

Nuthampstead

The village of Nuthampstead is at the far eastern end of North Hertfordshire, the only parish in the district to have a border with Essex. It shares a lot of characteristics with north-east Essex and south Cambridgeshire. It is part of a loose association of parishes in the area, known as 'the Hundred Parishes', covering 1100 km². The name was proposed by local historian David Heathcote. The village is perhaps best known today, especially among the older generation, as the home of some 3000 US airmen, at first of the 55th Fighter Group, later replaced by the 398th Bomb Group. The Americans unkindly referred to their temporary home as Mudhampstead on account of the clay soils.



Figure 1: Barkway and Nuthampstead on Bryant's map of Hertfordshire, published in 1822

Several headwaters of the River Quin, a tributary of the Rib, rise in Nuthampstead; the name is not ancient, being first recorded on Kitchin's map of the county, published in 1750. It is a back-formation from Quinbury (*Quenebury*, 'Queen's manor' in 1325) in Braughing. In the Middle Ages, it was known as *le Burne*. There is one spring to the east of Five Acre Wood and another north of Mossop's Grove, both in the north of the parish, one to the east of Little Cokenach and one in Scales Park in the southeast corner.

Domesday Book

Although Nuthampstead does not appear under this name in Domesday Book, it was a manor of Barkway held from Geoffrey de Mandeville in 1086 by someone called Hugh. It is simply named as *Bercheuuei* and was assessed to pay tax of £6 on three hides of arable land. Historians suggest that the other manor in Nuthampstead, known as Berwick, was the holding belonging to Eadgar Ætheling in 1086, and held by Godwin; this was assessed for 1½ hides, taxable at 40 shillings (£2). In January 1066, two of Asgar's men had the manors. Asgar was a significant landowner, with holdings in *Afleduicha*,

Ashwell, Bengoe, Bozen, Braughing, Brickendon, Digswell, Much Hadham, *Hainstone*, Hare Street, Hexton, Hixham, Hoddesdon, Hormead, Hyde Hall, *Ichetone*, Libury, the Pelhams, Sawbridgeworth, Shenley, Stanstead, *Stiichesuuorde*, Theobald Street, Thorley, Wallington, Wickham and Wormley. Most of these are in eastern Hertfordshire.

Domesday Book records the taxable population as consisting of 12 villeins and a priest, with four ploughlands between them, 15 cottars and six slaves on Hugh's holding and four bordars, four cottars and one slave with two ploughs on Eadgar's land. Three ploughlands were in Hugh's demesne and one in Eadgar's. There was half a ploughland of meadow, pasture and enough woodland to provide pannage for 50 pigs on Hugh's manor, pasture and woodland for 15 pigs on Eadgar's; Hugh's pasture and woodland were taxed at 2 shillings. These 43 adult males may imply a population of about 269 people, considerably more substantial than the population of 152 recorded in the census of 2011.

The taxable value, which was £8 (£6 + 40s) in 1066 and again in 1086, fell to just £3 10s when Geoffrey and Eadgar acquired the manors. The reasons for this are unknown; in Cheshire and Yorkshire, revenues fell after the 'harrying of the north', when William I led a punitive campaign against an English rebellion, burning fields and houses, and killing a significant proportion of the population. It is unlikely that this happened in Nuthampstead.

Archaeology

The first time Nuthampstead is recorded as a name was in the twelfth century. It occurs in documents as *Nothamsteda* and *Nuthamestede*; the name contains Old English *hnutu*, 'a nut', and *hāmstede*, 'a homestead'. A *hāmstede* was a small place, the placename historian A H Smith suggesting that it was used to name a single, isolated dwelling, belying the large population recorded in 1086; this indicates that the name was much older than when it was first recorded.

AAS 124 Little Cokenach

Cokenach (also spelt Cokenatch) is recorded as a Domesday manor, but this refers to Great Cokenach in Barkway; Little Cokenach was the estate of Robert Burun, who granted land where a chapel stood to Robert, Abbot of St Gunwal at Montreuil (*Gwinwaloe de Mustrol*). The house now called Little Cokenach stands to the north-east of the village centre. A sub-triangular moat, measuring about 80×55 metres, lies to the southwest of the present house. Its arms are about 6 m wide on average. There was an entrance causeway to the north-east. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) inspected the site in 1975 and found the north-eastern arm to be 1.3 m deep and mostly dry, the south branch reduced to 3 m and used as a drainage ditch, and the centre planted with trees. Large scale Ordnance-Survey maps from the 1890s show that the trees were already there in the 1890s.



Figure 2: Little Cokenach and the moat on the Ordnance Survey 25-inch map of 1896

AA 290 St Gunwal's chapel

The chantry chapel owned by the Abbey stood on the border of Nuthampstead and Barley, where Wynnell's Grove preserves the name of the Breton Saint Winwaloe. The land was alienated to Walden Abbey in 1221 but the chapel no longer existed by 1343. The chapel may have existed before the monks of Montreuil gained possession, and the priest recorded in 1086 may have performed his duties in the building.

The present timber-framed house of Little Cokenach was built in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century and consisted of three bays, the hall section open to the roof. Its owner, W H Clinton of Great Cokenach, had the building heightened to two storeys, an attic inserted, re-floored, encased in brick and extended to the right by one bay in 1837.

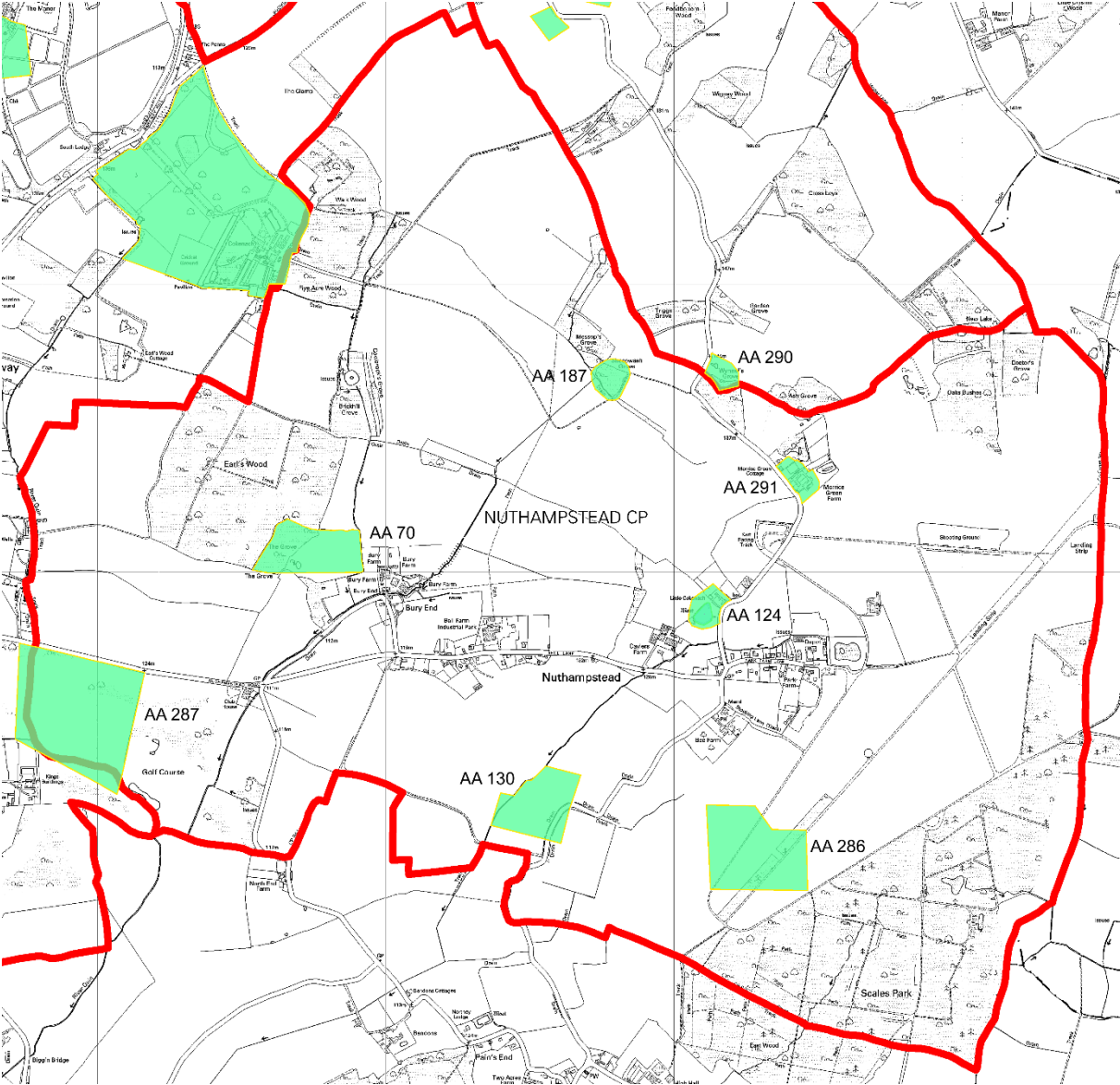


Figure 3: the Civil Parish of Nuthampstead; the areas in pale green are Archaeological Areas, designated in the 1980s and 1990s for planning purposes, with their reference numbers (mapping licensed from Ordnance Survey)

AA 291 Morrice Green

Morrice Green, a hamlet north-east of Little Cokenach, was the home of Thomas Morice in 1341. The late nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey maps show the area north of the present hamlet to have been a brickworks. The water-filled hollow to the south, which has grown considerably since the 1890s was probably the quarry pit for clay to use in brick-making.

Scales Park

Scales Park, in the southeastern corner of the parish, was the home of Roger de Scaldis in 1263. The USAF took over part of the parkland, then a wooded area of over 100 hectares, when it requisitioned the land in 1942. About a third of the woodland was removed to build an airfield. It extends south to the boundary with Anstey and east towards Meesden. Stocking Lane led to the Nuthampstead Gate towards the north-western corner of the park, a now lost lane led past a moat to the Park Barrs, a gate towards the southwestern corner, Anstey Gate lay just west of the southeastern corner and

Meesden Gate on the eastern edge. The southern boundary is marked by a bank 6 to 7 m wide that also marks the parish boundary with Anstey

Robert, first Lord Scales of Newsells, received a grant of free warren in 1270. The medieval park was a parcel of Newsells, in Barkway rather than Nuthampstead. Robert Chester, lord of the manor of Nuthampstead since 1545, bought it in 1548, alienating it from Newsells. A survey of 1741, which named the four gates, gave its area as 278 acres, 1 rood, 20 perches (112.65 ha).

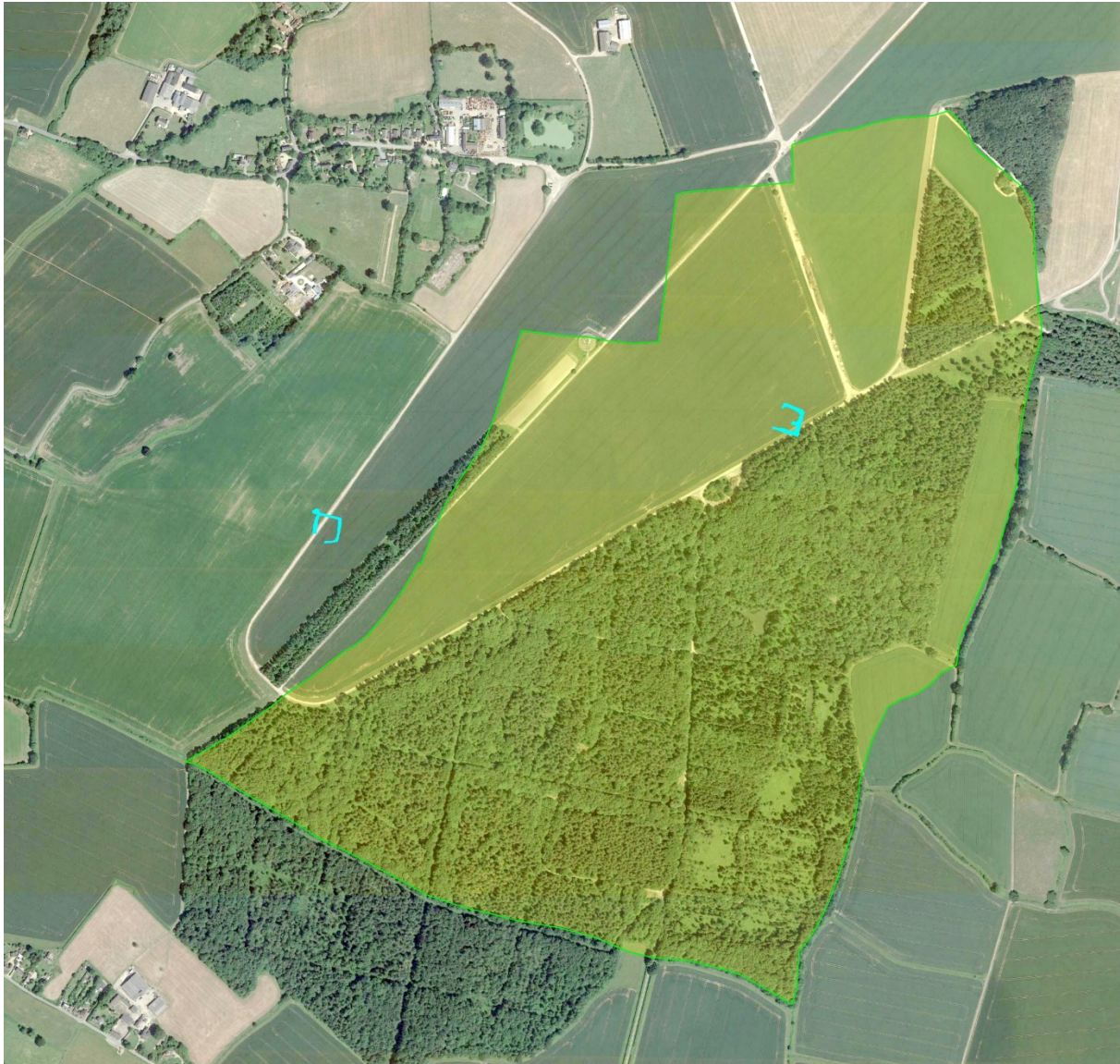


Figure 4: the extent of Scales Park imposed in pale green on a satellite image from Google Earth Pro; the 1890s extent of the water-filled ditches of the two moats associated with it are marked in pale blue

A supposed moated site, known as The Warren, stood inside the park, entirely within the woodland. It was the moated area north of the centre of the park, marked in Fig. 4. In 1946, Audrey Williams published the results of her excavation of the site without stating when it happened. She thanked American airmen for their hard work, so it must have been shortly after the road on the southeastern edge of the site was built across the site, destroying it.

She found that the site was never finished. The ditch measured about 45×45 m and was between 3 m and 7.5 m across. There were irregularly shaped mounds inside the ditched area, including one 2.9 m high, and a low bank around the outside. They covered traces of hearths built by the labourers and scraps of material that they had dropped, including broken cooking pots and the handle from a jug. The

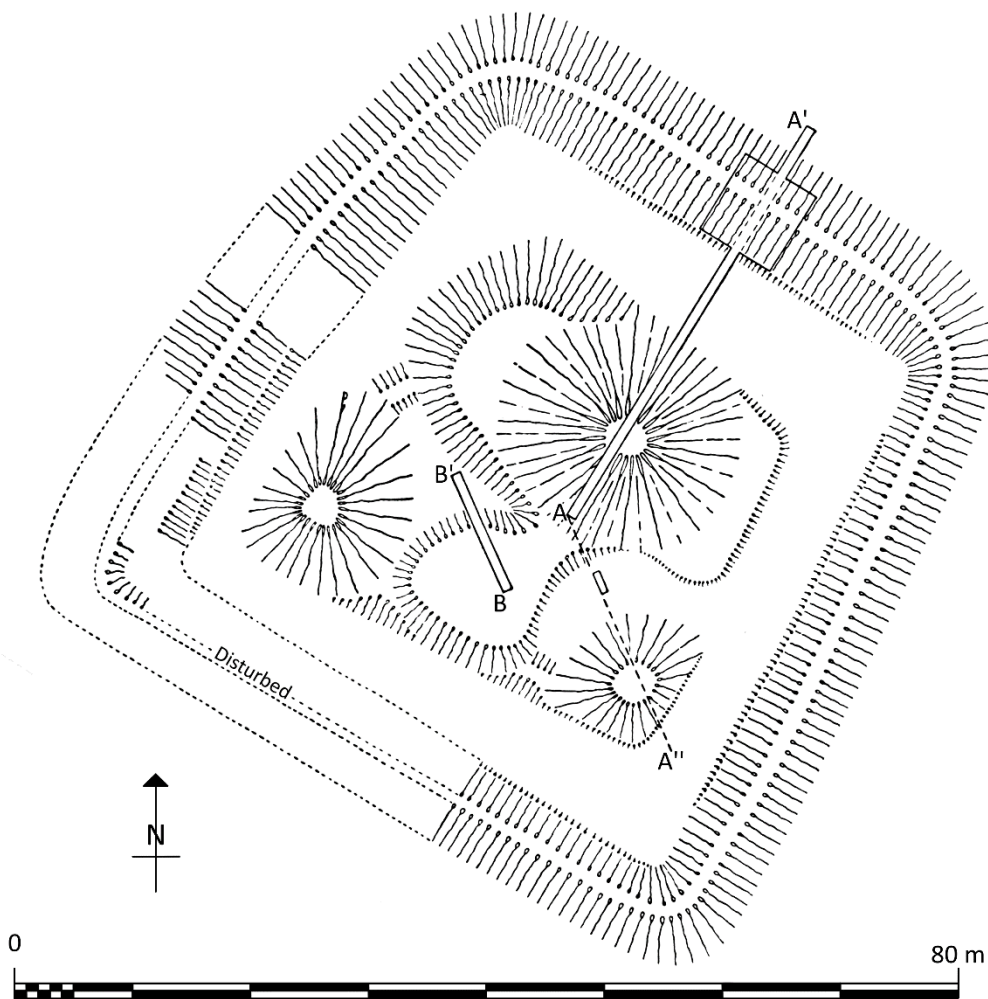


Figure 5: the destroyed unfinished moat at The Warren, after Audrey Williams

most interesting object was a tiny ivory pendant, just 41.5 mm high and 22 mm wide, carved to show the Madonna and Child. There was an inscription AVE MARIA GRA (for *Ave Maria Gratia Plena*, 'Hail Mary, full of grace') across the top. The style dates from about 1200×25. The pottery was slightly later in date, probably from the end of the thirteenth century.

The mounds on the island were formed from soil piled up from excavating the ditch and should have been spread to raise the central area above the surrounding landscape if it were intended to be a moat. The fact that they were not is confirmation that the work was never finished. Derek Renn thought the remains were of a small castle, which is very unlikely; it has also been suggested to be the remains of a gatehouse to Scales Park. Another possibility is that the name gives a clue to the purpose: a rabbit warren, proposed by the Gatehouse website. The form of the mounds is unlike those of a typical rabbit warren: we can, therefore, discount this suggestion. The most likely interpretation of this monument is that work began on a moated farmstead after 1250 but was soon abandoned. There does not appear to be any documentation to suggest who may have intended to have a house here.



Figure 6: early 13th-century ivory pendant, actual size (after Audrey Williams)

AA 286 Southwest end of RAF Nuthampstead

There was a second moat on the edge of Scales Park, also destroyed when the airfield was built in 1942-3. The survey of 1741 described it as '*the old moat*'. Less is known about this monument, but it appears to have been complete, unlike The Warren. The gap in the ditch at the southwestern corner was probably the entrance, as it lay beside the now lost lane that led to it. The road continued beyond

the moat but was lost to the construction of Scales Park in the thirteenth century and may have joined Roper's Lane towards Langley (Essex). This moat may have been a hunting lodge for Lord Scales or a parker's lodge.



Figure 7: Scales Park moat in 1896, with the airfield from Google Earth

AA 70 Earls Wood

In the west of the parish, Earl's Wood is named after the Earls of Hereford and Essex. A descendant of Geoffrey de Mandeville, the lord of the manor at the time Domesday Book was compiled, was created Earl of Essex by King Stephen. This first Earl was also called Geoffrey, and he died in 1144. At the time of this Geoffrey's death, the tenant at Nuthampstead was Ralph de Noeriis, whose son Roger built a chapel in his 'court' (probably the manor house) between 1141 and 1151. The manor of Nuthampstead Bury became known as Earlsbury by 1422 because of this connection.



Figure 8: earthworks west of Bury Farm as shown by Lidar

Earthworks in this area have long been known from aerial photographs. They were designated as an area of archaeological interest (AA 70) in the 1980s. The recent availability of Lidar has shown that these earthworks extend into the woodland to the west and north. A large area of hollows west of Bury Farm is the remains of quarry pits for clay used in brick-making in the nineteenth century. Less distinct but similar features in Brickhill Wood are perhaps older clay pits (the placename Brickhill Wood may be a clue to their origin). The other earthworks include well-defined ditches and more poorly-defined banks and ditches, forming

enclosures of different sizes. The more diffuse banks and ditches are probably older, and some may relate to woodland management in the past.

The farmhouse at Bury End (where the term bury is a Hertfordshire medieval dialect word for manor house) is Listed as Grade II. Its core may date from the early fifteenth century. Sir Robert Chester, who bought the manor in 1545, extended and partly rebuilt the house; he was already lord of the manor of Royston Priory and Great Cockenatch. It was a hall house, with the great hall on the right open to the roof, with a storeyed parlour and chamber above to its left. One of his descendants, perhaps Edward Chester, who died in 1640, extended the house further to the left, inserting a first floor and fireplaces with chimney stacks. The left-hand bays are narrower than those to the right. The rendered brick gable end to the left is part of this rebuild. These changes thoroughly modernised what must have seemed a very old-fashioned house at the time. During the eighteenth century, the house was re-fronted in red brick, with black brick diapering, creating four bays of unequal size.

AA 130 South of Nuthampstead Village

In the 1980s, a cropmark of a rectangular enclosure seen on an aerial photograph was used to define this Archaeological Area. Analysis of early Ordnance Survey maps shows that the well-defined anomaly was still a field boundary in the 1890s. This observation does not necessarily mean that it is of recent date, although the suspicion that it is post-medieval cannot be ignored.

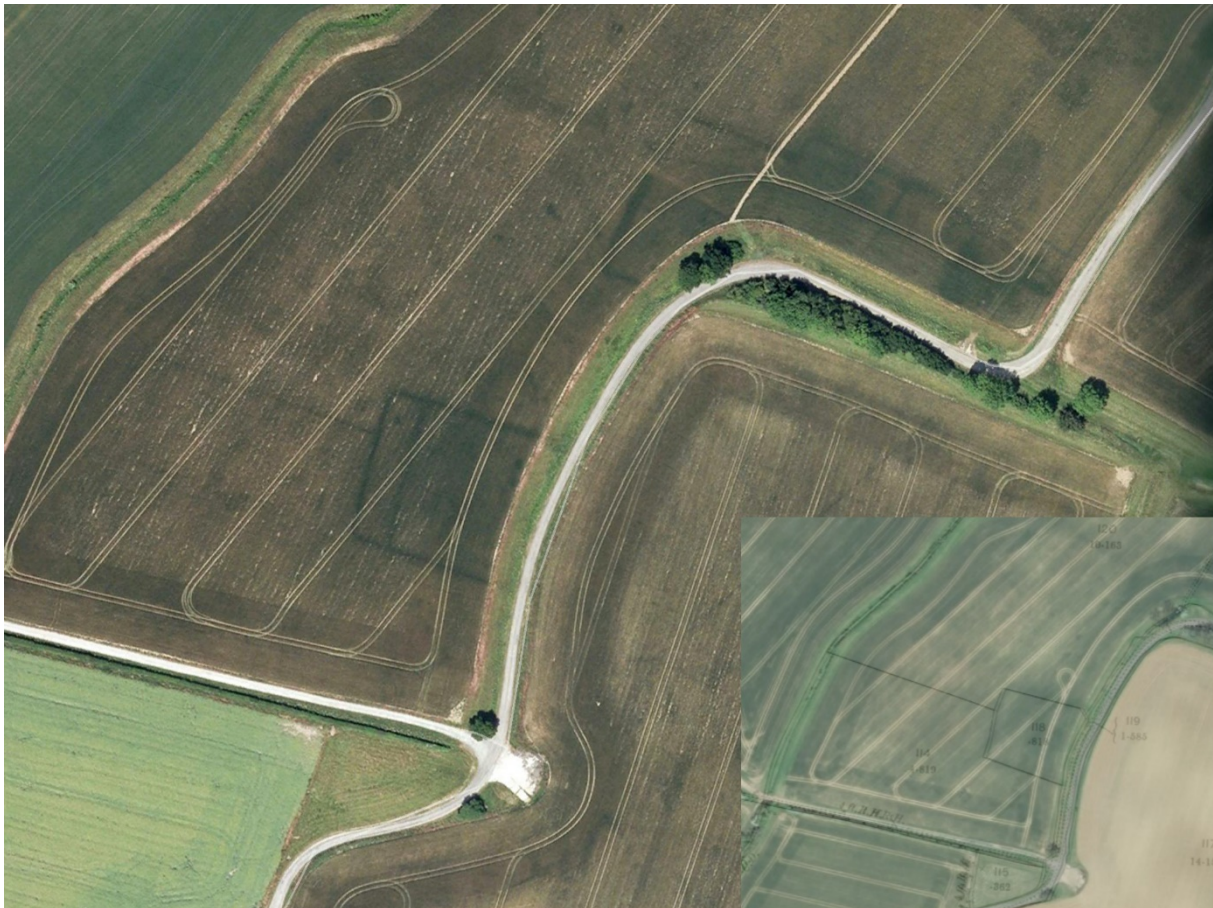


Figure 9: AA 130, an enclosure identified in the 1980s from aerial photographs; the inset shows it as field boundaries on the 1898 25-inch Ordnance Survey Map

However, the field to the north-west does contain cropmarks visible on Google Earth Pro. These include anomalies that suggest lost tracks or roads, enclosures and traces of ridge-and-furrow cultivation, particularly in the northern part of this area. They are likely to be of many different dates but indicate a lost hamlet and farmsteads in the southern part of the parish. One of these groups of enclosures, which appears to be related to the road system, lies immediately to the north-east of

Archaeological Area 130. Some of the long and very straight anomalies could well indicate pipeline and cable lines of twentieth-century date.



Figure 10: soil and crop marks south of Nuthampstead village, apparently of many different dates and origins

AAS 187 Sheepwash Grove

A small well preserved moated site lies in Sheepwash Grove. The regularity of its shape and the lack of an obvious entrance causeway suggest that it is not a medieval homestead moat but a landscape feature of post-medieval origin. Little appears to be known about it.

AA 287 Barkway Park Golf Course

An area on the western edge of the parish was developed in 1991 as the Barkway Park golf course, to a design by Vivien Saunders. The club opened in 1992, but during its construction, a metal detectorist found a hoard of Late Bronze Age scrap metal. Although the find was reported to Mike Daniells, at the time the County Archaeologist for Hertfordshire, the finder was at first reluctant to reveal where he had discovered it. The finder passed the metal on to Letchworth Museum as a gift and in January 1992 told the Field Archaeology team that he had found it on one of the fairways during construction work. The precise location was not recorded.

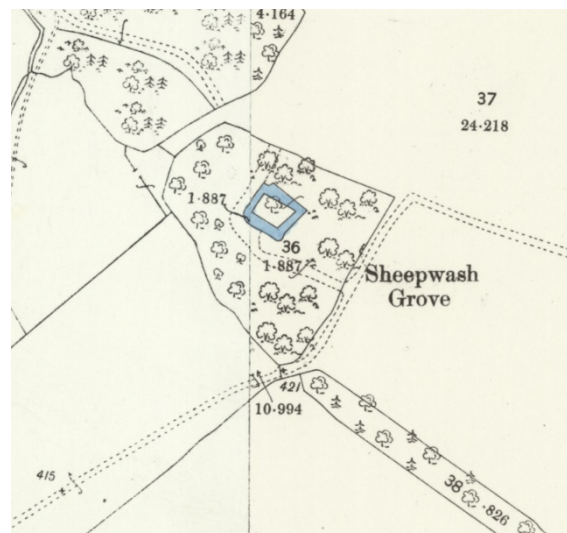


Figure 11: the moated enclosure at Sheepwash Grove, as shown on the 1898 Ordnance Survey 25 inch map

In the meantime, the Field Archaeology team undertook fieldwalking on the site of the golf course, starting on 7 December 1991. Robert Dimsdale arranged access to the site. The team laid out

fieldwalking lines using a prismatic compass, tapes and marker canes. The separation between these lines varied according to the number of volunteers for each session (15 m for days one and three, 30 m for day two). For the first session, all material excluding recognisably late twentieth century finds were collected; the first survey lay to the west of the River Quin, in Barkway. The second and third sessions, on 8 and 29 February lay to the east of the river, in Nuthampstead.

Prehistoric finds (including the hoard) clustered towards the north-west of the site, on the east bank of the River Quin. They consisted of 12 struck flints: a burin (an awl-like instrument), two scrapers, four core fragments and five waste flakes. Although too scattered to represent an occupation site, these lithics suggest an area around the 115 m contour where period working took place. There was a similar concentration at the same height to the west of the river. The material appears to date from the Early to Middle Bronze Age (about 2500-1400 BC).

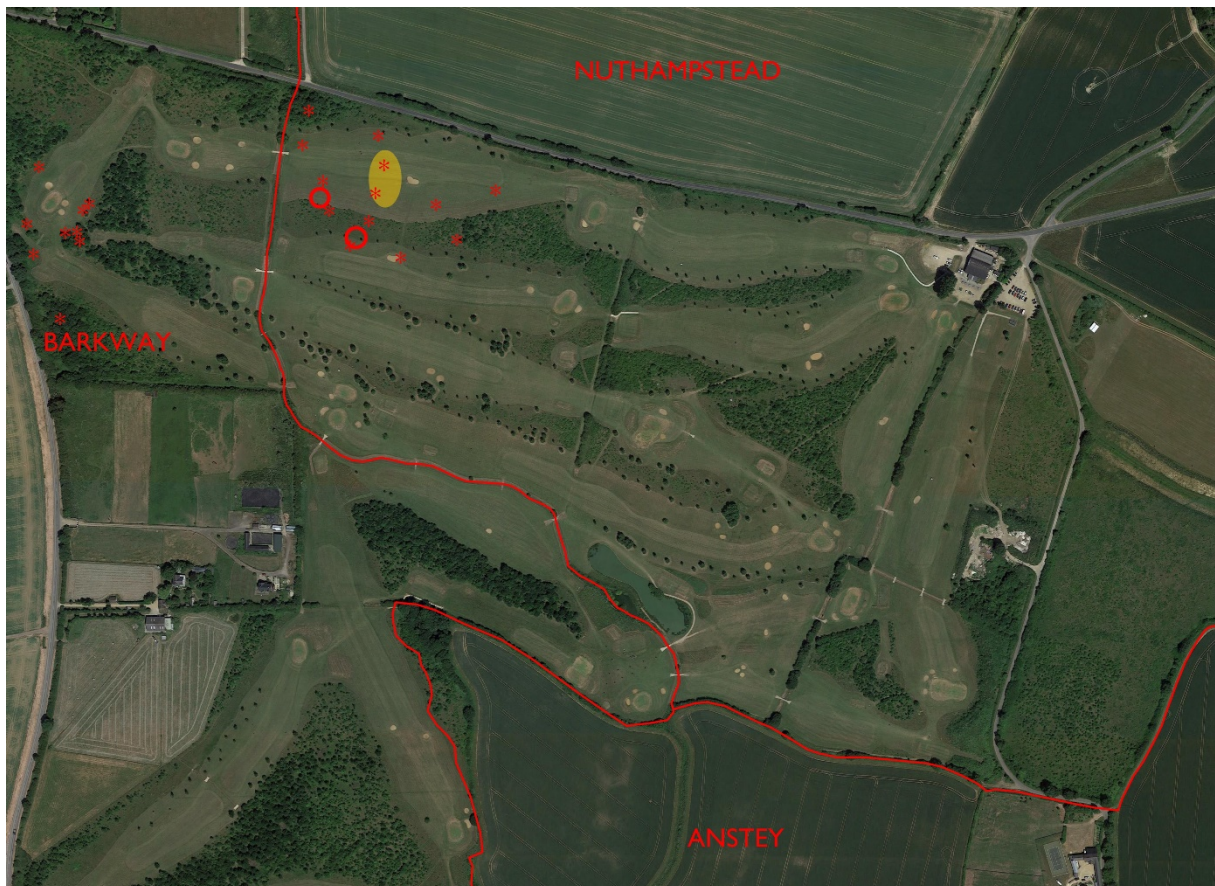


Figure 12: prehistoric finds from the Barkway Park Golf Club; the yellow oval shows the approximate position of the hoard

The hoard as recovered contained 122 items of metalwork, including 39 ingots and formless lumps. Socketed axeheads were the most frequent type of artefact in the collection, which also included spearheads, sword and knife blades, bracelets and other Late Bronze Age forms. The collection belongs to the Ewart Park phase of metalworking, dated about 920-800 BC. The date is some centuries later than the probable date of the two ring ditches known from aerial photographs a short distance to the west of the reported findspot.

Some of the metalwork was poorly-cast and never given its final polish; they were never used. Other pieces show use wear. The breakages appear to be deliberate, with rough and distorted fractures, and more hammer marks than necessary to destroy the object. Only two of the fragments join, showing that this is a selection from a more extensive collection. It is impossible to know if the 'missing' pieces were all melted down for reuse in antiquity or if they escaped detection in 1991. Both possibilities are likely to be correct.

The hoard was one of the largest known when discovered in the early 1990s. Some found since then contain considerably more objects, but this remains a remarkable collection. It is currently on display in North Hertfordshire Museum. Although the group has never been published, Dave Went and Jane Read, then of the Museums Service's Field Archaeology team, produced a catalogue between 1992 and 1995.

Roman finds in the parish

The fieldwalking during the construction of Barkway Park Golf Course also uncovered Romano-British material, mostly clustering in the same area as the flint, above the valley of the River Quin. The 13 potsherds were mostly of Much Hadham coarsewares, too few to suggest that they came from a settlement. It is more likely that they were part of waste taken out for disposal in fields close to habitation.



Figure 13: Romano-British finds from the Golf Course

During extensive fieldwalking in north-west Essex, Tom Williamson identified a scatter of Late Iron Age and Roman pottery on the very eastern edge of the parish. The only information about this discovery is a grid reference in a paper that includes no details about how much material was found. The findspot is under 400 m from The Warren, where residual Roman pottery was also found. Another area of settlement presumably lay in the general area of Scales Park.

Nuthampstead Airfield

The airfield built in 1942-3 in the eastern part of the parish is arguably the most significant archaeological monument in Nuthampstead. After opening in 1943, it continued in operation as a United States Air Force base, designated USAAF Station 131, until the end of the Second World War, when the RAF took it over as a munitions store. The RAF stopped using it in 1954, and it returned to agricultural use in the 1960s. The US Army 8th Air Force used it as a base, built by the Army Engineer Battalions 814

and 830. It was first home to the 55th Fighter Group and then to the 398th Bomb Group, which flew missions in Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses. The barracks lay to the southwest, as did the sickbay.

The airfield had three runways; the main runway was orientated southwest to northeast and is still in use, although reduced in width and turned to grass in the 1960s. The perimeter track was constructed partly across the top of The Warren, which was bulldozed. Dispersals for the separate squadrons were located around the track. Bomb stores and ammunition dumps were created in the woodland of Scales Park. They were cleared of hazardous waste in the 1960s when the Forestry Commission replanted the area with trees.



Figure 14: USAF Nuthampstead, photographed in 1946, imposed on a current Google Earth Pro satellite view

The Roskill Commission, set up to investigate the location of London's proposed third airport looked at Nuthampstead as a possibility. Together with Cublington (Bucks), Foulness (Essex) and Thurleigh (Beds), it was shortlisted but eventually rejected. One can only guess at the impact the creation of an airport would have had on the nearby towns of Royston and Saffron Walden. Instead, parts became a shooting range in 1992, used for international championships.

Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews
April 2020