

# TEST PIT EXCAVATION WITHIN CURRENTLY OCCUPIED RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC, NETHERLANDS, POLAND AND UNITED KINGDOM – RESULTS OF THE CARE PROJECT 2021

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In 2021 the four-nation CARE project, ‘Community Archaeology in Rural Environments Meeting Societal Challenges’ (CARE-MSoC), continued archaeological test pit excavations within currently inhabited rural settlements of known or suspected medieval date in the Czech Republic, Netherlands, Poland and the UK. As in 2020, the number of test pit excavations that could be carried out was severely restricted in 2021 by the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, but limited work was possible in seven settlements: Drválovice, Merboltice, Předhradí, Vanovice (all in the Czech Republic), Liempde (Netherlands), Biadki (Poland) and Riseholme (UK) (Fig. 1). The results of these excavations are summarised here, as an update to previous reports reviewing test pit excavations in 2019 and 2020 (Lewis *et al.* 2020; 2021).

## Results

### Czech Republic (P.V.)

*Drválovice (district of Blansko) Czech Republic (49° 33'56" N, 16°39'00" E)*

Due to interest from local inhabitants in test pit excavations in Vanovice (Lewis *et al.* 2020, 82–6), test pit excavation was extended in 2021 to the neighbouring small hamlet of Drválovice (Fig. 1), which today contains just 64 houses and 138 inhabitants. Drválovice is first mentioned in written records in AD 1256 (‘in Drwalowitz’; RBM II, 45). Two test pits were excavated in Drválovice in 2021, both in the garden of house no. 28. These excavations revealed clay-loess natural subsoil at a depth of c. 0.5 m overlain by anthropogenic deposits containing a large assemblage of middle Bronze Age pottery. These finds add to the known evidence for extensive Bronze Age settlement in the wider microregion (Malach, Štrof and Hložek 2016; Štrof 2014).

*Merboltice/Mertensdorf (district of Děčín) Czech Republic (50°41'06" N, 14°20'25" E)*

The village of Merboltice (Fig. 1) is situated in the Central Bohemian Highlands 60 km north of Prague at 150–350 m above sea level. Geologically, the area has a complex structure of sandstones, basalts, tephrites, nephelines and pyroclastics typical of the tertiary volcanic Central Bohemian Highlands. The village today lies along the Merboltice stream (originally Triebtschbach) in a deep valley and its total length reaches 4 km. The origins in this area of long, linear valley-bottom villages such as Merboltice are conventionally thought to lie in the colonisation of previously unsettled Bohemian uplands during the thirteenth century AD, a process thought to have been driven by settlers coming from different parts of medieval Germany (e.g. Klápště 2005, 208). A typical feature of this type of village is a field system formed by long linear arable strips extending from individual village farms to the border of the cadastral area. At Merboltice this system is visible as convex-shaped field boundaries on LIDAR surveys (Fig. 2). In total, 29 historical fields have been identified (Hanzlík, Sellnerová and Veselá 2014).

Although it is accordingly presumed that Merboltice was established in the thirteenth century, it was first documented in 1352 when it was part of Šarfenštejn estate of the lords of Michalovice (‘*Merbotonis villa*’). Written reference, from 1357, to a priest in Merboltice suggests that the parish church of St Catharina was in existence by then (Karlíček *et al.* 2012, 6). In the early sixteenth century the village was owned by members of a protestant family (Pojetičtí of Pojetice), from whom it was confiscated after the suppression of the Czech protestant rebellion against the Habsburgs in 1623. General Johann von Sporck, who served the Austrian throne during the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48), bought a number of confiscated estates in Bohemia after the war, including Merboltice (Hanzlík, Sellnerová and Veselá 2014, 181). In 1708–09, the construction of a

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Figure 1 Map of northern Europe showing the villages where test pit excavation took place as part of the CARE project from 2019 to 2021 (J. Verspay).

new large baroque church (Zeman 2021, 14–17) demonstrated the successful conversion of the village back to Catholicism. The tax register for 1654 records 38 peasants including 29 tenant farmers and nine cottagers (Karlíček *et al.* 2012, 7), but the number of houses grew significantly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from 113 in 1713 to 168 in 1785, 179 in 1833, and 198 in 1900 (Karlíček *et al.* 2012, 7–8), and a village school was established in the late eighteenth century. The village economy was mostly based on cattle grazing, corn and flax production and, as in other parts of the northern Bohemian uplands, five small cotton-spinning mills were established in Merboltice in the nineteenth century, with many local people also working in textile factories in nearby small towns. By 1900, Merboltice was densely populated with 965 inhabitants, and in the early twentieth century had a range of services and crafts including a post office, seven pubs, three grocery shops, two butcher shops, three bakeries, a confectioner's, five mills, a sawmill and a glass-grinding mill, as well as workshops engaged in crafts such as musical instrument making,

basketmaking, coopering, cobbling, tailoring and wheelmaking.

After annexation of the so-called Sudetenland to Nazi Germany in 1938, the village – populated entirely with Czech Germans – found itself within the 'Third Reich', and a local organization of the Nazi party was founded in Merboltice (NSDAP Ortsgruppe; Karlíček *et al.* 2012, 8–9, 14–15). As was the case across the Sudetenland, the German population of Merboltice was expelled after the Second World War (1946) and a slow flow of Czech settlers from inland started. The ethnic cleansing resulted in about half of all houses being abandoned, many of which were subsequently torn down. Communist collectivisation of the land was not successful, so that the local cooperative farm established in 1952 was taken over by the state farm in neighbouring Verneřice in 1962 (Karlíček *et al.* 2012, 9–14, 19–20). On the decision of the district communist authorities, the church of St Catharina was demolished in 1975, with only the bell tower surviving (Zeman 2021, 116). According to testimonies of local

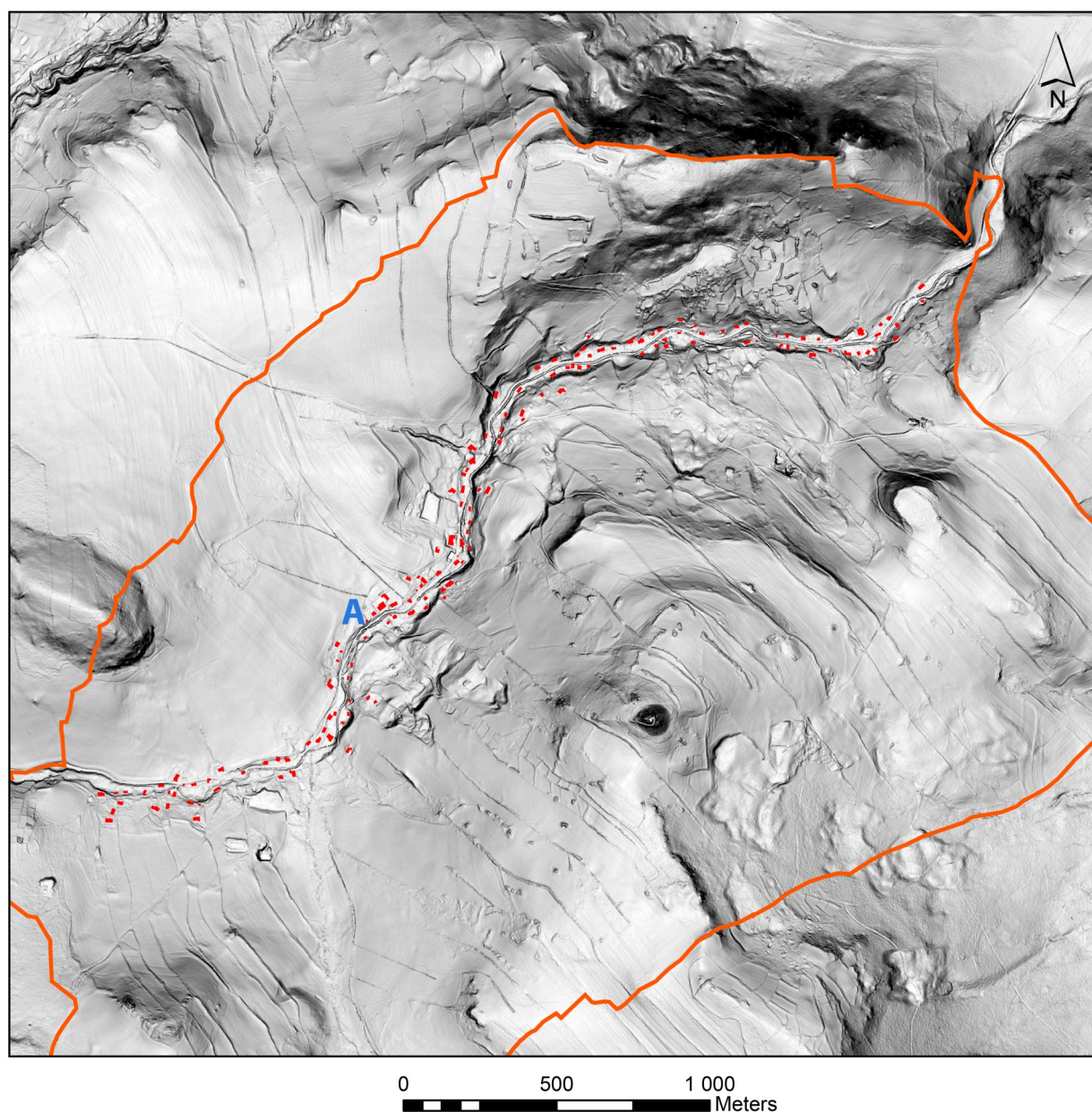


Figure 2 Digital Relief Model of the Merboltice (Czech Republic) cadastral territory based on airborne laser scanning. Linear concave features indicate historic field boundaries. A – former parish church, red – contemporary houses, orange line – cadastral boundary (data provided by the Czech Office for Surveying, Mapping and Cadastre; map by L. Hobl and P. Vařeka).

inhabitants, gravestones from the churchyard were also removed and thrown into a nearby valley (Interview 1).

As in other places in the Central Bohemian Highlands, from the 1960s its proximity to Prague encouraged the conversion of farms in Merboltice into weekend homes, thus saving them from demolition. This holiday home ownership has been of crucial importance for the preservation of historic rural housing in Merboltice and, in 2004, the acknowledged quality of preserved traditional architecture led the Ministry of Culture to declare Merboltice a listed monument (village zone).

Currently Merboltice has 174 houses, 64 of which are permanent residences and the rest holiday homes; thus,

while the number of permanent inhabitants is around 200, summer visitors can raise this as high as 500. Despite this relatively high population, of all the pre-war services and workshops listed above, only one inn has survived. Some civic initiatives have developed in the last few years (e.g. Club of Merboltice Friends, Volunteer Fire Brigade) as have ecological agricultural businesses (e.g. goat dairy production) and a tourist infrastructure including accommodation facilities.

Research into the tangible heritage of Merboltice started with a survey of its well-preserved traditional rural domestic architecture (e.g. Veselá, Sellnerová and Hanzlík 2015, 96–109), comprising impressive storeyed block houses (Fig. 3) with a three-compartment





Figure 3 Storeyed block houses in Merboltice: (top) 'Devil's Mill', house No. 98, dendro-dated to 1713/14–1778/79; and (bottom) House No. 141, dendro-dated to 1759–1766.

plan. In these, the ground floor consists of a large living room with a narrow annexed room on one side, a central entrance room with so-called black kitchen situated in the back (from which the stove and backing oven in the living room were operated) and a byre on the other side. The central part and the byre were built of stone, with the living section constructed of timber. The first floor was entirely timber-built and consisted of additional living room and storage rooms. Farms also had a timber barn and other outhouses. In response to interest amongst local people in finding out how old their properties were, dendrochronological sampling was carried out in 11 houses, seven of which produced usable results (Nos 14, 57, 60, 98, 109, 141 and 150), showing that the earliest timbers dated to 1645–94. Structural analysis showed, however, that timbers had been re-used from earlier buildings, with the two earliest *in situ* houses proving to date from the early eighteenth century (Nos 57 and 60), and two more to the late eighteenth century (98 and 141), with the rest dating from the nineteenth century (Kincl 2022).

Test pit excavation in Merboltice in 2021 focused, at the request of the local community, on establishing and exploring the location of the demolished church of St Catharina (Fig. 4). Ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey north-west of the preserved bell tower over an area c. 700 m<sup>2</sup> (survey by M. Vágner) revealed a massive rectangular structure measuring 12 x 29 m with a southern entrance hall (Fig. 5), which corresponded



Figure 4 Photograph of baroque-era parish church of St Catharina with bell tower in Merboltice in the 1960s (Regional Museum in Děčín, Archive No. č. 34477; photograph by P. Vařeka).

closely to the church plan from 1974 (State District Archive Děčín, ONV Děčín, kart. No 1119, inventory No. 1965). The GPR data also showed another smaller feature situated within the baroque-era church that appeared likely to be an earlier structure, possibly an early Gothic-era church (length c. 18 m) with rectangular presbytery. In Bohemia, this layout is usually dated to the second or third quarter of the thirteenth century (e.g. Libal 1984, 154, 166).

The results of geophysical survey were tested by excavations comprising a total of 11 interconnected test pits so that the total excavated area was 12.5 m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 6). The excavations revealed the foundations of the baroque-era church extending from just 0.1–0.3 m beneath the current ground surface to a depth of 1.1–1.2 m. These foundations were built of quarry stones bound with lime mortar. The south-eastern corner of the nave was identified in test pits 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 11, as were modern concrete-built tombs annexed to the outside of the church. The northern wall of the presbytery was found in test pits 4, 5, 9 and 10, which showed the interior of the church to be filled with large stones (Fig. 7), probably representing demolition rubble, which could not be removed due to the limited size of test pits. Fragments of an earlier stone wall built of smaller quarry stones cut by the baroque foundations were excavated outside the church (test pits 5, 8 and 9); these can be interpreted as the remains of a vestry of the thirteenth-century Gothic church. A clay layer 0.8 m below the present ground surface appeared to be part of the vestry floor, an interpretation supported by finds of fragments of Gothic floor tiles and a few sherds of late medieval pottery.

In November 2021, the results of the geophysical survey and the excavations were presented to the local community (Fig. 8), leading enthused inhabitants to



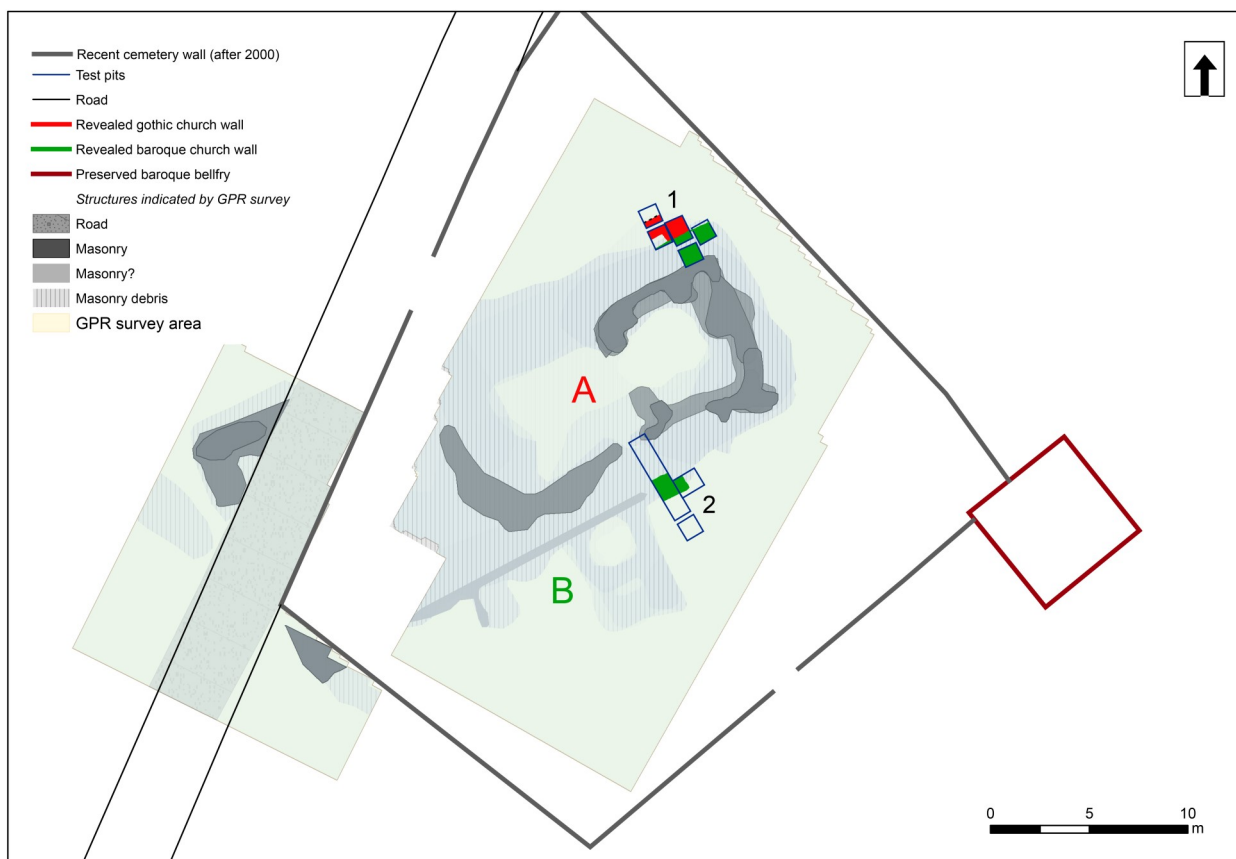


Figure 5 Interpretative plan of ground penetrating radar survey in Merboltice showing the remains of the baroque parish church of St Catharina demolished in 1975 and its Gothic predecessor. A – Gothic church; B – baroque church. 1: test pits 4–5, 8–10; 2: test pits 1–3, 6–7 and 11 (plan by M. Vágner and P. Vařeka).



Figure 6 Photograph of test pit excavations in Merboltice in 2021 on the site of the demolished church in front of the preserved belfry (photograph by P. Vařeka).





*Figure 7 Merboltice 2021 test pit 5 showing the baroque church wall (northern section of the presbytery) and Gothic church wall (probably foundation of the vestry; photograph by P. Vařeka).*



*Figure 8 The CARE project team discussing conservation and presentation of the parish church foundations with members of the village community in October 2021 (photograph by L. Hobl).*

propose the reconstruction of the demolished church on its original site as a spiritual and community centre.

*Předhradí (district of Chrudim) (49°49'53" N, 16°02'21" E)*

11 test pits were excavated in Předhradí (Fig. 1) in 2021, bringing the total since 2020 to 23. Two test pits focused on the northern edge of the castle garden (Nos 16–17). Here the clay-rock subsoil was covered with a thin cultural layer containing fragments of sixteenth-century stove tiles which may represent waste from the aristocratic residence, which produced identical tiles during earlier excavations. Above this, ceramic finds of eighteenth- to nineteenth-century date relate to modern gardens which raised the ground level by 0.8 m. Test pitting around the former manorial brewery (test pits 19–23) revealed two layers of cobblestones which covered a thick sequence of layers reaching 1.2 m. Numerous finds from the early modern and modern periods (including a large assemblage of broken beer bottles, porcelain and stoneware) indicate that this area was used for waste disposal. The remaining test pits (13–15 and 18) produced only recent archaeological finds.

*Vanovice (district of Blansko) Czech Republic (49°34'01" N, 16°40'01" E)*

Three test pits were excavated in Vanovice (Fig. 1) in 2021, on the village green north of the church, bringing the total since 2020 to 22. The 2021 test pits revealed modern deposits with residual medieval pottery but no intact medieval contexts, although geological subsoil was not reached at the maximum excavated depth of 1.1 m. Two test pits focused on house plot No. 52 which was depicted on the 1826 cadastral map as a solitary farm situated 300m south-east of the village, which also included a pub. Excavations revealed building debris that could relate to the construction of the farm, built of stone and brick. The pottery assemblage dated to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the absence of any earlier material supporting the presumed late establishment of this farm.

#### **Netherlands (H.v.L. and J.V.)**

The COVID-19 regulations of the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment continued to hamper the test pitting programme throughout much of 2021, as its public character meant test pitting activities were classified as events, a category to which severe restrictions applied. It would take until the autumn for research into medieval villages to be resumed.

Before this, possibilities for alternatives presented themselves, as constraints were gradually eased in the summer to permit practical education activities (not classified as 'events'). A community-based field school was organised, investigating the Battle of Boxtel (AD 1794), a topic studied by several local history clubs and which could be explored with socially distanced

methods such as metal detector survey. A well-attended course with 55 participants including amateur archaeologists, students and other history enthusiasts set out on a two-week investigation to test the current identification of the site of the engagement between British Expeditionary Forces and the French Republican Army aided by Dutch Patriots (Wills 2011, 20–24). Although some artefacts were found that could be related to the conflict, analysis suggested the main confrontation probably took part elsewhere in the vicinity. This first CARE Summer School provided some interesting insights, but these were not directly related to currently occupied rural settlements which are the primary subject of this report, and therefore they will not be further discussed here. The format was nevertheless well received by the participating amateur archaeologists, students and professionals, and has been put forward as a means of engaging people at a more in-depth level in the archaeological heritage of their place or region, one of the aims of the Faro programme of the National Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (Van Engelshoven 2021).

*Woensel (51°28'57" N, 5°26'48" E)*

In 2019, six test pits were excavated in Woensel (Fig. 1) in the area surrounding the Oude Toren, the bell tower of the fifteenth-century church of St Peter and one of the few remaining elements of the historic village (Lewis *et al.* 2020). Following these initial results, we intended to increase the number of test pit excavations in order to map the Carolingian settlement phase in more detail and establish whether its roots extend to the Merovingian or even Roman period. Unfortunately, in 2021 there was little local interest: this was due not so much to the pandemic as to very recent demographic changes, which have seen families replaced by students who have little connection with the neighbourhood. Despite interest from people in surrounding villages, disappointment over the lack of participation from Woensel itself made the local history club Archeologische Vereniging Kempen en Peelland (AVKP), our partners in this event, decide not to proceed.

*Liempde (51°34'15" N; 5°22'25" E)*

Liempde (Fig. 1) is another settlement where test pit excavation took place in 2019 (Lewis *et al.* 2020, 86–7), and here it was possible to return for a second campaign in 2021, again organised in collaboration with the local heritage association Kèk Liemt, to involve Liempde residents, people from neighbouring villages, members of fellow history clubs and archaeology students.

The 2019 excavations had indicated that Liempde was an agglomeration of smaller hamlets that had developed into a nucleated village fairly recently (Lewis *et al.* 2020); the current village centre, where several vernacular houses are preserved, only started to form in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The establishment of a clandestine 'barn church' in 1672 and

the construction of the town hall in 1787 appear to have been major drivers in this process, acting as focal points of further settlement development. Subsequently, the area between these nuclei was filled in and developed into the present village centre. Building on these results, the focus of excavation in 2021 was on the northern part of the village, on the habitation in the Kerkeind, around the Kerkakkers and in the hamlet of Hezelaar.

Over the course of the weekend, approximately 50 participants completed a total of ten new test pits (Figs 9–10), bringing the total in Liempde since 2019 to 17. Several pits were located in the centre of the current settlement. Test pits 8 and 16 confirmed the early modern origin of the present-day village centre and showed that the deposits here had been severely disturbed in recent times. Test pit 17 was sited near the church of St John the Baptist, where previous investigation had showed that the barn church had not been built on an arbitrary plot conveniently chosen in between the hamlets, but rather had been erected on a farm that had been established in the early fourteenth century and developed as a site of craft and industry, in particular for iron processing. To explore the extent of the medieval habitation, test pit 17 was dug on the other side of the former deanery next to the present church of St John the Baptist. As well as material related to the construction of this church, test pit 17 yielded pottery dating from the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, including Elmpt ware, red ware and Langerwehe stoneware. These wares are contemporary with finds from the previous test pit, and suggest that the late medieval settlement extended further east and therefore may have consisted of multiple houses.

Test pit 18 was sited to explore an anomalous topographical feature, a rounded plot partly visible in present-day roads and field boundaries, whose curved shape has been identified as possibly indicative of an origin as an early medieval farm (Spek 2004, 678–681). Unfortunately, only a peripheral area was accessible for excavation; although most of the artefacts retrieved from the test pit post-dated the sixteenth century, the pit did yield a single sherd of Carolingian pottery, providing very tentative support for a possible early medieval origin.

Another group of test pits excavated in 2021 was located north of the Kerkeind, around the arable fields of the Kerkakkers. Test pit 19 aimed to explore the site of Wedehamer farm, whose earliest documented references date back to 1365, when it was part of a manorial estate held in fief by the lords of Herlaer, a prominent seigneurie with a castle in the neighbouring village of Sint-Michielsgestel (Coenen 2004, 72). The current Wedehamer farmhouse was built in the sixteenth century (Steenbakkers 2017, 218–226), but it is believed to have been a property of Echternach Abbey before it was annexed by the lord of Oud-Herlaer, who served as steward on behalf of the monastery. To test this hypothesis, test pit 19 was dug in the back garden.

Unfortunately, the area proved to have been disturbed when the pond was excavated and no medieval finds were recovered.

Test pits 7, 20 and 21 were excavated on the other side of the Kerkakkers around St John's chapel. This was elevated to a separate church in 1603 and served as the place of worship for the people of Liempde until the region fell to the Dutch Republic after the Treaty of Münster in 1648. Previously, the chapel lay within the parish of Boxtel; its peripheral location, a considerable distance from the village centre and close to the river Dommel, had led to the suggestion that the chapel might have originated as a private church on the site of a manorial farm (Kortlang 1987). Test pits 7, 20 and 21 yielded some high medieval pottery, but no clear evidence for habitation in the previous period.

On the south-western side of the Kerkakkers there is a small cluster of historic farmhouses and a former school, which was built in 1793 to replace the old building at the churchyard (Coenen 2004, 269). Test pit 6 in the 2019 campaign, in the playground on the corner of the Vendelstraat and the Smidsepad, revealed a modern horizon with nineteenth- and twentieth-century artefacts and debris which covered the remnants of an early modern arable soil and a well-preserved ditch that had been filled in the sixteenth century. The ditch lines up with the unpaved part of the Pastoor Dobbeleijnstraat, but its orientation deviates from the present section of the Vendelstraat along which the vernacular houses stand. In 2019, features dating to the seventeenth century were found on the other side of the junction, and in 2021 test pit 22 produced no older artefacts; hence, the combined observations from both pits support the inference of a relatively late origin for habitation at this crossroad.

To refine understanding of the origins of the hamlets that coalesced into the later village centre, we extended research 0.5 km to the east, excavating one test pit (no. 23) in the neighbouring hamlet of Hezelaar. This yielded an assemblage of pottery of fourteenth- to fifteenth-century date, mainly grey ware and Langerwehe stoneware, including adjoining sherds and a cattle bell, suggesting that settlement at the Hezelaarsestraat has been arranged along the road since the late medieval period. Finds collected from the garden by the owner suggest that the farm had predecessors in the high medieval period, and probably even in the Carolingian period. Initially these houses were located further back, on the edge of the main arable field. This infield has been well preserved and its contours still retain the convex surface that has formed since the late medieval period as a result of plaggen manuring. The distinct topography combined with the rounded form of its boundary supports the idea that this arrangement was of considerable age, and perhaps indicates a manorial origin.

As part of the CARE Summer School, four additional test pits (nos. 25–28) were dug around the watermill on



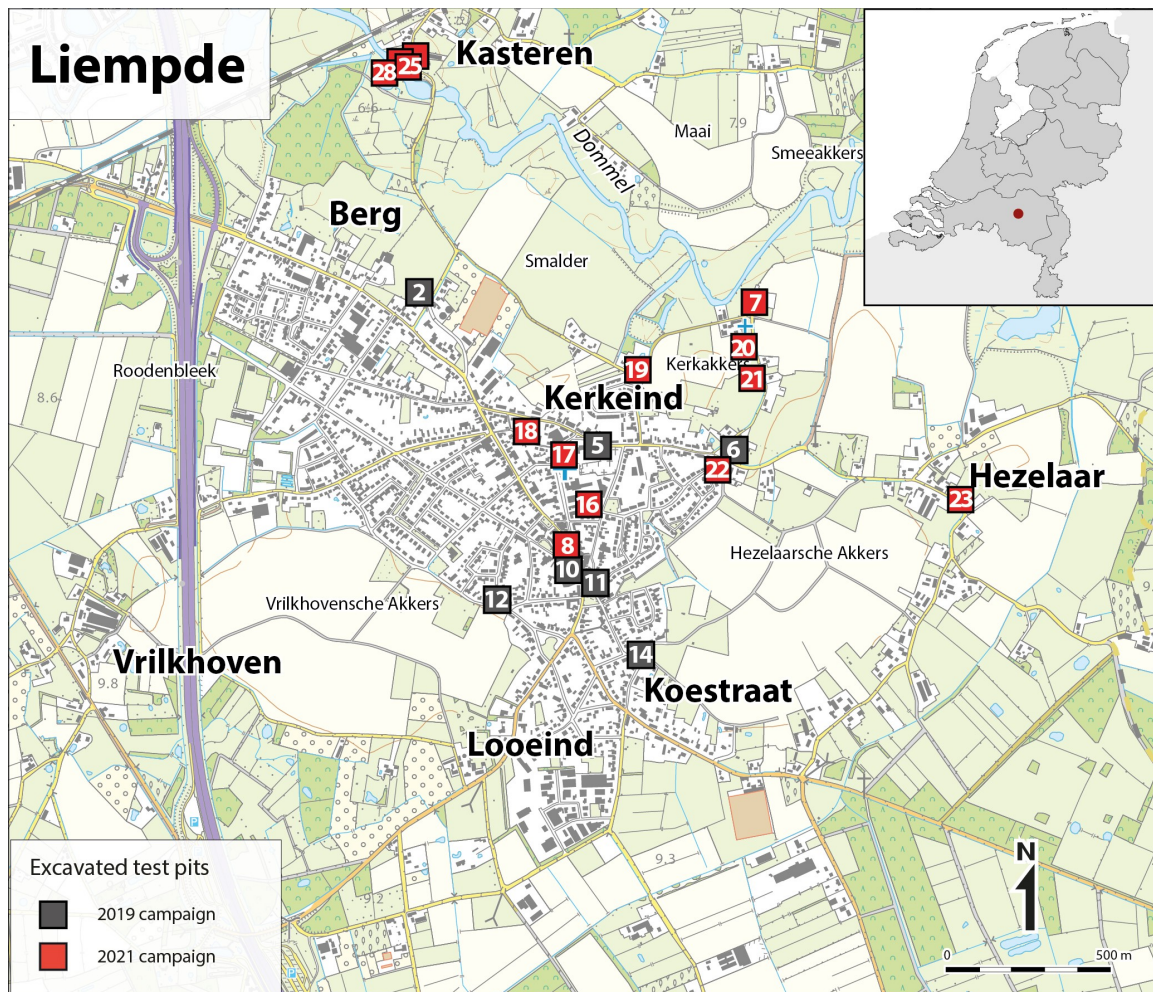


Figure 9 Map of Liempde, North-Brabant, Netherlands, showing the approximate locations of the test pits excavated in 2019 and 2021. Topographic map source Kadaster: The Netherlands' Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency.

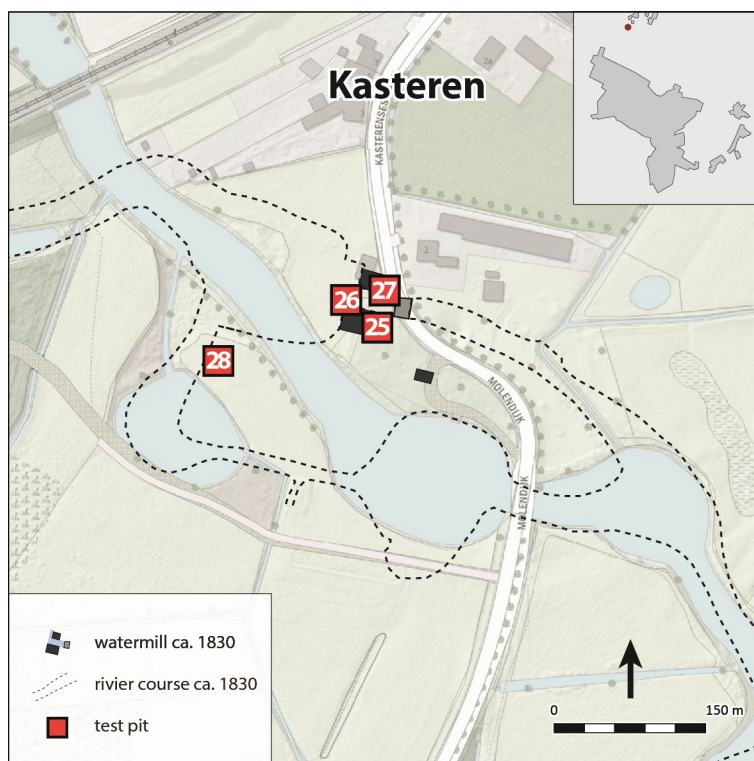


Figure 10 Map of Liempde showing the approximate locations of the test pits excavated at the site of the former watermill in Kasteren on the northside of Liempde. Topographic map source Kadaster: The Netherlands' Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency.

the northern edge of Liempde. The mill dates back to at least the beginning of the fourteenth century when half of it was a property of the Duke of Brabant held in fief by the lords of Boxtel. The other half was allodial property. There was a grain mill and an oil mill which served the inhabitants of the four parishes who were entitled to the commons of the Bodem van Elde: Sint-Michielsgestel, Boxtel, Schijndel and Sint-Oedenrode. In 1936, the sluice and the oil mill were demolished, and the corn mill burned down in 1960. After this, the mill race and pond were infilled and the Dommel was straightened. All that remains today is part of the brick building that continued to be used as a byre but is now in a dilapidated state.

Three test pits were dug in the immediate vicinity of the mill. Test pit 25 revealed parts of the foundation of the latest construction phase. Test pit 26 encountered the mill pond, which briefly served as a rubbish tip (1967–70). Excavation was halted after digging through 1.5 m of modern debris, which included a large, hand-forged broadaxe which might have belonged to the mill. Test pit 27 was dug in front of the remaining building, but only revealed a modern pavement. Test pit 28 was excavated in the last surviving part of the original mill island. The straightening of the Dommel cut through most of this, but the westernmost part survives. The island was considerably larger than necessary for the watermill alone, so we were interested in its nature, the origin of the mill site, and whether it accommodated additional uses. Test pit 28 showed the island was a natural dune that had been used as cropland since at least the late medieval period, leading to the formation of a modest plaggen soil. No evidence was found for settlement in this area, with the scarcity of artefacts in the plough soil suggesting that the terrain has served only agricultural use. There is no evidence, so far, for intensive use of the mill island prior to the fourteenth century.

Overall, the inference that Liempde as a nucleated village developed from an agglomeration of hamlets, which originated as dispersed farms set amidst their arable fields, seems to be supported by the test pit data. Artefacts from the Iron Age and Roman periods have previously been found at various sites in the surrounding open fields, indicating that settlement remains from this period are to be expected underneath the thick arable soil. So far, there is no indication of a direct link between the medieval settlement and the late Roman or Merovingian period, with no finds known from the area. To establish whether the area was indeed largely abandoned after the Roman period, additional test pits could be excavated at the presently known early medieval sites, with an absence of material from the previous period supporting the suggestion of a distinct break in the settlement development. To establish whether there really was a discontinuity in habitation in the wider area, rather than just a localised shift in settlement location, it would be necessary to investigate

the open fields, but test pitting is not the most suitable method for this type of prospection.

Regarding the development of the medieval settlement, further research would benefit from extending the test pit excavation programme to the other hamlets that make up Liempde, to see whether or not these settlements developed similarly and synchronously. In addition, a more thorough historical geographical analysis could reveal key locations in the development of Liempde.

#### **Poland (D.W., K.K. and P.F.)**

*Biadki (Wielkopolskie Province) Poland (51° 40' 24" N; 17° 33' 08" E)*

Biadki (Fig. 1) is the largest village in Krotoszyn commune (southern part of Wielkopolskie Province), with 1,396 inhabitants. The earliest known archaeological evidence of human activity in the area is related to Neolithic communities (Kosiński 1996) and there are also many archaeological finds from the Bronze Age, Iron Age and medieval period to the modern era. The first written records of Biadki date to the sixteenth century (Hładyłowicz, Bujak 1932, 147). This part of Poland was annexed by Prussia in 1793, in the Second Partition of Poland. In this Prussian era, the village was situated within the Duchy of Krotoszyn (1819–1927), which was ruled by the princes of the Thurn and Taxis family (Plater 1846). As one of the consequences of the First World War, Poland regained independence and control of the village. During the Second World War, the village was occupied by Germans, who destroyed the Catholic church of Isidore the Labourer, carried out deportations of the locals to Germany, and brought prisoners of war of various nationalities to the village (Wardzyńska 2017).

Today, the village of Biadki is spread out over a large area with housing and amenities arranged along several long, straight, modern roads. The settlement is divided into several districts and includes a primary school with 137 pupils and a public library nearby in the old building of a former school. The parish church is a modern building, situated more than 350 m beyond the edge of the village. Within the village, there are several active organizations, including the volunteer fire brigade and the folk song ensemble 'Biadkowiaki' or 'Stowarzyszenie Wspólnie dla Biadek' ('Together for Biadki Society'), the latter having the main aim of promoting culture and heritage. The school, the Catholic parish church and the community leader play a major role in organizing social and cultural life in the village.

15 test pits were excavated in Biadki in 2021 in three cadastral parcels (Fig. 11). Two of these (where test pits 1–5 and 6–10 were sited) lie south of the main road through the village and are currently in use as a playing field and a football pitch, used regularly by children from the local primary school. Test pits 11–15 were also located on a playing field further to the north, close to a



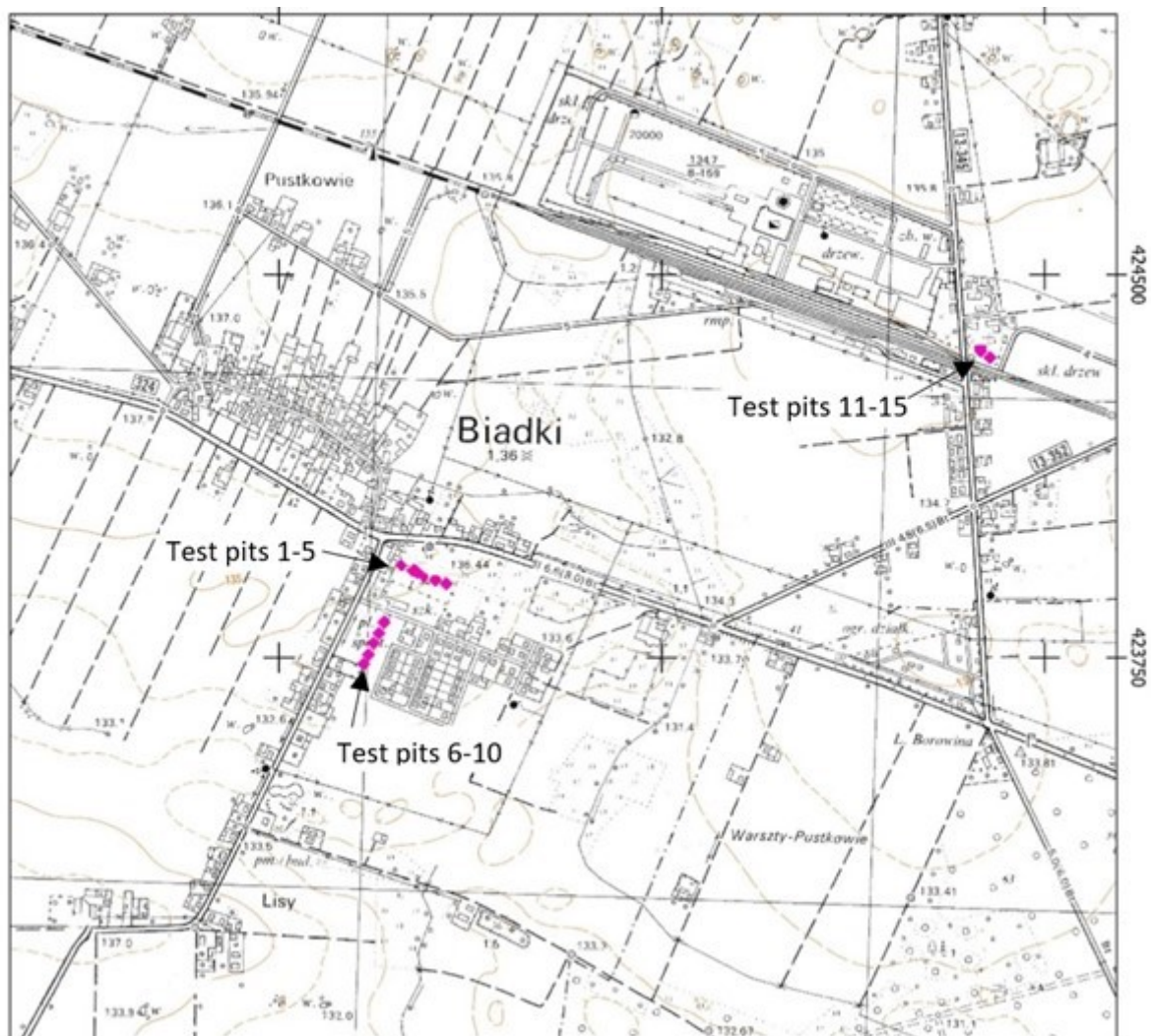


Figure 11 Map of Biadki, Poland, showing the approximate locations of the test pits excavated in 2019 and 2021. Map produced by Filip Waldoch.

railway station in an area that was heavily disturbed during construction of a new housing estate in the 1970s. Ten of the test pits produced finds, comprising 45 potsherds, two tile fragments and an ebonite button (pits 1–8, 10 and 13; Fig. 12). No material predating the seventeenth century was recovered, with 57% of the assemblage dating to the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries and the remainder to the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. Most of the seventeenth- to eighteenth-century material, mostly small body sherds (Bis 2004), was recovered from test pits 6, 7, 8 and 10 (in the southernmost area investigated). Sherds of nineteenth- to twentieth-century date were mostly of simple, common stoneware vessels, except for five fragments of porcelain found in the lower contexts of test pits 5, 8 and 13. An ebonite button (test pit 14) and two fragments of clay tiles (test pits 1 and 3) may have been of eighteenth- to nineteenth-century date, although the latter were in use for a long time in Polish villages (Dabrowska 1987, 87–88).

The lack of pre-modern finds, along with observation of test pit sections, suggests that none of the excavated

areas were used for habitation in the past and prompted the suggestion that they were used as fields, although there was little evidence for anthropogenic soils. From an archaeological point of view, the earlier spatial organization and development of Biadki cannot be reconstructed from the test pit excavations carried out to date. However, the project was successful in engaging more than 200 volunteers including many local children who were very interested in finding material traces of the history of their village (Fig. 13).

**United Kingdom (C.L.)**

*Old Dalby (Leicestershire) UK (52°48'25" N;  
1° 00'07" E)*

In 2021 further test pit excavation at Old Dalby was prevented, as in 2020, by concerns about risks of COVID-19 transmission within the community even when restrictions were lifted, combined with uncertainty around the possible reimposition of restrictions in the wake of new variants emerging, which remained a possibility well into the latter part of the year.

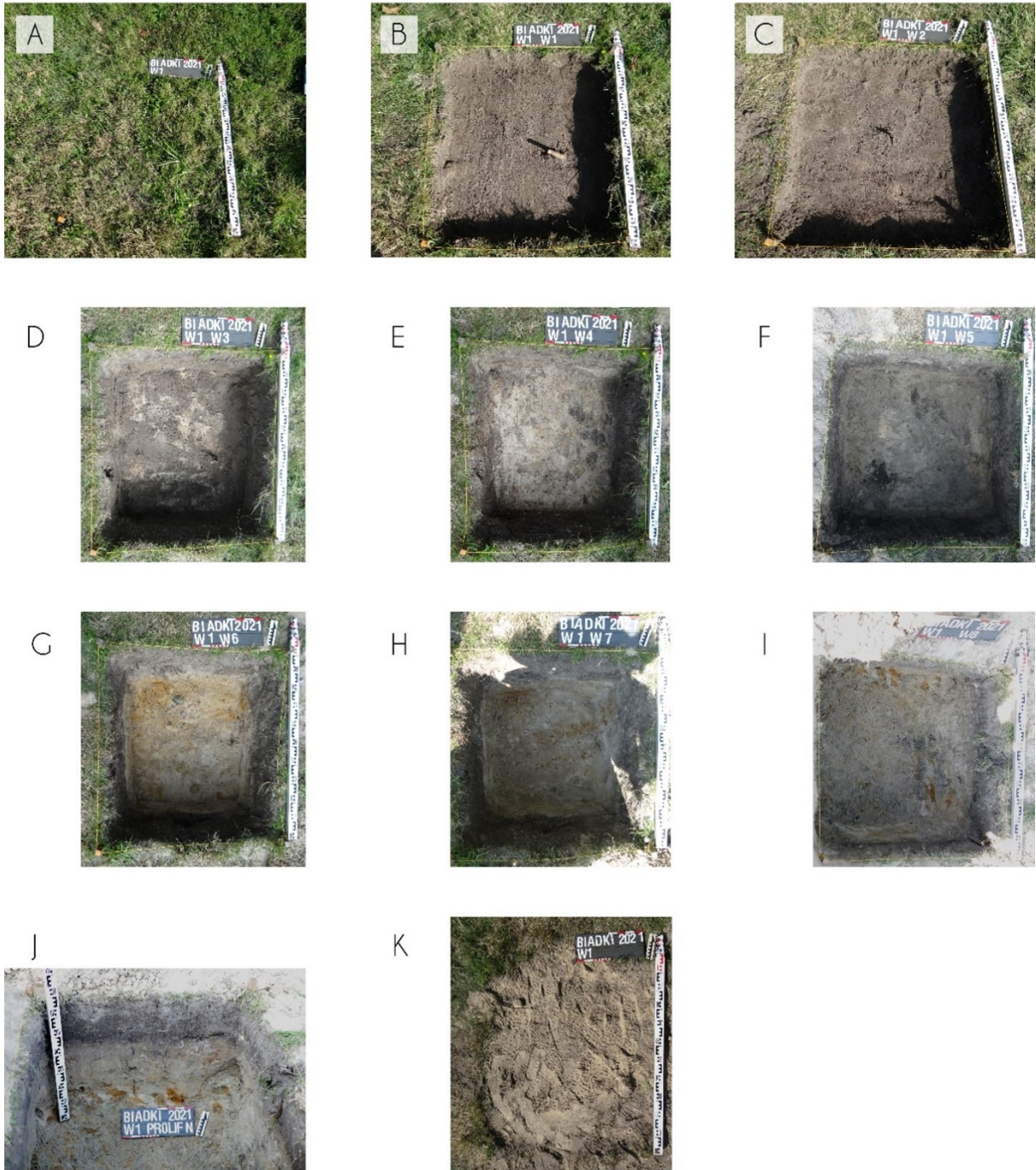


Figure 12 Biadki 2021 test pit 1 – photographs of the surface of each excavated context (D. Kobialka).





Figure 13 Test pits under excavation by young residents of Biadki (photograph by D. Frymark).

Riseholme (Lincolnshire) UK ( $53^{\circ} 16' 00''$  N;  $00^{\circ} 31' 46''$  E)

Riseholme lies in eastern England (Fig. 1), around 8 km north of the major Roman and medieval city of Lincoln. The parish includes a deserted medieval settlement and a large number of twentieth-century university campus buildings, but barely a dozen inhabited homes, only two of which (the Lodge and the Rectory) were in existence in the nineteenth century (Fig. 14). The western boundary of Riseholme parish runs along the major Roman road of Ermine Street, and pre-medieval archaeological evidence from the parish includes a large first-century AD Iron Age coin hoard, a late first-century Roman square burial mound, and a fourth-century farmstead. Many stray finds of early medieval date have been recorded from the parish, and five holdings are listed for Riseholme in Domesday Book (1086), hinting at the possibility of more than one settlement predating the Norman period. One of these may have been near the church, as a terrier of 1601 references an east-west orientated lane south of the church (approximately along the line of the present drive to Riseholme Hall), which may have been a former village street (Oxford Archaeology East 2016). By 1166, the five Domesday holdings had been reduced to three and it may have been around this time that, south of the stream, a regularly planned double-row village was created anew (or replanned on the site of a previous settlement of unknown form). LIDAR survey clearly shows the earthworks of the deserted medieval settlement (LHER 54196) south of the stream (now a lake) surrounded by ridge-and-furrow (Fig. 15a). Contour survey indicates that the now-deserted settlement was laid out at least partly over the ridges of previous arable cultivation (Everson *et al.* 1991), and limited excavation of a very small area in 1957 produced no finds pre-dating the twelfth century

(Thompson 1960), offering tentative support for a late date for this part of the settlement. The 1957 excavations recovered no finds post-dating the mid-fourteenth century, tentatively supporting documentary evidence for late medieval demographic decline, including grants of tax relief in 1352 and in 1428 when fewer than ten households were present. Recovery took more than two centuries, and even then was not sustained: two individuals were recorded on the 1539 Muster Rolls, seven taxpayers listed in 1542–3, two farms recorded in 1601, and 12 communicants in 1603; but within 20 years of this post-medieval demographic high point, Riseholme residents were being buried in Nettleham. It is not known precisely where the documented later and post-medieval inhabitants of Riseholme lived, but the settlement south of the stream is presumed to have been abandoned in or before 1721 when the Riseholme estate was acquired by the Chaplin family. They built a substantial south-facing hall with stable block and kitchen garden north of the stream which they landscaped into a lake, and laid out an ornamental park lying mostly north-east, south, and south-east of Riseholme Hall, overlying the remains of the village to the south. In 1839, the hall was bought as a residence for the Bishop of Lincoln and the existing church of St Mary was re-built in 1851, reputedly on the site of the medieval church. In the twentieth century, the estate has been used as a university campus.

In October 2022, 18 test pits (Fig. 15a–b) were excavated by students from the University of Lincoln. The test pits were sited around the existing church to test the hypothesis that this area had been a focus of medieval settlement. The test pits yielded minimal evidence for prehistoric activity, with no pottery of this date from any test pits and just a single heavily patinated worked flint flake. Five pits (nos 4–9 and 12) produced pottery of Roman date, mostly clustered in the



Figure 14 1880s Ordnance Survey map of Riseholme, UK, showing the extent of settlement in the later nineteenth century. © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2022). All rights reserved.

north-west of the target area, with the largest number of sherds (seven, 25 g total weight) in test pit 5, closest to the excavated Roman farmstead c. 250 m to the north. Most of the sherds were small (less than 5 g) and all abraded, probably due to use of the area for arable farming. Several tile fragments of Roman date were recovered from test pit 8 near the church, but these were in disturbed contexts likely to relate to the construction of the adjacent eighteenth-century stable block and/or church, so do not necessarily indicate a Roman building in the immediate vicinity. No material of fifth- to ninth-century date was recovered from any of the test pits, but two tiny (1 g) sherds dating to the tenth or eleventh century were found in test pits 5 and 18, located close together in the north-west of the excavated area, c. 100 m north of the church. These represent the first hints of activity in the area at this time but, while intriguing, such a small number cannot be used confidently to infer habitation nearby.

Only three test pits (nos 2, 4 and 7) produced more than a single sherd of twelfth- to fourteenth-century pottery, all in the area north-west of the church. The small number of sherds from test pits 2 and 4 suggests that this area was not in habitative use at this time, but the slightly larger number of sherds from test pit 7 (seven sherds including one large (15 g) and unabraded example), the westernmost of the pits excavated in 2021, does raise the possibility of habitation further to the west, beyond the investigated area. Two test pits south of the church (17 and 11) each produced just a

single tiny (1 g) sherd of twelfth- to fourteenth-century pottery, suggesting that this area was then in arable or horticultural use, although these finds may also relate to the documented use of the areas south of the church as a trackway. The near or complete absence of high medieval pottery from the other pits excavated in 2022 suggests that it is unlikely that the area immediately around the church was used for settlement at this time.

Four test pits produced pottery of later medieval (fourteenth- to sixteenth-century) date. These cluster slightly closer to the church than the pits producing pottery of high medieval date. None produced more than a single small sherd, however, so they are unlikely to represent habitation at this time, and thus the spatial change cannot be taken to indicate any church-ward shift in settlement focus. Likewise, low numbers of sixteenth- to eighteenth-century sherds suggest that the area continued not to be intensively used until after the hall was built. A notable scarcity of clay tobacco pipe fragments is likely to reflect the use of the area as parkland rather than for arable or horticultural purposes.

### Overall conclusions

A total of 70 test pits were excavated in 2021 as part of the CARE project, considerably fewer than we had hoped for at the end of 2020, but more than might have been expected given the continued disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2021. While progress in the Czech Republic was more severely





(a)



(b)

*Figure 15 Contemporary aerial images of Riseholme: (a) LIDAR survey of Riseholme showing the deserted settlement and field systems remains; (b) aerial photograph showing the approximate locations of the test pits excavated in 2021.*



affected in 2021 than in 2020, in the Netherlands and the UK more fieldwork was possible than in 2020, although this was still limited. Nonetheless, by the end of 2021 test pit excavations had taken place in 14 different communities in the four participating countries, and a total of 182 test pits has been completed since the CARE project started in 2019. The findings are advancing our knowledge of medieval settlement development. In 2021, excavations at Merboltice showed the post-medieval church to overlie a thirteenth-century antecedent which would have been a focal part of the contemporary settlement, even if little evidence for this was found in the test pits clustered around the church, while test pits at Biadki allowed three areas of possible medieval habitation underlying the present settlement to be ruled out. Returning to Liempde in 2021 allowed hypotheses about settlement development proposed in 2019 to be tested, and showed newly identified areas of medieval habitation around St John's Church to be larger than previously known, while data from test pit excavation at Riseholme challenged existing ideas about the extent of medieval settlement around the church.

Since 2019, the CARE excavations have involved more than 700 volunteers, with feedback captured from around a third of these on their attitudes towards the experience of excavating within their local communities, providing a rich source of evidence which is being analysed for publication elsewhere (e.g. Lewis *et al.* 2022; Brizi *et al.* in prep.). Test pit excavation is planned to continue and complete in 2022 in the Czech Republic, Netherlands and UK (pandemic permitting). The results of this final season will be reported in the next issue of *Medieval Settlement Research*.

## Abbreviations

LHER. Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record.

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