

Hinxworth

This parish lies in the northern extremity of North Hertfordshire. This was the former Odsey Hundred, which included Ashwell (its central place and once a market town), Caldecote, Radwell, Newnham and Bygrave to the north of the Icknield Way. Clothall, Wallington, Rushden, Sandon, Kelshall, Therfield, Royston, Reed, Broadfield, Cottered and Ardeley were the villages in the Hundred to the south of Icknield Way (the last three are outside North Hertfordshire). Hundreds were one of the ancient divisions of most English counties, their origins going back to the tenth century or even earlier. The half north of the Icknield Way was perhaps originally the territory of a minster church at Ashwell.



Figure 1: The parish seen on Google Earth in 2020

Sitting away from main roads, it is a parish that may be unfamiliar to outsiders. It is not uninteresting, of course. Although there are no mentions of the place before the compilation of Domesday Book in 1086, archaeology shows that there is an earlier history to the area.

The placename

The name is first attested in Domesday Book in two spellings, *Haingesteuorde* and *Hainsteuorde*. It contains *hengest*, 'a stallion', and *worð*, 'a farmyard'; a *worð* was the lowest status of farm, usually thought to be dependent on a more important place.

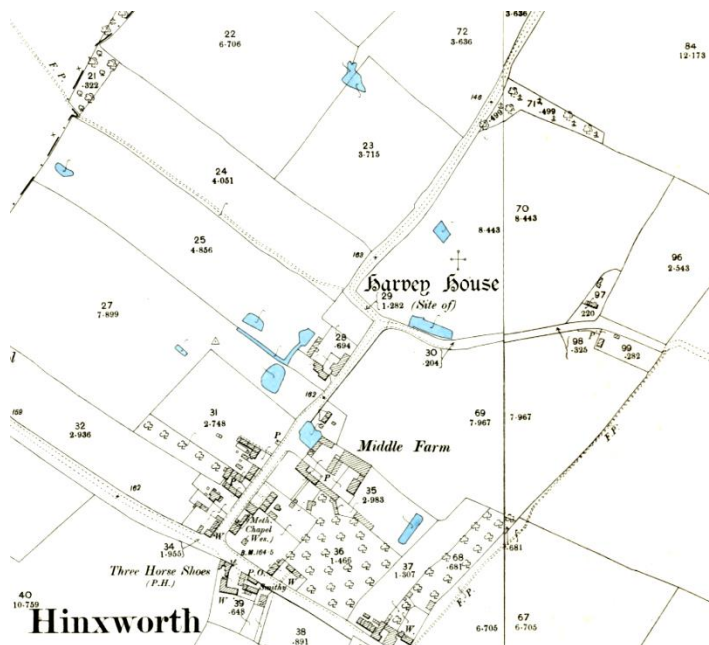


Figure 2: the site of Harvey House marked by the Ordnance Survey in 1897

Harvey House was formerly known as Cantlowbury (which was first recorded in 1523), named from the family of Walter de Cantelu (fl. 1176). The house is marked on early Ordnance Survey maps and stood at the end of Chapel Street, by the junction with Arnolds Lane and the track to Manor Farm. John Wesley recorded a visit to Miss Harvey here on 19 July 1782 in his diary. The house was derelict by the early 1860s and was pulled down with some difficulty in 1863. It stood in its own enclosure (Although early historians were wrong to believe that the fishpond to its south was part of a moat) and consisted of a courtyard house, built

from stone with mullioned windows. It probably resembled Hinxworth Place, to the south. The draft first edition Ordnance Survey map shows that it also had numerous outbuildings. There seem to be no surviving images of this house, unfortunately.

Bury End was recorded as *Henxworthbury* in 1570. Although historians once suggested that the name originally referred to a moat on the other side of the road, the only evidence is an L-shaped depression, measuring 50 × 100 m, the 'arms' about 10 m wide. Three 'arms' are shown on early Ordnance Survey maps, but the southern is much narrower and seems to turn to the south at its western end; this southern branch does not appear on the Enclosure Map of 1806.

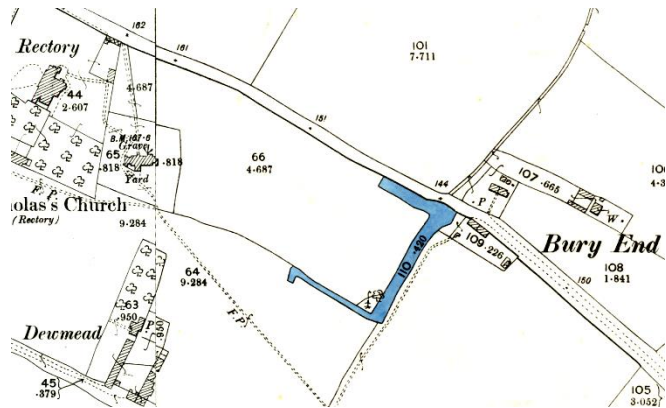


Figure 3: the supposed 'moat' at Bury End in 1897

The name of Saltmore Farm, towards the southern end of the parish, off New Inn Road, was recorded as Saltmore Field in the early seventeenth century. The farm does not appear on the 1806 enclosure map, which may mean that it was built as part of the enclosure process on a new apportionment. The farmhouse and two barns date to precisely this period. One of the barns had been altered by 1882, but two bays are the oldest part and belong to this first phase; it was probably built as stables.

The Ridgeway is first recorded in the early 17th century; it runs along a low ridge north from Bury Farm. A field boundary south of Ashwell Road continues the line towards Hinxworth Place, but there is no sign of it extending north beyond the county boundary.

Topography and extent of the parish

The parish, a little over 590 hectares (1460 acres) in area, is roughly rectangular, its long axis aligned south-south-west to north-north-east, and it lies in an area characterised in the 1990s as the Hinxworth Lowlands (Landscape Character Area 225). This consists of gently rolling, low-lying countryside dominated by arable fields. There is a slight slope down to the north-west; outside the parish to the south-east, Newnham Hill rises to 85 m above sea level. The roads are mostly straight, and there is a network of drainage ditches between fields. The church tower is a dominant feature of the built landscape. The south-western, north-western and north-eastern boundaries are with Bedfordshire, while the south-eastern is with Ashwell and Caldecote. The boundary with Ashwell is formed by the course of the River Rhee, a tributary of the River Cam that rises in Ashwell.

Settlement plan

The settlement is in the centre of the parish area, straddling the road between Edworth and Ashwell. The parish church lies at the eastern end of the village, while other early properties clustered around Chapel Lane and the north end of New Inn Road.

Communications

The current settlement pattern consists of a village mostly strung out along a high street (Ashwell Road to the east, High Street to the west), which follows a low ridge. The settlement is connected with the A1 to the south by New Inn Road. Chapel Street is the historic road to the north, connecting with

Arnolds Lane, running east to the parish boundary. There are farms to the north and south of the village centre.

Historical Summary

Hinxworth was first recorded as three separate manors in Domesday Book, held by William de Ow, Hardwin of Scales and Peter de Valognes. Peter's holding was an outlier of his main holding in Ashwell, so was perhaps in the eastern side of the parish. When his last descendant in the male line, Christine de Mandeville, Countess of Essex, died in 1233, the Hinxworth manor passed through her husband's sister Maud to Maud's son Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Essex. The holding of Hardwin de Scales was divided between his sons Richard and Hugh; their grandsons William and Hugh were alive in 1207×8, but they were the last of the family to have possessions in the village.

Henry I granted William de Ow's holding, which was let to two knights in 1086, to Walter de Clare. On his death, it passed to his nephew Gilbert de Clare, who became Earl of Pembroke in 1138. When his son Richard died in 1176, his daughter Isabel and her husband Sir William Marshal inherited the manor. After William's death in 1219, it passed through the hands of each of his five sons, none of whom had children. When the last son, Anselm, died in 1245, the manor was divided between his five sisters.

The later history of the various manors is complex, tied up in politics and split between different branches of Sir William Marshal's descendants, until the end of the fifteenth century. Richard Waferer was the owner of the manor that became known as Hinxworth or Wattonbury by 1471×2. His son John sold it in 1521 to John Bowles of Wallington. From then on, it has the usual post-medieval history of short family descents and frequent sales. In 1881, it was bought by John Sale, and after he died in 1881, his daughters continued to own it. They were early donors of objects to Letchworth Museum.

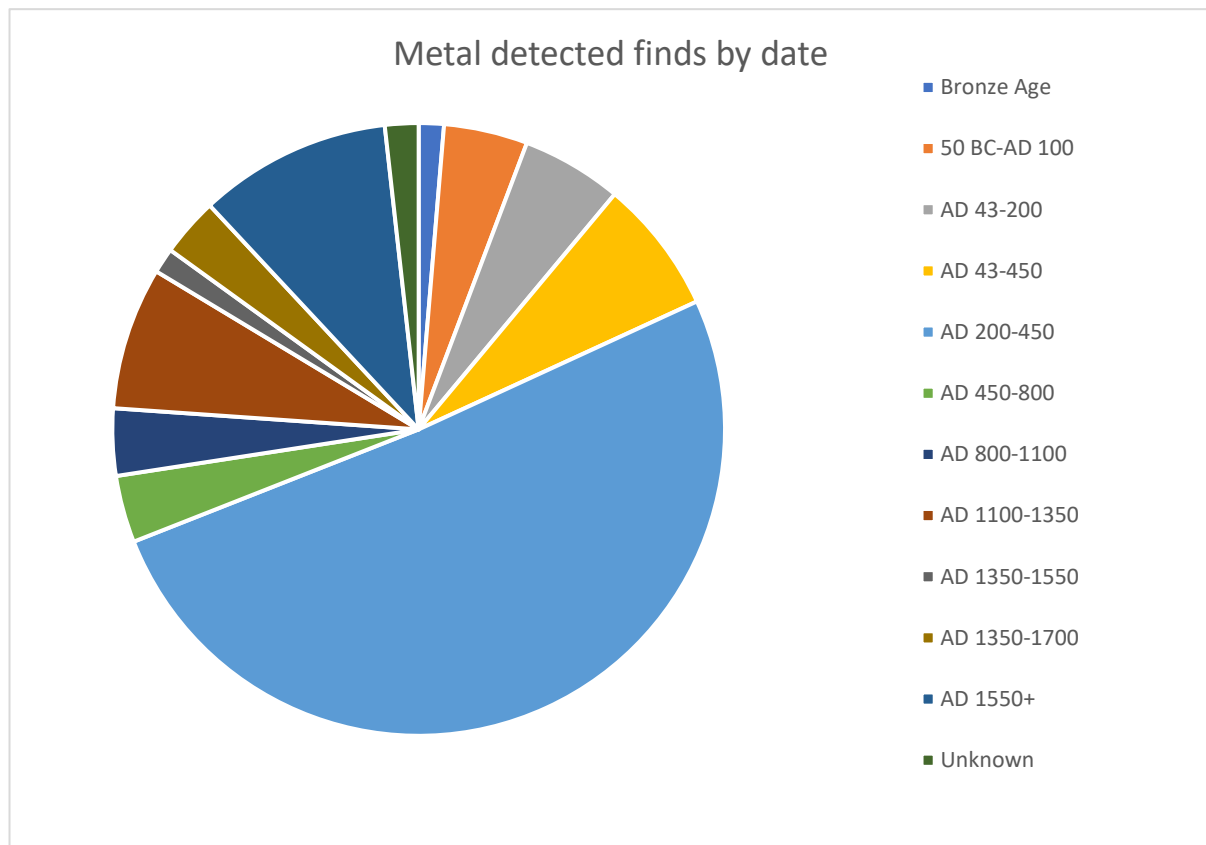
A second manor, Cantlowbury, was not recorded before 1521×2 but seems to take its name from the family of Walter de Cantelupe, who had property in the village in 1176. Walter's descendants had the advowson (the right to nominate the parish priest) for St Nicholas's Church in the village until 1326. This shows that they were an important family with large landholdings, although we do not know where they were.

Sir Henry Chauncy named a third manor, Pulters, in his *Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire*, published in 1700. He said that it was named for Pulter who held it for a rent of 10/8 (53½p) in the reign of Edward IV (1461-1470, 1471-1483) and that they were the patrons of Hinxworth Rectory. However, the Victoria County History discounts the manorial status of Pulters, saying that it was a property held from the Manor of Hinxworth.

Archaeological Summary

Nobody has yet tried to put all the archaeological data from the village into a coherent story. The Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record lists seven prehistoric sites and finds, eight Romano-British (AD 43-450), one Viking period (AD 800-1000) and thirteen medieval (AD 1066-1550). This is not a lot of information to write a story, even if we supplement it by historical data, mostly consisting of the family trees of the holders of the manors.

However, the situation is made easier because a lot of archaeological data is generated through the hobby of metal detecting. Even if the archaeological context of finds made in this way is unclear, we can plot out the distribution of finds of different dates (remembering, of course, that blank areas may not have been unoccupied in the past, just that no detectorists have searched them). As of April 2020, some 226 finds have been recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme; more than half of them are dated to the Late Roman period (AD 200-450) and almost three quarters are Late Iron Age or Roman. This is because most of the finds of this date consist of scrappy low-value bronze coins that are frequent finds on and around Roman sites, not because there was a massive settlement here at the time.



The pie chart shows the finds of different date; starting at the 'midnight' position and working in a clockwise direction brings you forward in time. One thing that jumps out to the trained eye is the number of finds dated AD 450-1100 (16 in all, split equally 450-800 and 800-1100). Metalwork of this date is not often found by detectorists in Hertfordshire, beyond a few hot spots. Hinxworth appears to be one, and we need to explain why that might be so. Something else to note is the drop-off after the Black Death.

Prehistory

There is almost no prehistoric archaeology from the village. A faint cropmark may be a destroyed Late Neolithic or Earlier Bronze Age burial mound in the north-east of the parish. A tripartite urn dated 2000-1800 BC was found during excavations by Arthur Waddell at Newinn, in the southern corner of the parish, which is now on display in North Hertfordshire Museum. These excavations took place in 1911, in a disused gravel pit. They were perhaps the site of discoveries made in 1724, which the historian Nathaniel Salmon said in 1728 consisted of *'some earthen vessels or large urns, full of burnt bones and ashes... a human skeleton... bodies... not above a foot under the surface... and with urns*

great or small near them, and pateras of fine red earth, some with the impression of the maker on the bottom. From the description, we can recognise other Bronze Age burial urns (*'earthen vessels or large urns'*) together with finds of a later (Roman) date. Dr Waddell also found fragments of a Bronze Age collared urn. The curator of Letchworth Museum, Percy Westell, wrote up an account of Waddell's work (*'Roman and pre-Roman discoveries at Newinn, Herts', St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archeological Society Transactions 1931: 141-150*). Owing to Waddell's death and the passage of time, Westell's account is speculative and muddled.

There are also the two Middle Bronze Age spearheads, one in good condition, the other badly corroded, and an awl found by metal detectorists. Both the spearheads came from a field known as Clacketts, in the east of the parish. This is about a kilometre south of the possible ring ditch, so they are probably not connected with it unless it formed part of an extensive barrow cemetery, spread out along the west bank of the River Rhee tributary that forms the parish boundary here. There is another possibility, as we shall see. The awl came from a field to the east of Middle Farm, closer to the centre of the parish.

There is not enough information from this scattered material to make sense of what was going on in the parish during the second millennium BC. This is not unusual: the Bronze Age is better known for its metalwork and burials than for understanding settlements in the landscape.

Late Iron Age to Roman

Two puzzling finds were made in 1810: coins from the east. One was minted by Mithridates King of Pontus (probably Mithridates VI, who was king from about 120 BC to 63 BC), the other by Perseus of Macedonia (king 179-168 BC). Pontus was a kingdom on the Black Sea coast of northern Turkey and western Armenia, while Macedonia was a northern Greek kingdom. Coins of this period are found occasionally across Britain, and although they are sometimes dismissed as recent losses by collectors, it is more likely that they arrived in the decades after they were minted. They were traded not as money but for their bullion value. It was probably this trade in coins in the Middle and Late Iron Age that led to the Britons of the south-east adopting and minting their own coinage. We do not know where in the parish they were found, unfortunately.



Figure 4: Roman roof tile from Newinn, with a dog's footprint

With the end of the Iron Age, from about 50 BC, the number of finds increases hugely. At Newinn, where Arthur Waddell had found Bronze Age remains, he also excavated 15 objects dated by Percival Westell to the Late Iron Age (although a couple of pieces of metalwork may have been Bronze Age in date), and 31 Romano-British objects. Most of these consisted of pots used as grave gifts, although there were two fragments of roof time, one with a dog's footprint.

These discoveries were made less than 150 m from the Roman road that is now followed by the A1. This important road linked the Late Iron Age and Roman town at Baldock to the south with the town at Sandy to the north, then on to Godmanchester and Lincoln. There are hints from Baldock that the

road was established long before the Roman conquest, so it is likely that this was the burial ground of a community established along the line of the road. There were also skeletons and an apparently isolated skull, which Waddell believed to be of different dates. He thought that the skull, which was face-down in a gravelly deposit, had belonged to an unfortunate individual drowned when a flood overtook him. This idea is fanciful, and it is likely that this was a burial in a grave cut into the gravel subsoil. One of Waddell's unpublished photographs in the museum collection shows the skull not to have been facing down, but resting on its left side, with the face turned downwards, and a poorly-preserved fragment of the humerus (the upper arm bone) close by. We now know – although Waddell and Westell did not – that inhumation (the burial of a body directly in a grave without cremation) was a locally common burial rite in the Late Iron Age and early Roman periods. These burials are likely to have been part of the same cemetery in which the cremation burials were made.

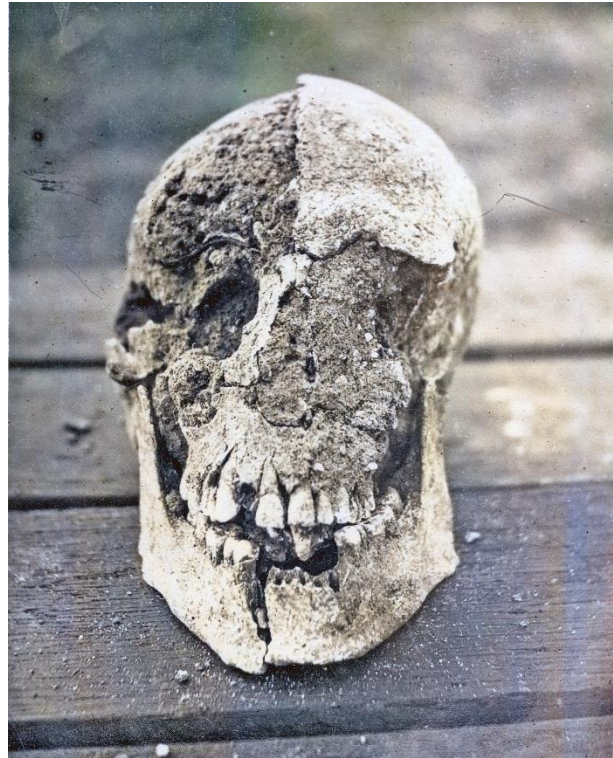


Figure 5: the skull wrongly thought by Dr Waddell to have belonged to a prehistoric person drowned in a flood (colourised)

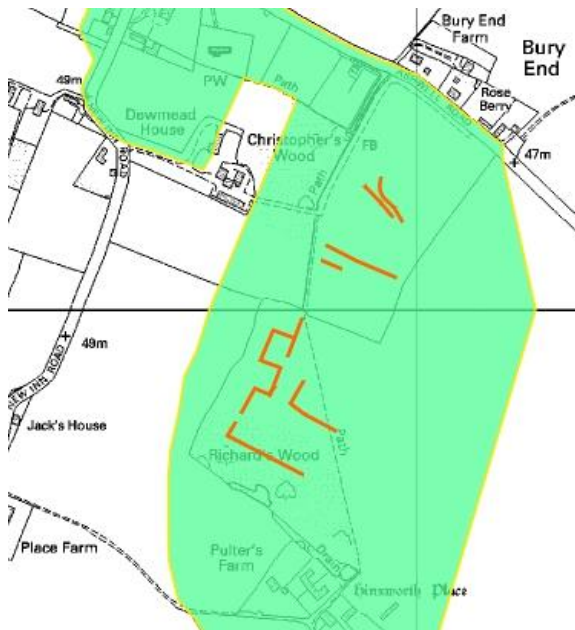


Figure 6: cropmarks west of Marshfield Farm, possibly associated with the Iron Age and Roman finds made during fieldwalking in 2002

In 2002, fieldwalking took place west of Marshfield Farm, between Hinworth Place and the village. This is an area where aerial photography has revealed the presence of buried ditches that suggest occupation. An area of 1.5 hectares was examined, which recovered Late Iron Age and early Roman pottery. This may be connected with the reported discovery of burials beneath one of the barns at Hinworth Place about 1880, when *'many skeletons were discovered ranged in order close to the surface under the barn floor'*. Although nothing was found with them to confirm the date, they are most likely to have been associated with the nearby occupation.

An area of activity more significant than either Newinn or Marshfield Farm has been known for some time around Middle Farm. Here, aerial photographs show a series of ditched enclosures, all very rectangular. This is a good clue that they are of Roman date. One of them, which consists of three concentric ditches, has been Scheduled as an Ancient Monument (number 1015852) since 14 February 1997 as a 'Roman fortlet'. According to the Heritage List for England, its *'garrison of up to 80 men...*

would have been considered sufficient in an area which was generally regarded as stable... The fortlet may also have acted as a transit camp for troops passing along the Great North Road some 2.5km to the west. The fortlet may also have had administrative purposes perhaps connected with food production at nearby villa complexes such as Radwell... and as a secure stopover for the movement of taxes’.

This detailed account is fantasy, and it is inexplicable that English Heritage chose such wording. The interpretation can be shown to be wrong on several counts. Firstly, the ditches are strictly rectangular, without the rounded corners that are a distinctive feature of Roman military installations. Secondly, no other forts are known in the region, of any date. Thirdly, despite a large number of metal-detected finds from the site and its environs, not one single piece of military equipment has ever been recorded. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments for England had earlier, and more plausibly, compared it with a Late Iron Age temple site at Gosbecks (Colchester). Similarly, Gil Burleigh compared it with another Late Iron Age religious site at Fison Way in Thetford.

This interpretation is borne out by the finds from the site. They range from Late Iron Age coinage through to late Roman finds. One of the most intriguing is a tubular copper alloy object decorated with raised bands covered in a repeating pattern of lozenges. Similar finds from religious sites at Wanborough and Godstone (both in Surrey) belonged to religious sceptres, carried by priests. They date from the Late Iron Age through to about AD 200. If the identification is correct (and no other has been suggested), this is good confirmation that the site at Middle Farm is religious, not military.

Another find from the area confirms this. A metal detectorist found a unique figurine 63 mm tall of a goddess identified as a combination of Minerva and Fortuna in 2004. The style is more associated with parts of the Classical world that had been colonised by Greeks (the eastern Mediterranean basin and southern Italy), while the clothing is archaising (deliberately old-fashioned). The goddess Minerva instantly alerts us to a comparison with Senuna, a



Figure 7: a sceptre terminal (Portable Antiquities Scheme object BH-78F164), © P.A.S.



Figure 8: figurine of Minerva-Fortuna, from Hinxworth (© Gil Burleigh)

goddess whose shrine was discovered at Ashwell End, just a kilometre away to the east, during excavations between 2003 and 2006. Part of Senuna’s temple treasure that was buried early in the fourth century included plaques dedicated to the goddess that show her dressed as Minerva. This raises the likelihood that the Minerva-Fortuna statuette from Hinxworth was also identified with the local goddess. More speculatively, her name contains the Brittonic word **zeno-*, ‘old’ (Welsh *hen*), the *-n-* doubled to emphasise ‘very old woman’; would a goddess shown in a very old-fashioned style of dress make the owner even more likely to make the link between the figurine and Senuna?

A comparison with Senuna raises another possible connection. The Bronze Age finds from this area recall Bronze Age metalwork deposited at Senuna’s shrine at Ashwell End. There, they were given as gifts to the goddess by

worshippers in the Roman period. Where they acquired this metalwork, between one and two thousand years old at the time, then dedicated it to Senuna, is anyone's guess. It once again makes the connection with 'the very old goddess' and, if the metalwork from Hinxworth arrived on the site in the same way, provides an alternative explanation for how it got here.

There is yet another unusual find. It is a marble statue of Venus, missing its arms and lower legs, like its more famous counterpart in Paris, but also missing its head. Unfortunately, we know little about where it was found, because it was spotted in 1911 by H W Bowman, the Ashwell Parish Clerk, being used as a weight on a plough, an indignity to which the goddess of beauty and love ought not to have been subjected. All we know is that it was in use at Middle Farm for many years. We may as well call her the Venus de Hinxworth! Was she also part of the temple furnishings here? The style dates her to some time about AD 200. The statue is now on display in Ashwell Village Museum.

There are two more enclosures known to the south of this religious complex. That closest has been described as both a Roman temple and associated compounds and as a corridor villa. The discovery of Roman roof tile in this area shows that whatever the building was, it was substantially built. It is on the same alignment as the site to the north, the long axis aligned roughly south-west to north-east, which is a clue that the two may be contemporary.

The third cropmark site partly overlaps the middle site and is on a different alignment, more west-south-west to east-north-east. This suggests that it is of a different date from the central site; perhaps most significantly, there are no Roman metalwork finds reported from this area, although they are frequent across the rest of the field. There are finds, though, of early and central medieval date (about AD 450 to 1100). Are we perhaps looking at a shifting focus from the initial religious site to the north to one of a completely different character?

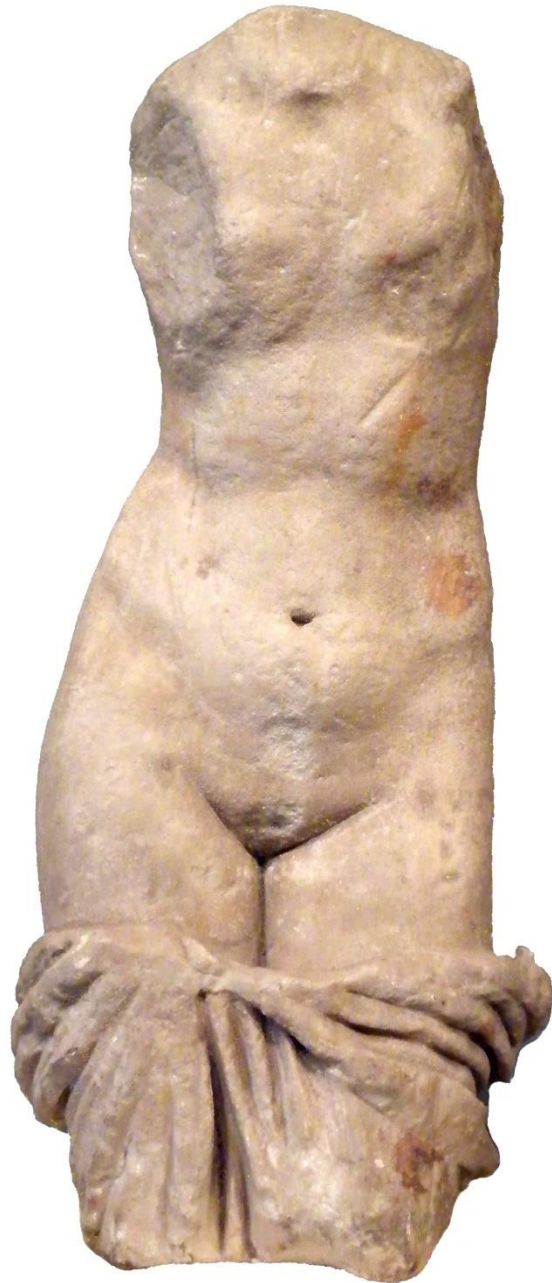


Figure 9: the Venus de Hinxworth

Early medieval

There are some 16 metalwork finds that can be dated to the centuries between the end of Roman rule and the Norman Conquest. This is unusual in North Hertfordshire and must be significant. Some of them are from the area of the third cropmark site in Clacketts (there are two pins, a small-long brooch dated to the sixth century, some sceattas, a type of early Anglo-Saxon coin, a brooch and some hooked tags for securing clothing).



Figure 10: book mount (find BH-1B9603) © P.A.S.

Other finds of this period were made close to the church, including another small-long brooch, more sceattas and a book fitting. This last probably dates from the first half of the eleventh century, and its shape indicates that it came from a religious book, perhaps a copy of the Gospels or a prayer missal, both popular with the educated wealthy at this time.

What seems to be happening is that there was a shift over time, from the site at Clacketts, which may have continued further south as a Pagan Saxon centre, towards the place where a church was eventually established. In time, this became the focus for the growth of a new community, the village of Hinxworth.

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