



## News and events

- Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday 17 July** when Philippa Parker will talk about '**The Shaws in Hertfordshire - the lives and friends of GBS and Charlotte in the county**'.
- There will be **no meeting** of the Society in **August**.
- On **Wednesday 18 September** our own Chris Blackler will give an illustrated talk **Old Wheathampstead on Film** with some of his own recollections. Members may wish to contribute to the discussion with some of their memories of the village.

## The missing Thorp of Wheathampstead

The missing what? Until a few years ago historians thought the placename 'Thorp' signposted where Vikings had settled in the ninth century Danelaw, particularly in Yorkshire, the Midlands and Norfolk. Examples of 'Thorp' names include Scunthorpe and Mablethorpe and there are hundreds of them. The 'Thorp' name was thought to refer to a minor settlement.

So, what has this got to do with Wheathampstead? While 'Thorp' seems to be associated with the Danelaw, there was an Old English version, 'Throp', with the same meaning. Indeed, the origin of both versions is thought to be Old English rather than Norse.

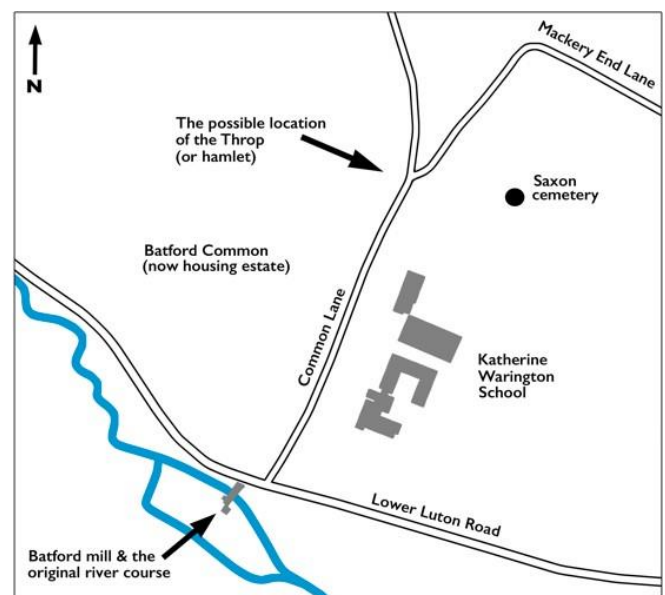
The idea that there was a Throp in Wheathampstead is not new. It gets a tantalising mention in the classic book '*The Place Names of Hertfordshire*', published in 1938. This flagged up minor place names such as *Thropfeld* (field of the Throp), *Thropmulle* (mill of the Throp) and *Thropmanland* (land of the men of the Throp) in this area. These names suggest that the places referred to must be close to a Throp.

Can we tease out the location of our thousand-year-old Throp? We have some strong clues.

1. It has got to be in the Lea valley because this is where the good soil was located.
2. It can't have been too far from the village of Wheathampstead.
3. A later document suggests that *Thropfeld* is a large field, over 62 acres.
4. It's near a watermill so it must be close to the river.

The area that shouts out is Batford. The most likely location for the Throp is in the side valley near the junction of Common Lane and Mackerye End Lane, opposite the new school. To the west

is the large expanse of Batford Common, likely to have been *Thropfeld*. According to the tithe map (1841) the Common was still covered in medieval farming strips as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Immediately to the east and overlooking the Throp is the 7<sup>th</sup> century Saxon cemetery that was discovered a few years ago when Katherine Warrington school was built. To the south is Batford mill that looks to be a shoo-in for *Thropmulle*.

What was the Throp doing there? Rather than being a minor settlement, historians now suggest that Thorps and Throps might have been part of a cereal farming revolution when new land was cleared and production ramped up in the expanding early medieval economy.

Mike Smith

Further reading: *Thorps in a changing landscape*, P Cullen, R Jones and D N Parsons, University of Hertfordshire Press, 2011