Excavations of a Medieval Toft and Croft at Cropston Road, Anstey, Leicestershire

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Archaeological excavations at Cropston Road, Anstey (SK 553 086) in 1996 and 2002 have revealed medieval occupation dating from the 12th–13th century within a raised toft platform separated from a croft by a hollow-way. Ditches flanked a hollow way in the south-eastern part of the site and beyond this the croft contained remains of a medieval ridge and furrow field system, leading down to the Rothley Brook.

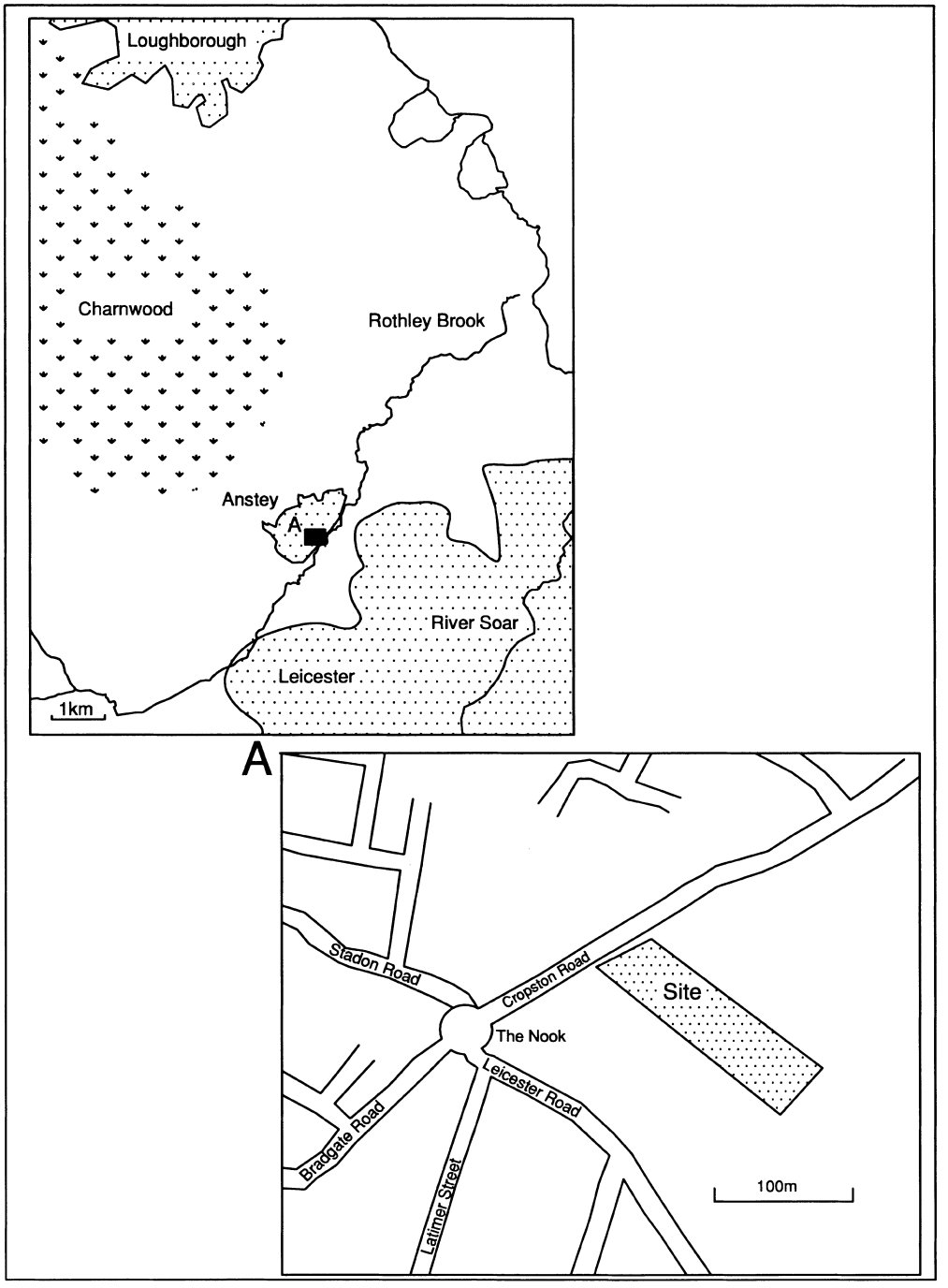
Structural evidence included compacted gravel foundations for a rectangular building and three possible post built structures. The excavations suggest that the site was abandoned in the late 13th century before re-use from the 15th century onwards with the toft being sub-divided perhaps for pastoral farming.

Introduction

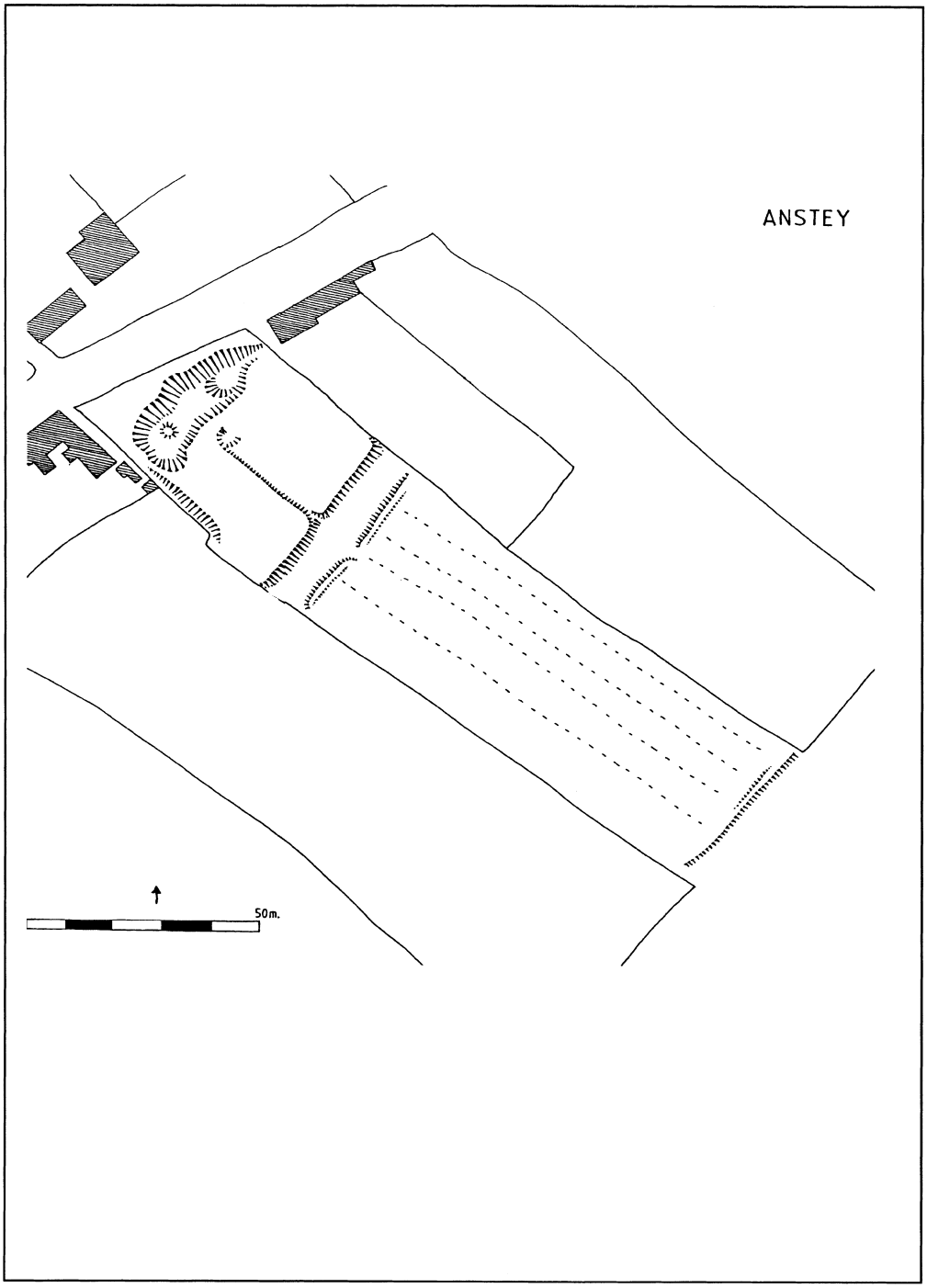
The village of Anstey lies three miles north-west of Leicester on a low boulder clay ridge between the former Leicester Forest to the south-east and Charnwood Forest to the north-west (SK 550 086; illus 1). Cropston Road is situated in the south-eastern quarter of the village aligned north-east to south-west towards The Nook and the Church of St Mary's.

To the south-east of Cropston Road, earthworks were situated in a rough pasture field on a south-facing slope overlooking a flood meadow around Rothley Brook. The land slopes down from a height of around *c.*63m at Cropston Road to *c.*60m OD to the south with boulder clay outcropping in the higher ground and alluvium present in the floodplain. Earthwork survey (illus. 2; Hartley 1989, 8) showed that the area consisted of a raised toft platform separated from a croft by a hollow way. A toft is the immediate yard of a rural medieval house while a croft is a separate enclosure, often attached to the rear of the toft, devoted entirely to agricultural use (Astill 1988). The cartographic evidence suggested that the plot had remained undeveloped since the enclosure of 1762. Geophysical survey and limited trial trench evaluation had been undertaken in 1994 by the Leicestershire County Council, Training for Work Scheme, at the request of the then landowner, Miss Pratt. Results from the resistivity survey indicated a high level of disturbance in the north-western corner of the site while three hand-dug trial trenches, revealed post holes, gullies and possible cobbled surfaces (Coward 1994). Pottery recovered from these features was dated to the 11th–12th centuries (Sawday 2002).

Two phases of excavation were undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) in this area. In 1996 excavation of part of the earthworks was carried out in advance of the construction of Anstey Sewerage Rehabilitation Scheme by Severn Trent Water plc (Higgins 2000). By 2001 plans for the re-development of the site



1. Location of the excavations on Cropston Road, Anstey



2. The earthworks on Cropston Road, Anstey (drawn by R.F. Hartley LMAPS *c.*1980)

were underway. Midlands Co-Operative Society applied to Charnwood Borough Council to construct a new store and car park on the site, adjacent to their old premises. Leicestershire County Council, Heritage Services, as advisors to Charnwood Borough Council and following Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG 16, Archaeology and Planning) requested further archaeological work. The work was funded by Midlands Co-operative Society and carried out in May 2002 (Browning 2002).

Historical Background

Anstey parish lies in the Hundred of West Goscote. The village itself seems to have grown up around two separate manors (Courtney this volume). The oldest part of the village is potentially pre-Conquest and is focused around the Nook, on the eastern side of modern-day Anstey. Land in Anstey was granted to Leicester Abbey by Robert fitz Parnell, earl of Leicester (1191–1204). The second village focus was post-Conquest, centred round Manor Farm and the Green and is associated with a manor held by the Earls of Winchester and later the Ferrers family. In its earliest years it seems almost to have been a separate village and probably had its own field system. After the Dissolution the distinction between the two estates became less clear. Land that had previously belonged to the Abbey continued to belong to the Crown for some time, after which it was sold piecemeal to various tenants, ensuring a more diverse social structure.

The excavated site is located in the older part of the village and the earliest traceable owner was a Mr. Bakewell, a freeholder who in 1762, held over 50 acres of land in Anstey. It seems likely that the land may have been a Leicester Abbey tenement.

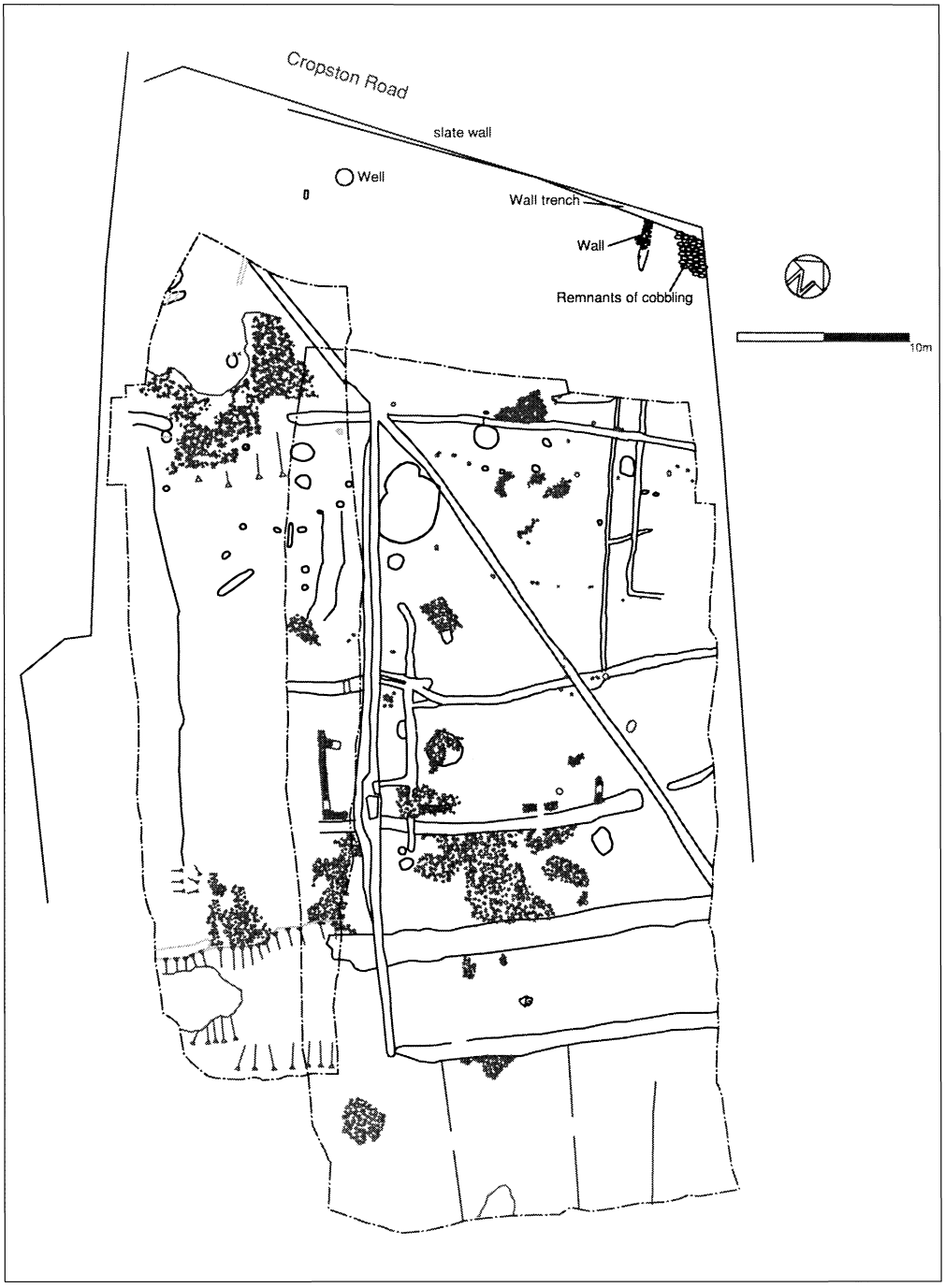
Aims

Undeveloped village cores have been recognised as research priorities nationally and regionally (Lewis 2001). The specific objectives of these excavations were to establish the form and function of medieval activity on the site, locate and/or identify any specific activities taking place on or near the site and attempt to date and phase any occupation identified within the site

Results

The first archaeological excavation on the site was undertaken between September and November 1996 directed by Tim Higgins. Following earthwork survey a total of 650 sq. metres was stripped of topsoil, which varied in depth between 0.20m and 0.50m using a JCB3C with ditching bucket under full supervision. Following the completion of the excavation an archaeological watching brief was also carried out over the areas of the earthworks and the ridge and furrow during topsoil stripping for the pipeline, during February 1997. Unfortunately, prior to this, the eastern extent of the earthworks which were to have been avoided by the development had in fact been stripped of topsoil without notification and consequently without record.

The second phase of work on the site took place during May – June 2002, directed by Jennifer Browning. The excavation area was larger than the previous one and measured 1272 square metres. The topsoil was stripped using a hymac 360, again under full supervision. The fieldwork also included a watching brief, which took place during topsoil stripping on the frontage and at the rear of the site, which has been designated for car parking.



3. Plan of the 1996 and 2002 excavations.

Phasing

Stratigraphical links between the two excavations were few. While the 1996 excavation included the house platforms with some stratified deposits the 2002 excavation was in an area where the earthworks had already been levelled during construction work for the new sewer and disturbed to the level of the natural substratum. The pottery recovered from the site suggests that the main phases of activity on the plot were during the late Saxon/early medieval period and the later medieval/early post-medieval periods. However, the low sherd numbers recovered has meant that it has not been possible to firmly date individual features or deposits. Some features yielded no dating material at all and there is evidence that some residual material from earlier periods has been incorporated into the fills of later features. Except in a few cases, the physical characteristics of the features themselves makes it difficult to distinguish earlier and later features. Most of the features on site were fairly shallow and were filled by similar sediments, which frequently made it difficult to determine stratigraphic relationships even where these existed.

Phase 1 *12th–13th century occupation* (illus.4)

Buildings

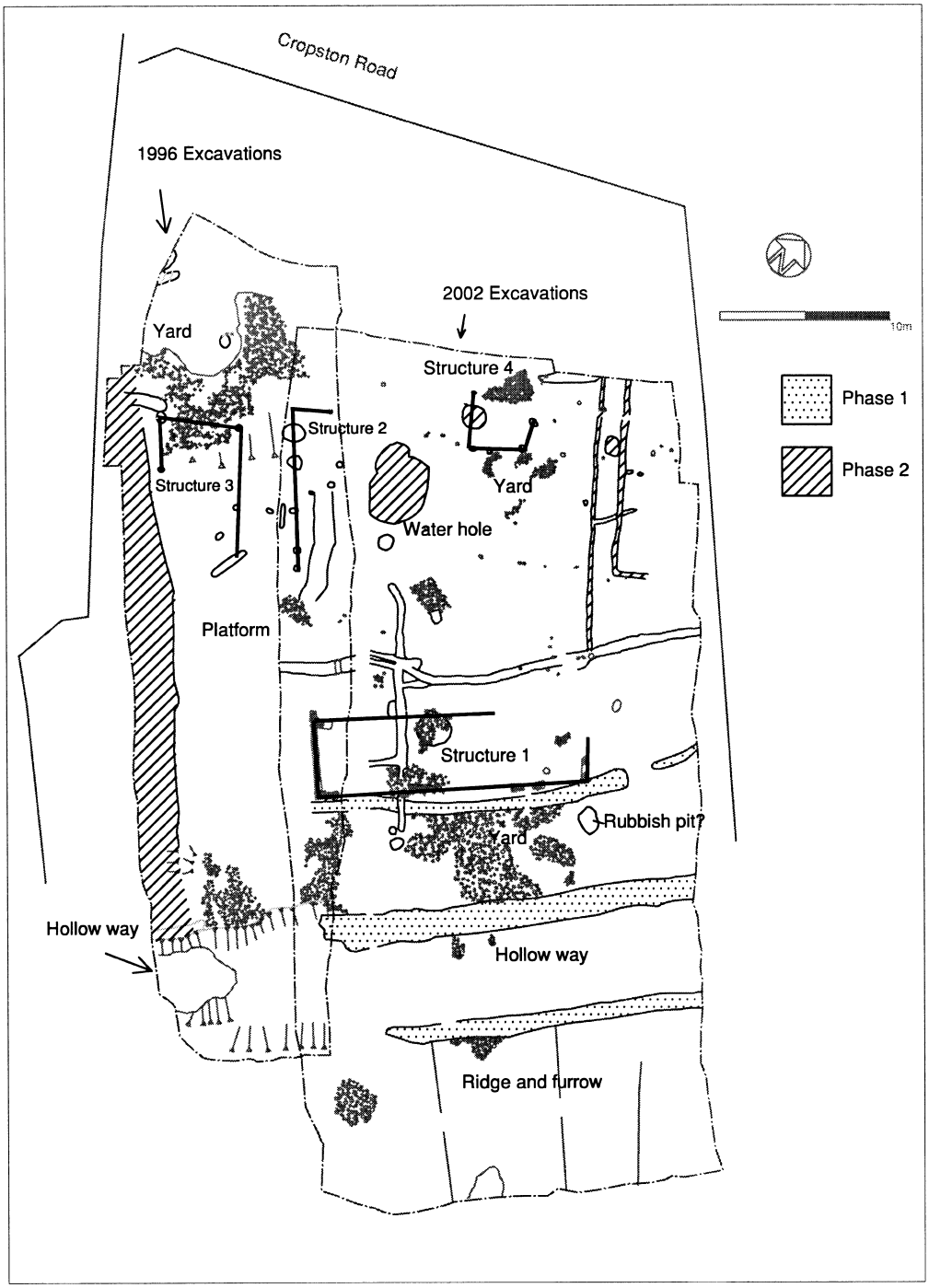
The earliest evidence on the site comprises the partial survival of gravel foundations for a wooden framed building measuring *c*.5m by 16m (illus. 3–4; Structure 1). This was located on a north-east to south-west alignment 35m south-west of Cropston Road. Two gullies flanking the building contained 12th- to 13th-century pottery

Further structural evidence was located cutting the toft platform. Post holes located within the platform may be evidence of a rectangular structure (illus. 3–4; Structures 2–3). A further rectangular building may be interpreted from a group of post holes to the north-east (illus. 3–4; Structure 3). A paved yard area partly extends into this building on the north side perhaps denoting a passageway. A ditch found to the north of the structure may represent the eaves drip for drainage or boundary to the toft. To the north a group of post holes may denote a further post built structure (illus. 3–4. Structure 4). 12th- to 13th-century pottery sherds and iron smelting slag were present in some of the post holes while shallow post holes found inside the building may be evidence of internal structures.

The Toft, Croft and Hollow-way

The toft platform appears to have been constructed in the late 12th or early 13th century, based on ceramic evidence. It had a broad and level upper surface and gradually sloping edges on its excavated northern and western sides (illus. 3). The platform was demarcated on its south-western side by a boundary ditch and to the south-east by the hollow way. A low bank ran between the platform and the hollow way and presumably formed the toft boundary. Excavation of the hollow way produced pebble rich fills possibly representing the remnants of successive surfaces.

A boundary ditch had been created on the western side of the site by the construction of the platform and bank (illus. 3). At its base was a group of three stake holes with vertical sides and tapered points. The ditch contained a series of fills consisting of either brown or yellowish brown silt clay, mixed with occasional pebbles and charcoal flecks. These appear



4. Phases 1 and 2 12th–13th century

to have been truncated by a re-cut of the boundary ditch, which gradually sloped from the platform into an irregular base. This re-cut appears to have been backfilled with refuse or midden material containing domestic refuse, including animal bone and highly abraded 12th to 13th-century pottery sherds. The environmental samples from this deposit contained evidence of food plants and charred cereals (Monckton 2000).

Cobbled surfaces may have been the remnants of pavements or yards. These are quite common on tofts particular near to the entrances of structures where the traffic of people and animals necessitate the provision of hard surfaces. The pavements may also offer hard stands for people to work on outside their domestic buildings and workshops. A silty clay deposit located between Structures 2 and 3 and the hollow way may be a garden soil located to the rear of the structures. A high proportion of very abraded 12th to 13th-century pottery sherds were recovered from this deposit suggesting that the ground may have been dug over or ploughed and domestic refuse used as manure spreads in this area.

At the southern end of the boundary ditch the remains of a possible boundary wall were located which may have been constructed to prevent drainage water being washed out of the boundary ditch into the hollow way. Located at the southern end of the platform division, the wall foundation had been robbed of its stone. The remains of the wall consisted of medium sized granite stones and pebbles bonded together with yellowish brown clay found at the base of the cut. Above this was a dark brown clay silt mixed with frequent pebbles. Sealing the robbed wall foundation was a layer of bank make-up consisting of brown sandy silt mixed with occasional small pebbles and charcoal flecks. The full extent of the wall feature is unknown, although it may have been part of a boundary to the adjacent toft. The wall may have been robbed at the same time as the backfilling and levelling of the platform boundary ditch. The change in the structure of the platform may be contemporary with the 12th to 13th-century buildings or have occurred after they have been abandoned. The extension to the bank and back-filling of the platform division may have been an attempt to incorporate the adjacent plot and construct a new larger platform. There appeared to be no new pebble surfaces on the extended bank or the back filled platform division.

Two ditches aligned east – west flanked the hollow way. These were significantly deeper and wider and had a different profile from the more northerly gullies. In profile, both ditches had steeply sloping sides with a slightly rounded base. A patchy area of pebbles and stone fragments was revealed between the two ditches, which may represent a crude metalled surface.

The land between the hollow way and Rothley Brook forming a croft was occupied by the remains of ridge and furrow, which were quite prominent prior to the topsoil stripping (Hartley 1989, 44). Running in a north to south direction with headlands encroaching on to the hollow way, the furrows were still visible during the watching briefs after the topsoil was stripped and were between 3m and 4m apart.

Phase 2 *Late 13th to early 15th century* (illus. 4)

The ceramic evidence suggests that the toft was no longer occupied from the late 13th or early 14th centuries. This phase is represented by a series of clay-silt deposits at the southern end of the excavation, which seem to represent erosion of the bank and the encroachment of plough soils over the hollow way. It seems likely that this phase post-dates abandonment of habitation in the toft and marks the erosion of the bank, infilling of the hollow way and continued ploughing of the croft. The toft was probably used as pasture given the lack of evidence for ploughing in this area.

To the north-east of the area a series of gullies were located containing late 14th to early 15th century pottery (illus. 4). The platform was sub-divided by other gullies, in addition to those aligned with the hollow-way. A north-west to south-east orientated gully was present crossing the centre of the platform while two very narrow parallel gullies on a north-west/south-east orientation were present towards the front of the site. These probably represent sub-divisions of the toft possibly for animal compounds.

Phase 3 *Late 15th to 20th century*

The re-use of the site is evident from the north-western corner in the form of a spread of greyish brown silt sealing the medieval yard surface of Phase 1. Overlying this was a rubble spread consisting of large stones and pebbles, which may have formed a surface. This surface may also have been re-used during this period and the pebble spread is perhaps a new layer of cobbles laid down in this area to firm up the original ground surface. Sherds of Midland Purple pottery found associated with these layers suggest use in the 15th to the 16th centuries.

A stone and slate drain was found on the west side of the site running approximately north to south. It comprised a layer of flat stones and occasional brick laid at the base of the cut to form a level surface, which supported the walls of the drain which were made up of large irregular stones. This created a channel approximately 0.6m wide and 0.2m deep sealed by a capping of large flat slates some of which had been removed. The drain cut appeared to follow the platform boundary ditch (see Phase 1 above) but it was unclear whether a new cut was excavated for the drain or it had utilised the existing medieval ditch. No finds were present to date its construction although pottery finds of 17th century date were found within its back fill. A second small drain running west to east comprised two parallel lines of angular granite stones which created a channel 0.80m long, 0.30m wide and 0.11m deep. Slate capped drains are known from both medieval and post-medieval contexts. At York Road, Leicester (Gossip 1999) a stone-lined drain with re-used roof slate as its capping was dated to the 13th century while an 18th-century example was located during excavations at Mountsorrel in Leicestershire (Lucas 1987). The enclosure map of 1762 does not show any structures on the site although buildings were present on the adjacent plot to the west. These buildings may have included the construction of the drains and the use of the yard surface

A large and deep pit, apparently re-cut several times, was located towards the front of the site and appears to have been visible as an earthwork when Hartley produced his plan in the early 1980s (illus. 2). The feature was excavated to a depth of 1.2m but the base was not established. At the level where excavation ceased, deposits rich in peat were encountered and the feature was becoming water-logged. Finds of brick, slate, glass and pottery ranging from Late Saxon to the late 18th century in date, were recovered from the fill indicating a fairly late date for the backfilling of this feature although it may have been in use in an earlier period. A very shallow linear gully at the front of the site had been truncated. It had a slightly different alignment to the other gullies and ditches on the site and was present across the whole width of the excavated area. The fill consisted of compact dark grey clay from which late medieval, post-medieval and modern pottery was recovered.

A vertical-sided linear feature crossed the site on an east-west alignment and another similar feature ran from north-west to south-east. Both of these were visible from just below the topsoil and cut through the medieval ditch features. A pit was located between the two hollow way ditches which must have been excavated after the hollow way fell out of use.

Stone and pebble spreads at the north-western end of the site may be remnants from the demolition of a structure, possibly on the adjacent plot to the west. The majority of the pottery sherds from this phase date from the 17th to 20th centuries.

A well was revealed during the watching brief on the frontage, capped with slates and still full of water. The structure was constructed from curved well bricks, and a modern pipe entered the well from the north-western side.

Discussion *(with Patrick Clay and Paul Courtney)*

Until recently, very little work had been carried out on medieval village remains in Leicestershire and Rutland. This has changed in the last few years, with small-scale excavations at sites such as Barrowden (Meek 2000), Empingham (Cooper 2000), Freeby (Thomas 1999b) and Glaston (Cooper and Thomas 2000), which have demonstrated that early medieval remains can survive within historic village cores. However, it is unusual to find an undeveloped plot within a still-thriving village and the excavations have provided a welcome opportunity to examine evidence that may elucidate the origins and development of a medieval Midlands village. Most comparative sites are found within deserted or shrunken medieval settlements. The excavation has revealed evidence for the early development of Anstey in the form of a house platform and associated structures, which was occupied in the 12th to 13th centuries. Within the platform was evidence for medieval settlement including rectangular buildings, cobbled surfaces and industrial activity. The platform appears to have been abandoned by the end of the 13th century and the area was probably then used for pasturing animals. Re-use of yard surfaces and the construction of stone-lined drains occurred between the 15th and 17th centuries.

At the time of the 1996 excavation, the earthworks were clearly defined (illus. 2) but these were largely destroyed by the subsequent sewer construction. The 1996 excavation focussed on investigation of the platform itself and natural substratum was only revealed in parts. The 2002 excavation examined features cutting the natural substratum and it is unclear whether they were originally cut from the surface of the former platform or pre-dated its construction. From the pottery evidence the earliest medieval features located during both the 1996 and 2002 excavations date from the 12th to 13th centuries.

A surprising absence of medieval activity was noted during the watching brief at the front of the site. This may partly be due to the method of topsoil stripping employed, which can sometimes inhibit the identification of archaeological features but it might equally be a result of the truncation of earlier remains by more recent activity. However, it also raises the possibility that earlier activity was always slightly removed from the frontage.

Tofts and Crofts

The medieval earthworks form a combination of toft and croft typical of others found in this region and in other parts of the country. Tofts comprised the peasant dwelling, out-buildings and yard situated along a street while crofts are purely agricultural enclosures to the rear of the toft (Astill 1988). Many tofts were examined in detail during the extensive excavations of the deserted medieval village of Wharram Percy in Yorkshire. This site provides many examples of tofts comprising a roughly rectangular small yard, in some cases on a raised earthwork platform, and often demarcated with boundary ditches. At the rear of the Wharram tofts were adjoining gardens or crofts, elongated enclosures containing evidence of ridge and furrow (Beresford and Hurst

1990; Wrathmell 1989). Crofts were probably used to supply the peasant family with root crops, legumes and perhaps, grain (Dyer 1989, 157–60).

These tofts and crofts form the basic make up of nucleated villages which are thought to have developed from the 9th to 12th centuries (Lewis *et al.* 1996). In the East Midlands the villages adopted either one of two basic forms. The regular linear row has rectangular tofts and crofts arranged in an orderly line at right angles to the street, on both sides, as at Anstey (Lewis *et al.* 1996). A good example of a linear row settlement survives as earthworks at Carlton Curlieu, Leicestershire (F. Hartley pers.comm.). The second common plan type among Midland villages is the gridded cluster. This form is less common than rows, but is not uncommon across the limestone country of the Northampton Heights, eastern Leicestershire and Rutland (Lewis *et al.* 1996). In this form, regularly laid-out sub-square tofts and crofts are grouped along a simple grid of roads to form a block-like settlement. This form of settlement has been detected in earthwork sites as Eye Kettleby, Hamilton and Sysonby in Leicestershire and Kelmarsh, Braunston and Muscott in Northamptonshire. More complex plans are also found combining rows and grid patterns and/or irregular elements, possibly representing different phases of plan development (Lewis *et al.* 1996). An indication of the range of activities carried out within medieval tofts has been revealed at Cottesmore, Rutland (Thomas 1999a), which revealed subdivisions of the plot dating to the early medieval period, including potential building plots containing a possible structure. Recent work in the village core of Claybrook Parva, in south-west Leicestershire revealed evidence of ditches, pits and postholes. The ditches appeared to reflect property boundaries marking out rectangular plots (tofts) running as strips away from the line of Main Street and, the east–west ditches may be internal dividing features (Jarvis 2001, 5). As these, and other sites indicate, it is common to find substantial ditches delineating the toft boundaries (Challis 1999, 231). At Anstey, a ditch marking the south-western boundary was located during the 1996 excavations and there is also a ditch separating the platform from the hollow way.

The plot at Anstey was sub-divided by a series of inter-cutting ditches and gullies. Some of these, particularly those around Structure 1, may represent eaves-drip gullies. They may also record internal divisions separating areas where different activities might be performed. The platform was separated from the hollow way by two substantial ditches, which clearly mark the boundary between toft and track and between track and field. The digging of drainage ditches along plot boundaries is a common feature of East Midland clay-land villages, for example, at Goltho and Barton Blount in Lincolnshire, Tattenhoe and Westbury in Buckinghamshire (Beresford 1975; Ivens *et al.* 1995).

At sites such as Caldecote, Brenig and Grenstein pits were dug to obtain building materials and afterwards used as water holes (Astill 1988, 57). This may be an explanation for the large pit observed in the front part of the site (illus. 3). Although this was not fully excavated, it was waterlogged at the base and appeared to have been backfilled at a later date.

Medieval buildings

Of the houses in the medieval period it has been observed that 'every croft and house was different' (Milne 1979, 73). The archaeological remains of medieval peasant buildings are notoriously insubstantial, especially in clay-land villages where a ready supply of stone was not always easily available. Certainly, it is extremely rare to find early stone walls (Beresford 1998, 71). At Anstey, the absence of stone-built foundations

may reflect the prevalence of timber; Anstey was assarted out of the woodland (Courtney this volume) and timber for building would have been readily available nearby. By contrast, where stone was more accessible for example at Wharram Percy in Yorkshire, stone foundations were used.

Evidence from sites, such as Goltho and Barton Blount, Lincolnshire (Beresford 1975), indicate that the buildings had a short lifespan and their arrangement was frequently reorganised. However, it may be misleading to suggest that all such medieval buildings were transient structures based simply on the remains that they leave behind. Instances where a standing structure has been removed and its plot excavated have yielded interesting results, For example, when a surviving late medieval cruck-built dwelling was removed in Devon, it left only 19th and 20th-century traces in the ground (Pearson 1998, 173). The available evidence indicates that different buildings on the same toft appear to have been built using a variety of construction methods and materials and could vary considerably in quality (Challis 1999, 231). Medieval houses and barns tended to be from 10–15m in length (*ibid.*) and Structure 1 at Anstey is slightly larger than this at 16m (illus. 3–4).

Within medieval village sites, buildings can often be interpreted only by the absence of remains. For example, at Eye Kettleby, Leicestershire, an apparently empty space defined by a cobbled surface formed the outline of a rectangular building and this was confirmed by the presence of mud-floors (N. Finn pers. comm.). Similarly empty rectangular spaces, defined by cobbled surfaces, were recorded at the medieval village sites of Tattenhoe and Westbury in Milton Keynes (Ivens *et al.* 1995). Buildings of a box-framed timber construction resting directly on the ground, rather an on a plinth wall, would leave little trace archaeologically and this was the interpretation suggested for most of the buildings at Tattenhoe and Westbury (*ibid.*). At Anstey there is evidence for a large building on the site, measuring approximately 5m by 16m (illus. 3–4. Structure 1). This was indicated by a series of stone-filled foundations, which may represent a base on which a box-framed building could stand. Although there was no evidence of a hearth, internal features may not have survived as only the very base of the structure is present (illus. 3–4). Early medieval buildings were also frequently post-built, a construction method that leaves more traces. Post holes identified during both excavations can be interpreted as comprising structures (illus. 3–4). The insubstantial nature of the post holes may suggest that these may have been smaller out-buildings rather than dwellings.

The lay-out of structures around a yard is typical of other 12th to 13th-century buildings (Hurst 1971, 89–117). The buildings were probably of wattle and daub with thatched roofs arranged around a small, cobbled open-yard with a garden behind. A hollow way separates the garden from the croft, which may be an original feature though such elements are extremely difficult to date. The type of yard excavated at Anstey, and other sites like Tattenhoe, Buckinghamshire, should not be confused with the banked crew-yards found at Barton Blount, Derbyshire and Goltho, Lincolnshire (Ivens *et al.* 1995, 47; Beresford 1975, 16–8). The latter were used to stall cattle over the winter and seem to be a feature of the 14th and 15th centuries, associated with a change towards a more pastoral economy.

It is difficult to judge the level of prosperity from such a small excavation and most of the artefacts used on the site are likely to have decayed or been carried in manure onto the fields. The predominant artefact type recovered was pottery but this was a relatively cheap medieval commodity. Beresford (1975, 50–4) has suggested that the building of house platforms and appearance of boundary ditches is an adaptation to a worsening climate. However, this interpretation was questioned by Wright (1976), who pointed out that such features are usually assigned to the 12th and 13th centuries and thus

pre-date the main evidence for deteriorating climatic conditions. As a result, Wright suggested that a cultural rather than an environmental explanation might be more appropriate. Since this debate, the scientific evidence for a wetter and cooler climate in the period *c.*1275–1350 has become clearer but Wright's general argument still remains valid (Lamb 1995, 83–93; Bailey 1991). The raised toft may thus have been a localised response within the village to the threat of flooding from the nearby Rothley Brook, but is unlikely to reflect general climatic change.

By the late 13th century most Midland villages were seeing earth-fast construction being replaced by buildings constructed upon stone pads or low stone-walls. Such buildings in the Midlands and north-east are now thought to have generally carried cruck superstructures reflecting the later vernacular architecture of much of the region (Wrathmell 1989; Field 1965; Dyer 1986). The excavated site appears to have been abandoned before such a transition occurs. However, both the historical and architectural evidence point to improved standards of living in Anstey during the late Middle Ages. Contributory factors are likely to have included the fall in population and engrossment of holdings, rising wages and the conversion of arable to pasture within the continuing open field system.

Industry and Trade *(with Deborah Sawday)*

The 1996 excavation yielded a greater quantity of finds than the later one. Residual sherds of Late Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman pottery provides evidence for earlier activity on or close to the site. In addition, a high proportion of pottery, belonged to the Late Saxon and early medieval period (37% of total pottery from the site) suggesting that there was considerable activity during this period.

Over 400 pottery sherds were recovered from the 1996 excavations, the vast majority of which dated to the early medieval period. The medieval pottery from the site provides some information on the trading patterns with this area of Anstey. Stamford ware is the most common late Saxon pottery on the site even though the kilns are situated some 50 km away to the east. The local Potters Marston wares dominate during the medieval period, which is to be expected given that the kilns are situated only 13 km to the south. The relatively large proportion of pottery dating from the later 11th, 12th and early 13th centuries from Nottingham, approximately 32 km to the north, is of interest, as is the apparent lack of local Leicester Splashed ware.

A significant proportion of pottery continues to originate from Nottingham in the 13th and 14th centuries. However, during the later medieval period, the source of most of the pottery found on site changes to the kilns at Chilvers Coton, approximately 26 km to the south-west in Warwickshire. This westerly pattern seems to continue, with most, if not all, the later medieval and early post-medieval period pottery originating from the Ticknall kilns, 25 km to the north-west in Derbyshire.

The predominance of Stamford ware on the site in the Saxo-Norman period is typical of both Leicester and the rest of the county. More unusual is the relatively high proportion of Nottingham fabrics in the 12th century when, given the proximity to Leicester and its markets, one might expect Leicester Splashed ware to predominate, to be followed by Chilvers Coton ware, the latter being the most common medieval sandy ware in Leicester (Davies and Sawday 1999). However, the evidence for a distinctive trading pattern in areas immediately to the west of Leicester – apparently favouring Nottingham – is limited by the dearth of pottery recovered to date from comparable sites.

Slag representing the clearing of furnaces or hearths was recovered, some of which had been reused to pack post holes. This collection represents mainly iron extraction or

smelting, with slightly smaller quantities of hearth slag material from iron working. The tap slag does not show much evidence of the usual flows or ropy structure and may result from the use of slag pit furnace rather a slag tapping furnace. The quantities present are too small to suggest that the iron was being smelted or worked on a large scale (G.C. Morgan, pers.comm.).

Crops and Food *(with Angela Monckton)*

The charred plant remains from the area excavated in 1996 were of greater quantity and quality than those from the 2002 excavation. These indicate that there was a clear division of activities on the site. The boundary ditch to the west contained a significant deposit of material, including break wheat grain chaff, arable weed seeds (probably cereal processing waste), legumes and hazel nutshell. Those from the 2002 excavation were all from features on the house platform and probably represented waste from domestic activity. All contained small numbers of cereal grains, weed seeds and a few chaff fragments (rarchis) of wheat. The chaff were of free-threshing wheat and was identified as bread wheat, while smaller amounts of cultivated barley, oats and rye grains were also present. Animal remains usually help illuminate the dairy habits and economy of the site, but unfortunately the soil conditions resulted in extremely poor preservation of bone.

When free-threshing wheat is processed the grain is easily separated from the ear by threshing and then winnowing to remove small light weed seeds and the light chaff. The grain would then be coarse sieved to remove the larger chaff fragments and then fine sieved in a sieve which retains the grains, to remove small weed seeds, final hand sorting would remove the last contaminants (Hillman 1981, Jones 1990). Samples which contain abundant chaff and weed seeds are likely to represent waste from cereal processing and these were found in the boundary ditch during the 1996 excavations. Samples which contain grains and seeds in about equal numbers with a few chaff fragments may represent waste from the final stages of cereal cleaning in food preparation as were found on the house platforms. The presence of legumes and nutshell in the samples suggest that the presence of domestic rubbish from hearths burnt during food preparation. The legumes found also show the cultivation and consumption of beans or peas while hazel nuts were being gathered and consumed.

The remains recovered in the 2002 excavation were all found in the features on the house platform and are probably from domestic activity; the samples contained grains and seeds in about equal numbers with a few chaff fragments and may represent waste from the final stages of cereal cleaning in food preparation. The abundant chaff in the boundary ditch suggested the processing of a bread wheat crop produced nearby because bread wheat grains thresh easily from the chaff, which would be removed to reduce the bulk before transport. The deposit contained domestic rubbish so the cereal may have been processed for use on the site but also showed nearby agricultural activity. The variety of arable weeds added to this evidence of cultivation with corn cockle and cleavers indicating autumn sowing, while stinking mayweed indicates the intense cultivation of clay soils, which are local to the area. The presence of numerous leguminous weeds may suggest that the crop followed fallow or a fodder crop in a crop rotation. The difference in evidence from the two excavations may show that some areas were more dedicated to agricultural activity, perhaps because of their proximity to the cultivated fields.

The excavations in their historical context *(with Paul Courtney)*

The origins and topographic development of Anstey are discussed by Courtney (this volume). This research suggests that the excavation site was located in the older part of a polyfocal village linked from the 12th century onwards to a manor of Leicester Abbey. The topographic research suggests that the excavated plot on Cropston Road was part of a planned row. Unfortunately firm dating evidence for the laying out of the toft system is elusive. As some continuity in boundaries is likely this is a problem which is difficult to examine without excavating contiguous tofts, a rare opportunity in a living village. The problem with examining the back of tofts is the relative rarity of finds. The presence of Stamford ware from the excavations points to late Saxon, or at least Saxo-Norman, occupation in this area of the village. Indeed Stamford ware seems to be a type fossil of early village occupation in Leicestershire and Rutland (e.g. Thomas 1999a). This is hardly accidental and both villages and the widespread trade in late Saxon ceramics, such as Stamford ware, are presumably aspects of a general economic transformation. A key factor in this transformation was the re-organisation in certain regions of the land into villages and open-fields to produce wool and grain for a commercial market. The growth of towns and ceramic market in the same period are surely interconnected. The growing complexity of the commercial market is also reflected in the mixed origins of the 12th to 13th-century ceramics, a reflection of a competitive market.

The virtual absence of any diagnostic earlier 14th-century pottery may suggest that by then the toft was no longer occupied. It is possible that the climatic deterioration and associated demographic crisis of the early 14th-century was responsible for this (Harvey 1991). However, an earlier desertion cannot be ruled out whether due to mortality, sale or other factors. There is no sign of any abandonment in the abbey's survey of 1341 which records 33 tenants holding a total of 24 virgates. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that this disguises the fact that one family may have been living on one toft while utilising another for pasture. After desertion the toft was probably used for pasture in what was a more livestock orientated economy. This is certainly an area of East Midlands research which needs more investigation.

Despite the growth in Anstey's post-medieval population and undoubted demand for building land the plot was not built upon. This is a reflection of the various and unpredictable strategies of individual owners. The Anstey excavations illustrate both the potential and problems of intra-village excavation in shedding light on village origins and their subsequent development.

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