

**EVIDENCE BASE: CHAPTER 7: LOCAL ARCHAEOLOGY: REPORT BY MR HUGH RICHMOND FSA MA  
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**Corpusty and Saxthorpe**

1. The Local Plan area

The area covered by this plan is the civil parish of Corpusty and Saxthorpe. The boundaries are also those of the ecclesiastical parishes of Corpusty and Saxthorpe, the origins of which go back at least to the late Anglo-Saxon period. The parishes were united in 1921 at which time the church of St. Peter in Corpusty ceased to be a parish church.

2. Historical Perspective

The earliest comprehensive record of the plan area is in the Little Domesday Book that covers Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex and records the situation in c.1086.

Both Corpusty and Saxthorpe have entries. Corpusty has a total population of 6.6 households and tax is assessed at 0.7 geld units suggesting a small settlement. It is therefore perhaps surprising to find that two churches are listed. Saxthorpe on the other hand has a total population 50.3 households and tax is assessed 4.0 a medium amount. No church is recorded which might be regarded as odd because the church of St. Andrew was certainly in existence by that time. It is however clear from the evidence of surviving churches with early fabric that recording was erratic throughout East Anglia. Both entries include Mills, Corpusty has 1.8 and Saxthorpe 2.

3. Topographical setting

The two parishes are on the eastern edge of the high ground that forms the watershed that runs through the centre of the county in a broad arc that points eastward. This is well illustrated by two rivers that have nearby sources, the Bure and the Glaven. The former runs east from near Melton Constable to the Broads and then to sea at Great Yarmouth while the latter runs north-west from Edgefield to Cley next the Sea and now runs out through Blakeney Harbour.

By the time The Bure reaches Corpusty and Saxthorpe it has been fed by a number of tributaries and has become a well-defined waterway. The river has acted on the pattern of settlement in two ways. It forms the boundary between the two parishes and was probably a territorial boundary long before the rationalisation and definition of parishes in the 11th and 12th centuries. It has also acted as a magnet for settlement and industry in both parishes.

The other major influences are the river crossings, the most important being that joining the settlements of Corpusty and Saxthorpe and the other about half a mile up stream at Little London, a subsidiary settlement. They would presumably have started as fords that were subsequently bridged.

4. Settlement pattern

The pattern of settlement before modern development is clearly shown on Faden's map of Norfolk dated 1797. Saxthorpe is clustered on the high ground around the church of St. Andrew but also spreads along the road down to the bridge and along the river, while Corpusty runs along the valley side above low lying land adjacent to the river. The church of St. Peter stands alone on the highest ground in the parish about half a mile south of the centre of the village. Houses are shown on both sides of the river at Little London but the river crossing appears to be a ford.

Considerable development has taken place in recent times in both villages but the early pattern of occupation has not been destroyed.

#### 5. Communications

Faden's Map also gives a clear picture of the major roads crossing the parishes the origins of which are certainly a great deal earlier.

The principal north south route, the road from the Port of Cley to Norwich turned to the south as it reached the Church of St Andrew at Saxthorpe and became the main street of the village. It then went over the bridge to the centre of Corpusty and up the hill to the Church of St. Peter and on in an almost straight line to Norwich. The main east west route was that from New Walsingham to Aylsham and this crossed with the Cley to Norwich road on the north side of Saxthorpe. This pattern remained relatively undisturbed until 2002 when the bypass was opened. It runs on the east side of both villages and crosses the Bure. There are the remains of the railway line that was opened in 1883. It provided practical access to the rest of England via Norwich, Ely and Kings Lynn. The line was closed in 1959 when almost all the extensive rail network in the county was lost.

#### 6. Archaeological Evidence

The archaeology of the Local Plan area is well documented in the Norfolk Historic Environmental Record on line database ([heritage@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:heritage@norfolk.gov.uk)). It listed under Corpusty, the name of civil parish before it was changed to Corpusty and Saxthorpe in 2007. One hundred and twenty sites and finds have been recorded so far and the location of each has been plotted on an interactive map base and on aerial photographs.

The important elements of this database were summarised and arranged in chronological order by Sarah Spooner (Norfolk Landscape Archaeology) in 2005. It is this work that provides the basis of the following account.

The information set out below summarises the history of occupation of the plan area from prehistoric times to the present day. It must however be remembered that this is by no means a complete survey but an evolving picture that is dependent on continuing archaeological activity and recording.

Corpusty, from the Old Norse meaning 'raven path', is a large parish in the northeast of the county, on the River Bure. The two villages of Corpusty and Saxthorpe are now almost conjoined, and dominate the centre of the parish. Saxthorpe comes from the Old Norse meaning 'an outlying farmstead of Sasaki'.

There is some evidence for early occupation in the parish, a number of prehistoric flints have been found scattered throughout the parish, including Neolithic flints axes, a jade axehead, and an arrowhead, which dates to the Late Neolithic or the Early Bronze Age. The sites of two ring ditches, probably the remains of Bronze Age barrows, are visible as crop-marks on aerial photographs, and a Bronze Age palstave and a spearhead have been found in the parish.

Iron Age coins and a chariot fitting have been found in the parish, suggesting that settlement continued to develop in the parish during the Iron Age period. Roman coins, brooches, pottery and other metalwork including a cosmetic palette and part of a figurine have been found, although a specific settlement cannot be identified with any certainty.

In the Domesday Book, Corpusty is a small settlement, whereas neighbouring Saxthorpe was much larger, and more valuable. A church is recorded at Corpusty, rather than Saxthorpe but St Andrew's Church in Saxthorpe contains Late Saxon work. An Early Saxon ring brooch and part of an Early Saxon

coptic bowl, as well as Middle Saxon coins and Late Saxon pottery have been found in the parish, and the present villages have probably developed from the Saxon settlement on the banks of the River Bure.

During the medieval period Aylmer de Valance, the Earl of Pembroke, built a large moated manor house in the parish, known locally as 'Saxthorpe Castle'. The manor house has now disappeared, and is only visible on aerial photographs. Close to the site of the manor is an area of abandoned medieval settlement suggested by the large amount of pottery and other medieval finds recovered from the site.

The tanning and the cloth industries were important in the parish during the medieval and post medieval periods. A medieval tanning pit was found during an excavation in 2001, and the site of a post medieval tannery is close to the river. A post medieval watermill next to the bridge and a windmill on the hill in Corpusty are shown on Faden's map.

Saxthorpe Airfield was some distance north of the village and was used as a landing strip during World War One.

## 7. Important Buildings

We now move from the important but largely hidden archaeological record to the tangible and more prominent evidence of buildings. The outstanding examples have been listed.

The two oldest and largest buildings are the parish churches. The Church of St. Andrew in Saxthorpe is listed grade I. It is located at the northern end of the village on high ground adjacent to an important road junction. The earliest fabric dates from the Saxo-Norman period and the plan of the present nave and the western part of the chancel were established at that time. The development took place throughout the middle ages. It consisted of the construction of the tower, the lengthening of the chancel and the addition of low aisles. These were raised in height and the clearstory was added in the later Middle Ages. A major restoration was carried out in 1892 when the late medieval roofs were replaced.

The church of St. Peter in Corpusty is listed Grade II\*. It is located at a remote site about half a mile south of the village on the highest ground in the parish. There is no known associated settlement and the churchyard is oval. These factors could perhaps suggest that this is a site of long standing significance. The church is a simple structures consisting of chancel, nave, west tower and south porch. It apparently dates from the 14th century but there is evidence of an earlier phase as the nave was raised in height to accommodate the large windows that were fashionable at that time. The church was declared redundant in 1981 and it is now in the care of the Norfolk Churches Trust.

The Manor House at Corpusty is listed Grade II. It is located on the east side of the village at the junction between Norwich Road and the By-pass (B1149). The original house of two stories dates from the 16th century and consisted of two bays with end stacks and it has a two story porch on the south side with a four-centered entrance arch flanked by elaborate polygonal buttresses topped by finials. A further bay was added on the west in c. 1620.

A water Mill and Mill House listed Grade II is located just up stream of the bridge between Corpusty and Saxthorpe and spans the river. The lower two stories of the mill are brick and the date 1699 is inscribed on the sluice arch. The building was remodeled in c.1880 when the weather-boarded third story was added. The mill house of two stories and attics has two bays that date from the 18th century and two more that were added to the south at about the same time as the mill was remodelled. There is an elaborate door-case in the second bay of the extension.

Little London Farm House, listed Grade II, is on the west side of Corpusty. It dates from the 18th century and comprises a single range of three bays of two stories and attics. It is built of brick and the roof is covered with pantiles.

#### 8. Conservation priorities

having set out something of the development and history of the plan area and highlighted the more important heritage assets. The next step is to move towards a strategy to preserve and enhance the environment against which proposals for development can be measured.

As the nature and extent of future proposals is unknown it is impossible to set out any case in detail but it is possible to provide some broad markers.

#### 9. Topography

The basic topography of the plan area will endure but the existing character should be carefully considered and evaluated in the face of proposals for large-scale development such as wind farms, solar fields, transmission lines and major changes in land use.

#### 10. Settlement pattern

Future building activity should be on such a scale that will not obscure the pattern of the development of both Saxthorpe and Corpusty. Some of the more important features in this matrix are: the pattern of settlement and the distribution of open land, the relationship of both settlements to the River Bure, the preservation of the existing open spaces adjacent to the river, the very different character of the churches in their wider setting and the position of the mill adjacent to the bridge.

#### 11. Buildings

The listed buildings in the plan area and their immediate surroundings are afforded protection by the legislation but their wider prospects are vulnerable. All the listed buildings occupy key sites and it is important that the wider character of each location is preserved. It is also important to consider all the buildings in the plan area, as the existing pattern of settlement should not be compromised by future development.

#### 12. Communications

The early pattern of roads is preserved and the course of the railway can be traced through the plan area. The bypass has reduced traffic flows through Saxthorpe and Corpusty but it has also cut off the eastern parts of both settlements.

This provides a good demonstration of the importance of balancing need and effect, and the dilemma inherent in all large-scale development.

#### 13. Archaeological evidence

The quantity and spread of remains dating from prehistoric times to the present day across the plan area shows that any proposed development will involve the disturbance of archaeological material. This opportunity should be fully exploited as the information and material gained will further enhance an understanding of the development of the plan area and the links with the wider world.

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