

# Knaptoft

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**Knaptoft** is a civil parish in the Harborough district of Leicestershire, England, with a population of around 50. The population was still less the 100 at the 2011 census and the population is now included in the civil parish of Mowsley. It is also a deserted village in this parish. Knaptoft is just off the A5199 near Husbands Bosworth. Knaptoft House Farm is a nearby bed and breakfast and stud farm. The medieval fish ponds were restored from 1976 to 1982 and are now run commercially.

## History

The village was deserted in the 17th century, and the only visible remains are some farm buildings and a ruined parish church. It is recorded in the Domesday Book as *Cnapetot*. *Cnape* could refer to either a personal name, or derive from either the Old Norwegian word *Knapp* meaning a hilltop or the Old English word *Cnap* meaning a young servant boy (Old Norse *Knapi*). *Toft* is believed to derive from the Old Scandinavian *toft* which means homestead.

In 1301 the village was known to comprise a manor, a windmill, 2 fish ponds and 20 tenants. By 1624 only the manor and 5 labourers remained. The depopulation was due to the enclosure of the land for sheep pasture, which required less labour.

The present day farmhouse Knaptoft Hall Farm is thought to be on the site of the old manor. The manor was held by the Horton family from 1279 to 1761. The first of this line was Henry de Horton who became a free tenant in 1279 and built the manor next to the church. The manor was demolished in 1761 and a new house built on the site.

The Church of Saint Nicholas is now roofless but still contains headstones and the stone font. It is thought to have been sacked and destroyed by Oliver Cromwell's Roundhead forces after the Battle of Naseby in June 1645 whilst in pursuit of the fleeing defeated Royalist army. Certainly, a skirmish occurred here, confirmed by archaeological finds. The church is said to be haunted. Church services are still held at the church at 3pm on the third Sunday of June, July, August and September.

The ancient parish included the chapelries of Shearsby and Mowsley and the hamlet of Walton in Knaptoft, all of which became separate civil parishes in 1866.

In 1870-72, John Marius Wilson's *Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales* described Knaptoft like this:

**KNAPTOFT**, a township in Lutterworth district, and a parish partly also in Market-Harborough district, Leicester. The township lies near the Grand Union canal, the Market Harborough and Rugby railway, and the boundary with Northampton, 2 miles WNW of Theddingworth r. station, and 7 ENE of Lutterworth.

Real property, £1, 808. Pop., 54. Houses, 7.—The parish contains also the hamlet of Walton, and the chapelries of Shearsby and Mowsley; the last of which has a postoffice under Rugby. Acres, 4, 940. Real property, £6, 733. Pop., 841. Houses, 204. A mineral spring, of some medicinal repute, but not much resorted to, is at an inn in Shearsby township. Framework knitting is carried on. There are traces of an ancient camp. The living is a rectory, united with the chapelries of Shearsby and Mowsley, in the diocese of Peterborough. Value, £700.\* Patron, John Hood, Esq. The parish church is in ruin; and the church of Shearsby, which has a tower, is in use. Bishop Watson was rector.

BBC

## Leicester's "lost" village



Knaptoft is one of Leicestershire's "lost" villages. It disappeared because the lord of the manor swapped from crop growing to sheep farming, which meant less labourers were needed. All that is left is a collection of farm buildings and church ruins.

## HISTORIC ENGLAND

A settlement at Knaptoft was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. The parish church was first documented in 1143 and a survey of 1301 records a manor house with gardens and fish ponds. The manor was acquired by the Turpin family in the late C15 and was enclosed by 1507. By 1524 only the lord of the manor and five agricultural labourers lived in the village. It is believed the Tudor hall, which survives as a ruin, was built between 1525 and 1530.

At least parts of the Tudor hall appear to have remained in occupation well into the C19 although elements were converted to farm buildings during this time. A new farmhouse and a three-sided range of farm buildings were built on the site in 1843, and probably resulted in the demolition of much of the Tudor hall, with some brickwork being reused. The current farmhouse, built in 1931 replaced that built in 1843. In 1967 further farm buildings were demolished leaving an east-west range connected to the former Tudor porch and a two-storey barn with diaper brickwork.

Tradition suggests that the Tudor manor and the church were destroyed by Cromwell's troops in 1645 following the battle of Naseby but an illustration by John Nichols in 1792 shows the manor house as largely complete and depicts elements which survive today.

Aerial photographs, recent work by Paul Everson and Graham Brown (Dyer and Jones (eds) 2010) and field assessment has shown that the settlement earthworks are more extensive than previously thought. Archaeological evaluation trenches excavated in preparation of a proposed development (Allen Archaeology, 2011), adjacent to the standing fabric of the Tudor hall, have revealed the footings of further walls pertaining to the Hall.

### **Details**

**PRINCIPAL ELEMENTS** The medieval settlement and manorial complex at Knaptoft is situated 11km south of Leicester and includes the earthwork, buried and standing remains of an abandoned medieval village, manorial centre, church, ridge and furrow and a windmill mound. Also included are the buried remains of Knaptoft Hall and the associated post medieval formal garden earthworks.

**DESCRIPTION** The area of protection slopes gently to the south, extends for c667m east to west and c350m north to south at its widest, and includes the standing remains of the church, ground beneath the remains of Knaptoft Hall and that beneath part of a modern agricultural building. The scheduling incorporates two previously separate scheduled areas, that of the windmill mound to the east and of the medieval settlement (NHLE 1008817).

The monument lies to the south of an access road leading to Knaptoft Hall Farm. Situated approximately midway along the northern boundary are the standing remains

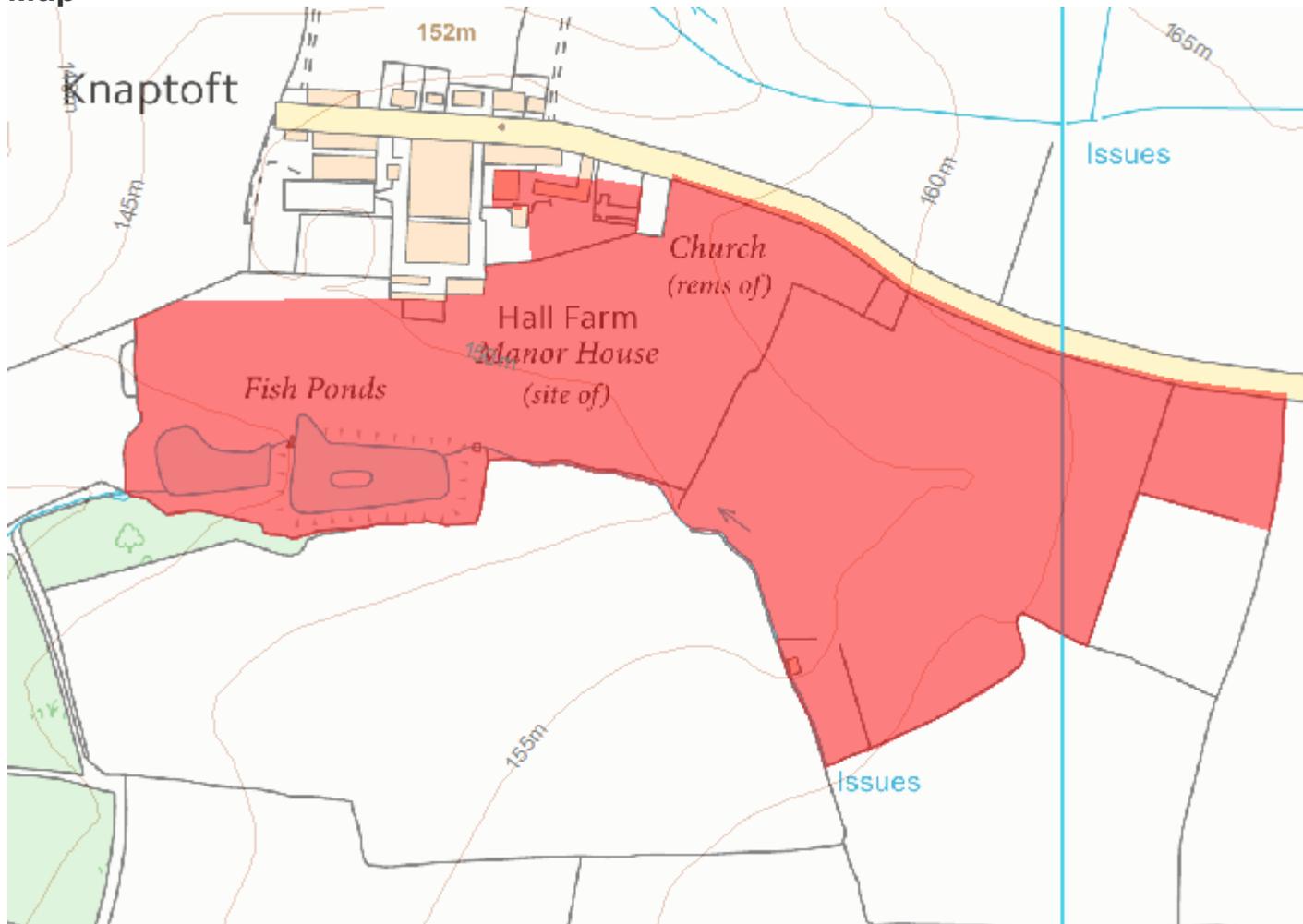
of the largely C13 church which was consolidated in the C20 and is currently both listed at Grade II and scheduled. The original plan consisted of a nave with a north tower and chancel: the walls of the tower survive up to a height of c1.5m and are substantial in places. In the field to the south east of the church earthworks depict what appear to be a nucleated and discreet group of settlement tofts and crofts at the head of the minor valley c300m south east of the church. These are 'enclosed' by a sunken track around the north-east and north-west sides and a natural stream on the south eastern and south western sides. The sunken track survives to a depth of approximately 2m and leads northwards from the corner of the 'enclosed' tofts and crofts to link with the existing farm access track. To the north east of the settlement lie the earthwork remains of ridge and furrow, providing a physical link between the settlement and the windmill mound at the extreme east of the scheduled area. The circular mill mound measures c20m in diameter and c0.5m high with a pronounced circular depression in the centre.

To the west and north-west of the sunken track and settlement remains are earthworks forming a coherent group of sub-rectangular enclosures. These remains are less easily defined in the field but aerial photographs suggest they are agricultural enclosures at least one of which displays evidence of a furlong of ridge and furrow defined on the southern side by a head land. The sunken track curves to the west serving the area of enclosures but appears to have been truncated by the post medieval garden earthworks further to the west.

The garden earthworks lie in the field immediately south of the church and the remains of Knaptoft Hall. Here the earthworks form a pattern of terraces and rectangular compartment boundaries defining the extensive remains of the post-medieval formal garden laid out, presumably by the Turpin family, to accompany Knaptoft Hall. The garden earthworks have been cut by areas of quarrying into the hillside but remain intelligible. At the southern boundary of the field are two large sub-rectangular fishponds fed by the natural stream (both still water filled), the easternmost of which has a central island. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886 marks these as 'Old Fishponds' indicating some antiquity. The ponds are now used commercially for leisure angling and although some dredging will have taken place to maintain the fishponds the shape and size of these are as shown on the early maps.

National Grid Reference: SP6279189421

## Map



## GENUKI

### Cemeteries

Anglican

St. Mary Magdalen, Knaptoft, Church of England

## Census

- The parish was in the Lutterworth sub-district of the Lutterworth Registration District.
- The 1851 Census for Leicestershire has been indexed by the [Leicestershire & Rutland Family History Society \(link is external\)](#). The whole index is available on microfiche. The society has also published it in print.
- The table below gives census piece numbers, where known:

<i>Census Year</i>	<i>Piece No.</i>
1841	H.O. 107 / 598
1861	R.G. 9 / 2246 & 2248 & 2250
1871	R.G. 10 / 3223
1891	R.G. 12 / 2490

## Churches

### Anglican

[St. Mary Magdalen, Knaptoft, Church of England](#)

You can also perform a more selective search for [churches in the Knaptoft area](#) or see them [printed on a map](#).

## **Church History**

- The Anglican parish church was dedicated to St. Nicholas.
- The Anglican parish church was decayed by 1842.
- Ian ROB has a photograph of the ruins of [The Church of Saint Nicholas \(link is external\)](#) on Geo-graph, taken in January, 2012.
- The local parishioners went to church in Shearsby and Mowsley.
- The Anglican church at Shearsby was dedicated to St. Mary Magdalen.
- St. Mary Magdalen church at Shearsby was built in early English times and has a tower built in 1789.
- The church seats 300.

## **Church Records**

- The Anglican parish register dates from 1711 for baptisms, 1713 for marriages and 1710 for burials.
- The church was in the rural Guthlaxton deanery (third portion).

## **Civil Registration**

- The parish was in the Lutterworth sub-district of the Lutterworth Registration District.
- Civil Registration began in July, 1837.

## **Description and Travel**

Knaptoft is a parish and two townships 9 miles south of Leicester and 4 miles northwest of Theddingworth. The parish covers just over 1,420 acres and includes the townships of *Shearsby* and *Walton*.

If you are planning a visit:

- By automobile, take the A50 south out of Leicester city past Arnesby. The village is tiny, just off the road between Leicester and Welford.
- The Bath Inn in Knaptoft (actually closer to Shearsby) held a mineral spring called "The Spa", which was reputed to have medicinal benefits.
- Three streams rise in the parish. One flows into the Welland River and thence to The Wash. A second flows into the Soar River and onto the Humber. A third flows into the Avon River.

## **History**

- The land around the village has been mostly pasture for centuries.
- In the 1800s many of the workers in the parish were either graziers or framework knitters.

## **Manors**

- *Knaptoft Hall* was the residence of Wilfred GLOVER in 1912.
- The web page author has been unable to find any description of *Knaptoft Hall*.

- **Military History**

The churchyard Lych Gate is a World War II War Memorial. It contains plaque with white lettering bearing the dedication. It was dedicated in September 1950.

## **Names, Geographical**

- The name Knaptoft is from the Old Norse *knapi*, or "servant".
- The name is given in many old records as "Knapton".

### **Politics and Government**

- The parish lies in the Guthlaxton Hundred in the southern division of the county.
- Check the [Parish Council \(link is external\)](#) site to see what is happening locally. The citizens have decided to forgo a formal parish council and instead they have regular Parish Meetings to discuss civic and political issues.
- In 1898, a portion of the parish (Walton hamlet) was added to the parish of *Walton with Kimcote*.

### **Poor Houses, Poor Law etc.**

- Bastardy cases would be heard in the Lutterworth petty session hearings.
- As a result of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act reforms, most of this parish became part of the [Lutterworth Poorlaw Union](#).
- Part of this parish was in the [Market Harborough Poorlaw Union](#).

### **Population**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Inhabitants</i>
1801	249
1811	312

1821 601

1831 641

1841 669

1851 650

1881 315

1901 46

1971 45

## **Schools**

- There was a Ladys' Boarding School in Knaptoft, operated by a Miss Ann WESTON in 1849.
- A Public Elementary School was built in Shearsby in 1869 to 52 children.

A Free School was built in Walton township some time before 1881. It appears to have disappeared by 1911.

## **THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND**

The ruined church of St Nicholas stands in the deserted village of Knaptoft. It is believed that it was sacked by the forces of Oliver Cromwell following the Battle of Naseby in 1645. In the Summer outdoor services are held on Sunday afternoons.