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Lower Paxcroft Farm, Hilperton, Wiltshire Analytical Earthwork Survey

Edward Caswell

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**Lower Paxcroft Farm
Hilperton
Wiltshire**

Analytical Earthwork Survey

Edward Caswell

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SUMMARY

In 2014 the Assessment Team (West) undertook an analytical survey of the earthworks east of Lower Paxcroft farm, Hilperton which had been identified as part of the West Wiltshire NAIS Project. This survey, alongside desk based research has defined the remains of an irregular row settlement placed along the edge of a hollow-way which has marked the boundary of Steeple Ashton Parish for centuries. The earthworks probably indicate that the settlement saw at least one phase of growth before suffering a staged decline which extended into the 19th century. It was placed along the hollow-way to provide ready access both to Steeple Ashton's common and the enclosed arable fields north of the site.

CONTRIBUTORS

The earthwork survey was carried out by Edward Caswell, Elaine Jamieson, and Nicky Smith; Sharon Soutar provided assistance with the illustrations. Thanks also to Luke Griffin and Historic England Archive Services Team for providing the required aerial photographs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Mr Richard Fyffe for giving permission to undertake the survey and the staff of the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre for their help in accessing the records held in their archive.

ARCHIVE LOCATION

The original field drawings, site plans and other information is held by Historic England's Archives

DATE OF SURVEY

September-October 2014

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INTRODUCTION

In 2013 the West Wiltshire National Archaeological Identification Survey (NAIS) project identified earthwork remains using aerial photographs in fields south-east of Lower Paxcroft Farm in the parish of Hilperton (Last, Carpenter and Evans 2016, 92). It was decided that these warranted further investigation and in September 2014 English Heritage undertook a Level 3 analytical survey of the earthwork remains. This has revealed a medieval settlement alongside a 500m stretch of hollow-way. The settlement was placed ideally to exploit both the rich arable soils of the area and what would have been extensive common land. This report presents the results of this earthwork survey and its associated desktop assessment and provides a detailed analysis of the study's findings. It shows how the settlement was occupied in the medieval period and, after minor expansion, began to decline in stages until the mid-19th century. At this point it was fully abandoned and the fields it occupied were turned to farming purposes, predominately as pasture for cattle. The project was undertaken by the author as part of a Historic Environment Placement designed to provide training in the methods used by English Heritage's Assessment Team, which was funded by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.

LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The survey covered an area of 10 hectares centred on ST 88748 58686. This was divided between two fields immediately south-east of Lower Paxcroft Farm, whose western edge marked the limit of the study area. Further earthworks were seen in fields south of the study area, but these were not surveyed.

The site is situated on low lying ground placed between Hilperton and Steeple Ashton and is found at the bottom of a slight slope. A steeper wooded slope, known as Green Lane Wood, is visible approximately 1 km to the south of Paxcroft Farm. Paxcroft Brook, a minor tributary of the River Biss which runs through Trowbridge, flows into a pond at Lower Paxcroft Farm and is connected to land drains found across the survey, one of which flows along the southern boundary of the survey area.

The earthworks are located at the south-eastern corner of the parish of Hilperton adjacent to the boundary of two other parishes, Steeple Ashton and Great Hinton (Figure 2). However, this has only been the case in recent times. Originally the site lay within Semington which was later appropriated to Steeple Ashton and then to Hilperton (Chettle *et al* 1953; Crittall 1965). The parish of Whaddon also includes one parcel of land adjacent to Lower Paxcroft Farm such that the area of the survey was at one point between five parishes (Figure 7).

Lower Paxcroft Farm is 1km due east of Trowbridge, which itself is near the western edge of Wiltshire. The settlement of Steeple Ashton is approximately 2km south-east of Lower Paxcroft Farm, the lands between being made up of open fields similar in size to those north of the study area.

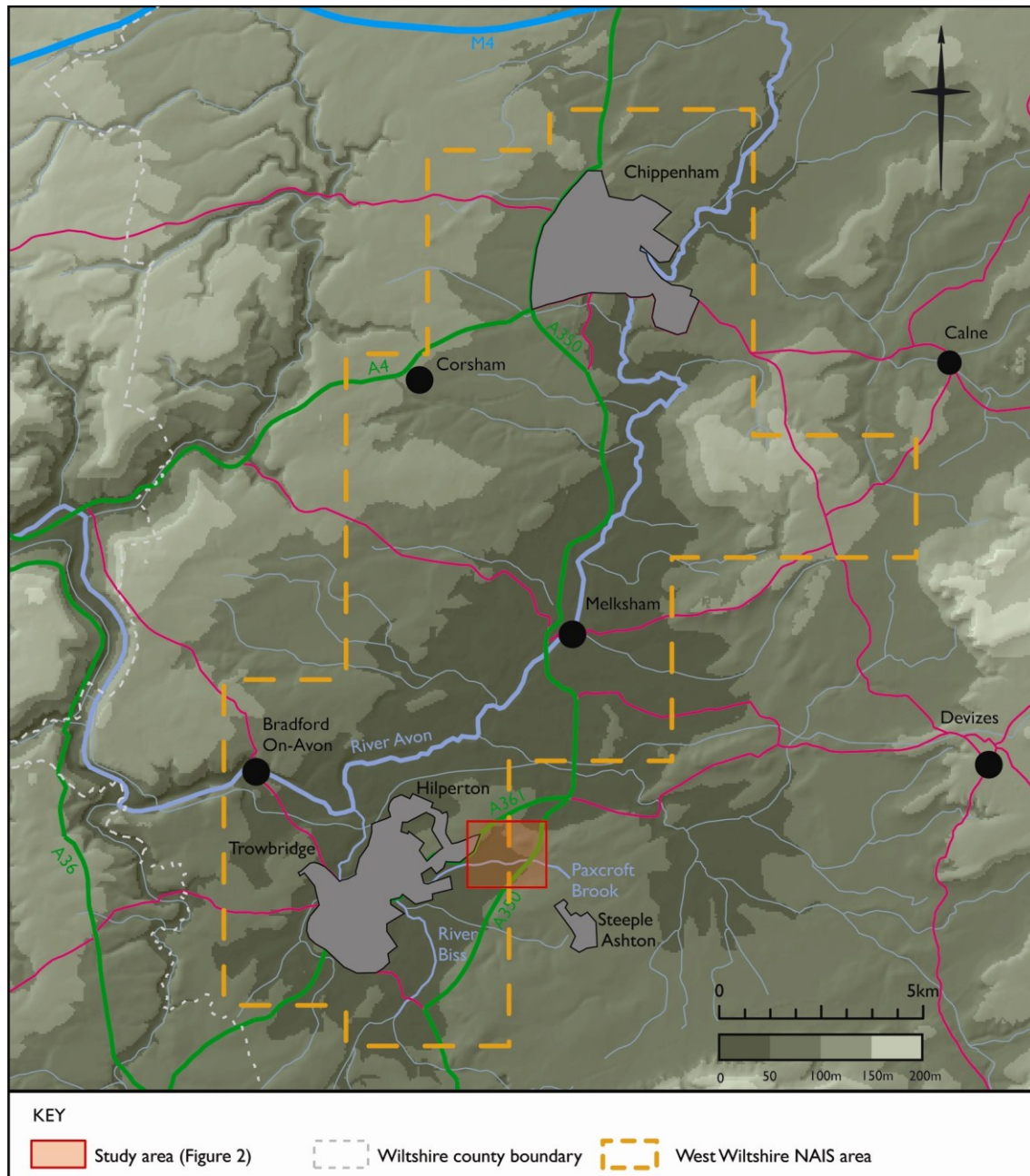


Figure 1 Location of the earthwork survey within the West Wiltshire NAIS project area. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2014. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900.

The earthworks lie within National Character Area (NCA) 117 'The Avon Vales' which echo the 'chalk and cheese' division often applied to Wiltshire, describing this landscape as

'an undulating clay vale with a mix of arable and pasture' (NCA 117, 6). This description is appropriate for the study area whose land is given over entirely to farming. Compared to the majority of the NCA the area is flat and low lying, having an average height of 46m above sea level while the mean height of the character area is 78m.

Lower Paxcroft Farm is located on the Oxford Clay Formation, a sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 156-165 million years ago and is also near the Kellaways Formation and Hazelbury Bryan Formation (British Geological Survey Map sheet 281).

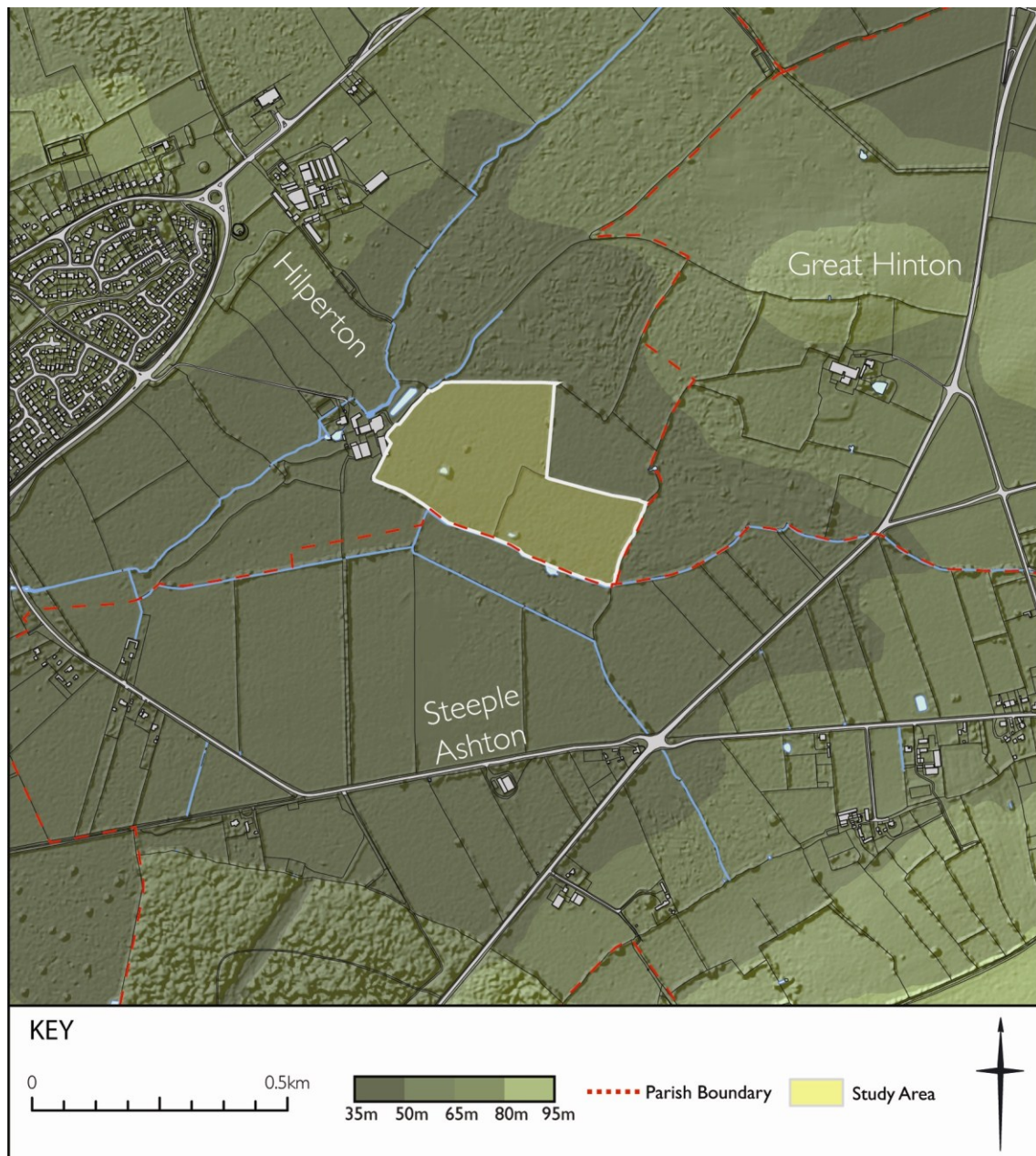


Figure 2 The area targeted for analytical earthwork survey lies along the Hilperton, Great Hinton and Steeple Ashton parish boundaries (Contains Ordnance Survey data ©Crown copyright and database right 2014. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900).

BACKGROUND

Historical Background

References are made in the Domesday Book to the parishes of Whaddon, Steeple Ashton and Hilperton, but not Semington. Unfortunately, no names from these records could be linked to the survey area, it instead being likely that these reference the major settlements in each of their parishes, which are at least 1 km away from the earthwork survey's location.

The name Paxcroft is said to originate from associating the personal name Pæcci with the croft to form Pæccel's croft (Mawer and Stenton 1930, 310). This was subsequently shortened and modified till reaching the form recorded today. It is first recorded in 1249 in the Assize Rolls for Wiltshire which records the name Packlescrofte (Gover *et al* 1939, 127) and has appeared in various forms since such as Pakelscrofte (1279) or Plaxcroft (1667). The term in use today, Paxcroft, is first recorded in 1574, in the Calendar of Fine Rolls (*ibid*).

In 1254 '3 cottages at Packelescroft paying yearly 8s, worth per anum 12d' are recorded under Henry de Waddon who held it from the Abbess of Romsey (Inq PM 38 Hen III File 15, 20; Fry 1908) and in 1731 the same estate was leased by the Duke of Kingston, for a rent of £80 (Crittall 1965, 208).

The name Paxcroft is also recorded within the 1841 Census reports and is initially associated with four families: the Blakes, Howells, Matthews and Becketts. The Blakes appear to be the largest family, having 9 occupiers in 1841, and occupied these holdings for the greatest amount of time. The first head of this household, James Blake, is recorded as a Yeoman using 150 acres (1851) who died before the 22nd September 1851 (Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette - Thursday 20 November 1851). He was succeeded by his son Alfred, who held 130 acres (1861), who in turn was succeeded by George Blake who is recorded as still residing at Paxcroft in the census record of 1871 after which point the family is associated with Efford farm house (1881), not Paxcroft.

The Howells are also recorded up until 1871, the head of the household, named Thomas being a tailor until 1871 at which point he is recorded as an alms man living with his wife, Anne, a house maid, and son John, a carpenter. It is likely John is named after a fourth resident of Paxcroft in 1841, Jon Howell who was a wool spinner and who may have been the father of Thomas.

The Matthews were the smallest family recorded in 1841, consisting of only three members, declining to only one person in 1861. This person, George Matthew, appears to have been the head of the household throughout this period and is recorded as an agricultural labourer. No further land is associated with his name.

The last household appears to have been one which rotated between owners quite frequently, housing the Becketts in 1841, the Boys in 1851 and 1861, the Holloways in 1871 and various individuals after this point. Finally, the 1871 census records a new family, the Littles, who are then mentioned frequently into the 20th century.

Mapping

Andrews and Dury's 1773 Map of Wiltshire

The earliest located map including the name 'Paxcroft' was published in 1773 by Andrews and Dury. It associates the name with at least seven structures, the easternmost of which are placed within a sub-square enclosure. This fronts the Paxcroft Brook. It also has a second building abutting its western edge and is separated from three other buildings by the brook. Further west of these again are two possible buildings which appear to be placed at a meeting point of track-ways and rivers.

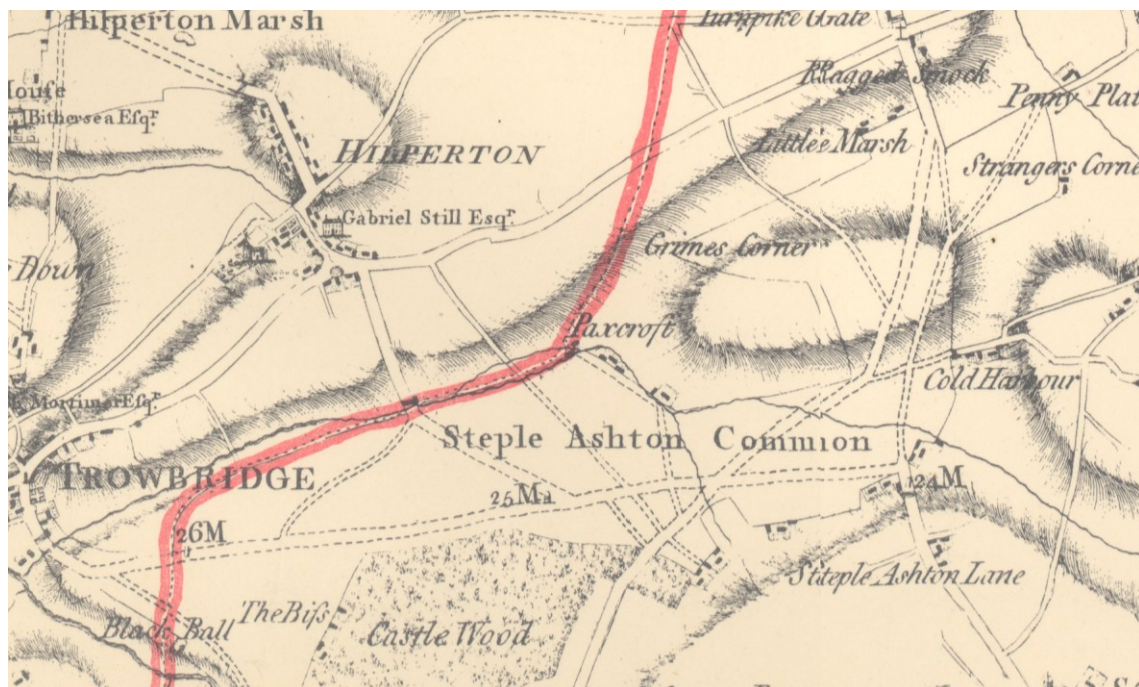


Figure 3 Detail from the 1773 Andrews and Dury Map (Number 10) depicting Paxcroft with several settlement buildings on either side of a track-way and watercourse.

John Rennie's 1793 Map of central Wiltshire

A second map of the area, attributed to John Rennie, surveyed in 1793, was commissioned due to the proposal to build a canal between the River Kennet at Newbury and the River Avon at Bath (Chandler 1998, xvii). This displays a similar

arrangement of buildings to the 1773 map, in that it contains a set of three buildings separated from buildings placed north-west of it. However, the depiction of the buildings differs in detail.

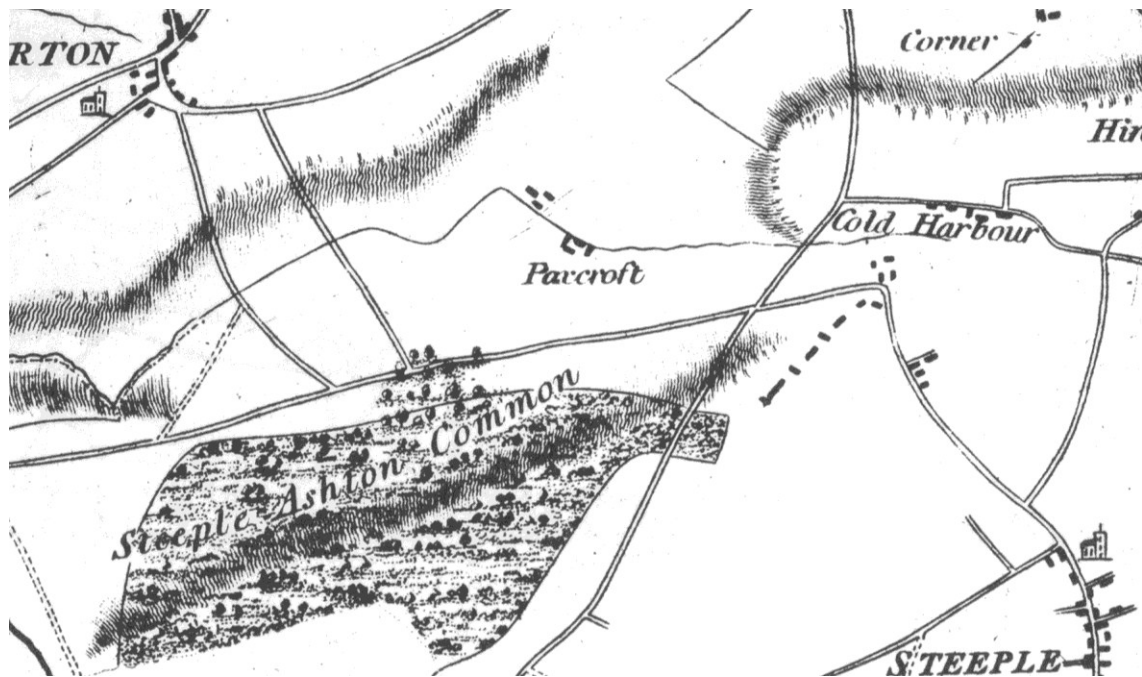


Figure 4 Detail of the 1793 John Rennie Map of central Wiltshire depicting Paxcroft north of Steeple Ashton Common (after Chandler 1998, 66).

Ordnance Survey 1 Inch Map (1817)

The Ordnance Survey 1 inch map shows a different arrangement of buildings at Paxcroft. This source displays at least nine buildings sitting between two linear features. The southern feature is very regular and appears to represent a field boundary, while the northern feature is far less regular and is clearly a watercourse.

Of the nine buildings seen it is likely that the westernmost three represent the location of Lower Paxcroft Farm, being separated from the remaining units by a field boundary. This number of buildings correlates with the later 1818 enclosure award and 1837 tithe award of the area, although their form does not match the plans of these buildings.

Enclosure award 1818

The enclosure awards of Semington and Steeple Ashton contain far greater detail as to the land's division at this time. In this record the landscape is shown to have been enclosed to the north of Paxcroft (Fig 6).



Figure 5 Ordnance Survey 1 inch mapping of Paxcroft abutting the edge of Ashton Common.

The fields are divided by boundaries running from north to south between two axial boundaries running from east to west to form four almost rectangular units of land and a fifth plot which resembles a funnel shape. This funnel abuts what used to be Ashton Common suggesting that it might represent the original access route to the common for settlements north of this location. Along the eastern edge of the funnel-shaped field is a farmstead. If this field was an access route to the common this would place the farmstead on the edge of the common.

West of this farmstead are three cottages, each in a small garden or yard, which might similarly be understood as being located at the edge of the common access route. These are placed such that they appear to end the course of the field boundary marking the common edge. These buildings are *not* placed on the same location as the current Lower Paxcroft Farm which is slightly offset to the north-west. One further farmstead is seen in the east of the study area. Each farmstead appears to be associated with at least one pond.

The Steeple Ashton enclosure award (WSHC A1/210/6EA 107) shows a track-way leading from Lower Paxcroft to the Hilperton road. This is likely to have acted as a common right of way for those living at this point to access what had been the common and remains as a public right of way today.

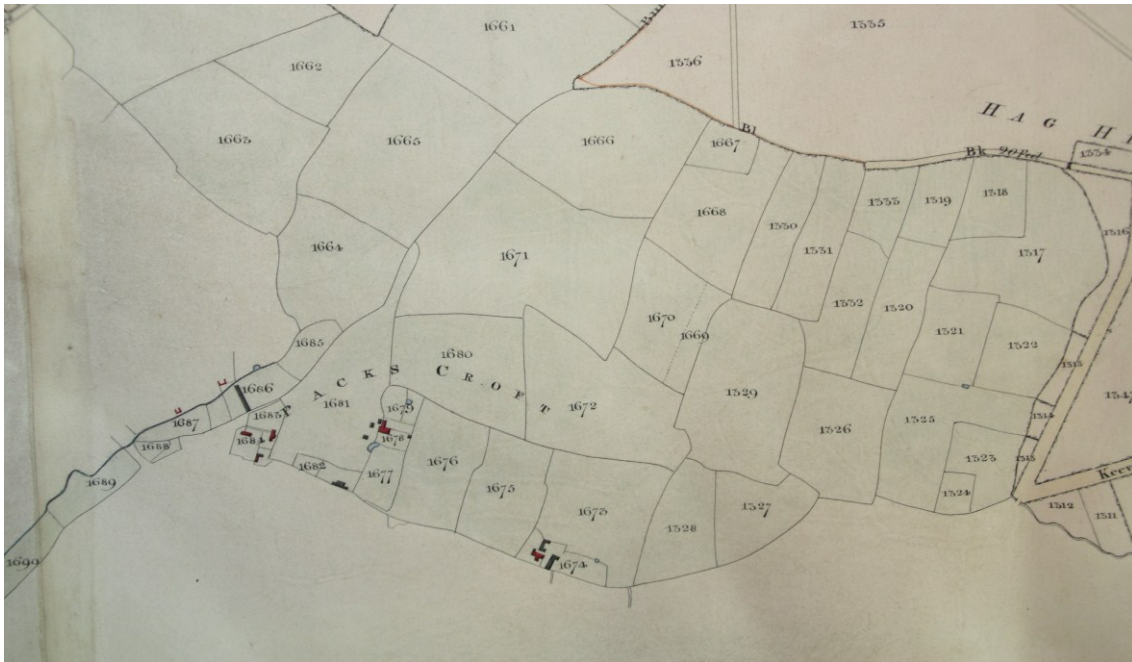


Figure 6 Photograph of part of the 1818 Enclosure Award for Semington indicating that much of the land covered by the survey has already been enclosed by this time (coloured green) (©Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre A1/210/6EA 107).

Tithe awards for Great Hinton (1842), Semington (1837), Whaddon (1840), Hilperton (1838) and Steeple Ashton (1841)

Due to the earthworks' proximity to so many parishes, each tithe award for the area was studied, traced and then merged onto a master plan to allow research of both the field arrangements at this time and the ownership of fields adjacent to and including the study area (Figure 7).

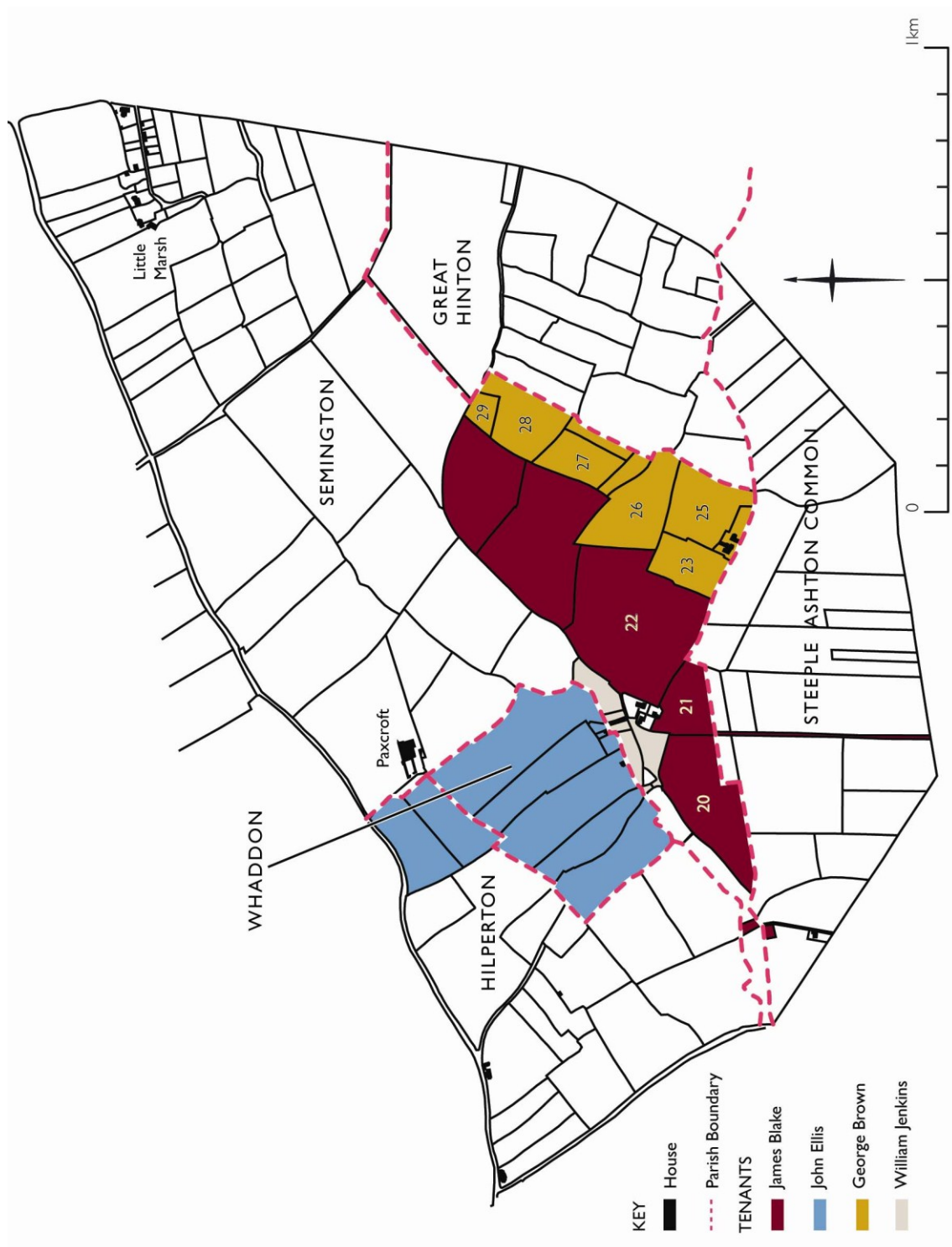


Figure 7 Trace of the tithe maps for the parishes around the earthwork survey area with the fields rented by selected individuals highlighted. This source places the name Paxcroft with the most northerly structure despite this being a new addition since the 1818 enclosure award.

Whaddon's tithe award (1840) is the first map to show the modern location of Lower Paxcroft Farm. This farm was owned by the Reverend Bailey Fisher and rented to John

Ellis, who may be the same individual recorded with this title in the 1841 Whaddon census; however, there is no further mention of this person so he must have left by 1851. It is not certain that the buildings currently named Lower Paxcroft Farm were associated with the Paxcroft name at this time.

Immediately south of this farmstead are several other fields and associated buildings rented by William Jenkins, also from the Reverend Bailey Fisher. William Jenkins was not resident, however.

South of Lower Paxcroft Farm and the land rented by William Jenkins there were three cottages. These structures were held by George Mathew (A), Jon Howell (D) and Parish Officers (B) who, based on the 1841 census record, probably rented this accommodation to the Becketts. A fourth field in this area is recorded as belonging to Thomas Howell (C) who is also recorded in the 1841 census.

The owners of the three southern buildings are not attached to any other parcels of land in the tithe award either as owners or tenants, which would suggest these buildings did not originate as farms. Instead they are more likely to be cottages built on the edge of the common. This might explain why field 16 is owned by the Parish Officers at this time, as it seems reasonable to suggest that land rights would revert back to the parish once the occupants of the land vacated a property erected illegally.

Also depicted in the Semington tithe award is the easternmost complex of buildings which retains its general plan and associated fields as depicted in the 1818 enclosure award. This farmstead, which is recorded as including an orchard, was owned by the Reverend Owen Gethin Williams and his family, who rented the property and the surrounding fields known as Buckers Close (23) Gutter ground (26), Stillmans croft (27) Hagg hill (28) and Little Ground (29) to George Brown. This may be the same George Brown mentioned in the 1841 Little Marsh census, but this is not certain.

The farmstead on the eastern edge of the funnel-shaped field in the enclosure award and boundaries associated with it do not appear on the map so they might have been abandoned or demolished by this time. This land has been amalgamated, into a field named as the Lains (22), and set aside for agricultural purposes along with the fields south west of this (Browns Tynning 20 and Water Trough 21) which are all associated with the Blakes, who rented this land from Ann Long until at least 1871 but not after 1881.

The Semington award is the first record to depict Upper Paxcroft farm, which is absent in the 1818 enclosure award. This indicates that this upper farm was added between 1818 and 1837. The Blakes rented this farmstead which, despite being a relatively new construction, is the only settlement directly associated with the name Pax Croft on the 1841 Semington tithe map.

OS 1st Edition map of 1886

By the time of the Ordnance Survey 1st edition mapping only two buildings remain near the hollow-way, those which were placed west of the field named 'the Lains' in the 1841 tithe award, which are probably the cottages formerly occupied by Thomas Howell and George Matthew. The building owned by Parish Officers had been removed by the time of this record.

Of note in this source is that the Lains still contains trees indicating the original course of the boundaries seen in the 1818 enclosure award. Furthermore, the field boundaries seen running from the north-east to the south-west remain intact, despite the loss of the settlement at this spot. The field boundary running along the southern edge of the survey area is depicted carrying water and containing a pond, alongside the formation of another pond in the south-west corner of field 249.

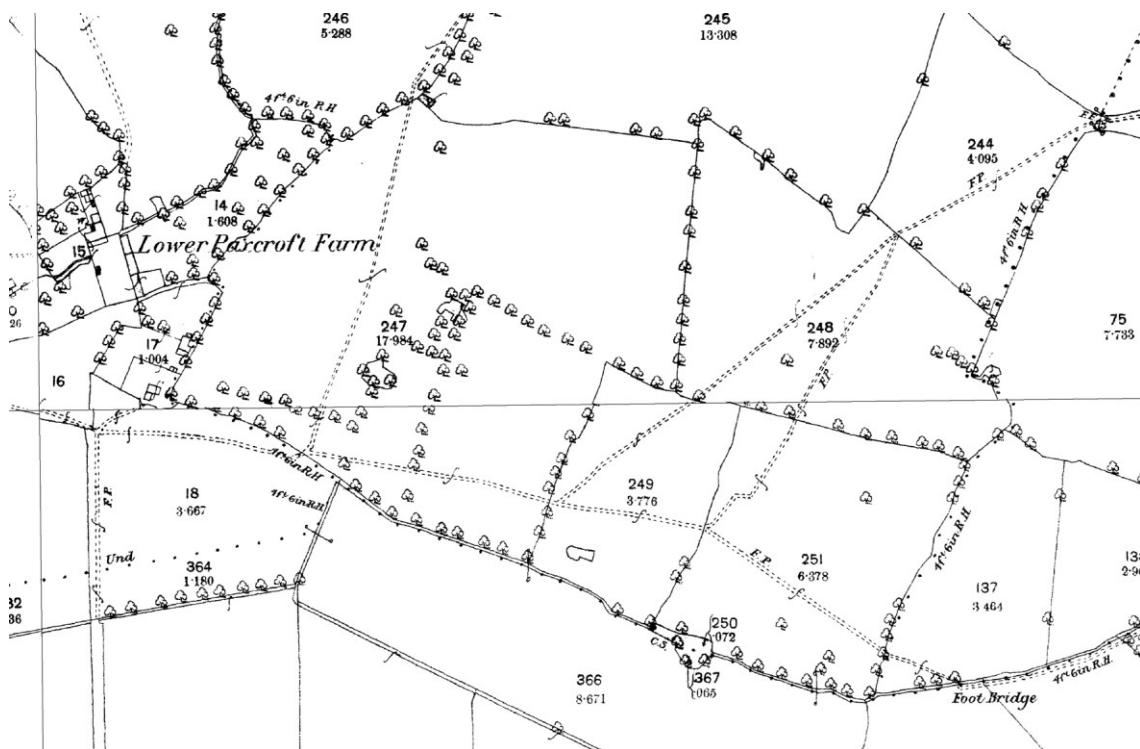


Figure 8 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of the surveyed area, 1886.

OS 2nd edition map of 1900

By the 2nd edition mapping of the region no buildings remain that were recorded in the 1818 enclosure award. After this time only a limited number of field boundaries used to enclose the cottages' associated yards remain. These were also amalgamated by the 3rd edition OS mapping in 1926 and then merged with the neighbouring field by 1971.

Previous research

Numerous distribution maps of medieval settlements based on the Domesday record, earthworks, tithe awards and other sources have been produced for the county of Wiltshire (e.g. Aston 1989). Only in one (Lewis 1994, 174) does Paxcroft appear to be marked as a site. These distribution maps show that the region around Paxcroft contains very linear settlements which were often deserted or suffered shrinkage.

The earthworks were first discovered as part of the West Wiltshire NAIS Pilot Project. This project identified elements of the settlement and its surrounding fields which primarily consisted of several ditches running from north-east to south-west, associated with other banks and ditches appearing to identify rectangular units backing onto a possible hollow-way (Last *et al* 2016, 92).

Lower Paxcroft Farm was listed as a Grade II building in 1988 and was visited by Ordnance Survey staff in 1966, at which time a record of the farm building was created: NRHE 207672 (ST 85 NE 3).

No further archaeological research has been undertaken within the area targeted for analytical earthwork survey, although at least three prehistoric enclosures and three other complexes of field boundaries dating to either the Iron Age or Roman period have been identified north of this area. Romano-British Pottery and Iron Age scatters have been found near this same area (Wiltshire Historic Environment Record numbers: MWII287 and MWII279) while other finds within 1 km of Paxcroft include find-spots of Bronze Age material (WHER numbers: MWII272 and MWII276) which were also located near to two possible Anglo-Saxon grubenhauser (WHER number MWII296) excavated in 2005 (Young 2005).

Other medieval activity has also been recorded within 1 km of Lower Paxcroft Farm typically as ridge and furrow but also as find-spots on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database which lists multiple artefacts, the majority being medieval buckles (Appendix 1), within the vicinity of Paxcroft Farm.

When contextualised with the nearby Anglo-Saxon grubenhauser, Roman, Iron Age and Bronze Age enclosures it is clear that this region has a long, if not continuous, occupation which is likely to have had an agricultural role.

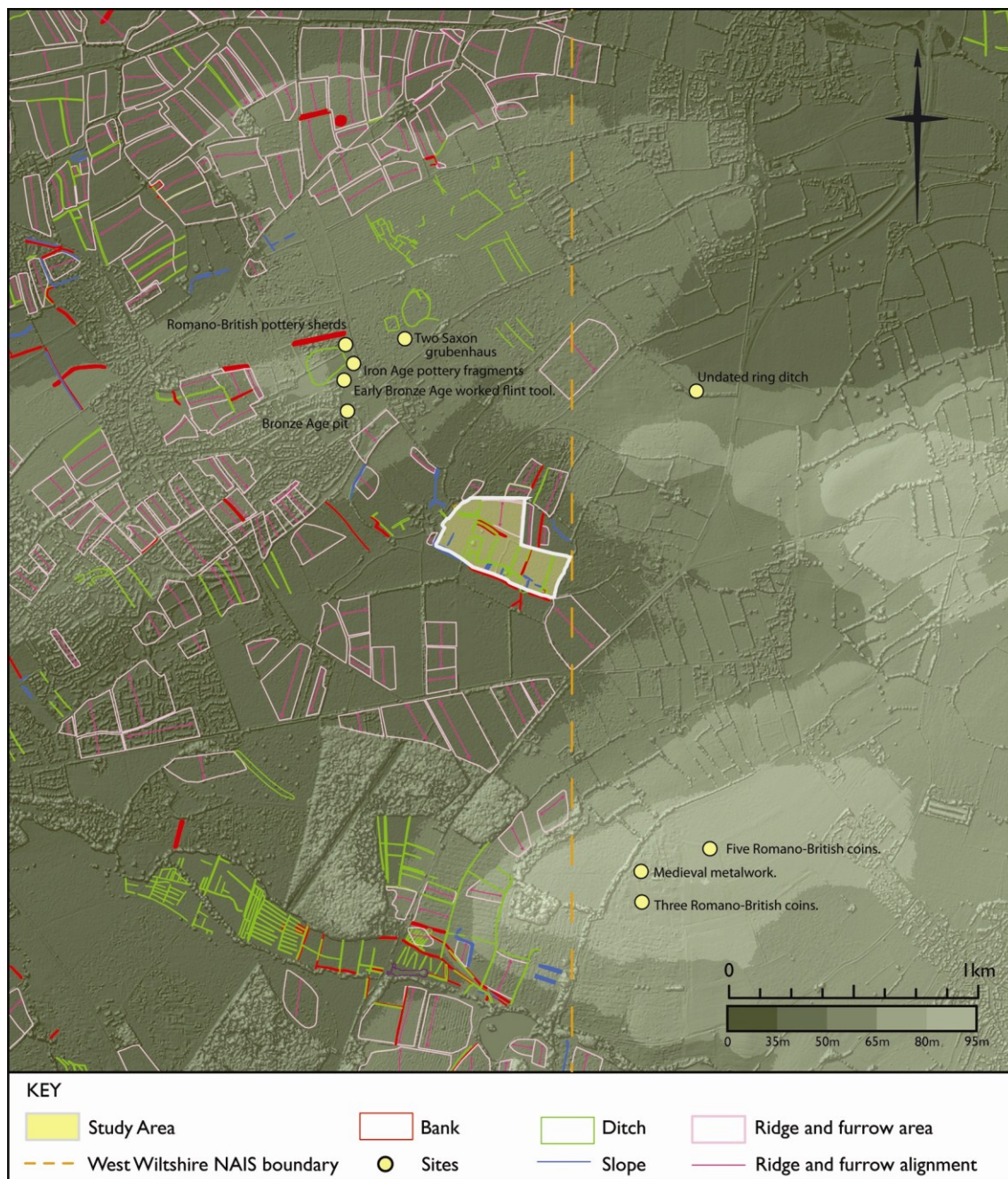


Figure 9 Sites located within a 2km radius of the Paxcroft farm study area during the NMP survey of West Wiltshire, the eastern boundary of which is shown as an orange line; selected sites from Wiltshire's Historic Environment Record are also displayed.

EARTHWORK SURVEY AND INTERPRETATION

Figure 10 (opposite). Lower Paxcroft earthwork survey (reduced from 1:1,000) with additional features recorded from aerial photographs. The green lines represent ridge and furrow.

The site's features are visible as very diffuse earthworks in pasture, which have suffered damage through ploughing that appears to have crossed the features in two different directions. The site is interpreted as a linear interrupted row hamlet containing at least four individual farmsteads made of crofts, tofts and possible extended enclosures which are placed adjacent to two hollow-ways and over an earlier field arrangement

The hollow-ways



Figure 11 Detail in the western part of the survey area.



Figure 10 English Heritage 1:1000 earthwork survey of the area east of Lower Paxcroft Farm reduced to 1:2000

Running for around 500m along the southern edge of the survey area is a deep, 9m-12m wide, irregular hollow-way (labelled X on Figures 10 and 11) which is now followed by a fenced and hedged boundary. The hollow-way is water-filled at its south-eastern end but has been partly in-filled with earth at its north-western end to allow access to a field gate. The depth of the feature varies greatly but is typically over 1m. The feature's western end follows the corner of the field boundary turning northwards. A spread bank (not surveyed) up to 6m wide runs parallel with the eastern section of this feature for almost 360m on its southern side and might mark the original maximum width of this feature. A pond has been inserted into the hollow-way and also cuts the bank south of the hollow way. It is first recorded on 1st edition OS mapping.

Hollow-way X marked the boundary between land used for cultivation and common land prior to its enclosure and also formed the border between Semington and Steeple Ashton before changes to the parish boundaries made it the border of the latter parish and Hilperton. It is unknown whether the hollow-way was already in existence and was chosen to mark the boundary or whether it developed at a later date. Its use as a hollow-way is likely to have ended before 1818 at which point it is mapped as a field boundary.

Running from the north-east to the south-west for 150m from hollow-way X is a ditch that is also broken by a pond (labelled Y on Figures 10 and 11). The earthwork has a maximum depth of 0.5m at its southern end which decreases steadily as it extends north of the pond. Its width varies between 8m and 15m, being wider at its southern end. This feature lies directly over a field boundary which forms the eastern edge of the funnel-shaped field on the 1818 enclosure award. While the ditch certainly represents a 19th-century boundary, it is also likely to have been an earlier hollow-way running past Lower Paxcroft Farm. As with hollow-way X, this was later turned into a boundary.

A further hollow-way ran from the north-west to the south-east. This was partially recorded during the earthwork survey as single scarp V which, on aerial photographs, is visible as continuing the full width of the field as two parallel banks (Figure 10). These form a 4m wide hollow, similar to the other hollow-ways recorded. This runs into a hedged and fenced boundary which also includes a ditch. It is therefore likely that a track-way once ran the length of the area parallel with hollow-way X.

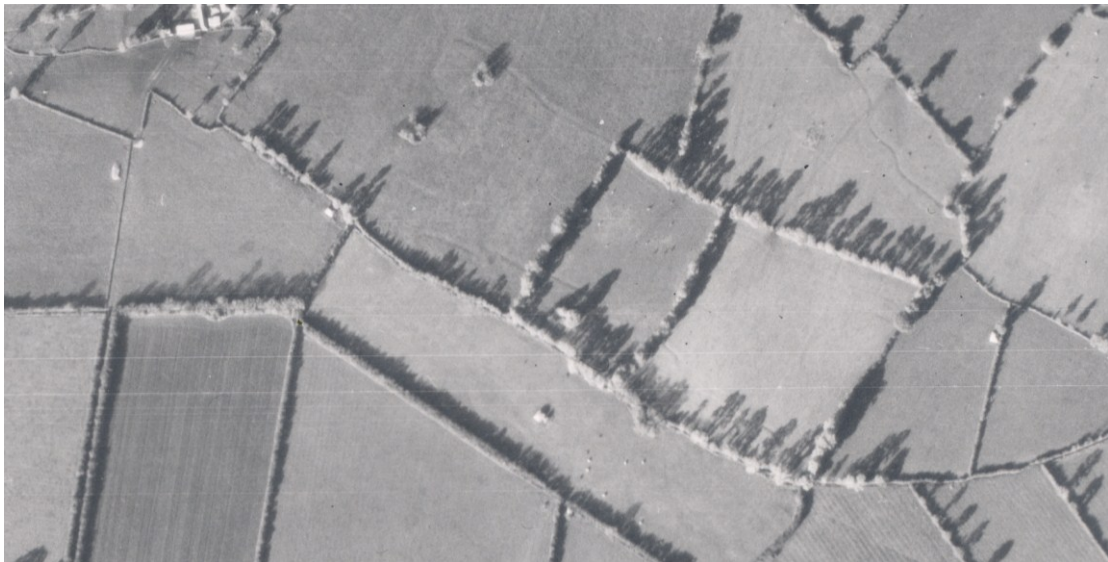


Figure 12 Vertical aerial photograph of the area surveyed showing earthworks surviving in 1946 particularly in the western field (RAF/CPE/UK/1821 / V 4191 04-NOV-1946).

The farmsteads

The majority of earthworks surveyed are likely to represent medieval or early post-medieval farmsteads which typically have a series of features in common. Each area has a croft defined by parallel banks spaced 50m apart which run for approximately 100m from north-east to south-west. Within most of these crofts are the earthwork remains of ridge-and-furrow which runs parallel to the croft boundaries. At the south-western end of each of these crofts are smaller sub-rectangular enclosures defined by ditches, which sit adjacent to hollow-way X. The size and form of these enclosures varies, which implies that they may not have been built in a single planned phase or that they have been subsequently altered. Some of these enclosures contain evidence for buildings, while other earthworks are more likely to represent yards.

The best preserved earthworks of a toft are found in area A (Figure 10). This contains a very clear sub-square platform, measuring 20m from north-west to south-east and 26m transversely, which abuts the hollow-way. It is surrounded on three sides by a 2m-6m wide ditch which has a maximum depth of 0.3m on its eastern and western sides, while its northern edge is far shallower being as little as 0.1m deep. Within the sub-square platform is a small scarp running 9m north-west to south-east, which might indicate that the area was sub-divided internally. A second 0.1m high rectangular platform, 15m long and 4m wide, runs parallel with the northern boundary of enclosure A. The western and eastern ends of this platform are defined by irregular mounds, so that it resembles a three celled building. Area A is likely to be representative of a single farmstead consisting of at least one building which has a, possibly subdivided, farmyard placed between it and the hollow-way and a croft to the north-east. Of note is that area A's western ditch is offset from

the bank defining its croft and appears to cut this earthwork so that it is likely to have been constructed later than the bank.

Area A's earthworks do not correlate with any of the buildings seen within the enclosure or tithe award so it must have been abandoned and destroyed by 1818. However, its northern and eastern boundary ditches appear on the enclosure award. It therefore appears that the farmstead of George Brown incorporated the earlier toft's boundaries to enclose its orchard.

Area B's 0.1m high northern bank also runs along a similar course as the boundary recorded in the enclosure and tithe award. This area differs from area A in that it includes a platform defined by banks, not ditches. This platform measures 11m by 35m. Area B also contains a 0.1m high mound in its north-east corner and a small C-shaped depression, with a maximum depth of 0.15m, in its southern section adjacent to hollow-way X. This probably represents an entrance to the hollow-way.

Area C is defined by a sub-rectangular enclosure whose maximum length is 42m and maximum width is 30m. It is surrounded on three sides by a ditch which is up to 6.3m wide and 0.3m deep on its western side. Its eastern ditch has a similar width but is slighter, being as shallow as 0.1m in depth, and is broken near to the hollow way. Abutting this ditch's north-western corner is a 4m-8m wide bank with a maximum height of 0.2m which runs north-east to south-west for the full 100m of the field. These earthworks are visible in the enclosure award.

Within area C's north-eastern corner is a 0.2m high oval mound which might match the farm building in this area. East of the enclosure is a low platform measuring 6.5 from north-east to south-west and 9.7m from north-west to south-east, labelled K on Figure 10, south of which is a small area similar in dimensions to the eastern most farm building mapped in these same sources. If the very wide hollow between Areas B and C is interpreted as a yard this would suitably fit the plan of the farm buildings rented by George Brown seen in both the enclosure and tithe award, such that Area B's end is marked by the curved bank south-east of K. However, these similarities are in contrast with the utter lack of a platform which might represent the actual farmstead. A scarp divides area C in two, and there are two C-shaped features which are similar to that in area B. Area D might be classed as an extension to a farmstead. Its northern edge is delimited by a scarp and it contains two shallow scarps and a mound abutting hollow-way X.

The earthworks of area E are far more regular and better preserved. Area E comprises a croft defined by a 4.5-7m wide ditch which is cut by a modern pond. The north-eastern corner of this area contains a circular mound and a large ditch in its southern section which is up to 14m wide and over 1m deep, the most defined of any feature recorded and presumably an entrance into hollow-way X. The sub-square enclosure that the mound occupies is approximately 22m wide east-west and also contains a subdivision seen as a 6m wide bank running from north to south. At the eastern edge of area E is a

further rectangular enclosure measuring 33m by 11m, defined by a ditch. This might be considered as a secondary yard associated with area E. However, its northern edge is aligned with the northern edge of area D. Adjoining the western edge of Area E's platform is a further platform likely to represent a slightly raised building. This platform is approximately 16m square, although only its eastern and northern side are complete, the south-eastern corner being totally flattened. Its centre is cut by the current field boundary. This boundary was present in 1818, as shown on the enclosure award. Area F contains spread and irregular earthwork remains which are difficult to interpret but probably represent one or more farmsteads.

Only one other area, area H (Figures 10 and 11), can be matched with buildings recorded in the maps discussed above. Its southern edge is defined by a slope which extends from the pond to a, 8m wide and 0.2m deep, ditch which becomes shallower as it extends north. Together with hollow-ways, these define a sub-square enclosure measuring 52m long by 40m wide. This corresponds with the field layout shown on the 1818 enclosure award. Within this area is a scarp running from north-east to south-west which divides the area into two blocks. Furthermore, the location of a 0.2m deep irregular depression (L on Figure 10) matches the location of a pond recorded in the 1818 enclosure award and which is visible on aerial photographs up until 1995. There are no further earthworks in this area due to the intensive improvement and ploughing of the field seen on aerial photographs (RAF/5823021/V42 14-JUL-1946 and OS/74089/V67 30-MAY-1974).

South of area H and the pond, and east of hollow-way Y are several earthworks which make up area G. These include a rectangular platform measuring 24m by 9m, which contains the faint trace of a mound similar to those seen in areas A, B, C, E and F representing either a farmstead or farm building. This is surrounded on its north, west and east sides by a ditch which varies between 9m and 3.5m in width and between 0.1m and 0.3m in depth. This forms a dog-leg on its north-western side. South of the rectangular platform within the boundary is a C-shaped shaped depression adjacent to the hollow-way, wider than any of the similar features in areas A and B. It has a maximum depth of 0.25m. This might represent either a yard or an entrance into the hollow-way.

There are no earthworks in Area J though a linear feature is visible on aerial photographs and a building was recorded here in 1818 (enclosure award).

DISCUSSION

Prior to the West Wiltshire NAIS Project, the earthworks near Lower Paxcroft Farm had not been the focus of any archaeological investigation. Analytical earthwork survey combined with documentary evidence has made it clear that the earthworks represent a settlement, some of whose buildings survived in to the 19th century. This settlement took the form of an interrupted row hamlet fronting onto a hollow-way which served to mark the divide between arable and common land. It is now possible to comment on the extent of the settlement's preservation, its date of origin, form, the possible reason for its location and then its abandonment.

While hollow-ways X and Y remain in part as deep earthworks, the majority of earthworks recorded were far slighter and have suffered a considerable degree of damage since the settlement's abandonment. Yet the earthworks include platforms with mounds that are probably the remains of medieval buildings. These are almost exclusively recorded in areas mapped as showing no occupation in the 1818 enclosure award or any other subsequent records. Each of the fields has been subjected to ploughing in the 20th century as seen in aerial photographs and the presence of ridge-and-furrow would suggest this has been the case since the medieval period.

It seems that the structures abandoned earlier were left to decay, thereby leaving large earthwork features, while a more concerted effort was applied to flattening the more recently abandoned buildings. Therefore the foundations of older features have survived better while buildings recorded in more recent maps have suffered greater damage.

Origins

It is hard to specify the settlement's original date of construction. However, the Paxcroft name has been associated with these fields since as early as 1249 and three 'cottages' are recorded in 1254. There is no mention of Lower Paxcroft in the Domesday Book (1086) and the relatively ordered nature of the settlement along the hollow-way would argue against a pre-Conquest date (Jones and Page 2006, 91). Therefore a medieval origin, at some point before 1249, seems very likely for site's first phase of occupation. Abandonment occurred before 1817.

Settlement form and location

The survey area appears to be divided into at least eight regularly divided tofts and crofts only five of which have remains which definitely represent buildings while a sixth farmstead remains as a bounded area adjoining hollow-way Y. However these features

represent a palimpsest of remains and do not represent the plan of the settlement at a single moment.

Current evidence best supports the suggestion that the settlement is made of at least four farmsteads, areas A, C, E and H, two probable farmsteads, F and G, and that at least three of these had enclosures added to them, areas, B, D, and I. Further modification of the settlement might be shown by area H which appears to be constructed in what was probably a croft associated with area G.

It is clear that the site represents a single row settlement that is likely to have been built after the villages of Hilperton, Semington and Steeple Ashton, which are parochial centres. This, coupled with the size of the settlement suggests that the Paxcroft earthworks are best understood as a secondary hamlet. Its plan would fit neatly into Van Bath's category d of row plans (as outlined in Roberts 1987, 46), being a settlement made of strips with scattered dwellings. This form is believed to have developed from the 8th or 9th century onwards, often in colonising contexts.

This hamlet form is similar to the earthwork remains of the hamlet at Thornden in Withington (Dyer 2002, 18) which also has evidence for platforms with mounds and yards adjacent to a hollow-way. This latter settlement had similarly variable tofts and has been suggested to have grown in a series of phases, which would also be comparable with this site.

However, while the tofts vary in form, many of the crofts associated with them are of equal dimensions. The ridge-and-furrow may underlie the crofts, as seen in Area B, but the poor survival of the earthworks means that this is not certain. If this is the case it might be suggested that the hamlet developed on top of the field system with each family being allotted a regular plot of land in which to place their farmstead.

Similar occurrences have been noted, as at Toft in Cambridgeshire (Oosthuizen 1997, 45) where a seemingly planned rectangular settlement is suggested to have been defined using a pre-existing series of regularly spaced furlongs. The hamlet therefore shows a degree of planning in its allocation of land.

The hamlet is sited on a common edge, on a route-way and beside a water course. The placement of settlements along track-ways which border common land is frequently seen near Paxcroft. Other examples include Cold Harbour/Blett where farms are placed by common land and also at Little Marsh where a small settlement lies along a length of track-way similar to that at Paxcroft on a common edge.

Abandonment

What can be stated is that the hamlet lasted until the early-19th century. There is no evidence for a single wave of desertion. Therefore, if each croft represents a single

farmstead with a separate family the abandonment of this site should be interpreted as a gradual decline which started before, and continued until, the end of the 19th century.

The nature of the site's decline is supported by the digging of ponds within the survey area. In two cases these have been cut into hollow-ways so that these features could no longer have been used as track-ways. However these ponds were clearly used by the farmsteads shown on the 1818 enclosure award. It must therefore be assumed that their creation, to the detriment of the hollow-ways, did not mark a terminal blow to the settlement. Instead, their creation must have brought benefits to the settlement, which no longer needed the hollow-ways, possibly because of a shift to dairy farming.

If the farmsteads at this site were placed to exploit the interface between arable and common land then it must be accepted that this was an advantage that disappeared with the enclosure of land by 1818. After enclosure access to what remained of Ashton common appears to have been limited to a single track running south from Lower Paxcroft Farm. While not a death blow in itself, enclosure and changes in agricultural practice coupled with the decline of Steeple Ashton's market from the 16th century (Crittall 1965, 199) would have made the site less favourable to occupy.

This might explain why the cottages south of Lower Paxcroft Farm are the last to be abandoned as if they were built more recently they might never have had a right to the use the common (Mingay 1997, 126 citing William Marshall 1788, 63) This is supported by the majority of their trades listed within the census records, being non-agricultural.

FURTHER WORK

This survey has recorded the form and general layout of the settlement but details of phasing are unclear. Geophysical survey might reveal further details of buried features and could identify the buried remains of domestic and agricultural buildings where excavation could uncover dating evidence. A further survey of earthworks to the south of hollow-way X would provide contextual information, though there is unlikely to be further settlement in this area.

METHODOLOGY

The site was surveyed by Edward Caswell, Elaine Jamieson and Nicky Smith at a scale of 1:1000 using Trimble R8 survey grade GNSS receivers. The GPS data was processed using Trimble Geomatics Office software. The position of the base station was adjusted to the National Grid Transformation OSTN02 via the Trimble VRS Now Network RTK delivery service. This uses the Ordnance Survey's GNSS correction network (OSNet) and gives a stated accuracy of 0.01-0.015m per point. Additional survey data was added using a Trimble Geo7X hand held GNSS receiver and processed using Trimble's K-Matic V.1.6.1 software.

This data was downloaded and transferred into AutoCAD 2008. The survey plot was completed in the field using graphical survey methods. A digital hachured plan of the final survey was produced in AutoCAD software and completed using Adobe Illustrator.

Aerial mapping data recorded as part of the West Wiltshire NAIS Project was added to the archive plan. Mapping and recording for this was undertaken by the Aerial Investigation & Mapping team based in York and Swindon according to the methodology established for the National Mapping Programme (NMP).

Desk-based study involved a review of the aerial data available for four square kilometres surrounding the site. It also included a review of all sites within 1km of Paxcroft Farm recorded by the Wiltshire Historic Environment Record, Portable Antiquities Scheme and English Heritage Archive. Visits to the Wiltshire Record Office provided additional background detail on the history of Hilperton, Steeple Ashton, Semington, Whaddon and Paxcroft.

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All census records were accessed via www.Ancestry.co.uk those referenced in the text have the following reference numbers:

1841 census record: Class: HO107; Piece: 1188; Book: 10; Civil Parish: Steeple Ashton; County: Wiltshire; Enumeration District: 14; Folio: 13;

1851 census record: Class: HO107; Piece: 1840; Folio: 238;

1861 census record: Class: RG 9; Piece: 1294; Folio: 143;

1871 census record: Class: RG10; Piece: 1918; Folio: 60 and
Class: RG10; Piece: 1918; Folio: 61

1881 census record: Class: RG11; Piece: 2046; Folio: 79

They were last accessed 26th November 2014

APPENDIX I

Summarised results table of all artefacts found near Paxcroft farm currently recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme website database available at

ID	Object Type	Classification	Broad Period	Parish	NGR	Thumbnail No.	Discovery Method	URI
643886	AXE	flint polished axe	NEOLITHIC	Semington	ST9060	489121	Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/643886
611727	VESSEL	Leg	MEDIEVAL	Semington	ST9060	467555	Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/611727
611720	STRAP FITTING		MEDIEVAL	Steeple Ashton	ST8957		Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/611720
611712	BUCKLE		MEDIEVAL	Semington	ST9060	467559	Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/611712
611694	BUCKLE		MEDIEVAL	Semington	ST9060	467557	Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/611694
611658	BUCKLE	Double loop	MEDIEVAL	Semington	ST9060	467556	Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/611658
548655	SWORD	Pommel	MEDIEVAL	Semington	ST9060	418698	Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/548655
548645	UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT		UNKNOWN	Semington	ST9060	418686	Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/548645
545196	BUCKLE	Double loop	MEDIEVAL	Semington	ST9060	418677	Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/545196
323170	COIN		IRON AGE	Keovil	ST9157	252502	Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/323170
278154	BUCKLE	Annular	MEDIEVAL	Great Hinton	ST9159	230031	Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/278154
220335	BADGE		MEDIEVAL	Hilperton	ST8759	176738	Metal detector	http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/220335



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