

Berry Close – The mound and its Archaeology

The mound in Berry Close with the church of St Peter & St Paul behind – the heart of the original Chacombe as shown by archaeological excavations (photo taken before the felling of a huge beech tree to the left)

Geoff Jones, June 2020

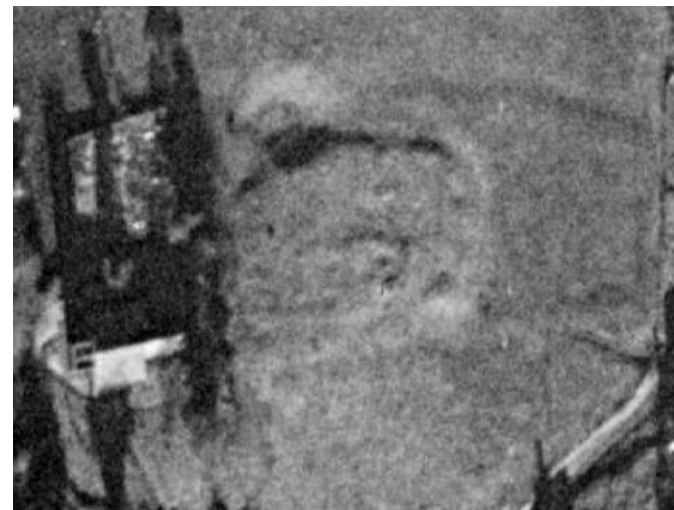
The earliest significant presence of people in Chacombe Parish date back to the Roman/Romano-British period; overlooking the current Chacombe village there is crop mark evidence of a villa or farm.

We see from the Domesday book of 1086 that Chacombe was a significant settlement. It had 3 mills and in the whole of Northamptonshire there were only 11 places with 3 or more mills. There was therefore a Saxo-Norman village of Chacombe but we did not know precisely where it was till recently. Archaeological investigation shows it to be in and around Berry Close with the mound and church marking its key early features. To date there is nothing to prove Chacombe village existed before 1066 but it is quite likely to have been a Saxon foundation. The Saxons tended to take up residence in valleys next to small streams, which fits Chacombe village.

The precise location of Saxo-Norman Chacombe was resolved by the excavation for the commemorative stone in 2015. In that small trench there were many pottery sherds dating to the Saxo-Norman period. Prior to this no pottery from the period had been reported from anywhere in the parish

– strongly suggesting that Berry Close and its surrounds being the historic heart of Chacombe. As Chacombe was significant in 1086, it is quite possible that it was founded before 1066 but there is no evidence for this yet.

Excavations for the Churchyard burial ground and commemorative garden and on the mound in Berry Close in 2018 showed that Berry Close was definitely a medieval manorial site after we discovered substantial house foundations on the mound. It was not possible to date the manor precisely but it seems as though it may be within the range of 11th to 15th c. from the date ranges of the main pottery finds.



Air photographs of the mound in Berry Close with the church to the left, in 1947 (top) and 1960 (bottom)



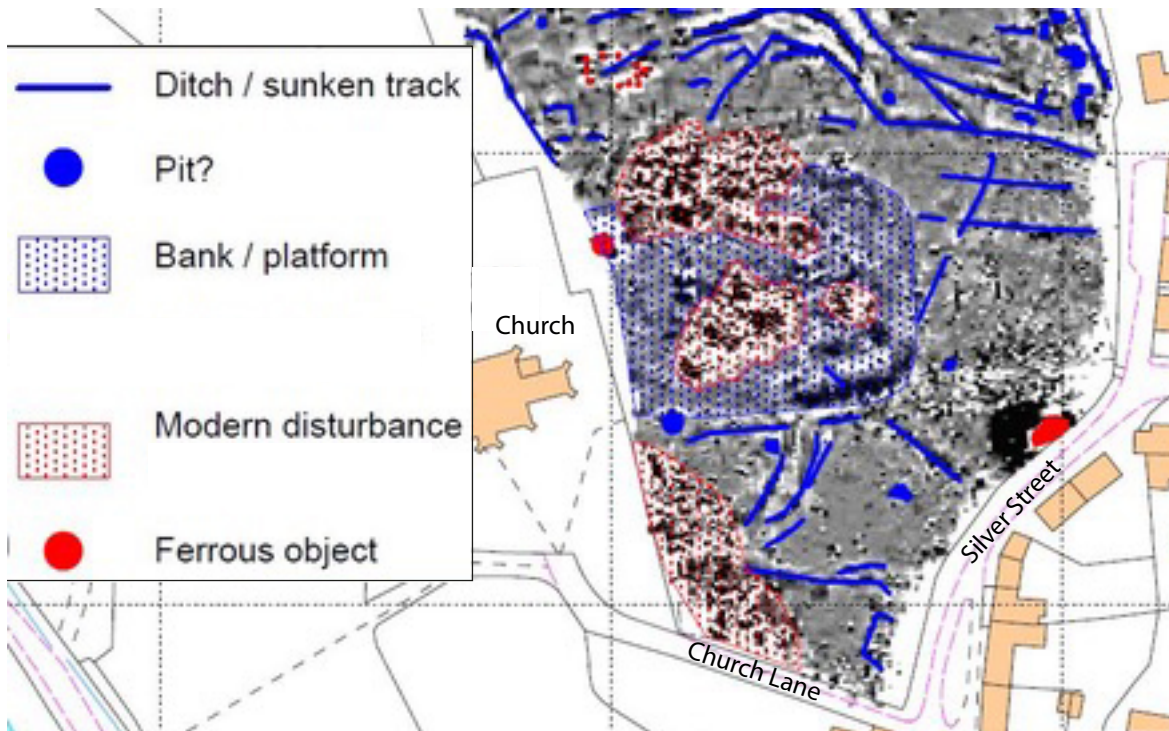
The substantial manor house walls close to the soil surface as revealed in 2018



A stone manor of the 14th century



The Edward I silver farthing found in the rubble of the manor walls on the mound during the dig in 2018. Peter Spackman describes it as being c. 1344–51, showing, top, crowned portrait facing EDWARDVS REX after which there can be seen an edge of a mintmark; cross 3 (class g) and, bottom, a long cross with three pellets in each angle surrounded by the mint name CIVI TAS LON DON, an indication that the coin was made by Tower Mint London.



This map shows part of Berry Close with the results of a magnetometry survey. Overlaid is the interpretation of features by NCC. Note: this interpretation pre-dates the dig in 2018 and therefore does not show manor house walls or the church burial ground and memorial garden extension, which touches the edge of the mound.