



## Bosworth Links

A community archaeology test-pit excavation at Market Bosworth,  
Leicestershire (2017-18)

**Mathew Morris** MA ACIfA  
Project Officer, Archaeological Services (ULAS)



**BOSWORTH LINKS**



Digging up the past







Today, Market Bosworth is perhaps best recognised for giving its name to the Battle of Bosworth, fought nearby in 1485, where the last Yorkist king of England, Richard III, was slain. In recent years, this defining moment in history has framed the town's narrative, drawing in thousands of visitors and tourists, especially following the discovery of Richard III's remains by University of Leicester archaeologists beneath a car park in Leicester in 2012. The battle's long association with the town was reaffirmed in 2015, when the king's funeral cortège passed through Market Bosworth on its way to Leicester Cathedral for his reburial. Today, a memorial plaque in the Market Place commemorates this event.

Market Bosworth's own history, however, was far from clear. Historical research, some archaeological excavations, and the random discovery of a few Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and 'Viking' artefacts in the town showed that it had rich archaeological potential but left many unanswered questions particularly regarding the origins and early development of the settlement.

The Bosworth Links project aimed to redress these questions by involving residents of Market Bosworth and its wider community in carrying out archaeological excavations (1m sq. test-pits) in the spaces they currently inhabit in order to make new discoveries about the history of the places in which they lived. It was hoped that this would inspire and stimulate wider interest in the history of the market town and contribute to ongoing academic research into the development of settlement, landscape, and demography in Britain.

Bosworth Links was a two-year community initiative set up in 2016 by the Market Bosworth Society in partnership with University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) and primarily funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Parish Communities Initiative Fund and the Dixie Educational Foundation.

### Market Bosworth

The town of Market Bosworth is situated in the Borough of Hinckley and Bosworth in western Leicestershire, 11 miles west of Leicester and 6 miles north of Hinckley. The modern settlement consists of a nucleated historic core focused around the Market Place with sprawling modern development to the west along Station Road, and to a lesser extent to the north along Barton Road. East of the town, development is largely curtailed by the extensive grounds of Bosworth Hall, with some development east of the hall along The Park and to the south of Rectory Lane.

The main settlement is sited on the top of a broad hill between c.125-135m above sea level, plateauing to the east, with ground dropping into a series of narrow post-glacial run-off valleys to the north and south, and a broader plain to the west, all watered by tributary streams of the River Sence.

The town lies primarily over superficial deposits of Mid Pleistocene epoch glaciofluvial clay, sand and gravel and bedrock deposits of Lower Triassic period mudstone. Superficial deposits change beneath outlying areas, downslope from the town centre, to a mixture of



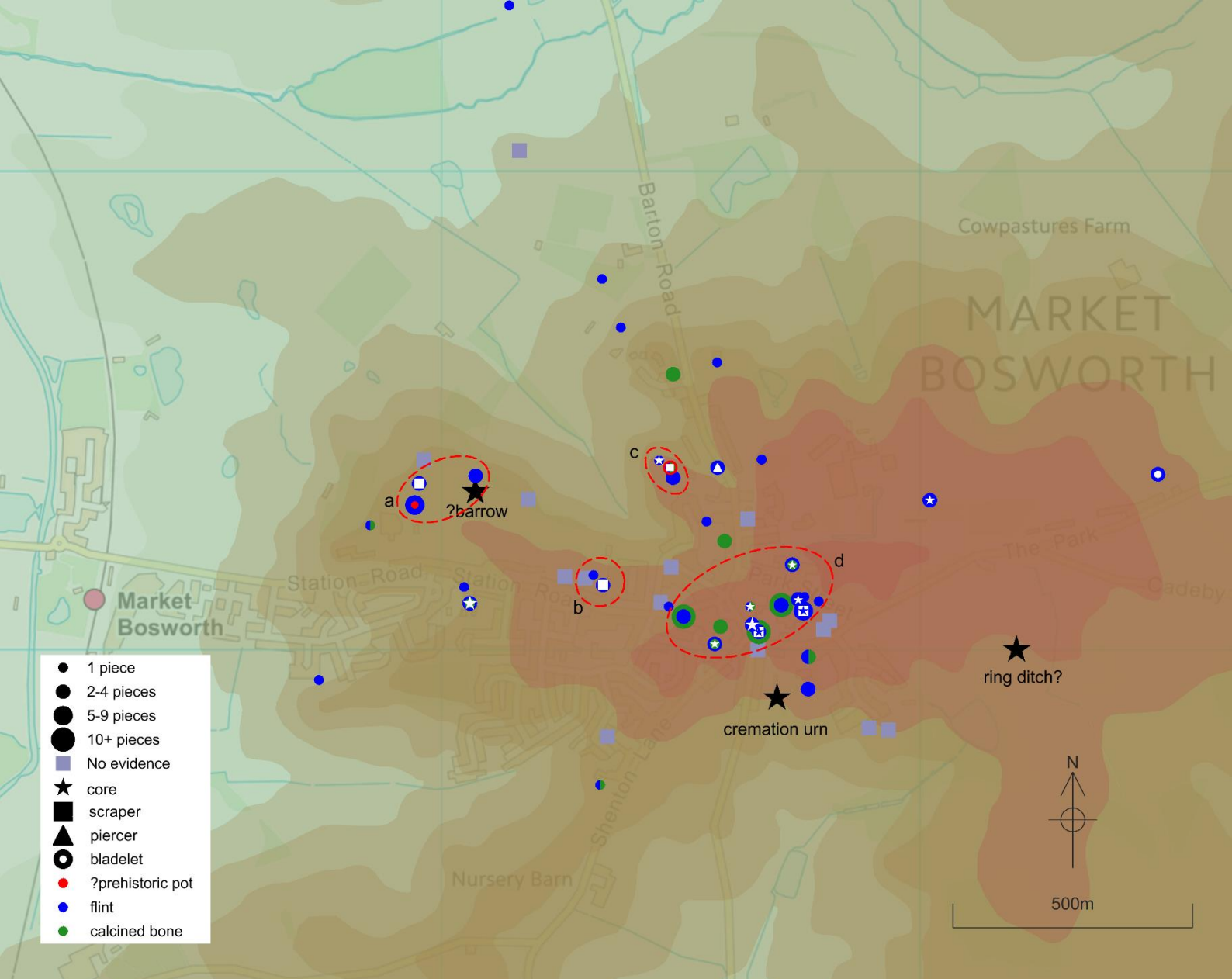


Figure 1: Distribution of worked flint, calcined bone and prehistoric pot (c.4000-700 BC).

Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2017).

Mid Pleistocene epoch diamicton and Quaternary period clay, silt, and sand.

## The Excavations

In total, 53 test-pits were excavated in 2017-18 by more than 300 homeowners, volunteers, and students from local schools. On average, test-pits were dug to a depth of c.0.6m through topsoil and subsoil. Natural substratum was reached in 39 test-pits. For the most part, ground at most sites was extensively reworked in the past, either through agricultural disturbance (i.e. ploughing), building work or gardening. However, eight test-pits did contain archaeological features, pebbles surfaces, pits and post-holes, and possible stone wall footings of medieval to modern date.

Altogether, 20,573 individual finds (176kg) were recovered. Archaeological material ranged in date from the Neolithic to the present day and could be divided into the following categories for analysis: flint, pottery, clay tobacco pipe, glass, metalwork, coins, building material, industrial residues, bone and shell, and other finds.

## Prehistoric activity (c.4000-700 BC)

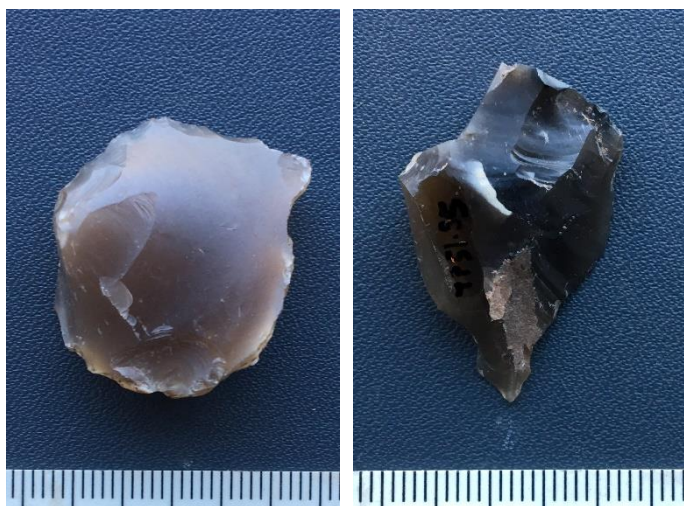
Prior to Bosworth Links, known archaeology across Market Bosworth gave tantalising hints of an extensive later prehistoric landscape around and beneath the town. Notably, the discovery of an early Bronze Age (c.2350-1501 BC) cremation urn at the Old Rectory on Rectory Lane in the late 19th century, coupled with an undated earth mound north-west of the town and an undated ring ditch in Bosworth Park to the east, raised the possibility that the town lay over an early Bronze Age barrow cemetery sited on the edge of the Bosworth hilltop and overlooking the valleys to the north, south and west.

Finds from the project appeared to support this idea. Small quantities of flint debitage were found in 36 of the 53 test-pits. For the most part, the assemblage comprised 1-2 flakes per test-pit, representing low-intensity 'background noise', evidence of lithic reduction (i.e. flint knapping) occurring in the general environs of Market Bosworth, probably in the Neolithic or Bronze Age (c.4000-700 BC), but not necessarily in the immediate vicinity of the test-pits.

In some, individual tools like a piercer from a test-pit on Barton Road, probably represented chance losses by people using and moving through the landscape. In other test-pits, more concentrated quantities of flint debitage and

the presence of tools and pottery suggested more prolonged activity in their immediate vicinity.

Four areas stood out. West of the town (Figure 1, a) three test-pits in the playing fields of the Primary School and Market Bosworth School were all located within c.100m of a possible barrow. Together, the test-pits produced twelve separate pieces of flint debitage, including two retouched flakes and a concave scraper. One flake, and a small piece of prehistoric pottery, was possibly stratified in subsoil at the base of one test-pit, whilst the rest were recovered residually from higher levels. This is a relatively large assemblage of worked flint to be found in three 1 sq. m test-pits and, coupled with the pottery, suggested activity was taking place nearby.



*Flint tools (l-r): A concave scraper and piercer.*



*Neolithic pottery from a test-pit on Silk Hill.*

Two other small areas of prehistoric activity were identified c.300 to the south-east, further along the brow of the hill on the north side of Station Road, and on Silk Hill c.400m to the east. The test-pits on Station Road (Figure 1, b) produced five worked flints including a retouched natural piece and two scrapers. Four of these flints, including both the retouched piece and the two scrapers, all came from one test-pit. Whilst to the north-east at Silk Hill (Figure 1,

c), three test-pits (all within a c.45m area on the hilltop) produced a combined assemblage of ten worked flints including a bladelet core, two retouched flakes, a concave scraper and a side scraper. At the centre of the group, one test-pit also produced four sherds of pot probably of Neolithic date.

Again, these are relatively large assemblages of worked flint, including a high percentage of tools, and at Silk Hill the largest group of prehistoric pottery found during the project, making it highly likely that at Station Road and Silk Hill, both overlooking the post-glacial run-off valley to the north, there was activity in the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age (c.2,900-1,600 BC).

The fourth area of activity covered a c.300m by c.150m zone in the centre of the town around the market place (Figure 1, d), where a spread of eight test-pits each produced 2-4 worked flints, and a further four each produced a single flint. Altogether, these 38 flints included secondary and tertiary flakes, six core fragments, calcined shatter (flint effected by high temperature), and two scrapers. These sites were all located at the centre of the hilltop within c.100m of a second possible barrow site, the cremation urn found at the Old Rectory. Here, as at the other sites, there is not only evidence of lithic reduction taking place in the vicinity but other activities as well – the scrapers are tools used for hideworking and/or woodworking and the calcined flint, in this context, could be from heated stones used to boil water. Combined, this suggested that there is a good chance of Neolithic or Bronze Age occupation taking place over much of the hilltop.

In light of the potential early Bronze Age barrow sites around the town, and emerging evidence for later Neolithic or early Bronze Age activity in the vicinity, it may be significant that there appears to be a correlation between test-pits producing larger assemblages of worked flint and those producing calcined (cremated) bone. In all, fourteen test-pits produced calcined bone. These were mainly located in the centre of the town around the market place and three test-pits particularly stood out, each producing more than ten pieces of bone.



*Calcined (cremated) bone from a test-pit on Station Road.*

For bone to cremate it must have been heated to 650-800°C, and therefore is unlikely to be produced simply by a random process. It could represent human cremation burials (c.4000 BC – AD 600) or some other process requiring the cremation of animal bone (e.g. bone china, fertilizer etc.). However, whilst it cannot be said for certain, at this stage, that these bone assemblages do come from disturbed prehistoric cremation burials it is certainly further enticing evidence for an extensive later Neolithic or early Bronze Age landscape beneath the town.



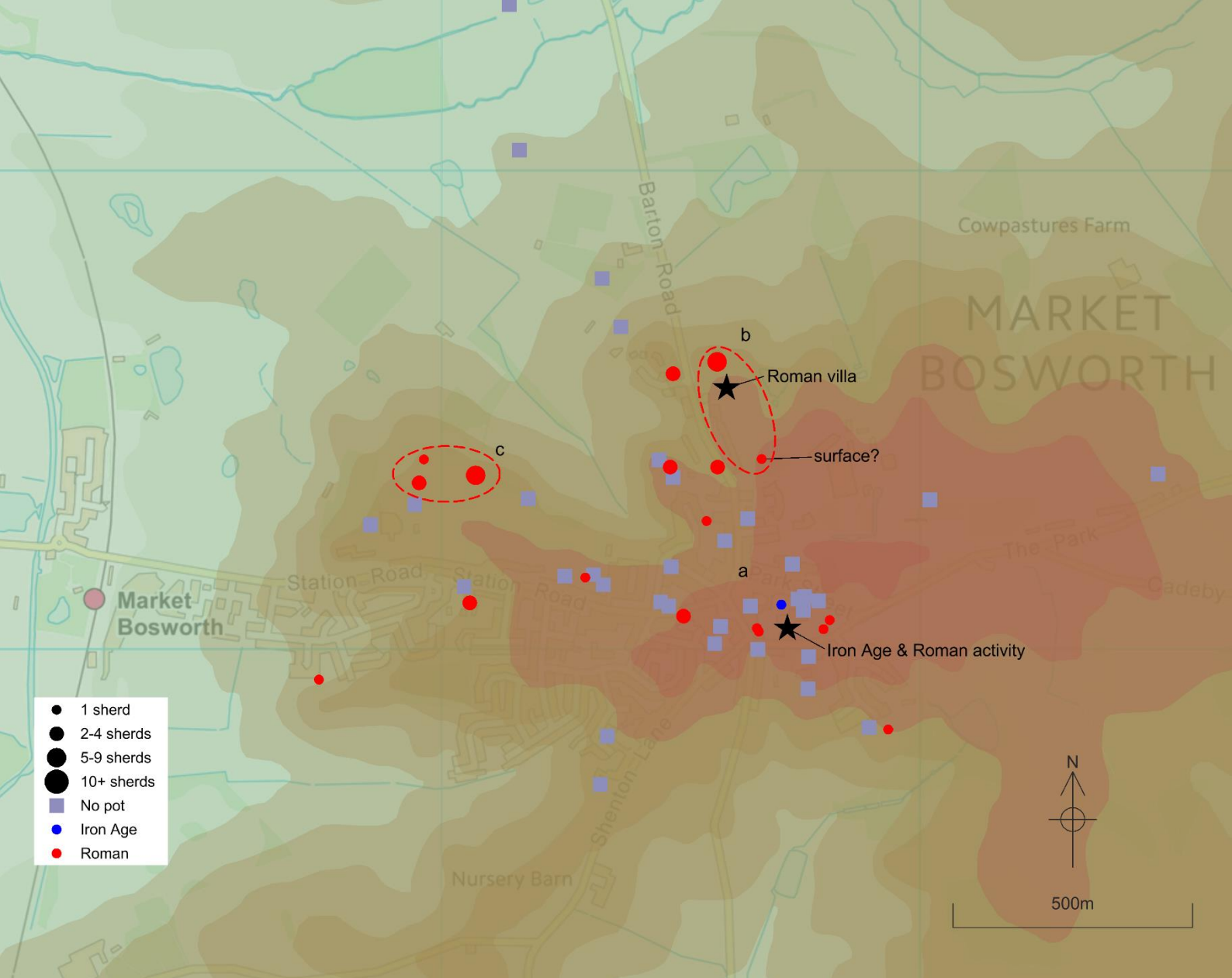


Figure 2: Distribution of late Iron Age and Roman pot (c.100 BC – AD 410).

Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2017).

### Iron Age and Roman activity (c.700 BC – AD 410)

One potential late Iron Age and Roman (c.100 BC – AD 410) site was known before the project, in the centre of town east of the market place at the site of the former cattle market. Excavation in 1996 revealed Iron Age activity in the vicinity including pits, ditches and a timber structure, although these could have been Roman features too, with one large ditch probably being the boundary of a Roman field. Finds of both Iron Age and Roman pottery were generally scarce and the little material that was present was most likely in plough soil which had been introduced to the features as they filled in.

A single sherd of Iron Age pottery found in a test-pit immediately north of this site, and four sherds of Roman greyware, white ware and Derbyshire ware found to the east and west, coupled with a scatter of residual Roman material in other test-pits across the hilltop, is further evidence of this slight Iron Age and Roman presence beneath the town centre (Figure 2, a). So far, this does not suggest occupation in the immediate vicinity of these test-

pits which instead, are probably located within the agricultural hinterland surrounding a settlement site.

On present evidence, this settlement is probably a Roman villa to the north of the town centre, on a spur of high ground east of Barton Road (Figure 2, b). Parts of the site were excavated by the School Master and pupils of the Dixie Grammar School and the Leicestershire Archaeological Excavation Group in the 1960s, and more recently in 2016-17 by Archaeology Warwickshire during construction work at 48 Barton Road. These investigations have uncovered walls, areas of mosaic pavement, and part of a hypocaust (under-floor heating), whilst geophysical survey has identified a potential boundary ditch and three structures. Finds, including pottery, building material and coins, dated from the 1st to 4th century AD, and fragments of kiln lining also suggested that some form of industrial activity was occurring nearby. The finds assemblage also included some Iron Age pottery and a beehive quern, suggesting that there was earlier occupation on the site too.

With this level of Roman activity occurring it was reassuring that small assemblages of Roman pottery and building material were recovered from the test-pits closest to this Scheduled Ancient Monument. Finds included possible tile tesserae, sherds of Roman oxidised ware, grey ware and calcite gritted ware, and a few fragments of

fired clay hearth lining. This material was consistent with previous discoveries at the site and does not add any new information to the archaeological record. Of more significance may be a possible clay surface found in one test-pit south of the villa. If this is Roman in date – it and the underlying subsoil only produced Roman or undated/possibly Roman material – then this is the southernmost extent Roman features have been identified so far, indicating activity over some c.220m along the entire length of the spur.



*Roman pottery from near the villa site.*



*Clay hearth lining (left) and a tile tessera (right) from near the villa site.*

On the opposing side of the valley, c.550m to the west (Figure 2, c), another test-pit produced the second-largest concentration of Roman pottery from a single test-pit in Market Bosworth, seven sherds of oxidised ware and Derbyshire ware. There is no known Roman settlement in the vicinity but given the site's similar location to the villa, on another projecting spur of high ground, and the presence of smaller quantities of Roman pottery in some of the surrounding test-pits there may be a second settlement nearby.

### **Anglo-Saxon (c. AD 410-850) and Saxo-Norman (c. AD 850-1100) activity**

No Anglo-Saxon (c. AD 410-850) activity was documented in Market Bosworth before the project, although it was speculated that the villa north of the town centre was a focus of post-Roman occupation. This was unproven, archaeologically, until a sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery was found in a test-pit near the villa site (Figure 3, a).

This is a significant new addition to the site's history and is the first evidence that the villa may have remained occupied after the Roman administration of Britain ceased in AD 410 and, therefore, is now one of the earliest known areas of post-Roman occupation in the town. With only a single sherd of pottery recovered, it is impossible to learn

anything more meaningful about the nature of this activity. However, Anglo-Saxon pottery is fragile and relatively rare, and the discovery of a single sherd in a test-pit can reasonably be interpreted as evidence of occupation of 5th to mid-9th century date in the vicinity.

The villa was sited on top of a spur of high ground projecting north from the hill on which the present town sits. To the north, south and west the edge of this hill divides into many similar spurs. It has been speculated that the neighbouring spur to the west of the villa, St Anne's Hill, was also a focus of early post-Roman activity.

No evidence of this has been found yet. However, three test-pits dug on the summit of the next hill to the west, Silk Hill, have all produced Anglo-Saxon pottery (Figure 3, b). Two each produced a single sherd of pottery, whilst the central test-pit produced 13 sherds. For three test-pits, all within c.45m of each other, to have all produced Anglo-Saxon pottery is very significant and must indicate another site of early post-Roman activity. Again, this is located to the north of the presently recognised historic town core.



*Anglo-Saxon pottery from Silk Hill.*

A fourth test-pit on the southern side of the town (Figure 3, c), also produced a single small sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery which may indicate a third focus of activity nearby. Again, this test-pit is located on a spur of high ground projecting away from the main hilltop.

Together, these foci of Anglo-Saxon activity suggested a landscape of dispersed settlement around the edges of the hill. Noticeably, none of the test-pits produced later Saxo-Norman material suggesting that settlement in the three areas had ceased sometime before the mid-9th century.

In fact, none of these test-pits produced large assemblages of medieval pottery either, with the few sherds present probably introduced to the soil through manuring fields with domestic waste transported from elsewhere, rather than evidence of occupation in their immediate vicinity. This suggests that settlement in the area most likely moved to its present location sometime after the 8th century.



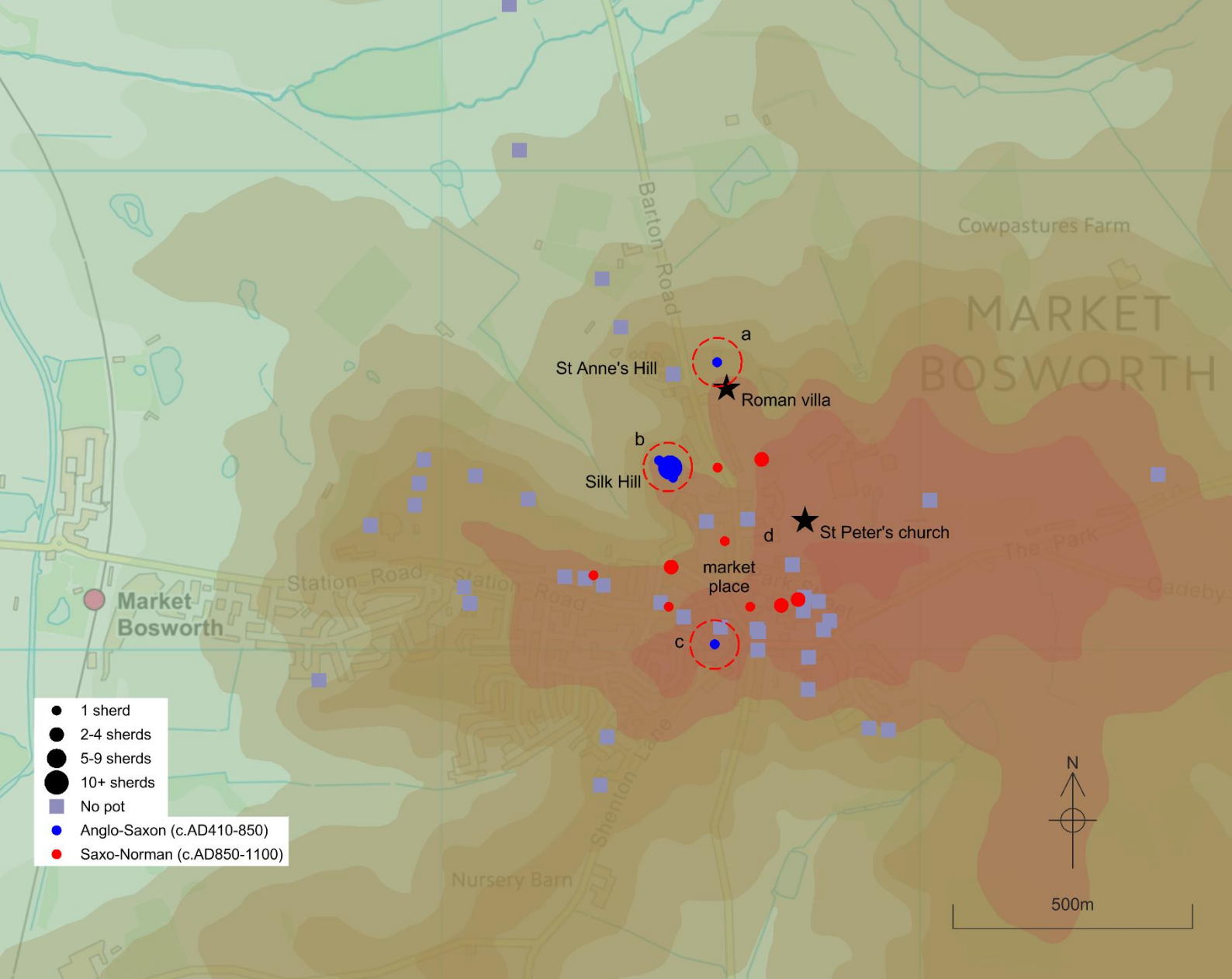


Figure 3: Distribution of Anglo-Saxon (c. AD 410-850) and Saxo-Norman pot (c. AD 850-1100).

Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2017).

So far, no distinct assemblage of Saxo-Norman material has been found at Market Bosworth. However, a small assemblage of pottery of potential Saxo-Norman or early high medieval date was found scattered across the present town centre (Figure 3, d). Ten test-pits produced 1-2 sherds of Stamford ware or reduced sandy ware of 10th-12th century date. This Saxo-Norman/early high medieval pottery is the earliest evidence for the development of Market Bosworth in its present location. At present, only sixteen sherds have been recovered from these test-pits, which is not enough evidence to say for certain that there is occupation in their immediate vicinity. However, the assemblage does suggest that there was no post-Roman occupation of the present town centre before the 10th century, whilst the clustering of the test-pits does highlight a broad zone of activity. This is consistent with the earliest reference to settlement at Market Bosworth (*Boseworde*) by name in the Domesday Book (AD 1086).

The absence of greater quantities of Saxo-Norman material cannot, as yet, be explained. It is possible that the population of Market Bosworth was largely aceramic during this period, settlement being quite a distance from

the kilns at Stamford and in East Anglia which were producing the distinctive late Saxon/Saxo-Norman pottery found elsewhere in Leicestershire. Alternately, the main area of Saxo-Norman settlement may have been in an area of the town as yet uninvestigated, perhaps north or east of the parish church which today is located on the north-eastern edge of the town centre; whilst another possibility is that this early settlement was much more dispersed than previously expected, and therefore more difficult to find in test-pits. Invariably, the answer will probably be a combination of all these factors.

Dispersed or polyfocal settlement in the 11th century is suggested in the Domesday Book which describes Market Bosworth divided between two estates. One, Alwin's estate, including a priest and a deacon, was probably in the vicinity of the parish church and Bosworth Hall. The other, Saxi's estate, is currently unknown. Together, these estates appeared to have contained around 34 households, suggesting a population of 100-200 people.

Whilst this is quite a large settlement in the late 11th century, spread over two estates it would be dispersed enough to make it difficult to find in test-pits. The only solution to this conundrum, however, is to continue excavating in uninvestigated areas and keep adding to the existing dataset on settlement across the town.

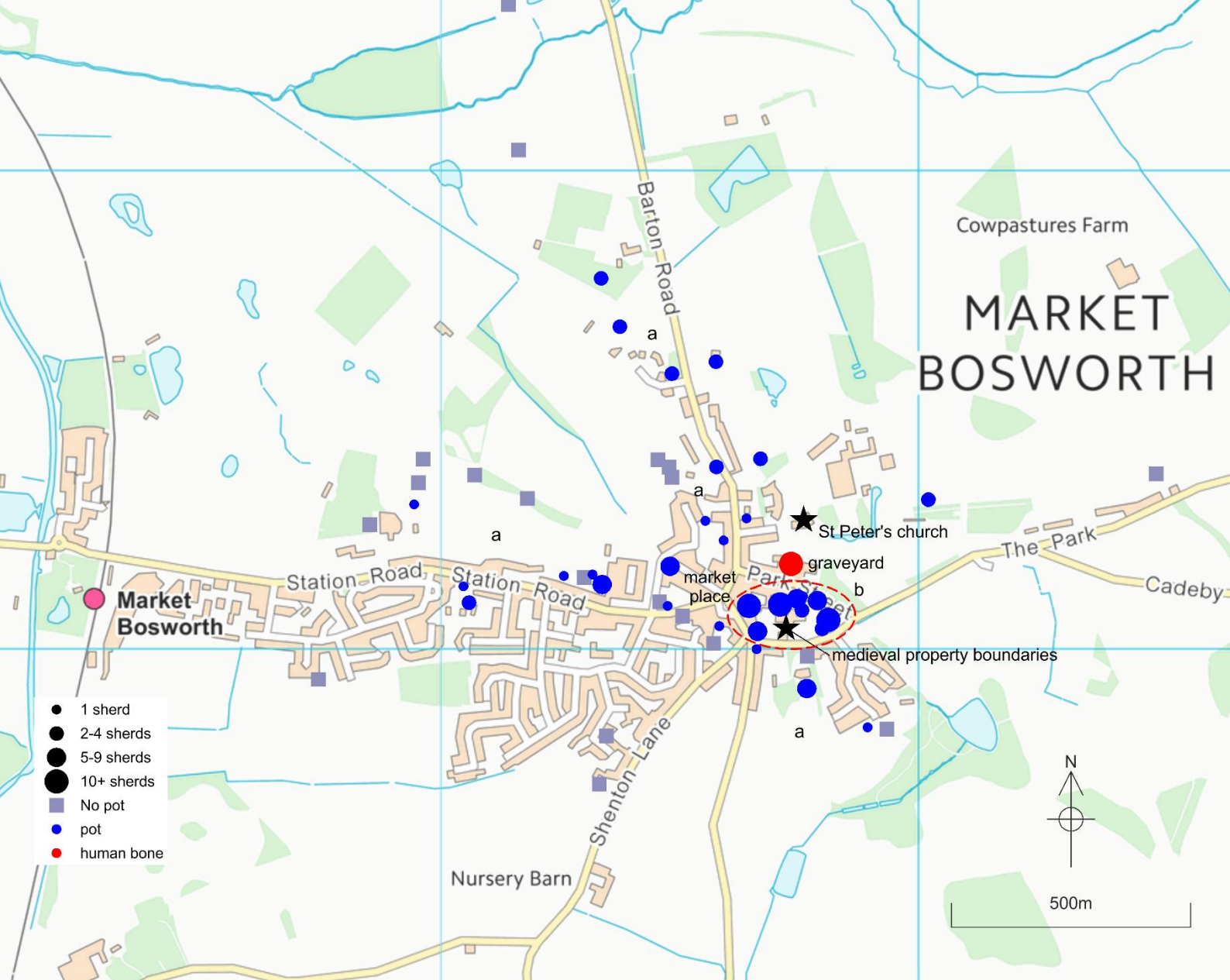


Figure 4: Distribution of early high medieval pot (c.1100-1250).

Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2017).

### High medieval (c. AD 1100-1400) and later medieval (c. AD1400-1550) activity

Better evidence of settlement in the centre of Market Bosworth, corresponding with the area of occupation suggested by the distribution of Saxo-Norman pottery, can be identified from the early high medieval period (c. AD 1100-1250) onwards. Of the twenty-eight test-pits which produced early high medieval pottery, twenty-one (75%) each produced less than five sherds. These were predominately in peripheral locations around or beyond the historic town centre and probably represented the enrichment of cultivation soil with manure containing domestic refuse (Figure 4, a). For the most part, these sites were still shown as fields and pasture on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886 and were not built on until the 20th century.

Only three test-pits (11%) each produced more than ten sherds. These were all located on the south side of Park Street or east of the market place. The significantly higher quantity of early high medieval pottery recovered from these test-pits, which all also produced Saxo-Norman pottery, suggested more sustained occupation in this area

than elsewhere. On current evidence this is a good indication that the town first developed as linear settlement south of the parish church along Park Street in the 12th century (Figure 4, b) rather than as a nucleated settlement focused around the market place, which is first mentioned in 1292.

South of Park Street, behind its frontage, excavation at the former cattle market site, identified several medieval property boundaries dating from the 12th-13th century. Extending the projected boundary alignments to the north, south, east and west suggested that they represented a series of rectangular plots belonging to properties fronting onto Park Street and the east side of the market place. One boundary was speculatively linked with the later property of a Thomas Stafford listed in a 1592 survey of the town, whilst another was linked with a property belonging to a Thomas Armeson in the same survey. No evidence of occupation was found to the south, along Rectory Lane (originally a back lane called 'Neubuggyn' which probably did not come into existence until the 14th century) and it was thought that the ditches defined a series of long, linear plots laid out perpendicular to Park Street to the north.

New evidence of this occupation has been found in three test-pits at the Parish Field at the eastern end of Park Street. Excavation of one test-pit close to Park Street



uncovered the remains of a pebble surface and a possible stone wall footing. Given the limited size of the excavation it is difficult to interpret the uncovered archaeology but the little that could be seen may be associated with a building that once occupied the north-west corner of the Parish Field, presumably fronting onto Park Street.



*A pebble surface and part of a possible stone wall at the Parish Field on Park Street.*

The presence of twenty-nine sherds of medieval and later medieval pottery, coupled with a large quantity of early post-medieval pottery strongly suggested that occupation in the immediate vicinity dated from at least the 12th century through to the 17th or 18th century. This may equate to a farmstead belonging to the Parsonage, under the tenancy of a Thomas Whitehead mentioned in the 1592 survey but more investigation needs to take place before this can be said with certainty.

A slight linear earthwork crossing the Parish Field on a north-west to south-east alignment parallel with Park Street may be a boundary, probably a hedge bank, relating to this property. A test-pit dug on the bank produced one of the largest assemblages of high medieval pottery in the town, fifty-two sherds of 12th-14th century date. Whilst south of the bank, closer to Rectory Lane, Test-pit 43 only produced nine sherds of comparable date. This again seems to confirm that occupation focused on Park Street to the north rather than Rectory Lane to the south.



*High medieval pottery from a possible hedge bank in the Parish Field.*

On Park Street, there was a difference between the test-pit dug to the north of the street, and those to the south. The southern test-pits all contained good evidence for medieval occupation from at least the 10th century onwards whilst the northern test-pit only produced evidence of activity from the mid-15th onwards. This would appear to suggest that through much of the medieval period dwellings only lined the south side of the street whilst ground to the north was more open. What the northern test-pit did produce, however, was a small assemblage of human bone. Nearby, other finds of human bone have also been made in the past, only on the northern side of Park Street. These have been interpreted as medieval burials, most likely linked with St Peter's church to the north.

This suggested that the churchyard associated with St Peter's church may have once been, or extended, much further south than its present limit, possibly all the way to the frontage on Park Street, before contracting or moving northwards to its present location sometime before the mid-15th century. This would explain the apparent absence of occupation before the later medieval period on the north side of the street.

Further evidence of occupation east of the market place was found at a test-pit to the rear of the Old Black Horse Inn. A compact pebble surface and a pit or post-hole dated to the late 14th-15th century, whilst pot from soil beneath the surface suggested occupation dated back to at least the 12th century.



*A pebble surface and pit or post-hole at the Old Black Horse Inn.*

By the later high medieval period (c. AD 1250-1400), the pattern of settlement at Market Bosworth had evolved. Of the thirty-nine test-pits that produced later 13th and 14th century pot, seven (18%) each produced more than ten sherds. These show occupation still predominately focused to the south of Park Street and to the east of the market place (Figure 5, a), but also show activity beginning to spread westwards around the south side of the market place (Figure 5, b) and northwards along Main Street (Figure 5, c). Present development around the north side of the market place was unsuitable for test-pit excavation, leaving a gap in the dataset. However, test-pits dug at the tail end of plots that would have fronted onto the north side of the market place all contained little or no pottery of this period which might suggest this area was not extensively developed.



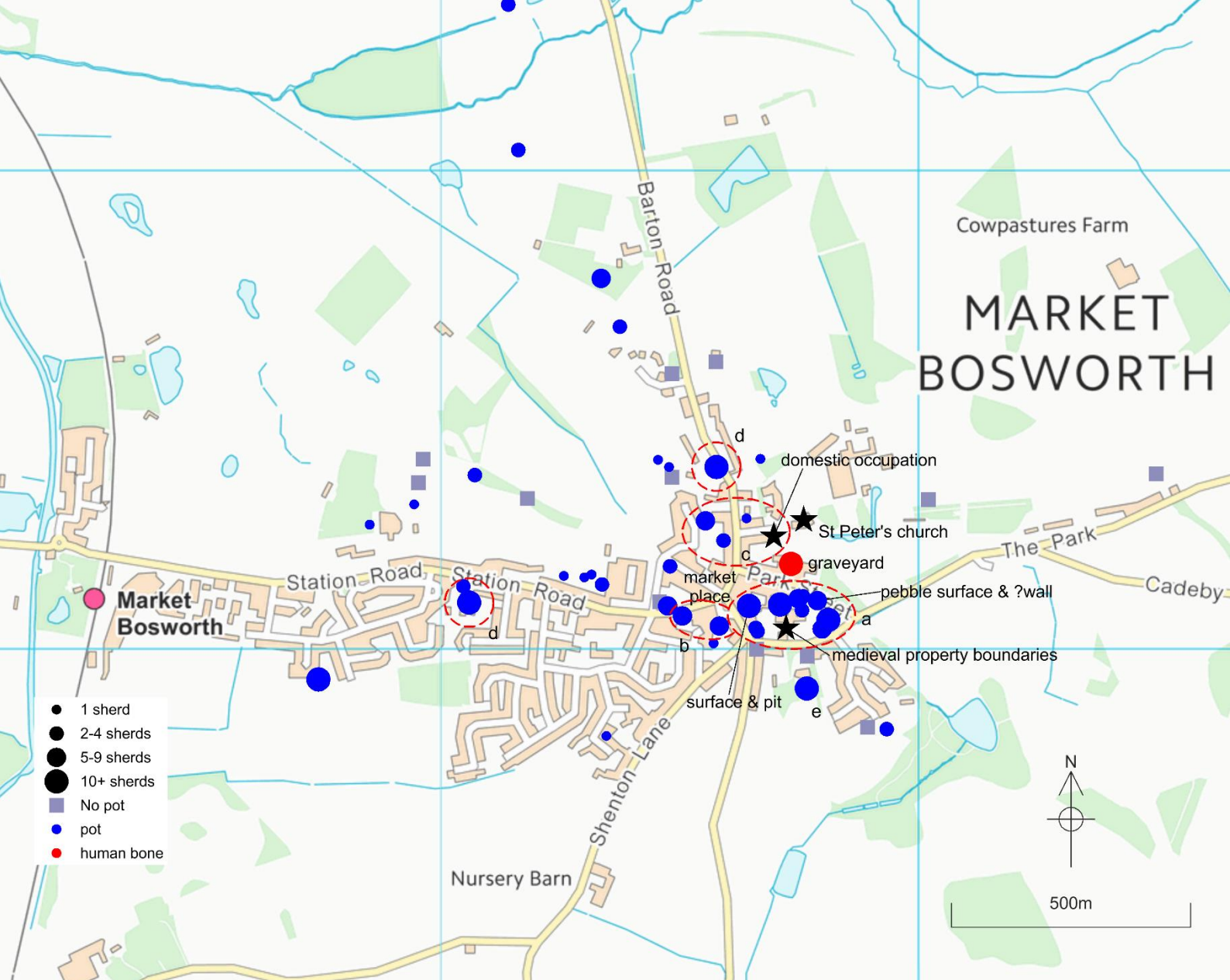


Figure 5: Distribution of later high medieval pot (c.1250-1400).

Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2017).

South-west of the market place between Station Road, Warwick Lane and Shenton Lane, pottery from two test-pits suggested that later high medieval activity was occurring nearby. Whilst they only produced eight and seven sherds of pot respectively, this had a high average sherd weight (15.7g) compared to similar assemblages from test-pits north of the market place between Station Road and Back Lane (3.2g). Studies of currently occupied rural settlements (CORS) across eastern England have considered pottery assemblages with an individual sherd weight greater than 5g as generally signifying greater potential of occupation nearby, whilst those under 3g had less significance. With this in mind, it is probable that the pottery from test-pits north of the market place was introduced to the soil through non-habitative means, whilst those to the south represent the disposal of domestic waste in the immediate vicinity.

North of Park Street and west of the church, an excavation in 2016 identified a pit and a ditch which probably relate to 13th-14th century medieval dwellings on the south side of Church Street. Small quantities of pottery from two test-pits west of Main Street also probably indicate activity nearby in the later high medieval period.



Tumbled stone and broken roof slates, possibly the remains of a medieval building east of Barton Road.

Two surprisingly large assemblages of 13th-14th-century pottery, comparable with material from the town centre, were recovered from a test-pit on Station Road c.500m west of the market place (19 sherds) and a test-pit on Barton Road c.300m north of the market place (Figure 5, d). At Barton Road tumbled stone and roofing slate also suggested a building had once stood in the area, and at both sites there might be some form of dispersed settlement nearby, perhaps an isolated message or farmstead detached from the main settlement.



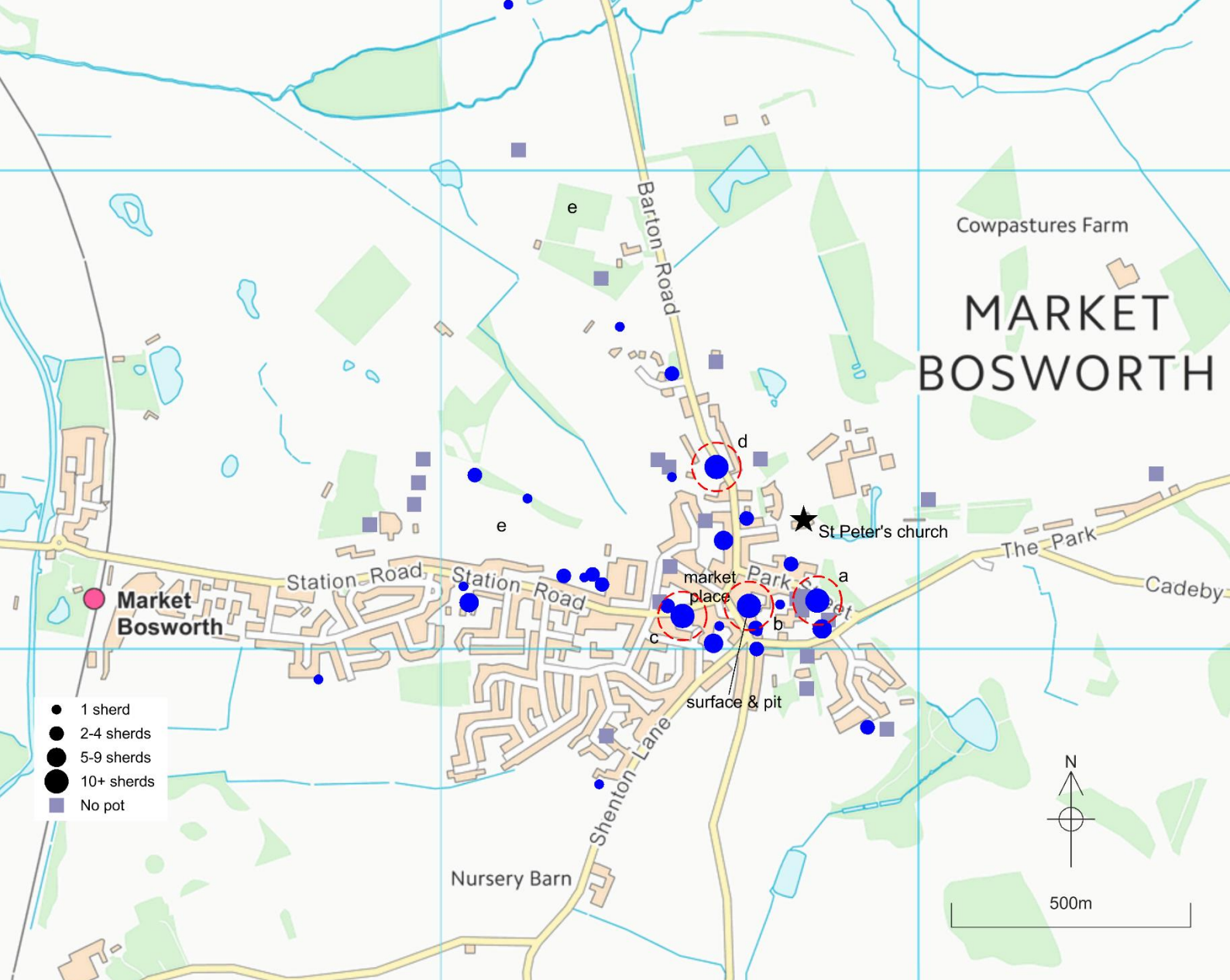


Figure 6: Distribution of later medieval pot (c. 1375-1550).

Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2017).

Of all the test-pits, only one did not fit this pattern of occupation (Figure 5, e). The twenty-five sherds of high medieval pottery recovered from it should, ostensibly, suggest occupation in the immediate vicinity. However, this data must be treated with caution as excavation revealed that the test-pit was dug into made-ground redeposited during extensive landscaping of the garden of the Rectory in the late 19th century. As such, it cannot be said for certain where the pot originally came from although much of it probably did come from ground within the property.

Thirty-three test-pits produced pottery of later medieval date (c.1375-1550). Whilst this is broadly the same as test-pits producing high medieval pottery, the quantities of pot from each test-pit were noticeably lower overall. Only eight test-pits (24%) each produced five or more sherds of pottery, and only four (12%) produced more than ten sherds - these were scattered across the town, on Park Street (Figure 6, a), east of the market place (Figure 6, b), west of the market place (Figure 6, c), and on Barton Road (Figure 6, d). Significantly, elsewhere in the town centre, north of the market place and along Park Street other test-pits produced no later medieval pot despite producing

earlier material. Whilst on the north side of Park Street, pottery from a test-pit suggested that some domestic activity was now taking part on this side of the street, although pottery from test-pits to the south suggested that occupation of the southern side of the street was patchier than in previous centuries.



Late medieval and early post-medieval pottery from the Parish Field.



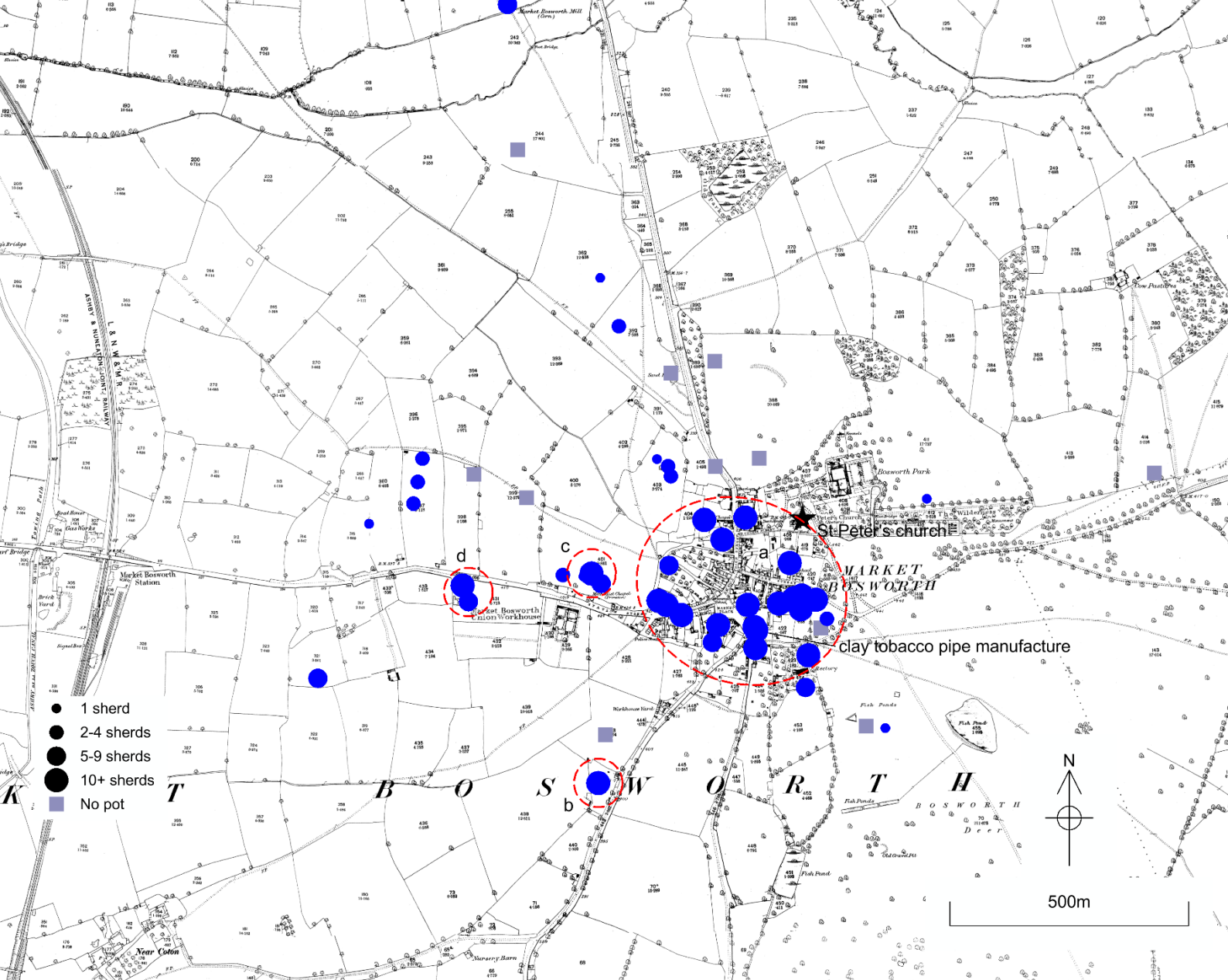


Figure 7: Distribution of later post-medieval pot (c.1650-1850).

Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2017).

This distribution suggested a potentially significant change in settlement in Market Bosworth in the late 14th century, with occupation mainly contracting eastwards away from the market place, and overall appearing patchier with some small areas of detached habitation continuing across the town but also large areas seemingly devoid of domestic activity. At other settlements in eastern England, the change in relative amounts of high medieval (copious) to later medieval (much scarcer) pottery was interpreted as evidence of changes in medieval demography, with the pottery-using population being 45% lower in the centuries after the Black Death than before. At Market Bosworth a similar percentage fall of 41% was recorded.

Beyond the town core, thirteen test-pits each produced less than five sherds of pot, with eight only producing a single sherd each (Figure 6, e). As with earlier periods, it is thought likely that this was introduced to the soil through non-habitative means. It is important to note, however, that the presence of widely dispersed later medieval pottery assemblages in the plough soil around the town is a good indication that any contraction in population the town might have been experiencing in the later medieval period was far from terminal to its economy – midden deposits

containing broken pots continued to be generated, transported and spread as manure on the fields, which were still being ploughed - all evidence for an active, well-maintained agrarian landscape, not a landscape neglected by population shortage.

### Post-medieval and modern activity (c. AD 1550-present)

By the mid-16th century, settlement at Market Bosworth appeared to have begun to re-occupy areas which had seemingly depopulated in the later medieval period, particularly around the market place and along Main Street and Park Street, but had not spread much beyond the town's medieval limits keeping its compact, nucleated plan. A tithe map of 1848 and Ordnance Survey maps from the late 19th century onwards show that this remained the case well into the 20th century.

Early post-medieval pottery (c.1550-1650) was found in thirty-six test-pits. Of these, eleven each produced more than ten sherds of pot (31%), whilst five each produced more than twenty sherds (14%). These were all located in the centre of town and concord well with our understanding of the 16th-century settlement based on a survey of the manor of Bosworth undertaken by Toby Mathews for Sir Wolston Dixie in 1592.



This is a remarkable and detailed description of Market Bosworth describing it as 'well and roundly compact together having many streets and lanes in it' with the manor house and church, three inns, a school, nine farms, ten tenements and thirty-five cottages. Thus, on the north side of Park Street, a test-pit was sited close to the original Free School and a property held by a John Corbet, whilst to the south, test-pits were behind properties held by Thomas Armeson, the Widow Kent, Thomas Stafford and Thomas Whitehead. On Main Street, a test-pit was on land held by a Nicholas Bradshaw, whilst another was close to the George Inn (replaced by the Dower House in the 18th century), part of a farm in the freehold of a William Noel with Thomas Wright as landlord. Around the market place, test-pits were all located in historic properties –at Bakery Cottage which reputedly has 16th-century elements to it, behind a row of 17th century cottages, behind a building of cruck-framed construction, and behind two former dwellings (now part of the Old Black Bull Inn) parts of which probably date to the 16th century. West of the market place on Station Road a test-pit was located behind a late 18th-century house and opposite, test-pits at the Dixie Grammar School were behind buildings probably of comparable date which are no longer standing.

By the later post-medieval period (c.1650-1850) pottery was found in forty-three test-pits. Of these, sixteen each produced more than twenty sherds of pot (37%), whilst eight each produced more than fifty sherds (19%). Again, these show extensive habitation around the market place, and along Main Street and Park Street but still not much expansion beyond the town's medieval limits (Figure 7, a).



*Later post-medieval and modern pottery from a test-pit behind a late 18th-century building on the south side of Station Road.*

One test-pit east of the market place produced compelling evidence for commerce and/or industry in the town in the latter half of the 17th century. An extraordinary quantity of broken clay tobacco pipe was recovered from a single c.0.2m thick layer in the test-pit – 138 pieces in total from a minimum of thirty separate pipes. Where datable, these were all characteristic of c.1640-1680 date. No makers' marks were present, and few pipes showed signs of use, and it seemed likely that the assemblage represented waste from the cottage-manufacture of clay tobacco pipes or their sale on the premises. A second test-pit behind the same row of cottages, c.5m north of this pipe waste found no similar layer, suggesting that the broken pipes were

being discarded in a localised dump on the southern edge of the property.



*Late 17th-century clay tobacco debris from a dump of manufacturing waste east of the market place.*



*Makers' marks on clay tobacco pipes from the town. Top row (l-r): John Mats and Jane Mats, husband and wife pipe makers in the late 17th and early 18th century, initially from Shropshire who later moved to the Tamworth area. Bottom row (l-r): Richard Legg (1687), from a family of pipe makers from Broseley in Shropshire, and Richard Pain of Derby, a late 18th century pipe maker.*

From the 17th-century onwards, the absence of pottery from test-pits on the eastern edge of the town probably reflects the enclosure of this area within Bosworth Park, with most of these sites becoming parkland or permanent pasture no longer being enriched with domestic waste. This emparkment may have had serious consequences for dwellings on the north and east edge of town, along the



east side of Barton Road and at the Parish Field on Park Street, which were probably cleared to make way for the new park. Noticeably, pottery in these test-pits rapidly diminished from the 17th-18th century onwards, whilst other test-pits in the park all produced little or no pottery.

South of the town, west of Shenton Lane, one test-pit (Figure 7, b) was ostensibly sited in the open field from the medieval period onwards. Yet close to 200 sherds of post-medieval and modern pottery were recovered from it. Admittedly, some of this material could have been introduced to the soil through the site's current use as allotments but the assemblage also suggested activity in the vicinity dating back to at least the 17th century. An answer can be seen on the 1848 tithe map which shows the site to be a small field fronting onto Shenton Lane. On the frontage, some 30-40m east of the test-pit is a small group of buildings, possibly a row of three cottages. These remained on Ordnance Survey maps into the 1980s and their existence probably explained the large quantity of post-medieval and modern material in the test-pit which was otherwise in a rather isolated position away from the town centre.

Pottery from several test-pits along Station Road can also be attributed to similar dispersed settlement (Figure 7, c and d). The 18th and 19th century material in particular can probably be related to a row of cottages and a Primitive Methodist Chapel which were on the frontage of Station Road nearby (Figure 7, d). The chapel was built in 1791 and demolished in the early 20th century.



*A George IV farthing from the 1820s, found in a test-pit on Church Street. Left: OBV. George IV facing left. Right: REV: helmed Britannia seated facing right with trident and shield.*

Forty-two test-pits produced pottery of later-19th or 20th-century date. Again, test-pits containing large assemblages were focused in the centre of the town but test-pits along Station Road west of the market place also contain larger assemblages than previous periods, testament to the town's growth in this direction in the early 20th century. Elsewhere, some test-pits produced little or no modern material. In outlying areas of the town this can probably be explained by the fact that they were in areas given over to pasture, playing field or woodland in recent times, leaving fewer opportunities for material to be introduced to the soil as it was reworked. In others, at the Old Rectory for instance, the test-pits were dug in areas that have been formal lawn for at least 100 years, again leaving few opportunities for modern material to be introduced to the soil.

Perhaps one of the more unusual artefacts of this period was a 1904 USA One Cent coin, known as an 'Indian Head Penny', found in a test-pit on Park Street. How an American coin got to Market Bosworth will never be

known, but it is tempting to speculate that it was a souvenir of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show which visited Nuneaton, 7 miles away, on 26 April 1904.



*A 1904 USA One Cent – known as an 'Indian Head Penny'. Left: OBV. Liberty with head dress. Right: REV. Laurel wreath.*

Other finds brought Market Bosworth story into the 21st century, with the likes of a Japanese computer chip and a battery (dated 2014) from topsoil in a test-pit on the Market Place; a CD fragment and a Toffee Crisp wrapper from a test-pit on Station Road; decimal coins dated 1997 and 2001 from a test-pit on the Parish Field; and a moulded pink plastic toy pig from a test-pit on Church Street, completing a sequence of activity beneath the town which started in the late Neolithic more than 4,200 years ago.



*Modern finds from a test-pit on the south side of the market place included buttons, a glass marble, a pocket knife, a dress pin, shell cases, metal eyelets, part of a light bulb, a Japanese computer chip and a AAA battery dated 2014.*

## Conclusion

Bosworth Links was an overwhelming success. Analysis of the test-pit data has identified an extensive late Neolithic or early Bronze Age landscape beneath the town. Worked flints and calcined bone focused in an area around the market place, in the centre of the high ground on which the town presently sits, suggesting domestic and funerary activity was taking place nearby. Three other activity sites were identified on spurs of high ground projecting west and north from the town centre, where test-pits also produced pieces of prehistoric, probably Neolithic, pot. This new evidence coupled with several currently undated ring-ditches and earth mounds around the town increasingly suggest that it was sited over a late Neolithic or early Bronze Age barrow cemetery.

No new Iron Age sites were identified beneath the town, with the only find of this period discovered near known Iron



Age and Roman activity east of the market place. Small quantities of Roman pot were found widely distributed across the town but concentrated near a known villa site north of the town and at a second location west of the town, possibly a new Roman site. Significantly, one test-pit close to the villa also produced Anglo-Saxon pottery, as did three other test-pits on a neighbouring hill and a fourth to the south of the town centre. This is the first recorded evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity in the area and the four test-pits have potentially identified three new activity sites on the brow of the hill, all beyond the historic town core.



*Silk Hill to the north of Market Bosworth is now one of the oldest known archaeological sites in the town. Neolithic and Anglo-Saxon pottery was found on the hilltop.*

Evidence suggested that Market Bosworth did not begin to develop in its present location until the 10th century. This early activity appeared to have been linear settlement concentrated along Park Street to the south of St Peter's parish church. By the 12th century the town appeared to be well established, the bulk of the activity again focused along the southern side of Park Street and east of the market place.



*The south side of Park Street was probably occupied from the 10th century onwards and has the earliest evidence for occupation in the town's present location.*

During the 13th century, habitation spread westwards around the south side of the market place and north along Main Street, giving the town the nucleated appearance it still has today. By the 15th century, occupation had become patchier with some small areas of detached habitation continuing across the town but also large areas seemingly devoid of domestic activity. This constituted a 41% drop in activity from the preceding centuries and

could perhaps be taken as an indication of population decline following the Black Death in the mid-14th century.

In the 16th century, occupation across Market Bosworth appeared to have re-occupied areas which had seemingly depopulated at the end of the medieval period, particularly around the market place and along Main Street and Park Street but had not spread much beyond the town's medieval limit, keeping a compact, nucleated plan. This remained the case until the late 20th century when modern housing estates started to expand the town away from its historic core.



*Through the 16th to 20th centuries, Market Bosworth did not spread much beyond its medieval limits.*

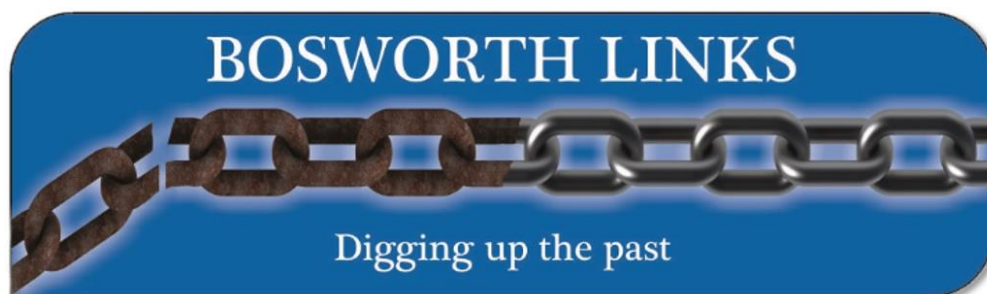
In 2016, the Bosworth Links project set out to reveal the, then, poorly understood development and habitation of Market Bosworth. The main research goals, to learn more about what was going on in the area before the town was established and to try and provide a coherent understanding of how and why the town developed where it did, were achieved with great success and have pushed the town's story back a further 3,300 years from its first documented reference in the late 11th century to reveal an extensive late Neolithic or early Bronze Age landscape beneath.

This could only have been achieved through the successful partnership between the Market Bosworth Society and University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS), the generous support of the project's sponsors, and the army of homeowners, local students and volunteers who welcomed us into their town and gave their time, schools, gardens, allotments and playing fields to the project. They worked hard to dig fifty-three 1m sq. test-pits, carefully excavated 35 cubic metres of soil (approximately 50 tonnes), and documented and kept over 20,000 individual finds (176kg). The lasting legacy of this is not just of new skills and knowledge, and an interest in archaeology, but also of new friendships and lasting relationships, and we thank everyone who took part and supported us.

To find out more about the project, visit:

<https://www2.le.ac.uk/services/ulas/discoveries/projects/community-archaeology/bosworth-links>





This document was published in November 2018 (© ULAS 2018).

**Archaeological Services (ULAS)**

University of Leicester  
University Road  
Leicester, LE1 7RH, UK

t: +44 (0)116 252 2848  
e: [ulas@le.ac.uk](mailto:ulas@le.ac.uk)  
w: [www.le.ac.uk/ulas](http://www.le.ac.uk/ulas)



[ulasnews.com](http://ulasnews.com)

[facebook.com/ulasnews](https://facebook.com/ulasnews)

[@ULASarchaeology](https://twitter.com/ULASarchaeology)

[sketchfab.com/leicester-archaeology](https://sketchfab.com/leicester-archaeology)

