The Desereted Medieval Village of Snarford, Lincs.

STANLEY E. WEST, M.A., A.M.A.

The deserted medieval village of Snarford lies on the fifty foot contour on gently sloping land draining into a small stream to the west, eight and a half miles to the north-east of Lincoln and some six hundred yards north of the A46 from Lincoln to Market Rasen. (Nat. Grid Ref. TF641825, O.S. 25 ins; Linco, LIII S.W.). The medieval church of St. Lawrence and Hall Farm are the only buildings now standing in the area of the original village, the recent council houses to the south are beyond the medieval settlement area.

Prior to the bulldozing and levelling operations carried out in 1954 and 1956, the village system was visible as a series of irregularities in the fields to the north and west of the church; fields which are still known as the Hall Close, the Hall Yards and the Bottom Hall Yards. A survey of these fields was carried out by the Ministry of Public Building and Works prior to the levelling, and showed that the field known as the Hall Close to the south-west of the church seems to have been moated, although the form of the moat is not easy to follow. The Hall Yards, immediately to the north of the Hall Close and the Bottom Hall Yards, on the north side of the church, were occupied by a series of basically rectangular raised platforms of various sizes. These were grouped together in a compact area, comprising some twelve platforms, forming a typical nucleated plan, roughly aligned in three rows divided by wide hollow ways running north-south. Smaller, more irregular hollows, from east-west divided the individual plots. These platforms, or crofts, originally standing two or three feet high were by no means of uniform size and shape and the plan is somewhat distorted by the minor road which traverses the site from the A46 and runs over one of the rows of platforms.

Local memory states that the southern section of this road was lined by mature trees in the early twentieth century and that they may well have been a century old. That part of the road overlying the platforms north of the church appears to be a realignment to avoid its original course between the house platforms as can be clearly seen from the plan. The area occupied by the house platforms and excluding the Hall Close area was in the order of three hundred yards east to west and two hundred yards north to south, or just over twelve acres. Prior to levelling and deep cultivation, areas of ridge and furrow were visible to the north and south of the village area. (Plan and plate 1).
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Observations made by Mr. Walter Toyn during the levelling operations in 1954 indicated the sites of two substantial buildings in the area known as Hall Close. The most northerly of these (Site 1) appears to have been associated with the moated area already noticed. Whatever the original nature of the site, a scatter of large stones, red tiles and hand cut bricks of greenish-yellow clay measuring ten inches by five by one and seven-eighths thick were noted during the levelling of the site.

The second, most southerly site (Site 2) is two hundred yards south of the church and most likely represents the foundations of the “ancient seat of the St. Paul’s”, which was in existence by at least the middle of the sixteenth century, the foundations of which were described in the nineteenth century as being visible “perhaps one hundred yards south from the church”. During the levelling of the site Mr. Toyn noted among the building debris, red bricks, ten by five and a half inches by one and five-eighths of an inch thick, red tiles, eight and seven-eighths by seven and a half inches by five-eighths of an inch thick, cut stones, churchwarden pipes and glazed pottery. He also noted two circular stone foundations, ten feet in diameter and filled with rubble, forty yards apart on the eastern side and the presence of three cellars.

On a further site (Site 3), situated on a platform at the south end of the Hall Yards, greenish grey bricks and stone foundations were seen together with eighteenth century Staffordshire potsherds. To the east of this spread, on the same platform, the remains of an oven of rubble, stone and brick, nine feet in diameter was noted.

TRIAL EXCAVATION, 1957.

1957 the writer conducted a trial excavation of two weeks duration on behalf of the Ministry of Public Building and Works to ascertain the extent of the damage caused by the levelling of the site and the subsequent ploughing and to assess the possible value of further excavation, in particular on that part of the site occupied by the deserted house platforms north of the church. Surface indications showed a scatter of building rubble and pottery over the whole site, ranging in date from the twelfth to thirteenth century. Accordingly, in the time allowed, trenches were cut across the edges of three of the most prominent and regular platforms at the eastern edge of the settlement area and across the area to the north of the church.

AREA “A”

Trench 1. A trench was cut completely traversing the site of the platform. This revealed that the hollow way to the north had been cobbled and resurfaced after the accumulation of some eighteen inches of mud had taken place. A few fragments of thirteenth-fourteenth century glazed wares occurred both above and below the resurfacing, together with fragments of shelly St. Neots ware. Towards the centre of the platform three broad dark marks crossed the trench in a north-east to south-west direction. Although these were four feet three inches, seven feet nine inches and five feet wide respectively, from north to south, they were found to be only an inch deep. All contained a few small sherds of thirteenth-fourteenth century glazed wares and some shelly fragments. The southern and eastern limits of the platform were determined but no other indications of internal features remained.

AREA “C”

Trenches 3 and 5. In these trenches the northern and southern limits of the platform were determined, with cobbled areas in the hollow ways beyond. Again the levelling had all but removed the internal features and had completely destroyed any stratification. There remained the lowest levels of an inch or so of what may have been sleeper trenches but although large stones littered the surface and numbers occurred in the trench itself, non remained in situ.

The pottery from this site was markedly of the shelly St. Neots type with only a few medieval glazed sherds.

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AREA ‘D’

Trench 7. Although the limits of the platform to the north and the south were discernible by the remains of a slight slope into the hollow ways, the severity of the levelling here appears to have completely removed all traces of buildings on the platform.

AREA ‘E’

Trenches 4 and 6. Trench 4, on the northern side of this area failed to find the northern limit of the original platform. Trench 6 determined the southern edge and indicated a cobbled surface in the hollow beyond. On the southern edge of the platform there was a scatter of large, irregular stones, possibly indicating stone foundations, but all of them were displaced.

CONCLUSIONS

Of the areas examined by the trial trenching of 1957, only area ‘C’ showed any real promise for the recovery of house plans, but the severity of the levelling has made the determination of successions and close dating very unlikely indeed. Admittedly trial trenching is not a reliable method for the discovery of features on a large site, but in this case, with limited time, it was able to show that the levelling of this site had so reduced the height of a selected group of the most promising platforms to such a degree as to suggest that further excavation of the site would be unprofitable. Archaeologically there was no evidence to show that the areas of abandoned house platforms continued much beyond the fifteenth century; the documents show that it was a Domesday vill which survived the Black Death in 1377 but shows a steady decline to the sixteenth century. The building of a vicarage is recorded in 1305 and further indicates that a grange stood opposite the church and that the vicarage was built next to it. The earliest glebe terrier existing for Snarford (1601) describes the benefice as having a mansion home and garth adjoining, containing half an acre. This house had apparently disappeared by the early eighteenth century, when a description of the site would seem to place it on the north side of the churchyard, presumably Area ‘A’ of the 1957 exploration, although nothing was found to substantiate this. A tablet in the church commemorating Sir George St. Paul records that “Flee builded and furnished this faire house of Snarford”. Sir George died on October 28th, 1613, so that the house referred to must have been a rebuilding of an earlier St. Paul house. It may well be that both sites in Hall Close may belong to the St. Paul era. From sometime after 1613 the St. Pauls are replaced by others and the documents refer to “the park” at least by 1693.

The names of the fields concerned, the Hall Close, the Hall Yards, and the Bottom Hall Yards refer to the time when the old settlement area had been deserted and had been incorporated into the Manor House estate.

THE POTTERY

SHELLY WARES

2. Rim of large cooking pot, oxidised on surfaces only. Rim thickened and angled, slight internal hollow. Diameter 18 inches. Trench 5.
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GLAZED WARES


10. Fragment of drawn, ribbed handle in red ware with splashes of greenish brown glaze. 13th-14th century. Trench 1.


Most of the glazed medieval sherds were small fragments, amounting to some twenty-five per cent of the total number of sherds. From the surface of Hall Close and the Hall Yards a scatter of 16th-17th century sherds were collected at the time of bulldozing and included fragments of stoneware and a high proportion of black glazed wares.

TABLE OF POTTERY DISTRIBUTION

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<th>Unglazed</th>
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<th>15th</th>
<th>Later</th>
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<td>46</td>
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SMALL FINDS

A. Thin bone plate, flat beneath and slightly convex above, ornamented with incised, compass drawn concentric circles. Incomplete; traces of a sixth circle exist at the upper end.
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A small, broken hole at the lower end shows that the plate was originally attached by pegs or rivets. Incised concentric circles occur on bone objects from both Roman and Saxon contexts particularly on combs and comb cases and this may well be a plate from an early medieval case. Trench 5, below plough.

B. Bronze object cut from a strip of thin metal, originally pointed at both ends. Now flat, the pointed ends have, at some time, been bent down; possibly the object was a large staple. South end of Trench 3.

THE ANIMAL BONES

Very few animal bones were recovered from the excavation; the sample is insufficient to be of statistical use but is included here purely for the record.

Sheep. Total No. of bones: 24 Maximum No. of animals: 8
Pig " " 13 " " 6
Ox " " 15 " " 6
Horse " " 7 " " 5
Deer " " 8 " " 1

Acknowledgements.

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Notes

1 MSS. notes and observations by Mr. W. Toyn are in the Lincoln Museum.
2 MS. directory of the early 19th century, Cragg 1/2, Lincolnshire Archives Committee, also a Probate Inventory of Matthew St. Paul, d.1556; Inv. 27/245, Lincoln Archives Committee.
3 Reg. 2, f.88. Lincolnshire Archives Committee.
4 Snarford Ter. 5/311; Lincolnshire Archives Committee.