

Post-medieval buildings and medieval features at Adderbury House, Adderbury, 1996

by STEVEN D. G. WEAVER, with an introduction by NICHOLAS ALLEN

SUMMARY

A field evaluation carried out at Adderbury House, Adderbury, Oxfordshire, led to the discovery of post-medieval stone walls and garden features and a number of medieval ditches and pits. Subsequent excavation revealed a post-medieval settlement represented by a series of structures, one with a cellar, trackways, a boundary wall, and pits; it appears plausible that the structures found are among the 90 houses known to have been demolished for the embankment of Adderbury House. The medieval period was represented by a series of north-south and east-west aligned ditches in three of the four excavated areas.

The site lies close to the historic core of Adderbury village to the north of Adderbury House, on land previously used as allotments. It was thought that investigation might reveal deposits of late Saxon and medieval date, representing the early development of the village. Field evaluation carried out in May 1996 by Thames Valley Archaeological Services revealed areas of potential which were subsequently targeted by the excavation (Fig. 1). The fieldwork was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer. The site lies at a height of 102.72 m. above Ordnance Datum, on Marlstone Rock Bed and an orange/yellow clayey silt. The site archive has been deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service (OXCMS:1996.141).

INTRODUCTION by NICHOLAS ALLEN

On the strength of the fact that I have written a history of Adderbury¹ I have been asked to set in its historic context the report that follows; to try, perhaps, to put a human face on what went on in and around Adderbury House during the period of interest. As it so happens I also live in close proximity to the dig and as I was at that time one of the wardens to Adderbury Lakes Conservation Area I necessarily passed the dig every time I made my daily visits to The Lakes.

These excavations were incredibly complicated as the archaeologists uncovered layer upon layer of history rather like peeling an onion. In fact anyone digging with a trowel need hardly turn over a trowel full of soil before something popped out - as the locals who worked the allotments on top of all this archaeology will testify; they frequently harvested a superb crop of stones!

In the Domesday Survey (1084-86), Adderbury (a vastly larger parish then) was divided into three manors one of which was held by the bishop of Winchester. This land had been granted in 1014 to the diocese of Winchester, by Aethelstan son of Aethelred II. The Winchester manor was recorded in Domesday as having 14 hides (roughly 1,740 acres). In course of time the lease of the demesne lands of the manor, including the land that accommodated Adderbury House and estate, was held of the see of Winchester by the sequence of occupiers of Adderbury House listed below.

The first firm mention of a house on the site of what is now known as Adderbury House is in 1612 when Sir Charles Wilmot (originally from Witney), President of Connaught, later Viscount Wilmot of Athlone, took out a lease on the house with the intention of using it as a shooting box. In 1624 he had the house completely re-built (a small drawing of the house shows it to be a six gabled-bay, Jacobean house). There is also a re-set date stone of 1624 that bears witness to this piece of history.

By 1642, the start of the Civil War, Henry, Charles Wilmot's youngest and only surviving son, a very experienced cavalry officer was commissioned as a colonel in the Royalist cavalry. He became Prince

¹ N. Allen, *Adderbury, a Thousand Years of History* (Phillimore, 1995). See also *VCH Oxon.* ix, 7-9.

Rupert's second-in-command fighting with him at the Battle of Edgehill. Afterwards Henry was ennobled as Baron Wilmot of Adderbury for his services to the Royalist cause. Subsequent records show that Adderbury House was frequently used as a Royalist cavalry base during the war.

Lord Wilmot was deeply involved in the dramatic escape of Charles II after the abortive battle at Worcester in the second Civil War. Wilmot, under the assumed name of Barlow, escorted Charles disguised as his servant, minus his long hair and beard; they survived some hair-raising adventures as they criss-crossed England until Wilmot/Barlow finally got Charles to Shoreham and onto a fishing boat with a sympathetic skipper and thence into exile on the Continent. Charles, whilst in exile, created Henry Wilmot earl of Rochester for his loyal service.

Adderbury House, meanwhile, was sequestered by the Parliamentary Commissioners in 1645. Wilmot, however, never lived to enjoy his title in England as he died in 1657/8 at Sluys in Belgium; he was buried at Bruges. The Wilmots did not get their Adderbury home back until the Restoration. John, Henry's son, the notorious earl of Rochester² was a very bright young man and a favourite of Charles II; he behaved atrociously all his life, dying an alcoholic in 1680. Anne, his mother, spent a small fortune on building work on the house and garden; she called this work 'graft to the old manse'. Plot regarded Adderbury House as 'among the most eminent in the county'. John's young son, also John, survived him just by two years; the title died out. Anne, the Dowager Countess continued to live at Adderbury, outliving her husband, son and grandson. She died in 1696.

In 1717 John Campbell, 2nd duke of Argyll, took out the lease, which had reverted to the Bishop of Winchester; he too wished to use the house as a hunting lodge. His first wife had died in January of that year and in June he married Jane Warburton, maid of honour to the Princess of Wales.

He proceeded to carry out an intensive building programme over the next ten years, for he intended to make Adderbury House his principal residence. This required the purchase of substantial amounts of land: he paid £2,300 for the Adderbury manor of St Amand and £30 per acre for the land of freeholders. He employed the Hon. Charles Townshend, son of Lord Charles Townshend, an influential political friend, as his agent. Sir William Chambers, Sir James Gibbs and Roger Morris were at various times involved. Morris was called in to design and build two arcaded Palladian galleries (one of which still survives) rather in the style of Vanbrugh. Vanbrugh, of course, was responsible for nearby Blenheim Palace, home to the Duke of Marlborough.³ Campbell had been Marlborough's second-in-command during his Continental campaigns - they thoroughly disliked each other; indeed Argyll at the siege of Douai referred sarcastically to Marlborough as 'The mighty Prince of Blenheim'.

Campbell died in 1743 and it appears that by that time the construction of the house and the acquisition and emparkment of necessary land was by and large complete. Emparkment often meant the removal of whole villages, for example, at Nuneham Courtenay, Oxfordshire in 1761,⁴ Moor Criche, Dorset in 1765, Shugborough, Staffordshire, between 1723 and 1773, and at Milton Abbas where the village was demolished between 1771 and 1790 as part of a landscaping scheme by Capability Brown.⁵ It was not always necessary to relocate whole villages, but only demolish those dwellings that would spoil the vista of the landlord. The emparkment of Adderbury House involved the demolition of 90 cottages north and west of the house in the area of the Red Lion Inn. The masons must have used some of the stone from these buildings to build the very extensive estate boundary walls, as some of the stones (much of the wall still exists) one can see today are dressed in a far superior way to what is usual for a wall. Also detailed, dated, drawings exist of a variety of designs for garden buildings: James Gibbs designed a garden seat and a cascade, Roger Morris a garden building and Lancelot Brown a garden seat. There appears, however, to be no record that any of them were ever built. Richard Hewlings conjectures in his paper⁶ that if these garden buildings had been built then Adderbury House would have ranked with places like Stowe, Studley Royal and Stourhead.

² Grahame Greene, *Lord Rochester's Monkey* (1974).

³ Correlli Barnett, *The First Churchill* (1974).

⁴ M. Batey, 'Nuneham Courtney: An Oxfordshire 18th century Deserted Village', *Oxoniensia*, xxxiii (1968), 108.

⁵ D. Crossley, *Post-Medieval Archaeology in Britain* (1990), 72.

⁶ R. Hewlings, 'Adderbury House: a history of the House and Park', paper presented to a conference on The Early C18th Great Houses, Oxford, January 1996.

It is hard to establish a more exact date for these demolitions. The buildings in question appear on the map of 1735,⁷ and the land on which they stand is shown there as belonging to Campbell. They do not appear in Jeffery's map of the Banbury area dated 1767. Though nothing can be claimed as a certainty the most likely interval in which the demolitions took place is 1735–1743.

As can be imagined the demolition of 90 buildings, in the immediate vicinity of the big house, some of which would have belonged to farm and estate workers with the consequent displacement of families, must have caused much grief in the village. There is no evidence that the Duke ever had new homes built for the people he had displaced — there are no rows of estate type houses in the village, for instance, as at Nuneham Courtenay. On the other hand, as the Duke had paid what were for the time generous prices for the land he acquired we need not assume that those displaced were left destitute. Much later, after the Enclosure award of 1768, the newly arrived vicar, the Reverend Henry Blackstone, was moved to write several letters⁸ to the Duke and to the Warden of New College (owner of the rectory of Adderbury⁹ and of the extensive rectorial manor) complaining bitterly about the consequences of the Duke's actions — but to no avail. Warden Hayward was an enthusiast for enclosure and claimed that Blackstone had a 'general dislike of the practice', a dislike that may have been sharpened by the loss of lesser tithes.

After Argyll's death his wife Jane continued to run Adderbury House, assisted later by her daughter Caroline, Lady Greenwich, who married Francis, Earl of Dalkeith, son of the second Duke of Buccleuch in 1742. By most accounts the Dowager Duchess was something of an autocrat. She decided that the manorial watermill sited on the Sor Brook about a quarter of a mile south of the house spoiled her view and ordered that it be dismantled and rebuilt upstream alongside the church. She also caused the main Banbury–Oxford road to be moved away from her doorway, though other considerations may have anyway made this advisable, for, according to a report written in 1842 by Mr J. Davenport, Clerk of the Peace, 'Prior to 1766 the road crossing the Mill Stream was greatly subject to floods and often rendered totally impassable either for horses or horses and carriages'. Under the terms of the Enclosure Act of 1766 she was to maintain the new road for three years, but she died in 1767; nevertheless the bridge when built was known and is still known as Duchess Bridge.

By the time of the local Enclosure Award of 1768 Adderbury House, now very grand, was in the hands of Henry Scott, 3rd Duke of Buccleuch (Argyll's grandson); he had inherited Adderbury House in 1767 with the lease of the Manor's demesne and other adjacent land that Argyll had purchased. It was either he or his predecessor, the Dowager Duchess, who set in motion a further phase of development, including laying out the by now customary park to embellish the grand house and the enclosure of the park by an extensive wall built, as reported later, from the stones of the demolished buildings. Sir William Chambers was commissioned to continue with the house building programme,¹⁰ and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown must have been consulted about the design of the park, for there is an undated entry in Brown's workbook listing his commissions, with a drawing showing some ideas for a park at Adderbury; it included a long, narrow ornamental lake which was to be about a quarter of a mile to the east of the house. But there is no record that Brown's ideas were ever executed although there are today two small ornamental waters instead of the planned single water — as it happens the topography would never have allowed the design to be executed as one water; perhaps Brown never actually visited the site.¹¹ What is on record is that Capability Brown was working on nearby Aynhoe Park (3 miles east of Adderbury) between 1760 and 1763 landscaping the park for Thomas Cartwright; so Capability Brown would not have been too far away for consultations with the Duke.

⁷ ORO SL/30/3/M/I 1735. A very large map, drawn on two skins sewn together, labelled 'A Map of the East Side of Adderbury being the Inclosure that belongeth to his Grace John Campbell Duke of Argyle and Greenwich'. Campbell had been created Duke of Greenwich in 1719.

⁸ New College Muniments 2861, Adderbury corresp.: Letter from Rev H. Cotton, 1796.

⁹ C. Dalton, 'Adderbury and New College', a paper presented to Adderbury History Association by Caroline Dalton, Archivist of New College, Oxford, May 1990.

¹⁰ Hewlings op. cit., n. 139.

¹¹ This is now the conservation area already mentioned.

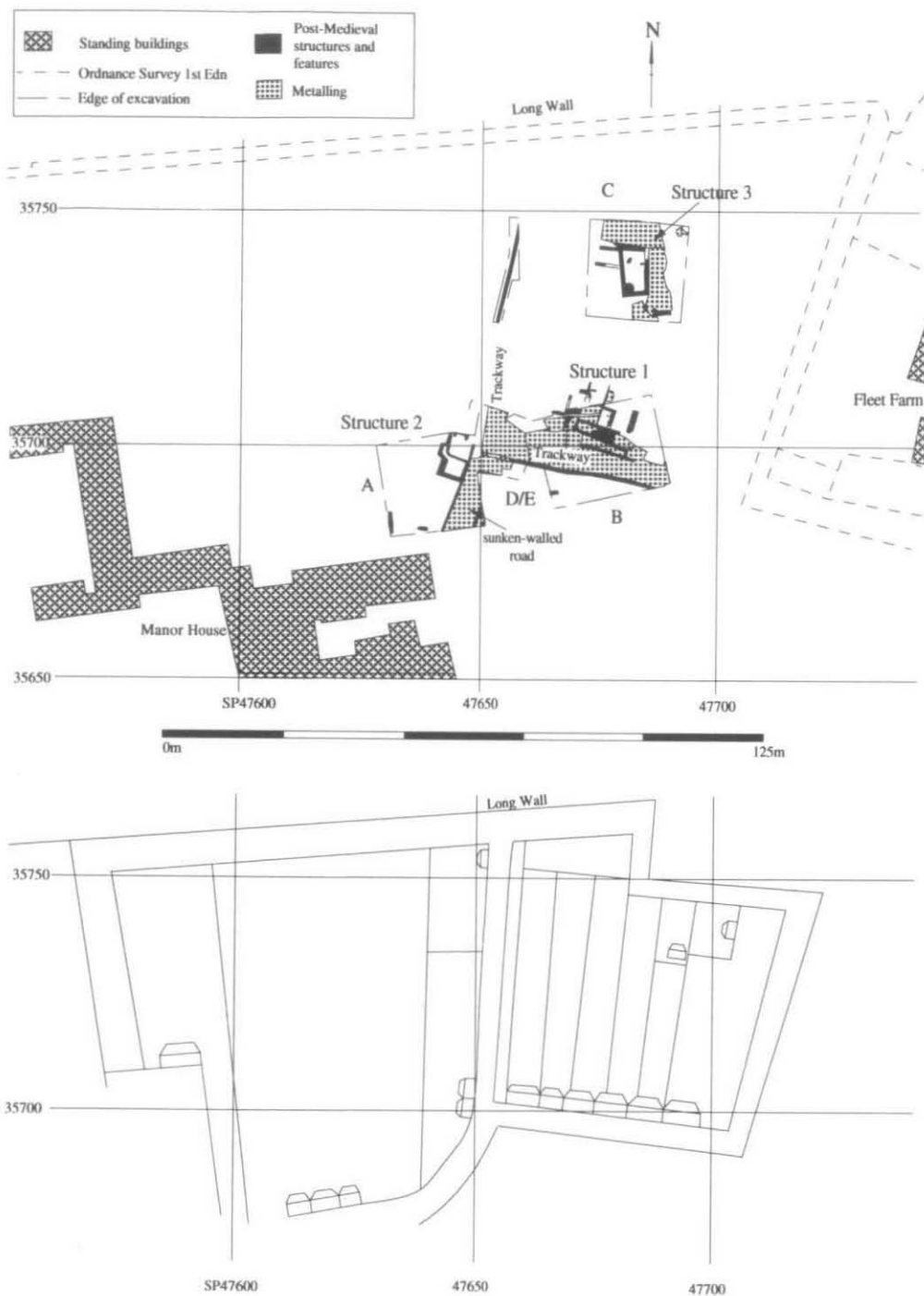


Fig. 1. Comparison of post-medieval features excavated (above) with the Manorial plan of 1735 (below).

In 1805 Adderbury House changed hands, and yet again in 1826. Then in 1891 Mr James Larnach, a wealthy country gentleman, purchased the house and estate for £22,500. Adderbury House, yet again, had the builders in – this time to re-model it to make it a more suitable residence for a country gentleman. He had the size of the house and outbuildings reduced considerably; this then is the house we see today.

THE EXCAVATION

The evaluation revealed that the site had been subject to modern disturbance from the allotments, services, engineer's test-pits, and what appeared to be quarrying in the north-west corner. Nevertheless, features recorded in the remaining trenches included medieval ditches, medieval and post-medieval pits, a series of walls, possible postholes and a metalled surface. The excavation consisted of an archaeologically supervised topsoil strip of five areas, totalling 1420 sq m. (Fig. 1). The archaeological features and deposits revealed were generally well-preserved. They consisted of a series of stone-walled structures with associated floors and hearths, a sunken-walled trackway, metalled surfaces, a stone boundary wall, a well, pits, postholes, hearths, stone drains, and ditches. The foundations were of varying depths and walls survived from one or two courses up to 0.60 m. high. The well-preserved remains of a 1.83 m. deep cellar were discovered in Area A (Fig. 2, Pl. XXIV).

The material remains from the archaeological features and deposits include pottery, animal bone, glass, clay pipe, shell, coins and metalwork, from the medieval, late medieval and post-medieval periods and residual prehistoric flints.

Prehistoric

The Prehistoric period was represented by a small number of residual struck flint flakes, dating from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age. These residual finds add little to previous evidence of prehistoric activity in the area.

Medieval

Medieval activity was characterized by a series of ditches, pits and postholes, dated ceramically to the late 13th and 14th centuries. The low yield of finds from the features, with the exception of ditch 245 (in the south-east corner of Area B), suggests that they do not relate directly to an area of occupation. The higher quantity of pottery recovered from ditch 245 may indicate that it was closer to a settlement, possibly located to the south-east of the site.

It is likely that the features of this phase relate to agricultural activity: eight ditches provided evidence of cereal cultivation including wheat, barley and oats. Medieval field systems, indicated by ridge and furrow, lie directly north of the site, and it is possible that the features recorded during the excavation were part of this system. The alignment of the ditches east-west and roughly north-south corresponds with established trackways to the north and east of the site. Intercutting of these features shows that the site was subject to more than one phase of activity.

It is interesting that the orientation of a number of the earlier medieval ditches is closely adhered to by the later post-medieval settlement pattern observed over the site.

Post-Medieval

The post-medieval phase comprised extensive deposits representing a settlement certainly in use during the 18th and 19th centuries, and which most probably had 17th-century origins. A number of cartographic and documentary sources throw further light on the nature of the archaeological features and deposits recorded.

A schematic plan attached to the Manorial record of Adderbury House documented in 1735 clearly indicates the presence of structures and trackways that correlate reasonably well with Structures 1 and 2, as well as trackways and boundaries recorded in these areas (Fig. 1). The Manorial plan correlates less well with the structures revealed in the north-eastern part of the site. However, as the plan is schematic the more westerly of the two buildings may relate to Structure 3.

The Manorial plan also shows a row of east-west aligned houses towards the south of the site which appear to be represented by the remains of the walls, floors, and drains of Structure 1. Unfortunately, due to the heavy truncation and extensive reuse of the site, it was not possible to define any single dwelling amongst the 'Structure 1' deposits.

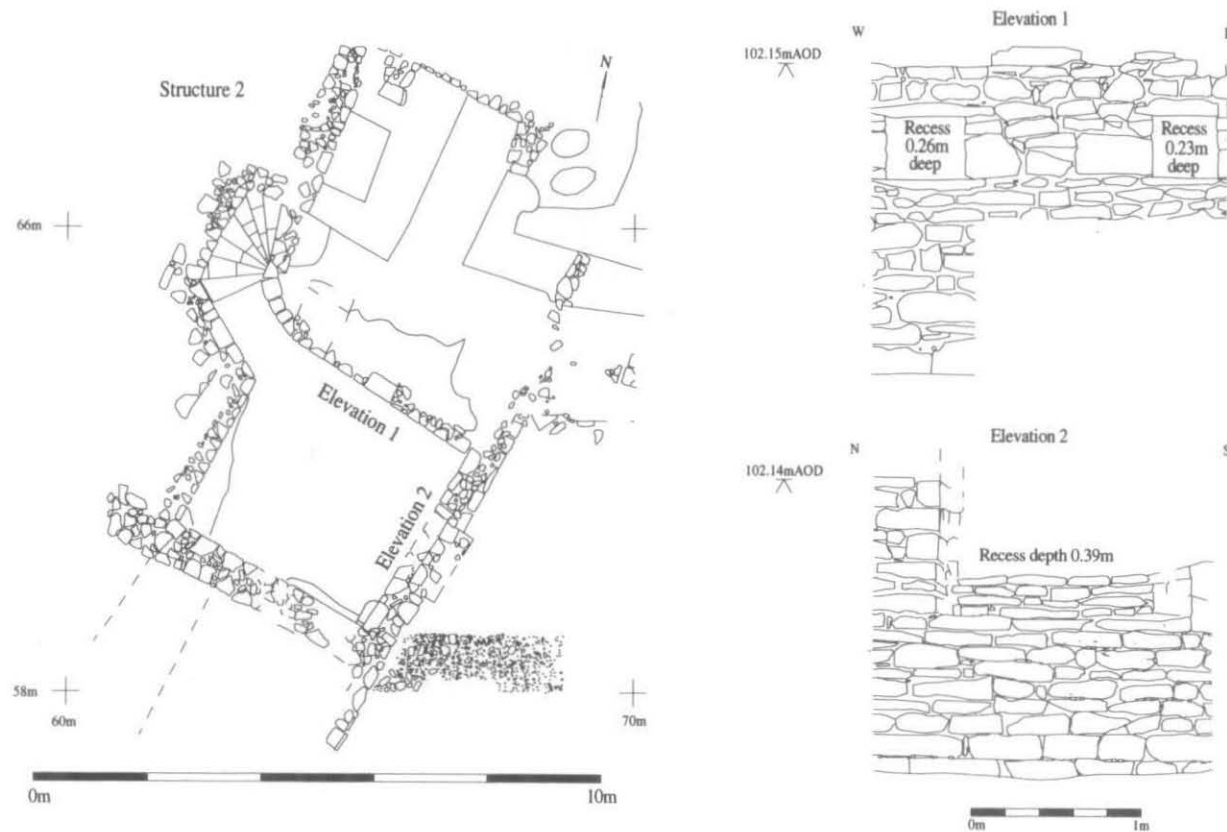


Fig. 2. Plan and sections of Structure 2.

The row of cottages aligned along an east-west trackway is most likely represented by the metalling and boundary wall found to the south of Structure 1 (Fig. 1). A north-south trackway and two structures against its western edge also recorded on the Manorial plan appear to relate to the excavated sunken-walled road and Structure 2 (Fig. 1).

The close correlation between the 1735 plan and post-medieval deposits suggests that the site was occupied by several structures linked by a series of walled trackways within the grounds of Adderbury House. The cottages were most likely inhabited by a number of tenants, who may have served as labourers or servants in the employ of the owner.

Structure 1 may have originated as a post-built structure but this was replaced by one which consisted of walls based upon a series of deep foundation cuts, constructed with uncoursed, dressed and undressed, marlstone blocks, most of which had been robbed away. The walls were one to two courses high, except one which consisted of a single row of marlstone and bricks and may have been a less substantial internal dividing wall. Sections of chalk floors and a stone hearth also remained. It was butted by several metalled surfaces. Two stone-lined and stone-capped drains orientated NNE-SSW served this building. A well-constructed pathway south of Structure 1 had been lined with large upright slabs of marlstone, the space between which was then filled in and a herringbone patterned metalled surface laid on top.

Structure 2 consisted of a stone cellar with a spiral staircase leading down from an above-ground structure. Construction of the southern and western cellar walls incorporated large stone blocks and incorporated three recesses, probably for lamps. The spiral staircase was constructed of large dressed stone blocks. A second access point to the cellar was a delivery chute. The above-ground structure was represented by partial remains of foundations, with no floor surfaces, hearths or upper walls surviving, and its northern extent is not known due to the limited area of excavation and truncation by later features. Demolition deposits within the cellar produced a small number of 18th- and 19th-century pottery sherds and a modest quantity of undecorated wall/roof plaster, window lead and glass fragments, possibly suggesting a structure of reasonable status.

Associated with Structure 2 was a sunken road, constructed using a mix of large stone slabs and metalling, 0.40 m. deep, laid directly onto the reduced natural surface. The surface of the trackway was heavily grooved, but it was unclear whether these were wheel ruts, or caused by running water. Pottery recovered from the surface of the earliest metalling would appear to suggest a 17th- to mid-18th-century date for the initial trackway which seems to have fallen out of use sometime in the later 18th or 19th century.

Structure 3 consisted of walls constructed of random coursed and uncoursed marlstone up to five courses high, bonded by a clay silt. Four of the walls formed a roughly rectangular structure with a small extension to the west. No evidence of flooring survived but a possible hearth lay within the north-west corner. Again metalled surfaces were laid around most of the exterior.

A single-coursed, stone-walled, marlstone-paved pathway corresponds with a boundary shown on the 1735 Manorial record plan and may represent an entrance to the site.

At a later period it would appear that the north-south trackway, and probably also the east-west trackway, fell out of use when the original boundary wall was extended westward over the roadway and then turned north (not shown on plans).

Pottery recovered from a number of features and deposits indicates that the settlement was still in use in the 18th and 19th centuries. Davis' map of 1790 (not illustrated) shows buildings to the east of the excavated areas along the lane between the site and Fleet Farm. It also shows a north-south boundary along the same alignment as the earlier trackway. Inaccuracies within the cartographic evidence must be taken into account, as Davis appears to indicate that Adderbury House was situated to the west of the excavated area, rather than to the south. It is possible, therefore, that structures found during the excavation represent those on Davis' map.

Later cartographic sources such as the First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1881 (Fig. 3) and the Second Edition of 1900 show no structures within the excavated area. One possible explanation for the lack of buildings on later maps is that they were demolished as part of the emparkment, at some time between 1768 and 1796. The later north-south boundary wall may be the boundary between Davis' proposed location of Adderbury House and a group of buildings to the east. Later post-medieval activity on the site was represented by a series of rubbish pits aligned along, and to the north and east of, the boundary wall, and the incorporation of a hearth within the wall. The pits contained large



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Fig. 3. Detail from First edition OS map of Adderbury, 1881

quantities of mostly 18th- to 19th-century pottery. As mentioned above, Davis' map shows structures present on the eastern edge of the development, where there was evidence of disturbance of the archaeological deposits. It may be that the pits and hearth relate to activity at the ends of land plots which formed the back gardens/yards of buildings aligned along the southern edge of the site. However, likely inaccuracies in Davis' map must be taken into account.¹²

The rubbish pits fell out of use when the later boundary wall was demolished. The exact date of this demolition could not be ascertained during the excavation, although it must have occurred before 1881 as no boundary wall is indicated on the First Edition or Second Edition Ordnance Survey maps. If further buildings were also present along the eastern boundary of the site, these too had gone by 1881.

The house and surrounding estate were occupied in the 1940s by the War Office, who erected temporary huts within the grounds and billeted a number of British and American regiments. Testament to the site's occupation by military forces was the recovery of a live mortar shell during construction work on the site. Most recently the site was used as an allotment. Although this caused some damage to subsoil features, especially to the eastern half of Area B and the western half of Area A, preservation of the archaeological deposits was generally good.

¹² [Note by Nick Allen] Davis' map is marred by a number of errors, perhaps the most serious being the complete omission of Broughton Castle. It may be that the structures mentioned here arise from careless redrawing of an earlier map, but their absence from Jeffery's generally reliable map makes it unlikely, in our view, that they depict the buildings excavated.



Plate XXIV. Cellar with stairs as in fig. 2 on p. 418. Photograph by Nick Allen. [Adderbury p. 417]



Plate XXV. Port Meadow Boat Trench 1 from north: timber sampling by English Heritage specialist staff. Behind are the modern moorings that may be affecting flow. [Durham p. 435]

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