

A MEDIEVAL HAMLET AT CASTLETHORPE ROAD, HANSLOPE, MILTON KEYNES: ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN 2018

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INTRODUCTION

Between April and June 2018 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out a programme of archaeological investigation on land at Castlethorpe Road, Hanslope, Milton Keynes, (centred on NGR 479825 246969; Fig. 1). The work was undertaken at the request of Triskelion Heritage, acting on behalf of Bloor Homes, in advance of residential development of the site.

The site comprised a single arable field to the north-west of Castlethorpe Road on the western edge of Hanslope and was bounded by residential development to the south and east and agricultural land to the west (Fig. 1). A footpath that runs along the north-western edge of the site follows the line of a trackway that linked Hanslope with the former settlement at Green End (Figs 1 & 4). The 0.33ha excavation area was located at the north-west of the site. Ground levels within the site sloped downwards from a maximum *c.* 114m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) in the south-east to the lowest area at *c.* 102m aOD in the western corner. The underlying geology is mapped as part of the sedimentary Blisworth Limestone Formation, formed approximately 165 to 169 million years ago (mya) in the Jurassic Period. This is overlain by superficial deposits of Oadby Member Diamicton, formed up to 2 mya in the Quaternary period (BGS 2019).

The site was located in the area between the medieval core of Hanslope to the north-east and the now abandoned contemporary hamlet at Green End to the west (Fig. 1). The settlement of Hanslope is recorded as *Hammescle* in Domesday Book and whilst its origins remain unclear, it almost certainly originated in the Anglo-Saxon period. The satellite settlement of Green End, probably associated with early medieval develop-

ment of Hanslope is recorded in The Easter Book of Hanslope (Anon 1616). A now-demolished 16th-century mansion house, fishponds, a moat and pottery findspots (MMK3439, MMK3440, MMK3441) are also noted in the Milton Keynes Historic Environment Record (MKHER) and located immediately west of the site. The MKHER also records an extensive scatter of metal-detected medieval finds within the site. The assemblage comprises nineteen coins, five buckles, one brooch, a copper-alloy mount and a possible 'mortuary cross'. The scatter appeared to be of greater density within the north-western area of the site, close to Green End (CA 2016, 21). Previous evaluation within the site identified remains broadly characteristic of the periphery of a medieval rural settlement, including midden deposits and a possible trackway (CA 2017).

A detailed record of the excavation, including full specialist finds and biological reports, is contained within a typescript report (CA 2019, report no. MK0054_1) available online via the Cotswold Archaeology website (<http://reports.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk>). This paper represents a summary of that report.

RESULTS

The Palaeochannel

A 110m stretch of a palaeochannel (Fig. 2) traversed the excavation area from north-east to south-west along a minor valley, possibly heading towards the river Tove, some 800m to the south-west. It was the earliest feature in the chronological sequence recorded on site, measuring up to 16m wide and at least 0.6m deep. A small quantity of residual Roman pottery, along with a single, late prehistoric sherd, was recovered from its fill. The presence of the palaeochannel appears to have influenced the

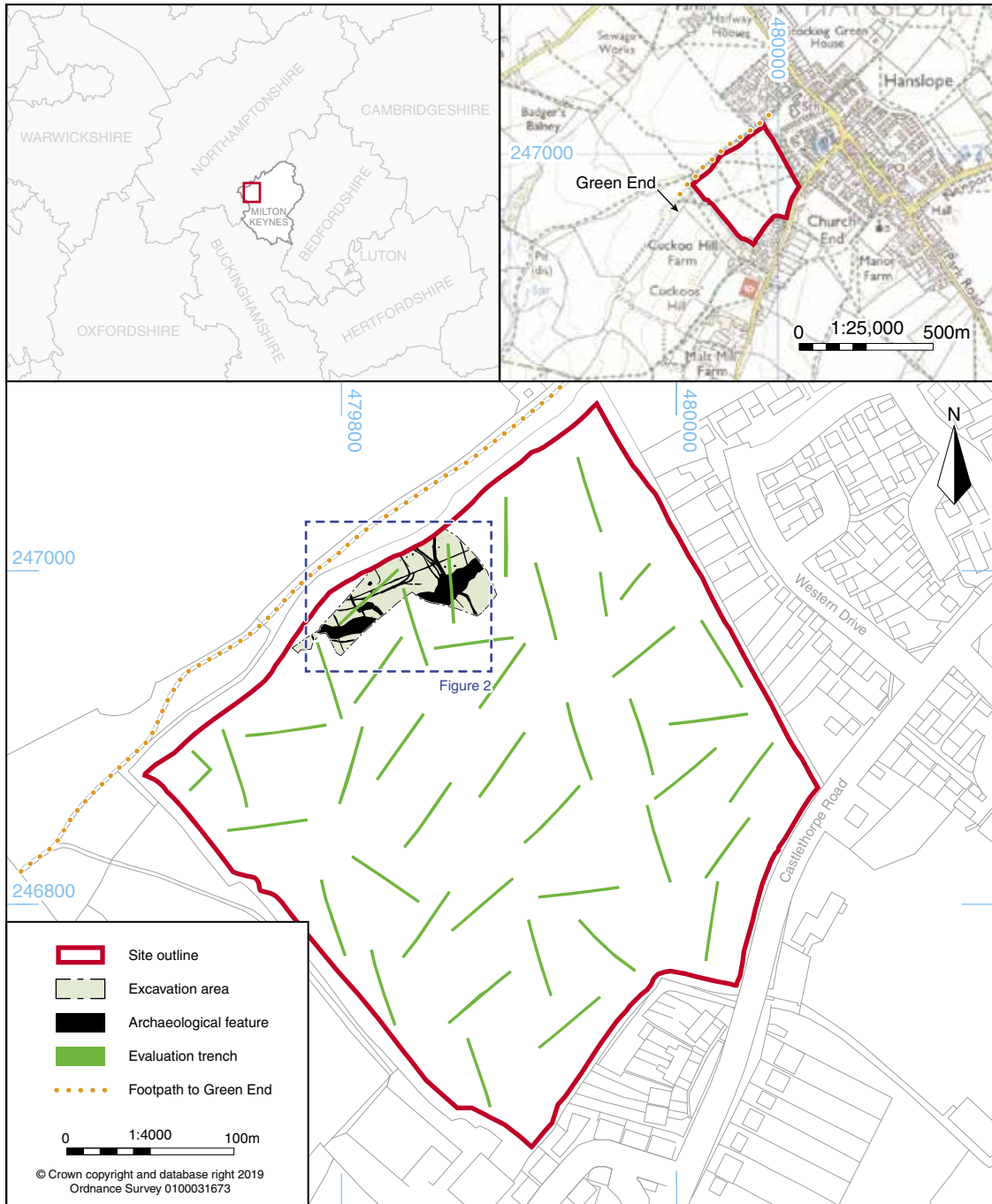


FIGURE 1 Site location plan (scales 1:25,000; 1:4000)

alignment of a Roman ditch as well as some later features, indicating a significant natural feature which may have influenced human activity within the site even after it had silted up. Evidence for this was observed during the course of the excavation works, when it was noted that the immediate area of the palaeochannel still remained the wettest part of the site.

Period 1, early Roman (c.AD43–225)

Ditch E, running on a north-east/south-west alignment, represented the earliest period of human activity, containing sherds of pottery broadly dating to the Roman period, as well as an associated bone group of cattle ribs and foot bones (Fig. 2). Radiocarbon dating of one of the bones produced a date range of 75–225 cal. AD (SUERC-87772; 95.4% probability), providing a more refined Early Roman date for the feature.

Period 2, early medieval (11th century and earlier)

Evidence for pre-Norman Conquest activity within the site (Fig. 2) survived as ditches L, M, and N, demarcating a possible rectangular enclosure (Enclosure 1) to the north of the site, with ditches C and D probably representing field boundaries to the east. These ditches, in contrast with later features, contained relatively sterile fills with only small quantities of animal bone, terrestrial molluscs and carbonised plant remains being present. The latter, recovered from ditches C, D and L, indicated dispersed/wind-blown settlement waste, possibly from occupation at Green End, whilst only a single cattle tooth was recovered from ditch C and two cattle bone fragments from ditch L showed no signs of butchery or other processing. The absence of dateable artefacts has meant the enclosure and boundary ditches can only be phased through stratigraphic relationships, resulting in a broad early medieval date for Period 2.

Periods 3 and 4, medieval (11th to 14th centuries)

Evidence for settlement activity dating to the 11th to 14th centuries (Periods 3 and 4) survived as a series of ditches and pits (Fig. 2). Period 3 (11th to 13th-century) features were mostly located to the west, where ditch V was partly truncated by extensive pit/hollow T, containing a fill of midden

material. This was in turn truncated by ditch Q, which along with ditch P delineated the three edges of small rectangular Enclosure 2. Moderate assemblages of 11th to 13th-century pottery were recovered from ditch V, pit/hollow T and ditch P, as well as from pits 5059 and 5081, whilst a single contemporary sherd was recovered from pit 2055 to the east.

Period 4 (13th to 14th-century) activity was recorded across the site but was more dominant to the east, where boundary ditches F, G and H were major landscape features. There were also a number of contemporary, discrete pits in this area. A significant assemblage of pottery, much of it of late 13th to 14th-century date and dominated by Olney Hyde types was recovered from ditch F, whilst ditches G and H, along with pits 2027, 2037, 2153, 2157 and 5009 yielded smaller quantities. Less substantial contemporary features further west included ditches K, S, O and J, along with pit 5031, the latter producing a small quantity of 13th to 14th-century pottery.

The Period 3 and 4 features contained debris indicating nearby settlement activity including small to moderate pottery assemblages, iron nails within Period 3 pit 5059 and Period 4 pit 2029, an iron buckle fragment within Period 4 pit 2027 and animal bone. The pottery is described in detail in the online typescript report (see above), which shows that much of the material comprised medieval shelly wares (fabrics: MC1, early medieval shelly ware; MC1/3, Medieval shelly ware; and MC3, Olney Hyde A / later medieval shelly ware). The bulk of the pottery was recovered from Period 4 features and examples are illustrated (Fig. 3, nos. 1-7). Charred plant and charcoal remains including free-threshing wheat and barley indicative of food preparation waste were recovered from Period 3 Enclosure 2 ditches, pit/hollow T and pit 5059 and Period 4 ditches O, F and G and pit 2027. Period 4 pit 2027 produced a ceramic spindle whorl (Fig. 3, no. 8) and an antler fragment was recovered from Period 4 ditch J, both indicating some level of nearby craft production.

Undated (Fig. 2)

Two ditches and twelve pits and postholes contained no dateable material and exhibited no stratigraphic relationships with other features and therefore remain undated.

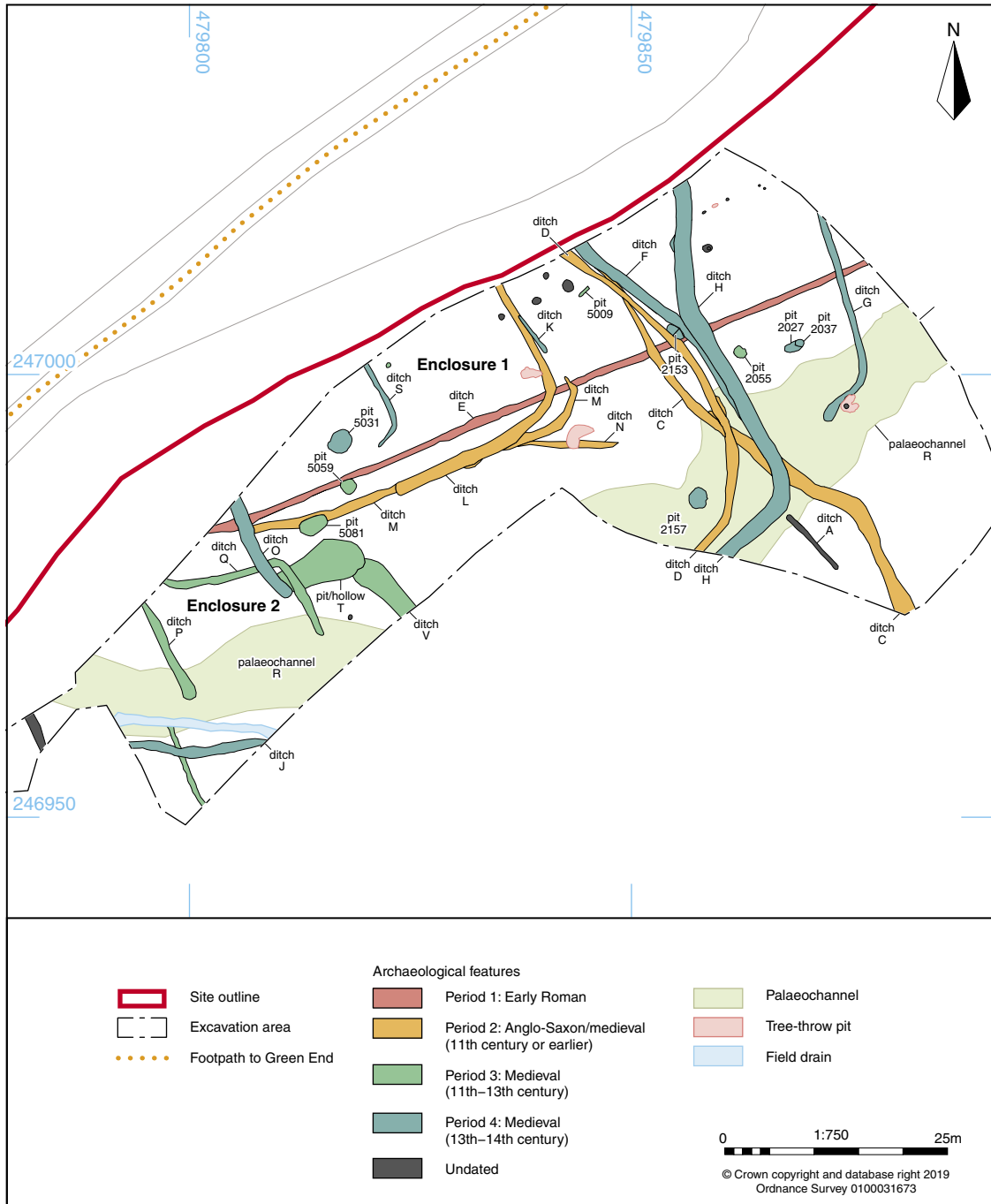
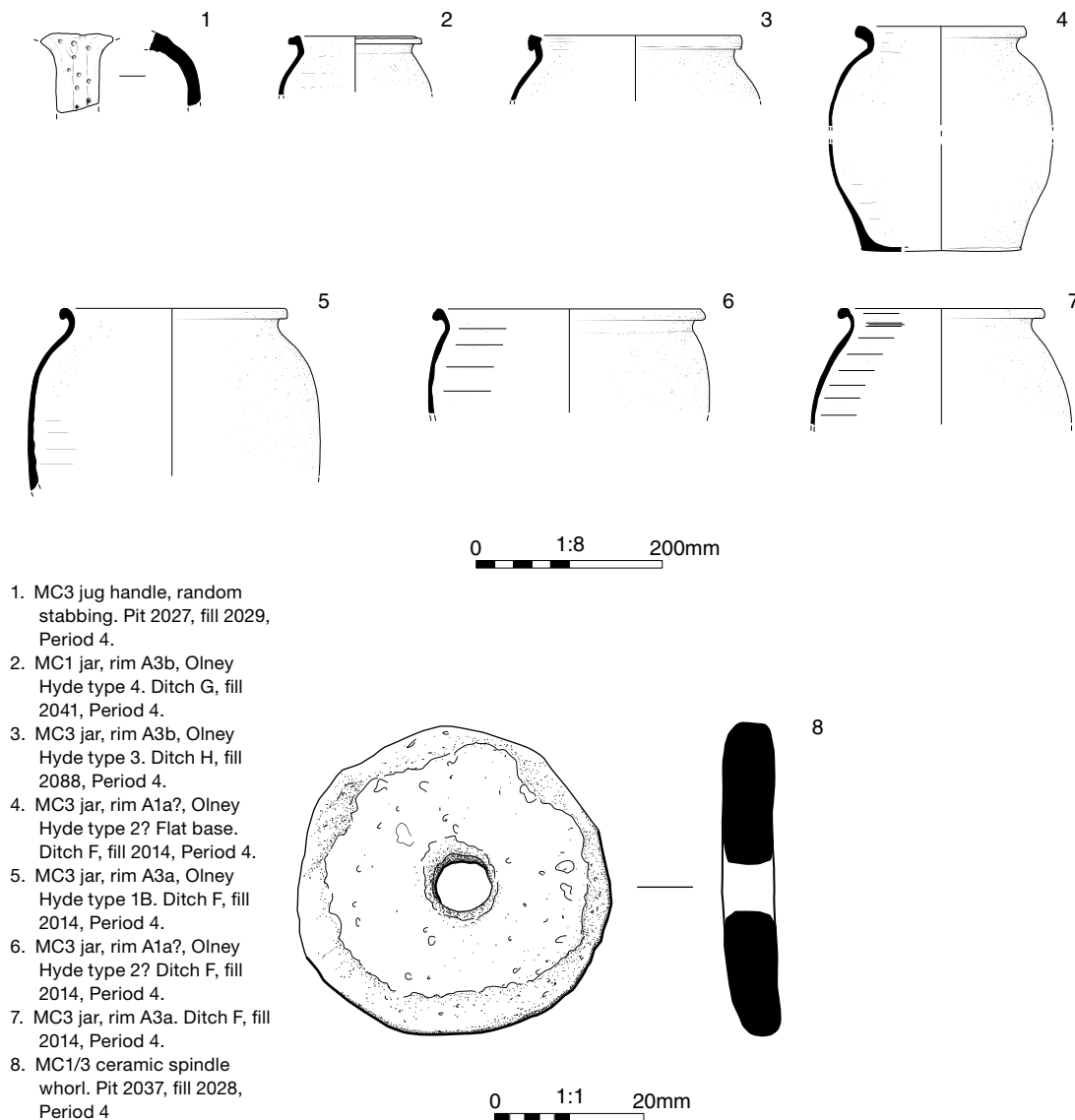


FIGURE 2 Excavation area phased feature plan (scale 1:750)



1. MC3 jug handle, random stabbing. Pit 2027, fill 2029, Period 4.
2. MC1 jar, rim A3b, Olney Hyde type 4. Ditch G, fill 2041, Period 4.
3. MC3 jar, rim A3b, Olney Hyde type 3. Ditch H, fill 2088, Period 4.
4. MC3 jar, rim A1a?, Olney Hyde type 2? Flat base. Ditch F, fill 2014, Period 4.
5. MC3 jar, rim A3a, Olney Hyde type 1B. Ditch F, fill 2014, Period 4.
6. MC3 jar, rim A1a?, Olney Hyde type 2? Ditch F, fill 2014, Period 4.
7. MC3 jar, rim A3a. Ditch F, fill 2014, Period 4.
8. MC1/3 ceramic spindle whorl. Pit 2037, fill 2028, Period 4

FIGURE 3 Finds Illustrations (scales 1:8; 1:1)

DISCUSSION

The archaeological investigations at Castlethorpe Road showed that there was limited prehistoric and Roman activity in the near vicinity but that areas of settlement developed nearby, probably during the Anglo-Saxon period, evidenced by a series of field boundary and/or drainage ditches. From the 11th to 14th centuries, more intensive activity was

apparent, most likely associated with the small settlement at Green End, west of the site, and its contemporary, Hanslope, to the east, though both may have formed a single entity at this time. Both settlements declined from the later 14th century, Green End eventually becoming abandoned and Hanslope contracting to its modern extent.

The earliest feature recorded was palaeochannel R, the backfilling deposits within which, contained

a small quantity of late prehistoric and Roman pottery, indicating that the channel may have been at least still partly open during these periods and possibly indicating habitation upstream of the site. No features of later prehistoric date were recorded during the investigations, but a single Roman ditch crossed the site on a north-east/south-west alignment respecting the palaeochannel; radiocarbon dating indicating backfilling during the earlier Roman period.

Evidence of early activity in the vicinity of Hanslope is limited, possibly because of unfavourable topographic factors, with only a small number of isolated Iron Age and Roman findspots recorded by the MKHER and detailed in the Hanslope Historic Town Assessment (Green 2011). Some evidence for a small sub-rectangular Iron Age enclosure to the south-west of the site has been previously identified through aerial photography (CA 2016, fig. 2). The nearest small-scale, Roman rural farmsteads are recorded approximately 1.5km to the east of the site, near Woad Farm, and approximately 2km to the north-west at Gordon's Lodge Farm (Green 2011, 20). The urban focal point of the area, meanwhile, appears to have been the small Roman town of *Magiovinium* located approximately 11km to the south-west of Hanslope (*ibid.*). However, it appears that there was little direct or sustained interaction between the site and other Roman sites in the vicinity.

Early medieval activity (Period 2) was characterised by rectangular Enclosure 1, defined by ditches L, M and N and two probable boundary ditches C and D. No dateable artefactual evidence was recovered from these features so the broad time span of this period is based on stratigraphic evidence. Other than a small quantity of animal bone, no finds were recovered so it is not possible to deduce a function for the features beyond field boundary/enclosure divisions. It is possible that Enclosure 1 was directly related to settlement activity associated with the early development of Green End, whereas ditches C and D were more likely associated with land management in the area between the Green End and Hanslope habitation areas; both settlement areas probably having Anglo-Saxon origins. There is no clear evidence for the extent or nature of Anglo-Saxon occupation at Hanslope, although it is recorded in Domesday Book and a settlement of reasonable size must have existed by the time the church of St James the

Great was founded in the 12th century. However, it has been suggested that the foundation of the church itself, possibly on a green field site, was a catalyst to settlement and population expansion (Green 2011, 25). Domesday Book records Hanslope as a 'very large' settlement comprising 55 households. Anglo-Saxon and medieval settlements in this area were characteristically dispersed in nature, each settlement comprising a series of "ends" located around a central focus, such as a village green (Green 2011, 22). Therefore, rather than solely referring to the village of Hanslope, the Domesday entry probably includes a number of these surrounding "ends", including Green End.

Evidence for medieval activity (11th to 14th centuries; Periods 3 and 4) survived as a large pit/hollow containing a fill of midden-like material and a series of discrete features (pits and postholes), as well as boundary and enclosure ditches. The pottery assemblage from Period 3 and 4 features is of local importance as it is among the first stratified medieval assemblages from the parish of Hanslope. Whilst pottery of 11th to 14th-century date was recovered from all areas, assemblages containing 11th to 13th-century material were more dominant in features to the west, whilst 13th to 14th-century material was more dominant to the east, indicating an eastward shift in occupation focus between the two periods.

The medieval features contained occupation debris including pottery, fired clay, metal artefacts, animal bone, charred plant remains and charcoal. This evidence, together with the westerly concentration of medieval artefacts recovered from the previous metal-detector survey (CA 2016, 21) and structural remains identified to the west of the site during the trial-trench evaluation (CA 2017) and evidence for buildings on the 1779 Watts Estate map (Fig. 4) suggests this material originates from settlement activity within the village of Green End, located just to the west of the site. Metal artefacts include horseshoe nails and an iron buckle fragment, and the ceramic spindle whorl and antler fragments provide evidence for craft production. Analysis of the carbonised plant remains and charcoal suggests similar crops (free-threshing wheat and barley) were being utilised throughout the medieval period, with a focus on food preparation rather than crop processing. The charcoal identified as oak, hazel, blackthorn, hawthorn and apple indicates that fuelwood used in small domestic

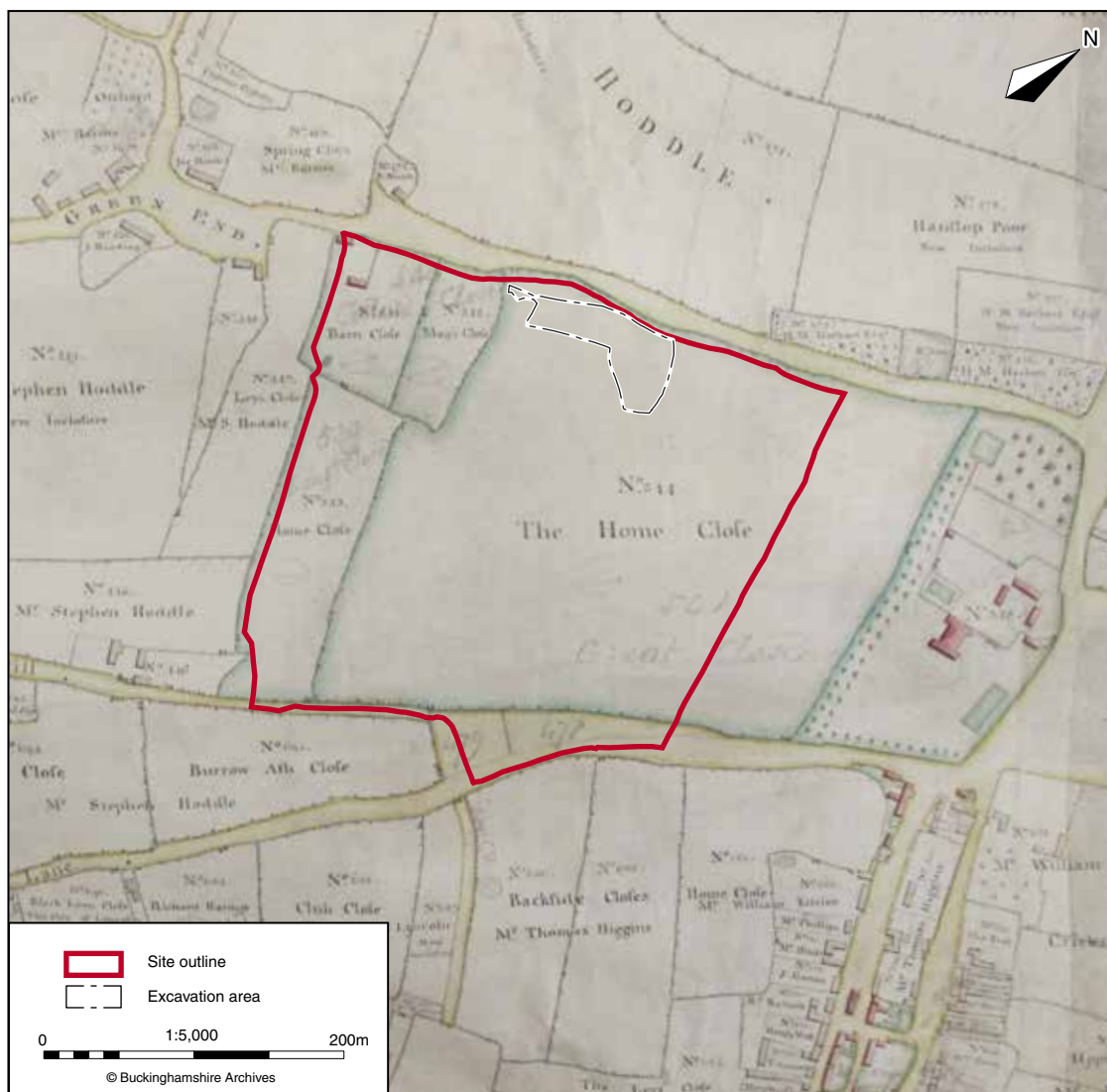


FIGURE 4 Hanslope parish map [Watts Estate map], 1779, showing site boundary and excavation area (reproduced at 1:5000)

fires was derived from a deliberate supply of firewood, supplemented by pruning waste. The animal bone assemblage comprises cattle, sheep/goat, pig, horse, goose and red/?roe deer, suggesting these species were being consumed, although no evidence of butchery or processing was observed on the bones.

Stratigraphic, ceramic and other evidence suggests that the medieval enclosures and/or

boundary ditches had been backfilled or silted up by the end of the 14th century, indicating a scaling back of activity during this period. This coincided with a time of widespread settlement shrinkage and abandonment across a large part of the country attributed to the onset of the black death in the mid-14th century, though also sustained by subsequent changes in land ownership. Numerous other examples of rural settlement/population decline

are recorded in the surrounding region; immediately north of Hanslope for example, the settlement at Stocking Green clearly had medieval origins, but had contracted by the post-medieval period, declining further after the late 18th century (Green 2011, 31). Other notable examples of shrunken or deserted villages in the local area and more widely across Buckinghamshire include Tattenhoe and Westbury (Ivens *et al* 1995), Quarrendon (Everson 2001), Doddershall (BAS 2013), Stantonbury (Mynard 1971) and Stowe (Page 2005). Numerous further examples are listed by Beresford (1953–4).

The apparent abandonment of features within the site from the later 14th century did not herald the desertion of Green End, rather there was a shrinkage in the area occupied by the settlement. The now-demolished mansion house and associated structures including ponds and a moat recorded at Green End Farm, appear to date to the late 16th or early 17th century, indicating a continued occupation west of the site. The Hanslope Easter Book (Anon 1616) records that the hamlet still comprised a total of 24 households; although only eight houses including the mansion house are shown on the 1779 Watts Estate Map of Hanslope (Fig. 4). By the 19th century, the former settlement at Green End had been reduced to a single entity; Green End Farm. Whilst Green End experienced significant shrinkage after the 14th century and there was also probable contraction of Hanslope back to the area of the current village, the area reverted largely to agricultural usage and remained as such up until the start of the archaeological investigations.

Overall the archaeological investigations have permitted an increased understanding of the development of Hanslope and Green End; both most likely established in the Anglo-Saxon period, developing in the earlier medieval period and declining from the later 14th century. This has been supported by artefactual evidence, including a significant medieval pottery assemblage, and other artefactual and palaeoenvironmental evidence that has allowed a better understanding of the wider environment as well as activities taking place on site and the diet of the inhabitants.

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