

Deserted Medieval Villages

There are many deserted medieval village sites in the fields of England's midland counties - and they have attracted increasing interest from historians and archaeologists since the mid-1900s. An early paper on the deserted medieval villages of Northamptonshire by Maurice Beresford and colleagues in 1966 forms a useful introduction to this topic, and may be [viewed/downloaded via this link](#)

West Northamptonshire has its fair share of these deserted village sites - and this section concentrates on just one of these sites, at Onley within the modern parish of Barby.

Despite Beresford's view that the Onley site would repay closer study, remarkably little historical work has ever been done on this site. In Victorian times a railway line was run across the east side of the site, whilst the western half of the site was destroyed by steam-ploughing and precious archaeological data was lost for ever; and in the 1900s the eastern side of the site was developed initially as a WWII munitions establishment and subsequently as a prison, and the M45 motorway was built across the far western side of the site. Much work had indeed been done on the site - though it was not of the type recommended by Beresford.

Over the period 2000-2008 a project was carried out, to collect together what documentary evidence still exists, and combine this with new fieldwork on the site, in an attempt to produce a firm chronology for the desertion of the site - and moving on from this, to produce a suggested chronology for the original foundation of the site, so as to establish a complete record of the formation and decay of the community at Onley.

The results of this work are presented here. It is hoped that this work may be of assistance to other scholars who are working to interpret the pattern of settlement in medieval Northamptonshire.