

# LATE IRON AGE, ROMAN AND SAXON COMMUNITIES AT HANCHETT END, HAVERHILL

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## INTRODUCTION

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS BY Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd in 2012 in advance of commercial and residential development at Hanchett End, Haverhill, revealed elements of a multiperiod landscape, with activity dating from the Late Iron Age onwards. The 4.5ha site was situated on a ridge of higher ground to the north-west of Haverhill, overlooking a valley of a tributary of the river Stour (Figs 60 and 62). The underlying geology is chalk (Lewes Nodular Chalk/Seaford Chalk Formation), overlain by superficial deposits (chalky till, silts and clays) of the Lowestoft Formation (NERC 2022).

The excavation revealed evidence for multiple phases of activity spanning the Late Iron Age to post-medieval periods (Table 1). The primary phases comprised an Iron Age droveway and series of enclosures, succeeded by an Early to Late Roman farmstead (Fig. 61). Evidence for Anglo-Saxon occupation comprised a timber building and a burial assemblage. A post alignment at the eastern edge of the site could also be Anglo-Saxon in date. Later agricultural activity comprised a medieval quarry pit and post-medieval field boundaries, which can be identified on the 1840 tithe map. Truncation caused by this later agricultural activity had affected the majority of the archaeological remains, which were typically poorly preserved. The paucity of features indicating domestic structures might be a consequence of this truncation. Overall, the dating evidence revealed by pottery and other artefacts is mixed, prohibiting a more nuanced view of the development of the site. As such the phasing predominately relies upon stratigraphic relationships and the spatial distribution of features. This report provides a summary of the excavations at Hanchett End, with a full archive report available on the Archaeology Data Service (OASIS headland4-131583).

## LATE IRON AGE – LATE ROMAN FARMSTEAD

The principal excavated features comprised elements of an extensive farmstead, with activity from the Late Iron Age to Late Roman period, including systems of enclosures, field boundaries, droveways, at least five buildings, and three burials (Fig. 61). This settlement lies within a well-populated landscape, with plentiful find spots of Roman date in the area and four broadly contemporary sites investigated fairly recently in the vicinity, at Burton End School (HVH 070), Helions Park and Haverhill Business Park (HVH 056) to the south-east; and land north of Ann Suckling Road (HVH 083) on the other side of the valley to the east (Fig. 62).<sup>1</sup> The evidence from the latter site probably represents the agricultural periphery of a settlement. As such, there appears to have been farming communities sited at least every 2.5km along the upper boulder clay slopes and plateaus of the valley, although there are chronological variances which suggest significant changes to this landscape over time.

There is evidence for at least four major phases of reorganisation of the farmstead (Table 1). The earliest phase of activity, dating to the Late Iron Age, comprised a droveway positioned across the southern slope of the site, at least 90m long and 30m wide, and associated with a series of small rectilinear enclosures. Parallel to the droveway was a shallow

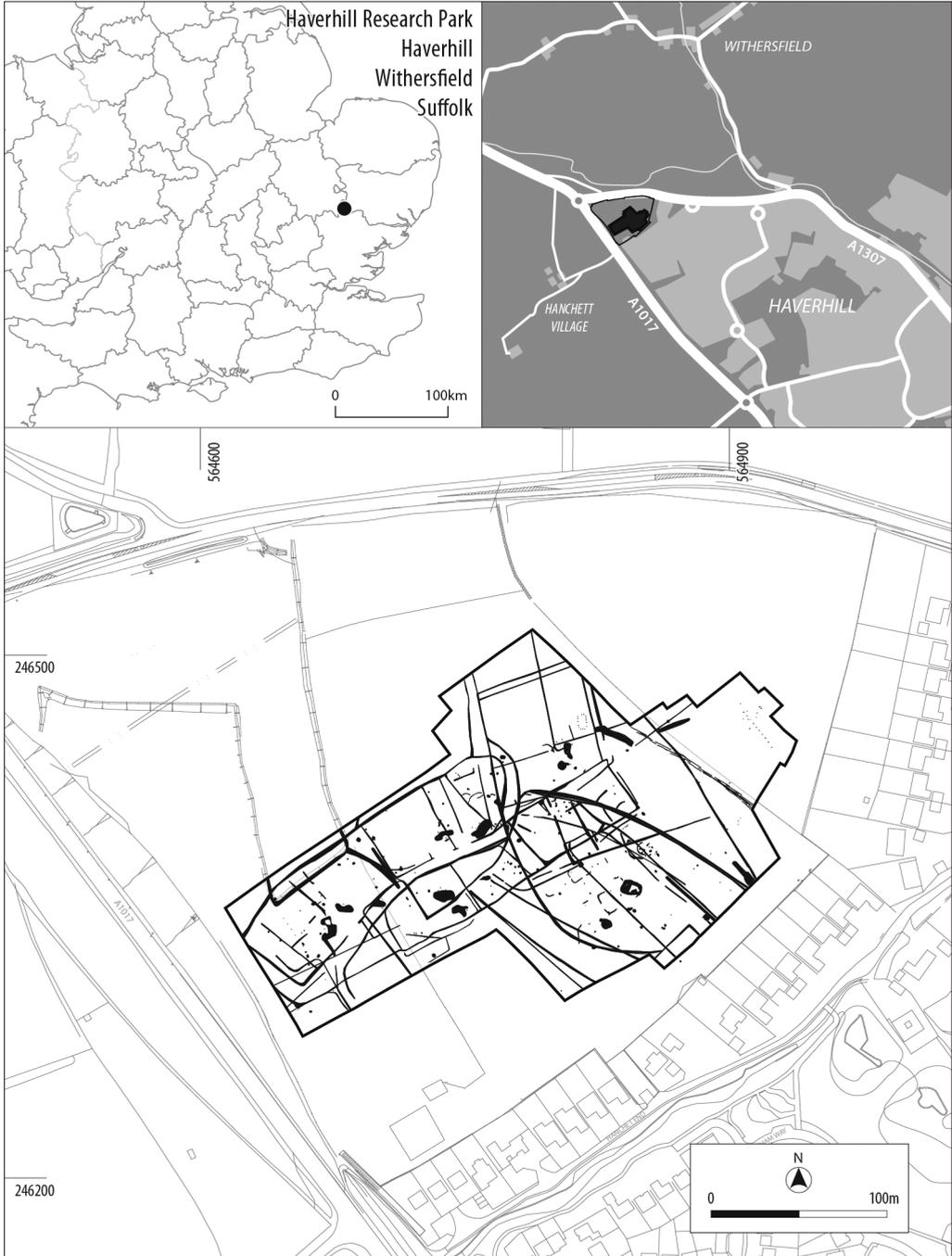


FIG. 60 – Site location.

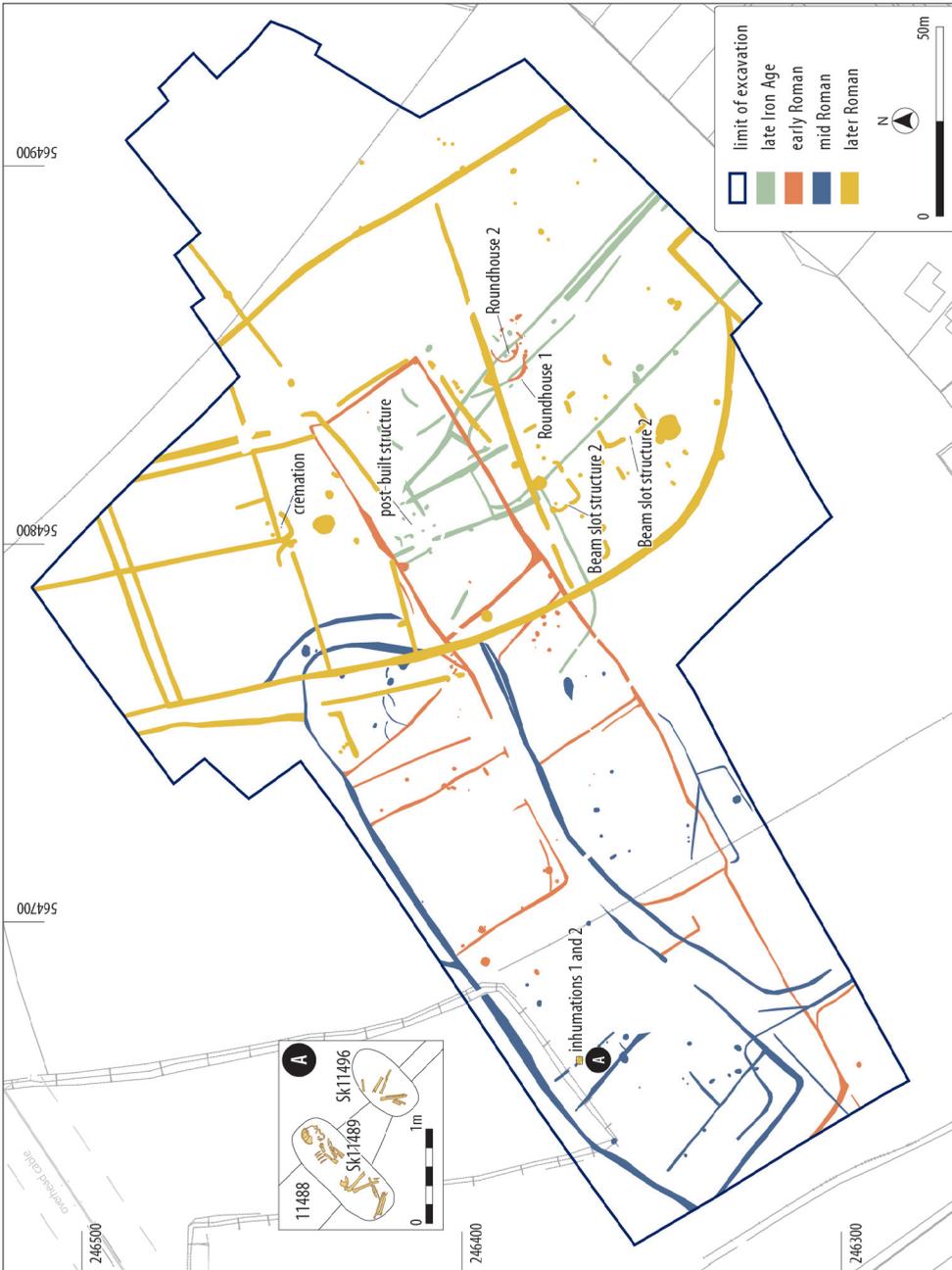


FIG. 61 – Phased plan of the Late Iron Age to Roman settlement.

ditch defining the edge of a field or area of pasture (Fig. 61). A rectilinear post-built structure (7.5m by 5m) was positioned within one of the enclosures, partially blocking its western entrance. Although relatively uncommon, similar post-built rectangular structures of Iron Age date have been observed across the country, with varied interpretations as temporary animal byres and for domestic occupation in a society based upon transhumance.<sup>2</sup> The arrangement of the droveway, structure and enclosures could represent the remains of a ‘race’ designed to move animals from one paddock to another.<sup>3</sup> The relatively low density of finds suggests that the site may not have been host to domestic activity during this period, but given the high levels of truncation recorded across the site, the possibility of settlement cannot be ruled out. The overall nature of the site at this time is similar to the Late Iron Age droveway and enclosure system at Helions Park, *c.*5km to the south-east (Fig. 62);<sup>4</sup> both droveways apparently led towards the lower valley and possible areas of common pasture. This suggests an emphasis on livestock management in the valley at this time, although whether this was an exclusive focus or part of wider mixed regime is unclear.

The site underwent a major redevelopment during the Early Roman Period, dated by the presence of Hod Hill brooches and south Gaulish Samian. The Late Iron Age droveway was replaced by a series of north-east to south-west aligned rectilinear enclosures and field systems, positioned across the top of the ridge. These covered an area of over 1.6ha, continuing beyond the western limit of excavation (Fig. 61). These Early Roman enclosures may have fulfilled a similar role as the Late Iron Age enclosures and boundaries, functioning as pens and enclosures for livestock. Whether any elements (e.g. hedgerows) of the earlier droveway persisted is unknown, although the partial remains of two possible roundhouses of this date were observed truncating the droveway ditches (Fig. 61). Within the interior of Roundhouse 2 were two pits which contained fragments of charcoal, cereal grain, daub, hammerscale, and sherds of Roman pottery. The continued use of roundhouses in the Early Roman period is not unusual, though it contrasts with the nearby Haverhill Business Park site, where the existing Late Iron Age roundhouses appeared to go out of use. Nevertheless, the settlement at Haverhill Business Park did undergo a similar significant change at this time, with a rectangular enclosure system developing around a pond.<sup>5</sup> The evidence overall suggests changes in the nature and scale of farming practices in this area occurring relatively soon after the Roman conquest, as has been observed in other parts of eastern and southern Britain.<sup>6</sup>

The Early Roman period seems to have been the time of maximum expansion in terms of numbers of settlements in the Haverhill area, with some farmsteads such as at Haverhill

Period		Activity
Late Iron Age	150/100 BC – AD 43	Construction of droveway, enclosures, and associated field system on southern slope.
Early Roman	<i>c.</i> 43 to mid-2nd century AD	Construction of new enclosures and associated field system positioned along the top of the ridge of higher ground. Other features include two possible roundhouses and a cremation burial.
Mid-Roman	Mid-2nd to mid-3rd centuries	Construction of a larger enclosure and boundary ditches extending the existing field system to the west. Associated droveway.
Mid- to late Roman	3rd to 4th century AD	Construction of new enclosure system aligned broadly north to south and laid out to the east of the earlier core of activity. Two inhumation burials.
Early to mid-Anglo-Saxon	5th to 9th century AD	Single structure, possible grave assemblage (unstratified), possible post alignment.

TABLE 1 – Major phases of activity at Hanchett End, Haverhill.

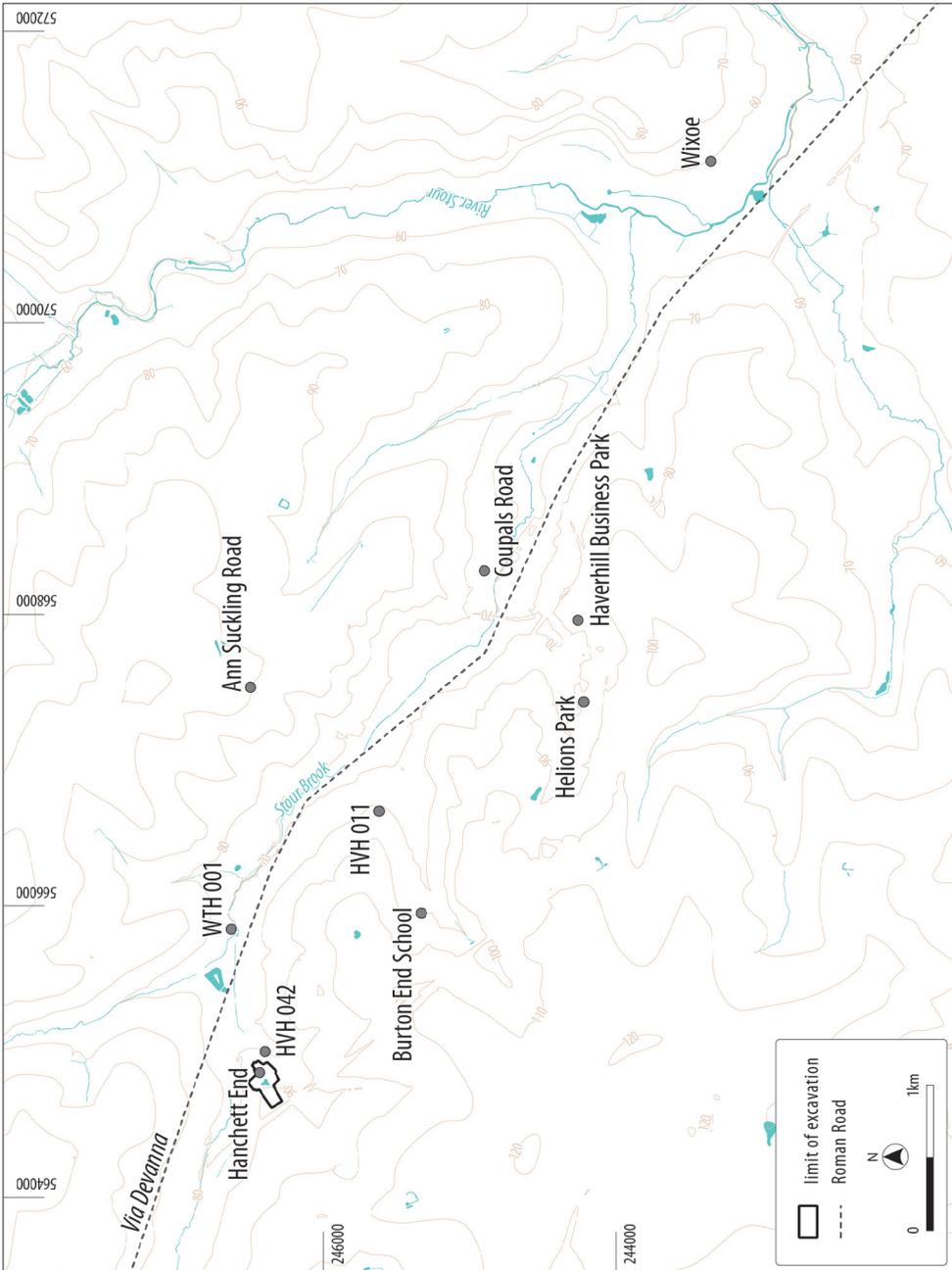


FIG. 62 – The site in relation to selected Roman sites in the region.

Business Park subsequently going out of use by the mid-second century, or at least shifting location after this time. This reflects the general Early Roman emphasis in settlements across the wider region.<sup>7</sup> At the Hanchett End site, however, the farmstead continued in use and underwent another major phase of reorganisation in the mid-second century, with the construction of a larger enclosure and boundary ditches in the western part of the site cutting across the earlier enclosures and creating larger plots of land. These new enclosures were associated with a trackway which ran across the southern edge of the enclosure before turning towards the north (Fig. 61). There were no obvious traces of buildings associated with this phase, but this is not unusual on Roman rural sites, possibly reflecting differing building traditions and, certainly in this case, the damage caused by plough truncation.<sup>8</sup>

The Early to Mid-Roman phases of activity can be linked to a wider reorganisation of the landscape from the Flavian period. This includes the establishment of the *Via Devana* (Margary 24), located c.0.3km to the north of the site and the emergence of new nucleated centres including Wixoe (WIX 003), 7.7km to the south-east (Fig. 62). The settlement at Wixoe was founded during the Late Flavian period, although its initial development appears to have been relatively slow until the early to mid-second century AD.<sup>9</sup> A number of farmsteads have been found in the area around Wixoe, with the present site falling within the suggested main 10km economic and social hinterland of the 'small town'.<sup>10</sup>

The final phase of Roman activity, in the third to fourth centuries AD, comprised the construction of a new north–south aligned enclosure system to the east of the earlier core of activity, covering an area of over 2.2ha (Fig. 61). The southernmost of the Late Roman enclosures contained four poorly preserved beam-slot structures, aligned broadly north-east to south-west, and measuring 11–12.5m long by c.7.5m wide. No internal features, such as floor surfaces, hearths, or post-holes, were recorded. There is a scarcity of evidence for such timber beam-slot buildings in Suffolk, possibly due to issues of preservation, though other examples include those from the nucleated settlements at Hacheston (HCH 001), Wenhaston (WMH 003) and Wixoe.<sup>11</sup>

On present evidence it is unclear if this Late Roman activity was continuous with the earlier phase of settlement, or if there was any intervening period of abandonment or decline in activity. The nucleated settlement at Wixoe experienced a period of decline during the third century AD, while several of the farmsteads in its hinterland also appear to have been abandoned in the Mid-Roman period.<sup>12</sup> This accords with a general decline in the number of sites in use from around the third century AD in many parts of the east of England.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the apparent expansion of settlement at Hanchett End during this period may represent part of a wider consolidation of landholdings into smaller numbers of larger agricultural estates. This is not to say that this settlement became the centre of an estate — the relative paucity and quality of material culture does not suggest particularly high-status inhabitants — but it possibly formed a subsidiary farmstead within a wider, villa[?], estate.

There is a range of material and environmental evidence relating to the lifestyles and economic practices of the inhabitants of the excavated settlement. The pottery assemblage, comprising 5614 sherds (64.7kg), was highly mixed, with sherds dating broadly to the first to fourth century AD. It was dominated by locally produced wares, but also included Late Roman regional imports from the Lower Nene Valley, the Oxfordshire kilns, and the Wareham/Poole Harbour area. There were also Samian sherds from Gaul (one with a two-letter *graffito*, presumably an owner's mark) and amphora sherds from southern Spain (Table 2). Some of the jars had holes pierced post-firing through their bases or necks, suggesting they functioned as strainers or in cheese-making.<sup>14</sup> Overall, the assemblage was fairly basic and utilitarian, typical of a rural farmstead in this area, although there was enough imported and fine wares to suggest some relationship with higher status occupants in the vicinity. This was

Fabric	NoSh	%site	Wgt (g)
Total reduced	4244	76	41226
Total oxidised	812	14	15784
Flint	156	3	1654
Grog	227	4	3440
Shell	82	1	990
Amphora	5		452
BB1	1		8
SGS	19		128
CGS	8		93
LNVCC	39	1	263
LNCW	3		402
OXCC	3		108
OXWH	10		172
Organic	5		22
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5614</b>		<b>64742</b>

TABLE 2 – Quantification of Roman pottery fabrics.

also suggested by a small quantity of vessel glass, a stone colonette fragment and a limited assemblage of ceramic building material, including box-flue tiles and pilae from hypocausts; together these hint at connections with a nearby higher status settlement, probably a villa as alluded to above. Metal-detector finds of six Late Roman coins and a copper-alloy key handle fragment, *c.*200m to the east of the site (HVH 042), also suggest possible higher status activity in the vicinity. A possible Roman villa was identified at Coupals Road (HVH 008), 3.7km to the south-east, through finds of roof- and floor-tiles, tesserae and painted wall plaster (Fig. 62).

Other finds were relatively scarce but did include a Hod Hill brooch, a type that came in with the Roman army during the mid-first century AD, a mirror fragment of Early Roman date, and hobnails indicating ‘Roman’ style footwear. These suggest that at least some inhabitants had particular cultural aspirations when it came to appearance. Craftworking activities relating to textiles were evidenced by a spindle whorl, while limited metalworking was indicated by an iron chisel or punch, and slag relating to blacksmithing. There was also some evidence for the use of antler for object manufacture, found within a later Roman pit. These are all fairly typical low-level craft activities expected on rural sites, though nevertheless tend to be more frequently recovered on larger, complex farmsteads such as this.<sup>15</sup>

There is no doubt that agriculture, both arable and pastoral, was the economic mainstay of the settlement, although the relative lack of preserved cereal remains and layout of the enclosures may suggest there was more of a focus on the pastoral side. In eighty-three bulk samples, only occasional cereal grains were recovered, these were dominated by wheat, most probably spelt. Far more abundant and well-preserved cereal remains from the nearby Haverhill Business Park site attest to the domination of spelt cultivation locally, as indeed was the case across most of southern and eastern Britain. Two bun-shaped puddingstone querns dating to the Early Roman period do attest to grain processing being undertaken at the Hanchett End settlement, likely at a household level. It has been suggested that centralised milling of cereal grain in nucleated settlements (e.g. Wixoe) and/or villa estate centres became more common during the later Roman period, which may partly account for the lack of later querns at this settlement.<sup>16</sup>

The limited animal bone assemblage (750 identifiable specimens) was recovered from a

number of contexts, but due to the mixed nature of the site detailed phasing of the assemblage was not possible. The animal bone assemblage consisted predominantly of cattle, as with most other sites in the area and wider region, and these were mainly slaughtered as mature beasts, possibly following their use for traction or milking.<sup>17</sup> Butchery marks were only noted on 1 per cent of bones (probably due to high fragmentation), however, a collection of waste material from the primary butchery of cattle was recovered from a Late Roman pit. The remains of sheep, goats, and pigs were also recovered, indicative of a mixed husbandry regime. Other faunal remains included eel (probably caught locally in weirs or traps) and red deer (used as an occasional food source), while a quantity of oyster was also recovered, a resource which had to be transported *c.*60km from the coast.

The population of the Roman settlement was glimpsed at through the discovery and excavation of a cremation burial and two crouched inhumation burials (Fig. 61). The cremation burial has been assigned to the Early Roman period, was placed in a Roman wheel-made urn of late first- to second-century AD date, and was located just to the north of the enclosures. The crouched burials were radiocarbon-dated to the Late Roman period (cal. AD 243–394; 95 per cent probability; SUERC-49234) (cal. AD 246–395; 95 per cent probability; SUERC-49235). They were in the western part of the site, *c.*100m from the settlement, both in shallow cuts, one aligned north-east to south-west and in a flexed position, and the other heavily disturbed by later ploughing. As elsewhere, these burials probably represent a minority funerary rite, with the majority of dead being disposed of in ways that are archaeologically invisible.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, the disarticulated human bone found in the lower fill of an undated ditch could possibly represent the remains of an individual who had undergone the rite of excarnation. Further examples of Roman burials have been recorded in the area, including a single second-century AD cremation burial 2km to the south-east (HVV 011), and a cremation cemetery near Meldham Bridge, 1km to the east, revealed during gravel quarrying in 1759 (WTH 001) (Fig. 62).

#### THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

The Anglo-Saxon period is represented by a single post-built structure G150 (A) and a collection of artefacts, presumed to be part of a burial assemblage (Fig. 63). These were recovered by metal-detecting of spoil to the north-east of the excavation area, close to a possible post alignment G151 (B), located towards the eastern edge of the site, and which could date to this period as well. There is no evidence for direct continuity from the later Roman farmstead into the Anglo-Saxon period, with no definitive evidence for fifth-century activity. This ties in with a wider pattern where most Roman sites within the region (and wider) do not have any direct evidence for fifth-century activity,<sup>19</sup> although possible evidence for continued occupation into this century was noted at Wixoe.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the position of the structure G150, parallel to and within the latest Roman field ditches (Fig. 61), suggests that these ditches may still have been visible features in the landscape when this building was constructed. Similarly, the post alignment was positioned parallel to the eastern-most latest Roman boundary ditch. This all suggests, at the very least, some continuity of land orientation between the Roman and Saxon periods, a situation which has become increasingly recognised.<sup>21</sup>

Structure G150 was located in the northern part of the site (Fig. 63.A) and measured 8.2m by 4.5m; it has been interpreted as an Anglo-Saxon hall.<sup>22</sup> The long walls were constructed of a single line of evenly spaced posts with no definite corner posts. A possible entrance is indicated by a pair of post-holes in the eastern wall, which oppose a single post on the western side. No internal features were recorded. The overall form of the building, including the



FIG. 63 – Plan of Saxon building G150 (A) and post alignment G151 (B).

absence of definite corner posts, finds ready parallels in other known Anglo-Saxon structures, including examples at Brandon and West Stow.<sup>23</sup> The general absence of finds, including pottery, makes dating the structure and establishing its relationship to the other probable Anglo-Saxon features difficult. Based on comparison with other known buildings, including those at Brandon, a provisional middle Anglo-Saxon date (AD 650–800) is suggested. The duration of the occupation is unclear, but could have extended into the Late Saxon period. ‘Hanchett’ was recorded in the 1086 Domesday Book, demonstrating that there was settlement in this general area by the Late Saxon period. Furthermore, place-names in and around the site (e.g. Hanchett End Green in the southern corner of the site, and Chapel Field within the site) suggest that Saxon settlement may have been in the vicinity of this site, with the building perhaps belonging to the periphery of such a settlement.

An alignment of twelve post-holes on a north-west to south-east alignment, plus four post-holes to the east, was recorded at the easternmost edge of the site (G151; Fig. 63.B). Given the linear arrangement of these, they probably represent the remains of a fence-line. A reddish-amber coloured bead was recovered from the fill of one of the post-holes (Fig. 64.A). This type of bead may date from the fifth century, but does not achieve true popularity until the sixth century, and continues in use through the seventh and into the eighth century.<sup>24</sup> In the absence of further finds, the precise date of the fence-line is uncertain, and its assignment to the Anglo-Saxon period is tentative; a date in the Late Roman period cannot be ruled out.

In addition to the structural evidence, a significant quantity of finds was recovered in an associated group by metal-detecting of spoil to the north-east of the excavation area close to the post alignment G151. The assemblage included a pair of Martin group 2.1.2 type cruciform brooches, a copper-alloy ring, an iron girdle hanger or key, a blade, a bone spindle whorl, and twenty-two glass and jet beads of various sizes and colours (four polychrome) (Fig. 64.B). The artefacts are typical of a burial assemblage and likely that of a woman.<sup>25</sup> This may have been disturbed in antiquity as there were no obvious traces of bone in the surrounding soil, and several of the finds show old breaks (possibly from ploughing). Dating, primarily based on the cruciform brooches, is early fifth–mid-sixth century.<sup>26</sup> The glass bead recovered from the post alignment is of similar form and colour to those found in the ‘burial’ assemblage, suggesting they may have formed part of the same group, and that the structures and burial assemblage may have derived from the same community. Saxon burial assemblages are relatively rare in south-west Suffolk so this assemblage, even when disturbed, represents an important contribution to the history of the local area. There are, however, a large cluster of Saxon cemetery sites in the wider area, particularly in Cambridgeshire and Great Chesterford (Essex). Furthermore, a number of sites in the region have produced similar surface finds or small cemeteries/single burials. For example, a single grave was recorded at Great Thurlow in Suffolk, one grave was found at Horseheath in Cambridgeshire, and three were found at West Wickham in Cambridgeshire.<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Excavations at Hanchett End have shown the existence of a multiperiod landscape. The earliest activity at the site comprises a farmstead which was probably occupied throughout the Late Iron Age and Roman periods, and which was reorganised at various stages. It is one of a series of known Late Iron Age to Roman settlements lying on the fringes of the valley, which may well have had integrated economies, with common cattle grazing in the lower valley and areas of arable cultivation on the valley slopes, possibly targeting the clay/glaciofluvial interface. These may have been connected by droeways and trackways, while a significant Roman road passed through the valley, probably linking settlements with larger nucleated

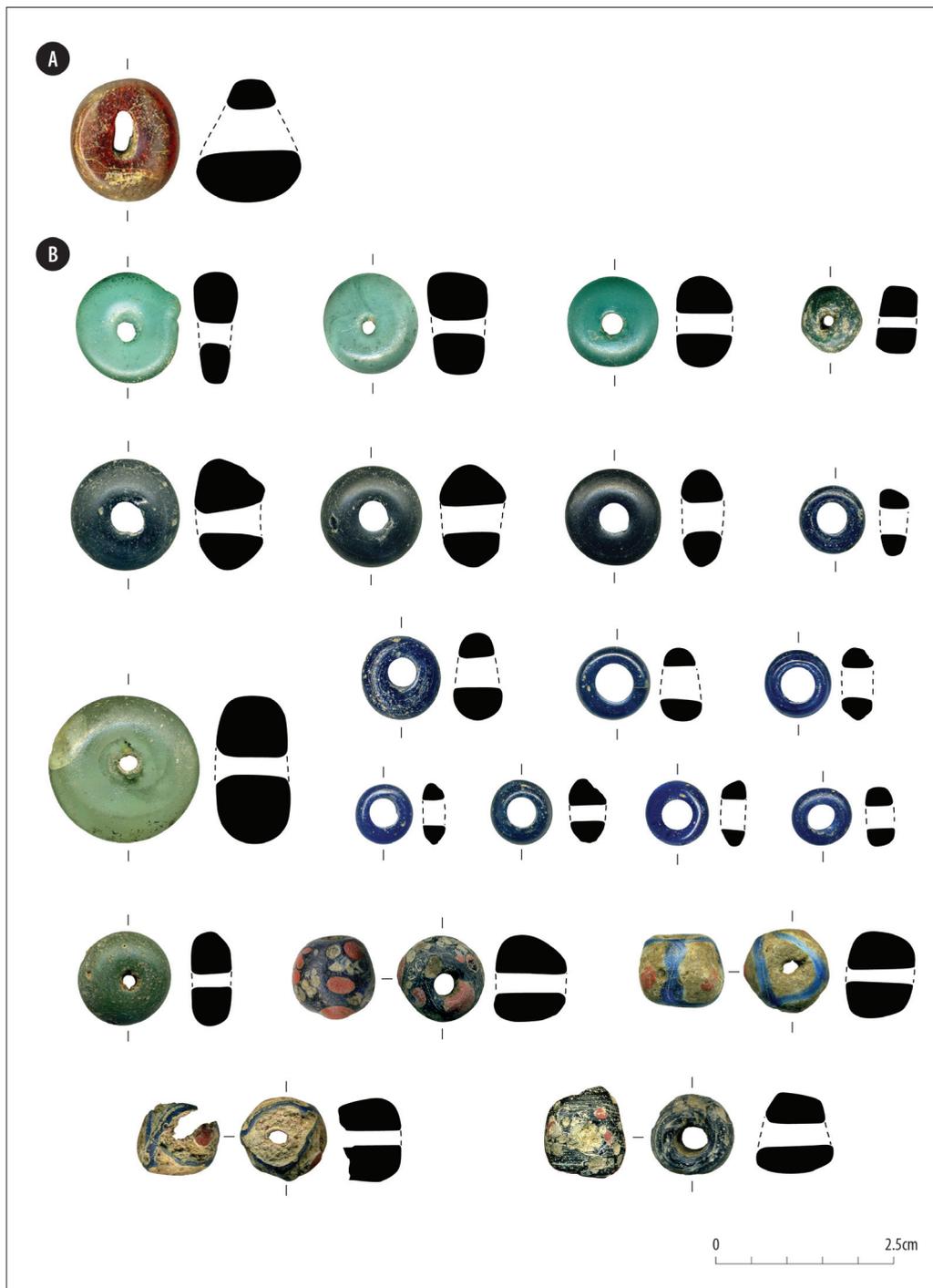


FIG. 64 – Anglo-Saxon glass beads recovered from the post alignment (A) and from spoil to the north-east of the excavation area (B).

centres such as at Wixoe to the south-east. Significant changes to the layout of some settlements, and the apparent abandonment of others, probably reflect developments in agricultural practices and possibly changes in land tenure. By the Mid- to Late Roman period the Hanchett End farmstead may have been part of a wider villa estate.

The 'end' of occupation of the Roman farmstead remains uncertain, but glimpses of an Early to Middle Saxon settlement and burial presence in the same area, aligned upon the existing boundaries, is of great interest in furthering our understanding of this still ill-understood period of history.

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#### NOTES

- 1 Burton End School: Sommers 2009; Helions Park: Gill 2002; Haverhill Business Park: Gardner 2004; Ann Suckling Road: Stocks-Morgan 2015.
- 2 Smith *et al.* 2016, 50.
- 3 Pryor 2006.
- 4 Gill 2002.
- 5 Gardner 2004.
- 6 Allen *et al.* 2017, 142.
- 7 Smith *et al.* 2016, 214.
- 8 Perring 2002, 98–105; Smith *et al.* 2016, 52–4.
- 9 Atkins and Clarke 2018, 181.
- 10 Atkins and Clarke 2018, 193–7, table 5.3 and fig. 5.7.
- 11 Hacheston: Blagg *et al.* 2004; Wenhaston: Stirk 2009; Wixoe: Atkins and Clarke 2018.
- 12 Atkins and Clarke 2018, 181, 194.
- 13 Smith *et al.* 2016, 214.
- 14 Biddulph 2015.
- 15 Smith *et al.* 2018, 178.
- 16 Allen *et al.* 2017, 72.
- 17 Allen *et al.* 2017, 89.
- 18 *Cf.* Smith *et al.* 2018, 275.
- 19 Smith *et al.* 2016, 215.
- 20 Atkins and Clarke 2018, 183.
- 21 Rippon *et al.* 2015; Rippon 2018.
- 22 Marshall and Marshall 1993.
- 23 Brandon: Tester *et al.* 2014; West Stow: West 1985.

- 24 Guido 1999, 60.  
 25 Bayliss *et al.* 2013.  
 26 Martin 2015.  
 27 Meany 1964; Penn and Brugmann 2007.

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