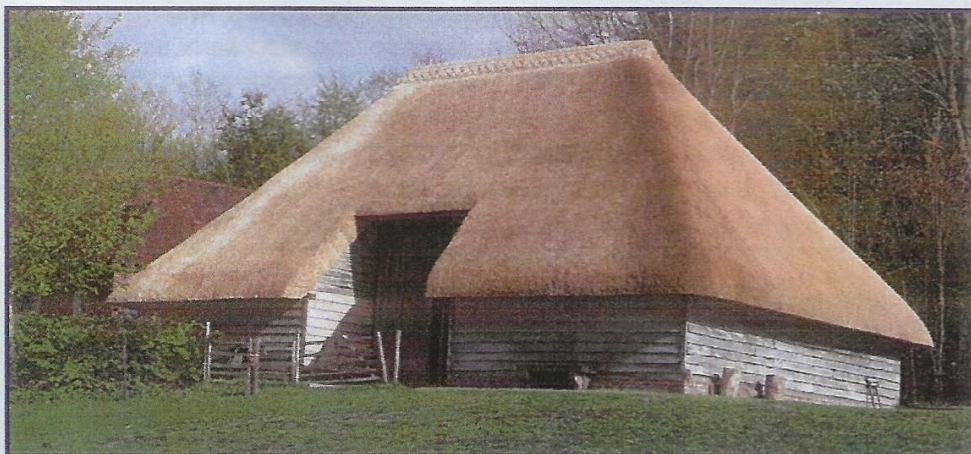
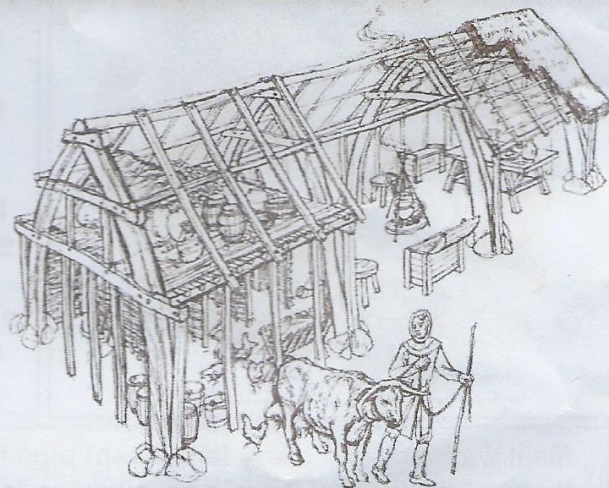


DISCOVERING A MEDIEVAL BUILDING

LIFE ON A MEDIEVAL FARM

As archaeologists have cleaned back the layers of soil under School Close, they have revealed patterns of circular holes, both large and small, that when aligned to form the outline of a medieval building. Despite their simple status, these small farmsteads required clever engineering, with larger posts supporting a long thatched roof, and smaller posts framing wattle-and-daub panels that created a solid wall. But this type of structure, probably occupied by serfs, was almost entirely organic, so all we find left are the holes that the posts were sunk into.



ARTEFACTS LEFT BEHIND

Within some of the pits surrounding the house are items discarded as rubbish after they had been broken, in particular pieces of pottery that would have been used as cooking pots. The cooking pots could be jars or bowls that were placed over a hearth, so many have soot encrusted on their outer surfaces. The shape of the pottery vessels also tells us that were made locally in the 11th to 13th centuries, about 1000-1300AD, when the Normans controlled England and re-shaped the manors, castles and monasteries that owned the rural farmsteads.

*tē. unspati. i. car. 7 dim. ēre. tenent. quos tenet corstannus. f.
 Wd. temp. iii. m. m. 7. m. b. 2. tē. 7. p. i. car. 7. dim. 7. m. ii.
 car. 7. dim. m. ac. p. 7. u. car. homin. sep. tē. 7. p. uat. xxv.
 fot. m. xxx. ii. fot.*



At the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, Knapton had a population of 32 households, probably over 100 people (in latin, above). Tenant farmers and serfs who would have had to grow their own food, give a portion of it to their lord, William of Warrene (at Gimingham) as rent, and had very limited opportunity to trade in towns. So this building may have been one of those households, with a relatively poor diet based on dark bread made of rye grain, and stews called 'pottage', made from peas, beans and onions

Meat was rare, but many farms kept pigs that could be kept loose and fend for themselves in local woodland, allowing farmers to till the land and tend crops. Pork could be salted and preserved as bacon to be consumed throughout the year, probably in more luxurious stews. Cows were also kept as dairy animals to produce milk and cheese, but were far more valuable alive than as meat. Bread may even have acted as plates, with thick slices partly scooped out to hold stew, and known as 'trenchers'. Their only sweet food was the berries, nuts and honey that they collected from the woods, sometimes used with cereal to produce a more flavorsome pottage or porridge called 'frumenty'.