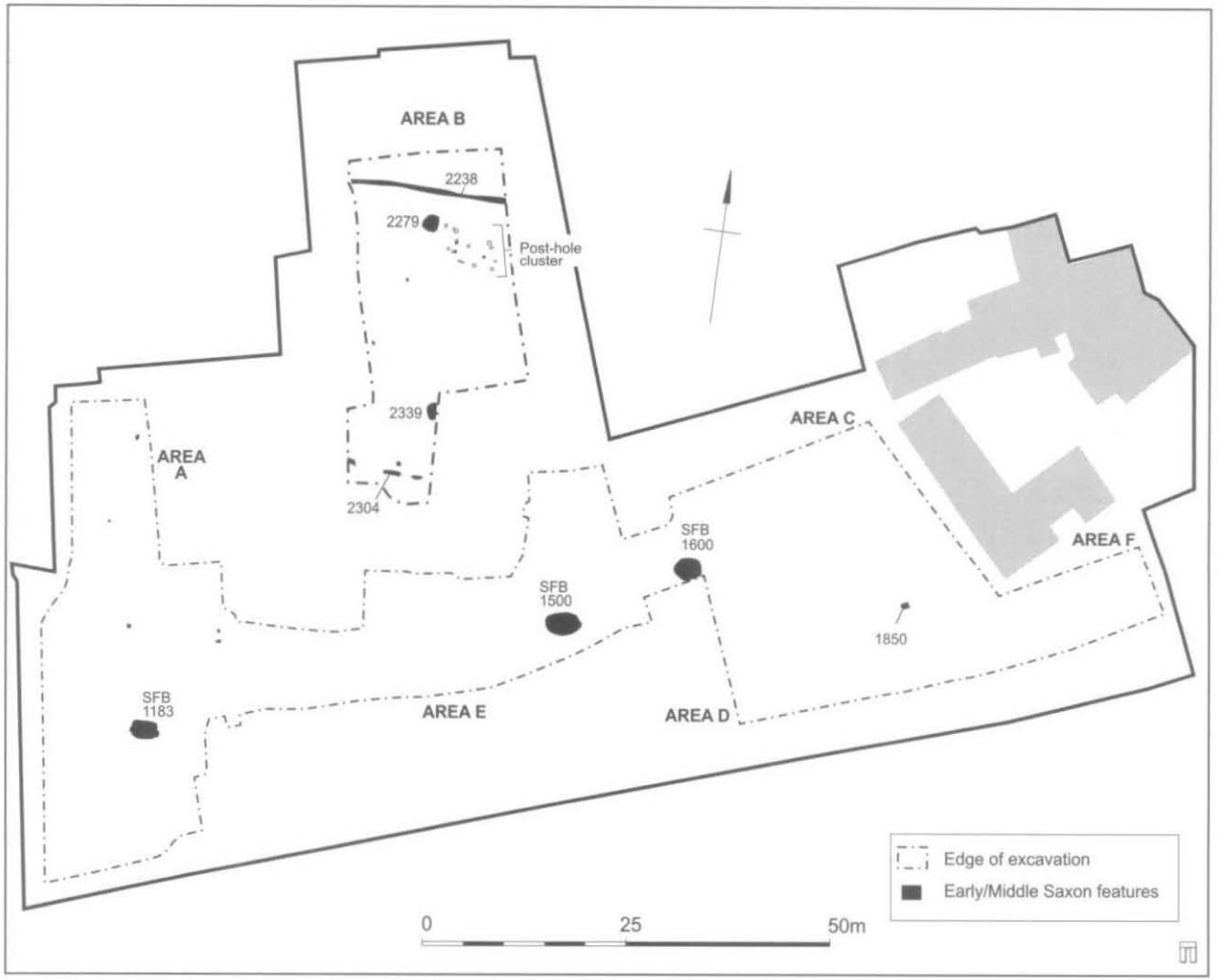

Fig. 3. Early Saxon features.

lengths of discontinuous gully less than 0.1 m. deep, approximately parallel and 35 m. to the south of ditch 2238. Whatever the function of these ditches, there is no clear evidence for the regular layout of fences, pens or enclosures which tend to be characteristic of mid- and particularly late Saxon rural settlements. The lack of organisation, permanence and intensive land use reflects the unstable nature of the earlier settlements with a greater emphasis on pastoralism. The identifiable animal bone from Chapel Lane provided little information in this respect, although cattle was the major species represented, and only one early Saxon feature was sampled for charred plant remains. The small quantity of material recovered gives no reliable indication of the crops grown.

The dating of the early Saxon settlement at Bicester is, as is often the case, difficult to establish with any degree of precision. The relatively large pottery assemblage recovered from the sunken-featured buildings broadly spans the 5th to 7th centuries, but amongst this are several diagnostic sherds which together suggest that the assemblage is largely of 6th- or early 7th-century date, with some possible 5th-century material (see below). Furthermore, the absence of organic-tempered wares from SFB 1600 might suggest that this was earlier than the other two buildings which both contained these wares, albeit in small quantities. The small, oval rather than larger, sub-rectangular or square plans of the sunken-featured buildings might also provide further, slight support for a relatively early date for the structures (as, for example, is indicated at Yarnton). The settlement was perhaps the original 'fort of the warriors' (*beornas*), though Alchester cannot be ruled out as the site of early (perhaps 5th-century) settlement, but pending chance discoveries or further excavation there this cannot be demonstrated.

Bicester can now be added to the increasing number of 6th-century sites recorded in Oxfordshire, many represented by burials, but increasingly evidenced by settlements. The excavated settlements are largely, but not exclusively, confined to river valleys, particularly the Thames between Abingdon and Dorchester and in the Eynsham/Cassington area. Here, the light well-drained soils of the second gravel terrace appear to have been a particular attraction to early farmers in this period.

Determining the end date of the early Saxon settlement at Bicester is perhaps more difficult than establishing its beginning, particularly given the relatively small area exposed, though a late 6th- or early 7th-century date might be suggested on the basis of the pottery. The duration of occupation is particularly crucial in determining whether there was any continuity between the early and late Saxon periods on the site, although this seems unlikely. At Chapel Street there is no convincing evidence for mid-Saxon settlement, even allowing for the possibility that this period may have been largely aceramic, or that early Saxon potting traditions may have continued in to the late Saxon period with little or no change (see below). More probable is that there was a shifting focus to the settlement, and mid-Saxon occupation may have been established across the river in the vicinity of St. Edburg's church less than 300 m. to the west, the presumed site of the late Saxon minster.

The structures (Fig. 4)

The three sunken-featured buildings were aligned E.–W., of two-post type, and all had shallow-sloping, irregular sides and uneven bases, partly a reflection of the cornbrash into which they had been dug. The fills were largely undifferentiated deposits which probably represented domestic rubbish disposed of in the pits after the buildings had gone out of use. The finds mainly comprised pottery, including small quantities of Roman material, some perhaps deliberately 'curated' or collected in the Anglo-Saxon period, a limited amount of animal bone, and a restricted range of other finds. The fills had been subject to varying degrees of post-depositional mixing and disturbance, and there was little evidence for post-pipes within the post-holes at either end. Nor were there any surviving hearths or other internal features which might contribute to the debate as to whether the bottoms of the pits were floors or whether they had suspended, planked floors as has been suggested for some of the sunken-featured buildings at West Stow, Suffolk.[17]

SFB 1183: This was irregular in plan, measured 2.70 m. by 2.35 m. and was 0.20 m. deep. The pit almost certainly extended further to the west, but had been partly cut by late Saxon ditch 1036, and survived only as a spread of pea-grit in this area. The post-holes were respectively 0.26 m. and 0.35 m. in diameter and 0.23 m. and 0.43 m. deep. There was nothing to indicate the post-positions, although both post-holes contained

17 S. West, *West Stow: The Anglo-Saxon village* (E. Anglian Archaeol. 24, 1980).

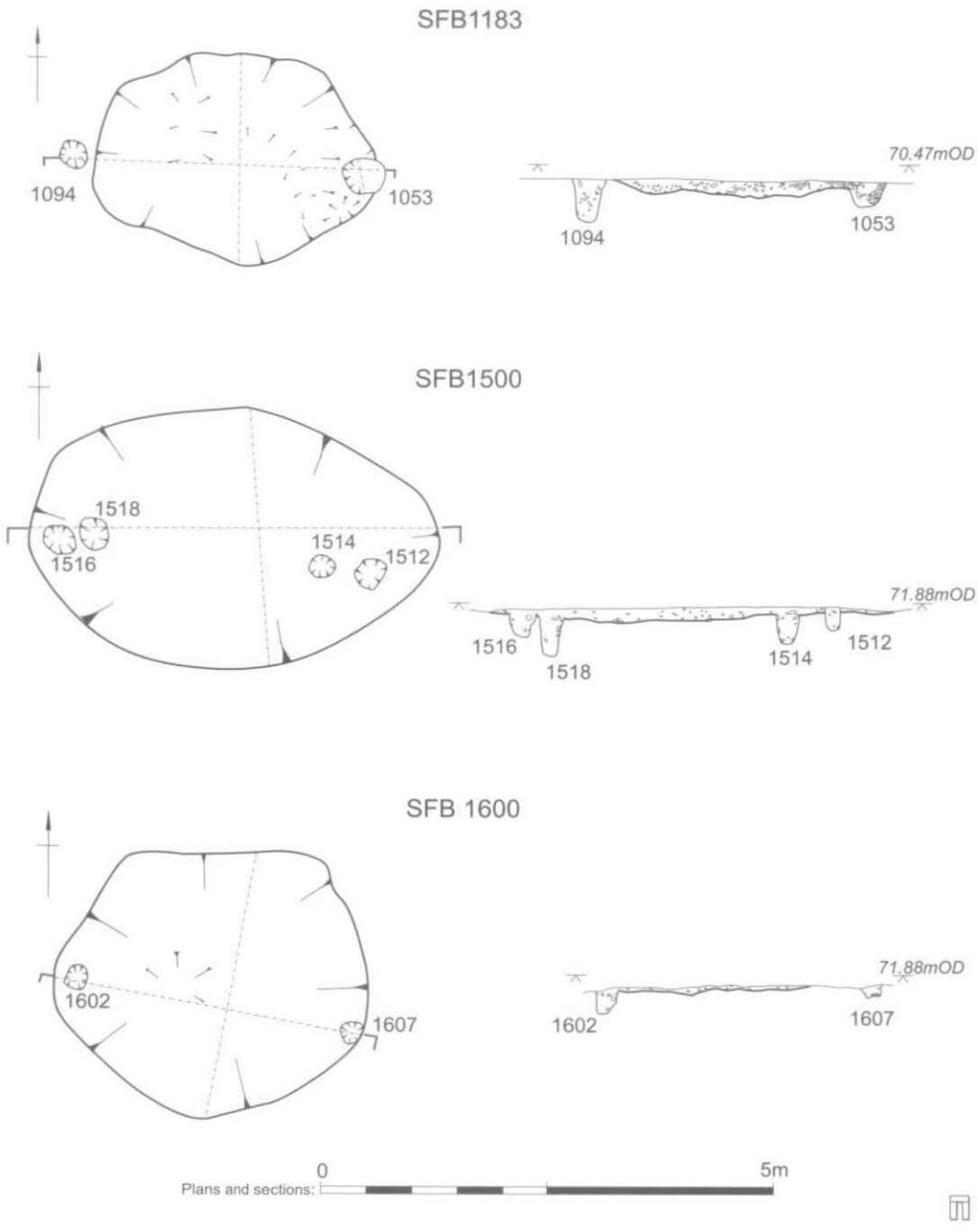

Fig. 4. Plans and sections of sunken-featured buildings.

pieces of limestone, particularly that at the east end, where stones concentrated on the west side may have been packing. Sunken-featured building 1183 produced 112 sherds of pottery, an awl and a needle – both of bone. In addition to these finds, three loomweights came from later ditch 1036, but may have been redeposited from SFB 1183.

SFB 1500:This was approximately oval in plan and measured 4.40 m. by 2.90 m. and was 0.17 m. deep. Pairs of post-holes were located centrally at each end of the feature. Those at the east end lay 0.30 m. apart and measured 0.28 m. and 0.33 m. respectively in diameter and were 0.20 m. and 0.31 m. deep. The post-holes at the west end of the building lay next to each other and were respectively 0.39 m. and 0.38 m. in diameter and 0.45 m. and 0.28 m. deep. It is likely that the two deeper post-holes were paired and indicates that the superstructure was replaced or repaired during the life of the building. However, there was nothing to indicate which post-holes were dug first. This feature produced 176 sherds of pottery, the greatest quantity from any of the three buildings, as well as a bone pin, two iron ?ferrules and a knife.

SFB 1600: This was irregular in plan, and measured 3.50 m. by 3.10 m. and was 0.20 m. deep. Both post-holes measured 0.27 m. in diameter, but were respectively 0.29 m. and 0.11 m. deep. A post-pipe was visible in the deeper post-hole with stone packing on the west side. This feature produced only 40 sherds of pottery, but analysis of this small assemblage hints at the possibility that SFB 1600 may have been earlier than the other two buildings (see below).

Pottery by LORRAINE MEPHAM

Sixteen fabric types were identified: ten sandy, two calcareous (limestone-tempered), two organic-tempered and two with miscellaneous rock inclusions (Table 1). The diversity of the range of fabrics is likely to be a reflection of a number of different sources for the pottery, across a region which is geologically mixed.

L400 Calcareous fabric; moderately coarse matrix containing common, fairly well sorted, subangular/subrounded limestone <1mm; rare subrounded quartz <0.125 mm.

L401 Calcareous fabric (variant of L400?); moderately coarse matrix, containing moderate, poorly sorted calcareous inclusions (crushed limestone) <2mm; rare subrounded quartz <0.125 mm.

Q400 Coarse fabric with prominent subangular quartz <2mm, some polycrystalline

Q401 Finer variant of Q400 with moderate quartz, fairly well sorted, <1mm.

Q402 Sandy fabric with rare ?calcareous inclusions (do not react with acid); sparse to moderate, fairly well sorted, subrounded quartz (some iron-stained) <0.5mm, rare iron oxides.

Q403 Moderately coarse fabric with prominent iron compounds; fine silty matrix; irregular iron compounds <3 mm; rare subrounded quartz <0.25 mm.

Q404 Well-finished fabric with sparse quartz and organic inclusions; fine matrix, but not well wedged; rare, poorly sorted quartz <1mm; rare organic inclusions <2mm.

Q405 Fine sandy fabric; fine matrix containing common, well sorted, subangular/subrounded quartz <0.25 mm.

Q406 Coarse fabric with prominent, iron-stained quartz; sparse, poorly sorted, subrounded quartz (heavily iron-stained) <1mm; very rare calcareous inclusions <0.5 mm.

Q407 Sandy fabric with calcareous inclusions; relatively fine matrix, containing common, well sorted, subrounded/subangular quartz <0.25 mm; sparse calcareous inclusions <0.25 mm.

Q408 Soft, friable fabric with laminar structure; containing sparse, poorly sorted, irregular calcareous inclusions <1mm; sparse organic inclusions <10 mm; rare subrounded quartz <0.25 mm.

Q409 Hard, coarse fabric with polycrystalline quartz (coarse variant of Q400?); poorly wedged matrix containing moderate, poorly sorted polycrystalline quartz <3mm; rare iron oxides.

R400 Igneous fabric; moderately fine matrix, containing sparse rock fragments <2mm and large flakes of mica (<2mm); rare iron compounds and rare subrounded quartz.

R401 Micaceous fabric; fairly fine matrix containing common, fairly well sorted subrounded/subangular quartz <0.5mm; rare mica <1mm.

V400 Organic tempered fabric, slightly sandy; moderately coarse matrix containing moderate to common, poorly sorted organic inclusions <10 mm; rare subrounded quartz <0.25 mm.

V401 Sandy organic-tempered fabric; moderately coarse matrix containing moderate to common, poorly sorted organic inclusions <7 mm; moderate subrounded quartz <0.5 mm.

TABLE 1. POTTERY FABRIC TOTALS

Ceramic Phase	Fabric	No.	Wt
Romano-British	E170: Oxfordshire colour-coated ware	12	93
	G100: coarse grog-tempered	2	16
	Q100: coarse greywares	26	143
	Q101: coarse oxidised wares	2	2
	Q102: coarse whitewares	1	4
	sub-total	*43*	*258*
Early/Mid-Saxon	L400	7	140
	L401	14	85
	Q400	73	1317
	Q401	106	1202
	Q402	33	196
	Q403	4	10
	Q404	8	51
	Q405	21	322
	Q406	3	22
	Q407	95	1208
	Q408	27	284
	Q409	4	117
	R400	1	31
	R401	2	10
	V400	13	147
	V401	19	89
	sub-total	*430*	*5231*
Late Saxon/early med	St Neot's type ware (OXR)	38	210
	Late Saxon – early med. West Oxfordshire ware & early med. Oxford ware (OXAC)	85	754
	Late Saxon – early medieval Oxford ware (OXY)	16	123
	sub-total	*139*	*1087*
Later medieval	Brill/Boarstall type (OXAW & OXAM)	25	133
	Early – late medieval East Wiltshire ware (OXAQ)	5	35
	Miscellaneous sandy wares	6	50
	sub-total	*36*	*218*
Post-medieval	E600: redwares	24	271
	E695: Staffs-type slipware	2	4
	E730: tinglazed earthenware	1	2
	E740: industrial wares	31	73
	E741: creamware	3	8
	E770: stonewares	9	94
	sub-total	*70*	*452*
	TOTAL	718	7246

TABLE 2. EARLY SAXON VESSEL FORMS BY FABRIC

Fabric	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Rim, form unspec.	Pedestal base	Pulled-up lug	Total
L400	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
L401	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
Q400	2	1	1	–	–	1	–	–	5
Q401	1	6	–	–	–	1	2	–	10
Q402	–	1	–	–	–	1	–		2
Q404	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
Q405	1	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	2
Q406	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	2
Q407	1	1	1	1	–	2	–	–	6
Q408	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	2
Q409	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
V400	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	1
V401	–	1	–	–	–	1	–	–	2
	7	15	2	1	1	7	2	1	36

Rim Forms:

R400 rim, vessel form unknown
R401 short everted/upright rim, profile unknown
R402 short everted rim, closed form, profile unknown
R403 short everted rim, rounded body
R404 necked form, profile unknown
R405 everted rim, open form, rounded body
R406 plain inturned rim (one example, with swallow's nest lug)

The diagnostic sherds present (33 rims, 2 lug handles, 12 bases/base angles and 7 decorated sherds) are insufficient to create more than a minimal vessel type series; there are no complete profiles present. The following broadly defined vessel forms were identified (Table 2):

Type 1: rounded jar with short, upright or everted rims (Fig. 5, 2)
Type 2: vessel with similar rim but with overall profile unknown (Fig. 5, 1, 3, 5, 8, 9)
Type 3: vessel with inturned profile, pulled up lugs and swallow's nest handles (Fig. 5, 4)
Type 4: convex bowl with everted rim (Fig. 5, 6, 10)
Type 5: convex bowl with inturned rim (Fig. 5, 11)

There are no apparent carinated forms. In most cases bases are rounded or with slight basal angles; two pedestal bases are present, and one flat base. Most of the decoration is in the form of shallow tooling – horizontal lines on necks and shoulders. One sherd in R400 is rilled. Two sherds are stamped (vessel form 1, Fig. 5, 2, 7). One sherd is bossed (vessel form 2, Fig. 5, 5). There are no examples of rusticated decoration.

A proportion of sherds (nearly all in sandy fabrics, but including one sherd in L400) are burnished, usually externally but occasionally all over.

In the absence of a well understood and well dated ceramic sequence for the early to mid-Saxon period in Oxfordshire, dating this assemblage has proved problematic. The potential date range spans the 5th to 7th centuries, and there is little here that can be tied down more closely within this broad period. Exceptions to this include two stamped vessels from SFB 1500 (Fig. 5, 2, 7) and two pedestal bases from SFB 1183, all

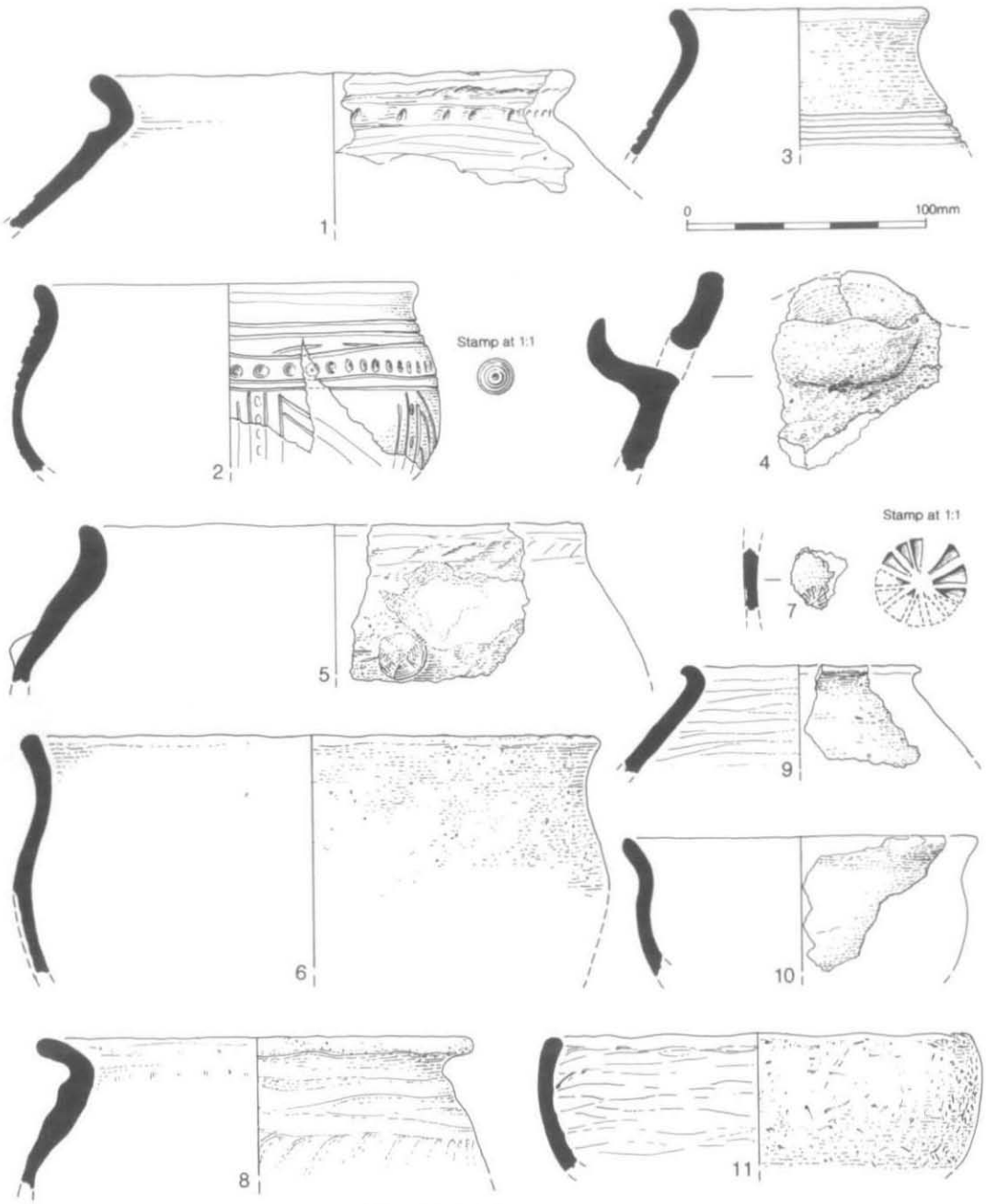

Fig. 5. Early Saxon pottery.

characteristic of early assemblages (5th or 6th century) and the 'swallow's nest' lug handle from SFB 1500 (Fig. 5, 4), a type dated at Mucking to the 6th/7th century.[18] The more complete stamped vessel combines a stamped neckline within horizontal bands, above a chevron design emphasised by further stamps and impressions; Myres places this decorative combination in the 6th century.[19] Chronological indications from the fabric types are more ambiguous. Elsewhere in the county organic-tempered wares are considered to be fairly common by the early 6th century and predominant by the later 6th.[20] This proposed sequence has been applied, for example, to assemblages from Abingdon,[21] but the results seem to be somewhat contradictory when compared with other datable features such as form and decoration.[22] The comparative rarity of these organic-tempered wares at Chapel Street (4.5% of the assemblage by weight) might suggest a relatively early date for the assemblage. Alternatively, this assemblage may have more in common with the ceramic traditions of the south-east midlands (e.g. Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire), where organic-tempered wares are rare at any time in the Saxon period. It may, however, be observed that organic-tempered wares are only present here in SFBs 1183 and 1500 – there are none in SFB 1600, with the possible implication that the latter structure is earlier than the other two. On the whole it appears likely that the Chapel Street assemblage is largely of 6th- or early 7th-century date, with some possible 5th-century material.

The mid-Saxon period in this region remains even more shadowy in ceramic terms, and in this respect Bicester conforms to the regional pattern of assemblages containing both early Saxon and late Saxon wares, with nothing definitely attributable to the intervening period. Indeed, it has been argued that the region was largely aceramic at this time, with little or no pottery production.[23] Alternatively, early Saxon traditions may have continued into the late Saxon period with little or no change.[24] Certainly there is no evidence of a specifically mid-Saxon ceramic tradition in the region, and Ipswich-type and Maxey-type wares are rare or absent.

List of illustrated vessels (Fig. 5)

1. Jar rim, exterior badly spalled. Obj No 308, context 1502
2. Jar rim, stamped and tooled decoration. Obj Nos 269, 270, 317, context 1504
3. Jar rim, tooled decoration. Obj No 483, context 1509
4. Jar rim with 'swallow's nest' lug handle. Obj Nos 364, 368, context 1509
5. Jar rim, with single boss. Obj No 457, context 1511
6. Jar rim, exterior surface spalled. Obj No 4589, context 1511
7. Stamped body sherd. Obj No. 391, context 1511
8. Jar rim. Obj No 409, context 1511
9. Jar rim. Obj No 241, context 1601
10. Bowl rim. Obj No 238, context 1604
11. Bowl rim. Obj No 162, context 1136

Other finds by RACHEL EVERY

The only identifiable fired clay objects comprise one partial and two complete annular loomweights (Fig. 6, 1), all recovered together from a late Saxon ditch (1036). However, these loomweights are of probable early Saxon date and may have been redeposited from SFB 1183 immediately to the east of the ditch. The undiagnostic fragments of fired clay were recovered from a variety of features of various dates and are probably structural in origin. A single fragment of shelly limestone came from SFB 1500.

[18] H. Hamerow, *Excavations at Mucking, vol. 2: The Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (Eng. Heritage Archaeol. Rep. 21, 1993), 42.

[19] J.N.L. Myres, *A Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Pottery of the Pagan Period* (1977), 51, Fig. 301.

[20] F. Berisford, 'The Anglo-Saxon Pottery', in A.C.C. Brodribb, A.R. Hands and D.R. Walker, *Excavations at Shakenoak* III (1972), 57.

[21] C. Underwood-Keevill, 'The Pottery', in G. Keevill, 'An Anglo-Saxon Site at Audlett Drive, Abingdon, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 57 (1992), 67-73.

[22] D. Miles, op. cit. note 14.

[23] P. Blinkhorn, in Hey, op. cit. note 16.

[24] M. Mellor, 'A Synthesis of Middle and Late Saxon, Medieval and Early Post-medieval Pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, 59 (1994), 36.

The worked bone assemblage consists of an awl (SFB 1183; Fig. 6, 2), a pin shank which has decoration around the perforation (SFB 1500; Fig. 6, 3), and a needle (SFB 1183; Fig. 6, 4). The date range for pierced fibulae needles is very broad, spanning the whole of the Saxon period, but similar examples have been found in early Saxon contexts elsewhere, for example at West Stow, Suffolk.[25] They were possibly utilised for coarse work such as netting or mesh knitting.[26]

Fifteen of the 37 metal objects derive from features of medieval or earlier date and include two nails, two ferrules (Fig. 6, 5-6) and a knife blade of uncertain type (Fig. 6, 7) all recovered from a sunken-featured building (SFB 1500).

List of illustrated objects (Fig. 6)

1. Complete annular loomweight. Obj No 46, context 1049, ditch 1036
2. Worked bone pin. Obj No 168, context 1136, SFB 1183
3. Worked bone pin, perforated head. Obj No 320, context 1502, SFB 1500
4. Worked bone pin, perforated head. Obj No 113, context 1052, SFB 1183
5. Iron ferrule. Obj No 256, context 1502, SFB 1500
6. Iron ferrule. Obj No 377, context 1509, SFB 1500
7. Iron knife blade. Obj No 548, context 1511, SFB 1500

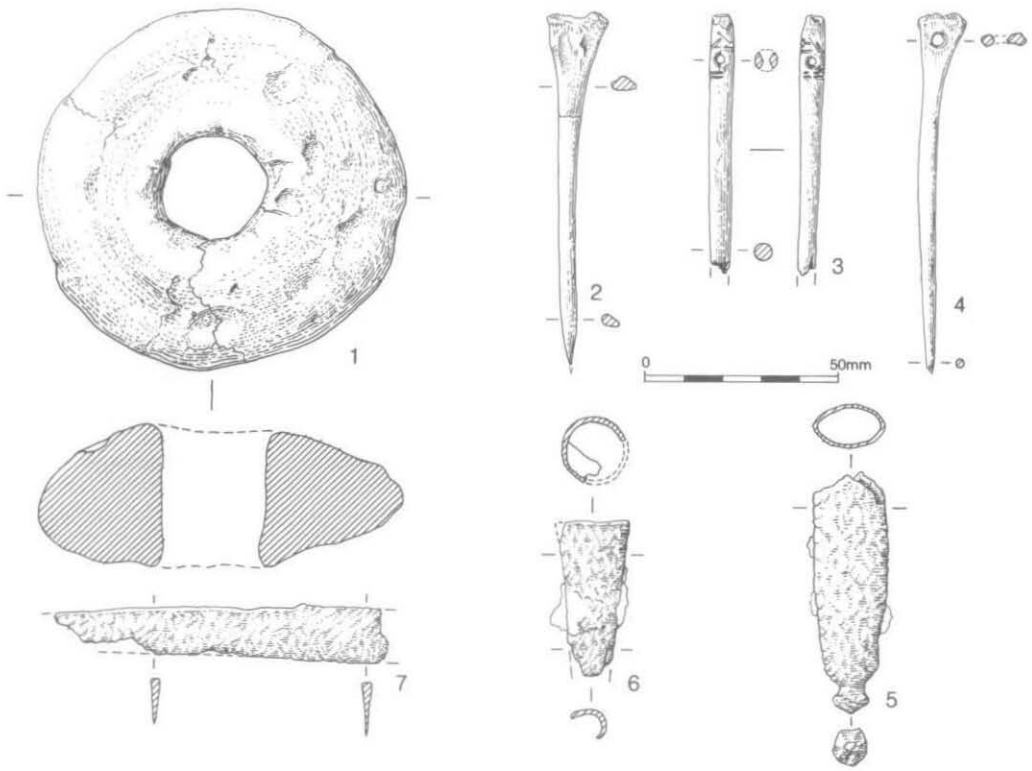

Fig. 6. Early Saxon finds: fired clay, worked bone and iron.

[25] West, op. cit. note 17.

[26] N. Crummy, *The Post-Roman Small Finds from Excavations in Colchester 1971-85* (Colchester Archaeol. Rep. 5, 1988), 6.

Animal bone by PIPPA SMITH

A small assemblage of 924 animal bones was recovered, the majority (58%) of which came from the three early Saxon sunken-featured buildings. Approximately 50% of the early Saxon assemblage was looked at in detail (Table 3). The bone was in generally poor condition, highly fragmented and a high proportion could not be identified to species. Very few bones survived which are complete enough to measure and very little age data is obtainable from this group.

Overall, there is too little identifiable material to say anything meaningful about the assemblage from Bicester. On other early Saxon sites in Oxfordshire sheep appear to be the major species represented in the assemblages,[27] but elsewhere cattle usually predominate (e.g. at Botolphs, West Sussex[28]) as may have been the case at Bicester. This might suggest that the landscape was a largely pastoral one, with arable agriculture a minor element, and this might be reflected in the general lack of boundaries on sites of this period.

The remainder of the early Saxon bone along with that from all other periods at Bicester was rapidly scanned. A large proportion of this comprised small, unidentified fragments and the majority which could be assigned to species belonged to cattle with sheep also noted and other species rarely seen.

TABLE 3. ANIMAL BONE FROM EARLY SAXON SUNKEN-FEATURED BUILDINGS

	SFB 1051	SFB 1500	SFB 1600	Total	*% of total*
Horse	–	2	–	2	*<1*
Cow	9	25	10	44	*19.3*
Sheep	3	10	2	15	*6.5*
Pig	4	2	2	8	*2.9*
Red deer	–	1	–	1	*<1*
Deer	–	–	1	1	*<1*
Dog	–	1	–	1	*<1*
Bird	–	2	–	2	*<1*
Unid.	34	104	14	152	*66.6*
Total	50	147	29	226	

THE LATE SAXON SETTLEMENT EVIDENCE

The two post-built rectangular buildings (Structures 1300 and 2000) could have been of early or possibly even mid-Saxon date, but this is considered above to be unlikely and a late Saxon date is preferred. There may, therefore, have been a hiatus of perhaps 250 years or more between the early and late Saxon occupation at Chapel Street, which on the basis of ceramic dating spanned broadly the 9th/10th–11th/12th centuries (Fig. 7).

The five timber buildings, all confined to the western half of the site, represent a significant discovery, and their constructional details are discussed further below. As with the early Saxon sunken-featured buildings, it is likely that that these later buildings represent part of a larger group which extended north and south along the east bank of the River Bure. It has been suggested above that these buildings were not all contemporary, and a sequence may be discerned which is to some extent corroborated by the pottery. This sequence sees the two post-built structures (1300 and 2000) being the earliest, followed by the two smaller trench-built structures (1200 and 1400), and finally the largest

[27] J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (1994), 20.

[28] M. Gardiner, 'An Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Settlement at Botolphs, Bramber, West Sussex', *Archaeol. Jnl.* 147 (1990), 240.

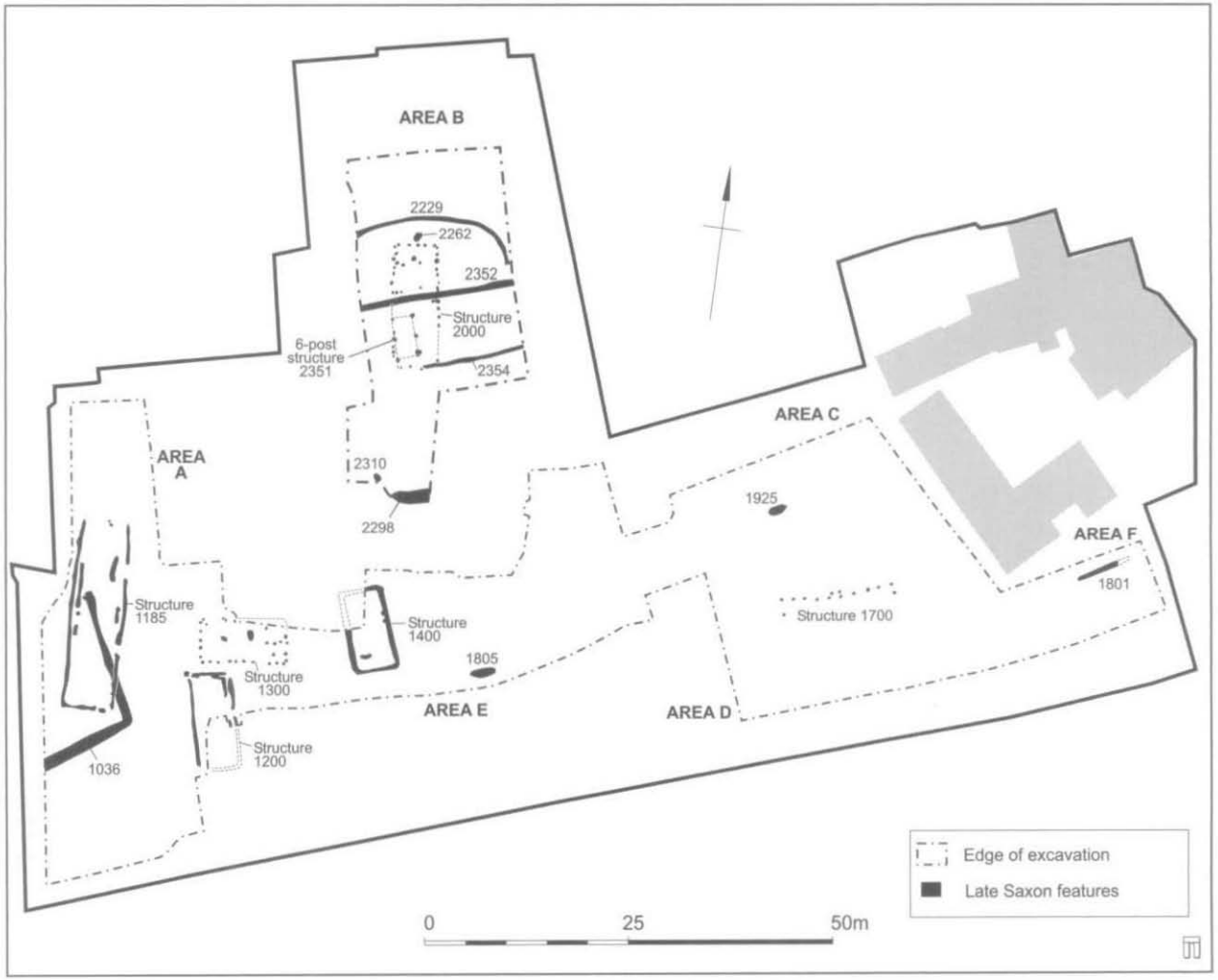

Fig. 7. Late Saxon features.

trench-built structure (1185). The evidence for this sequence is, however, partly circumstantial and other sequences are possible (see below). The two significant stratigraphic relationships are that Structure 2000 was cut by ditch 2352 (and possibly pre-dated six-post structure 2351), and Structure 1185 was built over the top of infilled ditch 1036. In addition to these relationships, the proximity of Structures 1200 and 1300, less than 2 m. apart, might indicate that they are unlikely to have stood at the same time. Finally, the alignments of the buildings could also suggest a sequence with post-built Structures 1300 and 2000 being aligned at 90° to each other; Structures 1200 and 1400, as well as six-post structure 2351 aligned slightly west of N.-S.; and Structure 1185 aligned almost exactly N.-S.

The pottery broadly supports this sequence, but might suggest that trench-built Structure 1400 was earlier than post-built Structure 1300, with both Structure 1400 and post-built Structure 2000 being of potential pre-Conquest date (see below). Sherds from Structure 1200 indicate a Conquest period or later date, but all of these sherds may come from the later infill of the foundation trench and could, therefore, reflect the disuse and demolition of this building rather than the period of construction and use. Perhaps this building stood for longer than any of the others, including Structure 1185.

Six-post structure 2351 almost certainly post-dated Structure 2000, but whether it was late Saxon or medieval is not certain. A single, small sherd of 12th- to 15th-century date was recovered from one of the post-holes which otherwise contained a mixture of Roman, early Saxon and late Saxon wares. However, it is perhaps more likely that six-post structure 2351 was late Saxon given its location in the western half of the site amongst the other late Saxon buildings, ditches and pits, and it may have been used for storage or some other ancillary, possibly agricultural function.

One other structure (1700) has been assigned to the late Saxon period on the basis of a single sherd of pottery recovered from one of the post-holes. However, it is possible that this was residual and structure 1700, of indeterminate form and function, may have been of medieval or later date. Whichever, it seems clearly to have been an ancillary structure, probably serving an agricultural function, which lay 50 m. or so to the east of the other buildings.

The few other features assigned to this period comprise mainly ditches which were, like the halls, mainly confined to the western half of the site. The sequence like that of the buildings is uncertain, but certain observations can be made. Firstly, shallow, curvilinear ditch 2229 appears to respect the northern end of post-built Structure 2000 and the two may have been contemporary. Parallel ditches 2352 and 2354, on the other hand, both cut Structure 2000 and lay at 90° to Structure 1400 approximately 30 m. to the south. These ditches were 8 m. apart, with 2354 terminating within the excavation area, and six-post structure 2351 lay midway between them suggesting that it may have been contemporary with the ditches. A short length of what may have been a broad, shallow ditch or a large pit (2298) lay parallel and further to the south. This feature was 0.27 m. deep with fairly steeply sloping sides and a flat base. Further to the south-west was a relatively substantial L-shaped ditch (1036) which was overlain by Structure 1185. Ditch 1036 produced a quite small, mixed assemblage of pottery, the latest of which could be assigned only a broad late Saxon date. It did, however, contain a group of two complete and part of a third annular loomweight of probable early Saxon date that may have been redeposited from SFB 1183 which was clipped by the edge of the ditch. Ditch 1036 extended 12 m. NE. from Chapel Street before turning 16 m. to the NW. to a terminus. It was up to 1.5 m. wide in the west, with a U-shaped profile, but narrowed north of the corner to 0.90 m. wide with a V-shaped profile, and averaged 0.45 m. deep. It was filled with a generally homogeneous mid greyish brown stony silty loam, although there was slight evidence in the stratigraphy near the corner to indicate that the material may have silted from a bank on the east side. Ditch 1036 appeared to be on broadly the same alignment as Structures 1200 and 1400, and it was possibly related to the other ditches which lay to the NE. However, if these ditches formed part of a field or enclosure system, as seems likely, it is unclear from the excavated area what the layout of this might have been.

Ditch 1801 was the only linear feature in the east half of the site. This lay approximately parallel to ditches 2352 and 2354 to the west, and was almost 6 m. long, 0.46 m. wide, 0.11 m. deep with sloping sides and a flat base.

A small number of pits of probable late Saxon date which lay outside the buildings have also been identified, with all but one lying in the western half of the site. These features, comprising 1805, 1925, 2262 and 2310, were usually little more than shallow scoops containing single sherds of late Saxon pottery.

The structures (Figs. 8 and 9)

Structure 1185: This was the largest building on the site and clearly bow-sided in plan. It measured approximately 23 m. long and was between 5.75 m. (N. and S. ends) and 6.25 m. (middle) wide. It was defined by an almost continuous foundation trench which extended around three sides of the building. The trench was absent on the north side, but the approximate position of the north wall was indicated by a pair of post-holes which were located midway between the termini of the east and west wall trenches. The foundation trench averaged 0.33 m. wide, was 0.06–0.15 m. deep and had steep, slightly irregular concave sides. A number of irregularly-spaced, shallow hollows in the base, which was generally flat, may represent the locations of timber posts, but there were no indications of post-pipes within the fill of the trench. The eastern arm of the foundation trench terminated approximately 2 m. west of the SE. corner of the building as a post hole, 0.53 m. in diameter and 0.32 m. deep, and the gap at the SE. corner was filled by a short segment of gully 0.80 m. long. A row of three shallow post-holes up to 0.04 m. deep, overlapped, and appeared to post-date, the inner edge of the foundation trench at the southern end of the east wall. However, the relationship of these post-holes to the trench make it more likely that they were directly related to the use of the building and were not part of a later phase of activity.

There were two doorways in the east side, approximately equidistantly located along the east wall. The north doorway was marked by a gap almost 2 m. wide, and approximately 1.5 m. to the east of this, within the building, was a shallow slot 3.25 m. long, 0.6 m. wide and 0.13 m. deep. This slot may have held a screen which perhaps acted as a windbreak within this unusually wide entrance. The southern doorway was inturned and formed by two oval post-holes, 0.36 m. deep, and set approximately 1 m. apart in the foundation trench terminals.

There were several internal features in Structure 1185. Along the central parts of the east and west sides were two slots or gullies which were considerably shallower than the main foundation trench. The slot on the west side consisted of two segments, both likely to have been approximately 5 m. long, although that to the south had been truncated by a modern feature. These two segments were separated by a post-hole, 0.33 m. in diameter and 0.07 m. deep, located at the mid point along the length of the building. The slot on the east side was much less clear, and appeared as a series of discontinuous shallow scoops and post-holes which sometimes only survived as ill-defined areas of pea grit.

Outside the building were other post-holes which may have been associated with it, but the evidence is equivocal. The line of the west wall was extended approximately 2 m. beyond its north terminus by three shallow post-holes, and there were three further post-holes, up to 0.43 m. deep, which lay 9 m. north of and aligned on the east wall of the building, the latter group possibly marking a boundary (see Fig. 2).

Structure 1200: This building measured approximately 10.8 m. by 5.2 m., although the SE. corner lay beneath a spoil tip. The building was defined by several foundation trenches or slots, perhaps of more than one construction phase, and provided details of construction techniques not present in any of the other structures (Fig. 9).

The east side of the building comprised a pair of trenches; the inner trench ran parallel to the outer before turning west to intersect and cut the north wall trench. Both inner and outer trenches were interrupted mid-way along their length by an inturned doorway, 0.80 m. across. The outer trench north of the entrance (1257) measured 4.00 m. long, 0.40 m. wide and was 0.10–0.15 m. deep. Shallow depressions along the base hinted that individual posts may have been positioned centrally within the trench, although no post-pipes were visible in the backfill. The north end of a similar trench, which contained two shallow post-holes (1282, 1289), was located south of the doorway. The inner trench of the east wall (1214) was less substantial than the outer. It measured 0.05 m. deep at the north end, but at the south end could only be traced towards the doorway as a line of shallow post-hole bases (1219, 1221) and pea grit. A similar spread of pea grit indicated that a similar trench formerly continued to the south of the doorway. There was no obvious function for the inner, apparently later trench on the east side; it may represent a re-build of the east wall, although it appears more likely to have been a contemporary internal feature.

The foundation trench on the west side (1204) was 0.40 m. wide and from 0.08 to 0.15 m. deep. It had irregular, steeply sloping sides and an irregular, flat base. The wall line of the building was marked by a series of circular post-pipes, up to 0.27 m. in diameter and spaced 0.50 m. apart. These indicated that the posts were placed against the inner, east edge of the trench which had been backfilled with limestone rubble in a brown silty clay matrix. Fifteen post-pipes were identified, with those at the south end filled with a charcoal-rich dark grey/black silty loam. These fills suggested that the posts had been burnt *in situ*, but analysis of the charcoal indicates other sources for this material (see below). Towards the north the post-pipes lacked charcoal, but were clearly visible in plan and section as areas of stone-free dark brown silty clay. The positions of individual posts were not defined by separate post-holes in the base of the trench and there was nothing to indicate how the spaces between the posts had been filled.

Evidence for construction techniques in the remainder of the building was less well-preserved. The trench on the north side (1216) was narrower than that on the west, and averaged 0.26 m. wide and 0.12 m. deep with steep sides and a flat base. No post-pipes were visible in the fill, but post-hole 1251 at the east end and two post-holes (1235, 1236) at the west end which extended into the inner edge of the trench suggest that it is likely to have been of similar construction to the west wall. A shallow, circular feature (1227), 0.75 m. in diameter and 0.04 m. deep lay in the gap at the NW. corner of the building.

Few features were present within the building, although post-hole 1212 was centrally-placed at the north end, and an oval post-hole (1280), 0.06 m. deep, contained some hammerscale.

Structure 1300: This was post-built, approximately 10.8 m. long and 5 m. wide, the NE. corner of which lay beneath a spoil heap. However, limited investigation suggested that most of the post-holes in this part of the building had been destroyed by a modern feature. Structure 1300 was the only one of the late Saxon buildings to be aligned E.-W. rather than N.-S.

The post-holes ranged from 0.36 m. to 1.90 m. (average 0.9 m.) apart, although it is likely that some of the larger spacings were filled with posts which would have been supported directly on the cornbrash or in post-holes which have not survived. Each corner of the building was marked by two post-holes set approximately 0.36 m. apart diagonally across the corners. Individual post-holes ranged from 0.13 m. to 0.27 m. in diameter and from 0.01 m. to 0.20 m. deep with vertical sides and flat bases. The consistent absence of packing suggests that the posts probably filled most of the post-holes and indicates the approximate diameter of the posts.

Within the east end of the building was a line of three or more post-holes extending 2.40 m. along the central axis, and others may have held posts which partitioned off the east end from the remainder of the building. The west end was entered from the north through a doorway, formed by a pair of double post-holes 1.10 m. apart, and there may have been an additional doorway in the east end of the building, indicated by a single double post-hole. Other internal features included sub-rectangular pit 1351 which lay towards the centre of the hall and measured 1.22 m. by 1.03 m. and was 0.33 m. deep, with vertical sides and a flat base. Towards the west end of the building was a group of three, centrally-placed features of uncertain date comprising two possible post-holes, one of which was cut by a shallow sub-circular pit (see Fig. 2). The base of this pit was heat-reddened and may represent the remains of a hearth.

Structure 1400: This building was approximately 10 m. long and 5 m. wide. The NW. corner lay beneath a spoil tip, but the recovered ground plan indicates that the foundations comprised a continuous trench, the shape of which was heavily influenced by the strike of the cornbrash. The foundation trench along the north and south sides was dug across the strike of the tabular cornbrash and was rather irregular, averaging 0.50 m. wide and 0.09 m. deep. By contrast, the trench on the east and west sides, excavated parallel to the bedding of cornbrash, was clearly defined and averaged 0.15 m. deep with straight edges, steep sides and a flat base. A single post-hole was located in the base of the trench in the NE. corner of the building, but no other post-holes or post-pipes were detected. The foundation trench was filled with cornbrash rubble in a greyish brown silty clay matrix which probably represents packing for timber posts, and it is possible that this building was constructed in a similar fashion to Structure 1200 where posts were placed against the inner edges of the foundation trench. Further possible post positions were noted along the inner edge of the west wall at the south end.

A doorway marked by a pair of internal, oval post-holes was located just north of the mid point along the east wall. These post-holes were 0.60 m. long, 0.38 m. wide and averaged 0.21 m. deep with centres 1 m. apart. The only other internal feature was a short slot, 1.30 m. long, which lay in the SW. corner of the building, 1.70 m. from the south wall.

Structure 2000: This post-built structure had very slightly bowed sides, measured 14.80 m. long, 5.60 m. wide in the middle and approximately 4.90 m. and 5.20 m. wide respectively at the north and south ends. It almost certainly pre-dated six-post structure 2351, of probable late Saxon date, which overlay the SW. corner of the building.

There were 18 post-holes on the west side and 16 along the east side which varied from 0.64 m. to 1.12 m. apart (average 0.80 m.). The north and south ends of the building were each marked by seven post-holes which ranged from 0.30 m. to 1.14 m. apart (average 0.70 m.). The lines of post-holes terminated approximately 0.30 m. short of the projected corners of the building. Most of the post-holes were shallow and provided no additional information regarding post positions and packing.

The post-holes on the east side, some truncated by post-medieval activity, ranged from 0.15–0.25 m. in diameter and from 0.06–0.18 m. deep. They were cut into horizontally-bedded tabular cornbrash and had vertical sides and flat bases. The post-holes in the west wall, in contrast, were cut into material which was less well bedded and these had sloping sides and rounded bases. These post-holes ranged from 0.18–0.50 m. in diameter and 0.05–0.40 m. deep. The post-holes towards the SE., NE. and NW. corners averaged only 0.08 m. deep and were shallower than most of the other post-holes in the building.

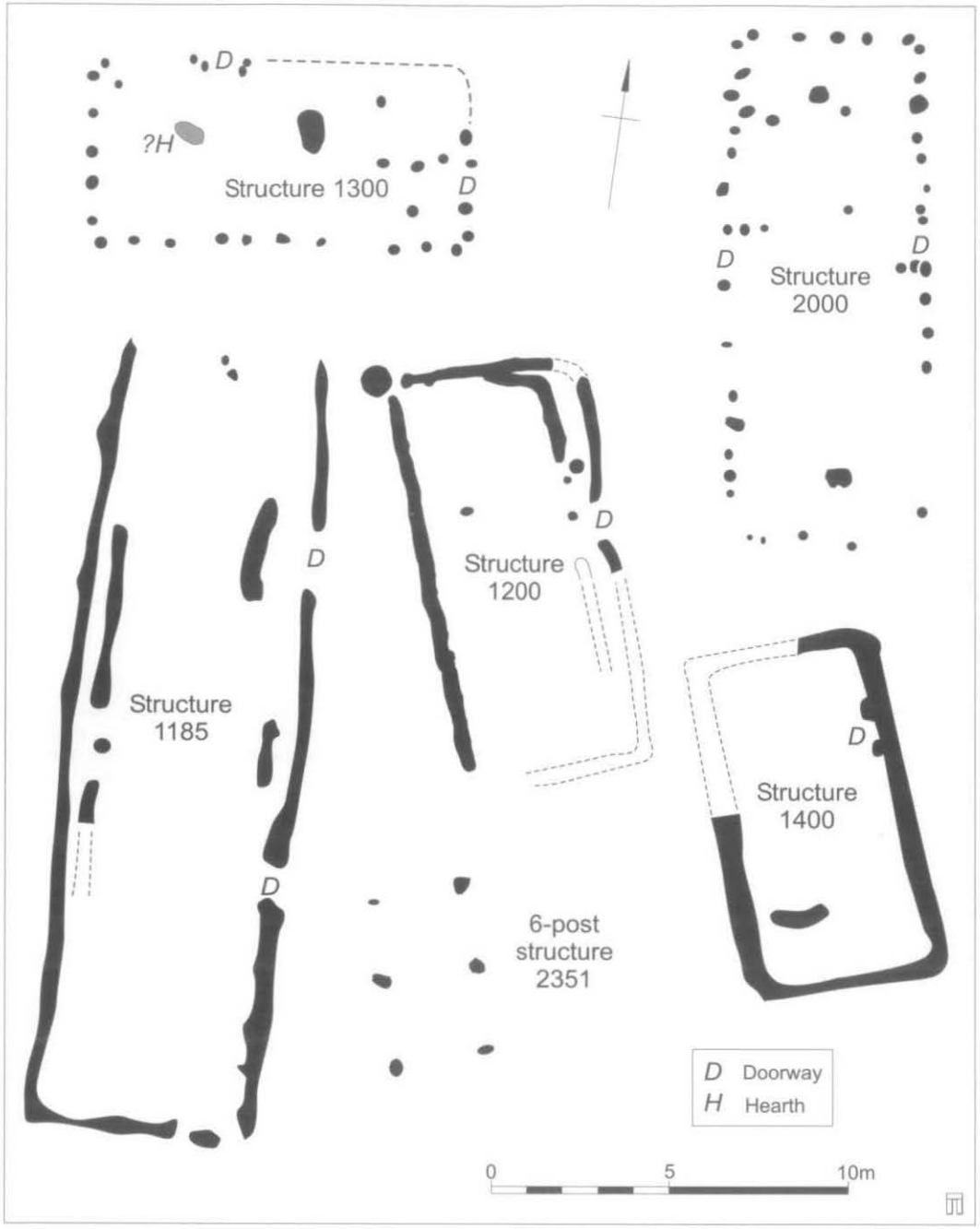

Fig. 8. Comparative plans of timber buildings and six-post structure.

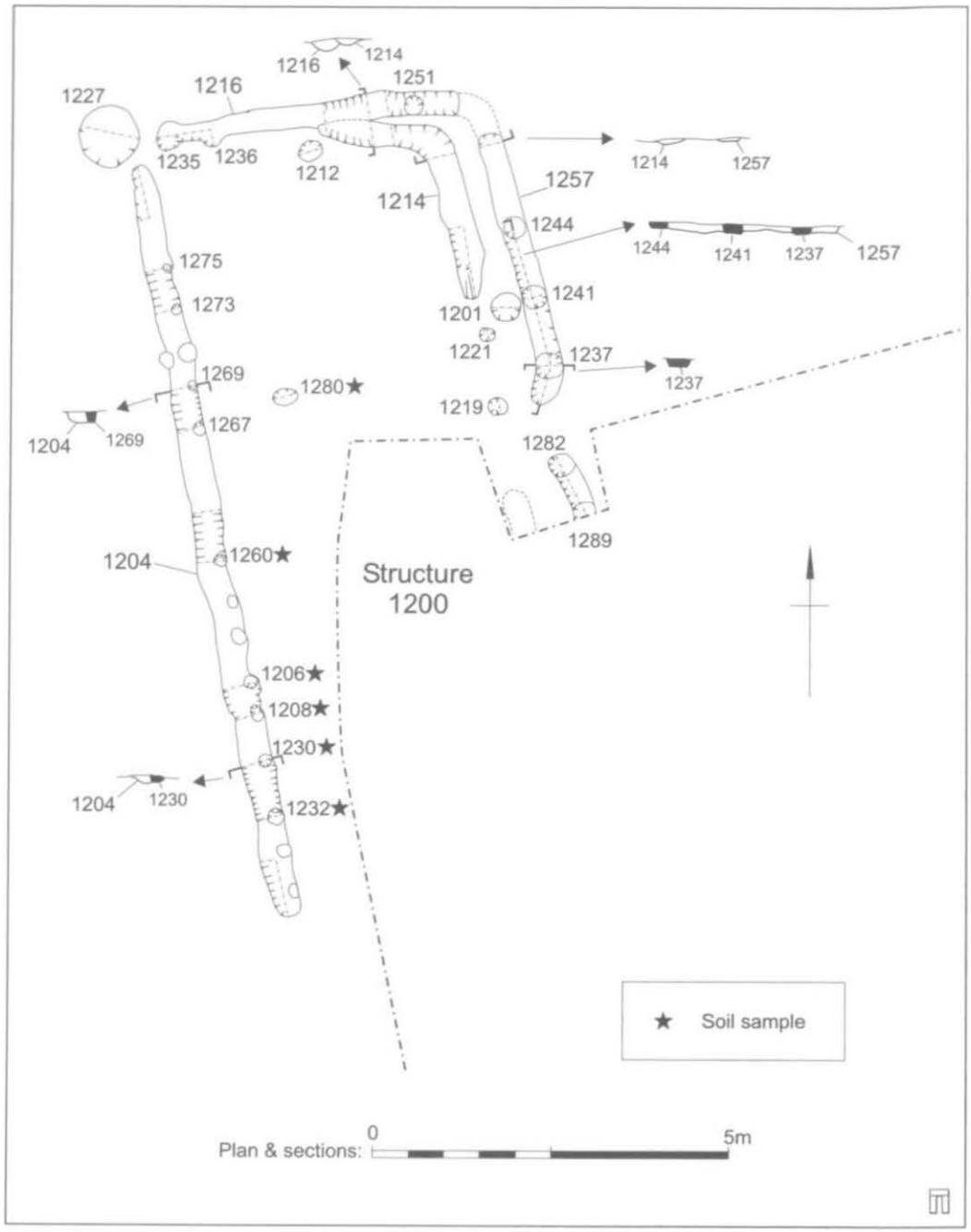

Fig. 9. Detailed plan of Structure 1200.

There was evidence for opposing entrances, just north of the mid point along the east and west sides, represented by relatively substantial post-holes approximately 0.20 m. deep. The doorway on the east side comprised double post-holes 1.20 m. apart, with two conjoining, internal post-holes added to the south side. The doorway on the west side was also 1.20 m. wide and this too had two additional, internal post-holes on the north side of the entrance.

Several post-holes and two shallow pits lay within Structure 2000. The post-holes might indicate the location of one or more partitions towards the north end, and the two pits, of uncertain function, lay towards the north and south ends respectively of the building.

Structure 1700: This lay towards the east end of the site and comprised a row of ten post-holes spaced at intervals of 1.20–1.70 m. (average 1.60 m.) over a distance of approximately 13.5 m. The post-holes had concave sides and rounded bases and ranged from 0.34 m. to 0.50 m. in diameter and from 0.03 m. to 0.22 m. deep. There were also two pairs of shallow post-holes which lay at 90° to the main row at the east and west ends respectively. A further pair of post holes lay parallel to this row, 0.50 m. north of its mid point.

Other, undated post-holes lay to the SW. and east of Structure 1700, but were probably unrelated to it. These included a row of five post holes which were aligned approximately NE.–SW. and spaced 0.90 m. apart. The remaining post-holes were mainly shallow and formed no coherent pattern.

Six-post structure 2351: This structure, which measured 4.90 m. long and 2.50 m. wide, overlay the south-west corner of Structure 2000 and was on a slightly different alignment. The paired post-holes, of various shapes, had steep sides and flat bases, and were 0.35–0.57 m. across and 0.15–0.30 m. deep.

No clear stratigraphic relationship could be demonstrated between the intercutting post-holes of six-post structure 2351 and Structure 2000. The date of this structure has, therefore, been interpreted partly from the evidence of the pottery and partly from its apparent association with ditches 2352 and 2354 which post-dated Structure 2000.

Discussion

A variety of construction methods appear to have been employed in the late Saxon period evident, for example, from Portchester[29] and Faccombe Netherton[30] in Hampshire and North Elmham[31] in Norfolk. From this it seems that there was no clear succession of building techniques in the Anglo-Saxon period, although some trends are apparent. For example, early Saxon post-built halls predominate and pre-date those with foundation trenches at Chalton, Hampshire.[32] In the mid-Saxon period load-bearing side walls and less deep end wall foundation trenches become more common, for example at Wicken Bonhunt, Suffolk,[33] and in *Hamwic* [Southampton] where a variety of construction techniques have been recorded within individual buildings.[34] In the late Saxon period both post-built and foundation trench structures occur, but in no clear chronological sequence. At Portchester, for example, post-built and trench-built structures occur alongside one another from the mid 8th–mid 11th century,[35] though the later post-built structures appear to have had more substantial gable walls than the earlier ones.

The buildings at Chapel Lane, Bicester fall into two types: post-built structures and foundation trench structures.

Post-built structures: Posts set in individual post-holes are widespread in the Anglo-Saxon period. On early Saxon sites, post-built structures occur almost to the exclusion of all other types of rectangular timber building, for example at Barton Court Farm[36] and Barrow Hills, Radley,[37] both in Oxfordshire. They

29 B. Cunliffe, *Excavations at Portchester Castle, vol. 2: Saxon* (Rep. Res. Comm. Soc. Antiq. London, 1976), 33.

30 J.R. Fairbrother, *Faccombe Netherton: Excavations of a Saxon and Medieval Manorial Complex* (Brit. Museum Occas. Paper, 1990), 74.

31 P. Wade-Martins, *Excavations in North Elmham Park 1967-1972* (E. Anglian Archaeol. 9, 1980).

32 P.V. Addyman and D. Leigh, 'The Anglo-Saxon Village at Chalton, Hampshire: second interim report', *Medieval Archaeol.* 17 (1973), 7.

33 K. Wade, 'A Settlement Site at Bonhunt Farm, Wicken Bonhunt, Essex', in D.G. Buckley (ed.), *Archaeology in Essex to AD 1500* (CBA Res. Rep. 34, 1980), 96-8.

34 P. Andrews, *Excavations at Hamwic, vol. 2: Excavations at Six Dials* (CBA Res. Rep. 1997), 109.

35 Cunliffe, op. cit. note 29, p. 58, Fig. 34.

36 Miles, op. cit. note 14.

37 Barclay and Halpin, op. cit. note 8.

continue to have been built through the mid-Saxon period (e.g. Portchester, Structures S9 and S10), though alongside buildings utilising other construction methods. This pattern is still evident in the late Saxon period, for example at Portchester (structures S14 and S17), Faccombe Netherton (building B8)[38] and Steyning, West Sussex (buildings A and B).[39] Overall however, post-built structures occur much less frequently by this time.

The two post-built buildings at Bicester (Structures 1300 and 2000) were of quite regular plan, with post-holes around all four sides. The absence of more substantial post-holes at the ends suggests a hipped rather than gabled roof. Whether the posts were paired or not is uncertain, though it appears not. The apparent insetting of the corner posts in both halls was a deliberate feature, recorded in structure S10 at Portchester and in both Buildings A and B at Steyning. In the absence of surviving post-pipes or packing it cannot be ascertained whether planks, squared posts or unworked posts were used in the buildings at Bicester. It is likely, however that the spaces between the posts were filled with wattle and daub rather than cob walling. The opposed doorways, clear in Structure 2000, were a common feature of Anglo-Saxon buildings, and this hall may have had one or more partitions towards the north end. There may also have been a partition towards the east end of Structure 1300, and possibly a hearth at the west end – the only example to have survived.

Six-post structure 2351 is of a form which occurs commonly from the Iron Age onwards, and a possible parallel for this is late Saxon building B8 at Faccombe Netherton which was slightly larger (7.85 by 5.03 m.) and had additional posts along one side. The function of the latter example is unknown, but four- and six-post structures of various dates are often interpreted as granaries.

The uncertainty surrounding the form and function of Structure 1700 has been noted above. No close parallels are known, but a late Saxon post-built structure measuring 23 m. by 3.5 m. at Yarnton, interpreted as a granary,[40] might have been similar

Foundation trench structures: Buildings constructed of posts set in continuous or interrupted foundation trenches are known from a large number of mid- and late Saxon sites. However, they also occur on a small number of early Saxon sites, for example Chalton[41] and Cowdery's Down[42] in Hampshire. Mid-Saxon examples are recorded at Portchester, Hampshire,[43] *Hamwic* [Southampton][44] and North Elmham, Norfolk,[45] and late Saxon examples at Portchester, Bishops Waltham[46] and Faccombe Netherton[47] in Hampshire, Goltho, Lincolnshire[48] and Cheddar, Somerset.[49] In Oxfordshire, examples of probable mid or late Saxon date have been recorded at Dorchester-on-Thames,[50] and at Cogges and Worton, near Yarnton.[51]

The three late Saxon buildings of this type at Bicester (Structures 1185, 1200 and 1400) were all aligned approximately N.–S. and had entrances in the east side. Structure 1185, discussed further below, had two entrances equidistant from the corners. The evidence from all of these buildings indicates that the trenches were generally very shallow and had been used to bed closely-spaced vertical posts. The post-pipes surviving in the west wall trench of Structure 1200 show that the posts in this building were small, round and possibly unprepared. The posts had all been set against the east side of the trench and it is possible that they had been used to stiffen cob or clay walls. The wall arrangements in the other halls of this type are less clear, but it seems certain that all had vertical posts rather than, for example, horizontal timber sole plates set within the

38 Fairbrother, op. cit. note 30.

39 M. Gardiner, 'The Excavation of a Late Anglo-Saxon Settlement at Market Field, Steyning, West Sussex', *Sussex Archaeol. Collect.* 131 (1993), 21-67.

40 Hey, op. cit. note 16.

41 Addyman and Leigh, op. cit. note 32.

42 S. James, A. Marshall and M. Millett, 'An Early Medieval Building Tradition', *Archaeol. J.* 141 (1984), 182-215.

43 Cunliffe, op. cit. note 29.

44 Andrews, op. cit. note 34.

45 Wade-Martins, op. cit. note 31.

46 E. Lewis, 'Excavations in Bishops Waltham 1967-78', *Proc. Hampshire Field Club Archaeol. Soc.* 41 (1985), 81-126.

47 Fairbrother, op. cit. note 30.

48 G. Beresford, *Goltho: the Development of an Early Medieval Manor c. 850-1150* (Eng. Heritage, 1987).

49 P.A. Rahtz, *The Saxon and Medieval Palaces at Cheddar: Excavations 1960-2* (BAR 65, 1979).

50 S.S. Frere, 'Excavations at Dorchester-on-Thames, 1963', *Archaeol. J.* 141 (1984), 91-174; but see Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, 191, note 72.

51 J. Blair and J.M. Steane, 'Investigations at Cogges', *Oxoniensia*, 47 (1982), 37-125; Hey, op. cit. note 16.

trenches. The posts may have been tied together at eaves level by a wall plate to spread the weight of the roof, and could have been infilled with wattle and daub rather than cob-built. The whole roof weight appears to have been supported on the walls, perhaps linked with tie-beams, with little evidence for internal supporting posts. They are likely to have had hipped roofs covered with thatch or possibly shingles. The inner wall line on the east side of Structure 1200 may represent a rebuilding, but it is perhaps more likely that it was built to strengthen this wall, or was part of the internal arrangements. There were no other internal features in Structure 1200, apart possibly from a single post-hole, and the only feature in Structure 1400 was a short slot in the SW. corner.

Structure 1185 was quite different in plan, if not construction, to the other two trench-built structures, and substantially larger. It was almost twice as long as Structure 1200 (and half as long again as Structure 2000, the second largest building), and its clear bow-sided plan marks it out from the other buildings. The absence of a foundation trench at the north end might indicate that this was open, or could be opened, although the two centrally-placed post-holes might simply represent a different form of construction. The reasons for the gaps towards the SE. corner are unknown. The internal slots or trenches, particularly clear along the central part of the west side, may have held additional supports for the roof structure or perhaps for some form of loft arrangement. The northernmost slot on the east side seems very probably to have held a screen, possibly a windbreak, just inside the wider of the two doorways. It seems likely that this hall would have been divided internally, but there was no evidence for this.

The bow-sided form of Structure 1185 is particularly characteristic of the late Saxon period, although it is occasionally recorded earlier.[52] A mid-Saxon trench-built structure, 14.5 m. long and 6.25–6.50 m. wide, dated to the 8th–early 9th century has been excavated at *Hamwic* [Southampton] (structure S29),[53] and a post-built, late Saxon (?11th century) example, at least 8.5 m. long and up to 5.8 m. wide has also been found there.[54] At least two bow-sided buildings, assigned a later 11th-century date, were recorded at North Elmham (buildings T and AJ/AL) and the excavator noted 'that other excavated houses with curved sides found in the region are also of this date'.[55] The Bicester example is considerably larger than any of the bow-sided buildings mentioned above. At approximately 23 m. long and up to 6.25 m. wide, Structure 1185 is comparable in size with the 'long hall' at Cheddar, which measured 23.76 m. by 4.27 m. and had slightly curved walls,[56] and a possible hall at Faccombe Netherton (building B7) which may have been 22.86 m. by 4.27 m.,[57] although these buildings were probably earlier.

The possible function of Structure 1185 and the other buildings is considered further below in a general discussion of the late Saxon evidence from the site.

Pottery by LORRAINE MEPHAM

Late Saxon and early medieval wares are more readily identifiable than any mid-Saxon wares that might be present amongst the assemblage. Three types were present on the site in any quantity (see Table 1): Cotswold-type ware (OXAC: late 9th–early 13th century), St. Neot's type ware (OXR: early 10th–mid 11th century), and late Saxon and early medieval Oxford ware (OXY: mid 11th–late 13th century). Vessel forms correspond to published examples of jars, bowls/dishes and spouted vessels.[58]

These wares are absent from the sunken-featured buildings, but are present in Structures 1185, 1200, 1300, 1400 and 2000, six-post structure 2351 and structure 1700. Structure 1700 produced only one small sherd of OXAC, which does not lend itself to close dating, but some sequence can perhaps be inferred amongst the other six structures. Apart from one post-medieval sherd (almost certainly intrusive) from each of Structures 1400 and 2000, these structures produced no pottery that is necessarily post-conquest in date. Within Structure 1300 the late Saxon/early medieval wares include vessel forms in OXAC which could fall later within the late Saxon–early medieval sequence. Within Hall 1185 they occur alongside one sherd of early to late medieval east Wiltshire ware (OXAQ: late 12th–early 15th century), although this is probably intrusive. A single sherd of post-medieval redware is certainly intrusive within Structure 1185, as are three post-medieval sherds from Hall 1200. However, sherds of OXY from Hall 1200 serve to date this structure to the

52 P.A. Rahtz, 'Buildings and Rural Settlement', in D.M. Wilson, *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (1976), 88.

53 Andrews, op. cit. note 34.

54 A. Morton, *Excavations at Hamwic. Volume 1: Excavations 1946-83 excluding Six Dials and Melbourne Street* (CBA Res. Rep. 84, 1992), 164.

55 Wade-Martins, op. cit. note 31, p. 244.

56 Rahtz, op. cit. note 49, p. 99.

57 Fairbrother, op. cit. note 30.

58 Mellor, op. cit. note 24.

Conquest period or later. Six-post structure 2351 is considered most likely to have been of Late Saxon or early medieval date, but this produced only a few tiny sherds including one of OXAQ (late 12th–early 15th century) which may have been intrusive.

Other finds by RACHEL EVERY

A nail was recovered from Structure 1200, and a looped object (possibly part of a chain), four nails, a strip fragment and piece of shelly limestone came from Structure 1400. A collar was recovered from a pit; collars were used to bind wood together and to strengthen vulnerable parts of tool handles. Residual Roman material included at least one *tegula* fragment, and two joining brick fragments in a coarse shelly fabric.

Charred plant remains by RUTH PELLING

Samples were taken from post-holes related to late Saxon Structure 1200, three pits of early and late Saxon date and a medieval ditch. Post-hole samples were whole-earth samples of 1 or 2 litres in volume, while other samples were of 10 litres. Twelve bulk samples were processed by standard flotation methods, and three samples submitted for further analysis (details in archive): one from the Structure 1200 (post-hole 1206), one from late Saxon pit 1351 associated with Structure 1300, and one from late Saxon pit 2310. Five other post-hole samples from Structure 1200 were also submitted for examination, but not detailed analysis. Generally the flots were found to contain large amounts of rooty material and modern seeds, although useful quantities of charred cereal grain were noted in all samples.

The detailed identifications are shown in Table 4. Quantification is based on seed, nutlet etc unless otherwise stated. Nomenclature and taxonomic order follows Clapham, Tutin and Moore.[59]

All four major Saxon/medieval cereals are represented: free-threshing *Triticum* sp. (wheat), hulled *Hordeum vulgare* (barley), *Avena* sp. (oats) and *Secale cereale* (rye). Only one asymmetric grain of *Hordeum vulgare* was identified. The ratio of lateral asymmetric to central straight grains in a live crop is 2:1. The low number of asymmetric grains therefore suggests that two-rowed or lax eared barley may also be present. In the absence of rachis however this can not be conclusively demonstrated. No *Triticum* sp. rachis was preserved, hence it was not possible to establish if a *Triticum aestivum* (bread wheat) type or *Triticum turgidum* (rivet wheat) is represented. *Secale cereale* (rye) was only rarely identified and appears to be a minor crop.

Structure 1200: The sample from post-hole 1206 produced a high concentration of remains including a large number of *Avena* sp. (oats) grains. Occasional grain still retained their lemma and floret base, while the remains of one spikelet was also recovered. The floret bases lack the sub-circular disarticulation scar characteristic of wild oats, and have therefore all been recorded as *Avena strigosa* or *A. sativa*, the cultivated varieties. Grain of *A. strigosa* are borne on a narrow stalk, while the hexaploid oats, *A. sativa* and *A. fatua* (wild oat) detach directly from the spikelet. None of the floret bases showed sufficient narrowing to be characteristic of the stalk of *A. strigosa*. The one spikelet recovered was identified as a hexaploid oat. It is likely therefore that the cultivated oats are predominantly of *A.sativa* with no *A. strigosa*.

Weed seeds were only a minor component of the sample. Large seeded Gramineae dominated the weed component, possibly including poorly preserved *Avena* sp. grain. *Bromus* subsect *Eubromus* (brome grass), a cereal sized grass seed was present in the same sample. Seeds of *Brassica/Sinapis* might be derived from a cultivated brassica variety (cabbage/turnip etc.) or could be a weed of cultivated ground. *Chenopodium album* (fat hen) is a species of disturbed ground which commonly occur within arable crops. *Anthemis cotula* (stinking mayweed) is a troublesome weed of cereal crops and is characteristic of heavy clay soils, and tends to be associated with winter sown wheat crops.

The samples from post-holes 1208, 1230, 1232, 1260 and 1280 produced lesser quantities of charred remains and were not examined in detail, but that from post-hole 1208 contained approximately 130 cereal grains and each of the others less than 50 grains.

Late Saxon pits: Cultivated legumes were recovered from pits 1351 and 2310. None of the seeds retained sufficient testa or hila to enable identification, hence they have been recorded as *Vicia/Pisum* sp. (bean/vetch/pea). Fragments of *Corylus avellana* (hazel) nut-shell were also recovered from these samples.

Weed seeds were only very minor components of these samples. *Galium aparine* (goosegrass) is a species of disturbed ground which commonly occurs within arable crops, and is characteristic of heavy clay soils, and both tend to be associated with winter sown wheat crops. *Vicia/Lathyrus* and *Medicago/Trifolium/Lotus* sp. are grassland weeds but also occur within cultivated plots. They tend to be commonly found with cultivated legumes as weeds which may explain their presence in the samples.

[59] A.R. Clapham, T.G. Tutin and M. Moore, *Flora of the British Isles* (3rd edn. 1989).

TABLE 4. CHARRED PLANT REMAINS FROM LATE SAXON FEATURES

		Feature	P-hole	Pit	Pit
		Feature No.	1206	1351	2310
		Context	1207	1352	2311
		Sample	1	12	11
		Volume (litres)	1	10	10
Triticum sp.	Wheat, free-threshing grain		38	10	–
Triticum sp.	Wheat grain		6	3	2
Hordeum vulgare	Barley, hulled asymmetric grain		1	–	–
Hordeum vulgare	Barley, hulled straight grain		15	–	–
Hordeum vulgare	Barley, hulled grain		52	2	–
Hordeum vulgare	Barley, grain		29	2	2
Avena sp.	Oats, grain		176	–	1
Avena cf. *sativa*	Common oat, floret		2	–	–
Avena sativa/strigosa	Common/Bristle Oat floret		15	–	–
Avena sativa/fatua	Common/Wild Oat, floret base		1	–	–
Secale cereale	Rye grain		4	1	–
Secale cereale/Triticum sp.	Rye/Wheat grain		4	–	–
Cerealia Indet	Indeterminate grain		128	16	6
Cereal sized	Culm node		–	1	–
Vicia/Pisum sp.	Vetch/Bean/Pea		–	2	2
Corylus avellana	Hazel nut shell fragment		–	1	1
Brassica/Sinapis sp.			3	–	–
Chenopodium album	Fat Hen		4	–	–
Chenopodiaceae			2	–	1
Vicia/Lathyrus sp.	Vetch/Vetchling/Tare		–	1	
Medicago/Trifolium/Lotus sp.	Medic/Clover/Trefoil		–	–	1
Umbelliferae			1	–	–
Galium aparine	Goosegrass/cleavers		–	1	–
Anthemis cotula	Stinking Mayweed		1	–	–
Bromus subsect *Eubromus*	Brome grass		5	–	–
Gramineae	Grass, small seeded		–	1	–
Gramineae	Grass, large seeded		11	1	–
Indet	Weed seed		2	–	–
Indet	Bud		–	1	–

Discussion: The range of crops represented are commonly encountered on sites of this period in the Midlands from sites such as West Cotton in Northamptonshire,[60] Stafford[61] and Eynsham Abbey.[62] The samples from Structure 1200, particularly post-hole 1206, are especially interesting in that the concentration of remains are so high. One litre of deposit from 1206 has produced 453 cereal grains, of which oats were most numerous. The weed seeds in this sample were very limited in relation to grain and included mostly cereal-sized grass seeds, which may include poorly preserved oats, but also grasses harvested with the cereal crop. The chaff in this sample is limited to the occasional floret bases of oats. While the paucity of chaff might be due to differential preservation,[63] the composition of this assemblage is consistent with cleaned grain with only occasional contaminating weeds seeds. Such a deposit might have been burnt deliberately if the grain was damaged in some way, for example by infestation of weevils, or if it had sprouted in the field or in storage. The high density of grain, however, suggests that the deposit might represent grain burnt either during a major processing episode such as corn drying, or in storage which has fallen into the post-hole perhaps when the building burnt down or dismantled. This would imply that the grain was being stored in or under the building.

Oats are recorded in increasing frequency during the Saxon period, seemingly becoming an important cereal by the late Saxon/early medieval period in many areas of the country.[64] Markham[65] refers to the 'singular virtues' and many uses of oats, which include fodder, particularly for horses, for beer, although only when the barley is to be found 'wanting' and in oat meal where its culinary use is akin to that of salt in terms of its usefulness. If the oats were destined for fodder it might be expected that they would not be so thoroughly processed, as has been suggested at Wraysbury, Berkshire[66] where oats were strongly associated with weeds, particularly *Bromus* sp. This might also be true if the grain was to be used for malting where the final cleaning stages could be conducted at a later stage. At West Cotton large deposits of germinated grain suggest that oats were malted with barley, and were possibly grown as a mixed crop or drage.[67] This site also produced evidence of oats being grown as a crop on its own. The fully processed nature of the Bicester oats, and the absence of germinated grain would suggest that it was destined for human consumption, perhaps as oat meal or even as whole grain, as has been suggested for grain recovered from kitchen deposits at late Saxon Eynsham Abbey.[68]

Samples from pits 1351 and 2310 produced much more limited assemblages. The weed seeds include large, cereal sized seeds which may have contaminated processed grain. It is possible that the assemblages represent the waste removed from the processed grain during the final picking over, and which includes damaged or tail grain, or accidentally removed grain. Such waste might be burnt on household fires if final grain cleaning and subsequent grinding was operated on a domestic scale. Alternatively the assemblages might simply represent background scatters of cereal processing waste which has been scattered about the site. As is the case for post-hole 1206, the evidence of the early stages of crop processing[69] is absent suggesting initial threshing, winnowing and sieving may have taken place elsewhere.

Only limited evidence about cultivation condition can be deduced from the weed assemblages. *Anthemis cotula* and *Galium aparine* favour heavy calcareous soils, and would grow on the brown earth soils of the cornbrash, suggesting crop production may be local. *Galium aparine* is an autumn germinating species and

[60] G. Campbell, 'The Preliminary Archaeobotanical Results from Anglo-Saxon West Cotton and Raunds', in J. Rackham (ed.), *Environment and Economy in Anglo-Saxon England* (CBA Res. Rep. 89, 1994), 65-82.

[61] L. Moffett, 'Charred Cereals from some Ovens/kilns in late Saxon Stafford and the Botanical Evidence for the pre-*burh* Economy', in J. Rackham (ed.), *Environment and Economy in Anglo-Saxon England* (CBA Res. Rep. 89, 1994), 55-64.

[62] R. Pelling, 'The Botanical Remains from Eynsham Abbey' (unpubl. rep. for Oxf. Archaeol. Unit).

[63] S. Boardman and G. Jones, 'Experiments on the Effects of Charring on Cereal Components', *Jnl. Archaeol. Sci.* 17 (1990), 1-11.

[64] E.g. F. Green, 'Landscape Archaeology in Hampshire: The Saxon Plant Remains', in J. Renfrew (ed.), *New Light on Early Farming* (1991), 363-77.

[65] G. Markham, *A Way to Get Wealth* (1681), 15.

[66] G. Jones, 'The Charred Plant Remains', in G.G. Astill and S.J. Lobb, 'Excavation of Prehistoric, Roman, and Saxon Deposits at Wraysbury, Berkshire', *Archaeol. Jnl.* 146 (1989), 124-8.

[67] Campbell, op. cit. note 60.

[68] Pelling, op. cit. note 62.

[69] G. Hillman, 'Reconstructing Crop Husbandry Practices from the Charred Remains of Crops', in R.J. Mercer (ed.), *Farming Practice in British Prehistory* (1981), 123-62.

may therefore indicate autumn sowing of crops, particularly bread wheat and rye. Other weeds are more generally characteristic of disturbed ground. The hazelnut shells suggest some utilisation of hedgerow or scrubland resources.

Conclusions: While the sampling at Chapel Street was limited, in large part due to the shallowness of the features and the mixed deposits they contained, sufficient material has been recovered to enable some interesting insights into the late Saxon economy of the site. A large grain-rich deposit from a post-hole of one of the timber buildings suggests that processed oats may have been stored in the building (perhaps evidence for it having been a barn). It is suggested, given the thoroughness of the processing, that the oats were destined for human consumption, although animal fodder is also possible. While barley grains were also common in this sample it is not possible to establish if they represent two separate cops or a mixed drage. In addition to the oats and barley, the two other characteristic Saxon cereals, free-threshing wheat and rye are also represented, while some limited evidence for pulses is also present.

The cereal grain recovered is largely in a fully processed, clean state, thereby limiting the potential information about arable conditions and soils from the weed seeds. The species which were identified are all appropriate for the local calcareous brown earth soils of the cornbrash.

Charcoal by ROWENA GALE

Charcoal was present in eight of the 12 bulk soil samples processed from the site, of which five, all from late Saxon contexts, were selected for analysis. These comprised post-holes associated with Structure 1200, pit 1351 in Structure 1300 and pit 2310.

Samples were prepared for examination using standard methods.[70] Full details of materials and methods are contained in archive. The charcoal was mostly firm and well-preserved, although it was too fragmented to include intact radial segments of roundwood. Where possible the maturity of the wood (i.e. heartwood/sapwood) was assessed. Classification follows that of *Flora Europaea*.[71]

The charcoal analysis is summarised in Table 5 and discussed below. Group names are given when anatomical differences between related genera are too slight to allow secure identification to genus level.

The anatomical structure of the charcoal was consistent with the following taxa or groups of taxa:

Corylaceae. *Corylus avellana* L., hazel
Fagaceae. *Fagus sylvatica* L., beech; *Quercus* spp., oak
Rosaceae. Subfamilies:

Pomoideae which includes *Crataegus* spp., hawthorn; *Malus* sp., apple; *Pyrus* sp., pear; *Sorbus* spp., rowan, service tree and whitebeam. These taxa are anatomically similar; one or more taxa may be represented in the charcoal.

Prunoideae which includes *P. avium* (L.) L., cherry; *P. padus* L., bird cherry, and *P. spinosa* L., blackthorn. In this instance two species appeared to be present: *P. spinosa* in contexts 1352 and 2311, and *P. padus* or *P. avium* in context 2311.

Salicaceae. *Salix* spp., willow, and *Populus* spp., poplar. In most respects these taxa are anatomically similar. The ray type sometimes allows the taxon to be named; however this feature is not always a reliable indicator, particularly for juvenile wood, and has not been used in this instance.

Charcoal was fairly abundant (although very fragmented) in adjacent post-holes 1206 and 1208 on the west side of Structure 1200. Most of the charcoal consisted of oak, with both sapwood and heartwood present. Hazel was common to both contexts, while the hawthorn/*Sorbus* group was identified from post-hole 1206, and beech from 1208.

The high incidence of oak, especially oak heartwood (which could be indicative of a post or stake), would be consistent with the structural use of oak for buildings. The presence of both hazel and the Pomoideae in these contexts is more difficult to interpret, but if the entire structure succumbed to fire, it is reasonable to suggest that the non-oak charcoal could have originated from other parts of the building (e.g. wattle-work). However, there is no evidence for such a fire, and it could also be argued that the charcoal derived from some other source such as a domestic hearth. The latter suggestion is supported by the additional presence of charred cereal grain, chaff and weed seeds in the post-holes (see above).

70 R. Gale and D. Cutler, *Plants in Archaeology* (2000).
71 T.G. Tutin, V.H. Heywood et al., *Flora Europaea* (1964-80), 1-5.

TABLE 5. CHARCOAL FROM LATE SAXON FEATURES

Feature	Context	Sample	*Corylus*	*Fagus*	Pomoideae	*Prunus*	*Quercus*	Salicaceae
Post-holes: Structure 1200								
1206	1207	1	1	–	1	–	15s,31h,u	–
1208	1209	2	1	6	–	–	4s,49h,u	–
1280	1281	9	–	–	3	–	3h,u	–
Pits								
1351	1352	12	1	–	2	1	1h	–
2310	2311	11	–	–	–	2	5s,4h	2

Key. h = heartwood; s = sapwood; u = unknown maturity (oak only)
The number of fragments identified is indicated.

Pit 1280 within Structure 1200 included charcoal and hammerscale, and it is possible that the charcoal represents fuel debris from iron smithing. Charcoal fragments were sparse and small and consisted of oak heartwood (and wood of unknown maturity) and the hawthorn/*Sorbus* group.

The charcoal from pit 1351, to the north of Structure 1300, was fairly sparse but included blackthorn, hazel, the hawthorn/*Sorbus* group and oak heartwood.

The charcoal from pit 2310 was rather comminuted but included oak sapwood and heartwood, willow or poplar, blackthorn and either bird cherry or wild cherry.

Discussion: Based on the assumption that the charcoal represents fuel debris, it is evident that oak was the preferred fuel while other species were more randomly selected. The charcoal was generally too comminuted to determine the type of fuel used, i.e. faggots (usually from coppice) or billets (usually from cordwood). However, the frequency of oak heartwood suggests the use either of roundwood of sufficient age to have developed heartwood (probably at least 12 or 15 years) or fairly wide cordwood; there was no evidence of narrow roundwood. It is probable that fuel consisted of seasoned firewood (as opposed to charcoal fuel) although the type of fuel used cannot be ascertained from the resulting fuel debris. With the exception of willow and poplar, which burn rather slowly, the species named would have provided high-calorie wood fuel.[72]

Environmental evidence: The site was located on a gentle slope based on calcareous brown earths at the northern end of the Middle Thames Valley, close to the River Bure. The charcoal analysis suggests that oak formed the dominant woodland. Other woodland trees included hazel, beech, and either bird cherry or wild cherry. Members of the Pomoideae such as hawthorn, apple, whitebeam, wild service and rowan may also have grown within the woodland. Hawthorn and blackthorn perhaps grew as scrub in marginal woodland or uncultivated areas and both were probably used for hedging. Cherries and other fruit trees were probably cultivated.

By the late Saxon period agricultural development throughout much of England had reduced local woodland to significantly small areas – Domesday (1086) records suggest that only 15% of the country supported woodland at this time. The rate of assarting increased over the ensuing centuries and by the mid 14th century woodland cover had probably decreased to 10%.[73] Most woodlands contributed to the economic stability of a given community and provided many essential staples, e.g. timber, fuel, food, coppice rods and poles for hurdle-making and other woodland crafts, fodder, tanbark and pannage.

[72] H.L. Edlin, *Woodland Crafts in Britain* (1949); V. Porter, *Small Woods and Hedgerows* (1990).

[73] O. Rackham, *The History of the Countryside* (1986); O. Rackham, 'Trees and Woods in Anglo-Saxon England: the Documentary Evidence', in J. Rackham (ed.), *Environment and Economy in Anglo-Saxon England* (CBA Res. Rep. 89, 1994), 7-11.

As indicated above, oak fuel from the site appears to have been cropped either from fairly wide poles or from cordwood. Cordwood could have been obtained from branches from mature free standing or hedgerow trees or pollards, or from lateral branches removed during the conversion of timber. Despite the lack of evidence for the use of coppice wood (see above) from the remaining species (hazel, beech, hawthorn group, *Prunus*, and willow/poplar) it could be argued that managed woodland would have been the most likely source of fuel, together with hedge trimmings and prunings from cultivated trees.

Discussion

The late Saxon settlement recorded at Chapel Street is certain to continue further to the north and south alongside the River Bure, but seems clearly to fade out to the east, based on the distribution of structures and, particularly, the rectangular timber buildings. It is probably no coincidence that six-post structure 2351 and structure 1700, both possibly granaries, lay on the periphery of the area occupied by the other buildings. The buildings show no obvious evidence for an organised layout, and do not appear to lie within any form of enclosure which might suggest that they were part of a manorial complex. The apparently unplanned distribution reflects a rural or proto-urban rather than urban settlement, further emphasised when the chronology of the buildings is taken in to account, although the precise details of this remains unclear. It is considered very unlikely that all of the buildings were contemporary, but the fact that none of them overlapped physically may be significant.

The two post-built rectangular buildings might be earlier than the others, partly on the basis of evidence from sites elsewhere, but the limited ceramic dating suggests that Structure 1400 (trench-built) and Structure 2000 (post-built) are the earliest, both of pre-Conquest date. Whether they were contemporary cannot be demonstrated. If they were, then it is possible that Structure 2000 formed the principal accommodation, with Structure 1400 serving an ancillary function such as a kitchen. A similar pairing of buildings with different construction techniques (trench-built and post-built) has been suggested at Portchester, but in this case the two buildings are dated as much as two centuries earlier, to the late 8th–mid 9th century (buildings S10 and S11).[74] At Bicester, as at Portchester and elsewhere, the lack of internal features makes it virtually impossible to distinguish between buildings which may have had differing domestic functions, or between these and ones with agricultural functions. The absence of hearths (with one possible exception) and floor surfaces, and the paucity of finds means that any interpretations put forward here must be based on a structure's position and the nature of its construction. Hearths and floor surfaces may once have been present, but have not survived later agricultural and horticultural use of the site.

Structures 1200 and 1300 may also have been paired, but they appear to lie rather too close together, and Structure 1200 may on ceramic grounds be later. It has been ascribed a post-Conquest date from the pottery, although this may all have derived from the post-pipes and thus indicate a date for its abandonment rather than construction. Unfortunately, the difficulties in distinguishing between the fills of post-pipes from the fill of the surrounding foundation trench make it impossible to be certain. The large quantities of charred oats from the post-pipes at the south end of the west wall indicate that oats may have been stored in this building prior to its destruction, and hint at the possibility that it may have served an ancillary function, perhaps a barn. The possible hearth in Structure 1300, on the other hand, may indicate a domestic function. In discussing the possible relationships between these halls it must be remembered that other related or contemporary structures are likely to have lain in the surrounding, unexcavated areas.

Were it not for the presence of Structure 1185 the group of late Saxon buildings at Chapel Street would be of some interest, but not unusual for a rural settlement of this date. The size, construction techniques and function of this building, however, considerably increases the importance of the group. Its construction has been discussed above, where it is suggested that it may have been the latest in the sequence of buildings, though this cannot be demonstrated with certainty. On ceramic grounds Structure 1200 may have stood for longer even if it was constructed earlier, but an 11th-century date is considered likely for Structure 1185. It is possible that Structure 1185 served an agricultural function,

74 Cunliffe, op. cit. note 29.

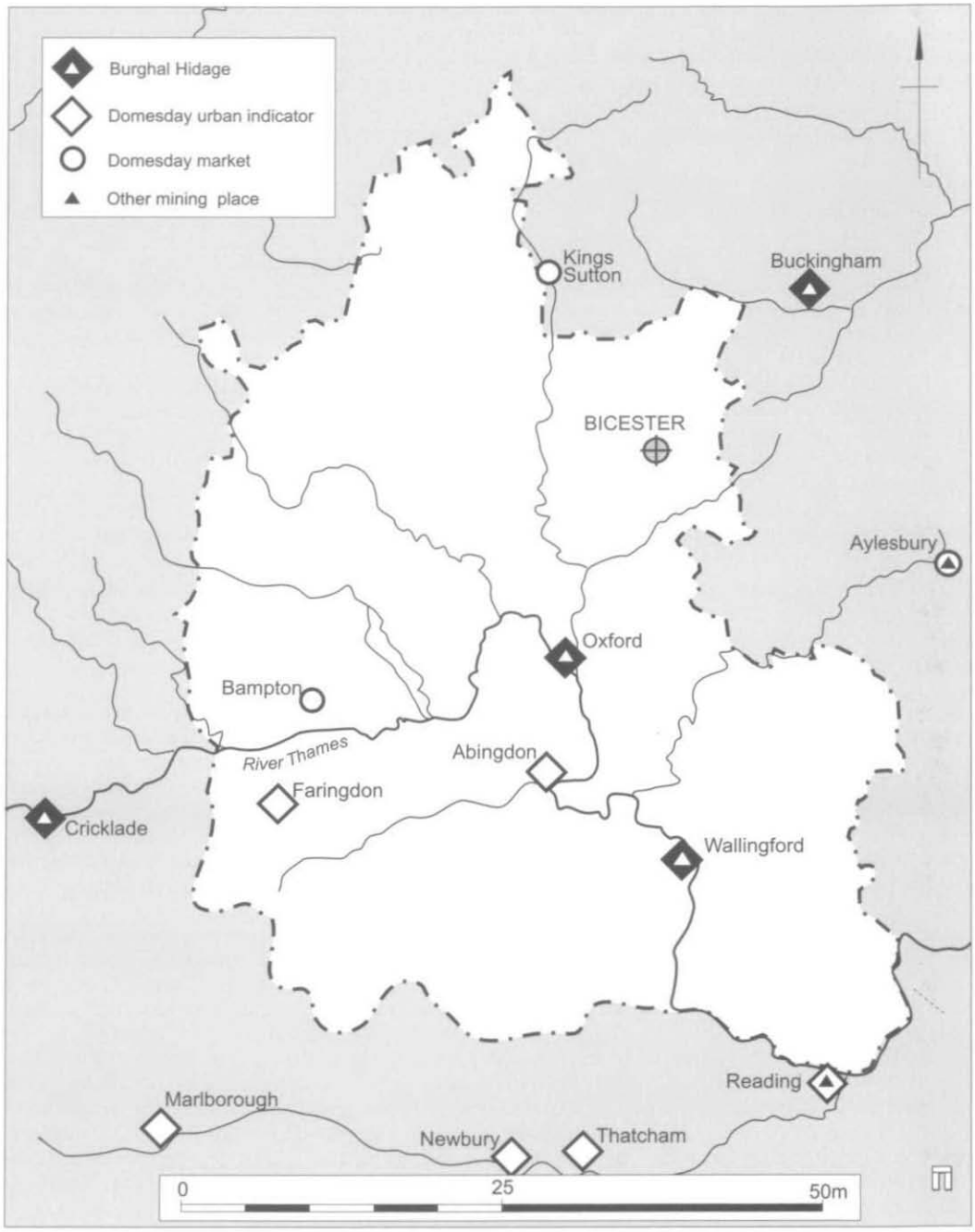

Fig. 10. Principal late Saxon settlements in the Oxfordshire region (after J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, Fig. 69).

perhaps a barn, though a domestic, perhaps communal function seems much more probable. In size comparable to the 'long hall' at Cheddar, it may also have been a building of high status, although the meagre finds and environmental evidence can provide no support for such a suggestion. It was built across a late Saxon ditch, on a different alignment, which may have formed part of an enclosure extending westwards down to the river, and perhaps of earlier significance. However, without excavating a larger area it is difficult to be certain what this may have been. It might, for example, suggest a shift in the focus of the settlement, and/or a shift in agricultural or stock management regimes.

The late Saxon settlement may have developed as early as the late 9th or early 10th century, but more probably reflects economic growth after *c.* 950, with occupation continuing perhaps into the 12th century on the basis of the ceramic evidence. The reason for the late Saxon development at Bicester can in all probability be ascribed to the presence of a minster, probably a royal foundation perhaps established as early as the late 7th century. Whether the buildings at Chapel Street were directly associated with this minster which lay less than 200 m. across the river is unknown, but minster sites were important for the economic role they fulfilled and they became important focuses for commercial activity. It is this economic role which probably set Bicester apart from the average late Saxon rural settlement, and the location of the minster and the late Saxon settlement at Chapel Street, either side but adjacent to the river may have been important in this respect. Bicester would have acted as one of many smaller exchange centres or proto-towns amongst a developing hierarchy of settlements with urban centres such as Oxford qualifying as towns of the first rank (Fig. 10).

Although the importance of minsters was much reduced in the 11th century, their control over their daughter parishes remained until after the Conquest, and minster-places such as Bicester often became towns. Certainly by the late 12th century the focus of settlement in Bicester had shifted again, with development being concentrated around a new market place, a short distance to the north of the site at Chapel Street.

MEDIEVAL DEVELOPMENT

A series of shallow ditches lay to the rear of the street frontages on Market Square and London Road and are likely to have defined either burgage plots or enclosures / fields (Fig. 11). The small quantities of pottery from these ditches is all of probable 12th-/13th-century date and suggests that they all belonged to broadly the same phase of activity. This suggestion is supported to some extent by their coherent layout and the absence of intercutting between the ditches, and there was no evidence for the maintenance or replacement of these ditches in the later medieval or post-medieval periods. No medieval structural remains were present in the area closest to London Road at the east end of the site, or adjacent to Chapel Street to the west, and the site lay approximately 50 m. south of the Market Place frontage.

Ditch 1811 was the most substantial of the ditches and is most likely to represent the rear boundary of a burgage plot which fronted on to London Road some 40 m. to the east. A turn to the NE. at the northern end of this ditch appears to align with the southern edge of the extant L-shaped stable block which itself reflects a kink in the alignment of London Road at this point. This ditch appears, therefore, to reflect a boundary which has survived to the present day, although the former width of the plot remains uncertain. Less than 10 m. to the east and parallel to ditch 1811 was a further, shallow ditch or gully (503) which perhaps marked a division towards the rear of the burgage plot. Two ditches (1192 and 1982) 10 m. to the west of 1811 may have defined part of an enclosure behind the plot, and the 8 m. gap between these ditches, both with slightly out-turned terminals, is suggestive of an enclosure entrance. Ditch 2236/2238 may also have been part of this postulated enclosure which lay behind the street frontages and perhaps extended as far west as the River Bure, with Chapel Lane, which led to a mill, perhaps providing access from the rear.

The only other medieval ditch (2223) ran E.–W. and appears to have defined the rear boundary of one or more burgage plots fronting on to the Market Place.

There appears to have been a clear shift in focus of settlement away from the site in the medieval period. At least some of the late Saxon buildings in the western half of the site perhaps continued in use until beyond the end of the 11th century, but were not replaced and the area reverted to agricultural use, possibly including an enclosure for keeping animals. Subsequent, medieval, settlement

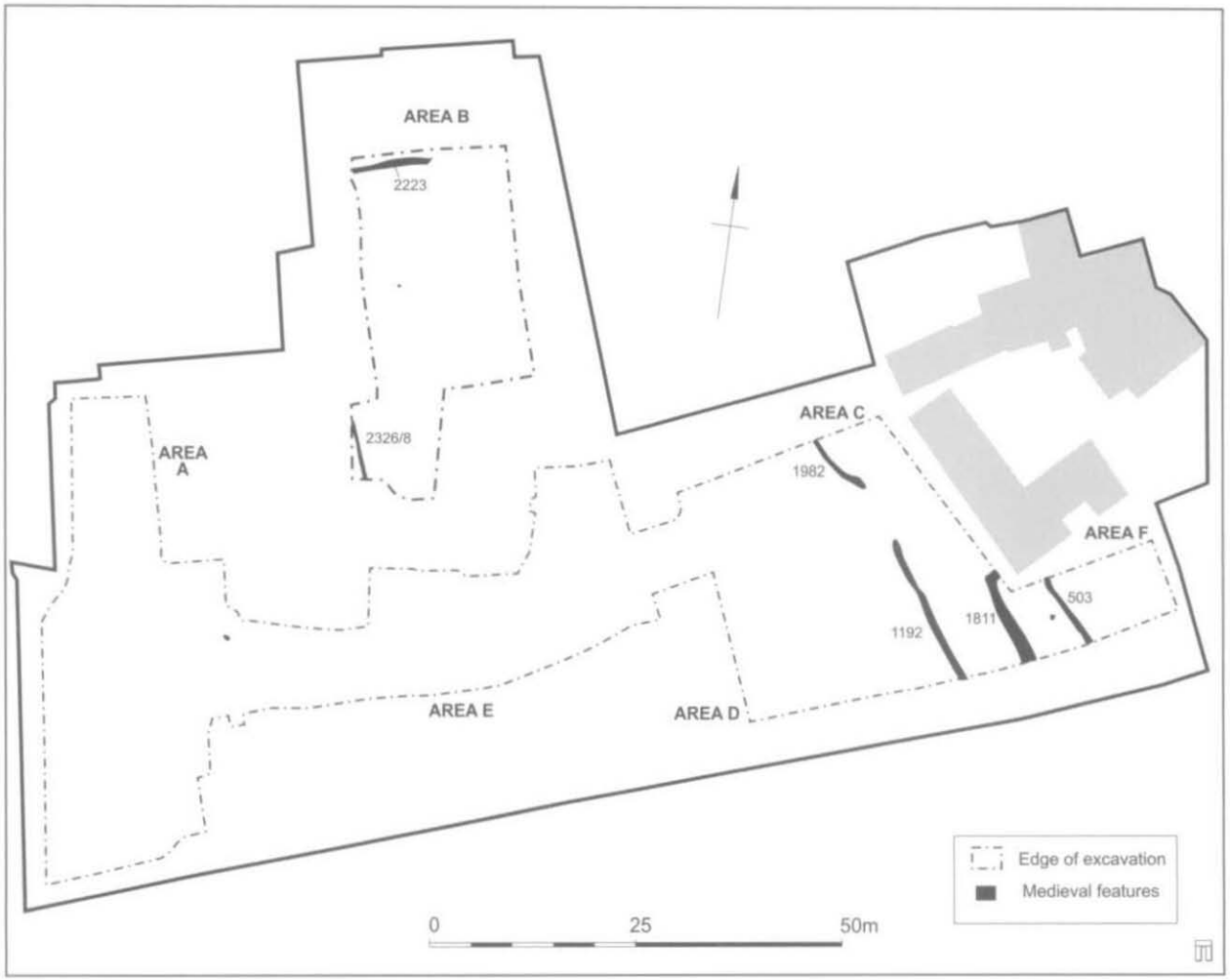

Fig. 11. Medieval features.

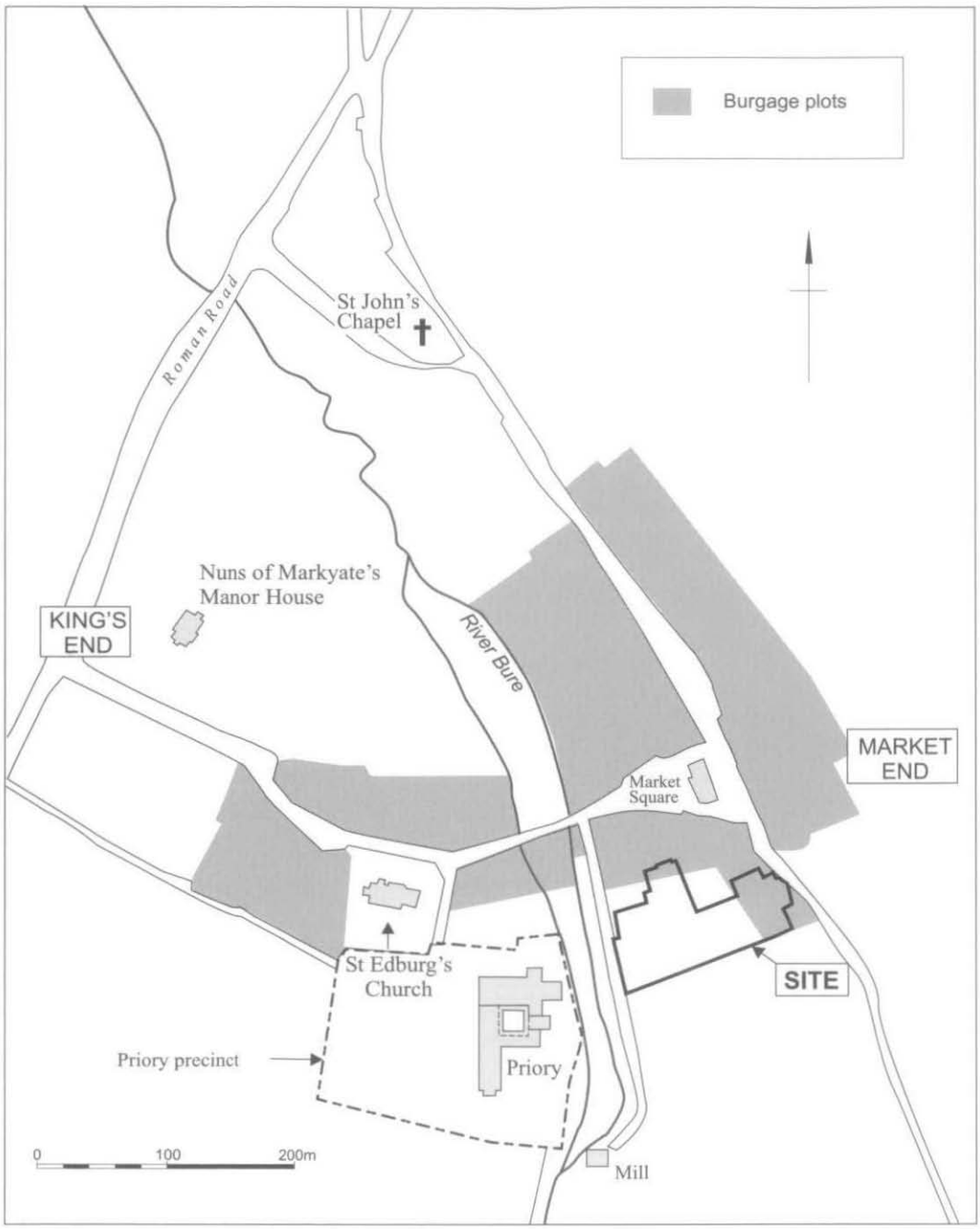

Fig. 12. Bicester: medieval topography (after K. Rodwell (ed.), *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire*, Bicester: map 2).

Fig. 13. Medieval urban settlements and monastic houses in Oxfordshire (after Rodwell, *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire*, Fig. 3).

was concentrated around the Market Square to the north of the site, as well as further west in the vicinity of St. Edburg's church. However, it remains uncertain to what extent these two areas may have been occupied by buildings in the late Saxon period, with medieval development reflecting a continuation of this earlier settlement.

The approximate extent of burgage plots and other medieval features within Bicester are shown in Fig. 12, although the excavation has suggested that the plots extended further south along London Road than is indicated on this drawing. The triangular market place is a characteristic feature of medieval urban development of the later 12th and 13th centuries, and at Bicester this lay at the heart of the most prosperous part of the town at Market End. The Augustinian priory and associated precinct, established *c.* 1180, lay opposite the site across the other side of the River Bure, with St. Edburg's church to the north. Topographic evidence suggests that the church became all but surrounded by medieval urban development, but the extent to which King's End to the west developed at this time remains unclear. Future excavation in this area is important to establish information about the medieval settlement as well as any Saxon, particularly mid-Saxon presence in what is traditionally considered to have been the earlier part of Bicester.

The growth of Bicester in the late 12th and 13th centuries reflects widespread urban development at this time as medieval trade increased. The Augustinian priory was founded next to the church between 1182 and 1185, although this was small and probably had little economic influence on the town. However, Earl William de Longspee granted a market in 1239 and a fair in 1259. Documents indicate the presence of high status properties with solars and cellars, and Market End remained prosperous until the Black Death in 1348. This event may have been the reason for the granting of a second market in 1377 and a third in 1441, and by the early 16th century the town was flourishing once again. Although Bicester was relatively small, it was an important market town which lay within 20 km. of several established urban centres and successful new towns in north-east Oxfordshire and the surrounding area. These included Oxford itself, Thame, Woodstock, Deddington, Banbury, Buckingham and Aylesbury, although there were other new towns, including three within 10 km. of Bicester, which failed to achieve any lasting success (Fig. 13).

Buildings thought to pre-date the 1700s lay to the east of the site on the London Road frontage. The presence of these buildings and numerous others within the town, though not of outstanding interest, nevertheless reflect the continued prosperity of Bicester in the post-medieval period. This was brought to an end in the early 18th century by a smallpox epidemic in 1704 and a succession of fires (in 1718, 1724 and 1730). Subsequently, the importance of the market, on which Bicester depended, declined and along with it the fortunes of the town.

Pottery by LORRAINE MEPHAM

Medieval wares (see Table 1) include Brill/Boarstall types (OXAM and OXAW), and early to late medieval east Wiltshire ware (OXAQ). A few miscellaneous sandy sherds have not been assigned to specific types. Apart from the single occurrences of east Wiltshire ware within Structure 1185 and six-post structure 2351, these wares are confined to medieval features assigned to the 12th/13th century and later, such as ditches 1192, 1811 and 1982. The post-medieval wares (see Table 1) potentially cover a date range of 16th century to modern, but most of the post-medieval features excavated are dated as 19th-/20th-century on the presence of industrial wares.

Other finds by RACHEL EVERY

A copper alloy token, issued in 1669 by William Stevens of Bicester, was recovered during the evaluation. The two other copper alloy objects are of post-medieval date and comprise a possible strip fragment and a dress fitting, perhaps a mount or tag. Similar examples have been recovered from Colchester, dating to the 15th century.[75] The majority of the iron objects are of post-medieval date, and include a shoe patten, nails and other structural items. A very small quantity of ironworking (smithing) slag was also recovered, virtually all from post-medieval contexts. A total of 90 fragments (4318 g.) of ceramic building material was recovered. The majority is of post-medieval date, but 33 fragments are Romano-British, all residual in later contexts. The only stone comprises five post-medieval slate fragments.

[75] Crummy, op. cit. note 26.

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