

# SHORTER CONTRIBUTION

## DISPERSED MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT SOUTH OF GIPPING ROAD, STOWUPLAND

by ROBIN WEBB

### INTRODUCTION

THIS NOTE DISCUSSES the development of a dispersed medieval settlement to the south of Gipping Road, Stowupland, Suffolk (centred on NGR TM 0712 6031; Fig. 217). Located in a predominantly rural setting on the north-eastern edge of the village, the site was in a field which sloped gently down from 56.5m OD in the north to 54m OD in the south. The underlying geology of the area is mapped as Crag Group Sand overlain by Lowestoft Formation Diamicton, with the river Gipping located c.1km to the north.<sup>1</sup>

Excavation by Oxford Archaeology (OA) East in advance of a residential development revealed continuous occupation at the site from the early medieval through to the post-medieval period (Fig. 218). The fieldwork, which followed a geophysical survey and phase of trench evaluation, comprised three areas: Areas 1 and 3 (0.41ha), adjacent to Gipping Road, and Area 2 (0.29ha), located along the eastern edge of the field.<sup>2</sup> A summary of the results is outlined below, while full details and an in-depth discussion of all the remains can be found in the grey literature report, which is freely available to download from the OA library.<sup>3</sup>

Stowupland lay within the royal estate of Thorney in the hundred of Stow, which was held by King Edward before the Norman conquest but by 1086 had been fragmented into five landholdings.<sup>4</sup> The name 'Stowupland' is derived from the components *stow* meaning 'place' and *upland* meaning 'above/higher' than Stowmarket (place with a market); the former always having been incorporated in the manorial system of the latter.<sup>5</sup> Although medieval settlement was focused around Thorney Green to the south-west of the site, this wider area is characterised by numerous scattered farmsteads, hamlets and moated manors, including Columbine Hall located a few hundred metres to the north (Fig. 217).

### MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT DEVELOPMENT

Fields or agricultural plots were first established at the site in the eleventh to twelfth centuries, defined by a series of narrow ditches (c.0.4m–0.9m wide and 0.1m–0.3m deep) evident across all three areas of excavation (Fig. 218). This arrangement was developed in the northern part of the site during the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries when a series of further ditches, along with some contemporary pits, was created extending at right angles and parallel to the medieval lane (now Gipping Road). Similar evidence has been found locally, notably the early ditched enclosures at Cedars Park, Stowmarket, c.2km to the south-west.<sup>6</sup>

In the eastern part of the site (Area 2), an enclosed farmstead or toft (Enclosure 1) was established at some point in the early to high medieval period, superimposed over the earlier ditches, with a driveway to the south. No evidence of internal structural features was encountered, although only the corner was exposed by the excavation, suggesting that the main area of settlement was either located further to the east or had not survived. The

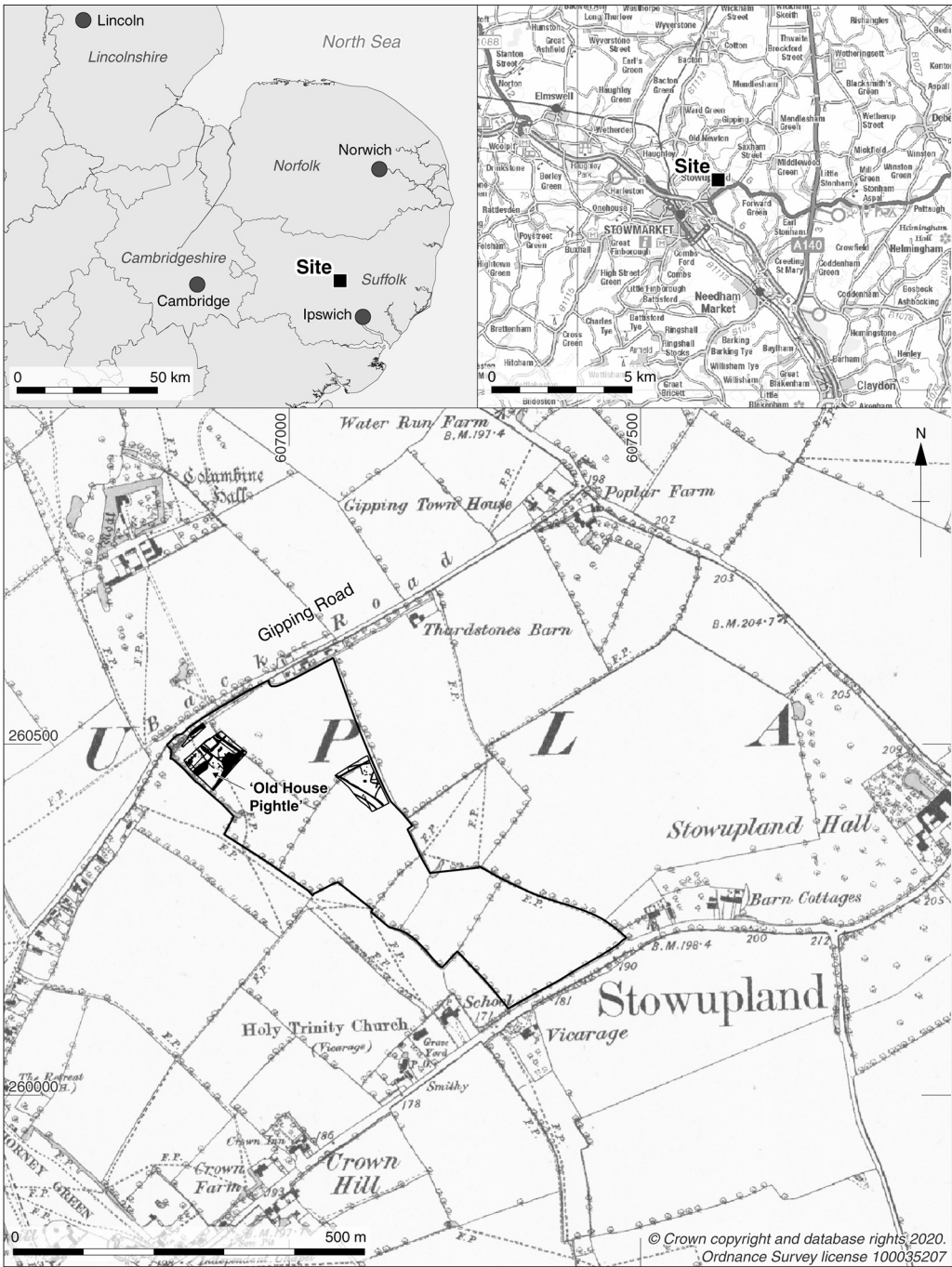
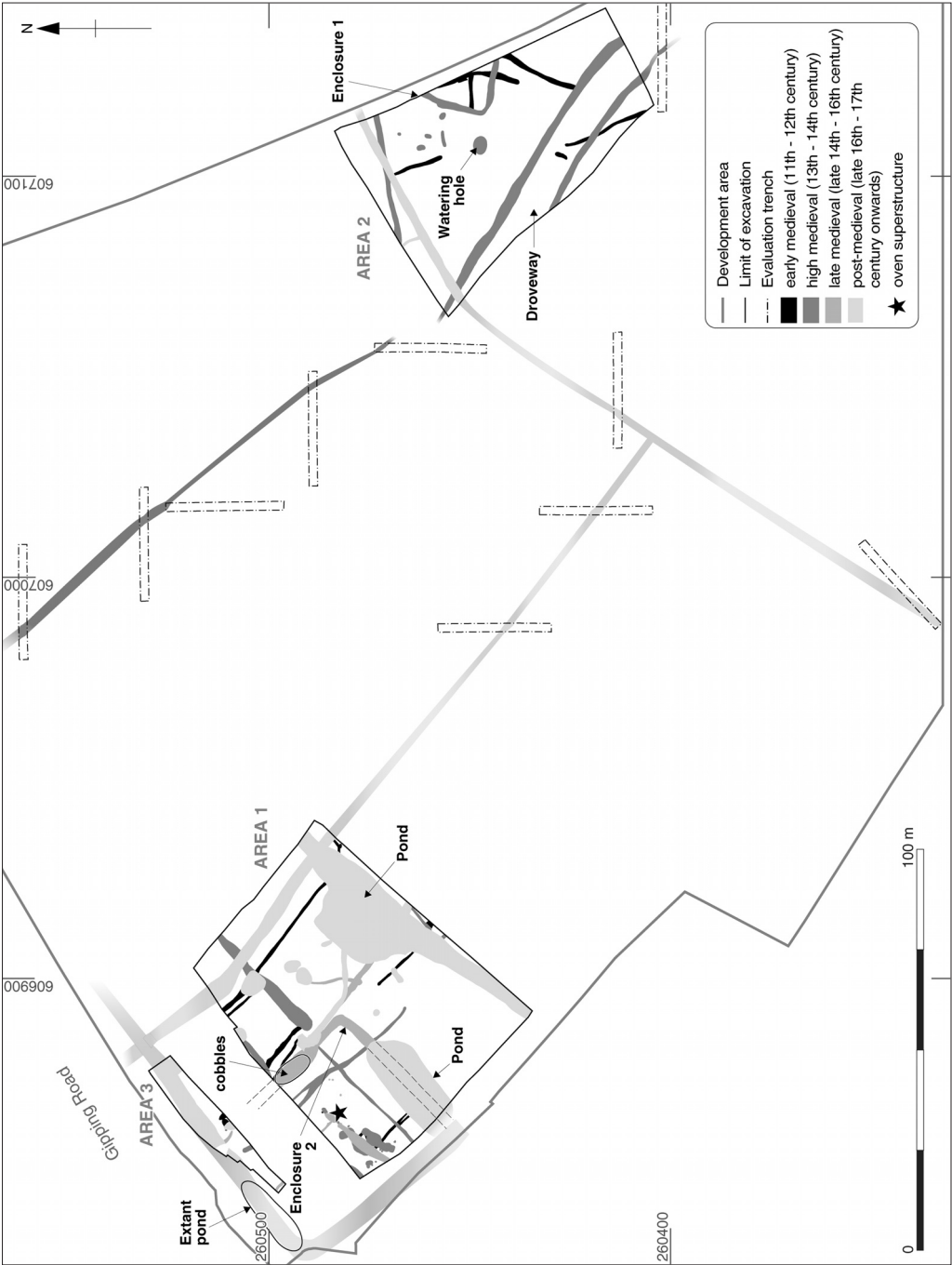


FIG. 217 – Site location overlain on 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map (1884).

NEXT PAGE:  
FIG. 218 – Site plan.



enclosing ditch measured 1.2–1.9m wide and 0.3–0.7m deep and contained a large assemblage of domestic waste, including 783 sherds (10.7kg) of medieval pottery dating to between the twelfth and early fifteenth centuries. A number of small finds were also recovered, including a silver short cross penny (AD 1191–1205) and a ceramic spindle whorl. An abundance of charred cereal grains recovered from the farmstead enclosure ditch fills indicates the nearby presence of an oven or bakehouse. Together, this evidence suggests that rubbish may originally have been middened and subsequently used to backfill the enclosure ditch and surrounding features. Beyond the enclosure was the droveway, formed by two north-west to south-east aligned ditches (*c.*2.8m wide and 0.7m deep), a small number of contemporary pits and a watering hole (*c.*3.3m wide and 1.28m deep).

This farmstead may have been created as part of the fragmentation of the Anglo-Saxon royal vill of Thorney, as recognised by Amor.<sup>7</sup> Access would presumably have been via the droveway and the occupants may have utilised the passing trade of drovers heading to the market at Stowmarket, with the fields enclosed to provide the pastures necessary for fattening cattle.<sup>8</sup> However, as with the farmstead at Cedars Park, Stowmarket, this settlement had a relatively short-lived and intensive period of occupation before being abandoned in the fifteenth century.<sup>9</sup> It is possible that it had become incorporated into Thrandestone Farm by 1427 when the field immediately to the east was part of the farm and was gifted to Earl Stonham.<sup>10</sup>

During the later medieval period, the focus of activity shifted towards the Gipping Road frontage (Areas 1 and 3) where the eastern side of a rectangular enclosure (Enclosure 2) was exposed, one of several tofts/crofts that have been noted in works around Stowupland positioned adjacent to medieval roadsides.<sup>11</sup> Alongside the archaeological evidence, this interpretation is also suggested through cartographic and field name evidence, notably 'Pightle' on the 1839 tithe map (see below), meaning a small field or enclosure and often synonymous with a croft.<sup>12</sup> The enclosure ditch, enclosing *c.*0.3ha, was probably related to drainage of the clay landscape, especially with the worsening weather of the later middle ages.<sup>13</sup>

A cobbled surface created for the consolidation of ground during wetter conditions was located by the east-facing entrance to the enclosure. It was exposed for an area of 14m by 4m and was densest towards the centre, with the cobbles and flint nodules not exceeding 6cm in diameter. This surface (and presumably the croft) appears to have remained in use for some time, with associated artefacts comprising a mix of both medieval and post-medieval items, presumably accumulated through accidental loss. Finds include a farthing from the reign of James I (1603–1625), part of a copper-alloy vessel, buckles, a button, a hand-forged knife, a lead weight and a small, mixed assemblage of pottery broadly dating to between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries (54 sherds, 599g), all concentrated towards the south-eastern extent of the surface. Domestic debris was also recovered from a possible internal boundary that lay roughly parallel with Gipping Road; this included medieval pottery of mixed date, animal bone, fired clay and oyster shell, along with wheat, oats, barley and rye grains and peas and beans. Adjacent to this ditch, a pit contained 3.8kg of fired clay fragments from an oven superstructure or hearth lining.

#### LATER POST-MEDIEVAL LAND USE

Settlement-related activity had clearly decreased in this area by the post-medieval period, when two large ditched boundaries (up to 5m wide and 1.2m deep) were created parallel with Gipping Road, along with a further internal division and a scatter of pits. Environmental samples taken from one of the larger ditches contained bramble, elder and hawthorn, indicating that there may have been a hedge alongside it. These boundaries appear to relate to the conspicuous square field labelled as 'Old House Pightle' on the 1839 tithe map and still

discernible on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 217). Further boundaries, dividing the site into three large fields, along with the creation of several large ponds, probably relate to Parliamentary enclosure in the nineteenth century.

The irregular form of some of the field divisions suggests the piecemeal incorporation of medieval selions stretching between Gipping Road to the north and Church Road to the south; continuing a process that began many centuries before, notably under the Hotot family who were resident in nearby Columbine Hall during the fifteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Whilst this has resulted in the gradual loss of medieval boundaries, their alignments have persisted into the present-day field pattern.<sup>15</sup>

#### OVERVIEW OF FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

Artefactual and environmental remains from the site provide some evidence of the diet and economy of the people living in this part of Stowupland during the medieval and early post-medieval periods. The pottery assemblage (2020 sherds, totalling 23.7kg) is typical of rural sites of this date in central Suffolk; the majority dates from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries and represents a continuous sequence of occupation. Although much of the pottery came from local producers, the presence of some non-local pottery from Essex, Norfolk and Buckinghamshire, as well as imported decorative Siegburg-type and Frechen/Cologne stoneware, demonstrates the relationship between rural and urban sites, probably gained through the market at Stowmarket and indirect trade from further afield on the continent.<sup>16</sup>

The faunal assemblage recovered from the site is of a small size (*c.*10kg), of which half could be identified to species. Analysis indicates that husbandry practices conformed with regional patterns and were consistent throughout the life of the site, with domestic animals being the mainstay of the food economy. There was a focus on cattle, primarily exploited for meat, with some breeding of sheep/goat and pig. Butchery took place to a limited degree on site and waste material was dumped into pits and redundant ditches, in some instances after lying on the surface as midden material.<sup>17</sup> Shellfish were also relatively evenly distributed between the periods and indicates that the occupants of the site had access to food sources outside the immediate hinterland, probably from the market at Stowmarket.<sup>18</sup> This consistency in activity was mirrored in the environmental samples, including plant remains representing culinary waste, with cereal crops (including wheat and rye for flour production; barley for bread, soup and animal fodder; oats for porridge and animal fodder) being grown in the surrounding fields.<sup>19</sup>

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavation was funded by Bloor Homes. Thanks are extended to Duncan Hawkins of CgMs Consulting and to Rachael Abraham of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service for their advice and guidance. The project was managed by Tom Phillips and the fieldwork was directed by Robin Webb with the assistance of Ro Booth, Nick Cox, Lindsey Kemp, Thomas Lucking and Anne-Marie Woolley. The illustrations are by David Brown, based on original figures by Séverine Bézie. Particular thanks are extended to the various specialists for their contributions, which have been summarised or referenced within this note, especially Sue Anderson (pottery, ceramic building material and fired clay), Carole Fletcher (clay tobacco pipe, glass and mollusca), Rachel Fosberry (environmental remains), Hayley Foster (animal bone) and Denis Sami (metal finds, worked bone and spindle whorl). This note was edited and prepared for publication by Rachel Clarke and Tom Phillips.



## NOTES

- 1 BGS 2019.
- 2 Davies 2015; Ladd 2017.
- 3 Webb 2019 (<https://oxfordarchaeology.com/oalibrary>).
- 4 Amor 2006, 178.
- 5 Goult 1990.
- 6 Woolhouse 2016, 21.
- 7 Amor 2006, 194.
- 8 Yelling 1977, 134; Amor 2006, 183.
- 9 Woolhouse 2016.
- 10 Neil Langridge pers. comm.
- 11 Abraham 2015, 1; Amor 2006, 175.
- 12 Martin and Satchell 2008, 27; Gailey 2014, 10.
- 13 Steane 1984, 175.
- 14 Medieval open strip of land.
- 15 Amor 2006, 177.
- 16 Anderson 2019.
- 17 Foster 2019.
- 18 Fletcher 2019.
- 19 Fosberry 2019.

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