

Bygrave Past

Introduction

Bygrave is a rural parish lying between Baldock and Ashwell. A lot of its landscape is characterised by vast open fields. This character is not a result of modern farming practices ripping up ancient hedgerows but of its history. The parish was never subject to an Enclosure Act in the 18th or 19th centuries, so it has kept the open fields of its medieval landscape, apart from a few early piecemeal enclosures.



Figure 1: parish boundaries; the area marked in yellow was transferred to Baldock in 1881, that in pink was transferred to Baldock in the 1920s, plotted on a Google Earth Pro view from 2012

The southern edge of the parish was formed by the traditional line of the Icknield Way, established in the early medieval period between about AD 450 and 900. The A505 followed this until the opening of the Baldock Bypass in 2004. The western edge follows the Roman road northwards from Baldock, later the Great North Road and the A1, before the motorway (the first Baldock Bypass) opened in the 1960s. Previously, it had followed the River Ivel; although this land was disputed with Norton during the Middle Ages, it was transferred to Baldock parish in 1881. The northern boundary runs along farm tracks to meet the Cat Ditch, a tributary of the River Cam. The stream then forms the north-eastern edge of the parish to a point northwest of the railway, where the Cat Ditch turns abruptly to the north-east. The parish boundary continues on its previous alignment. A roughly square chunk of Bygrave became

the Salisbury Road estate in the 1920s and was transferred to Baldock Urban District (shown pink in Figure 1).

Bygrave lies in Odsey Hundred, an ancient division of the county with its principal settlement at Ashwell, to the northeast. The medieval 'new town' of Baldock was founded in the 1140s to the southwest. The Abbots of St Albans, who were lords of the manor of Norton, west of Bygrave, fell into dispute over land on the east side of the River Ivel. The boundaries of Norton were recorded in 1007 as running as far as the river. Villagers used the area between the river and the main road, and it was eventually ceded to Norton.

The local history of our parishes is often about the deeds of characters: lords of the manor, vicars, eccentrics, farmers and so on. We should remember that buildings and monuments also figure in the story. Historians have been especially interested in churches, great houses and earthworks, but there is more to the past than this. There was a vast swathe of time before local people began to keep records. Much of it is 'prehistoric': there are no written records. In a situation like this, archaeology comes to the rescue. Where records don't exist, the physical remains of the past can help.

Archaeology is a specialised study that can seem full of strange jargon, which is often off-putting to the local historian. For the non-archaeologist, it can be challenging to find reliable information. Many people still think archaeology is all about objects, particularly treasures, or "mysteries". Objects are just one of the things we use to understand the past: archaeologists also look at buildings, "sites" and landscapes, and try to integrate their observations with any documents that may exist.

Early prehistory

The concept of deep time is vital to bear in mind. Humans have been around in Britain for at least 800,000 years on and off. The climate during that time often prevented people from visiting, as most of this period was the Pleistocene Ice Age. The earliest visitors were not even the same species as us.

These very remote ages are often hard to find: not only are they a long time ago, but they involved very few people. The Palaeolithic (before 11,000 BC) or 'Old Stone Age' is the name prehistorians use to refer to this period. Remembering that this period covers 95.5% of human history gives you some idea of just how long it lasted. The earliest evidence from North Herts is about 425,000 years old, although nothing from the Bygrave area goes back this far.



Figure 2: part of the mammoth tusk found in 1920

The earliest evidence is from Salisbury Road, which is now in Baldock but was originally part of Bygrave parish. Mammoth remains were found in 1920 when sewers were being installed for the new estate that was being built (Figure 2). Dr Bertram Suggit found part of a tusk and a molar tooth in the side of the trench, so we do not know if there was a complete skeleton. It may have died between about 65,000 and 45,000 years ago. A palaeochannel – an ancient stream-bed now infilled with soil – passes



Figure 3: the course of the southern palaeochannel in south-west Bygrave, plotted on a Google Earth Pro view from 2012

to the north of this area (Figure 3), so the remains were perhaps in a branch that joined it. Part of the channel, about 1.7 km (a mile) away was investigated when the A505 Baldock Bypass was being built in 2003. Archaeologists discovered that it probably began to fill up after about 18,000 years ago, long after mammoths had become extinct in Britain, but during the final part of the Ice Age. At this time, the tundra began to thaw, and melting permafrost brought vast quantities of sediment down into valleys.

Later prehistory

After about 11,000 BC, the climate warmed slowly and reached a high slightly above today's average by 2500 BC. During this time, Britain became an island partly through rising sea levels and partly as a result of a tsunami caused by the Storegga Slide about 6150 BC. The Slide was an undersea landslide of the coast of Norway, which caused a massive wave that became more powerful as it travelled south into a V-shaped estuary where the North Sea is today. When it reached the clay hills between Kent and the Pas de Calais, it swept them away, creating a narrow tongue of sea between Britain and the continent. The tsunami happened during a period known as the Mesolithic (10,000-4000 BC), or 'Middle Stone Age'. We currently have no evidence for this period from the Bygrave area, although flint tools of this date have been found in Baldock.

The earliest farmers

Around 4000 BC, the first farmers arrived. They were mostly descended from people in the Middle East (eastern Turkey, northern Iraq and northern Iran) who had first domesticated the crops and animals they raised. They brought wheat, barley, sheep, goats, cattle and pigs with them. The local population was small, and these Mesolithic peoples also acquired crops and livestock through trade with the incomers. Even though they were farmers, people remained dependent on hunting and gathering, and it took several thousand years to become completely reliant on domesticated crops and animals.



Figure 4: animal bone in one of the upper fills of a Late Neolithic pit on Bygrave Common © MOLA Northampton

Investigations of an area proposed for housing to the north of Baldock, at Bygrave Common, took place in late 2016. The archaeologists identified three Neolithic ('New Stone Age') pits in the trial trenches (shown by * on Figure 5). One of them was a quarry pit for chalk, although we do not know how it was used. It was difficult to establish its edges, perhaps a sign that it had stood open to the elements for a long time. Part of the mound of chalk piled up next to the hole eventually slumped across its top after it had been filled in. The other pits cut through the slumped chalk, and two were intercutting features, dug on at least three separate occasions. The earliest was circular, with vertical sides and a flat base. It was about 1.4 m in diameter and contained fragments

of antler (Figure 4). When this had been filled in, another was cut into one edge. The other pit to cut through the chalk layer lay to the north-east; it was over 1.15 m wide but shallow. It was the only pit to contain pottery, a flint-tempered fabric typical of the later Neolithic. We do not know the purpose of these pits. They were dug for a reason: chalk is not easy to remove. The fragments of antler found in the backfill of one of them may be the remains of broken picks.

There is equally no evidence for where the people who created these pits were living. There have been no reports of finds of this date from the parish other than in the trial trenching. A Late Neolithic site was excavated on Clothall Common, south of the A505, during the 1980s. It consisted of the remains of a house, sitting in the base of a shallow doline (a hollow created during the Pleistocene Ice Age). The hollow also contained an area that had been used for creating flint tools, shown by a quantity of *débitage* (working waste from flint-knapping); there were also large numbers of potsherds of Late Neolithic Peterborough-type Ware. The quarry pits also overlooked the valley where the Ivel Springs are located. On the hillside to the west, a significant settlement at Blackhorse Road was discovered in 1957. There is evidence for flint mining, gold-working and ritual activities, including an early henge excavated between 2010 and 2013. The communities living at either site may have been involved in the quarrying activities on Bygrave Common.

Bronze Age burial mounds (2500-1400 BC)

Long after the community that had dug the pits vanished, the landscape slowly filled with burial mounds, marking a change in the character of land use. In the Late Neolithic, there had been settlements, industrial activities and ritual sites, but few burials. After 2500 BC, we can see good evidence for where the wealthy dead were being buried but have few clues about where people were living. Most of the burial mounds are visible only from aerial photographs, where their quarry ditches can show up as rings. Standing examples are usually called round barrows and are generally marked on Ordnance Survey maps as *tumuli* (Latin for 'mounds'). Two almost destroyed mounds stand by A505, east of the track under the railway to the village (Figure 5 numbers 13 and 14). Most others were destroyed long ago by ploughing.

The known examples cluster mainly in the south of the parish, although there is one (Figure 5 number 16) to the north of the village. We do not know if this was isolated or if others stood nearby. These mounds usually covered the burials of individuals, who were often interred with expensive gifts, and their construction involved a substantial investment in labour. Barrows were probably the burials of only the upper levels of society, which seems to have been a warrior elite. The mounds in the south



Figure 5: Neolithic and Bronze Age sites in the parish, plotted on a Google Earth Pro view from 2012

are usually described as being in the 'Icknield Zone', a supposed band of more intensive prehistoric activity connected with the Icknield Way. However, many of them are on slopes facing away from the traditional route and would not have been seen by people using it. The connection appears to be a false deduction.

The trenches excavated on Bygrave Common and close to the railway examined sections through the ditches of ten of these denuded mounds (Figure 5 numbers 1-10). Five of them (Figure 5 3-7) formed a linear cemetery on a gentle slope overlooking the palaeochannel to the north. By this time, in the Bronze Age, the channel contained a winterbourne, a stream that flows only in winter. This activity, in the second millennium BC, marks the start of a lengthy interest in this seasonal watercourse.

Because our knowledge of the period is dominated by burials, there is an old joke among archaeologists that nobody lived in the Bronze Age: all they did was die. There is an element of truth in this, which we can see in the archaeology of Bygrave. Population numbers were higher than in the Neolithic and were boosted by the arrival of Celtic-speaking settlers in the centuries before 2000 BC; nevertheless, we can rarely see where people were living. A small Bronze Age roundhouse was found at the northern end of the Baldock Bypass in 2003, where the junction with Royston Road from Baldock now stands. It is only about 4.2 m (13.8 feet) in diameter, and its doorway faces east-northeast. When it fell out of use, a pit was dug just inside the entrance, and wheat, barley, a mussel shell, eggshell and a fragment of animal bone were placed inside it. Prehistorians have suggested that pits of this sort contained offerings to the gods as a mark of respect when buildings were abandoned.

People stopped burying the wealthy dead of their communities in barrows after about 1400 BC. We have no evidence from Bygrave of what people were doing in the area for more than a thousand years.

This lack of information probably does not mean that the landscape was abandoned or that there was a considerable population decline. The dead were cremated and the ashes buried in flat cemeteries known as urnfields, which left no surface traces for us to know where they were. There is no trace of what people were doing, where they were living or where they buried their dead until we reach the first century BC.

The Late Iron Age and Roman period (100 BC-AD 450)

During the first century BC, a settlement grew up almost 3 km (1¾ miles) south of the present village at Bygrave. It grew into a large and locally significant town. Its surrounding fields and farms extended across Bygrave Common, where a network of field ditches and tracks can be seen on aerial photographs. The 2016 evaluation found that many were first created at this time. The road along the top of the ridge continued to be respected for many centuries, as will be seen.

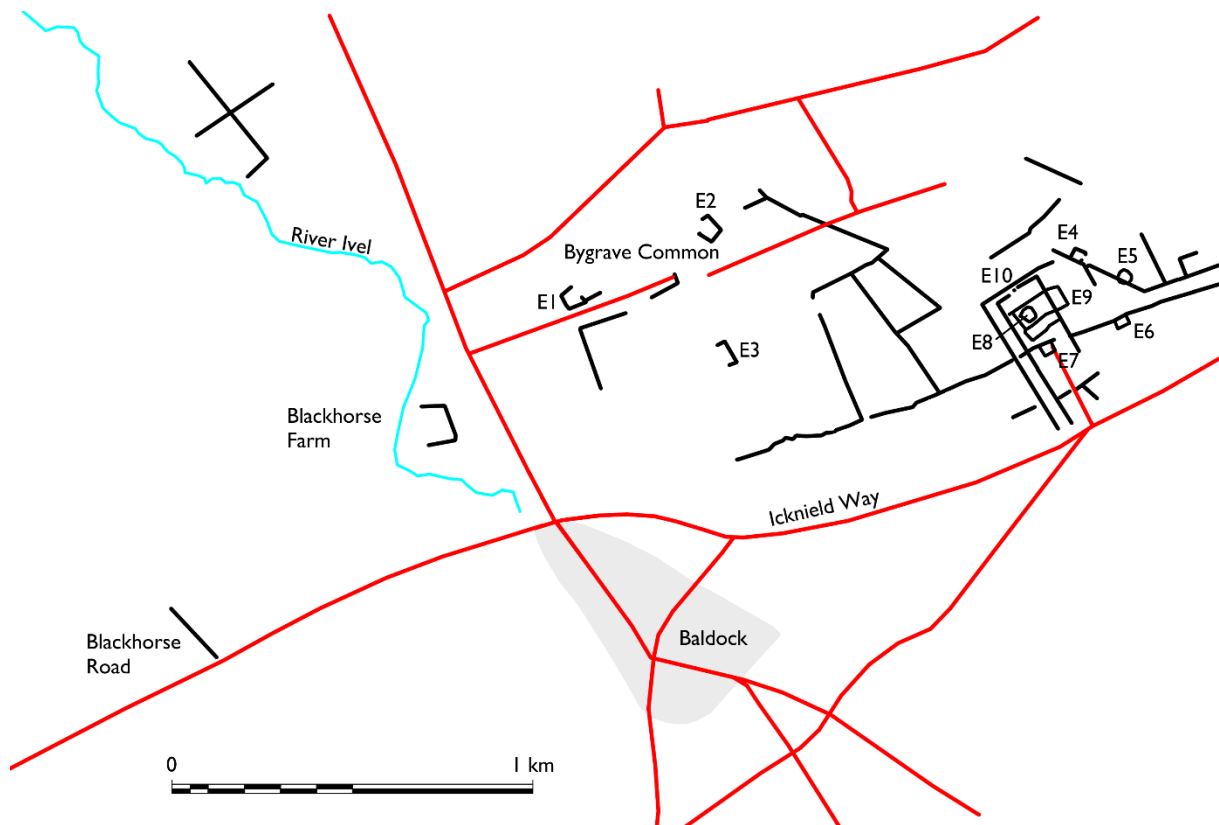


Figure 6: the Late Iron Age oppidum at Baldock, with contemporary roads (red) and enclosures (black) to its north and west

A large V-section ditch ran north of the railway, roughly parallel with it. It was recut on many occasions, and two enclosures (E6 and E7) were aligned on it. Although it follows the same alignment as Icknield Way as it passes through Blackhorse Road in Letchworth Garden City, the ditched compounds that 'hang' from its south side and the field ditches that run north from it show that it cannot have been a roadside ditch. It may have separated the area that belonged to Baldock and the agricultural land to its north. The earliest fills contained pottery dating from the late first century BC. Its width varied between 1.7 m and 4.6 m, but it does not appear to have been defensive. Nonetheless, its construction was a significant undertaking, and the frequent recutting it underwent shows that it was considered an essential element of the landscape for many years.

Enclosure I (E1 in Figure 6) lay at the west end of the common, north of a lane that branched east off the main road just north of the farmstead at Blackhorse Farm. Its ditches measured about 110×50 m and the long axis lay parallel with the track. None of the sections dug through it revealed any datable

finds, but its alignment shows it to have been part of the layout of the fields in this area. It was probably the site of a farmstead, perhaps working the fields either side of the ridge. Enclosure 2 (Figure 6 E2) lay further east and slightly away from the track, to the north. No dating evidence was recovered from the ditch fills, although they did contain animal bone. The possible Enclosure 3 lay south of the ridge and only three sides have been seen on geophysics and aerial photographs. Its southern edge was composed of two parallel ditches.

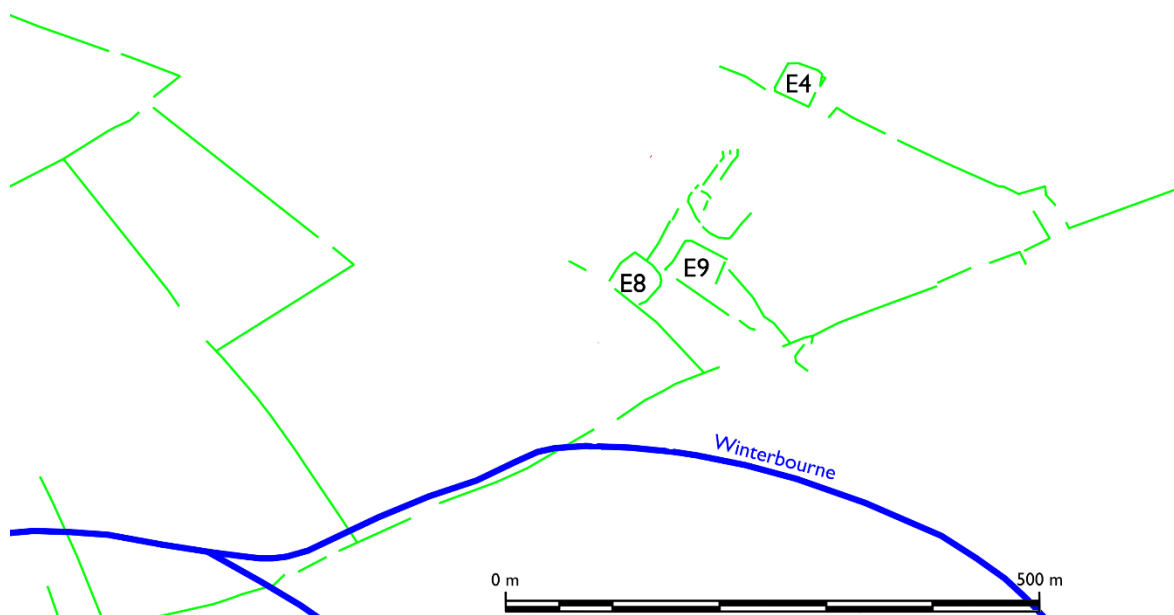


Figure 7: activity between the south-east end of Bygrave Common and the railway; first century BC

At the south-eastern end of the area investigated in 2016, a field boundary ditch branched off the long ditch that runs close to the railway (see Figure 7). There was a wide gap at this point, about 20 m and a short stretch of parallel ditch lay to the west. These features created a broad entrance with a dogleg, wider than contemporary roads and tracks. Perhaps this was to help with moving livestock, keeping them corralled in one area before driving them into another. Enclosure 4 lay towards the north-western end of the field boundary ditch. East of it lay another wide gap, also of about 20 m. Although the geophysical survey and aerial photographs have not confirmed the lines of ditches linking Enclosures 4 and 9, they appear to define a kite-shaped field in this area. North and west of Enclosure 9, the boundaries define two more unusually broad 'tracks', which were perhaps also for stock control. Enclosure 8, at the southern end of one of these, is linked with a further ditch, linking it with the long boundary to the south. Enclosures 8 and 9 were almost contiguous; their replacement by a single complex in the next phase of activity may be evidence that they were separate elements in a single functional unit connected with pastoral farming. Although the archaeologists who examined Enclosure 5 (see Figure 8) thought it belonged to the same period as 4, 8 and 9, it clearly cuts across the line of the field ditch, so it probably belongs in the early first century AD.

Enclosure 10 replaced Enclosures 8 and 9. It was much more extensive and consisted of two main elements: a squarish area to the north and a linear zone to the south. Enclosure 5, to the east of Enclosure 4, was probably its replacement. If the boundary in this area continued in use, it was no longer marked by a ditch: fences and hedgerows are almost impossible to recognise in small archaeological trenches like those used in 2016. The ditches of the dogleg entranceway may also have gone out of use. If this area was still being used for livestock at this time, we are no longer able to see precisely how the field system was arranged. The field system to the west carried on in use throughout this period and into the Roman, though. This data suggests that some elements of the Late Iron Age

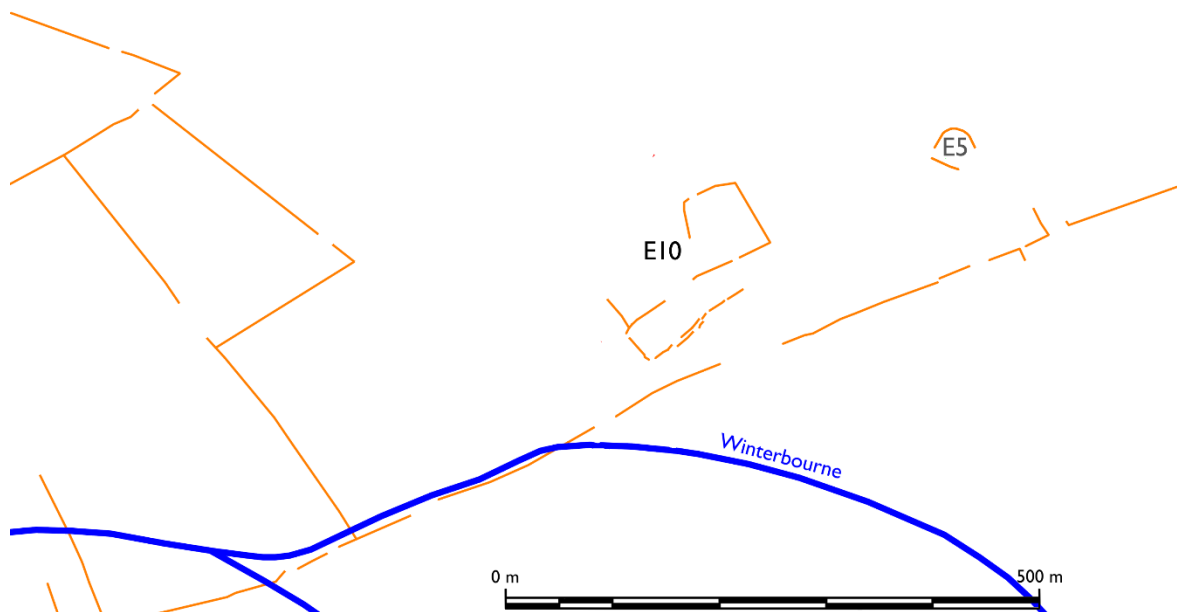


Figure 8: activity between the south-east end of Bygrave Common and the railway: early first century AD

landscape – the linear boundary to the south and the field system to the west – continued in use, others were more short-lived. The landscape changes may reflect a decline in the political status of Baldock in the closing decades of the first century BC. New sites such as *Uerolamion* (St Albans) to the southwest and *Camulodunon* (Colchester) to the east became the dominant towns of the region north of the River Thames at this time.

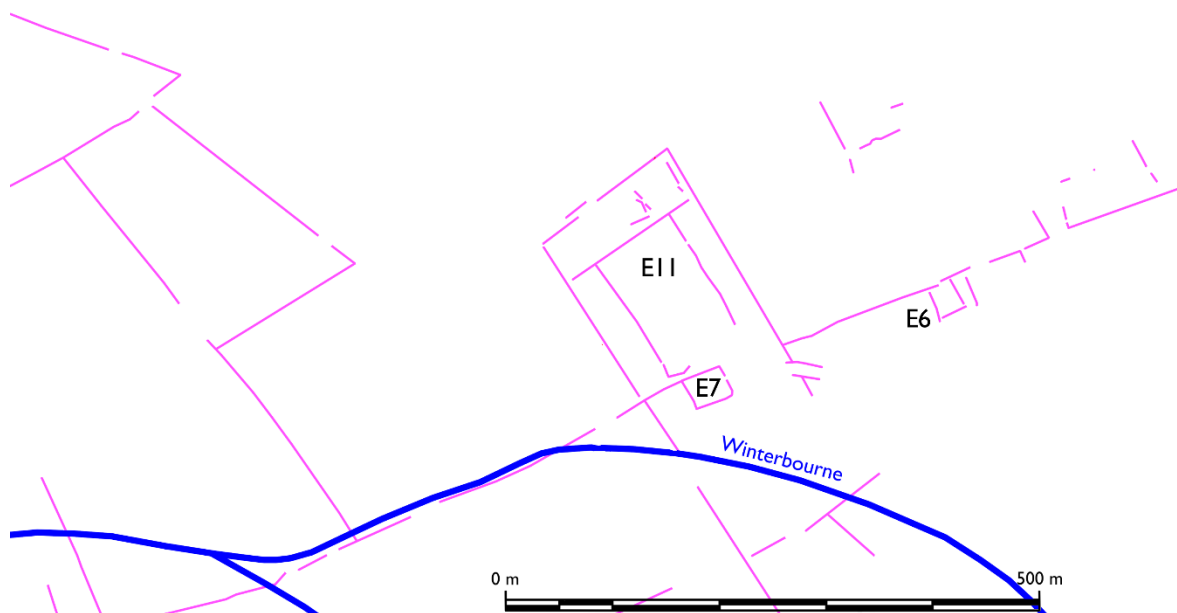


Figure 9: early Roman activity between the south-east end of Bygrave Common and the railway

There were further changes to activity in this area in the decades around the Roman conquest of Britain in AD 43. Enclosures 5 and 10 fell out of use, and the new large Enclosure 11 was built, stretching from the Icknield Way in the south, across to linear boundary ditch and over the site of Enclosure 10. The southern part also crossed part of the winterbourne, which may be significant for its interpretation. There were subdivisions inside it. Its size and layout are similar to those of the villa estate on Claybush

Hill, Ashwell, 3.25 km (2 miles) to the north. Pits excavated inside this enclosure contained 35 pieces of painted wall-plaster (weighing a total of almost 600 g), which must have come from a villa type building in this area.

Enclosure 7 lay inside Enclosure 11, using the linear boundary ditch as its northern edge. There was a pit inside it, filled in between about AD 70 and 130. A post hole was cut into the top of it, and another posthole inside the enclosure may be evidence that it contained a building. A pit cut through the ditch on the western side: some of the wall-plaster came from this feature. It must date from a time when Enclosure 7 and the villa building in Enclosure 11 had gone out of use. A human burial was also made into the silted ditch, but it was not excavated. It could well be later Roman in date. Under Roman law, burials could not be made inside the boundaries of a settlement, so it would suggest that Enclosure 11 was no longer a domestic villa site by the time it was made.

There is another possibility, though. The enclosure need not have included the winterbourne, so it must have been included deliberately, while painted plaster was also used in temple sites. Rather than a villa, might Enclosure 11 have been a temple precinct, focused around the seasonal appearance of water in the stream bed? In this situation, a human burial might have been permitted: there are religious sites in Baldock and Kelshall where graves are known to have existed.

The area investigated in 2016 seems to have been mostly abandoned by AD 200. There are some third- and fourth-century quarry pits, but no trace of settlements. The field ditches silted up. All this suggests a fall in population in the late second century AD. A plague, known to historians as the Antonine Plague, arrived in the Roman Empire in the winter of 165×6. It was spread by soldiers and merchants and could have killed up to one-third of the population. There was a second outbreak in 168×9 and a different plague in the 180s. Historians are unsure what the diseases were, although they may have been smallpox



Figure 10: cropmarks south-east of the village, from Google Earth 2007 and 2008

and measles. A sudden drop in population numbers would explain why field ditches stopped being maintained: less food was needed for fewer people.

Elsewhere in the parish

Aerial photographs reveal similar enclosures to the southeast of the village and east of Wedon Way (Figure 10). They can be dated by a scatter of Late Iron Age and Roman pottery from the fields. There are enclosures and tracks, including one that links them with the Icknield Way to the southeast. This track continues west-northwest beyond the settlement towards another group of compounds similar in character. The extended boundary ditch seen by the railway south of Bygrave common continues into this area. It appears to develop into a triple ditch just as it vanishes from view, south of this settlement area.



Figure 11: cropmarks west of the village

There is a silver coin of the Corieltaui (the people of Leicestershire and Lincolnshire) from the cropmarks west of the village (Figure 11). Another coin of the same people was found in excavations in Baldock, suggesting links with people to the north. The only soils producing good cropmarks in this area west of the village are limited in extent, and there are hints that the settlement area continued to the southwest and southeast. It is not clear if the entire zone between the two groups of enclosures was occupied by a single settlement or if there were two main groups.

The detail available for the southwestern part of the parish is remarkable, and it is possible to propose zones of different land use (Figure 12). To the southwest, abutting to the road north to Sandy and north of the long Iron Age boundary, was an area that was given over to large subrectangular fields, with tracks giving access to the main road and probably also to the Icknield Way and Baldock to the south.

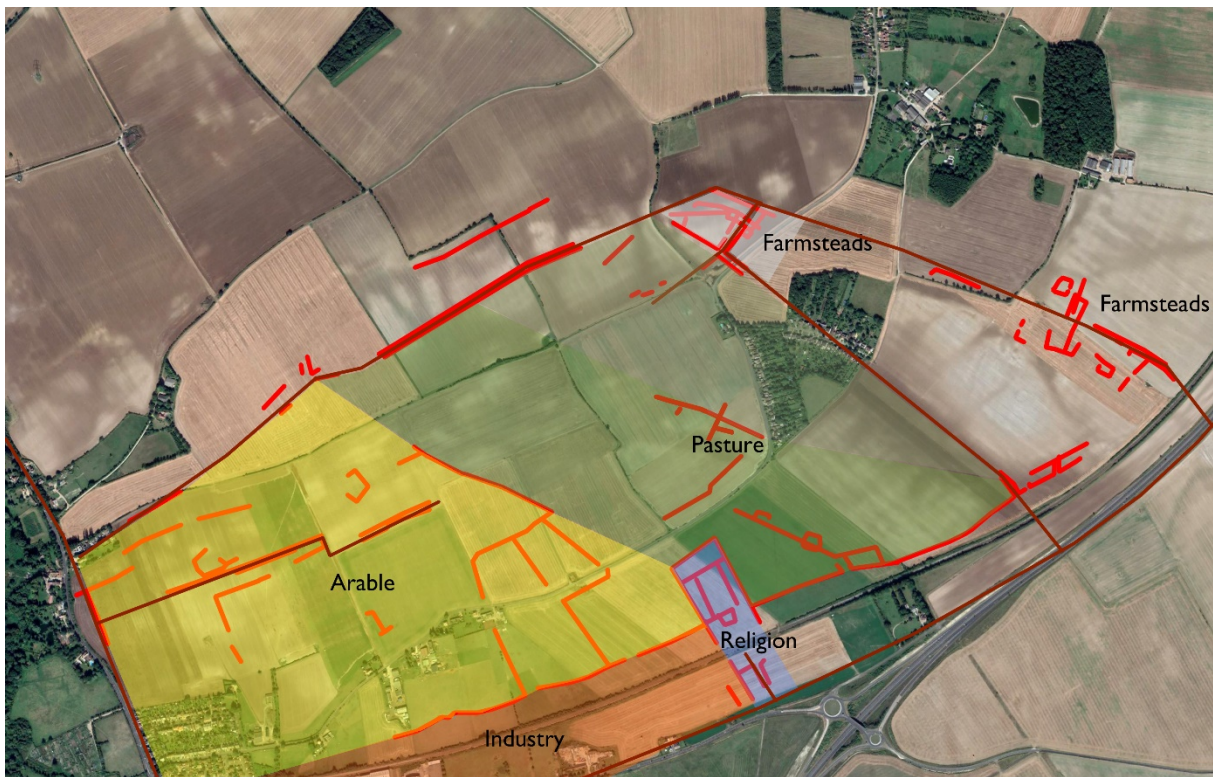


Figure 12: economic zones in Late Iron Age/early Roman southwest Bygrave; hypothetical road lines are brown

East of this lay an area that may have been devoted to pasture, with unusually wide access points and what appear to have been transferring pens for livestock. Between the two, was a zone around the winterbourne that was eventually given over to religious use. Although Enclosures 8, 9 and 10, which preceded the development of the probable Roman temple enclosure, were interpreted above as part of the pastoral regime, it is equally possible that these were Late Iron Age cult enclosures. The zone of industry identified to the south parallels a group of industrial enclosures identified to the south of Norton. Excavations and geophysical surveys between 2010 and 2013 west of Norton Road revealed a ditched and fenced compound that had held a building with a tile roof, possibly associated with glass manufacture using the bank of an abandoned henge as support for the kiln structure.

In the Late Roman period, the economic activity in this area declined to the point where arable use of the land ended. Perhaps Bygrave Common was given over entirely to pasture. Although Baldock struggled on as a town into the sixth century, there is no evidence from the Bygrave landscape for people. There is equally no sign of scrub or woodland development from nearby pollen samples taken when the A505 Baldock Bypass was under construction. For this reason, we know that people were still farming the fields, as trees soon take over abandoned farmland. We simply do not know where they were living.

Medieval Bygrave

There is only one find representing the centuries between the end of Roman rule in the early fifth century and the creation of the Kingdom of England by Æthelstan in 924. It consists of a silver-gilt sword pyramid (Figure 13). They were small fittings used to fix the strap holding a sword scabbard to the belt. They are common finds in England and continental Europe, part of a warrior's standard equipment.

The excavators who dug the trial trenches in 2016 claimed that a skeleton found in a ring ditch was of this period. However, it is more likely to be Iron Age or Roman in date: similar secondary burials were found in the silted-up ring ditches excavated at the north end of the A505 Baldock Bypass in 2003.

‘By the entrenchments’

The earliest forms of the village name, *Bigravan* (recorded in 973) and *Biggrafan* (about 1000), show it to be Old English *Bigræfan*. The English Place-Name Society suggested that it means ‘by the entrenchments’ (*græfe* gives us the Modern English ‘grave’). They backed this up by pointing out that ‘[t]here are ancient entrenchments here’. The features they refer to are the series of ditches (usually called ‘moats’, although we shall see that they are not moats in the usual sense, or ‘palace’), centuries later in date than the first record of the name in 973.

What might the name mean, if it is not referring to the ‘moat’?

One possibility is that the ditches of one or more of the Roman enclosures were still visible when the name was coined. The aerial photographs show that some of them were substantial features. On the other hand, the element *græfe* can also mean ‘bush’ or ‘bramble’; the name might then mean ‘by the bushes’, referring to a feature well-known in the landscape that we can no longer identify.



Figure 13: the sword pyramid found by a metal detectorist in 2007 © The Portable Antiquities Scheme



Figure 14: the hamlet on Bygrave Common: red lines mark the position of tracks, black lines show enclosure boundaries

St Margaret of Antioch

Architectural historians agree that the parish church dates from the twelfth century, a conclusion based on the shapes of doors and windows. However, the proportions of the building – narrow and tall – are reminiscent of pre-Norman architecture, while Domesday Book recorded a priest in the village. Furthermore, an excavation in 1993 revealed four separate floors laid on top of each other. The foundation trenches of the present nave walls were found to have cut through the two earliest surfaces. The later of these two contained tenth- to eleventh-century pottery, which may be contemporary with the wall construction. The present nave would, therefore, be a replacement for an earlier church on the same site, perhaps built from timber.

A medieval hamlet on the Common

Trial trenching in 2016 revealed a small settlement on top of the ridge west of the village, towards the east end of Bygrave Common (Figure 14). It seems to have been just a couple of houses, although there are no records of a separate hamlet in Bygrave. It stood at the eastern end of a trackway that first developed in the Iron Age. It is too early to be the Monks' Lands acquired from William de Wedona, although there may be a hint of its origins in Domesday Book.

Bygrave was a possession of Robert de Limesi, Bishop of Chester, who was taxed for five hides (about 600 acres) of arable. Two of those hides were his demesne land. The manor appears to have been the

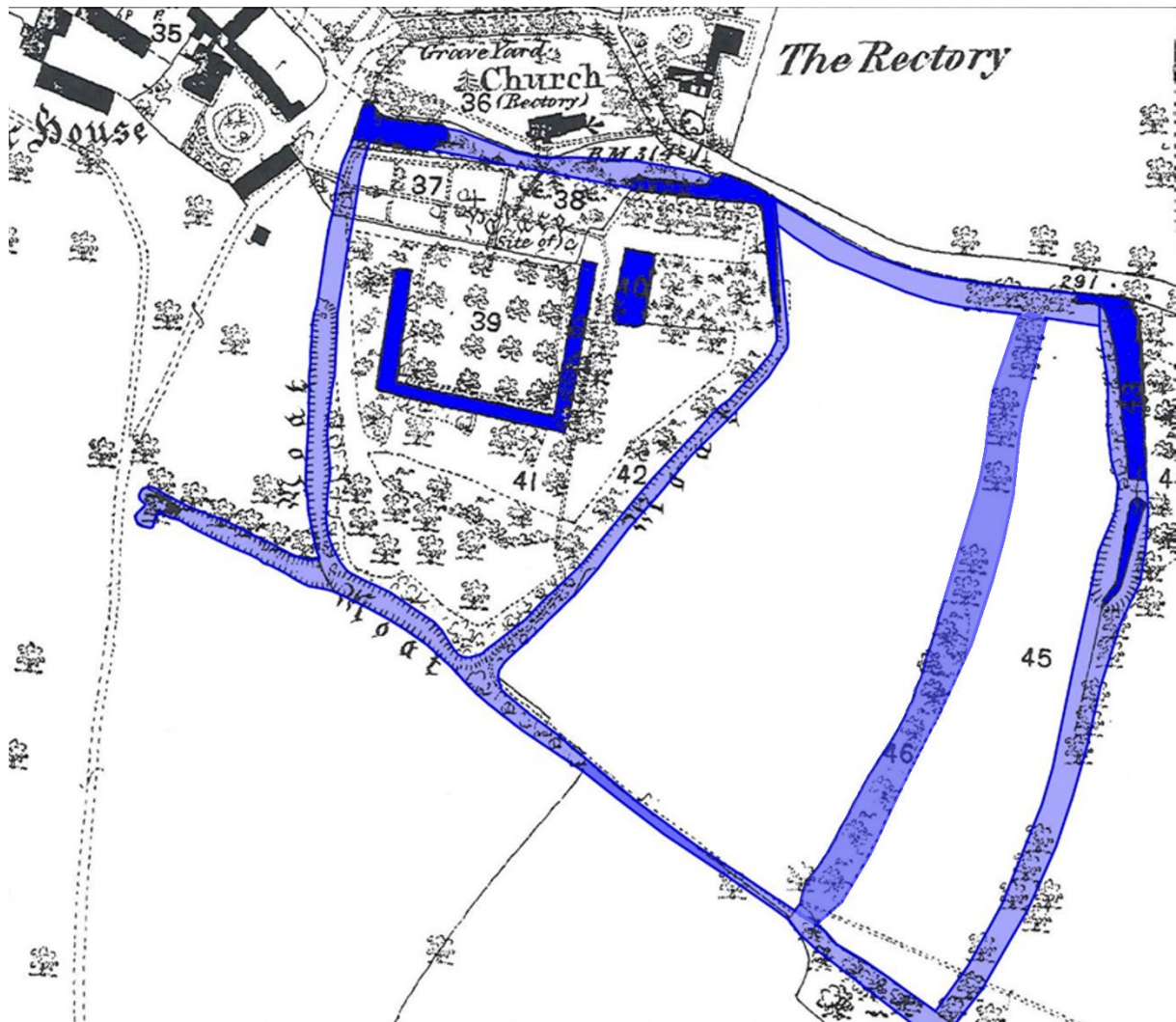


Figure 15: ditched enclosures known as 'The Palace', east of Bygrave House

Bishop's personal property, not the church's, as it passed to the Honour of Gloucester on his death. From this land, two freemen held three virgates (about 90 acres); this may have been the hamlet on Bygrave Common. No documents so far identified record its name.

Moats and 'palaces'

One of the enduring stories about the village is that there was a 'palace' here in the Middle Ages. The story has arisen for several reasons. Firstly, the Domesday manor belonged to the Bishop of Chester. Secondly, King Edward I stayed in Bygrave in January 1299 and April 1302. Thirdly, we know that Sir John Thornbury gained a license to crenellate two houses in 1386. Lilian Redstone, the author of the entry for the village in the Victoria County History in 1912, suggested that the earthworks still visible around Manor House and to its east-southeast were part of this 'palace'. The ditches are only partly visible today (and were already largely infilled on early Ordnance Survey maps) but show well on aerial photographs. They reveal (Figure 15) three sides of a square moat, still water-filled, surrounded by an irregular pentagon of ditches, some holding water. There is a larger enclosed area to the east and a narrower strip beyond that. The southern ditch continues to the west of the pentagonal enclosure.

The site is not level – the outermost ditch is 5 m higher at the western end than at the eastern – so they can never have worked as water-filled moats. They also seem always to have been relatively shallow: in places, they are little over half a metre deep. There is also no indication that the southern arm extended west of the road. Instead, the pentagonal ditch seems to have surrounded an ornamental garden, with the square 'moat' a pond. It can never have formed a complete circuit, as the ground slopes down to the church from the north end of the eastern side. Since the construction of Moat House on this site in the later twentieth century, little now remains of the square pond, although the rectangular pond to its east survives.

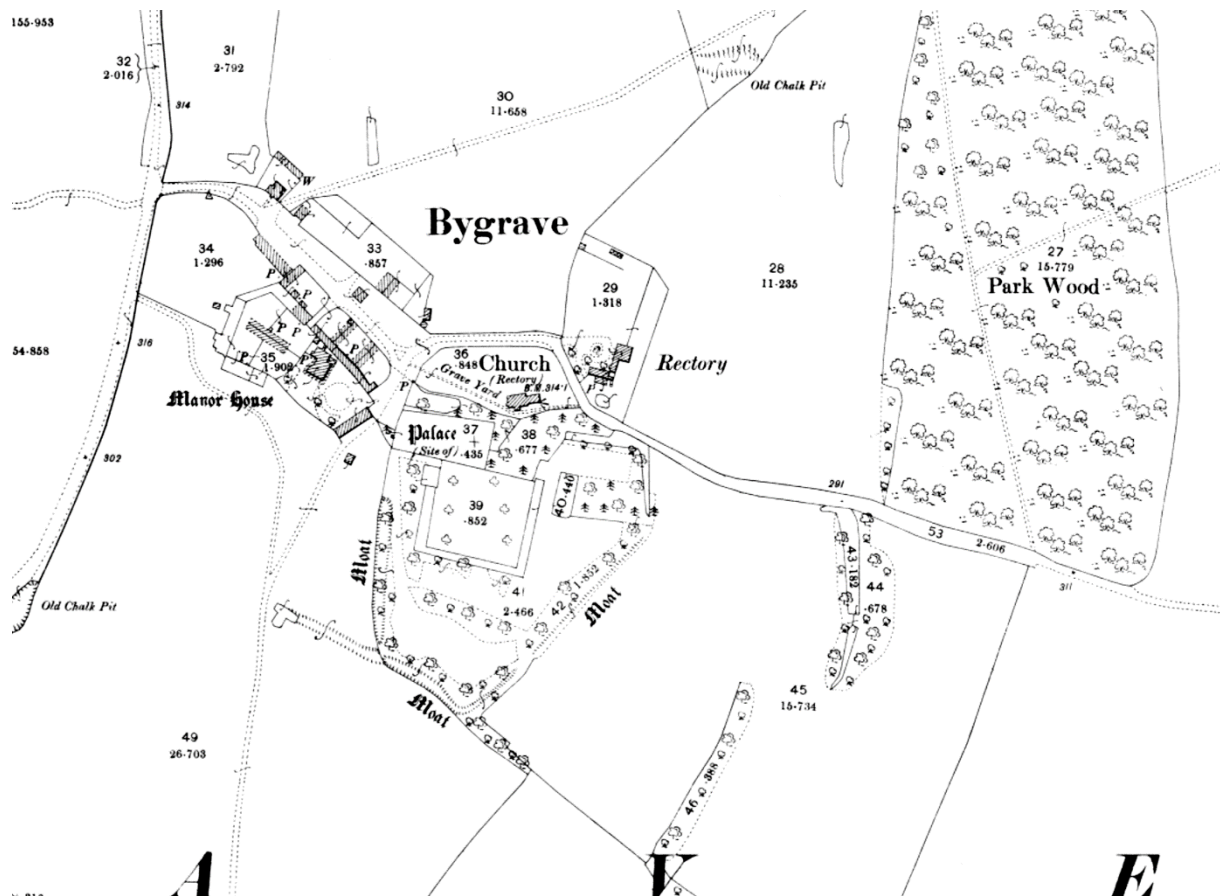


Figure 16: the village centre in 1897

If these earthworks were not built as water-filled moats, what might they have been? The pentagonal area was a formal garden by the nineteenth century, and the square 'moat' together with the rectangular pond to its east were probably water features within it. However, the continuation of the southern ditch beyond this area suggests that it is a secondary feature inserted into an existing enclosure. Perhaps the track between Manor House and Moat House marks the line of an infilled western ditch, completing a trapezoidal circuit. Although Dury and Andrews's map of 1766 is sketched and the details appear mostly conventional, they do show an enclosed area south of the church and Manor House with subdivisions running south to north. Immediately south of the church is a large building, which is perhaps the *Bygrave Place* marked away from the detail. Bryant's map of 1822 also shows *Place*, although his detail is hard to see among the shading. This information suggests that the enclosures may be part of gardens around a significant house in the village.

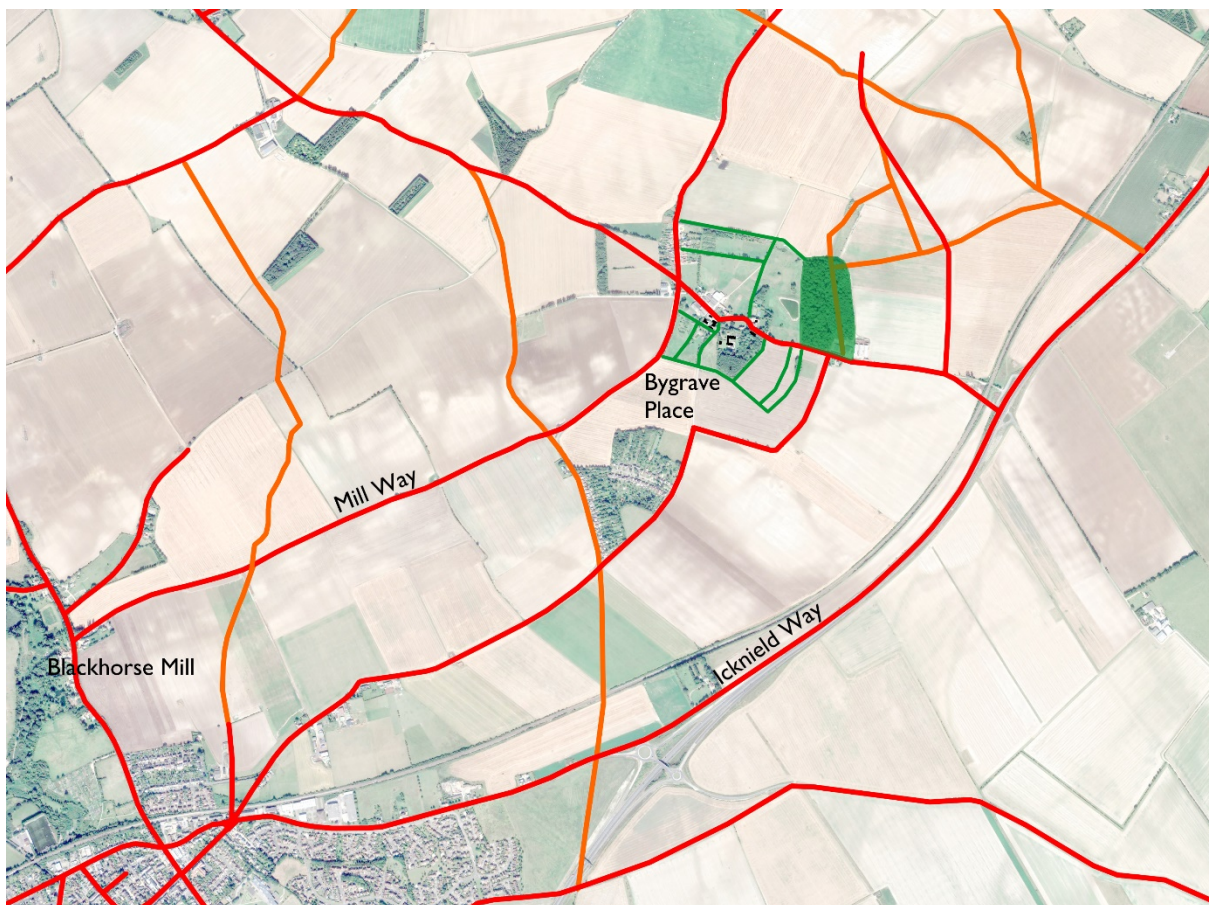


Figure 17: roads on Dury and Andrews's map (1766, shown in red) and Bryant's map (1822); green lines show the position of enclosures on Dury and Andrews's map

The early village layout

The church, Manor House and Bygrave Place formed a small unit with a broad space running northwest from the western end of the churchyard (Figure 16). As Bygrave received a charter for a market, fair and free warren on 20 October 1256, this could well be the relict marketplace. The market was held on Mondays, and there was an annual fair, held 19 to 21 July, the third day being the feast day of St Margaret of Antioch, the dedicatee of the parish church. The early maps show that the village was once better connected with main roads and less isolated than it appears today. The village street ran east to the Icknield Way, and there were more direct connections with Baldock and the Great North Road than survive in the present landscape. However, both Baldock and Ashwell were prosperous medieval

market towns, and Bygrave could not compete. There is no indication of how long the market operated, or even if it did at all.

The village had access to the River Ivel at Blackhorse Mill, which is probably the one assessed for 10s in Domesday Book. The track from to the North Road across the north side of Bygrave Common was recorded on Bryant's map as Mill Way in 1822, and the Victoria County History called it Miller's Way in 1912. Two mills were recorded in 1287, but the location of the second is unknown.



Figure 18: Lidar plot of the western end of the parish, showing ploughed-out field baulks in purple

Bygrave has not received blanket coverage of Lidar as it does not lie in a flood plain and only the western end of the parish was plotted by The Environment Agency. The main features it shows are broad, diffuse linear banks (Figure 18). These are probably the remains of field baulks and headlands in the former open fields. Although unenclosed, the land has not been farmed in common since the nineteenth century, and the old boundaries have been ploughed out.

Changes in more recent centuries

James Cecil (1748-1823), Marquess of Salisbury, created Bygrave Park early in the nineteenth century, only 30 acres (12.1 ha) in extent. Its creation explains the name Park Wood applied to the woodland east of the village, although the woods are already marked (but not named) on Dury and Andrews map in 1766.

The arrival of the Royston and Hitchin railway, which was authorised in 1846, cut the village off from major communications routes. In particular, it severed the road east from the village centre to the Icknield Way, reducing it to a farm track. Although the market – if it had ever started – had failed many centuries earlier, the fair continued into the 1880s or 1890s. New housing was built at Wedon Way and on Ashwell Road, extending the village to the south and the west.

The archaeological evaluation on Bygrave Common was a response to a housing allocation for Baldock in the Draft Local Plan. The proposal proved controversial, but the trenches revealed significant evidence for the earlier history of this part of Bygrave. The proposed estate is intended as a suburban community for the town, like Clothall Common. If the development happens, Bygrave will lose another chunk of its land to Baldock.

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