

## The 'Story of Hoxne'

### Community Test Pit Project Summary Report

#### Introduction

An archaeological community event, consisting of the excavation of twenty-nine test pits by local residents and other volunteers, took place in Hoxne in July 2013. The event was preceded in May 2013 by the excavation of another two test pits by local schoolchildren. The event was organised by the Hoxne Heritage Group, as a part of their HLF funded project 'The Story of Hoxne', with professional archaeological assistance from the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service (SCCAS).

Hoxne has a particularly rich and well-known archaeological and historical background, including two archaeological sites of international importance, the Palaeolithic site at the former brickworks on the Eye Road and the findspot of the late Roman Hoxne Hoard in a nearby field. Hoxne also has a long association with the legend of the martyrdom of St Edmund in 870AD and was an important parish for the early Christian church in the Late Anglo-Saxon and early medieval periods, being the site for a Chapel of St Edmund, a Bishopric and then a palace or manor for the Bishops of Norwich. Hoxne also had a market and a Benedictine Priory at Abbey Farm and the medieval and post-medieval layout of the parish is still clear to see, with three principal cores of settlement at Low Street, at Cross Street extending south-east from Abbey Farm, and at Heckfield Green, and dispersed settlement at South Green, Reading Green, and other farmsteads.

Modern archaeological investigation in the parish, which is usually linked to building development, has generally been somewhat limited in the past, although medieval settlement evidence has recently been found near Heckfield Green. The excavation of a series of 1m square test pits, which can be squeezed in almost anywhere in any size of garden, was a rare and exciting opportunity to investigate, in some areas for the first time, the archaeological potential of the village.

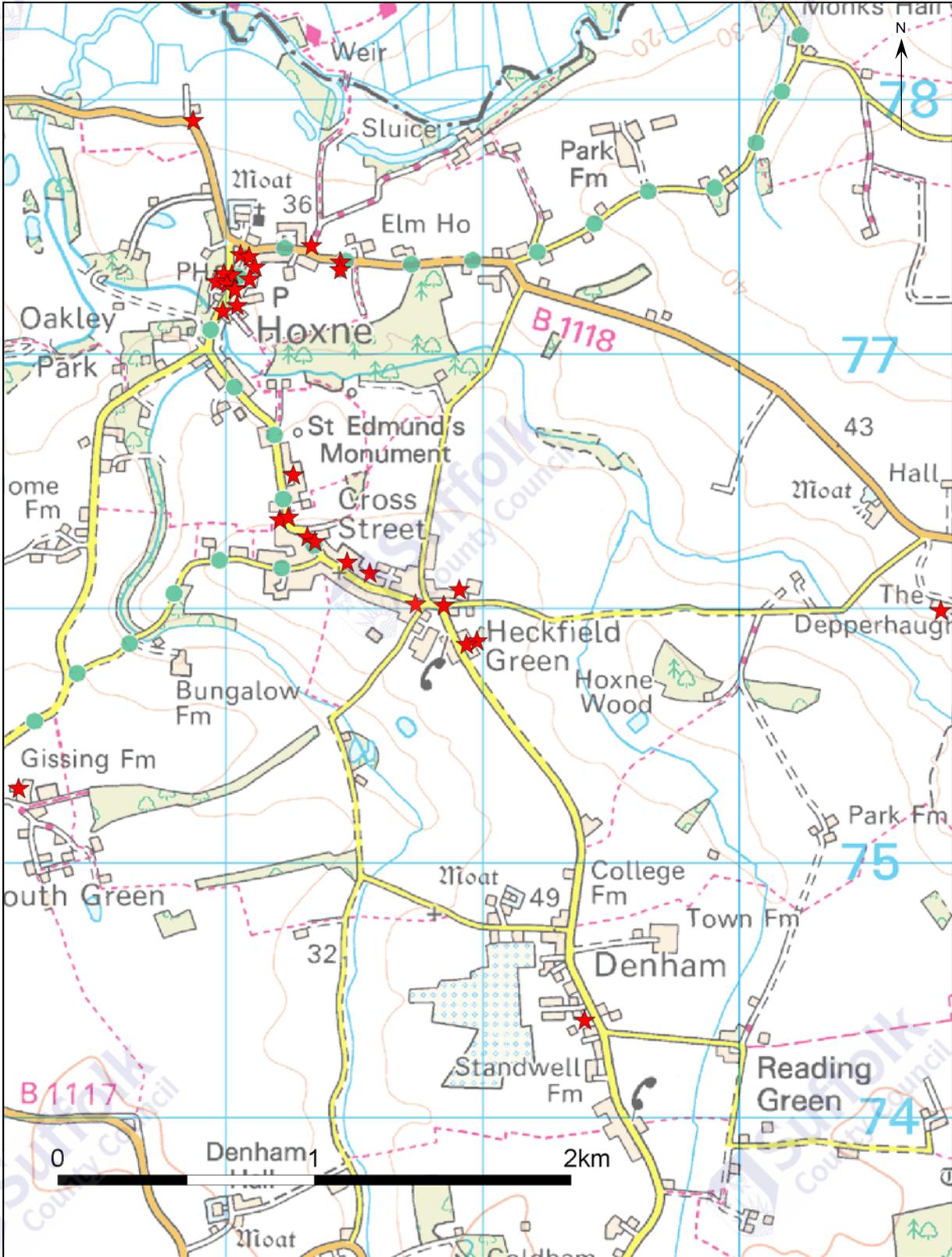
Twelve of the thirty-one test pits were located throughout Low Street, with a further three (at two locations) along Green Street. Another twelve pits were excavated from Abbey Hill, through Cross Street, to Heckfield Green with the final four being scattered throughout the wider parish. Twenty test pits were excavated by the property owners, the others by volunteers from the village or elsewhere in the local region.

<b>Pit</b>	<b>Address</b>
1	Waveney Lodge
2a & b	Mulberry Cottage, Green Street
3	Oaken, 10 Church Close
4	Yew Tree House, 37-39 Church Hill
5	High House, Church Hill
6	Little Park House
7	53 Low Street
8	54 Low Street
9	Beech Cottage, Low Street
10	Aldersyde, Low Street
11	The Old Bakery, Low Street
12	The Swan PH
17	Moatfield
18	Appletun, Abbey Hill
19	Appletun, Abbey Hill
22	5 Cross Street
23	6 Cross Street
24	The Old Grapes, Cross Street
25	Mill House, Cross Street
26	Bethesda, Heckfield Green
28	Cosy Cot, Heckfield Green
29	Larch House, Heckfield Green
30	Farm Cottage, Heckfield Green
31	Michelin House, Denham Rd, Heckfield Green
32	Gissing Farmhouse, South Green
33	Honeysuckle Cottage, Hoxne rd, Denham
37	The Depperhaugh
38	Rear 19-21 Low Street
39	Low Street Village Green
40	Low Street Village Green

Table 1. Test Pit List

The participants excavated the test pits themselves, under guidance from SCCAS staff who circulated around the test pits throughout the project. They were all asked to excavate and sieve the soil of their test pit in a series of 10cm layers, and to record their pits by issuing numbers to different layers, by describing each layer in a provided booklet, and by making 1:10 scale drawings and taking digital photographs.

The finds were looked at by Richenda Goffin, the SCCAS Finds Manager, to establish the types and dates of material present. All of the pottery was identified, with any dating to the 16th century or earlier being counted and identified by their fabric type.



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Figure 1. Test Pit location

## **Results**

By looking at the different layers and types of soil within each test pit, and thinking about how these layers have been created, we can try to build a picture of what has happened in each garden in the past. Collecting and identifying the different finds within each layer often means that we can tell when it was created, in addition to providing a glimpse into the everyday lives of the previous inhabitants by looking at the things they lost or buried, and the rubbish they threw away.

The test pits usually contained a series of horizontal soil layers which had been created by human activity in the medieval, post-medieval and modern periods. The depth, thickness and nature of the soil layers usually related to the known past land-use of each property. Those test pits in former fields or greens until the 19th/20th century were usually shallower, the natural geology sometimes being exposed at a depth of 30-40cm, and had relatively clean topsoils with only small amounts of post-medieval finds. Those pits in the established medieval/post-medieval settlement village cores, or in the gardens of isolated but older properties, tended to have thicker occupation soils, rich with finds, extending to a depth of up to or even over 1m. Some of these soils, particularly in the bottom of Test Pit 12 (The Swan), possibly dated back as far as the early medieval period.

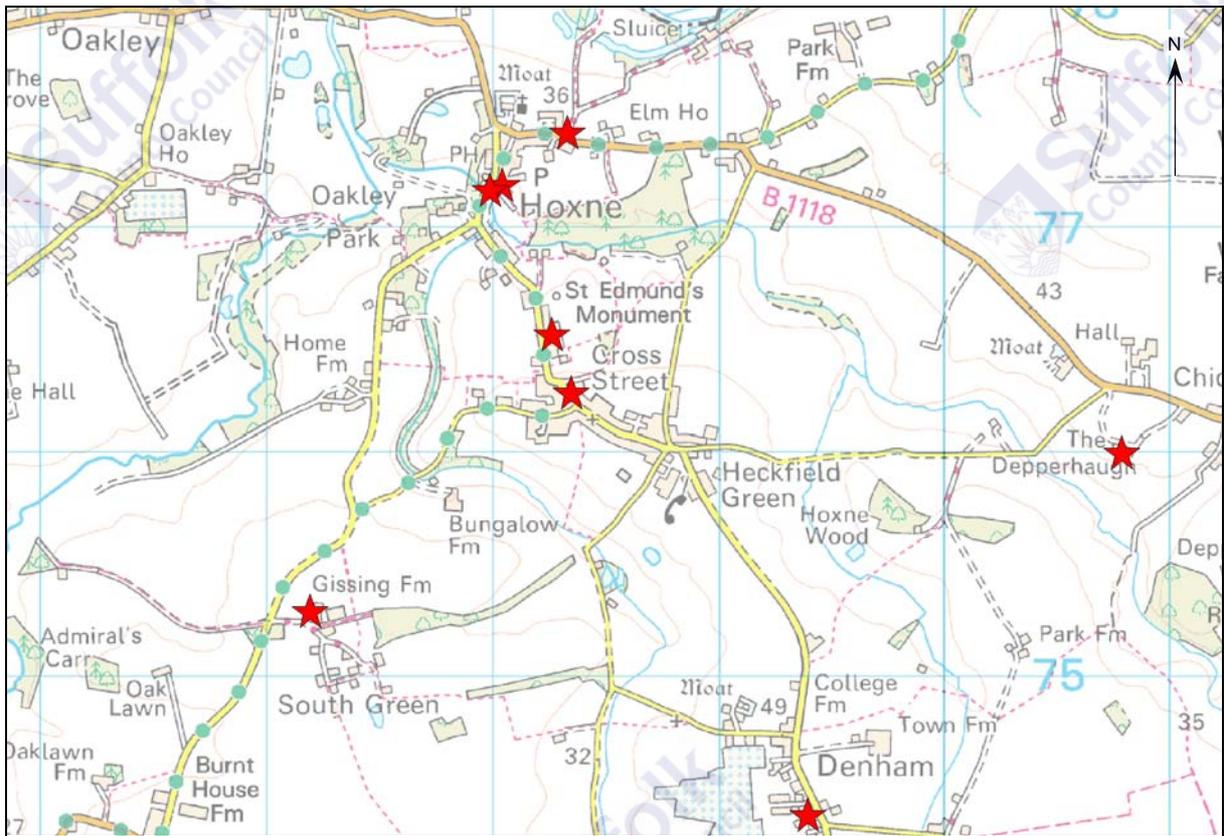
Some test pits identified man-made features, such as the edge of a platform cut into the natural slope for a former building in Test Pit 07 (53 Low Street), possible cobbled yard or road surfaces at Test Pits 23 (6 Cross Street) and 26 (Bethesda) and a former ditch at Test Pit 33 (Honeysuckle Cottage, Denham).

## **The Finds**

Although no test pit found any evidence of Late Anglo-Saxon occupation (and nothing to support the HHG's hope of supporting the village's association with the legend of St Edmund), two test pits (No's 03 and 12) did find pottery dating to the early medieval period (c. 11th-12th century). Slightly later medieval pottery, dating to the 12th-14th centuries was then found in eight pits with the largest amount coming from Test Pit 03 (10 Church Close). This garden was part of a field until the 20th century and so this pottery has probably been dumped on the site from nearby settlement along Green Street or from Low Street, perhaps deliberately or accidentally by agricultural practices

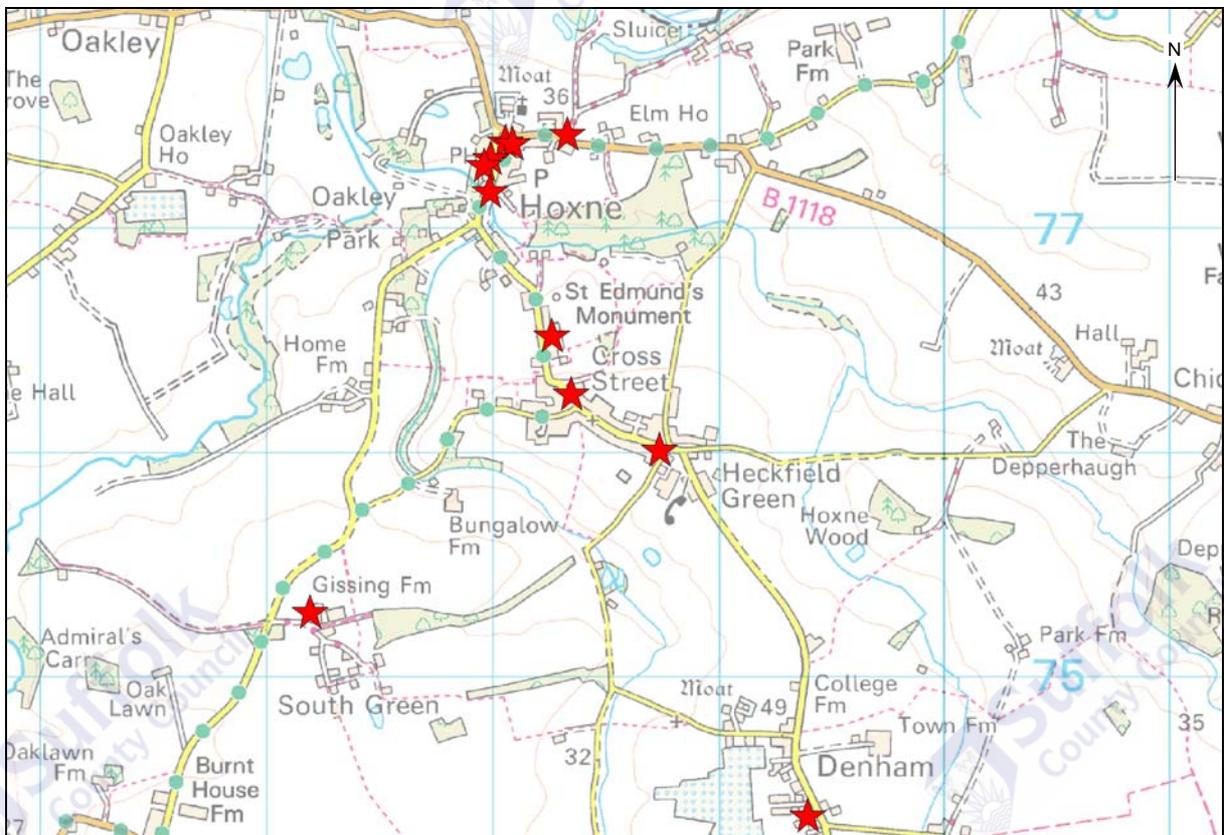
such as manuring. The pottery from Test Pit 12 (The Swan) is perhaps the strongest evidence yet seen in Low Street for evidence of medieval occupation while the medieval pottery from Test Pit 17 (Moatfield) was generally to be expected bearing in mind the garden's location within the grounds of the former Benedictine Priory at Abbey Farm. Occasional fragments at other sites also indicated medieval occupation even if they were mixed with later finds. Later medieval pottery dating to the 15th-16th century was identified in twelve test pits.

Most of the test pits contained post-medieval and modern material, the quantities generally reflecting the location of each site in relation to the established post-medieval settlement. The post-medieval finds consisted of a typical range of material that would have been used in everyday life in the village and shows how domestic rubbish was often discarded in the immediate vicinity of homes and businesses. Twenty-five pits contained pottery, which included imported vessels, a wide range of industrially produced vessels and other twentieth century ceramics. Ceramic building material, i.e. brick and tile, was recovered from twenty-eight pits, fragments of clay tobacco pipe from twenty-four, pieces of glass from twenty-seven, metalwork including iron nails and other objects from twenty-four, and organic material such as animal bone and oyster shell from twenty-two. The frequent modern material, such as concrete, tarmac, marbles, coins and plastic toys also showed how, despite our modern methods of rubbish disposal, we are still creating new archaeological deposits for future generations to discover.



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Figure 2. Medieval pottery (11th-14th century) distribution



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Figure 3. Late medieval transitional pottery (15th-16th century) distribution

## **Conclusion**

The test pits showed that, despite the inevitable disturbance caused by post-medieval and modern activity, there are archaeological deposits surviving throughout the village, at times dating back as far as the early medieval period. This is an important result as, apart from in one or two locations, little such evidence for medieval Hoxne has previously been found.

The test pits generally showed that the areas of medieval settlement underlie the later and larger post-medieval and modern village layouts. Even the results of those test pits which found little or nothing are useful as they will help archaeologists in future to define the extent and location of the medieval settlement, although unfortunately they may have been a bit boring and disappointing for the volunteers who dug them.

Finally the project as a whole has shown the potential for future fieldwork or documentary research to add to and enhance our knowledge concerning the life of the village and its development.

## **Acknowledgements**

SCCAS/FT would like to thank Margaret Sillis and the Hoxne Heritage group for creating the project, the 70 or so volunteers who took part, and the further c.12 landowners who allowed pits to be placed in their gardens, without all of whom the project would not have been possible.

J. A. Craven, SCCAS, December 2013

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