

Archaeological Investigations at Park Farm, Church Lane, Aston Clinton, 2018

INTRODUCTION

During August and September 2018, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological evaluation and excavation at Park Farm, Church Lane, Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire, centred on NGR 487790 211990 (Fig. 1). The work was undertaken at the request of Archaeology Collective on behalf of Laxton Properties Limited in advance of residential development of the site.

The site encloses an area of approximately 1ha on the southern side of Aston Clinton, to the north-west of Church Lane, a road that divides to the north-east of the site, with one branch also running partly along the north-eastern site edge (Fig 1.). The site slopes gently downwards from *c.*98m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) in the north to *c.*95m aOD in the south. The underlying bedrock geology of the area comprises undifferentiated Cretaceous mudstones, siltstones and sandstones of the Gault Formation and Upper Greensand Formation (BGS 2019). Superficial deposits of heavy clay, derived from the weathered Gault beds, with intermittent drift deposits of glacial till, have been identified in the village (BCMAS 1994).

The site lies north-west of the medieval church of St Michael and All Angels, which has 12th to 13th-century origins, whilst a moated manor house of probable medieval origin lay immediately south-west of the churchyard until the 19th century. The exact location of the medieval village nucleus is unknown, though ridge-and-furrow earthworks had occupied the western half of the site, indicating that this area lay within the open fields surrounding the settlement. Previous evaluation within the northern and western parts of the site identified the remains of a ditch system aligned with the main, north-east/south-west branch of Church Lane (CA 2016).

Following the excavation, a post-excavation assessment (PXA) was carried out, which detailed

the archaeological and artefactual findings from the site (CA 2019). This report is available online via the Cotswold Archaeology website (<http://reports.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk>). This paper represents a summary of the findings in the PXA.

RESULTS

Period 1: Medieval (12th to 14th centuries)

Significant occupation of the site began in the medieval period, with activity spanning the 12th to 14th centuries (Fig. 2). The earliest feature was curvilinear Ditch A at the north of the excavation area, which was replaced by a more regularly laid out series of linear ditches (Period 1.1). To the south-east of Ditch A was a rectangular, ditched field system, comprising Ditches B, C, D and E. Ditches C and B may originally have marked the edges of a trackway that extended beyond the south-western edge of the site. A number of discrete pits in the vicinity of Ditch D may have been contemporary with this phase of activity. One of these, pit 1009, contained 12th to 14th-century pottery, along with a quantity of animal bone, roof tile and iron nails.

During a second phase (Period 1.2) the ditched field system comprising Ditches B, C, D and E was modified with the excavation of the more extensive Ditch F, which ran the full width of the excavated area. At the north-eastern edge of excavation, Ditch C was truncated by the terminus of Ditch 1149/1169, which yielded a large assemblage of 12th to 14th-century pottery.

In a third medieval phase (Period 1.3) the layout of field boundaries underwent a significant change: Ditch J ran on a north-east/south-west-alignment for approximately 34m before turning to the north-west and continuing for another 27m to the edge of excavation. Running parallel to this was Ditch H, which turned to the north-west as Ditch I and to the south-east as Ditch K. At the north-eastern edge of the site, two pits may have been contempo-

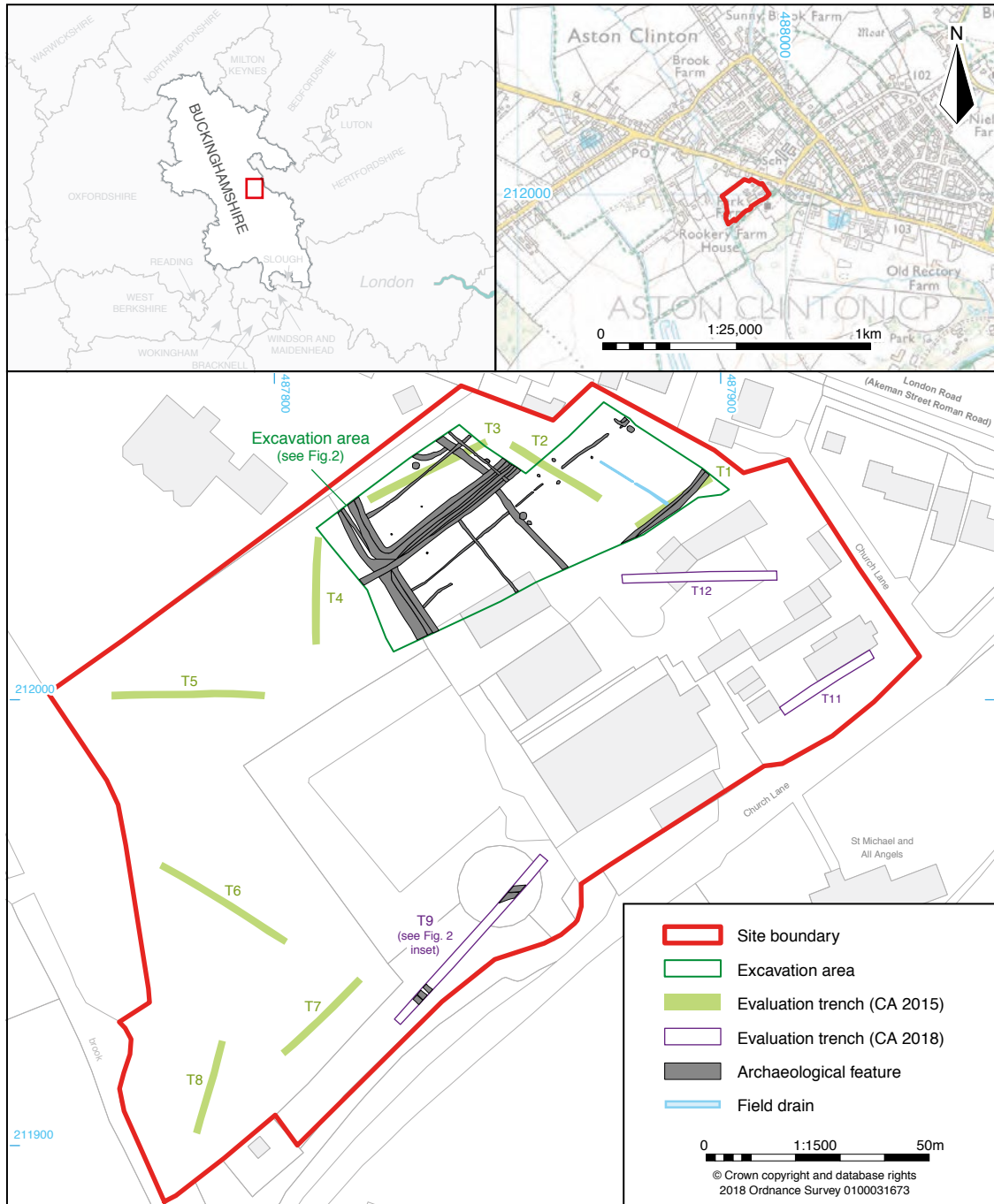


FIGURE 1 Site location plan (scales 1:25,000; 1:1500)

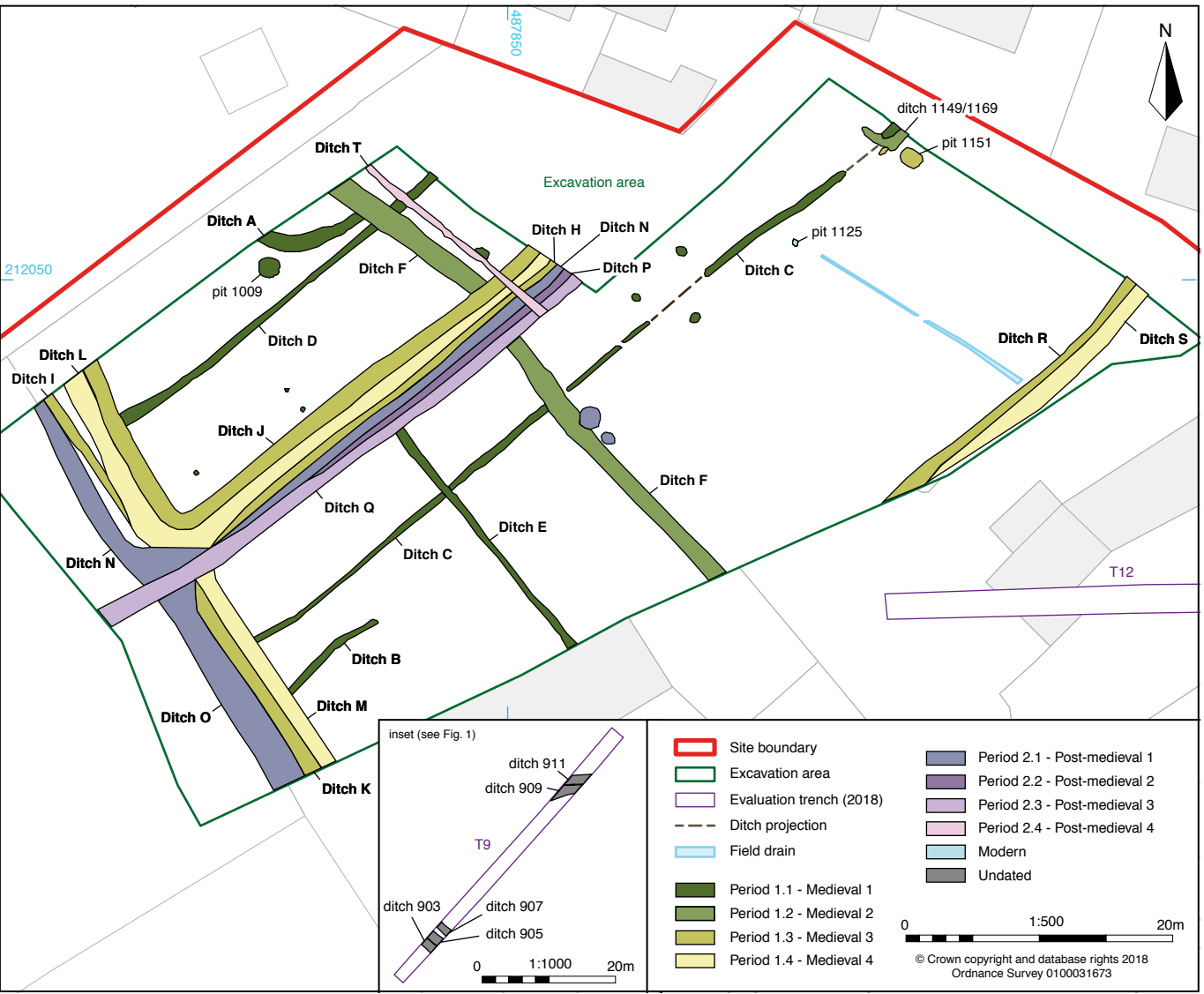


FIGURE 2 Excavation area phased feature plan (scales 1:500; 1:1000)

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rary features, with pit 1151 containing 12th to 14th-century pottery. Ditch R at the south-eastern site edge, which ran approximately parallel to Ditches J and H may also have been contemporary.

Towards the end of the medieval period (Period 1.4), Ditches J and H/I were recut and replaced by Ditch L, which ran parallel with Ditch J, turned to the north, and continued to the edge of excavation. It also turned to the south as Ditch M. Towards the south-east of the site, Ditch R was recut to the south as Ditch S.

Periods 2 & 3: Post-medieval and Modern (16th to 20th centuries)

Use of the ditched enclosures, probably as small agricultural fields, continued into the post-medieval period, with further activity from the 16th to early 19th centuries. The earliest development (Period 2.1) saw Period 1.4 Ditches L and M replaced by Ditches N and O. Ditch N ran parallel with Ditch L then turned across it and extended to the north-western edge of excavation. It also turned to the south as Ditch O, running parallel with and truncating Period 1.3 Ditch K. A small amount of 16th to 18th-century pottery was recovered from Ditch N, along with animal bone and a single iron nail.

A second phase of post-medieval activity (Period 2.2) was represented solely by north-east/south-west aligned Ditch P, which truncated Period 2.1 Ditch N. There was no evidence that Ditch P turned to the north or south as earlier features had done and it was truncated (in Period 2.3) by parallel Ditch Q, which extended from the north-eastern edge of excavation and continued on the same alignment, extending beyond the south-western edge of excavation and indicating a fundamental change in site layout. The layout was modified again, most likely in the late 18th or early 19th century (Period 2.4), with the excavation of north-west/south-east-aligned Ditch T close to the north-eastern edge of excavation. The only features of modern date were a dog burial in pit 1125 and a land drain.

Undated

Although most features have been phased, a small number of ditches in evaluation Trench 9 (Fig. 2) remain undated: Ditch 907 followed a similar alignment to Period 2.1 Ditches N and O, though lay some distance from these features. Parallel Ditch 903, a little more than 2m to the south, may

have replaced ditch 907. Ditch 905 truncated and appeared to have replaced ditch 903. Ditches 911 and 909 followed different alignments to all other linear features on site and could not be phased.

DISCUSSION

The archaeological evidence has indicated that a field system was initially established as early as the 12th century with modifications made throughout the medieval period. The finds evidence (Banks & Smyrnaiois 2019) has not enabled a more refined dating of the ditches but the stratigraphic evidence enabled the sequence of development to be understood. In addition to the field-boundary ditches, a number of discrete features were located towards the north-east and north-west of the excavation area with 12th to 14th-century pottery and animal bone indicating waste from domestic activity in the vicinity.

Aston Clinton has Anglo-Saxon origins and the Domesday Book of 1086 indicates a substantial estate with extensive lands under arable cultivation (AC 2015, 16–17), though little evidence for this was recovered from environmental samples taken from features during the excavation. The parish church probably has its origins in the 12th century and the adjacent medieval moated manor house was extant until the mid-19th century. Two further moated sites are recorded within the parish on the Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Record (BHER) and a document of 1302 indicates a well-populated manor (AC 2015, 18). However, the archaeological evidence for this period within the village is limited, though this is partly because of a lack of archaeological investigations within the settlement area. Prior to the Park Farm investigations, only two previous sites had yielded evidence of medieval activity. In Aston Clinton Park, medieval pottery was found by the edge of a stream (AC 2015, 19) and a pit containing a sherd of medieval greyware pottery was excavated during trial trenching at the north of the village (Chinnock 2013).

Development continued into the early post-medieval period, followed by landscape realignment resulting from early 19th-century Parliamentary Enclosure. Archaeological stratigraphy has permitted an understanding of the sequence of development, but from the early 19th century, this is supplemented by cartographic

evidence. The parish map of 1814 (King 1814, not illustrated) and subsequent (though less detailed) 1816 enclosure map (King 1816; Fig. 3) indicate that the boundary at the south-east of the excavation area defined by medieval Ditches R and S, was still extant at this time, whilst the main north-east/south-west boundary latterly formed by post-medieval Ditch Q, continued to the brook, west of the site. The maps indicate that the post-medieval north-west/south-east aligned boundary defined by Ditch O was also extant but the northern continuation as Ditch N was not. No other boundaries revealed by excavation are apparent on these maps, indicating they were abandoned prior to Enclosure, along with all of the features north of Ditch Q. An 1861 map of Aston Clinton Parish (Anon 1861; not illustrated) and the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1879 (Fig. 4) indicate that Ditch O has been abandoned, whereas Ditch N has been reinstated (and extended further to the north-west on the latter), though there is a variation in alignment between the excavated feature and the map repre-

sentation. The 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1899 (not illustrated) shows no change but sometime after 1899 the boundary defined by Ditch Q appears to have shifted northwards to the current site boundary, though exactly when, is unclear on later imagery.

The identification of limited evidence associated with possible agricultural and domestic activity at the south of the village has slightly increased the understanding of the known medieval development of Aston Clinton, whilst exposure and excavation of field boundaries has enabled a further understanding of field layout prior to Parliamentary Enclosure and that there was some post-enclosure continuity. The investigations have therefore gone some way to addressing research objectives within the Solent-Thames Research Framework, in particular those relating to field system and settlement development in the medieval period (Munby 2014: 16.4.1) and the impact of the post-medieval agricultural revolution (Hind 2014: 18.3.10).

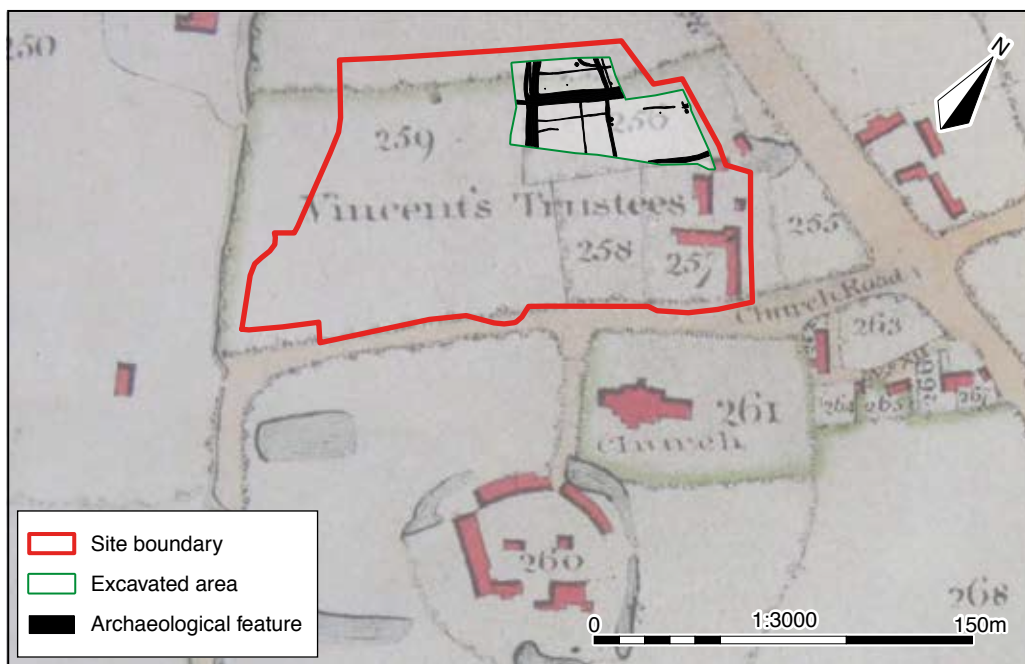


FIGURE 3 Archaeological features overlaid on 1816 Enclosure Map of the Parish of Aston Clinton in the County of Buckinghamshire by John King, scale 1:3000 (by kind permission of Archaeology Collective, reproduced from the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies)

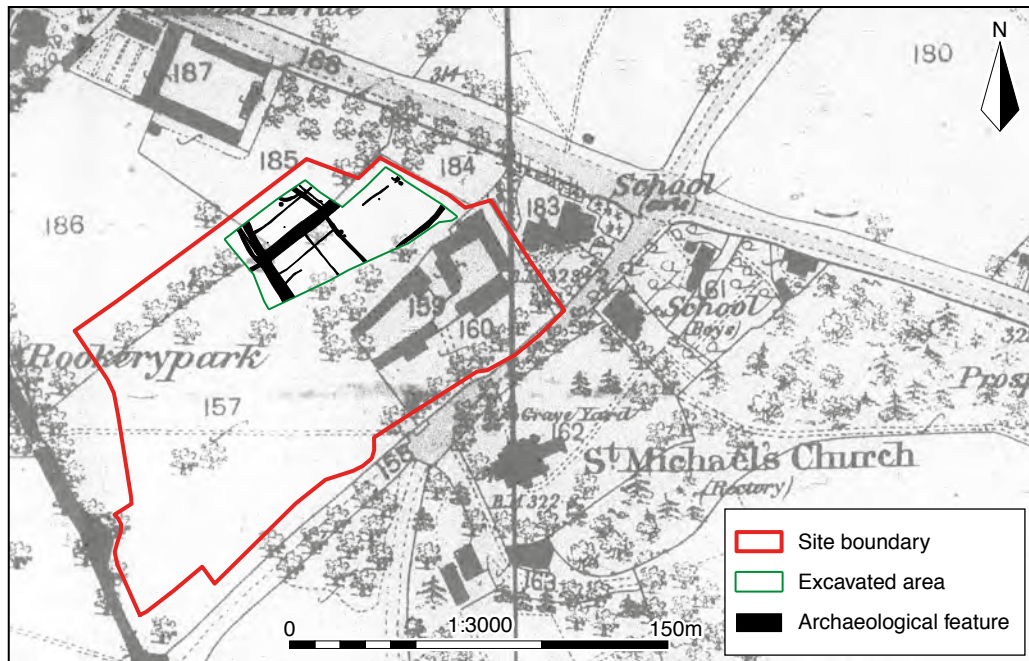


FIGURE 4 Archaeological features overlaid on 1879 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition; Buckinghamshire Sheet XXXIV.2, surveyed 1876 scale 1:3000 (by kind permission of Archaeology Collective, reproduced from the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks go to Archaeology Collective, particularly Joe Abrams and Charlotte Vallance, who commissioned the work on behalf of Laxton Properties Limited. Archaeology Collective are also thanked for giving their permission to reproduce two maps from their desk-based assessment as Figures 3 and 4 in this report. Philip Markham, archaeological advisor to Aylesbury Vale District Council, is acknowledged for monitoring the fieldwork, which was managed for CA by Stuart Joyce and supervised by Ralph Brown, assisted by Molly Agnew-Henshaw, Molly Day, Harriet Farr, Bethany Hardcastle, John Parker and Laura Pearson. Specialist contributions to the post-excavation programme were provided by Emma Aitken, Matilda Holmes, Ioannis Smyrniaos and Sarah F. Wyles. The Illustrations were prepared by Esther Escudero and Marta Perlinska.

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