Time Detectives at
Old Wolverton Medieval Village

There are lots of medieval villages in Milton Keynes. Most of them have remained villages so have changed over time and been absorbed by the city (for example Loughton and Milton Keynes village - the village that gave MK its name). But some of them were abandoned and became farmer's fields. One of these abandoned villages is in Ouse Valley Park, Old Wolverton, which is looked after by The Parks Trust. It is number 28 on the map below. Can you find it?

If you visited the site of the medieval village of Wolverton today, you would see little of the life that existed in the medieval period. However, if you look closely, you will start to see dips and shadows across the land that give us clues about what was here 500-900 years ago!

Look at the images below to see what you can learn about the village.

a) Look at the photo on the left. Can you make out the mound. What do you think this was? Hint: There was a ditch all around it.
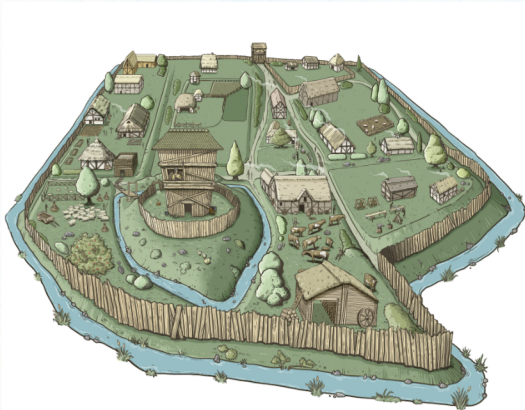

b) Look at the photo above. What could these sunken areas show?

c) The map on the left was created by archaeologists. What do you think the dotted lines show? Are there any other clues about what could have been on site?

The photos (a. and b.) show what is left of a motte and bailey castle that was built around 1100 CE. The motte was a mound of earth, surrounded by a ditch which would have had a wooden building on top (the keep). At the base of the mound was the bailey. This was also surrounded by a ditch. The motte is marked on the map (by the church). The church also existed in the medieval period, but has since been rebuilt on the same spot.

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The image on the left is a motte and bailey castle. This one was based on the Toot at Shenley Church End, but the castle at Wolverton would have been similar. William the Conqueror had only invaded from Normandy in 1066 and lent out land to obedient lords to make sure he and his decendents had power over the whole country. The Normans built the castles for defence but also to show power to the local people. Can you see the motte with the keep on top?

The dotted lines on the map (c.) are paths, and the rectangular shapes are where a peasant house and garden would have been, surrounded by a fence. The straight lines in the fields show ridge and furrows (created by the peasants when ploughing the land).

- Task: Create a thought shower of everything you have learnt so far about the medieval village of Wolverton.

The village stayed pretty much the same for a few hundred years, but started to change in the Tudor period (the time of Henry the VIII and his equally famous daughter, Elizabeth I).

- Task: Put the eras in chronological order (order of time) and then match up the events to find out how the site changed over time.

a) Tudor Period (1485-1603)	b) Anglo-Saxon Period (410-1066)	c) Medieval Period (1066-1485)	d) Stuart Period (1603-1714)

I) Motte and bailey castle built on site around 1100 CE to protect the village from attack and show the power of the local lord (and the new King).

II) Entire area enclosed (fenced off), probably to use it for breeding deer for the lord to hunt - a popular pastime in the Stuart period. Maps from the time label it as a 'park'.

III) Land was gradually being fenced off (probably to keep sheep) so villagers could not access land to farm. This was common in the Tudor period as wool made land owners rich! Most peasants had to leave.

IV) Village deserted around 1580 CE

V) A small settlement was built here as it was close to the river and on high ground.

VI) Peasant farmers worked the land owned by the local lord to grow crops. They used common land to graze their animals and lived in houses made of wattle and daub.

What else can we learn about about life in the medieval village of Wolverton?

So far we have looked at evidence from the site and reports from archaeologists. Historians also have access to two books that together, provide information about all the villages, towns and hamlets that existed in medieval England. You might have heard of it. It's the Domesday Book (even though it is two books!). This record gives us details about the people who lived in an area and their land, farm animals, and key belongings. Why was this book created? Because the King wanted money to pay for wars, to use to keep people on his side, to pay for the castles and generally to keep power. The best way to get this money was through taxes and to raise taxes, he needed to know how many people were in the country, what they owned (the majority were peasants and owned very little) and, most importantly, what they could produce (livestock and crops).

Below is what the Domesday Book says about the village of Wolverton:

Village of Wolverton:

Households: 32 villagers. 8 smallholders. 10 slaves.

Land and resources:
- Ploughland: 20 ploughlands. 5 lord's plough teams. 10 men's plough teams.
- Other resources: 9.0 lord's lands. Meadow 9 ploughs. 2 mills, value 1 pound 12 shillings and 7 pence.

Valuation
•Annual value to lord: 20 pounds in 1086; 15 pounds when acquired by the 1086 owner; 20 pounds in 1066.

Owners
- Tenant-in-chief in 1086: Mainou the Breton.
- Lord in 1086: Mainou the Breton.

Wolverton village had a recorded population of 50 households in 1086, putting it in the largest 20% of settlements recorded in Domesday. Each household is estimated to have approximately 5 people in it, so what was the approximate total population?

Each plough team would have had 8 oxen to pull the ploughs (oxen are male cattle). How many oxen did they have?

https://opendomesday.org/place/SP8141/wolverton/

Tasks: Complete your thought shower

Extension activities
- Create a glossary of key words including: enclosure, wattle and daub, oxen, Domesday Book, motte and bailey land add any others you find useful.
- Find out about the other medieval villages in Milton Keynes. You could use The Parks Trust website to help theparkstrust.com/heritage, and the Domesday Book (see link above).
- Research what a typical medieval village was like. Recommended websites include: BBC Bitesize and History on the Net but there are many others. You could use the information to make a brochure about the village. There is an example structure here if you need help (www.historyonthenet.com/medieval-life-brochure).