DEDDINGTON

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Setting

Deddington is situated on a high ironstone outcrop overlooking the Cherwell valley, where the road from Oxford to Banbury crosses the road from Buckingham to Chipping Norton. It is unusual for the region in not being located by a watercourse of any size, although numerous springs rise in the vicinity.

Archaeology

Roman buildings, probably villas, are known northeast and southeast of the town in the valleys of the tributary streams of the Cherwell. Roman pottery, coins and a skeleton were also recovered from the parish pit immediately east of the town in 1877, but no finds of any period have been made in the town itself. Saxon occupation is attested only by the placename, which means 'the village of Daeda' and suggests a 6th or 7th-century origin for the settlement.

History

By the time of the Domesday survey (1086), when Deddington was owned by Bishop Odo of Bayeux, its value was £60 per annum, making it one of the six largest and most populous places in the county. It was twice the value of its neighbour, Banbury.

It is therefore strange that Deddington did not maintain this position, particularly as one of the lords of the manor (prior to its subdivision into three in 1190) had the obvious intention of developing and sustaining urban growth. Although there is no surviving grant either of market rights or of the freeholding of burgage tenements, which are known to have existed in New Street in the early 13th century, it is probable that these two developments, both recognised means of attracting settlers, would have been carried out by the same lord. At least one house in New Street has a vaulted cellar, which indicates a certain prosperity, and Deddington was clearly more than merely an agricultural centre. Its connections were probably with the wool trade.

It is, however, difficult to explain the failure of the town, for it was advantageously placed, but tax lists suggest that its trade was taken by Banbury. Its market, held weekly in the 14th century, was famed in the 16th and 17th centuries for meat, but had declined and was closed in 1852. Two fairs were instituted in 1392, one of which survived until the 1930s.

Deddington was not affected by the civil war (1642-1649); the community was largely agricultural, with some part of its inhabitants catering for the needs which could not be supplied on the farms. Local ironstone was quarried, but it was not of sufficient quality to support a major industry. The town has never been chartered.

Medieval topography

The town retains its medieval street plan which can be divided into two main components; the irregular pattern of the original settlement in the streets to the south and east of the Market Place, and New Street, a planned extension, which had been laid out by the early 13th century along the pre-existing Oxford-Banbury road. The town did not subsequently expand.

The castle comprises an outer bailey of 3.5 hectares (8.5 acres) into which an inner bailey of c. 0.2 hectares (1 acre) was inserted in the 12th century. It has been suggested that the outer earthwork might be a re-used Iron Age hill fort. The site was excavated between 1947 and 1951 and the plan of the inner bailey, including curtain wall, gate towers, hall, chapel and outbuildings, recovered. The castle was in decline as early as 1277 and was being demolished by the 14th century for the canons of Bicester bought a quantity of dressed stone from it in 1377.

The present church is basically 13th century with 14th and 17th-century additions, although a few fragments of the Norman church, which seems to have been cruciform, survive. Until 1670 the vicarage stood to the north of the church.

Potential and Development

Though the castle has been investigated, nothing is known about the contemporary early medieval town or the Saxon settlement which preceded it. However, opportunities for work in the town will be few, since there is likely to be very little development, and the centre is to be designated a conservation area.

Buildings

Deddington is a very attractive town with many interesting buildings. Some of these have been described in R.B. Wood-Jones' study of the region. Because of persistence in vernacular forms and materials it is difficult to date many of the houses of the 17th or 18th century, but there appear to be some 30 houses built before 1700 and about 60 more which are within a few decades of this date. One outstanding house is Leadenporch House in New Street, a small hall house of c. 1325, and Plough House nearby has a 15th-century vaulted cellar. Castle House also includes medieval fragments. There are a few 16th-century features, such as the hall at Castle end, but most houses are of the 17th and 18th centuries and provide a good coherent group that would repay further study. The brown marlstone is almost ubiquitous, though there is some brick in Georgian and later buildings. There has been modest infilling and expansion in recent years in Deddington, but the character of the town has been preserved. The town is poorly listed: a provisional list of 1949 included the church, 13 grade II and 38 grade III buildings. The statutory list of 1955 gave protection to only fourteen buildings.

Bibliography

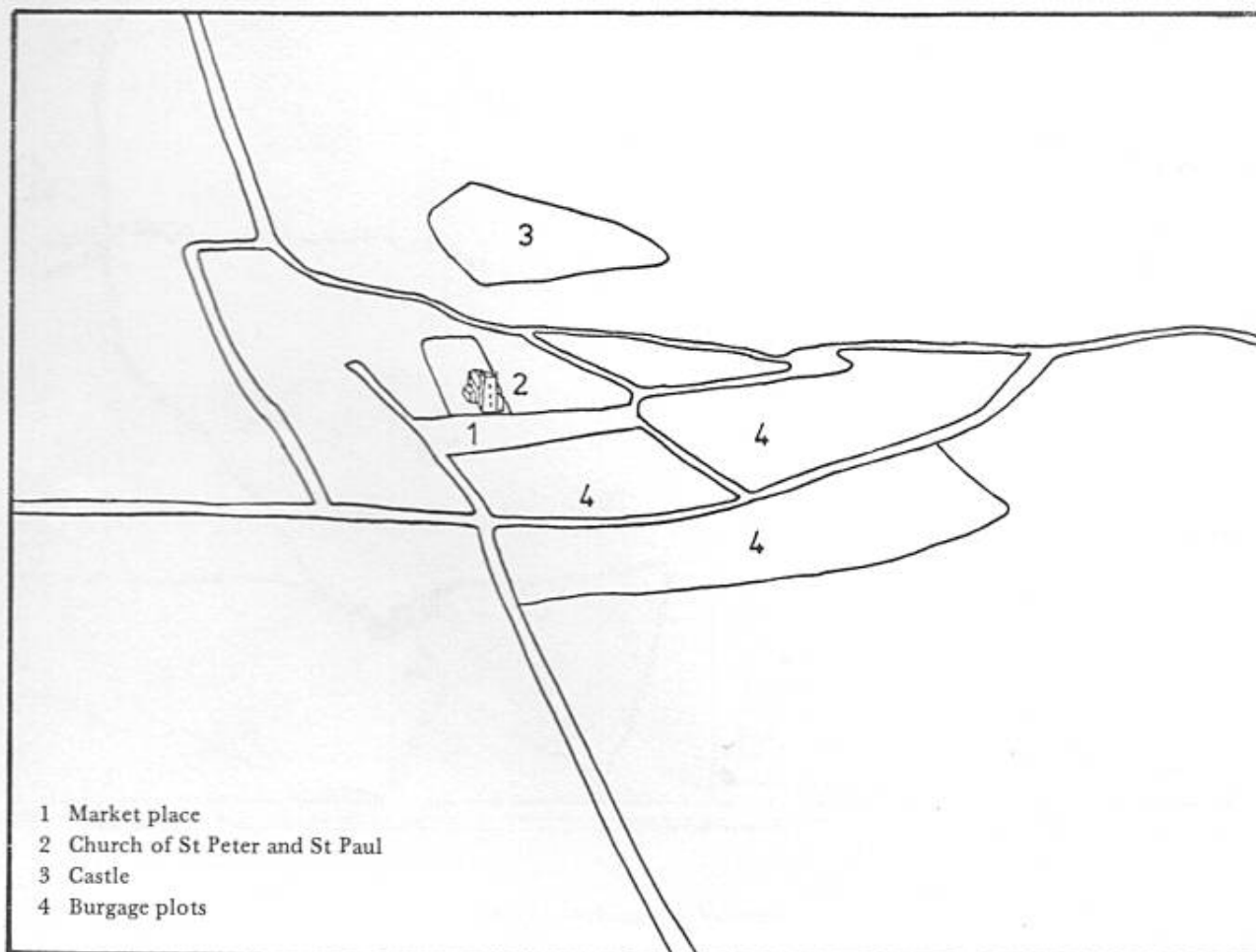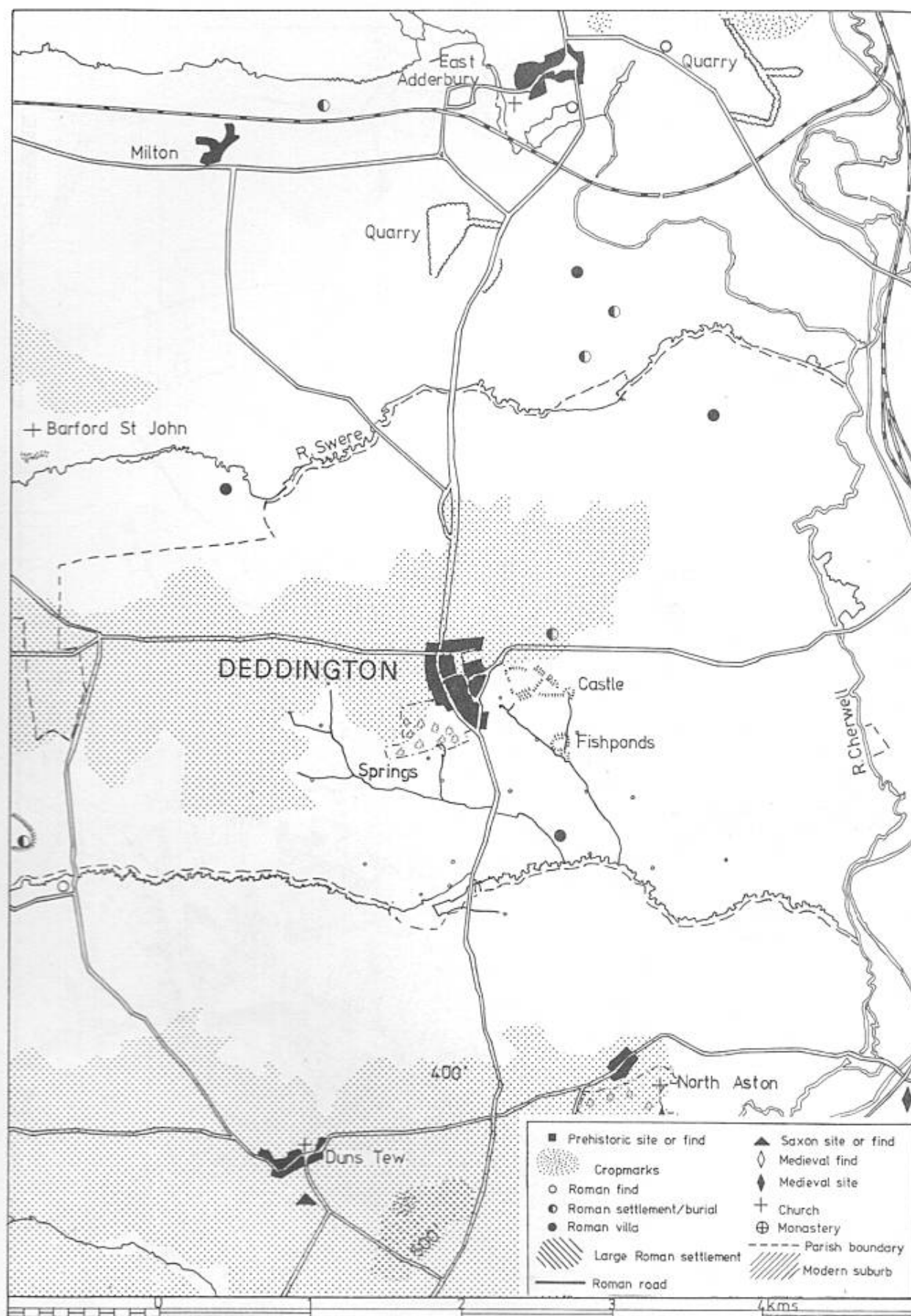Colvin, H.M. *History of Deddington* (1962) GoT.

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Deddington from the west

1 Market place
2 Church of St Peter and St Paul
3 Castle
4 Burgage plots

Map 1. Deddington: location

Map 2: Deddington: archaeology and topography

fishpond

Castle

Inner

Outer valley

Clifton Road

St Peter & Paul's

Vicarage

Market place

New Street

High Street

Church Street

0   100

Legend

- Roman find
- Saxon find
- Medieval find
- Find spot uncertain
- Site of uncertain building
- Approx extent of town c.1200
- Approx extent of town c.1500
- Pre 1700
- 18th cent. or earlier

Map 3. Deddington: age of buildings

1840–1914

1700–1840

Pre 1700

18th century
or earlier

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Map 4. Deddington: statutory protection and excavation

Legend:
- Excavation
- Scheduled area
- Conservation area
- Listed buildings
- Other buildings of interest
- Statutory buildings

castle earthworks site

Clifton Road

Castle Street

Field Street

New Street

High Street

Market Place

800 m

900 m

0   100