

MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL URBAN DEVELOPMENT AT LAND TO THE REAR OF THE WHITE SWAN PUBLIC HOUSE, BANK STREET, BISHOPS WALTHAM, HAMPSHIRE

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ABSTRACT

Excavations undertaken by AOC Archaeology Group in 2007 at Bank Street, Bishops Waltham, Hampshire, revealed evidence of medieval and post-medieval activity. The earliest activity was represented by a group of inter-cutting domestic refuse pits dating to the 13th to 14th century. After a hiatus in activity up to the 17th century, activity was re-established on site in the form of light industrial activity likely to be associated with urban development in the immediate vicinity. The function of the site changed in the early 18th century to a more agricultural function in the form of market gardening, represented by a substantial organic soil horizon. By the mid 18th century a small brick cottage fronting onto Basingwell Street was constructed through the organic horizon. The cottage was demolished in the second half of the 20th century. The multiple phases of activity on site demonstrate how this area of Bishops Waltham has developed through time.

INTRODUCTION

Site location

Between September and October 2007 AOC Archaeology Group undertook small scale excavations to the rear of the White Swan Public House, Bank Street, Bishops Waltham, Hampshire NGR SU 55491752 (Fig. 1). The site is located in the central historic core of the modern town, at the junction of Bank Street and Basingwell Street. The archaeological investigation was commissioned by Marble Hill Developments prior to the redevelopment of the White Swan Public House. Initially, the project consisted of the excavation of two evaluation trenches which identified multiple

features of archaeological interest. Based on this discovery the decision was made to carry out an open area excavation. The programme of archaeological works was allocated site code WINCM: AY323.

The aim of this article is to present the synthesised results of the excavation, by period, with the full archive available from the Winchester Museum on completion of the project.

Geology and topography

The underlying geology of the site has been identified as Reading Beds, a geological formation which separates the dominate formations of chalk and London Clay which underlie the town in general. The site lies on a shallow slope which increases in gradient as it descends southwest towards the River Hamble. Ground level on site lies at approximately 42.60m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Evidence for human activity pre-dating the medieval period within Bishops Waltham, and the immediate surrounding area, is limited. Prehistoric remains are restricted to several Bronze Age barrows located to the south and east of the town, associated with a scatter of contemporary pottery and flints in the vicinity; while Romano-British activity is represented by a small assemblage of coins and building material recovered from Vernon Hill to the north (Edwards 1999, 1). By the early 8th century a monastery had been established at Waltham, while the surrounding area remained as a royal estate until the early 10th century at which

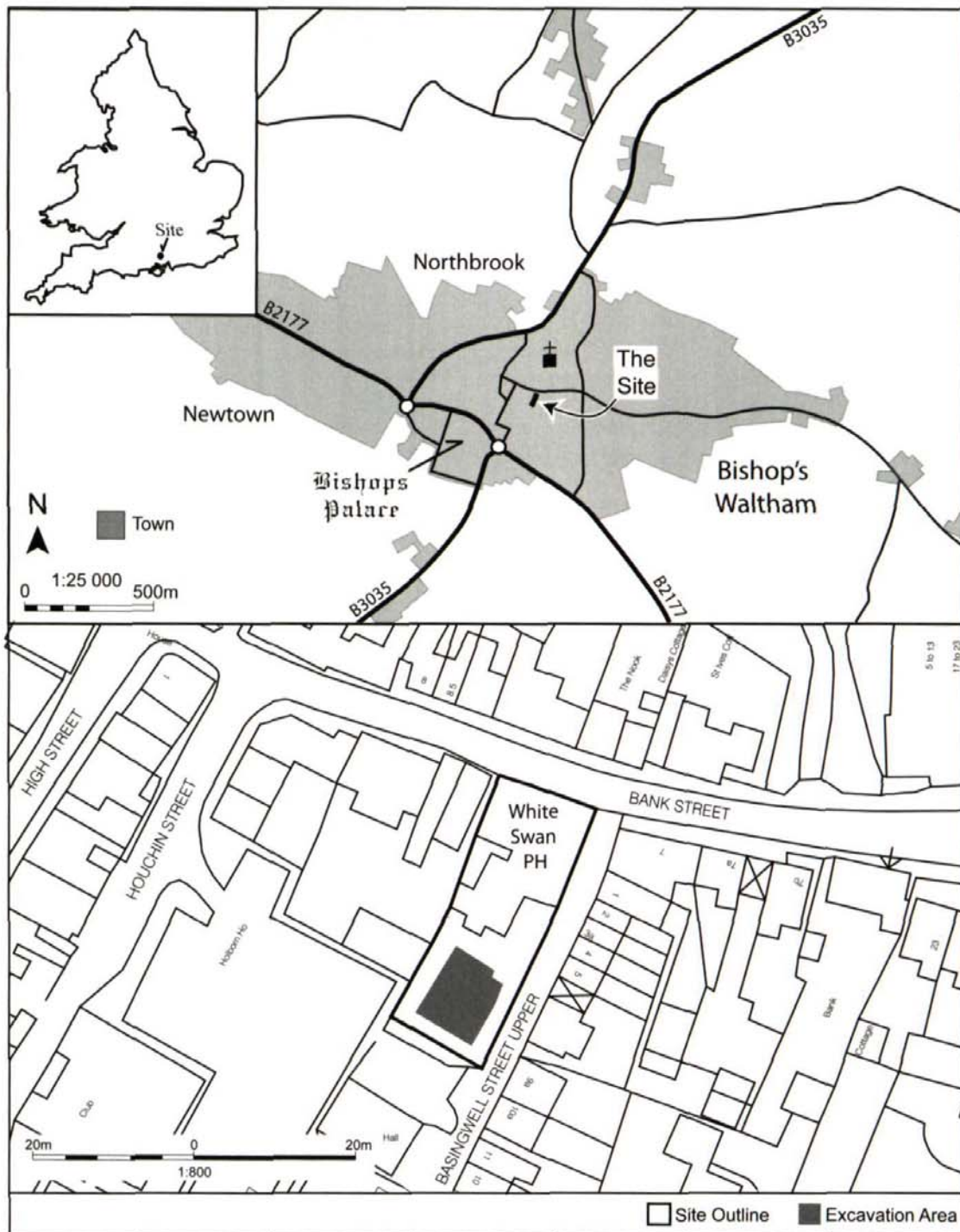


Fig 1 Site location

point the estate was granted by King Edward to the Bishop of Winchester (Hare 1988, 45; Sawyer 1968, 372). It is probable that the Bishops of Winchester maintained a residence in Waltham from this point onwards (Hare 1987, 9). The only archaeological evidence for activity for this period relates to a late Anglo-Saxon aisled hall excavated immediately north of the Bishop's Palace (Lewis 1985, 86).

The Domesday survey describes Bishop's Waltham as a modest town, with a population of 118, two churches, three mills and a deer park, in addition to comments indicating that the ownership of the town had lain with the Bishopric for a substantial period of time (Edwards 1999, 2). Much of the structure of the current town can be attributed to Bishop Henry of Blois in the 12th century. During Henry's reign as Bishop he undertook a substantial programme to develop the town. This initially involved the construction of a castle, or more probable the fortification of the existing Bishop's residence, which was later destroyed during the internal conflicts of the period (*ibid.*, 2). Documentary sources indicate that by AD 1170 the Bishop's Palace had been built on the former remains of the castle and was popular with visiting royals and courtiers (VCHH 1908, 278). The relocation of the monastic church to its present position to the north of the historic town is also attributed to Henry (Edwards 1999, 7). It has been suggested that Henry was involved with creating a formal street layout for the town, although more recent evidence indicates that the property divisions along the High Street are more likely to derive from encroachment rather than formal planning (*ibid.*, 4). The street layout at the historic core of the town, consisting of Brook Street, the High Street, Houchin Street and Basingwell Street running north-south, connected by Bank Street and the Market Square running east-west, appears to have changed little through into the present day.

The economy of the town focused on the central market, first referred to during the reign of Edward I (VCHH 1908, 278). The Bishop's Palace and associated court activity would have been a strong economic influence on the town as well, providing supplies and services to the residents within. Other economic activities

attested to within the town include brick and tile works and a possible boat yard (Edwards 1999, 8).

Development of the town appears to have diminished during the post-medieval period. The destruction of the Bishop's Palace after it was taken by Parliamentary forces during the Civil War caused the Bishops to abandon the Palace, thus removing their economic influence on the town (Hare 1987, 28). Without the Bishops the town was likely to have been left with only the market as a means of generating trade. Early descriptions of the town's layout are scarce but it has been recorded in a 15th century documentary source that Basingwell Street is described as a back alley (Edwards 1999, 4). A review of Milne's 'Atlas of Hampshire' from the late 18th century shows Bishop's Waltham was a small town with a road layout which has altered little up to the modern day (Fig. 1). At the time Milne's map was drawn up, multiple properties were concentrated on the High Street and Houchin Street. Basingwell Street itself is marked, with several properties present at the junction with Bank Street, but with vacant areas on both the east and western side of the road. Some open plots, possibly garden plots, appear to be marked out on the lower east side of the street. This visual description of Basingwell Street fits well with the earlier 15th century description of the street. The Tithe Map of 1841 indicates very little change in the intervening period, although substantial development has taken place along the eastern side of Basingwell Street. The western side of the street primarily remained vacant of properties. A review of the 1868 Ordnance Survey map now indicates the area within the site boundary had been developed, with a warehouse having been built directly to the rear of the White Swan Public House, with what appears to be a detached cottage present in the southern area of the site.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

During the course of the excavations at the White Swan Public House, three different periods of activity were recognised (medieval, post-medieval and modern); it was possible to

identify multiple phases of activity associated with the post-medieval period.

The natural deposits

The natural deposit consisted of an orange or yellowish brown sandy clay brickearth deposit, which was observed across the full 10m by 10m area of the site. The average height of the natural was 41.47m AOD with only minimal variation in this level noted during the course of the excavation.

Period 1 – the medieval features (13th to 14th century) (Fig. 2)

The earliest recorded activity on site was associated with the medieval period. Apart from the recovery of residual undiagnostic prehistoric flint debitage, there was no evidence for earlier activity on site.

The medieval features identified during the course of the excavation consisted of 10 circular or oval pits scattered across the site, several of which were inter-cutting. The majority of pits were similar in character, measuring between 0.90m and 2.45m in length, by up to 0.80m deep, primarily containing single fills. The largest of the excavated pits was located on the northeast side of the site recorded as being 3m in diameter by 0.80m deep. The profile of the pit was stepped resulting in the northern portion of the pit being the deepest. Two sub-rectangular shaped pits, adjacent to the northwest boundary of site, both measuring approximately 2m in length by 0.60m wide and 0.20m in depth, are believed to be contemporary with one another.

The finds assemblage recovered from the pits was similar in composition. The assemblage of 103 sherds of pottery dated to the 13th to 14th century made up the largest group of finds, represented by small groups of small abraded sherds. Nine fabric types were represented, dominated by flint and sand tempered coursewares and micaceous sandy wares, fine to course southern whitewares primarily made up the remaining fabric types. Pots and jars were better represented than jugs and the whole assemblage appeared to be the result of local pottery industries, with no imported

wares identified. The animal bone fragments recovered were also highly fragmented, with domestic species identified as being primarily represented by sheep/goat, with a smaller quantity of cattle and pig bones present. A limited number of dog and cat bones were also recovered. Other finds represented were fragments of building debris, consisting of brick, tile, slate and iron nails. Of interest among this group was a single figure-of-eight headed stud used for strengthening doors and chests. The small environmental assemblage from the pits includes cereal grains, indicating that wheat, barley and oats may have been grown and consumed within proximity to the site.

It is likely these 10 pits were originally excavated for the purpose of small scale brick-earth extraction. This would tie in well with the small, fragmented finds assemblage which appears to be secondary deposits, accumulating gradually as the pits were left open to be backfilled over time.

Period 2 – medieval to post-medieval horizon (14th to 16th century) (not illustrated)

All the Period 1 features were sealed by a 0.25m thick silty clay soil horizon. This soil horizon appears to represent a decline in activity taking place on site between the 14th and 16th century, with only limited activity occurring within the vicinity of the site attested to by the limited number of ceramic building material fragments recovered.

Period 3 Phase A – the 17th to early 18th century features (Fig. 2)

After a hiatus in activity on site, the next sequence of features identified on site relates to post-medieval activity represented by five pits and several postholes.

Three of the five pits associated with this period were similar; they were all rectangular in shape, with vertical sides and flat bases, measuring up to 0.70m in length by 0.20m deep. One of the pits had undergone a heating process evidenced by the discolouration of the natural clay lining the pit. Finds recovered from the three pits included fragments of unglazed

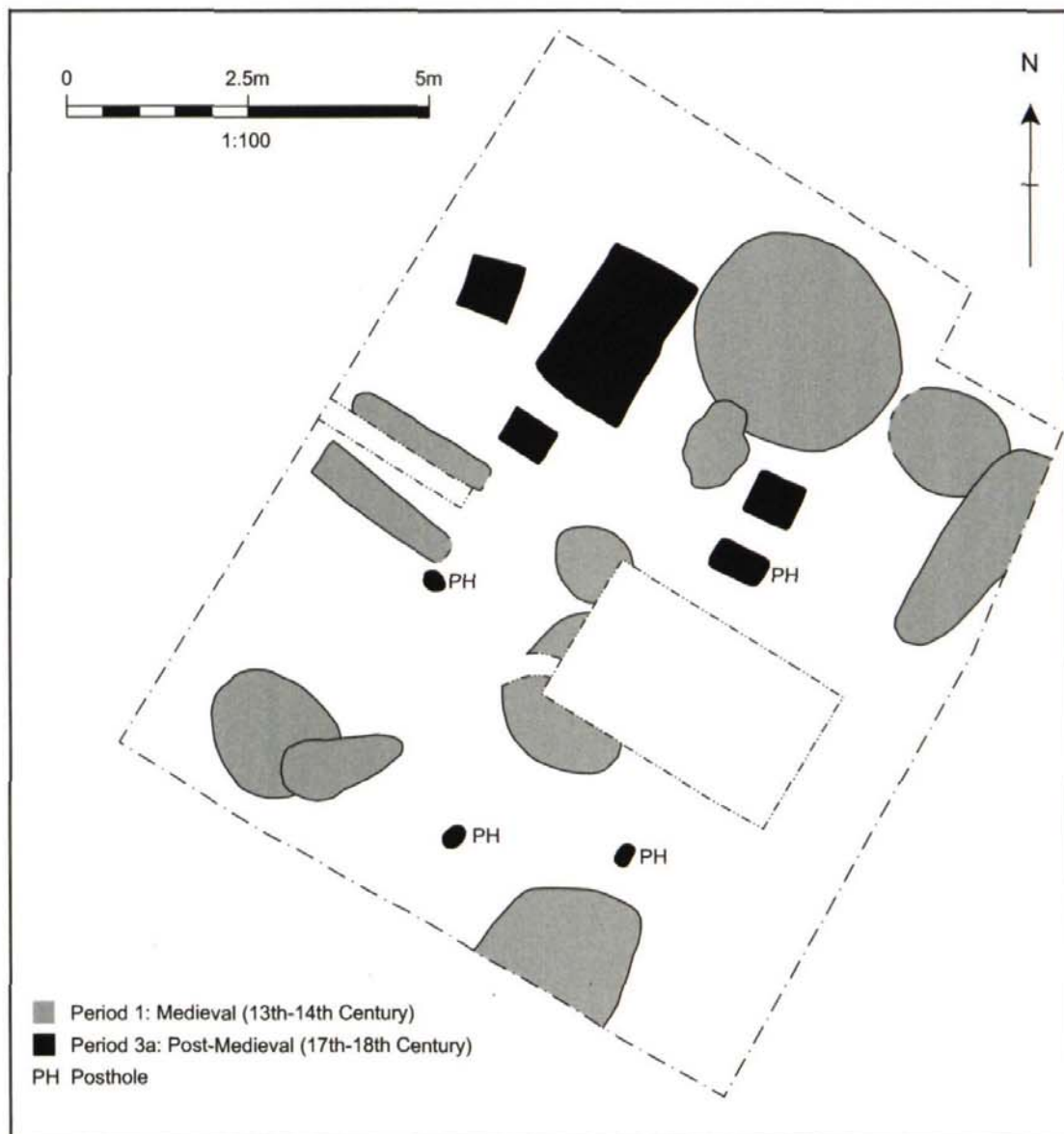


Fig 2 Periods 1 & 3a: medieval (13th to 14th century) and post-medieval (17th to 18th century)

floor tile, thought to have been imported from the Low Countries between the 16th and 18th centuries, and occasional fragments of clay tobacco pipe and ceramic building material tentatively dated to the 18th century. There is a strong possibility that these pits represent small scale industrial activity.

Two further features are assigned to this phase consisting of a large shallow pit measuring 2.20m by 1.50m in plan by 0.25m in depth, the fill of which contained fragments of roof tile and oyster shell. The second feature was a posthole 0.75m long by 0.50m wide and 0.40m deep, traces of a post pipe could be seen

in the fill. No similar comparative postholes were observed during the excavation indicating the feature represented an isolated post setting. No dating evidence was recovered from these two features, but have been included into this phase due to similar characteristics shared with the other three pits associated with this period.

In the southern central area of the site three oval postholes were recorded. All three postholes measured between 0.30m and 0.40m in length and up to 0.20m deep. A small number of 17th or 18th century pottery, ceramic building material and clay tobacco pipe fragments were recovered from the fills of the three postholes indicating a date for their use. It is likely that the three postholes form part of a temporary rectangular structure measuring approximately 3.60m by 2.40m.

Period 3 Phase B – the early to mid 18th century features

Phase 3B is represented by an organic silty buried soil horizon present in the northern half of the site; it was truncated in the southern half of the site by later activity. This organic layer was up to 0.65m thick and contained small fragments of ceramic building material indicating human activity was taking place nearby. The depth of the deposit and organic content suggests the immediate area might have been employed for cultivation, potentially as part of a garden or commercial market gardening operation. This deposit was dated through its stratigraphic location.

Period 3 Phase C – the mid 18th to 19th century features (Fig. 3)

Phase 3C is represented by the first evidence for a structure on site in the form of foundations for a small brick building. The foundations were in the southern half of the site surviving up to four courses high and fronting onto Basingwell Street. Together, the foundations formed three sides of a building, constructed in a single phase by means of foundation trenches cut through the earlier organic soil horizon. The walls were constructed in red brick 0.26m wide, measuring 230mm by 105mm by 65mm, stylistically dated

to the 18th century. Overall, the building measured 9m by 6m in plan. In the northeast corner of the building a basement level had been constructed measuring 3m by 1.70m at a height of approximately 41.60m AOD, demarcated by an internal wall a single brick wide. The basement floor was constructed using the same type of bricks as used in the foundations. Another small area of a floor surface survived at the northwest end of the structure. It is likely that the foundations represent the remains of a small residential property once constructed to front onto Basingwell Street featured on the Ordnance Survey map 1868.

Further wall foundations dated to the 18th century, were recorded during an earlier watching brief during redevelopment of the White Swan building itself. The walls are thought to relate to an earlier phase of construction associated with the building (Clarke 2007).

Period 4 – modern deposits

Sealing the foundations was a series of modern deposits across the full area of the site representing the demolition of the earlier brick building in the mid to late 20th century, subsequently sealed by the construction of the car park of the White Swan Public House.

DISCUSSION

The medieval period

The first evidence for human activity on site was a concentrated group of pits dating to the 13th to 14th century. The inter-cutting nature of several of the pits indicates this activity was taking place over an extended period, as the pits had time to be backfilled before new pits were excavated. The finds collected appear primarily domestic in origin, gradually accumulating rather than being directly disposed. The date, character and arrangement of this 13th to 14th century pit group is similar to another group of pits excavated at the site of 18 – 20 High Street, Alton (Taylor & Hammond 2007, 113).

The discovery of the 13th to 14th century

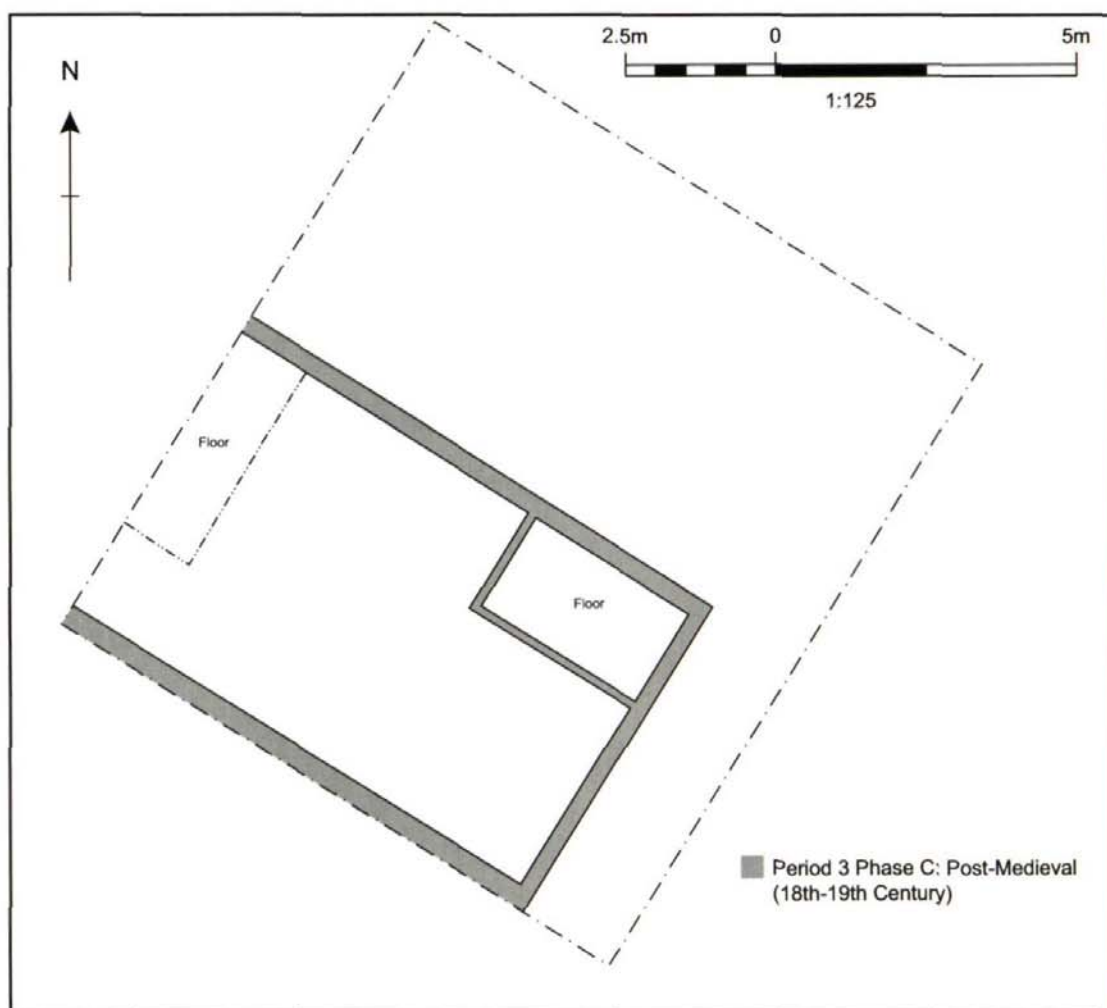


Fig 3 Period 3c: 18th to 19th century

pit group identified on site is significant. It is the earliest known archaeological evidence of medieval activity in Bishops Waltham; previous medieval evidence dated to the 15th century (Lewis 1985, 115). The evidence indicates that at this time, activity had extended to the eastern side of the medieval town. Comparison with the site at High Street, Alton strongly indicates such activity takes place to the rear of a domestic property. Therefore, it is highly probable that the pits identified on site were also located to the rear of properties, recorded

on Milne's 18th century map, which fronted onto Bank Street rather than Basingwell Street. The cartographic evidence indicates that this area of Basingwell Street did not start to be developed until the 19th century.

Medieval to post-medieval horizon (14th to 16th century)

The presence of a soil horizon across the site, sealing the 13th to 14th century pit group, appears to represent a hiatus of activity on site

lasting for approximately 300 years. The small number of finds recovered from this horizon implies limited activity was taking place in proximity to the site. It is possible that the area of the town in proximity to the Bank Street and Basingwell Street road junction, known from documentary sources to be part of the road layout at this time, went into decline with minimal activity occurring. It is not uncommon on medieval sites of this date to identify a decline in activity in the late medieval period attributed to changing patterns of trade, economic factors and depopulation due to the multiple outbreaks of plague (Reynolds 1980).

The post-medieval period

The hiatus of activity ceased in the 17th to early 18th century with the excavation of several pits thought to be attributed to some form of industrial activity and a four post temporary structure. There is strong potential that this activity is associated with construction activity taking place in close proximity to the site, relating to the processing and storage of materials required in the building process. This would tie in with development of the town in the 18th century.

The next phase of activity during the post-medieval period relates to the accumulation of a thick organic soil horizon, which is probably indicative of some form of intensive agricultural activity taking place, such as market gardening in the early to mid 18th century. The site's location in close proximity to the centre of the town meant it would have been well placed to supply fresh fruit and vegetables to the local population. The earliest cartographic evidence, which approximately dates to this period, does identify the site as an open plot of land. The transition in the function of the site from light industry to agriculture between the 17th to 18th century could be attributed to the construction of a new 18th century structure fronting onto Bank Street (Clarke 2007) representing either a change in ownership or function.

Subsequent development of the western side of Basingwell Street is confirmed with the discovery of the 18th century brick built foundation of a cottage in the southern area of the site which truncated the earlier agricul-

tural horizon. The cottage first appears on the Ordnance Survey map of 1868. At this time the town's occupants were exploiting plots of land towards the edges of the town in order to build new properties. This is most likely due to the lack of available properties in the historic heart of the town, created by growth in the town's economy. The cottage appears to be of a similar two-bay two-storey construction and date as those cottages which still survive on the opposite side of Basingwell Street. The cottage was demolished during the 1960s in order to make way for the previously existing White Swan Public House car park.

CONCLUSIONS

The archaeological investigation at the White Swan Public House produced significant evidence for both medieval and post-medieval activity on site, increasing the corpus of knowledge known on these periods in Bishops Waltham's history. The identification of pits dating to the 13th to 14th century, represent the earliest evidence for medieval activity taking place within the town, but also starts to provide an indication to how this part of the town developed throughout this period.

During the post-medieval period the site appears to have been utilised for several different functions. Between the 17th and early 18th century the site is exploited for light industrial purposes, followed by subsequent market gardening, resulting in the accumulation of a substantial organic soil horizon during the mid 18th century. The first evidence for substantial development of the site was the construction of a cottage in the southern half of the site by the mid 18th century, built against the Basingwell Street frontage. The cottage was eventually demolished in the 1960s.

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