

Hinxworth lies in the northern extremity of North Hertfordshire, in the former Odsey Hundred. This ancient division 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). 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. There is a link at the end to a longer version of this history.

## The parish

The parish, a little over 590 hectares (1460 acres) in area, is roughly rectangular, lying in an area characterised in the 1990s as the Hinxworth Lowlands (Landscape Character Area 225). Its gently rolling, low-lying countryside is dominated by arable fields, with a network of drainage ditches between them. The south-western, north-western and north-eastern boundaries are with Bedfordshire, while the south-eastern is with Ashwell and Caldecote. The village lies in the centre of the parish, with the church at its eastern end. The village 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

The name is first found in Domesday Book in two spellings, *Haingesteuuorde* and *Hainsteuuorde*. It contains *hengest*, 'a stallion', and *worð*, 'a farmyard', the lowest status of farm. In Domesday Book, it consisted of three manors, held respectively 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



Hinxworth Church during restoration in 1928 (colourised)

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.

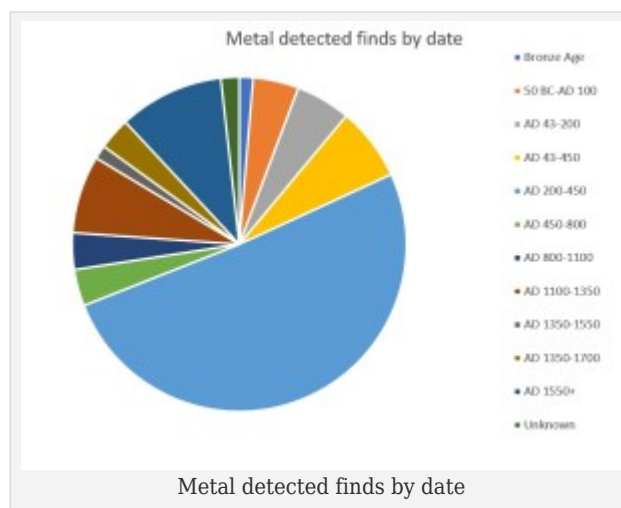
The later history of the various manors is complex, tied up in politics and split between different branches of Sir William Marshal's descendants, until the end of the fifteenth century. Richard Waferer was the owner of the manor that became known as Hinxworth or Wattonbury by 1471<sup>x2</sup>. His 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<sup>x2</sup> 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

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. The situation is made easier metal detecting has uncovered finds of many different dates. 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

The earliest finds from the village belong to the Bronze Age, in the second millennium BC. A faint cropmark towards the north-east corner of the parish may be a destroyed burial mound. 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. Dr Waddell also found fragments of a Bronze Age collared urn. Detectorists have also found two Middle Bronze Age spearheads, one in good condition, the other badly corroded, and an awl. Both the spearheads came from a field known as Clacketts, in the east of the parish. The awl came from a field to the east of Middle Farm, closer to the centre of the parish.

## 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. We do not know where in the parish they were found, unfortunately.



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 tile, 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. The discoveries at Newinn were perhaps part of 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 found in a gravelly deposit, had belonged to an unfortunate individual drowned when a flood

Dr Waddell's mystery skull  
(colourised)

overtook him. It is more likely that this was a burial in a grave cut into the gravel subsoil.

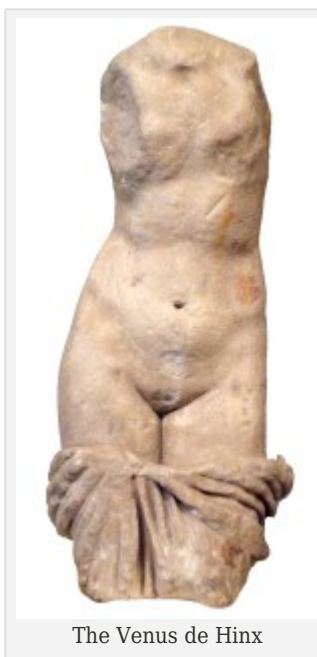
In 2002, fieldwalking took place west of Marshfield Farm, between Hinxworth Place and the village. This is an area where aerial photography has revealed the presence of buried ditches that suggest occupation. An area of 1.5 hectares was examined, which recovered Late Iron Age and early Roman pottery. This may be connected with the reported discovery of burials beneath one of the barns at Hinxworth 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'*.

It is impossible to understand why English Heritage chose such wording as their interpretation can be shown to be wrong. Firstly, the ditches are strictly rectangular, without the rounded corners that are a distinctive feature of Roman military installations. Also, despite the number of metal detected finds from the site, they include not one single piece of military equipment. 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.



Finds from the site 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. It is the end of a religious sceptre, carried by priests, used from the Late Iron Age through to about AD 200. A unique figurine, 63 mm tall, found in 2004 is a goddess combining Minerva and Fortuna. The goddess Minerva instantly alerts us to a comparison with Senuna, a 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. This 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.



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?

## 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).

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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