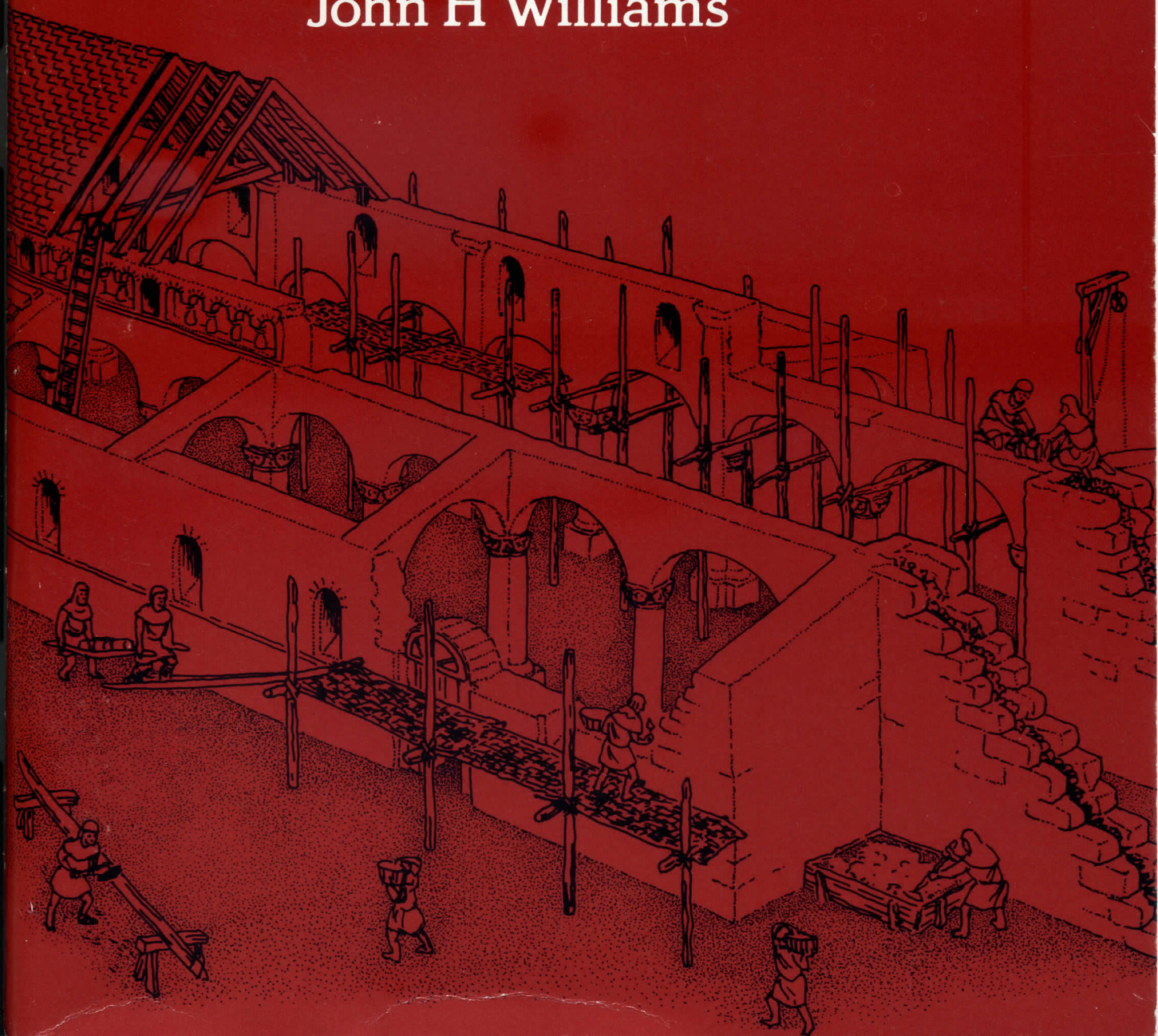# SAXON & MEDIEVAL NORTHAMPTON

John H Williams

Northampton Development Corporation's Archaeological Unit was set up at the start of the Northampton expansion programme and was the first such unit to be established by a British Development Corporation.

Its creation reflected the Corporation's determination to ensure that any evidence which increased our knowledge of the town's early history would not be lost as a result of development.

Saxon and Medieval Northampton

by John H Williams
Chief Archaeologist
Northampton Development Corporation

Contents

Fig. 1 Excavated sites in Northampton. Compare this modern street plan with that on John Speed's map (fig. 26) which remained largely intact up to the 1960's. Street names mentioned in the text are identified on Speed's map.

1 Castle
2 Chalk Lane
3 Marefair
4 St Peter's Street
5 Gregory Street
6 Horseshoe Street
7 Marehold
8 St Andrew's priory
9 Greyfriars
10 Abington Street
11 The Ridings
12 Derngate
13 St James' Square

—— Medieval defences

-- -- Late Saxon defences

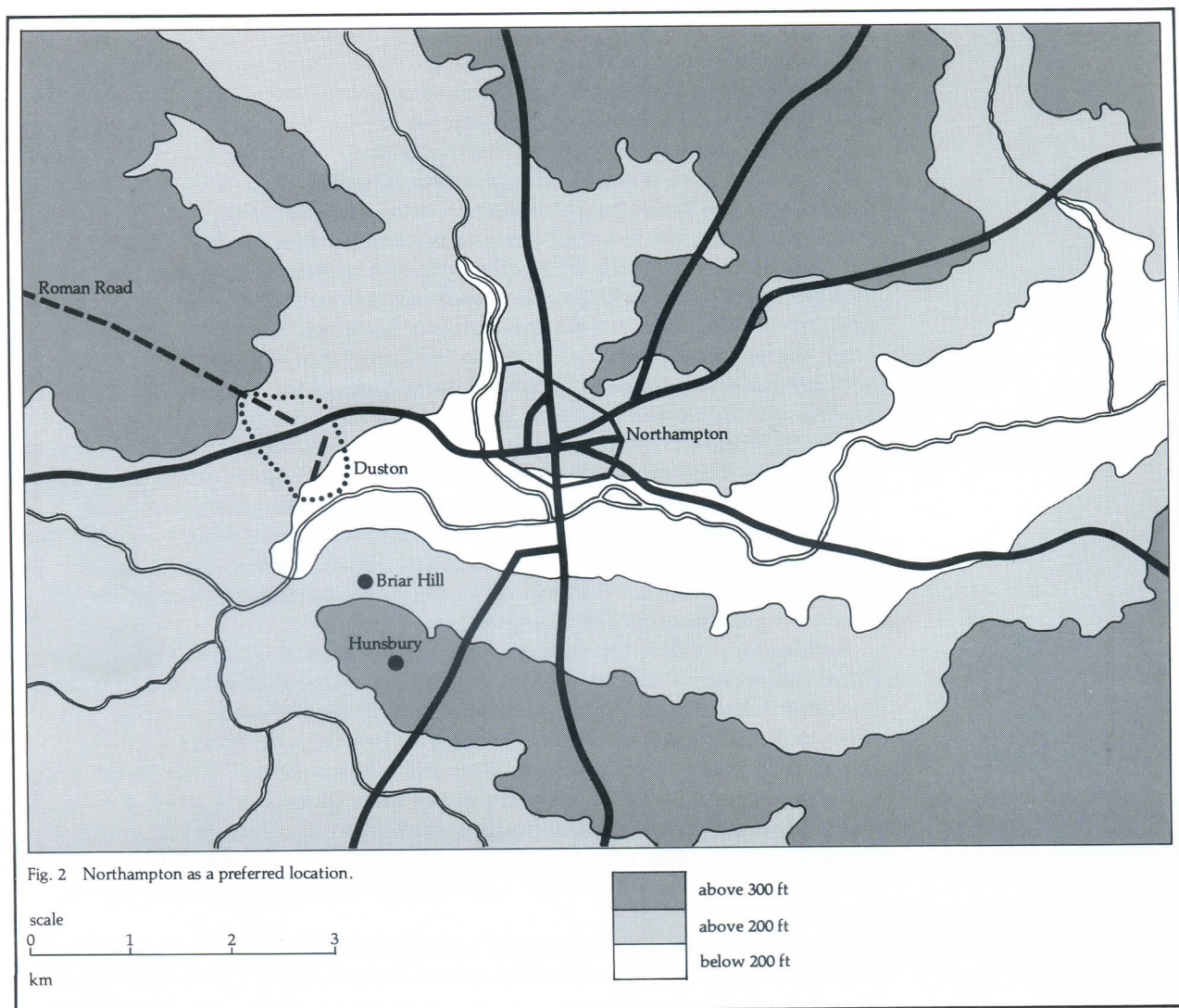• • • • possible 11th century defensive line

Introduction

In spite of its fine Medieval churches first impressions of Northampton are not of a town steeped in history. Indeed in 1675 the Medieval urban landscape was virtually erased in days when an all consuming fire devoured the town's historic core. Medieval documents also probably perished in the blaze. Yet beneath the ashes and the subsequently erected buildings traces of Northampton's past glories have survived to be revealed through archaeological investigation, and documents that escaped the flames help to illumine a most interesting story.

'Northampton, the first 6000 years', a booklet produced in 1979 illustrated how the work of the last decade by Northampton Development Corporation's team of archaeologists has considerably increased our understanding of Northampton's past. Archaeological and historical research, however, is not static and further work has led to substantial advances in our knowledge of early Northampton.

This booklet expands and updates those sections of the 'the first 6000 years' dealing with Saxon and Medieval Northampton. In writing it I have been most aware of the different nature of the evidence for the two periods. For the years AD 400-1066 documentary references to Northampton can be collected on a single postcard, but after the Conquest there is an ever increasing flood of written records commencing with Domesday Book, and substantial collections of material are extant in both national and local archives. Again, while archaeology can amplify the picture from the Norman Conquest onwards it is by far the major source for pre-Conquest Northampton.

Archaeology mainly witnesses past material culture; it provides evidence for social and economic history — how people lived, what crafts and industries they practised, what wealth they had and what was its basis. Rarely, however, can it give precise information on specific people and events, and again we can but superficially probe men's thoughts, ideas and religious beliefs. With the advantage of documentary records the story of the past takes on new dimensions and details relating to a wide range of subjects are spread before us. Nonetheless, even in the Medieval period, only a fraction of the total evidence has survived and it is still difficult to assign characters, ideas and ideals to townsmen who often appear merely as names.

Saxon and Medieval Northampton cannot be truly studied in isolation from its earlier history for settlement was not new to the area (*fig. 2*). The fertile Upper Nene basin had been attractive to early settlers who probably arrived on the east coast from the continent and followed the river inland. Finds of Palaeolithic material have occurred in the river gravels near Northampton and flint scatters of Mesolithic date onwards attest dense settlement on the lighter well-drained soils around Northampton. In the middle of the 5th millenium BC a Neolithic causewayed camp was constructed on Briar Hill to the south of the River Nene. This interrupted ditched enclosure, covering some 7 acres, was a great undertaking for its time. It was not a settlement as such but rather an economic, social or religious focus for the surrounding countryside. The enclosure was reconstructed several times over more than 1000 years. In the Iron Age (700 BC-AD 43) the small hill-fort at Hunsbury commanded the high ground to the south of the river and was probably the home of a local chieftain. With the coming of the Romans in the mid 1st century AD a fort connected with the initial military advance may have been established at Duston but certainly a 'small town' soon grew up. We can thus see, and this is maintained in later periods, continuity of settlement in the Upper Nene basin. Northampton was what geographers call a preferred location. This does not mean to say that occupation was uninterrupted and that there was a formal handover of power' to successive groups of inhabitants but rather that there was a continuing awareness of the desirability of the area for habitation.

Fig. 2 Northampton as a preferred location.

Roman Road

Northampton

Duston

● Briar Hill

Hunsbury
●

scale

0   1   2   3

km

above 300 ft

above 200 ft

below 200 ft

Saxon Northampton

Early Saxon (c 400-650)

During the 4th and 5th centuries the northern frontiers of the Roman Empire became subject to increasing attacks from warlike Germanic tribes. To help counter this growing menace the Roman legions still in Britain were withdrawn to mainland Europe in the early 5th century and Britain was left to fend for itself. The island too now felt the hostile incursions of the Anglo-Saxons and in the face of this mounting pressure Roman institutions, carefully nurtured over four centuries, crumbled, and the more visible signs of Roman civilization — villas, baths and fine public buildings — fell into disrepair. Exactly what happened is difficult to determine because of the paucity of written records and we find ourselves very much in the 'Dark Ages'. Town life seems to have fallen apart although the substantial defensive walls of the towns provided useful strongholds in the time of war. Archaeology to date has shown only meagre evidence for the continuing occupation of the towns, mostly in the form of fairly rude timber buildings erected in the ruined shells of their Romano-British predecessors. Nevertheless, it would seem that some towns may have become centres, but not necessarily urban ones at this stage, for emerging Saxon royal families. And why do we find so many of the new Saxon bishoprics being established on these crumbling Roman sites?

The evidence for Northampton as elsewhere is rather enigmatic. At Duston a 'small town' came into being during the period of the Roman occupation. The exact nature of this settlement is uncertain because of the extensive 19th and early 20th century ironstone quarrying which has effectively obliterated so much of the site but records of finds recovered during the quarrying, and limited excavations in the last ten years, suggest that although the settlement probably fulfilled many urban functions as a centre servicing the surrounding countryside it was not particularly densely settled and in appearance perhaps more resembled a modern village. Did this settlement continue as a recognisable urban entity into the fifth century? The coin series from Duston includes examples of Arcadius (395-408) and Honorius (395-423) and two buckles dating to the late 4th and early 5th centuries (fig. 3) can possibly be associated with some sort of yeomanry perhaps formed during these troubled times. Additionally a Roman lead coffin was found in the Saxon cemetery immediately west of the Roman settlement. Is this fortuitous or can it possibly indicate the cemetery remaining in use from Roman through to Saxon times?

Whatever the exact fate of Roman Duston was and however long it remained in existence the Upper Nene basin continued to be well populated during the 5th to 7th centuries. Over a hundred burials were recorded in the Duston Saxon cemetery during the ironstone quarrying. Brooches and other grave goods range from the middle of the 5th century onwards (figs. 4-5, 7). A few burials, noted during extensions to St Andrew's hospital in 1836, probably belong to another cemetery and occasional discoveries of inhumations or cremations between Hardingstone and Hunsbury Hill from 1779 onwards indicate Early Saxon activity to the south of the river. Other Saxon burials have been found in Abington and Cow Meadow. While the total number of burials is not overlarge the circumstances of their discovery, almost inevitably during quarrying or construction works, suggest that the burials are but part of a larger assemblage. Early Saxon occupation sites have been found in Northampton itself, on Briar Hill and at Upton. The concentration of the settlements and cemeteries cannot necessarily be explained away by the intensive fieldwork and development activity in the area and the disposition of the finds around Northampton is perhaps significant. Certainly sometime during the 5th to 7th centuries the focal settlement of the Upper Nene basin shifted from Duston to Northampton. Many of the roads

which now radiate out from Northampton may have their origin in the Early to Middle Saxon period, some even earlier.

The question of Early Saxon settlement on the site of the present centre of Northampton is most interesting, relying as it does almost entirely on the archaeological evidence. Here, about a mile to the east of the Romano-British town, we find the tentative origins of what was to develop into a great Medieval town. In order to understand the physical growth of the settlement it is useful to

Fig. 3 Parts of two buckles of late 4th or early 5th century date from Duston, now in Northampton Museum.

Fig. 4 Highly decorated brooches, covered with gold leaf, from the Early Saxon cemetery at Duston, now in Northampton Museum.
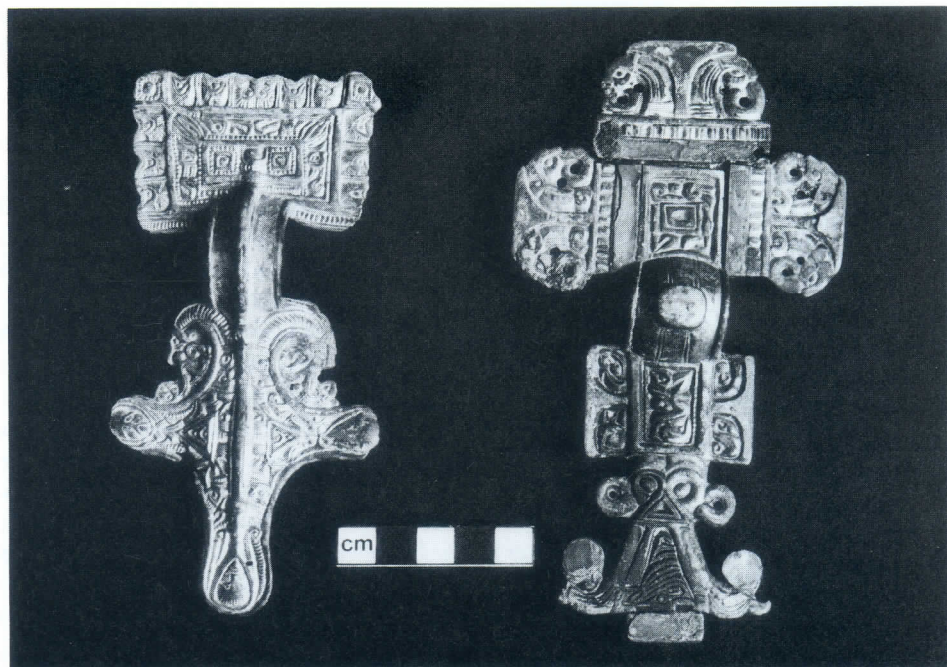
examine the topographical evidence. Initially this can be most usefully done by reference to John Speed's map of Northampton in the year 1610 (*fig. 26*). The town at that time was dominated by the castle, St Andrew's priory and the town walls. The street plan, however, retained many elements dating back to the Saxon period and it is only really the last 10 years which have seen the attrition of some of these elements (*fig. 1*).

Alderman Frank Lee, a former mayor of Northampton, discussed Northampton's street plan in the Archaeological Journal for 1954. He argued that Horsemarket and Horseshoe Street and Marefair and Gold Street formed the main north-south and east-west axial streets of a Saxon settlement whose defensive perimeter was fossilised by a double ring of streets representing intramural and extramural roads. A similar layout can be noted at Nottingham and an interesting parallel, although of different date, survives, with gates themselves intact, at Rothenburg ob dem Tauber in West Germany. Lee noted the presence of Medieval markets immediately outside the postulated north and east gates of the Saxon borough. He also noted how the roads radiated outwards from these gates. To the north roads went north-east to Kettering and due north to Kingsthorpe and Leicester. With the movement of Northampton's centre eastwards and the foundation of St Andrew's priory the main north-south route moved eastwards, but the original route is still preserved in Semilong to the north of the priory. From the east gate roads led to Kettering and Wellingborough, Billing and Bedford. Indeed the Billing Road, lining up with Lee's east-west axis, could possibly have its origin as a Roman road between Duston and Irchester, but this is pure speculation. To the south of the river the Towcester Road is perfectly aligned with Lee's early river crossing. Lee's theory then, functioned well, but as we shall see later, represents a fairly late stage in the evolution of Saxon Northampton.

The definition of the Early Saxon settlement on the site of Northampton itself is considerably aggravated by the general lack of firm chronological indicators in the period AD 400-875. For over half this period there is no coinage at all and finds of 8th and 9th century coins are rare. The coarse hand-made gritty pottery found on 5th to 9th century sites maintains a basically unchanged tradition throughout this

Fig. 5 Funerary urns from the Early Saxon cemetery at Duston, now in Northampton Museum.

period and undecorated wares can rarely be specifically assigned to the Early Saxon period as opposed to the Middle Saxon period or vice versa.

Approximately 2,000 sherds of Early/Middle Saxon date have been found in the area around St Peter's church. Twenty-five of these sherds, mainly from Chalk Lane, are stamped and almost certainly of Early Saxon date — 4 sherds may belong to the late 5th — early 6th century, but the other 21 sherds are perhaps more appropriate to the early 7th century. The decorated vessels to which these sherds belong are commonly found in cremation cemeteries but there is no reason to suggest that these vessels were not used for domestic purposes. Many of the plain sherds then are again probably Early Saxon in date. There is also from St Peter's Street a fine composite disc brooch with repoussé decoration which probably dates to the late 5th or early 6th century. Definite structural evidence for the period is scarce and consists of two sunken-featured buildings excavated on the Chalk Lane site (*figs. 6, 8*). These rather mean huts, cut down into the ground, have produced radio-carbon dates centring on AD 470-525 and 660. A further sunken-featured building which has recently been uncovered just east of St Peter's church was probably also of Early Saxon date. How extensive the settlement was or indeed what its character was is difficult to say. Again was settlement continuous or interrupted? Nonetheless, in view of the developments in the Middle Saxon period, it is tempting to argue for it having some central role in relation to the surrounding countryside. The earliest Saxon settlement at Northampton may well have been established by a small independent group under its own leader and it is probably only in the later 6th and 7th centuries, during the emergence of the great Saxon kingdoms that such Midlands groups began to fuse together and be incorporated into the kingdom of Mercia.
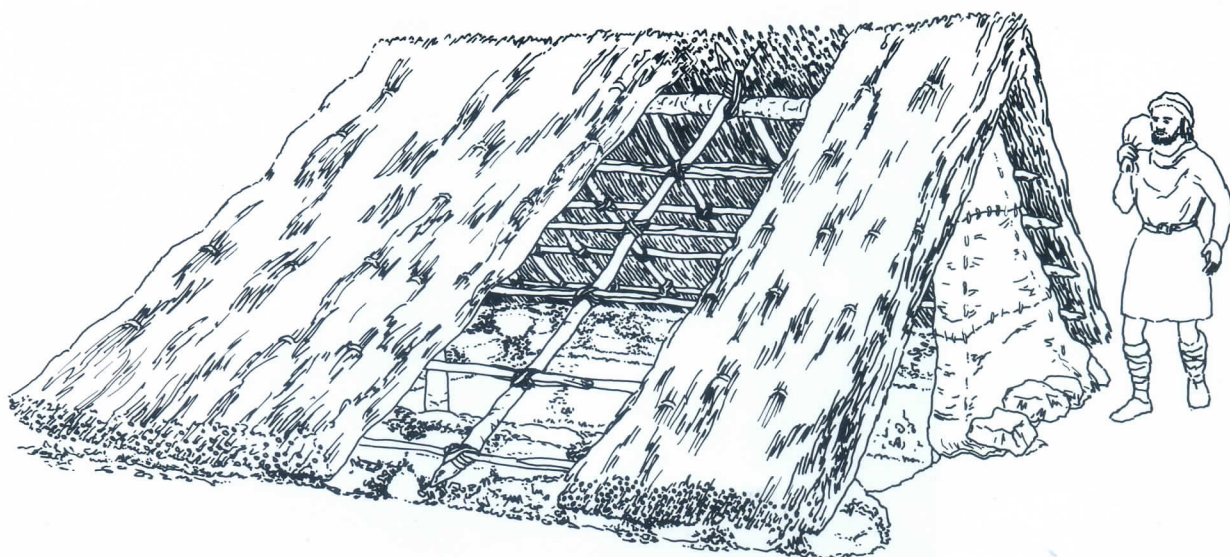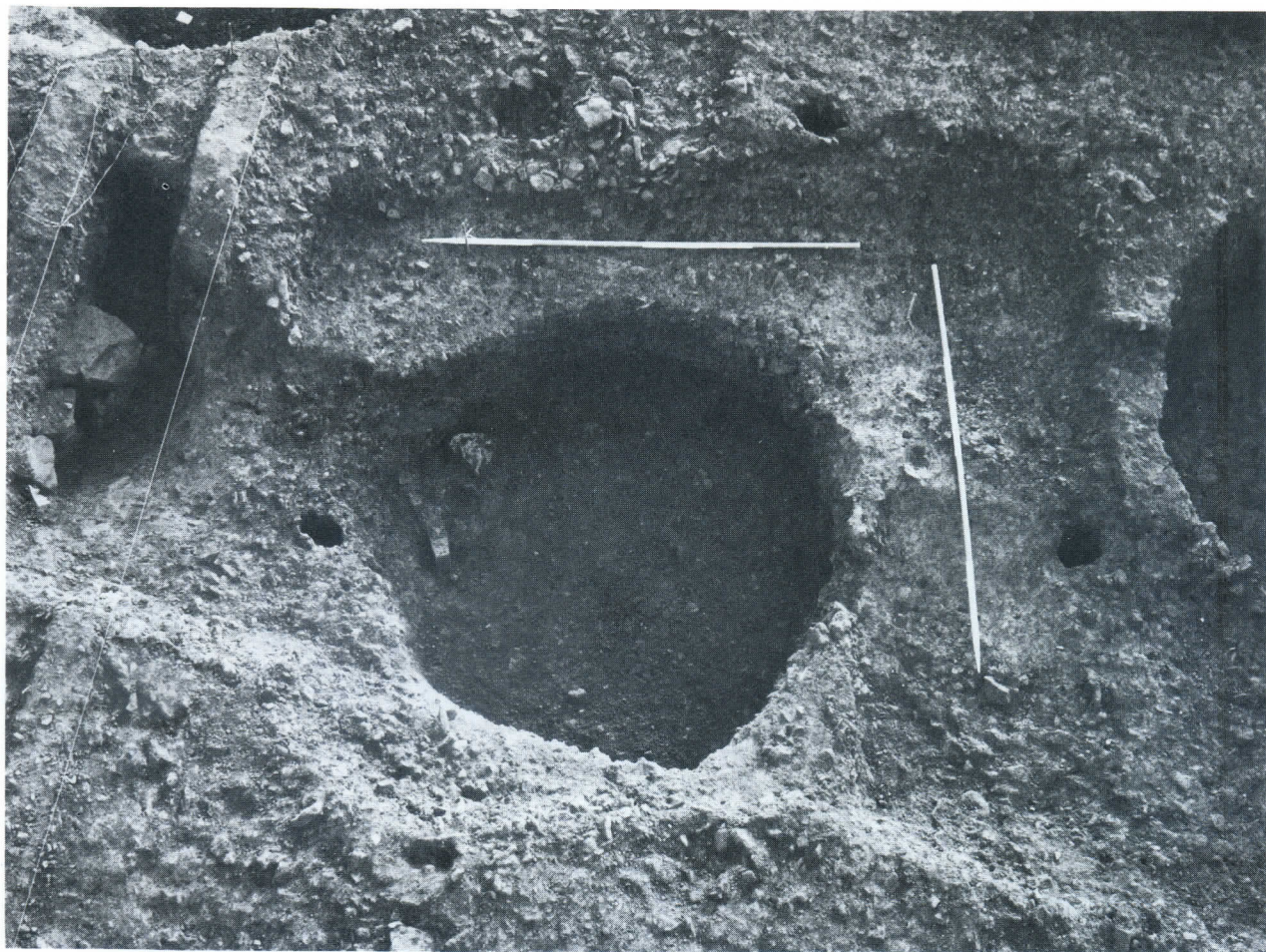
Fig. 6   Sunken-featured building, probably Early Saxon, on the Chalk Lane site. The scale is 2 metres long.
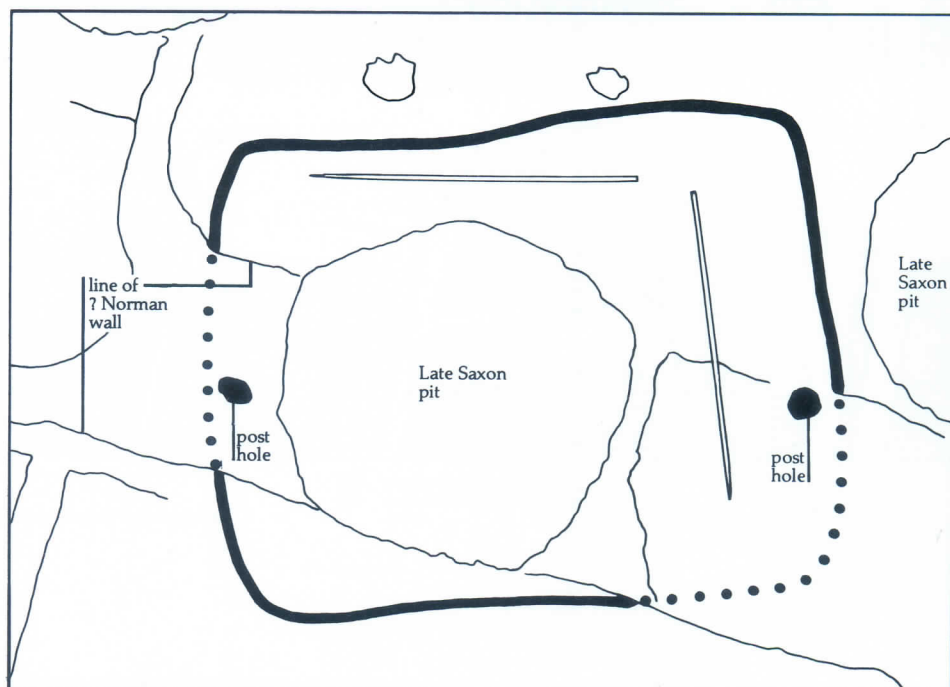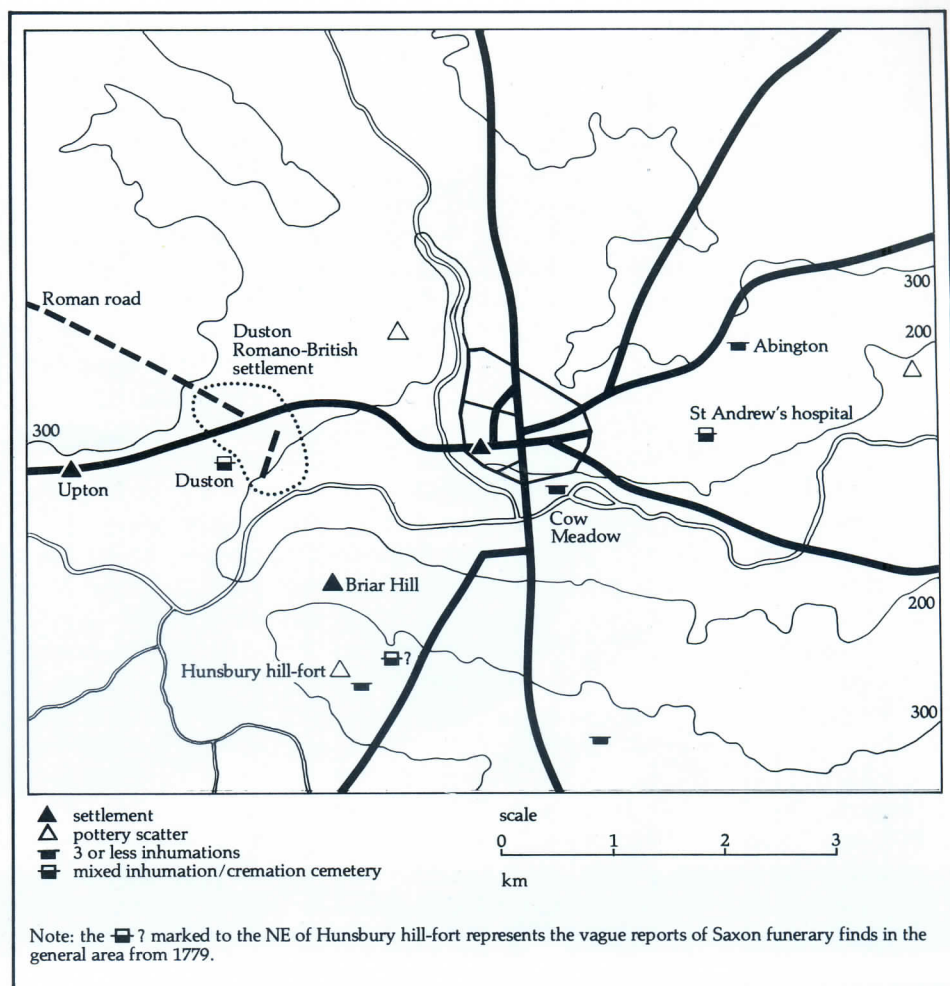
line of ? Norman wall

post hole

Late Saxon pit

post hole

Late Saxon pit

11

Fig. 7 Early Saxon cemeteries and settlements in the Northampton area.

Roman road

Duston Romano-British settlement

300

▲ Upton

Duston

△

Abington

300

200

△

St Andrew's hospital

▲

Cow Meadow

▲ Briar Hill

Hunsbury hill-fort △

?

200

300

▲   settlement
△   pottery scatter
▬   3 or less inhumations
⬛   mixed inhumation/cremation cemetery

scale

0   1   2   3

km

Note: the ⬛? marked to the NE of Hunsbury hill-fort represents the vague reports of Saxon funerary finds in the general area from 1779.

Middle Saxon (c 650-875)

Substantial construction trenches for a large timber building at least 12 metres long have been found immediately east of St Peter's church and a little to the south the corner of a further timber building has been excavated (*figs. 8-9*). Both these buildings probably date to the latter part of the 7th century; their function is discussed below.

In 1974 three Saxon mortar mixers were uncovered on St Peter's Street and in 1980 a further two were found a little to the north (*figs. 10-12*). The mixers, circular bowls cut down into the ground or built on its surface, varied in diameter
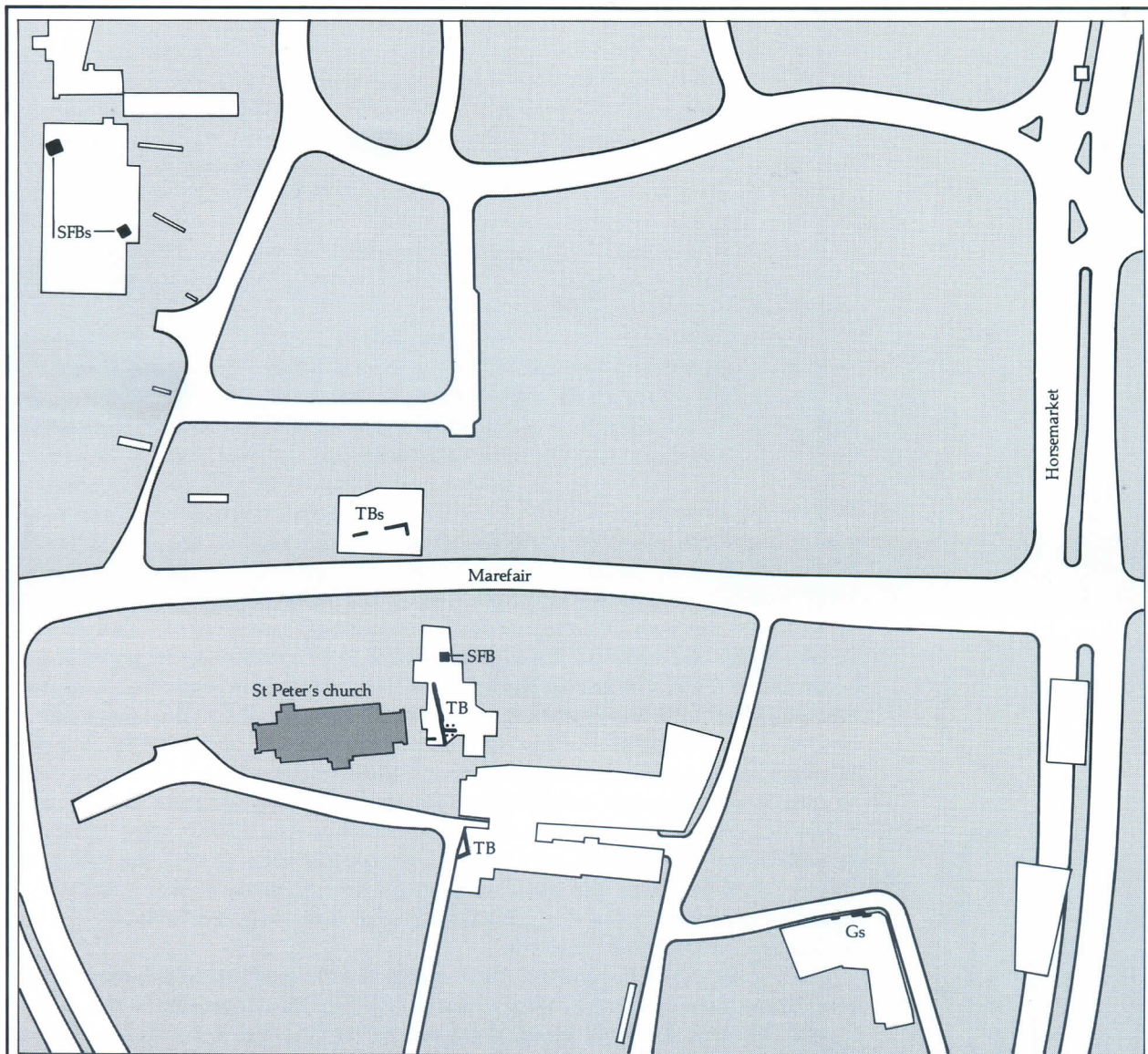

SFBs

Horsemarket

TBs

Marefair

St Peter's church

SFB

TB

TB

Gs

Fig. 8   Northampton c. AD 400-700.

Note: the Marefair timber buildings and the Gregory Street graves may post-date 700.

SFB   sunken-featured building
TB   post-built timber structure
G   grave

scale

0   50   100

metres

between 2 and 3 metres and all contained residues from mixing which facilitated the interpretation of these initially enigmatic structures. All had evidence of a central post and several had traces of basket work round their perimeter. Mixer 3 had a central ridge in which further holes were visible. On removal of the top residue from the mixer striations could be seen in the underlying mix, which lined up with the ridge holes. These striations were almost certainly the grooves scored by rotating paddles. Presumably the earlier residue was still soft when a fresh mix was being prepared and the different consistencies of the respective mixes preserved the indications of the rotary action of the mixer. Traces of grooves evidencing rotary motion were also present in the mixers excavated in 1980. The only possible parallel is the so-called building A at the Saxon monastery of Monkwearmouth in County Durham.

Just to the east of, and extending under St Peter's church, stone foundations of the east end of a building on an east-west alignment were found (*figs. 13-14*). The east wall had an internal mortar rendering and there were traces of a lime slurry on the floor. The mortar and slurry were compared scientifically with samples from the mixers and found to match reasonably well. Some 8 metres to the east were the remains of foundation trenches of a second stone building and a little further east was what appears to have been a boundary work consisting of a fence with a gully on its eastern side.

Radio-carbon dates from material associated with the first stone building (AD 740±85) and the mixers (AD 670±95, AD 680±65 and AD 900±70) suggest that building work was under way in the early 8th century. Pottery from robber trenches of the second stone building dates to the late 9th or early 10th century, a time when, according to further radio-carbon samples, the gully was silting up. The alignment of the first stone building and its proximity to St Peter's suggest it was almost certainly a church and a religious function for the other stone building is probable. Finds from St Peter's Street compatible with an ecclesiastical presence include a bronze shrine-fitting of late 8th century date and Irish manufacture, a bronze stylus with interlace decoration, again probably 8th century in date, a disc-headed bone pin with ring and dot decoration and a fragment of coloured glass vessel. About 100 metres to the south-east of St Peter's four oriented graves were excavated in 1978. The graves seemed to be overlaid by Late Saxon metalling and one which had Late Saxon pottery in its upper fill produced a radio-carbon date centred on AD 630±100. Further samples will be processed to test the validity of this date but St Gregory's church which lay some 10 metres to the north must now be considered a potential Middle Saxon foundation. The church was annexed to All Saints' in 1556 and subsequently converted into a free school. This was largely demolished in 1840 to make way for a warehouse but some parts of the Medieval church fabric have survived upstanding to this day. A further timber building was found on the Marefair site and it is probable that there was Middle Saxon occupation on the Chalk Lane site.

The Middle Saxon occupation, then, was probably confined to an area of 20-25 acres immediately around St Peter's church (*fig. 14*). But what was the status of Northampton at this time? It would appear that St Peter's church was founded as an 'old minster' or mother church for the surrounding countryside in which lay daughter chapels. This was the normal form of organisation of the early church and minster foundations were usually on royal land and by royal grant. In this context the second stone building may have been a second church within a family of churches, a not uncommon arrangement within minster complexes. Perhaps the best example of this is St Augustine's, Canterbury.

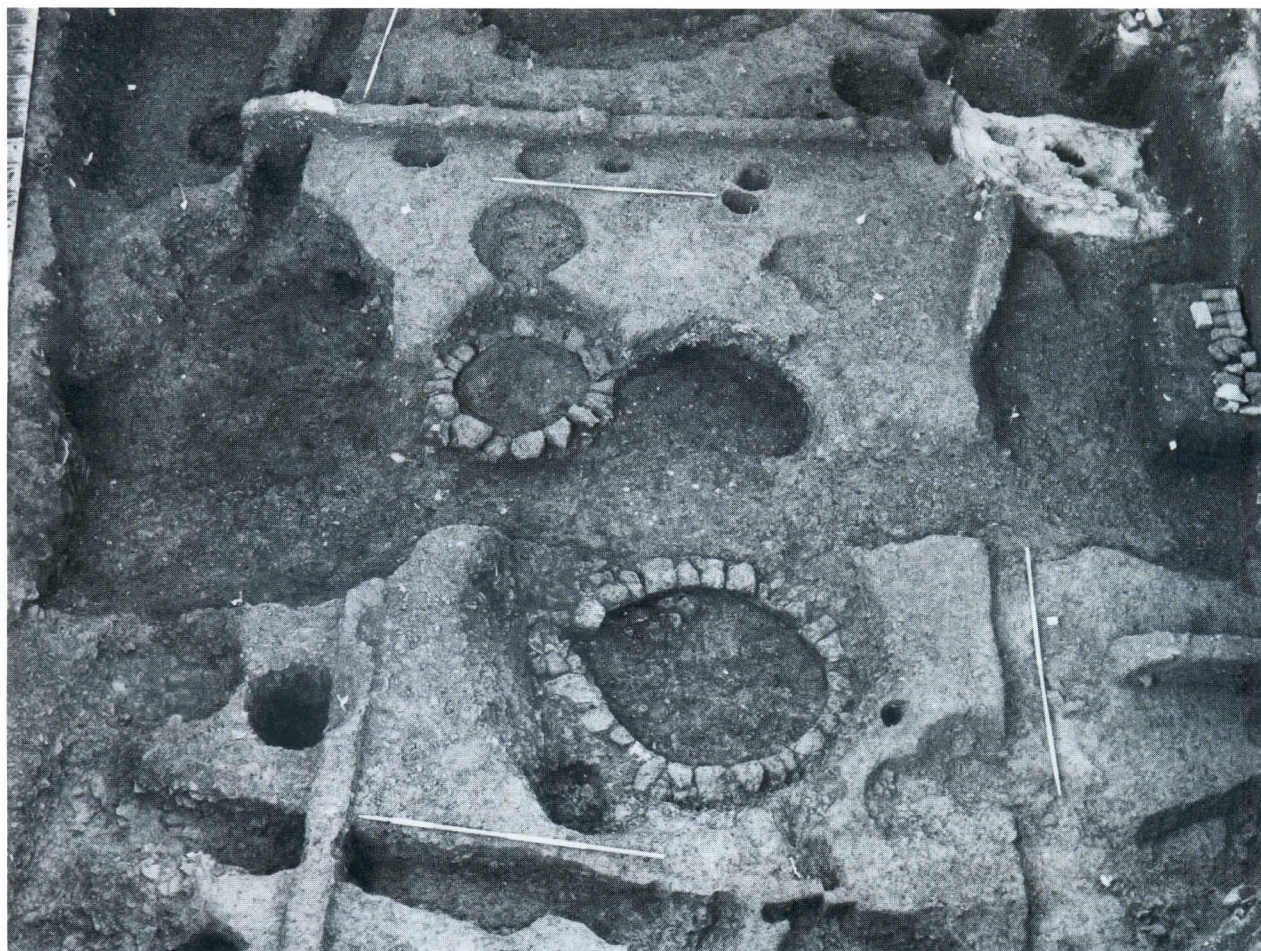Later documentary evidence lends weight to the idea (*fig. 15*). During the

Fig. 9 Part of the area excavated to the east of St Peter's church showing:
i) the foundation trench for the pre-church timber building
ii) the holes where two posts of a four-post timber structure stood
iii) the remains of a mortar mixer (see fig. 12)
iv) the robbed out foundation trench of the second stone building.
The scales are 2 metres long.

15
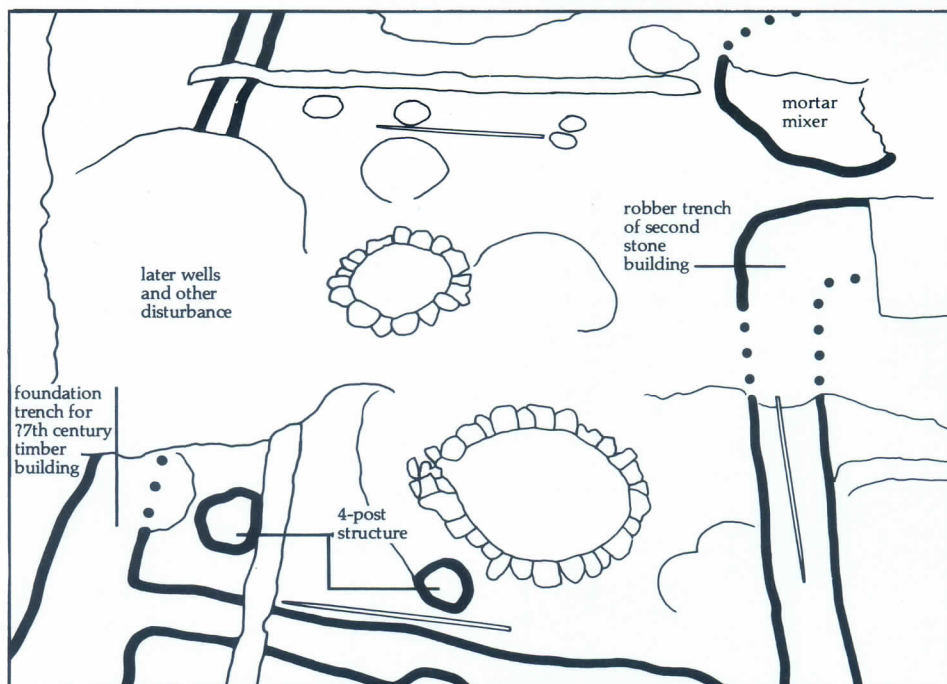
Middle Ages St Peter's had two dependent chapels, at Upton, 2 miles to the west, and at Kingsthorpe, 1¾ miles due north. Kingsthorpe became a parish church in 1850, but Upton is still dependent on St Peter's. Both Upton and Kingsthorpe were recorded as royal manors in Domesday Book and both are subsequently hundredal manors, Upton for the 1½ hundreds of Nobottle Grove and Kingsthorpe for the hundred of Spelhoe in which Northampton was situated. A hundred was a Saxon administrative unit within the shire (Northamptonshire was divided into 32 hundreds) and the hundredal manor was in effect the chief manor of the hundred and responsible for collecting the King's revenue from that hundred. St Peter's church thus appears to be at the centre of a royal estate serving outlying members of the same estate. The additional presence of St Gregory's church, unusual at this early date but paralleled at Canterbury, Worcester and Hereford, would provide further support for the idea of Northampton already being a centre of some importance.

Place name evidence seems to confirm the hypothesis. In the 'Place Names of Northamptonshire' published in 1933, Gover, Mawer and Stenton argued that 'It is on the whole probable that the Old English *hamtun* generally carried something of the sense of the modern "home farm" or in more general terms of a central residence as contrasted with out-lying and dependent holdings. It suggests a time when something anticipatory of later manorial development had begun to appear — the 8th rather than the 6th century . . . it may be surmised that the original Northampton was a royal residence and estate at which were rendered the dues payable by the men of the folk — the provincia or regio — settled around it.'

But can the royal estate have originated even earlier than the foundation of the minster church? The substantial ?7th century timber buildings noted earlier are perhaps more in keeping with a 'manorial' site rather than an ordinary domestic residence.

Fig. 10 A reconstruction of one of the mortar mixers.
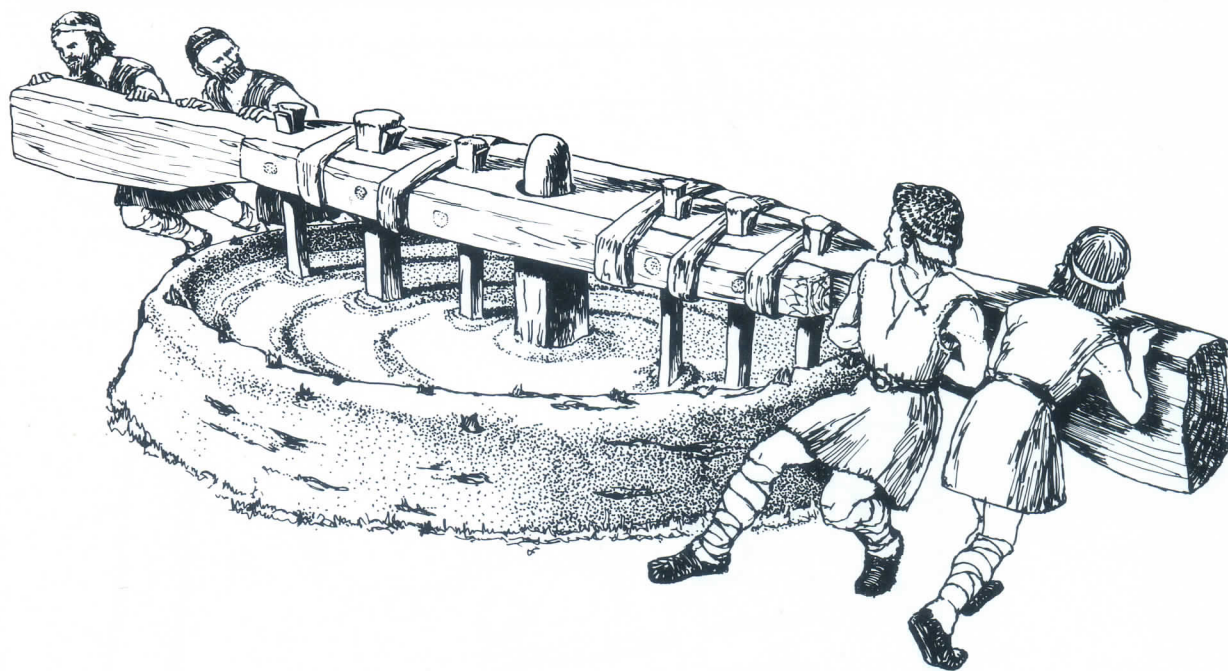

16

Fig. 11 One of the mortar mixers excavated in 1974. The void left by the decay or removal of the central post subsequent to the mortar setting can be seen and also, to the left of this post hole, voids of two of the paddles. The rotary motion of the paddles has been fossilised by the concentric grooves scored in the mortar. The scale is 1 metre long.
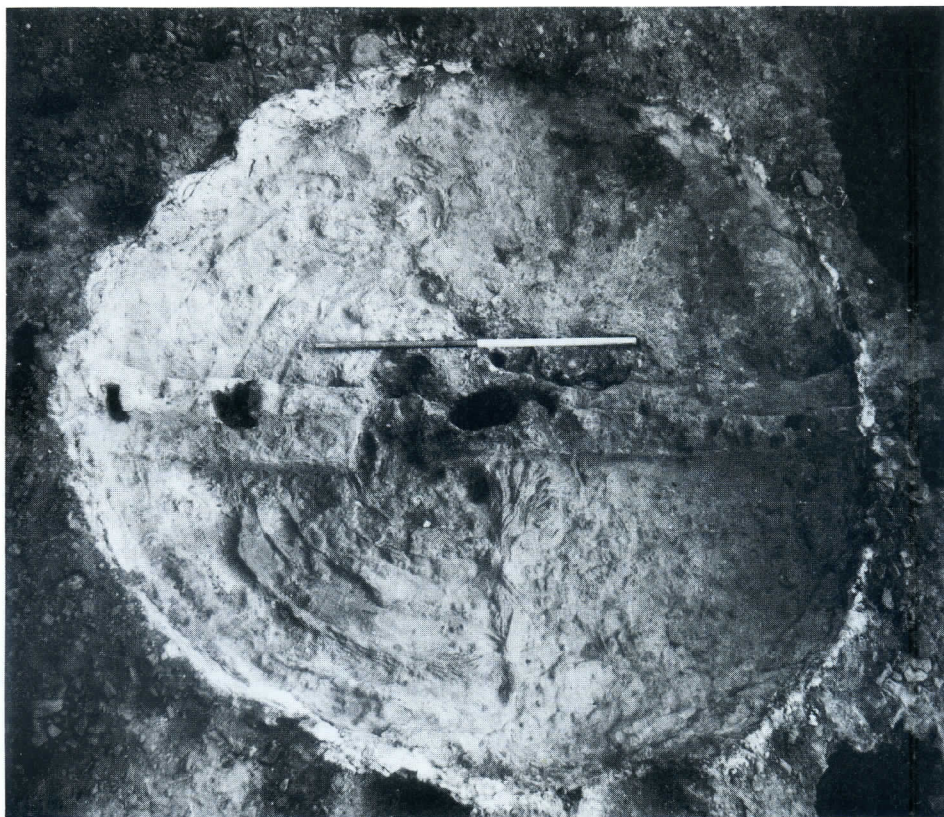

Fig. 12 One of the mixers excavated in 1981. The central post hole is immediately left of the scale and concentric grooves in the mortar again bear witness to rotary motion. The scale is 1 metre long.
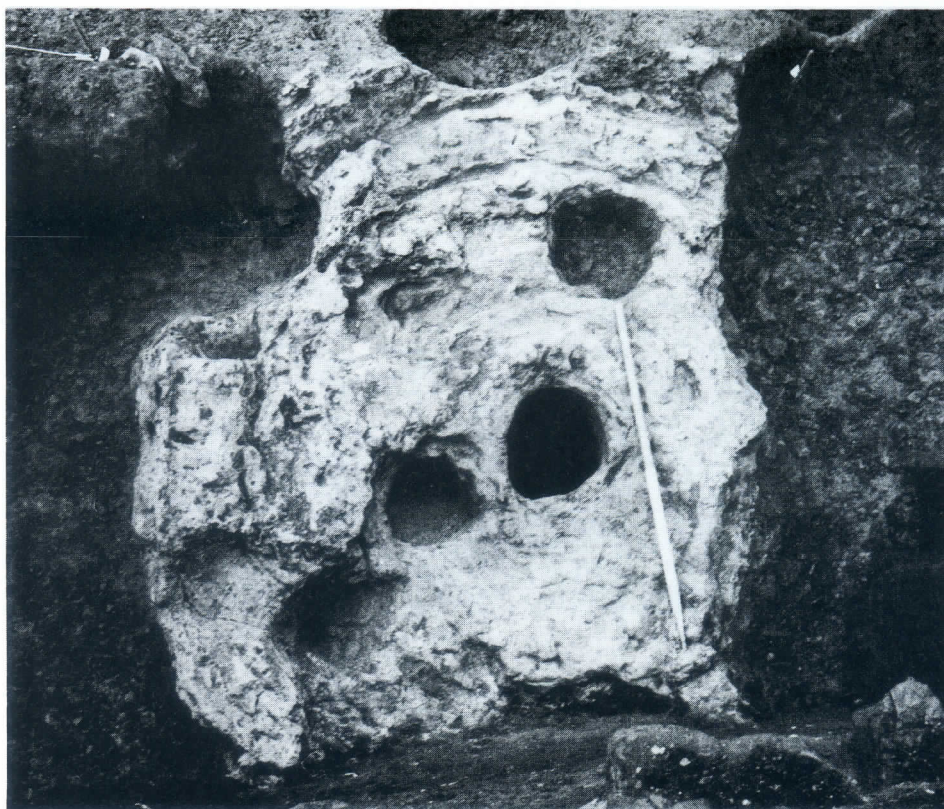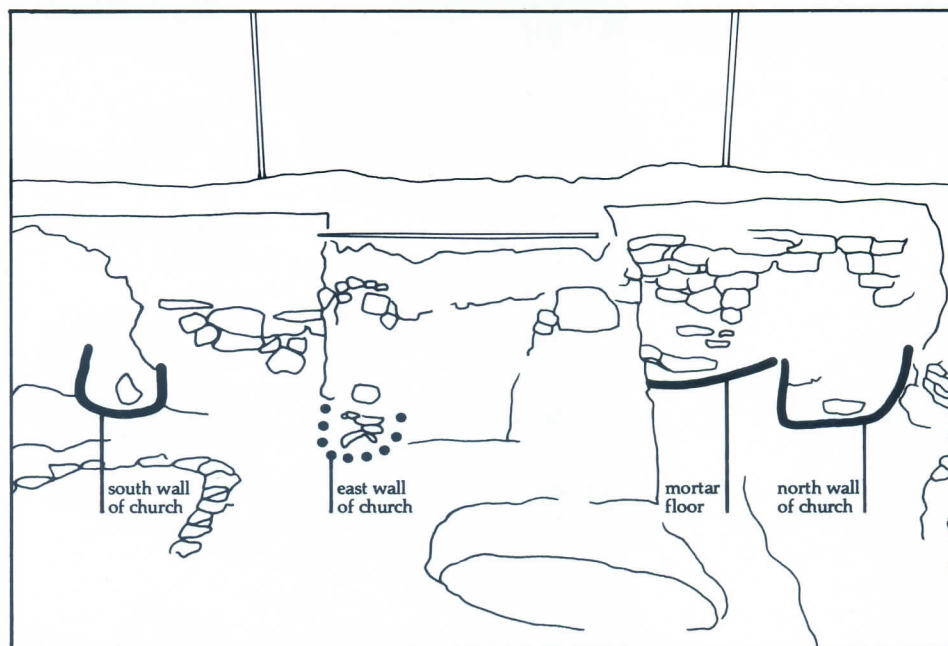
Fig. 13 Remains of the Middle
Saxon church on the site of
St Peter's. The scale is 2 metres long.

south wall
of church

east wall
of church

mortar
floor

north wall
of church

In discussing place names the significance of Kingsthorpe should be considered. The 'king' element first appears in the 12th century, although we have already noted that Kingsthorpe was a royal manor in Domesday Book. It has been suggested that Thorpe by Norwich may have been the seat of a royal power with a special relationship to Norwich, and by a parallel argument it could be suggested that Kingsthorpe was the royal residence with Northampton the trading centre. In view, however, of the early foundation of St Peter's church it is perhaps preferable in this case to take the commoner Old English usage of Thorpe as a small or secondary settlement.
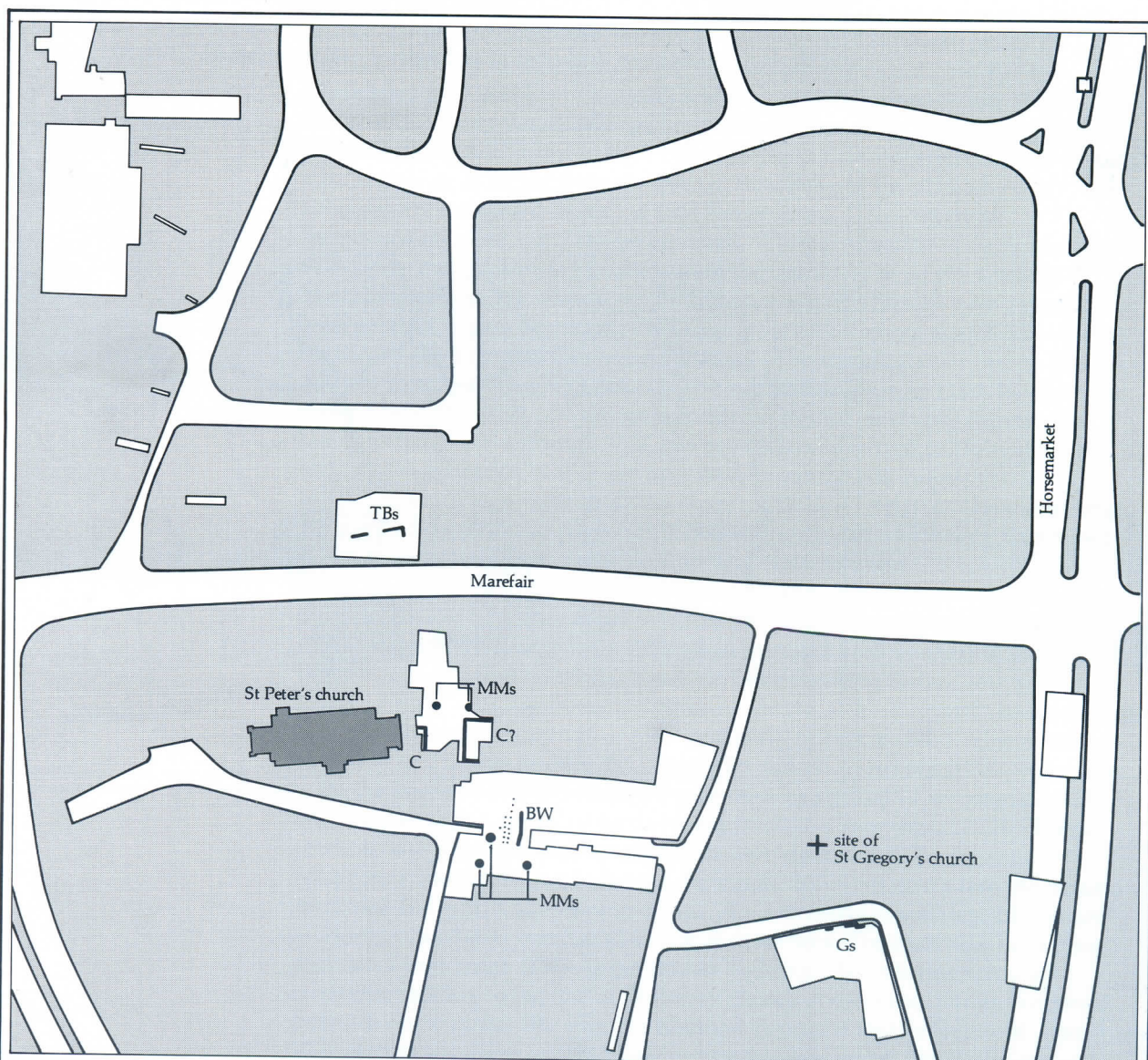

Fig. 14   Northampton c.AD 700-875.

Note: the Marefair timber buildings and the Gregory Street graves may pre-date 700.

BW	boundary work
MM	mortar mixer
C	church
TB	post-built timber structure
G	grave

scale

0   50   100

metres

The arguments are considerable for Northampton being the head of a substantial royal estate with influence extending over a wide area from at least as early as the first half of the 8th century and probably from the 7th century. Some sort of administrative function is implicit and probably also a military role, if only as a rallying point. A deliberate policy of town plantation in Mercia, perhaps by Offa (757-96), has been suggested but there seems little basis for relating Northampton's foundation or growth to such a hypothesis which seems to rest on rather tenuous evidence. A somewhat more gradual and organic growth towards urban status is more appropriate to the evidence as yet available from Northampton. The limited physical extent of the hamtun settlement must be emphasised, but nonetheless Northampton almost certainly played an important role during the Mercian domination of England under Aethebald (716-57) and Offa.

Fig. 15 Northampton, Kingsthorpe and Upton.
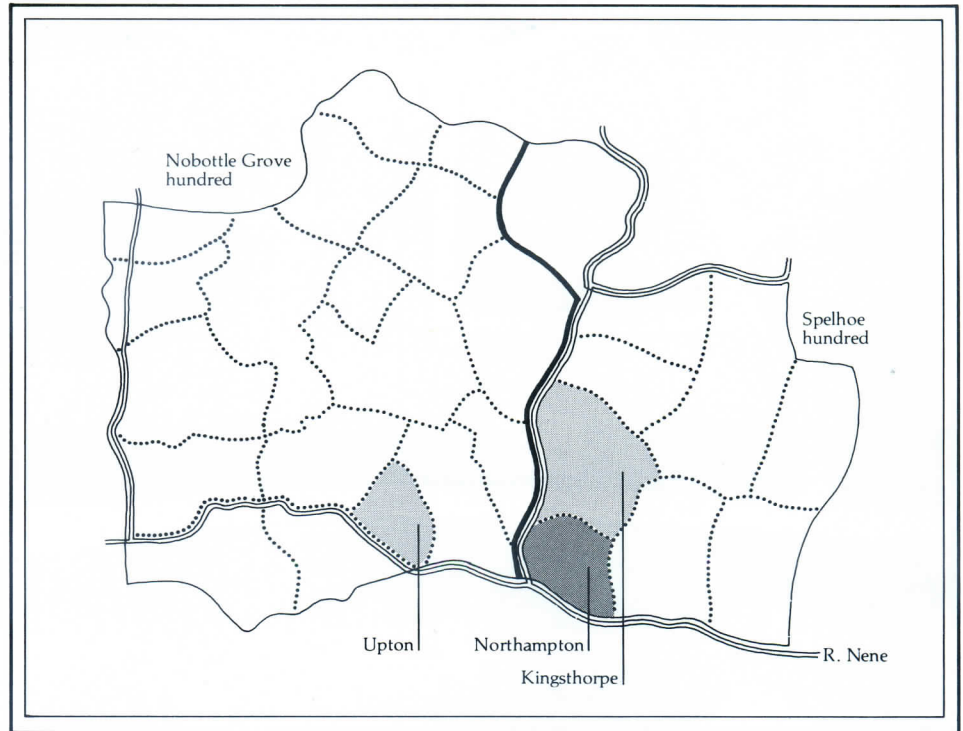
Danish and Late Saxon (c 875-1066)

During the 9th century England was once more under attack from the continent, this time by the Danes who gradually pushed forward from the east coast to the Midlands, creating the so-called Danelaw, until checked by King Alfred. A treaty between the Danish leader Guthrum and Alfred in 886 fixed the boundary between Saxon England and the Danelaw, which in Northamptonshire probably ran along Watling Street. In the early 10th century, under Alfred's son Edward and Aethelflaed queen of the Mercians, the Saxons began to recapture the Danelaw.

At the time of these campaigns Northampton was very much on the frontier between the opposing armies (*fig. 16*). In the later 9th century it was a Danish centre, but what was its function? The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, under the year 913, relates 'the [Danish] army from Northampton rode out.' For 917 the Chronicle states 'and Earl Thurferth and the holds submitted to him [Edward] and so did all the army which belonged to Northampton as far north as the Welland.' Thus Northampton seems to have been the Danish administrative centre for an area stretching as far north as the present boundary of the shire and this arrangement continued under the Late Saxon kings. Other traces of Scandinavianisation can perhaps be noted. When in the time of Aethelred II an ealdorman named Aelfric bought land in the 'assembly of all the army' at Northampton, we are witnessing the continuation of a Danish administrative or legal practice. Again Northampton's town court throughout the Middle Ages is known by the Scandinavian name 'hustings'. The significance of this is, however, difficult to assess. King Richard's charter to Northampton in 1189, in which the right to hold the court of hustings is formally granted, is clearly copying the London charters of 1155 and 1194 and either the court itself or the name may derive from a London model and be a comparatively late innovation in Northampton. Place-name evidence is not particularly helpful. There is a fairly significant Scandinavian place-name element north-east of Watling Street, but such names are relatively infrequent around Northampton.

While emphasising Northampton's military and administrative importance at this time the documentary records tell us little about the character of the place. Archaeological evidence is also difficult to interpret because there is little difference in material culture between the Danes and the Saxons and artifacts cannot normally be attributed to one group or the other. Certainly under the Late Saxon kings Northampton flourished as a town but when did it achieve urban status? Was it before or after 917? Firstly let us look at the results of excavation.

At the west end of the St Peter's Street site was a group of rectangular timber buildings arranged around a yard entered through a gate (*figs. 17, 19*). Metal-working was practised and furnaces have been discovered. To the east were four sunken-featured buildings, huts with floors cut down into the natural ironstone and with a simple ridged roof. An interesting assemblage of iron and worked-bone objects was found in one of these huts. The huts may have been associated with some of the larger timber buildings. No information was recovered relating to the fate of St Peter's church at this time, but its continued presence on its earlier site after the Norman Conquest and its links with Upton and Kingsthorpe suggest it suffered little lasting damage, either physically or organisationally, through the Danish occupation, although the second stone building seems to have been robbed and the boundary gully silted up about this time. The Chalk Lane site affords complementary but different evidence. Two major structural phases can be detected. At the beginning of the 10th century a timber building measuring 10×3.5 metres was constructed with a small cellar approximately 3 metres square. Just outside the building was a large sunken-

York

Lincoln

Chester

Derby   Nottingham

Stafford

Shrewsbury   Leicester   Stamford   Norwich

DANELAW

Huntingdon
Northampton
Worcester   Cambridge
Bedford
Hereford

Buckingham   Colchester
Gloucester   Hertford
Oxford

London

Canterbury

Winchester
Southampton

.... boundary of Danelaw fixed by the treaty between Alfred and Guthrum in 886

featured building. This complex was replaced by another timber building and the
layout of the site at this time is most interesting. To the north was a heavily pitted
area, perhaps for the disposal of waste; to the west was an unpitted area, probably
a yard, while the land to the south was cultivated. Certainly there is no evidence
of dense settlement here and although there is industrial activity, particularly
metal-working (bronze, silver, iron) the presence of agricultural activity within the
town only emphasises the agricultural origins of Northampton and its still heavy
dependence on agriculture at this time of growing trade and economic
diversification. Northampton had extensive town fields to the north and east
which probably covered some 1,000 acres. On the evidence from the Medieval
period a three field system was in operation.

On Gregory Street two rectangular timber buildings, aligned north-south,

fronted on to a possible lane (*fig. 18*). Underneath the lane was the series of possibly Middle Saxon graves previously discussed which were presumably associated with St Gregory's church. In addition to the Middle Saxon foundations of St Peter's and perhaps St Gregory's, All Saints' may also have been pre-Conquest in origin as a church in the market place outside the east gate, but the other urban churches appear to be later.

The finds seem to indicate a more commercial and industrial society than earlier. There was a mint from at least the mid-10th century and certainly there is an increase in the number of coins found in Northampton dating from the 10th century onwards. The study of the Northampton mint is, however, made more difficult by the fact that all its pre-Conquest coins bear the mint signature HAMTUN, the same signature as Southampton, but research on the dies of the coins has established that Northampton was a mint at least from the reign of Eadwig (955-9) onwards and it would appear that at any one time several moneyers were active in the town (*fig. 20*). Iron smelting furnaces were found on St Peter's Street, together with evidence for copper working by way of slag, crucible fragments and a small piece of a mould. Copper and iron working is attested on the Marefair site together with silver working and possibly glass enamel manufacture. Furthermore, there is a fairly large collection of crucible fragments from Chalk Lane, again probably indicating silver, bronze and iron working. The silver working is of particular interest in view of the apparent strict


Fig. 17 A reconstruction of part of Late Saxon Northampton based on the excavated evidence from St Peter's Street.

control over gold and silver in the Late Saxon period and the possibility of a mint in this part of the town cannot be discounted. Pottery was produced in Northampton, namely Northampton ware, a hard sandy fabric similar to Stamford ware. Part of a kiln was salvaged in a pipe trench in 1972. The other dominant pottery was St Neots type ware (*fig. 21*), which may also have been produced locally, but regional imports include Stamford ware, Thetford type ware and Leicester type ware and there are also a few continental imports. Hones from Eidsborg, Norway, further evidence trade with Europe both before and after the Norman Conquest. Bone and antler working was practised in the St Peter's Street area where antler waste and several pieces of worked antler were excavated. Bone combs, needles, thread pickers and bobbins indicate textile manufacture (*fig. 22*). A few herring bones, again from St Peter's Street, perhaps suggest at least limited

Fig. 18 Late Saxon timber buildings in Gregory Street during excavation in 1979.

possible Late Saxon timber buildings comprising 'post-holes' for timber uprights

disturbed

later pits
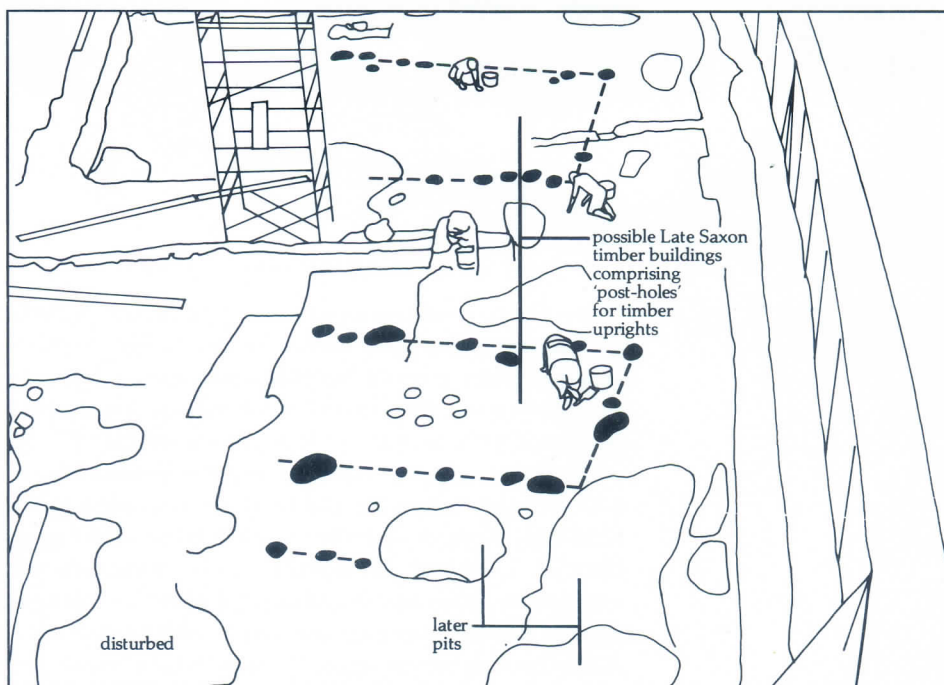
trade in perishable foodstuffs with the east coast.

The overall chronology and lay-out of Danish and Late Saxon Northampton can now be examined. From the Chalk Lane and St Peter's Street excavations a total of six St Edmund Memorial pennies have been found and a further three were discovered on the site of the castle in the late 19th century as well as seven coins of Edward the Elder (these last pennies were, however, a single find). The St Edmund Memorial pennies are Danish coins minted in the southern Danelaw prior to 910 and while it is possible that individual coins continued in circulation until 930 it is
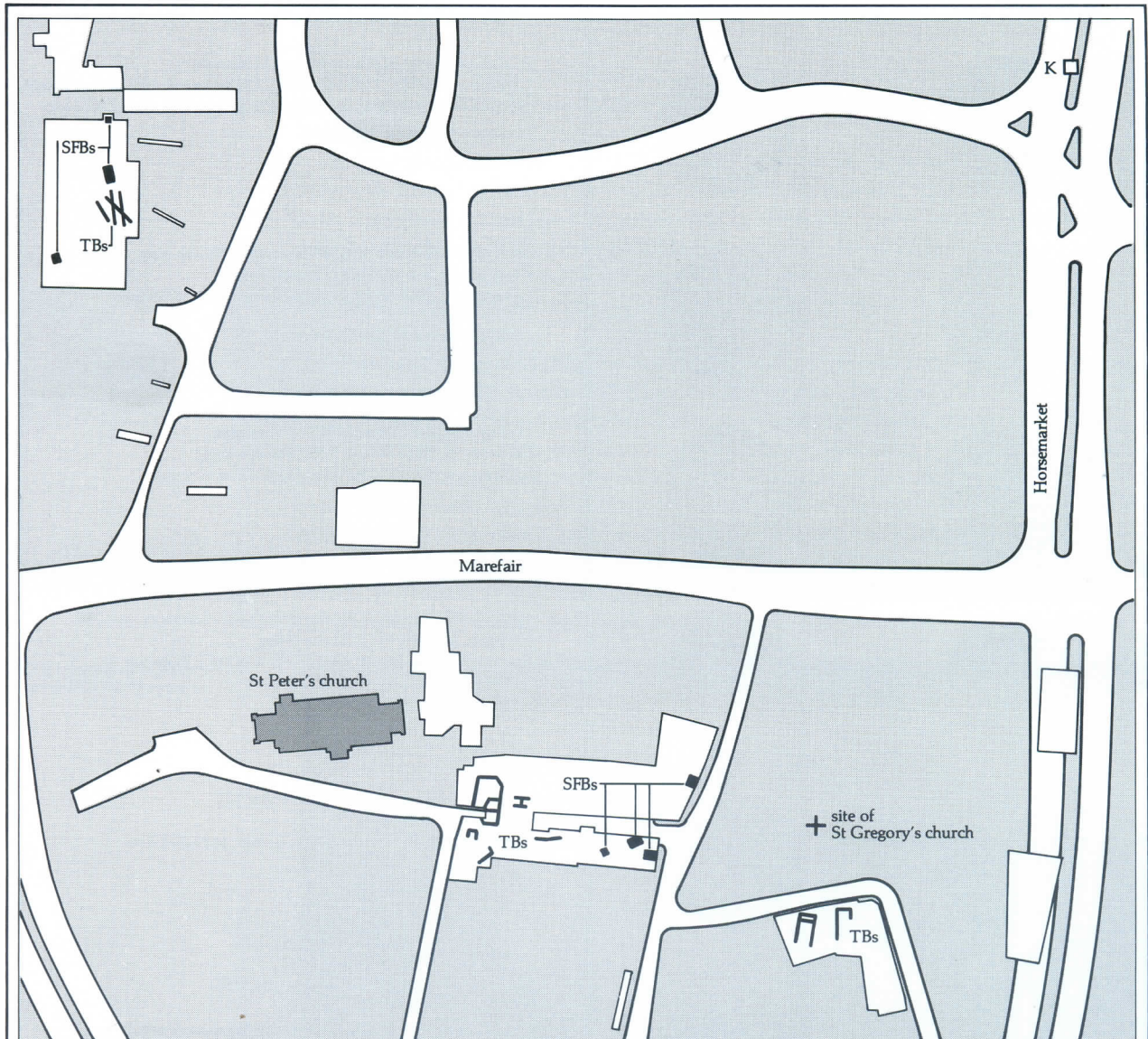

Fig. 19   Northampton c.AD 875-1066.

SFB   sunken-featured building
TB   post-built timber structure
K   kiln

scale

0   50   100

metres

25

Fig. 20 Saxon and early Medieval silver pennies from the Northampton mint in the Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum. Some of the letters are 'elided' or joined together, for example on the obverse of no 2 | Æ = A E and |NG = N G. The prefix NOR which distinguishes *North*ampton from *South*ampton is not present before the Norman Conquest.

1 EADGAR (reigned 959-979) Post-reform issue.
    Obverse: + EADGAR · REX ANGLOX (Eadgar, king of the English)
    Reverse: + CYLM MO HANTVN (Cylm moneyer of Hamtun)

2 Aethelred II (reigned 978-1016) Long-cross type.
    Obverse: + ÆÐELRED REX ANGLO (Aethelred, king of the English)
    Reverse: + LEOFPINE MΩO HAM (Leofwine moneyer of Hamtun)

3 Edward the Confessor (reigned 1042-1066) Helmet type.
    Obverse: + EDP<R · REX (Edward, king)
    Reverse: + ÆLFPINE ON HAMT (Aelfwine, at Hamtun)

4 William I (reigned 1066-1089) Two stars type.
    Obverse: + PILLEM REX ANI (William, king)
    Reverse: + SEPINE ON HMT (Saewine, at Hamtun)

5 Henry I (reigned 1100-1135) British Museum Catalogue type XIII.
    Obverse: HENRICUS R (Henry, king)
    Reverse: + GEFRE:ON · HAMTVN (Geffrei at Hamtun)

6 Henry I British Museum Catalogue type XIII.
    Obverse: same die as no 5
    Reverse: G(EFRE) · ON · NORHA (Geffrei, at Norhantun)

7 Henry I British Museum Catalogue type XIV.
    Obverse: HENRICUS R
    Reverse: + STIFNE:ON:NORHA (Stifne at Norhantun)

unlikely that all these coins were deposited in Northampton after 917. It is probable then that the earliest levels on the St Peter's Street and Chalk Lane sites belonged to the period of the Danish occupation and the nature of the settlement, perhaps the silver working in particular, suggests that we are dealing with an urban community. This is important for although excavations have demonstrated that York and Lincoln were important trading centres at this time little is known of such Danelaw centres as Nottingham, Derby, Leicester and Stamford and the possibility that these places were essentially fortresses could not be discounted. The Northampton evidence suggests that there was at least an incipient urban network growing up in the Danelaw probably during the last quarter of the 9th century.

King Edward, then, took over a probably flourishing centre which continued to prosper during the 10th and 11th centuries. In 1010 the town was referred to as a 'port' or market centre.

As regards the lay-out of Northampton it still seems reasonable to accept Lee's defensive line as referring to the Danish and/or Late Saxon town. Trenches have been excavated across Lee's supposed line to the north of the town and revealed possible ditches, but the findings were inconclusive. Most of the recent excavations have also been confined to the western half of the 60 acre enclosure, but casual finds, though extremely limited are not inconsistent with the town covering such an area.

It has been suggested that the burhs of Wessex were laid out with defences and a planned network of streets in the late 9th century as part of an Alfredian design in order to provide effective military bases to counter the Danes and to establish viable centres for future economic growth. These ideas seem to have been applied by some recent scholars to the almost total exclusion of organic growth both inside and outside Wessex and it is interesting, therefore, to look at Northampton in relation to such ideas. At first sight, with the two axial roads intersecting centrally and at right angles and with other streets laid out approximately parallel to one or other of them, it would appear that a reasonable case for deliberate planning could be made out. It should be noted, however, that the roads do not

Fig. 21   Late Saxon pottery excavated in Northampton.

deviate at the gates, but continue straight along their way, particularly that northwards to Leicester and that eastwards to Billing. With the erection of the defences associated with the crossroads, streets developing parallel to either of the main axes would be most natural. The buildings excavated, while aligned generally north-south or east-west are not regularly disposed and certainly on St Peter's Street there is a very loose settlement pattern (*fig. 19*). Indeed it should be noted that some degree of formalisation of the St Peter's Street area occurred after the Norman Conquest.

If Northampton's development over the whole of the Saxon period is considered it is clear that there was a settlement from Early Saxon times onwards. The occupation probably continued without break, sometimes developing more slowly and sometimes more quickly. At least from c.700 it was a royal centre at the head of an estate and from that time onwards it steadily assumed an increased commercial, administrative, military and political role. Fresh stimuli were probably provided by the Danish settlement and the general expansion in the 10th century under the Saxon kings, but the picture so far emerging is one of consolidation over several centuries rather than imposed and planned growth at a single or indeed several moments of time.

Fig. 22 Late Saxon bonework excavated in Northampton: top, combs and a comb case; middle right, decorated disc and spindle whorls; bottom, thread pickers, casket mounts, bobbins and needles.
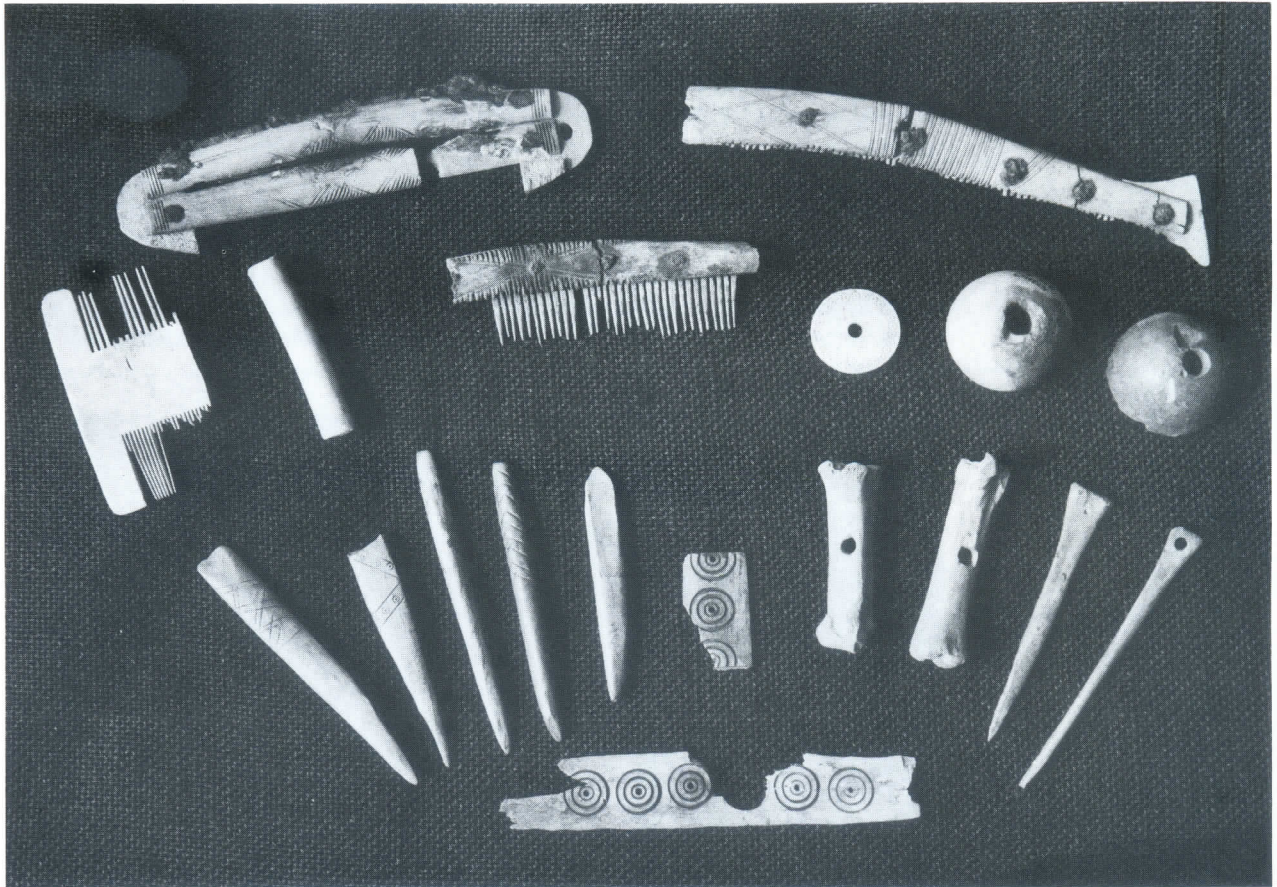
The Middle Ages

Rise and Fall

In Domesday Book, the great national census which was compiled for William the Conqueror in 1086, Northampton is recorded as a town of between 291 and 301 houses with 36 waste plots (*fig. 23*). The total population was perhaps 1500. A variety of personages, including such nobles as the Countess Judith, the bishop of Coutances and the Count of Mortain all held property within the town but the king was the chief landowner with 87 houses and 13 waste plots. Northampton was thus a middle-sized county town, although in terms of population probably smaller than present day villages such as Brixworth, and rendered an annual tax or 'farm' to the king of £30 10s. The farms of London and Winchester are not recorded in Domesday Book but we know that London contributed £300 at this time. York and Lincoln were the next highest with £100 and Northampton, ranking approximately 20th, was among a group of towns, including Chichester, Derby, Guildford, Ipswich, Lewes, Nottingham, Torksey and Worcester, which paid between £30 and £40. Waltheof, the Saxon earl of Northampton, had married King William's niece, the Countess Judith, and although Waltheof was subsequently executed for treason in 1076, this marriage almost certainly consolidated Northampton's position. Indeed, as at Nottingham and Norwich, a new borough or 'novus burgus', comprising 40 burgesses, possibly French settlers, had been added to the town by 1086.

Simon de Senlis I, probably a cadet of the great Bouteillers family of Senlis, one of the most powerful in France in the 12th and 13th centuries, married Maud, the daughter of Waltheof and Judith. He was probably granted the earldom and the town of Northampton by William Rufus in 1089 and this dynasty continued in Northampton for the next 100 years. Simon died sometimes between 1111 and 1113 and the town reverted to the king. Maud, however, Simon's widow, had meanwhile in 1113 married King David of Scotland and there is some evidence that David acquired the earldom. By 1138, however, Simon de Senlis II, the son of Simon de Senlis I and Maud, had gained both the earldom and the town as a reward for his loyalty to Stephen. Simon de Senlis II died in 1153 but his son Simon de Senlis III, still under age at the time, did not become earl until 1159. Simon remained earl until 1184 when he died but he never acquired the town which reverted to King Henry II on Simon de Senlis' death and from 1154 Northampton remained a royal borough.

During the period of the Senlis earls Northampton probably reached the height of its prosperity. Simon I founded St Andrew's priory, which in many ways came to dominate the town, probably began the construction of the castle and according to tradition enclosed the expanding town with new walls, and Simon II founded Delapré Abbey. Certainly by 1130 the farm of the town had remarkably more than trebled to £100 and this was further raised to £120 in 1184. Indeed, at the end of the 12th century Northampton's farm was exceeded only by those of London, Lincoln, Winchester and Dunwich. Also, in a ranking of towns based on aids and tallages (special taxes rendered to the king) between 1158 and 1214, Northampton never fell below seventh position, in 1172 was third behind London and Lincoln and in 1176/7 was only surpassed by London itself.

Northampton was a trading centre and its markets and fairs were important. The first reference to a fair at Northampton occurs during the time of Simon de Senlis II although it is very likely that there was a fair in pre-Conquest times. The fair, indeed, became one of the great fairs of England alongside those of Boston, St Ives and Winchester. Certainly during the reigns of John and Henry III considerable purchases are recorded for the royal household, particularly of furs and cloth, and cloth almost certainly played a considerable part in Northampton's economic growth. In 1202, when Northampton, along with Leicester and

Tempore Regis Edwardi fuer(unt) in Northantone in d(omi)nio regis lx burgenses h(abe)ntes totid(em) mansiones. Ex his sunt m(odo) xiiii vaste. Residue sunt xlvii. Preter hos sunt m(odo) in novo burgo xl burgenses in d(omi)nio regis Will(elm)i.

In ipso burgo h(abe)t Ep(iscopu)s constantiensis xxiii domos de xxix solid(is) et iiii denar(iis).

Abb(as) de S(ancto) Edmundo i domu(m) de xvi denar(iis).

Abb(as) de Burg xv dom(us) de xiiii sol(idis) et viii den(ariis).

Due s(un)t vaste.

Abbas de Ramesyg i domu(m) de xvi denar(iis).

Abbas de Coventreu iiii dom(us) de xii denar(iis). Tres s(un)t vaste.

In the time of King Edward (the Confessor) there were in Northampton in the lordship of the king 60 burgesses having as many residences.

Of these 14 are now waste. 47 are left. Besides these there are now in the new borough 40 burgesses in the lordship of King William.

In the same borough the Bishop of Coutances has 23 houses at 29s 4d.

The Abbot of St Edmund's, 1 house at 16d.

The Abbot of Peterborough, 15 houses at 14s 8d. Two are waste.

The Abbot of Ramsey, 1 house at 16d.

The Abbot of Coventry, 2 houses at 12d. Three are waste.

Winchester, paid the king £10 to be free of the assize of cloth, only Lincoln, York and Beverly paid more and at one time there were apparently 300 weavers in the town. Northampton's political importance, as indicated by frequent royal visits, probably stimulated more general expansion.

Its prominence as an urban centre is further demonstrated by the presence of all four major orders of friars and a sizeable Jewry. For some time Northampton was also a centre of learning. Schools are known at Northampton as early as 1176 but in 1264, after some of the masters and students of the university which had been

expelled from Oxford had apparently settled in Northampton and fought against the king at the Battle of Northampton, the king forbade Northampton to be the centre of a university.

There are indications that even before the end of the 13th century Northampton was beginning to decline for in reply to the great inquisition of Edward I in 1275 the Northampton jurors said ' because of the aforesaid charters and aforesaid markets and mills and because many burgesses of Northampton who hold many great rents in the vill of Northampton and who trade in the same vill have been unwilling to share in the tallage and other burdens with the community of the vill of Northampton nor yet are willing, fullers, weavers, dyers, drapers, glovers, "magizarii", skinners and other craftsmen of this sort have left Northampton because they are too heavily tallaged. And thus the vill of Northampton is damaged they cannot estimate how much.'

A ranking of towns based on the Lay Subsidy of 1334 suggests that by then Northampton had slipped to below 50th position. In the same year the town applied to the king for a reduction of the farm because of houses fallen to the ground and rents thus lost but the petition was refused. From 1462 onwards, however, various reliefs were given until the farm was finally fixed at £98 in 1514.

In 1524 approximately 480 people in Northampton contributed to the Great Subsidy, suggesting a population of about 3,000 people. The town was more than double the size of any other in the county and comparable with Leicester and Oxford but the taxpayers do appear to have been rather worse off than in towns of comparable size, confirming the impression of Northampton's relative decay. The town was then dominated by self-employed shopkeepers and craftsmen and some 70 trades are represented. There was a fairly mixed economy but even at this date the leather trades, from tanning through to shoemaking, showed some prominence and textiles were still relatively important.

The poverty of the town in 1539 is well recorded by Dr John London writing to the king 'I see in Northampton notable decay first of the houses, whereof part belonged to the religious houses there lately suppressed which were evil repairers of their lands and part to the gentlemen of the country who extort as much rent as they can and leave all repairs to the tenants who now let their housing fall in ruin to the great deformity of the town.'

A National Centre

Northampton's position at the heart of England was particularly important during the Early Medieval period. Strategically it played a powerful national role, lying within two days' march of London and most of central England, and it was also an extremely convenient meeting place for councils and other assemblies both secular and religious. Many parliaments and councils were held at Northampton from the time of Henry I to Richard II and the kings frequently visited the town, John on no fewer than 30 occasions. The more notable of these councils and events are summarised below but the numerous more routine events should not be forgotten. For example, the general chapter of the Benedictine order met in St Andrew's priory 39 times.

In 1106 a meeting took place in Northampton between King Henry and his brother Robert Duke of Normandy and in 1131 the barons swore allegiance to Matilda, the daughter of Henry I, who was heiress to the throne.

In 1164 Thomas Becket, after his long-running dispute with Henry II on whether or not the clergy was subject to lay courts, was accused by the king of financial mismanagement as chancellor. The trial lasted five acrimonious days but Becket further declared he could not be judged by laymen and appealed to the pope. Finally, in fear of his own safety he escaped from Northampton by night disguised as a monk and made his way to France.

General rebellion broke out against King Henry in 1173 and in May of the following year Northampton was attacked by some of the rebels who won a convincing victory. Three months later, however, Henry received the submission of the rebels at Northampton.

A great council was held at Northampton in 1176 and the assize of Northampton was passed. This was concerned with more systematic keeping of the peace. In 1211, following a dispute between King John and the pope over the appointment of a new archbishop of Canterbury a dramatic but fruitless meeting took place at Northampton Castle between King John and two papal legates but in 1213 the king submitted to the pope.

Civil war broke out between the barons and John in 1215 because of John's oppressive government and during the struggle Northampton was unsuccessfully besieged by the barons. Northampton did not escape damage, however, for after the townsfolk had attacked the castle a large part of the town was burnt in retaliation. After John finally submitted to the barons and signed Magna Carta, Northampton Castle together with three others was surrendered to the barons as a pledge for keeping the terms of the charter. War, however, again broke out before the end of the year when the castle is again recorded as being held by the king.

Under King Henry III England was increasingly misgoverned and in 1258 Henry, under pressure from the barons, agreed at Oxford to rule with the advice and consent of a formally elected privy council. The agreement did not last, however, and in 1264 civil war broke out between the king and the baronial faction led by Simon de Montfort. Simon's power base was split between the East Midlands, London and South-East England and Glamorgan. Northampton became the centre of the Midlands resistance, being within easy distance of the king's headquarters at Oxford. The king soon laid siege to Northampton and captured it by a stratagem, managing to breach the town wall in the north-west of the town where it also served as a boundary for St Andrew's priory. Whether there was collusion by the abbot is uncertain. The town was then pillaged relentlessly. Five weeks later, however, the tables were turned and the royalist forces crushed at Lewes but the king gradually re-established control with the war finally ending in 1267.

During the parliament of 1328 which was held at Northampton, peace was

made with Scotland and the first statute of Northampton was passed. This was intended to improve the administration of justice in the royal courts.

In 1380 Richard II was desperately short of money and in the parliament held at Northampton in that year it was agreed to raise £100,000 by poll tax — so much for every head of population — and it was this tax, extremely burdensome on the poor, that was partly responsible for the rebellion led by Wat Tyler in the following year. Northampton was again the scene of a battle in 1460 when Henry VI was routed by the forces of the earls Warwick and March.

Fig. 24   Medieval pottery found in Northampton now in Northampton Museum. The vessels (from left to right) were made at Potterspury, Lyveden and Brill.

Town Government and Administration

Across the whole of Europe the Middle Ages saw not only general urban growth and increasing prosperity but also a more acute social and political awareness on the part of townspeople particularly with regard to the determination of their own affairs by themselves. Whilst these aspirations for independence manifest themselves in parts of France and Italy in the establishment of virtually autonomous urban 'communes', English towns, under the influence of a strong monarchy, witnessed a more gradual transition to some form of local government. The first real signs of change occurred towards the end of the 12th century when Northampton's star was at its zenith and it is not surprising, therefore, that the town was among the first to acquire certain privileges of self government. These privileges, however, once wrested from the Crown, over a period of time came more and more to reside in the hands of a narrow oligarchical clique.

At the time of the Norman Conquest, Northampton, as most English boroughs were, was almost certainly directly subject to and a source of revenue to the king, although Waltheof, the earl of Northampton, probably took a third of the income from the town, the so-called 'earl's third penny'. Although the king was the chief landowner in the town many others held property there. This diversity of tenure, contrasting with the normal single lordship of a village manor, was characteristic of a well established borough, which as a social, administrative and economic focus for the region attracted important personages.

This administrative pattern seems to have continued virtually unchanged for the next 100 years or so. After Waltheof's execution in 1076 Simon de Senlis was probably granted the earldom and the town of Northampton in 1089.

The town was then a mesne borough, subject to and taxed by the king through an intermediate lord. During the next 100 years the earldom of Northampton and the lordship of the town were in and out of the hands of the Senlis family but from 1154 Northampton remained a royal borough. Thus throughout the immediate post-Conquest period Northampton was very much in the control of the king through his sheriff, or of the earl.

In 1185 the townsfolk paid 200 marks to the king to farm the town themselves, thereby becoming free to some extent of the interference of the sheriff and from that date the farm was probably paid to the exchequer by town-reeves elected by the townspeople. Certainly in 1189 the townsfolk were empowered by charter to elect a reeve for this. There do, however, seem to have been two reeves and later charters talk of two reeves.

King Richard's charter of 1189 granted further economic and judicial benefits (*fig. 25*). Existing liberties and customs were confirmed and the townsfolk were specifically freed from various taxes and tolls, for example 'that all the Burgesses of Northampton be quit of toll and lastage through all England and by the ports.' Probably of particular importance to the townspeople was the right to plead in Northampton rather than outside the town. Nonetheless much jurisdiction including serious criminal cases at least was probably retained by the King's justices.

It is difficult with this as with later charters to determine what is innovatory and what is merely the formal recording of established custom. The granting of a charter was a source of profit to the Crown by whom liberties could be both granted and withdrawn and there are clear cases where an apparently new concession in a town charter can be demonstrated to be merely the ratification or regrant of that privilege. Since, also, it is only in the second half of the 12th century that the recording of grants to towns through charters becomes established the historian's job of recording the development of town government is made considerably more difficult and there is a danger of seeing the evolution as rather

more sudden and later than it actually was. Some customs first recorded in the 12th and 13th centuries may in fact date back to before the Norman Conquest. Thus, for example, the hustings court mentioned in Richard's charter to Northampton could have originated in the 9th century, for the hustings is an essentially Scandinavian institution, although it may be a post-Conquest copy of a London court.

Northampton's first custumal, recording the customary law of the town, was drawn up about the same time. This apparently first written codification of the 'Laws of Northampton', following soon after the death of the last of the Senlis earls and coinciding with Northampton's economic apogee, the right to elect a reeve or reeves and the granting of its first charter, would seem to mark a decisive step forward along the road of self-government by the people of Northampton if only as the formal establishment of a written code of practice. The custumal is headed by a list of 40 names of those who drew up the laws, including several who are known to have been reeves at some time. It is uncertain, however, whether
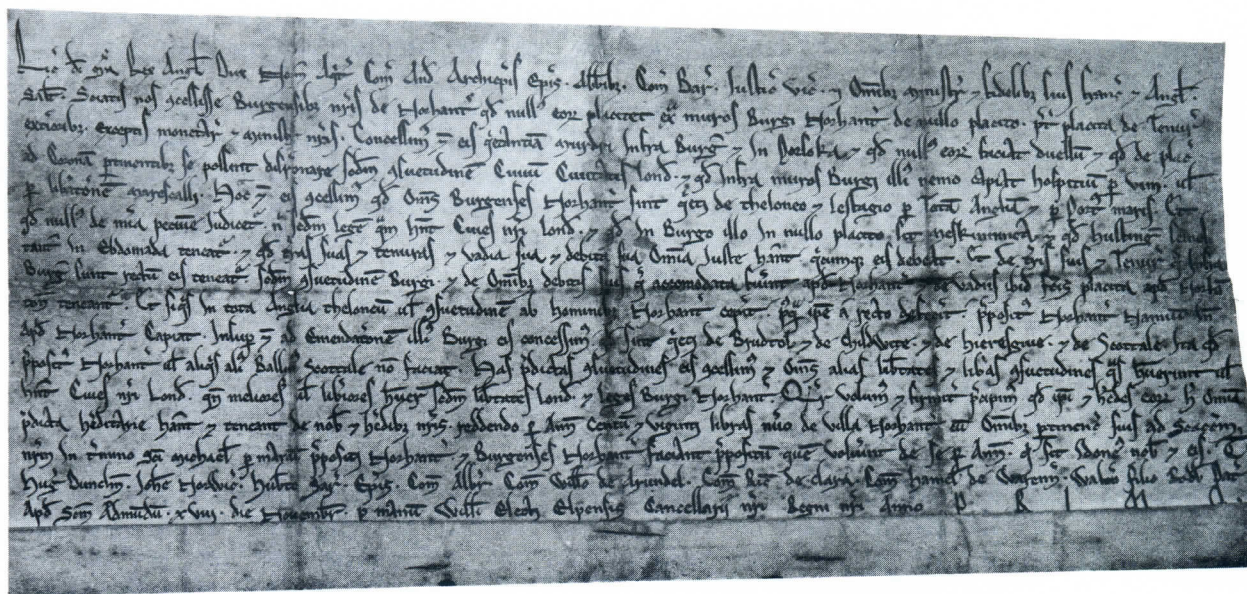

Fig. 25 King Richard's charter to Northampton, now in the Northamptonshire Record Office. The text is written in abbreviated Latin. The opening portion is transcribed and then translated below. In the transcription letters missing in the original text but indicated by marks of abbreviation have been enclosed in brackets.

Ric(ardus) d(e)i gra(cia) Rex Angl(orum), Dux Normannorum Aq(ui)t(anorum), Com(es) And(egavorum), Archiep(iscop)is, Ep(iscop)is, Abb(at)ibus, Com(itibus), Bar(onibus), Iustic(iis), Vic(ecomitibus) et Om(n)ibus ministr(is) et fidelibus suis Franc(is) et Angl(is) Sal(u)t(em). Sciatis nos (con)cessisse Burgensibus n(ost)ris de Norhant q(uo)d null(us) eo(rum) placitet ex(tra) muros Burgi Norhant' de nullo placito p(re)t(er) placita de tenur(is) ext(er)ioribus exceptis monetar(iis) et ministr(is) n(ost)ris. Concessim(us) et eis q(ui)etantia(m) murdri Infra Burg(um) et In Portsoka et q(uo)d null(us) eo(rum) faciat duellu(m) et q(uo)d de plac(itis) ad Corona(m) p(er)tinentibus se possint disronare secundum (con)suetudine(m) Civiu(m) Civitatis Lond(inii).

Richard by the grace of God, King of England, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, Count of Anjou, to the Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Earls, Barons, Justices, Sheriffs and all his ministers and faithful men French and English, greetings. Know that we have granted to our burgesses of Northampton that none of them plead outside the walls of the Borough of Northampton on any plea besides pleas relating to external tenures except our moneyers and ministers. Also we have granted to them quittance of the murder fine within the Borough and its liberties and that none of them make duel and that of pleas pertaining to the Crown they may justify according to the custom of the citizens of the City of London.

this was a special assembly or some form of town council like the councils of 24 and 48 known in later times. The laws, 24 in all, are primarily concerned with the rights of the townsfolk in relation to property, inheritance and debt but two clauses deal with the control of the activities of merchants from outside the town. Three later versions of the custumal, dating from the middle of the 13th century to the middle of the 16th century, are known. Each contains more numerous clauses than its predecessor and there is an increasing regulation of trade affairs. There is no evidence for a merchant gild at Northampton which elsewhere exercised control over industrial matters.

A second charter to Northampton in 1200, this time from King John, repeats the privileges granted by Richard but also provides for the election of 'four of the more lawful and discreet men of the borough' as judicial officials called coroners.

The first mayor of the town seems to have been chosen in 1215 and he subsequently was the chief officer of the town although the reeves, later known as bailiffs, seemed to continue to be responsible for formal dealings with the Exchequer. The first record of a 'town council' occurs at the same time. King John instructed the townsfolk 'to cause to be elected twelve of the better and more discreet of your town to expedite with him (ie the mayor) your affairs in your town.'

By the second half of the 13th century the council of 12 had become 24 and remained the same until the late 15th century. Although the main power rested in this council there was also a town assembly, presumably comprising all the freemen of the town. This met in St Giles' church or churchyard and was responsible for electing the town officials and also passed some town laws.

Town officials, other than those already mentioned included the town clerk, the mayor's serjeant, four bailiffs' serjeants and two chamberlains.

In 1459 Northampton was incorporated by charter. This in law made the town a fictitious person giving it the right to have perpetual succession and a common seal, to sue and be sued, to hold lands and to issue bye-laws. Whilst in theory this was a great step forward it is debatable whether the new reality was much different from the past. In 1489, however, there was a major change in the organisation of the town's government. The influence of the moneyed classes had probably been substantial throughout the Middle Ages but there now appeared to be a popular movement demanding a say in the running of affairs. An Act of Parliament was passed providing for a new town council. Forty-eight persons who had not been mayor or bailiff were chosen by the mayor and ex-mayors. The 48, together with the mayor, ex-mayors and ex-bailiffs would elect the mayors and bailiffs for the town. The mayor and ex-mayors would also have the power of changing the composition of the 48 at will. Although the act was proposed for the good of the town, the council now became a narrow closed body and town democracy was effectively suppressed for several hundred years.
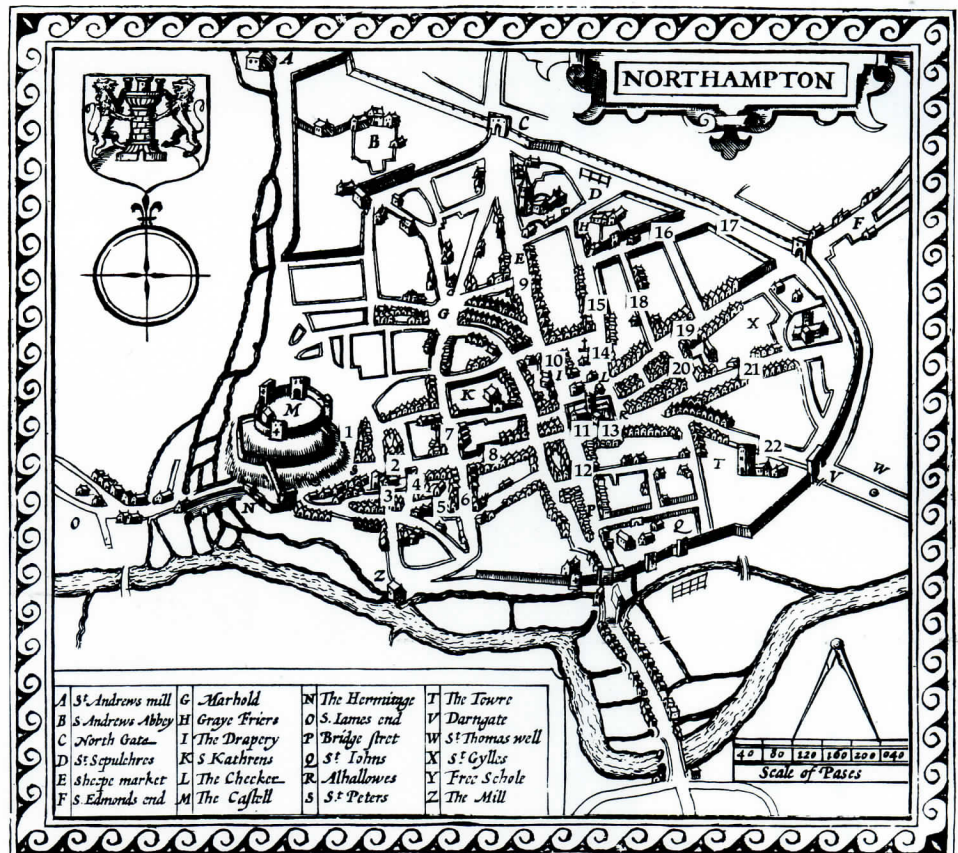
Medieval Topography

At the time of the Norman Conquest, Northampton, as we have seen, lay mainly to the west of All Saints' and essentially comprised a defended area of some 60 acres (*figs. 1, 26*). Some suburban expansion had probably taken place outside the north and east gates but this was probably quite limited. By 1086 the 'new borough' had been established. This appears to have been a distinct physical entity for the name 'new borough' is still recognised as a separate area in the second half of the 12th century. It is quite possible that the modern Newlands indicates the site of the new borough. Newlands in its Latin form 'nova terra' occurs first in the 12th century and seems to refer to an area rather than a street and certainly the modern Wood Street can be identified as lying within Newlands. Although 'Newlands' elsewhere have been demonstrated to have been laid out in the 13th century there is no reason why an earlier origin is not possible. Indeed at Norwich the area of 'Newport' was probably the site of Norwich's 'new borough'. The area of Newlands perhaps extended from the present Market Square to the Mounts and from Abington Street to Lady's Lane. On Speed's map this area is surrounded by a wall apart from the commercial frontages in the south-west, which in any case may be later additions. The wall makes little sense in other terms. If this enclosure is the new borough, as a separate defended area it is without parallel in this country and suggests the need for protection for the new, possibly French settlers.

Tradition attributes the building of the Medieval town walls to Simon de Senlis I. A charter dating to the time of Simon talks of 'tenants dwelling outside the old ditch', 'old ditch' possibly being Lee's defensive line. Another charter of Simon himself to the monks of St Andrew's priory mentions 'land . . . from their

Fig. 26 John Speed's map of Northampton in 1610. The lay-out is largely that of Medieval times although some of the churches and other religious institutions disappeared following the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1540 (cf. fig. 30). The street pattern remained largely intact up to the 1960's. Modern street names mentioned in this volume are identified in relation to Speed's map.

1 Chalk Lane
2 Marefair
3 St Peter's Street
4 Freeschool Street
5 Gregory Street
6 Horseshoe Street
7 Horsemarket
8 Gold Street
9 Sheep Street
10 The Drapery
11 All Saints'
12 Bridge Street
13 George Row
14 Market Square
15 Newlands
16 Lady's Lane
17 The Mounts
18 Wood Street
19 Abington Street
20 Fish Street
21 St Giles' Street
22 Derngate

A	S.t Andrews mill	G	Marhold	N	The Hermitage
B	S Andrews Abbey	H	Graye Friers	O	S. Iames end
C	North Gate	I	The Drapery	P	Bridge ftreet
D	St.Sepulchres	K	S Kathrens	Q	S.t Iohns
E	Sheepe market	L	The Checker	R	Alhallowes
F	S. Edmonds end	M	The Caftell	S	St Peters

T	The Towre
V	Darngate
W	S.t Thomas well
X	S.t Gylles
Y	Free Schole
Z	The Mill

NORTHAMPTON

Scale of Paſes

ditch [the monks of St Andrew's] up to the ditch of the town.' Since the precinct of St Andrew's stopped short of the Lee line we should probably regard 'their ditch' as the northern boundary of their triangular site and 'the ditch of the town' as the line of Simon's defences. In this case the Medieval town defences would pre-date the establishment of the St Andrew's priory precincts. St Andrew's priory, although originally founded on a different site had almost certainly moved to the north of the town by 1113. The use of 'ditch' rather than 'walls' suggests that at this stage the town defences comprised an earthen bank and ditch rather than stone walls. The defences, probably in existence by c.1100, enclosed an area of some 100 hectares (245 acres). This intramural area was only exceeded in England by those of London and Norwich (London's walls, in any case, being of Roman date) and was roughly comparable with that of York. Such a large defended area seems to have been speculative, to attract settlers within a safe defended borough and market and the town may not have been very densely settled initially. The site of the present market square was described as waste land in 1235 and the Franciscan and Carmelite friars did not acquire their sites, which may or may not have been previously occupied, until the middle of the 13th century. Nevertheless, the high farm of £100 in 1130 suggests fairly rapid growth.

The town walls are referred to in the borough charters granted by Richard I in 1189 and John in 1200 and murage grants, presumably for the repair of the walls, were made in 1224, 1251 and 1301. These grants enabled the burgesses to raise a toll on carts coming into the town and goods sold there and to apply the proceeds to the construction or repair of the town walls. The grant of 1301 was very comprehensive and was to last for five years and suggests substantial works.

It has been suggested that there was more than one phase to the eastern defences with an earlier Anglo-Norman wall running to the west of St Giles' church. There is no good documentary evidence for this and excavation on the former convent site to the north of Abington Street in 1980 failed to pick up any sign of defences along the postulated line.

On Speed's map defences are absent to the south-west of the town but Medieval defences almost certainly existed in this area and Speed notes that 'To this [ie the castle] upon the South the Towns wall adjoyneth.' In 1275 the town walls

Fig. 27 The inner bailey wall and ditch on the south side of the castle in the 19th century. (Photograph in Northamptonshire Record Office.)

extended from the south gate as far as Mervyn's mill where there was a postern gate and between the mill and the west gate ran the 'King's ditch' as well as a 'common way'. Additionally in both the Edward I and 1504 rentals of Northampton the town wall is recorded in St Peter's parish, the eastern limit of which is Freeschool Street.

With the new defences the centre of Northampton shifted from Horseshoe Street, Horsemarket/Gold Street, Marefair crossroads to All Saints'; Sheep Street, the Drapery and Bridge Street became the new main north-south road and the main crossing of the river moved some 250 yards eastwards to the site of the present south bridge. The area within the defences gradually filled with houses, churches, and other religious institutions such as friaries. The Market Square, as noted above, was moved from the church and churchyard of All Saints to its present site in 1235. The buildings now standing between the Square and the Drapery and All Saints' are infill encroaching on the original rather larger Market Square area.

The castle was probably initially erected either by Waltheof or Simon de Senlis I and seems to have comprised a simple earth-and-timber motte and bailey. This was replaced, probably from the early 12th century onwards by the more substantial castle seen on Speed's map (*figs. 27-28*). An inner and outer bailey can be clearly identified. Modifications and repairs to the castle are recorded over the centuries. The castle was largely destroyed in the late 19th century to make way for a railway goods yard but part of the inner bailey bank can still be seen rising to a height of c.3 metres between St Andrew's Road and Chalk Lane.

Dr J. Alexander, in excavations conducted between 1961 and 1964, uncovered some of the internal buildings and cut a section through the rampart and inner bailey ditch which was found to be c.10 metres deep, and excavations in 1976 showed the outer bailey ditch to be c.6 metres deep.

There is an interesting rental of the town during the reign of Edward I in the Public Record Office with a later version of 1504 in the County Record Office at Delapré. The rental in fact records contributions to the 'farm' of the town by street or area but it is not possible to completely reconstruct the town's topography, for where an owner has several properties in the town these are not individually listed

Fig. 28 The massive west wall of the castle, with external buttresses, photographed during the destruction of the castle in the 19th century. (Photograph in Northamptonshire Record Office.)
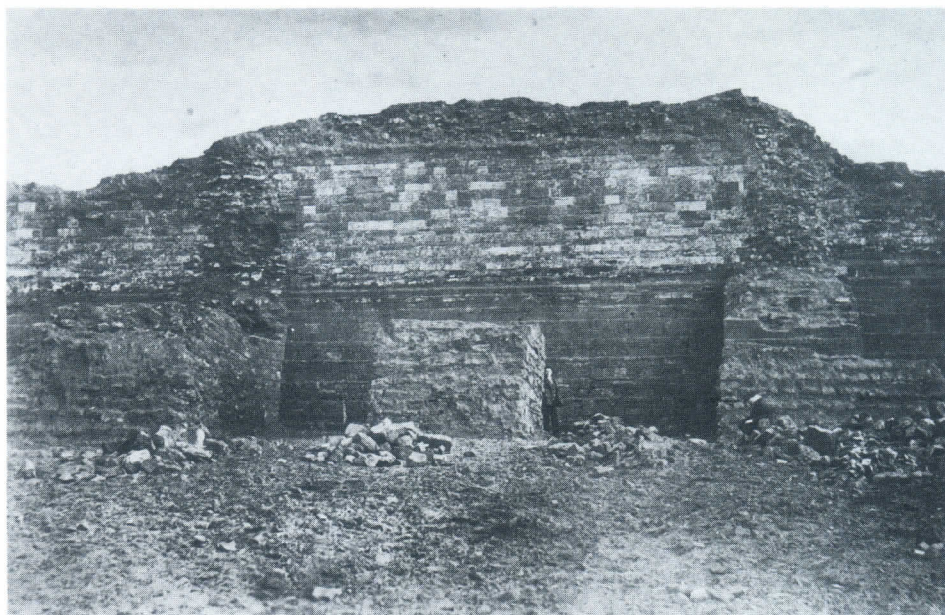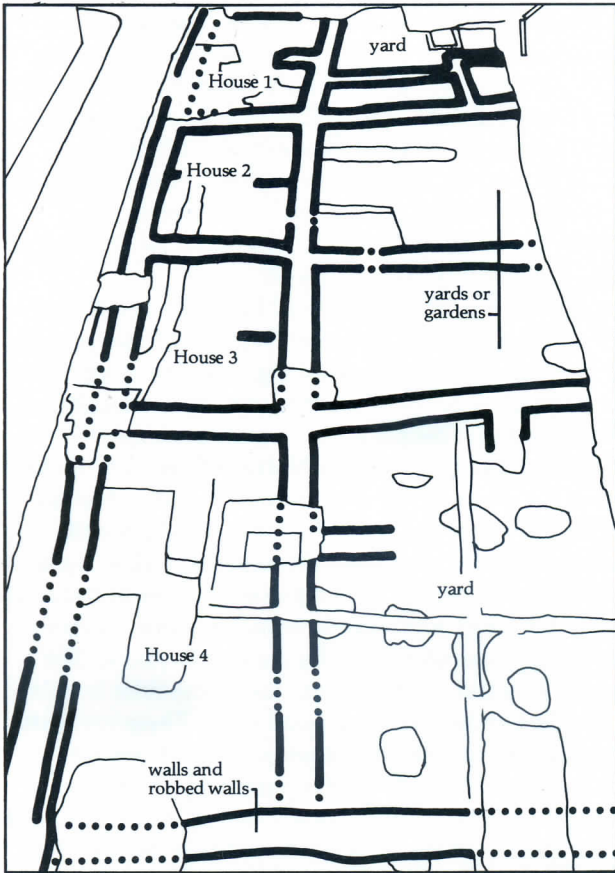
Fig. 29   Remains of Medieval houses on the north side of St Peter's Street in the course of excavation in 1973. The scales are 2 metres long.

yard

House 1

House 2

House 3

yards or
gardens

House 4

yard

walls and
robbed walls

but a block contribution is charged against the main or 'capital' tenement. Nevertheless the rentals are most useful and it is possible to trace for most of its way the rent collector's route round the town, up Derngate, down St Giles' Street, down Abington Street, into the Newlands, etc. The earlier rental also shows that half a century after the establishment of the Market Square it was filled with traders' stalls. Street names from the rentals and elsewhere show concentrations of craftsmen of a particular sort in their own areas. Thus we have Mercers Row, Butchers Row, Fishmongers Row, Shoemakers Row, Glovers Row, Gold Street, Woolmonger Street, Fullers Street, Tanner Street and so on.

But what of the buildings within the town? No Medieval buildings apart from the churches survive above ground but the excavations in St Peter's Street revealed the development of a street through the Medieval period (*fig. 29*). The street was not a major thoroughfare nor was it close to the Market Square and so wealthy merchants' houses could not be expected. There is an immediate contrast, however, to the pre-Conquest period. Shortly after the Norman Conquest timber buildings were erected respecting the street line and set close to it and each other. It would appear that it was at this time that the actual boundaries between the properties were established and this lay-out continued through the Middle Ages. In the 13th century some of the timber buildings were replaced in stone and then at the beginning of the 15th century the street was entirely rebuilt in stone, in fact so uniformly that one wonders if it was a speculative act by a single landlord. The houses, measuring 8-12 metres by 6 metres deep and with their long sides fronting on to the street were divided into two rooms on the ground floor. There was quite possibly an upper storey constructed of timber. Floors were of clay or beaten earth. The houses, while being fairly substantial, were not particularly elaborate and probably accommodated artisans or small craftsmen. Pits dug in the backyard areas give some indication of the quality of life. Expensive jewellery and the like were lacking but several iron and bronze buckles, bronze belt fittings and pins were found and also iron knives, shears, a hammer and chisel, awls and other tools, spindle whorls for spinning thread and sherds of pottery in abundance. Elsewhere in the town there were more substantial merchants' houses, although the great fire of 1675 destroyed much of the evidence. A Medieval vaulted cellar still exists in George Row just south of All Saints' church and other examples were recorded in the 19th century in the Drapery and Gold Street.

The town had its town fields which were still being cultivated but much of the land had been acquired by St Andrew's priory. By the end of the 13th century the Gobion Manor had a substantial holding in the fields as well as at least 45 houses in the town. The origin of Gobion Manor is uncertain but the Gobion family is first mentioned in Northampton in the late 12th century and the manor, situated between Fish Street and St Giles' church, is probably the large structure shown in that area on Speed's map. Suburbs lay outside the north, south, east and west gates and all were substantial enough to be served by their own church but only the southern suburbs seem to have remained any size by the early 17th century and the time of Speed's map.

The Church

With only four parish churches, All Saints', St Peter's, Holy Sepulchre and St Giles', surviving today within the line of the Medieval defences and with no great cathedral it is hard to imagine the influence which the church exerted over the lives of the Medieval townsfolk (*figs. 30-33*). We have already noted that at the time of the Norman Conquest Northampton had two, possibly three churches. At the end of the 12th century the following churches were confirmed to St Andrew's priory: All Saints', St Giles', St Michael's, Holy Sepulchre, St Mary's, St Gregory's, St Peter's, St Edmund's and St Bartholomew's and it is probable that
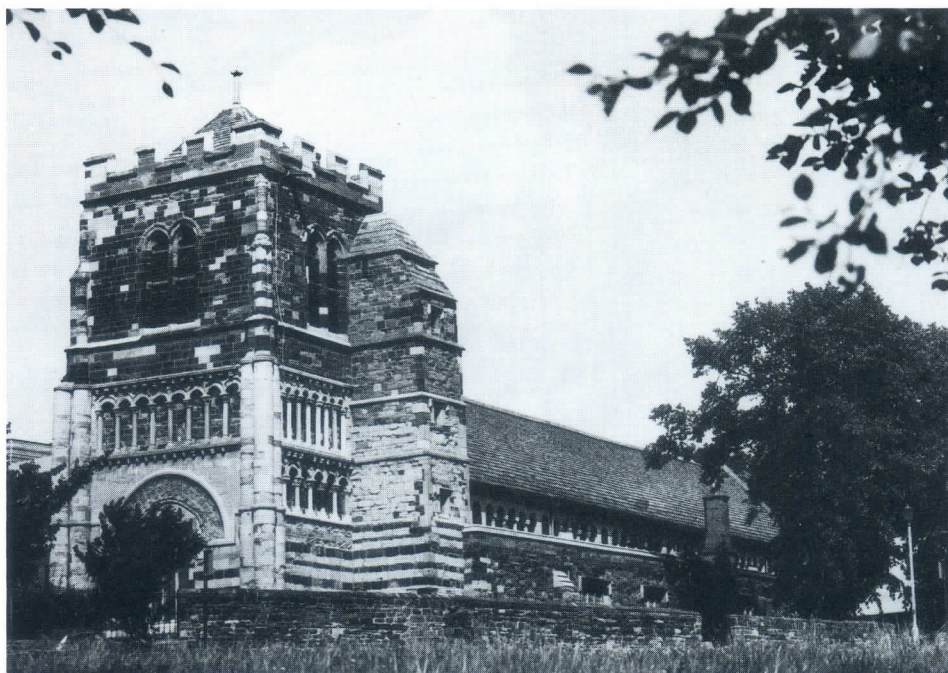
Fig. 30 The Medieval Church in Northampton.

- ⊕ monastery/nunnery
- ⊕ friary
- + church
- ■ hospital
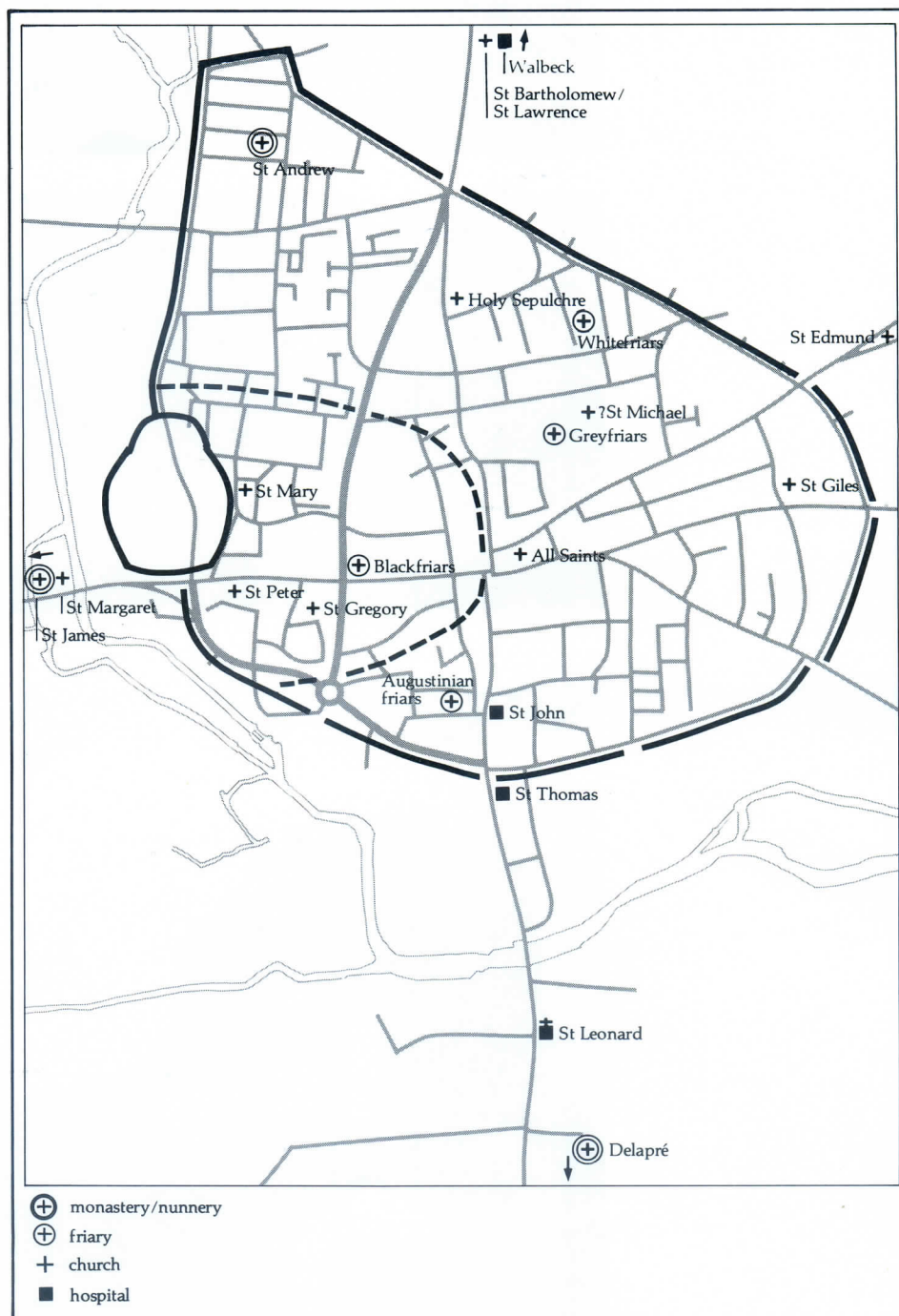
b-e) elaborately carved 12th century
column capitals in St Peter's church

Fig. 31   a) St Peter's church from
the south-west.

44

all these churches were in existence by 1100 or soon after. All except St Edmund's and St Bartholomew's lay within the Medieval walls. St Edmund's served the eastern suburbs and St Bartholomew's, originally a parish church serving the northern suburbs, seems to have lost its parochial status by the end of the 15th century and to have changed its dedication to St Lawrence and become a chapel directly dependent on St Andrew's priory.

The west suburbs of the town were served by St Margaret's, a chapel dependent on Duston parish church in whose parish it lay. The southern suburbs were apparently at least partially served by the chapel of St Leonard's hospital, a leper hospital. The chapel seems to have acquired parochial functions by 1282 when a dispute arose between the vicar of Hardingstone in whose parish St Leonard's was situated and the master and brethren of St Leonard's. The hospital was allowed by Bishop Sutton to retain parochial rights (baptism and burial and the concomitant fees) with respect to persons living on its land but if at all possible appointments to the mastership were to be referred to the vicar of Hardingstone for approval. There were additionally a few other chapels in Northampton.

Seven parish churches and four other churches or chapels serving the suburbs had parochial or semi-parochial rights. The proliferation of urban parish churches in England in the 10th to 12th centuries is most interesting. Lincoln had 35 parishes by 1100, York over 40 by 1200, Norwich approximately 60 Medieval parishes and London over 100 while lower down the order Canterbury had 22, Oxford 17 and

15th century wooden corbels in the later nave of the church, all depicting Medieval musicians. They are playing:

b) a small portative or processional organ

c) kettle-drums

d) an organistrum

e) a bag-pipe or corna musa of simple pattern with no drone-pipes

Fig. 32 a) The church of the Holy Sepulchre from the east. The original 12th century round nave can be seen just in front of the tower.

Cambridge and Stamford 14 each. Villages and small towns generally only had a single church. The urban churches would normally have been founded by individuals to serve their own needs or by groups of persons for the benefit of their local neighbourhood. It would appear that increase or otherwise of churches in an urban context was dependent very much on the relative strengths of the local ecclesiastical organisation and the lay lordship and also on whether the latter was in the hands of a single person or divided. Thus the divided lordship within a town, as noted above in relation to Northampton at Domesday, was conducive to the growth of urban parishes. By the 13th century more effective implementation of the rights of parish churches produced a climate unfavourable to the further proliferation of urban parishes.

Some idea of the relative wealth of the various parishes in 1428 and 1535 is possible by looking at figures in the Feudal Aids and the Valor Ecclesiasticus. The Feudal Aids figures record taxation by the crown and the Valor Ecclesiasticus lists tithes and other income to the respective churches.

	Feudal Aids 1428		Valor Ecclesiasticus 1535	
	£	%	£	%
All Saints'	13.33	24.26	16.00	20.39
St Giles'	4.66	8.48	8.00	10.19
Holy Sepulchre	2.66	4.84	6.05	7.71
St Mary's	2.00	3.64	2.66	3.39
St Gregory's	2.60	4.73	2.66	3.39
St Edmund's	1.00	1.82	0.91	1.16
St Michael's	2.00	3.64	0.83	1.05
St Peter's	26.66	48.53	41.33	52.68
Total	54.93		78.44	

St Peter's, one of the smaller parishes in the town, drew its income through the dependent chapelries of Kingsthorpe and Upton.

Religion for the ordinary Medieval man was very much a mixture of individual piety and superstition. While ascetics spurned the pleasures of the world, many viewed God through human materialistic eyes. It was believed that heaven could be attained through good works or financial donations to the church and the prospect of hell and everlasting damnation as so vividly portrayed in the grotesque sculpture of the devil and the deadly sins to be found in cathedrals and elsewhere must have had a profound impression on the Medieval mind, particularly that of the uneducated majority. Numerous references are to be found in Medieval wills in Northampton to money being left to keep altar lights burning. Richard Cartmell leaves 2d to the mother church of Lincoln, 4d to the Rood light of Holy Sepulchre and 4d to St Martin's altar. Wealthier men made greater provision for their souls. Thus John Wederhurd, a merchant of Northampton, left 'to a fit chaplain to celebrate mass within the said chapel of St Nicholas and other sacred duties in the choir of the church for a whole year after my death for the repose of my soul £5 6s 8d.' St James' priory was founded by William Peverel 'for the salvation of his own and the souls of his father and mother and of all the faithful departed.'

Whereas the above were essentially acts of individual 'piety', townsfolk did join together in guilds or fraternities for religious purposes, to aid their members during the vicissitudes of life and to celebrate mass for their souls in death. These guilds generally had their own chapel in a local church and might provide for one

Fig. 33 A Medieval charnel pit excavated in Horseshoe Street in 1974. The pit probably lay in St Gregory's churchyard. As later graves cut earlier graves the disturbed bones were gathered and redeposited in the pit. The scale is 2 metres long.

or more priests. All Saints' was particularly rich in guilds. The guild of St Mary had three chaplains, Holy Trinity four, Corpus Christi and St John the Baptist two and St George one. Little is known about two other guilds, those of St Catherine and the Holy Rood. Other churches in the town also had guilds but not so many.

Whereas the parish churches served the daily needs of the townsfolk there were numerous other religious foundations in and around Northampton of which the monastic institutions were of most importance. St Andrew's priory, a Cluniac foundation, was established by Simon de Senlis I at the end of the 11th century and came to exercise a considerable hold over the town, owning considerable estates both in the town and town fields as well as the right of presentation to Northampton's parish churches. St James' priory, later elevated to abbey status, was founded by William Peverel in the early years of the 12th century, a mile to the west of Northampton as a house of Augustinian canons (fig. 34). Just south of Northampton at Delapré, Simon de Senlis II established a Cluniac nunnery c.1145.

During the 13th century dissatisfaction with the established monastic orders brought into being the friars, who, eschewing all wordly wealth, turned to the towns with missionary zeal to preach and minister to the urban poor.

Northampton as a major centre attracted all four main orders of friars, the Blackfriars (Dominicans), Greyfriars (Franciscans), Whitefriars (Carmelites) and the Augustinian friars as well as the Friars of the Sack and the Poor Clares. The site of the Greyfriars was partially excavated in 1972 when some of the church and a claustral range were examined. Additionally either in or just outside the town were St John's hospital (*fig. 35*), St Thomas' hospital, St Leonard's hospital and the leper hospital at Walbeck outside the north gate and there was also St David's hospital at Kingsthorpe.

In discussing the religious life of Northampton we should not forget the Jews. In 1159 the community was large enough to pay £15 to the Exchequer and by 1194 it

Fig. 34 Decorated floor tiles in Northampton Museum from the site of St James' abbey (centre upper) and St Andrew's priory. The scallop shell motif is associated with St James.
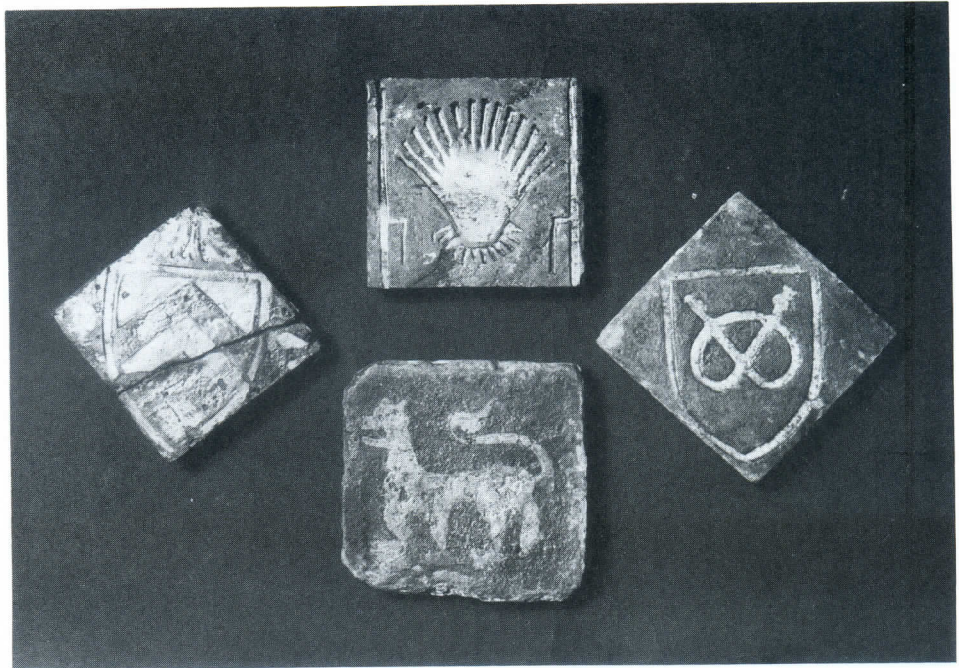
Fig. 35 St John's hospital at the bottom of Bridge Street, now in use as a church.

had become one of the largest Jewries in the country. They had their own synagogue in the town and a cemetery outside the north gate. But in the Great Exile in 1290 the Jews were expelled.

By the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII the Church was extremely influential in the town. In addition to the land taken up by the various churches and religious houses a considerable quantity of other property was in the hands of the Church. St Andrew's owned over 100 houses and shops and St James' over 50 in the town, probably a third or more of such property in the town. The demolition and sale of the monastic houses and the disposal of other monastic property amounted almost to a secularisation of Northampton and must at least have changed the character of the borough quite considerably.

Further Reading

The contribution by Helen Cam on Northampton in the *Victoria History of the Counties of England: Northamptonshire, volume 3*, although published in 1930 is still the most detailed survey of Northampton's Medieval and later history although recent historical and archaeological research has modified some ideas, particularly regarding the town's topographical development. Various articles on excavations in Northampton over the last ten years have appeared in *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, the journal of the Northamptonshire Archaeological Society and the important St Peter's Street excavations were reported in J H Williams, *St Peter's Street, Northampton, Excavations 1973-1976* (Northampton Development Corporation Archaeological Monograph no 2, 1979). A recent general summary of Northampton's past including prehistoric times is *Northampton the first 6000 years* by John Williams and Helen Bamford (Northampton Development Corporation, 1979).

Acknowledgements