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**Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Remains at Kent Place, Sherborne
Street, Lechlade: excavations in 2000**

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Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Remains at Kent Place, Sherborne Street, Lechlade: excavations in 2000

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With contributions by Alistair Barber, Julie Jones and Jane Timby

Introduction

In June 2000 Cotswold Archaeological Trust (CAT; now Cotswold Archaeology) carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at Kent Place, Sherborne Street, Lechlade (centred on O.S. Nat. Grid SU 21329968). The evaluation, connected with a planning application for the construction of a house (CAT 2000), revealed that archaeological remains were present, and so the footprint of the proposed house, an area of 75 m², was fully excavated in September 2000 as a condition of the planning consent issued by Cotswold District Council. An archive report detailing the results of the excavation should be consulted for further details of stratigraphy, finds and biological evidence (CAT 2001).

The site occupies a roughly triangular plot of land between Kent Place to the south and Sherborne Street to the west, some 200 m north-west of the historic core of Lechlade (Fig. 1). At the time of the archaeological works the area was a vacant plot containing several apple trees and rough grass. Documentary evidence suggests that the site had been used as a vegetable garden associated with Sherborne House since at least the early post-medieval period (H.S. Mullaly pers. comm.). Maps indicate that the area has remained undeveloped since at least 1876.

Methodology

A detailed design for the excavation was prepared by CAT and approved by the county council's archaeology section in its capacity as advisor to the district council. The project was to record all archaeological deposits within the part of the development area where it would not be possible to preserve deposits *in situ*. In practice this meant that while the area of the house footprint was to be excavated, areas of proposed garden terrace and access drive could be preserved. Topsoil and a thick subsoil layer resulting from cultivation of the site were removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision down to the surface of the natural coarse yellow gravels and sands (a depth of approximately 0.5 m). Archaeological deposits identified at this level were then hand excavated. Where possible, linear features were sampled at intervals providing a 20% sample of their surface area. Other features were generally at least 50% excavated. Samples were taken for biological analysis as appropriate. A full written, drawn and photographic record was maintained.

Excavation Results

The datable activity in the excavated area has been assigned to five periods from Anglo-Saxon to post-medieval times. Cut features are numbered in square brackets and deposits in round brackets.

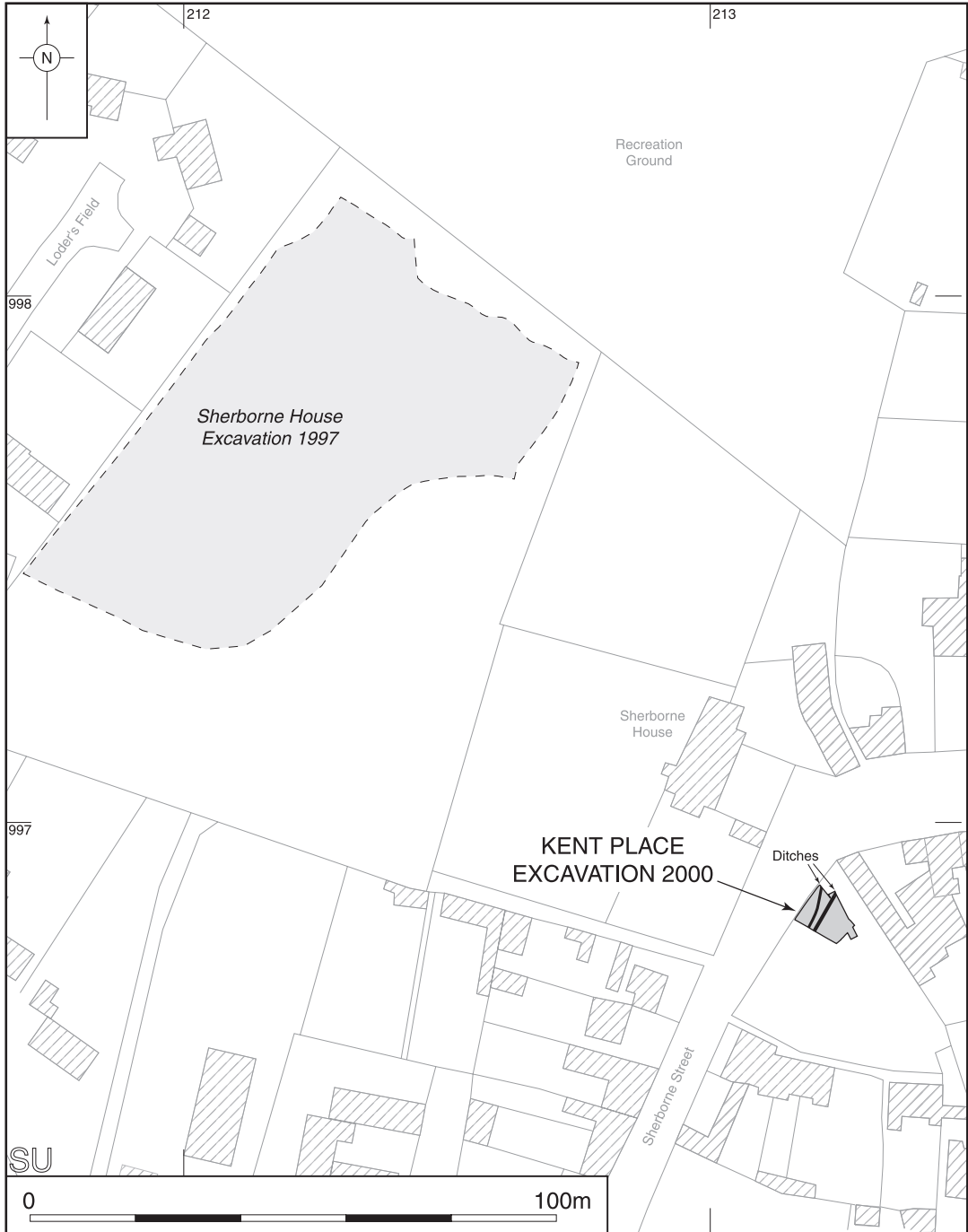


Fig. 1. Location of the excavation area at Kent Place and the previous excavation at Sherborne House, Lechlade (1:1,250).

In some cases more than one section was excavated through a ditch, with individual numbers allocated in each section. For clarity these ditches have been given a code letter (A–K) which refers to each feature along its whole length (Figs. 2 and 3).

Period 1

The earliest feature uncovered on the site was a subcircular pit [155]. This did not contain any datable material but was cut by the Period 2 ditches. It is possible that this feature is the result of small-scale quarrying of the underlying natural gravel. Some animal bone was found within the fill (137).

Period 2: 6th to 9th century A.D.

Two ditches, D and F, crossed the western part of the site on a NE–SW alignment. The larger ditch, F, survived up to 1.0 m deep and 1.5 m wide (Fig. 3, sections 2 and 3). Both contained pottery dated to the 6th to 9th centuries, as well as animal bone. Ditch D appeared to curve slightly to the north, but the short lengths exposed made it difficult to determine their precise alignments.

Period 3: 10th to 12th century A.D.

Ditches E and J lay on a similar alignment to those of Period 2 and contained 10th- to 12th-century pottery, along with residual 6th- to 9th-century material. Ditch J was a very large feature, 1.0 m deep and up to 1.4 m wide, but it appeared to terminate in the area of a modern intrusion under the apple tree in the centre of the site (Fig. 3, section 2).

Period 4: 12th to 15th century A.D.

Ditch G was encountered within the sequence of ditches on the western side of the site. It contained 12th- to 15th-century pottery as well as earlier wares. A further similarly dated ditch (K) ran parallel to the other ditches, but some 4 m to the south-east, and was thus only encountered in the evaluation trench. Ditch K was notable for its depth, in excess of 1.5 m, and its vertical sides (Fig. 3, section 1). Unfortunately it was not possible to fully excavate this feature due to health and safety considerations.

A range of other later medieval features was encountered. Ditch K cut through a thin spread of reddish clay (007) containing 10th- to 13th-century pottery, and several features were found in the north-western part of the site, cutting the earlier ditch fills. These consisted of two burnt subcircular hearth-like features, [019] and [128]. The former contained a bowl-shaped deposit of gravel in its base, with a burnt fill on top including fragments of burnt limestone but no datable material. A single sherd of 10th- to 12th-century pottery was recovered from the fill of [128]. Two large postholes, [015] and [118], were both 0.75 m in diameter. Posthole [015] contained stone packing and pottery dated to the 10th to 12th centuries; posthole [118] was undated. As both appeared to cut the earlier Period 3 ditch J, the pottery recovered may be residual.

Period 5: modern

A deep sub-rectangular pit [105] in the centre of the site contained 19th- or 20th-century pottery, and it may have been associated with the planting of an apple tree. A smaller 19th-century rubbish pit [003] was encountered in the eastern side of the evaluation trench.

Undated features

Four ditches contained no dating evidence. Three (A, B, and C) ran on a similar alignment to the Period 2 ditches (D and F). Ditches B and C appeared to follow the same curve as the Period 2 ditch D, and ditch C cut ditch D. The fourth ditch (H) ran parallel to Period 4 ditch G, but the

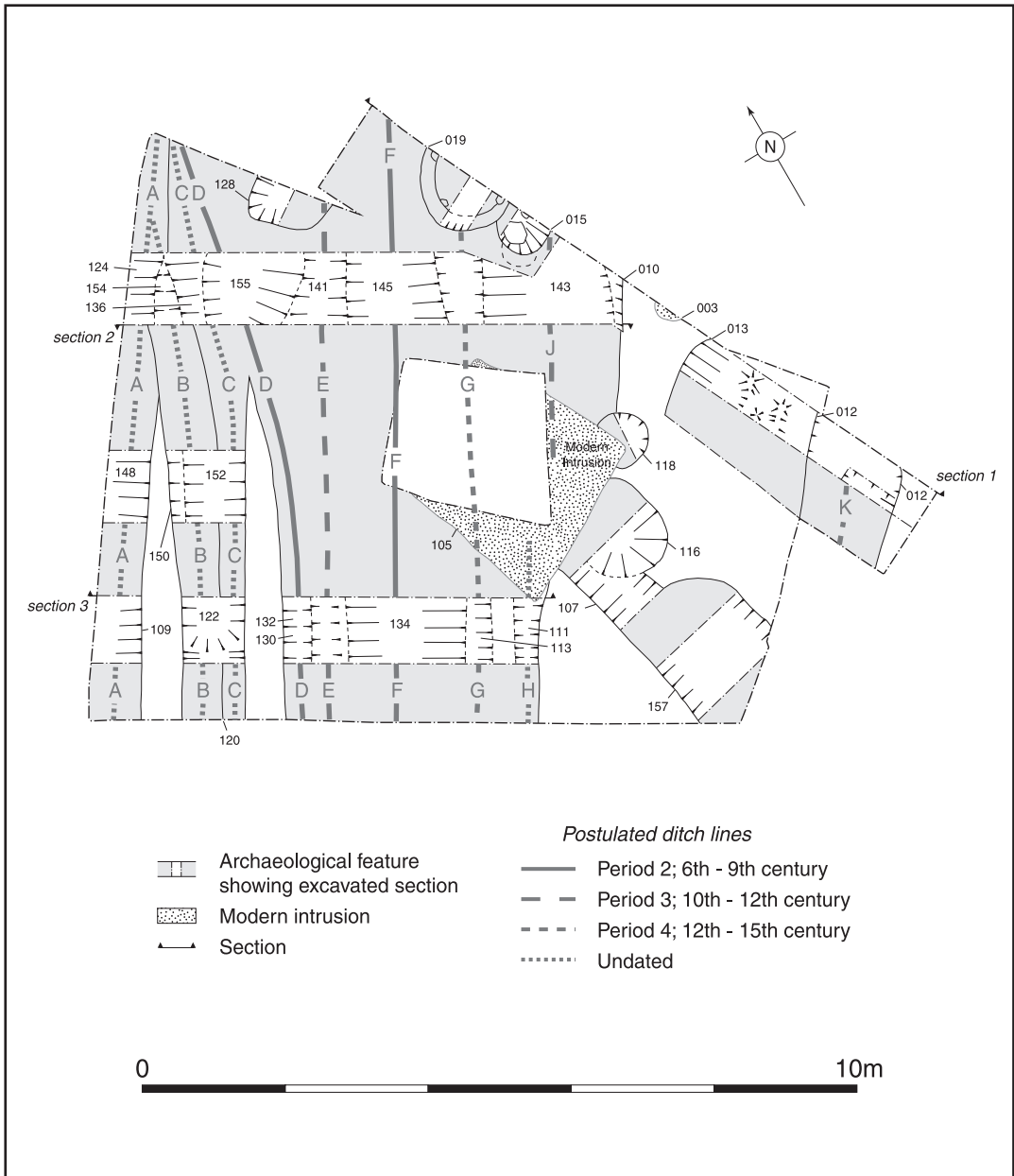


Fig. 2. Kent Place, Lechlade: plan of the excavated area (1:100).

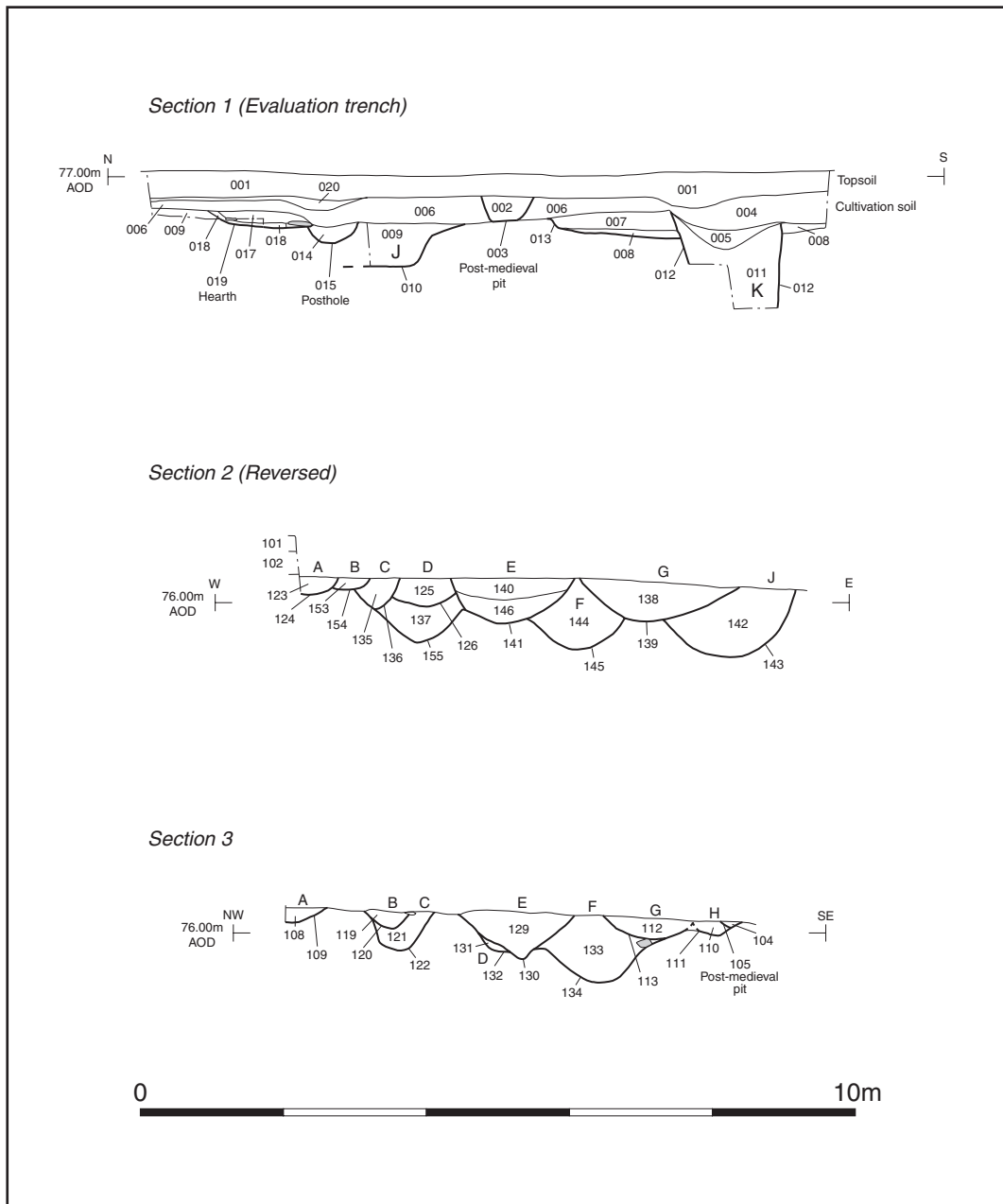


Fig. 3. Kent Place, Lechlade: sections (1:100).

stratigraphic relationship between them could not be determined. A conical pit [116] and a shallow irregular gully [107]/[157] were excavated in the southern corner of the site, but no datable material was recovered from either feature, and the presence of modern pit [105] left these features stratigraphically isolated. The north–south alignment of gully [107]/[157] suggests that it belongs to a different phase of activity from that of the NE–SW oriented ditches in Periods 2–4.

THE POTTERY by Jane Timby

The two stages of archaeological work resulted in the recovery of a small assemblage of 83 sherds of pottery, 903 gm in weight, dating to the Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods. The pottery was moderately well-preserved with an average sherd weight of 11 gm. Seventeen sherds were unstratified and the remaining pieces were distributed over 14 contexts of which 12 represent feature fills. The individual groups were thus very small, a fact to be borne in mind when considering dating. The material was sorted into fabrics and quantified by sherd count and weight. A summary of the data can be found in Table 1 which uses the Oxford regional fabric codes where relevant (Mellor 1994).

Anglo-Saxon pottery

Thirteen sherds are typical of the Anglo-Saxon period. They comprise eleven coarse organic-tempered wares, one sand-tempered sherd and one oolitic limestone-tempered sherd. Similar material is well documented from Lechlade (cf. Timby 1986; Bateman *et al.* 2003; Boyle *et al.* 1998) and probably derives from occupation dating to the 6th–9th centuries. Only two featured sherds are present, both simple everted rim jars. Two of the organic-tempered vessels have a highly burnished finish and one, from ditch [145], contains burnt residue. Features containing material exclusively of this date include ditches D and F accounting for six of the sherds; the remainder of the sherds were redeposited in later contexts.

Late Saxon–early medieval pottery

Several sherds are present in fabrics typical of the late Saxon or early medieval periods. Amongst the finds from the subsoil is a handmade sherd from the shoulder of a jar, in a medium to coarse sandy fabric. It has a distinctive scratch-marked exterior surface. A single piece of late Saxon St. Neot's type shelly ware was present amongst the unstratified material.

Table 1. Quantification of pottery fabrics from Kent Place by sherd number and weight.

Period	Fabric	Description	No.	Wt. (gm)
Anglo-Saxon	SXORG	organic-tempered ware	11	65
	SXSAND	sandy ware	1	3
	SXLIME	limestone-tempered	1	7
Late Saxon–Medieval	OXR	St. Neot's type shelly ware	1	3
	OXAC	Cotswold calcareous ware	30	266
	OXBF	South-west Oxfordshire ware	4	60
	SAND	coarse sandy scratch-marked ware	1	25
Medieval	OXAQ	East Wiltshire flint and sandy ware	25	251
	OXBB	Minety ware, North Wiltshire	1	52
	MISC	miscellaneous sandy wares	4	83
Post-medieval	PM	red earthenware, stoneware, china	4	88
Total			83	903

At least 30 sherds of late Saxon–early medieval west Oxfordshire ware (OXAC) were present. This ware, also known as Cotswold ware, is handmade with a calcareous gravel temper. It has been recorded from 9th-century contexts at Fairford and was common at Winchcombe from the early 11th century (Mellor 1994, 51). The tradition appears to be dying out by the mid 12th century. Other sherds of contemporary date include four sherds of south-west Oxfordshire ware with a sandy, flint-tempered fabric.

Single sherds of OXAC were recovered from hearth [128] and posthole [015]. Three sherds were associated with an Anglo-Saxon organic sherd in ditch J, and another sherd with two Anglo-Saxon organic sherds in ditch E. Potentially these features could be late Saxon. Other sherds of OXAC were associated with wares more typical of the early medieval period, e.g. a sandy ware dish in scoop [013] and East Wiltshire ware in ditches K and G, the earliest dates for which are more likely to be from the 12th century. Other medieval material present includes a single unstratified sherd of Minety ware and a quartz-tempered ware from the subsoil.

Post-medieval/modern pottery

Four sherds of post-medieval/modern date were present amongst the unstratified collection.

PLANT MACROFOSSIL REMAINS by Julie Jones

Two samples were wet sieved and the dried floats were sorted under low-powered magnification with the charred plant macrofossils extracted for identification. An estimate was also made of the number of charcoal fragments of >2 mm overall dimensions, a size which would allow identification to species. Sample 1 derived from the burnt fill (017) of Period 4 hearth [019], and Sample 2 from fill (133) of Period 2 ditch F. A very small assemblage of cereal remains was recovered confirming the presence of the staple cereal crops, wheat, barley and rye. Oats with brome may have been present as crop weeds. Full details of these samples are contained in the archive report.

THE ANIMAL BONE by Alistair Barber

The animal bone assemblage was quantified and subjected to basic scanning to identify species, anatomical representation and butchery marks. A total of 135 animal bone fragments, weighing 1,667 gm, was recovered. Overall bone survival was good, although most of the material was small and fragmentary, and much was unidentifiable to species. However, cow, horse, pig, deer and sheep/goat were all represented. In terms of anatomical representation teeth and cranial, pelvic, rib and long bone fragments were well represented. Some rib and longbone fragments showed evidence of butchery, carrying chop or knife marks. Full details of the assemblage can be found in the archive report.

Discussion

The surviving archaeology on the site was encountered at some depth (in excess of 0.5 m) below the modern ground surface. This is most likely to be the product of manuring of the site during its time as a post-medieval garden. As a consequence, the survival of archaeological deposits is quite good, with a stratified sequence apparent as well as individual features cut into the natural gravel. The small size of the area excavated hinders a wider interpretation of the features uncovered, and the short length of the ditches exposed does not admit more than general speculation as to their form and function.

To judge from the 6th- to 9th-century pottery recovered from ditches D and F, it would appear that a boundary running approximately NE–SW across the western end of the site was established during the mid to late Anglo-Saxon period. It continued to be re-dug throughout the earlier medieval period. The latest ditch in this sequence (G) contained pottery of the 12th–15th centuries, suggesting that this boundary was still extant at that period. Subsequently, a new ditch (K) was dug a short distance to the east, but on the same alignment, while the area of the former ditches became the location for several hearths and postholes. The relatively early pottery recovered from hearth [128] is probably residual material from the fill of the ditches upon which it lies.

The Anglo-Saxon activity previously discovered around Lechlade lies to the north-west of the current site (Sherborne House, Recreation Ground, and Butler's Field), but the latest material from these sites dates from the 8th century (Bateman *et al.* 2003, 86). Based on the later end of the date range for the earliest material from Kent Place, it can be suggested that the shift in settlement to the site adopted for the medieval town occurred in the 8th or 9th century. The ditches found at Kent Place possibly represent the north-western boundary of this settlement, their line fossilised in the current alignment of Sherborne Street.

If this interpretation of albeit limited evidence is correct, it suggests that the process of village nucleation began in Lechlade before the 10th century. Such dating can be paralleled at the Cotswold village of Lower Slaughter, where recent excavations revealed a series of recut ditches that may have defined a large enclosure. On the basis of pottery and radiocarbon dates obtained from animal bone found in the ditches, it has been suggested that settlement nucleation at Lower Slaughter may have commenced in the middle Saxon period (Enright and Kenyon 2000). Further work is required to elucidate the chronology, plan and extent of late Saxon/early medieval occupation in Lechlade, although opportunities continue to arise. For instance excavations in 1999 at Allcourt Farm, 200 m to the south-west of Kent Place, recovered further traces of occupation of this period (Brown 2000).

In the later medieval centuries there was activity on the site, apparently domestic in scale and type. The limited character of the remains and the absence of complex and deep occupation deposits reinforces the established view of the development of Lechlade in the medieval period (Douthwaite and Devine 1998, 106–7). Sherborne Street was peripheral to the burghal core which grew along the main roads and around the market place to the south and south-east.

Acknowledgements

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