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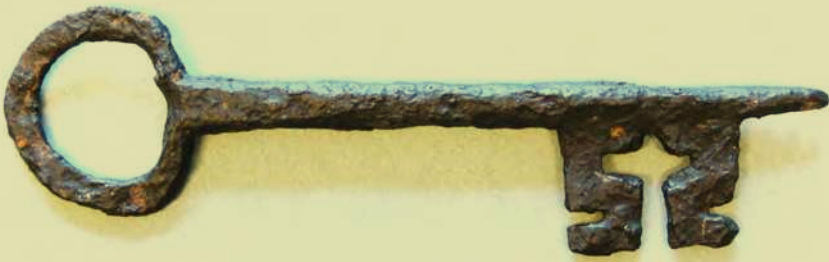
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TORPEL MANOR:  
THE BIOGRAPHY  
OF A LANDSCAPE



BY  
FRIEDA GOSLING, STEVEN P ASHBY  
AND ALEKSANDRA McCLAIN

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Cover Illustration: Medieval key found at Torpel Manor Field.

Photograph by Steven P Ashby



# TORPEL MANOR: THE BIOGRAPHY OF A LANDSCAPE

By Frieda Gosling, Steven P Ashby and Aleksandra McClain

With Contributions from Martin Bradshaw, Michael Clatworthy, and Stephen Upex



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# PREFACE

This book is the result of an extended collaboration between the local communities of the villages of Helpston, Bainton and Ufford, and staff from the Department of Archaeology, University of York. It has been made possible by the support of the Langdyke Countryside Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund, to whom we are grateful. We also extend our thanks to additional benefactors: the Aidan Fogarty Will Trust and the Helpston Gala Committee.

The volume is intended as an accessible introduction to the site's complex biography, and will hopefully be of interest not only to the people of 'Torpel Country', but also to anyone interested in the landscape history of Eastern England, and to enthusiasts of the Middle Ages more generally. With this in mind, we have taken an unusual approach to referencing our supporting evidence, including not just archival resources and recent academic literature, but also more popular treatments, which should provide a more accessible point of entry into the scholarship for many readers. The further reading can be followed up in the endnotes for each chapter. Further supporting information, in the form of data and raw materials collated from archive research, is available via *Torpel Online* at: <https://www.york.ac.uk/archaeology/research/project-archives/torpel/>

We are indebted to a great number of people. Initial background research was undertaken by Robbin van Splunder. Brenda Hirst's dissertation on the deer park also helped our initial research.<sup>1</sup> Frieda Gosling's archival research has been facilitated by the generosity of a number of parties including the Quarles family, the staff of the Northampton, Peterborough and Lincoln Record Offices, the National Archive, and especially David Hall and Tim Halliday, who advised on archive sources and presented evidence based on their own research. The photography, transcription, and translation of original documents was undertaken by a number of individuals, including Peter Wordsworth and Simon Neal. Archaeological fieldwork and finds identification were supported by individuals at the University of York (Helen Goodchild; Neil Gevaux) and beyond (Hayley Saul, Michael Fradley, Julie Cassidy, Paul Blinkhorn). Invaluable specialist advice and reports have been provided by Chris Cumberpatch, Jane Young, Paul Blinkhorn, and Hugh Willmott, and we have benefited from discussion with Alison Leonard, Megan von Ackermann, Jon Finch, Kate Giles, Cath Neal, Terry O'Connor, Julian D Richards, James Symonds, and Tom Williamson. Illustrations are produced by permission, with original drawings by Ivan Cumberpatch, and maps drawn by Peter Leverington. Federica Benedetti assisted in the production of plans. All efforts have been made to secure relevant copyrights and permissions.



We are of course particularly indebted to all the volunteers who came out to help us with fieldwork, to support our dissemination events, and to keep us fed and watered. The numbers – too many to list – include but are not limited to: Mike Clatworthy, Ivan and Eileen Cumberpatch, Roy Hinchliff, Anne and Judi Horspole, Jane Johnson, Robert and Karen Lakey, Peter Leverington, Avril Lumley Prior, Mary and Bill Purdon, Nigel and Lauren Sandford, Linda Smith, Cliff Stanton, Iain Stowe, Bob and Sue Titman, Peter and Clair Wordsworth, and the members of Fenland Young Archaeologists Club.

The project was first conceived as part of a Heritage Lottery Fund application by the Langdyke Countryside Trust, who continue to maintain and care for the Torpel Manor Field site. Indeed, great thanks are due to the HLF, who have provided grants to cover field research and the construction of an interpretation centre, as well as a second, dissemination phase, for which this volume provides a key output. Finally, Marcus and Debbie at PPS have shown great patience throughout the process of publication.

All errors of course remain the authors' own. As the first in-depth investigation into the history and archaeology of this enigmatic site, it is our hope that it inspires further research, which may build upon, elucidate, or challenge these initial findings. As John Clare said, 'If life had a second edition, how I would correct the proofs.'<sup>2</sup>

# LIST OF AUTHORS

## **Frieda Gosling, Ufford**

*Frieda Gosling is a geographer by profession, and an amateur local and landscape historian. She led on the documentary and archival research, and co-authored this text.*

## **Dr Steven P Ashby, Dept of Archaeology, University of York**

*Steve Ashby is Senior Lecturer in the Dept of Archaeology, University of York. He specialises in craft, industry and everyday life in medieval England and Scandinavia. Steve co-directed the archaeological work, and assisted in editing the present volume.*

## **Dr Martin Bradshaw, Castor**

*Martin is a geologist by training, and one-time lecturer at the University of Aston in Birmingham. His D.Phil. research at Oxford included the rocks of Torpel Country. He returned to his roots after decades abroad, brought the team together and instigated the project collaboration. He wrote 'Torpel's Natural Setting', and advised on the book's editorial process.*

## **Michael Clatworthy, Tickencote**

*Mike is a former geography teacher, and was head of three field study centres during his career. Whilst working in Oxford he completed a Certificate in British Archaeology, and dug for many years with the Oxford Archaeology Unit on sites in the Cotswolds. He is now Warden of the Interpretation Centre at Torpel. Mike has been a key force in driving the project both in its initial HLF-funded phase, and in later work: maintaining the site, and leading on various episodes of fieldwork. He wrote the section on 'Finds from Torpel Manor Field', and advised throughout the editorial process.*

## **Dr Aleksandra McClain, Dept of Archaeology, University of York**

*Aleks McClain is Senior Lecturer in the Dept of Archaeology, University of York. She specialises in the archaeology of churches and commemoration and Anglo-Norman society. Aleks co-directed the archaeological work, and assisted in editing the present volume.*

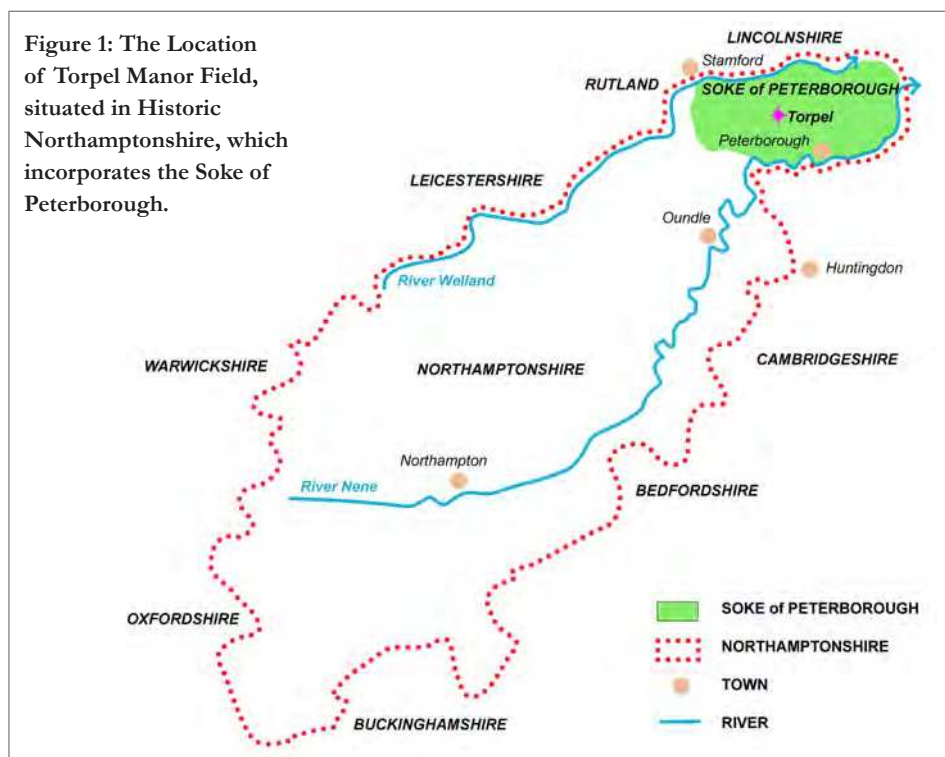
## **Prof Stephen Upex, Institute of Continuing Education, University of Cambridge**

*Stephen is a Tutor at Madingley Hall Cambridge. He lectures widely within the UK, and works as a freelance archaeologist and consultant. He is a specialist in landscape archaeology, and has worked across the globe, but has made particularly important contributions in Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire, where he has directed excavations and undertaken research on the prehistoric, Roman, and Anglo-Saxon landscape. Stephen has been a supporter of the project since its early days, speaking at our first public meeting. He has provided an important source of advice on Torpel Country's ancient past, and wrote 'The Prehistory of Torpel Country' and 'Romans in Torpel Country'.*

## CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCING TORPEL MANOR

When Torpel Manor Field was purchased by the Langdyke Countryside Trust in 2009, very little was known about the site, other than the remarkably well preserved mound and ditches in the south west corner, and the Torpel Way: a long-distance footpath between Peterborough and Stamford which crosses the north of the field. Today, the site is visible as a wide, flat-topped mound surrounded by a somewhat confusing complex of ditches, banks, and upstanding earthworks that appear to represent building platforms and the footings of other long-lost structures. Through recent documentary and archaeological research involving the local community, we have begun to unpick the site’s history and its place in the wider landscape. Why is Torpel here? What did it look like in the past? What sort of activities happened here? Why did it fall out of use? These are the questions we intend to grapple with, and in so doing, to give the site the recognition it deserves, as a place of considerable local and national significance.

Torpel Manor Field lies on the edge of the village of Helpston, in the Soke of Peterborough, between the Rivers Welland and Nene (**Figure 1**).



Though now incorporated into Cambridgeshire, until 1965 this region was part of the historic county of Northamptonshire. The term *soke* tells us that it had the right to hold its own court of law, demonstrating some level of administrative independence from the rest of the county. The Soke was also known as the vill (a small medieval administrative unit) of Peterborough and the double hundred of Nassaburh. Northamptonshire, like other counties in central and southern England, was divided into administrative units called hundreds. Importantly, the Soke is more than simply an administrator's contrivance, and the region does have a character of its own, united chiefly by its low-lying topography relative to the rest of Northamptonshire.<sup>3</sup> This situation has resulted in a distinctive, varied cultural landscape. Across the Soke as a whole the pattern of settlement is somewhat more dispersed than that seen across most of Northamptonshire, but Torpel Country and the western Soke are characterised by the more familiar pattern of nucleated villages.<sup>4</sup>

There have been minor changes in parish boundaries over time. **Figure 2** nonetheless presents a useful guide to the likely distribution of villages around Torpel for much of the medieval period. Torpel has never had its own parish, and despite its close association with Helpston, it does not lie in that parochial unit. Until the end of the 19th century, Torpel was in the parish of Ufford, and thereafter it was considered part of the modern parish of Bainton and Ashton (see 'Baddingtō' in Figure 2), which had previously been a chapelry of Ufford.

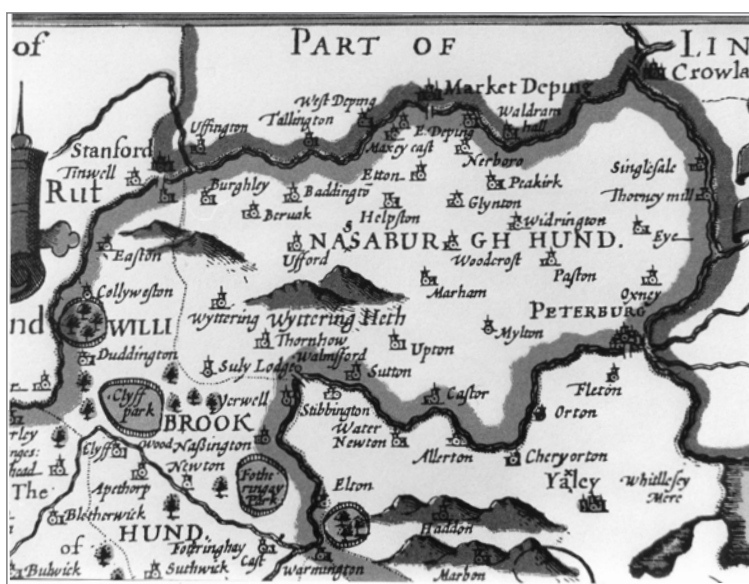


Figure 2: Speed's map of Northamptonshire, showing the organisation of rural settlement in the Soke of Peterborough in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The development of Torpel's landscape is indeed rather complex, and can only be understood by taking a long-term perspective. This book is thus more than a local history, and more than an archaeological report; it is an attempt to sew together a narrative that incorporates a wide range of the available sources for understanding the site. Fieldwork will be written up for scholarly publication in the near future, and this volume should be seen as a companion piece for both that article and the interim reports already available (via Torpel Online, the Archaeological Data Service, Historic England, and the Peterborough Historic Environment Record). This volume is intended as a biography of the site, introducing the key characters, events and processes that impacted on its development over the last 2000 years (and beyond). Rather than simply presenting a history of the site, our approach is to situate Torpel Manor within its wider context, which means paying attention to broader social, economic and political currents as they swept through the Soke of Peterborough, and through England more widely.

Thus, the book proceeds as follows. We begin by saying a little about Torpel Manor Field's natural setting. An understanding of landscape is central to any attempt to write rural settlement archaeology or history, and Torpel is no different in this regard. Thus Martin Bradshaw starts us off by considering the key aspects of the Torpel area's geology and geomorphology. As will be seen, this informs much of what is to come. We then move on with two chapters by Stephen Upex, considering the prehistoric and Roman antecedents to the site. What was going on in the area prior to the Middle Ages, and how might it have influenced what was to come? This is in turn followed by a consideration of the Torpel area between the Roman withdrawal and the Norman Conquest, taking us right up to the point at which the site becomes visible in the documentary record.

We then consider the development of the site through the High and Later Middle Ages, including its apparent transition as part of a landscape of settlement and economy, to one of elite leisure. Again, in order to understand these changes, we position the site in the context of local and national events. What did Torpel Manor look like at this time? How was rural life organised? How did people live and work? What was the impact of events such as the Black Death?

Though the Middle Ages were clearly the site's heyday, we do not finish our study here, and move on to consider Torpel's demise as a working manor, and its emergence as a place of dereliction, and of memory. We consider the events happening across the region between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, incorporating the evocative thoughts of Helpston's most famous son, the poet John Clare. In closing, we introduce Torpel today, and the work taking place there as a result of the efforts of the Langdyke Countryside Trust and the Langdyke History and Archaeology Group.

## An Introduction to the project

This book grows out of a collaborative project undertaken between the local community of Helpston and surrounding villages, and academics and professionals associated with the University of York. The project was envisioned by the Langdyke Countryside Trust, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and drew on local expertise such as Bob Hatton (University College Peterborough), Rebecca Casa-Hatton (Peterborough Historic Environment Record), and Sarah Poppy (Historic England, East of England office). Training in test-pitting was provided by archaeologist Phil Hill and his team.

Following extensive archival work already undertaken by a team led by Frieda Gosling, Martin Bradshaw introduced Steve Ashby and Aleks McClain to the project, in order to consult on plans for archaeological survey work, should HLF monies be forthcoming. There was a concern to design the project in such a way that the local community was integral; rather than simply contracting the work out, the idea was to involve volunteers in data collection, interpretation, and dissemination.

Little previous archaeological work had been done on the site, save for a report on archaeology identified during the construction of a pylon that still stands near the centre of the field.<sup>5</sup> As a first step, a student from York, Robbin van Splunder, put together an initial desk-based assessment for the site, and discussed the key documentary and archaeological evidence that was available. Fieldwork began in November 2012, when Steve Ashby visited the site with a colleague, Dr Michael Fradley, and together they undertook a digital topographic survey of the site's earthworks (**Figure 3**).

**Figure 3: Michael Fradley undertaking earthwork survey at Torpel Manor Field in 2012.**



**(a) Using a differential GPS unit for precise mapping of contours**



**(b) Traditional hand survey.**

Geophysical surveys followed, firstly by gradiometer, which allows rapid coverage of a large area and picks out disturbance in the magnetic properties of subsurface deposits. This allows us to identify features that may stand out from the surrounding matrix, such as clusters of stone and brick, or ditches filled with organic sediments.

A gradiometric survey will also detect features that have been subject to heating, such as hearths and kilns. Many thanks are due to the Langdyke Countryside Trust and all our volunteers for their help with this fieldwork, as together they ensured that the field was well prepared for survey, and that we were well looked after. A large number of volunteers helped us to set up the survey grid too, and took an active interest in the process.

The gradiometry survey was interesting in itself, but also allowed us to identify areas of the field for further investigation. Over the next two seasons, we undertook a programme of resistance surveys, a project in which volunteers also played a vital part; they cleared ground, learned how to use the equipment, discussed results, and even undertook basic repairs! These surveys confirmed some findings from previous years, but also provided the most surprising and exciting new data.

Alongside this, volunteers were trained in hand survey by Bob Hatton and UCP, and undertook fieldwalking and finds identification with the help of Paul Blinkhorn. They also took part in a programme of targeted test-pitting across Helpston village, under the direction of Phil Hill, and a smaller number of volunteers have played an important role in maintaining the site and its new interpretation centre, and monitoring activity (human and animal!) on the field. Together with Frieda's documentary research team, the work really has been accomplished very largely by volunteers, and our earnest hope is that our volunteers can see their contribution in the pages that follow. To all of you: thank you!

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## CHAPTER 2 : TORPEL'S NATURAL SETTING

MARTIN BRADSHAW

According to the well-known environmental activist and journalist George Monbiot: 'The land around Helpston, just to the north of Peterborough in Northamptonshire, now ranks among the most dismal and regularised tracts of countryside in Europe'.<sup>6</sup> It surely does not! Neither is it flat, and only those who have never walked or cycled it would say so. Truly flat landscapes exist further to the east, in the vast tract of Fenland: the hills of Torpel Country are merely of a modest scale. Because it is relatively low-lying it is short of large, dramatic features, but there are compensations in the importance of sky, the subtleties of colour, and the gentle simplicity of a varied and undulating landscape. It has not always been the dry land we see today, and considerable forces over millions of years were necessary to create it. This short chapter attempts to explain the geological and landform evolution of Torpel Country, and why one Roger de Torpel would choose to make it his home.

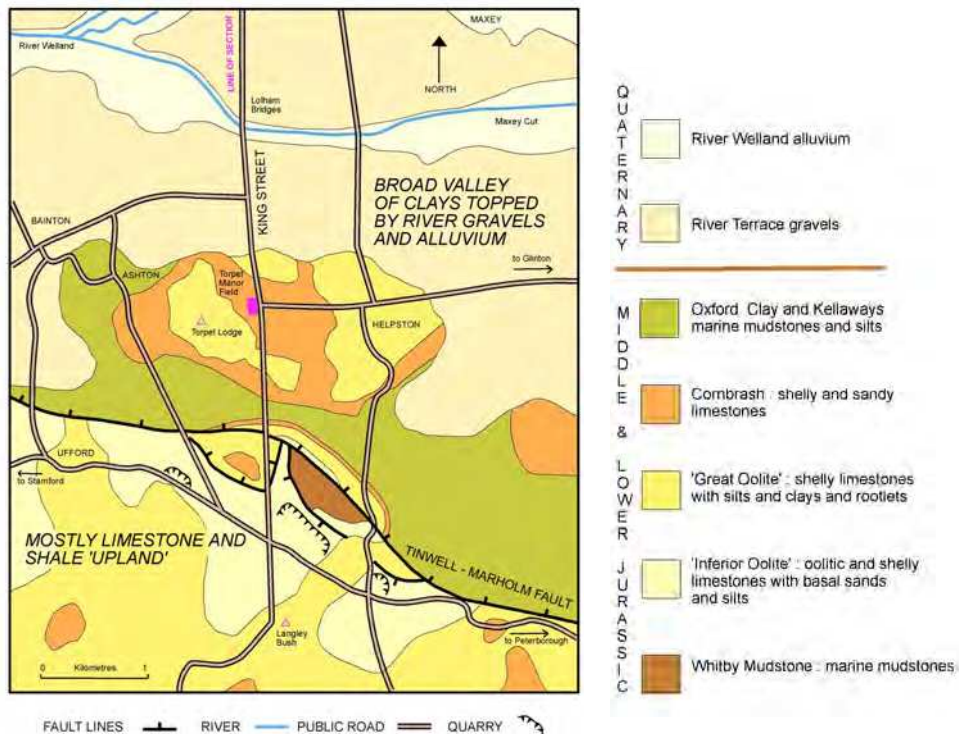
The bedrock geology of our area consists of fossiliferous shales, mudstones and oolitic and shelly limestones, deposited in sub-tropical latitudes some 163-174 million years ago (during the Middle Jurassic Epoch) on the northwest margins of a very broad continental shelf. The (super) continent was Laurasia, which combined both North America and Europe, and the shelf stretched south-eastward across France to the vast Tethys Ocean, small relics of which remain as the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Conspicuous among the various formations (Figure 1) is the Lincolnshire Limestone, the product of shallow marine carbonate banks akin to the Bahama Banks of today. It is the Lincolnshire Limestone which has provided much of the building stone, not only for our local area but also for the great Fenland abbeys, the colleges of Cambridge, and even the Houses of Parliament in London. But there are also fascinating sequences of shelly muds and sands with abundant fossil plant rootlets, clearly signifying that our area at times was part of a complex of very shallow deltas, estuaries and embayments facing out toward that deeper southern sea.

Today these sediments dip gently to the southeast, as they do across much of the Midlands, and this has led through erosion to the creation of a series of southwest to northeast trending and northwest facing escarpments, such as characterise the Cotswolds. The southeast dip may reflect in part the doming that accompanied the opening of the North Atlantic to the west and northwest of the British Isles around 65 million years ago, but also the subsequent closure of the Tethys Ocean to the south, which resulted not only in the formation of the European Alps but caused uplift and gentle folding and faulting in these islands. The Tinwell-Marholm Fault,



crossing our area from west-northwest to east-southeast (**Figure 4**), probably dates from this time, and while in gross terms beds are downthrown only by some 30 metres to the north, the fault has caused the creation of a low limestone escarpment on its southern side, controlling the course of the River Welland and preventing a merger with the Nene.

**Figure 4: Schematic geological and landform map of Torpel Country.** Note the inlier of mostly limestones which provides firm, dry ground for the settlements of Helpston and Torpel.

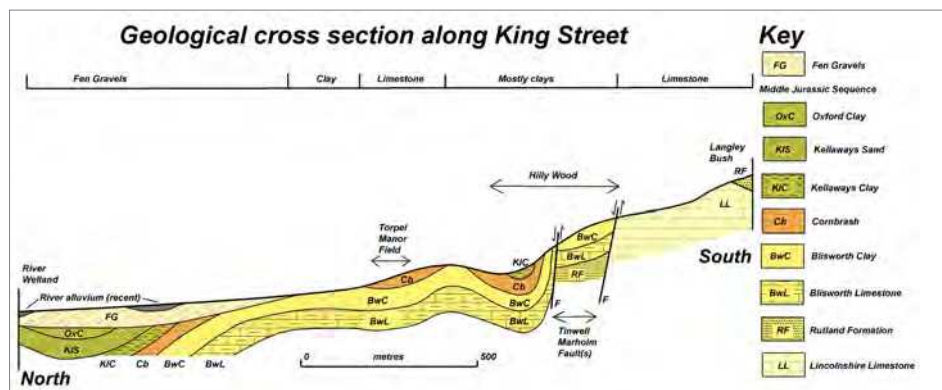


The uplift during the Palaeogene will have led to the stripping away of many hundreds of metres of younger Jurassic and Cretaceous sediments in our area, but it was, in geological terms, the rather recent Quaternary Ice Age of the last two million years that shaped the landforms of Torpel Country. Periods of temperate climate were interrupted by repeated advances and retreats of glaciers and ice sheets. Of the three major phases of glaciation it was the first, the Anglian, which proved the most widespread, the ice reaching as far south as the Thames Valley. The Wolstonian, from the north and west, spread almost as far, while the Devensian left our area largely unglaciated but in a zone of permafrost. The general effect of all this change in Torpel Country was the smoothing down of ridges and the carving out and broadening of the Welland and Nene Valleys, with glacial meltwater streams

depositing huge volumes of gravel as they spilled into the low-lying embayment of the Wash. Glacial till or boulder clay, which forms wide tracts capping the hills of neighbouring Northamptonshire, is confined in our area to small patches around Castor Hanglands. The river gravels have yielded fossil mammal bones, including those of mammoths and rhinos.

The last Ice Age gradually ended around 10,000 BC. The warmer temperatures of the interglacial period we are now living in caused North Sea levels to rise, and people were encouraged to move away from low-lying game and fish-rich pastures to what had been a less hospitable hinterland. Thus the story of Torpel Country moves toward the 'Anthropocene' - and the subsequent chapters of this book.

Today, when we stand at Langley Bush, looking down King Street toward Torpel (Figures 5 & 6), we see in the foreground gently undulating fields of cereals, growing mostly on the Lincolnshire Limestone.



**Figure 5: Geological cross-section along King Street, illustrating the favourable location of Torpel Field on limestones of the Cornbrash.** The formations are coloured in line with the map (Figure 4). The geological input for both Figs 4 & 5 are guided by British Geological Survey 1:50,000 Sheets 157 (Stamford, 1978) and 158 (Peterborough, 1984).

**Figure 6: Roman King Street, looking north from Langley Bush.** The gently undulating Middle Jurassic limestones in the foreground form a low escarpment with the clays and gravels of the Welland Valley beyond. Torpel Field is hidden behind the mass of Hilly Wood on the right of the photo.



A line of old building-stone quarries range along the Stamford - Marholm Road and beyond, down the low escarpment and across the Tinwell - Marholm Fault; the view opens upon the broad Welland Valley with its now diminished river, an expanse of upper Middle Jurassic clays carved through by glacial gravels, supporting rich crops of root vegetables as well as cereals. Locally, as in Helpston itself, Middle Jurassic limestones have come to the surface, giving firm ground for settlement. This is also the case at Torpel Manor Field, to the west of Helpston village and only a mile south of the River Welland at Lolham Bridges, where the Cornbrash Limestone is betrayed by a very gentle elevation. Such a position, beside an old Roman Road and commanding the southern approach to a river crossing, may have been an ideal spot to build a castle.

## CHAPTER 3 : THE PREHISTORY OF TORPEL COUNTRY

STEPHEN UPEX

We can be fairly certain that people have been living within the area of Helpston and the surrounding parishes for the last 40,000 years. Early communities of hunter-gatherers first pursued large animals such as mammoth and bison as they went on their seasonal migrations.

The evidence for such populations is of course rather scant; settlement sites would have been entirely temporary, and our knowledge of these people is restricted to the chance finds of stone tools they lost, broke and discarded.<sup>7</sup> However, the advent of aerial photography<sup>8</sup> from the early 20th century onwards has allowed us to look at almost all periods of later occupation within the Welland valley in increasing detail. From the earliest farmers of the Neolithic (c. 4000-2200 BC) period onwards, populations have left tell-tale traces of their settlements, farming and economic activities on the landscape, as well as some large scale ritual and religious sites. The well drained, alluvial and gravel based soils of the Welland valley provide some of the best areas in Britain for the production of crop marks, most clearly seen when cereals are ripening in mid-summer. Such cropmarks reveal the outlines of former structures, often of many different periods, all superimposed upon one another to form complicated, multi-period sites (**Figure 7**).



**Figure 7:** Aerial photograph of the area to the north of Helpston, looking south. Crop marks indicate the existence of a multi-period landscape, featuring a Bronze-Age ring ditch, and Iron-Age and Roman farmsteads, bounded by Roman King Street on the west, and the railway line on the south.

We know little about the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods within the area, and it is in the Neolithic period that we get the first real indications that people were becoming settled within the landscape, as they adopted farming practices, and needed to maintain their fields and animals in a fixed location. The Welland valley has a long history of archaeological excavations, especially in advance of quarrying for gravel, which has revealed this prehistoric landscape. The settlement sites and houses of this period are difficult to trace, but where evidence has been found, it suggests that such structures were rather ephemeral, wooden constructions.

However, aerial photography reveals some large-scale ceremonial monuments built by these early farmers, which show that the local population was buoyant and prosperous. In the area to the south of Maxey, a 2.5km long, parallel-ditched enclosure called a *cursus*, and another curious monument known as a causewayed enclosure have been identified, initially from aerial photographs, and subsequently confirmed by excavations in advance of gravel quarrying.<sup>9</sup> The *cursus* may have been a form of processional way, or an area set aside for religious practices of which we have little understanding. The site of the causewayed enclosure at Etton, first discovered in 1976, was systematically excavated in the following decade.<sup>10</sup> Here the site consisted of a series of long, sausage-shaped ditches enclosing a roughly circular area. After being dug, the ditches appear to have had offerings of pottery, stone axes and butchered meat placed in the ends close to the causeways that provided access to the central area of the site. The pottery and axes were smashed *in situ* before the ditches were backfilled, suggesting that these objects were offerings that were not meant to get into the hands of others. Within the area of the causewayed enclosure, excavation revealed more gruesome practices. Human bodies were being laid out in the open shortly after death, and de-fleshed by birds and animals as part of the passage into an afterlife.

By the Bronze Age (c. 2200-800 BC) burial practices had changed, and bodies were interred under circular barrows or mounds of earth, often with a surrounding ditch. There are a number of these barrow sites within the Helpston and Welland valley area, and often when they are excavated they contain a primary burial – presumably someone of status within the local community – and multiple secondary burials, perhaps of other family or clan members.

With the passing of time, many of these burial mounds have been eroded or ploughed flat by later generations of farmers, so the only features that can be detected on aerial photographs are the grave cuts themselves, or the circular ditches that ran around the edges of the barrows (**Figure 8**).





Figure 8: Crop marks of Bronze-Age ring ditches (former burial mounds) to the south of Lolham Hall, Maxey. The uppermost feature appears to be an enclosure of possible Iron-Age date.

At Barnack, a barrow excavated in 1974-76 proved to contain the remains of what was probably one of the more important members of the local Bronze-Age elite.<sup>11</sup> This primary burial was of a man, about 1.87m tall and aged 35–45, who had died sometime between 2330 and 2130 BC. His body was laid out in a typical crouched form and was accompanied by grave goods, perhaps to show the status of the owner when they entered the afterlife.

Indeed, the grave goods associated with this burial are particularly important (**Figure 9**). There was a large vessel, called a ‘beaker’, and a copper dagger. This blade in itself makes the burial stand out as important, because it is one of Britain’s earliest-known metal objects, and would have been a mark of some considerable status or prestige. However, the burial also had an unusual pendant, made of either sperm whale or walrus ivory, and a stone ‘wrist-guard’. Such wrist-guards, as they have traditionally been interpreted, were designed to stop the whip from a bow string bruising the wrist of an archer, and normally have between two and six holes carefully drilled into them. The example from Barnack has eighteen holes, and each one was filled with a foil-thin disc of gold. Wrist-guards are not uncommon items in graves of this period, but the example from Barnack is arguably the finest in Britain.



Figure 9: Finds from the Barnack beaker burial. Published with the kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

If burial rites had changed between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age, then so too had the monuments that we associate with their religious practices. The long cursus monuments and the curious causewayed enclosures gave way to new types of monuments called henges (**Figure 10**). These were normally circular earthen banks with an inner ditch, enclosing a space that often contained sets of upright timbers set in circular forms, or set against the edge of the encircling ditch. There are several known henges within the Welland Valley.<sup>12</sup> Some are small structures, a matter of a few tens of metres across, whilst the largest (situated just to the south of Maxey) measures 126m in diameter. How henges functioned or what their precise use was remains difficult to ascertain.

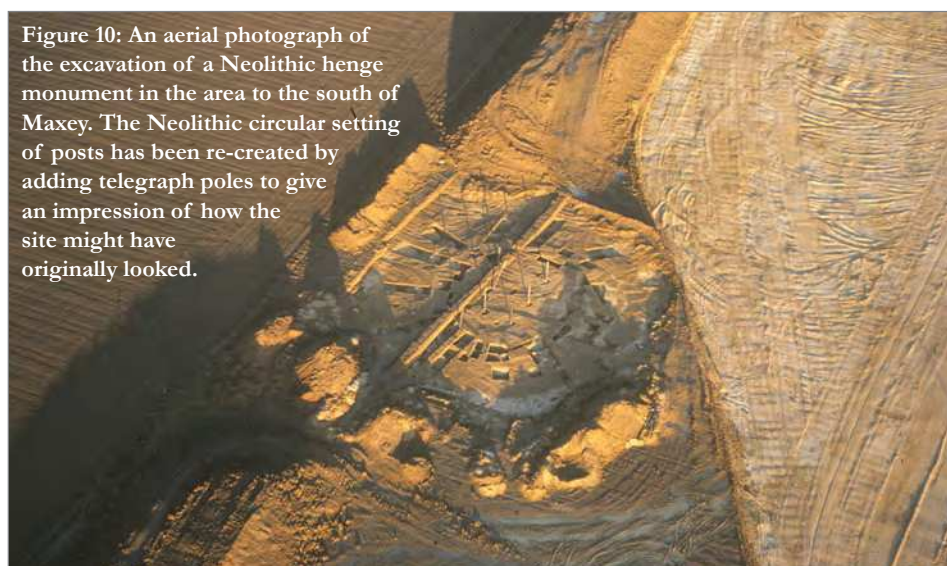


Figure 10: An aerial photograph of the excavation of a Neolithic henge monument in the area to the south of Maxey. The Neolithic circular setting of posts has been re-created by adding telegraph poles to give an impression of how the site might have originally looked.

However, what can be said for all of the religious monuments described so far is that they would have required large inputs of labour for their construction, which implies that the farming regimes were well organised, and that food production was such that surpluses allowed either for spare labour to work seasonally to build these monuments, or that a small permanent force of workers could have been released to accomplish the tasks. However these projects were undertaken, it shows that society had by this period organised itself into some sort of hierarchical structure, with some members presumably dictating both where and when to construct such sites. The period may even have seen the emergence of a priestly class to officiate over rituals associated with the monuments.

The evidence from aerial photography and excavation in the region shows that the landscape was already being extensively exploited. Certainly by the middle and late Bronze Age, fields were being formally laid out, with trackways linking the settlement sites scattered within these wider systems. This ties up with evidence



from elsewhere in the UK, and it seems that the later Bronze Age saw something of an increase in population size, an acceleration in the rate of woodland clearance, and an expansion of scale in settlement planning. By the Iron Age (c. 800 BC –AD 43), the forms and shapes of settlement areas seem to have become ever more standardised, with typical farmsteads consisting of a rectangular ditched enclosure, within which circular house foundations can often be found.<sup>13</sup> Outside these main farmyards there were often secondary enclosures, perhaps for stock, and beyond these we can see the outlines of the fields in which the farming communities were working.

Roman writers such as Tacitus tell us that in the late pre-Roman Iron Age the landscape of the area was well populated, and that cattle and corn were the bases on which the population's wealth was founded.<sup>14</sup> Certainly aerial photography demonstrates that there are considerable numbers of Iron-Age sites throughout the Welland valley, and this must support Roman comments on the size of the population. As to the exact numbers, archaeology remains silent, but it certainly was a buoyant, well-fed population that was farming cattle and cereals, making pottery and using iron tools and weapons.

Of course there are mysteries and problems in how we interpret the Iron-Age landscape. One example occurs to the north of Bainton, where a late-prehistoric land boundary continues to puzzle archaeologists. The aerial photographs show a series of ditched field boundaries and trackways, but at one point the ditch line morphs into a series of pit-like features which then continue on the same alignment, as if they are somehow replacing the ditch line. In this particular instance the 'pit alignment', for that is what they are generally called by archaeologists, is only known from the aerial photographs, but excavated examples from elsewhere in the Welland valley show that they may be composed of a number of circular or rectangular pits, and tend to date to the very end of the Bronze Age or more often the Iron Age. How these features functioned, and why they were dug remains controversial. What one can say is that there would appear to have been clear spaces between each of the pits, so that the alignment would hardly have provided a boundary that could effectively limit stock movement. Whether the soil from the pits was piled to one side of the alignments, or filled in the gaps between the pits is also unclear. What they do provide is a timely reminder to archaeologists that there is still much to learn about early landscapes, both within the area and more widely across the country, about how early, pre-Roman populations lived, worked and died.

## CHAPTER 4 : ROMANS IN TORPEL COUNTRY

STEPHEN UPEX

The Roman occupation of Britain started in AD 43, but it would probably have been AD 44 / 45 by the time that Torpel Country began to see its first sight of Roman troops. The 9th Legion built a large (27 acre) fortress at Longthorpe, to the west of Peterborough, which was occupied until the mid-60s of the first century AD.<sup>15</sup> The local presence of troops of this legion is further supported by a remarkable find from Bainton parish. A tile found in 1867, and now in Peterborough Museum's collection, is reputed to have come from a disturbed burial in Hilly Wood (**Figure 11**). It was stamped on manufacture with the legend 'LEG.IX.HISP', which tells us that it was made for the Ninth Hispanic Legion.<sup>16</sup> Such tiles are not common, and this example must have been produced especially for the legionaries, and for use in their buildings.

During the period of occupation of the fortress at Longthorpe, a much smaller (5-acre) fort was built near the river crossing of the Roman road known as Ermine Street, between Castor and Water Newton. This fort appears from recent excavations to have been very short-lived, perhaps only occupied for a few months.<sup>17</sup> It probably housed a detachment of troops who were developing the early Roman road system in the area. This included the realignment of Ermine



**Figure 11:** The Roman tile from Hilly Wood, Bainton marked 'Leg IX Hisp' for the Ninth Hispanic Legion.

Street near the fort, and the construction of a new bridge over the river Nene. Such a safe, all-weather crossing of the Nene would have been essential for the conquest of the rest of the country, which continued into the mid- to late-first century, and was only finally halted with the arrival of the Emperor Hadrian in AD 122, and the building of the Hadrianic frontier.

The system of Roman roads is still visible in the modern landscape. Ermine Street runs from Chesterton parish in the south, up through parts of Southorpe village, and skirts Burghley Park before crossing the river Welland to the west of Stamford. Another road, known as King Street, leaves Ermine Street in Ailsworth parish, and heads due north in a straight line between Helpston, Bainton and Ufford (marking what were later to become parish boundaries), before heading past Lolham Bridge and Maxey into West Deeping, where today it forms the village's main street. Parts of the line of King Street are now under modern roads, such as the section near Langley Bush to the south of Helpston (Figure 6, above), while other sections have been marked in the landscape by hedge lines or trackways.

King Street would have brought Roman troops and traffic directly into the area that is now the parish of Helpston. The line of the road seems on the ground to make a slight bend around the later medieval site at Torpel, but this short, curved section of road has to be an entirely later creation, and the original Roman road line would have been absolutely straight.

In the first century of Roman occupation, the earlier Iron-Age farms within the area would have slowly become Romanised. Their occupants would have started to use Roman currency and local Roman pottery produced at the major kiln sites to the south, around the area of today's Castor and Stibbington parishes. Such farms would eventually move away from Iron-Age ways of farming and start to become ever more productive by adopting Roman farming practices, with new and improved crops and livestock breeds. The aerial photographs reveal numerous examples of Roman farms being founded on earlier Iron-Age sites (and where the original families may simply have continued farming into the Roman period), as well as being set up on areas of land that had not previously been intensively farmed.

Farming had to become more intensive as the Roman administration imposed a whole series of taxes on the population. These taxes were to pay for the setting up and maintenance of the local towns, with their roads, walls, cemeteries, water supply, and administration. In addition, taxes would have been used to pay the army, and surplus funds were sent back to Rome to support the Emperor.<sup>18</sup> The types of farms within Torpel Country range from small farmsteads with wooden rectangular buildings, houses, and yards for stock with their fields beyond, to the more elaborate sites that can be described as villas. For example, a rectangular enclosure overlies the Iron-Age pit alignment discussed in the previous chapter, and within this zone Roman pottery can still be found on the surface of the field. Another site, probably of similar type, existed in what is now the centre of Helpston village. We know this from the excavation of a series of test pits dug in 2016, one of which, in the area immediately to the north of the church, was full of Roman pottery.<sup>19</sup> Away

from the village, aerial photographs show that Roman farmsteads were spaced in the surrounding landscape about 500-800m apart, with a complex series of tracks and minor roadways linking them together. These minor routeways also fed traffic onto King Street, which gave direct access to the main markets for produce from these types of settlements.

As mentioned above, within this landscape of farmsteads were one or two larger farms that developed into what we would term villas. These may have been farmsteads acquired by local Roman officials or retired military troops, or simply more efficiently farmed by Iron-Age families who wanted to take on the trappings of Roman society by spending their wealth on the new luxury items introduced into Britain by their colonial overlords. To the south of Helpston, in the area of Oxy Wood, one such farmstead developed into a substantial villa, which had the addition of mosaic floors and plastered, painted walls. Various excavations have taken place on the site of this villa, but little is known about its overall plan or chronological development. It does appear to have had several rooms and tessellated or mosaic floors, including one featuring a geometric design. This mosaic was found by the antiquarian Edmund Artis, who reports that he excavated the floor on 'December 11th 1827 in one of the fields on the south side of Helpston called Pail Grounds adjoining Oxy Wood and Wood Lane'. Artis illustrated this mosaic floor in a book published in 1828 (**Figure 12**).<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 12:** The Roman mosaic from the Helpston Villa, first found by Edmund Artis, on December 11th 1827.



It is probable that the main market for the area surrounding the Welland and Nene valleys was centred on the Roman town of Durobrivae (**Figure 13**). The setting up of the Roman bridge across the River Nene at Castor, and the importance that soon accrued to the line of Ermine Street as one of the key roadways in the entire Roman province, appear to have given the area around the bridgehead a new impetus. The origins of the Roman town must be linked to the development of what would have been a passing trade of military personnel, artisans and other travellers moving up and down the Roman road on their way north to Lincoln, York and perhaps Hadrian's Wall, or south to various Roman towns, including Cambridge, Godmanchester, St Albans and of course, most important of all, Roman London. As well as being important for overland trade, Durobrivae had good links with the sea via the river Nene, and appears to have traded grain, pottery and other commodities along coastal routes around the eastern areas of Britain, and across the North Sea to other parts of the empire.



**Figure 13:** Looking south to the Roman town of Durobrivae (top left), with Ermine Street running through the town to the bridge-crossing of the River Nene, and the Roman industrial area of Normangate Field (bottom), all showing as crop marks.

As the town became more important it was fortified, but its walled circuit eventually became so heavily built-up with houses, shops, public buildings and religious structures that development, especially of industrial premises, spilled out beyond the wall lines. By the end of the Roman period there were over 500 acres of industrial sprawl making up the suburban area of the town. Today parts of these suburbs can

be seen clearly from the air in the area of Normangate Field, to the south of the village of Castor.

Limited excavation here in the 1970s revealed pottery and metalworking workshops crammed together with those of many other tradespeople, whose production capacities served local, regional and even national demands for their products. Chief amongst the activities was the production of pottery, which was exported as far afield as London, Leicester, and Hadrian's Wall; it can even be found on the Continent.<sup>21</sup> The importance of Durobrivae was further increased by developments in the fenland to the east of modern Peterborough. It seems probable that the Roman military and state administration invested in roads and drainage works in the fenland, perhaps as part of the setting up of a large imperial agricultural estate, on which native farmers worked the land. Any profits and products from such an enterprise would have been siphoned off to support the imperial coffers back in Rome. All of this may have been done by confiscating land from the Iceni tribe, perhaps justified as a reprisal for their part in the Boudican revolt. The Car Dyke, a major engineering work which runs from the Witham to the Nene, may have been intended as a formal boundary between the area of this estate to the east, and the civilian area to the west. All of the fenland activity appears to have been controlled, at least after about c. AD 200, from a massive Roman building on what was later to become the site of Castor's medieval church. This control over fenland wealth would have added ever more to the importance of the area and Durobrivae.<sup>22</sup>

At the end of Roman rule, as the Empire contracted in on itself in response to insurgents on the continent, Britain saw the withdrawal of troops and state officials to help shore up Roman provinces in France and Germany. With the removal of both troops and mechanisms of government, the Roman tax system collapsed. Local farmers and villa owners no longer needed to farm so intensively to pay their taxes, and difficult agricultural land seems to have been abandoned. It is into these areas of marginal and near-marginal land, with their abandoned Roman farmsteads, that 5th-century migrants from Saxony and other areas of the continent came and settled.

## CHAPTER 5 : TORPEL COUNTRY IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

As the Romans withdrew, the first Anglo-Saxon settlers sailed into the Wash and up the rivers Welland and Nene. By the end of the 6th century, the culture of much of what is now England seems to have been predominantly Anglo-Saxon, rather than 'British'. Through politics, trade, negotiation and force, the Anglo-Saxon elite successfully built their powerbases, culminating in the emergence of the new kingdoms of Wessex, East Anglia, Northumbria and, here in the central region, Mercia.

This period was to have a great impact on the landscape of England, including the Soke of Peterborough. Most of the woodland in what is now the Soke had been cleared well before the Roman conquest, but timber was a valuable commodity, being used for buildings, tools and domestic fuel, so some forested areas were maintained. Higher ground, where clay soils hindered ploughing, often saw the retention of woodland; today's Southey Wood owes its survival to this geological accident. However, such wooded areas were far from wild and their trees were managed by pollarding and coppicing, and exploited for timber when needed.

### Early medieval farming

In the years that followed the departure of the Roman legions, the political structure of what is now England changed. After what must have been a period of some instability, land was taken over by hereditary lords known as *eorls*. Between the 7th and 11th centuries, hundreds of charters and grants record the transfer of land. For example, after its re-foundation in 966, Peterborough Abbey received a large number of parcels of land, some of which were nearby, while others lay much further afield. Notably for us, by the time of the Norman Conquest, the abbey held most of the land in the Soke of Peterborough.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, the abbey did not work all this land itself. Such labour was undertaken partly by freemen, but also by slaves and bondmen (unfree land tenants, who usually paid their rent in kind), but the names and lives of most of these labourers have long been lost to us. The real riches of the Soke lay in its soils, providing good agricultural land close to the fen edge. While the floodplains of the Welland and Nene were used for seasonal grazing, on both sides of the low-lying limestone ridge between the two rivers well-drained soils provided perfect conditions for arable farming. Wheat, barley and spelt were the most important cereal crops in early medieval England, and by the 8th century wheat had replaced spelt as the main source of bread flour, while barley was used in animal feed and brewing. Other cereals included rye and

oats, while beans (similar to our broad beans) were also grown as a field crop. Straw was also in demand for use in thatching.

A little is known about how the land may have been farmed in the Anglo-Saxon period. Much of the English landscape was farmed according to the open field system, in which any given manor held common woodland and pasture, but divided up a number of very large arable fields into long, narrow strips to be worked by tenants.

The success of the open field system hung on the integration of communally worked arable fields and livestock rearing. Arable crops depended on the manure and labour of animals, while the crops fed the people and the animals. It is worth noting that Anglo-Saxon farming was not static and unchanging; the early years were characterised by a subsistence economy far removed from the intensive production of the Roman period, but soon farmers were once again producing surpluses: this time to feed local lords, the church and townspeople.

At the time of the first Anglo-Saxon settlement, most farmers were simply using spades to turn over the soil, or else ards (little more than long wooden sticks with pointed ends) pulled by a single animal. With this technology, the ability to plough would have been dependent on weather and, given that the ground had to be covered several times over in order to break up the soil, it may often have taken all winter. Agricultural technology developed and spread, however, and by the 7th and 8th centuries a number of farmers appear to have been using a heavy plough with a coulter (a vertical metal blade that cut into the ground) and a mouldboard (to turn over the soil and bury weeds). The new set-up had several advantages. First, it was quicker and more efficient than the scratch plough method; an entire acre or strip could now be ploughed on an average day. Second, it permitted ploughing and sowing in the autumn as well as winter.

Even with this innovation, ploughing was a slow process, as it remained heavy work. On light soils the new ploughs could have been pulled by two oxen, but heavier soils required a team of four or six. Moreover, time needed to be given for driving the oxen to and from the field, as well as feeding. Livestock were often left to graze freely on the meadows and heaths, meaning that arable fields had to be enclosed with fences and ditches. Initially, animals were turned on to the stubble and fallow, in order to maintain fertility on these fields. However, as more and more land was taken into arable cultivation, and the number of oxen needed for ploughing this land increased, so there was a need for more winter fodder. Hay meadows came to replace the old tradition of allowing livestock to graze on the floodplains in spring, and herdsmen began to move them between pastures, leading to the establishment of drove roads.



It is clear that Anglo-Saxon farming changed significantly in style, scale, and organisation over c. 700 years. Many of these changes were related, directly or indirectly, to the pressures put on farmers by the rising elite. What is clear is that agriculture was hard work, and it was increasingly communal work. Well before the Norman Conquest, agricultural labour was organised in such a way that the secular and monastic elites could extract significant benefit.

### **Anglo-Saxon settlement**

Of course, the landscape was not just made up of agricultural land, but was also home to settlements. The first rural settlements following the Roman withdrawal seem to have been small and isolated; Northamptonshire and its neighbouring counties were the most densely settled and prosperous parts of England, but were nonetheless characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern.<sup>24</sup> Settlement in the Soke of Peterborough appears to have followed this pattern, though the fenlands to the east were less densely populated.<sup>25</sup> The name of the village ‘Maxey’, denoting its character as an island, tells us something about the nature of the landscape in the first millennium AD.

But what did these settlements look like? As individual farmsteads rather than villages or hamlets, most Early Anglo-Saxon settlements seem to have consisted of small numbers of wooden buildings.<sup>26</sup> They tended to be set apart from Roman-period farms, although there are examples of both continuity and transformation of use at sites across Northamptonshire, such as Brixworth, Stanwick, Borough Hill, and Orton Hall Farm.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, although society must have been stratified, with a small elite holding sway over many more working people, it is difficult to detect any kind of hierarchy in English settlements at this time, and the organisation of space into specialised areas and enclosures was yet to really develop.

The situation of apparent equality was not to last, however, and from the 6th century, many houses became larger, with subdivisions and annexes, and lands became increasingly enclosed: separated off from the lands of others, and broken up into areas set aside for specialist activities. By the Middle Saxon period it is possible to clearly identify residences associated with the elite, and we start to see the appearance of the famous halls and longhouses of early medieval northern Europe, complete with specialised buildings for food preparation, stables, grain stores, and latrines. Though evidence is sparse in the area of the Soke, east Northamptonshire does provide some good archaeological data. For instance, there is evidence for the existence of an enclosed, possibly high-status settlement at Warmington, where a number of hall buildings and ditched enclosures are suggestive of an elite residence.<sup>28</sup> High-status hall buildings are also known from Northampton,<sup>29</sup> while excavations at Higham Ferrers

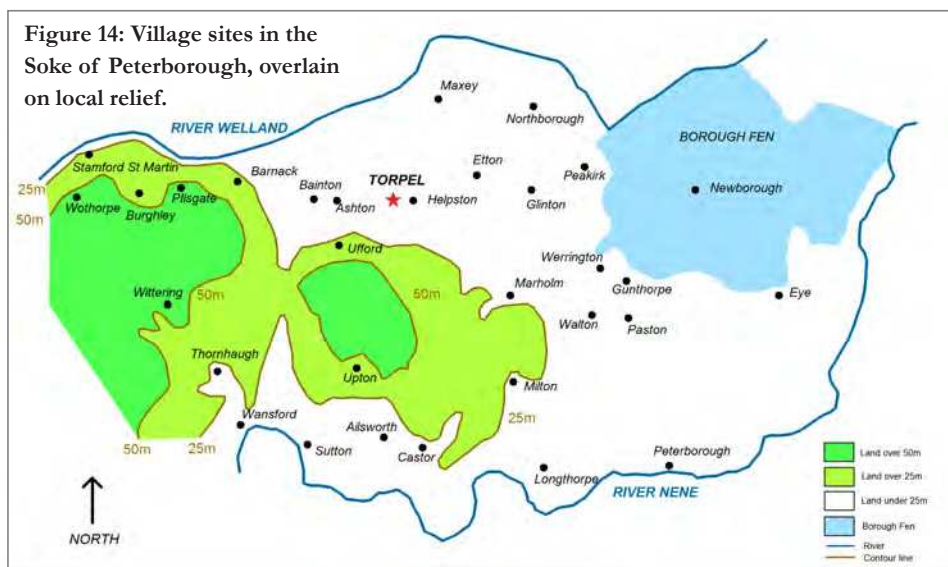
provide one of the country's most elegant pieces of evidence for Middle-Saxon social stratification and site specialisation, in the form of an enclosed settlement that may have related to tax collection.<sup>30</sup>

The Middle Saxon period is also synonymous with the religious conversion of Anglo-Saxon England. After Mercia officially accepted Christianity in the 650s, churches started to appear across central England. Initially, most were of wood, but soon they were rebuilt in stone; at All Saints, Brixworth, this seems to have happened as early as the 8th or early 9th century.<sup>31</sup> Recent archaeological work adds to our knowledge of these sites. At Oundle, commercial excavations have uncovered evidence for a sort of monastic enclosure of similar form to that known from Brixworth; both seem likely to have been monastic satellites of Peterborough Abbey.<sup>32</sup>

### Settlement organization

Yet another important change was happening in this dynamic period in the middle of the first millennium AD. Recent archaeological research shows that houses were starting to cluster together with individual plots separated by ditches: the first shoots of the medieval village. Changes in farming systems from around AD 850 led to further clustering of buildings, sometimes at crossroads, sometimes around greens or wells.<sup>33</sup>

The remains of many of these early villages lie under their later-medieval and modern successors, but it has been possible to excavate a few of them. At West Cotton in the Nene Valley (near Raunds, east Northamptonshire), Northamptonshire Archaeology excavated a medieval hamlet that appears to have undergone a number of transformations since it was originally laid out as a planned, high status settlement in the 10th century. In the initial settlement there was a large wooden hall and a number of associated structures, including a watermill; clearly the peasants who worked the land must also have lived nearby.<sup>34</sup>



It is worth spending a little time discussing the particular organisation of settlement in the Soke, and the way in which this was constrained or directed by local topography (**Figure 14**). Two linear strips of villages seem to have developed in the valleys of the rivers Welland and Nene. Both rivers were liable to flood and change their courses, so the villages were set back, lying 10m or more above sea level. The exceptions are Wittering, Wothorpe and Pilsgate, which were over 50m above sea level.

Conversely, at a height of only 2-4m above sea level, the eastern quarter of the Soke (known as Borough Fen) was periodically flooded, and rendered unsuitable for permanent habitation. However, this was not marginal or unexploited land; the fen was valued for its summer grazing, its wood and peat for burning, its reeds for thatching, and its rivers and meres for fishing. It simply required a more specialised, tailored approach to its exploitation. This more dispersed pattern has been widely observed in the archaeology of wetlands across Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>35</sup>

It is this juxtaposition of settlement patterns that makes the early-medieval landscape of the Soke of Peterborough so interesting to study. In a relatively small area, we see land exploited not only for arable and pastoral farming, but also for timber, for peat, and for fish. Understanding this complex backdrop is vital to any attempt to reconstruct the dynamic life story of the landscape around Torpel Manor Field.

### **The Vikings: Scandinavians in central England**

Of course, the end of the Anglo-Saxon period is best known not for its agriculture and settlement reorganisation, but for the violent impact of pirates from overseas: the Vikings. We know from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that the first Viking raids occurred at the end of the 8th century. However, by the first half of the 9th, their activities were no longer restricted to attacks on coastal monasteries, as larger and larger forces travelled into the English interior, bringing their highly agile longships up the rivers, but also travelling by horse, and setting up camp in hostile territory.<sup>36</sup> The attacks grew in number and frequency, and by AD 865 the kingdom of Mercia was forced into submission. Though in itself a high-level political event, its impact can also be seen on the ground, not far from the Soke of Peterborough.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is our key piece of documentary evidence for conflict and accommodation between Anglo-Saxons and ‘Northmen’, but it should be remembered that it was written by monks under the patronage of the kings of Wessex, who had a clear interest in the story that was to be told. Furthermore, though the original text was written in the 9th century, copies were sent out to a number of monasteries, and these continued to be updated even into the 12th

century. One such copy, known as the Peterborough Chronicle, does give us a local perspective on events:

Bishop Athelwold came to the minster called Medeshamsted which was formerly ruined by heathen folk, but he found nothing there but old walls and wild woods. In the old walls he found hid writing which Abbot Hedda had formerly written... He then ordered the minster to be rebuilt...He gave it the name Peterborough which before was Medeshamsted.

Peterborough Chronicle, entry for AD 966.<sup>37</sup>

This is interesting, but given the late date of the Peterborough Chronicle, its description of the predations of the Viking Age must be read critically, particularly as the rebuilding of churches destroyed by heathens is a common motif in writing of this period. Indeed, while violent disruption does seem to have been felt at the abbey of Medeshamsted, the continuity of activity there does suggest that the impact was less than utterly destructive.

Moreover, it is incorrect to pigeonhole all Scandinavian settlers as Viking raiders. There is very little archaeological evidence for raiding, but plentiful support for the eventual settlement and integration of Danes and Northmen. Place names and artefactual evidence, for instance, show that some of the Danish invaders eventually settled north of the Welland in Lincolnshire, which was to become part of the area known as the Danelaw. It is not inconceivable that some set up home in the Soke itself; 'Maxey' means 'Maccus' Island', where *Maccus* is likely to be an Old Norse (or perhaps Hiberno-Norse) name.<sup>38</sup> Such place names are rare in the Soke, however, and it may be that it was only in peripheral areas such as Maccus's island that Scandinavians were able to take land in the region.<sup>39</sup>

Scandinavians also played an important role in the urbanisation of England. Following the departure of the Roman legions, and the attendant crumbling of Roman Britain's infrastructure, very few of the remaining settlements could really be referred to as functioning towns. Trading centres started to reappear in the Middle Saxon period, but it was really only from around the 10th century that urban life began to take off in England. We can see this close to the Soke, too, as Stamford is recorded as one of the Five Boroughs of the central Danelaw (together with Lincoln, Leicester, Derby and Nottingham; Northampton was another growing town at this point).

The name Stamford ('stone ford') points to the site being an important crossing point on the Welland, and the orientation of its streets certainly indicates that the river was an important factor in its development.<sup>40</sup> Well connected by both road and river, and only six miles to the west of Torpel Manor Field, it seems likely that the

town was within reach for those from this area who had the means to travel (see Figure 1).

With no evidence for Roman settlement, Stamford's origins date to the Late-Saxon (*aka* Viking) period.<sup>41</sup> In the 1970s, excavators identified a ditched and palisaded enclosure beneath what is now the Warrenne Keep housing estate. They dated the site's foundation to the later 9th century, but it looks much more like an Anglo-Saxon manorial estate than a town, and may even have had royal associations. Meanwhile, a Scandinavian presence appears to have been established to the east. The structure of this early town or 'borough' is preserved today in the street plan. Centred on the modern High Street, it covered the area between Broad Street in the north, St John's Street in the west, Star Lane and St George's Street in the east, and St Mary's Street in the south.<sup>42</sup>

In the early 10th century, Edward the Elder began a campaign to claim the whole of England for Wessex, and the capture of Stamford seems to have been an important concern, as he founded a new fortified settlement to the south of the river, in what came to be known as Stamford Baron:

In 918 Edward the Elder went with the army to Stamford and ordered the burh on the south side of the river to be built, and all the people who belonged to the northern burh submitted to him and sought to have him as their lord.<sup>43</sup>

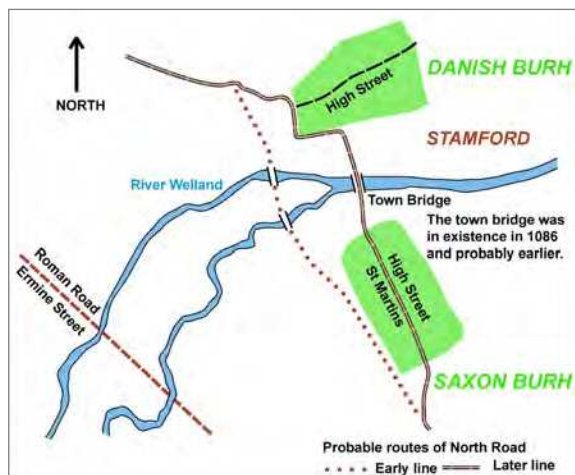


Figure 15: The early medieval topography of Stamford; note Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian settlements.

After this takeover, the town as a whole appears to have grown as a commercial centre (Figure 15). Stamford's heyday was still to come, but its mint already had an impressive output in the late 10th and 11th centuries, and one can imagine that as a regional market and administrative centre, Stamford would have held some attraction for the wealthy and well-connected individuals of Torpel Country.<sup>44</sup>

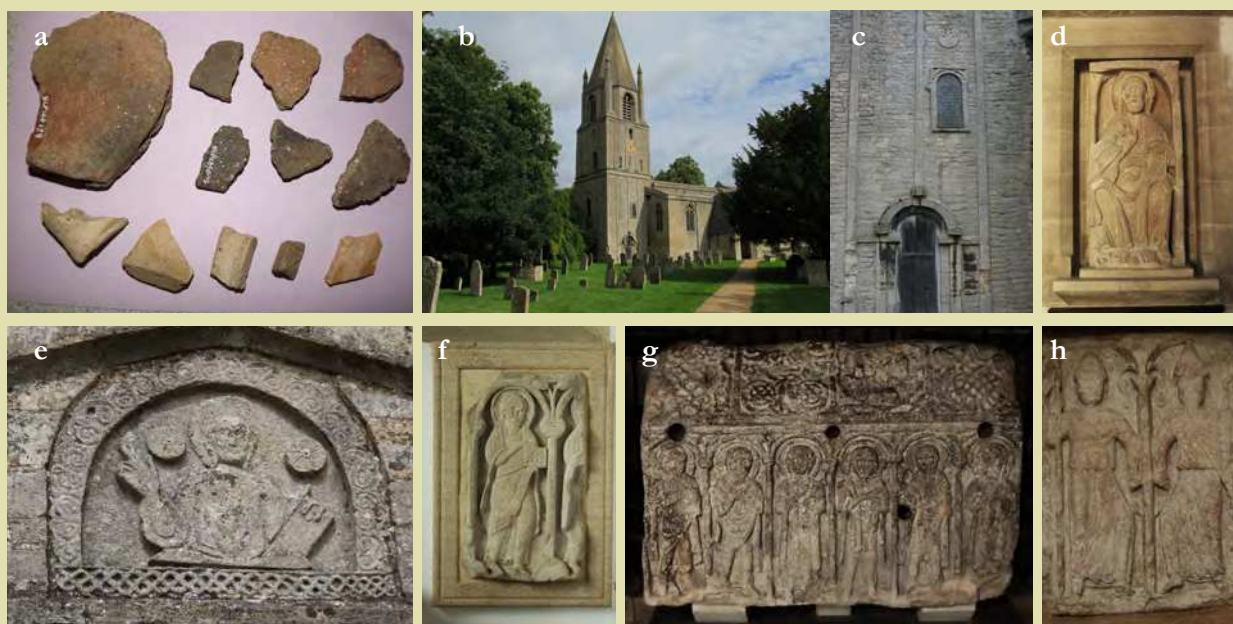


## Archaeological evidence of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian activity in the Soke of Peterborough

Pottery sherds found in test pits and commercial excavations (**Figure 16a**), as well as surface finds thrown up by wildlife, demonstrate that there was early-medieval activity in the area of Helpston and what is now Torpel Manor Field. There is good archaeological evidence from Maxey, where excavations in the 1960s famously identified the remains of rural settlement in the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>45</sup> Finds of Anglo-Saxon remains – particularly pottery – are common across the area, dating a structure excavated at Ufford as well as showing up in test pits dug in the Helpston area. By the Late-Saxon period, churches would have been established in many settlements across the Soke. Though these original wooden churches no longer stand, the remains of their stone successors are often preserved in the architectural fabric of today's churches, as is associated sculpture (**Figures 16b-h**). Together, this material forms some of our richest evidence for early-medieval activity in the region.

**Figure 16: Early medieval material Culture in Torpel Country**

- a** Early-medieval pottery sherds found in test pits and commercial excavations.
- b** Barnack Church: the lower two stages of the tower are of Anglo-Saxon date.
- c** Barnack Church: close-up of Anglo-Saxon stonework.
- d** Barnack Church: the 'Christ in Majesty' sculpture, AD 1000-1050.
- e** Castor Church: the 'Christ in Majesty' sculpture, now situated above the porch, AD 1000-1050.
- f** Castor Church: carving of St Mark, 8th century, part of the shrine of St Kyneburgha.
- g** Peterborough Cathedral: 'Hedda Stone', c.AD 800. The six figures on each side are thought to be the apostles.
- h** Peterborough Cathedral: carved figures on the west wall of the south transept, the so-called 'Dancing Bishops'. They have long been considered to be Anglo-Saxon, but recent study suggests they may actually be of Roman date.



## Evidence from place names

Another clue to the region's settlement history comes from the names given to towns, villages, fields, and natural features of the landscape. Place names commonly taken to herald Scandinavian influence include those that incorporate the elements *-by* (meaning farm/village) or *-thorpe* (indicating a secondary, perhaps later, outlying settlement), and those which may preserve evidence of hybridity (e.g. Grimston) or linguistic change (e.g. Keswick).<sup>46</sup> Conversely, place names containing the elements *-ing*, *-ham*, or *-ton* are conventionally taken as evidence of Anglo-Saxon naming practice (noting the hybrid exceptions noted above).

Distribution analysis clearly demonstrates that Anglo-Saxon place names were more numerous than Scandinavian names in the Soke; with only Peakirk and Gunthorpe being of demonstrably Scandinavian origin (though see also Maxey, above). This is in accord with wider regional and national patterns; the majority of Old Norse-influenced place names lie north and east of Roman Watling Street (today, the A5), in the area that was to become known as the Danelaw.<sup>47</sup>

However, there is no one-to-one relationship between place names and genetics; it is unclear whether the former relate to a settlement's founders, inhabitants, or lords, and they are of course subject to evolution and transformation through time, as well as the vicissitudes of linguistic fashion. This means that while it is informative to study overall patterns and distributions, we should not lay too much interpretative weight on individual names. Attempting to write the history of a settlement from the linguistics of its name alone is never a good idea.

That said, 'Torpel' is an interesting name. In the context of the nearby Anglo-Saxon placenames of Helpston, Ufford, and Bainton, its *thorp* element is conspicuously Norse-looking, but it should be noted that in the Midlands *thorps* are just as likely to derive from the Anglo-Saxon *throp* as the Old Norse *þorp*. A recent study of this form of name argues that *Torpel* is the combination of the Old-Norse *thorpe* with the Old French diminutive *-el*, suggesting this was a Norman re-naming of an existing settlement.<sup>48</sup> However, no pre-Conquest settlement has been definitively identified in the archaeology to date, so its precise location and character remain to be discovered.

Between the end of Roman rule and the arrival of Norman governance, the landscape that was to become Torpel Country underwent a great many changes, reflecting social, economic and political transformations that happened on a larger scale, but which would certainly have been felt by the area's inhabitants. Following Anglo-Saxon settlement, repeated introductions of paganism and Christianity,

Viking campaigns, the breaking up of the great manorial estates, the settlement of Scandinavian lords to the north, the development of the open-field system of farming, the nucleation of villages, the foundation of burhs, and the growth of urban markets, life in 1050 would have been very different from that experienced by the area's inhabitants 700 years previously. But more change was to come.



## CHAPTER 6 : MEDIEVAL LANDSCAPES AND SOCIETY

**1066 and the origins of Torpel Manor**

An elite presence in the area first becomes clear in the documentary record following the Norman Conquest of 1066, as a result of the associated changes in landholding and advances in recordkeeping. Though an Anglo-Saxon presence in the Soke is well evidenced (see above), it seems likely that the years following the Norman Conquest saw a significant expansion of settlement in the area.<sup>49</sup>

This was a period of turmoil and transformation. Many Saxon landholders appear to have been dispossessed, their positions taken by Norman knights. The Peterborough Chronicle provides some insight into life in the Soke in the turbulent years following the Norman Conquest. For instance, the entry for the year 1070 describes in detail an attack on the abbey by a combined Anglo-Saxon/Danish army led by Hereward, united in opposition to the Normans.

They burnt down all the houses of the monks and all the town...They went into the minster and climbed up to the holy rood, took away the diadem from the Lord's head, all of pure gold...They seized so much gold and silver and so many treasures in money, in raiment and in books as no man can tell to another.

Peterborough Chronicle, entry for 1070<sup>50</sup>

Such attacks would only have encouraged a tightening of the Norman hold on power in the region. A Norman monk, Turolde (Thorold) de Fécamp, was chosen by the new King William to become abbot of Peterborough Abbey. He, in turn, distributed almost half of the abbey's pre-Conquest holdings to around 60 Norman soldiers, who came to be known as the 'Knights of Peterborough'; the abbey was obliged to provide these knights to support the king. Hugh Candidus, a monk at the abbey in the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century, sums up Turolde's actions:

He being a stranger neither loved his monastery, nor his convent him. He began to make a strange dispersion of lands belonging to the church, conferring land upon certain knights that they might defend him against Hereward.

The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus<sup>51</sup>

The knights' distribution was not even-handed; an individual known as Pain de Helpstone held a very small estate (a third of a fee), and his military obligations consisted of himself, two horses, and a sword. At the other end of the scale, the largest holdings were held by Anketil de St Medard and a certain Roger de Torpel.

Roger de Torpel – initially known as ‘Roger Infans’ – was one of William’s supporters. Rather than signifying his being a minor, his name may indicate that he was a junior member of Abbot Turolde’s family.<sup>52</sup> Whatever his familial status, Roger was given 12 hides of land in exchange for providing six knights to fight in support of King William.

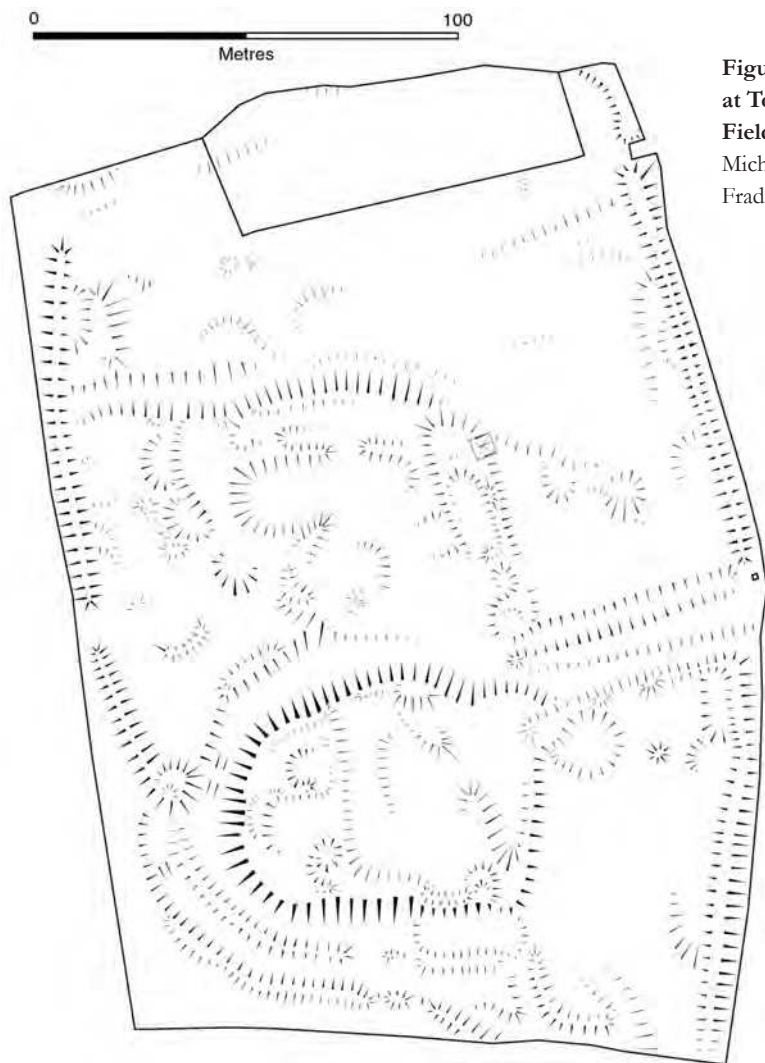
Roger’s land was scattered over 11 parishes in the Soke: Ufford (including Bainton and Ashton), Helpston, Southorpe, Ailsworth, Glington, Lolham, Nunton, Northborough and Maxey, and three more 14 miles to the west, at Pilton, Cotterstock and Glapthorne.<sup>53</sup> From 1190, the lords of Torpel held the patronage of Ufford church from the Abbot of Peterborough, and that right remained with the lordship throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>54</sup>

However, it seems that the central and most important holding of Roger’s estate in the 11th and 12th centuries was at Torpel itself. There was sound reasoning behind the decision to focus his residence at Torpel. The site’s relative elevation and its cap of Cornbrash Limestone rendered it relatively dry, but with easy access to water sources via wells. Moreover, the site likely held a strategic position on what is now known as King Street, and which had been one of the region’s two northbound arterial roads since the Roman period. On logical grounds, it could even be speculated that the site may have been a Roman military staging post ahead of the crossing of the River Welland just to the north, though there is little indication of Roman-period activity on site, or clear evidence for continuity of activity through the early medieval period.

### **The archaeology of the early manor**

Torpel Manor Field today is marked by a striking and distinctive array of earthworks (the visible humps and bumps that are the tell-tale indicators of past fortifications, routeways, and buildings). In the southwest corner of the field is a wide, flat-topped mound of irregular shape, surrounded by a very complex array of ditches and banks. Beyond the mound, to the north, further earthworks probably indicate the positions of small buildings, and all this is encircled within what appears to be a larger ditched enclosure, forming something like a bailey.

However, when we start to unpick the complex, it becomes clear that it is the result of a long sequence of activities, built up over several centuries.<sup>55</sup> Topographic survey, together with geophysics, allows us to deconstruct a complicated palimpsest, and to start to build up the sequence in which things happened (**Figure 17**).



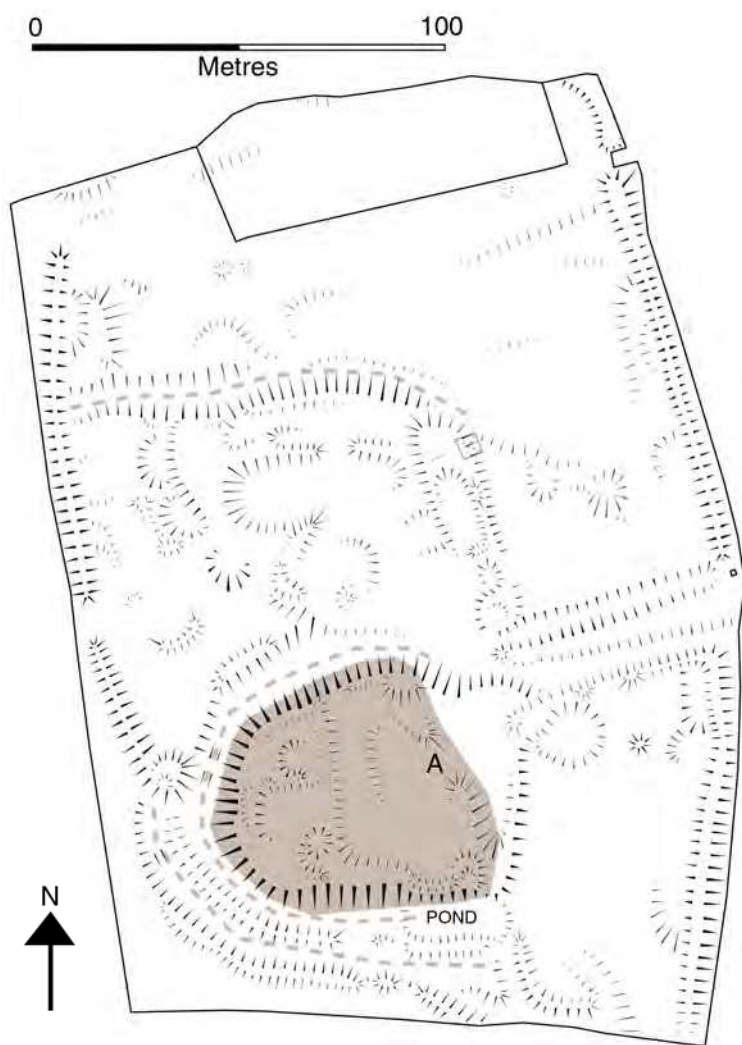
**Figure 17: Earthworks at Torpel Manor Field.** Illustration by Michael Fradley (after Fradley et al. 2013)

It is notoriously difficult to ascribe absolute dates to earthworks, as without excavation we lack the artefacts needed to tie them to particular decades or centuries. However, it is possible to build up a relative sequence, and by comparing the morphology of our earthworks against examples of known date, and by also considering the site within the political context of the time, we are able to make some suggestions about when certain features developed.

Documentary sources would lead us to believe that the site became important soon after the Norman Conquest. The earthworks we can see do appear consistent with this. Nothing here appears likely to have been constructed in the pre-Conquest period, but it is worth noting that we do not actually know very much about the topography of fortified manorial sites in the late Saxon period. Examples that are known (e.g. Goltho in Lincolnshire and Sulgrave in Northamptonshire) were

identified following extensive excavation, and nothing about their pre-excavation form suggested that they were anything other than Anglo-Norman castle sites.

So, what can we see at Torpel? It does seem likely, if not easy to demonstrate, that some of the earthworks here relate to a relatively early period of post-Conquest settlement (**Figure 18**). The first phase of activity visible to us is the construction of the mound in the southwest corner of the field. This mound rises 2-3m above the field's ground level, but even though the passing of time is likely to have eroded the earthwork and shallowed its slopes, it cannot be classed as a motte in the traditional sense. Nonetheless, it clearly served a defensive purpose, and this point is further reinforced by the presence of a wide, shallow ditch that partially surrounds it. In places, this ditch is close to 10m wide. Together, the mound and ditch formed a ringwork: a defensive fortification dating to the years that followed the Norman Conquest, contemporary with the better-known motte and bailey castles.



**Figure 18: Possible Anglo-Norman features visible as earthworks at Torpel Manor Field.** The hachured symbols indicate the existence of visible earthworks (arrows point downslope). The shaded area, labelled 'A', is likely to represent one of the earliest phases of construction still visible today.

The detailed form of this ringwork is hidden to some extent by changes that were made to the site later in the medieval and post-medieval periods (see below). Nonetheless, the remains of subsequently levelled earthworks on the eastern edge of the mound make it clear that the original fortification would have been embanked with a significant rampart. A break in these earthworks preserves what must have been the entranceway.

On the mound's south and south-western perimeters we can clearly see the remains of a double ditch. The outer ditch is around 6m wide, and though parts of it have since been lost, it appears to have originally extended further to the north, connecting up with a partially surviving 8m-wide ditch some 60m from the mound. Though many ringworks were not accompanied by such features, it is possible that this ditch enclosed an early bailey. One might expect such an enclosure to contain estate outbuildings, but these may well have been timber structures, and there are no earthworks in this area that clearly date to this first phase.

Though earthworks on the mound and beyond it are likely to relate to later phases of development (see below), geophysical survey suggests that the foundations of a number of small buildings survive below the surface, and it is possible that some of these relate to this first phase of medieval activity (**Figure 19**). For instance, magnetometry revealed several roughly circular features associated with the visible earthworks on the mound. They are unfortunately impossible to date, and are probably not strong enough readings to indicate hearths – though some could arguably be interpreted as such – but as clusters of small pits, they are a clear suggestion of some density of activity on the mound.

Resistance survey has been more revealing, though some of the features revealed must relate to a later phase (see Figure 35 below). An irregular cluster of anomalies on the eastern edge of the mound is suggestive of a complicated group of features: very likely building foundations. Close analysis of these anomalies allows us to isolate two possible alignments, which may suggest a phased development. Could one of these be a Norman hall?

The first group of features is oriented WSW-ENE. It is dominated by a rectangular structure over 20m long. If this is indeed our Norman hall, then it was of significant size; many halls from this period measure less than c.15m long. The other group of features is oriented NNE-SSW, meaning that it is at 90 degrees to the trackway from the Roman road. It incorporates an L-shaped high-resistance feature on the south-side of the mound, which extends southwards into a round area of low resistance, and it is possible that this is some form of water management feature. Similar drainage structures are known from excavated castles across the country.<sup>56</sup> Both groups of features are of significant interest, although their dating and relationships are unclear, and would certainly repay targeted excavation.



Also noteworthy is an unusual, broadly cruciform feature just downslope to the east. This is the only off-mound anomaly that aligns with the features discussed above, and may thus be contemporary with them.

The northernmost end of the field appears largely featureless. Possible early features in this area include a number of very faint E-W linear trends set at 6-8m apart. They may reflect ridge and furrow, though they are impossible to date. A positive linear magnetic anomaly is also visible in the northern part of the field running NE-SW, and likely relates to some form of drainage ditch, again of unknown date.

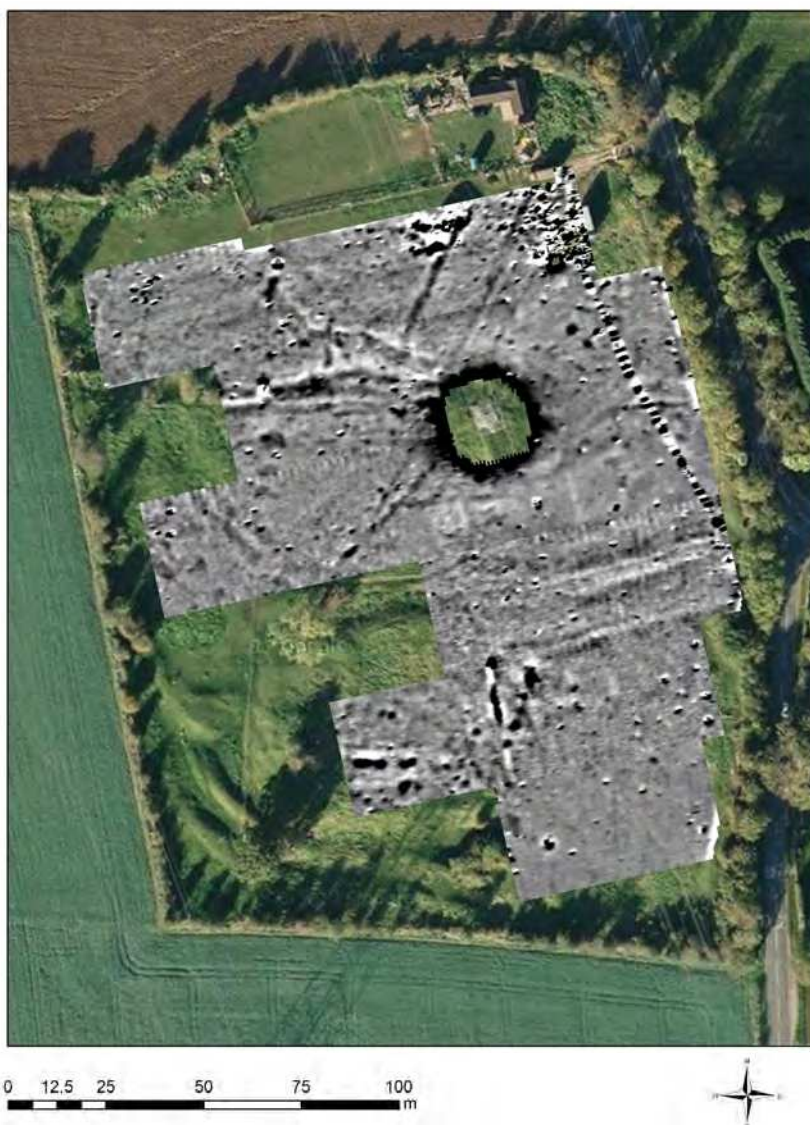


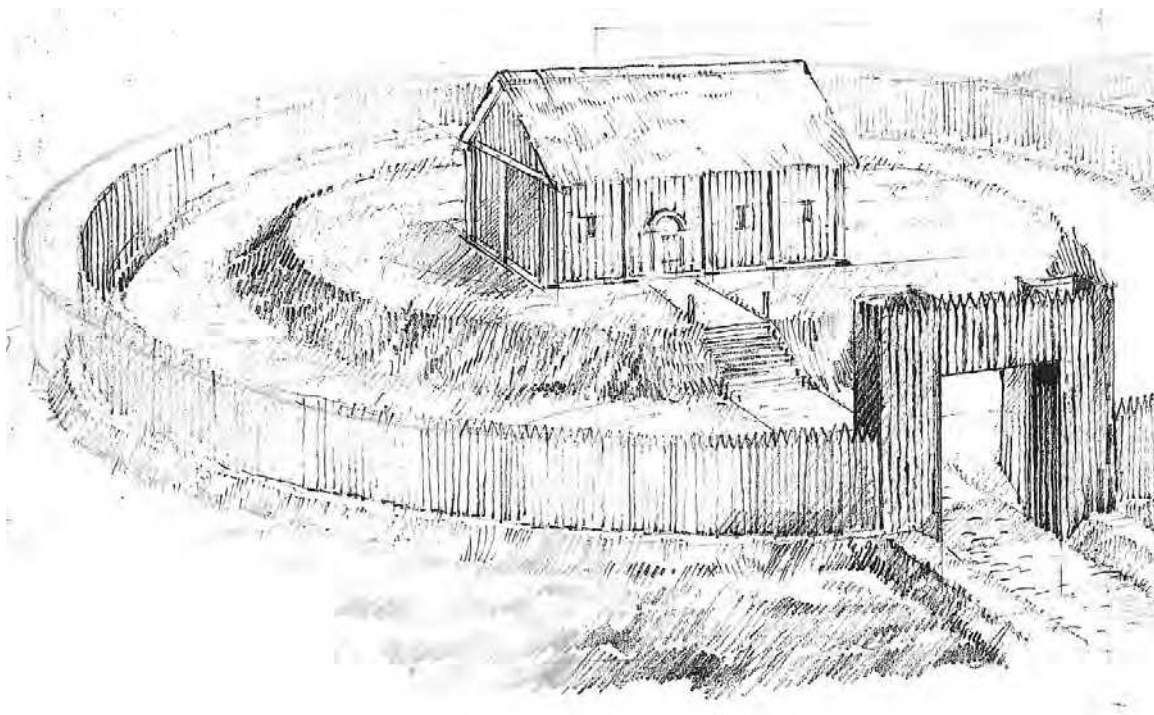
Figure 19: Magnetometry survey of Torpel Manor Field (after Goodchild et al. 2014). Note the cluster of round features on the mound, and the strong linear patterns that follow raised banks.

Otherwise, whatever activity was taking place on the field prior to the formation of the Anglo-Norman ringwork appears to have left very little trace visible in either surface topography or geophysics.

Today, a trackway wends its way from the mound to the field gate that opens onto King Street, and the fact that the banks flanking this path appear to preserve the footings of walls suggest that this is indeed an ancient routeway, perhaps even dating back to the Norman period.

So, what does all this tell us? This initial phase of the site is best characterised as a ringwork, a kind of motte-less fortification that is known across 11th and 12th century England.<sup>57</sup> Ringworks were very simple forms of fortification, and seem to appear in the English landscape relatively soon after the Norman Conquest. At their most basic, they consist only of a central area enclosed by a ditch, but many were later extended and redeveloped. We believe that their purpose was to provide a secure environment for the residence and resources of the elite, and would thus expect them to include a hall, storage buildings, and sheds for livestock. Without a motte, they probably lacked a central keep or large guard towers, though there must have been some sort of security provision at the gateway.<sup>58</sup>

Knowing exactly what these sites looked like, or how they were organised is a





problem, as very few have been extensively excavated. Even when they are dug, their timber structures mean that we often find very little. So what can we say?

It is important to note that while we tend to judge the defensibility of these early castles on the scale of their earthworks, these were only the foundations of their fortification.<sup>59</sup> Their strength and influence came very largely from what was on top of those earthworks. So, in the 11th century, sitting on the ramparts that surround the low castle mound, we would expect to find a timber palisade. Our understanding of the appearance of these imposing structures comes from a small number of excavations in which waterlogged soil conditions have preserved timber in situ. Interestingly, while the more frequently-preserved bases of posts suggest that timbers were roughly hewn, in the few cases in which the upper parts of the palisade have been preserved, they seem to be more finely worked.<sup>60</sup> This suggests that any pre-conceived ideas we may have of hastily erected, primitive stockades may be some way off the mark. Indeed, these sites were more than just military camps; they were the residences of an incoming elite. Just as the first stone castles and cathedrals made visual statements of power, status, and sophistication, perhaps we might expect something similar in their timber equivalents. All the evidence we have for woodworking around this time suggests that carpentry was a well-developed, finely honed craft.



Morphologically, the palisade would probably have consisted of a single circuit around the mound (**Figure 20**). Given the small size of the earthwork, there was probably no need for substantial interval towers along its length, though one might expect there to have been a number of guard posts or look-out points. There may also have been an outer palisade taking in the bailey area to the north, again with small look-out towers.

**Figure 20:** An artist's impression of Torpel Manor's 'Norman ringwork' phase, looking westward from a location above King Street. Drawing by Ivan Cumberpatch.

Both earthworks and geophysical survey suggest that the entrance to the castle lay on the eastern side of the mound, and was probably approached via a trackway from the Roman road. We might make some suggestions about the appearance of the gateway itself. Excavations at castles such as Windsor have demonstrated that Anglo-Norman castles and manorial complexes could be protected with palisades that featured imposing gate-towers.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, the Late-Saxon manor at nearby West Cotton, Raunds featured a timber palisade, but with relatively simple entranceways, so we should not simply assume the existence of such gate-towers here.<sup>62</sup> Geophysical survey revealed the existence of features in the entrance area that may relate to something like a gatehouse, but without excavation it is impossible to be sure that this relates to the first, Norman phase.

Having passed along the trackway to the site, a visitor would need to cross a defensive ditch or moat, presumably via a bridge or drawbridge, before entering under the gateway itself. Once inside the compound, they would be faced with the sight of what was probably quite a busy space. Certainly they would have seen a long hall on the mound: the complex's central building, and the lord's residence. We know that these were the central features of such elite fortifications, and local parallels suggest that they were commonly between 10 and 15m long. Initially constructed in timber, they were often replaced by stone buildings by the end of the 12th century. Both geophysical and earthwork surveys of the mound suggest that the traces of walled structures may remain below the surface at Torpel.

What would such halls have looked like? Excavations at contemporary manorial and fortified sites have revealed both aisled and un-aisled forms, though the former seem more common at the residences of the very highest echelons of the elite. Entrance to the hall would be via an entrance at one end, and in progressing into the building, one would note the large central hearth, around which there would have been a general sense of business and activity.

Halls were central to the construction of Anglo-Norman social order, being the focal point of the household. The hall was a multi-purpose space, where people congregated, ate, engaged in crafts, and saw justice meted out. It was also a theatre in which the social hierarchy could be confirmed. It was a communal space in which people of all ranks and statuses could be seen, and would provide the clearest snapshot of the castle's social structure.

The hall would not have been the only building on the mound, however. Excavations of ringworks and other fortified sites in Britain and northern Europe have shown that these central areas also incorporated smaller, less formal structures, such as stables, kitchens, and sunken-featured buildings used for crafts. Re-interpretation of

documentary, architectural and archaeological evidence suggests that as time passed, the social and political roles of the hall persisted, but that the lord and his family required additional, more intimate space.<sup>63</sup> The existence of such private chambers has been suggested on late Saxon manorial sites, but the need clearly becomes widespread by the 12th and 13th centuries.

Turning back to the entranceway, and climbing to the top of the palisade to take in the view, one would notice the bailey area to the north, enclosing a small number of estate outbuildings. This area was probably used largely for enclosing animals, and we might expect to see buildings related to livestock and estate maintenance. To the east, one would have an important view of traffic approaching down King Street, as well as of the village of Helpston itself, while the south and west prospects provided oversight of the open fields towards Ufford, Bainton, and Ashton, and up to the site of the hundred court at Langley Bush. The slight elevation of the Torpel site in a largely lowland landscape would have provided impressive – and important – views across the area. If someone were able to sit in such a spot for the next 900 years, they would have a front-row seat from which to watch as the landscape was transformed before their eyes.

## Contemporary parallels : Norman fortifications

Torpel is not unique in the country, or even in the region. William built a ring of fortifications as the base for his defence system for eastern England. A motte-and-bailey was constructed close to Peterborough Abbey in the early 1070s, and significant fortifications are known in the area, including Stamford, Rockingham, Fotheringhay, Lincoln, Bourne and Barnwell. Though of course the original towers would have been of wood, rather than stone, most do appear to have been on a rather grander scale than at Torpel.

Though ringworks like Torpel are less well known than traditional motte-and-bailey castles (**Figure 21**), there is a concentration of these sites in the south and east Midlands. Good parallels include mounds and earthwork complexes at Culworth, Lavendon, Long Buckby, Sharnbrook, Sulgrave, Weedon Lois, and Woodhead (near Tickencote) (**Figure 22**).

Indeed, across the country ringworks tend to cluster together in small groups, and we have little understanding of why this may be. The choice between ringwork and motte-and-bailey does not appear to be related to differing functions, nor to local politics or geology, and may have much more to do with the individual preferences of lords or architects. It is quite possible that fashions developed simply as a result of local precedents.<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 21: Motte and bailey castle, Fotheringhay.** Note the impressive scale of the mound.

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**Figure 22: Ringworks at Culworth (above) and Sulgrave (below).** Unlike Torpel, both are closely associated with parish churches.



## Torpel at Domesday

In this twentieth year of his reign, by order of William king of the English, there was made a survey of the whole of England ...This was done in respect of ploughland and habitations, and of men both bond and free, both those who were cottagers and those who had houses, and a share of the arable land, and in respect of ploughs and horses and other livestock, and in respect of the services and payments due from all men in the whole land.

Robert Losinga, Bishop of Hereford (1079-95)<sup>65</sup>

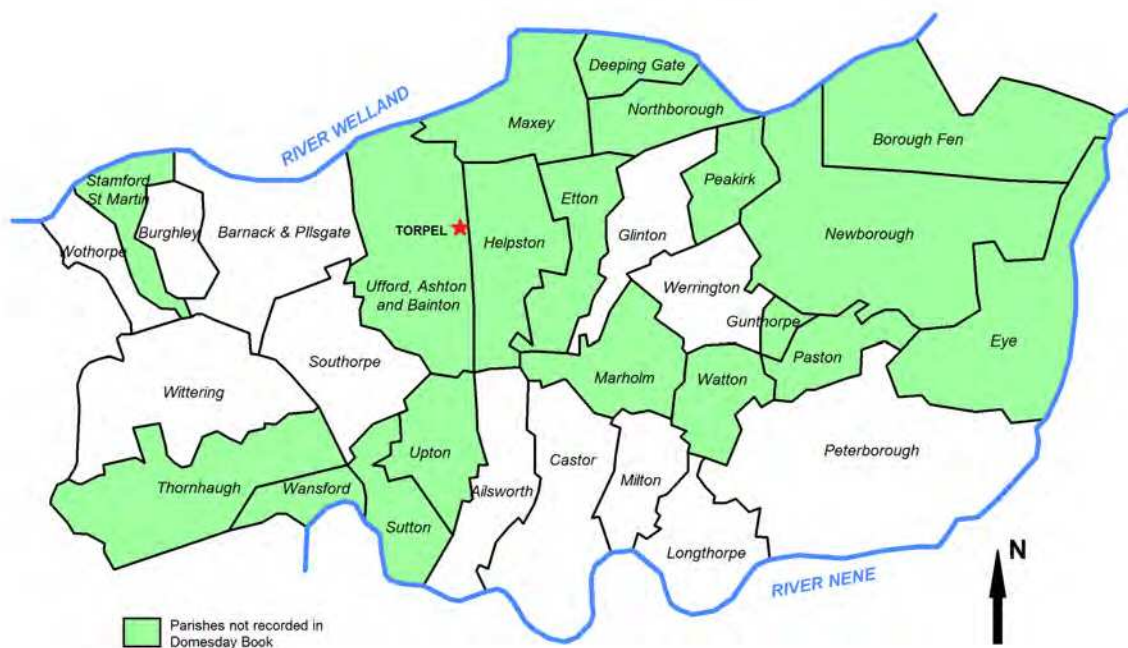
The aim of the inventory known as Domesday Book was to provide an account of land tenure, taxes and services owed to the country's monarch. William the Conqueror commissioned the survey in December 1085, and over the subsequent year, he sent commissioners around the country to take testimony from landholders about the extent and character of the manors they held.

Today, Domesday Book provides historians and archaeologists with an invaluable source of information about the landscape and its exploitation around the time of the Norman Conquest. In the Soke, clear differences can be seen in the ways that different landholdings were used, and in how they were valued. For instance, Domesday records for the nearby villages of Ailsworth and Glington show significant contrasts in farming and social structure. On the southern side of the limestone ridge, Ailsworth had six hides of arable land, worked primarily by 17 bondmen (villeins) and ten freemen. It had only 15 acres of meadow. In contrast, Glington – situated on the fen edge – had three hides of arable land, and was served by ten villeins, three female slaves, and 14 freemen. It had a hundred acres of meadow, which was highly lucrative, as it allowed the landholder to produce hay for winter feed, and for sale.<sup>66</sup> More generally, the value of land at both Glington and Ailsworth was considerable, and increased significantly between 1066 and 1086. All of this suggests that the area saw a considerable investment in agricultural development soon after the Norman Conquest.<sup>67</sup>

Another interesting feature of the Soke's Domesday record is the omission of around half of the region's parishes (**Figure 23**). In order to assess the level of military service owed to the king, Domesday Book was set out under manors rather than parishes, and only a few of the manors in this part of the Soke seem to have been included.



Figure 23: Parishes in the Soke of Peterborough omitted from Domesday Book.



There are several possible reasons for this. An initially tempting explanation might be that they had been devastated by raiding to the extent that there were no taxes to be collected. Superficially, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle may support such an idea:

...the northern men did much harm around Northampton ...either they slew men and burned houses and corn; or took all the cattle...which amounted to many thousands. Many hundred men they also took...so that not only that shire but others near it were the worse for many Winters.

Peterborough Chronicle, entry for 1065<sup>68</sup>

However, even if damage was extensive, the 21 years between these Northumbrian campaigns and the Domesday Survey surely provided sufficient time to establish re-settlement and regeneration of the landscape. Furthermore, manors with no 1086 value were regularly recorded in other counties in Domesday. Thus, we must consider other possibilities. Place names, as well as evidence from the region's churches, are suggestive of late Saxon settlement in the area, and perhaps the most likely explanation is that some manors were omitted as they were grouped within the



overall value of the Abbey of Peterborough's land. Such apparent inconsistencies are not uncommon in Domesday Book, though this is unlikely to be the complete explanation.<sup>69</sup>

Whatever its origin, this gap in the record means, of course, that Torpel Manor is not mentioned in the key document for the period during which it was probably founded. Documentary records make it clear that it was a significant estate by the 12th century,<sup>70</sup> but the context for activity in the area prior to the Norman Conquest is difficult to ascertain.

### **The manorial history of Torpel in the 11th-13th centuries**

The history of the post-Conquest lords of Torpel is a star-studded one. It is also complex, not least because so many of the lords of the manor went by the name of Roger. It appears that the first Roger de Torpel (who we will denote as 'Roger (I)') arrived from Normandy in the entourage of William the Conqueror, and was granted land here. His son, Roger (II), married Asceline de Waterville, who brought Upton Manor as her dowry. Their son Robert de Torpel contracted leprosy in around 1146, and had to take up residence in the leper hospital at the Chapel of St Leonard in Peterborough. He was succeeded by his brother Roger (III), who in 1198 enclosed 60 acres of woodland to create a deer park. His son, also Roger (IV), appears to have resisted his duties to the king on a number of occasions, until ultimately his land was temporarily confiscated in 1224.

Roger (IV)'s son William appears to have been rather less troublesome, but in 1242 he died without a male heir, leaving his sister, Asceline, to inherit his land, and allowing the estate to pass into the holdings of her husband, Ralph de Camoys. The de Camoys dynasty persisted until 1280, when John de Camoys fell bankrupt. It appears that it was an impossible task to satisfy all the demands on the family's income, including dowries, the subdivision of holdings to give younger sons an income, and the requirement for regular payments to be made to the church.

The result was that Torpel Manor was taken by Edward I, before being passed to his wife, Eleanor, who leased it in turn to a certain Geoffrey of Southorpe and Sir Gilbert Pecche. In 1291, following the death of Queen Eleanor, the manor of Torpel was returned to Edward I, who designated Peterborough Abbey as tenant in chief. The abbey paid rent to the King, and Torpel Manor paid rent to the abbey.

In 1309, Edward II gifted the manor of Torpel to his controversial court favourite, Piers Gaveston. Through the later and post-medieval period, Torpel was held by a number of members of England's high elite, including the monarchy (notably

Richard III, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I). From the time of the de Camoys onward, we appear to have a history of absentee landlords.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps as a result of this situation, it seems that over time the manor house itself fell out of use, and consequently into disrepair (see below). The heyday of Torpel Manor had passed.<sup>72</sup>

## Medieval agriculture in Torpel Country

Having set out Torpel Manor's political history, such as it is known, we need to understand how the lord ran his estate, how the land was worked, and what life was like in Torpel Country more generally.

It appears that the land at Torpel was primarily used for arable farming, its soils being well suited to the production of cereal crops. The main products would have been wheat, barley, oats, peas and 'dredge': a mixture of barley and oats used in livestock feed. In the Middle Ages, such farming was organised using a method of crop rotation, wherein the land was arranged in 'open fields' and farmed in strips, across which a range of crops were planted in order to distribute their harvest across a number of seasons and maximise yield. The traces of this style of agriculture are still visible today, in the form of ridge-and-furrow (**Figure 24**).



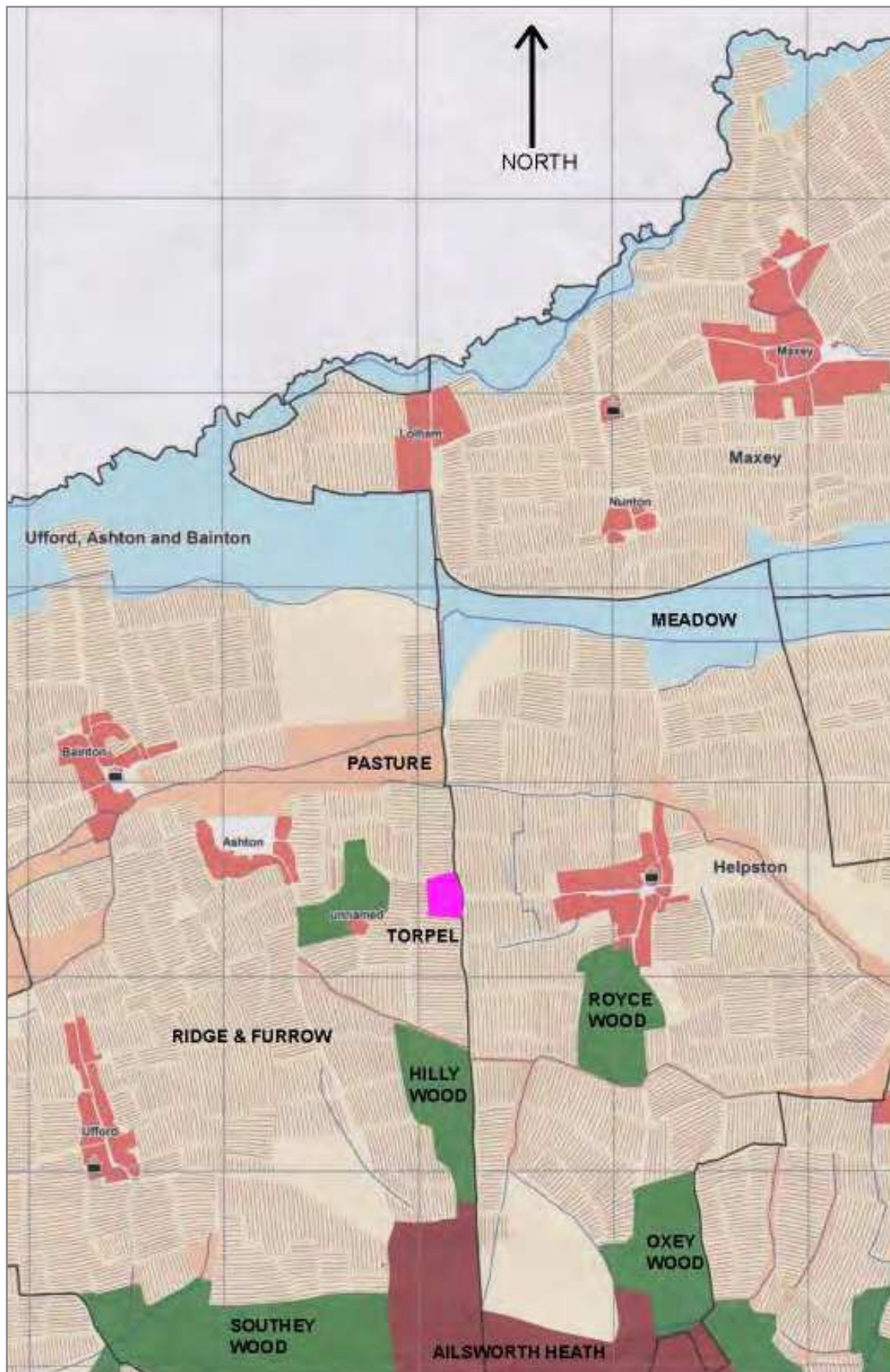
**Figure 24: Ridge and furrow at Bainton.** Aerial photograph by Dr Stephen Upex, Nene Valley Archaeology Research Committee.

Ridge and furrow actually preserves some of the experience of cultivating the medieval landscape. Ploughed strips of land developed an elongated S-shape, with a 'headland' at each end which was necessary to provide space for the large ox-teams to turn around. Large fields were divided into blocks called furlongs, in which the ridges and furrows ran in the same direction.<sup>73</sup> In many parts of the country these patterns are still visible, and historic Northamptonshire (including the Soke of Peterborough) is fortunate to have had its landscape of furlongs comprehensively mapped at high resolution (**Figure 25**), so we know more about the organisation of the landscape here than in practically any other part of England.<sup>74</sup>

As Figure 25 shows, most of the land in the region was used for arable farming. Ufford, Bainton and Helpston were surrounded by three large, open fields. The lord's or Abbey's land, known as the demesne, was intermingled with strips belonging to other manors and those rented by freemen and villeins for the production of their own food.

This pattern of open fields and nucleated villages (see above) typified the central belt of medieval England, running from Yorkshire in the north to the Dorset coast in the south. The pattern seems clear, and there has been much debate about the origin of the system, particularly around the degree to which it was either centrally planned or the result of peasant initiative. Until recently, many researchers had overlooked the correspondence between the geographical position of the belt of open fields and nucleated villages, and the underlying geology. When examined in detail, there was clearly considerable diversity,<sup>76</sup> but it is now clear that the explanation for this pattern lies in the interaction of social factors and local environmental conditions, such as differences in topography, soils and rainfall patterns.<sup>77</sup>

**Figure 25: Medieval land use c. 1300 (Foard et al. 2013).** Each stripe on the map represents about four ridges on the ground. These were arranged in blocks called furlongs, which were separated by grassy banks called baulks. In addition to the arable land marked with ridge-and-furrow, the map identifies five key types of landscape: pasture (on heavy clay soils); meadow (also used for grazing after the hay crop); heath (the local name for limestone grassland, and used for grazing); woodland (e.g. Hilly Wood, Southey Wood), and settlement (including gardens). Reproduced by kind permission of David Hall.<sup>75</sup>





## The Luttrell Psalter

With its exquisite illustrations (see **Figure 26**), the Luttrell Psalter, written around the 1330s, is an invaluable source of evidence for the everyday activities of life in rural England. Its patron, Geoffrey Luttrell, was lord of the manor at Irnham, near Bourne, only 14 miles from Torpel, making its relevance to us perhaps even more marked. It should be noted that Geoffrey held a number of other estates across England, but in any case the psalter's illustrations of daily life and work on the manor have a universal relevance, and we can certainly expect that those working on the manor at Torpel would recognise the scenes depicted.

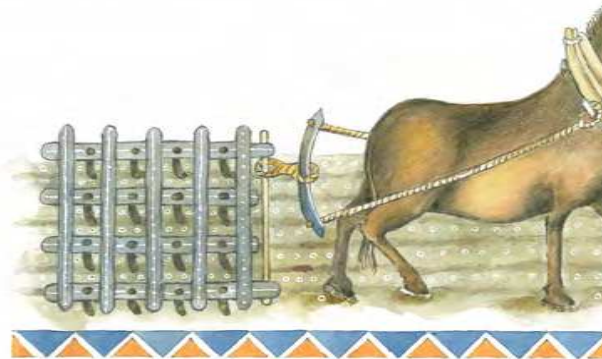
a



b



c



**Figure 26 : Illustrations by Ivan Cumberpatch, based on the Luttrell Psalter**

**a:** Ploughing: The plough was pulled by two pairs of oxen. The ploughman – wearing gloves – needed to use both hands in order to control the plough and the depth of the furrow. His assistant's role was thus to keep the oxen moving steadily. Ahead of the plough, a metal blade cut into the turf like a knife, while the wooden board turned the soil over, producing a furrow. The mallet would be used to clean the plough when it became clogged with soil.

**b:** Sowing: The sower carried a wicker basket, and from this scattered seed by hand.

**c:** Harrowing: Harrowing was necessary after ploughing, in order to break up the soil, and sometimes after sowing, to cover up seeds before they were eaten by birds. The harrow was pulled by a horse, while the man shown carries a sling and a bag of stones to send off crows.

**d:** Harvest. The crop was cut with sickles, and tied up into sheaves. Both men and women seem to have been involved.



There are a few written documents that give us a direct insight into everyday life, economy, and agricultural production in medieval Torpel Country, and one of the chief records is the accounts of Godfrey of Crowland, Abbot of Peterborough, dating to c. 1300.<sup>78</sup> These accounts cover all the manors attached to the Abbey of Peterborough, and provide a snapshot of medieval farming and daily life at the start of the 14th century. The accounts are highly standardised, and both large and small transactions are recorded: from the sale of 14 acres of meadow for £4 0s 16d, to the purchase of a new key for the park, which cost 2d.

All accounts begin with cash income derived from fixed rents, sales of land and produce, and customary payments made by the villeins, such as hens and eggs at Easter. This is followed by an enumeration of expenditure, which can tell us much about the organisation of estate lands. Expenses included repairs to ploughs, buildings and carts, shoeing of draught animals, and payments for a variety of tasks. For example, the settlement of Boroughbury paid stipends to a beadle, a forester, a shepherd, a hayward, ten ploughmen, five carters, a pigman, a boy to guard the peas, and a dairy maid. All the manors employed *famuli* (paid servants) whose tasks included making the pottage and the malt. Following this list of expenses, there follows an inventory of grain and livestock, and each record closes with a list of tasks and the number of days spent on labour services.<sup>79</sup> The documents shed light on the organisation of the abbey's accounts and the administration of its estates, but also provide a glimpse into the everyday life and people of these villages.

A different system was used to record transactions between manors, so these do not appear in the accounts directly. The accounts show that bailiffs visited the manors several times a year, in order to oversee what was happening, and to collect the revenue due to the abbey. Torpel's bailiff in the early 14th century was a man called Robert Fairfax.

The accounts of Godfrey of Crowland demonstrate that the abbey held extensive lands, with seven manors lying close to the abbey, ten further west in Northamptonshire, and five as far north as Lincolnshire. On a day-to-day basis, the management of a manor was the job of a local reeve (Torpel's reeve at this time was known as Geoffrey). He would have been responsible for ensuring that the labour was carried out as owed, and that all rents and fines were collected. He was personally responsible for any shortfall in revenue. One of the privileges associated with the position was the right of pannage (permission to graze pigs in the lord's woods), and reeves were also occasionally granted the opportunity to buy land.

Agricultural production on Peterborough's estate was geared towards providing grain for the abbey, and each manor was required to provide a certain amount of



produce in rent. The manor could keep any surplus grain produced, but the payment of rent was an obligation, and in poor seasons it may have left the villeins with little remainder on which to subsist. There was considerable variation in soils across the 23 manors held by the abbey, but all carried out mixed farming. Torpel specialised in arable production, while manors with poorer soils, such as those further west in Northamptonshire, would have focused on pastoral farming. Payments made by villeins tell us that many manors held livestock for a range of functions. As well as cattle, sheep, pigs and fowl, there was a stud with 20-30 mares at Eye, some manors had goats, and rabbit warrens and dove-cotes were common. Several manors even had peacocks (Warmington Manor presented 45 as Easter gifts to the abbey).

With their nutritious fen pasture, the manors of Glington and Eye focused on lambing. Much of the region's medieval wealth and prosperity stemmed from the wool trade, and this was the abbey's main source of income; the accounts show that the total flock increased from about 4000 to 9000 sheep between 1301 and 1308. How accurate these figures are is difficult to tell, but they do give a sense of the scale of the local medieval wool trade; it was clearly a well-developed commercial industry. We also know a little about how these estates were maintained. The abbey's flock was managed by a stock keeper known as John of Biggin, and on a local level, flocks of 200-300 sheep were moved between pastures, using drove roads as well as the old Roman roads. Shearing, packing and weighing of wool were supervised by the bailiff, who also brokered deals with merchants.

The accounts also tell us something about the role played by Torpel Manor in sheep husbandry. There were purchases of hurdles for sheep pens, bitumen for marking sheep, and ointment for treating them, but there is no direct reference to sheep themselves. Perhaps they only visited the manor occasionally, staying as long as there was good grazing.

## **Medieval villages and settlement patterns**

So, what of the people who worked the land? The English population more than trebled between the Norman Conquest and the mid-14th century<sup>80</sup> and most villages expanded, but the largely nucleated pattern of rural settlement was in many ways similar to that of late Saxon times. It is difficult to calculate village populations, but a tax known as the Lay Subsidy provides a guide. Based on a listing of taxpayers dating to 1334,<sup>81</sup> Helpston, Northborough and Ufford were the largest nucleated villages in the region, with 27 or more taxpayers. Other nucleated villages at Barnack, Southorpe, Upton, Wothorpe, Walcot, Bainton and Milton had 15-22 taxpayers, while Ashton, Nunton, Lolham, and Torpel, with only 8 to 11 taxpayers, could be described as large hamlets. Burghley and Pilsgate, with only 3 or 4, were small hamlets.

While we have a long documentary history for the existence of Torpel manor, we know little about the associated village. The first documentary evidence for settlement at Torpel comes in a charter for a fair and market, dated to 1264.<sup>82</sup> By 1329, which appears to have been the manor's highpoint, 21 tenants were working Torpel's demesne.<sup>83</sup> The Lay Subsidy confirms the existence of Torpel village in 1334, with only eight taxpayers listed (**Table 1**).<sup>84</sup>

Taxpayer	Taxes due
Simon Dutt	8d
Ralph Strak	3d
(Gilbert) Streyt	11d
Nicholas Holdtoyn	6 ½ d
Lucy Chat	9d
John, son of Nicholas	3s 5¾d
John, son of Margery	12 ½d
Simon Launcel	3s 3¾d

**Table 1 Taxes due for Torpel village in the Lay Subsidy of 1334<sup>85</sup>**

Two of those on the list were obviously better off than the others, and perhaps they were freemen with their own plots of land. Lucy Chat is the only woman, perhaps listed because she was a widow holding land. Her sons feature in several of the cases heard at the manor court 30 years later. We know that the manor was in decline throughout the later Middle Ages, and whatever settlement there was at Torpel did not persist into the post-medieval period, eventually becoming one of the lost villages of Northamptonshire.<sup>86</sup>

Archaeology may be able to help us to better understand the location of settlements around Torpel. A test-pitting survey undertaken by the Langdyke History and Archaeology Group (HAG) in the village of Helpston showed evidence of activity throughout the last 2000 years. Though much of the pottery found was post-medieval in date, there was a sprinkling of Stamford ware and other medieval material across the village, confirming the existence of settlement there at least as far back as the 11th century, though no clear settlement focus was identified.

### **Finds from Torpel Manor Field**

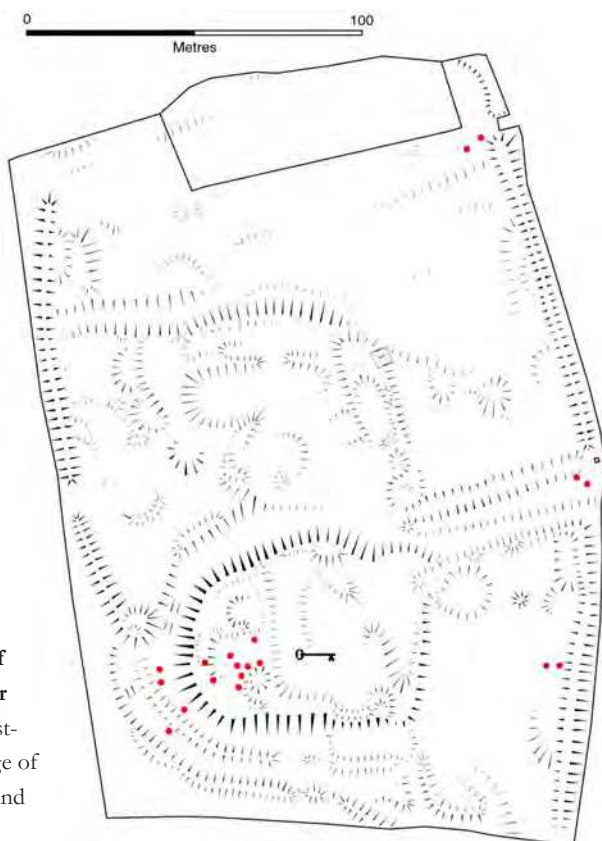
After the Langdyke Trust purchased Torpel Manor Field in 2009, the HAG was set up to gather existing data and establish an ongoing recording scheme. As the site

was now fully open to public access, and would be hosting visiting groups, it was important that both the site's significance and the need to care for it were widely understood. Though the site has been in use as permanent grassland for centuries, <sup>87</sup> surface finds occasionally appear, not least as a result of the burrowing actions of moles and badgers, and it is important that this material is recorded.

As a Scheduled Ancient Monument, Torpel Manor Field is protected, and archaeological work may only take place on the site subject to the permission of English Heritage. Prior to scheduling, it appears that metal-detecting had taken place on the site, and while interested passers-by have collected loose sherds of pottery, stones, and the like, few finds have been reported to either the Portable Antiquities Scheme or Peterborough Museum. In order to better understand the material, at the first public meeting about archaeological work on Torpel Manor Field in 2012, members of the local community were encouraged to bring along anything they had found on the site over the last several decades, in order that these objects could be identified, recorded, and, where possible, plotted on a large-scale plan of the site (**Figure 27**). This provided an opportunity to salvage useful archaeological data from rather dispersed material, and to discuss the significance of the site one-on-one with members of the local community: the unofficial guardians of Torpel Manor Field.

Findspots cluster on the mound, along the sides of the Torpel Way, and close to the field gate, but in all likelihood this is a pattern of recovery rather than deposition: it reflects both burrowing activity and the walking routes of passers-by. Finds can be dated to the Roman, Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods, and there are even some Neolithic flints; activity on Torpel Manor Field may date back several thousand years.

**Figure 27 : Approximate distribution of legacy surface finds from Torpel Manor Field.** Finds include medieval buckles, post-medieval accounting tokens, a diverse range of pottery, and a medieval key, which was found on the mound.



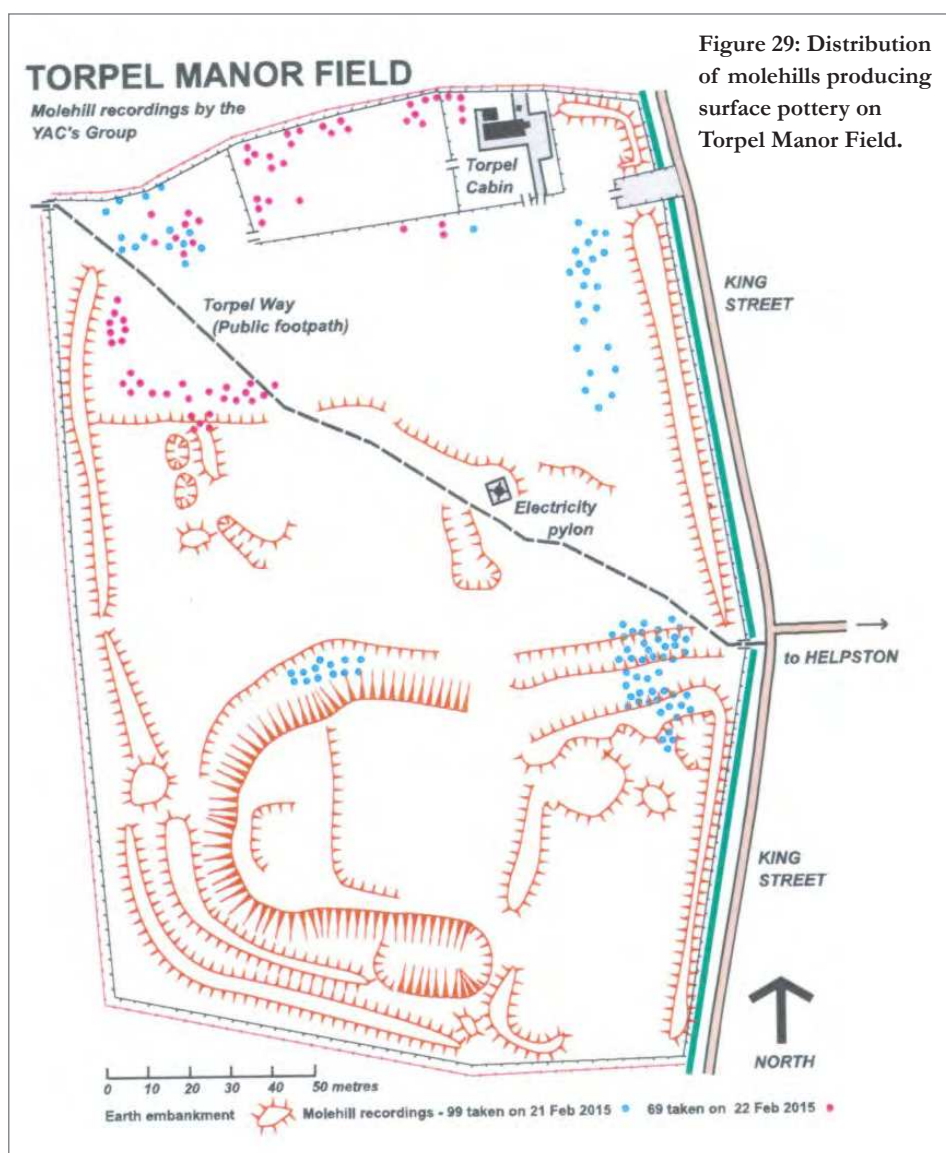
In recent years, destructive interventions have been limited to the digging of postholes for fencing, the replacement of former stables with an interpretation centre, and a shallow excavation for a composting toilet.<sup>88</sup> However, since the 2012 meeting, members of HAG have kept a watching brief on the site and environs, and they are constantly engaged in cleaning, labelling, identifying, and recording finds brought to the surface by the activity of burrowing animals (**Figure 28**).



**Figure 28: Surface finds from Torpel Manor Field (as of 2014).** a) Stamford ware pottery sherd; b) molehills on Torpel Field; c) active badger hole; d) finds from the badger hole.

Rabbits turn up material from shallow depths across the site. While ‘scrapes’ (intended to expose nutritious roots) are widespread, burrows themselves tend to be situated in the field margins or on fairly flat ground (such as on the mound), rather than in the earthworks themselves, which one might have presumed would have been ideal for rabbits. This conundrum would appear to be the result of possible stone revetments noted in the geophysical surveys (see opposite). Badgers bring up material from greater depth, though their activities are more limited in area. Molehills are widespread but contain fewer finds, as moles work in the topsoil, just under the turf. Non-invasive examination of molehills has been undertaken by our volunteers, especially the Fenland Young Archaeologists Club, and the results plotted on a plan

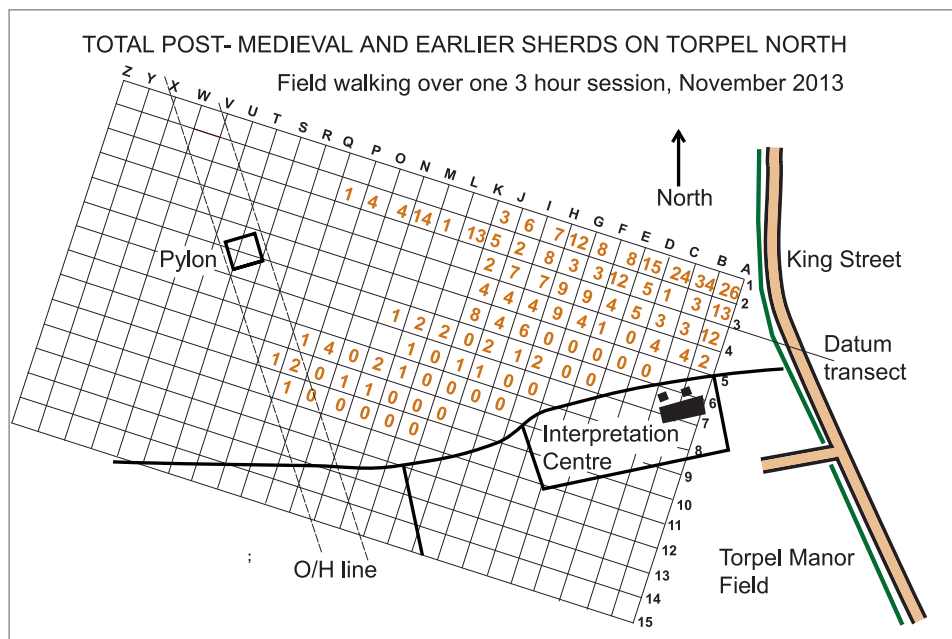
of the field, using the 20m grid established for the University of York's geophysical surveys (**Figure 29**).



More systematic work has been possible beyond the scheduled area of Torpel Manor Field. The fields to the west and south produced few finds. This is not surprising, given that the area was formerly part of a deer park (see below) and thereafter does not appear to have been brought into cultivation until the mid-1500s. Similarly, four test pits in a garden immediately to the east, across King Street (and apparently beyond Torpel's landholdings), produced almost no early finds.



‘Torpel North,’ the field immediately to the north of Torpel Manor Field, was also once part of the deer park, and is currently ploughed. The field was systematically walked in 2013, prior to the potato harvest, with over 400 sherds of pottery being found across a 900m<sup>2</sup> area in a two-hour period (**Figure 30**). This local accumulation may suggest that part of Torpel village lay here.



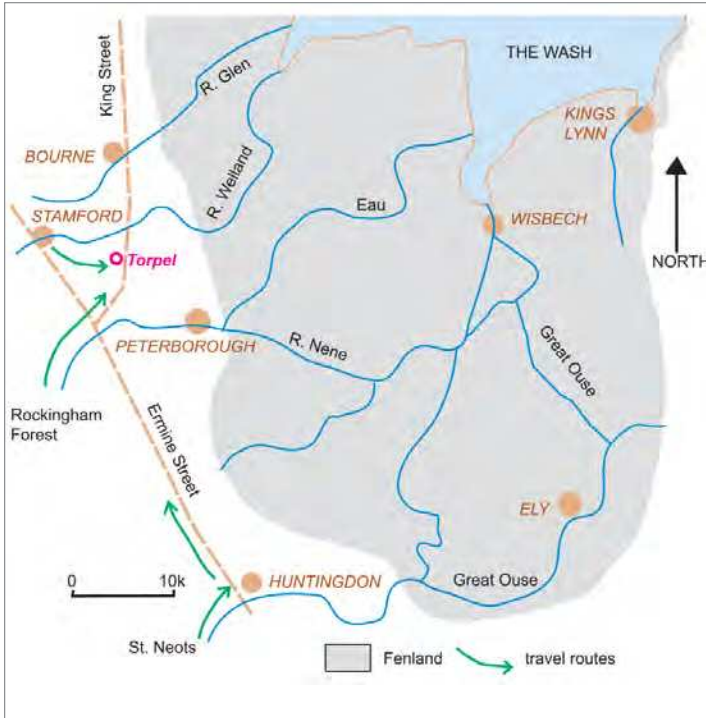
**Figure 30** Distribution of finds recovered during fieldwalking survey undertaken in fields to the north of Torpel Manor. Note the concentration in the north-east of the grid.

Much of the material from the area around Torpel Manor Field consists of medieval ceramics. There is a smaller amount of Romano-British pottery, as is to be expected adjacent to King Street. However, on Torpel Manor Field itself these finds are few, other than from one badger hole. In Torpel North, 6% of the total finds are of Romano-British origin; these include Nene Valley greyware and a mortaria fragment probably made in Stibington.

Torpel’s late Saxon pottery consists primarily of Stamford and St Neot’s wares, though these industries persisted (with evolution) to around the 13th century. With 11 types of medieval pottery represented, it is clear that post-Conquest Torpel was well connected for trade: source areas are shown on **Figure 31**. Fabrics fall into two main types, sandy wares from fen-edge sites, and shelly wares from inland sources.<sup>89</sup> It is interesting to note that finds from Torpel Manor Field appear fairly fresh, no doubt because the site has not been ploughed. In contrast, finds from adjacent fields are quite abraded from being in the ploughsoil.

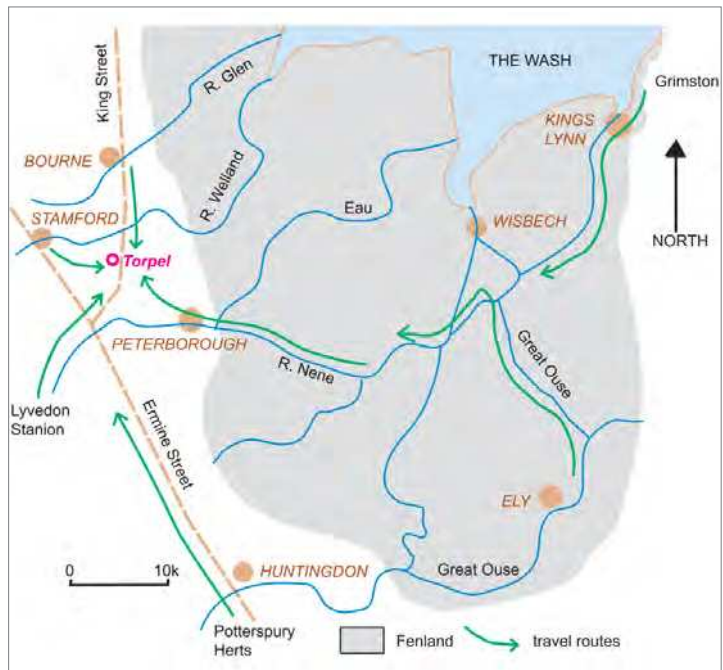


Figure 31: Sources of pottery reaching Torpel Country, according to identification of sherds found in the area.



(a) The early and high-medieval period: Early Stamford and St Neot's type wares are important here.

(b) The later medieval period: this is marked by developed forms of Stamford ware, as well as Lyvedon Stanion and Bourne type wares.



Paul Blinkhorn's analysis of the finds concluded that: 'The distribution of the pottery suggests that the settlement in the Torpel [Manor] Field area is largely Saxo-Norman, 11th-12th century, and somewhat earlier than that at Torpel North, where Stamford Ware is much less common, and 13th-14th century wares occur in far greater quantities. Wares of 15th and 16th century date are scarce at both sites'. The exercise has thus proven extremely useful, both in providing a landscape context for the site on Torpel Manor Field, and in providing evidence for the dates at which people were living and working in the area. There is, no doubt, much more to be discovered, but the pottery distribution across local fields suggests that there was a focus of activity on Torpel Manor Field and Torpel North for several centuries.

### **Medieval social structure and administration**

Medieval society was highly stratified under the feudal system, in which lords held land from the king and oversaw the labour of a large peasant class. Most people worked on the land, and nationally 80% of the heads of households were labourers of some kind, ranging from sokemen/freemen, through bondmen/villeins to bordars and cottars and then slaves. Bordars and cottars were unfree and held very small plots of land.<sup>90</sup> Villeins were also unfree and could not leave the manor. They had to work for the lord for 2/3 days a week, but they also had their own strips in the open fields for which they paid rent, as well as their own vegetable plots. They also had to give the lord a gift at Easter, and had to pay him fines on particular occasions, such as when they inherited or took over the holding of another tenant, or when a daughter married and left the manor. A villein's family was even responsible for paying a fee to the lord when they died.<sup>91</sup>

Freemen were able to buy, sell and inherit land and could move to another manor. Nationally they accounted for about 15% of the population, but it is estimated that in 1086, one third of the population in the Soke were freemen.<sup>92</sup> This was an even higher percentage than in the rest of Northamptonshire, and corresponds best with the Danelaw areas beyond the Welland, in Lincolnshire and neighbouring Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. It is estimated that the actions of the freeholders resulted in 1000 acres of new land being gained by woodland clearance in the Soke in the 12th and early 13th centuries.<sup>93</sup>

One of the elements of medieval rural life that we know most about is the organisation of its legal affairs, as these were carefully recorded. Torpel's Court Rolls (1361) show us how the lord of the manor exercised jurisdiction over his tenants.<sup>94</sup> The manorial court seems to have met about every three weeks, on or close to a feast day, probably out of doors. There is no mention of the lord or his bailiff being in attendance, or of there even being a formal chairman. However, we can

see that all tenants (most of whom were unfree) had to attend on a regular basis. A jury of both free and unfree tenants provided information about manorial customs, and made decisions on disputes based on the principles of homage (formal public acknowledgment of feudal allegiance) and fealty (sworn loyalty to the lord).

Disputes are recorded between the tenants of the lord's lands in Ailsworth, Ashton, Bainton, Deeping Gate, Glington, Helpston, Maxey, Northborough, Nunton, Sutton, Thornhaugh, Uffington, and Ufford. These villages were no more than four or five miles from Torpel, but on foot, a return trip to the court would have been a considerable undertaking by today's standards. Tenants who could not attend could be excused on grounds of infirmity, though a fine of 1d or 2d could also be imposed. Debt between neighbours was by far the most frequent cause of disagreement. In practically all cases a third party was drawn in to guarantee payment. Other disagreements were caused by trespass or theft. Most interestingly for us, there is a reference to the poor state of repair of some buildings in Torpel village itself:

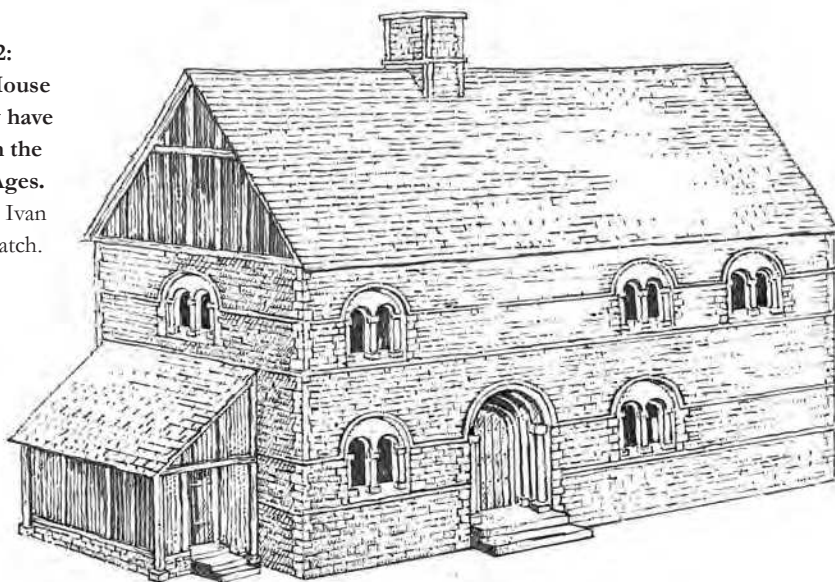
Peter Alleyn has ruinous houses in Torpel. Therefore an order is made for him to repair them before the feast at Easter, under pain of 10s.

Torpel Court Rolls<sup>95</sup>

## Torpel Manor House

From the time of the post-Conquest ringwork, there would always have been a manor house of some sort at Torpel. However, what it looked like is less certain, as we lack clear descriptions of the building until 1624. From this description, it appears to have been a typical 'hall house', and **Figure 32** provides an artist's impression.

**Figure 32:**  
Torpel House  
as it may have  
looked in the  
Middle Ages.  
Sketch by Ivan  
Cumberpatch.



The first documentary evidence for the existence of an elite residence at Torpel relates to the death of the second Ralph de Camoys in 1277. In this text, Torpel's manor house was described as a *capital messuage* (main residence).<sup>96</sup> The site seems to have been going strong a century later; in a document dating to 1367, there is a reference to two gardens and a nearby sheepfold. The Bailiff's Accounts from 1446 refer to a kiln and an orchard, as well as the provision of a room called *le ballyez chambre*.<sup>97</sup> But the nature or scale of activity on the site is difficult to assess from these few, fragmentary sources.

An important piece of material evidence for settlement on the site at this period comes in the form of a wrought iron key found by a local farmer, John Broughton, while metal-detecting on the mound in the 1990s (**Figure 33**). Measuring 160mm, and featuring a simple rectangular bit, it has been dated c.1350-1450, though recent research suggests that this is a widespread form, known from urban and rural contexts across Europe, throughout the 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>98</sup> Nonetheless, the key is substantial, and probably from a door to a building; it stands as evidence for medieval activity on site, and seems likely to relate to permanent settlement rather than anything more transitory. The possession of a key—whether related to a building or a chest, whether fixed or portable—speaks to a perceived need for security, and consequently of relative wealth on site.



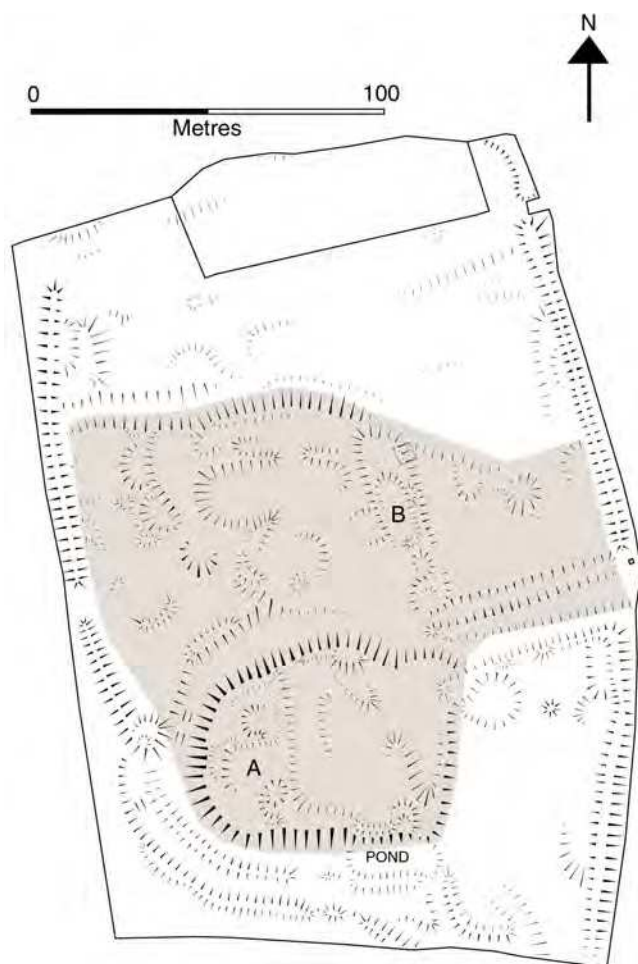
Figure 33: The Torpel Key (Length: 160mm).

### Later developments at Torpel Manor: the archaeological evidence

Archaeological survey takes us beyond this general impression, and allows us to demonstrate the existence of quite a complex of buildings on the site, many of which must date to the later medieval period (**Figure 34**). A number of linear earthworks were found to be characterised by strong magnetic anomalies, suggesting that either walling or stone revetments for the banks survive below ground. Particularly notable are the lines that flank the pathway from King Street, and though there is no way of

knowing at what date such walling may have been constructed, it was probably not part of the primary phase, and one might imagine that it relates to later medieval or post-medieval activity.

**Figure 34: Postulated second phase of earthwork development at Torpel Manor Field (after Fradley et al. 2013)** 'A' denotes the central core of activity on the mound; 'B' indicates a later phase of expansion.

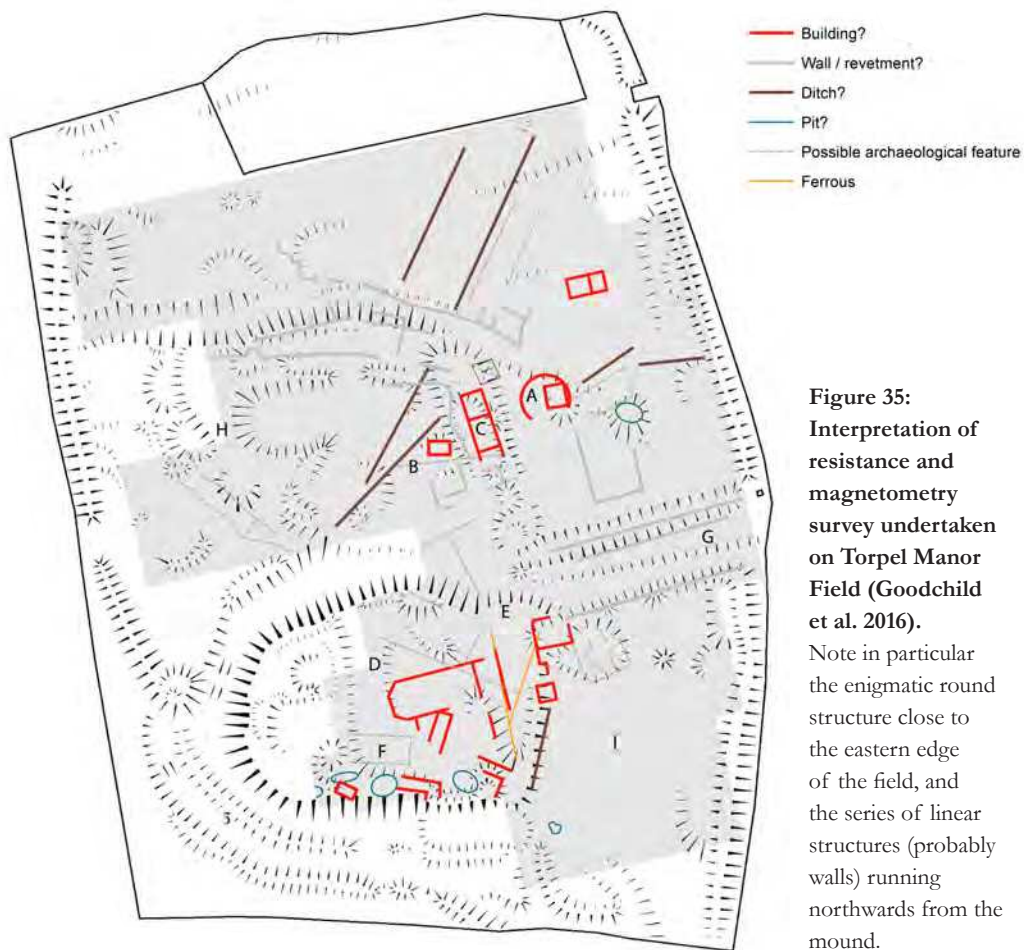


Moving on to the mound, it appears that at some stage the plateau was extended out towards the east, at least some sections of its ramparts levelled, and elements of its defensive moat or ditch filled in. This all suggests that the need for fortification had passed. It seems likely that the buildings on the mound for which earthworks still remain were laid out at this point. There appears to have been a row of structures along the western edge of the mound, and at least one structure on the south side, overlooking an open central court. The mound's western side was inaccessible to geophysical survey due to undergrowth and unstable ground, but magnetometry and resistivity do confirm activity on the southern edge.

Close to the edge of the mound, geophysical survey identified another very interesting feature. A linear anomaly serves to connect a number of elongated features previously identified elsewhere in the field, such that the overall impression is of a substantial eastern enclosure wall or series of structures, about 50m west of King Street, with a possible entrance structure at its southern end. At the northern



end of this alignment, close to the pylon, we have been able to look in more detail at the structure of the large, rectangular earthwork known locally as ‘the barn’ (the field was known as Barn Close from the 17th century).<sup>99</sup> Its end features a double return, consisting of two walls separated by a gap of c. 3m. This arrangement was not clear from the earthwork survey, and what was previously seen as a number of rather incoherent features is now resolved as a large, single structure, perhaps with internal cellular divisions. Interestingly, a small number of features close to the pylon now appear to lie outside of this linear feature, perhaps indicating the existence of a lean-to structure of some kind. This area is indeed very complicated, featuring a number of buildings on both sides of the suggested enclosure, and an alternative interpretation is that this is not an enclosing wall, but rather a linear array of buildings. In either case, it is a striking group of structures, which must be late or post-medieval in date. Indeed, it is quite plausible that these results reveal the remains of the northern-most sections of the complex associated with the long-lost Torpel House.



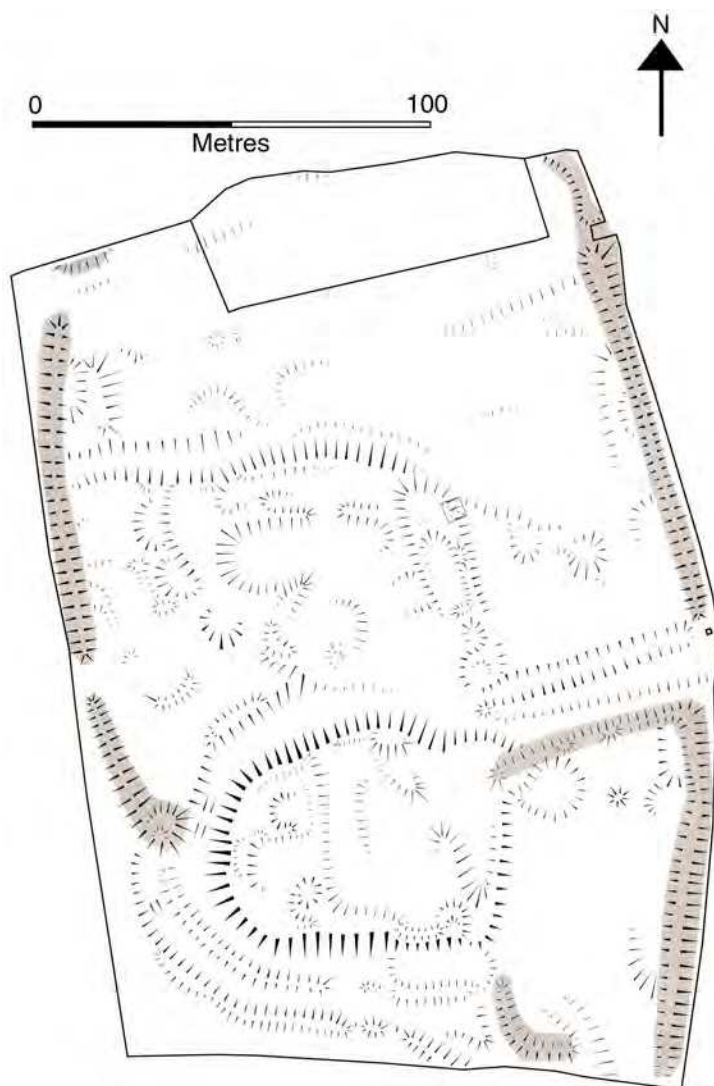
**Figure 35:**  
**Interpretation of**  
**resistance and**  
**magnetometry**  
**survey undertaken**  
**on Torpel Manor**  
**Field (Goodchild**  
**et al. 2016).**  
 Note in particular  
 the enigmatic round  
 structure close to  
 the eastern edge  
 of the field, and  
 the series of linear  
 structures (probably  
 walls) running  
 northwards from the  
 mound.



Geophysical survey also highlighted the existence of a number of unidentified features further east, between the field's upstanding earthworks and the road. Most notable is a large, circular structure with thick walls, close to the pylon, and to the earthworks known as 'the barn' (**Figure 35**). Without excavation, it is difficult to discern either the date or the function of this substantial feature: it could be anything from a windmill mound or rabbit warren, to a horse mill, kiln or granary, and may be of medieval, post-medieval, or even industrial date. Contextually, its most likely identity is a dovecote. Large, round dovecotes are known from a number of later medieval sites, and excavated examples from West Cotton and Burystead, Raunds are sited close to manorial building complexes, just as we see at Torpel.<sup>100</sup> However, all of these examples are well under 10m in diameter, and at 12.5m, Torpel's structure would be an unusually large example of such a building. Excavation is required if this feature is to be definitively identified.

- A: Circular feature, 11.5m in diameter, with what appear to be thick walls.
- B: The rectangular feature visible here may perhaps relate to the board-framed hovel west of the barn referred to in the account of the demise of Torpel House, dated 1624, perhaps used for the storage of carts, or a similar function.
- C: This large rectangular feature may indicate the existence of a stone or brick building, divided internally into cells. This may have been the barn that was still standing in the early 19th century, and which gave the field the name 'Barn Close'.
- D: This 20m-long rectangular feature, oriented WSW-ENE may be the remains of a hall or manor house, though it is unclear from which phase. Around it would have been outbuildings such as a kitchen and bakehouse.
- E: This cluster of features may indicate the remains of a gateway structure. The 1624 account refers to three great gates for carts to go through.
- F: This L-shaped anomaly may indicate the position of some sort of water or waste disposal system (again of unknown date, see above).
- G: The entranceway from King Street, perhaps flanked with stone walls.
- H: A large court in the centre of the 'bailey' area to the west of the barn, surrounded by estate management buildings (stables, barns, malting ovens, and so on).
- I: A level area that could have been used for vegetable and herb gardens, or an orchard. It may later have become a stock enclosure.

In all, the scale of building on site seems to have picked up considerably between the primary ringwork phase and the later medieval redevelopment. We also see a number of structures being built in the ringwork's unusual 'bailey' area to the north. At least one large group of buildings was laid out around a court. These earthworks do not look like a typical peasant settlement, and it is unlikely that this is part of Torpel village. They are more likely to represent a formally arranged array of buildings, as we might expect at a high-status manorial complex.<sup>101</sup> It is not clear at what date the redevelopment happened, or over how long a period, but at some point, perhaps in the post-medieval period, a large bank was built, enclosing the whole field. This may be evidence of livestock management, suggesting an entirely new, later function for the site (**Figure 36**).



**Figure 36:** Final phase of activity evidenced in earthworks (after Fradley et al. 2013). The shaded areas indicate new earthworks raised late in the sequence of development at the site, perhaps as a means of stock enclosure.

So what would the manorial complex of late-medieval Torpel have looked like? For many manors, the hall remained the central place, as its role in creating community, order, and hierarchy, and in allowing the lord a theatre for display, persisted right through the Middle Ages. Its form had evolved in the centuries since the Norman Conquest, and many halls incorporated multiple doorways to butteries, pantries, kitchens and other service facilities. They also tended to feature a raised dais at one end, at which the lord and his family would dine: ‘the high table’. Moreover, by the later medieval period the lordly elite were provisioning themselves with more private spaces, such as integral solars or separate chamber blocks, often accessible by doorways from the ‘high’ end of the hall.<sup>102</sup>

On the other hand, it has been suggested that on estates run by absentee landlords (such as Torpel from at least the 14th century), the resident bailiff would have had little need of regular public use of the hall, and that instead the private chambers may have been adopted as the administrative centre of the manor, with the halls themselves being abandoned.<sup>103</sup> How does this fit with the evidence we can see at Torpel?

The geophysics and the earthworks suggest that the spatial organisation of the site was becoming more complex as time progressed. There is a suggestion of a single line of buildings running northwards from the eastern side of the mound. Though at first this looked like a perimeter wall, it is now clear that it is much more complicated. While some of the features visible may relate to earlier (or later) time periods, there is a coherence to the organisation of the majority of the structures, which suggests that they were at least partially contemporary with one another. The arrangement also looks similar to that of excavated late-medieval manors in the region,<sup>104</sup> so we can speculate about the experience of visiting the manor at the start of the 14th century. The site would look bigger, more developed, and more extensive than that seen in the 11th century. The trackway from the Roman road may by now have been flanked by stone walls. Whether or not the entire complex remained fenced, or even walled, is unclear, but part of the defensive ditch had been filled in, in order to extend the mound’s plateau into the gateway area. This arguably suggests that the lord’s priority for the complex was now public display, rather than security.

Passing into the complex, one would note an array of buildings extending for 50m to the north. Up on the mound was a stone-built manor house, perhaps with a central hall and numerous outbuildings. Beyond this, in an extended bailey area, were a number of estate buildings: one might imagine stables, barns, perhaps even malting ovens. There may also have been a dovecote. Some of the structures would have been stone-built, others would have been timbered, and some may have been more ephemeral lean-tos or similar.

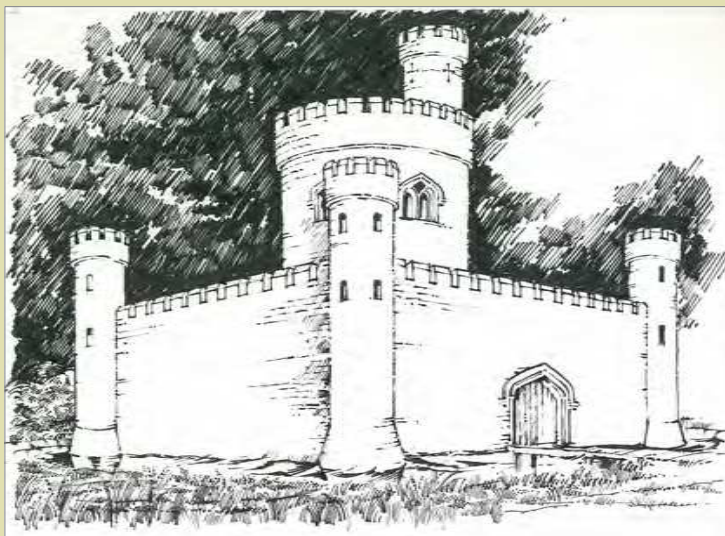
On exploring the manor, our visitor would notice not only these sights, but also the various signs of life on a busy estate. This was an elite residence, but it was also a centre for agricultural production; the air would be filled with the sounds and smells of labour, of animals, and of the fields. The smell of the hearth, and of roasting meat would have been conspicuous on approaching the manor house, but no doubt one would also pick up the smell of rotting food and human cess. How such a sensual cornucopia was interpreted would depend very much on the visitor's identity, status, and relationship with the lord of the manor. Indeed, space was so ordered in these sites that visitors would know very well that there would have been parts of the complex to which access was restricted. The hierarchy of medieval society was very much reproduced in the landscape and built environment that it created.

## Contemporary parallels : medieval manor houses

Torpel Manor House was not unique, with a number of parallels across the region. Here we present just two examples for comparative purposes. Buildings of similar form and function may have existed at nearby Maxey (**Figure 37**) and Ufford (**Figure 38**).

**Figure 37: Maxey Castle.** Sketch by Ivan Cumberpatch, based on a 16th-century illustration.

Probably built sometime after 1250, it was at first a moated manor house, later becoming crenellated, perhaps with turrets added, in 1374. Only the moat and fishponds survive today.



**Figure 38: The Old Rectory, Ufford (formerly 'Uphall').** This was a medieval hall house; the wings on either side of the central hall were added later, and the windows are Victorian. The building is still in use as a house.

## Torpel Deer Park

Until 1215, much of the land in the Soke of Peterborough was classed as ‘forest’. This does not mean, however, that it was covered in trees. A Norman forest was a legal entity rather than a description of the landscape, created for the protection of deer and other animals of the hunt. As such, it incorporated villages and farms, as well as woodland. The area was held by the crown and subject to forest law. Deer were free to roam in the forest, and there were also fenced pastures known as ‘lawns’, which were given over for the exclusive use of deer. Many forests were carved out of the countryside; perhaps the most famous example was the New Forest, created by William the Conqueror.<sup>105</sup>

Woodlands in the Soke of Peterborough were detached from the area’s most important forest, Rockingham (named after the village and nearby castle). In 1215 a survey of woods in the Soke recorded 84 blocks of trees, totalling 1,600 acres. The majority of the trees were oak, hazel, field maple and hawthorn, providing a range of important resources and habitats. For instance, timber from Castor Wood was used for mills, cogs and plough beams. In 1301, we have a record of 78 trees being felled at Castor Hanglands Wood (*le hangende*) to repair the grange at Biggin, while woodland at Upton was exploited for timber to be used in the production of rafters for Ramsey Abbey, south-east of Peterborough.<sup>106</sup>

The woods were divided into blocks and coppiced in rotation, with trees being periodically cut close to the ground. Each coppice was surrounded by a bank and fence to exclude the deer after felling, and thus allow for re-growth. Cattle, but usually not pigs, from the village were allowed to graze in the coppices and ridings. In the later Middle Ages, woodlands were often cleared to make way for increased arable land. A record from the 12th century relates that the abbot and convent of Peterborough, four knights including Roger de Torpel (III), and various freeholders made assarts, or clearances, of woodland in the Soke. Roger’s share was 11.5 acres, for which he had to pay a fine of £10 15s 9d.<sup>107</sup>

Throughout the medieval period, one of the most common uses of woodland was for the elite pastime of hunting. In 1198, Roger de Torpel (III) paid 100 shillings to enclose 60 acres of woods in order to create a deer park. Parks were big business for the elite, and required significant amounts of labour in order to maintain and steward them. By 1300, there were 3,200 deer parks in England, including over 30 in Northamptonshire.<sup>108</sup> However, few of these medieval parks exist today. The most well-known deer park in the region is at Burghley House, but it was not actually established until 1552.<sup>109</sup>



A deer park was both a status symbol and a source of meat for the lord of the manor, his family and guests, and hunting appears to have been the main leisure activity of the medieval elite (**Figure 39**). Aristocrats hunted a range of game including deer and hares, and though practice varied according to quarry, the hunt was usually led by men on horseback, supported by dogs apparently similar to modern greyhounds, mastiffs, and spaniels.

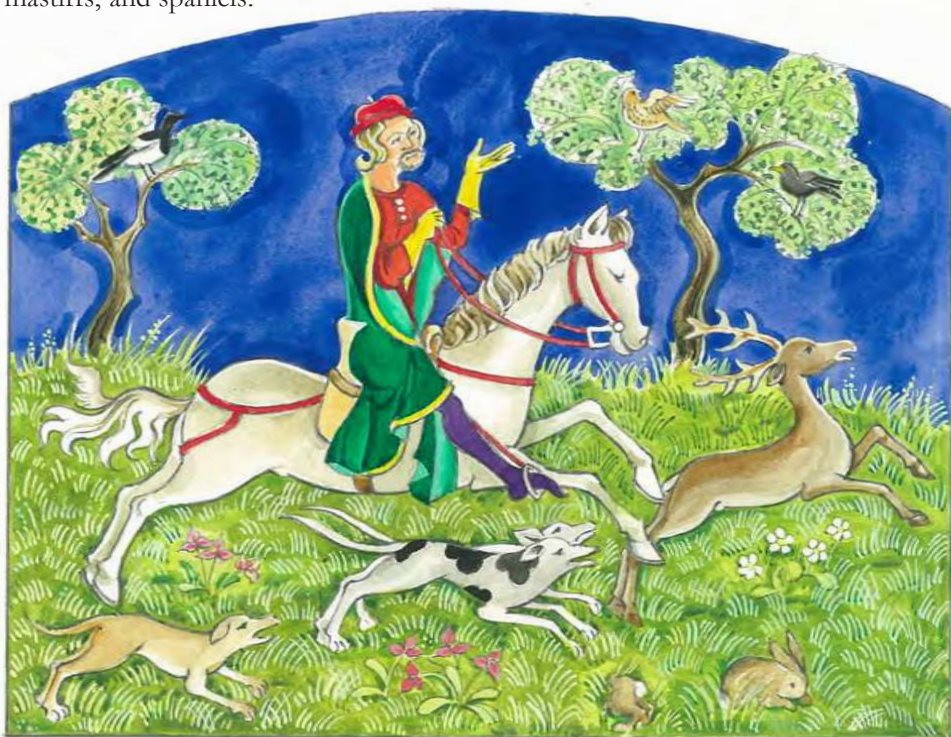


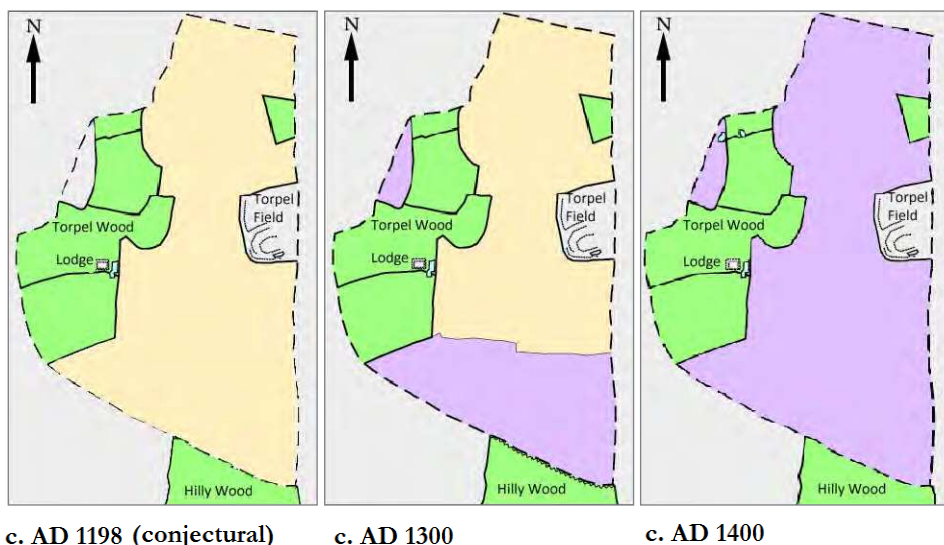
Figure 39: Hunting in a deer park. Artist's impression by Ivan Cumberpatch.

Figure 40: The ditch and wall at the north edge of Hilly Wood, marking the southern perimeter of the deer park.



In order to keep deer enclosed, their parks were surrounded by perimeter ditches, with external banks often topped with a pale, fence, or stone wall. This arrangement was intended to allow wild deer to jump into the park, but to prevent their escape once inside.<sup>110</sup> A ditch and bank provide the only surviving evidence of the boundary to Torpel's deer park (Figure 40).<sup>111</sup>

- Woodland
- Open Field
- Deer park (in addition to woodland)
- ~ Ditch and bank



**Figure 41: Estimated extents of Torpel Deer Park in 1198, 1300 and 1400.** More land to the east of the 60 acres in Torpel Woods was progressively added to the deer park over three centuries.

We know that in 1198, Roger de Torpel paid 100 shillings to enclose land for a deer park, but what did this entail? He broke up the landscape into a number of specifically named blocks: *Le Hage* (meaning ‘enclosure’), *Ravenesland* (which was perhaps the present day Rough Ravens and the adjacent close) and *Cnibtecroft* (which apparently no longer exists). Over the following decades, the deer park appears to have been further extended, eventually overwriting large areas of open field, although the details are hazy (Figure 41).<sup>112</sup>

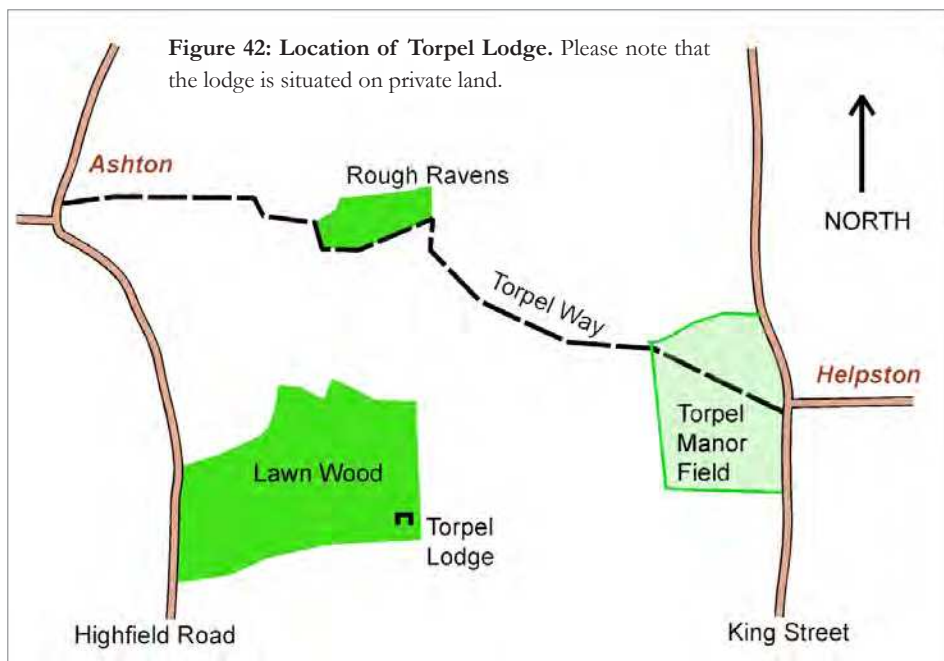
For Torpel, although Roger paid to enclose it in 1198, the first documentary reference we have to the actual existence of such a park does not appear until 1300, when the Torpel manorial accounts detail a forester's annual stipend of 6s 8d, and pay for the king's huntsman (3s 5 1/2d).<sup>113</sup> A more direct reference comes in 1367, in the form of a rental record which identifies the park as an area ‘where they can keep

deer, stags, with pasture, worth nothing' (meaning that no rent was paid to the lord of the manor).<sup>114</sup> Finally, the documents record that Hugh of Northborough, who was responsible for rabbit warrens in Ufford and Upton, was granted the office of 'parker' in 1399. This demonstrates that the park was still active at the end of the 14th century.

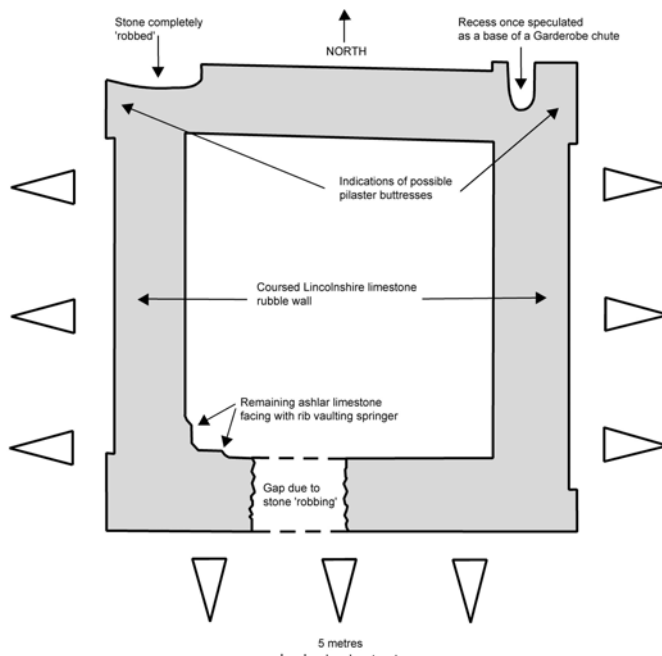
Although the archives tell us no more than this, we do have some physical evidence to help us imagine how the park may have looked. Local field boundaries appear to map out the conspicuously curvilinear shape of the park, while as we have seen, the remains of the ditch and bank are visible as a curved feature running north-west from King Street on the northern edge of Hilly Wood. On Torpel Manor Field itself, the preservation of early ridge-and-furrow under pasture is a direct result of the fact that the land was protected from the medieval plough by its incorporation into the park. Most tantalisingly of all, nearby Lawn Wood hides the remains of what may be a hunting or warrener's lodge or tower, or a similar elite outbuilding (see below). Most deer parks had at least one lodge, which housed the park's officers or wardens, and served as temporary accommodation for the elite while they were hunting in the park. There were over 30 lodges in Northamptonshire, some of which were quite small and will no doubt have been lost to archaeology, while others were very large. The Great Lodge at Higham Castle, for example, was surrounded by a moat, and had a hall, chapel, kitchen, brewhouse, bakehouse, fish ponds, and dovecote.<sup>115</sup>

Bailiff's accounts from 1466 tell us that by this date there were several lodges or houses associated with Torpel's deer park, and that the lord benefited from rents paid for the grazing of livestock on the land.<sup>116</sup> A 'lodge', a house and an orchard were reserved for 'the lady at her pleasure' (no name is provided), and she granted the lodge/house and rights of grazing and pannage (for pigs) to Walter Rodley, keeper of the park for no fee.<sup>117</sup> This gives a sense of the architecture and structures associated with a landscape of elite leisure. From the historical record alone, the precise locations of the buildings referred to in the document are unclear. However, there are standing archaeological remains that appear to relate to this period.

In the deer park, at the south-east corner of what is now Lawn Wood, stands a tower (**Figures 42, 43**). It is almost square, built of locally quarried oolitic limestone, and has walls 4m thick. In the main, only the infill of coursed rubble remains today, but it would have been faced inside and out with ashlar (squared stones), and was probably once three stories high. The only surviving ashlar can be seen on the inside south-west corner, and this is all that remains of what was likely a springer to support a vaulted ceiling. There appears to have been a single room on this ground or basement floor.



**Figure 43:**  
Torpel Lodge today



**(a) Plan:** The remains of ‘Torpel Lodge’ in the southeast corner of Lawn Wood. The walls when complete were some four metres thick, and the remaining ashlar facing is of good quality local Lincolnshire Limestone. Plan diagram by Martin Bradshaw, after Hirst 1988.





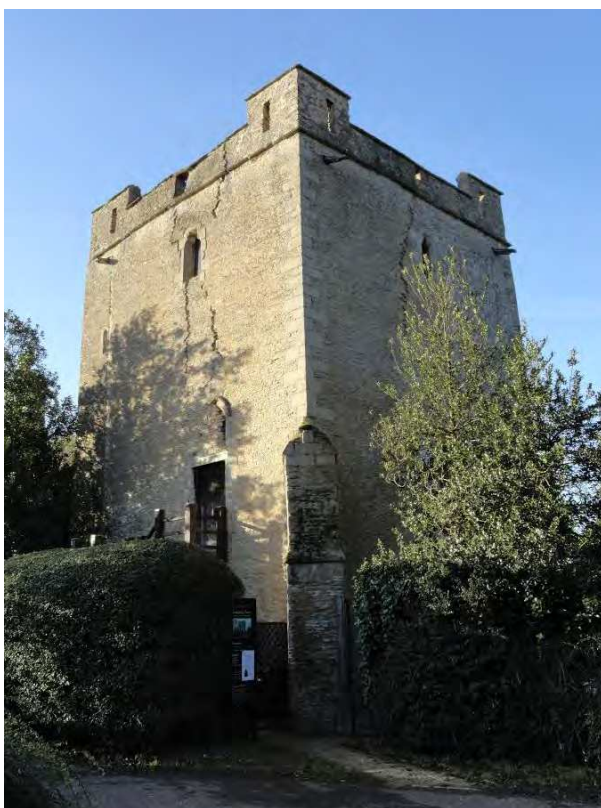
**(b): Torpel Lodge remains: northwest corner, looking south externally.** The coursed rubble walling would have been originally faced with limestone ashlar. The corner in the foreground appears to have carried pilaster buttresses.



**(c) Torpel Lodge remains: the interior southwest corner contains the sole remaining section of ashlar facing.** The workmanship is of high quality and the courses vary between 8 and 11cm in height. The shaft was presumably the springer for rib-vaulting, forming the ceiling of the ground floor.



Known today variously as Torpel Lodge, Torpel Castle, and (somewhat confusingly) Torpel Manor House, the building was built around 1300, judging from the architectural evidence. Indeed, in the absence of contemporary documentary evidence, the building's architecture suggests that it was built at roughly the same time as nearby Longthorpe Tower and Maxey Castle. Otherwise a good analogy, Longthorpe Tower (**Figure 44**) was much smaller than Torpel, with exterior walls only 8 metres in length, and it was directly attached to a manor house.



**Figure 44: Longthorpe Tower.** This gives a general impression of the original form that Torpel Lodge may have taken.

Various suggestions have been proposed regarding the possible functions of Torpel Lodge: was it a defensive tower, an elite residence, or something a little more 'functional'? Our belief is that it is some form of hunting lodge. Such lodges would have been a familiar feature of the medieval landscape, but varied considerably in size, form, and ostentation. They were intended to host a lord's aristocratic visitors and facilitate the hunt, but when not in such active use one might imagine they would house senior forestry officials: those charged with the maintenance of the forest, deer park, and game.

In order to fulfil both a practical requirement and the need to impress visiting aristocrats (or royals), the buildings took on a diverse array of forms. Originally constructed in timber, they were soon rebuilt in stone, and were often situated within complexes of earthworks and even moats. Indeed, they could be luxurious affairs, with gardens, water features and even aviaries, while inside expensive tapestries adorned the walls. With the use of stone, lords and architects became aware of the possibility of building vertically, and we start to see lodges built as towers, so that their occupants could survey the landscape and follow the game within it. The thick,

sturdy walls and relatively small footprint of Torpel Lodge fit this idea quite nicely, and a broad parallel might be Thetford Warren Lodge, Norfolk.<sup>118</sup>

The dating of Torpel Lodge suggests that it may have been built by one of the Camoys lords of the manor, though it may also have been erected under the first stage of royal ownership. After the end of the Camoys dynasty in 1280, the manor reverted to King Edward I, and he in turn gave Torpel to his wife, Queen Eleanor. Although Edward built many famous castles, it is unlikely that either he or Eleanor built the Lodge, although the entire court made regular progresses to visit her estates and often chose to stay in hunting lodges rather than castles, as both the king and queen enjoyed hunting.<sup>119</sup> Although Eleanor may well have visited the lodge while she held the manors of Torpel and Upton, it would certainly not have been one of her more luxurious and accessible residences, and as we have no record of such a visit, any royal time spent there would likely have been brief.<sup>120</sup>

### **Torpel Market and the economy of Torpel Country**

Even in this landscape of leisure, Torpel Country retained its economic function. Over time, the market economy of England grew steadily, and by 1300 all of Torpel's tenants paid rents to the lord in cash rather than in kind.<sup>121</sup> At busy times such as harvest they could be paid at piecework rates for their labour on the demesne, while some workers on the manor had regular salaries. The forester received an annual stipend of 6s 8d, and four ploughmen were each paid 4s 6d per year. If the villagers brewed ale or had a surplus of vegetables, they could either barter or sell them to neighbours.

The growing monetary economy meant that there were incentives to grow more produce for sale, leading to a need for more accessible markets. Before the Conquest, both Stamford and Peterborough had gained charters to hold markets, but Torpel lay six miles from each of these: a long way to walk with a basket of eggs or a few sheep for sale.

A charter from 1264 tells us that at this time, under the second Ralph de Camoys, Torpel was granted its first market, to be held weekly on Thursdays. This institution must have transformed the lives of the people of Torpel and surrounding manors, by allowing them to buy and sell local produce, as well as everyday items such as needles, candles, tools, and agricultural equipment. In that same year, Torpel was granted a charter to hold a three-day annual fair around St Giles' Day. Traders and buyers came from miles around looking for bargains in leather goods, pottery, cloth, dyes, livestock, and foods such as salted meat and fish, spices, and fruit.

The charters were renewed in 1309, during Piers Gaveston's brief tenure at Torpel,

but there were complaints that Torpel was causing a loss of trade from the markets and fairs in Stamford and Peterborough. After this, there are no further references to a fair and market at Torpel, so it seems that they were short-lived. This was not an unusual fate; the same happened to markets and fairs at nearby Northborough and Milton. Indeed, around 1400 new markets were founded across England in the 13th century,<sup>122</sup> but most failed to compete with their well-established urban rivals, which were supported by much larger hinterlands.<sup>123</sup>

Torpel Country produced a range of important goods and raw materials that could be traded locally, or further afield. Of course, we have evidence for the storage and trade of staples and edible commodities; grain was stored in granaries on abbey land across Peterborough, with examples on the site of the city's railway station, and on Church Walk. The grain was partly used for home consumption, and partly traded. Salt was also important, being a daily necessity not only for flavouring, but more importantly as a meat preservative. Interestingly, the abbey's accounts for 1300 note: 'Pepper- 4lbs delivered to brother Peter of Ketton at Easter, £3 sold.' We know that Peter of Ketton was a monk at the abbey who came to Torpel to collect the rent and check the accounts, but we do not know what he wanted with that much pepper, which at this time was essentially a luxury item. Such spices were shipped into Europe by Arab merchants, while returning crusaders inevitably brought back knowledge of culinary and medicinal uses of various oriental plants. Spices such as nutmeg, cinnamon, ginger and cloves were used to flavour the lord's food, but were out of reach for most people, so four pounds of pepper is a significant record. Wine, also for the lord, would have been imported from Gascony, Bordeaux, the Rhineland and Spain, and it is notable that amongst the stray finds recovered from Torpel Manor Field were sherds of stoneware vessels imported from Germany.<sup>124</sup>

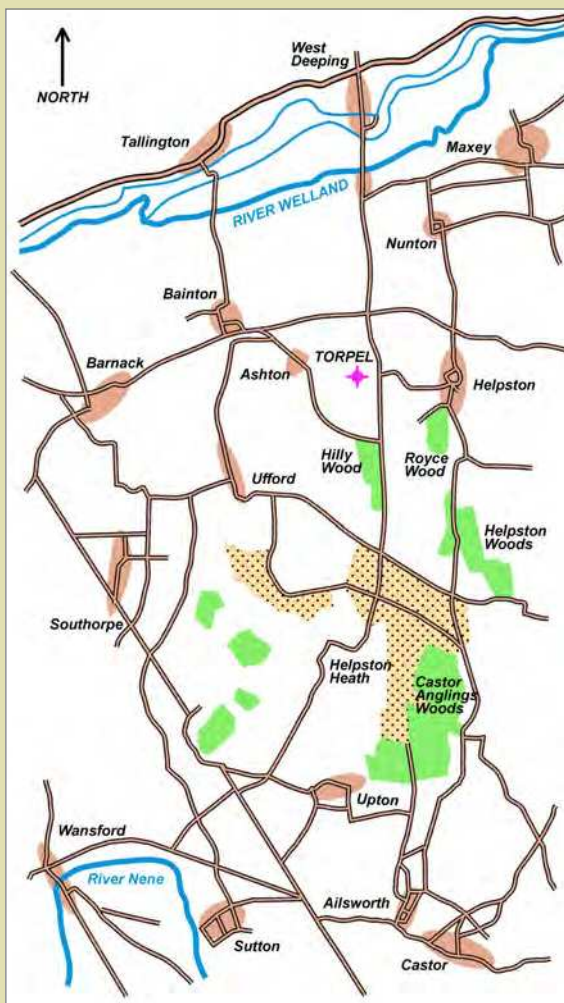
With their vast sheep flocks, Midland England's monasteries produced large quantities of wool, with that from Leicestershire and Lincolnshire being in great demand because it was particularly fine. We know that in Stamford, this wool was collected at warehouses at the corner of Wharf Road, and although the industry faced competition from new centres in the Cotswolds, East Anglia and west Yorkshire in the 14th century, there were some very wealthy wool merchants in Stamford by the 1400s. Notable amongst these were William Browne and his family, well-known as patrons of Browne's Hospital (almshouse) in the town.<sup>125</sup> Much of this wool went into the manufacture of textiles for clothing. In the 13th century, a cloth called *hauberg* was produced in Stamford, and this later gave rise to a higher-quality twill known as *haburget*. Below the bridge in Stamford, there is a Tenter Meadow and Street, where the worsted cloth was hung out to dry after weaving and fulling, but Stamford's chief role appears to have been in 'finishing', which was dyeing the cloth and making clothes.

Pottery from Stamford was also highly prized. Kilns are known from sites at Stamford Castle, Wharf Road, and Stamford School,<sup>126</sup> and from the later 9th century the vessels produced in these kilns were distributed right across eastern England, to the north at Lincoln and York, and even on the Continent. Although the earliest vessels were metalworking crucibles, Stamford Ware soon expanded to produce a distinctive range of cooking and storage pots, as well as bowls and pitchers. In time, Stamford Ware became available with a distinctive splashy yellow glaze, and it was one of medieval England's first glazed ceramics.

## Communications

Torpel Manor was geographically central to a wide network of riverine and terrestrial transport links, and this may well have influenced the decision of its first lords to set up base here. It is clear that by 1300, Torpel's region saw considerable movement of people and goods whether by foot, on horseback, or via horse-drawn carts. Eyre's 1791 map of Northamptonshire (Figure 45) suggests that few new roads had been built in the years since the departure of the Romans. The map may thus be taken as a reasonable estimate of the extent of the 14th-century communication network.

Figure 45: Medieval roads in the vicinity of Torpel.



There were three key roads in Torpel's immediate area. The Roman King Street provided the area's north-south arterial road. Still extant is the old east-west Peterborough ridge-road which ran from Marholm through Ufford, and on to Stamford. We also know that there was once a trackway to the north of Helpston village, linking Glington and Stamford, but this is now lost. Eyre's map does not include trackways connecting villages to one another, but in some cases evidence of such trackways can be seen on the ground (examples are visible to the east and west of Ufford, while the northern section of Helpston's Maxey Road must have also been a track at this date). Livestock must have been driven largely using traditional drove roads.

Of course, sections of the rivers were also navigable. Bales of wool were exported to Flanders via the River Welland and the ports of Boston and Lynn.<sup>127</sup> The textile



industry was an extremely important economic driver in the later Middle Ages, tying together the pastures of Midland England and the trade ports of northern continental Europe. Barnack Stone (quarried at what is now known as ‘Hills and Holes’, and used in the construction of the abbeys at Peterborough, Crowland, Thorney and Ramsey, as well as many village churches) was also distributed using the waterways (**Figure 46**). It was probably carried down to Wansford on the River Nene, from where it could be shipped further afield.



**Figure 46 Barnack Hills and Holes, and cross slabs at Barnack church.** The high-quality stone from the quarry gave rise to the Barnack sculpture workshop, which produced a distinctive range of medieval cross slabs which were exported across eastern England, often characterised by the use of a ‘double-omega’ symbol.



## CHAPTER 7 : CHANGING LANDSCAPES : THE LATER AND POST-MEDIEVAL PERIODS

Torpel Manor reached the height of its prosperity about 1300. In most years, the efficient organisation of Peterborough Abbey and the coordination of all its manors resulted in surpluses in food to supply a growing population. Profits were made from the sale of wool. The feudal system had not been challenged and manorial lords had no incentive to change the status quo.

But the overall prosperity of Peterborough's estate was not necessarily seen on all of its manors. Between 1312 and 1687 a succession of absentee landlords, interested primarily in accumulating wealth derived from rents, eventually led to the neglect of Torpel's manor house, and perhaps of the village. While the lives of the peasantry improved somewhat as the feudal system began to change and labour services were replaced by rents, most of them were still cultivating their strips in the open fields and living in humble cottages. Moreover, the 14th century started badly with excessive rainfall, crop failures and famines, followed by the Black Death. The following centuries produced yet more change and upheaval, including the enclosures of land which began in the late medieval period and accelerated in the 18th and 19th centuries. These were national and international phenomena, but they each had distinctive effects in this part of the Soke of Peterborough.

### **The Black Death**

Between 1348 and 1353, bubonic plague spread across Europe, and in England killed between a third and a half of the population.<sup>128</sup> In the later 20th century, historians tended to downplay the impact of the Black Death on local communities, citing slower, longer-term mechanisms as the drivers that led to the economic downturn of the 14th century.<sup>129</sup> More recently, however, historians have begun to adjust up their 'death estimates'.<sup>130</sup> There are no figures for Torpel in particular, but it appears that Northamptonshire was one of the less badly affected counties. Nonetheless, 32 of the 64 monks in Peterborough Abbey died, as well as 27% of the total population of the city, and local infrastructure was seriously impacted. Stamford lost 57% of its clergymen; the closure of three or four churches may reflect both this and the plague's direct impact on parish congregations.

From a historical standpoint, the documents we have available for the post-Black Death period do not indicate a radical change in everyday life at Torpel, even if the population was reduced. References from the Manor Court, dating to about 10 years after the Black Death, record little immediate change to the feudal structure. When a tenant died, his land and possessions still reverted to the lord, and the heir still had

to pay a tax to inherit. He had to remain as a villein and perform all the customary services. He was still not allowed to buy or sell land, or to leave the manor.

Nevertheless, archaeology demonstrates how the Black Death may have impacted local communities in diverse ways. Recent work by Carena Lewis in East Anglia, including parts of the Soke of Peterborough, suggests that the effect was both severe and widely felt across the east of England.<sup>131</sup> Lewis' work, which is based on the analysis of finds from test pits dug by members of local communities across the region, takes changes in the quantities of ceramics found at a site as a proxy for impact on local populations. This work demonstrates significant decreases in activity between the High Middle Ages (early-twelfth to early-fourteenth century) and the later period (late-fourteenth to late sixteenth-century). For instance, in Cambridgeshire the 'pottery population' drops by 44%; the figure is almost 45% across East Anglia as a whole, and 65% in Norfolk.<sup>132</sup> Lewis' figures from her work at Ufford show a 50% downturn, so are not out of line with these results, although the sample size here is extremely small (2/23 test pits contained pre-14th-century material, but only 1/23 contained later 14th century material).

Langdyke History and Archaeology Group's work at Torpel shows a more complicated picture: given the lifetimes of many of the pottery types found in the region, it is more difficult to isolate pre- and post- Black Death phases, and the material has not yet been quantified in a way that will allow direct comparison with Lewis's work. Nonetheless, from 15 test pits in Helpston village, there are 84 sherds of pottery that pre-date AD 1400, versus 33 sherds from between 1400 and 1700. The paucity of 15th and 16th-century wares in fieldwalking on Torpel North, and in salvage material from Torpel Manor Field is equally suggestive of a late-medieval decline at Torpel.<sup>133</sup> However, this may be related as much to a general economic downturn in the manor and village as to the particular impact of the Black Death.

Across the country, the immediate economic effects of the plague were a fall in prices of agricultural produce and crafts, driven by decreasing demand, and wage increases fuelled by a shortage of workers and the increased mobility of villeins. Many landowners moved from arable to pastoral farming, in order to survive with fewer workers.<sup>134</sup> This phenomenon may have been a contributing factor in the desertion of a large number of English villages around this date, but there is no documentary evidence to suggest that Torpel was affected in this way. 14th and 15th-century references suggest the existence of gardens, sheepfolds, orchards, and kilns on Torpel Manor, but the status of the village itself is more unclear.<sup>135</sup>

In the years that followed the Black Death, the overall distribution of Torpel's land changed very little, but wages replaced labour services, and rents were charged for

land.<sup>136</sup> While the open fields remained intact, the amalgamation of closes or lands originally held by freemen and later on, perhaps former villeins, gathered pace. So as early as 1367, Robert Nunton of Ufford held as much as 140 acres of land and meadow; John Pippard held 40 acres, and John Bernevyl 30 acres. A new landscape was beginning to be carved out, and the transition from an open to an enclosed countryside had begun.

## The post-medieval fortunes of Torpel and its neighbours

With no national records of population size and characteristics until the first census in 1841, our understanding of medieval settlement patterns and character is largely dependent upon archaeology and taxation records, such as the Lay Subsidies of 1334 and 1524/5 (see above).<sup>137</sup> By the 17th century, access to this element of social history is assisted by the institution of the Hearth Tax, which was imposed by parliament in 1662 in order to support the Royal Household of Charles I. Every hearth, fire or stove in every dwelling, apart from those of the poorest people, was taxed at the rate of 2 shillings a year. Though unpopular and ultimately cancelled by the Bill of Rights in 1689, the tax records provide historians with an invaluable record of the relative size and wealth of households in the Early Modern era. It focuses on heads of households, and excludes the poorest elements of society, but nonetheless provides us with useful data.

The records are arranged village by village, and detail the number of hearths possessed of each household.<sup>138</sup> They provide clear evidence of the social structure and the size of settlements, ranging from the 70 hearths of Burghley House to the single-hearth households that made up 50% of the buildings in

Name	Hearths
Mr Francis Quarles Esqr	12
Mr John Bourne	9
Mr John Quarles	9
Richard [unclear]	3
James [unclear]	1
Thomas [unclear]	1
John [unclear]	2
John [unclear]	1
Thomas [unclear]	2

villages such as Helpston, Bainton, Deeping Gate, Ashton, and Ufford (Figure 47).<sup>139</sup>

**Figure 47: Sample of Hearth Tax records for Ufford in 1674.** Records related to: Mr Francis Quarles Esq, lord of Downhall (12 hearths); Mr John Bourne, Torpel steward (9 hearths); Mr John Quarles, Rector (9 hearths).



Several villages had one or more substantial houses or mansions, which would have had multiple hearths upstairs and downstairs. These houses belonged to the well-to-do farmers, local gentry, nobility, and clerks. Houses with three or four hearths may have been occupied by prosperous yeomen farmers and craftsmen. As a point of reference, Dovecot Cottage, said to be the oldest cottage in Ufford, had two hearths (**Figure 48**). Houses with single hearths would have been occupied by farm workers, some of whom rented land, while others worked in the fields as landless labourers.



Taken together, Hearth Tax accounts provide an indication of village populations, and can be compared with medieval accounts to get a sense of how villages were changing as they moved into the Early Modern era. The records suggest that by the 17th century, the region's five largest villages (Castor, Barnack, Helpston, Glington, and Maxey) had grown significantly since the late medieval period. They benefited from local industries and attracted tradesmen such as stonemasons, carpenters, shoemakers and blacksmiths. Smaller villages (such as Ufford, Bainton, Northborough, Peakirk, Thornhaugh and Wansford) appear to have been more static, while the smallest of all (Torpel, Burghley, Milton, Nunton, Walcot, Wothorpe and Woodcroft) were in existence in 1334, but are not listed separately in records from 1524 onwards, and appear to have dwindled or become deserted altogether from the later medieval period. Small farms survived at Nunton and Lolham, while Burghley, Milton, Wothorpe, Walcot and Woodcroft were given over to country estates, in many cases with landscaped gardens.

Torpel village does not follow the same pattern as the other small settlements, and



must be considered in the context of the manor itself. In 1329 the village had 21 residents working the demesne, in addition to its freemen and cottars, and other than Peter Allyn's fines for the ruinous state of his houses in 1362,<sup>140</sup> there is little indication that the village was in serious decline immediately after the Black Death. Torpel's Lay Subsidy taxes were recorded with Helpston's in 1524, demonstrating that the village was still populated by potential taxpayers at this point, though their numbers are unknown. Evidence from pottery salvaged from the upthrow from badger holes in Torpel Field, and from fieldwalking in the field to the north, suggests active use of the site until c.1450, followed by an apparent decline. There are no Hearth Tax records for Torpel, and if the village was still extant at this time, it is likely that no one there was paying tax, or else its submission was bundled with that of Helpston's.

### **The demise of Torpel House**

The decline of Torpel's village echoes the fate of its house and manor. Hunting in the deer park had ceased by 1554, and there is a record of 50 cattle on its land as early as 1547, so at least one major form of elite activity at Torpel had ended by the mid-16th century.

Torpel House itself is no longer standing, but 17<sup>th</sup>-century documents give us some sense of how it once appeared. It seems that it suffered a long, slow decline; clues about its worsening condition and appearance can be found in a description from a court case in 1624:

A little chamber over the entrance of the dwelling house is decayed, part of the boarded floor being rotten and will no longer serve for use. Its walls, especially in the south end, are out of repair. The plaster ceiling above the chamber is broken down and decayed and the ceiling over the entrance has almost fallen down.

Also in decay is the chamber over the closet in the wall on the south side of the house. The chamber, on the north side of the house, which is against the closet, is in some decay for want of a ceiling overhead on the west end. The corner wall of the kitchen has fallen down and the lean-to at the end of the kitchen over the oven is much decayed both in the wall and in its thatch roof. The dwelling house is in decay for want of some slates and the walls are in need of pointing. Apart from some windows on the north side of the house, all the windows are unglazed.

The condition of the outbuildings was equally bad. The walls of the stable and the barn were falling down due to lack of thatch. Two wooden framed hovels, fences and posts and wooden gates had been removed. <sup>141</sup>

Dereliction was ultimately confirmed in Robert Angel's inventory of 1628, contained in a report commissioned by the City of London, which was then leasing the land from Charles I:

The manor house of stone and slate is much decayed and almost ruined and has no tenants living in it. In the park round it there are houses and buildings, the main house itself, a stable and a barn, also out of repair.<sup>142</sup>

His report continued with a list of acres of arable land, pastures, meadows, woods, and the rents paid by tenants. It thus appears that some activities of the manor persisted as before, notwithstanding the loss of the house.

Nonetheless, geophysical survey suggests that many of the walls that underlie earthworks on the site have been robbed of their stonework (Figure 19 above), and it is possible that some of the re-used stone visible in the buildings of Helpston and other nearby villages originally derived from the house (Figure 49). For parts of the post-medieval period, then, it is possible that Torpel Manor Field was seen as little more than an attractive source of building stone.



**Figure 49:** The ‘Torpel Arch’, popularly believed to have been acquired from the ruins of Torpel House. The building into which it is now incorporated was once known as ‘Castle Arch’.

However, the story is not quite as simple as this, for there are still tentative glimpses of high status activity well into the post-medieval period. For example, pottery found on the field includes material dating to as late as the 17th, or perhaps even the 18th century,<sup>143</sup> and most interestingly, two shards of 16th/17th-century glass found on the mound in Torpel Manor Field have been identified as fragments of very high-status, imported vessels.<sup>144</sup> These tiny fragments – relating to objects that

are suggestive of a site of regional or national significance – hint at a particularly important part of our story; at a time when the site otherwise appears to have been in decline, the glass suggests that someone of considerable wealth was still engaging in conspicuous displays of status and prestige. More research is clearly needed in order to examine this apparently conflicting evidence.

### **Enclosures and the end of feudalism? Torpel and nearby manors in the 16th and 17th centuries**

Over a number of centuries, the English landscape was subject to a political, aesthetic, and structural transformation, as the open fields that characterised the Middle Ages were replaced by a complex arrangement of larger bounded areas in an effort to respond to changing markets. The process – known as Enclosure – began in the medieval period, but it continued and gathered pace over the next several centuries, with the so-called Parliamentary Enclosures of the 18th and 19th centuries finally bringing an end to open-field farming. In 1901, Sutton was the final parish in the Soke of Peterborough to be enclosed.<sup>145</sup>

Pre-parliamentary enclosure was common in the region around Torpel. By the mid-17th or 18th centuries, enclosed blocks of land known as closes were established near the centre of Helpston village and on Heath Road to the south. At least two of these were in place by the late 16th century.<sup>146</sup> The land at Milton was entirely enclosed in the 17th century, by which time it had been turned over to sheep pasture. By 1772, a large part of Ailsworth Heath (John Clare's 'Emmonsailles') had been fenced off by the Earls Fitzwilliam, and it has not been ploughed since; the old ridges and furrows are still visible.

At Torpel, the land was divided into closes following the demise of the deer park in the mid-16th century. **Figure 50** is based on the enclosure map of Ufford parish of 1799, which clearly shows the maximum extent of the former deer park and the closes that replaced it. Two closes are referred to as Old Parks, a reminder of the land's former use. Torpel Manor Field was known as Barn Close. The new owner of the Torpel land, Sir John Trollope, received rents from tenants twice a year. Interestingly, going on records dated to 1699, one of the highest rents was paid by the tenant of Barn Close, so the old manorial site was still valuable, even if the manor house and Torpel village were no longer extant.

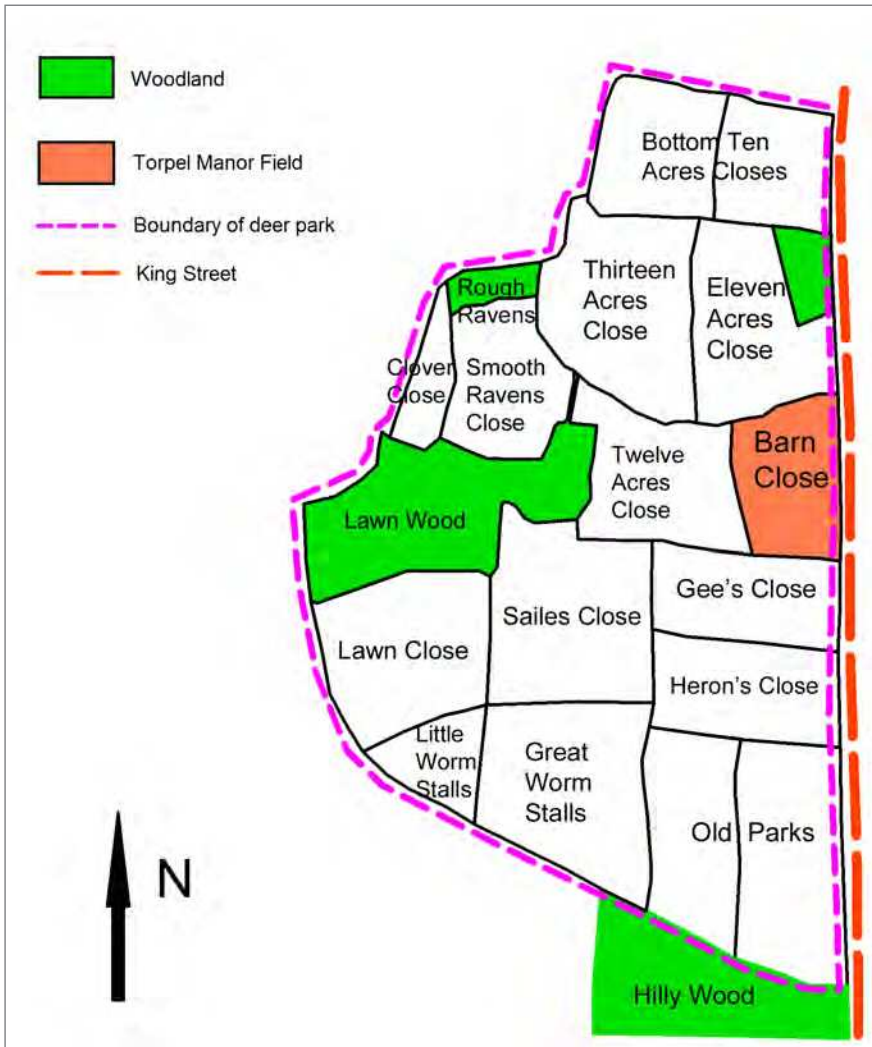


Figure 50: The closes on the former Torpel deer park, based on the 1799 Ufford enclosure map.

## Another lost manor: Downhall

Today, the manor of Downhall is preserved only in the name of a wood between Ufford and Bainton; its physical remains amount to no more than piles of building stone. However, a little of the estate's history can be established from the documentary record, and there must once have been an imposing building on site: a hall house of stone, surrounded with barns, stables and outbuildings. The documentary sources speak of Downhall's organisation and relationship with nearby Torpel Manor, and provide clear evidence of the first cracks in the feudal system that had operated for centuries.

The Downhall estate is thought to have originated in 28 acres held by Thurston of Ufford in 1199, but by the 16th century the estate held additional lands as a result of the amalgamation of closes, as well as both paying and receiving rent for further arable land. In the 16th and 17th centuries Downhall was home to five generations of the Quarles family, who were originally from near Gresham in Norfolk.

In 1544, George Quarles' sister, Margery, married a Sir Robert Wingfield, who leased the manor of Torpel, and George went to live in the neighbouring manor of Downhall. His will bequeathed all his 'farms, holdings and leases' and all his 'goods, chattels, jewels, plate, goblets, saltsellers (sic) and silver, etc' to his son, Francis.<sup>147</sup> Francis acquired the house at Downhall in 1555, and eleven years later produced a terrier: an inventory of all his land in Ufford, Ashton and Bainton. It is clear from the terrier that some of his land consisted of strips in Torpel's open fields.<sup>148</sup>

In 1674, the Hearth Tax returns show that Downhall manor house, with 12 hearths, was the largest building in Ufford.<sup>149</sup> However, the last member of the Quarles family to live at Downhall died soon after this in 1689.<sup>150</sup> The land was acquired by Lucy, Duchess of Rutland, in 1725 the manor house was lost or torn down, and in 1741 Downhall became the site of Ufford Hall and park.<sup>151</sup>



## CHAPTER 8 : JOHN CLARE'S TORPEL COUNTRY

The poet John Clare (13 July 1793 – 20 May 1864) was born in Helpston, the son of an agricultural labourer. He led a difficult and troubled life, but today is recognised as one of England's greatest rural poets. His life and work are of particular interest in our multi-generational biography of the Torpel area, given that he wrote eloquently of the beauty of its landscape, and mournfully of its transformation through enclosure.<sup>152</sup>

Clare was born at a cottage in Woodgate, next to the Bluebell Inn in Helpston (**Figure 51**). His world was Torpel Country: the open fields that converged on Helpston, the woodlands and heaths to the south, the meadows of the Welland Valley to the north. As a child he played on the grassed-over spoil heaps of the old limestone quarry at Swordy Well (now Swaddywell) and one day set off in search of the horizon and the end of the world, reaching only as far as Emmonsailles (Ailsworth Heath), about two miles away. At seven, he was sent out onto Helpston Heath to care for the village livestock. He heard the nightingale, the cuckoo, the woodpecker and the evening call of the partridge. He knew where to find birds' nests, the five varieties of ferns in Hilly Wood and pooties (snails) on the old Roman Bank (King Street).



**Figure 51: John Clare's Cottage today.** Image Rodney Burton, reproduced under Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9335481>

These experiences were clearly formative in the development of Clare's affinity for rural life; so much is visible in his poetry and letters. Throughout his lifetime he felt nostalgic for his lost childhood and for the landscapes and ways-of-life that were

transformed by enclosure: a process that lined the pockets of the elite, and birthed a new, landless working class who could then offer their labour on these new farms, or in the towns and cities that were rapidly appearing and expanding as the Industrial Revolution took hold.<sup>153</sup>

With its focus on productive, efficient farming, the Enclosure Act triggered a huge change in the landscape. The most obvious and far-reaching effect was that the previously open countryside was broken up into a large number of small, square fields of roughly equal size. The boundaries of these fields were marked out with hedges of ‘quickthorn’ (whitethorn and hawthorn). Ditches ran down one or both sides of the hedges, and although ash and oak trees were occasionally planted along these boundaries, existing stock (including elm, oak and ash) was cut down to provide timber for fences. Drainage was improved; in Torpel Country this meant the creation of the Maxey Cut, and a second drain just to its south. Heathland, which had for centuries been given over to communal grazing, was repurposed as part of an expansion of cultivated land, or for more efficient methods of stock-rearing.

There were also impacts on settlement and infrastructure. New farmhouses with outbuildings and associated labourers’ cottages were built outside villages, surrounded by their fields and those of the neighbouring farms. A new road network was also laid out, to relatively standardised specifications, though usually without a metalled surface. In the Torpel area, this meant the widening of the roads to Nunton and Castor, the building of a new road between Glinton and King Street, and the blocking off of the old road from Glinton to Stamford. One can imagine that all the changes must have seriously affected the way in which locals understood and moved around the area, and while the economic impact on John Clare’s family would have been significant (as a poor family living in just two rooms, losing the right to graze animals on common land would have been keenly felt), his writing speaks more to the damage to the romantic, rural aesthetic, and to the destruction of memory. Indeed, he relates first-hand experience of the loss of a favourite tree, of fences barring his well-used footpaths, of aggressive gamekeepers preventing passage. These narratives are perhaps his greatest gift to the historian of rural England, and his stories strike a very personal note here in Torpel Country.

Beyond the impact of enclosure, Clare showed concern for the conservation of this part of the world. Journal entries for November 1824 mention the ruins in ‘Ashton Lawn’ (what we know now as Torpel Lodge). Describing the building, he states that the walls were covered in blackthorn, and stood about 12 feet high, but their state of repair was to deteriorate rapidly over the coming years. In the 1830s he wrote a letter (though it is unclear if it was ever sent) to Sir John Trollope, the Conservative politician and landowner:

'In a wood of yours in your Lordship of Ashton there are some fragments of an old castle or some other vestige of ancient shadows and I frequently in times past paid it a visit as a favourite spot but on last seeing it was very disappointed to find that the hand of modern improvement (whose thirst for change is eternal) had found it out and commenced its utter destruction to supply materials for mending the road through the wood.'<sup>154</sup>

Pieces of worked freestone can still be identified in the trackway through Lawn Wood today. Clare captures the state of Torpel Lodge again in his sonnet 'Ashton Lawn':

*In Ashton Lawn condemned to slow decay  
Close to the south-east nook a ruined hill  
Lies cloaked in thorns and briars - yet to this day  
Reality may trace the castle still  
A fragment of the moat still forms a pond  
Beset with hoof tracked paths of horse and cow  
That often go to drink and all beyond  
Greensward with little mole hills on its brow  
And fairy rings in its old mysterys dark  
Still wear its ancient name and shepherds call  
The closen all around it still 'Old Parks'  
Still traced by buried fragments of a wall  
The castles self will soon be nothing heir  
Piket up to mend old roads - old garden walls repair.<sup>155</sup>*

As we have seen, the remains of Torpel Lodge are still visible today, though their height is significantly lower than that represented in an (admittedly romantic, and possibly fanciful) 19th-century painting (**Figure 52**).



**Figure 52:** Torpel Lodge: a painting by Jimmy Nidd, amateur artist, dated 1879.

Clare ended his days in an asylum, after a difficult life scarred by poverty, adversity, lost love, and mental health concerns. His poems, however, are appreciated more today than ever. As powerful evocations of the fragility of the natural world, they give voice to the rural landscape, to Helpston, and to Torpel Country.

## CHAPTER 9 : TORPEL MANOR TODAY

Today, Torpel Manor Field is held in the care of the Langdyke Countryside Trust; it is maintained as a nature reserve, providing an important, wildflower-rich habitat. Its upstanding earthworks – the remains of Torpel Manor – are protected by English Heritage as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (**Figure 53**), and the site is maintained by a dedicated team of volunteers, who ensure security, repair fences, monitor wildlife activity, and tend the sheep that keep the grass in check.



**Figure 53:** Torpel Manor Field today

But much more than this is going on at Torpel. Through the hard work of the volunteers and with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the site features a new interpretation centre and heritage trail, helping children and adults, locals and visitors to learn about the history and archaeology of the site, and to hear the many voices of Torpel Country. No longer is Helpston just the home of John Clare, but of the de Torpels, the de Camoys, Lucy Chat and Peter Alleyn, and all those who laboured on the manor (**Figure 54**).



Figure 54: Torpel Manor Field as a centre for community activity.



For some time, the ‘Torpel Way’ has snaked its way across the field en route between Peterborough and Stamford, but now visitors can engage with the ever-increasing body of stories we have about the site. The collaborations between the group and the University of York have allowed us to find out more about what the site may have looked like in the past, while small test-pit excavations in Helpston village are starting to set the archaeology of Torpel within its wider landscape. For the first time in generations, Torpel Manor Field is starting to give up the secrets it has long held close to its chest. Come and visit, and hear what new stories it has to tell!





## GLOSSARY

### GEOLOGY

**Anglian, Wolstonian, Devensian:** the three latest glacial ages of traditional British stratigraphy, divisions of the Quaternary Period, the third and last period of the Cenozoic Era, in which we are still living.

**Cretaceous:** relating to or denoting the third and last period of the Mesozoic Era, between the Jurassic and Paleogene Periods: from about 145 to 66 million years ago.

**Escarpment:** a steep slope or long cliff that forms as a result of faulting or erosion and separates two relatively level areas of differing elevations.

**Jurassic:** relating to or denoting the second period of the Mesozoic Era, between the Triassic and Cretaceous Periods: from about 201 to 145 million years ago.

**Oolitic:** an oolitic limestone is a carbonate rock made up mostly of ooliths (or ooids) which are sand-sized carbonate particles composed of concentric rings of  $\text{CaCO}_3$  formed around grains of sand or shell fragments that were rolled around on a shallow sea floor.

**Palaeogene:** Relating to or denoting the first period of the Cenozoic Era: from about 66 to 23 million years ago.

### ARCHAEOLOGY

**Anomalies** are simply phenomena that deviate in some way from what is expected, or from wider visible patterns. In the case of geophysical survey, the term is used to identify patterns in a dataplot that are different to the surrounding natural geology; they may relate to either natural geological features, archaeological structures, or more recent activity.

**Earthwork survey** is a systematic way of recording visible 'humps and bumps' in the landscape, so that a coherent plan of a site can be produced and interpreted. Traditionally this has been undertaken using measuring tapes, but digital technology now allows for more rapid, high resolution data to be collected. In either case, the results are very much dependent on the careful eye of an experienced surveyor.

**Gradiometry/ magnetometry** This is a form of geophysical survey that identifies patterning in the magnetic properties of subsurface deposits. Magnetism is affected by a number of factors including bacterial action, and histories of burning. This makes magnetometry particularly effective at identifying features including hearths and kilns, pits and ditches.



**Resistance/resistivity** is a form of geophysical survey in which an electrical current is sent through the ground at regular intervals. As the current passes between two probes, readings of electrical resistance are taken, and variations in this can be used to interpret the properties of subsurface features, many of which may be archaeological.

## PEOPLE

**Browne** family of Stamford: wool merchants in 14th and 15th centuries. Legacies of William Browne, described by Leyland as ‘a merchant of very wonderful bigness’ include Browne’s Hospital and parts of All Saint’s Church.

**Camoyo**s dynasty: Ralph inherited Torpel manor on the death of William, the last of the Torpels. His son, Ralph, built the stone hall-house on the mound before 1277. His son, John, went bankrupt and Torpel manor reverted to the king, Edward I.

**Eleanor of Castile**: wife of Edward I, held Torpel manor from 1281 until her death in 1290; Peterborough Abbey then became tenant in chief. Eleanor may have hunted in Torpel deer park and stayed at the Lodge, but there is no evidence that the king built it.

**Piers Gaveston**: favourite of Edward II, but very unpopular with the nobles at court, who ultimately murdered him. He had been given Torpel by the king, but it is unlikely that he ever visited it.

**Roger Infans (de Torpel)**: he came from Normandy with William the Conqueror and was one of the 60 ‘knights of Peterborough’ who had to fight for the king when needed, in return for land.

**Quarles** family: in the 16th and 17th centuries five generations of this prosperous family lived at Downhall manor, now the name of a wood north of Ufford. They owned land and also rented some Torpel land.

## PLACES

**Danelaw**: An area in the North and East of England nominally ceded to Danish law in the Viking Age. Much of the area to the north and east of Watling Street (today’s A5) was incorporated into this area, which included for example Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, and East Anglia, as well as parts of the midlands.

**Durobrivae**: Roman town and industrial area close to the crossing of the River Nene by Ermine Street.

**Five Boroughs:** Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham and Stamford were the five key urban settlements of Danish Mercia in the Viking Age. They were not the only towns in the region, and their significance as a coherent group is disputed, but Stamford's inclusion is nonetheless indicative of the important role it played in the early-medieval period.

**Medeshamsted:** the Anglo Saxon name of Peterborough, 'home by the deep well'.

## RURAL HISTORY

**Acre:** a day's ploughing for one plough team; its size varied with local soils and relief.

**Bordar:** smallholder, higher status than Cottar (the lowest level of peasant farmer), with under 4 acres.

**Deer park:** land enclosed by a ditch and mound with a hedge or fence on top, and in which deer were kept for hunting by manorial lords; at Torpel this seems to have been the case between 1198 and around 1550.

**Demesne:** land devoted to the lord's profit, worked by unfree labour.

**Enclosure:** the legal process by which small landholdings could be brought together in the creation of much larger farms, taking common land into private ownership, allowing landholders to exploit their estate in the most efficient manner possible.

**Fee:** land given in exchange for military service. For instance, Roger de Torpel held 6 fees, whereas Pain of Helpston held just one third of a fee.

**Feudalism:** The medieval system that structured economy, law and society around the idea that individuals held land from their social superiors in exchange for labour and military service. At one end of the spectrum, the aristocracy held land from the king, while at the other, peasants were bound to their local lords by the same system.

**Freeman:** an individual who was personally free, could buy and sell land, and paid rent to the lord.

**Furlong:** A block of land in an open field.

**Hide:** a unit of land. In the 7th century one hide was considered to be the amount of land needed to support one family, so it reflected the value of a piece of land, rather than simply its area. By the time of Domesday Book, one hide was equivalent to about 120 acres, and worth about 20 shillings.

**Hundred:** an administrative unit; theoretically there were 100 hides in each hundred. Nassaburh, which included Torpel and much of the Soke of Peterborough, was a double hundred.



**Land or strip:** a ridge in an open field.

**Manor:** an estate; a manor could hold its land in a single village, or be spread over several villages, like Torpel.

**Ridge and furrow:** the name given to the undulations still sometimes visible on former open fields, and which reflect the past actions of the plough.

**Soke:** the right to hold a court, and the district over which that right was exercised.

**Villeins:** Bondsmen, who were not free to leave the manor, and had to carry out labour services for the lord.

## NOTES

The references detailed below constitute a deliberate mixture of recent scholarly publications, classic antiquarian research, and more widely accessible resources, which may provide an easier way into the topic. Where known, references are also made to Record Office archive numbers, and where *Torpel Online* is referred to, further information can be found on our website, accessible via :

<https://www.york.ac.uk/archaeology/research/project-archives/torpel/>

Archaeological data is archived with the ADS, at:

[http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/torpel\\_hlf\\_2016/](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/torpel_hlf_2016/)

### Introducing Torpel Manor

- 1 van Splunder 2012; Hirst 1988
- 2 Story 1986
- 3 Wright 2015
- 4 Partida et al. 2013, 93
- 5 See Challands 1978

### Torpel's Natural Setting

- 6 Monbiot 2012

### The Prehistory of Torpel Country

- 7 Roe 1968
- 8 RCHM 1960
- 9 Pryor et al. 1985
- 10 Pryor 1988
- 11 Donaldson 1977
- 12 See RCHM 1960; Pryor et al. 1985
- 13 Upex 1977, Figs 12-14

### Romans in Torpel Country

- 14 Tacitus
- 15 Frere and St Joseph 1974
- 16 VCH II, 21-25; McComish 2012, 58
- 17 Upex 2014
- 18 Upex 2008
- 19 Frieda Gosling pers. comm.
- 20 Artis 1828
- 21 Upex 2008
- 22 Upex 2011

**Torpel Country in the Early Middle Ages**

- 23 King 1973
- 24 Foard 1978; Banham and Faith 2014
- 25 Partida et al. 2013, Figure 64
- 26 Foard 1978
- 27 Wright 2015, 21; Spoerry and Atkins 2015; Mackreth and Bamford 1996
- 28 Wright 2015: 32
- 29 Williams 1979
- 30 Hardy et al. 2007; Wright 2015, 39
- 31 Parsons and Sutherland 2013
- 32 Wright 2015
- 33 Williamson 2013
- 34 Chapman 2010
- 35 cf Rippon 2004; Rippon 2009
- 36 see for example Hadley and Richards 2016 (open access: freely available online)
- 37 ASC, entry for AD 966
- 38 Thornton 1997
- 39 see Gower et al. 1933 for a classic study
- 40 Alan Rogers 1983, 22
- 41 In fact, it appears that the Romans favoured Great Casterton, as a more sheltered crossing of the River Guash valley, a mile further north
- 42 Mahany and Roffe 1982; South Kesteven District Council, n.d.
- 43 ASC
- 44 Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England 1977
- 45 Addyman et al. 1964
- 46 Richards 2007, 55-62
- 47 see Richards 2007
- 48 Cullen et al. 2011

**Medieval Landscapes and Society**

- 49 Charters recording land transfers suggest rapid expansion from the 12th century onward, some of it due to forest clearance and assarting
- 50 ASC entry for 1070.
- 51 Mellows 1949
- 52 see Mellows (ed.) 1927
- 53 VCH II, III
- 54 Bridges, 603
- 55 Fradley et al. 2014; Goodchild et al. 2015; Goodchild et al. 2016
- 56 Higham and Barker 1992, 309
- 57 see Cathcart King and Alcock 1969
- 58 Higham and Barker 1992, 198
- 59 Higham and Barker 1992

- 60 Higham and Barker 1992, 273
- 61 Higham and Barker 1992, 245
- 62 see Chapman 2010
- 63 Grenville 1997, 67-88
- 64 see Higham and Barker 1992, 195
- 65 EHD II, 851
- 66 see *Torpel Online* for details
- 67 DB. A detailed comparison can be seen on *Torpel Online*
- 68 ASC
- 69 see Partida et al. 2013, 93 for a brief discussion
- 70 see Mellows 1927; King 1970
- 71 full details outlined in *Absentee Landlords, Torpel Online*
- 72 This history is recounted in more detail in VCH (II) and King 1973
- 73 Banham and Faith 2014
- 74 Partida et al. 2013
- 75 Partida et al. 2013
- 76 Wright 2015, 24-25
- 77 Williamson 2004, 2007, 2013; Williamson et al. 2012
- 78 Crowland
- 79 Crowland
- 80 e.g. Tomlins 2010, 195
- 81 see *Torpel Online*
- 82 VCH III, 108.
- 83 Muir 1982, 132
- 84 The tax was not comprehensive, and did not include dependents. Bearing this in mind, the village could have had a population of c.20-30. See LS
- 85 LS
- 86 Allison et al. 1966
- 87 In his *Autobiographical Fragments*, John Clare refers to the site as Baron Parks, notes the presence of ‘Roman camps and Saxon castles’, and describes his encounter onsite with a ‘ghost’ (actually a foal). See Clare 1996
- 88 Casa Hatton and Botfield 2013
- 89 Paul Blinkhorn pers. comm.
- 90 Wood 1988, 27
- 91 see Torpel Court Rolls of 1361, Lincoln Record Office, Trollope Archives: TB 15/21/1
- 92 King 1973, especially 55-61
- 93 King 1973, 61
- 94 Torpel Court Rolls, Lincoln Record Office, Trollope Archives: TB 15/21/1
- 95 Lincoln Record Office, Trollope Archives: TB/15/27/3
- 96 VCH II, 535
- 97 Lincoln Record Office: TB 15/27/11 and TB 15/24/2

- 98 Megan von Ackermann, pers. comm.
- 99 The field was referred to as ‘Barn Close’ in a list of Torpel rentals dated 1698. It is also referred to as Barn Close on the Enclosure map of 1799
- 100 Audouy and Chapman 2009; Chapman 2010
- 101 see for example the North Manor at Wharram Percy, Yorkshire. Rahtz and Watts 2004.
- 102 see *Torpel Online*
- 103 Grenville 1997, 88. See *Torpel Online* for a list of absentee landlords
- 104 e.g. Audouy and Chapman 2009
- 105 Rackham 1986, 129-131
- 106 Partida et al. 2013
- 107 King 1973
- 108 Partida et al. 2013
- 109 Hoskins 1955; Steane 1977
- 110 Partida et al. 2013
- 111 Crowland
- 112 VCH I; II, 534
- 113 Raban 2011
- 114 Extent of Torpel Manor, Trollope Archives, Lincoln Record Office: TB 15/27/11
- 115 Partida et al. 2013; Crowland; Williamson et al. 2012
- 116 Account of James Sawyer, Bailiff. Lincoln Record Office: TB 15/27/12
- 117 Account of James Sawyer, Bailiff. Lincoln Record Office: TB 15/27/12
- 118 see <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/thetford-warren-lodge/>
- 119 Cockerill 2014
- 120 Cockerill 2014
- 121 see Crowland
- 122 VCH II
- 123 Crowland; Letters et al. 2003; Mortimer 2008. Further information about markets and fairs in Stamford and Peterborough can be found on *Torpel Online*
- 124 Paul Blinkhorn pers. comm.
- 125 Rogers 1983, 2012
- 126 Stamford’s pottery industry and products are most comprehensively discussed in Kilmurry 1980
- 127 Miller and Hatcher 2014, 183

### **Changing Landscapes: The Later and Post-Medieval Period**

- 128 Ziegler 2003
- 129 e.g. Postan 1973; Bridbury 1973
- 130 see Lewis 2016 for a review
- 131 Lewis 2016
- 132 Lewis 2016, Table 2
- 133 Blinkhorn pers. comm.
- 134 Ziegler 2003



- 135 Lincoln Record Office: TB 15/27/11 and TB 15/24/2
- 136 see Court records for 1361-2,(TB 15/27/1) , available on *Torpel Online*
- 137 see *Torpel Online* for details of Lay Subsidy in the region
- 138 see *Torpel Online* for details of Hearth Tax in the area
- 139 Hearth Tax for Northamptonshire, Public Records Office: PRO E/179/254/12
- 140 Hallmoot (Reference to Peter Alleyn), Lincoln Record Office, Trollope archives TB 15/27/1-3; Allison et al. 1966)
- 141 Notes based on Tim Halliday's original transcription of 'Alleged waste committed at Torpel House' (PRO E178/4335) can be seen on *Torpel Online*
- 142 Robert Angel's dereliction notice of 1628 (TB 15/12/96)
- 143 Unpublished finds reports: Cumberpatch n.d.; Cumberpatch and Young n.d.
- 144 Willmott, in Cumberpatch n.d.
- 145 Partida et al. 2013, 51
- 146 Hall 1995. The closes were on either side of an old drove way leading to Helpston Heath. They were there in 1772, probably 1651, and two were listed in a 1597 field book
- 147 see *Torpel Online*. Will in Quarles family archive. See also VCH II, 535
- 148 The document opens with Ufford's West Field at Downhall hedge:
- In primis one rode (rood) Downe haule hedge byinge on the north syde and Roberde Weldon in the right of his wife on the south now in the occupation of Martin Crane...Item one bedeland (turning place for the plough team) in ij rigges abboting upon the coneyegre pale*
- A coney green was a rabbit warren, and a pale was a boundary (in this case a wall that still exists, now on land occupied by Robert Vinde)
- Francis Quarles Terrier 1566* (Northampton Record Office: NRO ZB 1240)
- 149 Hearth Tax (1674) for Nassaburgh/Northamptonshire, Public Records Office: PRO E179/254/12
- 150 Ufford parish registers; meeting and personal correspondence with Cordula Waldeck-Quarles van Ufford
- 151 Hereward May 1998

## John Clare's Torpel Country

- 152 Barrell 1972 ; Bate 2011; Northampton Record Office, Fitzwilliam (Milton) Archive vol. 89
- 153 Thompson 1963
- 154 Storey 1986, 553; Heyes 1997
- 155 Cushion, 448

## **Torpel Manor Today**

156 Clare, *Sighing for Retirement*. In Robinson, E. and Powell, D. (eds) 1984, 19

## **Materials available on Torpel Online**

Transcriptions and summaries of documents used to prepare this volume are available online. Contents comprise:

Domesday records for parishes in the Soke

Origins of village names

An outline of the Torpel dynasty between 1066 and 1280

A list of absentee landlords at Torpel between 1329 and 1687

A list of the manors held by Peterborough Abbey in 1300

A list of the Lay Subsidy taxpayers in Torpel Country in 1334.

The Torpel hallmoot records from 1363

Details of changes in landholdings from services to rents at Torpel Manor between 1367 and 1619.

A list of markets and fairs in Peterborough and Stamford

An account of the land held by Torpel and Downhall in 1566 and 1570

The will of Anne Quarles, dated 1601

A description of Torpel House from 1624

Details of population change in Torpel Country between 1524 and 1762

Hearth Tax records for Torpel Country (1674)

Torpel rentals (1699)

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Just outside the village of Helpston (Cams) – the birthplace of England’s great rural poet, John Clare – lies a modest square of pastureland known as Torpel Manor Field. The field’s long grass hides a mysterious collection of humps and bumps, now the only trace of what was once a significant medieval manor and settlement. The site is preserved as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and is well known to locals, but until recently, very little had been done to uncover its past. This book presents the results of a collaborative project of documentary research and archaeological survey undertaken by the Langdyke History and Archaeology Group and the University of York, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Langdyke Countryside Trust. By unravelling the mystery of Torpel, we reveal a story that extends from prehistory to the modern day, highlighting how an apparently inconspicuous field can be a window into the dynamic history of settlement and society in England.

