

MIDDLE SAXON OCCUPATION AT CHICHELEY, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

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Summary

A ditch exposed during construction of the Newport Pagnell by-pass contained Middle Saxon 'Maxey-style' pottery, animal bone and a few small finds, perhaps debris from a relatively short-lived farmstead. It is suggested that a footpath which today passes the site may have been in existence during its occupation and that the site's influence can be detected in the layout of the mediaeval open field system.

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The Site and Nature of the Occupation

Observation of the Newport Pagnell by-pass construction during 1979 was carried out by Buckinghamshire County Museum in conjunction with the Department of the Environment. Apart from the site noted here, two Iron Age sites were also exposed which will be described elsewhere in *Records*, and it would seem that although not generally fashionable, watching briefs on construction projects are still worth the small amount of effort involved in their execution, so far as Buckinghamshire at least is concerned.

Machinery movement during construction of the by-pass was hampered by a particularly wet winter and early summer which also meant that search conditions were far from ideal. The site, which lay on yellowy-brown Oxford clay, was exposed as a dark stripe running roughly north - south along the carriageway after both topsoil and subsoil had been stripped. It was positioned on a fairly prominent natural shelf sited above the Chicheley brook with the rising ground of Chicheley hill behind (Fig. 2). The limits of the area investigated (Fig. 3) were determined partly by resources, partly by ridge-and-furrow damage and standing water, and also by the presence of operating machinery. An area roughly 40 x 8 m. was cleaned to expose an infilled ditch on average 1.10 m. wide and 0.40 m. deep after c. 0.35 m. of topsoil and subsoil had been

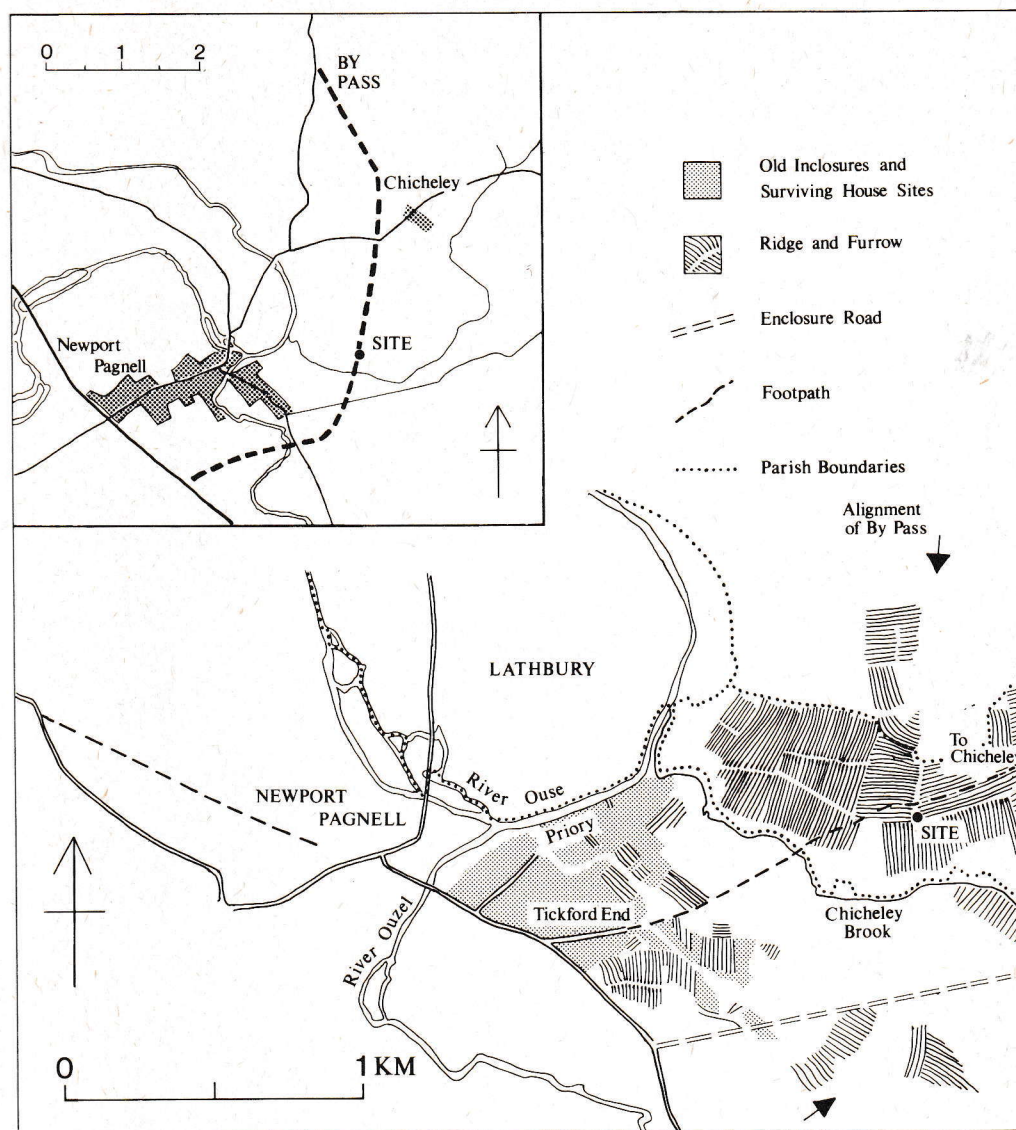


Fig. 1 Site Location: the ridge-and-furrow shown is plotted from air photographs, the old enclosures from the Award of 1808.

removed. The ditch, which was sectioned at several points, was traced for 22 m. and undoubtedly continued further in both directions. A narrower ditch joined the main ditch from the east. Two areas of charcoal-stained clay lay at the southern end of the ditch. A partial section of the easternmost one showed it to be a shallow hollow about 0.30 m. deep – the sort of hollow which might be caused by ‘poaching’ of the ground by cattle or conceivably represent occupation debris from the floor of a building, of which no other trace remained.

The fill of the ditch was a fairly homogenous grey clay with fragmented charcoal present throughout, a number of burnt sandstone pebbles, and some animal bone. The pottery recovered was hand-made, shell-tempered, and included rim forms similar to those from the Middle Saxon settlement at Maxey, Northants. A significantly greater amount of pottery was found towards the ditch’s southern end. Five iron objects were recovered, a few pieces of slag, half of a stone spindle whorl and forty fragments of lava quern. A sparse scatter of Romano-British pottery was collected over several hundred metres of the carriageway in the area, ten sherds came from the ditch and a probable Romano-British feature was identified at the northern end of the area investigated.

Enough pottery, animal bone and other domestic refuse was recovered from the ditch to suggest it was adjacent to a settlement, forming perhaps the boundary of a group of buildings as at Catholme in the Trent Valley (Losco-Bradley 1977), although the area investigated was insufficient to determine whether it was anything more extensive than a single farmstead. About 20 g. of charcoal were available from the ditch fill, and a radiocarbon date was considered, but examination of the charcoal by Mrs. Anne Miles showed it to be from particularly slow grown trees which the low curvature of the growth rings suggests were also substantial and hence likely to give an inaccurate date. The dating of the site depends then on the ceramic evidence which strongly suggests occupation in the eighth or ninth century. It is worth noting that a portion of the site may yet survive in undisturbed land to the east of the by-pass.

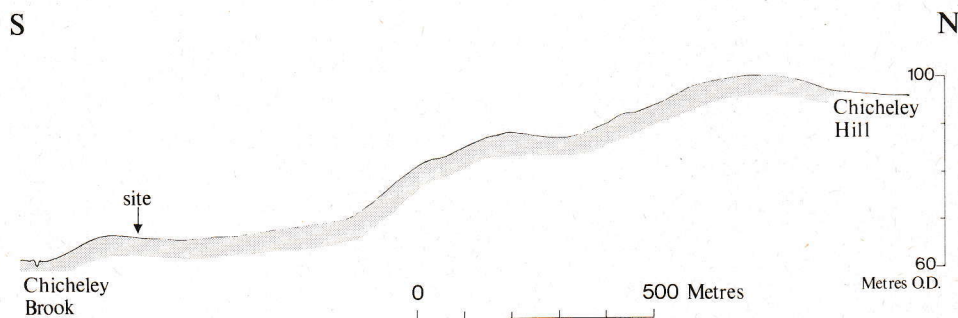


Fig. 2 Profile along by-pass showing location of the Chicheley settlement.

Historic Setting of the Site

The settlement was in existence in the eighth or ninth century and so it is interesting to note that it has a 'relationship', to use an intentionally neutral word, with two topographical features observable today, namely the footpath linking Tickford with Chicheley and the layout of the mediaeval open field furlongs. The furlongs in the vicinity of the settlement shown on Fig. 1 have been plotted from air photographs, and it can be clearly seen that the site falls at a junction of three, suggesting that the settlement, or its former site, has influenced their layout. In a careful consideration of the evidence available for the origin of furlongs, Hall (1981, 36) argues that a late eighth century date would best fit the available evidence, a conclusion with which the Chicheley evidence would accord.

The footpath which passes the site on the north side has a long history. The route shown on Fig. 1 is taken from the modern Ordnance Survey map and shows it linking directly with the present-day Tickford Street at Tickford End thence on to cross the Ouzel. A Mid-sixteenth century plan of the stream between the two parishes (BRO ref. D/C/2/18) marks a ford at approximately the same point described as being 'repaired at the charge of both parishes': the stream incidentally is described as Chicheley Brook 'alias Tykford Brook'. On the Chicheley side the trackway is shown as Lakebrygge Lane. The Tickford Field Enclosure Map of 1808 (BRO IR 67(ii)R) shows a crossing a few metres to the north of the present footpath with the road from Tickford curving north to meet it, although the route shown on modern maps is also apparent.

Tickford was a manor of five hides at Domesday, and two streets and several tenements are noted when it was granted by Fulk Paynel to Tickford Priory in the early twelfth century (Bucks VCH, 4, 417). The surviving earthworks and old enclosures (Fig. 1) show it to have been a flourishing settlement during the mediaeval period, which extended as far south as the present-day Tickfordfield Farm. If the antiquity of the trackway is accepted, it seems possible that Tickford was also in existence by the date of the Chicheley settlement. The discovery of St. Neots ware at two points in the village lends some support to this view (Millard 1967, 115-116 and Mynard 1969, 14). The mediaeval history of both Tickford and Chicheley has recently been considered in some detail by Chibnall (1979).

Since so little of the Chicheley settlement was seen, it is clearly impossible to reach any firm conclusion as to its nature. The growth of mediaeval settlement pattern has been discussed by Taylor (1977) who, looking backward from the multiple-manor village, notes the commonly dispersed pattern of Romano-British settlement and suggests a possible link. Evidence from excavations has produced two kinds of evidence for the intervening centuries, neither irreconcilable. Firstly a number of mediaeval settlements can be shown to have had occupation of Middle and occasionally Early Saxon date beneath or immediately adjacent to them, for example Maxey, Northants (Addyman 1964), Wicken Bonhunt, Essex (Wade 1980), Wharram Percy, Yorkshire (Hurst 1976 (a) and 1977) and Walton, Aylesbury (Farley 1976) — examples which clearly demonstrate continuity of site. Secondly some settlements were established in the later Early Saxon or full Middle Saxon period but survived only a hundred years or so, the most comprehensively excavated being that at Chalton, Hants. (Champion 1977). To this group the settlement glimpsed at Chicheley must belong. There is no conflict

Table 1. *Species present.*

	No. Bones		Min. No.
Cattle	70	35%	6
Sheep (goat)	106	53%	7
Pig	13	7%	2
Horse	1		1
Dog	8	4%	1
Fowl	1		1
Goose cf. <i>Anser anser</i>	1		1
	200		

Min. No. — Minimum number of individuals represented, taking the pit as one context.

The bones were fragmentary, only 42% being identified. A fifth of the identified bones were loose teeth. Given the small size of the collection (200 identified fragments), the percentages given in Table 1 are of minor value in indicating the livestock kept at Saxon Chicheley. Evidence from Saxon sites varies considerably (King, 1978) but there was a trend since Roman times towards keeping sheep in proportionately greater numbers, e.g. Portchester (Grant 1975) and Elmham, Norfolk (Noddle 1980). Cattle and sheep were about equally represented (by fragment count) at Saxon Maxey, Northants. (Seddon *et al* 1964) and Walton, Aylesbury (Noddle 1976).

Cattle

The cattle remains included jaws and teeth of at least five individuals, all immature. Three of these died at perhaps less than a year old (two right mandibles with the first molar in wear on the first cusp and a deciduous lower third molar at wear stage f — Grant 1975) and the other two at less than about 2½ years (maxillae with the second molar: (a) first cusp in wear and (b) not yet at the mature wear stage). Bones from the rest of the skeleton included only one (a piece of fused radius and ulna shaft) certainly from a mature animal. It is unusual to find a majority of immature cattle. Little significance can be attached to evidence from the small sample here. However, Maltby (1981) has observed that some Saxon sites have produced a higher proportion of immature cattle than is general on Roman sites. Both Walton and St. Peters Street, Northampton (Harman 1979) showed such an age distribution. It may be that there was some relaxation in the demand for working beasts and/or that breeding was more successful, resulting in more animals surplus to working and breeding requirements.

Only three bones were measurable, but these included an astragalus larger than any at Iron Age Bierton (Jones, forthcoming) and at the top end of the range of astragali from Saxon Hamwih (Bourdillon and Coy 1980); and a first phalanx which was small, being just within the range of measurements from Elmham. (Astragalus Greatest Length medial side 66.8 mm/Breadth distal 45.7; 1st phalanx GL peripheral half 48.2; method defined by von den Driesch 1976).

In both cattle and sheep, bones from most parts of the skeleton were present.

Sheep

Ovicaprine bones were the commonest find. Also, of the unidentified fragments, more were of sheep size than of cattle size (167 to 109, with only 2 bones from smaller species). The bones are probably mostly from sheep. Two pieces of skull from horned sheep were found, and no bones were definitely of goat. Seven lower jaws give an indication of the slaughter age of the sheep, four of them having fully adult dentition (more than c. 4 years old) and none being less than about 2 years. Using the method of Grant (1975), they were at the following stages: 25 estimated, 26, 27e, 32, 36, 38e and 41. In one jaw (stage 27e) the lower fourth premolar had worn against the anterior edge of the first molar causing an indentation, 2 mm below the occlusal surface. The mandible was in too fragmentary a state to determine whether periodontal disease was present. At Saxon Portchester and Elmham a high proportion of the sheep were adult, indicating the importance of wool production.

Only two bones were measurable, both from animals at the small end of the range observed at Hamwih and Elmham (humerus Breadth of Trochlea 24.9 mm; metacarpal Breadth proximal 19.0).

Other Species

Two ageable pig jaws were from animals more than two years old (4th permanent premolar in wear). The dog bones may be from one individual, a young dog; signs of the dog were also evident as gnaw marks on cattle and sheep bones. The goose bone was an incomplete humerus; it is likely to be from a domestic bird. (The assistance of Mr. G. Cowles in using the ornithological collections at the British Museum (Natural History), Tring is gratefully acknowledged). The fowl bone was as small as the smallest femur found at Hamwih (femur GL 66.4). Presence of both goose and fowl in such a small sample is of note. Both, and particularly geese, are more common from Saxon, than earlier, sites. No wild species were found.

A complete list of identified material is filed with the archive.

(f) *Charcoal from the ditch*, by Anne Miles

Context numbers precede each description:

- 100 Birch (*Betula* sp.) 12, two twigs unidentified, oak (*Quercus* sp.) 9
- 107 Several birch (*Betula* sp.), rest not suitable for identification
- 109 Twig possible birch (*Betula* sp.), birch (*Betula* sp.), oak (*Quercus* sp.) 7
- 113 Oak (*Quercus* sp.) 6, two twigs unidentified, ?birch (*Betula* sp.) 4

Most of the oak samples had a growth rate in excess of 14 rings to the inch. Oak is a ring-porous timber: at the beginning of the season's growth the earlywood large vessels are laid down: the rest of the growth ring (the latewood) has small vessels. As the density of timber is directly proportional to the amount of cell-wall material, the density of the two zones varies considerably, the earlywood being less dense than the latewood. When oak is slow grown, as these samples were, the growth ring consists mainly of earlywood and hence the wood is much lighter in density than 'normal' oak, about 4-8 rings to the inch with a 50/50 earlywood/latewood/ratio.

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