



## **FIELD BOUNDARIES, A MEDIEVAL STRUCTURE AND DEAD SHEEP AT IWADE, KENT**

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# Field boundaries, a medieval structure and dead sheep at Iwade

By Paw Jorgensen

## Summary

In August 2009 Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited carried out an archaeological evaluation of plots of farmland along The Street just north of All Saints Church in Iwade, Kent (centred on National Grid Reference TQ 9015 6815) (Fig. 1). The initial investigation revealed the presence of several linear features dating to the Iron Age and medieval period.

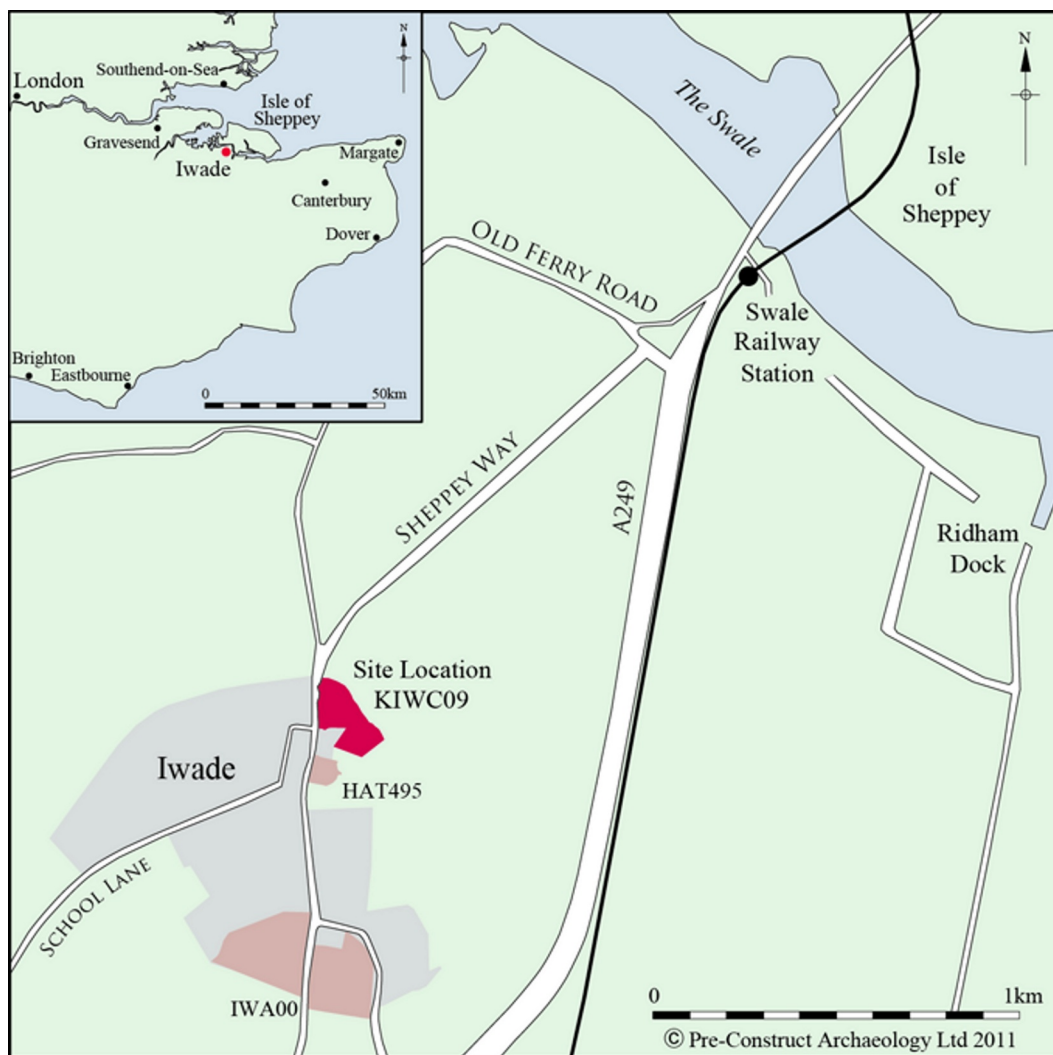


Figure 1: Site location

Based on these results Kent County Council (KCC) requested that a strip, map and sample investigation be carried out in order to characterise the nature of the archaeology at the site. This was undertaken in September 2009 (Fig. 2). The exercise identified further linear features as well as a number of shallow pits, again dating to the Iron Age and medieval periods. In addition, a single structure, medieval in date, was recorded towards the western boundary of the excavated area.

While Iron Age and medieval features dominated the evaluation and subsequent excavations it is worth noting that a number of residual struck flints, probably dating to the Bronze Age, were recovered from later features (Meddens 2010). In addition to the struck flints a small number of pot sherds dating to the Middle- and Late Bronze Age was found. The small assemblage of prehistoric pottery fragments recovered from the site bore some resemblance to the fabrics of the material recovered from other sites in the vicinity (Seager-Thomas 2011). This material suggests at least some ephemeral use of the area during this period.

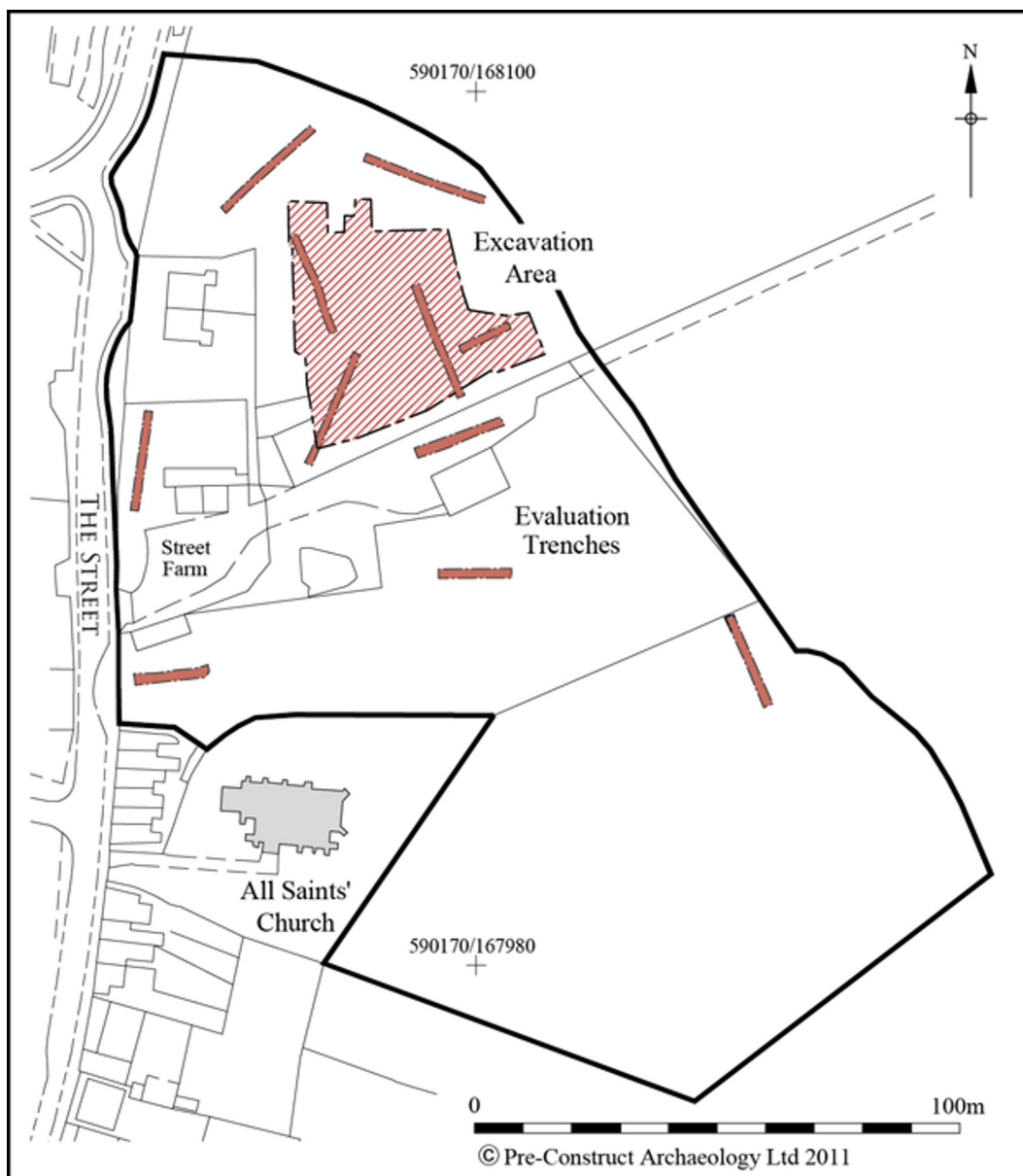


Figure 2: Trench location

## ***Introduction***

The earliest occupation of the Iwade area dates to at least the Bronze Age although the current town was not founded until the later 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. There is some evidence to suggest at least transient, perhaps seasonal, use of the area during the Mesolithic and Neolithic, perhaps becoming more frequent and intensive towards the Middle to Late Bronze Age. Certainly by the Early Bronze Age the area was situated within a highly developed agricultural and ritualistic landscape. During the Early Iron Age human activity appears to have dropped off and it was not until the Late Iron Age that the Iwade area was once again used. It is possible that The Street, or at least a proto version of it, originated during this period as a trackway across the marshes. By the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD the area entered into a second hiatus which this time lasted for more than a millennium until the late 12<sup>th</sup> century (Bishop and Bagwell 2005).

Throughout medieval times, and indeed most of the post-medieval period, Iwade remained thinly populated and land-use appears to have been similar and unchanging. An 18<sup>th</sup> century commentator (Hasted 1798) described the hamlet as low-lying, isolated, malodorous and unhealthy. The Kent marshes are known to have been affected by malaria at this time which had a significant impact on the demographics of the region (Dobson 1980). The paucity of wills from the parish of Iwade proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury between 1300 and 1651 intimates the general poverty and isolation of the village (Draper 2010).

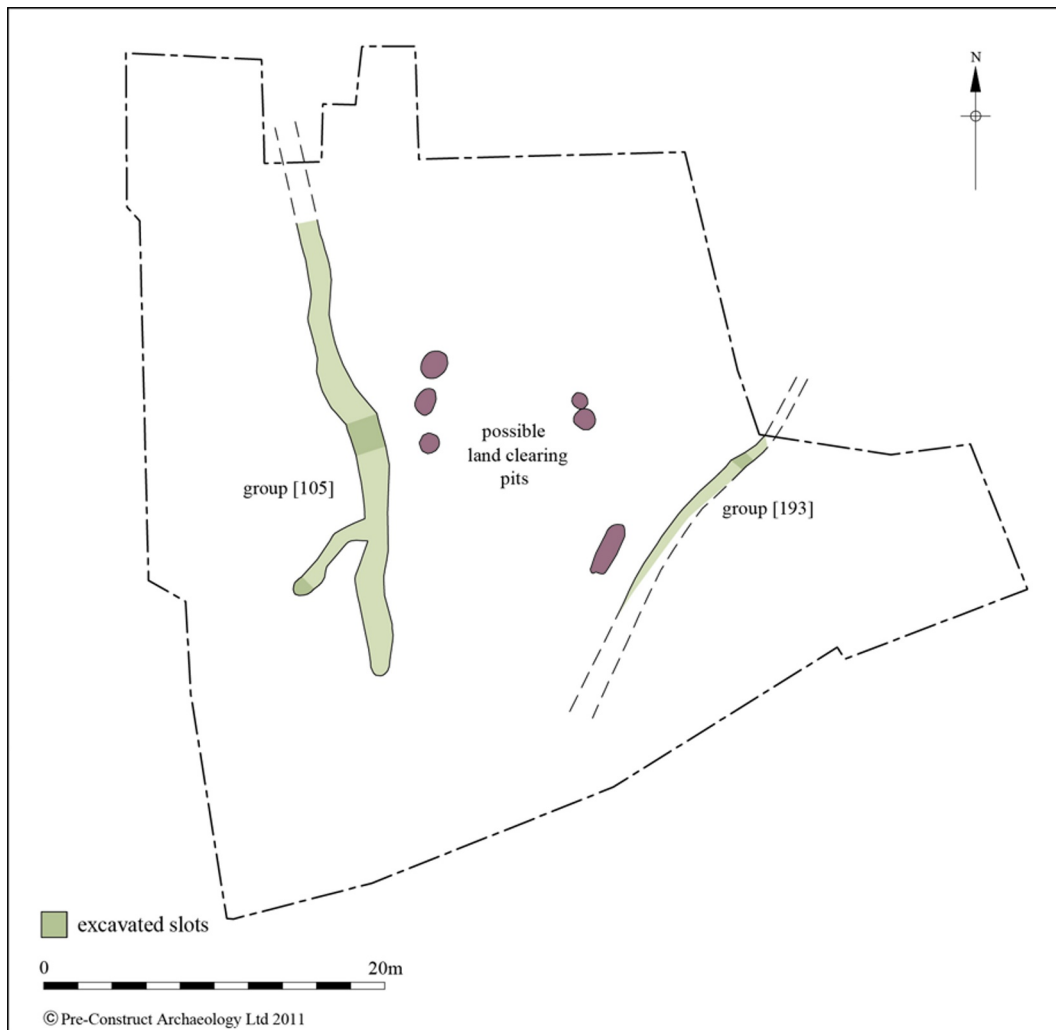
Little development of note took place in the Iwade area throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century terraced houses had started to appear along School Lane and Ferry Road. At this time the land use within the study site also seemed to change as an orchard was established there, occupying most of what is now 'Iwade 7'. Possibly the largest development before the Iwade Development Brief of 1999 updated in 2008 (<http://www.swale.gov.uk/iwade-development-brief/>) took place in the 1960s with the construction of the Sheerstone neighbourhood and Springvale in the early 1980s.

The Iwade Development Brief (IDB), saw the village increase in size from 325 households to approximately 1125 households and when the IDB was updated in 2008 this allowed for a further 400 homes to the east and south-west of the village. Various archaeological investigations have been carried out in advance of the development of the sites (David Lock Associates 2009). The land discussed in this paper is located within the Phase 7 development and covers the portion of the brief pertaining to land to the north of the Grade I listed All Saints Church.

The site is delimited by The Street to the west and All Saints Church to the south; to the north and west it is bordered by arable fields. Topographically it is located on the back of an east-trending ridge extending from a small promontory to the west. To the east the landscape falls off towards the marshes below and to the north towards an unnamed tributary of the Ridham Fleet.

On the 1:50,000 scale British Geological Survey Sheet 272 the site area is shown as lying near the interface between deposits of Head Brickearth and London Clay to the south-east and north-west respectively (Chatham; 1977). The evaluation, and subsequent excavation activities, confirmed that brickearth deposits survived in a few areas of the site although in most places these had been truncated by ploughing and erosion. Underlying the Pleistocene brickearth were deposits of pedogenically altered Eocene London Clay (Branch 2009).

Virtually all the features recorded had been heavily truncated by erosion and ploughing, so only the basal portions survived. It is likely, especially in the case of the ditches, that the recorded fills represent silting rather than deliberate backfilling.



**Figure 3: Iron Age features**

### ***Middle- to Late Iron Age (Fig. 3)***

A number of pit-like features were recorded which were fairly irregular in both plan and profile; several appeared to display signs of root impressions at the base. It is probable that these features represent a phase of land clearance immediately prior to the establishment of an organised field system. Temporally diagnostic material recovered from these features showed that this land clearance occurred during the Middle- to Late Iron Age (300BC-43AD).

Of the linear features uncovered two, [105] and [193], yielded material dating to the Middle- to Late Iron Age. These were interpreted as ditches forming part of the south and west sides of a field system or, more specifically, two sides of a field covering an area of at least 216m<sup>2</sup>.

A 23m long section of the north to south aligned ditch, [105], was recorded near the western boundary of the excavation area. Excavation of a portion of this feature revealed it to have moderately steep sides gradually transitioning into a mostly flat base. The fill comprised mid-brownish grey clayey silt containing frequent small rounded and sub-rounded pebbles. Unfortunately only the bottom 0.14m of the ditch survived, the top having been truncated by later ploughing and erosion.

The east to west aligned ditch, [193], was recorded over a length of 13m and extended east beyond the limit of the excavation. To the west it had been truncated by a later medieval ditch. The sides of the feature sloped gently towards a mostly flat base. Like [105] its fill comprised mid-brownish grey clayey silt, and the fill contained frequent small rounded and sub-rounded pebbles. The ditch survived to a maximum depth of 0.38m although for the most part only the bottom 0.18m was left. Ditches of this type have elsewhere been interpreted as the remains of a field-system defined by hedges used in the management of stock control (Prior 2008)

Previous work in the Iwade area has identified a sizable Late Iron Age settlement (Bishop and Bagwell 2005) and it is probable that the field system recorded during this phase of work was related to the nearby settlement. A similar field system was also recorded in 2001 to the south of All Saints Church (Boyer 2001).

### **Medieval** (Fig. 4 )

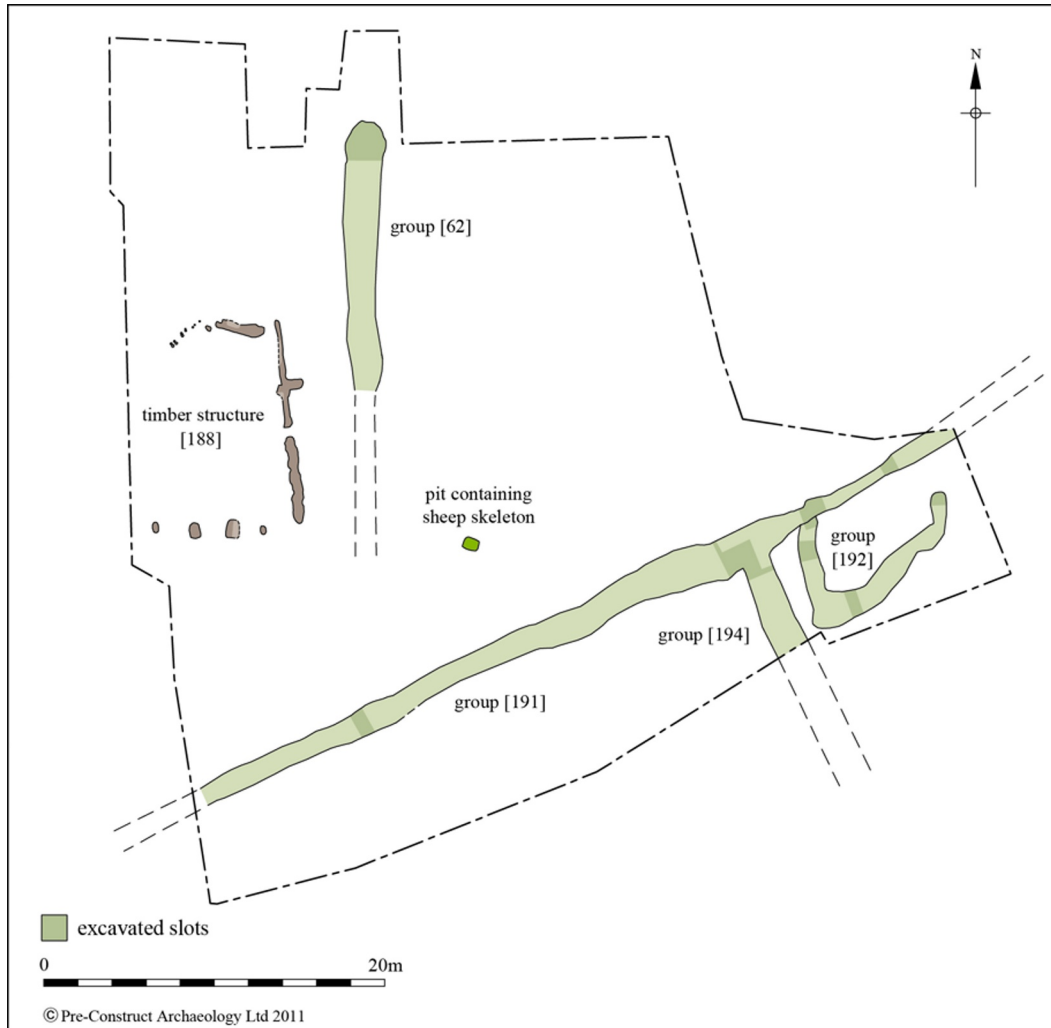
There appears to have been a hiatus in the occupation of the Iwade area between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. This trend was also observed on the current study site by the lack of archaeological evidence for this period.

The medieval activity relating to the establishment of a further field system closely resembled that of the Iron Age in that it was preceded by a phase of land clearance, presumably during the late 12<sup>th</sup>- or early 13<sup>th</sup> century, shortly followed by the introduction of field ditches. It is interesting to note that the layout of the medieval ditches does not stray far from the arrangement of the Iron Age field system. This suggests that despite the apparent discontinuity in occupation that the field boundaries continued on a similar configuration, perhaps replaced by a boundary type which leaves little or no archaeological evidence over the time of the apparent interruption in land use.

The field system consisted of three ditches; one aligned roughly east to west, [191], extending across the whole site. It was joined on its south side by a north to south orientated ditch [194]. Ditch [62] consisted of a truncated segment measuring approximately 17m which was also north to south aligned.

Only the basal portions of these features survived, to a maximum depth of between 0.3m and 0.4m. The excavated fills for all of these comprised light greyish-brown silty clay containing occasional charcoal and shell flecks. Most of the sections excavated through the field ditches yielded pottery dating from the late 11<sup>th</sup> to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to the field divisions there was a small enclosure, [192], perhaps a small livestock pen or structure. It was located in the south-eastern corner of the excavated area. This feature measured ca. 8m east to west by 6m north to south, covering an area of 48m<sup>2</sup>. The east end contained a 2m wide opening.



**Figure 4: Medieval features**

Along the western boundary the remains of a timber structure, [188], measuring 12m north to south by 10m east to west were recorded. Unfortunately the building extended beyond the western limits of the excavation so only the eastern portion was exposed. Even so, it can be estimated that the overall area covered by the building would have been 120m<sup>2</sup>.

The east side consisted of two wall footings of roughly equal lengths separated by a gap. While post holes were observed along the entire length of the east wall, these appeared more substantial at the ends and around the gap between the two foundation trenches. It is likely that the interruption in the middle of the wall represents access into the building.

At the southern end of the structure the roof appears to have been supported by four posts in addition to the two side walls. Of these the two centre posts were the largest with the post hole cuts surviving to a depth of 0.35m while only the lower 0.13m of the outer posts had outlasted the impact of the later truncation. All four posts were spaced ca. 2m apart with the easternmost post having been set 2m west of the eastern wall.

Both surviving wall elements were of similar construction, consisting of foundation trenches with post hole depressions at the base. A series of small post holes made up what remained of the north wall. It is possible that the north end of the building had initially been left open and was subsequently closed off in two stages in the later life of the structure.

The overall dimensions of the building must thus have been 12m north to south by 10m east to west covering a ground area of 120m<sup>2</sup>. The isolated farm building may quite possibly have been constructed using timbers of varying quality essentially utilising any spare timber that was available.

Pottery recovered from the different elements of the building suggests a date of around AD 1200 to 1300. Excavation of the medieval field ditches yielded pottery dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting that the field system was contemporary with the structure.

A rectangular pit recorded in the central portion of the site did not yield any readily datable material. However, the pit did contain a near complete adult sheep skeleton alongside a partial juvenile sheep/goat skeleton. Based on the size of the individuals and the preservation of the bones it is likely that the remains date to the medieval period or later rather than to the Iron Age (Rielly 2010).

### ***Conclusions***

The results of the strip, map and sample excavation carried out across the parcels of land at Iwade 7 conform to those of other sites in the area. Previous work in the vicinity has located the core of a substantial Late Iron Age settlement to the south and south-west of the site. Other phases of the village development brief have facilitated the archaeological exploration of areas peripheral to the recorded settlement; mostly to the north and north-east. Almost all of these sites have shown an extensive series of field systems which almost certainly formed the agricultural landscape setting for the Iron Age community, to which the current site can be added.

Similarly, almost all the places explored in the vicinity have flagged up a gap in occupation between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD; this was again the case at the current location. The re-emergence of activity during the 11<sup>th</sup> century supports the claim made in the historical record that the village was founded in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century. At other sites in the area similar medieval field systems to the one observed during the work on Iwade 7 have been noted. The presence of the medieval structure and find of the sheep and lamb/goat burial of possible similar date suggest that these medieval fields may have been used for sheep grazing and management. Finds of articulated animal remains are comparatively uncommon because of the value of the animals to their owner. In the absence of any other obvious reason this discovery may indicate the disposal of diseased stock.

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