

EXCAVATIONS AT MYNCEN FARM, SIXPENNY HANDLEY, DORSET: A SUMMARY REPORT

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The following account of the multi-period site adjacent to Myncen Farm summarises the results of archaeological investigations, in advance of the fuller report. Reports of the site have previously appeared in the Proceedings over the years 1996-2001 as well as in *Britannia* (Sparey-Green 1996 and following years; Esmond Cleary 1997, 445 and following years to 2000). The opportunity is taken here to provide updated general plans showing the extent of the investigations in 1996-2001, with the addition of those trenches dug in 2003 by the Time Team which relate to this building (Figs 1 and 2).

The site at Minchington, close to Gussage St Andrew, appears not to have been identified previous to 1986 when Roman building material was observed in recently ploughed meadow by Elizabeth Waller, this find reported by Martin Green (Green 1990). Prior to that date the area had been unimproved pasture, on which some slight earthworks were visible. These mainly comprised post-medieval field boundaries but the latter may have incorporated some earlier features of significance, the whole system extending beyond the farm to encompass the eastern side of the Gussage valley at this point. To the south-east the site adjoined Chapel Farm and Gussage St Andrew church while to the north-west traces of medieval and post-medieval settlement extend for a kilometre up the valley towards Farnham, part of this extended settlement extant today as isolated cottages and the buildings of Lower Farm and Stickley's Barn.

During the early 1990s the site was the subject of geophysical surveys by Bournemouth University, these surveys not readily intelligible but, in the light of further survey and field investigations, confirming the layout of structures and some enclosure features. Field work was initiated in 1996 with a survey of surface finds for the landowner Simon Meaden, prior to the renewed ploughing of the site. The survey and fieldwork at Myncen Farm was conducted between 1996 and 2001 as a project of the East Dorset Antiquarian Society. Thereafter, in 2003, a further short season was undertaken by the Time Team, this intervention comprising only limited investigation of both this site and the adjacent Goldfields site (Wessex Archaeology 2004). In the following account the results of the 2003 season at Myncen Farm are summarised and reviewed in the light of the earlier work on that site; the work on Goldfield Farm will form part of a separate report.

Discovery and previous investigations.

A nineteenth century reference to 'remains of Roman houses' near the road from Tollard, might relate to this site but the description of its location as 'in a field called Oakhill' and 'at a short distance from the banks and ditches of British village' would suggest a spot on Oakley Lane or Oak Hill, close to the earthwork enclosure Sixpenny Handley 24 (Hutchins 1876, 547; Bowen 1990, Fig. 1). It is possible that the location given is

erroneous and that the reference is to the hilltop north-east of the present site where soil marks of an enclosure and cropmarks may indicate a building in a ditched enclosure (Sparey-Green 2000, 156-7 and Fig. 5). This problem remains unresolved and the hilltop site has not been followed up by fieldwork.

In the decades to 1986 the land adjacent to what is now called Myncen Farm was pasture but, as elsewhere in the upper Gussage valley, numerous slight earthworks indicated the presence of old field enclosures and traces of early settlement straddling the valley and extending as far as Farnham village (Sparey-Green 1984; Sparey-Green 1996, 157-7). Neighbouring prehistoric and Roman sites on the down land are catalogued in RCHM Dorset V (East), and comprise numerous settlement sites, field systems and linear boundaries such as the complex dyke system on Gussage Hill 2km to the east (Bowen 1990, 47-51, Area Plan 2, monument Gussage St. Michael 7).

Included within this ancient landscape are the enclosures and boundary ditches on Goldfields Farm in a combe immediately west of the present site, this area the subject of a project initiated by Bournemouth University in 1998 (Hewitt 1998; Hewitt and Rumsey 1999; Hewitt 2000). This has revealed elements of an Iron Age and Roman ditch system, settlement and cemetery, the site first recognised by air photography and geophysical survey (Bowen 1990, Area Plan 2, monuments Sixpenny Handley a58, a63 and a68).

Field systems and other enclosures are visible as soil marks on the downs to north-east and south-west, mostly recorded in air photographs taken by John Boyden in the late 1990s but now also including a previously unrecorded hilltop enclosure 800m west of the Myncen Farm site. Details of this will be published later but the enclosure appears to be defined by a narrow ditch coinciding approximately with the 90m contour and enclosing an area of approximately 4 Ha. There are no obvious entrances (air photographs NMR 21689/30 and 21704/06; I am grateful to Martyn Barber of English Heritage for information about this site).

The Myncen Farm site adjoins earthworks which may be of early origin but which have been subsumed within the traces of a shrunken medieval village, now represented by Chapel Farm and the church of Gussage St Andrew (Sparey-Green 1984). The site of Maidment's Cottages in Area D of the present site and other areas of earthwork in the valley towards Farnham may form part of the extended village. Peter Irvine has studied the documentary evidence for the post-medieval period and, in particular, the background to the Maidments Cottages site; this will be published as part of a study of the post-Roman aspects of the site.

While the most significant elements of this downland landscape are protected, much of the wider complex is being revealed and slowly erased by agriculture. Remains of early settlement in the valley survive better but are masked by later, medieval occupation and are subject to erosion by other agricultural activity, chalk quarrying and the limited development allowed in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Topographical and geological background.

The Myncen Farm site lies on the south-western side of the Upper Gussage valley on a terrace of redeposited pebbly chalk derived from the Upper Chalk bedrock which is exposed higher up the hillside. On the floor of the valley east of the site and beyond the present course of the Gussage winterbourne are three existing ponds fed by springs. Other spring-fed ponds lie further down the main valley in a combe to the west, nearer Goldfields Farm. The excavated site lies at approximately 68m OD and is centred at SY 97331433.

The investigations were carried out in a paddock and field on the north-east and north of the present Myncen Farm, the four areas investigated, Areas A-D, encompassing an area of approximately 2.5 hectares (Sparey-Green 2000, figs 5 and 6). These areas were originally designated in 1996 on the basis of surface indications of earthworks and surface finds. The excavations were limited to a series of 26 test pits over a ten metre grid on Sites A and B, in the zone closest to Myncen farm. These were intended to reveal the extent of the main structure and the density of finds without disturbing more than the minimum of the stratigraphy. The initial investigation allowed the main area of the Roman building to be defined and for a regime of land-use to be instituted which preserved this sensitive area from further plough damage. This evaluation was followed up by the cutting of thirteen trenches, trenches 1-5 and 13 in Area A, 6 and 7 in Area B, 8, 9, 11 and 12 in Area D and 10 in Area C. These trenches provided a sample of the buried features in each area but did not entail large open area excavation or the wholesale removal of stratigraphy to bedrock. Thus, while the archaeological record remains largely intact, the early enclosure system and the origins of the Roman settlement remain unexplored.

The Archaeological Sequence

Early Prehistoric

Potentially the earliest feature identified was a channel in Area C, at the far north-west of the site (SY 97291444). This consisted of a shallow hollow, approximately 9m wide, of irregular, flat-bottomed profile with an almost vertical face uphill and a slight, gently sloping eastern side. It contained silts sterile of any cultural material other than some worked flakes from the upper levels. The location of this feature in the base of the valley and the character of the fill suggests this was an ancient, natural water course, perhaps predating the Roman occupation by a considerable length of time.

To the southeast in Area A, a thin scatter of worked flints has been identified across the site. The most definite evidence for earlier prehistoric occupation is a small group of probable Bronze Age pottery and flint flakes from lower levels beneath the north end of the Roman building in Area A.

The late Iron Age and early Roman Period

The only features certainly pre-dating the Roman building was a ditch system encountered in several test pits and trenches 3 and 7 in Areas A and B. Three ditches have been identified, one beneath the north-western end of the building, another on the north-eastern side and another to the south passing beneath building 2. Geophysical survey, the results of which are indicated on Figure 1, suggests the latter may have returned to the north-west and formed with the others a roughly polygonal area at least 0.3Ha in area. Where sectioned, few finds were recovered from these features and they may not all be contemporary. The north-western ditch was traced for 30m, passing beneath the northern rooms containing the mosaic pavements. This ditch must have been, in part at least, still open at the time of the construction of the building since the section to the north-east contained fourth century pottery and rubble, much of which was burnt. It must have served as a drain or sump during the life of the building and the early post-Roman phase. The sequence of deposits in the eastern ditch, however, suggested that that had silted up completely before the late Roman occupation. The southern ditch likewise appeared to have been filled with silt by the time of the construction of Building 2.

To the north-west, further, more substantial, features formed part of a rectilinear boundary system. This was first encountered in the 2000 season, trench 8 crossing the line of three parallel linear features traced on geophysical surveys carried out by both Bournemouth University and the Time Team. The more northerly feature was a V-cut ditch 1.8m wide by 1m deep, with a chalk rubble fill suggesting silting from a bank on the south side. Two post holes lay either side. To the south, and 5m from this ditch, was a flat bottomed trench 2.2m wide at the surface, with steeply sloping sides to a flat base 1m wide at a depth of 0.75m. The fill was largely chalk rubble but a central slot containing flint rubble appeared to have originally held upright timbers. Two slighter ditches lay 2 and 3m to the south of this feature. Few finds were retrieved from these but the northern ditch contained some Roman material in its upper fill. The apparent palisade slot to its south was sterile of finds but the nature of the fill and the red-brown colour of the soil suggested an early date for the feature. The two shallower ditches produced no dateable finds.

The following year, trench 13, 60m to the north-east, revealed further ditches crossing the projected line of the first at right angles. Here at least two phases of a gently arcing ditch, 1.7m wide and 1m deep, were identified, the fills comprising mostly chalk rubble and soil. At three points, however, there were clusters of partially articulated animal bones which appeared to have been placed in flint filled pits along the length of the silted ditch. Examination of this material by Robin Bendry has shown that this was not simply butchery waste but the preferential deposition of complete pelves of horses in structured groups and similar to other finds from Late Iron Age 'ritual contexts'. Such deposits have occurred in pits at Danebury but also, significantly, at the Folly Lane aristocratic burial and temple site at St Albans (King 2005, 348 and 360).

A rounded pit, or the terminal of a linear cut, adjoined the uphill, western side of the recut ditch. This feature measured at least 1.5m wide and 0.9m deep and was conceivably the terminal of the palisade trench, the line of which can be traced from the geophysical survey to this point. A series of at least nine small post sockets set along the edge of the ditch may be part of fence lines flanking the recut ditch. The few finds from the ditch fill, other than animal bones, comprised redeposited flint flakes and samian ware of the early second century AD, a date supported by the lack of Roman building material or later Roman finds from the fills.

The features identified in excavation of Trenches 8 and 13 may relate to traces of an enclosure, part of which is shown on the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 plan of 1901 and which was only levelled in 1986. Slight earthworks or soil marks on air photographs show this feature and may also indicate the northern side, suggesting an enclosure 100m wide north-west to south-east and at least 140m long (RAF HLA/651. 543 SQDN. 13.1.43 2069; John Boyden 24/10/96A/19).

Later Roman Occupation

Few finds from the early Roman period were recovered and the only feature dated to this period was the recut ditch in Trench 13. Rare sherds of first and second century samian from the earliest layers suggest some activity in this period prior to the construction of the main buildings.

Two buildings, Buildings 1 and 2, were identified in the excavations and the site of another, Building 3, can be identified from geophysical survey and casual finds. The outline of Building 1 is fairly certainly identified although its south-eastern corner appears to have been largely removed by, or buried beneath, the present lane. It appears to consist of a block at least 56m long and 25m wide, aligned north-west to south east. At the south end a platform of flint rubble extended south-east for at least 15m, its south-west edge lying beyond the projected line of the west wall. This platform appears to have been the foundation for some major structure at this end of the building.

Trenches 1-6 revealed some details of the building's internal layout; here only a brief summary of the structure will be given, starting with the northern end of Area A. Trench 3 and adjacent test pits here revealed two major rooms decorated with mosaic pavements and painted walls and ceilings. Externally the two measured 15.8m, the north-western external wall and it returns south east being of one build in flints and mortar with greensand quoins. The eastern wall was found to comprise five courses, its alignment traced over a distance of 30m to the south-east. Externally, scattered flint metalling was traced around the building but at the western corner a deposit of limestone chips, clunch and shale probably represented debris from the manufacture of tesserae. A report on the glass by Denise Allen has identified fragments of blue bottle glass and some finished glass cubes amongst this material. Unused tesserae were also found outside the north wall.

The two rooms had been formed by the insertion of a dividing wall which created one room 4.8m north-east to south-west by at least 3.5m wide and a larger room, 8.8m by at least 2.6m wide, to the south-west. The full width of both was probably 5.4m. These rooms had been floored with mosaics, the former containing a square central panel with a central swastika with multiple returns and a border of right-angled Z-pattern, surrounded by a wide border of coarse grey tesserae (Cosh and Neal 2005, 141). The mosaic elements were of a character with other pavements in the Durotrigian area but the choice of a swastika as the main feature is perhaps unusual. Where the pavement had slumped it was covered by a small amount of collapsed stone roof tile debris overlying plain cream ceiling plaster.

Limited investigation of the pavement's foundations in the western part of the interior showed only a thin layer of mortar overlying deposits of unused white, grey, dark grey and red tesserae of medium size, intended for a pavement of a different quality to those discovered.

The small part of the western room investigated contained a mass of painted plaster and mosaic debris from a partially destroyed floor. Shallow trenches in the subsoil beneath were possibly for reinforcing beams supporting the floor over the earlier ditch fill beneath. No *in situ* mosaic was revealed but the loose fragments of fine tessellated pavement suggested a complex and possibly figurative design which might still survive in the unexplored portions of the room. The painted plaster was notable for the quantity of fragments with purple, blue and flesh tints, possibly part of a figurative scene of figures in purple robes set against a sky blue background.

The layout of the building to the south is less certain but collapsed walls suggested further structures in the area of Trenches 2 and 4. On the north-eastern side of the building a complex of rooms has been identified by geophysical survey and by the excavation of Trench 1 and the Time Team's Trench 11. The main feature of this area is a heated room decorated with a fine mosaic and a tank or plunge bath as well as traces of a much damaged stoke hole or furnace. The geophysical survey suggests a group of at least eight rooms in this area, with at least two and possibly five heated rooms, including one furnished with a mosaic of fine quality. This was first identified in 1996 and found to be an integral part of the building with massive flint channels united with the wall footings (Sparey-Green 1996, 155).

The tank or plunge bath found by the Time Team had been inserted into a room adjacent to this hypocaust and was adjoined by a room inserted into a corridor to the north-east. The tank was lined with concrete and tiles, access being via steps on the south-east. An external gully found in 1998 may have served as a drain. Further heated rooms probably adjoined on the north-west, served by a furnace adjoining the eastern chamber in Trench 3. Trench 5 at the south-eastern end of this suite revealed building debris including scattered window glass, perhaps from a window or roof light composed from fragments of differently coloured glass.

In Area B, south of the farm track and a modern quarry, further traces of the building were revealed, although here the medieval robbing had been more extensive. Immediately south of the farm track the more westerly of three test pits identified the south-western outer wall of the structure with an internally collapsed wall in situ. The next to the east uncovered a chalk floor, suggesting this lay within the building interior while the easternmost pit revealed rubble including part of the decorated edge of limestone table top. A trench to the south again picked up the outer wall, parallel walls within the interior, an area of *in situ* roof collapse of stone tiles and part of a concrete lined tank. What may have been the southern corner of the main range was revealed in Trench 6 abutting the extensive flint foundation to its south. The interior of the building here had been extensively robbed but part of a furnace and the base of a raised hearth or chimney survived. A narrow flint-lined channel in the exterior, possibly for a timber drain or water pipe, adjoined the extensive foundation or platform. The irregular upper surface of this, without signs of traffic to be expected on a heavily metalled surface, suggested this was the heavily robbed foundation of a substantial structure at the south – east end of the building.

Decorative materials used in the building's interior have already been mentioned. Examination of the brick and tile from the site by Peter Irvine has identified nine fabrics, the flue tile fragments bearing different combing patterns and vent hole shapes which correlate with some of these. Stone work included fragments of columns and decorative mouldings, the stones identified by Barry Perratt including material from both Purbeck and the Shaftesbury area.

Building 2

To the south-west and 20m from this area, the north corner of a separate building has been identified in Trench 7. The north-western side of this structure was subsequently encountered in Trench 12 of the Time Team excavation. The main feature identified was the external northern corner of a building apparently on the same alignment to Building 1. The extent of this building is uncertain since it did not reappear in a test pit 8m to the south-west and the may be relatively small in area and extending to the south-east. The foundations cut deposits which produced samian of the late first and second century, suggesting construction during the later second century or later. A mortar surface and post holes on the north side of the wall were probably part of some external structure.

Building 3

Uphill and 40m to the south-west of Building 2, reports of building rubble on the boundary of the garden and the recovery of a complete leaf-shaped roof tile suggested the presence of a further building. Geophysical survey would confirm the outline of the north-west end and north-east side of a rectangular building 30m long by at least 12m wide, set on the same alignment as Building 1.

Post-Roman Activity

Returning to Building 1, numerous features related to its conversion and reuse in the late Roman or post-Roman period. In Area A at least 24 post holes were observed cutting the Roman structures, these intrusions containing no medieval or later finds, even though material of this date occurred in the robbing of the site. The most significant structures were at the north-west and north east corners of Building 1. The first of these was a very substantial timber setting or buttress while in the latter the uppermost surviving courses at the corner had been removed, possibly for the later insertion of a structural timber or to allow drainage into the external ditch. Within the interior the pavement had been cut by many smaller posts, perhaps as internal roof supports. In one a worn second century coin appeared to have been deliberately placed in the base. Two post holes cut into the exterior of the north wall appeared to mark an inserted door, giving access from the crudely paved exterior.

A late metal surface also survived outside the north-eastern side of the building and at least 6 possible post holes cut or abutted the structure in the Time Team Trench 12. Two substantial post holes set in the wall face adjacent to the tank suggest an inserted doorway, as on the north-west side of the building. Late levels within the building included ash and slag and the external drain contained hammer-scale, suggesting smithing activity in this area.

At a later date the north-eastern side of Building 1, closest to the present lane, had been heavily robbed, the most extensive destruction in Trench 6 containing quantities of early medieval pottery. Elsewhere the footings remained intact, and collapsed walls had been left lying where they had fallen. In the nineteenth or twentieth century a quarry off the side of the farm track had exploited part of this debris.

Discussion

The six seasons on the Myncen Farm site have identified three periods of activity on the site, the first dating to the Late Iron Age and early Roman period, the second to the late Roman and the third to the early post-Roman period. The site of Maidments Cottages extends this sequence to a fourth late medieval and post-medieval period, occupation continuing down to the early twentieth century.

The enclosure system beneath and to the north of the Roman building is the first major feature of the site and appears to consist of two elements, a rectangle of perhaps 1.5 Ha. to the north and a smaller polygonal system beneath the building. The later phases of the former date to the early Roman period but may have a pre-conquest origin. It appears to have been defined on the south by a palisade trench, later replaced by a ditch with external bank. At the eastern corner there was a complex junction with a ditch approaching from the south-east. On the uphill, south western side and on the north-western side this enclosure may have been represented by earthworks and soil marks. If these elements are related they form an enclosure 100m wide by 140 m long which aligns with earthworks and soil marks across the valley and on the opposite hilltop. The

deposits of horse bones encountered at the eastern corner of the larger enclosure appear to be of a ritual character, suggesting its interpretation as part of a religious focus adjoining the spring site to the east. The date of these un-explored earthworks remains, however, uncertain and they may simply relate to the medieval settlement of Gussage St. Andrew. The limited investigation to date has also produced little in the way of coinage or ritual deposits and metal detecting has, reportedly, not produced significant surface finds.

The smaller, south-eastern ditch complex recalls those of the late Iron Age and early Roman period which have been identified beneath several Dorset villas, as at Halstock and Tarrant Hinton (Lucas 1993, 6-11; Graham 2006, 19-32).

There appear to be no direct links to the complex of boundaries and settlement remains on the higher ground towards Goldfields Farm but the earliest phase of that site may have co-existed with the enclosure system at Myncen Farm. The newly discovered hill-top enclosure to the north adds another element to the increasingly complex system of enclosed settlements in this area but its form and location might place it earlier, in the Late Bronze Age or early Iron Age. Air photography of the downs north of the Gussage valley has also identified a system of fields which may link with the boundary system and enclosures towards Sixpenny Handley and Gussage Hill.

Early Roman occupation on the site appears rare, use of the site for farming or domestic purpose at this date not being identified. The late Roman building was of high architectural refinement, on a par with the finest villas of the area, yet the revealed plan and location does not easily conform with local examples of such buildings. A block at least 60m long and 20m wide was aligned north-west to south east, set south of the early enclosure. The corner of another substantial building lay uphill of this and other building remains have been traced from surface finds for 50 m westward. The exact relationship with the Goldfields site remains uncertain but the latter appears, at least architecturally, to have been less sophisticated and perhaps more directly involved with farming activity. Myncen Farm has produced no evidence of structures directly involved with farming or industry.

Building 1 is the first major building, other than the Tarrant Hinton villa, to have been investigated in the heart of Cranborne Chase. It is large in comparison with other late Roman buildings in the area and the quality of its construction, with probably figurative decoration of both floor and walls places it the same class as the major villas. There were at least two suites of rooms with baths or tanks, the northern bath approximately a quarter the size of that at Halstock.

The form of the building is, however, uncertain. The lack of corridors in trenches 1 and 4 suggest the northern and eastern elements are not wings facing up-hill and south-west, an unlikely arrangement. Equally, the opposite long side appears to be occupied by a bath suite and several of the test pits revealed internal floors within the main area of the structure. Finally, the flint platforms or foundations at the south end suggested major structure at that end. The plan of this and the adjacent structures forms a layout dissimilar to the courtyard plan of the known villas in the vicinity such as Tarrant Hinton

or Rockbourne and suggests it was another form of high-status building (Graham 2006; Royal Commission on Historical Monuments 1983). A parallel might be found at Shillingstone where a building on a similar alignment, comprising a single block with a major structure at the south-east end, has been recognised as an aisled building or converted barn (Corney and Robinson 2007). Although such buildings have not been previously identified in Dorset, they occur in neighbouring areas of Hampshire and Wiltshire and are marked by the addition of living rooms and bath suites to an existing rectangular building block, the more southerly end embellished with a major facade and towers, founded on a substantial foundation. If this is the case, then this is a particularly extensive example accompanied by two smaller structures, Buildings 2 and 3, apparently set on a parallel alignment.

There is considerable evidence for post-Roman activity and the re-use of the structure prior to the medieval robbing. This would suggest a date in the Saxon or sub-Roman period, the nature of the structures recalling the posthole structures coinciding with buildings at Halstock (Lucas 1993, 53 Figs 9-12 and plate 45). The adaptation and reuse of such rural Late Roman buildings is of considerable interest and might allow the identification of the ephemeral remains of settlement in the period before the settlement of the area by the Anglo-Saxon incomers (Lewit 2003).

The medieval robbing of the south-eastern part of the structure may be for materials transported off site along the adjacent road but some material may have been drawn off for construction work on the earlier structure beneath Maidment's Cottages to the west.

The wider context of the site within Cranborne Chase in the Roman and early post-Roman period.

The site lies within a rich landscape of prehistoric earthworks, soil and crop mark sites dating from the Neolithic period onwards. The earlier prehistoric phases have been the subject of considerable research, most recently by John Barrett and Richard Bradley in association with Martin Green (Barrett, Bradley and Green 1990; Green 2000). Environmental research has revealed changes in the landscape and the history of land use over time, most recently through large scale sampling and limited investigation of specific monuments (Allen 2002).

Whether or not the larger enclosure at Myncen Farm is correctly identified, the find of horse bones recalls the evidence for the making of chariot fittings at Gussage All Saints earlier in the Late Iron Age and the burial of complete horses at Tarrant Hinton in the Late Roman period (Spratling 1979; Graham 2006, 60-61). Even if this site has so far produced no high-status finds in this early period, metal-work and coins of Iron Age date as well as imported early Roman metalwork and glass do occur in the area, hinting at its importance as a centre of the eastern Durotriges at the time of the conquest and in the immediate aftermath (Corney 1991; Worrell 2006, 458-462).

The late Roman settlement lay 3km north-west of the Roman road and a roadside settlement and possible shrine on Gussage Down but major settlements and high status

buildings appear rare, other than the lost site at Oakhill and the more distant villa at Tarrant Hinton (Corney and Green 1987). The lack of rich settlements or Romanised buildings within the Chase has led to the area being postulated as an Imperial estate but other possibilities exist and the absence may be chance or a function of research priorities and the lack of survey of the river valleys (Hawkes 1947). The Myncen farm building may be an example of an aisled or hall type villa, not necessarily a farm centre but part of a larger rural centre focussed on a site of religious significance, away from the major road line

The nature of the post-Roman activity may remain uncertain but could some insight into the continuing occupation of the area behind the line of Bokerly Dyke, prior to the Anglo-Saxon invasions of the later sixth or seventh century. The re-use of a major late Roman structure is of more than local interest and a potentially valuable source for the study of settlement change and continuity of land-holdings into the post-Roman period.

The place-name Minchington refers to landholdings of the monastic house refounded by Alfred at Shaftesbury Abbey (RCHM 1972, 58). The association of the Minchington valley settlement with this nunnery raises the possibility that its predecessor was located here and only moved to the more defensible hilltop at the time of the Viking raids. Whether or not the site of an ecclesiastical foundation, a charter of 956 shows that the land of Handley held by Shaftesbury included a mill which must have been located higher up the Gussage valley (Grundy 1936, 117). This at least suggests a late Anglo-Saxon settlement nearby in the valley, perhaps extending down to the area of the present site and Gussage St Andrew Church .

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CAPTIONS

Fig 1 Plan of Myncen Farm showing location of trenches excavated by East Dorset Antiquarian Society between 1996-2001 and by the Time Team in 2003. The enclosure traced from earthworks on early Ordnance Survey maps and from soil marks on air photographs is also shown.

Fig 2 Plan of Building 1 showing trenches excavated by East Dorset Antiquarian Society between 1996-2001 and by the Time Team in 2003.