



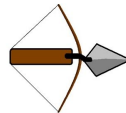
**“Robin Hood’s Village Volunteer Dig 2014”, Community Archaeology  
Village Test Pitting Project,**

**Edwinstowe, Nottinghamshire.**

**Interim Report**

07/01/2015

the  
**Sherwood Forest**



**Archaeology Project**



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**Edwinstowe SK62613 66777**

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## Edwinstowe (SK 62613 66777)

As part of the Sherwood Forest Archaeology Project, Mercian Archaeological Services CIC undertook a Community Archaeology Test Pitting project within the currently occupied settlement of Edwinstowe. The “Robin Hood’s Village Project” is a long term research project started in 2014, which is run in conjunction with the Edwinstowe Historical Society. The excavations undertaken in 2014 took place over two phases: phase one in July 2014 as part of the festival of British Archaeology, and phase two in October 2014.

The project is designed to tie in with key regional and national research objectives and is of vital importance to understanding the development of the landscape of Sherwood Forest over time. This research forms part of Mercian’s long term research in Sherwood Forest, of which understanding settlement development in the Forest is a key element. Mercian’s work on the landscape of neighbouring Clipstone has identified the lordship of Clipstone as a designed medieval landscape around the royal palace site, published in these Transactions (Gaunt and Wright 2014). With such alteration of the landscape under the agency of the crown at Clipstone in the medieval period, it was decided that the neighbouring village of Edwinstowe could offer an opportunity for a comparative study. Test pitting in the currently occupied settlement of Kings Clipstone is ongoing (Budge and Gaunt, in Challis, Ed., 2013), and it is hoped the results from both projects will be vital as a starting point to understanding settlement development in the High Forest bailiwick of Sherwood Forest, on the Sherwood Sandstones.

Historic Mapping for Edwinstowe shows the village developed in a number of key areas. The area to the North around the church, the area to the South on the River Maun, and the central portion of the village around the High Street. The central portion consisted of housing plots along the frontage of main street with long narrow linear crofts extending backwards from the properties to either side. These crofts are accessed on both sides by back lanes running parallel to main street. The back lanes are in turn accessed by an East Lane to the East, and a West Lane to the West. This portion of the village forms a characteristically Medieval village layout. The recent East Midlands research Agenda describes Sherwood Forest as having a dispersed settlement pattern in the medieval period (Knight, Vyner and Allen 2012). This is contradictory to historic mapping evidence for Sherwood Forest which suggests that all settlements are nucleated and adjacent to rivers by the time they are cartographically recorded in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The primary aim of the project was to determine if the historic village core as depicted on early mapping represented the footprint of the medieval settlement. The secondary aim was then to provide dating evidence for the various parts of the village. The working theory is that the area around the church was the earliest focus of occupation within the current village, presumably developing in Saxon times. It is not known what the settlement plan was like in the early Medieval period, at this stage of the project. It is hoped that wider surveying including geophysics and field walking in the surrounding landscape will help to determine earlier occupation patterns as seen in Whittlewood Forest (Jones and Page 2006). The area of the mills, to the South of the historic core of the settlement on the River Maun presumably developed sometime in the 12th century after the Domesday Book of 1086, which does not list a mill in Edwinstowe at that time. A *Henry iuxta Aquam de Edwinstowe*, listed in documents from the 14<sup>th</sup> century along with various other surnames including *Byywater* and *Bythewater* for people from Edwinstowe (Boutlon 1964) suggest this area was in existence in the medieval period. Likewise a *Reginald ad capud ville de*

*Edwinstowe* (ibid), may also support the existence for settlement at the North end or 'top' of the town. The central portion of the village along the high street between East and West Lanes and their associated back lanes was presumed to have developed later, perhaps during population expansion in the 13th century.

Stage 1 focused on the area to the North around the church, the central area between Main Street and East and West Lanes, and also concentrated on areas outside the historic core to help determine the limits of occupation, and to understand the open field systems and wider land use. It was decided to investigate the area in the South around the mills in a future phase of work, as the documentary evidence (above) already suggests this area was in existence in the medieval period.

A number of key initial results can be offered that have been very useful in building up a picture of development of the village, and largely support the working theories. They include:

- A test pit some distance to the Northwest of the church revealed a buried cultivation soil containing 12th to 14th century ceramics. This test pit lies to the North of the area of "West Field" one of the open fields of the settlement, as suggested by historic mapping evidence. This area is depicted as "Breck" on the William Senior map of Edwinstowe dating to 1638 (Photographic copy NAO, ED/2/S). Brecks were areas of common "Sheep Walk" turned over to occasional arable (Fowkes 1977) a technique common in the Forest in medieval times. It could be that the soil was from one of these episodes of temporary arable cultivation. Another strong possibility is that the buried cultivation soil represents the extent of the fields during a period of population growth in the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, followed by a reduction in land subject to arable cultivation from the 14th or 15th century. If this is the case then there could be evidence of population decrease during this time period, possibly that associated with the Black Death of 1348/9.
- A number of test pits were excavated around a property to the North side of the church. A test pit close to the frontage of Swinecote Road contained what is interpreted as stone rubble foundations of a wall, perhaps the corner of a building, orientated North- South by East- West with the remains of a cobbled surface within (on the Northwest side). No ceramic dating evidence was found in relation to this feature, but levels taken as part of the excavation showed it to be at the same level as a clay deposit encountered in a test pit 20m to the Northwest. This deposit, possibly representing a clay floor, was cut by 18th century features and sealed by demolition rubble containing large amounts of lime mortar, fragments of worked stone, including pieces of alabaster or marble type stone with polished face, and painted medieval window glass. The most likely origin for this material is the nearby church. As both of these test pits displayed evidence of well preserved and complicated archaeological features they were recorded and left in-situ, as test pitting is not an appropriate method of investigating such features and to continue to dig through them in the test pits would have lead to unacceptable destruction of archaeological deposits without enabling them to be sufficiently understood or recorded. A Ground Penetrating Radar survey of these features is planned by Mercian Archaeological Services for 2015; to see if they can be better understood using non-invasive techniques, and to enable a better targeted intervention in the future if required.
- A test pit located to the rear of the same property, and close to the North side of the church-yard wall discovered evidence of Saxo-Norman (late 10th to 12th century), medieval and post medieval activity. This location in the proximity of

the church, and the cultivated soil layer to the Northwest mentioned above is the only evidence so far discovered that pre-dates the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This supports the initial theories that settlement within the currently village originates in the vicinity of the church.

- Test pits excavated to the East and West of Main street in the area of crofts enclosed by West Lane, East Lane, and their associated “back lanes” have yielded pottery sherds from the 13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> centuries and nothing of an earlier date.
- Mapping evidence suggests that occupation on the East side of Main Street extended from the modern day ‘The Wheelrights’ to the North, down to the Southern end of East Lane. The modern day Royal Oak Court to the North of the A6075 originally formed a continuation of the back lane of the crofts. The current route of the A6075 is a Victorian alteration, the original East- West route was to the North of the Church as depicted on Chapman’s map of Nottinghamshire dating from 1774. The absence of medieval finds from a test pit dug to the North side of ‘The Wheelrights’ (on the Eastern side of Swinecote Road) provides a good indicator of the limits of medieval occupation in that part of the settlement, evidence from this test pit showed an absence of activity until the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A test pit excavated on the Southern end of East Lane, within the most Southerly croft of this part of the village core, contained a beautifully preserved sherd of comb-decorated glazed pottery from an industry influenced by Humberware. 13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> century pottery was also found in a test pit excavated half way along the former Back Lane of East Lane.
- An absence of medieval finds from test pits dug in the Southern half of the Western side of main street suggest the area of medieval occupation did not stretch as far South as that on the East side of Main Street. The mapping evidence also suggests that the crofts on this side of the road extended further back from the frontage than those on the Eastern side. Map evidence and evidence from the test pits supports the possibility that the modern West Lane has migrated further South than its medieval location. Within the central part of the Western crofts of Main Street; 13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> century pottery was discovered in a number of test pits at the modern Rectory garden.
- The Rectory garden also provided evidence of life from later periods with a whole late 19<sup>th</sup> century olive jar being found in one test pit along with imported Chinese Porcelain. This property belonged to the village Doctor at that time.

The project so far has helped to further understanding of the development of settlement in Edwinstowe in the Medieval period and beyond, and it is hoped that future work will further add to this picture. The project has also been a fantastic success as a Community Archaeology project with around 150 volunteers having excavated so far. The dig engaged a large number of people in the village of Edwinstowe with 22 test pits dug in gardens around the village over the course of the two phases, with householders and families learning about the heritage in their gardens and community. Alongside the local community; people volunteered from all over the region and around the United Kingdom. The project was also joined by a volunteer all the way from Queensland Australia, and has had a significant international following online. Other societies and groups involved included the Newark and District branch of the Young Archaeology Club, members of the Edwinstowe Beavers Group, and members from the Southwell and from the Newark Reach Learning Disabilities Groups. We would like to thank the Edwinstowe Historical Society, The Sherwood Forest Trust, Edwinstowe House, Robert

Woodhead Ltd, and Newark and Sherwood District Council for their support with the project to date. Stage Two is set to commence in the summer of 2015.

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