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ANDREW MUNDIN

A new extension to the existing house frontage in November 2020 required archaeological observation during excavation for a raft foundation. Initially, a quarry tile floor and brick wall were observed which, according to historic maps, formed part of a malthouse, later warehouse, that was eventually replaced by No.54 and the other extant row of houses. After the floor was recorded, it was removed and the ground reduced further by 0.2m but only revealed further made ground, probably a pre-19th century levelling deposit, likely for construction of the malthouse. A small collection of Late medieval and early Post-medieval pottery (16th-17th century) was also recorded.

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PIERRE-DAMIEN MANISSE

Following prior evaluation of the site which confirmed the survival of Late Saxon, Medieval, and Post-medieval deposits on the site, a mitigation strategy was drawn up to preserve-in-situ the majority of archaeological deposits on the site by a suitable foundation design. Archaeological excavation took place in April 2020 on smaller areas in advance of unavoidable deeper groundworks, namely a soakaway and drainage trench. Excavation for the drainage trench was not deep enough to impact on the relevant archaeological horizon, but the soakaway trench revealed seven pits of Late Saxon, Medieval, and Post-medieval date, which contained a typical range of artefacts variously of pottery, animal bone including a horse burial, charred plant remains metal objects, and some tile fragments.

Woodstock, St Mary the Virgin Church, Wootton

SP 4390 1987

ANDREW MUNDIN

Archaeological observations were made in September 2020 during the excavation of a new service trench, north-west of the north aisle and tower. The investigation of an existing drainage pipe linked up beyond the west boundary, uncovered partly articulated human remains at over 1m depth. A few very fragmentary of pieces disarticulated human bone were encountered during the excavation of the drainage trench.

TVAS Publications of potential interest to SMA readers:(available from TVAS, email tvass@tvass.co.uk)

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Published in 2021

Neolithic, Iron Age and Saxon occupation at Milton Road, Shipton-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire, by Pierre-Damien Manisse, TVAS Monograph 42. ISBN 978–1-911228–56-1

A Middle Bronze Age field system, occupation and burial with Neolithic and Saxon pits and Roman ditches at Littleworth Road, Benson, Oxfordshire, by Andy Taylor, TVAS Occasional Paper 46. ISBN: 978–1-911228–58-5

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, DEPT. FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION**Appleton Area Archaeological Research Project (AAARP)****Survey, Test Pits and Evaluation Trenches at the Old Manor House in Besselsleigh SP 4558 0104**

JANE HARRISON, LEIGH MELLOR and WILLIAM WINTLE

Introduction

The AAARP Project is researching an area around the village of Appleton in collaboration with local people. This area includes the modern settlements of Appleton, Eaton and Besselsleigh, the deserted medieval village of Tubney and the old manor house of Besselsleigh, the site of which lies next to the surviving twelfth century church of St Lawrence. Fieldwork undertaken in 2017 and 2018 was summarised in Harrison and Rowley 2019 and the Appleton test pit campaign was described in Harrison *et al.* 2020.

This report provides an initial description of the geophysical and topographical surveys, three test pits and two evaluation trenches which have been undertaken in the area of the demolished medieval manor house and possible deserted medieval village at Besselsleigh. AAARP volunteers carried out the excavations, while OUDCE postgraduate and undergraduate students performed the geophysical and earthwork surveys.

The Site

The area discussed covers the site of a demolished medieval and early-modern manor house, possibly with a neighbouring medieval village, the manor farm buildings which survived until the nineteenth century, together with gardens and parkland. The site was described in the early 1540s by the antiquary John Leland in his *Itinerary*:

“Bleselles Legh a litle village is a 3. mile from Hinkesey fery in the highe way from Oxford to Ferendune, alias Farington. At this Legh be very fayre pastures and woods. The Blesells hathe bene lords of it syns the tyme of Edward the First or afore, and there they dyd enhabite. The place is all of stone, and stondithe at the west end of the parochie churche” (Toulmin Smith, 1910, 72).

The relative locations of the sixteenth century manor house and village are not clear from this passage, nor is it apparent whether the manor house alone was built of stone, or both the house and the village. The manor house was demolished in 1784 not long after a major fire but a farmhouse and ancillary buildings to its north remained until the later nineteenth century. The surveys and exploratory excavations at the site were shaped by the following project research questions: was there pre-medieval settlement on the site; what was the layout and character of the medieval manor house; was there a village associated with the medieval manor house, if so, what was its extent and when was it founded and abandoned; and what are the relationships between the manor house site and the modern village of Besselsleigh?

The Geophysical Surveys

Much of the land available to survey at Rye Farm, Besselsleigh, has been covered by magnetometer surveys conducted by groups of OUDCE students in 2018, 2019 and 2020. In the area of the earlier manor house and associated farm buildings the surveys have detected magnetic anomalies

Oxfordshire

which appear to represent either demolition rubble or the foundations of former buildings known from historic maps. In the wider parkland the surveys have not detected definite archaeological features such as ditches or pits.

A smaller area over and adjacent to the former manor house has been covered by resistivity surveys conducted by groups of OUDCE students in 2018, 2019 and 2020. The resistivity surveys have identified distinct areas and lines of high and low resistance which in some cases do appear to represent archaeological features. These features have been and will be targeted by test pits and excavation. The general impression is of a well-used and relatively disturbed environment. An area of high resistance just west of the western end of the church may be related to the demolition of a farm building that survived into the nineteenth century – possible demolition debris was discovered in the western end of the 2020 evaluation trench.

A Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey was conducted in July 2019 by OUDCE MSc ALA student Ruth Halliwell in association with Kris Lockyear from University College London. As with the previous surveys it was conducted over the main area of interest – the medieval and early-modern manor house. This survey showed more clearly than both the magnetic and earth resistance surveys a number of linear features which it may be possible to associate with features on eighteenth century drawings of the manor house. Some of these features had previously been identified as parch marks recorded during the hot summer of 2018.

The Plane Table Surveys

Between 2018 and 2020 OUDCE postgraduate and undergraduate students carried out plane table surveys of the topographical features surviving in the parkland to the west and north of the churchyard of the twelfth century church of St Lawrence. The amalgamated surveys are shown in figure 1. In the east, the slight earthworks capture the line of a hollow way, seen as a track on an early eighteenth century depiction of the site, running north-north-west beyond the eastern churchyard wall. In the north are depressions, platforms and banks which may be associated with farm buildings, some of which survived until the late nineteenth century. South of these earthworks and west of the north-west corner of the churchyard is a significant depression located at the heart of the manor house complex. To the south are slight banks linked to the courtyard south of the manor house and to the west of the courtyard is a large rectangular area, again delineated by slight but decided banks. This last feature can be linked with the outline of a plot called 'The Paddock' depicted on the 1842 tithe map.

It is planned to extend the plane table survey in the future.

The Excavations

In 2019 three test pits, TP47 to TP49, and a small evaluation trench (Trench 1: 1m by 3m) were excavated. This was followed in 2020 by a further small evaluation trench (Trench 2: 1m by 3m). Due to restrictions on the number of people allowed to work in Trench 2, deeper excavation was restricted to a sondage 1.6m by 0.45m in the south-eastern corner of the trench.

Geophysical survey had revealed areas of high resistance along a probable hollow way, also seen on eighteenth century estate maps. Test pit TP47 was located over this track. Excavation revealed the line of the track in this



Figure 28: Besselsleigh, Evaluation Trench 1

section was positioned on a floating cap of hard limestone concretions associated with bedrock. The surface of the concretion was smoothed, perhaps by vehicles and people using the hollow way. Test pit TP48 was located to the north-west of the churchyard wall and just to the north of a circular depression captured in the topographical survey (Fig. 30). It was assumed to be within the central area of the later manor house. A floor surface was discovered alongside the trench of a robbed-out wall which ran on a similar north-west to south-east alignment as wall-lines captured in the GPR and parch mark surveys. Test pit 49 was sited to the north of TP48 in an area which probably lay within the northern quadrangle of the manor house (Fig. 30). At only 0.2m depth a rough cobbled surface was found, probably a yard or other exterior surface.

All three test pits and the evaluation trenches produced medieval pottery (Fig. 31). This suggests that evidence for medieval occupation may survive to be discovered in larger excavations. Test pit 48 was particularly significant, as medieval sherds were found underneath a later floor surface associated with sixteenth to eighteenth century pottery.

The two evaluation trenches were placed over wall lines to the west of the churchyard and known from parch marks

and the GPR survey. Those lines were on broadly the same north-west to south-east alignment as the churchyard wall. While the western wall line could be linked with a courtyard wall seen in plans of the manor house and gardens, the eastern wall line cannot be convincingly accounted for in known plans and depictions of the site. Both trenches were three metres long and one metre wide. The 2019 trench (BL19 Trench 1) across the western wall line revealed a double-faced, stone-built wall 0.6m high, 0.65m wide and surviving to six rough courses. The nature of the upper deposits suggested that, in the past, different activities were carried out to the west and east of the wall (Fig. 28). BL20 Trench 2, excavated in 2020 closer to the churchyard wall, discovered another wide double-faced stone-built wall lying just over 20m north-east of the wall uncovered in 2019 (Fig. 29). The western end of the 2020 trench included a deposit of nineteenth century floor tiles and demolition debris, probably originating with the farm building just to the north and in use until the nineteenth century. It is intended to explore these walls further in future excavation.



Figure 29: Besselsleigh, Evaluation Trench 2

Summary and planned future work

The fieldwork conducted to date at the deserted manor house site indicates that there is some archaeological survival of elements of the manor house, and some indications of medieval activity and archaeological features that cannot be explained by reference to known plans, drawings and photographs. A larger excavation is therefore planned for summer 2021 to explore the heart of the manor house and its surroundings. Further test pits will investigate other earthworks and geophysical anomalies in the wider area of the park, and it is hoped to conduct a test pit campaign in the modern village of Besselsleigh to discover more about its origins and development.

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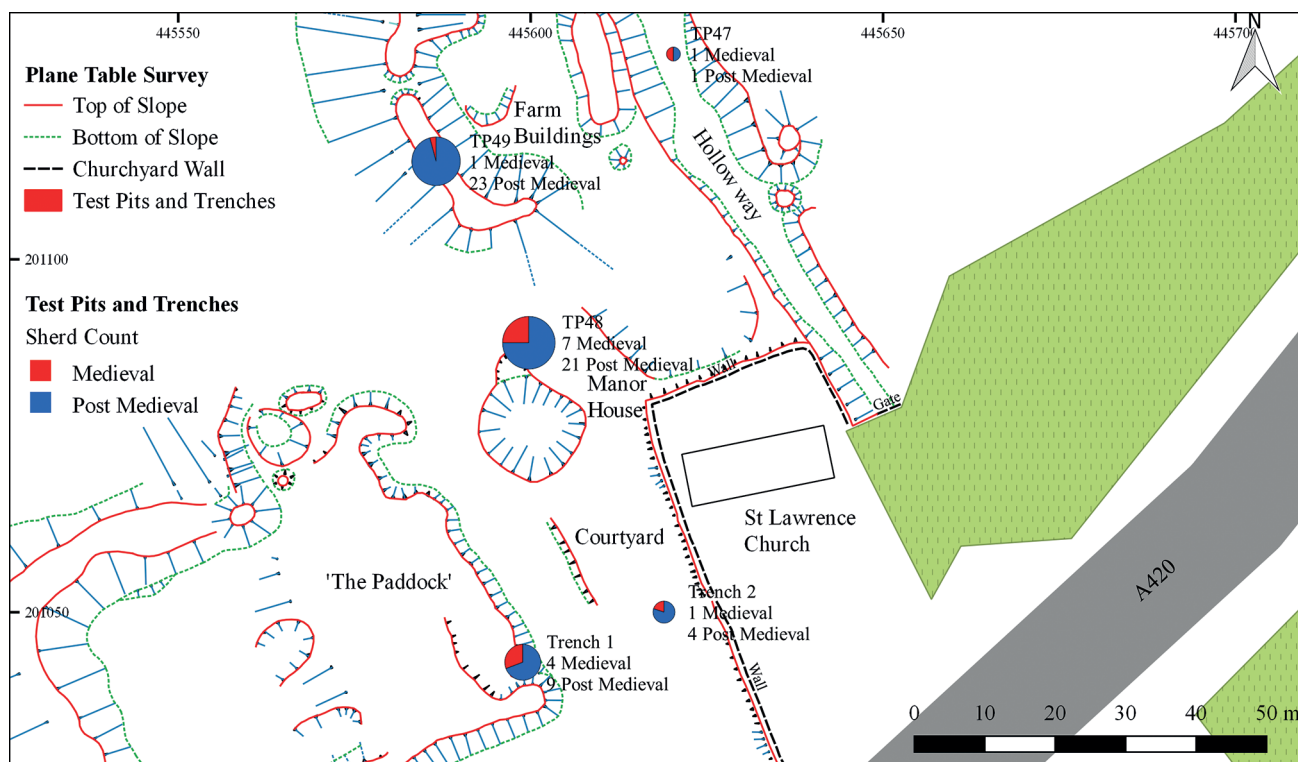


Figure 30: Besselsleigh, Topography and Location of Test Pits and Trenches

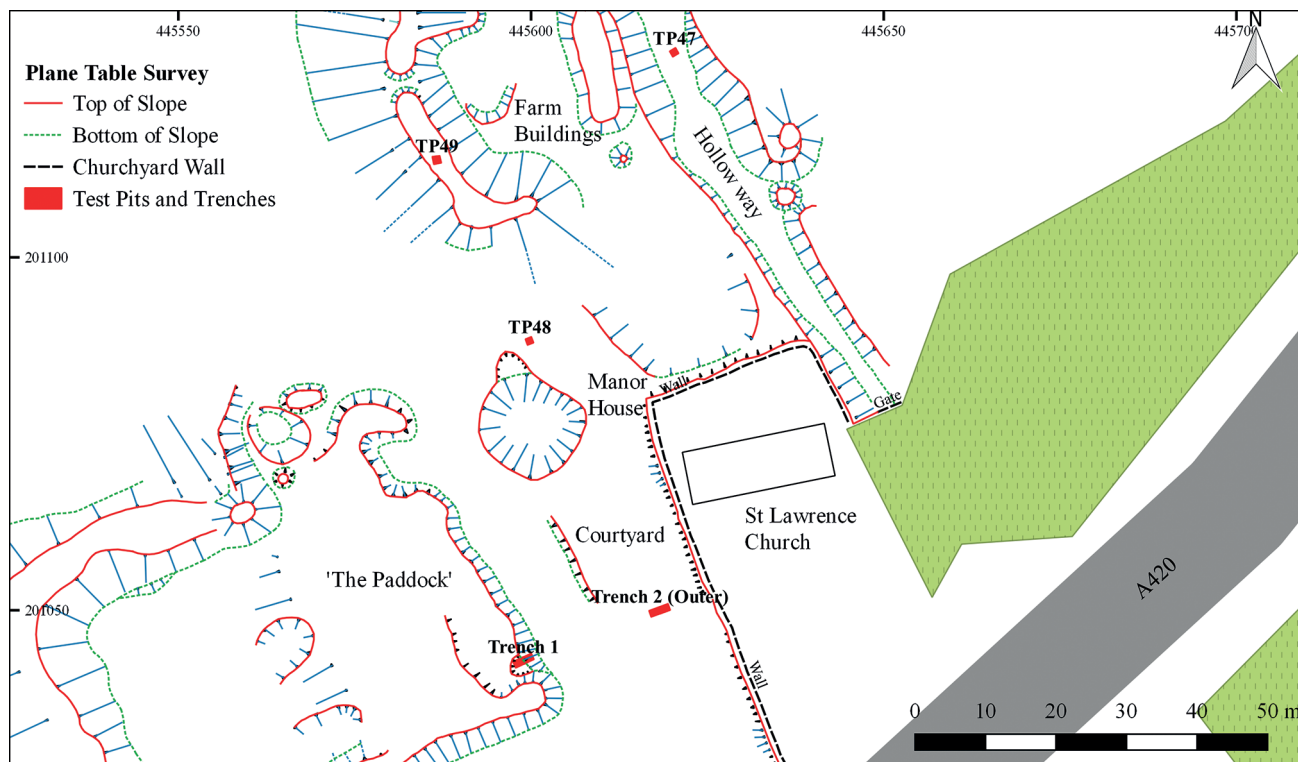


Figure 31: Besselsleigh, Pottery Analysis of the Test Pits and Trenches by sherd count

Test Pit Excavation at Chimney Meadows, Chimney 2019

LEIGH MELLOR and WILLIAM WINTLE

Introduction

The nature reserve of Chimney Meadows is located south-east of Bampton on the north bank of the River Thames surrounding the hamlet of Chimney. It is the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust's (BBOWT) largest nature reserve in Oxfordshire. Formerly a commercial farm, the natural landscape and wildlife has been restored since the Trust took over in 2003. Part of the site is a National Nature Reserve, owned by Natural England, and whose wildflower meadows form one of England's largest areas of unspoilt grassland.

In 2019 a geophysical survey was undertaken in Church Field and two smaller fields to the south and west with the aim of identifying potential Roman settlement. Ditch features indicating a settlement were discovered but it was unclear from the morphology whether the settlement was Roman, medieval, or medieval overlying Roman. In October 2019 two test pits were dug, each 1m by 1m in extent, over two of the ditches in Church Field to obtain dating material (Wintle 2020). This report discusses the results from these two test pits.

The Test Pits

Test Pit 1 (CH19 TP1) was located over a large ditch on the western side of the track which runs through the settlement at a junction with another ditch which ran north-west. It was excavated in spits to one metre depth, with the final 0.2m dug in a smaller 0.5m² sondage. Below the topsoil, the fill was a homogenous sandy silt, changing only to a sandier deposit at the base of the sondage. No ditch cut was visible. This suggests the ditch was backfilled rapidly in one episode, and

also that it was originally at least a metre deep and a metre wide in the location of the test pit. Pottery sherds, fragments of animal bone and teeth were found evenly distributed throughout the fill in small quantities, with over half of the ceramics being Roman greyware. The change in fill towards the base of the excavation indicated the bottom of the ditch was being reached and, at that depth, a near complete greyware jar was revealed. The results suggest that the field had been the location of both medieval and Roman activity and that it had not been ploughed intensively enough in any period for a deeper ploughsoil to develop.

Test Pit 2 (CH19 TP2) was positioned twenty metres further north on a ditch within the settlement area and produced very similar results to TP1. TP2 was excavated to 0.7m in spits, with the final 0.05m dug in a 0.5m² sondage. The fill was also homogenous and silty, although it was becoming sandier at the base of the sondage suggesting the base of the ditch was being reached. This indicates that the width of the ditch was at least one metre but it may have been about 0.2m shallower than the TP1 ditch. The finds were also very similar to TP1 although less numerous.

The pottery has been analysed by Paul Blinkhorn and the summary results are listed below in table 1. For trench 1 Paul Blinkhorn has commented "The sherds from the lower contexts, particularly 106, include many that are large and fresh and with individual vessels well-represented, indicating a primary deposit."

These results strongly suggest the ditch features are Romano-British and are overlain by a medieval field system and not a medieval settlement. Thus the Romano-British settlement at Chimney has been located, but the exact location and extent of the deserted medieval settlement is still to be determined.