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MEDIEVAL MAXEY

Introduction

Maxey is part of a landscape of national archaeological importance, which is focused on the gravel terraces of the Welland river system. Prior to the first systematic drainage and reclamation schemes in post-medieval times, several river channels meandered towards the fens, to create a wide river ‘delta’ interspersed with low gravel islands.

The solid geology consists of Oxford Clay and Kellaways Sand and Clay, overlain by drift deposits of river terrace sand and gravel. Around 10,000 years ago the late Pleistocene (Devensian) - Early Holocene (Flandrian) saw the development of anastomosing channel system (two or more interconnected channels that enclose flood basins) in the Lower Welland Valley.

Maxey occupied a strategic location, being situated on one of these gravel islands, with limestone to the south and the wet fenland to the east.

The first settlers would have been able to inhabit and cultivate dry ground, harvest the fowl and fish of the wetlands, and use the pastures for seasonal grazing.

Evidence suggests that occupation began in the Early Neolithic period, with a large number of ceremonial and ritual monuments dating from 4000 BC. Occupation continued throughout the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods.

Neolithic

- Two cursus monuments, from the Latin for 'racecourse', long tracks or avenues with parallel banks and external ditches and closed at the either end by further banks and ditches. They may be some kind of processional way and are sometimes associated with long barrows.
- A causewayed enclosure, an enclosure with one or more irregular circuits of ditch interrupted by numerous gaps or causeways.
- Henge monuments, circular or near-circular enclosures defined by a ditch with outer bank, with either a single entrance or a pair of opposed entrances. They may have had a ritual function.

Bronze Age

- Round barrows, circular burial mounds consisting of an earthen or earth and rubble domed structure often with a surrounding ditch and sometimes an outer bank. The mound would usually have covered inhumation or cremation remains on, or just below, the original ground surface. These are the most common prehistoric remains in Britain as individual barrows, or clustered together in barrow cemeteries. Most date from the early and middle Bronze Age period.

Iron Age

- A pit alignment, a linear arrangement of pits, typical of the middle and later Bronze Age into the Iron Age in southern and central England, originally forming a boundary feature, probably in conjunction with the spoil dug from them raised up as a bank to one side.
King Street (Durobrivae – Ancaster in Lincolnshire), a branch of Ermine Street (London - York), runs north-south through Maxey parish. (West Deeping has developed along this route).

Lolham Bridges are located on this road, to the south of Lolham House. They are supposed to have been originally constructed by the Romans when they built the road.

Lolham Bridges were built in the 17th century. They consist of 5 bridges which do not go across a river but across meadows liable to flood (inscriptions of 1651 – construction; inscription of 1721 - repairs) (HER 00624).

Aerial photograph: Lolham Bridges

The Roman Car Dyke lies 2km to the north-east of the village. This water channel was traditionally thought to represent a Roman canal stretching from the River Witham to the Cam. It was proved to form part of a late 1st or early 2nd century fen drainage system. The dyke is not continuous, being interrupted at intervals by causeways, and functions as a catchwater system, diverting water from the uplands to the west into east-flowing streams. It has been suggested that the dyke may have acted as a boundary of an imperial Fen estate created under the Emperor Adrian in the early part of the 2nd century.
The Medieval Poly-focal Settlement

Maxey is not mentioned in the Domesday Book of AD 1086. However, it is referred to as Macuseige in AD 965, meaning “Macus’ (Scandinavian personal name) Island” from the Old Norse ‘ey’ ending, as Maxey village occupies a gravel islands.

By the 12th century a number of knights were recorded as holding fees in Maxey. During the 13th and 14th centuries, land within the parish was held by Roger de Torpel, Robert de Corvill and Eleanor, Queen of England.

Maxey, historically in the Soke of Peterborough, appears to have developed as a ‘poly-focal’ settlement during the medieval period, with dispersed nuclei of occupation:

- The castle to the north (now known as Castle End).
- The outlying manorial centres at Lolham and Nunton (now marked by Lolham Hall and Nunton House, respectively), to the west.
- The hamlet of Deeping Gate to the east.

**Deeping Gate**

The hamlet of Deeping Gate is located to the north-east of Maxey, on the right bank of the River Welland. Is first recorded as Depynggate in 1390 meaning “Road to Deeping” (Old Norse Gata, meaning ‘street’). By tradition, it has been associated with Maxey from the earliest times, and most of the land was held of the manor of Maxey. The Abbey of Peterborough had a toll at Deeping, which was repeatedly confirmed by royal charters.

**Nunton**

The hamlet of Nunton is first recorded as Nunnetun in 963 meaning “Nunna’s Farm”. It was situated in the fields between Maxey Church and the low marshy land in the south of the parish. It comprised 11 taxpayers in 1301 and 1524, and had shrunk by c 1720 to 4 families. Slight disturbance is visible around Nunton House but there are no remains of desertion (HER 00638). Nunton House is a late 17th century Grade 2 Listed Building with 19th century alterations.

**Lolham**

The hamlet of Lolham, first recorded as Lehalm(e) in 1150 from the Old English hleo for “protection” and helm for “cattle-shed”, meaning “sheltering shed”, was located near the junction of King Street and the branch road to Maxey, where Lolham Hall stands. It comprised 12 taxpayers in 1301 and in 1377 it was taxed with Maxey and Nunton. In 1512 6 houses and 100 acres of arable land still survived. There were several different owners and in 1681 Fitzwilliam of Milton brought the manor. The settlement had shrunk by c. 1720 to 1 family. Slight disturbance around Lotham Hall indicates possible desertion but there are no outstanding remains (HER 01014). Medieval pottery has been recovered in the general area.

Lolham Hall is a late 15th century Grade 2 listed Building with 18th century alterations. During the 16th and 17th century the manor was held by the Claypoles who were related to Cromwell through marriage. It was then sold to the Fitzwilliams.
The Castle

According to the sources, in 1374 a license was granted to Sir William de Thorpe, Chief Justice of the King's Bench, who owned land within the parish, to fortify the manor house at Castle End and convert it into a castle. Maxey Castle was originally a fortified moated manor house. In the 15th century Margaret, mother of Henry VII, is known to have lived there. The manor continued to be passed within the royal lineage until 1561, when Elizabeth I granted it to William Cecil (Lord Burghley). In 1625, it was sold to Lord Fitzwilliam and it has remained in the Fitzwilliam estate ever since. By the mid-16th century, English poet and antiquarian Leland reported that much of the castle was already in ruins.

The Churches

Church of St Peter

The Church of St Peter was built to serve the needs of the hamlets of Lolham and Nunton; hence its location away from the core of the modern village. Built on an artificial mound, it was erected in the early 12th century, as indicated by the tower, which is the oldest part of the building. However, fragments of tombstones excavated in the churchyard and preserved in the church indicate that a Saxon church may have existed on the current site. In addition, references are made to the church and Makesey Field in the 10th century, and in 1013 the parish of Makesey, the manors and church are said to have laid to waste by the Danes. Accordingly, the church was repaired to allow worship to continue, until rebuilding began a century later. The building style is very similar to that of the Norman church at Castor (St. Kyneburgh), which was built around the same time, possibly by the same architect (HER 02242).

Free Chapel of St Mary (Deeping Gate)

Near the southern end of Deeping St. James Bridge is the site of the medieval free chapel of St. Mary known from historic and cartographic evidence. A free chapel was not subject to the jurisdiction of the ordinary, having been founded by the king or by a subject specially authorized. The chapel might have served the needs of Deeping Gate. It was founded by the Anable family between 1370 and 1402. Records show that it passed into the hands of the Cecil’s at Burghley in 1552. A lease agreement from 1632 states “all of which premises anciently belonged to the Chappell of Deepingate” suggests that the Chapel no longer existed by this time. The O.S map series 1886 indicates the former chapel being located immediately south of the Old Black Bull P.H. There are no remains of this former chapel (HER 02254).

Chapel of the Blessed Virgin (Castle End)

The medieval chapel of the Blessed Virgin to the S of Maxey Castle at Castle End was extant in 1549. Its foundation is unrecorded. No remains of the chapel have been found and its site is unconfirmed. It is likely that the chapel was built to serve Castle End (HER 02251).
Early Medieval (Anglo Saxon) archaeological evidence
The Layout from the Archaeology

Early Medieval (Anglo-Saxon)

There is little doubt that settlement and agriculture were well established at Maxey in later Saxon and Norman times. Recent archaeological excavations at Castle End and along West End Road have revealed well-preserved sequences of Early Medieval settlement remains dating from the Middle Saxon period (mid - 7th century to mid - 9th century).

The distinctive locally-produced pottery found at Maxey lends its name to a type recorded throughout the region, the so-called ‘Maxey Ware’, AD 650-850, a medium-hard to hard fabric with the surface and core colours ranging from black through grey to red-brown. The clay was tempered with crushed shell and sand, vessels were coil-made with surfaces finished by washing, giving a soft soapy feel). In some parts of eastern England the transition to the Middle Saxon period was marked in the pottery sequence by the introduction of new handmade pottery traditions. The best known of these is Ipswich ware found throughout East Anglia and along the east coast. Southern Maxey ware is found in southern Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire into Bedfordshire. Northern Maxey ware is found mainly in central and northern Lincolnshire. Examples were traded to York and Nottingham, all on navigable rivers.

A Middle Saxon settlement was excavated in the 1960s to the west of the village, in advance of gravel extraction (OS Map of 1967-78). There were at least seven rectangular post-built structures and various boundary ditches and pits (HER 02175).

Further evidence for Middle Saxon settlement was identified at Stepping Lane (HER 02159), where extensive deposits of pottery were found.

At Lolham Hall several sherds of Anglo-Saxon pottery were retrieved (HER 02151a).

Investigations carried out at 37 West End Street in 2009 identified a large Late Saxon pit containing early-mid 11th century pottery and a significant amount of cattle, horse and pig bones. These remains may possibly relate to the settlement in the Castle End area (HER 52002 and 52003).

In 2010 an archaeological evaluation undertaken on land at Wisteria Farm revealed pits and ditches dating to the late Saxon and medieval periods (HER 52260 and 52261).

The Coal Yard site excavated in 1999 produced evidence for occupation dating from the 11th to the 15th century, including a good assemblage of Stamford and developed Stamford ware. Occupation consisted of timber buildings and a series of deep quarry pits. During the early post-medieval period the site was levelled and returned to cultivation (HER 50591).

An archaeological field evaluation undertaken at Willow Brook Farm in 2003 revealed surfaces, a hearth, stone walls, ditches, post holes, and pits, pointing to occupation from the Late Saxon period to the early post-medieval period along the street front on Castle End Road (HER 51250).

Investigations at Lyndon Farm in 1997 revealed an extensive area of Roman settlement. Evidence for continuous occupation of the site into the early Anglo Saxon period comprised a dispersed collection of hand-made pottery that was recovered from pits, gullies, and post holes across the site. A fragment of loom weight, a bone needle, and red deer antler were also assigned an early Anglo Saxon date. The presence of a few sherds of Maxey Ware or St Neots ware indicated middle to late Saxon settlement in the vicinity. The furrows of medieval strip cultivation were identified across the site (HER 50497 and HER 51130).
Medieval archaeological evidence
Medieval

During the medieval period settlement developed around the earlier foci, as suggested by investigations carried out at West End Road and Castle End.

During investigations carried out at the rear of 19 West End Road in 2005 and 2006 several phases of activity were identified. Activity was consistent with continuous domestic occupation along the street frontage, dating from the 12th century and spanning the whole of the medieval and post-medieval periods (PCC HER 51411).

At Wisteria Farm the 2010 investigations revealed archaeological features dating to the late Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods. The latter was characterised by the presence of ditched rear plots and rubbish pits, confirming medieval settlement in this part of Maxey. The focus of medieval occupation lay along the West End Road with arable fields visible as a headland and ridge-furrow extending across the adjacent site at 37 West End Road to the rear (PCCHER 51658).

The archaeological excavation undertaken at Willow Brook Farm during 2004 revealed evidence for Anglo-Saxon and medieval activity (pits, post holes and small ditches) within the backyards of properties along Castle End Road (an area focused on a large medieval moated site). The settlement declined between 1350 and 1450. (PCCHER 51372).

The Layout from the Maps

Enclosure

The Enclosure Map of 1819 shows the vestiges of the large manorial open fields, with names including Barr Dike Field, the Great Clay Field and South Field around the village. The remains of medieval strip fields survive in pasture as earthwork ‘ridge and furrow’. There are earthworks in pasture indicative of early quarrying, ponds, boundaries, lanes, and settlement, off Castle End Road, around the castle site, and at Nunton.

These contrast with the smaller narrow closes of 1-2 acres situated around cottages and probably used to grow herbs and vegetables and secure stock. Medieval or early post-medieval long thin property plots are preserved in present boundaries running from the High Street, Castle End, and West End Road.

The toft refers to the land on which the house was built, the croft is the adjoining plot of land used for pasture or arable. Generally seen as narrow parallel strips of land.

The 18th and 19th century Enclosure caused many changes, including the re-routing of High Street from the south to the north of the church and the straightening of several boundaries. At this time road names changed, including Pound Lane becoming Castle End Road and Stepping Lane (deriving from the stepping stones) changing to West End Road.

OS 1st and 2nd Editions

The 1886-1889 and 1900-1901 Ordnance Survey map shows that Maxey was relatively untouched by Victorian development. The Congregational Chapel was built, farmyards expanded into courtyard complexes, and a few cottages constructed and others extended. However, the settlement would have been characterised by groupings of stone and thatched, and Collyweston stone slated buildings along narrow roads, with wide grass verges that were less regular and more open than today, incorporating bends and turns.
Post-War

The village was still largely untouched by development until the Second World War when the first quarries were opened to provide aggregates for the airfields. Immediately after the war new houses were built, although it was the 1960s and 1970s that saw real change. During this period, a number of old cottages were demolished and replaced by infill houses. The great majority of these new homes were constructed in modern bricks with concrete roof tiles, so ending the tradition of stone, thatch and Collyweston slate that had been almost the only materials until the 20th century.
Maxey Castle

List entry Number: 1008454
Date first scheduled: 05-Jan-1995
PCCHER: 00639

Maxey Castle is located at Castle End, on the N edge of the village of Maxey. It represents a scheduled moated site with associated enclosures and a fishpond.

Around 6,000 moated sites are known in England. They consist of wide ditches, often or seasonally water-filled, partly or completely enclosing one or more islands of dry ground on which stood domestic or religious buildings. In some cases the islands were used for horticulture. The majority of moated sites served as prestigious aristocratic residences, with the provision of a moat intended as a status symbol rather than a practical military defence. The peak period during which moated sites were built was between about 1250 and 1350, and by far the greatest concentration lies in central and eastern parts of England. However, moated sites were built throughout the medieval period, are widely scattered throughout England and exhibit a high level of diversity in their forms and sizes. They form a significant class of medieval monument and are important for the understanding of the distribution of wealth and status in the countryside.

The history of Maxey Castle is well documented and indicates that occupation was relatively short-lived. The castle is a late medieval moated site with outworks to the north and north east and an associated fishpond to the south east. A licence to fortify the moated manor was granted to William de Thorpe in 1374. By the mid-16th century, however, Leland observed that parts of the site were already ruinous. A 16th century illustration of the castle shows it with a tall central tower or keep and a number of earthwork banks, the outer flanked by a ditch parallel to the NE angle of the moat.

The moated site includes a square central island, measuring 50m across, which is surrounded by a wet moat on the SW, NW, and NE sides. The remaining side, the SE, has been largely in-filled to the level of the external ground surface. Where the moat is open it is about 16m wide. The ditches have been cleared of silt recently using a machine, and the up-cast material dumped on the island. As a result, the ditches are now permanently wet. There is a counterscarp bank, between 6m and 10m wide, on the NW and NE sides of the moat. A 5m wide outlet channel at the E end of the SE side drains into the boundary ditch flanking the road. The area to the north of the moated enclosure contains a rare example of an outer courtyard surrounded by flood defences. The island and courtyard are likely to retain buried remains, including the foundations of buildings. The undisturbed section of the moat is likely to contain environmental, artefactual and ecofactual evidence related to the occupation of the site. Two duck houses have been constructed in the moat. The extant Castle Farmhouse is a 15th century Grade 2 Listed building with 17th and 18th century alterations.
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Maps

Map of Maxey, Deeping, Gate, Glinton, Northborough, Peakirk, etc. [Henry VIII], Public Record Office MPI 251

*A map of Maxey with Deepingate, undated but probably mid-18th century* (NRO Map 1084)

Enclosure Map of Maxey, Deeping, Northborough, Glinton, Peakirk and Helpston, 1819 (Copy in Peterborough Central Library)

Ordnance Survey Series, 1819