

Kimpton

The parish

Kimpton is a moderately sized parish of about 1500 ha (3700 acres) in the south-west of North Hertfordshire. It is a mostly agricultural area with about 70 ha (170 acres) of woodland. The main settlement area – Kimpton village – lies east of the centre of the parish area, while Peters Green (and the former Perry Green, which now forms part of it) is to the west and Blackmore End is to the south. There are smaller hamlets at Ansell's End and Porter's End.

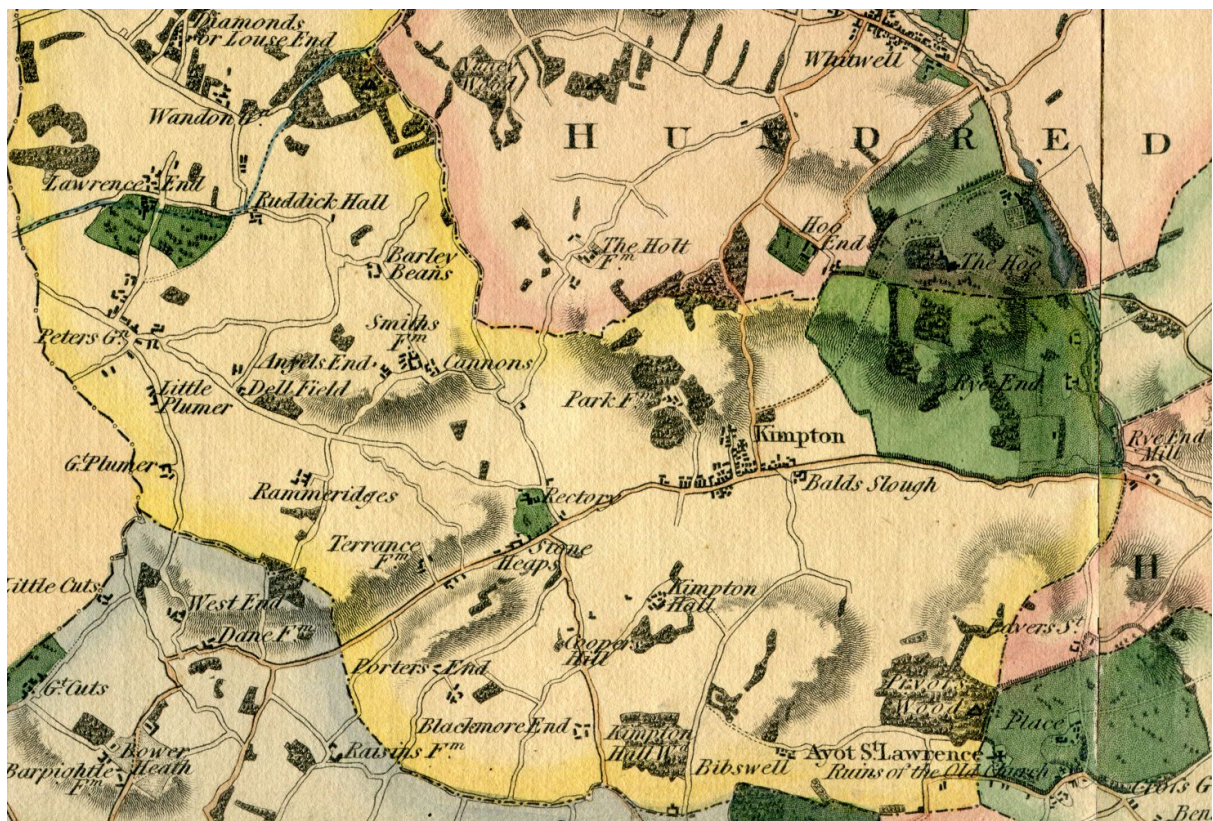


Figure 1: Kimpton as shown on Bryant's map, published in 1822

The parish is bisected by a Y-shaped valley with its foot to the east and a fork at the west end of the village: one branch trends to the north-west along Whitway Bottom, the other south-west along Kimpton Bottom. The valley shows the former course of a lost river, known as the Kym, Kyme or Kime, now culverted under the High Street. It joined the River Mimram at Kimpton Mill.

Placenames

Kimpton is first recorded as *Kamintone* in Domesday Book, which is usually explained as **Cyman tūn*, 'the enclosed farm of Cyma'. The river-name expert Eilert Ekwall was in no doubt that Kym or Kyme is a back-formation from the village name (in other words, it was never an independent river-name). Although Cyma is a genuine Old English personal name, there is river-name Kyme in Lincolnshire,

which Ekwall derived from Old English **cymbe*, ‘a hollow’. If the river-name came first – which is what we usually find – could Kimpton be the *tūn* on the River Kym? The next possibility is that because many river-names belong to an older stratum of place naming than Old English village names, **cymbe* may be Brittonic (a Celtic dialect). Brittonic **Cumbja* (‘valley-river’) would develop into Old English **cymbe*, and we should bear this possibility in mind. The Mimram also has a Brittonic name, as do most other local rivers.



Figure 2: the River Kyme as it reappeared in 2001 (from the Kimpton Yesterday website at <http://www.kimptonvillage.tsohost.co.uk/flood.htm>)

The name of the Mimram is one of the few local names recorded before Domesday Book was compiled in 1086. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle described the building of a *burh* (a fortified town) at Hertford in 913, *betweox memeran and beneficcan and lygean* (one manuscript spells *memeran* as *maran* and another gives *mæran*), ‘between the Mimram and the Beane and the Lea’. All three rivers have names that are meaningless in Old English and have Brittonic origins. Mimram seems to contain Brittonic **mimo-*, ‘speaking, murmuring, mumbling’, and **aramo-*, ‘gentle, calm, quiet’. The original **Mimaramā* would mean the ‘murmuring gentle river’. Speakers of Old English found words with three repeated consonants challenging to say and changed the third *-m-* to *-n* by a process known as dissimilation.

The manor of Hookenhanger or Hockinghanger is first mentioned in 1235×6, and the name means Hocca’s *hangra*, ‘Hocca’s wood on a steep hillside’. It was one of the three principal manors of medieval Kimpton, the others being Parkbury and Leggatts, both first mentioned in 1303. Parkbury was connected with Park Farm, the site of a deer park first recorded in 1366, while Leggatts was held by a family of that name.

Other places in the parish include Bibbs Hall, which was *Bibeswrthia* in the late twelfth century. The name means Bibba's *worð*, 'Bibba's hedged farm'. Bibbesworth was the name of one of the lesser manors of the medieval parish. It was held of the manor of Pirton, an excellent example of how manors were all about ownership, not geography, as Pirton is not even nearby. Little Bibbesworth was another manor held of Pirton and granted to the Priory of St Mary's at Hertford. The Priory's holdings were valued at £2 13s 8d in the Inquisition of Pope Nicholas, carried out in 1291.

Two 'reputed manors' are known in the parish. A 'reputed manor' was one where the demesne lands (those belonging to the lord of the manor) were separated from services (such as the requirement for the lord's tenants to work his fields); in feudal law, this is also called seigniorship in gross. The first of these to be mentioned, although not as a manor, was Plummers, the home of Thomas *de Plumere* ('of the plum-tree pool') in 1272. The first mention of it as a manor is in 1596. The second is Leigh or Lye, mentioned in 1518; the name is found today as Lye Wood, the home of Thomas *de la Leye* ('of the clearing') in 1314.

Rye End is not recorded before 1728, but the name is Middle English *atter ee*, 'at the water', wrongly understood later to be *att ree*. Blackmore End was the home of Kateryna *de Blakemere* ('of the black pool') in 1296. Peters Green and Perry Green are not mentioned before they appear on Dury and Andrews's map of Hertfordshire, published in 1766. They show as developed hamlets that had existed for some time. Their origins are currently a mystery.

Domesday Book

The earliest record of the village is in Domesday Book, as already mentioned. The commissioners who compiled it were keen to find out how the owners had been in January 1066, when King Edward the Confessor was still alive, as they regarded Harold II as a usurper. *Ælfgifu*, the widow of Earl *Ælfgar* of East Anglia (died 1062), was the tenant in 1066. She was the mother of Earls Eadwine of Mercia and *Mōrcæ*r of Northumbria, and mother-in-law of Harold II. William I's half-brother Odo, the Bishop of Bayeux and Earl of Kent, let it to Ralph Courbespine, a member of the Maminot family, after the Norman Conquest. The Maminot's barony was Dover-Castleward, from which Kimpton was held for two knights' fees (sufficient land to give two knights income to perform the duties they owed their feudal overlord). The barony passed to the family of Geoffrey de Say (1155–1230), one of the signatories of Magna Carta in 1215. The medieval lords of the three principal manors of Kimpton held their lands from the Maminot and the Say families.

The Domesday commissioners assessed four hides of arable land for tax, set at £12. These fields were worked by seven ploughs, of which two were in demesne (on the lord's land), although there was the capacity for ten, including an extra team on the demesne land. As well as arable, there was meadow

to support six oxen and pannage (woodland foraging for acorns) for 800 pigs. The population is given as 24 adult males (2 Frenchmen, 12 villeins, two bordars, three cottars and five slaves), which indicates that the community consisted of about 150 people.

Archaeology

We need to use archaeological data to understand periods earlier than the Domesday Book. There have been very few archaeological fieldwork projects in the village and no overall surveys, so the following summary is based mainly on monuments recorded in the county Historic Environment Record and the database of the Portable Antiquities Scheme. The PAS database has only six entries: one is an Iron Age Coin, one an Iron Age object that may have been an earring, two are Roman coins, one is a medieval coin, and the other two are post-medieval coins.

Prehistoric

The Historic Environment Record lists three ring ditches, the buried ditches that surrounded burial mounds, quarries for the mound itself. Most of them date from the Late Neolithic to the Middle Bronze Age (about 3000 to 1400 BC). It is impossible to be more precise about their dates without excavating them. One lies at Ansells End, to the north of Cannons Farm; there is another north of the village centre, east of Park Farm; there are three east of the wood at Gorse Field, south of Kimpton Road as it travels towards Codicote. This last group of three is close to cropmarks that show buried enclosures and ditches.

The Iron Age coin is a type known as a Whaddon Chase stater; staters were Greek coins that became standards for coins made in Gaul and Britain. They are named after the discovery of a hoard of these coins at Whaddon Chase (Buckinghamshire) in 1849. The coin specialist John Sills has suggested that they date from shortly after Julius Caesar's second



Figure 3: the Whaddon Chase stater from near Blackmore End © Portable Antiquities Scheme

invasion of Britain in 54 BC. He argues that they were struck from bullion collected to pay 'tribute' to Rome (basically a bribe to prevent a third, permanent invasion).

The other Iron Age object is more puzzling. It consists of a hollow bronze crescent, decorated on both sides. Similar artefacts have been found in the Champagne region of France as well as in Britain. In France, they are dated



Figure 4: a possible earring © P.A.S.

to the late Tène I style of metalworking, about 380 to 250 BC. They may have been earrings, although it is difficult to see how people might have worn them.

Roman

The Historic Environment Record includes three possible Roman roads. They are part of a network first identified by a group of enthusiasts led by Ivan D Margary who called themselves the Viatores (Latin for travellers, although they translated it as 'road surveyors', a worrying sign). Two of their roads cross Kimpton: route 210, running north to south, route 211, running east to west, and route 221 along the eastern parish boundary.



Figure 5: Roman roads claimed by the Viatores

The first of these possible roads has all the signs of Roman engineering south of Kimpton at Gustard Wood, where it follows a straight course on top of a low bank (*agger* in Latin). Although there has been no archaeological fieldwork to test the date of this route, this stretch is plausible. The Viatores thought it linked *Uerolamjum*¹ (St Albans) in the south with Ircchester in the north, but there is no sign

¹ The name is usually given as *Verulamium*, but this spelling occurs only in the text of Tacitus's *Annales* (xiv.33), where it is written *uerulamio*; every other ancient source spells the name *Verulamium*, which is more likely to be correct (the capital *V* is a consonantal *U* sound in Latin, which can be written *U* to distinguish it from the vowel). Tacitus's text survived in a unique copy preserved in Biblioteca Medicea Laurentiana MS Plutei 68.2.

of an engineered road through Kimpton on the line they proposed. Route 211 runs west to east across the south of the parish, forming its boundary in places. The track follows a hollow way at Blackmore End, which is likely to be ancient. Ancient does not necessarily mean Roman, though, and its lack of long straight alignments here argues against a Roman origin. The third, route 221 between *Uerolamjum* and Baldock, follows parish boundaries to the east of Kimpton. Although there was a road linking the two places (it has been traced south-south-west from Baldock as far as the parish of Langley), this line is unconvincing. There are no signs of Roman engineering in the route through Kimpton that the Viatores suggested. We shall return to the question of Roman roads later.

When workmen were widening Bibbs Hall Lane south of Prior's Wood in 1851, they found a hoard of Roman coins in a greyware jar. There were about 230 coins in the collection, which was dispersed before an expert could examine them. Sir John Evans was able to trace twenty of them, which ranged from a coin of Valeria dated 104 BC through to Tiberius (Emperor AD 14-37). The discovery was made in the south-eastern corner of the parish, so it soon became known as the Ayot St Lawrence hoard. Although all the identified coins were minted before the Roman conquest of AD 43, they are types that the invading army would have brought with it, so it was probably buried around the middle of the first century AD.

The PAS database records two further coins from the parish. One is a coin of Hadrian (Emperor AD 117-138), found in a field north of Prior's Wood; the other is a coin of Constantine I (Emperor AD 306-337), discovered near Ansell's End. Single coin finds are challenging to interpret, especially when we do not understand anything about how they came to be in the ground. Were they lost by people working in the fields, deliberately placed in the ground as part of a religious ritual, or for some other reason? We will never know.



Figure 6: a coin of Hadrian from Kimpton © P.A.S.

The Historic Environment Record includes a description of some cropmarks visible in a field east of Hog Wood as possibly Roman quarry pits. The large dark blobs (the technical term is *maculae*) are infilled depressions in the ground, and if they were dug to extract chalk bedrock, a Roman date is possible. We know of chalk quarries in Roman Baldock, and that chalk from them was exported as far

This manuscript was written during the eleventh century in the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino and was stolen from its library by Bocaccio (or an accomplice) in the 1360s.

away as Leicestershire to make mosaic floors. It was also used to make lime for mortar and plaster. Does this point to a Roman industrial site in Kimpton?



Figure 7: possibly Roman chalk quarry pits (the larger dark green blobs) and possible settlement traces north of the sewage works

Further examination of the area using Google Earth Pro shows several linear marks crossing the field roughly west to east and a small group of marks making a rectilinear pattern. These look like boundary ditches and robbed-out foundation trenches. There are also groups of dark blobs smaller than the possible quarries that resemble domestic storage and rubbish pits. These features could belong to the community working in the quarries.

The cropmarks visible south of the prehistoric ring ditches south of Kimpton Road east of Gorse Field appear to show a roughly rectangular enclosure with rounded corners. It is too irregular to be a Roman fort, famously described as being shaped like playing cards. The shape is typical of small Iron Age and Roman farmsteads. The land falls away on three sides, and there are especially good views across the Kyme valley to the north. The parallel lines to its north are too far apart to be a Roman road (at over twelve metres, they are more than twice the width of most such tracks) unless it has formed a hollow way as it crosses the hillside. There is no trace of it in the fields either side.



Figure 8: an enclosure east of Gorse Field, probably the remains of a Roman farmstead

Aerial photographs show a concentration of cropmarks to the west of Park Wood. They can be interpreted as enclosures and lanes between them, one of them worn into a hollow way towards the south. There are also signs of at least one more prehistoric ring ditch in this area, hitherto unnoticed. The form of these cropmarks is also typical of a Roman period settlement. They resemble a village or hamlet rather than an industrial site or farmstead.



Figure 9: part of the complex of cropmarks west of Park Wood, a village-like settlement

Early medieval

The period after the collapse of Roman rule is always elusive in Hertfordshire. Remains of this date are rarely found, but there are some cropmarks visible on Google Earth Pro that may be of this period. They consist of playing card shaped blobs mostly between four and seven metres long. They are larger than most Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured buildings (or *grubenhäuser*), so are probably not early medieval. They are similar in scale to the deeper cellars excavated at Green Lane in Letchworth Garden City in 1988, which dated from the tenth to twelfth centuries. Only excavation will reveal the date and function of these anomalies.



Figure 10: anomalies to the north-west of the watercress beds

Medieval and later

Kimpton is well covered by Lidar (Light Detection and Ranging), a technique that shows small differences in land height exceptionally well. The method helps with understanding the more recent historic landscape of Hertfordshire rather than the earlier as centuries of ploughing have levelled earlier remains. Medieval and later remains can be seen in great detail.

Kimpton Hall Farm

The probable manor house of Hookenhanger, at Kimpton Hall Farm, lies to the south of the village beside a former road that is now just footpaths. The modern access is from Gunn's Lodge, on Ballsough Hill. The original track – Hall Lane – shows up well on Lidar, while the farm is surrounded by earthworks that are less easy to decipher. Some seem to show an even earlier line of Hall Lane, while others look like former enclosures and perhaps even gardens.



Figure 11: a Lidar plot of the earthworks around Kimpton Hall Farm

Prior's Wood

The historian John Morris discovered earthworks inside Prior's Wood in 1953. He thought that they were of Roman date, but they are more likely to be medieval. The name of Prior's Wood associates it with Little Bibbesworth, the manor held by the Priory of Hertford. There are records of wood being harvested in Kimpton for the Priory, and the earthworks may be old woodland boundaries, dividing areas for planting and felling at different times.

Kimpton Park

The manor later known as Parkbury was first mentioned in 1303, while the park itself was not recorded until 1366. Sir



Figure 12: the earthworks in Prior's Wood; the mark at the bottom is the gravel pit where the Roman coin hoard was found in 1851

Nigel de Loring (c 1320-1386), who became lord of the manor before 1346 received the licence to create the park from which the holding took its name. The landscape historian Anne Rowe has shown that the park included Park Wood, Dovehouse Wood, Clarkshill Wood and two fields to the west, First Lawn and Second Lawn. The Lidar survey shows the park's pale (boundary bank) particularly clearly on the north side, as well as a bank surrounding the almost circular clearing where the manor house was built.



Figure 13: Lidar plot of Kimpton Park

Church of Ss Peter & Paul

The earliest parts of the parish church, dedicated to Ss Peter and Paul, were built in the thirteenth century. Parts of the chancel are of this date. Most of the outside dates from after 1400, including the south aisle, the south chapel and the tower. The entire north side was rebuilt in 1860-61, although a watching-brief carried out in 1989 revealed the foundations of the earlier north aisle and a drainpipe. The Lidar



Figure 14: the Church of Ss Peter and Paul

shows that the church and its surrounding graveyard occupy an embanked trapezoidal enclosure. The height and regularity of the bank are a sign that it was deliberately constructed, although it is not

possible to suggest a date for it. It is perhaps contemporary with the earliest church on the site. We will see that this may have been founded before the Norman Conquest.



Figure 15: Lidar view of the trapezoidal enclosure around the parish church

Kimpton Hoo

The house at Kimpton Hoo was built for Sir Jonathan Keate (1633-1700), first Baron Keate and Lord High Sheriff of Hertfordshire in 1666. He became lord of the manor of Hookenhanger through his wife Susan, whose father Thomas Hoo died with no male heirs in 1650. The family sold the lordship of Hookenhanger to

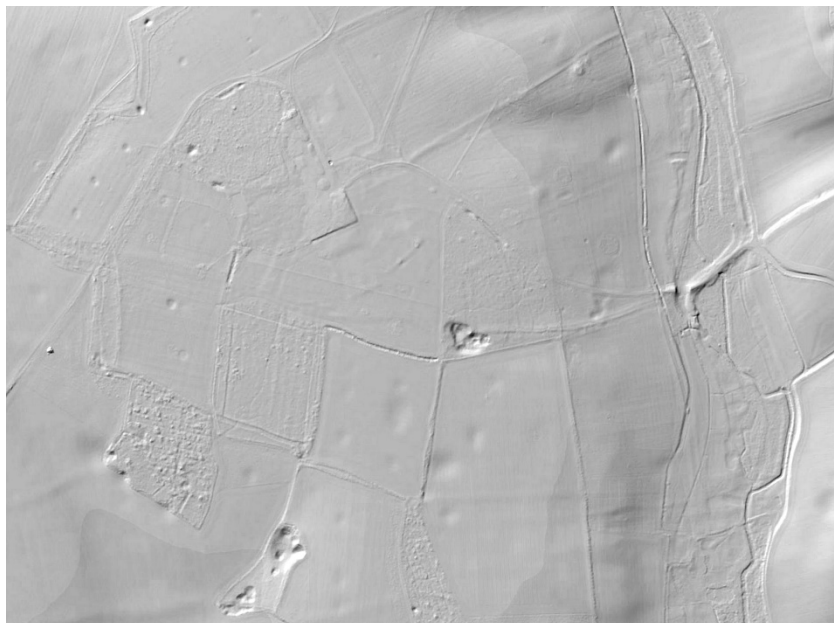


Figure 16: 'Capability' Brown's gardens at Kimpton Hoo

Margaret Brand of St James's, Westminster, in 1732. Her son Thomas paid Lancelot 'Capability' Brown £150 to design a bridge for the garden of his house in 1758. The bridge that was eventually built about 1764 was to a design by William Chambers, who carried out alterations to the house. Other elements

of the park are typical of Brown's work, including the lake formed by damming the River Mimram that required the bridge. The Hoo was demolished in 1958.

Porters

Porters End House is today mostly a nineteenth-century brick mansion that is not listed. It replaced an earlier property bought by Richard Howe (1726-1799), First Admiral of the Fleet, in 1772. In 1773, he wrote to 'Capability' Brown to commission a garden for the house. He obtained permission to divert the highways past the property in the same year. The Lidar view shows little that could be regarded as Brown's work.



Figure 17: earthworks at Porters End House

Lawrence End Park

Lawrence End, north of Peters Green, is a country house completed about 1841, but of Georgian style. It is a chequered brick mansion of two storeys. The park laid out around it is now largely grassland,

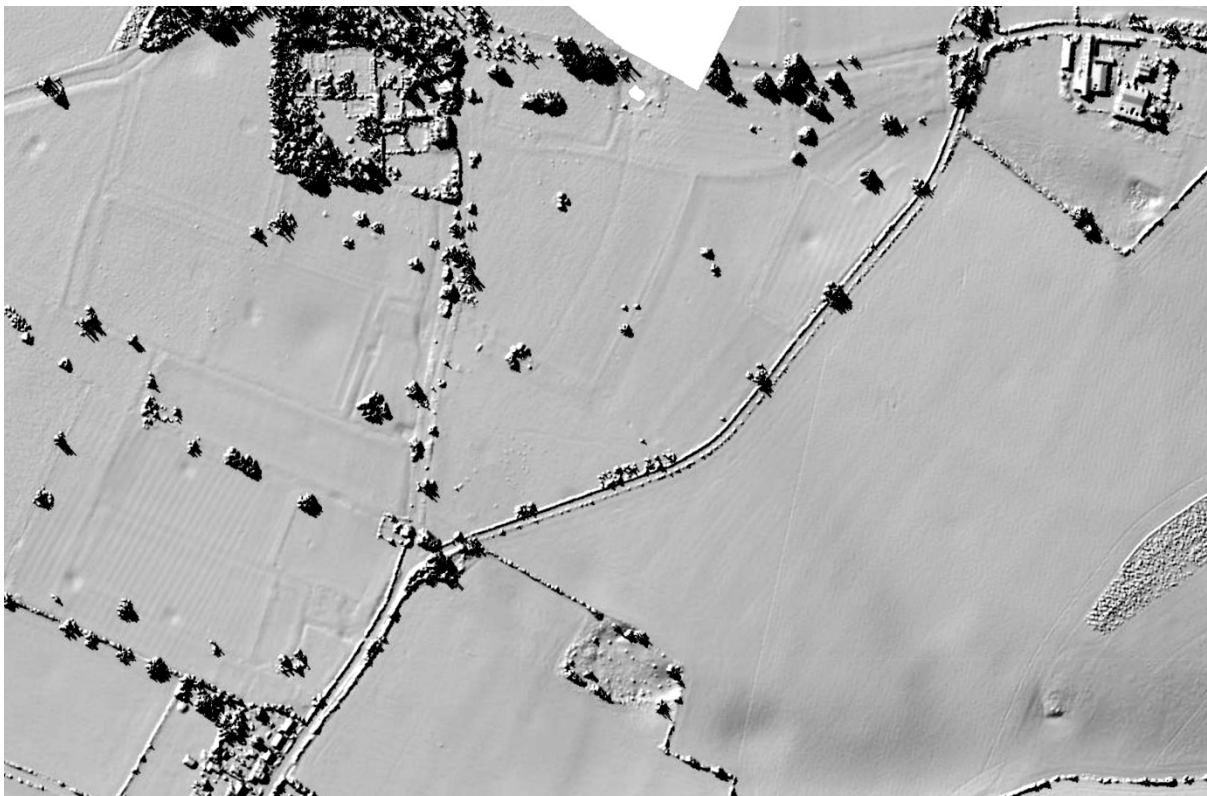


Figure 18: lost formal gardens at Lawrence End Park

but the Lidar plot shows that the gardens to the south of the house were once extensive. Some of them have been partly obliterated by marks that show the land was subject to steam ploughing.

Some questions

This account of the early history of Kimpton leaves us with several questions. The first is when did the River Kyme disappear? The name has never been forgotten, and it occasionally reappears after heavy rain, notably in 1795 and 2001. Was its disappearance a natural phenomenon, or was it culverted? It flows beneath the High Street in a tunnel. The location of the River Kyme in the village centre then raises a further question: what were the communications routes before the river vanished? The High Street is in the valley bottom and cannot have been the main road while it still flowed. The river valley is a natural route for east-west travel, and the village appears to have developed first on the south-facing slope; at Whitwell to the north, the High Street lies uphill from the river, to the south. The south side of Kimpton High Street has no old buildings, so perhaps it ran along the north bank of the river.

Roman roads again

We have seen that the lines of roads proposed by the Viatores in the 1960s are unreliable. We know that there must have been a road linking Baldock with *Uerolamjum* and the northern part has been traced for almost 12 km to a spot just west of Langley. Projecting this line beyond that point would bring it through the western edge of Prior's Wood. The Lidar plot shows an old route on precisely this line: this must be Route 221. To the north-east it turns to a more easterly alignment,

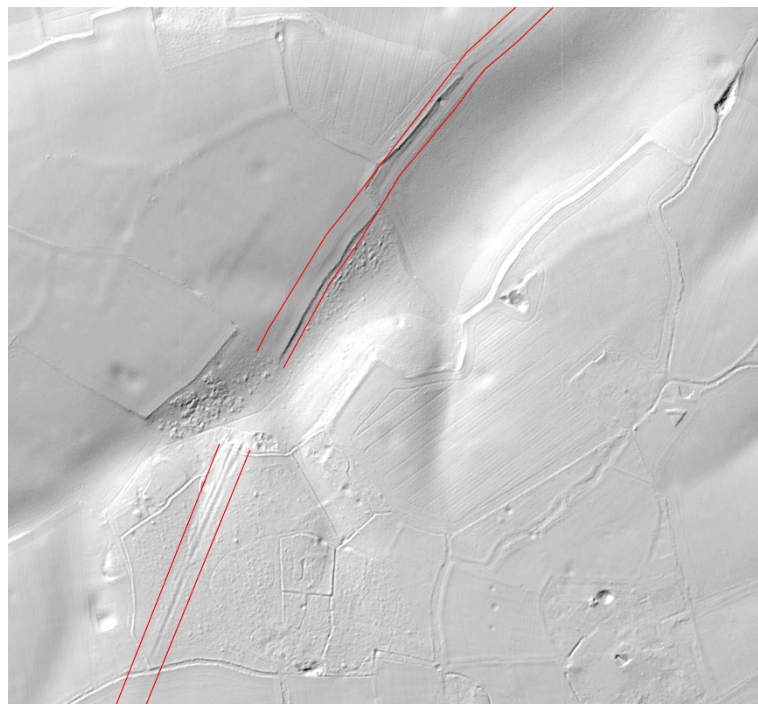


Figure 19: Route 221, *Uerolamjum* to Baldock, at Prior's Wood

probably to negotiate the valley of the River Mimram, while there is no trace of it through Wheathampstead. Projecting the line would bring it to meet Route 210, south-west of Gustard Wood. We have already seen that the section of this road that runs through Gustard Wood is engineered and plausibly of Roman origin.

The road through the southern part of Blackmore End, in Wheathampstead parish, continues the line of the probably Roman Route 210. Its course can be traced beneath Kimpton Hall Farm, and Hall Lane

follows it into the centre of the village. Modern buildings mask the line, and there is no trace of it through Kimpton Park or further north. The creation of the park in the fourteenth century is probably to blame for the loss of this road. It would be easier to trace the line if we knew its destination to the north, but at the moment we do not.

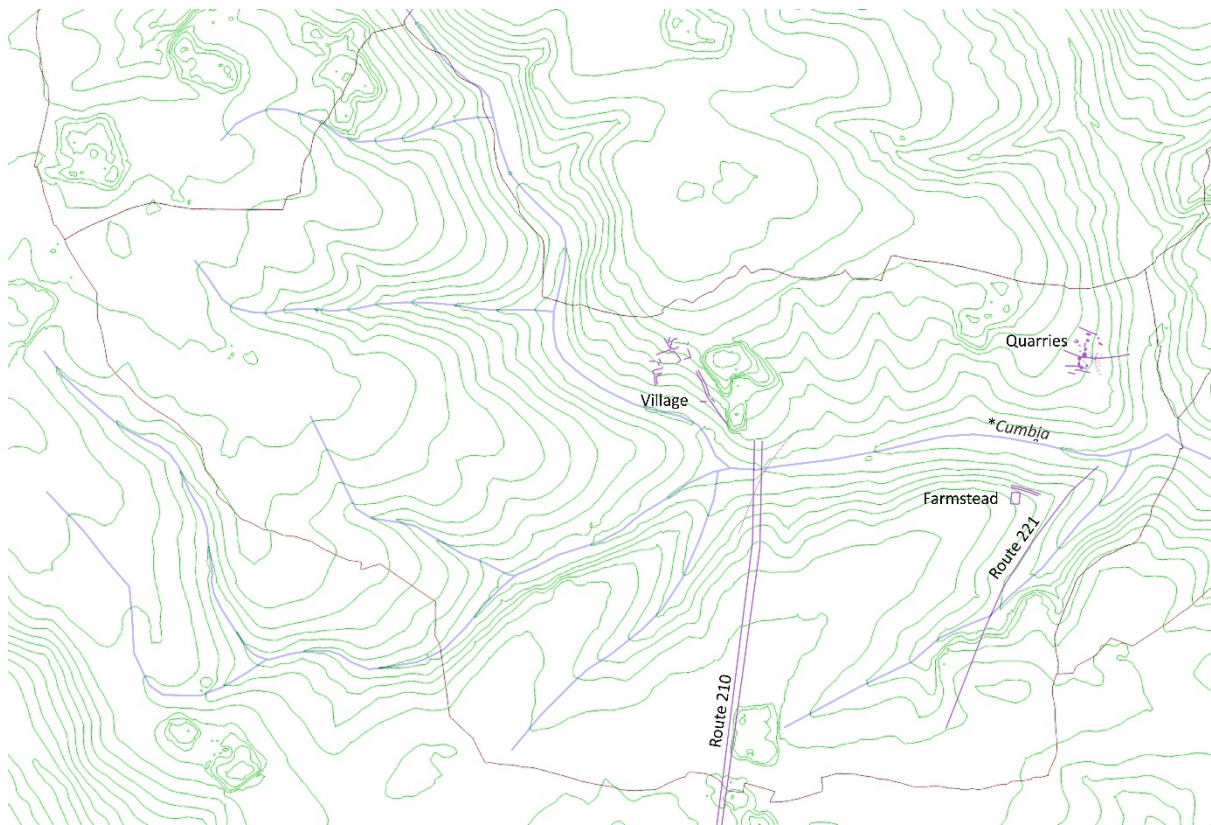


Figure 20: Roman Kimpton, showing 'lost' rivers and streams; the lines showing Route 210 define its likely limits, not its precise course

Summary

Kimpton is a something of an archaeological blank, partly because a lack of recent large-scale development means that very little fieldwork has been carried out. There is equally a dearth of metal detectorists' discoveries: if they have been made, only a few have been reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme. The village did not attract the attention of early antiquaries. Sir Henry Chauncy devoted barely two pages to his narrative of the manorial descents, half as long as his account of Stagenhoe; even the Roman coin hoard discovered in 1851 was wrongly said to be from Ayot St Lawrence. This lack of information makes it very challenging to understand the early development of the village.

The prehistoric period – accounting for hundreds of thousands of years of human history – is represented by a scatter of burial mounds dating from 3000 to 1400 BC, and two pieces of Iron Age metalwork. So little data makes it impossible to understand where people were living, how they used the landscape, and how settlement and land use changed over time. Even the century or so before

the Roman conquest in AD 43 is a virtual blank. There is a possibility, no more, that the River Kyme's name was first given by speakers of Brittonic, a language that developed during the second and first millennia BC.

With the Roman period, there are hints of what was happening. We can trace several long-distance roads, and recover part of the plan of a village and its lanes to the west of Park Farm. A farmstead stood on a hilltop south side of the river, east of Gorse Field; a possible industrial complex lay on the north side. There is a bare minimum of information, but it looks as if settlement lay away from the river valleys, with a preference for south-facing slopes.

There is no indication of what happened from the fifth century to Domesday Book apart from the possible site north of the sewage works. Although this is not unusual, it creates difficulties for understanding how the community assessed for tax in 1086 came into being. The church, north-east of the current centre, may have been the focus or it may have been on one edge. The latter seems a more common pattern in North Hertfordshire. The banked compound around the church that is visible on Lidar may be compared with the rectangular enclosures recently identified in Pirton, to the north. There, they seem to have been created in precisely the period in question and to have belonged to people of high status, perhaps the type referred to as *þegns* (thegns or thanes) in documents.

Even the medieval period is poorly represented by archaeological remains other than the parish church. The limited archaeological investigations that have been carried out in the village centre have given us no information about where the village first began to develop or when. Kimpton is a parish that will repay further investigation.

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