

Report on Excavations at Sedgeford, Norfolk 1996

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Part I: The Excavation of a Late Anglo-Saxon Christian Cemetery, Sedgeford

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Introduction

Excavations were undertaken as part of the ongoing work of the Sedgeford Hall Archaeological Research Project, which was set up in 1995 with the aim of investigating the archaeological history of the parish of Sedgeford, west Norfolk. Ultimately, as much as possible of the archaeological record in and around Sedgeford, as noted on the SMR, will be investigated, the project having a long remit of at least ten years. The programme for the first season was designed to include the investigation of the cemetery (already partially excavated in the 1950's), the sampling of some other centrally located sites and initiating the construction of environmental and historical frameworks for the area. Some of this work, such as that on the church, was dictated by 'rescue' considerations as a result of imminent reconstruction work.

Thus the 1996 summer season included open area excavation on the cemetery site and trial trenching in an area known to have been used as a medieval reed-bed (See Fig. 1). Further excavation was undertaken in an area adjacent to the site of a medieval manor, and an extensive programme of environmental test-pitting, church survey, fieldwalking, and archival research was also conducted. This campaign was generously supported by Dr. and Mrs. B. G. Campbell, the owners of Sedgeford Hall; Mrs. J. Hammond; Mr. T. Snelling; the Gordon Childe Fund; the Roman Research Trust; Anglian Water; the villagers of Sedgeford and the volunteers who took part. This report could not have been completed without the work of the rest of the project staff, particularly Sue Fielding, Jo Dullaghan, Peter Inker and Tim Haines.

Archaeological Background

Sedgeford (TF 705 365) is a small village (population c.500) which lies about 15km north-north-west of Kings Lynn, close to Hunstanton, Heacham, Snettisham and the Wash, all of which lie a short distance to the west. The Sedgeford Hall Estate comprises approximately 1500 hectares lying to the south of the village, divided between Glover's farm to the east and West Hall farm to the west. The bulk of the land consists of chalk downland, which rises to a maximum 65m O.D. towards the southern edge of the estate. To the north and north east, the land dips down to the Heacham valley, approximately 15m O.D. at Sedgeford, where the subsoils consist of gravels, sands, silts and peats; the land is presently used as pasture and woodland.

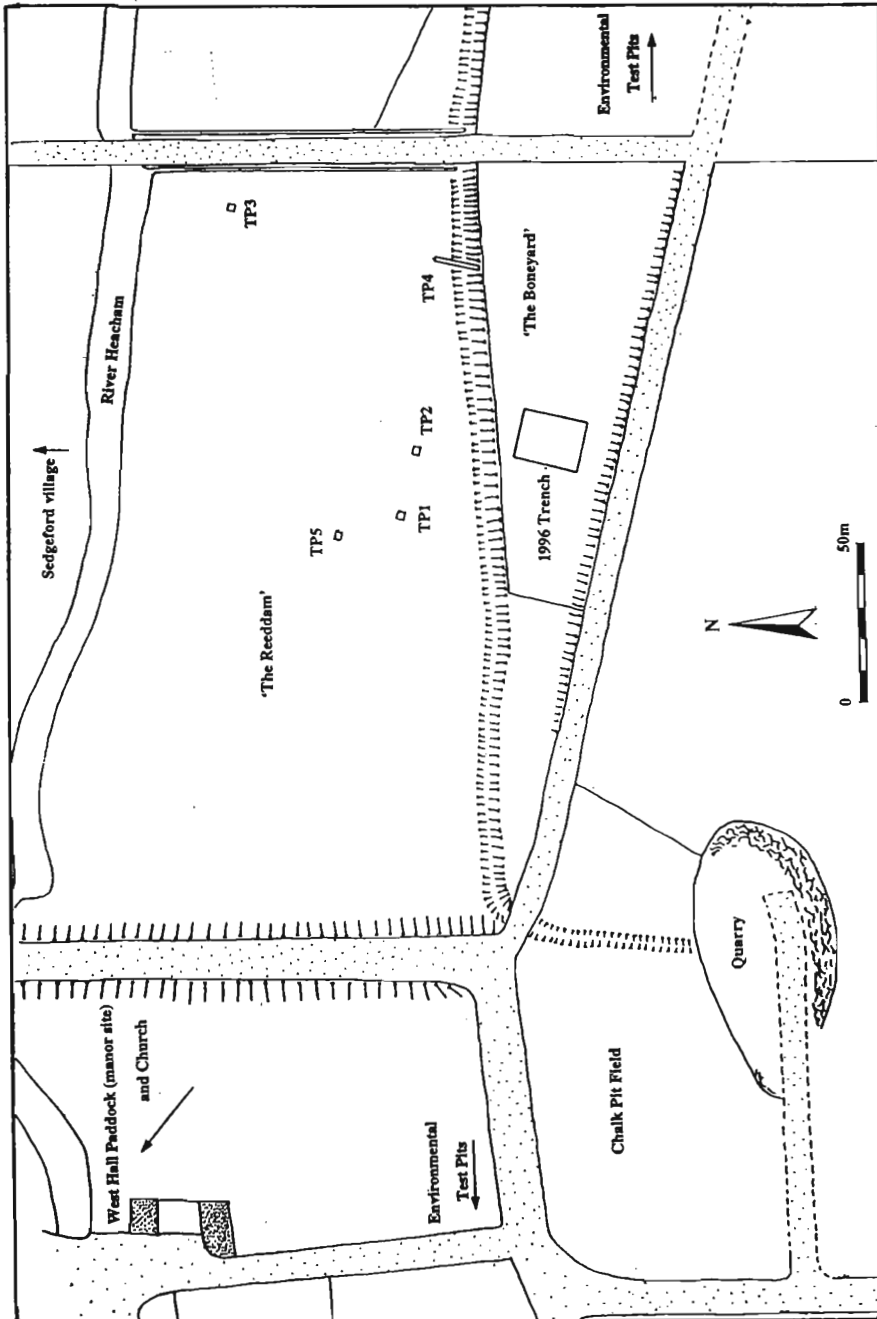


Figure 1 Location plan of the excavations described in this report, just to the south of the centre of Sedgeford village

The cemetery site lies to the south of the River Heacham, on a steep north-facing slope of the valley, immediately above 'the Reeddam'. Although the field is currently used as pasture, it was deep-ploughed as recently as the 1960's. The underlying sub-soils are sands and gravels, the interface of which lies directly within the excavation area. Ploughing and colluvial action have created considerably greater depths of deposits further down the slope, with glacial till being left exposed at the top. The discovery of some of the skeletal remains in colluvial deposits suggests that soil movement occurred prior to the cemetery's foundation. The field is bordered to the north and west by a marshy area which, until recently, contained poplar trees. The southern boundary is formed by a little used road, which cartographic evidence suggests was in use by the late medieval period (LeStrange Estate Map 1546). The eastern boundary, meanwhile, comprises woodland. The presence of the road has led to the formation of positive and negative lynchets on either side, and circumstantial evidence suggests that this route was in use as far back as the Late Anglo-Saxon period. The shape of the field seems to have changed little over the 450 years since the drawing up of the 1546 LeStrange estate map.

The field is known to local farm labourers as 'the Boneyard', because of the quantity of human remains turned up by ploughing. Such discoveries, combined with the threat of proposed deep ploughing, led to excavations on the site by the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works in 1957-8. Trial-trenching in 1957 revealed evidence of occupation debris, gullies, and human remains. The excavations, carried out by Dr. P. A. Jewell (Jewell 1958(a)), suggested that some form of settlement lay to the west of the field, and that an inhumation cemetery lay to the east. Jewell's excavations focused mainly on the area interpreted as a settlement, and these excavations uncovered two phases of gullies and areas of possible flint cobbling and burnt daub. The daub overlay a narrow ditch, which was interpreted as a foundation trench for a structure. It was suggested that this feature represented a building, as it appeared to have an entrance, flanked by possible post-holes, and a right-angled corner. This structure had an east-west axis and would appear to have been at least fifty feet in length. There was no evidence for a southern or western limit, and the interpretation of the remains as those of a building cannot be considered proven. The pottery associated with this feature suggests a Late Anglo-Saxon date (Wade in Jewell 1958(a)). This feature overlay a series of other, less coherent gullies, which contained pottery of broadly Mid- to Late Anglo-Saxon date.

Less substantial excavations to the east uncovered further evidence for the inhumation cemetery. A trench close to the main excavation revealed a number of inhumations laid west-east, with those to the south (upslope) being badly plough-disturbed. Another 10ft x 10ft trench was opened up approximately 100ft further to the east. This revealed a greater density of inhumations (12 in this area). In total, some 25 skeletons were uncovered. There was evidence in only one case for the presence of a coffin (identified through the presence of coffin brackets and nails). The only grave find was a broken stone adze placed on the pelvis of skeleton 8. The skeletons were generally placed in an extended supine position, with their hands commonly placed at the sides of the body or on the pelvis. All the skeletons had a common alignment, with the feet generally pointing 20° south of true east. These

skeletons were originally thought by Dr Jewell to date to the Middle Anglo-Saxon period (1958(a)), but subsequent study of the pottery associated with a number of these skeletons by Keith Wade suggested that these could not be earlier than Late Anglo-Saxon in date (in Jewell 1958(a)). Where skeletons were associated with pottery, it was generally of Thetford or Thetford-type ware. The lack of significant quantities of medieval wares suggests that these are indeed Late Anglo-Saxon Christian inhumations. There were further excavations on the site of the cemetery by Dr D. Brothwell in 1960, but the records for these have yet to be found.

The 1996 excavations

A 20m x 15m trench was opened between the two areas of known inhumations, with the aims of further investigating (and ultimately clearing) the cemetery, as well as exploring any continuation of Jewell's 'settlement' features. In addition to uncovering part of the cemetery, the excavations revealed a complex series of ditches, gullies and pits dating from the Middle Anglo-Saxon to Medieval periods.

The turf and topsoils were all removed by hand. The topsoil consisted of two layers, (0001) and (0002); a turf/root-disturbed upper context and a cleaner lower context, both of which contained significant quantities of Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon pottery. The presence of the former in such large quantities originally suggested the existence of potentially important Middle Anglo-Saxon evidence, but given the limited number of Middle Anglo-Saxon features identified, it seems likely that this pottery was redeposited from further upslope as the result of colluvial action. This interpretation is supported by the preliminary results of fieldwalking to the south of the road, where significant quantities of Middle Anglo-Saxon pottery have also been recovered, and where excavations in 1991 by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit revealed a Middle Anglo-Saxon kiln/oven (Bates 1991). This would seem to suggest that the road to the south of the site post-dates the Middle Anglo-Saxon period. In addition, as part of the trench intersected the site of one of Jewell's 1950's spoil dumps, subsequently ploughed out, some of the topsoil pottery may derive from this.

Beneath these contexts lay plough-disturbed layers, including the upper levels of the glacial gravels at the summit of the hill (0003), and a deeper, colluvial deposit (0004) further down the slope. Removal of these layers revealed a series of clear, regularly-spaced, narrow linear features, interpreted as ploughmarks. These, in turn, overlay the deposits into which many of the other archaeological features were cut, principally the glacial gravel (0007) and further colluvium (0016). The natural subsoils, in addition to (0007), were a clean sand (0006), and an orange sandy deposit (0057) overlying a looser gravel (0094); only a limited proportion of the site was cleared down to these layers.

The colluvial layers (0004) and (0016) were not encountered on the upper part of the slope, to the south, where plough damage extended as deep as the natural gravels, but occurred increasingly deeper further down the slope. Layer (0016), although originally identified as homogenous, in fact consisted of an upper and a lower colluvial layer, with the lower deposit predating the cemetery, and the latter sealing the same. This seems to indicate that after the cemetery fell out of use, the

field was used for agriculture and there was a secondary build up of colluvial deposits which destroyed the evidence for many of the grave cuts (some of the grave cuts were only identified just above the level of the bodies themselves). The upper layer (of 0016) contained further evidence for the post-cemetery use of the field in the form of disarticulated human remains, presumably attributable to plough disturbed inhumations (there is only limited evidence for intercutting inhumations).

Although there are significant colluvial deposits at the site, the good state of preservation of the majority of the skeletons suggests that agriculture was not intensively practised - given the poor nature of the soils, the steepness of the slope and the relatively shallow post-cemetery colluvium, it seems unlikely that the field was particularly agriculturally viable, and this factor may have influenced the choice of the field as the site of a cemetery. Both colluvial layers contained significant quantities of Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon pottery.

The archaeological features have been divided into three broad phases of activity on the basis of ceramic associations and stratigraphic relationships, and these have been sub-divided where indicated. The descriptions are accompanied by a phased sequence of plans of the 15m x 20m excavated area.

Middle Anglo-Saxon Features (Fig. 2)

Preliminary analysis suggests that there are at least three phases of Middle Anglo-Saxon features. The earliest is a shallow north-south gully, [0095], truncated to the extent that the shape of the cut was not preserved in the trench. The second consists of three narrow gullies, [0022], [0024] and [0027], running roughly parallel in a north-easterly direction, two of which truncate the earlier feature. The latest feature is a large 'V' shaped ditch, aligned NW-SE which cuts all of the earlier gullies, [0044]. This exceeds 1.4m in depth, although it has probably been truncated by later ploughing. The ditch was cut along the interface between the natural glacial gravels and sands, and seems to have been backfilled deliberately with earth, gravel and rammed yellow clay.

Two rubbish pits were found, the larger of which is likely to be the latest. This latter contained a considerable quantity of pottery and animal bone, as well as an unusual artefact - the upper half of a high quality Ipswich Ware flagon (A. Rogerson, pers. comm.) (0081), clearly deliberately placed with some care. This vessel had been used as part of a container *in situ*, after its initial breakage, with a base and sides made up with raw clay. Within this makeshift container were two distinct burnt deposits, although the clay packed around the pottery showed no signs of exposure to heat. These deposits await analysis, leaving the feature difficult to interpret at the present time - whether or not it is a cremation deposit has yet to be confirmed.

There is little evidence therefore to suggest that, prior to the Late Anglo-Saxon cemetery, there was any significant use of the excavated area, although it seems likely that there was more intensive activity in the vicinity. The gullies are likely to be drainage features, and the substantial ditch (to be the subject of further exploration in the forthcoming season) is probably a boundary feature. The Ipswich

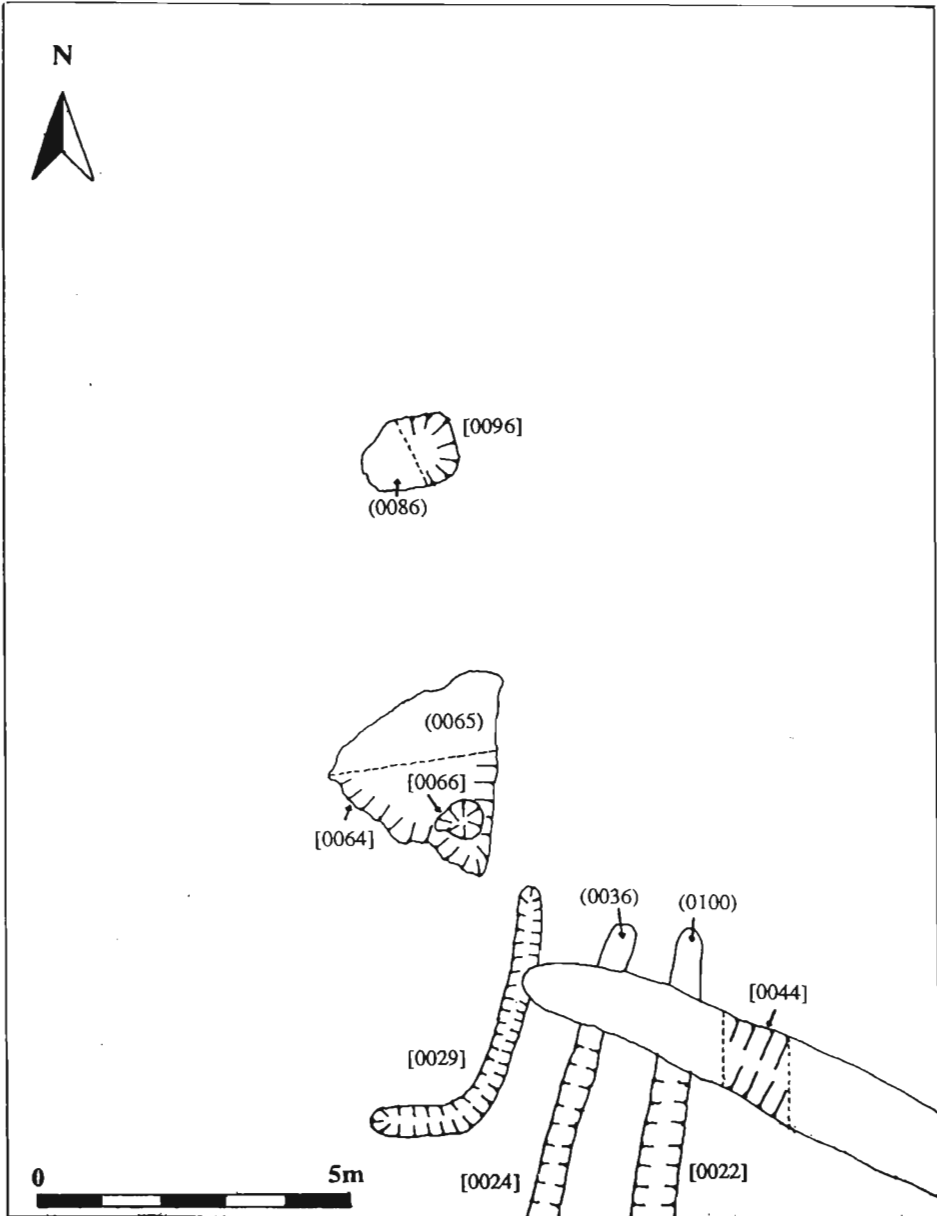


Figure 2 'Boneyard': Plan of phase I features: Middle Anglo-Saxon

flagon feature is unusual and, if it can be shown to contain cremated bone, could represent the first deposition of human remains on the site.

Late Anglo-Saxon / Saxo-Norman features (Fig. 3)

Excavations in the western half of the site uncovered a portion of the cemetery. This appeared to be bounded by a shallow gully running W-E across the site. In all, 19 skeletons were uncovered, with 15 being fully excavated. All of these lay west-east, in a supine position, with the hands commonly placed on the pelvis. The skeletons towards the south, higher up the slope, had suffered from extensive plough damage. The graves were all cut into the top of layer (0057), the natural orange sub-soil, or (0016B), the lower colluvium. The grave cuts were often difficult to identify given the nature of the surrounding matrix. The density of inhumations was greater further down the slope, and in two cases, one inhumation truncated an earlier one (so that (S0012) cuts (S0013), and (S0015) cuts (S0016)). The disturbed bones of the left-hand side and legs of one individual, (S0013), were respectfully placed along the edges of the later grave cut, possibly around the edges of a wooden coffin. Two of the skeletons seemed to have been buried in coffins - identified through the presence of coffin nails ((S0002) and (S0012)). None of the coffins were identified by wood stains and it is possible that some wooden coffins were jointed rather than nailed, leaving no traces. The difficulty in identifying the grave cuts often made the direct association of finds with skeletons difficult, but oyster shells (found in abundance over the whole site) and a small quantity of pottery were the only classes of artefact recovered from the burials. In one case, oyster shells were directly intermingled with the bones (S0003). Where pottery was found with the inhumations, it was always in the form of relatively small sherds (see Table 1). Five small pits were also dated to this period, two of which were associated with the boundary gully, and one cut into the fill of the Middle Saxon ditch.

Table 1. Catalogue of burials excavated at Sedgeford, 1996 (after initial ceramic spot dating, but currently without sex/age data).

Grave	Align-ment	Coffin	Stratigraphy	Associated remains & comments
1	?			Not fully excavated
2	W-E	x		11 sherds of pottery, ranging in date from Middle Saxon to Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman. Skull & upper torso badly plough damaged.
3	W-E			Large amounts of oyster shell in and around the body.
4	W-E			No major finds
5	?W-E			Lower left leg survives. Badly plough damaged.
6	W-E			6 sherds of pottery, ranging in date from Middle Saxon to Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman.
7	W-E			5 sherds of pottery, ranging in date from Middle Saxon to Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman.

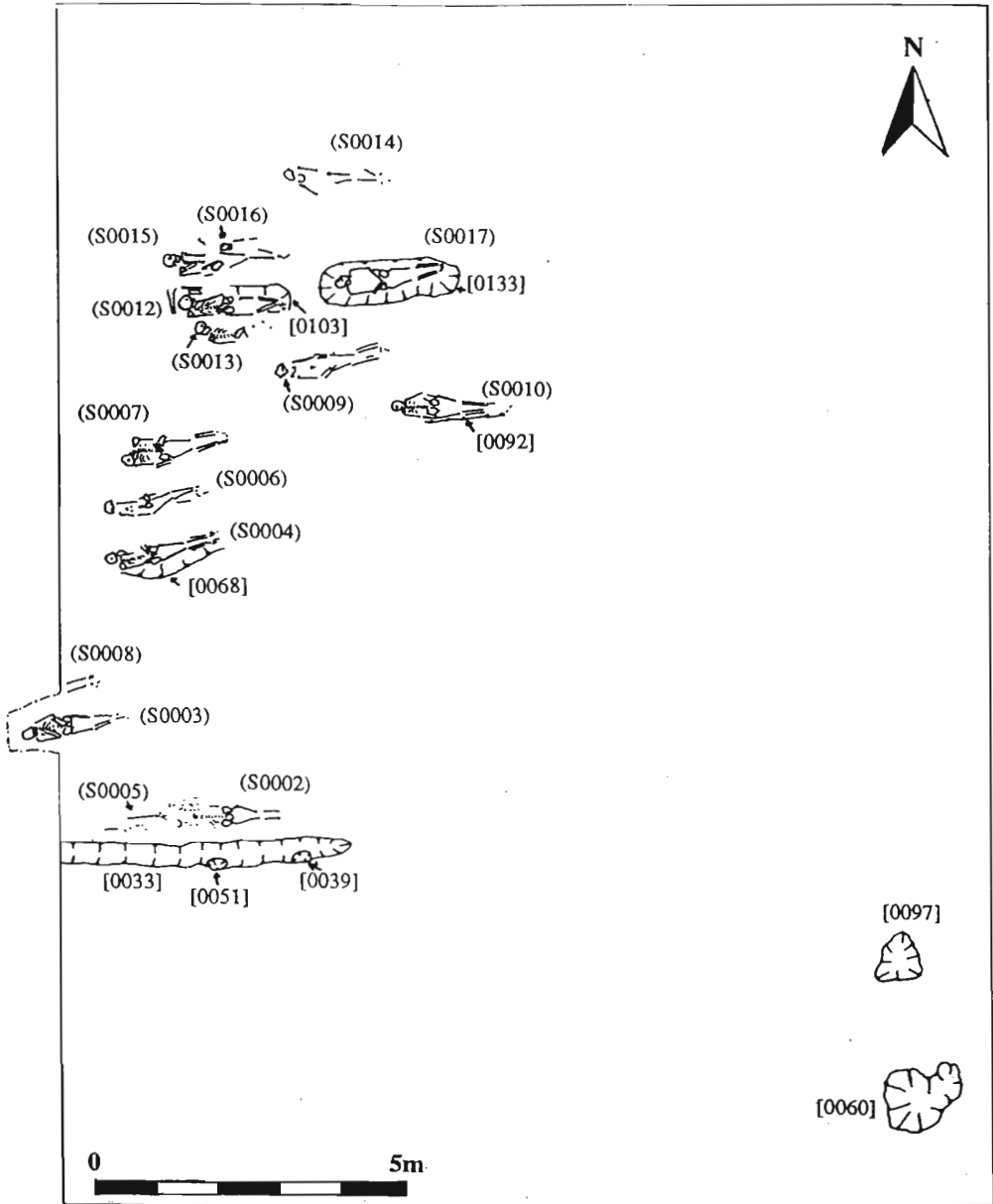


Figure 3 'Boneyard': Plan of phase II features: Late Anglo-Saxon/Saxo-Norman

8	W-E			Not fully excavated. Plough damaged. 7 sherds of pottery, ranging in date from Middle Saxon to Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman.
9	W-E			Poorly preserved. 10 sherds of pottery, ranging in date from Middle Saxon to Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman.
10	W-E			1 sherd of Middle Saxon pottery.
11	W-E			Unexcavated
12	W-E	x	Cuts 13	4 sherds of pottery, ranging in date from Middle Saxon to Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman .
13	W-E		Cut by 12	Lower limbs disturbed by burial 12.
14	W-E			Very poorly preserved. 6 sherds of pottery, ranging in date from Middle Saxon to Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman.
15	W-E		Cuts 16	1 sherd of pottery, of uncertain date.
16	W-E		Cut by 15	Very poorly preserved body of child.
17	W-E			Poorly preserved. Oyster shells associated with the burial.
18	W-E			Unexcavated
19	W-E			Unexcavated

Medieval features (Figs. 4 & 5)

The dominant feature of this period is a large north-south ditch. This begins at the southern edge of the site as two shallow gullies, which seemingly coalesce into the much broader, deeper ditch. This feature may be associated with the southern ditch of 'the Reeddam', which it appears to join. This ditch clearly cut through the cemetery, as its fill contained disturbed human remains, including two skulls. The ditch appears to have been deliberately backfilled. The fill of this ditch was then cut by a stone-packed gully (possibly a foundation trench or field drain), which was, in turn, cut by a narrow east-west gully. The only other feature of this period is a small pit.

The latest feature on the site, as noted above, is an insubstantial stone-packed feature dug into the fill of the large medieval north-south ditch. This runs north-south, and appears to be associated with a short stretch of a similar feature which runs west-east, and to which it may have been joined. The excavated length of the latter is too short to ascertain whether or not it forms part of the same feature. Certainly it is similar in form and profile. These features may represent foundation trenches for some form of structure, perhaps suggested by the stone packing, which makes it less likely that they were robber trenches, though this is still possible. The structure (if so interpreted) is built on the flattest area at the top of the field - where the anti-lynchet formed to the north of the road has created a break in the slope. It is impossible at this stage to date this structure closely as the pottery from the fill is clearly residual, but it clearly post-dates the cemetery by a considerable period of

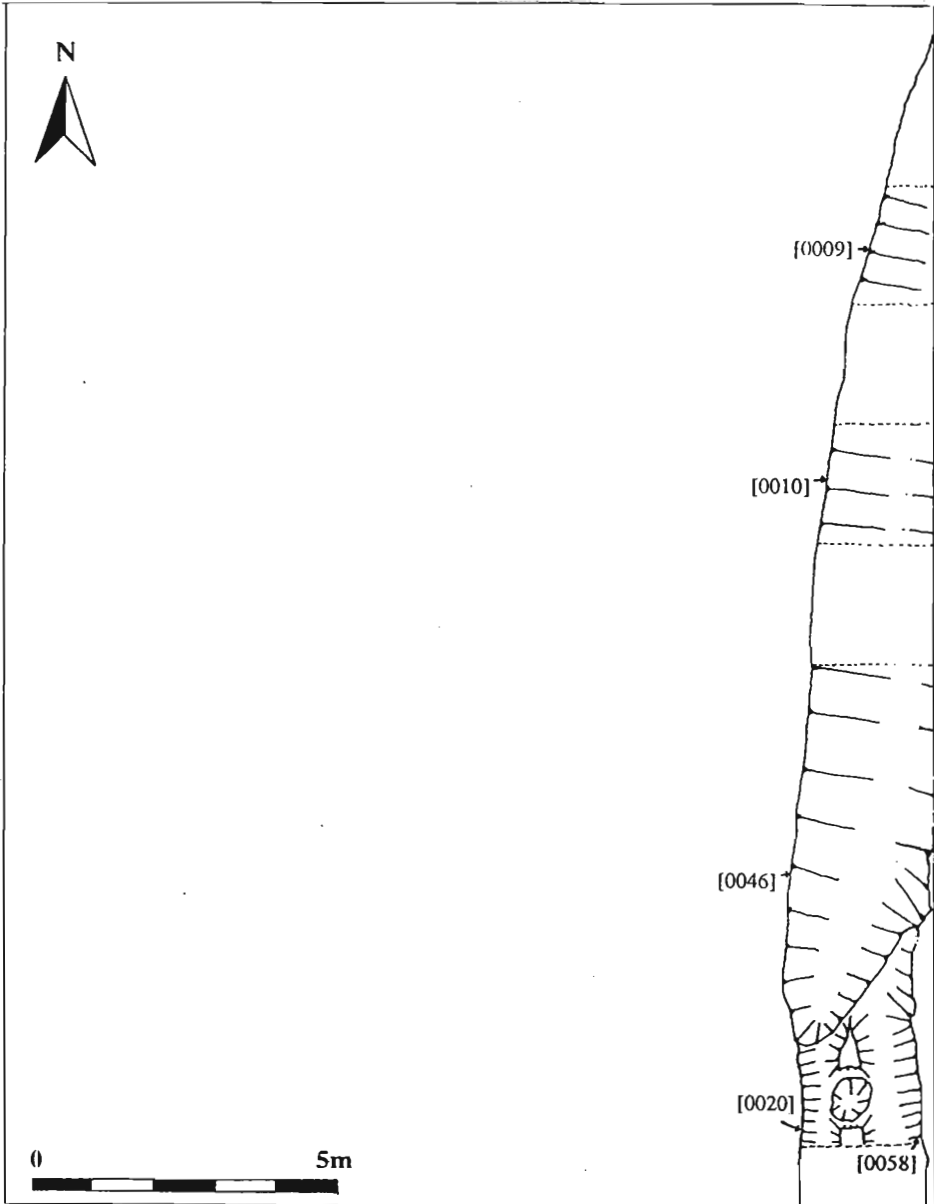


Figure 4 'Boneyard': Plan of phase III features: Medieval

time and also post-dates the north-south ditch, which seems likely to be associated with the creation of the water control systems for 'the Reeddam' to the north. If this ditch does indeed belong to this period of land development (which may be that referred to in the manorial rolls of 1278-9), then the structure clearly post-dates the

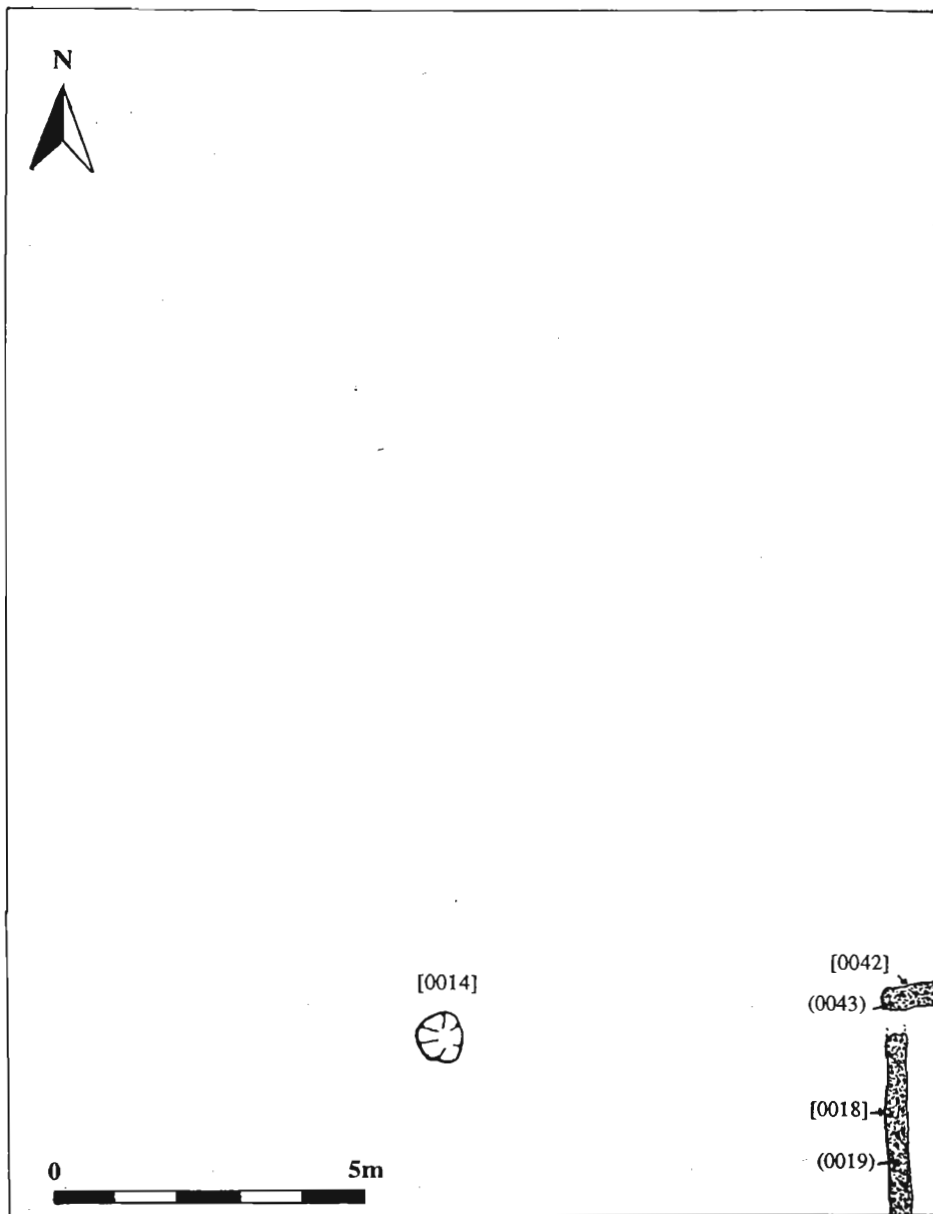


Figure 5 'Boneyard': Plan of latest phase III features: possibly Medieval

same. There is no better evidence so far to suggest a closer date for the structure, with the artefacts recovered failing to suggest either date or function.

General Conclusions

The earliest activity on the site appears to be Middle Anglo-Saxon, consisting of features that may be related to a nearby settlement site. The most significant of these would appear to be the large boundary ditch. The main concentrations of features belong to the Late Anglo-Saxon period, and confirm this as the date of the cemetery found by Jewell. It is interesting to note that the cemetery is on the other side of the river to the parish church, which lies to the north-west. The present church of St. Mary the Virgin has a round flint tower and is likely to date to the Late Anglo-Saxon/Early Norman period. This would suggest that there may have been a period of overlap between use of the 'Boneyard' cemetery site and use of the church. It may be that 'the Boneyard' represents the burial ground for another church, which may lie within the field. As yet it is difficult to establish whether the two areas of religious focus are contemporary or whether the religious focus of the population moved across the river.

Norfolk is notable for having many instances where the preclusiveness of parish boundaries is not maintained, and in several cases two separate parish churches share the same churchyard. This trend developed particularly during the 11th century, and many of the new churches of this period are dedicated to St. Mary (Warner 1986). Clearly this 'shared churchyard' phenomenon is not quite reflected here, but nonetheless it would not be surprising if an unusual pattern was being followed, even though the parish boundaries do not run near 'the Boneyard'. Until further research is carried out (particularly regarding the location of any 'second church'), there can be little certainty in the matter.

After the cemetery fell out of use, activity on the excavated area was limited and predominantly agricultural. The major features are the large north-south ditch and the possible Medieval structure.

In terms of the project's objectives, it was a successful season. As well as locating the cemetery recorded in Jewell's excavations (which will now be subject to full excavation in following years), several other features were located which, with further investigation, should clarify the site's history in greater detail. The work carried out, in conjunction with the topsoil ceramics and fieldwalking data, suggests phases of activity that both pre- and post-date the cemetery, and although the same may not centre upon the excavated area, they would certainly seem to have left their mark upon it. Excavations in 1997 will be concentrated in two major areas: the further investigation of the cemetery, dealing primarily with the unexcavated portions of the 1996 trench; and the full excavation of the two large ditches. This will probably involve extending the trench to the north to ascertain any relationship between the north-south ditch and 'the Reeddam' and also to explore the northern limits of the cemetery.

Part II: An Archaeological Investigation in the area of 'The Reeddam', Sedgeford

G. Thomas

Historical and Archaeological Background

The area of the so-called 'Reeddam' occupies a valley-bottom. It is bounded to the west by the road-topped causeway just east of West Hall; to the east, by a north-south trackway leading to a bridging of the river; to the north, by the current course of the river (which runs from Fring to Heacham); and to the south, by a ditch which follows the northern fenceline of the valley-side field called 'the Boneyard'.

The naturally damp, waterlogged conditions of this area in the margins of the river were exploited in the medieval period as a combined fish-pond and reed-growing area, referred to as the '*stagnum*' in contemporary documentary sources (Manor Account Roll for 1278-9¹). These references relate to the regular cleaning and upkeep of 'the Reeddam' which provided an important economic resource in the form of reed for thatch (see Hammond, J. & Barnett, S, forthcoming).

Most recently this area has been used for osier-carr and, in the last 50 years, as a plantation for alder, the last crop was harvested just prior to the first season's excavations.

The only previous archaeology carried out in the area of 'the Reeddam' was in the 1950's in the form of a small-scale excavation undertaken by a local amateur archaeologist, Lewton-Brain. Unfortunately the excavation was very poorly recorded in the form of letters addressed to the then curator of Norwich Castle Museum, R. R. Clarke. It appears that Lewton-Brain believed he had discovered the site of a circular hut-platform raised above the level of the surrounding marshy terrain. Finds from what was interpreted as the floor of this structure, included sherds of pottery, a copper-alloy dress pin and fragments of decorated bone comb, suggesting a Middle Anglo-Saxon date for the structure. Archaeological levels encountered beneath the floor of the 'hut' were described as "Roman, and possibly earlier" by R. R. Clarke, who received all the finds from the Sedgeford excavation.

Methodology

Originally, it was agreed that a systematic, non-random targeting strategy was to be used in locating test pits in the area of 'the Reeddam'. Each test-pit was to be placed in the south-west corner of a 20 metre grid -tied into that of the 'Boneyard' excavation- in order to sample as much of the area as possible.

Test pits were to be no smaller than 2 × 2m². Since they were placed to assess the extent of the archaeology, it was agreed that not all test-pits would be excavated through archaeological deposits, and that the excavation of the majority should terminate on their discovery. Instead, only a small sample would be fully excavated to the natural subsoil to establish the nature and survival of the archaeological remains.

However, as the season's work progressed, it became increasingly evident that this no longer remained a viable strategy in light of limited time and resources. Instead, it was decided to define a mid-term strategy concentrating on the southern limit of 'the Reeddam' on the higher ground adjacent to the field known as 'the Boneyard'. This was designed to expand our understanding of the extensive Middle Anglo-Saxon deposits encountered in this area

Results

Test Pit 1

A 2m × 2m test-pit was excavated to the natural subsoil, a light orange/yellow fine sand with lenses of gravel. The uppermost deposit, no more than 20cm in depth, was a dark brown silty-peat with a high humic content. This topsoil (or 'mulch layer'(2001)) was archaeologically sterile apart from a few fragments of animal bone. This overlay a peat of similar composition (2002) but with a higher percentage of inclusions, including degraded chalk, gravel and charcoal. This deposit was up to 8cm in depth and contained archaeological finds of oyster shell, animal bone and a decorated fragment of a blue glass-bead. The excavation of this level revealed a clear interface with the underlying deposit (2003), a clean homogeneous light greyish-white calcareous clay, approximately 12cm in depth. Only two small fragments of animal bone were derived from this layer. The underlying deposit, (2004), was a dark-brown silty-sand of mixed composition with inclusions of flint gravel, chalk lumps, and flecks of chalk and charcoal. Finds from this deposit included 34 sherds of pottery, mostly of Middle Anglo-Saxon date, animal bone, oyster shell, iron, a fragment of decorated bone comb and two fragments of decorated glass. Layer (2004) overlay a deposit of similar composition, (2013), characterized by its sandier matrix, large flint nodules and ferrous staining. The range of archaeological finds from this layer was similar to layer (2004), including significant quantities of Middle Anglo-Saxon pottery, animal bone, (some of which displayed butchery marks) and fragments of decorated bone comb. Finds from this context differed however, in that they were generally less fragmentary. Beneath layer (2013), approximately at the level of the modern water table, was a dark greyish-brown deposit up to 33 cm in depth (2019), of similar composition to (2004) and (2013). This was also characterized by ferrous staining, however, the quantities of pottery, animal and oyster shell recovered was significantly less than from the overlying deposits. The removal of layer (2019) revealed the soil-mark of an east-west orientated gully or small ditch [2020] cut into the natural sand subsoil. This had two fills (2021) and (2022) both of a silty-clay composition with few inclusions. Two fragments of Middle Anglo-Saxon pottery and animal bone were recovered from the later of these fills (2021).

Test Pit 2

A 2m × 2m test pit located 20m to the east of the south-west corner of T.P.1 was excavated to archaeologically sensitive levels. A modern topsoil (2005) of dark-brown sandy peat 20cm in depth with root-disturbance, was first excavated. Archaeological finds contained within this layer included fragments of animal bone, oyster shell and a fragment of a human mandible. Layer (2005) overlay a dark orange/brown silty-peat (2006), up to 18 cm in depth. This deposit contained four

sherds of Middle Anglo-Saxon pottery, oyster shell and animal bone. Excavation of T.P.2 terminated after the removal of (2006), which revealed the surface of the light greyish-white calcareous clay deposit encountered in T.P.1.

Test Pit 3

A 2m × 2m test pit located 70m north of the north-east corner of T.P.2 was excavated to natural deposits to establish the nature of the archaeology in the vicinity of the modern course of the river.

A dark-brown humic topsoil (2007) approximately 20cm in depth was first removed. This contained little or no finds apart from a single fragment of animal bone. This, in turn overlay a deposit of similar composition with small quantities of flint gravel and chalk inclusions, (2008). Finds from this level included animal bone and a post-medieval iron horseshoe. Removal of layer (2008) revealed a distinct interface with an underlying deposit (2009), a light greyish-white calcareous clay. This deposit, up to 15cm in depth, was very homogeneous in composition and archaeologically sterile. An underlying deposit (2010) of similar composition and depth, though slightly darker and with preserved organic remains, was encountered below the water-table. These two deposits were of a similar nature to the calcareous clays encountered in T.Ps 1 and 2. Deposit (2010) overlaid a dark greyish-brown alluvial silt characterized by a high constituent of preserved organic remains (2011). This layer, no more than 6cm in depth, contained no archaeological remains however, apart from a fragment of animal bone. A lighter deposit of greyish-brown alluvial silt (2012), was preserved beneath layer (2011), was also characterized by a high content of preserved organic remains, though not as great as in the preceding deposit. Excavation of layer (2012) revealed a clear horizon with an underlying deposit (2059), 8cm in depth, of coarse angular flints within a sandy matrix. It is most likely that this deposit represents the bed of a former river-course. Again, this was an archaeologically sterile deposit apart from a large fragment of animal bone that straddled the interface between layers (2012) and (2059). Two further deposits (2060) and (2063) were discovered thereafter, but their excavation was impeded by difficult conditions below the water-table. Layer (2060) comprised a deposit of flint gravel and fine sand with preserved organic remains and contained fragments of animal bone and a single sherd of pottery (which could be residual). This overlay a fine white/yellow sand (2063) which appeared to slope away beneath the northern bank of the pit.

Test Pit 4

A 1m × 11m test pit, 60m to the east of T.P.1, was excavated across a substantial bank and ditch, delimiting the southern boundary of 'the Reeddam' on an approximate east-west orientation. The potential complexity of the stratigraphy encountered in this test pit allows only a summary of the excavated deposits.

The southern section of the trench in the locality of 'the bank' was characterized by the build-up of a series of loose sandy colluvial deposits (2014/5), (2024) and (2033) that suggest that 'the bank' was in fact a positive lynchet formed by a build-up of hillwash around the fence and tree-line which marks the northern limit of the

'Boneyard' field. Interestingly, all these deposits contained large fragments of human bone. The earliest of these colluvial layers (2033), overlay a deposit characterized by a fine yellow sand matrix interspersed with dark silty-clay marbled inclusions (2026). This layer was most unusual in composition but may be associated with upcast fill from either the central ditch [2061] or the large pit [2040]. This, in turn, sealed the soilmark of the large pit [2040], which extended under the eastern bank of the trench. Excavation of this feature, over a metre deep, revealed seven discrete fills. Most important were two layers of compacted chalk lumps (2051) and (2053), and an earlier fill of flint packing, (2054). The latter, sealed a dark humic silty deposit (2067), at the level of the water table. The only find from this primary fill was a fragment of animal bone.

Excavation of the ditch immediately to the north of the bank [2061] revealed two fills (2028) and (2030). The primary fill (2030) contained one fragment of Middle Anglo-Saxon pottery. A re-cut feature [2035] to the south and shallow ditch [2036] to north of central ditch [2061] probably represent measures to clean and maintain this channel.

At the north end of the trench, the removal of a silty topsoil (2017/8), exposed a dark greyish-brown deposit of silty-sand (2031/9), similar in composition to (2004) in T.P.1. This layer also produced significant quantities of Middle Anglo-Saxon pottery (24 sherds), oyster shell and animal bone. Excavation of this deposit uncovered two features, the first a small ditch or gully, [2043], orientated north north-east to south south-west, and the second a shallow pit just to the north of the ditch [2043]. The stratigraphic relationship between these two features was not clear. The fill of the ditch contained fragments of animal bone and Middle Anglo-Saxon pottery. The only find from the pit-fill was a large decorated fragment of a flanged bowl of Late Iron Age Aylesford-Swarling type.

Test Pit 5

This test pit, 2m x 3m, was located approximately 14m north of T.P.1 in the north-west section of an area of raised ground in the vicinity of Lewton-Brain's 1953 excavation. The purpose of T.P.5 was to test the previous excavator's hypothesis of this area being a 'Middle Anglo-Saxon hut-platform'. This test-pit was not fully excavated and spot dates are not yet available for the pottery. Also because the sequence of deposits encountered in this test-pit were mirrored in the excavations of T.P.1, and 2, only significant differences and features will be described.

The test pit straddled the junction between the northern edge of the raised 'platform' and a lower lying peat deposit (2046). Removal of this peat and the topsoil to the south revealed a mixed interface horizon (2047) predominantly composed of a white calcareous clay (2048) which it sealed. This deposit was the same as that encountered in Test Pits 1, 2 and 3, although it was generally thicker. At its greatest extent, it was up to 46cm deep (in the west-facing section) approximately in the centre of the raised area but tapered off towards the north-west as the ground surface subsided towards the edge of 'the platform'. Horizon (2048) overlay a deposit of ferrous-stained peat 5-8cm deep, which sealed deposits of humic sand similar to the

Middle Anglo-Saxon deposits encountered in T.Ps 1 and 4, layers (2050) and (2064) respectively. Again, these contained substantial quantities of Middle Anglo-Saxon pottery (20 sherds), oyster shell, animal bone and fragments of a decorated bone comb.

Excavation beyond these levels was of a rescue nature because of time constraints, however, at least one small east-west orientated ditch was discovered beneath layer (2064). The stratigraphic position of this feature together with its orientation, suggests this is contemporary with the features encountered at this level in the other test pits.

Interpretation and Conclusions

The most significant evidence derived from the clear sequence of deposits encountered in T.Ps 1, 2, 4 and 5 was the identification of a distinct phase of Middle Anglo-Saxon activity. This was represented by *in situ* deposits containing significant quantities of Ipswich-ware pottery, animal bone, oyster shell and decorated bone comb. These very mixed deposits, characterized by irregular inclusions, can best be interpreted as rubbish or midden material dumped into the valley bottom. The absence of similar deposits in T.P. 3, located close to the river, suggests that this activity was confined to the slightly higher ground in the south of 'the Reeddam'. The 'midden hypothesis' is further supported by the lack of archaeological features encountered at this level. Lewton-Brain's excavation uncovered what he believed to be stake-holes associated with the 'hut-platform structure'. It is more likely however, that this is a misinterpretation of the many irregularly spaced root-holes (5cm to 6cm in diameter), which penetrate these deposits across much of 'the Reeddam'. Indeed, a reappraisal of Lewton-Brain's findings in light of the results of the test-pitting, suggests that the raised area he called a 'hut platform' may simply relate to a 'natural' thickening - following the uneven deposition of calcareous clay in this specific locality. Having only excavated one small area in 'the Reeddam', and without the benefit of comparative evidence from several test pits, his misinterpretations are perhaps understandable.

A particular point of debate during the excavations was the nature of the calcareous layer which not only sealed the Middle Anglo-Saxon deposits in T.Ps 1, and 5 but was also encountered more widely in 'the Reeddam' (in T.Ps 2 and 3) and beyond, in an environmental test-pit to the east. Excavation of this layer in T.Ps 3 and 5, which revealed a general thickening towards the river and also an irregular 'high-spot', indicate that its deposition was far from uniform. This is also suggested by its unexpected absence in Test Pit 4, where the Middle Anglo-Saxon deposits were immediately overlain by horizon (2017/8), a dark silty topsoil. A reasonable explanation for the occurrence of this widespread deposit is that it is connected with the original construction of 'the Reeddam' and the building (or refurbishment) of the causeway in the 13th century- an event recorded in contemporary documentary sources. Only a scientific analysis of the deposit will be able to decipher whether it was deliberately laid down to level off the area in preparation for reed planting, or whether it is a secondary water-borne deposit associated with eroding chalk from the

many contemporary channels and watercourses (of which the ditch sectioned by T.P. 4 may be one) created to maintain sufficient water-levels in 'the Reeddam'.

Another interpretative problem concerns the nature and date of the features cut into the natural sand subsoil, sealed beneath the Middle Anglo-Saxon 'midden deposits'. Dating evidence obtained from the small ditches from T.P.s 1, 4 and 5 was scanty, the best coming from the fill of [2043] which included large sherds of Middle Anglo-Saxon pottery. The task is also complicated by the occurrence of the Late Iron Age bowl in the small pit [2057], although this might well prove to be residual. Only further archaeological investigation will determine whether the changing use of 'the Reeddam' area occurred during the Middle Anglo-Saxon period, or earlier.

The function of the substantial pit discovered beneath the eastern bank of T.P.4, also merits discussion. Two possible interpretations can be offered to explain the carefully deposited rammed chalk fills and the lower layer of flint packing stones. Either they were designed to act as supporting foundations for an overlying structure, or alternatively, as a method of sealing rubbish or cess in the bottom of the pit. The latter hypothesis is certainly supported by the dark humic primary fill (2067), which awaits environmental analysis. However, these would seem to be extraordinary measures merely to seal the pit's contents, a task which could have been simply achieved by backfilling with rubbish or spoil, as seen in many of the pits from Middle Saxon Hamwic (Morton 1992). Again the resolution of this problem will only come with future excavation.

The fragments of human bone discovered in the colluvial fills of 'the bank' of T.P.4 and the human mandible in T.P.2, suggest colluvial redeposition of these remains from the cemetery in 'the Boneyard' to the south. The same might also be postulated for the glass bead derived from one of the late contexts in T.P.1. The presence of these finds calls into question the possible northern extent of the cemetery. It is unlikely that such quantities of bone and other finds would have travelled this far to the north of the 'Boneyard' Field, unless the cemetery extended close to the modern-day northern field boundary.

¹ NRO. DCN records. Bailiffs Account Roll DCN 60/33/6

Part III: The Finds

N. M. Cooke and A. N. Gardner

The major bulk finds were pottery, oyster shell, and other faunal remains, as well, of course, as the human remains. The pottery has been classified into broad periods: Late Iron Age, Roman, Middle Anglo-Saxon, Late Anglo-Saxon/Saxo-Norman, Medieval, and Modern. The Middle Anglo-Saxon and Late Anglo-Saxon/Saxo-Norman periods predominate at 'the Boneyard', while the former is more prominent on 'the Reeddam'. There is no Medieval pottery on either site.

A notable selection of small finds was also recorded (See Figs. 6-7). These include a decorated bead, possibly of late Iron age date; a globular-headed Middle Anglo-Saxon pin; several fragments of Middle to Late Anglo-Saxon bone combs; and a possible 7th century Anglo-Saxon 'safety pin' brooch (A. Fitzpatrick, pers. comm.). None of these finds were found in association with any of the burials, with most coming from the colluvial deposits or the fill of the large north-south ditch. Other post-Medieval finds, including a 20th century coronation pin, were useful in confirming the mixed nature of the ploughsoil at 'the Boneyard'. The bulk of the finds date from the Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon periods, with few finds either prior to, or after, this date. The Iron Age evidence is confined to 'the Reeddam'. It seems likely that the lack of evidence from either site for the medieval period is a result of the creation of 'the Reeddam' and the nature of the 'Boneyard' field, possibly combined with the likelihood that ploughing would disturb human remains. Further investigation is required before the remains of the possible structure can be dated and interpreted.

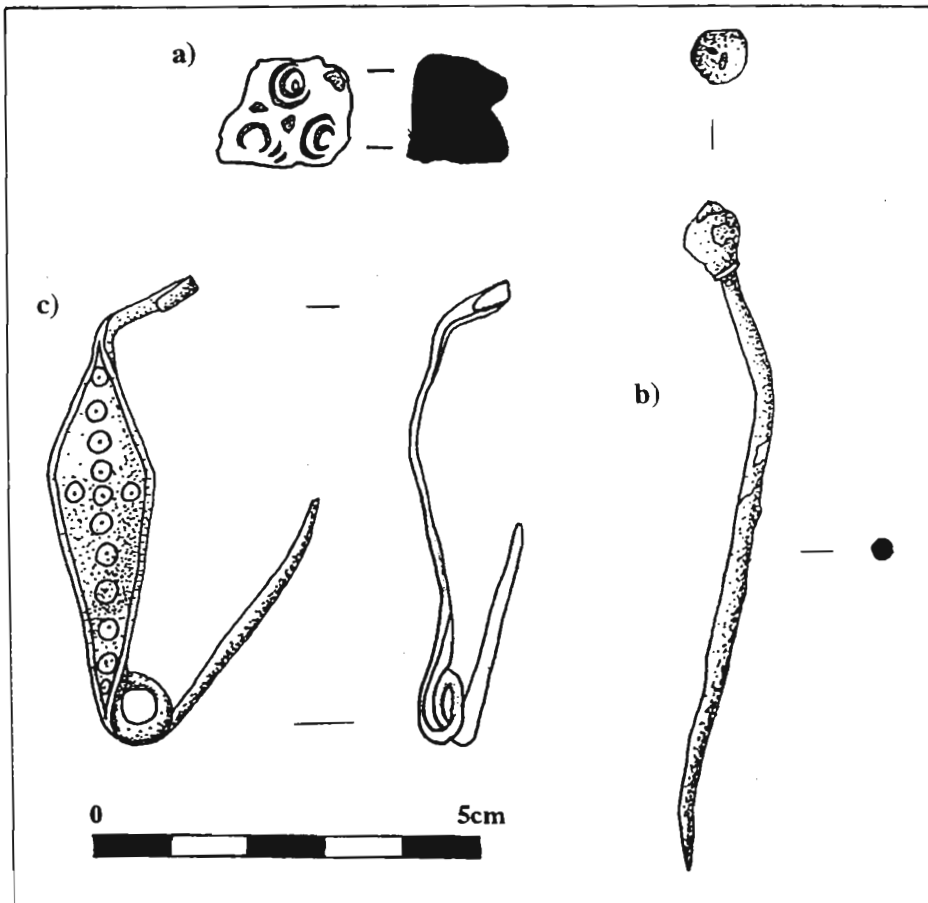


Figure 6 a) Decorated glass bead, possibly Iron Age. 'Reeddam'; b) Globular-headed Middle Anglo-Saxon pin. 'Boneyard'; c) Anglo-Saxon 'safety pin' brooch, possibly 7th century. 'Boneyard'.

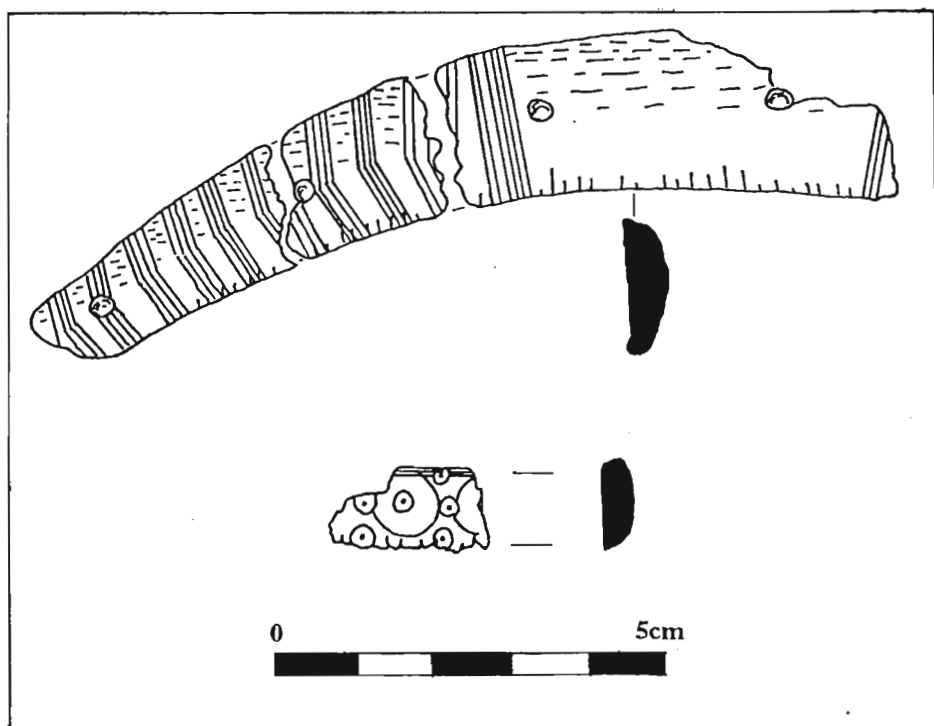


Figure 7 Fragments of bone combs, Middle to Late Anglo-Saxon. 'Reeddam'

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