

# Discovering Hampton Gay: the Landscape of a Ruined Manor House

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Photos of Hampton Gay. Left: ruined mill . Centre: ruins of the manor house. Right: ruined cottage near Manor House Farm



## Introduction and Aims

Hampton Gay lies in the northern part of the modern parish, in north-east Oxfordshire. The manor house survives as a ruin and is surrounded by the village earthworks. Although it is visible from adjacent footpaths, there is no access and there has been little research on the multi-period landscape. I have addressed the gap with this research, in order to assist public understanding of the manor house and village.

## Methods

Data was gathered from: PastScape, Oxfordshire History Centre, Lidar from the Environment Agency, Historic England Archives, Victoria County Histories, Ordnance Survey, Bodleian Library as well as a several site visits. I transcribed earthwork features from Lidar onto a Google map background (see drawing centre)

## Conclusions

The manor ruins, the deserted medieval earthworks and St Giles church and all designated as nationally important heritage sites, but there is more to their history than is recorded in the listing descriptions. It is recorded as a 'deserted medieval village' but a better description would be 'shrunken settlement', with only two farms and the church surviving on the site of the village. The population of the parish has fluctuated heavily and has always depended on the manorial estate. My research shows there is more information available, which would enrich our knowledge of the village's history.

## References

- Bagwell, J. (2001) Manor Cottage Hampton Gay Oxfordshire Archaeological Watching Brief Report. Oxford Archaeological Unit: Oxford.
- Lobel, M.D. (1959) *Parishes: Hampton Gay. A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 6*. Available at: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol6/pp152-159> [Accessed on 01/07/2018]
- PastScape (2018) *Hampton Gay Manor House*. Available at: <http://www.pastscape.org.uk> [Accessed on 03/06/2018]



Archaeological features at Hampton Gay drawn from historic OS Maps and LiDAR. Features include ridge and furrow earthworks (parallel lines in the fields), fields and buildings including St Giles church, the manor house, farm buildings, paper mill. Map by author, based on Google Maps ©.

## A Rural Backwater?

Hampton Gay is in a remote rural location, even though it is only lies 12 miles from Oxford. It is in a bend of the River Cherwell and is accessed by local lanes. The river around Hampton Gay is too shallow for navigation, and the construction of weirs for the mill from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards would also have obstructed boat journeys. Although transport was improved by the construction of the Oxford canal from 1790, there was no direct link to the village. A proposed 'London Western' canal proposal in 1792 would have improved communications, but was never built. The railway is a defining characteristic in the modern landscape of the site, but again had direct link and was not an accessible travel option.

## The Rural Economy

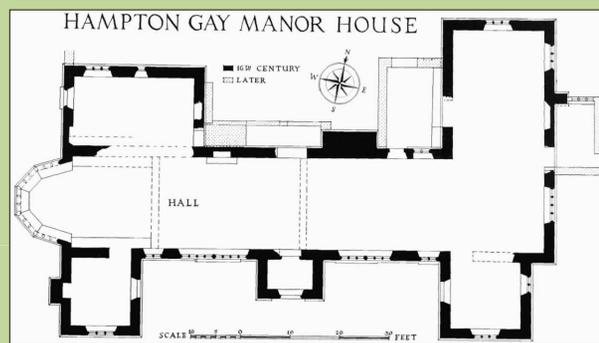
The overall economic background to the village of Hampton Gay is agrarian, this can be inferred by the surviving ridge and furrow earthworks. The survival of ridge and furrow suggests a lack of farming success with a failure to improve agriculture from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.. The lack of agricultural wealth was historic as shown by the documented poor harvest of 1596, which was a fundamental cause of the unsuccessful Oxfordshire Rising. Fields were enclosed and converted to pasture for sheep in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, thus preserving the ridge and furrow. Sheep rearing was an attempt to exploit the success of the wool trade. A corn mill was present in Hampton Gay as early as 1086, which is not unusual for small villages in Oxfordshire, but was converted into a paper mill by John Allen in 1681. The business would have supplemented agricultural income and was successful enough to be rebuilt three times after damage by fires.

## The Manor House

The manorial estate changed hands many times after the construction of the manor house by the Barry family in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, though there is little change to the building afterwards. The building retains, for the most part, the Elizabethan 'E' shaped plan, with 3.5 storeys including a basement level, made from coursed rubble and freestone dressings. The front entrance is battlemented but otherwise the house has gabled roofs. The manor house, now ruined, now lies within holding of 17<sup>th</sup> century Manor Farm.



Detail from map of Oxfordshire, showing houses in Hampton Gay that were later deserted (C.Smith 1801)



Plan of the Manor House ruins (Lobel 1959)

### 1086: Domesday Book

First recording of village. 11 houses documented.

### Late 16<sup>th</sup> Century:

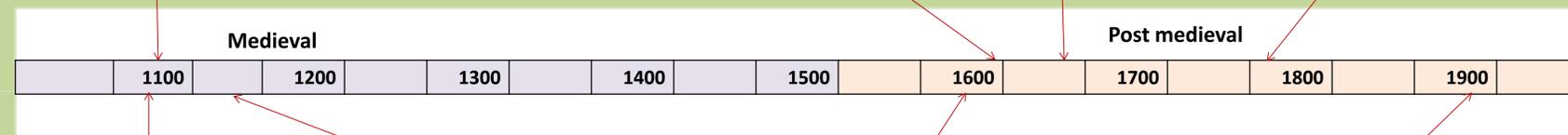
The Barry family build the Elizabethan manor house

### 1681: Mill

changes from producing flour to producing paper.

### 1768-72: St Giles Church rebuilt

upon the earlier church foundations. It includes a Norman style west facing doorway



### 1074: Grant of Tithes

Church present, same location as the standing St Giles is likely.

### 1137: Hampton estates owned by Robert de Gay

who lends his name to Hampton Gay.

### 1596: Oxfordshire Rising

Notable Agrarian Revolt led by villagers James Bradshaw and Bartholomew Steer. Unsuccessful but leads to Parliamentary action to change rates of enclosure

### 1887: Fires

Paper mill hit by second fire and closes. Manor engulfed in third fire and is not rebuilt.