

# THE IRON AGE ORIGINS OF SUDBURY: DID PREHISTORIC DEFENCES INFLUENCE THE LAYOUT AND DEVELOPMENT OF LATE ANGLO-SAXON SETTLEMENT SEEN AT THE GAINSBOROUGH'S HOUSE MUSEUM EXCAVATIONS?

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## INTRODUCTION

THE CURVING STREET PATTERN of Sudbury reflects the large defensive ditch encompassing the historic core of the town. Although the circular street plan as we see it today is likely to have Anglo-Saxon origins, is it possible that the extensive ditch and bank itself could have been earlier and is possibly of Iron Age date? If prehistoric, these defences were later repurposed to create an Anglo-Saxon defended settlement or 'burh'.<sup>1</sup> Such a reuse of earlier earthworks conforms to a pattern of refortification of Iron Age defences seen across Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>2</sup>

In this article the Iron Age use and occupation of Sudbury will be reviewed and the prehistoric origins of the town defences considered. Recent excavations at Gainsborough's House Museum by Cotswold Archaeology (Suffolk office) have revealed intriguing remains of the Iron Age and Late Anglo-Saxon periods. Could the Iron Age features relate to the adjacent defensive bank and ditch? And how did the bank and ditch influence the later layout of the Anglo-Saxon town?

The Gainsborough's House excavations were located behind the museum, adjacent to Weavers Lane (Figs 206 and 207). The excavations revealed an initial Iron Age phase followed by a hiatus of over a thousand years until the Late Anglo-Saxon period. This long time gap suggests that the defensive bank was occupying the area throughout this period and it was not until the bank was removed (backfilling the ditch) that the newly cleared space could be developed. This new cleared area remained a marginal space, used for pottery making, craft activity and food processing, as evidenced from the artefact and environmental remains. During this time or soon after, the curving twin routes of Weavers Lane and Burkitts Lane were established (either side of the large ditch), influencing the town layout from the Late Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods to the present day.<sup>3</sup>

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Gainsborough's House site lies within the Anglo-Saxon and medieval historic core of Sudbury (Fig. 206). The town of Sudbury had been established when mentioned as a 'burh' in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of AD 798, but probably had earlier origins, with the dedication of the church of St Gregory likely to belong to the seventh century.<sup>4</sup> The curving Weavers Lane, adjacent to the site to the east, follows the inner circuit of the original town ditch. This ditch bounded the main Anglo-Saxon and medieval focus of the town.<sup>5</sup> Most 'burhs' of Late Anglo-Saxon date were rectilinear in shape, while Sudbury is distinctively circular.<sup>6</sup> Rounded defensive enclosures were more commonly constructed during the Danish occupation (as at Ipswich) and tended to belong to the tenth century.<sup>7</sup> It is likely that the Sudbury defences were in use long before this period.<sup>8</sup>

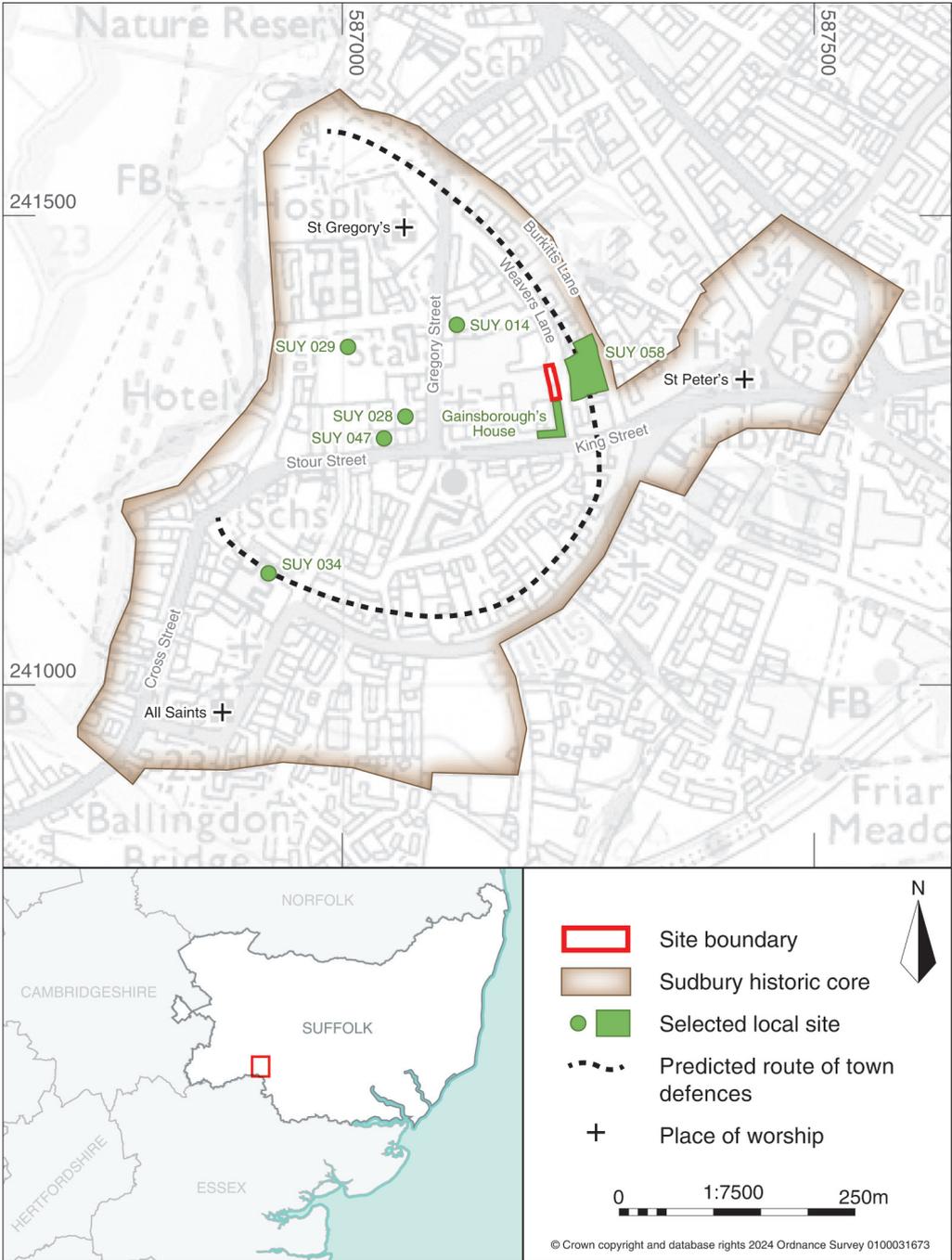


FIG. 206 – The historic core of Sudbury with the projected route of the town defences in relation to the excavation area and to other sites and places mentioned in the text.

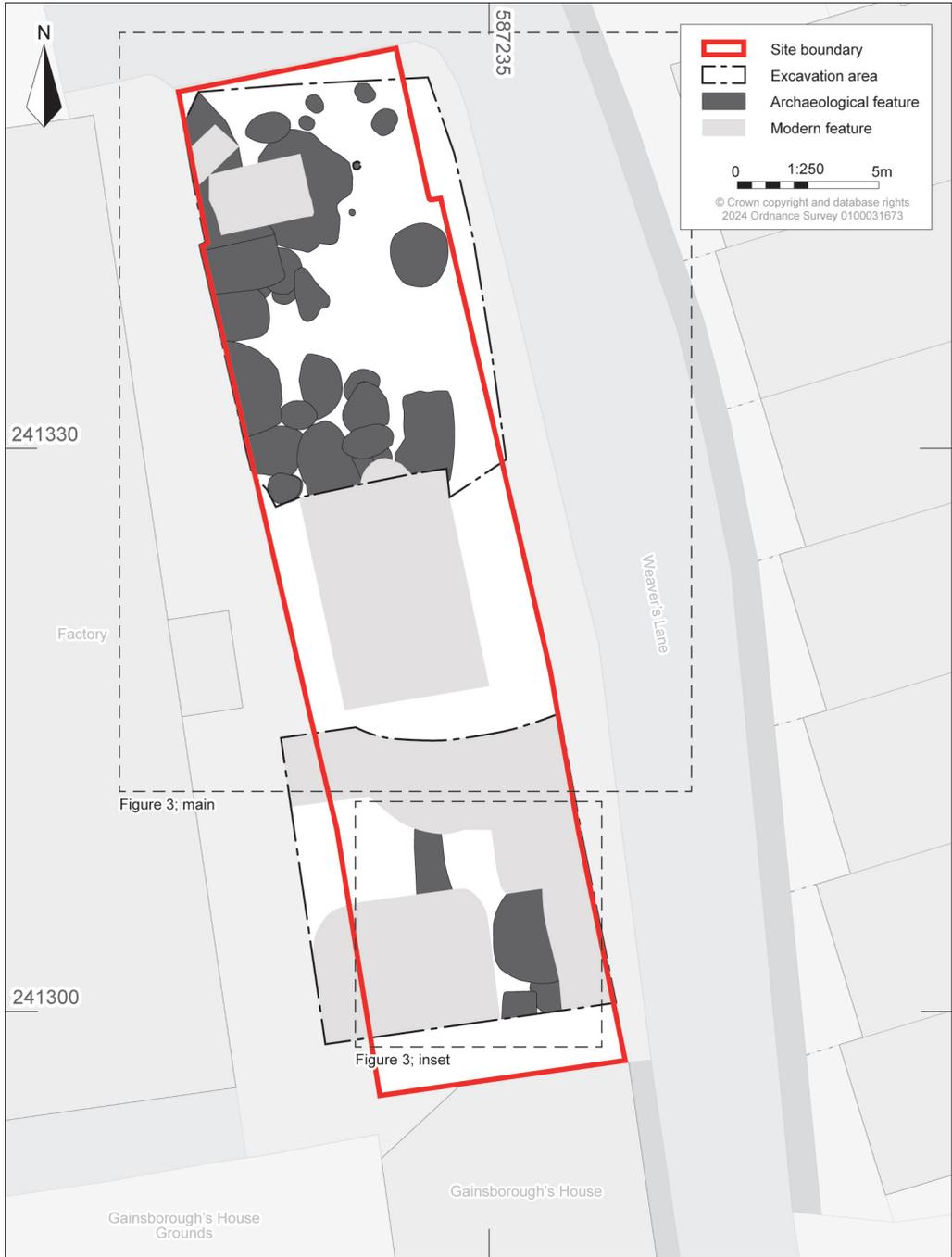


FIG. 207 – The site area adjacent to Weavers Lane.

There is nothing to suggest that the Sudbury ditch was constructed during the Danish period, with the known establishment of Sudbury by the eighth century or earlier. Therefore the circular defence seems unusual and raises the possibility that a prehistoric earthwork was repurposed for later use. The presence of Iron Age material from Gainsborough's House calls for a review of the evidence from the large ditch that encircles the town and of prehistoric activity from Sudbury.

At Mill Lane (site SUY 034) the ditch was found to be in the region of 20m wide and 3m deep. Estimations suggested that the internal bank could have been up to 15m wide and 6m high. At the site between Weavers Lane and Burkitts Lane, deep deposits associated with the ditch were encountered (SUY 058). Too deep and too dangerous to excavate by hand, a machine-cut slot across the ditch at SUY 058 revealed handmade pottery of possible Iron Age date from the primary fill of the ditch.<sup>9</sup>

Some significant prehistoric finds have been made in Sudbury (Fig. 206). Of particular importance was the excavation at Gregory Street (site SUY 028) where a large Middle Iron Age pit (feature 0094) contained three decorated bone combs and a cache of baked clay sling shots. Features from the same site included substantial ditches belonging to the Late Iron Age or early Roman periods. Other Iron Age activity has been recognised in Sudbury, encountered as a minor element in the following multi-period sites: Gregory Street, site SUY 014, revealed Iron Age pottery and a curving gully (possibly structural?); at the Walnut Tree hospital site (SUY 029) residual Iron Age pottery was recovered; and at Hardwick House, Stour Street, two Iron Age pits were recorded (SUY 047).<sup>10</sup>

## THE EXCAVATIONS

The archaeological investigations were within the footprint of the new extension to Gainsborough's House Museum (Fig. 207). The full report of these works is available online.<sup>11</sup> The site of the new gallery is within a north to south strip between Weavers Lane and Vanners silk factory on a slight incline, sloping upwards to the north. Until recently the site was occupied by the labour exchange, a building of the 1920s.

Initial trial-trenching uncovered thick overburden deposits of over 1m depth, dating to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Under these layers were revealed pits of Late Anglo-Saxon and medieval date cut into the natural sand and gravel geological substrate.<sup>12</sup>

During the winter of 2019 and 2020, an open area excavation was undertaken. This excavation was centred mainly on the northern end of the development area, where there was less modern disturbance and where foundations of the new museum extension would cut deeper into the slight incline (Figs 208 and 209). At the southern end of the development area, where the ground was extensively disturbed by modern intrusions, the site was subject to a watching brief and deposits and features were recorded and sampled for finds (Fig. 208, inset).

The pits and features encountered belonged to one of four dated periods and an undated group, see Table 1 (Fig. 208). Along the eastern half of the excavation area, a large rectangular pit and four smaller pits contained prehistoric material of Iron Age date (Period I). Across the western half of the site there was intense pitting of Late Anglo-Saxon and medieval date (Periods II and III) with some features of post-medieval origin also encountered (Period IV).

## RESULTS

### *Middle Iron Age (c.350–100 BC)*

There were fewer archaeological features across the eastern half of the excavation and it was within this area that Period I features were identified (Fig. 208). The most significant of these

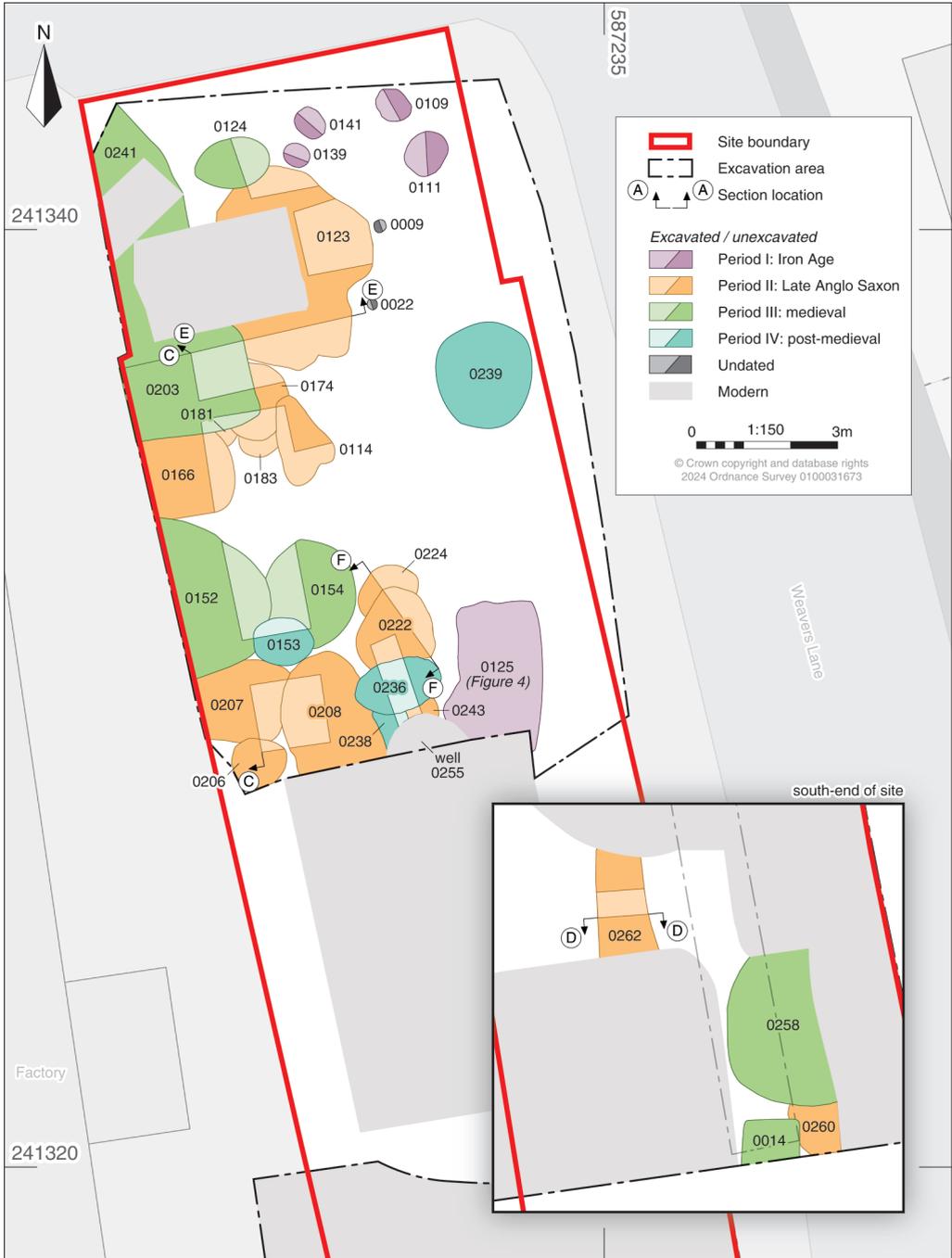


FIG. 208 – The excavation area, showing features of Iron Age to post-medieval date and with the locations of drawn sections shown in FIG. 211.

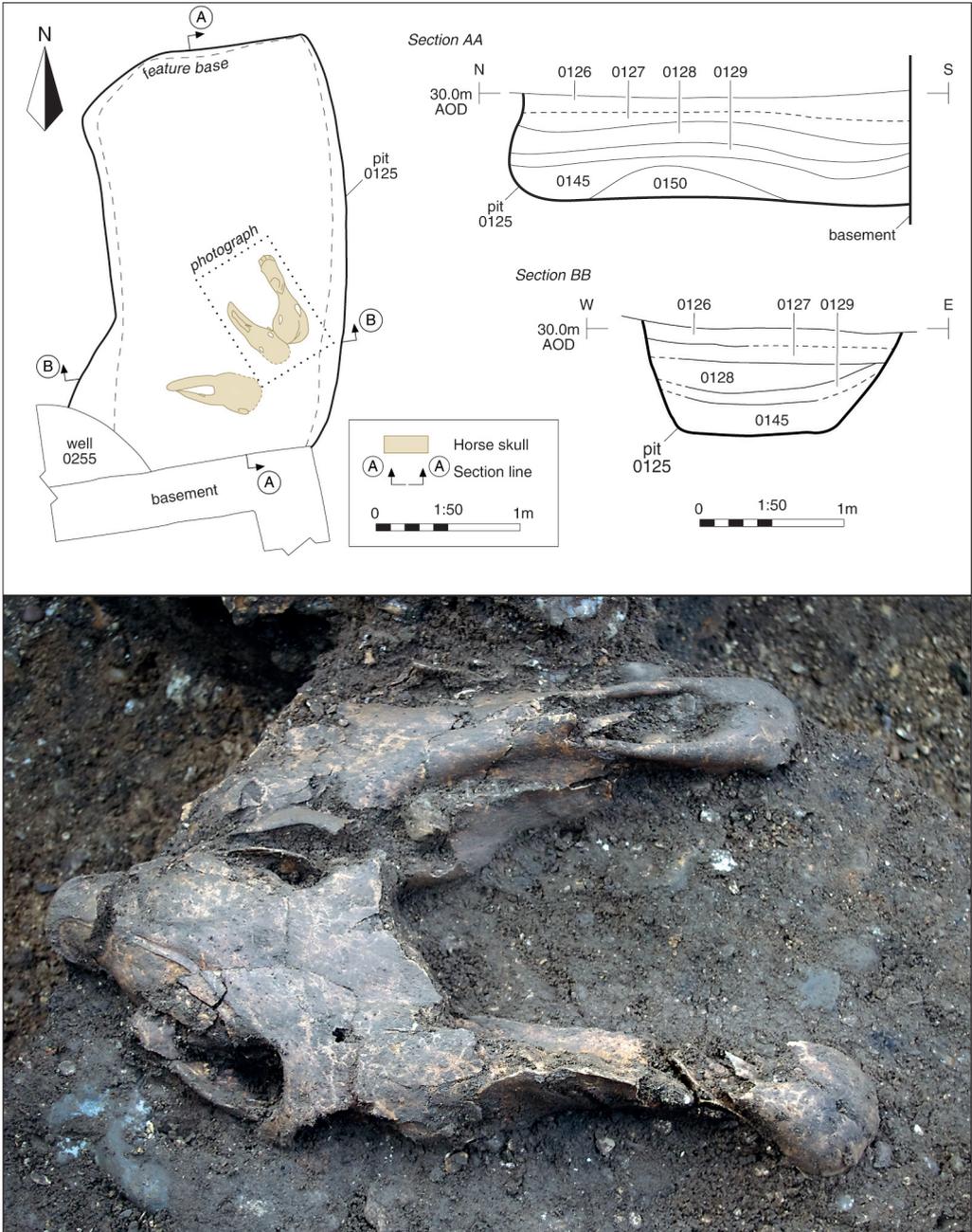


FIG. 209 – Period I: Iron Age pit 0125, showing the arrangement of the placed horse skulls (photograph looking south-west).

Period	Description	Approximate Date	Main Elements
Period I	Middle Iron Age	c.350–100 BC	Five pits
Period II	Late Anglo-Saxon	Tenth / eleventh centuries	Fourteen pits and a ditch
Period III	Medieval	Twelfth / fifteenth centuries	Seven pits
Period IV	Post-medieval / modern	Eighteenth / nineteenth centuries.	Four pits.
Period U	Undated		Two post-holes.

TABLE 1 – Period Sumamry.

was pit 0125 which contained an arrangement of horse skulls placed at its southern end (Fig. 209). Prehistoric pits could have extended across the western zone too and, if so, would have been truncated by later features (hence perhaps the worked flint and prehistoric pottery that was found residually in Period II and III pits).

Pit 0125 was a large, roughly rectangular feature, orientated north to south (but truncated at its south end) and measuring at least 2.8m long, 1.65m wide and 0.7m deep. It had steep to vertical sides and a level base and it presumably had some form of revetment (given the soft and collapsible sandy natural it was cut into), although no traces of this were recognised. It had a range of fills indicating a fairly complex backfilling sequence (alternating layers of redeposited natural sand and dark humic fills), the most significant of which was fill 0145 which contained the horse skulls, abundant animal bone (wild and domesticated species), carbonised hazelnut, beans and cereals (hulled barley and glume wheats: emmer/spelt) and a range of cultural material suggesting both domestic and industrial waste (such as hammerscale).<sup>13</sup>

The horse skulls were placed in a fan-shaped arrangement (two female skulls flanking a male skull in the middle) with the heads placed side by side with their noses pointing between the north and west (Fig. 209). There was no obvious butchery or skinning evidence associated with the skulls.<sup>14</sup> A radiocarbon determination from a horse bone fragment has given a calibrated date of 231 to 96 BC (SUERC-97883; 51.1 per cent probability).<sup>15</sup> Pottery from pit 0125 included burnished grey to black ceramics and vessels with flared rims and slack-shouldered jars consistent with the radiocarbon date and probably belonging to the Middle Iron Age period (Fig. 210.1–6).<sup>16</sup> A single bead made from a fossil sponge was also recovered from this pit (Fig. 210.8, Object 1022).<sup>17</sup>

Pit 0111 contained an unusual greensand rotary quern (Fig. 210.7), rare for East Anglia, and likely to have originated in Kent.<sup>18</sup> Such querns have currency in the Iron Age and early Roman periods. A significant carbonised seed assemblage was also recovered from this pit, indicating that a burnt deposit of prime, cleaned hulled barley and glume wheat had been placed in the same pit as the broken quernstone.<sup>19</sup>

Three other pits from the north-east corner of the excavation area belonged to Period I. Pit 0109 contained heat-altered flint, pit 0141 included a sherd of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery (abraded and probably residual) and pit 0139 was undated but likely to belong within Period I given its proximity to the other features and similarities of fill type. Carbonised

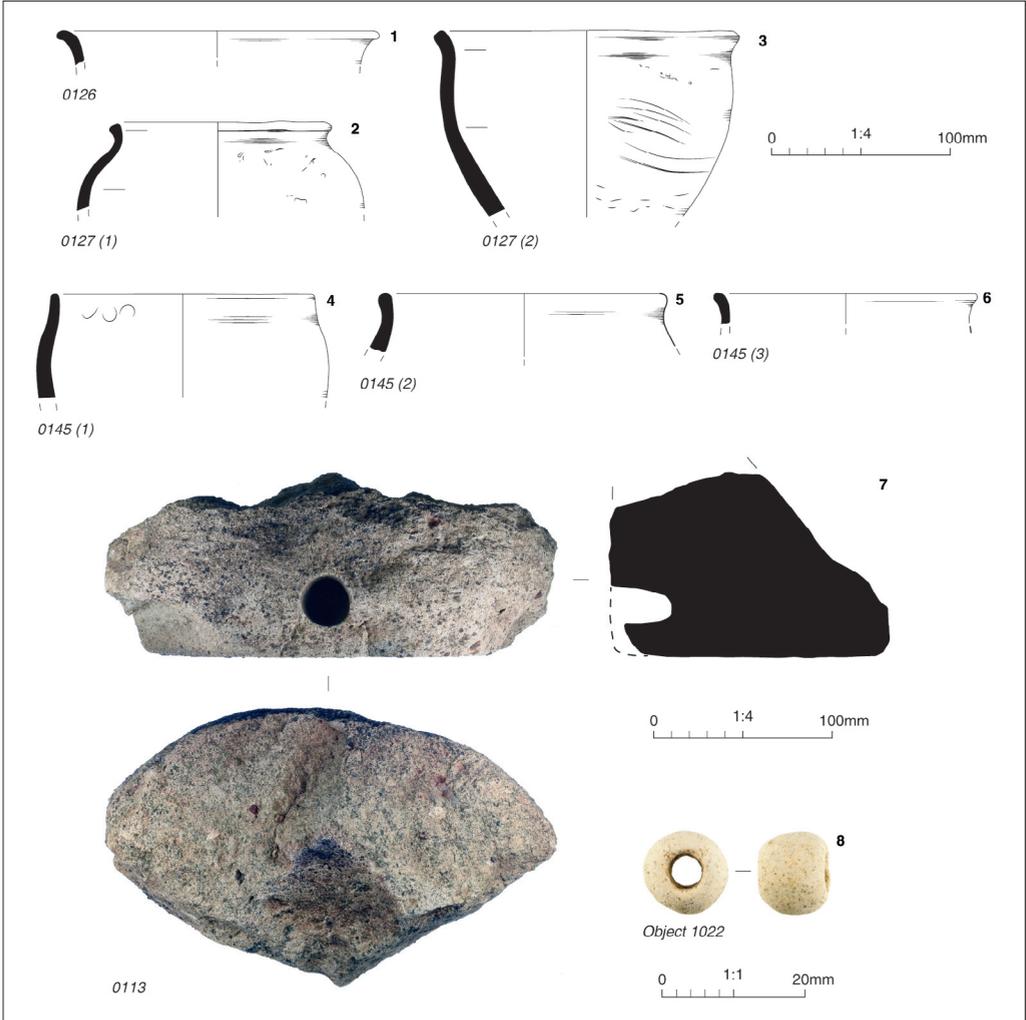


FIG. 210 – Period I: Iron Age artefacts including the pottery and a bead (Object 1022), all from pit 0125, and the rotary quern from pit 0111.

seeds of fat hen were found in clumps within the fill of pit 0109. Fat hen is now a weed of disturbed soil, but was probably purposefully gathered or even cultivated in the past. Fat hen was found in the stomach contents of the Tollund and Grauballe bog bodies in Denmark.<sup>20</sup>

Period I features contained cattle, sheep and pig bone. The cattle were a small variety (similar to a breed like Dexter) and the sheep were comparable to modern day Soay. From pit 0125 in particular, a number of wild species were also present including hare, duck, roe deer and (unusually) a wing bone from a long-eared owl.<sup>21</sup>

*Late Anglo-Saxon (late ninth to eleventh centuries)*

Historical accounts suggest that Sudbury was an important settlement with strong political, ecclesiastical and economic connections and that it was a place of some prosperity by the time

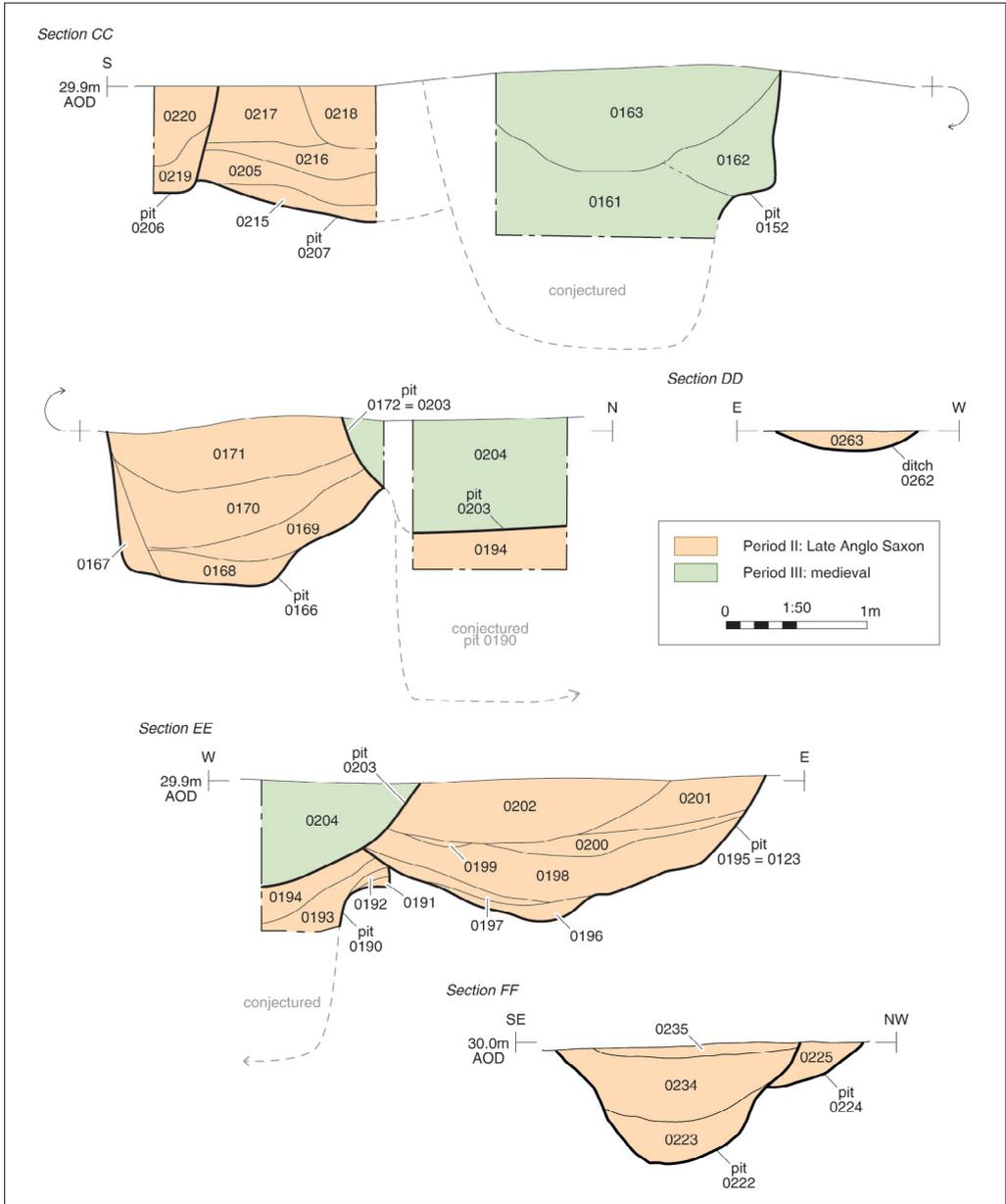


FIG. 211 – Period II and Period III pit sections, see FIG. 208 for their locations.

of Domesday.<sup>22</sup> Evidence from the Gainsborough's House excavation belong to this later, prosperous era of the Late Anglo-Saxon period, as dated by Thetford-ware pottery of the late ninth to the eleventh centuries.<sup>23</sup>

The Period II pits were restricted to the western half of the excavation area. This might suggest that these were the backyards of properties fronting onto Weavers Lane to the east. The blank area across the eastern side of the site therefore could correspond to the location

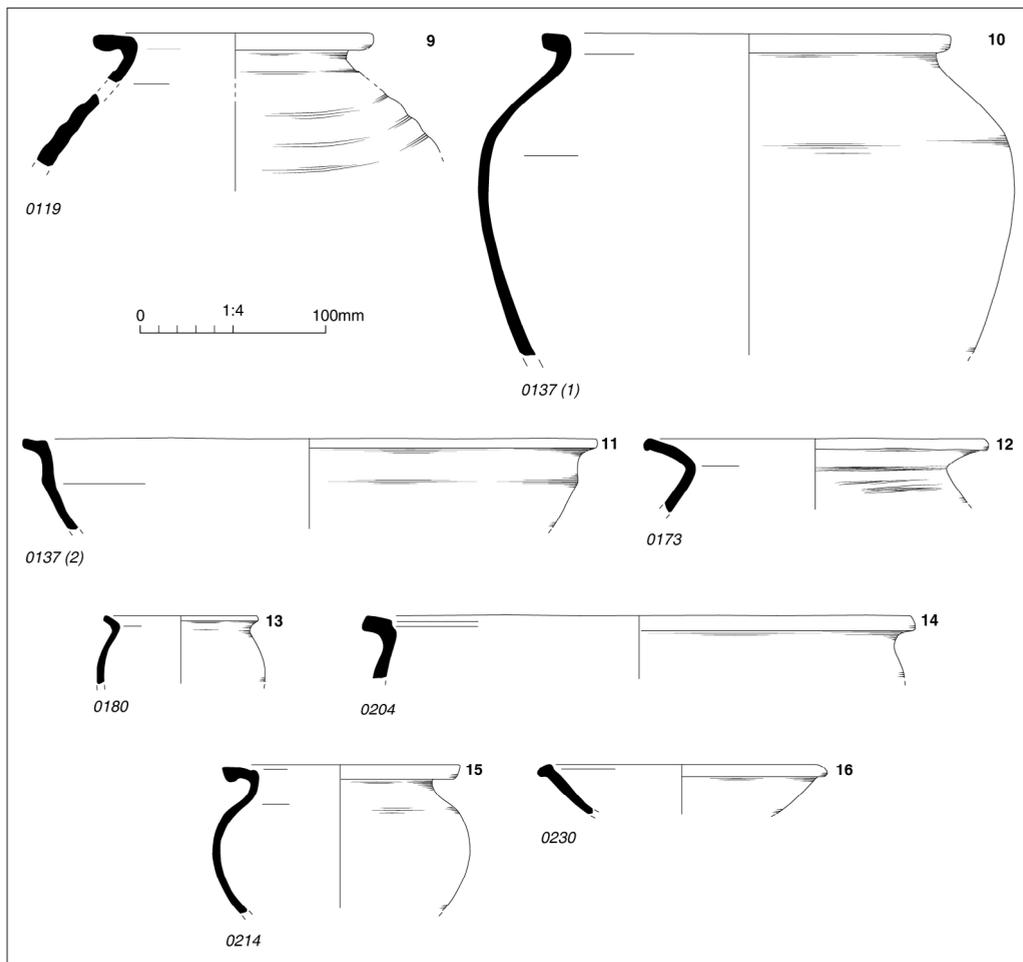


FIG. 212 – Period II: Late Anglo-Saxon Thetford-type ware pottery (Sudbury variant) recovered from excavated pits.

of dwellings, although no structural remains survived.

A variety of Late Anglo-Saxon pit types were revealed within the excavation area, generally arranged in two clusters (Fig. 208): a northern group arranged around pit 0123 and another group in the south-western corner of the excavation (pit 0207 and others). Within the watching brief area to the south, at least one other pit was recognised, although this was within a zone of considerable modern disturbance. Also within the southern area was a shallow, north to south running ditch (Fig. 208, inset).

Of the Period II features, the most extensive was the large pit 0123, near the north-western corner of the site. This was a substantial, amorphously shaped feature with a diameter of over 4m. It had a depth of just over 1m, although a large modern concrete intrusion occupied the centre of the pit where it might have been deeper. To the south of 0123, the tightly spaced group of intercutting pits were of a variety of shapes and sizes, generally larger towards the west. The deepest of these was pit 0190 which was hand augered to a depth of at least 2m below excavation level (Fig. 211, Sections CC and EE). Although highly truncated by a later feature,

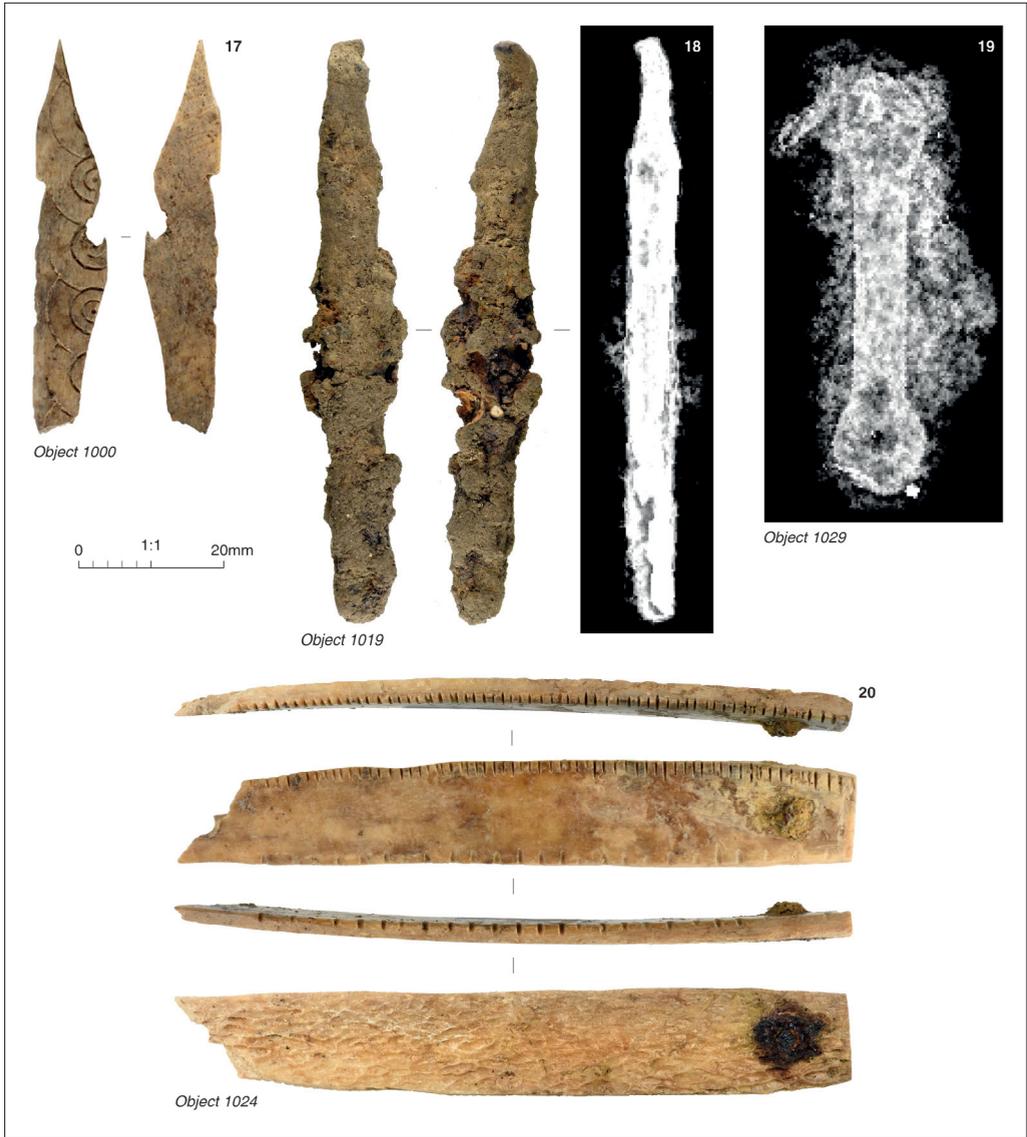


FIG. 213 – Significant objects of Late Anglo-Saxon date (Period II): 17. Decorated bone strip from a box or casket (Object 1000); 18. Possible shearboard hook used in textile production, with x-ray (Object 1019); 19. X-ray of binding strip or stapled hasp (Object 1029); 20. Bone side plate from comb (Object 1024).

its vertical sides and depth suggest it had been revetted. It might have been a well or storage tank. The presence of cess nodules in some of the other pit fills show they were used as latrines.

The southern group of intercutting pits suggests another close cluster of features (Fig. 211, Sections CC and EE). It is possible that this represents a separate plot from those in the north and indicates the location of the backyard of an adjacent property (although no obvious plot boundaries were detected between the two pit clusters).

The finds assemblage was dominated by Thetford-ware pottery (Fig. 212.9–16) with a

smaller group of early medieval wares. Interestingly, a number of pottery 'wasters' were recognised, probably from a nearby kiln site. This confirms the existence of a Sudbury variant of Thetford ware, which shows many similarities to those being produced in Ipswich at the same time.<sup>24</sup> Other finds include some fine examples of bone working, including a strip decorated with triple ring and dot motifs from pit 0123. This is probably from a box or casket (Fig. 213.17, Object 1000). A side-plate fragment from a comb was recovered from ditch 0262 (Fig. 213.20, Object 1024). An iron binding strip or stapled hasp (Fig. 213.19, Object 1029) might have come from a casket, coffer or piece of portable furniture.<sup>25</sup>

A loom weight was recovered from pit 0114 and an iron tool from pit 0207 might also have been associated with textile production. This corroded iron rod (Fig. 213.18, Object 1019) might have been a shearboard hook, used in the process of finishing textiles.<sup>26</sup> Hammerscale and ferrous pieces were found in the bulk soil samples from pit 0123, indicating metalworking in the vicinity.<sup>27</sup> Fired clay pieces with obvious curvature show that ovens and hearth fragments were disposed of in the pits, with those from pit 0123 indicating high temperature firing, possibly from a kiln or other industrial process.<sup>28</sup>

The animal bone assemblage was dominated by cattle (mainly of young adults) and pig was far more prominent than in Period I. Other domestic animal species include sheep, equid and fowl. Wild species included hare and duck.<sup>29</sup> The carbonised plant macrofossils included bread wheat, hulled barley, possibly oats, pea/beans and the weeds of cultivated land. Hazelnut fragments show that wild species were still being gathered.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Medieval (twelfth to fourteenth centuries)*

Medieval pits were restricted to the western edge of the site and generally appear to cluster roughly in the same groupings as the Period II features, suggesting that the Late Anglo-Saxon house plot layout persisted into the medieval period (Fig. 208).

Large pit 0152 was the deepest (augered to c.2m depth below excavation level), while the square-shaped, flat-bottomed 0203 was far shallower, but still extensive (Fig. 211, Sections CC and EE). Of a similar depth was pit 0154, while finds-rich pit 0124 was far smaller. Pits 0241 and 0258 were unexcavated, but surface collections of finds were made from these features.<sup>31</sup>

The majority of the medieval pottery was of twelfth- to thirteenth-century date, with a fine group of decorated jug sherds coming from pit 0124 (Fig. 214.21).<sup>32</sup> A neatly fashioned bone dress pin was recovered from pit 0203 (Fig. 214.22, Object 1018).<sup>33</sup>

Cattle again was the predominant meat animal, but sheep had become more common, probably coinciding with the importance of wool production during this period. Skinning waste was prominent amongst sheep bones. Pig and fowl were also being consumed and there is evidence for rabbit, which during this period was a rarity. Evidence for marine fish consumption (skate or thornback) shows variety in the diet and could even indicate the prescriptive Christian diets for Fridays and other fasting periods.<sup>34</sup>

Plant and other soil sample remains from pit 0124 indicate the use of bread wheat, hulled barley and peas. The presence of cess nodules and cess fly pupae suggest the use of this particular pit as a latrine.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Post-medieval/modern (fifteenth century onwards)*

Only one feature belonging to the late medieval/transitional period was identified (Fig. 208, pit 0014) which contained pottery of the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries. Whilst the low numbers of features and finds might suggest that Sudbury was in decline by the fourteenth century, it does not necessarily indicate an hiatus. It was more likely that patterns of rubbish



FIG. 214 – Period III finds: 21. Selected decorated medieval pottery sherds from pit 0124; 22. Bone dress pin from pit 0203 (Object 1018).

disposal had changed and the expansion of structures in urban areas had made the digging of pits more difficult.<sup>36</sup>

Dating from the early nineteenth century, the finds assemblage from pit 0239 suggests a certain degree of fine dining in Sudbury during this period with woodcock, hare and perch on the menu, besides the usual beef, mutton and pork.<sup>37</sup> Only a small sample was made of this pit (solely for the recovery of finds), which revealed a wide variety of different forms of table and kitchen pottery wares, showing a buoyant economy in late Georgian Sudbury.<sup>38</sup>

Large parts of the site were disturbed by substantial intrusions belonging to the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including a large central basement, concrete pads and

some major (machine dug?) pits. Contractors reported revealing a well in the bottom of the basement, and another well was revealed against the northern edge of the cellar (feature 0255). This was likely to be earlier than the basement, but included engineering bricks and hard modern cement, suggesting modification in the twentieth century.

#### SUDBURY, AN IRON AGE DEFENDED SETTLEMENT?

Evidence for the Iron Age has previously been recognised in Sudbury, particularly the extraordinary pit in Gregory Street which contained decorated bone weaving combs and a collection of fired clay slingshots. At Gainsborough's House, Iron Age pits were discovered near the eastern edge of the excavation area. Pit 0111 contained a large fragment of a greensand rotary quern from Kent and is a rare find for East Anglia. Within the same feature was identified prime cleaned grain which had been burnt and also placed in the pit. This looks like a placed offering of quern and grain; a concern for fertility and future crop harvests is a possible explanation for the association of this assemblage. The large rectangular pit 0125 contained the deliberately placed horse skulls (Fig. 209) and a variety of midden deposits representing both domestic and industrial waste.

There is much evidence that horses were symbolically charged in the Iron Age and the placement of their remains is seldom arbitrary in later British prehistory and can be part of a spectrum of offerings placed in the ground.<sup>39</sup> In pit 0125 the three skulls had been arranged in a formal pattern, comparable to the three horse skulls placed in a triangle observed at Lakenheath.<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere in Suffolk, a horse mandible had been placed within the lower fills of the impressive outer ditch at the Barnham Iron Age enclosure.<sup>41</sup> Significantly, at Sudbury, the skulls showed no evidence for butchery or skinning and could be part of a pattern of horse deposition in later prehistory where certain creatures were treated differently in death to other animals.<sup>42</sup> The purposeful placement of animal remains in the ground is often of significance and there is some evidence that during the first millennium BC in Europe, the horse had come to signify concepts of protection, order, hunting and warfare.<sup>43</sup>

Although pit 0125 appears to be a random mix of domestic and industrial debris, such deposits could be highly structured. The placement of midden material as a symbolic offering has been a recurrent theme in British prehistory and has been well rehearsed for the Iron Age.<sup>44</sup> It is therefore possible that the backfilling of pit 0125 (and deposit 0145 in particular) can be seen as a 'structured' deposit which contained a range of types of midden material derived from local sources, and a variety of objects including decorated pottery and a range of domesticated and wild species.

Iron Age defended enclosures are found across East Anglia, some using their riverside location to complete their defence. According to the online *Atlas of Hillforts*, Thetford Castle reuses an Iron Age defence which nestles within a loop in the river Thet, Arbury Camp in Cambridge was a large, almost circular, enclosure, and although of quadrilateral shape, Burgh Castle in Suffolk is another significant earthwork of Iron Age date.<sup>45</sup> There is a possibility that Iron Age defences may have been reused at Haughley Castle.<sup>46</sup>

The evidence from Thetford and Burgh castles indicate that significant Iron Age settlement occurred within these defences and this was possibly true of Sudbury too. The evidence from the Gainsborough's House site expands the known presence of Iron Age deposits within the core of Sudbury. The distance between this site and that at the Walnut Tree Hospital (SUY 029) measures *c.*200m, and the two significant Iron Age sites on Gregory Street (SUY 014 to the north and SUY 028 to the south) measure *c.*150m apart (Fig. 206). It is unlikely that Sudbury represents a fully urban prehistoric centre, such as a Late Iron Age enclosed *oppida* (as such later sites were normally associated with coinage and imports from the Continent),

but it does suggest that a significant Iron Age settlement was located within the ditch circuit, even if later occupation has destroyed or obscured this.<sup>47</sup>

After the ditch was dug and the upcast bank was formed, it was very likely that most, if not all, of the excavation study area would have been covered by the bank. Thus it is a possibility that the Iron Age pits encountered could have been purposefully dug and filled before the bank was raised and, containing their offerings of broken quern, burnt grain, horse skulls and selected midden deposits from a variety of domestic and industrial sources, could be viewed as placed or special deposits or offerings, placed under the bank prior to its erection. It is possible that the wedge- or fan-shaped formation of the horse skulls pointed along the bank and followed its sweep as it curved to the north-west.

#### A NEW SUBURB FOR THE LATE ANGLO-SAXON TOWN

Activity was renewed again in Sudbury from the Middle Anglo-Saxon period (there are historical records from the eighth century), but evidence from Gainsborough's House does not restart until the late ninth or tenth centuries (as indicated by the presence of Thetford-ware pottery). Extramural suburbs were developing at this time to the east, associated with St Peter's church, and to the south, around All Saints' church (Fig. 206).<sup>48</sup> It seems possible that part, if not all, of the town ditch near the Gainsborough's House excavations could have been backfilled by then.<sup>49</sup> The removal of the defensive bank (to fill the adjacent ditch) could have opened up new areas for habitation in the Late Anglo-Saxon period and the laying down of the curving routeway which was to become Weavers Lane. It is just at this point of time that the excavation site revealed extensive pit digging, probably associated with wells, latrines and rubbish disposal in the backyards of properties facing onto the newly created Weavers Lane.

Of particular interest was confirmation that a variant of Thetford-ware pottery was being produced in Sudbury during this period (Fig. 212). The presence of over- and under-fired, misshapen pottery 'wasters' (spoilt in kiln firing) suggests that manufacturing was being undertaken close to the site.<sup>50</sup> Except perhaps for the high temperature fired clay from pit 0123, there was little evidence of the kilns themselves. Some of the wasters had been used and showed evidence of sooting and other post-firing treatment (effectively they had probably been bought as 'seconds').

It is interesting that manufacturing was taking place in what looks like a residential area, while the pottery centres in Ipswich, Thetford and Norwich were based in areas peripheral to the main settlement. It is possible, however, that the new suburb to the east of the town (or maybe even the area of the backfilled ditch adjacent) was being utilised by the potters.

There are a number of aspects of the Sudbury variant of Thetford ware which are particularly reminiscent of those produced in Ipswich. Although the fabric is different (due to the use of locally sourced clay), it is nonetheless very sandy and is decorated with girth grooving, both distinctive features of the Ipswich variant.<sup>51</sup> It is possible that Ipswich potters moved to Sudbury, or were itinerant between the two locations.

#### MEDIEVAL CONTINUITY

The pit groupings seen in the Late Anglo-Saxon period seemed to continue into the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, indicating that the suggested house plots and frontages onto Weavers Lane had been maintained. The main pit concentrations, however, had moved slightly to the west, suggesting an expansion of the settlement area westwards. At least one of the pits was of considerable depth (over 2m) and it is possible this was a well, later utilised for rubbish disposal or as a latrine. Certainly some of the smaller pits contained evidence for cess. There

was a single feature of late medieval/early post-medieval date and occasionally finds of this period were recovered from across the site, but it seems highly likely that by the fourteenth century standing structures, hard surfaces and floors had extended into this area making it impossible to dig pits for rubbish disposal. It is likely that later truncation and disturbance has removed any evidence of these structures.

The medieval pottery assemblage was dominated by local coarsewares, typical of south Suffolk and Essex and dating predominantly from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Some decorated sherds of slipped and glazed jugs which date to the thirteenth century came from pit 0124.<sup>52</sup> An elegant bone dress pin was recovered from pit 0203, areas of wear on its shank indicating that it had been used for holding fabric (and proving that it was not a needle or bodkin).<sup>53</sup>

Food evidence in the medieval period suggests a rise in the consumption of mutton, with many sheep remains showing evidence for skinning and some horn working. Cattle still predominated, but pig and fowl were also being consumed. Marine fish and rabbit were being eaten too and indicate a more diverse diet for the residents. Similar delicacies were seen in the food remains recovered from a post-medieval pit, which revealed the consumption of beef, mutton, pork, woodcock, hare and perch.<sup>54</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The excavations at Gainsborough's House Museum have revealed archaeological remains belonging to the Middle Iron Age (c.350–100 BC), the Late Anglo-Saxon (late ninth to eleventh centuries) and medieval (twelfth to fourteenth centuries) periods. Large areas of the site had been damaged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but significant areas of earlier archaeology survived, particularly across the northern half of the site.

Insights from these excavations have confirmed that there was a significant Iron Age presence in several areas across Sudbury within the earthwork defences and this raises the possibility that the Anglo-Saxon town (with its early religious institutions) saw reuse of a prehistoric defence. It has also been suggested that the Iron Age deposits encountered represent votive offerings and would have been positioned under the defensive bank. Despite an initial impression that these pits contained undifferentiated refuse, the range of material represented (domestic and industrial refuse, domesticated and wild animals and plants) indicate an unusual degree of selection. The careful placement of the horse skulls and the burying of a rare type of quernstone, with burnt, prime grain, all suggest symbolic and meaningful deposition.

By the Late Anglo-Saxon period, Sudbury had outgrown its defences and it is suggested that there was a need to expand across the ditch. By the tenth century an extramural suburb had been established around St Peter's church and it could be argued that the ditch had fallen out of use and could have been backfilled, probably using any upstanding bank as fill. This would have made the area under the bank available for development, hence the presence of archaeological remains here from the end of the ninth or tenth centuries.

The indication that Thetford ware-type pottery was being made in the vicinity (with other craft activities) might indicate that this was initially an industrial area, marginal to habitation. The formation of Weavers Lane (fossilising the inner circuit of the ditch) would eventually bring this area into residential use, with the establishment of house plots that would persist into the medieval period and beyond.

It is perhaps surprising that so much information has been gleaned from such a small excavation area. It does point, however, to the value of investigating the historic urban centres of Suffolk towns when these opportunities present themselves. This rare chance to

archaeologically investigate a small corner of historic Sudbury has allowed a reappraisal of an Iron Age defence on the river Stour, the expansion of our knowledge of the Late Anglo-Saxon core of the town, and the confirmation of a distinct ceramic industry during this period.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### NOTES

- 1 Keith Wade, Edward Martin and others have long suspected that the Sudbury bank and ditch might predate the Anglo-Saxon town. In this article I review some of the prehistoric evidence from Sudbury to suggest that the origins of the defences belong in the Iron Age.
- 2 Blair 2018; Blair makes the interesting point that although both Roman and prehistoric defences were viewed as valid candidates for refortification, most Roman walled defences had already been annexed for ecclesiastical use, thus making Iron Age earthworks of particular focus.
- 3 Wade and West 1977; Wade 1993; Lewis and Ranson 2014.
- 4 Wade and West 1977; Plunkett 2005.
- 5 Lewis and Ranson 2014.
- 6 Carver 2019.
- 7 Wade 1993.
- 8 Plunkett 2005.
- 9 Boulter 1993; Sommers 2003.
- 10 Newman 1990; SAU, Wade 1977; Newman 1991; Loader and Boulter 1997.
- 11 Meredith 2022.
- 12 British Geological Survey 2019; Meredith 2019.
- 13 Curl 2022; West 2022; Benfield 2022b.
- 14 Curl 2022.
- 15 Calibrated to 231 to 96 BC at 58.1 per cent probability (355 to 57 BC at 95.4 per cent probability) SUERC 97883 (GU57487).
- 16 Banks 2022.
- 17 Beveridge 2022.
- 18 Keller 1989; Peacock 2013; Benfield 2022a.
- 19 West 2022.

- 20 Godwin 1975; Glob 1977; Stokes and Rowley-Conwy 2002; West 2022.  
 21 Curl 2022.  
 22 Wade and West 1977; Open Domesday.  
 23 Anderson 2022.  
 24 Anderson 2022; Anderson forthcoming.  
 25 Beveridge 2022.  
 26 Beveridge 2022.  
 27 West 2022.  
 28 Benfield 2022b.  
 29 Curl 2022.  
 30 These pits could not be excavated because of an overhanging wall which made this area of the excavation unsafe to work in. Surface finds collections were the only record that could be made in these circumstances.  
 31 West 2022.  
 32 Anderson 2022.  
 33 Beveridge 2022.  
 34 Curl 2022.  
 35 West 2022.  
 36 Anderson 2022.  
 37 Curl 2022.  
 38 Anderson 2022.  
 39 Bradley 2007, 250; Cunliffe 1995, 103; Hill 1995.  
 40 Caruth 2005.  
 41 Martin 1993.  
 42 Grant 1989.  
 43 Pluskowski 2012; Carstens 2019, although Carstens is primarily concerned with the eastern Mediterranean world, her research must be seen within the general framework of Indo-European culture and the linguistic connections across much of Europe for the words for ‘horse’ and wheeled transport.  
 44 Hill 1995; Brudenell and Cooper 2008.  
 45 Atlas of Hillforts in Britain and Ireland 2022; see also Cunliffe 2005; Thetford Castle: Davies and Gregory 1992; Arbury Camp: Evans and Knight 2008; Burgh Castle: Martin 1988.  
 46 Meredith 2000.  
 47 Historic England 2018.  
 48 Wade and West 1977.  
 49 Something protected the Iron Age remains from later pitting and I have suggested that this was due to Late Anglo-Saxon dwellings in this area. Alternatively, Dr Abby Antrobus has made the suggestion (pers. comm.) that the bank could still have survived and was masking this area, resulting in the deep pitting only occurring along the western fringe of the bank. This is a valid and convincing argument, but I think the medieval patterning might contradict this. Medieval pitting reflected the same general groupings of those of the Late Anglo-Saxon period with a slight shift westwards; I suggest this is due to dwellings fronting onto Weavers Lane expanding. If the bank was still there, I would have expected the medieval pits to have encroached into the bank more and would thus see a shift of centre to the east instead.  
 50 Anderson 2022.  
 51 Anderson 2022; Anderson forthcoming.  
 52 Anderson 2022.  
 53 Beveridge 2022.  
 54 Curl 2022.  
 55 Meredith 2022.

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