

Archaeological test pit excavations in Mill Green, Hertfordshire, 2005

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1 Introduction

A total of nine 1m² archaeological test pits were excavated over a one-year period in 2005 in the village of Mill Green in south Hertfordshire, as part of the pilot of the Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA) and run by Access Cambridge Archaeology (ACA) out of the University of Cambridge.

Mill Green is today a small hamlet, lying at c.60m OD either side of the river Lea c.3km north-east of Hatfield in Hertfordshire. Mill Green has no church, and its only claim to medieval antecedence comes from the presence of a mill, now a museum. Most of the surviving fabric of this structure is 18th century, although some 16th century timberwork is visible inside the building. No earlier fabric is known, but the present building is generally considered to occupy the site of a medieval mill, one of four held by the abbot of Ely at Hatfield in Domesday Book.

1.1 Access Cambridge Archaeology

Access Cambridge Archaeology (ACA) (<http://www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk/>) is an archaeological outreach organisation based in the Department of Archaeology in the University of Cambridge, which aims to enhance economic, social and personal well-being through active engagement with archaeology. It was set up in 2004 and specialises in providing opportunities for members of the public to take part in purposeful, research-orientated archaeological investigations including excavation. Educational events and courses range in length from a few hours to a week or more and involve members of the public of all ages.

Since 2015, ACA has been managed by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) and thus have been able to work more closely with the unit to deliver outreach programmes such as the community excavations at Peterborough Cathedral in 2016, community test pitting activities in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. The ACA and CAU collaboration has also enabled the continuation of the education outreach projects that involve work with both primary and secondary school pupils.

1.2 The Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA)

The Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA) programme aims to raise the aspirations, enthusiasm and attainment of 14-17 year-olds with regard to higher education by making a valuable contribution to current academic research at the University of Cambridge. The three-day learning-extension course has been run by Access Cambridge Archaeology (ACA) since 2005, aimed at UK students in state schools years 9, 10 and 12.

On HEFA, participants spend two days running their own small (1m²) archaeological excavation within living villages, with the aim of applying and developing a wide range of learning skills, boosting their academic confidence and giving them a taste of life and learning at university level. They make new discoveries for and about themselves, and, in the process, contribute to the university's currently occupied rural settlement (CORS) research into the development of rural communities and settlements in the past. The third day is spent in the University of Cambridge analysing the excavation results in discursive learning sessions which aim to engage and challenge participants, prepare them to produce a written analysis for assessment as well as provide an inspirational and positive experience of higher education.

After the field academy, learners receive detailed individual feedback on their data collection, personal, learning and thinking skills developed during the fieldwork as well as their reporting and research skills exhibited in the written assignment, which will support applications to further and higher education.

2 Methodology

The one year of test pitting in Mill Green was organised by ACA in conjunction with local residents of the village and AimHigher Hertfordshire. The excavation and records followed the standard Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA) instruction handbook and recording booklet.

The test pit digging takes place over two days, which begins with an initial talk explaining the aims of the excavation, the procedures used in digging and recording the test pit and the correct and safe use of equipment. Participants are then divided into teams of three or four individuals, and each team is provided with a complete set of test pit excavation equipment, copies of the instruction handbook and a record booklet to enter excavation data into.

The test pits were all 1m² and the turf, if present, was removed in neat squares by hand. Each test pit was excavated in a series of 10cm spits or contexts, to a maximum depth of 1.2m. The horizontal surface of each context/spit was then drawn at 1:10 scale before excavation, a photograph taken and the colour of the soil recorded with reference to a standardised colour chart. A pro-forma recording system was used by participants to record their test pit excavation. This comprised a 16-page *Test Pit Record* booklet which was developed by ACA for use by people with no previous archaeological experience. Each pit and context is described and noted using the site code MGR/05.

During the excavation, 100% of the spoil is sieved through a 10mm mesh (with the occasional exception of very heavy clay soils which have to be hand-searched). All artefacts are retained, cleaned and bagged by context. Cut and built features are planned at 1:10 and excavated sequentially with latest deposits removed first. Pottery and most other finds are identified promptly by archaeological experts on site who visit the test pits regularly providing advice and checking that the excavation is being carried out and recorded to the required standard. Test pits are excavated down to natural or the maximum safe depth of 1.2m, whichever is encountered first. A minority of test pits will stop on encountering a feature, (ancient or modern) which archaeological staff deem inadvisable or impossible to remove, and occasionally excavation may cease at a level above natural due to time constraints. On completion of each test pit excavation, all four sections are drawn at 1:10 along with the unexcavated base of the test pit prior to backfilling by hand and the turf replaced neatly to restore the site.

After the two days of excavation are completed, the archaeological records and finds (all of which are kept and cleaned on site) are retained by ACA at the University of Cambridge for analysis, reporting, archiving and submission to HER's, publication and ongoing research into the origins and development of rural settlement. Ownership of objects rests in the first instance with the landowner, except where other law overrides this (e.g. Treasure Act 1996, 2006, Burials Act 1857). ACA retain all finds in the short term for analysis and ideally also in the longer term in order that the excavation archives will be as complete as possible, but any requests to return finds to owners will be agreed.

Test Pit one (MGR/05/1)

Test pit one was excavated in the rear of a large garden of a possible early 20th century cottage, set close to the road in the far west of the village (1 Bush Hall Lane, Mill Green. TL 523925 209807).

Test pit one was excavated to a depth of 0.6m. Natural was not found but due to time constraints, excavations were halted at this level and the test pit was recorded and backfilled.

The vast majority of the pottery excavated from MGR/05/1 dates to the 19th century and was found in large numbers throughout the test pit. An additional three sherds of post medieval pottery was also recovered, which include German Stoneware and Red Earthenwares that were found from the middle contexts of the test pit.

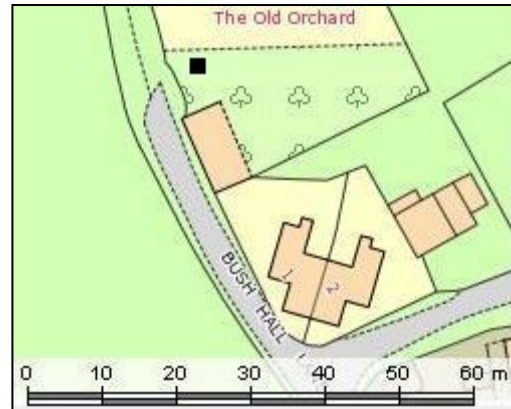


Figure 2: Location map of MRG/05/1

TP	Context	German Stoneware		Redware		19thC		Date Range
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1	1					27	120	1800 – 1900
1	2					48	210	1800 – 1900
1	3	1	9	1	21	22	117	1550 – 1900
1	4					23	116	1800 – 1900
1	5			1	9	16	56	1550 – 1900
1	6					22	623	1800 – 1900

Table 1: The pottery excavated from MGR/05/1

The pottery results that were excavated from MGR/05/1 are similar to the rest of the results identified from test pitting in the village and suggest that there was no activity on site prior to the 16th century, when the site was most probably used as open fields. The peak of activity came during the 19th century with an expanse of the village and more intense occupation that also potentially relates to the construction of the house at MGR/05/1.

Test Pit two (MGR/05/2)

Test pit two was excavated in the rear garden of a likely early 20th century house, close to the road in the far west of the village (The Laurels, Mill Green Lane, Mill Green. TL 524075 209859).

Test pit two was excavated to a depth of 0.6m, at which an orange clay natural was found. Excavations were halted at this level and the test pit was recorded and backfilled.

A single sherd of later medieval London Ware was excavated from context one of MGR/05/2 that was mixed with post medieval German Stoneware and three sherds of Red Earthenware, which were also excavated from context four. The vast majority of the pottery however, dates to the 19th century and was found mixed through the upper five contexts of the test pit.

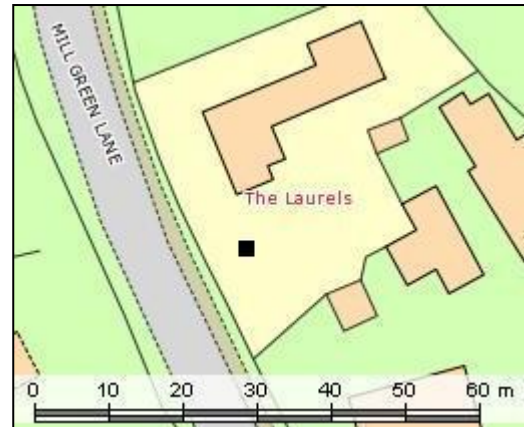


Figure 3: Location map of MGR/05/2

TP	Context	London		German Stone		Redware		19thC		Date Range
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
2	1	1	3	1	6			6	6	1450 – 1900
2	2							21	22	1800 – 1900
2	3							11	36	1800 – 1900
2	4					3	19	16	43	1550 – 1900
2	5							15	32	1800 – 1900

Table 2: The pottery excavated from MGR/05/2

Only a single sherd of medieval pottery was excavated from MGR/05/2 from all the test pit excavations undertaken in Mill Green. As the sherd is quite small and has been mixed with later activity on site it is most probably related to later medieval agricultural activity on site, rather than on site occupation. The site most probably continued to be used as fields until the 19th century, when there was more intense occupation that continued until the current house was built in the early 20th century.

Test Pit three (MGR/05/3)

Test pit three was excavated in the large rear garden of a grade II listed pub, built during the 17th century and is set back from the main road in the far south west of the village. It was also the northern of two pits excavated here; see also MGR/05/4 (The Green Man Public House, Mill Green Lane, Mill Green. TL 524118 209794).

Test pit three was excavated to a depth of 0.8m. Natural was not found, but due to time constraints excavations were halted at this level and the test pit was recorded and backfilled.

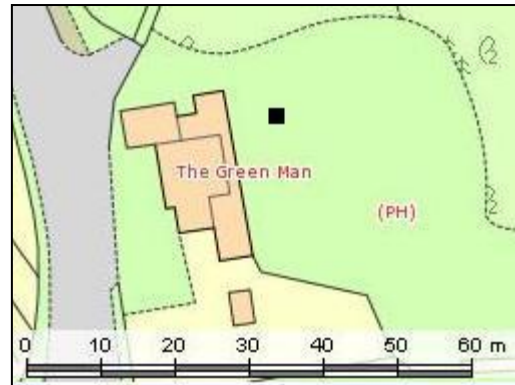


Figure 4: Location map of MGR/05/3

Two sherds of post medieval Red Earthenware were found mixed through the test pit in contexts three and seven, but the vast majority of the pottery excavated from MGR/05/3 dates to the 19th century that was found through all eight contexts of the test pit.

TP	Context	Redware		19thC		Date Range
		No	Wt	No	Wt	
3	1			3	25	1800 – 1900
3	2			39	92	1800 – 1900
3	3	1	91	13	43	1550 – 1900
3	4			19	57	1800 – 1900
3	5			11	56	1800 – 1900
3	6			14	77	1800 – 1900
3	7	1	26	15	39	1550 – 1900
3	8			10	36	1800 – 1900

Table 3: The pottery excavated from MGR/05/3

The results from MGR/05/3 follow the general pattern of results that were identified from test pitting in Mill Green. These suggest that the site was most probably open fields during the post medieval period, until more intense occupation into the 19th century that continued through to the pub being built in the 20th century.

Test Pit four (MGR/05/4)

Test pit four was excavated in the large rear garden of a grade II listed pub, built during the 17th century and is set back from the main road in the far south west of the village. It was also the southern of two pits excavated here; see also MGR/05/3 (The Green Man Public House, Mill Green Lane, Mill Green. TL 524122 209783).

Test pit four was excavated to a depth of 0.7m. Natural was not found, but due to time constraints excavations were halted at this level and the test pit was recorded and backfilled.

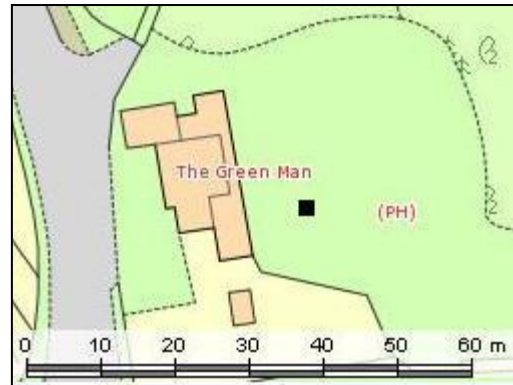


Figure 5: Location map of MGR/05/4

The vast majority of the pottery excavated from MGR/05/4 dates to the 19th century with generally large amounts recovered from every context of the test pit. An additional five sherds of post medieval pottery were also recovered from the upper half of the pit and consist of Red Earthenwares and a single sherd of Staffordshire Mottled Ware that was recovered from context one.

TP	Context	Redware		Mottled Ware		19thC		Date Range
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
4	1			1	2	22	83	1680 – 1900
4	2					25	104	1800 – 1900
4	3	2	25			37	274	1550 – 1900
4	4					5	25	1800 – 1900
4	5	2	58			30	92	1550 – 1900
4	6					6	16	1800 – 1900
4	7					5	54	1800 – 1900

Table 4: The pottery excavated from MGR/05/4

Much like the pottery excavated from MGR/05/3, the results from MGR/05/4 suggest that the site was open fields during the post medieval period, given the few finds and pottery excavated that suggest very low levels of activity on site. More intense occupation was noted into the 19th century which continued through to the pub being built in the 20th century.

Test Pit five (MGR/05/5)

Test pit five was excavated in the long narrow rear garden of a grade II listed 18th century mid-terraced cottage situated centrally in the village (4 Waterside Cottages, Mill Green Lane, Mill Green. TL 524072 209778).

Test pit five was excavated to a depth of 0.6m, at which natural clay was found. Excavations were halted at this level and the test pit was recorded and backfilled.

Four sherds of post medieval pottery excavated from MGR/05/5, with Red Earthenware recovered from the lower contexts of the test pit and a sherd of Staffordshire Mottled Ware found from context one. The majority of the pottery however, dates to the 19th century and was excavated in quite large quantities from contexts three to five.

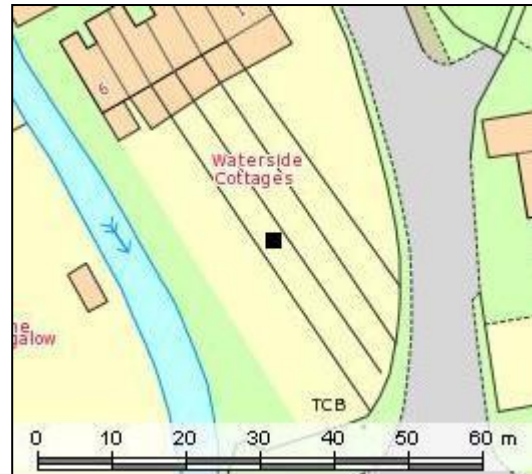


Figure 6: Location map of MGR/05/5

TP	Context	Redware		Mottled Ware		19thC		Date Range
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
5	1			1	5			1650 – 1750
5	3					19	31	1800 – 1900
5	4					50	71	1800 – 1900
5	5	1	7			15	44	1550 – 1900
5	6	2	25					1550 – 1800

Table 5: The pottery excavated from MGR/05/5

There was no evidence for any activity on site prior to the 16th century and the minimal pottery and finds that were recovered to date to the post medieval suggest that the site was probably open fields at that time. There was an increase in activity into the 19th century, probably relating to the construction of the cottages at that time. MGR/05/5 appears to have much less disturbance on site, compared to the other test pits in the village; context six may be an undisturbed post medieval layer.

Test Pit six (MGR/05/6)

Test pit six was excavated in the long narrow rear garden of an end of terraced grade II listed 18th century cottage situated centrally in the village (6 Waterside Cottages, Mill Green Lane, Mill Green. TL 524066 209775).

Test pit six was excavated to a depth of 0.6m, at which natural clay was found. Excavations were halted at this level and the test pit was recorded and backfilled.

The majority of the pottery excavated from MGR/05/6 dates to the 19th century and was found mixed through the test pit in contexts two and five. An additional three sherds of Red Earthenware were also excavated from context two.

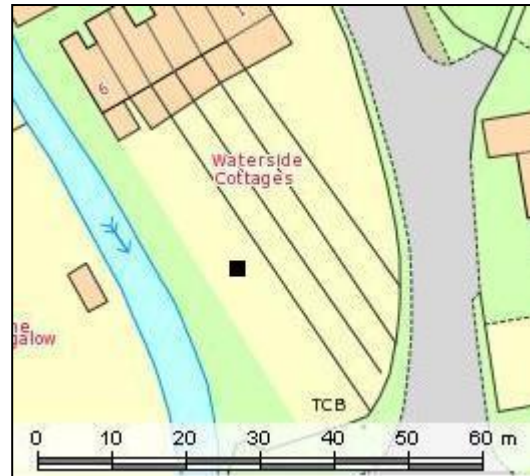


Figure 7: Location map of MRG/05/7

TP	Context	Redware		19thC		Date Range
		No	Wt	No	Wt	
6	2	3	109	25	83	1550 – 1900
6	5			12	80	1800 – 1900

Table 6: The pottery excavated from MGR/05/6

Much like MGR/05/5 that was also excavated at Waterside Cottages, MGR/05/6 also suggests that there were fewer disturbances on site during the 19th century; perhaps the finds and pottery were deposited over a larger area, which is why less is identified here, compared to the rest of the test pits in the village. The low levels of activity during the post medieval, again suggest that the site was used as open fields until the cottages were built, most probably in the 19th century.

Test Pit seven (MGR/05/7)

Test pit seven was excavated in the large rear garden of the old Mill House, a grade II* listed 17th century mill and house set to the east of the river and quite central in the village (The Old Mill House, Mill Green Lane, Mill Green. TL 524009 209788).

Test pit seven was excavated to a depth of 0.5m. Natural was not found, but due to time constraints, excavations were halted at this level and the test pit was recorded and backfilled.

The vast majority of the pottery excavated from MGR/05/7 dates to the 19th century and was found in generally large quantities through all contexts. A range of post medieval wares were also recorded mixed through the upper half of the test pit and consist of Red Earthenware, Delft Ware, Staffordshire Mottled Ware and White Salt-glazed Stoneware.

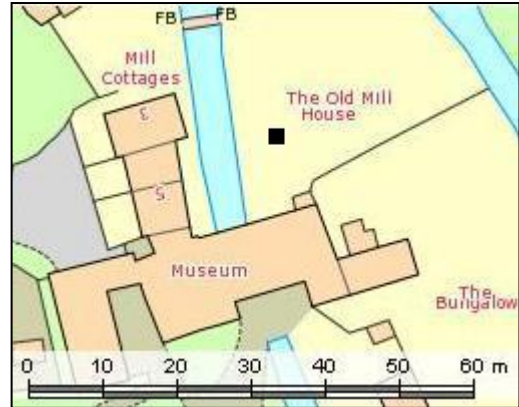


Figure 8: Location map of MGR/05/7

TP	Context	Redware		Delft		Mottled Ware		WSGS		19thC		Date Range
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
7	1	1	16	1	2	1	6			36	50	1550 – 1900
7	2	3	35							68	118	1550 – 1900
7	3	1	30					1	2	51	158	1550 – 1900
7	4	3	51							42	74	1550 – 1900
7	5									8	14	1800 – 1900
7	6									1	10	1800 – 1900

Table 7: The pottery excavated from MGR/05/7

The first recorded evidence for the water mill in Mill Green dates to the early medieval period and was in constant use until the early 20th century. The building standing today is evidence of a lot of renovations during the 18th and 19th centuries when the mill was its most prosperous. The pottery evidence suggests that there was no activity on this part of site until the 16th century, although there is potential for evidence of earlier activity at a greater depth. The peak of activity on site was again during the 19th century and the prosperity of the mill is probably the reason for the expansion of activity that has been identified through test pitting in Mill Green.

Test Pit eight (MGR/05/8)

Test pit eight was excavated on a small area of grass to the front of a grade II* listed 17th century mill and house, now a museum, just west of the river. It was also the northern of two test pits excavated here; see also MGR/05/9 (Mill Green Museum, Mill Green Lane, Mill Green. TL 523999 209759).

Test pit eight was excavated to a depth of 0.4m, at which natural was found. Excavations were halted at this level and the test pit was recorded and backfilled.

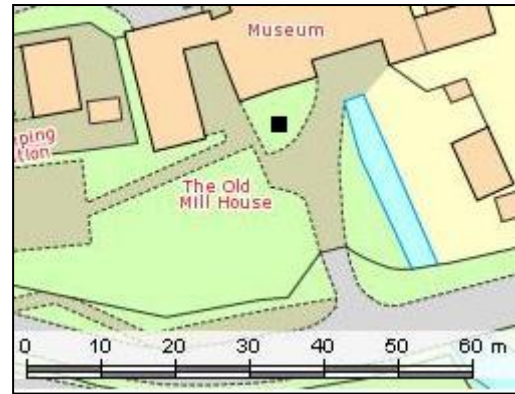


Figure 9: Location map of MGR/05/8

Small amounts of pottery were excavated from MGR/05/8, the majority of which date to the 19th century and were found through the upper three contexts of the test pit. An additional three sherds of post medieval Red Earthenware and German Stoneware were also recovered from the upper two contexts of MGR/05/8.

TP	Context	Redware		German Stoneware		19thC		Date Range
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
8	1	1	3	1	1	8	13	1550 – 1900
8	2	1	11			12	38	1550 – 1900
8	3					3	8	1800 – 1900

Table 8: The pottery excavated from MGR/05/8

Much like the results from both MGR/05/7 and MGR/05/9, the pottery excavated from MGR/05/8 indicates no activity associated with the earliest evidence of the water mill during the early medieval period. The test pit yielded low levels of post medieval activity with a peak of occupation into the 19th century, again due to the prosperity of the mill at that time.

Test Pit nine (MGR/05/9)

Test pit nine was excavated on an area of open grass to the front of a grade II* listed 17th century mill and house, now a museum, between the building and the road. It was also the southern of two test pits excavated here; see also MGR/05/8 (Mill Green Museum, Mill Green Lane, Mill Green. TL 523989 209746).

Test pit nine was excavated to a depth of 0.4m. Natural was not found, but due to time constraints, excavations were halted at this level and the test pit was recorded and backfilled.

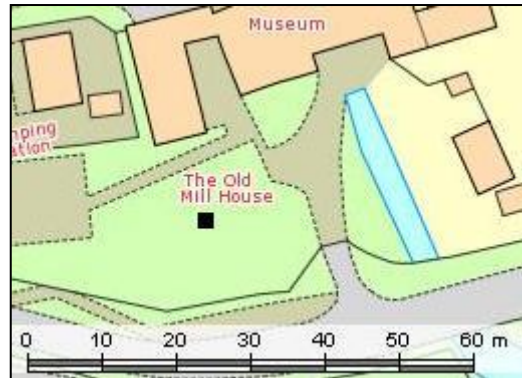


Figure 10: Location map of MRG/05/9

A small amount of pottery was excavated from MGR/05/9, the majority of which dates to the 19th century and found through the upper two contexts of the test pit. Two additional sherds of post medieval Red Earthenware were also excavated from context two.

TP	Context	Redware		19 th C		Date Range
		No	Wt	No	Wt	
9	1			10	15	1800 – 1900
9	2	2	34	11	62	1550 – 1900

Table 9: The pottery excavated from MGR/05/9

Similar to the finds and pottery that were excavated from MGR/05/8 to the front of the museum there was no evidence for any activity on site prior to the 16th century and indicates that this area was open fields at that time. The peak of activity was during the 19th century when the mill was most prosperous, but there may also be evidence for earlier finds at a great depth.

4 Conclusions

The nine archaeological test pits that were excavated in Mill Green in November 2005 have yielded archaeological evidence for settlement in the hamlet dating from the late medieval through to the modern day and have added to the bigger picture of the settlement, although no pre-medieval finds were identified from any of the test pits.

Only one test pit, MGR/05/2, produced a single sherd of later medieval London Ware, but as this was found from the upper most layer of the test pit, with material of a post medieval and 19th century date, it is impossible to exclude the possibility that this sherd was brought onto this site in the relatively recent past. Even if the London Ware sherd does indeed come from the location in which it was found, it is notable that MGR/05/2 is the furthest of all the 2005 test pits from the mill site itself. None of the other test pits produced any material earlier than c.1550, a date which does of course correlate well with that of the earliest known surviving fabric of the mill building. This does not, of course, completely exclude the possibility that a mill and/or associated settlement existed here in the Middle Ages, but it must cast doubt on that assertion. However, two of the test pits did also not go very deep. MGR/05/6 was inadvertently sited on top of a late Victorian/early-20th century rubbish pit, which prevented excavation to any significant depth, while MGR/05/9 was started late in the course of the excavation, after another test pit encountered natural. The possibility that excavation of further test pits might reveal more secure evidence for medieval occupation in the area cannot be excluded.

5 Maps

Much of the value of the test pit data from currently occupied rural settlements are derived from a holistic consideration across the entire settlement. Maps showing a range of the data from the test pit excavations in Mill Green in 2005 are included below.

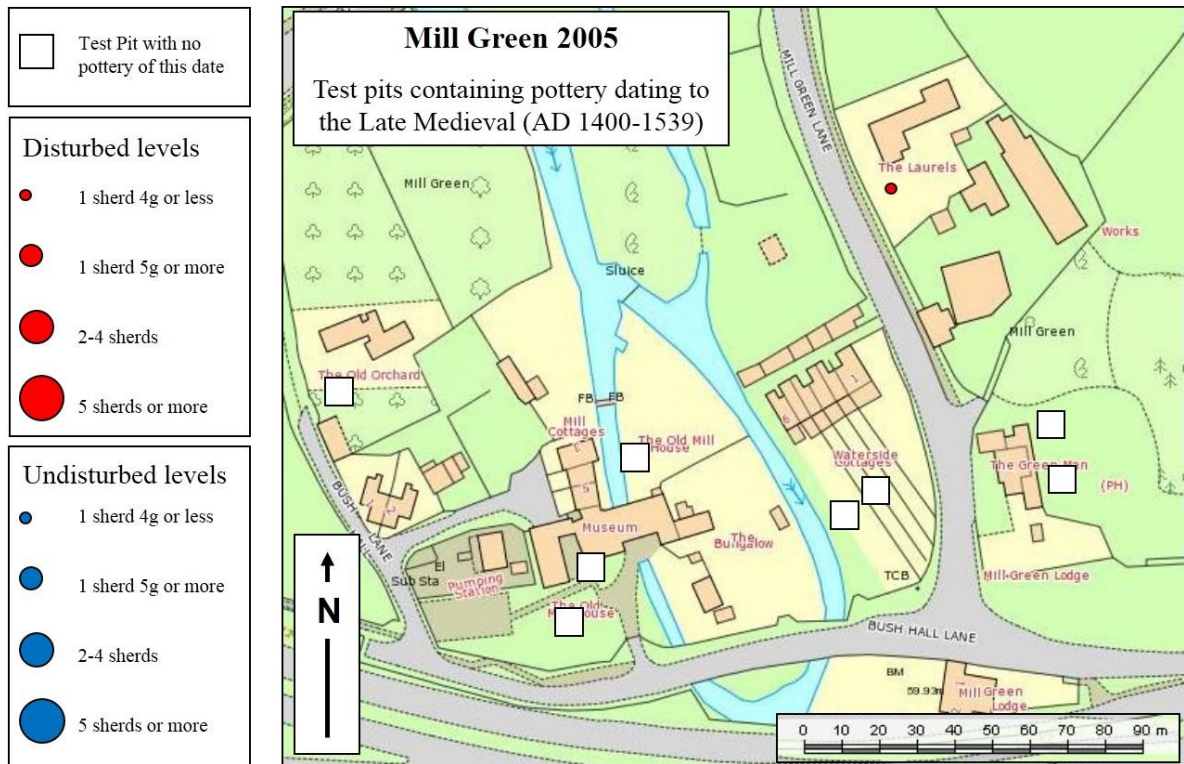


Figure 11: Distribution of the Late Medieval pottery excavated from the Mill Green test pits © Crown Copyright/database right 2019. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service 1: 2,500

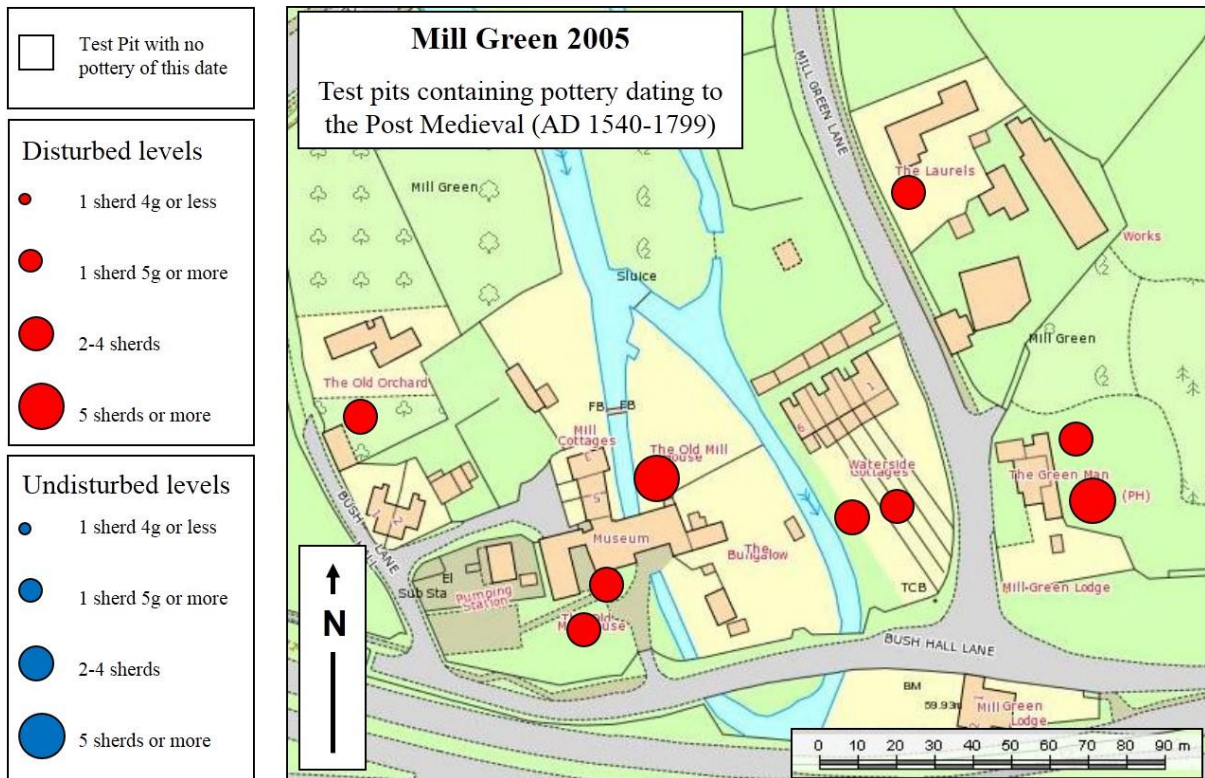


Figure 12: Distribution of the Post Medieval pottery excavated from the Mill Green test pits © Crown Copyright/database right 2019. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service 1: 2,500

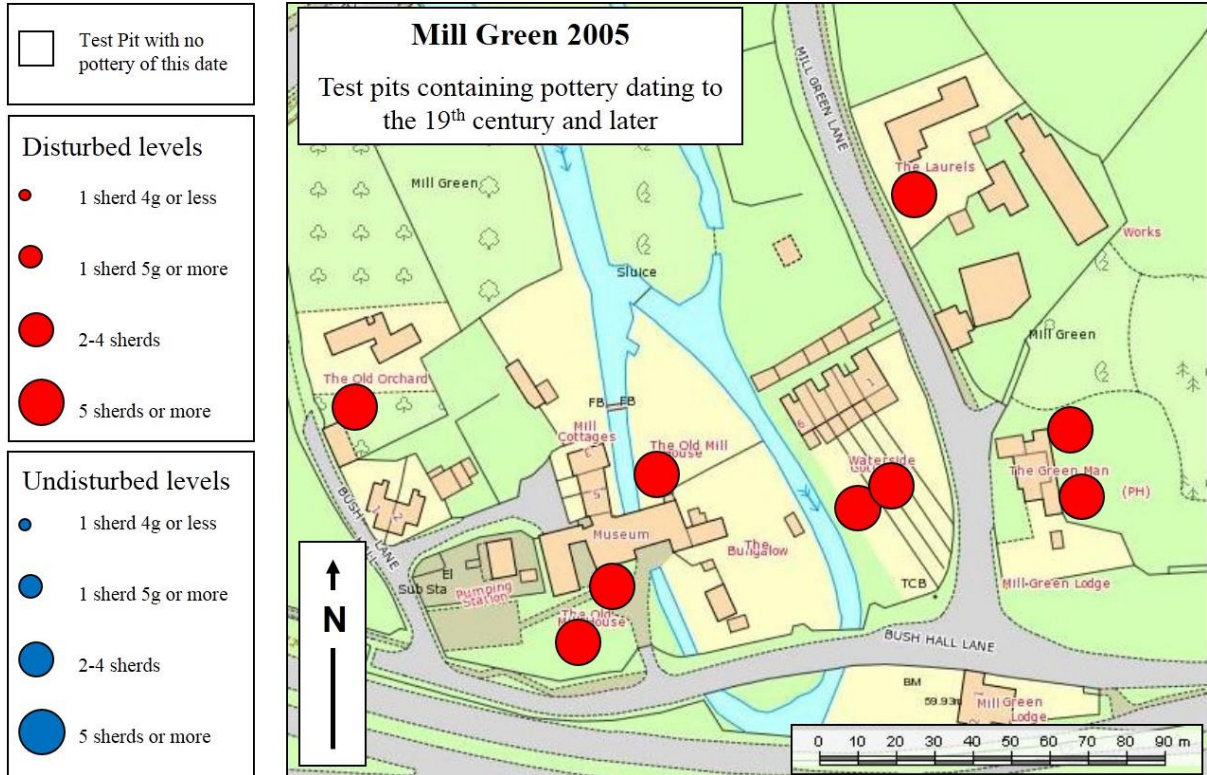


Figure 13: Distribution of the 19th century and later pottery excavated from the Mill Green test pits © Crown Copyright/database right 2019. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service 1:2,500