

## RE-EXAMINING MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT IN THE DARTMOOR LANDSCAPE

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### Introduction

This paper approaches the study of medieval settlements from the perspective of an engendered household archaeology, focusing on the diversity of everyday human experience in the past. Medieval archaeology, and settlement research in particular, tends to focus on description of types and changes in form over time and across space, with emphasis on determining the latest, earliest, most central or most distant of a particular type. For example, scholars produce maps on which a line divides areas of nucleated villages with open fields from places dominated by dispersed settlements (e.g., Roberts and Wrathmell 2000). Or one settlement might be described as planned, while another might be unplanned (see Dyer 2002; Jones and Page 2006; Roberts 2008). Although these distinctions are understood as general trends that simplify a complex landscape, such divisions nonetheless run the danger of projecting an artificial uniformity into the past that tends to obscure both the diversity of the archaeological evidence and the subjective, multivocal experiences of past peoples as they moved about and constructed the landscape. Such either/or distinctions also structure scholarly expectations for the type of evidence that ought to be present within a particular area, and therefore also affect the interpretations and conclusions that are drawn from the evidence.

While numerous scholars have critiqued these descriptive paradigms (e.g. Austin 1985, 1990, 2007; Hinton 2005; Jones 2010; O’Keeffe 2000; Oosthuizen 2013; Rippon 2007; Taylor 2009), a sort of common-sense, culture-historical formalism has nonetheless continued to dominate the field, together with an often unstated assumption that the proper way to understand or explain a site is to assign it with certainty to a formal typological category. In addition to critique, several scholars have suggested alternative theoretical approaches to medieval settlement (Austin and Thomas 1990; Jones 2010), but in general medieval settlement archaeology has not embraced these approaches, nor has it been significantly impacted by the more theoretical frameworks that have affected British prehistoric archaeology and some subsets of medieval archaeology (e.g., Gilchrist 2007; Johnson 2007, 2012; Tilley 1994).

I suggest that a perspective derived from anthropological advances in archaeological theory over the past 30 years can lead to a productive synthesis between typological and post-processual approaches to medieval settlement research. Such an approach would fall under the heading of what is known in North America as

“anthropological archaeology.” In this paper, I draw together themes from feminist anthropology, household archaeology, and object biography to consider the multivocality of human experience through the material record of the past. This perspective enables the archaeologist to ask how people of different social factions – including classes, genders, ages, and ethnicities – experienced life in the past, and how they related to one another within their particular social formation and political-economic system (Binford 1962; Brumfiel 1992; Earle 2003; Gosden 1999).

Many of these social differences are implicit in medieval settlement research. Feudal relations between elite lords, ordinary peasants, and the agricultural landscape are the understood and often taken-for-granted context of archaeological remains (Bloch 1961). The medieval documentary record provides the context through which social differences are implicitly understood. Although historians, especially feminist historians, have become adept at subversive readings of these documents (e.g. Hanawalt 2007; Meek and Lawless (eds.) 2003), the original sources are ultimately both androcentric and elite: this is the view of the peasantry as seen by literate, high-status, overwhelmingly male record-keepers. But the rigid social hierarchies and gender distinctions visible in the documentary record become blurred and softened in practice when the material and archaeological correlates of these experiences are examined in detail (Gilchrist 2007; Grauer 1991; Johnson 2013; Richardson 2003; Smith 2009).

Interrogating categories of social difference, as opposed to taking their existence as given, can allow them to emerge as conclusions drawn from material evidence, and opens up the ability to understand past lives and experiences that may not have fit within expected patterns. This can sometimes entail focusing on the exceptions, the settlements that do not fit the typological pattern of others around them, the contradictions between what is expected and what is observed, or the differences between a conceptual model and the observed material record.

As a practical example, I reexamine the archaeological record of a medieval farmstead in Okehampton Park, North Dartmoor, Devon. Few medieval buildings have been excavated on Dartmoor – only seven sites as of 2011 (Newman 2011, 133). Those that have been investigated were primarily rescue excavations, including the work at Okehampton Park (Newman 2011, 116). Some work has been carried out at peasant settlements elsewhere in England, though this has been primarily at the scale of the village or broader landscape (e.g., Beresford and Hurst 1990; Jones and Page 2006; Wrathmell 1989).

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The following analysis builds upon a 1990 paper by Austin and Thomas that critiqued more traditional, document-based approaches in medieval archaeology. Their interpretation understood the material record of the past as a “parallel text” (43) to the documentary record, following archaeological semiotic theory developed through the 1980s that views the archaeological record as a series of signs that convey certain complex meanings (e.g. Hodder and Hutson 2003). Their explicit approach viewed the settlement as constitutive of social hierarchy through the lens of a post-structural social theory (Bourdieu 1972, 1980; Giddens 1984). This drew on theoretical advances that were cutting-edge at the time, but as I discuss below, a semiotic reading of the archaeological record can turn out to be as proscriptively formalist as the typological approaches that continue to dominate the discipline.

I begin by expanding upon Austin and Thomas’ (1990) interpretation of the household spaces at Site 59, and go on to apply a perspective informed by feminist and household archaeology to the long-term biography of the farmstead as told through the changing arrangement of space and the post-abandonment artifact assemblage. I set out specifically to re-examine the excavation evidence, including the post-abandonment artifact assemblage which was not addressed in the 1990 paper. In contrast to Austin and Thomas, who take an

explicitly multi-scalar approach, I primarily focus on the excavated spaces and the immediate context of the farmstead. I address the broader landscape context only briefly to relate the Site 59 data to the later medieval emparkment of the space. Through this exercise, I endeavor to make explicit the medieval social dynamics that underlie both formal typologies and structural dichotomies, to go beyond text to understand past spaces not as types, but as inhabited by people – people with faces, ages, emotions, genders, and histories (Conkey and Spector 1984; Tringham 1991).

### Okehampton Park in theoretical context

On the northern edge of Dartmoor, between the town of Okehampton and the commons that edge the high moor, lies the grassy expanse of Okehampton Park (Fig. 1). Within the park are the ruins of seven medieval farmsteads, each containing two or three longhouses, several outbuildings, arable fields, and other farm roads and enclosures (Fig. 2). The farmland is arranged in a grid pattern on the steep slopes between the commons and the lower, forested land to the north, where Okehampton Castle lies. Between 1976 and 1978, an eighth farmstead – Linehan’s Site 59 (SX 574930) – was fully excavated in advance of the expansion of neighboring Meldon Quarry, which has since removed all evidence of the

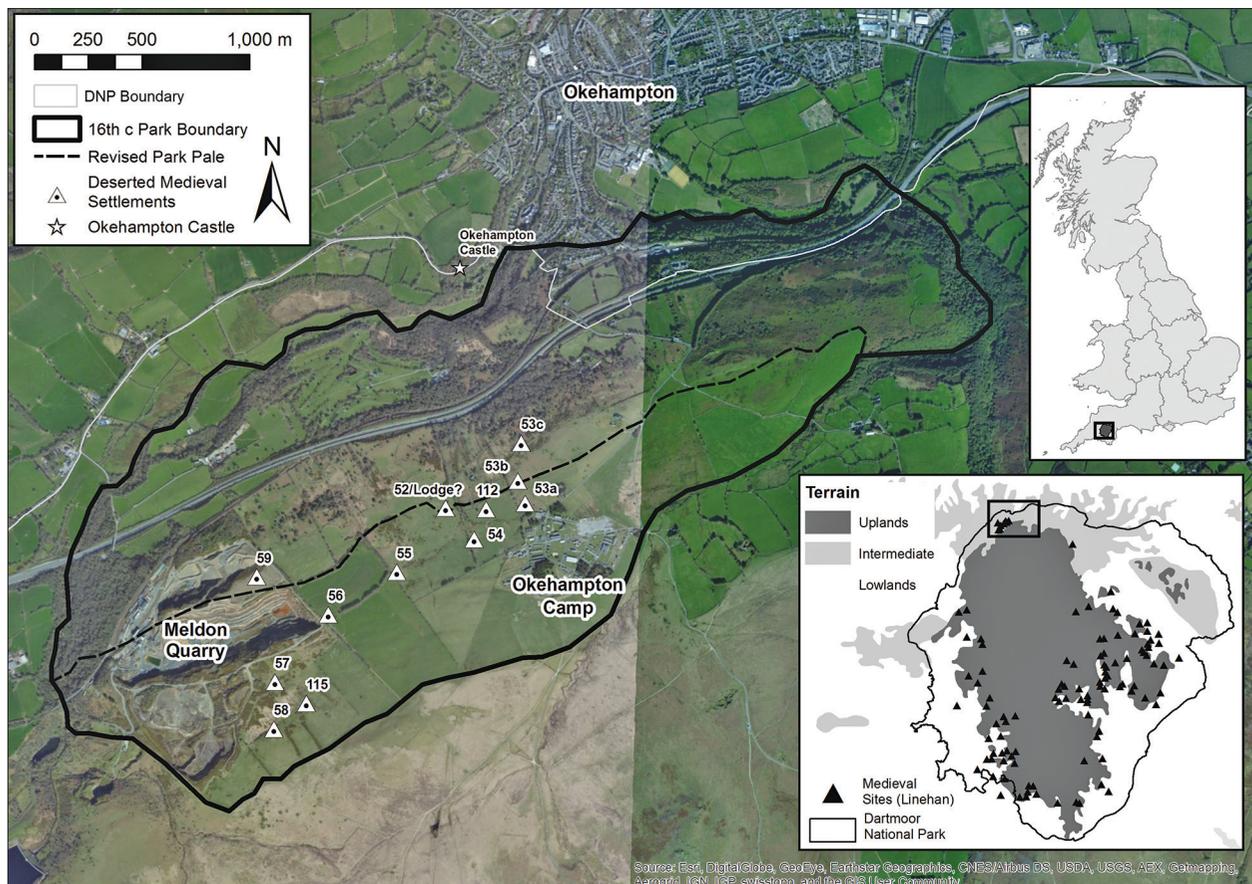


Figure 1 Map of the Okehampton landscape, showing the locations of deserted medieval settlements and other features. Settlement locations are derived from Linehan 1966, Austin and Thomas 1990, and Newman 2011. The line of the revised park pale is redrawn after Newman 2011. Air photo © Esri, Inc. Elevation data © Atlas of Medieval Settlement. Map created by author.



Figure 2 *Deserted medieval settlement in Okehampton Park (Site 54). Photo © K. Catlin 2013.*

settlement from the landscape (Austin 1978; Austin *et al.* 1980; Austin and Thomas 1990; Linehan 1966). The data on which I draw throughout this paper was originally published in the 1978 excavation report.

Ceramic evidence from the excavation established that the settlement was founded in the first half of the 13th century, ca. 1250 AD or earlier (Allan 1994). The Earl of Devon, lord of Okehampton Manor, most likely founded the settlement then known as Birham to facilitate exploitation of the moor's resources. According to documentary records, by ca. 1300 the land between the castle and the commons, including the farmsteads, had been converted to a deer park by Hugh de Courtenay, Lord of Okehampton (Austin 1978, 195–7; Austin *et al.* 1980, 41). The settlement therefore appears to have been inhabited for less than a century, perhaps only one or two generations.

#### *Reading Material Culture*

In their 1990 paper, David Austin and Julian Thomas used the material from Okehampton Park to critique medieval archaeology's reliance on the written record. They applied ideas based in the post-structural and semiotic turns of social theory to read the archaeological record as a text, as an alternative to existing models in landscape archaeology (Geertz 2005 [1973]; Hodder and Hutson 2003). In this hermeneutic interpretation, material culture and the built environment embody

social ideals and contribute to the formation and reproduction of particular subjectivities via repeated material practice, analogous to the way that reading a book imparts a particular idea to the reader.

The archetypal medieval longhouse is a one, two, or three-room building, much longer than it is wide (Fig. 3). The large main room is divided by a cross-passage connecting the entranceway to the back door, with the outer room (a living space with benches and a hearth) to one side of the passage and the byre to the other, usually downslope to allow for drainage. A door connects the outer room to a private inner room, perhaps used for sleeping, while a "room beyond," annex, or lean-to with a separate entrance might be attached to the upslope end of the house. The arrangement of space within the medieval longhouse is understood as a mirror and a symbol of the patriarchal medieval hierarchy, and one's place in the hierarchy is read via one's emplacement in domestic space. This semiotic interpretation relies on the application of a conceptual model, an archetype of the ideal medieval longhouse derived from regional typologies, to which excavated examples are expected to conform.

The structure of the longhouse therefore emplaces people in space according to their status and hierarchical role. The public space of the yard gives way to the semipublic living room, and then to the private back room. There are multiple ways to interpret what this

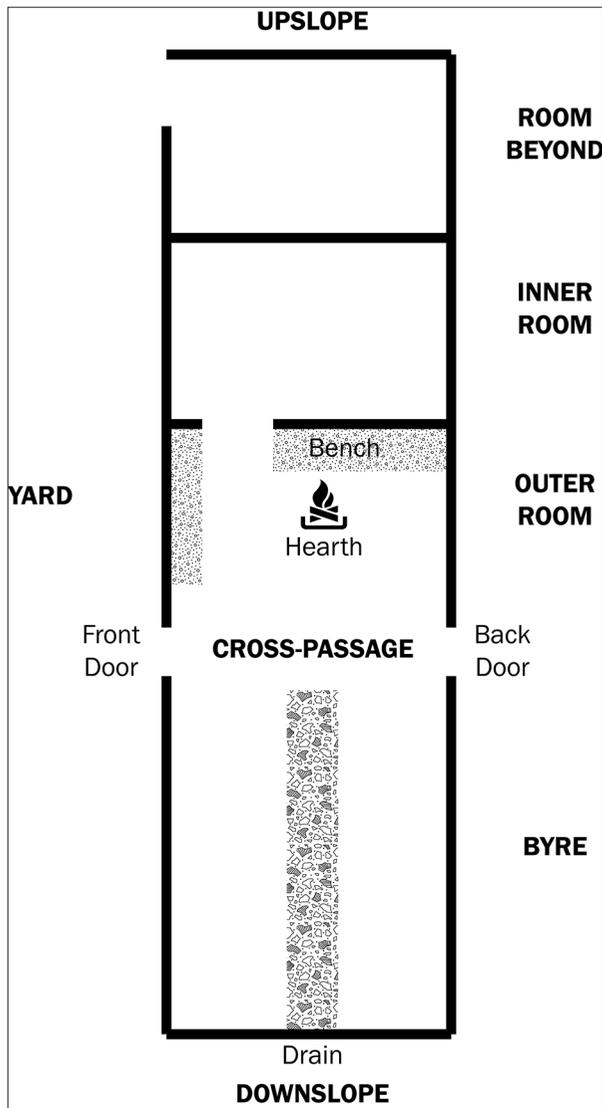


Figure 3 Structural model of a medieval longhouse (redrawn from Austin and Thomas 1990, p. 58, Fig. 2.2).

structure, viewed as a symbolic text, actually *means* in terms of medieval hierarchies of power. In one interpretation, the head of the household, implicitly male, sits near the hearth holding court and leading the family, visitors approach through the liminal space of the passageway, and animals and servants are relegated to the byre: a parallel to the way a manorial lord might preside over his estate, from the centre of power at the manor out to the tenants and serfs on the periphery. An alternative narrative constructs the household as a site of female authority, where the housewife was responsible for preparing meals, caring for children, safeguarding valuables, and generally ensuring that the household economy continued to function smoothly, while male economic activities took place in the fields (Altenberg 2001). The house is simultaneously constructed as symbolic of ultimate male power and authority, *and* of female authority over the day to day operations of the household. In both cases, the arrangement of space within the house serves to legitimize and reproduce the feudal

hierarchies and gender dichotomies of medieval social relations through daily experience and practice.

*From text to experience: households, gender, and biography*

This post-structural, semiotic approach was a landmark in medieval archaeology. It opened a way to study social relations, by reading the status and role of occupants from the arrangement of space within the house. But the interpretation of the “text” depends upon a conceptual model of an ideal peasant house (Fig. 3), one that never existed as a real building inhabited by people. This paints the farmstead as a static metaphor for the social and economic tensions that characterized late medieval feudalism, promoting a synchronic, hierarchical understanding of the space and obscuring the day-to-day realities of the medieval peasants who experienced life at the farmstead (Altenberg 2001, 62–3). In many ways, these approaches can be as formalist as other, more culture-historical paradigms, though focused at a smaller scale.

To the individuals who lived within its walls, the house would not have explicitly or discursively materialized male ownership or control, nor would it have been a purely or essentially feminine domain. In practice, farm work was largely undifferentiated in terms of gender and age, especially during certain times of year, with the exception of certain specialized forms of domestic labor (Graham 1997; Smith 2007). Work at the farmstead shifted between the fields, the open space of the farmyard, the house interior, and distant pasture on the common moor. At the hearth, the head of the household would greet guests, laborers repaired tools and performed other tasks that required a fire, and someone (likely, but not necessarily, female) prepared meals. People of all ages and genders slept in the house, took meals there, and prepared for the activities of the day. There would be work in the arable fields, around the farmstead, tending the animals at pasture and bringing them home, dairying, cooking and spinning, caring for and feeding the livestock, hoeing and weeding kitchen gardens. The farmstead was comprised of active spaces, multifunctional, multigendered, and multigenerational.

Household archaeology provides a framework for connecting the material record to the experience of everyday life, taking as its unit of analysis the material evidence of relationships between individuals (Ashmore and Wilk 1988; Lightfoot *et al.* 1998; Robin 2013; Tringham 1991; Wilk and Rathje 1982). The material culture of the household, as evidence of everyday practices and multivocal actors, can show that people are not utterly constrained in their actions and choices by social structures and ideologies that favor the powerful, but make choices in response to the needs of the moment that make sense given their own particular histories. In these ‘small things forgotten’ (Deetz 1996) lies evidence of the creative and individual engagements with the world that make every person, every place, and every day different from the last. An engendered household perspective can therefore show in a very specific way how daily life and power intersected in long-term trajectories of social change, through the slow accumulation of contradictions and affirmations between everyday life and broader social structures and values.

In particular, this work is influenced by Tringham's (1991) call to imagine 'faces' for the past human beings whose actions constructed the archaeological record; as she puts it, 'until you can engender prehistory, you cannot *think* of your prehistoric constructions as really human entities with a social, political, ideological, and economic life' (1991, 94). These words are relevant to the archaeological study of medieval peasant life, for which the written historical record is often sparse, absent, or biased. Tringham's architectural study of a Late Neolithic village does not on the surface enable obvious gendered interpretations of the evidence or clear material correlates to gender roles, and in this way it is similar to the study of medieval peasant households. Her response is to combine a detailed analysis of specific, minute differences between excavated households with an ethnographic and historical understanding of gendered experience to imaginatively (as opposed to speculatively) engender, and thus return faces, to her Late Neolithic subjects. I follow this approach to imagine some situated individuals who could have moved through and experienced the spaces of Site 59 at Okehampton Park, building upon the family units imagined by Austin and Thomas (1990, 61): not to definitively state that *these* particular people *were* here, but rather to emphasize the fact that these household spaces were inhabited by real people with ages, genders, and relationships.

In what follows, I contrast and complement Austin and Thomas' interpretation with one that emphasizes the lived experience of everyday life (Robin 2013). To do so, I envision the changing material arrangement of the farmstead as the result of gendered and aged practices and performances of historically situated people as they created and moved through its spaces at different points in time, constrained but not determined by overarching social structures. The changes in the built environment through time are the result of socially embedded practices, conditioned by memories of earlier practices and experiences, filtered through the specific choices made by individual human agents. Although the types of memory implicated in daily practice are difficult to access (Silliman 2009), the built environment of the house, and its changes in form over time, provides a concrete, material, and accessible representation of this kind of social and experiential memory (Hodder and Cessford 2004). Constructing a biography thus can be a way to explore how multiple meanings become embedded in a building through the many social interactions, both sequential and simultaneous, in which it is implicated over the course of its involvement with humans (Gosden and Marshall 1999). A long-term, biographical approach to the household, including built spaces and artifact assemblages, brings interpretation closer to a multivocal, multigendered experience, breathing life and movement into static descriptions of structure, authority, symbolism, and conflict (Johnson 1997).

### Lived experience at Site 59

The first construction phase at Site 59 was a timber-frame longhouse and outbuilding dated to the early 13th century, called A1 and A2 in the excavation

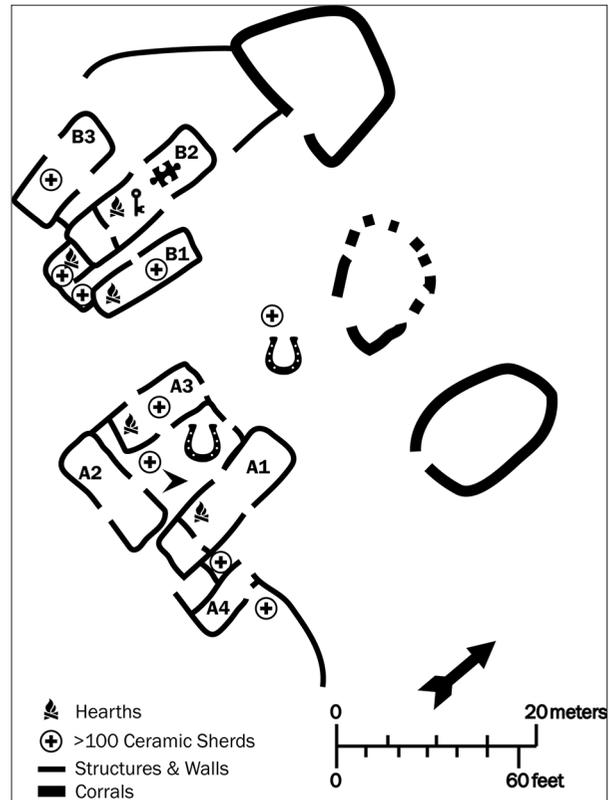


Figure 4 Plan of Site 59 (redrawn from Austin and Thomas 1990, p. 62, Fig. 2.3). Symbols indicate the location of hearths (fire symbol) and the types of artifacts recovered from rubble/collapse layers (horseshoes, arrowhead, game, key).

reports, with another possible small structure between the buildings that was later removed (Fig. 4; Table 1). The longhouse was orientated north-south with its byre end downslope to the north; the outbuilding extended west-east from the southern end of the longhouse. The earliest buildings were likely of cruck construction, but sometime later they were torn down and replaced with drystone structures: the stone walls precisely overlapped the postholes and in some cases were fitted into them. At about the same time, the first drystone buildings of the second group (B) were constructed, about 25 meters to the northwest of the first group. The new longhouse (B2) was also orientated north-south, and an ambiguous structure (B1) was built parallel to the longhouse along its eastern face. The ambiguous structure in some ways resembled a longhouse and in others appeared more like an outbuilding or workshop. In the final building phase, an outbuilding (B3) was added to the B group parallel to the western face of the longhouse, and an inhabited annex with a hearth was appended to the southern end of the longhouse. In the A group, a second longhouse (A3) was added, extending north from the western corner of the existing outbuilding and forming an enclosed yard space between the three structures. The yard may have already been enclosed in stone walls by this time, as the new longhouse (A3) seemed to incorporate some extant drystone walls. A new outbuilding (A4) was also constructed southeast of the longhouse, along a wall that

Table 1 Construction and Use Phases of Site 59 (Austin 1978)

Phase	Date	Description
1	1200-1250	Timber Phase: A1, A2, outbuilding beneath A3
2	late 13th century	A1, A2 replaced with drystone; B1, B2 erected in drystone
3	late 13th century	A3, A4, B3, B2 Annex erected; yard walls in place
4	1292-1306	Emparkment
5	1538-1545	Disemparkment
6	1780-1840	Enclosure
7	1976-1980	Excavation and demolition

enclosed a possible cattle yard to the southeast of the settlement (Austin 1978, 202–16).

Exploring how the built environment of Site 59 changed over time can suggest both the shifting demographics of the farm over time, as Austin and Thomas explore (1990, 60–4). Soon after the original timber-framed buildings were replaced with drystone construction, the main longhouse in the B group, also of stone, was added to the farm. This suggests the incorporation of a second household, perhaps part of an extended family. The secluded annex added to the second longhouse evokes the idea of living quarters for a relative, perhaps an elder or a grown sibling. The final longhouse, the second to be constructed in the A group and likely later than most of the B group, was smaller than the others and lacked a back room, though it did have its own hearth. This suggests less need for a private space in this house, indicating that it may have been inhabited by someone of lower status than the other longhouses – someone who would not be expected to regularly entertain visitors, such as, perhaps, grown children. Finally, the presence of three corrals in the yard implies that each household managed their own flock of sheep, and was to some extent economically independent.

A closer investigation of the divergences and unexpected elements of the built environment can begin to layer atop the demographics an understanding of the space as dynamic, both structuring and reflective of changes in the gendered social experiences of the inhabitants. The main sections of the two larger longhouses – living room, byre, and back room – were nearly identical to one another, suggesting repetition of structural ideals (Austin and Thomas 1990, 57–61). But several elements of the settlement diverge from the idealized structural plan, including the multiplicity of longhouses and inhabited spaces within them, such as the B annex. Because the model of the house is understood as the spatial correlate of an existing social hierarchy, the textual interpretation of the site reads any divergences as challenges to that social order: “If [the presence of two heads of household] can be explained by the expansion and splitting of the group, the exact replication of the conceptual framework of A by B *must* [emphasis added] have been a challenge to, a subversion of, the social authority of the primary household” (Austin and Thomas 199, 64). The multiplicity of longhouses, hearths, and sheepfolds is understood to index dominant and subordinate households, in conflict with each other over control of the land, agricultural choices, or the choices of subordinate household members and children, including which generation should be allowed to farm an ever-diminishing arable field. A possible

elderly household member in the annex is described as a threat, “once in authority and thus needing to be carefully distanced from the heart(h) [sic] of the decision making” (p. 61). Similarly, the lack of a back room in A3 is understood as a strategy to keep in check any threat to the dominance of the head of household in A1 from an upstart youngster (p. 61).

I suggest instead that these changes do not simply, or even primarily, represent a challenge to the patriarchal hierarchy and authority of a dominant head of household. When new buildings were added and constructed in different alignments with different interior arrangements, this was a response to the changing social experience of the farmstead, and it went on to alter and structure the ways people experienced, related to, and understood one another as they lived and worked in these altered spaces. It is reasonable to suggest that these changes reflected changing social attitudes, but the actual material experience of living as and with particular aged and gendered individuals is also accessible archaeologically, and is necessary to understand the day to day experiences of medieval peasants. These changes and additions can be understood as practical choices that reflected the needs and desires of gendered household members at specific points in their lives – a diachronic materialization of negotiations between memory, practice, agency, and power.

These practical negotiations are visible in the structural changes that occurred through the construction phases of the farmstead. First, the replacement of timber with drystone construction suggests a permanent investment in this place on the part of the inhabitants – a commitment to the future of the space, to raising a farm and family at Site 59. Though this may have materialized *authority over* the space, it also established *continuity within* the space, as did the construction of the second, similar drystone longhouse in the B group.

The major difference between the first and second longhouses was an intricate drainage network through both the byre and the living area of the newer structure, not observed in the older. This suggests a different intention in the building’s construction. There were indications in the course of the excavation that the entire site was poorly drained, including heavily eroded floors of several buildings. I suggest that the construction of the second house incorporated and creatively responded to lessons learned from life in the first: specifically, the addition of more drains to discourage erosion. I see this not as evidence of competition, but cooperation – care taken specifically to ensure that the second generation lived in greater comfort than the first.

Similarly, the addition of a private annex to the second longhouse need not be interpreted as removing a challenge

to authority, as Austin and Thomas imagine. A peaceful transfer of power might as easily be imagined – perhaps a retirement, a happy ceding of space and control to a pair of energetic newlyweds. In order to enter the annex, one would have had to travel through a long passage between the outer walls of the longhouse (B2) and the outbuilding (B1). The difficulty of access to the annex could be interpreted as a desire for privacy on the part of the inhabitant, rather than a strategy aimed at distancing a rival to power. Furthermore, the single entrance to the outbuilding was most easily accessible from the passage that led to the annex. Since the outbuilding was constructed at the same time as the longhouse but well before the annex, this space could have been used by the same individual over the course of a lifetime, perhaps as a workspace: first while living in the longhouse, and later accessed from the new private annex.

The third longhouse (A3) was one of the last buildings to be constructed and notably lacked a back room. The structure was otherwise similar to the two large longhouses, down to the stake holes indicating the presence of furniture near the hearth, perhaps a bench and table (Austin 1978, 209–10). This may have been the home of a younger daughter or son, not yet married or perhaps just starting a new household, but prepared to manage her own flock of sheep. Austin and Thomas (1990) interpreted the simultaneous practice of intensive arable and pastoral agriculture as signifying generational tension between the three households, as younger generations may not have been able to expect a productive field of their own. But it is just as reasonable to interpret the smaller longhouse and third corral as a ceding of autonomy over control of the livestock and pasture, guiding younger generations into the business of pastoral agriculture. This addition of a third household and sheepfold can be alternatively understood as an extension of trust and respect, fostering a productive future for the next generation by pragmatically helping to invest in livestock, without permanently tying them to ever-shrinking arable land. Some element of tension was likely present between households, but there would also have been respect and appreciation. Understanding the experience of life at Site 59 requires attention to the messy and contradictory relationships that exist between individuals, households, and generations, and to the conciliatory as well as the antagonistic aspects of those relationships.

The settlement at Okehampton Park was inhabited for about as long as one or two human lifespans – no more than a century, and perhaps much less. Someone who lived there at the end of the settlement may have remembered its beginning. The settlement changed and grew along with the inhabitants, as a result of their active choices, to accommodate multiple generations at the same time. The structures at Site 59 are the result of memory, practice, and structure, but also pragmatism, innovation, creativity, bonds between household members, and an enduring relationship with this particular place.

### After the farmstead

The settlement seems to have ended around 1292, the year in which Lord Hugh de Courtenay of Okehampton signed an agreement with local burgesses reclaiming

the land between the castle and the edge of the southern common as a deer park for his own use, including farmsteads and arable land (Fig. 1) (Austin 1978; Austin *et al.* 1980). What became of the space of Site 59 when it was no longer an active farmstead?

This appears to be a story of peasants forcibly evicted from their lands at the whim of the lord of the manor, “class victims of feudal structures of power” (Austin and Thomas 1990:73). At an institutional scale, this certainly occurred, but the documents do not describe the process of eviction. The archaeological record suggests a slow departure from Site 59, and for those who did leave, as Austin and Thomas point out, the experience of resettlement elsewhere on Lord Hugh’s manor might not have been traumatic.

Furthermore, Lord Hugh may not have needed to move the peasant farmers off his land immediately. Medieval deer parks were not necessarily closed to peasants, who were often required to perform maintenance within the park, and were sometimes allowed inside to gather firewood and other necessities (Richardson 2012; Sykes 2010). Poaching was illegal, but the regularity with which it was prosecuted indicates the ease of illicit access to deer parks. It is therefore possible that some of the inhabitants of Site 59 might have been permitted to stay, despite the deer park, though they would have had to give up their arable land and keep their livestock elsewhere. Their particular role may have changed, perhaps serving as live-in caretakers for the park or providing a nearby point of contact for shepherds and shepherdesses on the high moor.

The preceding suggestions are derived and extrapolated from historical sources, not from the archaeological material. However, I suggest that the ways these structures were used after emparkment are in fact visible archaeologically, and that a close examination of the artifact distribution from the rubble and silt layers – the post-occupation debris, collapse, and infill – can suggest several ways that these structures continued to shape the experiences of both peasant and elite individuals well into the 14th century (Fig. 4; Table 2).

Ceramic sherds were found in significant numbers in the mid-13th-century floors and features of all buildings, and the rubble layers of most of the structures also contained between 100–800 sherds (Austin 1978). However, there were no ceramic sherds at all found in the rubble of the two large longhouses or the two outbuildings in the A group. This pattern of deposition suggests that the first structures to collapse were used as a trash midden as they decayed, while the other four buildings stood for much longer and may have continued in use for a considerable time. This indicates that the settlement was used well into the 14th century – if not for habitation, at least visited by people who actively moved among and within the standing buildings, generating trash to dispose in the collapsed structures.

Who would have continued to inhabit this space, inside a deer park on land no longer available to either growing crops or herding livestock? As I suggested above, some peasant inhabitants may have stayed on as park caretakers while the remainder of the household relocated. Another possibility, not necessarily an incompatible one, is that the structures may have been used as shelter for hunting parties from the castle. Some

Table 2 Finds from Site 59. Finds from rubble contexts may be associated with post-habitation use of the site (Austin 1978)

Structure	Walls/ Floors/ Features	Rubble/Silt
A1	ca. 100 sherds	0 sherds
A2	ca. 50 sherds	0 sherds
A3	ca. 75 sherds	ca. 300 sherds
A4	ca. 50 sherds	0 sherds
B1	ca. 100 sherds	ca. 550 sherds 1 imported green glaze sherd
B2	ca. 325 sherds whetstone	0 sherds key stone game board
B2 Annex	ca. 150 sherds	ca. 120 sherds plow tip
B3	unknown	ca. 300 sherds
Yards, Alleys, Exterior Spaces	ca. 320 sherds	ca. 6000 sherds cistern hole (ceramic) spear head 2 horse shoes 3 ox shoes flint scraper modern whetstone assorted nails cattle, sheep, pig bones

evidence suggests that additional construction occurred at the nearby Site 52 after it ceased to function as a farmstead, perhaps now serving as a hunting lodge for the deer park (Newman 2011, 136). Site 59 was located approximately 1 kilometre west of Site 52 and could have served a similar (albeit less formal) purpose during the hunt. The lord and his guests might have rested here for an hour or a day, using the collapsed structures as trash disposal. The abandoned structures might also have served as a shelter for peasants, while maintaining the pale, gathering wood, or poaching. I suggest that all these activities may have occurred in some combination – some tenants may have stayed on for a few years, and when they eventually died or left, the structures were used occasionally by both the hunt and the peasantry, until finally all the structures collapsed and the settlement passed out of use and memory.

The artifacts from the rubble layers support this interpretation. Two very distinctive ceramic sherds were found in the rubble. A cistern hole, rare in England before 1350, is suggestive of a festive occasion late in the 14th century. A single sherd from a green lead-glazed jug is the only imported ceramic found at the site. These two pieces indicate access to a wide trading network, and an affair at which many people were served drink well after 1300, suggesting use of the site by large groups of high status individuals after emparkment. Horseshoes and a spear head, also from rubble layers, are more consistent with elite activities during this later time than peasant farming.

While the majority of the rubble finds are consistent with trash disposal, a crudely carved stone (possibly a Nine-Men's-Morris board) and a key were found at the base of the rubble in the second longhouse, one of the buildings that lacked significant ceramic sherds in the collapsed layers and may have been actively used after emparkment. These may have been left behind in a still-standing structure, after the peasant farmers had departed but before the roof collapsed. The game

board could have provided a distraction or reprieve from inclement weather during a hunt. A key may be suggestive of a female presence during this time, either elite or otherwise, given references in literary sources to women who controlled household wealth by keeping keys to coffers (Altenberg 2001, 282–3). The hunt is usually gendered male, but people of all genders, ages, and ranks probably participated, as depicted on contemporary hunting tapestries. Elite women certainly took part, sometimes leading hunts or owning parks. Peasants sometimes reaped benefits in the form of venison (Richardson 2012; Sykes 2010). The presence of children at Site 59 during the 14th century, perhaps playing at the hunt, is suggested by a dull projectile point found in the rubble of the A yard with no signs of having ever been sharpened.

The artifacts from the fill therefore provide evidence for sporadic but sustained use of the structures at Site 59 as shelter and refuse disposal after abandonment of the farmstead and well into the 14th century. This included use by elite individuals of multiple ages and genders, with access to long-distance trade networks.

An English Heritage survey of the landscape of Okehampton Park in 2003–4 (Newman 2011, 112, 135–8) recorded a possible park pale running west–east through the middle of the deserted settlements (Fig. 1). Traditionally the boundary of the park has been drawn along the current field boundaries that border the high moor to the south, but this has been derived from a map dating to the 17th century, long after the ca. 1540 disemparkment. If the medieval deer park was in fact of smaller size, emparkment may have led to the desertion of as few as three of the settlements: Site 59, a portion of Site 53, and Site 52, which may have been converted to a hunting lodge. This new interpretation of the park boundary has several implications for the continued use of Site 59. If the inhabitants of Site 59 were not moved to a distant village but perhaps joined the household of one of the remaining Okehampton Park farmsteads,

they may have returned to their old home on a regular basis to retrieve possessions or relive memories. The proximity of peasants still living very near to the park boundaries might also have encouraged their continued use, sanctioned or otherwise, of the park's resources, including the use of abandoned infrastructure for shelter, storage, or amusement. The close proximity of Site 59 to the revised pale might have made it an ideal location from which to maintain or guard the boundaries of the park, or to take shelter while hunting deer or gathering wood. Excavation at one of the settlements south of the pale would help to understand how the landscape, including site 59, may have been used and understood after the 13th century.

Just as the farmstead, traditionally or ideologically male, and the hearth and home, perhaps ideologically female, were in practice inhabited and worked by people of multiple genders, the same is true for the space of the deer park. The transformation of the settlement from farming household to deer park need not be conceived as a male space overtaken by a different male space, or a female space overtaken by a male space, or even a peasant space overwritten and forgotten by an elite space. Rather, the settlement was a complex, multivocal place in which multiple identities were constantly negotiated; the same is true of the deer park that followed.

## Conclusion

In populating these spaces with gendered individuals and problematizing the assumed hierarchical relationships of spaces and activities, I do not contest the idea that the overall layout of the house is in some sense mutually constitutive of the medieval patriarchal hierarchy. However, this hierarchical reading of the space is only part of the story. The materiality of the site as it was encountered during excavation was the result of specific people performing specific activities, situated in a social present with a particular history and memory. The symbolic and structural elements of medieval peasant life are unarguably important, and are certainly embedded in the material interactions of daily life. But it was the pragmatic, quotidian choices made by individuals moving about the farmstead that ultimately created the materiality of the archaeological record that is accessible to the researcher, and is the only existing imprint of medieval life as experienced by individual peasant farmers. An engendered perspective centered on the household can make explicit the multivocality of social life on a medieval farmstead, and excavating the material relationships that underlie implicit, formal ideas about social relationships can lead to a deeper understanding of what these structures did, what they meant, how they were experienced, and how they contributed to medieval relations of power.

Active choices made by medieval peasants and lords, conditioned by memory and practice, created the specific form of the site as it changed over the century and more of its use. From the decision to lay out a field system in a dispersed pattern familiar to Devonshire farmers (Turner 2007), to the construction of new longhouses similar in form to the old but modified in specific new ways, to the continued use of the structures after emparkment, the buildings are at each continuous moment the site of social

memory, practice, agency, and negotiation. Deviations from the "standard plan" (Austin and Thomas 1990, 60) need not be understood as subversions of the social order, but as creative and pragmatic responses to the specific needs of the inhabitants. Daily life was multigendered and multigenerational, and the experience of life at Site 59 seemed very different to each person who lived, worked, and played there, whether a farmer, a young shepherdess, an elderly widow, a child with a toy arrow, or Lord Hugh himself. Developing a biography invites archaeologically informed, imaginative interpretations to populate the past with individuals whose specifically situated desires and choices actively change and create their own social and material context. The processes of farmstead construction, use, and decay were at each continuous moment the sum of specific actions and practices performed by individuals with genders, ages, relationships, and faces, intentionally or otherwise, situated in a social present with a particular history and memory – at the timescale of daily life, over the course of a generation, and across centuries of time.

By the 16th century, the deer park had changed hands several times, and around 1540 it was disemparked and probably reverted to pasture (Austin *et al.* 1980). At this point there seems to have been no memory or use of the ruins. Enclosure came in the mid-19th century, and again, little notice was taken of the ruins until the 1960s, when Catherine Linehan completed her survey of the medieval remains on Dartmoor (Linehan 1966). Site 59 has now been quarried away, literally erased from the landscape, and exists only in memory and imagination as an archaeological case study with a number in place of a name. The remainder of the settlement, the ruins of medieval Birham, lies outside the actively managed portion of Dartmoor National Park between a quarry and a military encampment, invisible to tourists squinting up towards the moor from the ruined courtyards of Okehampton Castle, its lives and faces forgotten.

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