Living in the Landscape
Essays in Honour of Graeme Barker

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Chapter 22

The Power of Pits:
Archaeology, Outreach and Research in Living Landscapes

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Introduction

This chapter reviews the aims and results of a linked series of outreach projects which have involved thousands of members of the public in archaeological test-pit excavations in rural settlements. These have been intended to engage members of the public in research, in order to inspire and to enrich lives and communities while simultaneously advancing knowledge and understanding of the historic development of today’s previously overlooked villages, hamlets and small towns. This chapter presents and assesses the social impact of these projects as well as the new perspectives the archaeological evidence has provided on the historic development of medieval settlements and landscapes, documenting the story of an innovative landscape research programme which, since 2005, has sought to bring together public engagement and scholarly research in a genuinely symbiotic community research partnership.

Publicly engaged archaeology has a long history. Indeed, for many years, all archaeological investigation was carried out by and for people who were not professional archaeologists, until the subject acquired a foothold in the realms of academe and subsequently evolved as a profession. This process started in the UK in 1851 when the first British university professor in archaeology, John Howard Marsden (1803–91), was appointed to the newly endowed Disney Chair at the University of Cambridge (Leach 2007, 35). Although academia has not always espoused public archaeology with unbridled enthusiasm (Aston 2012, 456–7; Hills & Richards 2006), the incumbent of the Disney Chair at Cambridge has traditionally been a staunch advocate. Glyn Daniel (Disney Professor 1974–81) enthusiastically embraced the then new medium of television to present archaeology to wider audiences from the 1950s (Lewis 2007, 15) and his successor Colin Renfrew (Disney Professor 1981–2004) did likewise while also being energetically involved in protecting the archaeological resource from the trade in illicit antiquities. Graeme Barker’s period of tenure has brought different approaches again to public archaeology, including fostering Access Cambridge Archaeology (ACA), set up in 2004 to advance social, economic and personal well-being through hands-on public involvement in archaeology (www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk). ACA programmes, befitting those run from a top research university, have always sought to integrate this activity with academic research. One major strand, involving the excavation of archaeological test pits within today’s villages, hamlets and small towns in order to reconstruct their historic development, has proved to be a particularly effective, illuminating, innovative and adaptable means of benefitting wider publics while also advancing academic knowledge and understanding.

Access Cambridge Archaeology

Access Cambridge Archaeology was founded in 2004 as an archaeological outreach unit by the author of this paper, capitalizing on knowledge and experience from 20 years as a medieval archaeologist and as one of the original presenters of Channel 4’s long-running television series, Time Team. One of ACA’s aims in its first year was to promote undergraduate archaeology to secondary-school students, and the success of this revealed the potential for a broader scheme. This piqued the interest of Aimhigher, a UK organization set up in 2003 with funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the European Social Fund, in order to raise the numbers of young people attending university from lower socio-economic groups, disadvantaged backgrounds or areas of low participation in higher education (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/wp/recentwork/aimhigher/; Higher Education Funding Council for England 2007, 3–7).
Aimhigher’s provision included ‘summer schools’ which enabled academically able learners (capable of 5+ A–C grade GCSEs) in years 9–12 (aged 13–17) to experience life and learning at university. Early in 2005, meetings between Aimhigher and ACA established that, while demand for subject-based summer schools in archaeology would always be limited due to the relatively small size of the discipline, a programme focussed on archaeological investigation could nonetheless perfectly meet the wider requirements of Aimhigher’s generic summer schools, intended to raise aspirations to study at university among teenagers interested in any subject.

The Higher Education Field Academy

The summer school programme ACA devised for Aimhigher was christened the Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA), and intended from the outset to exceed significantly the requirements of Aimhigher’s summer school programme by giving participants the chance not only to experience life at university, but also to take part in a research project which would make genuinely useful new discoveries: in rising to this challenge, participants would hone new skills, develop greater confidence in their abilities, feel more informed and enthusiastic about progressing to university and be more capable of succeeding in doing so.

The archaeological investigation chosen as the focus of the HEFA programme was the excavation of ‘test pits’ within existing rural settlements. This could provide the desired educational opportunities in a reasonable time-frame while also being perfectly suited to advancing urgent research priorities within medieval settlement studies (see below). Michael Aston’s work in Shapwick (Gerrard & Aston 2008), along with previous projects with which this author had already been involved (Cooper & Priest 2003; Lewis 2003; Taylor 2003), had demonstrated that with appropriate professional support, archaeological novices could complete test-pit excavations yielding useful archaeological data within two days.

Accordingly, the HEFA programme was devised to allow around 40 pupils at any one time to spend two days working in teams of three or four to complete all stages of one of several simultaneous 1 sqm test-pit excavations sited in different locations within the same rural settlement. Each excavation would follow the same procedure (Lewis 2007), excavating in 10 cm spits and sieving spoil through a 10 mm mesh, all under professional archaeological supervision. The third day of the HEFA would be spent in the University of Cambridge, when pupils would experience life at university, attend workshops on applying to university and learn how to analyse their finds in order to answer research questions. After this, pupils would prepare a written report on their excavation for formal assessment by ACA and ultimately receive certificated reports with individual feedback on their practical and written work, intended to boost their confidence in their strengths and achievements.

In summer 2005, the HEFA programme was piloted amongst 15 Cambridgeshire schools (Lewis 2005), with 100 pupils aged 14–15 and 26 school staff attending three HEFAs in Terrington St Clement near King’s Lynn; Houghton and Wyton, near Huntingdon; and Ufford, near Peterborough.

Feedback from the pilot HEFAs immediately showed the positive impact which the programme had on pupils’ attitude to themselves, their education and their future, and consequently the scheme was extended to Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex in 2006 and Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire in 2007. By 2008, more than 400 pupils across the six counties were taking part every year.

Between 2005 and 2011 (when Aimhigher was closed down by the incoming Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government), a total of 91 HEFAs provided places for 2720 pupils in years 9 and 10. Written feedback was collected assiduously from participants and demonstrated the impact on pupils. Overall, 91 per cent rated their experience ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ (45 per cent rating it ‘excellent’: Lewis forthcoming), showing that HEFA provided a very enjoyable introduction to university life and learning. These findings were amply supported by thousands of enthusiastic anecdotal comments (verbal and written) from pupils and staff alike (Lewis 2011, 24–9). Seventy-nine per cent of all attendees felt more positive about staying on in education after the age of 16 after completing HEFA than they had before; 84 per cent felt more positive about going to university; and 85 per cent felt they knew more about university (Lewis forthcoming). The number intending to apply to university rose by 26 per cent after HEFA participation, while the number considering applying to the University of Cambridge was almost doubled.

This impact was also shown to be enduring. Tracking HEFA participants at the end of year 11 to assess their post-16 educational destinations showed that 80 per cent had made firm plans to study ‘A’ levels, the easiest and most direct platform for applying to university. The range of intended university subjects spanned humanities, arts and sciences, with Medicine the favourite followed by Natural Sciences, showing that HEFA boosted aspiration well beyond subjects closest to archaeology.
The success of the HEFA programme in raising academic aspirations and developing skills was widely apparent (Catling 2010) and although HEFA, as a highly intensive course, only ever formed a small part of Aimhigher’s extensive overall suite of activity in terms of numbers of attendees, it was regularly identified as particularly impactful by Aimhigher’s internal and external assessors (Belton et al. 2011, 16; Wilkinson 2011a, 9; 2011b; 2011c, 12). Consequently, when Aimhigher was closed in 2011, ACA was able to secure funds to continue the HEFA programme as part of the University of Cambridge statutory agreement with the Office of Fair Access (http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/414416.article; Wilkinson et al. 2011, 14). Since 2012, HEFA has been targeted at pupils at the top of the academic ability range who would otherwise lack the necessary confidence, support, knowledge and skills to apply successfully to top ‘Russell Group’ universities, such as the University of Cambridge. It continues to inspire young people, with 96 per cent of more than 500 HEFA pupils attending in 2012–13 rating their experience as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’, 84 per cent feeling more positive about going to college/university and numbers considering applying to a Russell Group university rising by 35 per cent.

Community projects

Enthusiasm for taking part in the test-pit excavations very soon spread beyond HEFA schools. As early as 2005, staff and parents of Houghton Primary School excavated test pits in their school grounds while HEFA pupils worked on others nearby, all under ACA supervision. A more sustained community programme began in 2008 when residents of Pirton (Herts) embarked on a series of ACA-supervised weekend test-pit excavation programmes extending the work done during HEFAs in the village: by 2013, more than 100 pits had been completed, most by local residents. As the popularity of this involvement became increasingly apparent, more community participation projects became possible. In 2009, as part of its 800th anniversary celebrations, the University of Cambridge funded two weekend programmes of community excavations, which enabled hundreds of residents of the villages of Cottenham and Willingham to conduct excavations in their home communities, entirely independently of any HEFA project.

Feedback from Cottenham and Willingham was spectacularly good: 100 per cent of participants rated their experience as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’, and 99 per cent recommended it to others. It also showed the activity to be very effective in introducing new people to archaeology and their local heritage; fewer than 10 per cent of participants had previously had any experience of archaeological fieldwork, only a third were National Trust members and fewer than a fifth were English Heritage members. A steady stream of other community-based test-pitting projects soon followed, including Kibworth in Leicestershire (as part of Michael Wood’s BBC2 series A Story of England, 2010) and several funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Managing A Masterpiece landscape partnership programme in Suffolk and Essex. In 2011–12, ACA ran six more such community projects as part of the Cultural Olympiad for the 2012 London Games (Lewis 2013) and 2012 saw the return of Michael Wood’s television series The Great British Story (2012), this time featuring ACA test-pit excavations in Long Melford (Suffolk), which in turn inspired All Our Stories, a collaboration between the HLF and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Connected Communities ‘Research for Community Heritage’ strand, which enabled even more communities to bid for ACA support for test-pit excavation projects in their locality (McDonald Institute 2013, 47).

By the end of 2013, thousands of residents of 16 different rural communities had participated in ACA community test-pit excavation projects with their families, friends, neighbours and new acquaintances, united by the appeal of excavating for the unknown in familiar places. Feedback showed that upwards of 95 per cent rated their experience as good or excellent and also revealed the impact of these projects, showing that skills gained or developed included not only those specific to archaeology but also valuable transferrable technical, organizational and communication skills. Participants especially enjoyed ‘learning something new’, ‘making new discoveries’ and ‘meeting new people’, with the latter social aspect demonstrating the capacity the activity has to build social cohesion by strengthening ties between residents of rural communities. The impact on participants’ appreciation of their local heritage was also clearly evident: 75 per cent knew more after the excavations about the history and archaeology of the place than they had beforehand; 84 per cent felt more engaged with local history and archaeology; and almost 80 per cent said they would continue to take more interest in local heritage in the future. These data all suggest that this sort of hands-on community-centred archaeological activity has a multi-faceted social role to play, boosting personal well-being through knowledge dissemination, building social capital by developing skills and connections within communities and strengthening community cohesion as people develop and share interests focussed on the place they inhabit and its heritage.
The positive impact extends beyond the local, with 79 per cent reporting that they would take a more general interest in archaeology and heritage in the future. This is particularly interesting, as rates of prior engagement with heritage amongst ACA community test-pit excavation participants is broadly in line with national averages: 67 per cent of volunteers on ACA community test-pit excavations had previously visited heritage sites, which may be compared with 70 per cent of adults overall in England who had visited a heritage site in 2009/10 (Seddon 2011, 17). This suggests that test-pit excavation is appealing to a representative cross-section of the communities in which they take place, not just attracting those already keenly interested in heritage, an inference supported anecdotally by comments from participants, many of whom claim no great prior interest in heritage and little or none in archaeology.

Test-pit excavations have also helped people who face particular personal challenges. Collaboration with Cambridgeshire charity Red2Green involved adults affected by autism in tailored test-pit projects intended to increase participants’ interest in archaeology and local history, to develop their teamwork and communication skills and to improve community integration for people on the autistic spectrum. Feedback (Lewis et al. 2013, 79–90) showed that 73 per cent of the Red2Green participants rated the experience very highly, with 85 per cent saying they would like to get involved with practical archaeology projects again in the future; 69 per cent said they would like more chances to discuss archaeology or local history with others, a notable achievement given the difficulties these individuals normally encounter when communicating verbally.

The test-pit projects discussed above, devised and run by ACA since 2005, set out to achieve a range of social outcomes in ways which were specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. It has demonstrably delivered a wide range of benefits to society, including transforming educational aspirations, enriching lives, strengthening communities and fostering support for heritage. The results thus not only demonstrate the wider impact of these programmes, but also provide a range of models for both providing and assessing the wider social benefits to individuals and communities of participation in university programmes of investigation. But the test-pit programme was always intended also to contribute to research into rural settlement (Lewis 2007), and this aspect of the excavations will now be reviewed below.

Rural settlement research

The initial research aim of the University of Cambridge test pit programme was simply to increase the number of currently occupied rural settlements (CORS) for which test-pit data could be used to reconstruct their development. This was needed in order to help redress the bias in existing rural settlement research which had long favoured deserted and severely shrunk sites (DMV or Deserted Medieval Villages) (Dyer & Everson 2012; Gerrard 2003; Taylor 2010; Wade 2000), especially in respect of research-driven excavation projects, despite the fact that CORS greatly outnumber DMVs (Dyer & Everson 2012, 13; Lewis et al. 1997, 143–6). The importance of CORS data is further underlined by evidence showing that DMVs are atypical when compared to medieval settlements overall, tending to be smaller, poorer, historically later and less favourably sited (Lewis et al. 1997, 146–55), as well as unevenly distributed – numerous in the central province of England but much less common elsewhere (Beresford & Hurst 1971, fig. 13; Roberts & Wrathmell 2000, 28–9). CORS, parts of the landscape by definition covered by modern settlement, are often perceived as archaeologically inaccessible, but test-pit excavation (originally developed as a technique for investigating buried occupation horizons in open landscapes) had by 2005 been shown to be remarkably effective means of recovering useful archaeological data from such sites (Cooper & Priest 2003; Gerrard & Aston 2013; Jones & Page 2007; Lewis 2003). Eastern England was highly suited to a programme of test-pit excavation within CORS, as it has good pottery sequences and displays considerable variation in landscape, settlement form and levels of desertion (Martin 2012; Rippon 2008; Roberts & Wrathmell 2000, 28–9; Williamson 2003;) but has benefitted from less field-
work than other parts of the UK such as the Midlands (Christie & Stamper 2012; Martin 2012, 228–9). In the University of Cambridge programme, test pits would be sited wherever possible on unbuilt-up land within selected CORS, usually in private gardens, and the excavated data analysed and mapped.

Mapping pottery data from test pits allows the development of CORS over centuries to be reconstructed in a way that no documentary evidence permits, while the data can also be aggregated to reveal regional patterns. Analysis requires care, of course, as inferences are inevitably based on small samples potentially affected by a range of biases. The principles behind the interpretation of the pottery data from test-pit excavations have been discussed elsewhere (Lewis 2007, 139–40), but in summary, for the Roman, late Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods, the recovery of five or more sherds from any one test pit is considered likely to indicate contemporary settlement in the immediate vicinity, with four sherds or fewer decreasingly less likely to do so, and a single sherd, especially if small and heavily abraded, most likely to be associated with non-habitative activity such as manuring of arable land (Jones 2005; Lewis 2005, 11–12). Inferences based on pits from several different modern properties are more reliable than those based on single pits, while negative evidence must inevitably be used with considerable caution. Depending on the size of the settlement, achieving a reliable picture of the shifting size, density and form of individual settlements typically requires at least 30 pits to be excavated (in an average-sized settlement) and ideally more than 50, but the Cambridge CORS project has shown that as few as 20 pits can show changes in settlement size and intensity of activity in the settlement over time.

By the end of 2013, more than 1500 test pit excavations had taken place in CORS in 53 rural parishes, 49 of which are within the eastern region counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk (Fig. 22.1), with summaries of the results published annually in *Medieval Settlement Research* and online (www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk/reports). A few examples are presented here to show how the evidence can inform our understanding of developmental trajectories within settlements and across landscapes.

At Pirton (Herts) (Fig. 22.2), excavation of 104 pits revealed that today’s nucleated village overlay two much smaller Romano-British settlements separated by c. 800 m, the larger of which lay alongside a small stream north of the present settlement. In the sub-Roman period the latter disappeared entirely, while the former contracted perhaps to the point of extinction, possibly leaving a tiny habitative node represented by just a single sherd of hand-made pottery from one test pit on the east of the present village. The scarcity of pottery suggests that settlement at this date was small in extent, relatively short-lived and probably inclined to shift around within the landscape. A marked change is evident in the later Anglo-Saxon period, however, with Thetford Ware (c. 850–1100 AD) found in a total of 30 pits. These occupy three distinct areas, in the northwest, centre and southeast of the present village. The former (repopulating for the first time the area occupied by the Romano-British settlement more than 500 years earlier) seems to comprise three separate farmsteads, but the central area (extending across previously uninhabited land between the two Romano-British settlements) appears to take the form of a nucleated village, possibly planned on a gridded layout (e.g. Blair 2013; Mortimer 2000; Ravensdale 1974, 121–44). Interestingly, this area encompasses a Saxo-Norman cemetery and east–west orientated building (plausibly interpreted as a church) (HHER 9677) found in advance of development in the 1990s (Fenton 1993). In the succeeding high medieval period (early twelfth–early fourteenth century), the volume of pottery recovered soars. While this in part reflects an increase in pottery manufacture in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Courtney 1997, 97), the test-pit data nonetheless can reasonably be inferred to suggest that settlement at Pirton more than doubled in size, with the northeastern farmsteads engrossed and extensions to the settlement added on its west side, creating a large agglomerated nucleation of polyfocal origin. The westerly extension appears to have been stimulated by the construction nearby of a motte-and-bailey castle (HHER 32), part of a major period of seigneurial investment in the twelfth century which probably also involved re-siting the church to its present location (HHER 4315) adjacent to the new castle. This dizzy growth was not to last, however, as the test-pit data show the number of pits producing habitative volumes of pottery to plummet in the later medieval period (late fourteenth–late sixteenth century) to just a third of its twelfth–fourteenth-century levels: several zones of the village were entirely abandoned, and Pirton did not recover its pre-fourteenth-century levels for more than 400 years.

Nayland (Suffolk) (Fig. 22.3) is also a nucleated village today, but here 32 test pits reveal a very different trajectory to that of Pirton. In Nayland, a cluster of just three test pits producing Romano-British pottery indicate a small rural settlement on the eastern margins of the existing settlement. No evidence was found for any activity in the fifth–ninth centuries AD, but finds of Thetford Ware from two pits near the
existing late twelfth-century parish church (SHER NYW 022) hint at the presence of a small settlement here. More than half the excavated pits produced high medieval pottery, however, clearly showing Nayland to have grown rapidly into a large and densely packed nucleated settlement in the twelfth–fourteenth centuries, arranged along several streets extending out from the core around the church and along the north
sides of the Stour River valley. Unlike Pirton, Nayland continued its expansion into the later medieval period. While Nayland did not grow much in area at this time, suggesting a lack of available land for new building, it grew instead in density, with a 50 per cent increase in the number of sites within the high medieval village footprint producing later medieval pottery. Unlike Pirton, medieval Nayland had little agricultural land, and relied instead on commerce, especially the lucrative wool trade. This is likely to have been the key to its late medieval success. In the post-medieval period, the test-pit data indicate that Nayland stagnated, as the cloth trade faltered and other settlements caught up, their growth fuelled by resurgent agricultural production and commercial diversification. Ranked by the percentage of pits producing two or more sherds, Nayland drops from top in the mid fourteenth–mid sixteenth centuries to joint eighth (out of 49) in the late sixteenth–late eighteenth centuries: still prominent, but no longer pre-eminent.

The settlement of Carleton Rode (Norfolk) (Fig. 22.4), very different in form to Pirton and Nayland, shows how test-pit data can reveal long-term development across entire landscapes of dispersed settlement. Fifty-seven pits excavated in the gardens of various hamlets, cottage clusters and farms produced only a couple of sherds of Romano-British pottery, showing that today’s settlements do not overlie Romano-British antecedents. Although Carleton Rode is very different to Pirton in this respect, in the succeeding early–middle Anglo-Saxon period it is more similar to Pirton, as just one site in Carleton Rode produced just a single sherd of early Anglo-Saxon pottery, hinting at the presence of settlement, but not one of extensive or long-lived duration. As at Pirton, this same site also produced Thetford Ware, but at Carleton Rode the form the parent settlement took then was very different, being just one node in a network of highly dispersed settlement comprising attenuated chains of farmsteads and hamlets. These included at least three sites in the marshy, lower-lying southern part of the parish, showing how early this area was used for settlement. This intensification of landscape...
Figure 22.4. Carleton Rode (Norfolk), showing the sites of all excavated test pits yielding pottery dating to Roman, early Anglo-Saxon, middle Anglo-Saxon, late Anglo-Saxon, high medieval and later medieval periods.
exploitation continued in the high medieval period (twelfth–fourteenth century), with at least seven new dispersed sites producing habitative volumes of pottery of this date, including three from Upgate in the westerly part of the parish, possibly fringing common land, a pattern seen elsewhere at this date in Norfolk (e.g. Davison 1990). Somewhat unexpectedly, around the early fourteenth-century parish church (NHER 10039), 14 test pits produced a total of just two sherds of pottery, barely enough to infer manuring for arable, and certainly much less than would be expected were settlement present here at this time. The phenomenon of isolated churches in Norfolk and Suffolk has long been recognized (e.g. Beresford 1954, 386), but it is a significant advance to see this pattern also evident in CORS, as the church at Carleton Rode is today not isolated but surrounded by a small cluster of settlement, including a farm. It is also noteworthy that dispersed Carleton Rode appears to suffer nearly as badly as nucleated Pirton from late medieval contraction, with the percentage of pits producing pottery dropping from 37 per cent to 14 per cent, little more than a third of its previous level. The majority of the farmsteads across Carleton Rode are entirely devoid of later medieval pottery while pottery from the densely populated interrupted row at Flaxlands is reduced to less than a third of its former size.

Clavering (Essex) (Fig. 22.5), some 60 km southwest of Carleton Rode, is also in a highly dispersed landscape, but the test-pit data display both similarities and differences. Three discrete sites at Clavering produced small amounts of pottery of Romano-British date, hinting at a dispersed settlement pattern, but nothing at all was found dating to between the end of the Roman period and the early twelfth century. In contrast, the high medieval period saw an explosion of settlement across the landscape, with a small village, probably nucleated, clustered around a core comprising church (EHER 115) and manor (EHER 113) and numerous even smaller dispersed settlements scattered along lanes throughout the parish, many with ‘green’ or ‘end’ names and some likely to have comprised little more than single homesteads. A significant number of these sites are furnished with moats. This energetic expansion of settlement saw the volume of pottery across the parish of Clavering climb from zero in the Anglo-Saxon period to above average

Figure 22.5 (right). Clavering (Essex), showing the sites of all excavated test pits yielding pottery dating to Roman, early Anglo-Saxon, middle Anglo-Saxon, late Anglo-Saxon, high medieval and later medieval periods.
Table 22.1. Test pits completed by 2013 listed alphabetically by parish name, showing the percentage of excavated pits in each community producing possibly habitative volumes of pottery of Roman, Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval date.

<table>
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<th>Parish name</th>
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<th>Total no. pits dug (to end 2013)</th>
<th>Roman</th>
<th>Early Anglo-Saxon</th>
<th>Middle Anglo-Saxon</th>
<th>Late Anglo-Saxon</th>
<th>Change since previous period in no. pits with 1+ sherds</th>
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for the eastern region in the high medieval period. This process of settlement expansion was, however, abruptly arrested in the later medieval period: most sites outside the village produced no later medieval pottery at all, although the nucleated settlement around the church seems to have fared much better. All but one of the pits produced pottery of sixteenth–eighteenth-century date, showing that when recovery took place, the dispersed character of the settlement pattern established in the high medieval period was maintained. Patterns of landholding and landscape organization in dispersed areas, it would seem, show a higher level of conservatism than do habitation sites.

Uncovering regional patterns

The examples above are intended to show how detailed settlement narratives can be reconstructed using data from test-pit excavations in CORS. Beyond this, however, the scale of the University of Cambridge CORS work is now allowing synthesized analysis to reveal wider regional patterns. A review of some of these follows, considering Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods in turn.

Roman

Looking first at the Roman period, an important question for researchers relates to that of continuity (or otherwise) between Roman and later settlement (e.g. Dark & Dark 1997; Hingley 2007; Rippon 2008; Rippon et al. 2012; Williamson 2013), a widely debated issue which recognizes that we need to know more about the evidence underlying CORS (Oake et al. 2007, 12–15; Wade 2000, 23). The University of Cambridge test-pit data reveal a marked lack of Roman material, a pattern apparent in all the case studies summarized above and many more besides (Cooper 2013). Overall, of the 1499 pits excavated by the end of 2013, only 132 (9 per cent) produced more than a single sherd of Romano-British pottery (Table 22.1, column 4). Given that pottery was in widespread use in this period in eastern England, considerably large volumes would be expected from locations overlying Romano-British settlements (Millett 1985), so its absence is an important discovery. This is made more surprising by evidence from field-walking in the region, which indicates a dense pattern of first–fourth-century settlement and suggests that few medieval and modern settlements will be far from a Romano-British settlement (Davison 1990; Parry 2006; Rogerson et al. 1997). The CORS with the highest percentage of test pits producing Roman material is Long Melford (Suffolk), which is in a class of its own in this respect, with 49 per cent producing two or more sherds of Romano-British pottery. Here, the medieval village is clearly sited on top of a Romano-British settlement, probably a small town. Of the remaining CORS with greater volumes of Romano-British sherds, Peakirk (Cambridgeshire) and Wiveton (Norfolk), with 25 and 22 per cent of pits respectively producing two or more sherds, are both sites with excellent access to navigable waterways (the Car Dyke and the North Sea). Echoing this, sites in Fenland and near the upper reaches of the River Ouse and Cam produce moderate quantities of Romano-British pottery, with 8–15 per cent of excavated pits in each place producing more sherds than would be expected from manuring (Houghton and Isleham: 8 per cent; Ufford and Castor: 9 per cent; Girton: 10 per cent; Cottenham: 12 per cent; Willingham: 15 per cent). Beyond these areas, however, most sites produced little or no Romano-British material, suggesting a higher level of co-location between Romano-British sites and CORS north of Cambridge, along the fen edge and along the River Ouse than elsewhere. Beyond this, those CORS which do produce moderate amounts of Romano-British pottery mostly do so only at, or beyond, their margins, a pattern repeated at Pirton, Wisbech St Mary, Acle, Binham, Chediston and Writtle. In fact, in all bar two cases, the Romano-British material does not seem to be present in significant volumes under the places occupied by medieval and later settlement (Cooper 2013, 37, fig. 4.6), implying that the degree of contiguity between settlements of Roman and later date is less than has previously been suspected (e.g. Wade 2000, 23).

Anglo-Saxon

This lack of co-location with later settlements is reflected also in the early and middle Anglo-Saxon data, most starkly evident at Romano-British sites such as Pirton and Long Melford, with the former yielding just a single sherd of early Anglo-Saxon pottery and the latter none at all. This does not, of course, necessarily indicate that the Romano-British sites were entirely deserted, but it does represent a significant change. Overall, there is a dramatic reduction in the volume of pottery recovered: out of 1499 pits excavated in the eastern region, 9 per cent produced two or more sherds of Romano-British pottery but just 1.5 per cent (22 pits) yielded even a single sherd of early Anglo-Saxon pottery (handmade wares dating to c. 450–700 AD), and only 1.5 per cent (27 pits) produced any pottery of middle Anglo-Saxon date (Ipswich Ware dating to c. 720–850 AD) (Table 22.1, columns 6 & 9). There is a marked correlation apparent between Romano-British and early–middle Anglo-Saxon material (Cooper 2013, 34–5; Lewis 2010, 103): all of the
Another pattern apparent in the late Anglo-Saxon period is the general absence of pottery of this date from the south of the region, especially from Essex, recalling the posited cultural divide along the River Gipping, separating the area to its south from the rest of the eastern region, which has been the subject of much recent discussion (e.g. Martin 2007; 2012; Rippon 2008; Williamson 2005). None of the test-pit excavations at Little Hallingbury, Thorington and West Mersea produced any late Anglo-Saxon wares from more than 120 pits, while Writtle produced just two sherds from 54 pits (Table 22.1). At Manuden two pits out of 18 (11 per cent) produced Thetford Ware, but these were located within 10 m of one another in adjacent gardens, and Manuden itself lies at the extreme northwest margins of Essex, less than 10 km from the present border with Cambridgeshire, in an area thought to look north rather than south (Rippon 2008, 140–41). It has been suggested that late Anglo-Saxon Essex was characterized by small habitation nodes focused on *thengly burhs* co-located with dependent churches (Martin 2012), and the test-pit data suggest that Manuden and possibly Nayland may be examples of this.

**Medieval**

Moving forward in time, the test-pit data from the eleventh–sixteenth centuries illuminate many aspects of the process by which the medieval settlement pattern evolved, a major focus of scholarly research across a range of disciplines (Aston et al. 1989; Hooke 1985; Jones & Page 2007; Lewis et al. 1997; Roberts 1987; Roberts & Wrathmell 2002; Taylor 1983). The CORS test-pit data suggest that nucleated settlements in eastern England appeared earliest in the centre of the region, but that these do not appear to be widespread before the eleventh century beyond the major river valleys. The CORS data show that the majority of settlements across the region became nucleated from the twelfth century, growing both in size as new extensions were added to existing settlements and in density as space within settlements was in-filled and plots sub-divided. The test-pit data allow the proliferation of dispersed hamlets and single farmsteads to be dated, showing this to take place widely from the mid ninth until the mid thirteenth century, notably in areas of relative elevation and heavy soil. Many of the dispersed sites are entirely undocumented before the seventeenth, eighteenth or even nineteenth centuries, and thus the test-pit data enable us to date and map the colonization of the landscape and the intensification of its exploitation much more accurately than was previously possible. Overall, the mapped and aggregated data is indicating demographic and economic expan-
sion across this region (constituting c. one-sixth of England) between the tenth and thirteenth centuries of at least 300 per cent.

The final pattern to be considered here is one of the most striking: that pertaining to post-fourteenth-century contraction. The fourteenth century is a period of great interest to social and economic historians, who have long debated the impact of the period of environmental and economic turbulence either side of the Black Death of 1348–9 (Hatcher 1994 and references therein). Reaching a consensus on this has not been made easier by the lack of standardized data spanning the longue durée. This is exactly what the test-pit data can provide, and the picture which it reveals is dramatic: overall, the volume of pottery recovered collapses to barely half the previous level when data pre-dating and post-dating the fourteenth century are compared. While 40 per cent of the excavated pits (595 out of 1499) produced two or more sherds of pottery dating to the early twelfth to early fourteenth centuries, just 21 per cent (321 out of 1499) did so for the mid fourteenth to mid sixteenth centuries (Table 22.1, columns 19 & 22). Overall, 90 per cent of all the excavated settlements show reduced volumes of pottery in the late medieval period (late fourteenth–late sixteenth century), with many CORS showing a decline of 60 per cent, 70 per cent or 80 per cent in the number of sites producing two or more sherds of pottery (Fig. 22.6). There is no evidence that per capita pottery use declined significantly in this period (Dyer 1982; McCarthy & Brooks 1988, 102–3), so it can be inferred that these drops do represent changes in population. We have seen that this is apparent at Pirton, Carleton Rode and Clavering (see above), but these are in no way exceptional, and the pattern is repeated widely across the eastern region. Gaywood in northwest Norfolk, now a suburb of nearby Kings Lynn, appears almost entirely abandoned: 21 pits produced 2 or more sherds of high medieval date, but just 3 of later medieval date, a drop of 86 per cent. At Binham (60 pits excavated), the number falls from 21 to 7, a drop of 71 per cent. Cottenham (34 pits excavated), just north of Cambridge, drops by 79 per cent from 14 to 3; Great Shelford (39 pits excavated) just south of Cambridge drops by 59 per cent from 22 to 9; Ashwell (Herts) (34 pits excavated) by 69 per cent from 13 to 4; Shillington (Beds) (23 pits excavated) by 71 per cent from 14 to 4. With rare exceptions (Nayland, Long Melford, Chediston and Thorney), pottery used in this way as a proxy for human activity reveals devastation on a grand scale in settlements which, it must be remembered, would conventionally be considered the ‘successful’ survivors which did not end up as deserted sites (DMVs). It is both illuminating and sobering to realize that the picture afforded to us by DMVs is shown by the test-pit data from CORS to be not exceptional, but just the tip of an iceberg of settlement depopulation, whose true extent has previously been concealed by post-medieval re-growth over areas of former abandonment.

Conclusions

This review of some of the outcomes of ACA test-pit excavations in eastern England is not intended to be comprehensive, but merely to demonstrate the capacity of this approach to advance both social and research agendas in a genuinely symbiotic virtuous circle, as the generation of new data and the delivery of social benefits each depend on and advance the other: engaging and benefitting the wider public increases available manpower and enables excavations to take

Figure 22.6. Eastern England, showing the percentage of pits producing two or more sherds of pottery dating to the high and late medieval period.
place in otherwise inaccessible private spaces in the landscape, while using the archaeological data to generate genuinely new knowledge and understanding of the past amplifies the impact of participation on individuals and communities. It is pertinent to consider here its wider potential application. The social outcomes – such as raised aspirations, skills development, personal enrichment, strengthened communities – are potentially of benefit to any and all, but are particularly important in a rapidly changing technological world where individuals are increasingly mobile and communities subject to flux. From an archaeological perspective, broader questions pertaining to aspects of long-term settlement and landscape which the test pit data illuminate – such as late antique/post-classical continuity and change, the origins of the nucleated village and the impact of the Black Death – are international in scope: much research around the Mediterranean, for example, explores similar issues (Christie 2000). Graeme Barker’s magisterial survey of the Biferno Valley in Italy (Barker 1995) is, of course, a classic example. Projects such as those in Italy (Arthur 2000), North Africa (Leone & Mattingley 2000), Greece (Sanders 2000) and Albania (Bowden & Hodges 2000) and beyond, many using field-walking combined with selective excavation and geophysical, geochemical and environmental sampling, have made great advances. But most such projects exclude built-up areas, or focus only on very limited areas within them, leaving these as black holes in our maps of the past about which little can be said, as has occasionally been ruefully recognized: ‘Whether earlier fortifications in reality underlie still-surviving villages cannot yet be usefully discussed’ (Hodges et al. 1995, 271) – although the issue is more often simply ignored. The potential of test-pit excavation within CORS in such regions, where it can not only bring inhabited zones within archaeological reach, but also benefit host communities and engage them in their shared heritage of place (e.g. Alonzo Gonzalez & Fernandez Fernandez 2013), is immense. While legislation may impede such endeavours in states where individual permits may be required for each test pit (Paul Arthur, pers. comm. January 2014), recent test-pit excavations in CORS in southern France (Turner & Webster 2012; Turner et al. 2013) and Spain (Fernandez Mier et al. 2014) are beginning both to demonstrate the practicability of this approach and to hint at its potential. More extensive programmes, similar in scope to the ACA work, could not only significantly advance knowledge and understanding of the past, but also transform public engagement with archaeology in the present, helping to protect and build for the future.

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