

CHAPTER I I

UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIEVAL LANDSCAPE

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Fifty years ago the study of the medieval countryside — as opposed to individual sites — was just beginning, and since then major advances have been made in both the techniques at our disposal, and the greater understanding they have provided for how the historic landscape has developed. This paper reviews the history of research into the medieval landscape across mainland Britain beginning with a series of pioneering studies in the late 19th/early 20th century, through the emergence of ‘landscape archaeology’ as a recognized discipline in the 1970s, to some current debates.

The increased interest in landscape has been one of the major trends within medieval archaeology in the past 50 years. In this short paper it is impossible to discuss all the developments and practitioners, but an attempt will be made to provide a broad discussion that reviews trends in interpretative traditions, new methods and some current debates. The focus will be on England, where the greatest amount of work on the medieval countryside has been carried out, though comparisons will be made with Scotland and Wales where important initiatives are now underway.

INTRODUCTION

The medieval landscape: early interest

In the first half of the 20th century it was historians who dominated the study of landscape, working within the culture-historical paradigm dominant at that time. Some of the first works to discuss such mundane matters as the rural countryside — as opposed to the great historical topics such as constitutional and religious history — were Seebohm’s *English Village Community* (1892), Vinogradoff’s *Villainage in England* (1892), and Maitland’s *Domesday Book and Beyond* (1897). In his *English Field Systems* (1915), Gray went significantly further in appreciating regional variation in landscape character by describing a series of distinctive patterns of land management, the origins of which he attributed in part to the impact of different

waves of settlers who had sailed across the English Channel in the 5th century AD. In *The Personality of Britain* (1932), Fox also developed the concept of regional variation in landscape character — most famously his distinction between the upland and the lowland zones — and, while his history of the people that populated Britain was similarly written in terms of migrations, this seminal study also reflects another dominant paradigm of that time: environmental determinism (Figure 11.1).

By the 1950s historians were starting to explore landscapes in the field and through their depiction on early maps, with pioneering studies including Orwin and Orwin's *The Open Fields* (1938) and Beresford's *History on the Ground* (1957). In 1952, W G Hoskins wrote that

The great Cambridge historian, Maitland, regarded the Ordnance map of England as one of the finest records we have, if only we could learn how to decipher it, and indeed it is. But the landscape itself is an equally revealing document, equally full of significant detail, and difficult to interpret it aright. (Hoskins 1952, 289)

It was also during the 1950s that the interests of historians and archaeologists came together in the study of deserted medieval villages, though in these early years the agenda behind excavating such sites — and it was a very 'site-based' agenda — was to use archaeology to test ideas that had already emerged from historical documents, such as the impact of the Black Death on rural settlement (Beresford and Hurst 1990, 27–28). In these early years of medieval archaeology there were also pioneering projects that looked at landscapes characterized by more dispersed settlement patterns such as Fox's work at Gelligaer Common in Glamorganshire and on Dartmoor in Devon (1939; 1958), and Leeds's work on 'Early Saxon' sites near Oxford (1947), but the agenda was soon dominated by the English village.

THE LANDSCAPE IN THE EARLY YEARS OF *Medieval Archaeology*

The early volumes of *Medieval Archaeology* give a clear impression of the interests that concerned the founders of our discipline. Deserted medieval villages make an early appearance in Thompson's (1960) report on Riseholme (Lincolnshire) and occasionally other papers plotted the distribution of sites against a background of the natural topography, such as Proudfoot's study of Irish raths (1960), and Gelling's report on shielings on the Isle of Man (1961). In the first 10 volumes of *Medieval Archaeology*, however, just 10% of papers were on rural settlement, compared to 30% on artefacts and around 40% on high-status sites (castles, manor houses, monasteries and towns). Comparison with the last 10 years of *Medieval Archaeology* (1998–2007) is not easy, as fewer papers have such a narrow emphasis on specific types of artefact or the excavation of individual sites, but perhaps up to a quarter of contributions have a broadly landscape focus (a trend that is also reflected in the increased numbers of rural settlements whose investigation is registered in *Medieval Archaeology*: Gerrard 2003, fig 4.3). Returning to the early volumes of *Medieval Archaeology*, however, it is noticeable that while an explicit focus on the landscape is rare, the breadth of some papers is impressive, with notable examples of interdisciplinary research including Dodgson's study of *-ingas* and *-inga* place-names

(1966), and Linehan's examination of deserted settlement and rabbit warrens on Dartmoor (1966). The latter is a remarkable paper that plotted 126 sites and used documentary sources, alongside ground survey and the mapping of earthworks shown on the RAF aerial photography from the late 1940s. It reconstructed individual buildings within a wider context of similarly abandoned trackways, crofts, and lynchets, as well as the still-functioning field boundary pattern that in these moorland fringes is also medieval in date (what we would now call the 'historic landscape'). All this is a clear precursor to the better known work on Dartmoor by Austin at Okehampton Park (1978), and Fleming and Ralph at Holne Moor (1982), both of which are classic examples of what emerged during the 1970s as 'landscape archaeology'.

THE STUDY OF LANDSCAPE IN RELATED HISTORICAL DISCIPLINES

Within the disciplines of history and historical geography there were also scholars studying the landscape in one form or another. Britain has a long tradition of detailed historical studies of particularly well-documented medieval estates — notably those of the major monastic houses — and some historians did at least attempt to give documented places a spatial context, such as Finberg's (1951) study of Tavistock Abbey (Figure 11.2). H P R Finberg was the second director (Hoskins being the first) of the Department of English Local History at the University of Leicester, whose members — including more recently, Alan Everitt, Charles Phythian-Adams, Harold Fox, and Christopher Dyer — have promoted a distinctive form of landscape research, with a strong emphasis on local *pays*, that has become known as the 'Leicester approach' (Tranter *et al* 1999).

The middle decades of the 20th century also saw the growth of historical geography with its clear focus on the landscape both at the local scale — for example, the analysis of village plans (eg Thorpe 1949) — and the mapping of historical data sets such as Domesday (eg Darby 1952; 1977). These regional Domesday Geographies remain an invaluable resource for the landscape archaeologist and historian, both for the analysis of the Domesday evidence itself, and the introduction they provide to the distinctive districts within each English county. Indeed, while best known as a historical geographer, Darby was also a landscape historian somewhat ahead of his time, for example through his work on medieval Fenland (Darby 1940; 1983). Another reflection of the value he placed upon collaborative research was his support for the Medieval Village Research Group (Gerrard 2003, 130). Other important contributions to giving documentary sources a spatial/landscape dimension were the mapping of early medieval estates from the boundary clauses of Anglo-Saxon charters, begun by Grundy in the 1920s but put on a firmer footing by Hooke (eg 1978; 1981; 1985), and Jones (1972) who reconstructed earlier territorial arrangements in Wales. The work of botanist Rackham (1986) has also been instrumental in providing a succinct summary of the major landscape character zones in Britain, and the history of woodland management. Other historical resources that were developing at this time, and have become so important to landscape archaeologists, include the revival of the Victoria County Histories, the county-based volumes of the English Place-Names



FIGURE 11.2. An early attempt at reconstructing a medieval landscape, from H P R Finberg's *Tavistock Abbey* in Devon. A comparison with more recent work shown in Figure 11.4 reflects the remarkable progress in the techniques of landscape reconstruction that has been made in recent years (after Finberg 1951).

Society, the *Agrarian History of England and Wales*, and the work of the many county Records Societies and other publishers such as the British Academy in making historical sources available in transcribed and often translated form. For Glastonbury Abbey, for example, we have published editions of the Great Chartulary (Watkin 1947; 1952; 1956), 13th-century Customals of Abbots Michael de Glastonbury and Roger de Ford (Elton 1891), a 14th-century Feodary of Abbot Walter Monington (Weaver 1910), the chronicle of John of Glastonbury (Carley 1985), and the late 12th-century surveys of Hilbert the Precentor, Henry Sully and Reginald de Fontibus

(Stacey 2001), all of which contain a wealth of topographical detail and have been of great importance in understanding the monastic landscape (eg Abrams 1996; Rippon 2004; in press; Gerrard with Aston 2007).

THE FIELD SURVEY TRADITION

There has been a long tradition of field survey within British archaeology, started by the antiquarian interest in sites such as abbeys and castles (Gerrard 2003, 5–55), and put on a more systematic footing by pioneering figures such as Toms (Bradley 1989) and Allcroft (1908, 552) — whose surveys included a deserted medieval village at Bingham in Nottinghamshire ‘said to have been destroyed by a hurricane’. Crawford (1953) also included medieval sites in his *Archaeology in the Field*. Although their emphasis in this early work was very much on recording sites, not whole landscapes, it laid the foundations of the British field survey tradition later developed by the Royal Commissions. By the 1960s the careful survey of earthworks was being developed by the likes of Bowen, whose *Ancient Fields* (1970) was an important step forward in the identification of medieval as well as ‘celtic’ field systems. This field survey tradition was developed by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME), with some of the most notable work being carried out by Taylor and his colleagues. Taylor’s (1967) reconstruction of the changing settlement patterns, field systems and land-uses in Whiteparish, Wiltshire, for example, went significantly beyond what Finberg had achieved in Tavistock as a piece of landscape reconstruction with a strong historical geography influence. Long-term research projects, such as Fowler’s work in Fyfield and Overton (2000), also in Wiltshire, set new agendas in landscape-scale research and inspired projects along similar lines elsewhere (eg Drewett 1982).

In the 1960s and 1970s there was also a transformation in the scale at which both survey and excavation were undertaken. The Jones’s work on the early medieval settlement at Mucking is a notable example where the concept of digging a discrete ‘site’ was replaced by the investigation of entire landscapes (see Hamerow 1993 and Rippon 2008 for interpretations of this site). Four books demonstrate this increasing emphasis upon investigating whole landscapes. The first two are the collections of papers published in *Archaeology and the Landscape* (Fowler 1972) and *Recent Work in Rural Archaeology* (Fowler 1975a) which reflect a moment when traditional ground-based field survey was being joined by aerial photography, fieldwalking and palaeoenvironmental analysis to study archaeological remains on a scale previously unseen. Aerial photography for archaeological purposes was not in itself new — Crawford and Keiller (1928), for example, included medieval strip lynchets and a shrunken medieval settlement in their *Wessex from the Air* — but its growing popularity transformed understanding of the density of past settlement, revealing the extent of cropmarks in the arable lowlands that complemented the already well-known earthwork complexes that survived in pastoral areas (Beresford and St Joseph 1958; RCHME 1960; Benson and Miles 1974; Leech 1977). Increased urban and industrial expansion, including the growing demand for sand and gravel by the construction industry, led to rescue excavations on a previously unseen scale,

with linear infrastructure developments such as the M4 and M5 motorways leading to archaeological investigations revealing unsuspected densities of sites in areas that had seen hardly any work in the past (Fowler 1979). Another innovation was fieldwalking that once again transformed our understanding of the density and nature of settlement in those areas with extensive arable cultivation and a good ceramic sequence. While some early studies may have had methodological problems — such as Wade-Martins's study of the Launditch Hundred (1980), where walking was restricted to areas around known deserted or still-occupied medieval settlements — whole-parish studies in the East Midlands and East Anglia were soon revealing the development of complete settlement patterns (eg Foard 1978; Davison 1990; Rogerson *et al* 1997; West and McLaughlin 1998). Alongside the continued results from earthwork surveys by the Royal Commissions in England, Scotland, and Wales (eg RCHME 1972; 1982; RCAHMS 1980; RCAHMW 1982), the dynamic and regionally varied medieval landscape that Taylor was able to describe in *Village and Farmstead* (1983) was far more complex than if he had been writing 20, possibly even 10, years earlier.

Two other seminal books of the 1970s were Aston and Rowley's *Landscape Archaeology: An Introduction to Fieldwork Techniques on Post-Roman Landscapes* (1974), and Taylor's *Fieldwork in Medieval Archaeology* (1974). These were innovative in a number of ways, not least their focus on the medieval and post-medieval periods (at a time when so much fieldwork was focused on the prehistoric and Roman periods), and their extensive use of maps and plans of the modern landscape, alongside aerial photography and earthwork survey, to try and understand the origins of what today we call 'the historic landscape': the present pattern of settlements, roads, fields and land-uses. It was the whole landscape — both urban and rural — which was being studied as opposed to the traditional focus on individual sites, and, whilst elite landscapes continued to receive attention, there was also a growing interest in the ordinary villages, hamlets and farmsteads within which the vast majority of the medieval population made their living. This approach was consolidated in Aston's *Interpreting the Landscape* (1985), which remains one of the best books on the subject.

The growth of landscape archaeology in the 1970s was not just about new techniques and the scale at which they were used: there was also a new agenda. One paper in *Recent Work in Rural Archaeology* provides an example: Fowler's (1975b) 'Continuity in the landscape: a summary of some local archaeology in Wiltshire, Somerset and Gloucestershire'. The traditional view of the origins of the medieval landscape, in the champion countryside of England's central zone at least, was that villages and open fields were introduced by the Anglo-Saxon settlers of the 5th and 6th centuries and that they replaced a sparsely settled and well-wooded country: a classic example of the culture-historical approach followed by the likes of Gray (1915), Fox (1932) and Hoskins (1955), whereby change in the landscape was brought about by invasion and migration. The increasing scale of aerial photography, fieldwalking and rescue archaeology, however, had revealed a Romano-British countryside that was far more densely settled than was previously thought: in the Nene Valley, for example, the number of known settlements in a study area of some

1000 square kilometres increased from 36 in 1931 to 434 in 1972 (Taylor 1975, 113). Fieldwalking and excavation were also suggesting that the 5th- and 6th-century settlement pattern was dispersed, with farmsteads and small hamlets spread across the areas covered by later parishes, rather than lying in the compact villages that are so characteristic of the later medieval period. Where medieval villages had been deserted, and so could be excavated, there was also no evidence that they dated back much before the Norman Conquest: rather than seeing the end of Roman Britain as a major discontinuity in the landscape, archaeologists such as Fowler were increasingly seeing continuity in settlement, land-use and even the estates into which the landscape was divided. Other examples of this emerging paradigm of continuity in the early post-Roman centuries include Jones's (1979; 1981; 1985) suggestion that territorial structures documented in later medieval Welsh law books might date back to the Roman period or earlier and that similar 'multiple estates' could be recognized in England (but see Gregson 1985). Likewise, Bonney (1979) argued that a relationship between Early Anglo-Saxon burials and parish boundaries meant that the latter were Roman or earlier in date (but see Goodier 1984 and Reynolds 2002), while Rodwell (1978) claimed that whole field systems may have survived in use since the Roman period. One example both of the impact that the 'New Archaeology' had on medieval scholarship, and the emerging trend towards seeing continuity in the landscape, is the use of techniques of spatial analysis borrowed from geography (eg Figure 11.3; Burrow 1982, fig 31). Thiessen polygons, for example, were used to try and reconstruct the territories associated with hillforts reoccupied in the early medieval period that seemed to show a close relationship with later parish boundaries. It is probably fair to say that theoretical archaeology has not had the same impact on the study of the medieval landscape as has been the case in the prehistoric period, though notable exceptions include Jope's (1972a; 1972b) work published at the height of interest in the 'New Archaeology', and subsequent studies have continued to show the potential for more processual and post-processual approaches (eg Rahtz 1983; Austin and Thomas 1990; Johnson 1996; 2002; and see Chris Gerrard this volume).

In 1979 the Society for Landscape Studies was founded, as a reaction against the highly empirical tradition that had developed within medieval archaeology, and reflecting the desire of many to develop a more holistic approach towards landscape research. By the 1980s the interdisciplinary principles and a larger-scale vision of landscape archaeology were becoming more commonplace in the study of all periods, though the approaches in the prehistoric and historic periods were somewhat different. A tradition of large-scale programmes of archaeological survey and excavation with a largely prehistoric and Romano-British focus developed in the heartland of British field archaeology — central southern England and in particular the chalk downs (eg East Hampshire Survey: Shennan 1985; East Berkshire Survey: Ford 1987; Maddle Farm Project: Gaffney and Tingle 1989; Stonehenge Environs Project: Richards 1990; Cranborne Chase: Barrett *et al* 1991; Vale of the White Horse Survey: Tingle 1991; Linear Ditches Project: Bradley *et al* 1994; Danebury Environs Project: Cunliffe 2000). Those with a greater interest in the medieval period tended to focus on smaller-scale parish surveys that integrate the study of maps, documents, and even standing buildings with programmes of archaeological survey,

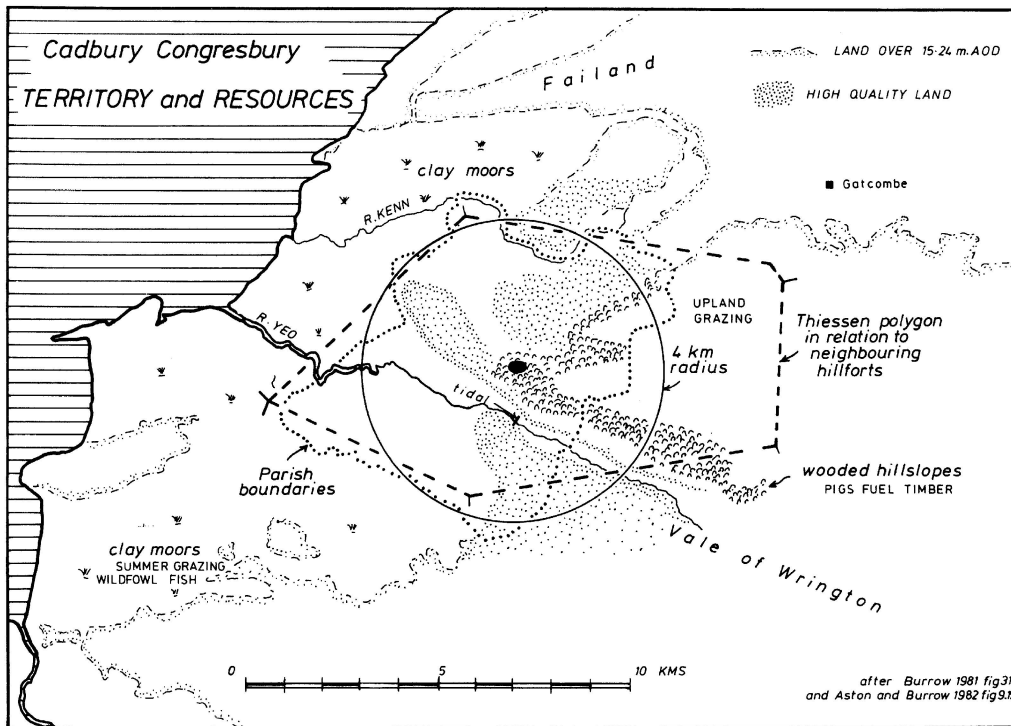


FIGURE 11.3. Possible early estates associated with the early medieval reoccupation of the hillfort at Cadbury Congresbury in Somerset. Ideas such as Thiessen polygons, borrowed from another discipline (geography) were typical of the 'New Archaeology' that came rather late to the study of the medieval period (after Rahtz *et al* 1992, fig 162).

and sometimes excavation. Such surveys were occasionally driven by threats from development, such as the urban expansion of Milton Keynes in Buckinghamshire (Croft and Maynard 1993) and gravel extraction around Raunds in Northamptonshire (Parry 2006), but more often they were research led as at Wharram Percy in Yorkshire (Hall 1982, fig 32; Hurst 1985, 204), Puxton (Rippon 2006) and Shapwick (Gerrard with Aston 2007) in Somerset, Hales, Lodden (Davison 1990) and Barton Bendish (Rogerson *et al* 1997) in Norfolk, and Walsham-le-Willows in Suffolk (West and McLaughlin 1998). One reason why medievalists work on a smaller scale, of course, is that in addition to the field evidence they work in a period for which some places have a large body of documentary material and its integration with evidence on the ground was a key character-defining feature of the emerging discipline of landscape archaeology (eg Aston and Rowley 1974; Taylor 1974; Moorhouse 1979).

Whilst these surveys were on a relatively modest scale, on the Continent far more ambitious projects were shedding new light on the long-term development of larger-scale landscapes in areas such as East Brittany (Astill and Davies 1997) and the Biferno Valley in southern Italy (Barker 1995). In Britain, the largest-scale surveys were on the major wetlands areas in response to a variety of threats such as agricultural

improvement, desiccation and development. The English Heritage funded projects in the North-West (eg Hodgkinson *et al* 2000) and around the Humber estuary (Van de Noort 2004) yielded modest results for the medieval period, while those of Fenland produced a remarkable series of studies that integrated fieldwalking, aerial photography and the analysis of historical maps and documents (eg Silvester 1988; Hall 1996). The Gwent Levels Historic Landscape Study, funded by Cadw and Countryside Council for Wales, was one of the pioneering examples of what is now called ‘historic landscape characterization’ (Rippon 1996), while other medieval wetland landscapes that have seen extensive research include Romney Marsh (Eddison 2000) and the North Somerset Levels (Rippon 2006).

It is clear from the examples given above that archaeologists in England had enthusiastically embraced the ideas of landscape archaeology, but there were some significant differences elsewhere in Britain. By the 1990s it was clearly recognized that the state of research into medieval settlement and landscape in Scotland and Wales was falling well behind that in England, with the publication of work in Scotland ‘limited to say the least’ and that in Wales ‘even bleaker’ (Atkinson *et al* 2000, vi; and see Morrison 2000). Part of the problem is that in Scotland the historic landscape of today is largely a post-medieval creation. Whereas in large parts of England the patterns of fields, roads and settlements that are depicted on 19th-century maps contain many elements that are medieval in date — especially away from the areas of Parliamentary Enclosure of former open field — in Scotland this is not the case. Here, the modern settlement patterns and field systems were largely created in the last two and a half centuries (eg Dixon 2002; 2007a; 2007b; Macinnes 2003), and with relatively scarce medieval documentary sources it is not surprising that in Scottish historical geography too the emphasis in ‘medieval or later rural settlement’ is largely on the ‘later’ (eg Dodgshon 2000; Fenton 2000; Whyte 2000; Lelong 2003).

Intensive agriculture in the Scottish lowlands also means that there are few upstanding remains of any pre-modern landscapes — in sharp contrast to the numerous deserted medieval villages that have dominated research in the central parts of England — and although the uplands contain a wide range of well-preserved relict landscapes, pre-18th-century buildings are extremely rare (eg Wickham-Jones 2001; Boyle 2003; Halliday 2003). Whilst there are a few notable examples of the familiar techniques of landscape archaeology being used on medieval sites in lowland Scotland, such as aerial photography and fieldwalking that led to the discovery of the deserted settlement at Rattray, in Aberdeenshire (Murray and Murray 1993), and the RCAHMS’s continued landscape-scale field surveys (RCAHMS 1990; 1994; 1997; 2007), the amount of excavation of medieval rural sites in Scotland remains ‘pitifully small’ (Dixon 2000, 260; and see Lelong 2003). Progress is, however, now being made, and while there is still no equivalent development-led work to the Raunds Project, there are now some excellent multi-disciplinary research programmes including the University of Sheffield’s research in the Hebrides (Sharples and Parker Pearson 1999; Branigan 2005), and the Ben Lawers Historic Landscape Project in the central Highlands (Boyle 2003; Turner 2003).

In Wales, the study of medieval rural settlement has been described as ‘marginal’, both in the sense of the best preserved remains usually being in upland areas, and in

terms of the relatively limited attention that it has received (Thompson and Yates 2000, 37). As Edwards (1997b, 5) has observed: ‘medieval settlement archaeology in Wales has received surprisingly little attention when compared with the amount of research, survey and excavation which has been carried out on both rural and urban settlements of the same period in England over the last fifty years’. Early work focused on post-Roman high status sites — such as Dinas Powys — and deserted rural settlement in upland areas where a lack of dating evidence was a common problem (eg Fox 1939; Butler 1971; Edwards 1997b, 2–5). In recent decades the bias towards upland areas has remained, although some excellent work has been done here (eg Cefn Graenog in Caernarfonshire: Kelly 1982, and see Ward 1997; Browne and Hughes 2003). But themed projects funded by Cadw are now targeting previously neglected topics such as later medieval royal courts (eg Longley 1997; Johnstone 1997), and lower-status rural settlement (eg Thompson and Yates 2000, 38; Roberts 2006), in an effort to redress the bias in excavation towards high-status sites such as castles and towns. While there is also a strong tradition of standing building survey in Wales (eg Fox and Raglan 1951; RCAHMS 1988; Smith 1988; Suggett 2005), there is a desperate need for more interdisciplinary landscape-based projects akin to Wharram Percy, Raunds, Whittlewood and Shapwick, that embrace the entire medieval landscape of settlement, communication systems, field systems and associated land-uses, something that the work of David Austin and Andrew Fleming at Strata Florida should achieve (Austin 2004).

NEW TECHNIQUES AND NEW DIRECTIONS

In recent years the range of techniques available to the landscape archaeologist has increased dramatically. Geophysical survey is becoming quicker and more sophisticated, allowing the coverage of ever-greater areas, and GPS (Global Positioning System) makes accurate but rapid earthwork survey possible across large areas (eg Chapman and Fenwick 2002). Development-led survey and excavation is adding enormously to the volume of data on medieval settlement, both deserted and, perhaps more importantly, still occupied. The application of PPG-16 (Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: advice from government to local authorities on how archaeology should be dealt with in the planning process) means that there are now increasing numbers of excavations within currently occupied settlements that are starting to shed light on their origins, and in areas as far apart as Gloucestershire and Cambridgeshire it is the Middle Saxon period that is emerging as the foundation date for many villages (eg Taylor *et al* 1994; Mortimer 2000; Reynolds 2003; Cessford 2004; 2005; and see Rippon 2008). In many villages, of course, there are no vacant plots to be developed, but even here archaeologists have started to make headway in testing the conclusions of plan analysis through the digging of large numbers of small test-pits (Rippon 2006; Page and Jones 2007; Gerrard with Aston 2007; Lewis 2007).

Another area that has seen recent advances is palaeoenvironmental sampling. On-site work is now routine, and we have increasing numbers of large, well-dated assemblages of both crop remains and animal bone, though more work is needed on rural settlements. There is also a need for more off-site work, to complement the large

numbers of well-dated sequences we have for the prehistoric period (Bell 1989; Dark 2000). In the past, attention has focused on upland peat bogs that are of little value in the medieval period, lying well beyond areas of settlement and presenting at best a broad regional picture due to their vast catchment areas. Increasingly, however, attention is shifting to the potential of small valley mires that occur within areas that were settled and farmed throughout the medieval period and these are addressing issues such as the absence of a widespread woodland regeneration in lowland areas in the early post-Roman period, and the intensification of agriculture around the 8th century that is now being identified as far afield as Devon (Rippon *et al* 2006) and East Anglia (Murphy 1996, 29; Rippon 2008). Preliminary work on the sediments filling small valleys in the East Midlands show the potential to address similar issues, though better dating is required (eg around Whittlewood: Page 2006, 52–53, 56, 86; Branch *et al* nd).

In the past two decades the British tradition of detailed local case-studies has continued, though an increase in the resources that are sometimes available, the use of GIS (Geographical Information Systems), and a change in philosophy with regard to the most appropriate scale at which landscape should be studied, have contributed to a move away from individual parishes towards studying larger districts. Notable examples include the Clwydian Hills in Wales (Brown 2004), Swaledale in Yorkshire (Fleming 1998), Whittlewood in the East Midlands (Jones and Page 2006), and the North Somerset Levels (Rippon 2006). The work of Glenn Foard and David Hall in particular, in reconstructing the medieval landscape across the whole of Northamptonshire will be a remarkable achievement (see Foard 2001, and Foard *et al* 2005 for the Rockingham Forest area pilot study: Figure 11.4). The survey team within English Heritage (the former RCHME) have also shifted their focus, from attempting to produce definitive county gazetteers of archaeological sites towards more focused projects on individual distinctive districts (eg *The Field Archaeology of Exmoor*: Riley and Wilson-North 2001; *The Malvern Hills: An Ancient Landscape*: Bowden 2005; *The Historic landscape of the Quantock Hills*: Riley 2006; *The Malvern Hills: An Ancient Landscape*: Bowden 2005; note how the titles of these volumes reflect the more holistic view of landscape shifting from field archaeology to the historic landscape as a whole). In Scotland and Wales the production of county-based inventories by the Royal Commissions there has similarly been replaced by thematic volumes focusing on particular regions (eg RCAHMS 2007), previously neglected subjects such as rural settlement (eg Boyle 2003; Roberts 2006), and particular types of standing buildings (eg Suggett 2005).

A growing appreciation that individual medieval sites can only be properly understood when placed in their wider landscape context is seen in many area of medieval archaeology, reflected in recent books on *Monasteries in the Landscape* (Aston 2000), *Monastic Landscapes* (Bond 2004), ‘*Landscapes of Lordship*’: *Norman Castles and the Countryside* (Liddiard 2000), *Castles and Landscapes* (Creighton 2002), and *Castles in Context: Power, Symbolism and Landscape* (Liddiard 2005). There are even entirely new facets to the medieval countryside that are being discovered, such as the extent to which some high status sites were associated with parks, gardens and planned landscapes sometimes with deeply embedded meaning

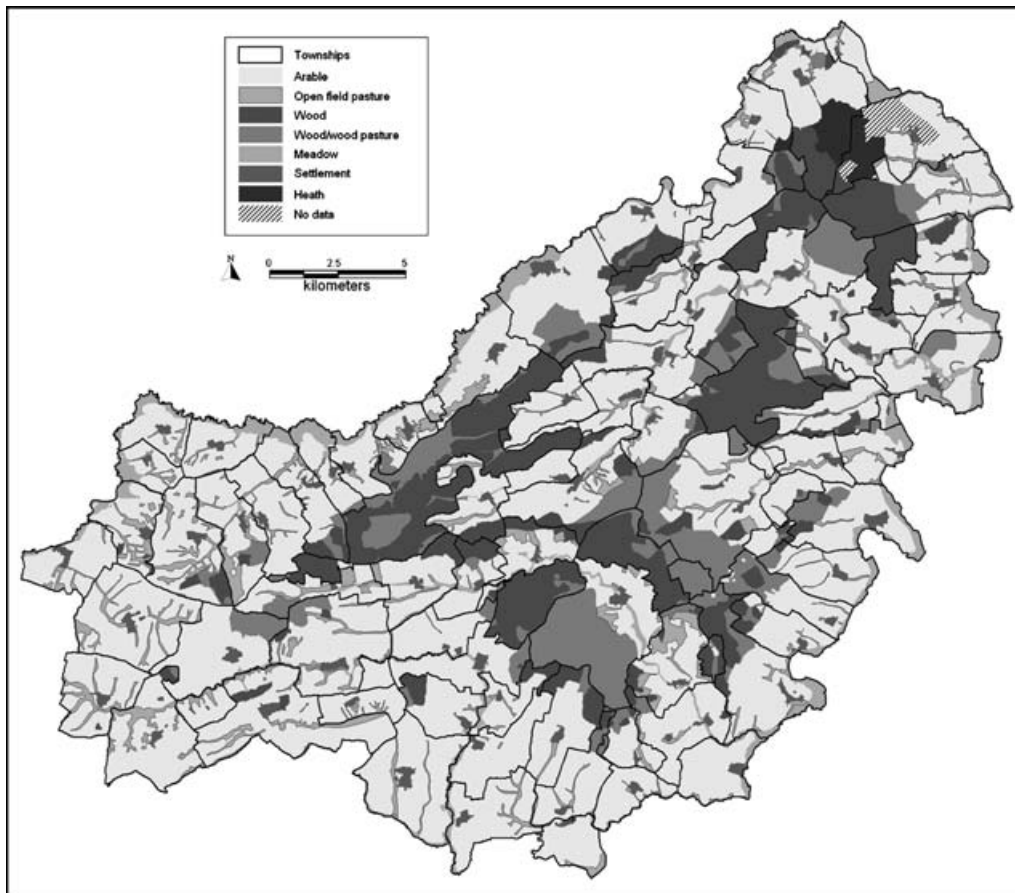


FIGURE 11.4. A reconstruction of the medieval landscape of the Rockingham Forest in Northamptonshire by Glenn Foard, David Hall and Tracey Partida. The use of GIS has allowed David Hall's decades of fieldwork and analysis of maps and document to be plotted in a way that was previously not possible (after Foard *et al* 2005, fig 7).

and symbolism (Harvey 1981; Gilchrist 1999, 111; Richardson 2005; Liddiard 2007; Creighton 2009). Another area in which the agenda of landscape research has moved on is the concept of marginality. It is striking how many of the pioneering projects referred to in this paper were in locations that would traditionally have been regarded as 'marginal' such as the uplands and wetlands (see Postan 1972). Traditional views of marginality have, however, changed radically, and we should now see various environments as offering different potential for human communities that will not always be based on cereal production (eg Bailey 1989; Fox 1996; Rippon 2000, 3–6). The study of specialist settlements adds much to the richness and texture of our countryside, and has also increased in popularity in recent years, such as seasonal settlements in the uplands, and the fishing villages of south-west England that were a

surprisingly late addition to the distinctive landscape character of this region (eg Fox 1996; 2001). This more holistic approach to studying the landscape is also reflected in a growing appreciation of the need to understand towns within their rural hinterlands (Giles and Dyer 2005; see Astill, this volume). Industrial archaeology, however, remains a subject that is somewhat detached from the wider world of landscape research, although a number of projects are now seeking to integrate the understanding of industrial sites and their fuel supply with their wider landscape context (eg Astill 1993; Foard 2001; Atkinson 2003; Rippon *et al* 2009).

REGIONAL VARIATION IN LANDSCAPE CHARACTER: A MIDLAND-CENTRIC DEBATE

Whilst there has been research into the medieval landscapes in all parts of Britain, there remain areas that are subject to much debate, such as the origins and development of regional variation in landscape character, and in particular why the ‘aberration’ (Taylor 1983, 125) of villages and open fields developed only in the central zone of England. As far back as Gray’s *English Field Systems* (1915), it has been recognized that the champion countryside that stretched from North-East England, through the East Midlands, and down to Wessex, was very different to the areas either side, and the origins of these villages and open fields has been studied through detailed local projects in places ranging from Wharram Percy in Yorkshire (Beresford and Hurst 1990), Raunds (Parry 2006), Whittlewood (Jones and Page 2006), and Milton Keynes (Croft and Mynard 1993) in the East Midlands, and Shapwick in Somerset (Gerrard with Aston 2007).

A trilogy of three major studies (Lewis *et al* 1997; Roberts and Wrathmell 2002; Williamson 2003) has recently examined the origins of regional variation in landscape character, focusing on the Midlands and East Anglia. Lewis, Mitchell-Fox and Dyer (1997) have provided what can be regarded as the currently dominant view, that areas which were to acquire champion countryside were the most developed regions of England and that the countryside here was reordered from around the 10th century, although this model does not fit comfortably with the results of recent survey and excavations in areas such as Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk that seem to suggest that settlement started to nucleate before the mid-9th century (Hayes and Lane 1992, 48; Lane and Hayes 1993, 69; Steedman 1994; Brown and Foard 1998; Rippon 2009). Roberts and Wrathmell (2000; 2002) have used a variety of mapped data-sets to suggest that the origins of the champion countryside in what they term England’s ‘central province’ lay in the Roman or even late prehistoric period, this being the area most extensively cleared of woodland. There is, however, no correlation between the density of population in Domesday and those parts of England that saw the transformation of their landscape through the creation of villages and open fields. Williamson (2003; 2007a) has suggested a very different explanation: that the physical form of the terrain, which affects the extent of meadow, and the characteristics of particular soils in relation to when they can be ploughed, determined the form taken by settlement patterns and field systems.

This suggestion that the natural environment may have had a greater part to play in shaping human behaviour appears in a number of other recent studies by younger scholars and is a direct challenge to the post environmental-deterministic paradigm of social agency being the over-riding cause of variation in landscape character. Draper (2006, 112), for example, suggests that the physical landscape is 'fundamental to understanding settlement and society', contrasting the very different patterns of settlement and agriculture in the chalk downland and clay vales of Wiltshire, while in his study of Somerset, Corcos (2002, 190) states:

it must now be clear that a common thread is the importance of ecology and natural environment as important considerations in shaping the nature of medieval settlement, and by extension, the nature of human communities . . . This is not a 'deterministic' conclusion, but one which accepts and indeed celebrates the extraordinary adaptive abilities of pre-industrial societies, and the symbiotic relationship between them and their ecological resource base.

It is difficult to disagree with Johnson's (2007, 145) assertion that 'the landscape archaeologist . . . is examining the effects of real people leading real lives, and, further, doing so in active ways', and Lewis *et al* (1997, 186) are right to remind us that 'human ingenuity is not *always* constrained by physical conditions' [my italics]. However, such is the fear of being accused of environmental determinism that there could be a tendency to overlook the possibility that the inherent properties of soil and topography do influence landscape character. Indeed, in another challenge to current orthodoxy, Martin (2006) has recently returned to the issue of the impact that migration might have had on the landscape, by suggesting that Scandinavian colonization contributed to a profound variation in landscape character either side of the Gipping and Lark valleys in Suffolk, a difference that Williamson (2006, 29–30) attributes to the effect that topography had on social interaction and trade/exchange networks. I have also examined the impact that the Anglo-Norman Conquest had on the landscape of southern Wales, identifying not just very 'English' landscapes of villages and open fields that contrast with adjacent 'Welshries' that had very dispersed settlement patterns and predominantly enclosed fields, but also distinctive planned settlements that could have been created by Flemish colonists (Rippon 1996, 63–64; 1997; 2008).

In a further contribution to the debate over the origins of regional variation in landscape character, I have tried to shift the focus away from Midland England towards regions to the east and west of the central zone, and ask why these areas did not see the development of villages and open fields (Rippon 2007a; 2008). Any notion that areas such as the South-East and the South-West were somehow backward and remote is rejected, and it is argued that the 'long eighth century' (the late 7th through to the early 9th centuries: Hanson and Wickham 2005) saw widespread agricultural intensification in the countryside right across southern England, but that the landscape developed in different ways in different areas. The South-West, for example, saw the development of a form of rotational agriculture, known as convertible husbandry, but little settlement nucleation. In the southern and eastern Midlands and East Anglia, palaeoenvironmental sequences similarly show an intensification of agriculture and

here dispersed settlement patterns do appear to have been replaced by nucleated villages, but ‘divergent developments’ — a term developed by Alan Lambourne (2008) — saw this pattern fossilized in the Midlands, whereas in East Anglia there was a subsequent trend towards settlement dispersion as farmsteads migrated towards greens and commons.

Even after 50 years of medieval archaeology, new light can still be shed on other much-debated issues such as the relationship between lordship and the community in shaping landscape character (see Dyer 1985 and Harvey 1989 for previous discussions). Two recent studies in Somerset have also addressed the issue of whether it was landowners or the peasant communities on their manors who were the prime movers in shaping landscape character. In Shapwick, on the Polden Hills, a strong case is made for Glastonbury Abbey, and perhaps Abbot Dunstan, as having been instrumental in replanning the basic framework of this landscape (Gerrard with Aston 2007), while in extensive areas of marshland held by the bishops of Bath and Wells marked differences in landscape character within a few miles of each other suggest that it was local communities who decided whether to manage their newly won lands within the context of villages and open fields, or more dispersed settlement patterns and closes held in severalty (Rippon 2006). Even within areas that show evidence for estates having been sub-divided and their landscapes restructured through the creation of villages and open fields, the degree of variation in features such as the layout of settlements shows the significance of individual decision-making (Rippon 2008).

CURRENT DEBATES

Another recently developed technique is ‘Historic Landscape Characterization’ (HLC) which, in terms of the work carried out in almost all English counties, and the related form of characterization that was the Roberts and Wrathmell (2000) *Atlas of Rural Settlement in England* project, represents a major investment of public resources by English Heritage. The initiative is not, however, without its critics. HLC developed in the 1990s in both England (beginning in Cornwall: Herring 1998) and Wales (the Gwent Levels: Rippon 1996) as a way of understanding the processes that lay behind the creation of all areas of our countryside, and a similar process has been developed in Scotland where it is known as Historic Land-Use Assessment (Dixon 2007a). In all three regions, prescribed methodologies are followed by English Heritage, Historic Scotland and Cadw/The Countryside Council for Wales, and while it is important to remember that these HLCs are designed simply to inform planners and countryside managers of the historic time-depth present in our countryside, rather than addressing the academic community (for example, see Herring 2007; Lake 2007; Clarke *et al* 2004; Alfry 2007), significant discoveries have been made including previously unsuspected examples of medieval field systems still surviving in use in parts of Scotland (Dixon 2007a; 2007b). There are, however, problems in the way that some HLCs have been carried out — including the use of only modern map sources in some examples — and this has unfortunately led to considerable doubts about its research value (for example, see Austin 2007; Finch 2007; Williamson 2007). There is, however,

more to characterization than these prescriptive schemes by governmental bodies, and the analysis of the earliest surviving map sources for a particular study area is clearly more rewarding. If we think instead of the broader idea of 'historic landscape analysis', that can include mapping and analysing layers of data such as patterns of landownership and occupancy, field- and place-names, vernacular architecture, and the results of archaeological survey and excavation, then characterizing settlement patterns and field systems is simply a further addition to the already diverse techniques of landscape archaeology (Rippon 2004; 2006; 2007b; Rippon *et al* 2009). The increasing use of computer packages is making such research increasingly straightforward, such as GIS, Kain and Oliver's (2002) mapping of ancient parish boundaries depicted on Tithe maps, and online resources such as Digimap (that includes a complete coverage of Ordnance Survey First Edition Six Inch maps) and some Historic Environment Records.

One problem with HLC is its almost complete reliance on morphology, most notably field boundary patterns, in reconstructing past patterns of land-use, but other layers of data can be added to this analysis to confirm or refute such hypotheses, including patterns of land ownership and land occupancy that can help identify areas of former open field that have been enclosed by agreement (eg Figure 11.5). Historic landscape analysis can even be used to integrate other strands of landscape research, such as the study of standing buildings, which have been used to confirm the antiquity of regional variation in settlement patterns mapped by Roberts and Wrathmell (eg Rippon 2006; 2007b; Rippon *et al* 2009). Indeed, the study of medieval buildings — both excavated and still standing — is a subject that has enormous potential for greater integration with research into the wider landscape (eg Gardiner 2007).

Historic Landscape Characterization was not the only issue being debated within landscape studies in 2007: far more significant doubts were being expressed over the past achievements and future direction of landscape archaeology as a whole. In his book *Ideas of Landscape* (2007), Matthew Johnson has examined the conceptual framework within which the British tradition of landscape archaeology has developed, appearing to argue that it is over empirical and lacking theoretical rigor. David Austin (2006, 193) has also recently commented on the still strongly empirical approach towards studying medieval rural settlement in Wales where 'in this pattern of explanation, humanity is either ignored — being seen as largely controlled by the systems — or is limited to the creators and controllers'. Johnson's apparent criticism of empirical research brought a swift response from Andrew Fleming (2007) whose plea 'Don't bin your boots' brought about an immediate and vigorous reply from Johnson (2007): 'Don't bin your brain'. Entertaining as such debates are, does such disagreement actually reflect some crisis within landscape archaeology? Johnson (2007, 1–2) is certainly right to observe that there is a clear divide between what can be regarded as a cultural geography approach, whose preoccupation is more theoretical and concerned with issues such as perception and the meaning of 'landscape', and the more empirical approach of 'traditional' landscape archaeology, historical geography and local history. It is true that some of the readers of *Landscape History*, the *Medieval Settlement Research Group Annual Report*, *Landscapes* and indeed *Medieval Archaeology* might struggle with the likes of Cosgrove's *Social*

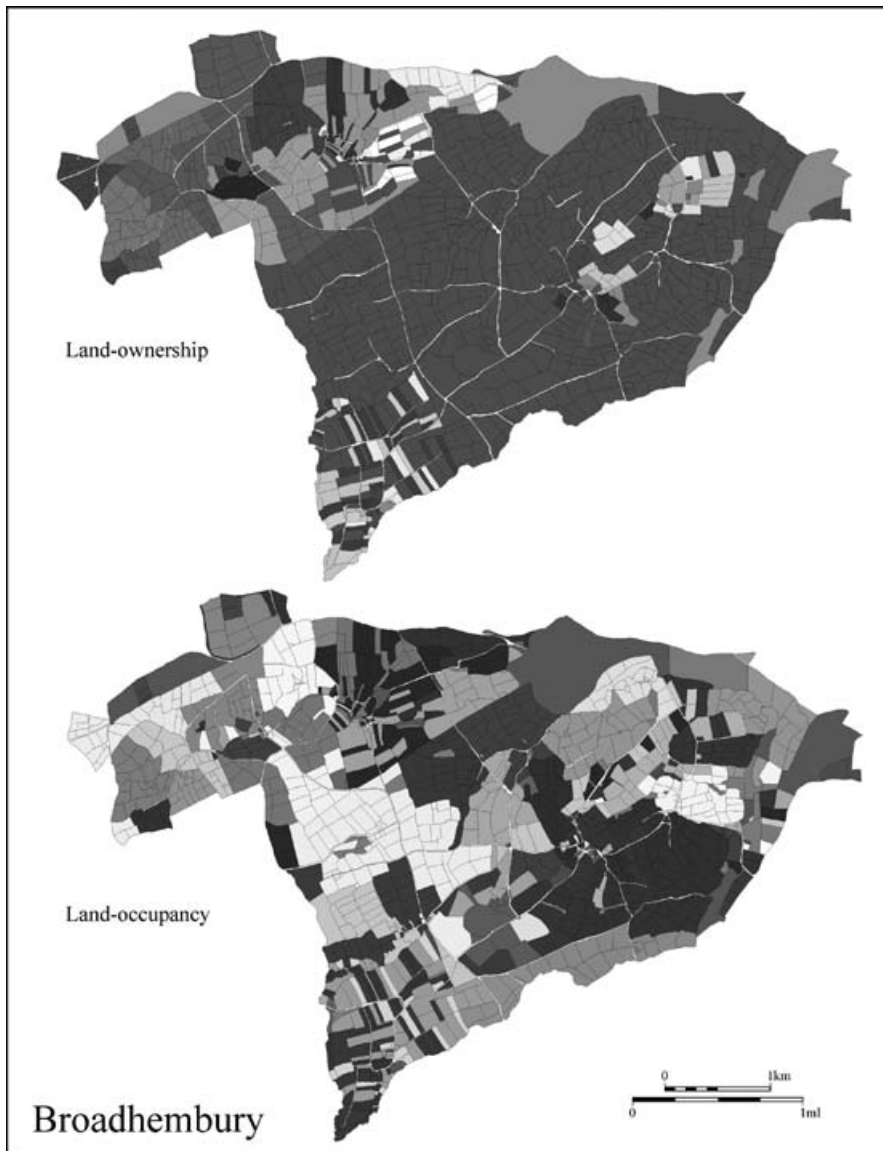


FIGURE 11.5. Patterns of landownership and land occupancy (ie tenements) in the parish of Broadhembury in east Devon. A characterization of this landscape based purely on morphology would suggest the presence of former open fields in the north and south-west of the parish. Such morphological hypotheses require testing with other data, and here such verification is provided by the highly fragmented patterns of landownership and land occupancy. Note how each open field was associated with a small hamlet and that most of the rest of the parish was dominated by closes held in severalty, a pattern typical of much of Devon. (Research and drawing by Richard Sandover)

Formation and Symbolic Landscape (1984), or Daniels's 'The political iconography of woodland in later Georgian England' (1988). But is Johnson (2007, 2) justified in dismissing the British tradition of landscape archaeology, historical geography and local history as remaining 'firmly in the grip of the most unreflective empiricism in which "theory" is a dirty word'? Theoretically incisive studies of the medieval landscape in Britain are relatively few and far between (eg Muir 1999; Holtorf and Williams 2006), in marked contrast to the emerging field of historical archaeology more globally (eg De Cunzio and Ernstein 2006; Pauls 2006), but need this concern us? In 50 years time, which books and papers will still be read: the discursive theoretical works of recent years, or the meticulous surveys of the English, Welsh and Scottish Royal Commissions, and major field-based programmes of research such as the Fenland Survey, many of which will record sites and landscapes that have long been destroyed?

Many readers will no doubt have reached a conclusion of their own, but if landscape research is to remain healthy we must try and reach a position where all these important works will still be valued in the future. Medieval archaeology has always been characterized by a multiplicity of special interest groups and this is not necessarily a bad thing: it is always good to enter a dialogue with colleagues who share a common interest. What is not healthy is the lack of communication with related disciplines such as the study of vernacular architecture, place-names and, yes, cultural geography. There is much in Ian Whyte's *Landscape History Since 1500* (2002) that should be of interest to landscape archaeologists and historians, yet his bibliography contains almost no reference to the work of 'traditional' landscape archaeology. Are geographers at fault for not embracing ideas and data from other disciplines, or is landscape archaeology at fault for not producing the sort of data and ideas that are of interest to anyone else? It is time for reflection, but the current debates such as these, and indeed the clear differences in philosophy between scholars with regards to the causes of regional variation in landscape character, should not be seen as a sign of a divided and declining discipline, but rather one that is facing up to the challenges of the future.

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