

FIELD SYSTEMS IN ESSEX

by John Hunter

Occasional Papers, New Series, No. 1



Published by
The Essex Society for Archaeology and History
Founded 1852



First published in 2003 in Great Britain by
The Essex Society for Archaeology and History
The Hollytrees, High Street, Colchester CO1 1UG
Registered Charity number: 213218

© ESAH & John Hunter. The moral rights of the author have been asserted. All rights reserved. No part of this material may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, or stored in any retrieval system of any nature without the written permission of the copyright holder.

ISSN 1740-5890

Printed by CDS Ref: E3020

FRONT COVER: part of an estate map of 1666 in the Essex Record Office of Roxwell, Shellow Bowells and Willingale Doe by John Coffyn (ERO D/DXa/21). The map is orientated with north to the right.

The most interesting feature is Skreens Park, fully enclosed with a palisade, and showing the ghostly outlines of narrow fields (parcels of strips) and a former lane on the left side and bottom of the enclosed area. The earliest reference to Skreens Park is in a perambulation of Writtle of 1358 (D/DP M1325), and this seems most likely to be the area on the centre right. So it appears that Skreens was one of the relatively few medieval parks to survive, and later be expanded over farmland. Chapman and André's map of 1777 shows the park yet further enlarged.

On the top right the map shows field edge "springs" - narrow woodland belts - that were a feature of landscapes at this time and are often depicted on estate maps.

FIELD SYSTEMS IN ESSEX

by John Hunter

The first in a series of Occasional Papers celebrating 150 years of the Society



Plougteam after the **Luttrell Psalter** c. 1330

Published by
The Essex Society for Archaeology and History
Founded 1852



Preface

The New Series of Occasional Papers celebrates the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Society in 1852. It has been funded by the Society's Publications Development Fund established in 1992. The series aims to provide well-illustrated popular guides to topics of archaeological and historical interest relating to the ancient county of Essex. It will pay special attention to themes previously neglected and will highlight opportunities for future research.

The Society has produced occasional publications in the past. In 1899 a calendar of *Feet of Fines for Essex* was begun, at first published in parts but brought together in four volumes (1910-1964) covering the period 1182 to 1547. The Society has also produced three occasional papers relating to historical records: J.F. Fisher, ed., *Cartularium Prioratus de Colne* (1946); F.G. Emmison, ed., *Guide to the Essex Quarter Sessions and other Official Records* (1946); E. Chapin Furber, ed., *Essex Sessions of the Peace, 1351, 1377-79* (1953). These were produced with financial and other support from the Essex Record Office and its archivist Dr. F.G. Emmison. The Society is very pleased that collaboration with the ERO has continued with the New Series, and we thank the current County Archivist, Ken Hall, and his staff, particularly Jan Smith, for their kind assistance. The later production stages of this first paper have benefited from the support of Essex County Council, Heritage Conservation Branch, and we particularly thank Owen Bedwin and Roger Massey-Ryan for their generous help.

H.L. Gray's classic work *The English Field Systems* (1915) concluded that "The early field system of few English counties is so difficult to describe as that of Essex". Understanding has grown since then, not least because of John Hunter's work in *The Essex Landscape: A Study of its Form and History* (ERO, 1999) and numerous papers on landscapes and field systems in *Essex Archaeology and History*. However, the history of our county's diverse landscape still needs research. We are extremely fortunate that John has agreed to prepare the first paper in our New Series, a wide-ranging analysis of Essex field systems concentrating on the medieval and Tudor periods. In four important historical landscape portraits John brings his perceptive eye to the relationship between Essex field systems and the wider contexts of estates structures, demography and economic forces. Historians and archaeologists could read no better call to arms for the study of Essex field systems in the landscape.

Chris Thornton, President, ESAH, March 2003

CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
AGE AND CHARACTER	2
HISTORICAL OUTLINE	
Prehistoric fields	5
Roman Essex	7
The Saxon kingdom	7
The Middle Ages	9
Tudor and Stuart Essex	10
Georgian and later Essex	11
CASE STUDIES	
1. Cressing Temple	15
2. Little Easton, Broxted and Tilty	20
3. Littley Park	26
4. The Parallel Parishes	31
THE SCOPE FOR RESEARCH	35
GLOSSARY	39
RECOMMENDED READING	41

INTRODUCTION

Fields, and their organisation into the patterns we term ‘field systems’, are among the most evident and often the most permanent man-made features of the countryside. The term “field“ is used here to include close, croft, meadow, mead, lay, piece and all the terms we may encounter which define a piece of land enclosed with a hedge (or fence) to contain livestock or, conversely, to exclude it when crops are growing. From the earliest times fields are found grouped into systems which reflect not only farming practice and technology, but also ownership and the social structure of communities, and always subject to change and evolution.

The study of field systems is essential to understanding rural communities as they evolved from prehistory to modern times and can be a most rewarding area for research; moreover one to which the amateur can make a considerable contribution for the study of the landscape of the parishes that make up Essex has barely begun.

The aim of this booklet is to give a short general summary of what is already known and to encourage and be of use to the newcomer to the subject.

When we consider the present landscape of Essex, seeking to tease out the historic evidence it may contain, it becomes all too apparent that drastic, often destructive changes took place in the course of the third quarter of the last century. The farmed landscape of 1945, while bustling with activity and productivity brought about by wartime necessity after long years of depression, had changed relatively little from a hundred years before. In the decades following the Second World War, government policy required the rapid modernisation of farming to achieve a near self sufficiency in food production, for siege by U-boats was a recent memory. Large machines required larger fields, and with mixed husbandry replaced by all-arable, many hedgerows were removed and the traditional meadows ploughed up, all done in haste with the goal of agricultural efficiency the sole criterion. While historic buildings and settlements were seen to be of value and given a measure of legal protection, knowledge and awareness of the historic interest of the countryside had yet to come.

Despite this destruction, however, much of the historic fabric of the landscape remains. This includes the network of lanes and trackways, boundaries, and features such as greens, moats, and mill sites. A substantial number of coppice woodlands survived ploughing or coniferization, and many hedgerows that existed in the 15th century, some already ancient at that time, still survive. Surprising as it may seem, there are many areas in Essex where someone transported in time from the Tudor age would find much of the landscape familiar.

In this booklet we will consider the age and character of the Essex landscape and its field systems, and secondly follow a brief outline of their prehistory and history. Thirdly we shall take four case studies of very different landscapes and attempt a detailed analysis, and then conclude with some practical guidance for students of field systems.

AGE AND CHARACTER

Essex, along with Suffolk, Norfolk, Kent and other coastal counties further afield, was enclosed early. Over much of central England huge open-fields, commons and heaths, survived until their enclosure by act of parliament in the 18th and 19th centuries, when a new pattern of fields, roads and access tracks was imposed with the old order largely superseded. The country roads of typical midland countryside are usually straight, with verges of even width and hedges composed mostly of hawthorn, whereas Essex roads are rarely straight, twist and wind, and have verges of varying width. On sloping ground, they are often sunken and the hedges are usually botanically rich. This illustrates the difference between “planned” and “ancient” evolved countryside, with Essex firmly in the latter category. Consequently, elements such as field systems, have an historic interest matching many of the buildings found in villages, hamlets and scattered farmsteads.



Fig. 1 The landscape regions of Essex

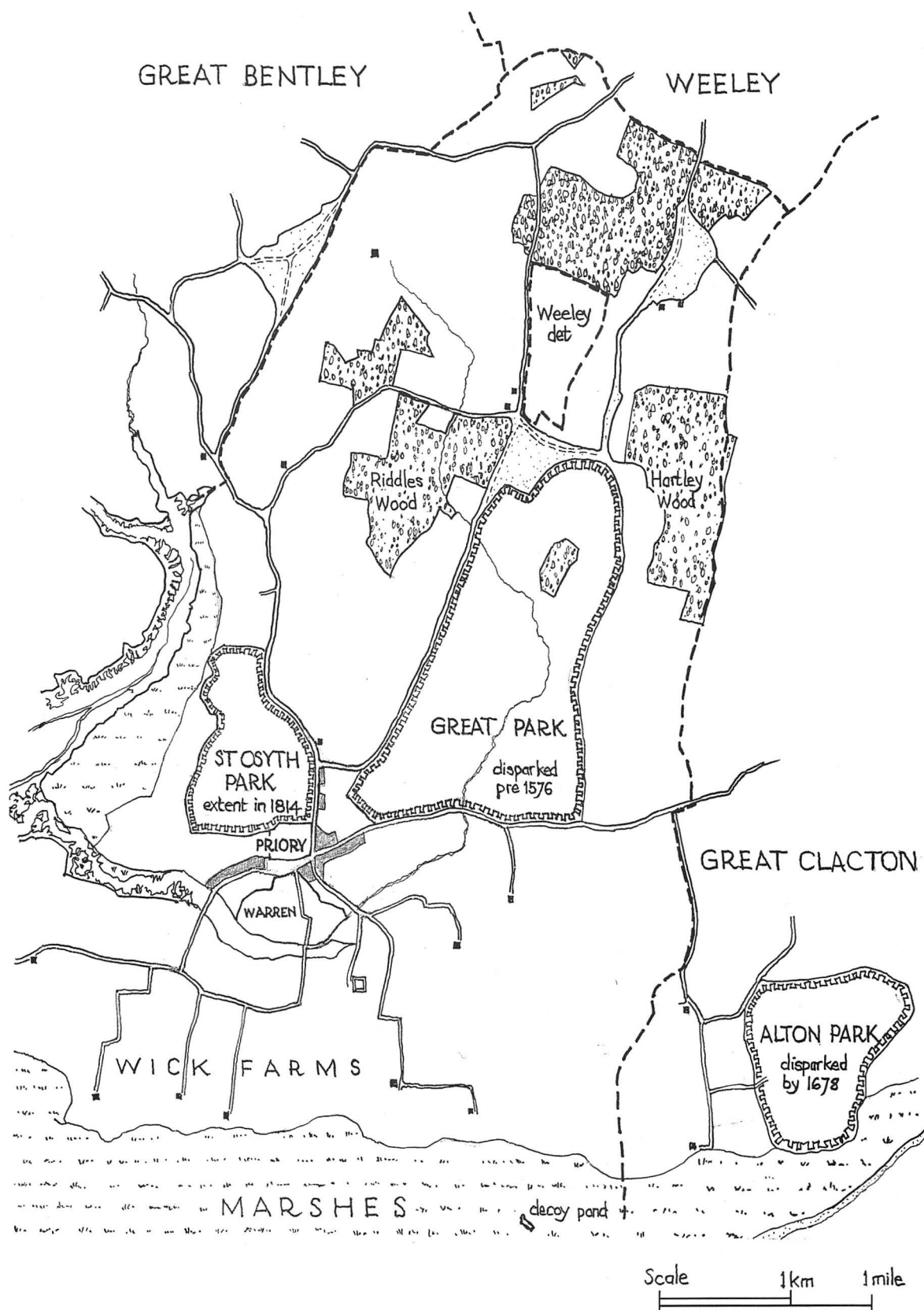


Fig. 2 The parish of St Osyth depicted with boundaries, roads, woodlands and heaths as in 1814. The Great Park and Alton Park shown with late medieval boundaries; the Little, or St Osyth Park, as in 1814. Reproduced by kind permission of the Sargeant family.

There is also a surprising diversity in the landscape, and the regions and sub-regions are shown in Fig. 1. The Essex Till, much the largest region, was covered with an ice sheet which melted around 430,000 years ago, leaving a thick deposit of boulder clays with a fertile chalk content. Its plateau character, dissected by river valleys fed by rills and watercourses from frequent spring lines, has slowly reached its present form over the millennia since the melting of the ice. This was always good corn-growing land, supporting the Roman villa estates and the prosperous manors and market towns of the Middle Ages and later centuries. Only in the Chalk Uplands does one find huge common-fields, resembling those of neighbouring Cambridgeshire and central England, which survived until parliamentary enclosure in the 19th century; but these parishes also have the greens and outlying ends characteristic of ancient countryside and lack the compact villages of the Midlands.

The Coastal Zone consists mainly of heavy London Clays, the least favourable land for crop-growing and traditionally supporting a sparsely settled, pastoral landscape. Wealth, however, lay in the rich marshland grazings for sheep, which were owned by inland manors, mostly lying nearby. A particular characteristic of the south Essex plain is extensive stretches of rectilinear field patterns, whose origins have been much pondered, and a sample area will be considered in Case Study 4. Elm dominant hedgerows are characteristic of the London Clays of south Essex and the Dengie peninsula.

The Tendring Plain is much like the Till but with lighter soils and a landscape that has been virtually unstudied, although packed with archaeological and historic interest which awaits the inquiring student. Fig. 2 is a sample of what awaits discovery, and resulted from an enquiry into the former parks belonging to the abbot and canons of St Osyth's Priory.

The Mid-Essex Zone divides into two. The Wooded Hills comprise poor soils but some pretty landscapes, and the historic interest of the area lies in the huge commons formally open to inter-commoning by the tenants of neighbouring manors (later parishes) of which the most notable is Epping Forest. Low density scattered settlement and extensive grazing were characteristic of the Hills, as they were of the Former Heaths, which lay on acid soils and flatter contours. Although clearly reduced in extent by the time of Chapman and André's Map of Essex in 1777, they still occupied vast areas around Colchester and Tiptree. Both piecemeal and parliamentary enclosure saw their destruction over the subsequent half century and the tiny fragments that survive lack any heathland character.

Fields, as we have noted earlier have always been hedged in order to confine or exclude stock. Hedges were made to last, the materials depending on what was locally available, with stone always used where present as in the Cotswolds, Dales and much of the uplands. In Essex the only common stone is in the form of field flints which require mortar to make walls and boundaries, and so, with our neighbouring counties this side of the Cotswolds, hedging has always made use of the trees and shrubs growing locally, together with a parallel ditch for drainage and sometimes a bank from the upcast. Hedges have also functioned to define property and administrative boundaries, of farm, manor, parish, hundred and county, except where an existing feature such as a brook or river would serve, or an ancient man-made feature such as an earthwork or Roman road.

Despite the references to established hedges in Anglo-Saxon charters, medieval perambulations, and their early depiction on estate maps, a belief persisted until relatively recently that hedges generally dated from planting during the period of parliamentary enclosure from the mid 18th century onwards and so had little historic value - a pernicious myth that justified their thoughtless removal, and was fostered to do so. In the early 1970s we became aware of “Hooper’s rule”, derived from work by Dr Max Hooper and his colleagues at Monk’s Wood experimental station. This established that the number of species of trees and woody shrubs in a sample 30 yard length approximated to the age of the hedge in centuries, and while there are caveats which we will look at later, the rule works well on the Essex Till which covers much of the county. In 1976 the method was used to date 24 miles of hedgerow over nearly 2,000 acres of John Tabor’s estate at Bovingdon Hall, Bocking, which was summarized as follows:

	Km	miles
Saxon and early medieval (pre 1350)	11.99	7.19
Late medieval and Tudor (1350-1600)	17.12	10.64
Later or undateable	10.74	6.68
Total	39.85	24.51

The survey demonstrated the intrinsic age and interest of this particular landscape although how far it may be typical can only be resolved when many more studies have been made. Guidelines and advice for such studies, taking into account the diversity of landscape types in Essex, will be discussed later in this booklet.

HISTORICAL OUTLINE

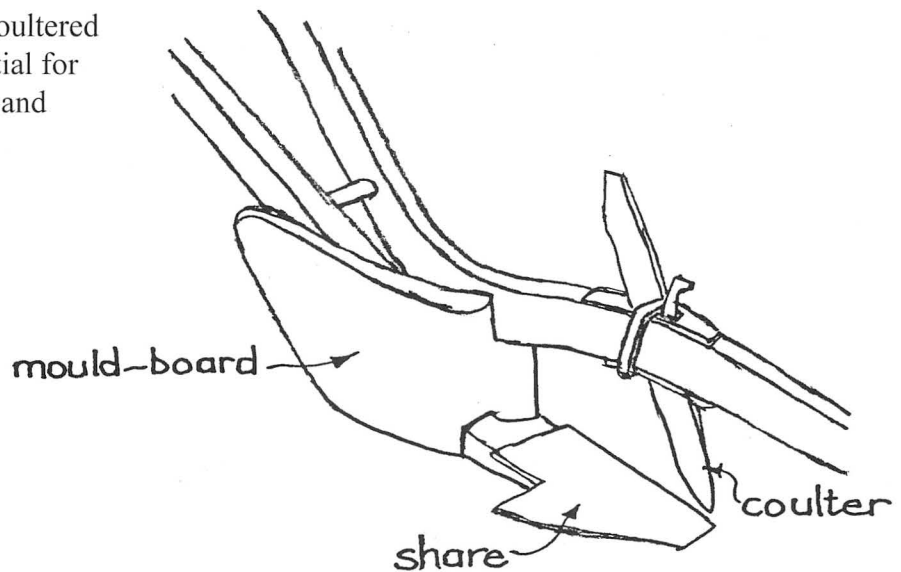
Prehistoric fields

The earliest known field systems in Britain and Ireland lie on the north coast of County Mayo and date from around 3,700 BC. They are co-axial (see below) and clearly planned as a communal enterprise to achieve large scale clearance and the construction of boundaries. Similar systems, with parallel boundaries known as “reaves“, cover a huge area on and around southern Dartmoor. Other extensive field systems dating from the Neolithic and Bronze Age have been discovered and studied in recent years, and those in the Lincolnshire fens are particularly relevant to Essex for lacking local stone, field boundaries were fashioned as ditched hedgerows.

Farming was concerned almost entirely with livestock, and a landscape pattern evolved around the movement of herds and flocks along droveways to seasonal pastures - the fens in the summer and upland grazings in the winter months. The roughly parallel alignment of the droveways influenced the formation of the intervening fields into patterns which reflected the dominant axes with ladder-like farms resulting, and such landscapes have come to be termed ‘co-axial’.

These farms had their steadings and stockyards, and were subdivided by “rungs” into small fields which enabled the rotation of grazing to avoid parasitical infections and for land to lie fallow with stock excluded. Cereal crops formed only a minor part of the farm economy, grown for local

The basic elements of the coultered mould-board plough, essential for the cultivation of claylands and heavier soils.



consumption in gardens and plots close to the farmsteads. These examples date from the prehistoric, but it should be borne in mind that similar landscapes based on the seasonal movement of stock might develop at any period. The “ladder” form also gives an equitable sharing of land of varied quality - particularly on valley slopes, and parallel parish boundaries are found in many broad valleys in southern England. These appear to derive from Saxon estates, or subdivisions of them, but could well be based on far earlier land allocation and field systems. An Essex example is considered below (Case Study 4 - The Parallel Parishes).

Co-axial landscapes suggest a high degree of organization over a considerable area. A different, and more relaxed, landscape appears in Essex with prehistoric farms lying to the north of the Blackwater estuary, where the hunter/gatherer economy of the Mesolithic appears to have merged with Neolithic stock farming; which is hardly surprising given the natural resources - fish, shellfish and wildfowl along the estuary and its shoreline, game in the extensive woodlands, and as much grassland as the communities wished to clear and maintain by grazing. Slight fragments of Neolithic field boundaries are known from Chigborough Farm in this area, and also at Hill Farm on the Tendring plateau.

Substantial elements of rectilinear Bronze Age field systems have been recorded at a number of locations in Essex. One of the best examples is at Mucking where the fields are associated with a number of ring-ditches, the remains of burial mounds. Such barrows and other ceremonial monuments were often related to land boundaries. Indeed alignments of monuments often seem to form an early phase of land allotment, with ditched field systems subsequently laid out aligned with and often incorporating the earlier monuments. The cropmark landscapes of the Stour Valley appear to contain many examples of this pattern. Extensive excavations at Ardleigh have demonstrated that Bronze Age barrow cemeteries formed major boundaries followed by trackways. These became embedded in rectilinear field systems during the Iron Age and Roman periods, and in one case an alignment originally created in about 1500 BC appears to survive as a lane in the contemporary landscape.

Whilst livestock was the dominant factor in the early agricultural economy, archaeological excavations in Essex over the last 25 years have yielded some of the best evidence, in the form of

plant remains, for Neolithic and Bronze Age arable cultivation in the east of England. Around 500 BC, well into the Iron Age, cereal production took on a new importance as improvements developed in the technology of ploughing. Iron ploughshares and coulter enabling cultivation of the heavier soils appear in the archaeological record, and it is possible that wooden mouldboards would have turned the furrows, but if so none have survived. Mixed farming systems developed, supporting a rapidly growing population, and we have the eye-witness account of Julius Caesar in 54 BC describing south-east Britain as well populated and studded with homesteads in a bosky landscape of trackways and woods, excellent for concealing charioteers. Some years later the significance of corn in the economy of north Essex was celebrated by the great and wealthy Cunobelin (c 10 to 40 AD) with gold coins depicting a head of barley.

Roman Essex

Under Roman rule villa estates grew up on the fertile soils of the Till, the network of principle roads was constructed and towns developed at nodal points. Over south Essex and the Dengie peninsula, some of the co-axial rectilinear patterns which survive today may have been evident, in particular on the Dengie which has the character of a planned landscape, probably under imperial direction. A problem, however, remains elsewhere. The appearance, nature and working of Roman towns, villas and their environs, is well researched and not difficult to reconstruct; but the pattern of rural settlement where most people lived, their field systems, farm and estate boundaries, and their relationship to the wider landscape are a blur.

It appears likely that by the second century AD, the population of southern Britain had attained a level it would only reach again in the 13th century. Land under the plough would be of a similar extent with woodland carefully managed and reduced to the minimum area required for the supply of its products. As with prehistoric field systems, Roman boundaries appear as cropmarks although it is possible that many may still be in use. It is also likely that a part of the network of minor roads and green lanes dates from Roman times, or even earlier. In the post-Roman period much of the landscape became rough pasture and woodland, and when the pendulum swung again to reclamation - in the late Saxon and early medieval centuries - it would have been easier to clear leaf mould and silt from pre-existing features than to begin from scratch, digging mostly into heavy clays.

The Saxon kingdom

From the near opacity of the late Roman and early Saxon, a time when a catastrophic decline in population occurred, probably from plague, a picture of the landscape in the Middle Saxon period (c 600-850 AD) is emerging. Great estates had appeared, such as the Rodings, the Colnes and the Tolleshunts, and the establishment of minsters with their huge parishes. In the late Saxon period it appears that a process of fission broke down these estates into smaller units, which formed the manors recorded in the Essex Domesday Book (EDB), many with their own parish churches and the first generation of greens situated at the gates of the manor. EDB suggests that despite a growing population, perhaps thirty per cent of the land was rough pasture or "waste" and twenty per cent woodland, although the latter was already in retreat from clearance in the course of the thirty year interval between the two dates compared in the survey (1066 and 1086).

The legacy of this period includes the establishment of the principal manors, with their location and economic status evident from EDB, the foundation of most parish churches, and delineation of

the major boundaries which included those of hundreds, manors and proto-parishes. Many small estates are also listed in EDB and these are more difficult to locate with accuracy, but in general the rural settlement pattern that we are familiar with today had been established, together with the network of main roads inherited from the Romans and a substantial extent of lanes and trackways.

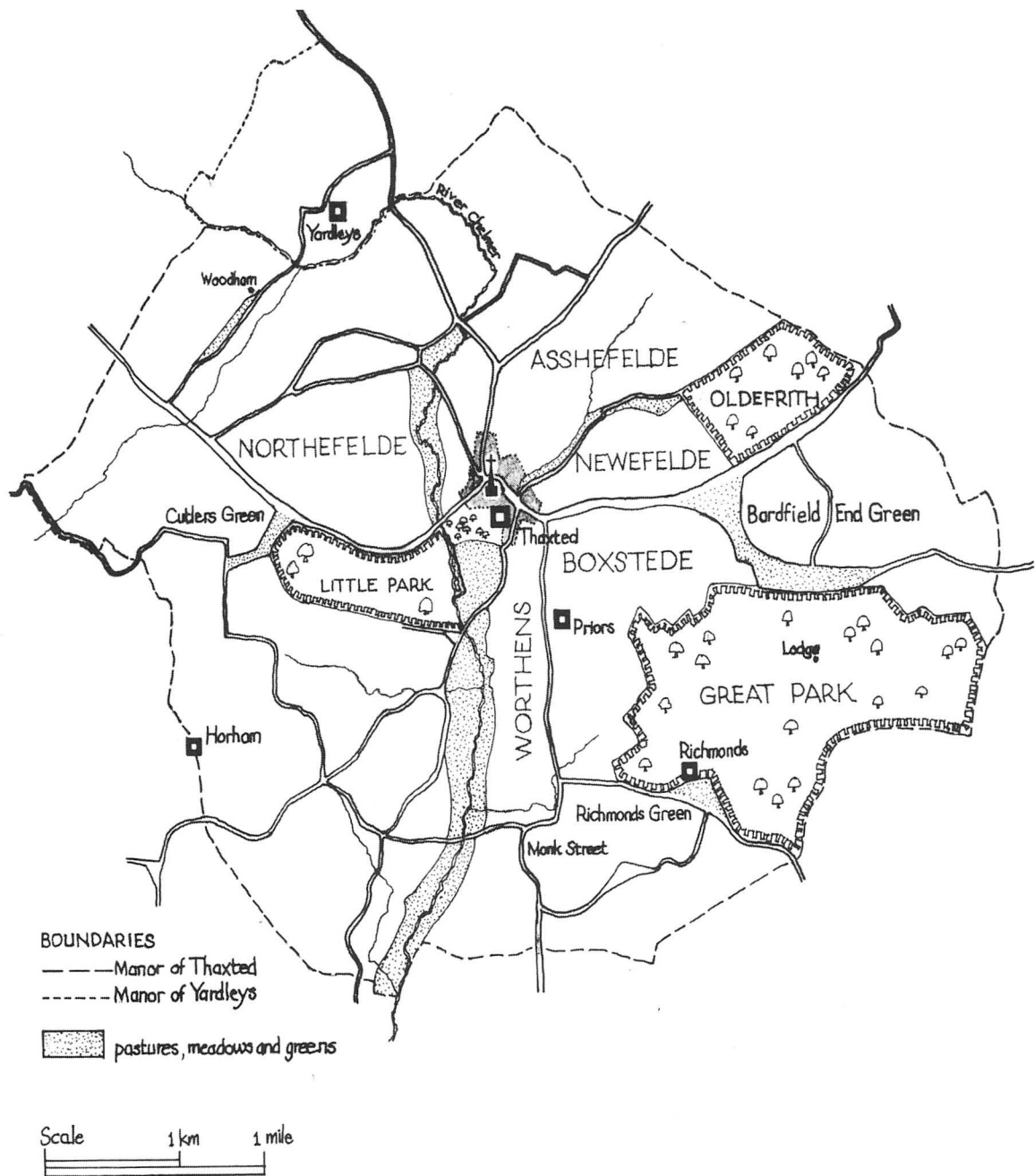


Fig. 3 The parish of Thaxted circa 1300

The Middle Ages

At the time of the Norman Conquest the economy and the population were growing, swiftly and relentlessly - a process that would reach its limits in the late 13th century. More and more of the waste had to be ploughed up for crops to feed more mouths, and the colonization of the areas of rough pasture and woodland, formerly extensive but now a limited resource, found peasants in competition with their lords. The essential minimum of land required for pasture came to be defined and preserved as a second generation of greens, bordered around by tofts - the smallholdings of peasant families, who would also cultivate strips in the adjoining arable.

This scattered pattern of settlement developed as hamlets - usually around or beside a green, which could be "focal" - a compact area of grassland, or "linear" - comprizing wide verges along a road. These hamlets, generally named as "X" End, Green or Tye - their particular name being most often of post-Conquest origin, are typical of the Essex Till and the Tendring Plain.

In the Wooded Hills of the Mid-Essex Zone, there were extensive commons often with a tradition of inter-commoning by the tenants of neighbouring manors. In the case of Epping Forest - a huge wood-pasture common - rights of inter-common survived into the late 19th century and were a crucial legal factor in the epic fight to save the Forest from enclosure by its landlords. Greens and commons are accurately shown on Chapman and André's Map of Essex of 1777, which also depicts the great heathlands (all now extinct) that lay around Tiptree and Colchester, and extended to the Dedham Vale.

The early 13th century saw the further development of manorial demesnes under the direct control of their lords or their agents as profitable enterprises. In the extreme north-west of the county, demesnes consisted of a proportion of the strips in the extensive common- fields of this area, but over most of the Till they formed compact blocks of land separate from the small common-fields of the peasantry. As pressure on the remaining waste intensified, so did its management. Woodlands were now protected with banks and hedge, and governed by the manor's woodward. Wood-pasture and some woodland might be retained as parkland, managed by the parker, who oversaw the welfare of the lord's deer from the lodge, sited on the highest point in the park. Parks were enclosed by a tall fence of oak palings erected on a bank, sometimes massive, with a ditch on the park side to increase the height.

The landscape of a prosperous high status manor in the 14th century is illustrated by Thaxted in Fig. 3, a depiction made possible by the survival of a detailed survey of 1393. At the centre lay the halls, courts and demesne home farm which made up the manorial curia, but the original green at the gates had now been replaced by the thriving market town of Thaxted. The core area of farmland surrounding the settlement was fully common-field in the manner of north-west Essex (Northfelde, Asshefelde etc.) which included the manorial arable, and there was no area for an exclusive demesne. Colonization of the outlying waste into arable was focussed on four second-generation greens, three focal and one linear, and three sub-manors (Yardleys was a part of the parish but not the manor of Thaxted). Much of the outlying waste, well-wooded in 1086, was now enclosed into deer parks: Oldefrith (old wood) and Great Park. This landscape remained stable, with its common-fields gently evolving into individual farms as the manor of Thaxted devolved into its sub-manor of Horham Hall, and by the 19th century strip fields, by then a rarity, survived only in a small area in the south of the parish. The parks became farms in the 16th and 17th centuries, with Oldefrith

surviving into the early 19th, to be grubbed under act of parliament together with some surviving waste and green - the only such enclosure in Thaxted, or its neighbouring parishes - to be part replanted some sixty years later as a game spinney. This still survives, with oxlips whose seeds long lay dormant until woodland re-established, and could well fool the unwary that their new habitat is "ancient woodland".

All changed in the 14th century. The climate was deteriorating towards the end of the 13th, and from its start a physical chill settled on the new century presaging the miseries to come. A series of failed harvests brought famine and in 1319-21 the great sheep murrain swept through flocks. In 1348 bubonic plague, known as the Black Death or Great Pestilence, returned after an absence of 700 years and remained endemic for the rest of the century. By 1400 the population of Essex stood at half or less of its extent in the 13th century and numbers would not fully recover until the 18th.

These catastrophes had solved the problem of a population exceeding its resources. There was now land for all who sought it, and despite some brief and fitful efforts by lords to forestall inevitable change, most were glad to find tenants for land that would otherwise be waste. So villeinage rapidly gave way to copyhold tenancies whose holders sought to consolidate their strips by agreement into discrete closes - a process illustrated in Case Study 2. Lords now preferred to lease out their demesnes, rather than farm them in hand and their huge arable fields were subdivided for farming by rotation with stock (Case Studies 1 and 2). Considerations of amenity in the design of mansions and their settings become more apparent with water often playing an important role. On demesne land the linear woods appear, termed 'springs' in north Essex and 'shaws' in the south (Case Study 4).

Tudor and Stuart Essex

We now come to a time when a massive change in land ownership took place, perhaps a third of the kingdom, following the Dissolution of the religious houses, much of it in royal grants to favourites or on the market at knock down prices. A benefit for posterity was the development of map-making as new landowners, wishing to know exact details of their estates, commissioned mapped surveys. The new art of cartography had arrived and in the hands of masters such as the Walkers of Hanningfield achieved a high level of accuracy. Moreover the pictorial convention of the time showed features in elevation, particularly useful with buildings as gables and chimney stacks were shown, and in the landscape, palings and fences, and the spacing of trees in hedgerows. We see batches of strips amalgamated to form closes and also lines of trees retained where crofts or small fields have been combined. These trees and those grown everywhere in hedgerows were generally pollards, meeting a huge demand for faggots and charcoal as well as the needs of the tenant. Timber trees were generally grown in woodlands at this time.

A prestigious rural seat was a requisite for a new magnate, a mansion built of brick with gatehouse, courts, turrets and everywhere battlements. Castellar references, a wide moat and a parkland setting conveyed a sense of pedigree and "old money", and we find many new mansions of this time built far from the old manorial centre, out on the site of the lodge. Parks had come back into fashion for the amenity and prestige they gave to the great house, but their overall number was now far lower and increasingly they were turned into tenant farms, giving a financial return instead of a constant management and maintenance cost. The Civil War took a further toll - Puritans disliked parks - and only 24 appear on John Oliver's map of the county in 1696.

Georgian and later Essex

From the middle years of the 18th century, Essex farming entered a new and increasingly prosperous phase which peaked during the Napoleonic wars. Arable, in particular, expanded to meet London's ever-growing demand for wheat, barley for its breweries, and oats for draught horses. As in the 13th century, owners took an active interest in development and experiment, with trials of rotations and crops to eliminate fallow years, and the improvement of implements: ploughs, drills and threshing machines. Livestock breeds were improved, and the inclusion of turnips and clover in rotations allowed more sheep and cattle to be raised, and so more meat for the London market. The Epping area had become the centre for dairy farming.

Financial incentives to increase production inevitably led to farming on a larger scale and the decline of small-scale farms - a process that had been underway for some time. A result was that landless farm labourers now comprised the largest economic group in rural Essex, a future source of disaffection when times became hard, particularly with the decline of the cloth industry in the early 18th century and the loss of the market it had long provided for wool spun and prepared by wives and daughters, doubling family income.

Common-fields had been enclosed by agreement, at a steady pace, since the 15th century. Now the remaining parishes where they survived on a considerable scale or agreement had not been reached,

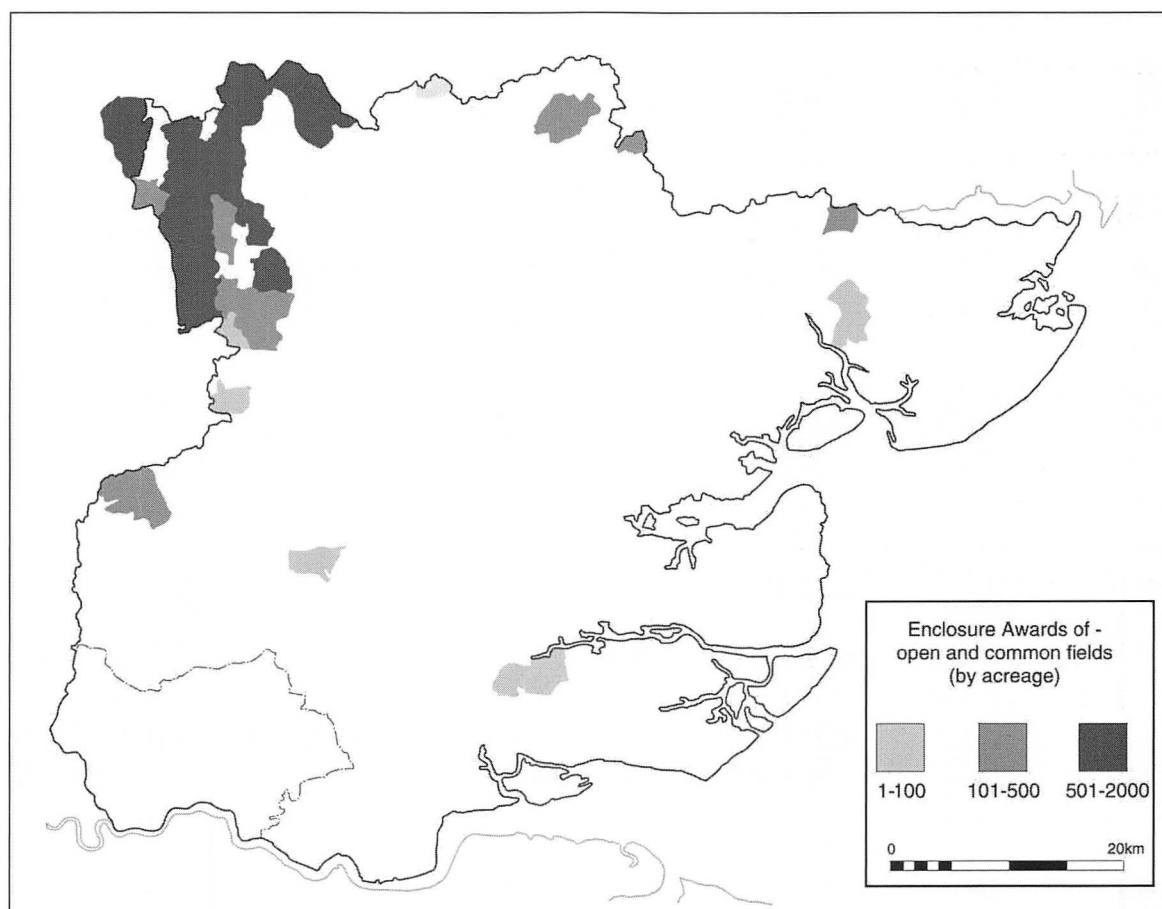


Fig. 4a Enclosure Awards of common-fields

were enclosed by Act of Parliament between 1778 and 1871 - an area of *circa* 22,335 acres, mostly lying in the extreme north-west of the county as shown in Fig. 4a. Similarly between 1770 and 1867 in Essex, *circa* 9,952 acres of heath, common, green and waste was enclosed, rather a low figure when one considers the huge areas shown on Chapman and André's Map of 1777. Much must have gone in the next few decades through agreement and encroachment, possibly with the threat of legal enclosure if other methods failed. It may also be noted that the density of settlement shown in 1777 is very low. Fig. 4b shows the parishes in which these enclosure awards were made, with most covering only a small part of the parish. In the case of Hatfield Broad Oak, the huge award removed common rights from the whole of Hatfield Forest - which was its main intention - but thankfully only a small part was actually enclosed for farming.

The French and Napoleonic wars brought unprecedented prosperity to farming while the ownership of land, as always, gave respectability to the "arriviste". The price of corn rocketed and between 1810 and 1814 reached a level attained neither before nor since. Both distant and "improving" owners urged their tenants to grub up small woods, enlarge fields and plough up pasture in this short term bonanza (Case Study 1). But on the established estates of resident owners a balance and long perspective was maintained - woodland and hedgerow timber was a long term investment, and also provided the cover required for game birds and foxes. But the springs and shaws so popular in earlier times returned to farmland in the later 18th century and relatively few survived the Napoleonic wars.

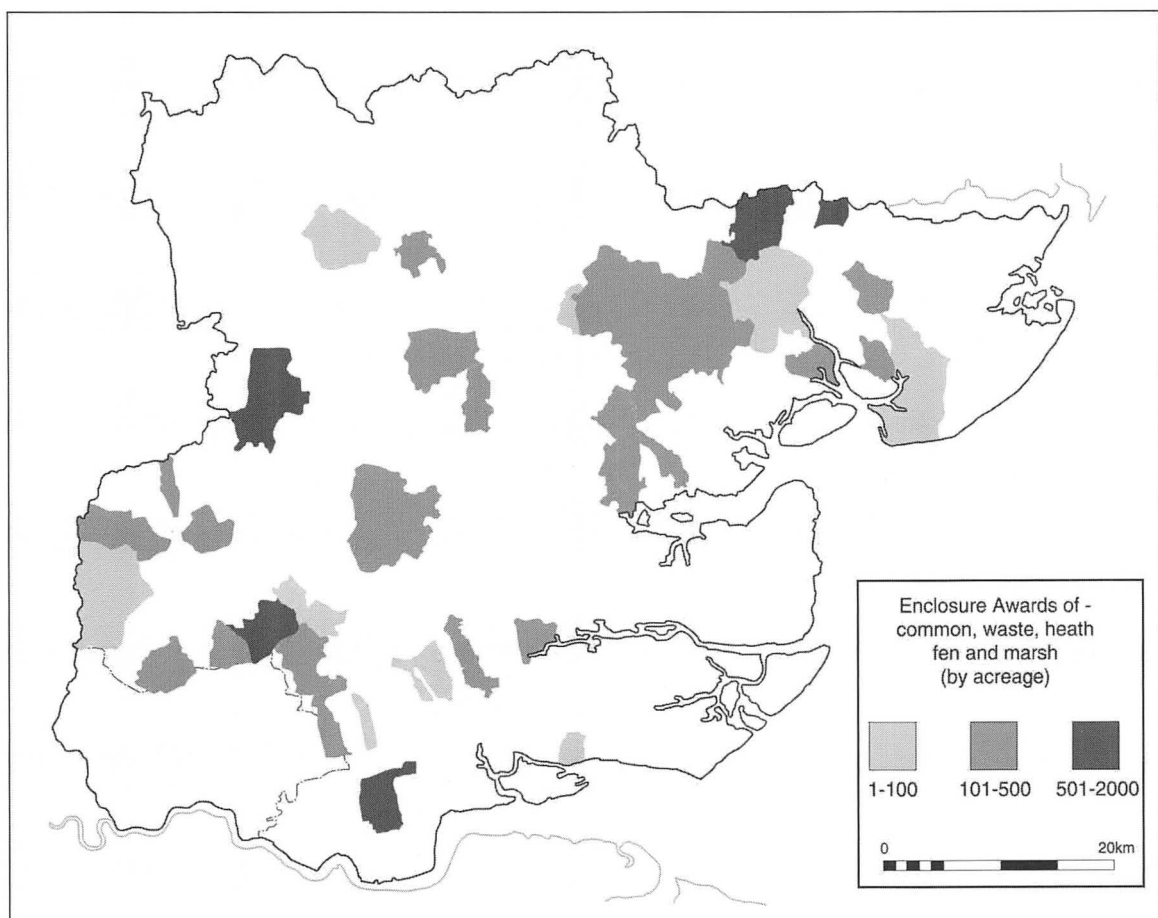


Fig. 4b Enclosure Awards of heaths, commons and greens

A feature of this time are purprestures on highway land. Where the highway was wide - usually on ill-drained level land where vehicles required space to pass in the winter morass, a tenant might secure a lease to enclose a long strip of ground for his house and smallholding. In addition to his rent he was required to surface and maintain the adjacent road - a sensible arrangement for landlord, tenant and traveller.

In contrast to agricultural improvement and the enclosure of landscapes deemed obsolete such as heathland, the 18th century saw the development of the landscape park. Perhaps not such a contrast as first appears, for the park, which was walled where resources permitted and with rights of way extinguished, represented wealth and the exclusive ownership of land. After a period of fascinating experiment in which Essex designers and owners played an honourable part, the dominant style became that of informal wood-pasture, not dissimilar to the landscape of the deer parks of earlier times. Relics of earlier field systems often survived, particularly hedgerow trees marking the line of a former field boundary.

In 1815 a deep depression set in, and although profitable farming revived for a while, the long term result of the repeal of the Corn Laws which allowed the unrestricted import of cheap grain from North America led to a depression lasting from the mid 1870s to 1939. Game spinneys were among the few additions to the farming landscape over these years.

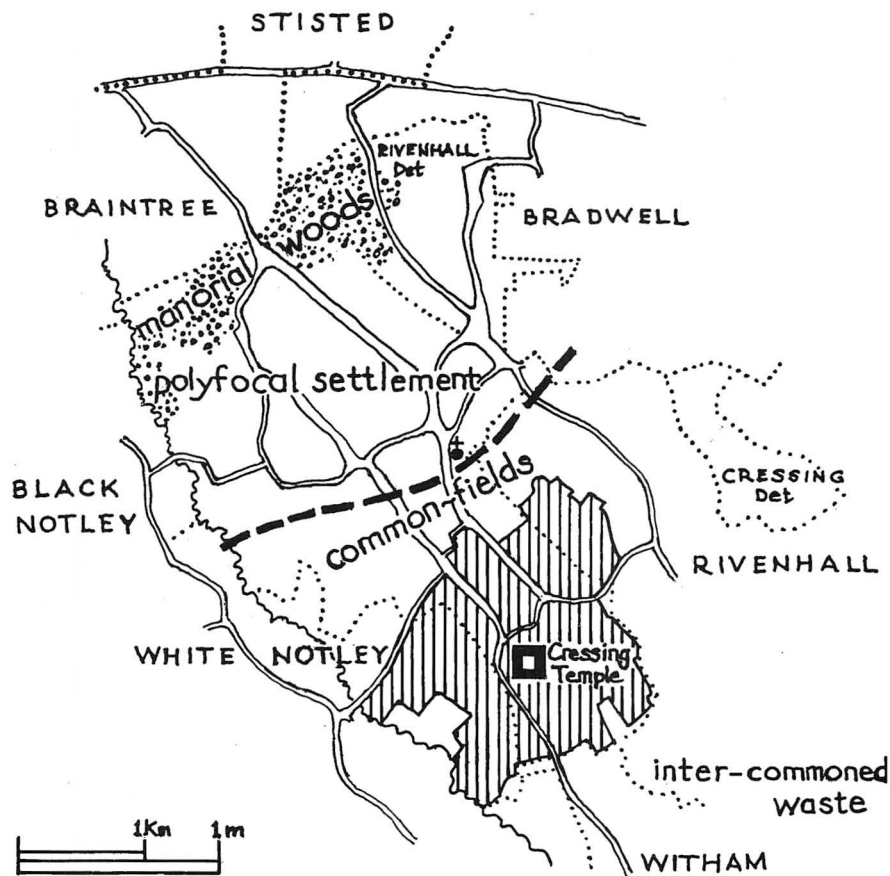


Fig. 5 Cressing circa 1300. The Templar demesne is shown hatched



Fig. 6 From the Tithe Map of Cressing, c. 1840. An area of tight-knit “peasant” landscape formerly composed of small common-fields, crofts and greens.

Farming came back to economic life in 1939 and we have considered earlier the effects of government-driven modernization in the years following World War Two. Changes, often very destructive, took place with no consideration of habitat, amenity and other factors which make up the historic landscape. Massive urban development, the construction of new roads, and the many holes in the fabric of the plateau landscape formed by wartime airfields, have taken a heavy toll, but these calamities to the historic landscape are of limited extent when considered in the context of the whole.

To summarize this historic outline, the Essex landscape of 1300 would seem in the main to be that depicted by Chapman and André in their Map of Essex of 1777, and the distribution of settlement and the network of roads and lanes which they show survive today, where not engulfed by urban development. The heaths and much of value have been lost, but a great deal survives, not least in the patterns of fields which mostly reflect a process of gradual change through adaptation of existing features rather than the drastic recasting that was fashionable two centuries ago.

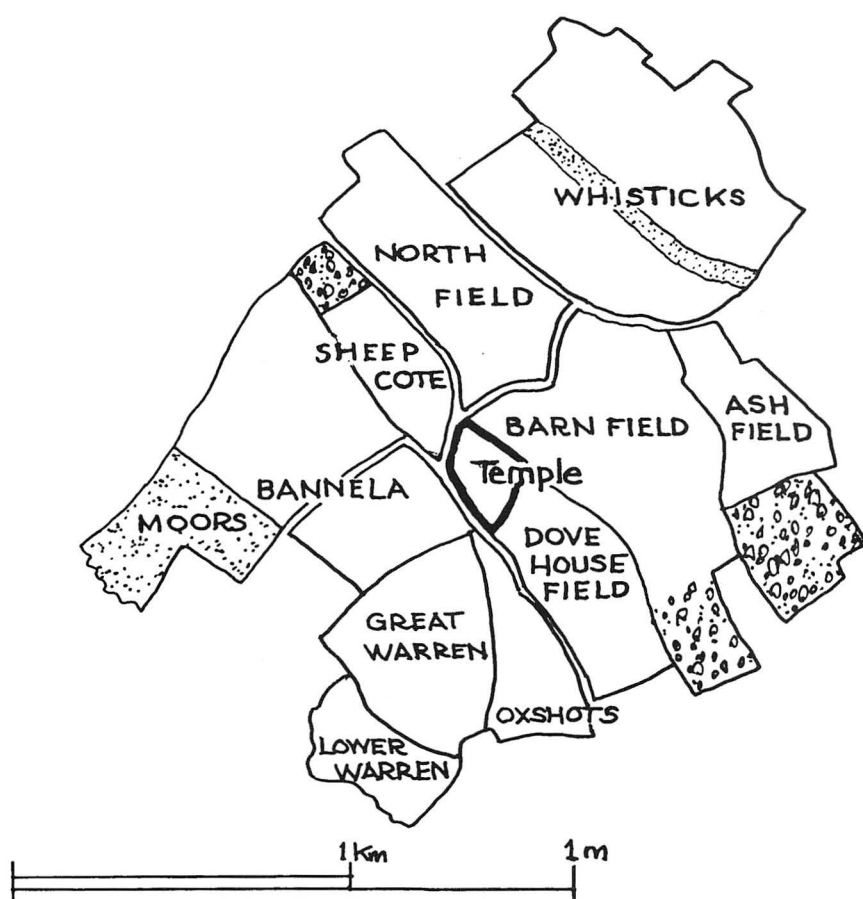


Fig. 7 Demesne home farm at Cressing Temple circa 1300

CASE STUDIES

1 Cressing Temple

Cressing does not appear in Domesday Book but it is generally thought that the small settlement around the church then belonged with the royal manor of Witham. As an independent manor, it was created by Queen Matilda and granted to the Knights Templar in 1137, and the grant was then confirmed by King Stephen in 1152. Apart from the survival of the two remarkable barns, the great interest of Cressing Temple for the student of landscape lies in the tithe free status of its demesne land, a privilege that survived to be recorded in the tithe awards of Cressing and also in adjoining parishes where the Templars held lands. The legal situation was that when ownership changed the status remained with the land, and as a result it is possible to reconstruct the post-Conquest evolution of the manor and parish.

Early in the 13th century, the Templars like other great landowners embarked on the development of their demesne for profitable arable farming under their own direct control. They selected a site for their curia - the estate centre (today's Cressing Temple) - on a site with good natural drainage beside the existing road on the east side of the valley of the River Brain, which linked them to their manor and developing market at Witham and the London/Colchester road. Their demesne was formed in the course of the following sixty years by the clearance and ploughing up of a substantial part of what appears to have been a huge tract of waste lying between Cressing and Witham. This

land may have carried existing rights of inter-commoning by neighbouring communities, similar to the inter-commoned waste, Tiptree Heath, which lay to the south-east of Witham and extended into a large number of parishes. This would explain why the land of the Templar demesne extended over the adjoining parishes of White Notley, Witham and Rivenhall, who may have had rights in the waste.

Fig. 5 shows Cressing and the adjacent areas of neighbouring parishes around 1300. Along the northern boundary lay a tract of demesne woodlands which mostly survived until the Napoleonic wars, when they were grubbed out to grow corn.

To the south of the woods lay a complex, tight-knit, small-scale pattern of settlement which I have termed “polyfocal” as it appears based on linear and focal greens, bordered by crofts and tofts, and with much of the intermediate land lying in small strip fields. Fig. 6 is a simplified plan of a part of this area of the parish in the mid 19th century, with the greens and small groves already lost in the agrimania of the Napoleonic wars, and sadly, such small scale landscapes had no hope of survival in the later 20th century. Now only a few hedgerows remain. Without the record of the Tithe Maps, the survival of the odd surveyor’s map and the early Ordnance Survey, such landscapes would have vanished from view as surely as those of the villa estates of the Romanized British aristocracy with their tribal villages or the scattered farms and hamlets of the Dark Ages.

The dotted line on Fig. 5 shown crossing the centre of the parish east/west divides the pattern of land-use between the small-scale landscape we have seen lying to the north and a zone of common-field farming to the south, and beyond that the exclusive and compact demesne of the Templars. Thus there are four zones: woodland, small-scale “peasant” farming, common-field (mostly held by tenants) and compact demesne.

The large scale field pattern of 13th century demesnes, illustrated well by Cressing Temple, tended to be flexible. As a result they proved adaptable to change, with a high chance of survival into the modern landscape. Fig. 7 shows the demesne home farm around 1300 when it had reached its maximum extent and its annual harvest of sheaves could be comfortably accommodated within the two barns. In the 14th century, direct farming of demesnes went out of fashion and it became the practice to lease out to tenant farmers. This led to a more relaxed and diversified use of land and following the Black Death, fields were divided up to form smaller closes, a pattern which survived in the main until the 1950s.

The tithe exemption together with the field names recorded on the Tithe Map (Fig. 8) supply the clues for the reconstruction of the demesne home farm of 1300 as shown in Fig. 7. For example, the medieval North Field is now divided into Cressing North Field, Fore North Field and Temple North Field; Bannela has become Further, Middle and Pound Bannerly. So as a general rule, where a field name applies to two or more adjacent fields, with a particular term for each - for example: further, hither, middle, fore, higher, lower and so on - we can be reasonably sure that we have a large former field that has been divided up in the late or post-medieval period. The former field may be a part of the demesne, as above, but equally well a common-field or a part of a common-field; “shot” may be indicative of such in Essex.

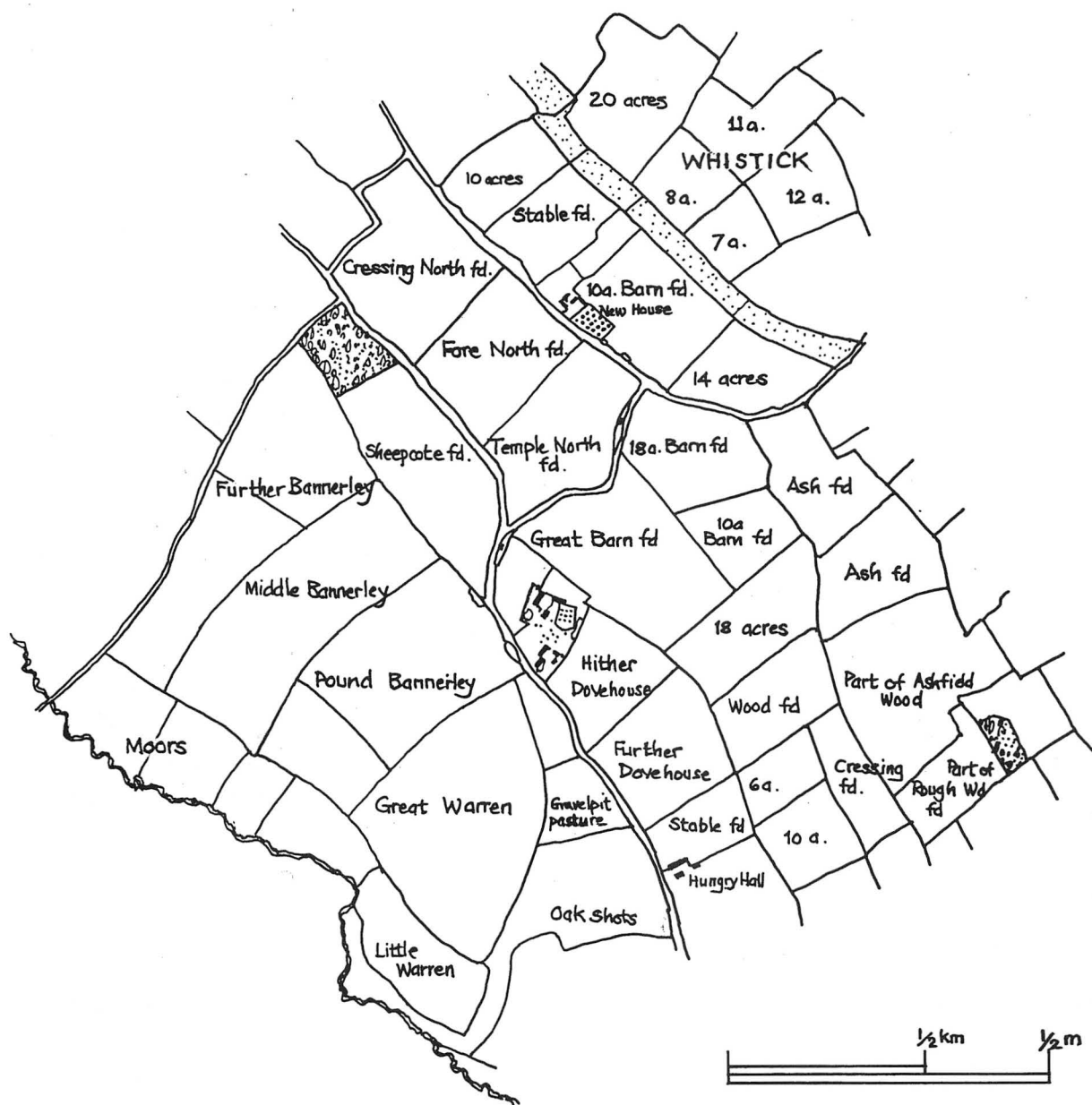


Fig. 8 Field names from tithe maps c. 1840

An interesting feature of the Templars' demesne farm and the remaining "waste" was the underlying presence of long linear features which appear to have survived under the tree cover or rough pasture of the waste, and were then to be incorporated into the pattern of fields and lanes in the Templars' reclamation. These features also remained in the waste beyond, forming natural property boundaries as the status of this land changed from common to severalty. They became apparent due to their depiction on a series of estate maps prepared for a new landowner in Rivenhall in 1716, and it would seem that their survival had resulted from a long period of preservation on common grazing land. As the land was enclosed, old boundaries filled with silt and leafmould would be easier to re-establish than digging out new ones.

The Templar estate remained mostly intact through subsequent ownerships until the Civil War when the unfortunate owners chose the wrong side and were saddled with heavy fines. The estate was consequently sold, and in connection with this a document of 1656 has survived describing the home farm in detail, but the rest of the estate more briefly with descriptions of the properties, acreages of land use and the rents payable. An interesting item is a list of twenty-one springs, the narrow coppice woods that followed the margins of fields, mostly no more than one or two acres in size. The home farm - nearly 800 acres in 1300 - was now reduced to 521, with the remainder in tenant farms, but the springs extended over the whole area and remained in hand. Newhouse Farm,

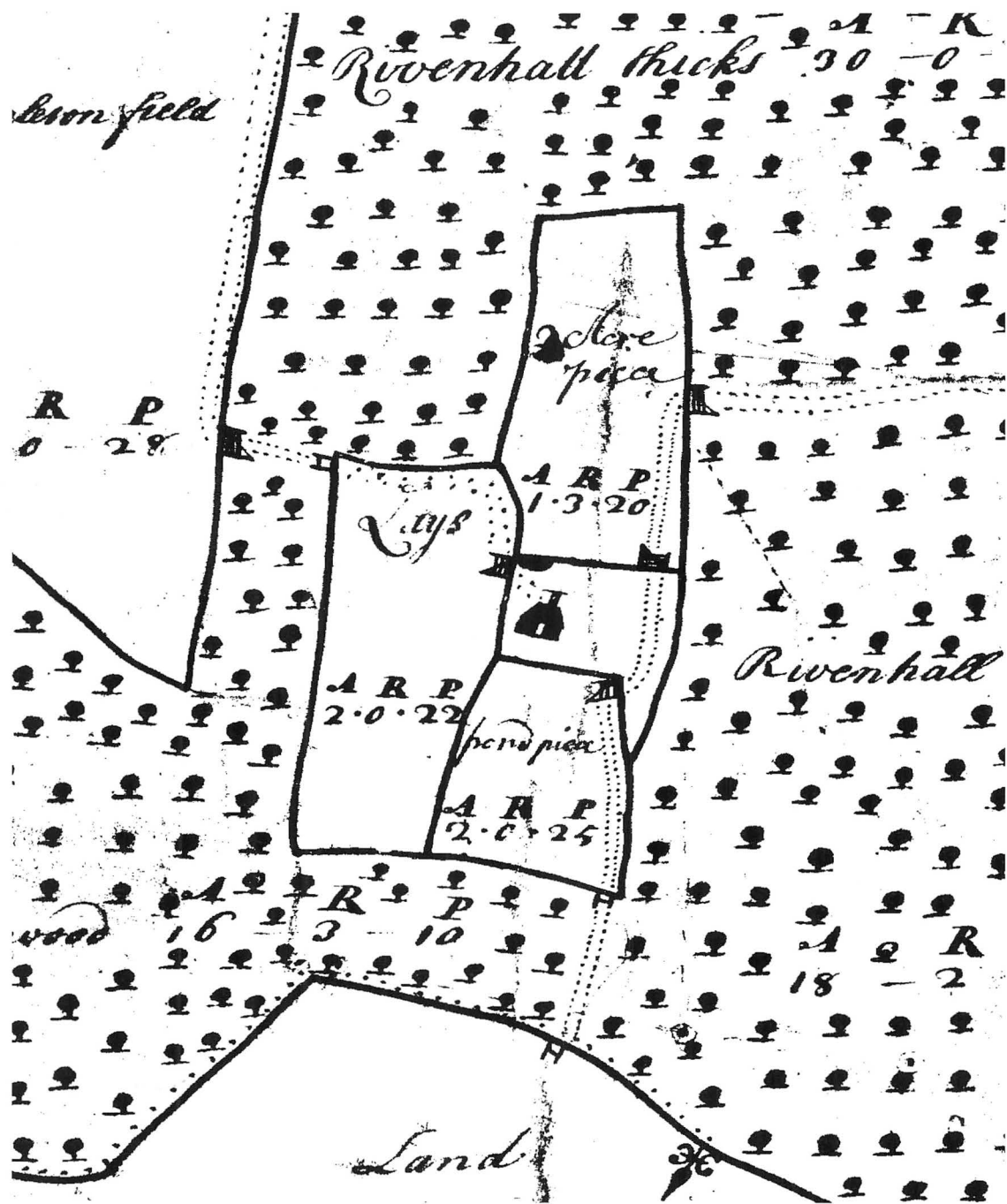


Fig. 9 A small farm within Rivenhall Thicks depicted on a map of 1716

one of the tenant farms and formed from the land formerly comprising North Field, Whisticks and Ash Field is depicted (now freehold) on an estate map of 1727. This shows the springs still surviving but they would be lost later in the century in the search for yet more land to grow corn.

Newhouse Farm, at over 200 acres was a very comfortable size for a yeoman farmer, his family and dependent workers, but vast compared with the holdings of medieval villeins and also many contemporaries. The Rivenhall estate map, referred to earlier, depicts the former waste which stretched to the south of the Templar demesne. It is land extensively wooded, with small farms carved out, rather like the assarts of an earlier time. The mass of the woodland was probably secondary colonization following the Black Death, but the survival of small-leaved lime in Tarecroft Wood, Rivenhall, suggests that wooded areas on the former waste were relicts of former wildwood, or derived directly from it. A fascinating detail of the map is a small farm (Fig. 9), comprising slightly more than five acres, probably of late medieval origin when landlords were still seeking tenants - very different from Newhouse Farm, but still a living for a family. By the time of the tithe map it had vanished and today it survives as a single field.

It is interesting to compare the demesne home farm of Walthambury with that of the Templars at Cressing. Walthambury, which covered most of the parish of Great Waltham, was the principal manor of the de Mandevilles in their great fief in central Essex and might be reckoned of similar status to Cressing Temple. Fig. 10 shows it as much the same size in the 13th century, and the field names are reconstructed from a written survey of 1562. By good fortune a mapped survey of 1643 has also survived and although somewhat sketchy, it shows the huge fields now divided up and the presence of springs along some of the boundaries. Given that all the field boundaries were hedged and contained regularly spaced pollard or standard trees, it must have appeared a very bosky landscape at that time, as indeed would Cressing. By the later 18th century the springs had gone. In the 1960s the fields of both farms were enlarged considerably - mostly, but not all - to the sizes of the 13th century.

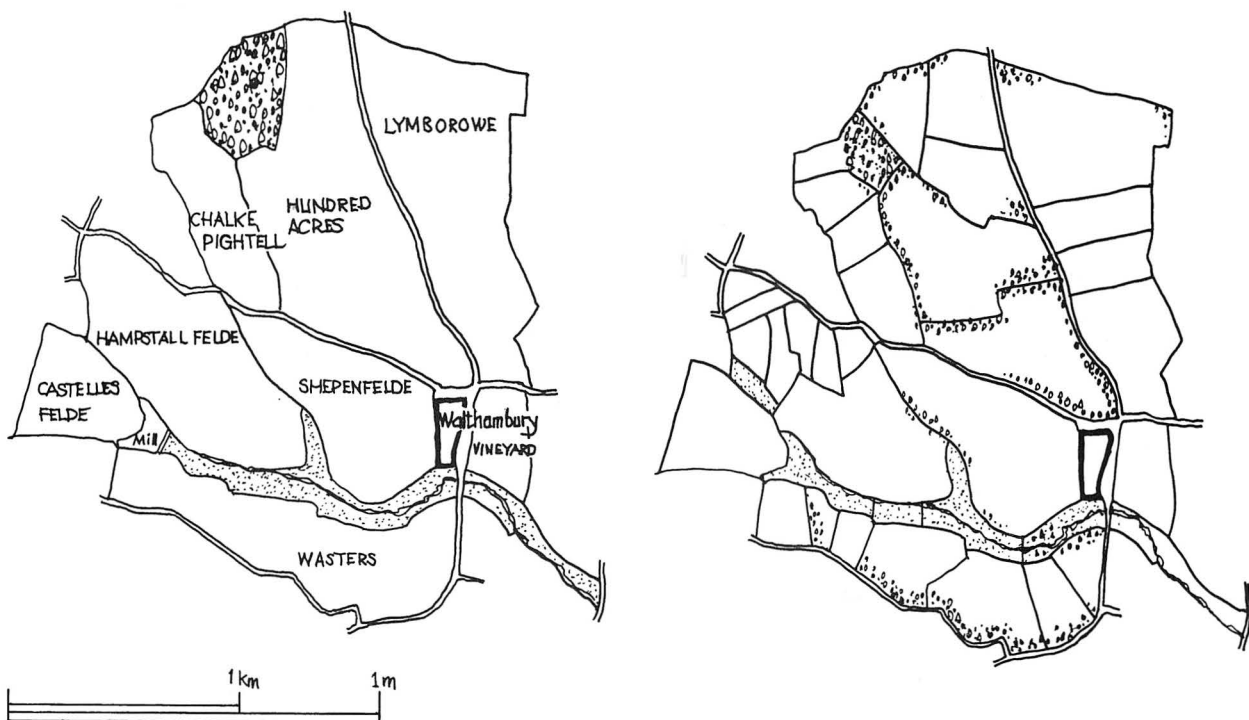
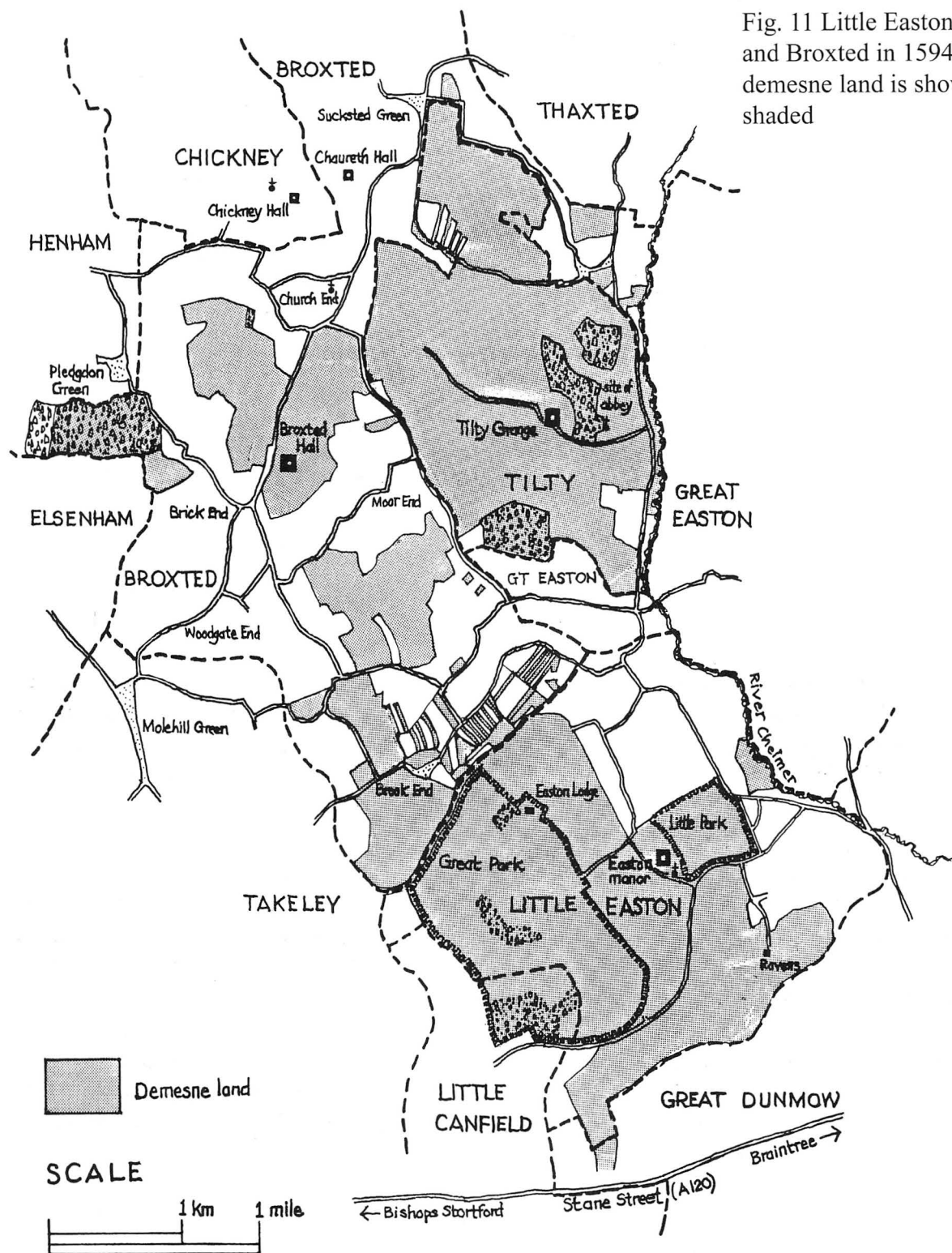


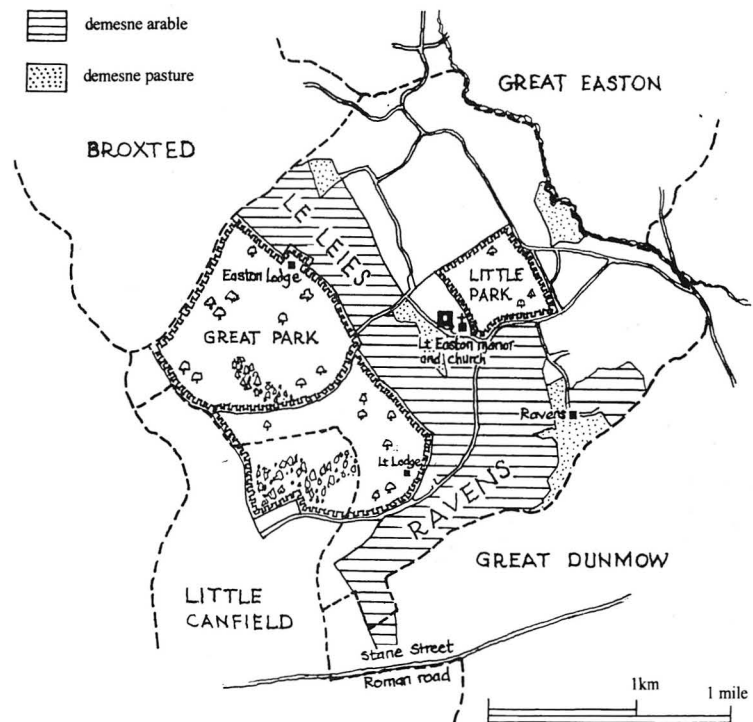
Fig. 10 The demesne home farm of Walthambury in the 13th century and in 1643.



2 Little Easton, Broxted and Tilty

Our reconstruction of the medieval landscape of Cressing rests on a variety of evidence of which interpretation of the tithe award and its map ranks highly (as in almost all Essex parishes) but more particularly on the exemption of land formally owned by the Knights from the payment of tithes.

Fig. 12 Little Easton circa 1300



In the three parishes we will now consider, the illuminating evidence is the survival of the fine estate map of 1594 prepared for Sir Henry Maynard, secretary to Lord Burghley, of the lands newly granted to him in north Essex. These comprised the manors of Little Easton and Tilty, both coterminous with their parishes, and Broxted also so, excepting only the manor of Chaureth (Cherry) Hall which covered the northern part of the parish.

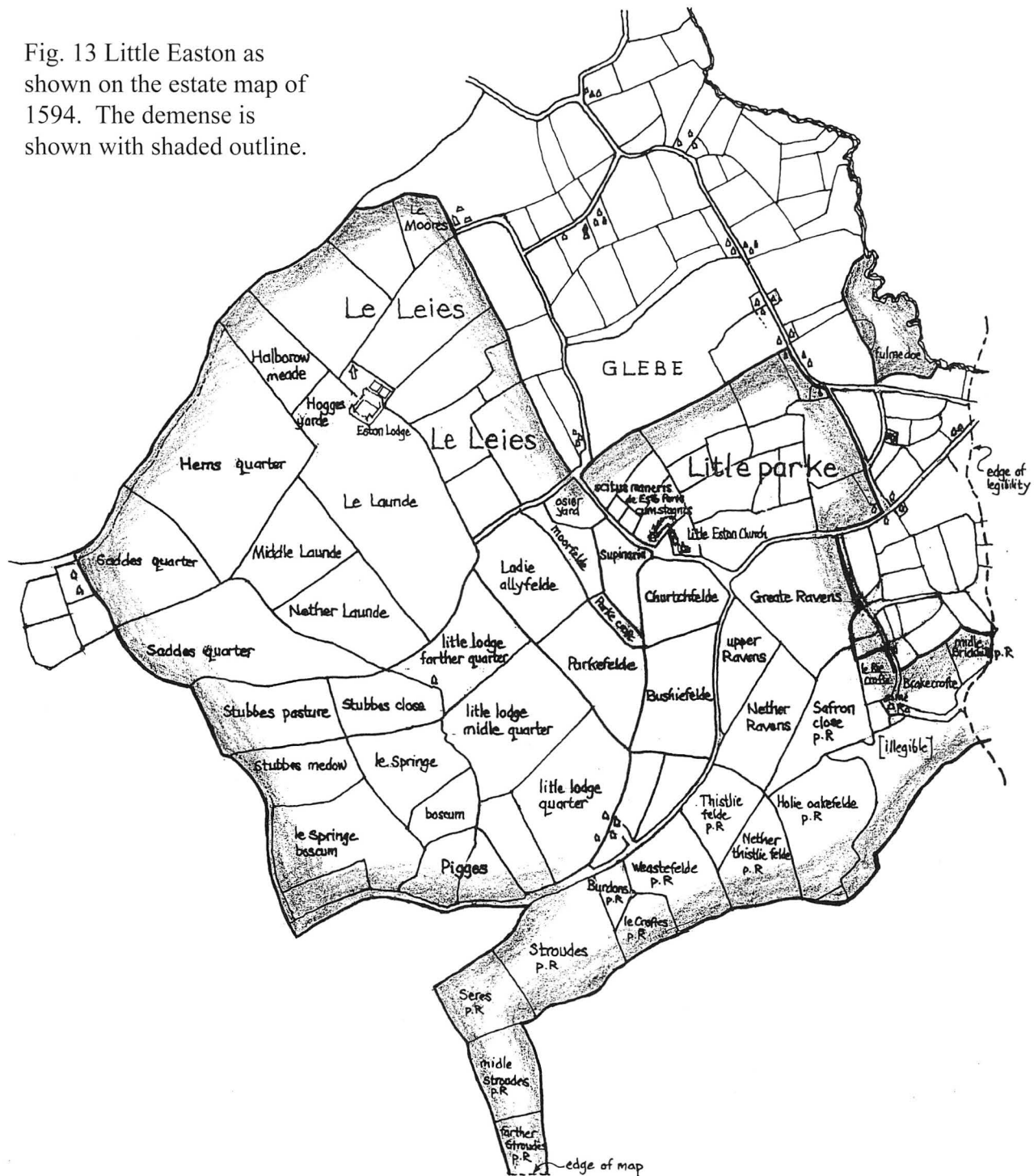
The condition of the map is good, but the durability of the dyes used for the inks has varied. The notations for the copyholders' lands has virtually disappeared, but the blue ink for the freeholders is legible, and the red for demesne land good and clear. This has provided the material for Fig. 11 showing the demesnes of the three manors, which could hardly have been more disparate in their evolution and formation. Each of these is considered below.

Tilty, with virtually the entire manor in demesne and farmed by a labour force housed at the curia (Tilty Grange) was serious Cistercian agribusiness, similar to the demesnes of Cressing Temple and Walthambury. Like them its fields were subsequently subdivided and leased out, and ultimately opened up again in the 1960s.

Little Easton, from 1365 until 1540 was a place of high status, a seat of the powerful Bouchier family. Fig. 12 shows the manor around 1300 with its Great Park lying on the high land of the Till plateau and its Little Park on pretty land, sloping down to the river and under direct view of the windows of the manor. The demesne arable lay in Le Leies, a single field of 107 acres, and some smaller fields based on the Curia at Little Easton Manor, and a tract of similar size to the south which is likely to have been farmed from a second centre at Ravens.

Fig. 13 shows the manor in 1594 with the Bouchier mansion, Easton Lodge (shortly to be replaced by Maynard's), set in the grassland of Le Launde and flanked by the little grove incongruously

Fig. 13 Little Easton as shown on the estate map of 1594. The demense is shown with shaded outline.



called Hogges Yarde - in all some 64 acres - while all else of the Great Park, with its many quarters, is now leased out as pasture. The Little Park is divided up into a dozen small closes. Le Leies is subdivided into nine fields. In the large tract based on Ravens, groups of fields - the three Stroudes, two Thistlies, several Brickcroftes (sadly in a damaged area of the map), and the Ravens (Greate, Upper and Nether) - indicate that these were earlier divisions, perhaps forming cropping blocks within the huge expanse farmed from Ravens. A surprising number of the field boundaries survive today, together with field names, indicating that these have remained practical divisions from a farming viewpoint. So again, we have a demesne that maintains its core layout and boundaries from the 13th century to the 21st.

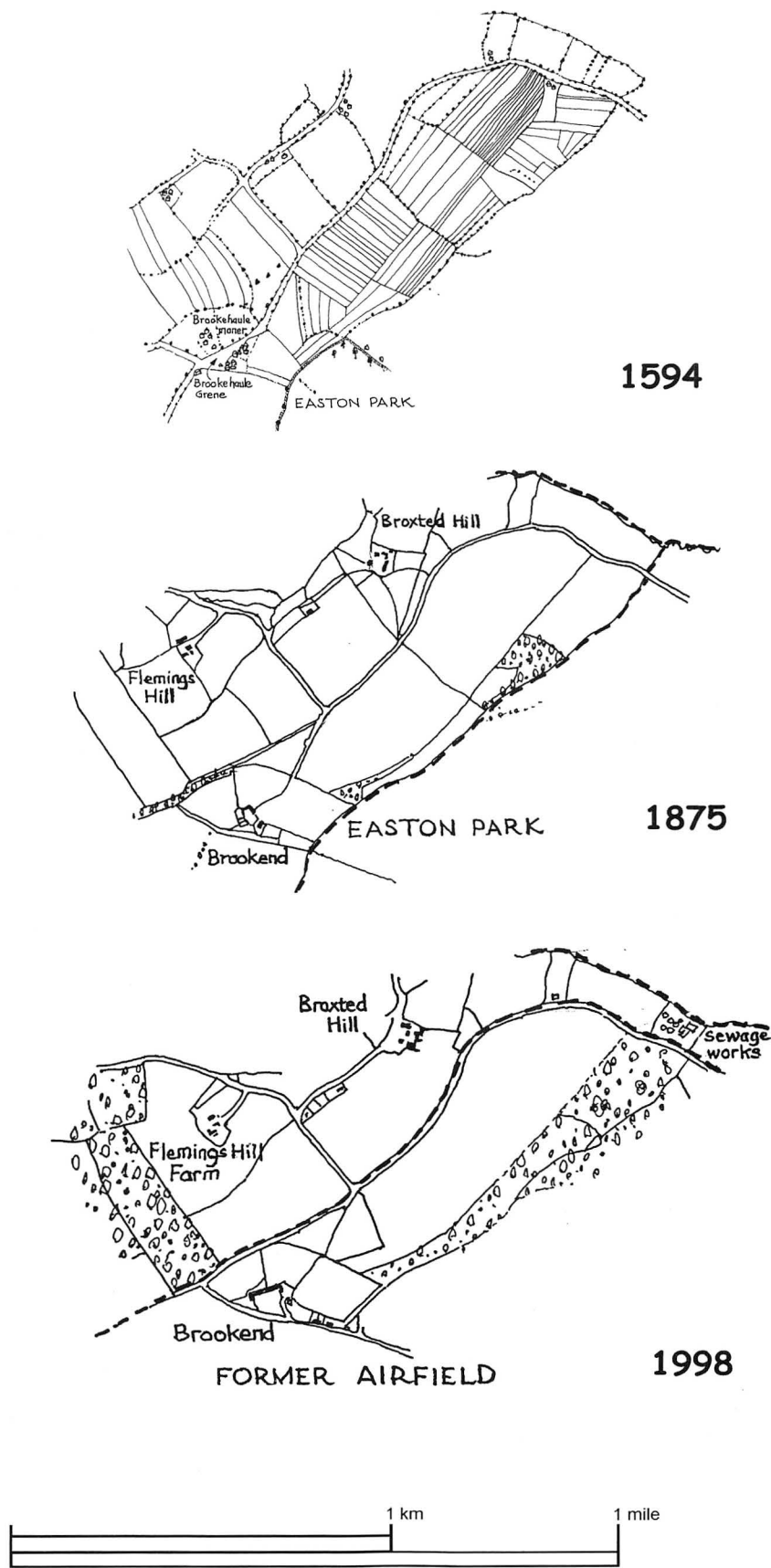


Fig. 14 Brookend, Broxted

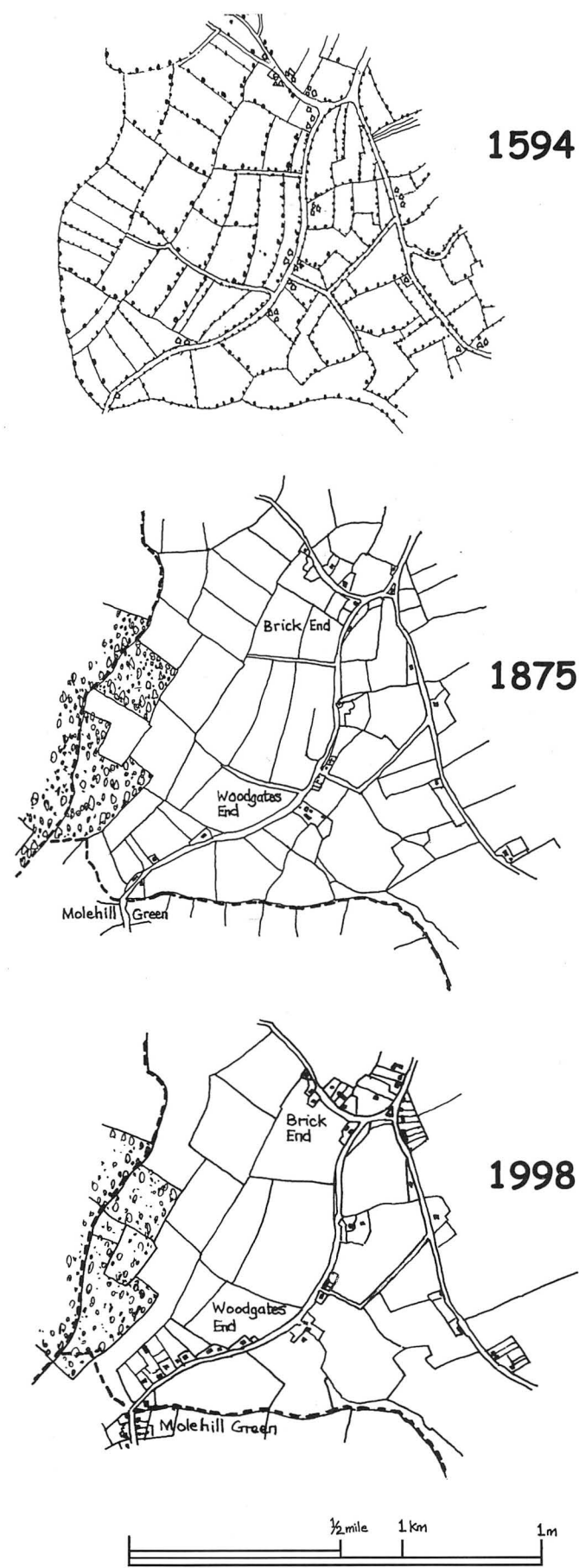


Fig. 15 Brick and Woodgate Ends, Broxted

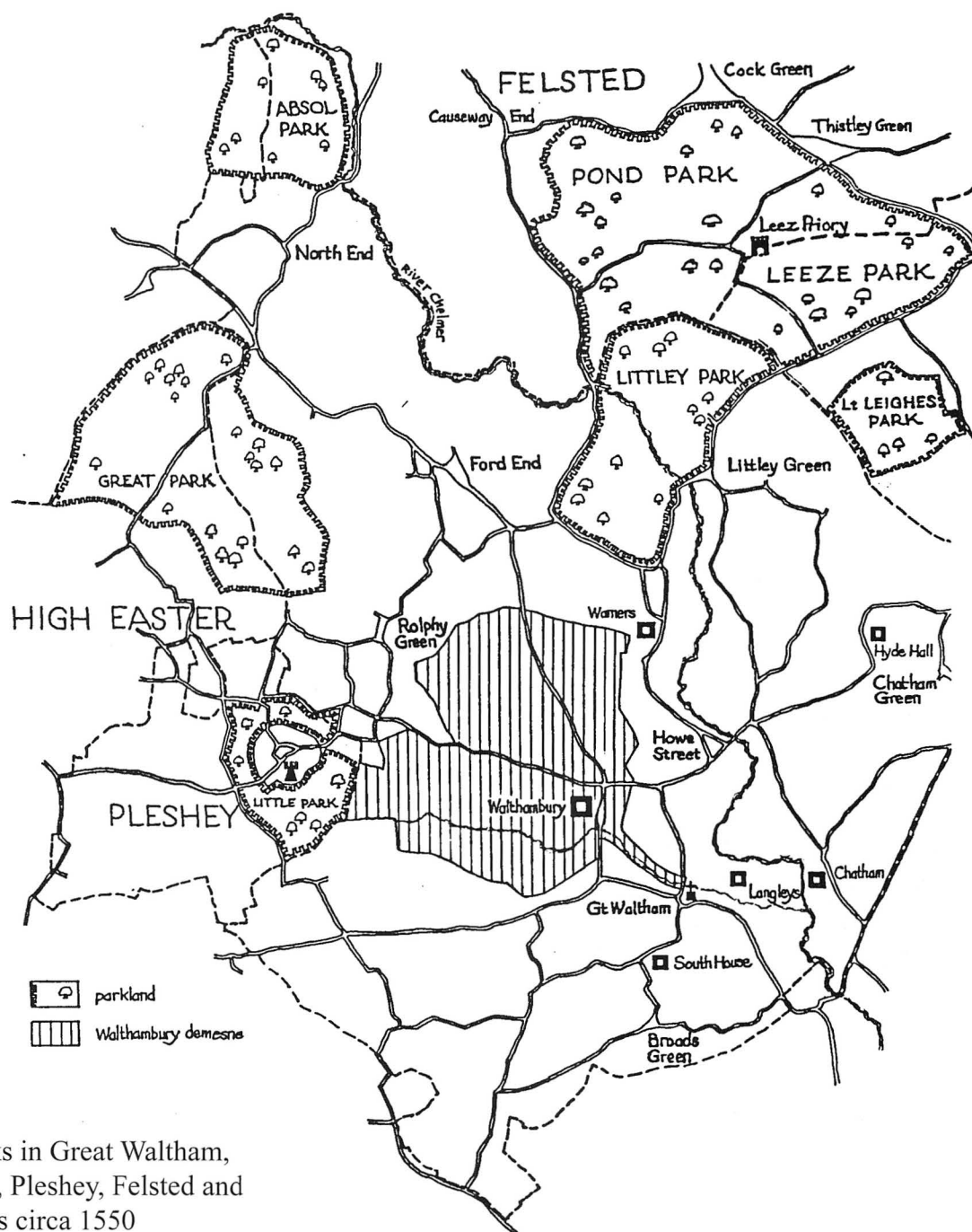


Fig. 16 Parks in Great Waltham, High Easter, Pleshey, Felsted and Little Leighs circa 1550

A very different record is evident in the “peasant” areas of Broxted. Manorial control appears to have been less pervasive here than in Little Easton and Tilty, and Broxted would seem more typical of its neighbouring manors, although it must be said that few generalisations are sustainable in this intriguing area for the study of historic landscapes. Fig. 11 shows a compact demesne home farm around Broxted Hall in 1594, although the parish church, for unknown historical reasons is more than half a mile away. A second demesne block lay to the south, and further away on the border of the manor adjacent to Little Easton is a fascinating area with an extensive display of strips based on Brookhall - later and now called Brook End.

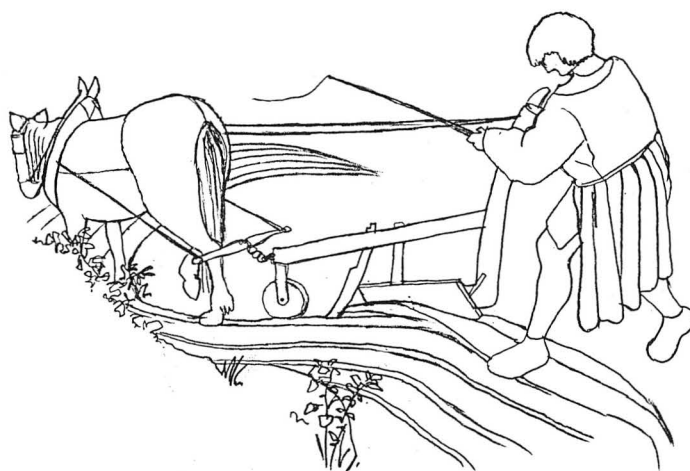
Fig. 14 shows Brook End in 1594 and the extent of demesne strips scattered in the fields suggests that this was a late clearance and colonization of the last remaining extent of waste carried out jointly by manor and tenants in the 13th century. It was probably a happy and profitable pooling of resources which lasted at least 200 years to be recorded on the map of 1594, but by the time of the First Edition OS 6-inch map the strips and farming pattern had vanished without trace, and we are reminded by this example that some of today's blander landscapes were once occupied by complex and interesting field patterns.

A similar vanished landscape lies around Brick and Woodgates Ends, Broxted (Fig. 15). The map of 1594 shows much of the area as former common-field with the strips now consolidated into hedged closes. There was no demesne in this outlying area of the manor, and it follows that the earlier clearance of "pasture for pigs" into arable common-fields and their subsequent enclosure into small "peasant" parcels was undertaken with minimum interference from the manor, provided that rents and customary taxes were paid.

These "peasant" small scale landscapes have gone, whereas the demesnes often survive, altered but still recognizable. This is the somewhat sad conclusion one may draw from these particular case studies.

3 Littley Park

Medieval deer parks were manorial status symbols and but also areas held in demesne for deer farming and the profitable management of woodland and wood-pasture. Other uses included warrens for coney (rabbits), imported by the Normans, and agistment - the letting of grazing land - increasingly an option as parks fell into decline. Generally parks were managed and overseen by the parker from a lodge, situated at the highest point and sometimes combined with a standing - a galleried building to observe the chase.



Ploughman from Pieter Bruegel's "Fall of Icarus", mid 16th century

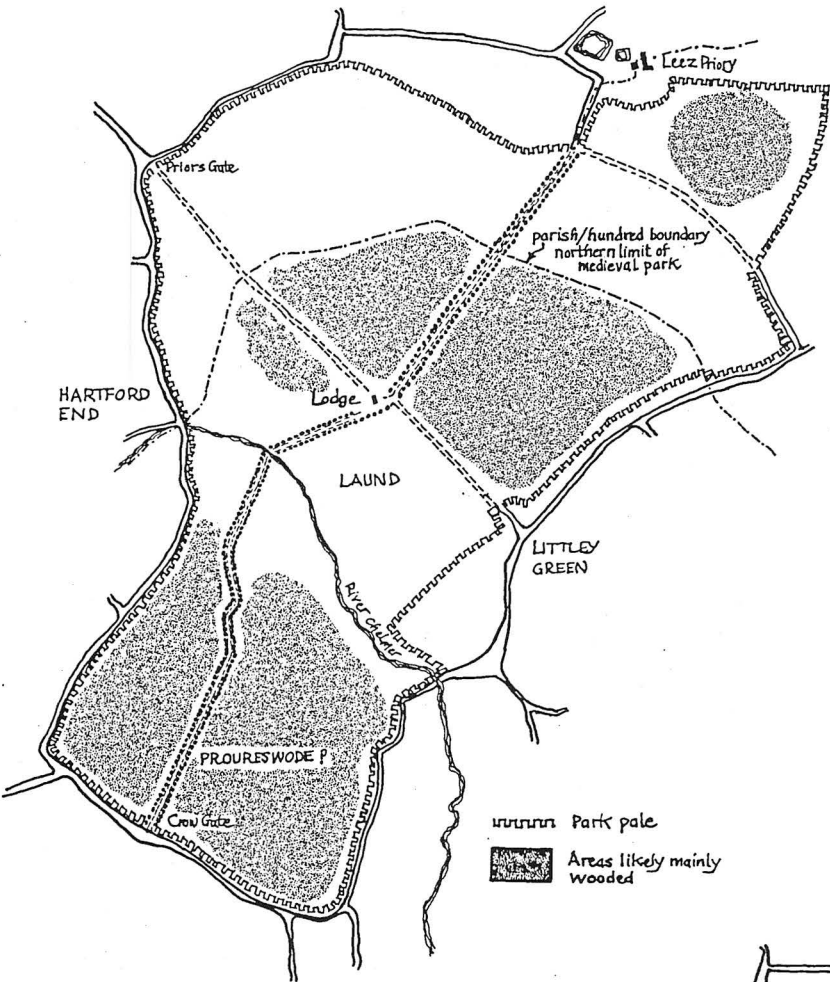


Fig. 17 Littleley Park in 1640

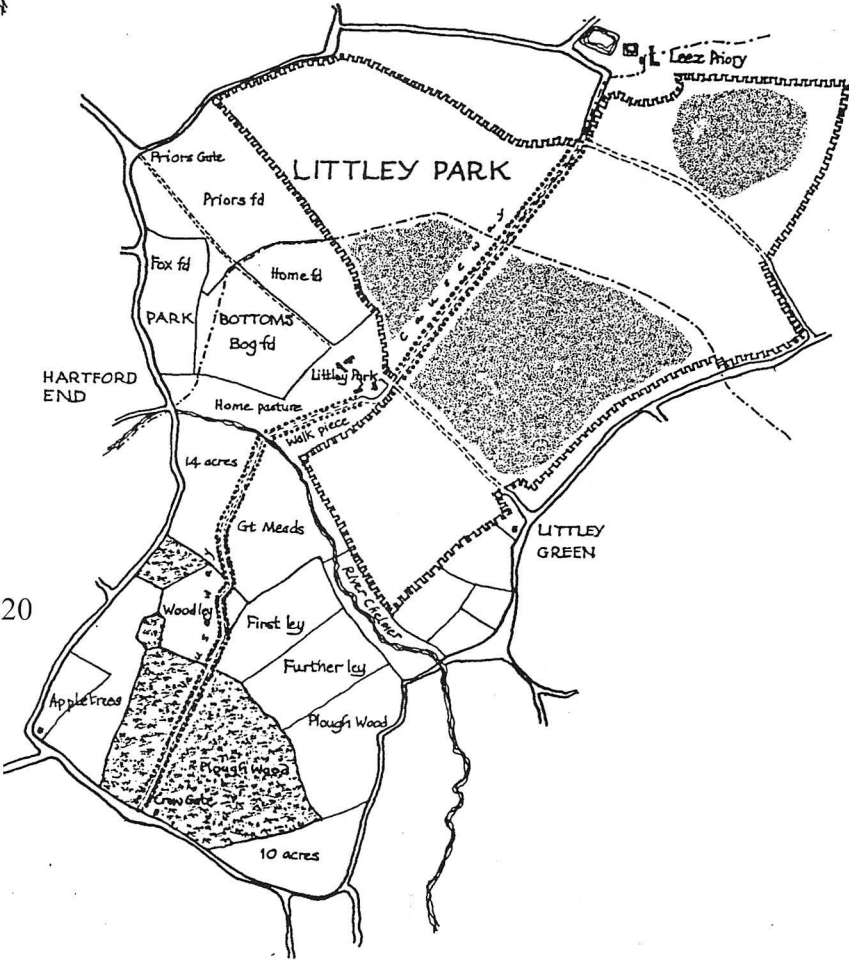


Fig. 18 Littleley Park in 1720

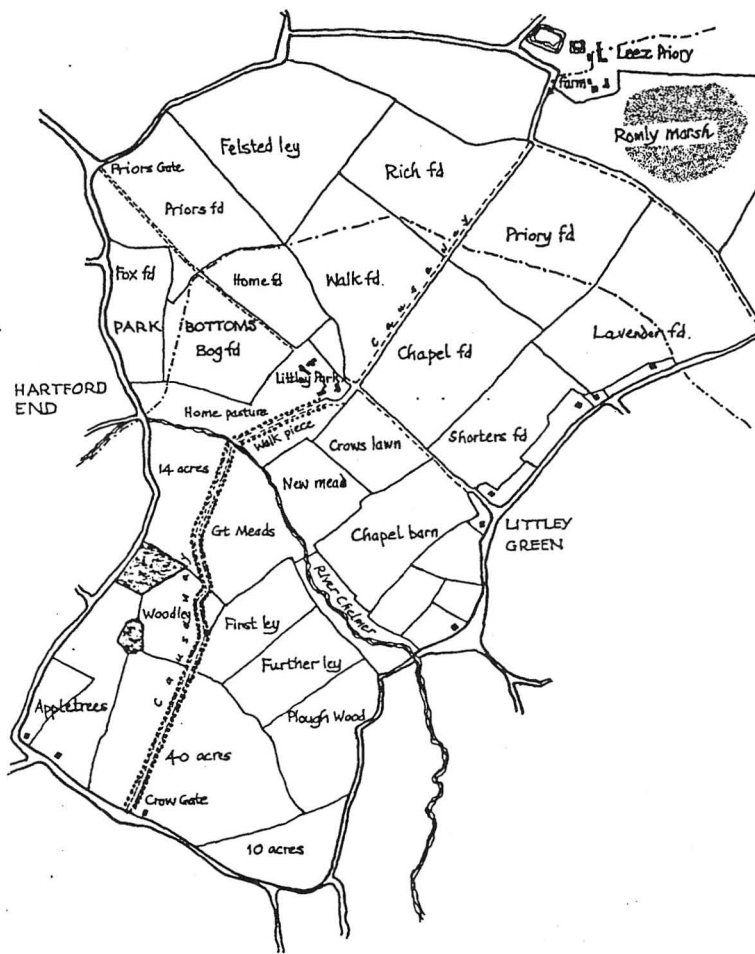


Fig. 19 Littleley Park in 1777

In the course of the Middle Ages we have evidence for 160 deer parks in Essex, which after Hertfordshire, is the highest number for any county, and there may well have been many more for which no documentary evidence survives. Consequently one often comes across the boundaries of former parks in the course of studying field systems. Characteristics are that adjoining boundaries abut but do not cross, and that parks roughly rectangular in plan often had rounded corners to effect a minor saving on the length of their enclosing pales, which were expensive to construct and maintain. Field names may include “park” or “lawn” - from “launde”, an open area of grassland - and there may be a “lodge” farm or field.

Littleley Park is of interest as we can trace the progress of both enlargement and the subsequent stages of disparking. There are several documentary references dating from the 13th century, when it belonged to the de Bohuns, lords of Great Waltham and Pleshey, and owners also of Absol Park and Pleshey Great and Little Parks. Except for Pleshey Little Park, all of these, together with Little Leighes Park, were to fall into the acquisitive hands of Richard Rich, rewards for his many, often morally dubious, services to Henry VIII and just a part of his vast list of estates in central Essex.

Rich decided to build his capital seat on the site of Leez Priory, and much of his mansion survives today. He extended Littleley Park northwards to the gates of the Priory over former farmland; the park now comprising 648 acres with a perimeter of about five miles. But this was not good enough for Rich in his lust for status and two further parks were created: Pond Park (413 acres) where the earthworks of a magnificent series of fish ponds are still visible, and Leeze Park of 325 acres. A huge park (1386 acres) now completely surrounded the mansion, suggesting to the visitor that it



Fig. 20 Parishes along the Warley - Horndon - Burstead Ridge

was sited in an ancient forest or chase (Fig. 16). Thus at a time when some other parks were preserved as a setting for a mansion, but the great majority were now becoming farmland or let out for pasture as at Easton, Rich was not only extending but creating new parks.

Maps of the county, published from the 1590s onwards, show parks which were then still active, and the three Leez parks appear on Ogilby and Morgan's Map of 1678. But the parks of Pleshey, Waltham and Little Leighs have gone, a part of a "mass extinction" over two centuries which left little more than a score surviving into the early 18th century.

Fig. 17 shows Littley Park in 1640 with a road termed the Causeway forming the approach to Leez Priory from the south. Formality has been given by avenue planting along it, probably influenced by the great avenue at New Hall, Boreham, planted in 1624 and probably the first axial avenue to a great house in Britain.

The Leez Priory Estate was sold off in 1723 and at some date before this, the southern and western areas of Littley Park were converted to farmland (Fig. 18). A farm, Littley Park, now stands on the site of the lodge and the former Proureswode is now Plough Wood. This information, together with the field names and layout is obtained from a surveyor's sketch map of 1753 headed "Underneath is Littly Park as inclosed before 1723. The dots describe the boundary as inclosed within pale and rail in 1753 and then fully stockt with deer". The map was prepared for the Governors of Guys Hospital who had just purchased the estate.

The Governors preferred rents to parkland and in 1768 Morant wrote that "They (the parks) are now dispark'd and converted into farms." Fig. 19 shows the park in 1777 since Chapman and André's Map of that year shows the southern section of the avenue still surviving. The new fields are as shown on the Tithe Map. Plough Wood has gone and the field replacing it called 40 acres, but its woodland origin remains apparent in the sinuous boundary.

In the course of the 18th century parks came back into fashion as the settings of country houses, generally laid out over farmland and like the architecture of the buildings, designed according to the fashion of the time. The pattern of planting shown on the early Ordnance Survey maps may sometimes provide clues to the field pattern the parkland displaced, or absorbed by retaining standard hedgerow trees. Hylands Park, Chelmsford, is an interesting example where the field boundaries shown on the Widford Tithe Map preserve their ghostly lines among the trees shown on the First Edition six-inch Ordnance Survey map.

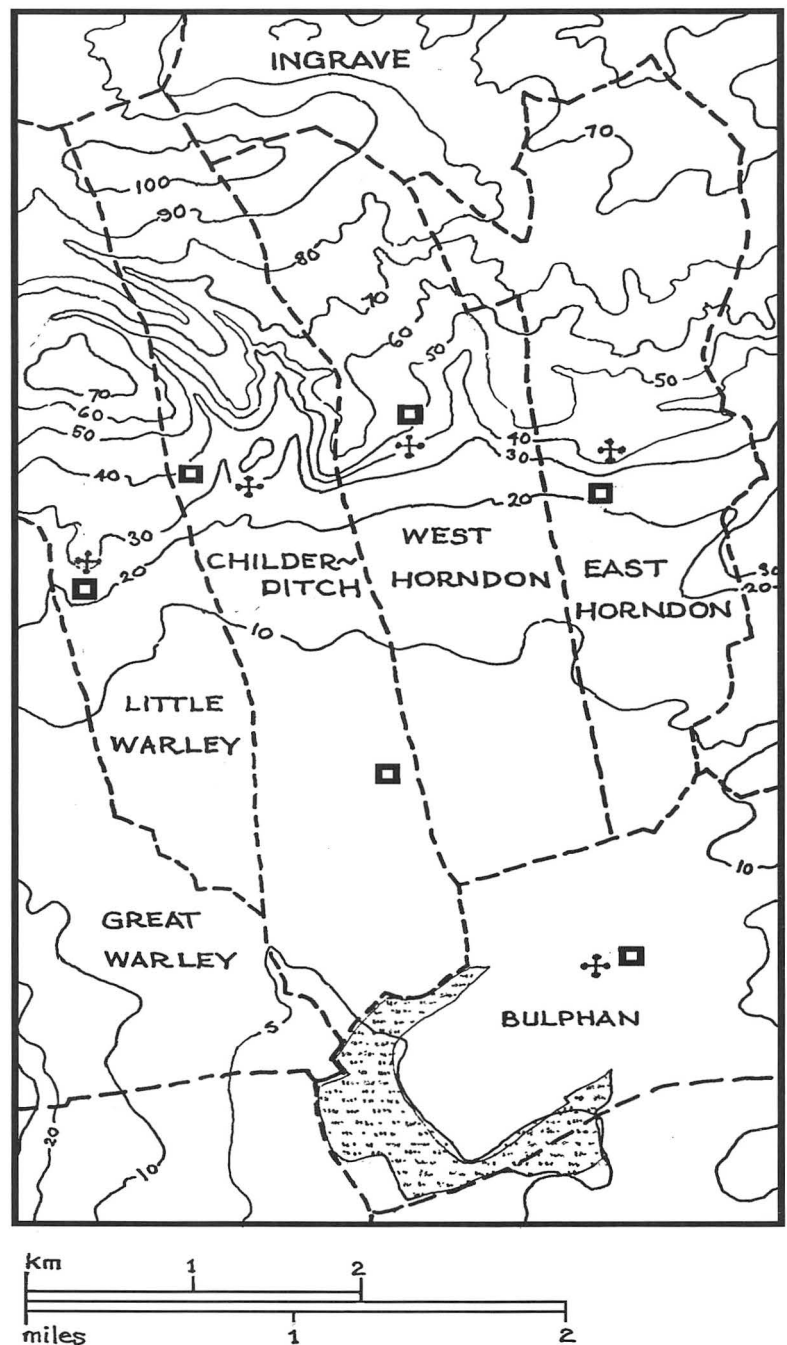


Fig. 21 Topography of the 'parallel parishes'

4 The Parallel Parishes

A long ridge marks the southern limits of the Wooded Hills, below which lies the South Essex Plain. The ridge is crossed by a series of narrow, parallel parishes on a roughly north/south axis whose boundaries and field systems merge into the rectilinear field patterns of the plain (Fig. 20). As we have seen, similar parallel dispositions occur in many other areas where at some distant time an overall authority could apportion the available resources - woodland, arable, meadow and pasture, fen and marsh - to each community. But this parallel, co-axial, development also resembles prehistoric field systems fashioned around seasonal droving routes between upland and lowland grazing areas - in this case wooded commons, fen and coastal marsh.

A Walker map of 1598 survives of the lands of Old Thorndon Hall and East Horndon (ERO D/DP P5; transcribed in Fig. 22); this assists a closer consideration of the parishes of East and West Horndon and Childerditch. Fig. 23 shows the area in the 1870s before the building of the London to Southend railway (1886) and the Southend Arterial Road in the 1930s. Comparison of these two maps show how stable the landscape pattern had remained over four centuries.

The earlier landscape history can be reconstructed in outline from the evidence available. The halls of the Saxon manors were sited where the slope of the ridge is dissected by small valleys and the natural drainage would be conducive to arable farming (Fig. 21). Churches were built near the

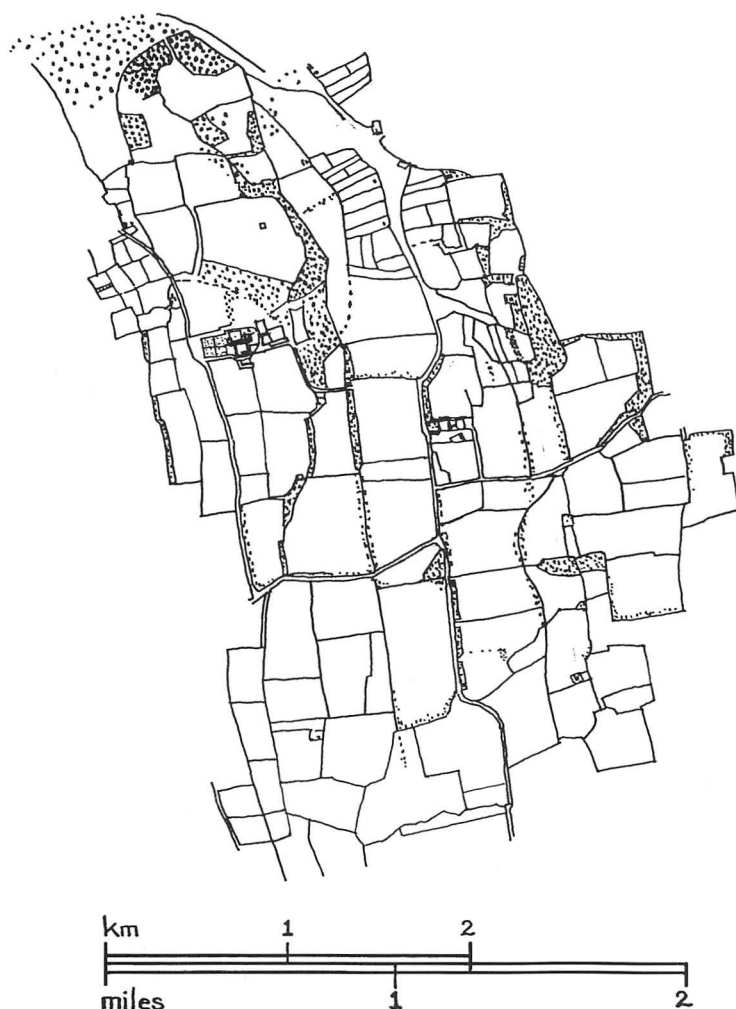


Fig. 22 Transcription of John Walker's map of 1598 showing Sir John Petre's estates of Thorndon (West Horndon) and East Horndon. The map shows the narrow woodlands known as "shaws" in south Essex.

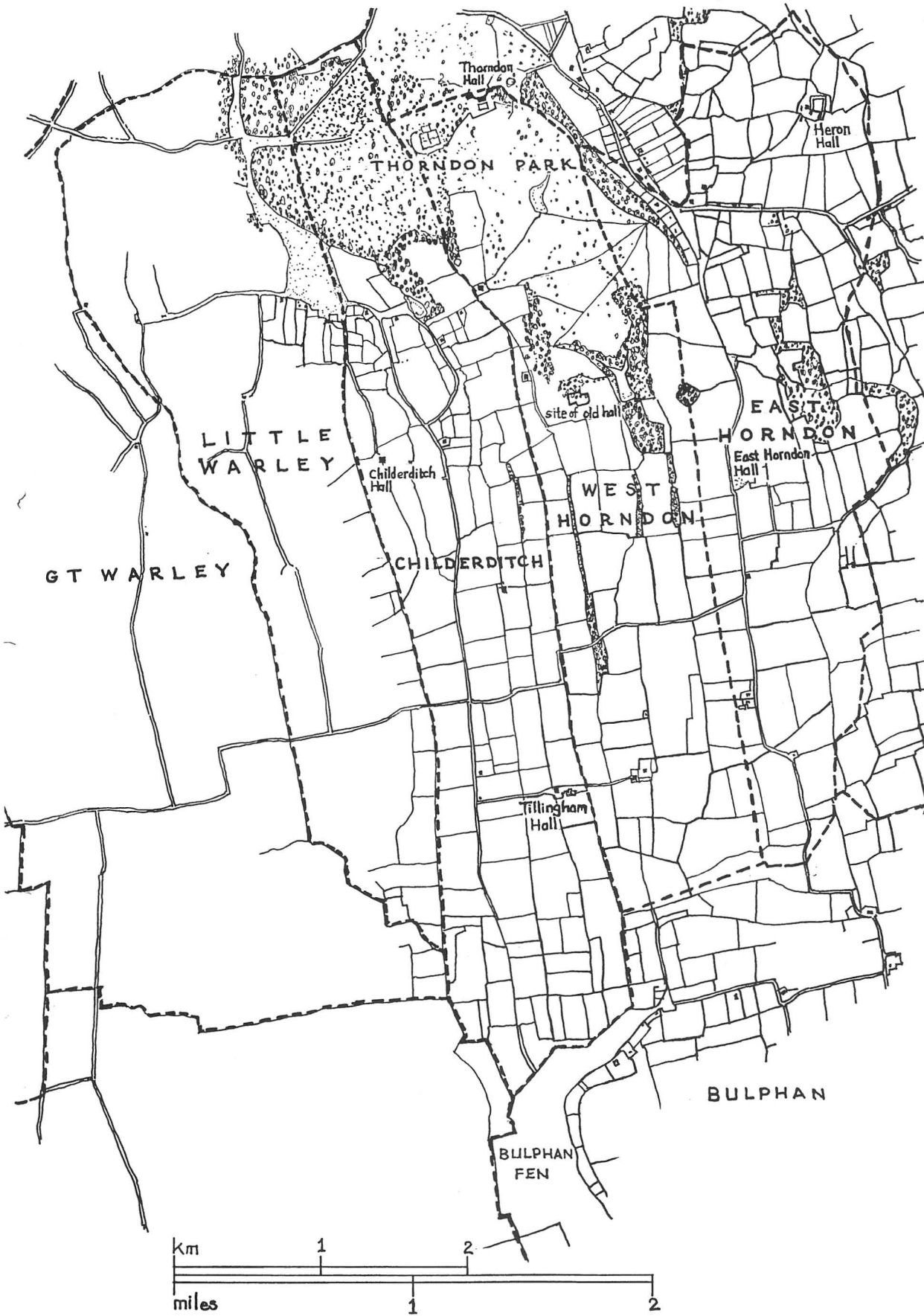


Fig. 23 The Horndons and Childerditch in the 1870s

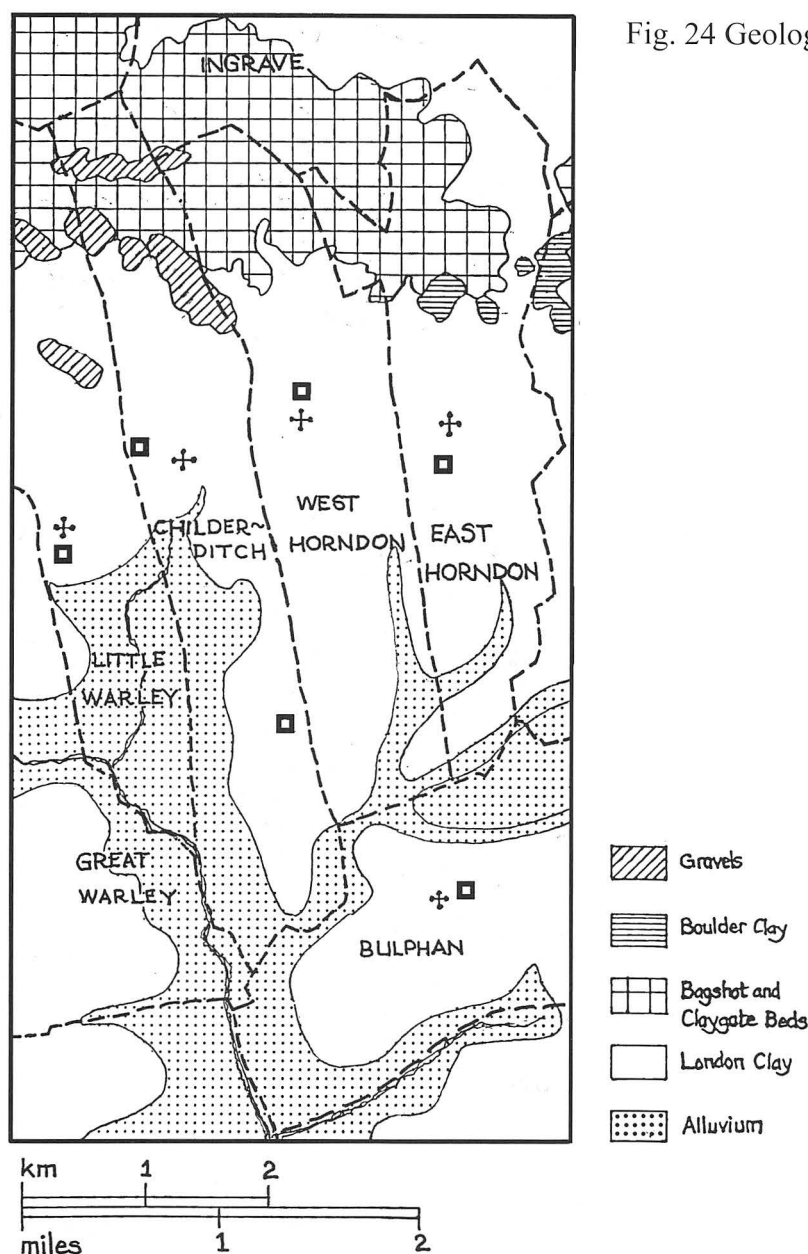
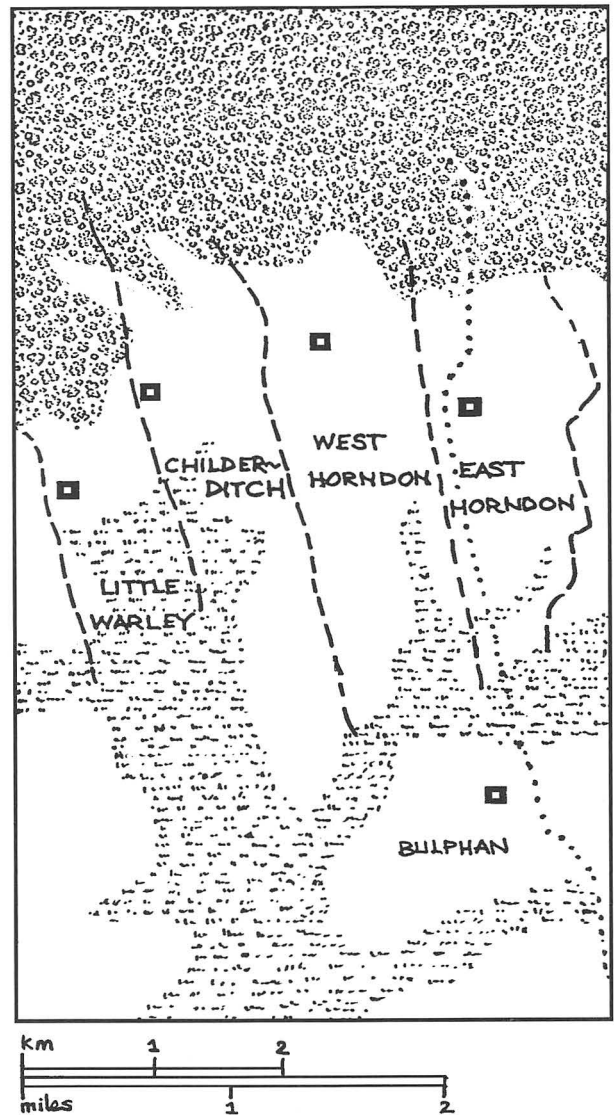


Fig. 24 Geology of the 'parallel parishes'

halls, and the parishes followed the boundaries of the manors, with that of Childerditch also including pre-Conquest Tillingham Hall. The allocation of land and the establishment of boundaries between the arable land of the manors is likely to have occurred between the 8th and 10th centuries AD - after recovery from the contraction of the post-Roman centuries, and before the later fission of a great Saxon estate.

The land to the north lay on the sands and gravels of the Bagshot and Claygate Beds, stony glacial outwash and heavy, ill-drained, London Clay. By the later Middle Ages, this land consisted of commons, woodlands, settlement beside a green as at Herongate, and extensive assarts such as the post-Conquest manor of Heron Hall in East Horndon. Heron and East Horndon had deer parks of several hundred acres, and West Horndon had two (oulde and new). These uses of land, mainly exclusive, would appear to have been superimposed on an earlier landscape of inter-commoned wood-pasture that had met the needs of a much smaller population.

Fig. 25 Suggested landscape about 900 AD. The later names are used and it is possible that the Warleys and Horndons were single manors at this date, dividing at some time before 1066 and each building its own status symbol - its proprietorial church.



To the south lay the flat land of heavy clays with the manors of Bulphan and Tillingham slightly elevated above tracts of fen which probably followed the alluvial deposits shown on Fig. 24. These it seems likely were originally inter-commoned, as were the coastal marshes. The fen was reclaimed for drained pasture by stages, with old fen edges discernible in the field patterns on Fig. 23, and by 1588 more or less reduced to the area still shown on maps as Bulphan Fen. Here, as to the north, the definition of manorial/parish boundaries seems to have been agreed by stages following changes of land use, clearance and drainage.

Fig. 25 shows the landscape as it may have been *circa* 900 AD. A drove trackway is suggested leading southwards to the coastal marshes where the manors of Childerditch and Horndon had grazing for sheep - holdings that suggest a survival of earlier ownership and control over a great tract of land. Seasonal movement of cattle and sheep from wooded commons to fen and coastal grazing marsh would have required droving routes and the dominance of these features in the landscape underlay the north/south co-axial pattern of field formation as fen and low-lying land were gradually drained and enclosed. Arable land would lie on the slopes of the ridge and small valleys close to the manorial centres. Otherwise, this was a pastoral landscape with a low population density, typical of the London Clays of the South Essex Plain and the Dengie Peninsula.

As suggested earlier, it is likely that this land formed part of a great estate of the Early Saxon period, itself part of a pattern of landholding by a powerful elite which included the royal manor of Barking and whose authority stretched across south Essex. Sub-division to thegns in the later Saxon period gave each new lord of the manor a share of the land and of the resources of woodland, marsh and fen. This fits with the creation at this time of new landscapes of feudal decentralization - each new manor, with its tenant farmers, being self-sufficient in resources - a process of fission, leading to the disappearance of the earlier great estates in the course of the late Saxon period.

While one may speculate that these earlier estates may have had their origin in Roman times, the form of the man-made landscape is likely to be very much older. Landscapes based on parallel droveways and dating from the early Bronze Age have, as we have seen, been found in Fenland, and large areas of land with trackways and field systems based on the seasonal movement of herds and flocks have been identified in East Anglia, which may have their origin in prehistory. The Parallel Parishes of south Essex were certainly fully settled and farmed in Roman times.

During the post-Roman period of population decline and the contraction of land use, earlier field boundaries are likely to have survived under scrub and rough grazing and droveways continued in use. It may seem reasonable to see the establishment of the manors and their subsequent expansion as the reclamation of an earlier landscape.

THE SCOPE FOR RESEARCH

The case studies we have looked at show something of the variety in the historic landscape we may find in Essex. As we have noted earlier, Essex, together with the other coastal counties of south-east England, was enclosed early with the former common-fields giving way to small fields or closes, individually owned or rented. It is often termed "ancient" countryside or "wooded" - a parallel with the French "bocage", the bosky landscape of lower Normandy, in contrast to "champagne", the open landscape of much of northern France.

The historic "champion" landscapes of the English Midlands had much in common with the French "champagne" until their enclosure generally by act of parliament in the 18th and 19th centuries. They have been much researched, and for those with the good fortune to be taught social history at school, they are likely to be shown as the "model" for the medieval parish. But this model has limited value for Essex, where the variety of historic landscape may justly be described as bewildering - every parish seems to have its own quirks and particular history - and it seems that the areas so far studied form only a beginning, and the scope for individual research and discovery is enormous.

While field systems are the building blocks in the study of the landscape, they should be approached within the unit of the parish - the social, economic and administrative unit which under the Tudor monarchs came largely to supersede the manor. Even when it is an estate or farm that is studied, it is to its parish that reference will need to be made in seeking information on records, history and maps. Landscape study will follow two main courses; the first, best described as "deskwork", will mostly be followed at the Essex Record Office in Chelmsford (ERO), or its outposts in Colchester and Southend; the second, "fieldwork", will be on site seeing for oneself what may not be evident in maps and records, in particular the gauging of the rough age of field boundaries from their tree and shrub content.

Deskwork

The first sources of information to be approached are the histories, and first and foremost of these is "The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex" by the Rev Philip Morant, published in two volumes in 1768. Morant assiduously assembled all the information available at the time from both national and local records on a parish by parish basis, grouped within the hundreds of Essex. Next, the "Victoria County History of Essex" should be consulted to check whether your parish has yet been included, but if not, Vol. I contains Horace Round's translation, interpretation and analysis of the Essex Domesday Book (EDB), which includes his identification of the small manors and estates of 1066, although the actual sites of many remain elusive. EDB is the foundation of local history, and one should also consult the Phillimore edition of 1983 and the map gazetteer in W. R. Powell's "Essex in Domesday Book" (ERO, 1990). There have been many parish histories written, and some may have information on the fields of the parish. Copies of these, together with theses which may be relevant, are likely to be found in the ERO.

The second source of information is cartographic, and as we have seen in the case of Little Easton, Broxted and Tilty, the evidence for the early landscape history of these parishes comes from an estate map of 1594 which by good fortune has survived. From the late 16th century onwards, numerous estate maps were commissioned, which might range in the size of the area depicted from a small farm or just a few fields, to the extent of a whole parish. Many of these maps are held by the ERO, together with photographs of those where the originals are held elsewhere. By the mid-19th century the Ordnance Survey was seriously in business and ready to publish the superb First Edition six inch to the mile maps - for the student of landscape the finest maps yet made, with a quality of detail which shows every hedgerow and parkland tree. Not surprisingly, the availability of the OS rendered the commission of estate maps unnecessary.

An early point of reference is the series of sheets comprising John Chapman and Peter André's "Map of Essex" published in 1777. These depict roads, greens, farmsteads and crofts, and are useful in showing many of the remaining commons which would shortly be enclosed. Parks and the grounds of country houses are generally depicted accurately, but woodlands are not and their presence on the maps should be interpreted as indicative only. This deficiency was put right on the draught one inch maps prepared by the OS at the beginning of the 19th century under the threat of French invasion. The ERO holds copies of these maps, and as with the "Map of Essex" there is a caveat: the patterns of fields sketched in are there to indicate an enclosed farmed landscape, not actual fields.

Tithe Award maps, drawn on a parish basis following the Tithe Act of 1836, cover almost the whole of Essex. The award, accompanying the map, lists the owner and tenant of each parcel of land, its use and its rental value. Except for the few parishes which have an early estate map of high quality, the Tithe Awards and Maps are the most valuable sources of information to hand on the historic farmed landscape. There is nothing comparable for today's countryside. There is also the bonus that the Society's own Essex Place Names Project is producing booklets for each parish with the Tithe parcels and names, and information from other maps which may be available for the particular parish. The booklets can be obtained from the ERO bookshop.

Another category of map are those accompanying enclosure awards, and these are of particular

value in the north-east corner of Essex where large scale common-fields survived. Unfortunately the maps only show the landscape post enclosure, Langley being the exception in having both "before and after" maps.

A third source of information is the documentary record listed under parishes at the ERO. This may include court rolls which have survived - the record of decisions of manor courts which often involved land tenure - surveys and other material which may be relevant to field systems.

Fourthly, there is the Essex Heritage Conservation Record (EHCR), held and maintained in County Hall by the Essex County Council - Heritage Conservation Branch. This records on a mapped basis all archaeological information, which may range from stray finds to complex multi-period sites that have seen extensive excavation. It also holds the parish lists of Historic Buildings, and the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. Field systems may overlies earlier sites or contain features such as moats which are recorded in the EHCR and conversely, study in the field may reveal previously unknown features which should be recorded. The E.C.C. Information Resource Centre also holds vertical aerial photographic cover of the county printed at 1:10,000 scale.

Fieldwork

The information gathered should allow certain conclusions to be drawn. As a rough rule, the later field boundaries will abut but not cross the older boundaries which may be found to define former land uses, for example common-fields, deer parks converted to farmland, commons and heaths now enclosed, or tracts of woodland now cleared. Later boundaries, such as those which subdivided the huge demesne fields at Cressing Temple, were particularly prone to removal in the post-war period when fields were enlarged. Boundaries dating from the late Middle Ages onwards are generally straight, whereas older boundaries tend to be sinuous, particularly where they reflect early enclosure from woodland.

Certain shapes may be indicative such as the rounded corners favoured by the creators of medieval deer parks, and the "z" kinks which indicate divisions in the lengths of arable strips in a former common-field.

With this information assembled, the actual boundaries should now be studied and compared in the field. Over most of Essex, field boundaries consist of a ditch dug for drainage with a hedge growing on the owner's side of the ditch. Generally the upcast from ditch maintenance was spread over the land, and if a bank occurs it is unusual and may mark a former feature such as a woodland boundary. However, on the light, well-drained soils that cover parts of north-east Essex banks may occur with a hedge but no ditch. Changes of level should be noted: over time, the plough soil on a sloping field will gradually shift downhill to create a raised level on a bank along the field boundary at the lower end. This is termed a "lynchet". At the upper end of the field, the displacement of soil may also form a bank, in this case termed a "negative lynchet". Both forms of lynchet are indicative of long establishment, although the height of the bank relates directly to slope and soil type; on light sandy soils they can be spectacular, such as those that can be seen as one leaves Wethersfield on the Heddingham road.

Hedges are likely to have been planted from the earliest times wherever stock was kept. In enclosure awards, the planting and establishment of quickset (hawthorn) hedges was usually a requirement,

except in areas of natural stone. Some two centuries earlier, the Essex farmer-poet Thomas Tusser, gave advice on hedge planting: “The berries of hawthorne, acrones, ashkeys, mixed and then wrought up in a rope of straw will serve . . . make a trench at the top of the ditch and lay in some fat soil and then lay the rope all along and cover it with good soile . . . keepe cattle from bruising them, and cut the young springs by the earth, so they will branch and grow thicke”.

Tusser specified three species and doubtless others would subsequently blow in and establish themselves to give a date agreeing with “Hooper’s rule” which we have seen earlier applied to a Bocking estate, and works as follows. To find the approximate age of the hedge, measure a thirty yard length and count the number of trees and woody shrubs within it. Repeat this several times (if the overall length permits) and take the average number, which will give an indication of the age of the hedge in centuries. The method appears to work well on the soils of the Chalk Uplands and the chalky boulder clays of the Essex Till, but there are several reservations that should be taken into account.

First, the number of species that will grow on a particular soil type is limited, and even the most tolerant soil is unlikely to support more than an average of twelve. So even if a hedge is prehistoric in origin, it will not appear of an age greater than late Saxon.

Secondly, on light, sandy, acid soils relatively fewer species will flourish compared with fertile loams with a lime content, and the method is unreliable in these areas.

Thirdly, elm species which spread by suckering may colonise a length of hedgerow where they have at some time been introduced, and suppress other species. While this a factor to be noted, it will not invalidate a count provided that there are several other sample counts to counteract it. More seriously, elm dominates the London Clays of south Essex and the Dengie and the gravels of the Thames Terraces. Why this should be so is not known, although theories have been put forward, but for our purposes the method is generally invalid in these areas.

Given these caveats, however, hedge species can provide useful local insights in addition to their overall counts and dating. The presence of bullace or cherryplum is likely to indicate the presence of a former cottage, and lime, hornbeam and the woodland thorn tend to be found in hedges that were formed in the course of woodland clearance, or lie near ancient woods. Pollards should be noted, both for their intrinsic interest and as survivors of a traditional practice which reserved timber trees as the property of the landlord, but allowed the tenant the underwood arising from coppicing or trimming the hedge. Pollards were a compromise, the bole belonging to the landlord and the branches to the tenant.

It is always good practice to first seek the agreement of the farmer on whose land the hedges lie, not least because most are unlikely to follow footpaths and consent is needed. Personally I have found that many farmers are interested in the history of their land and will be welcoming.

The resulting synthesis of the deskwork and fieldwork may turn out to be a rewarding piece of work adding to our knowledge of the Essex landscape, and more particularly, to the local history of the parish concerned. A good deal is known about the historic buildings of most parishes, but so far relatively little research has been done on their settings and making sense of how they evolved. There is boundless scope for individual research.

GLOSSARY

Abbreviations

AF	Anglo-French
L	medieval Latin
ME	middle English (1200-1500)
OE	old English
OF	old French
ON	old Norse

Terms

CLOSE (ME and OF “clos”): enclosure; fenced or hedged piece of land.

CO-ARATION: co-operative tillage. The combination of resources - draught animals, ploughs and labour - by peasant farmers, generally resulting in COMMON- FIELDS (see below). In Scotland this system was known as RUNRIG, and in Ireland, RUNDALÉ.

CO-AXIAL: roughly parallel alignment of droveways and continuous field boundaries in one direction. Intermediate divisions forming a ladder pattern.

CROFT (OE “croft”): also CROAT, CROUD, CROWD, a small piece of land, frequently attached to a house and almost invariably enclosed.

DEMESNE (OF “demeine”): manorial land held exclusively by lord. Either leased out or farmed by the lord himself, usually by paying wages or by labour services or boon work.

FIELD (OE “feld”): the meaning has changed during the twelve hundred years of its recorded existence in English. It was first used to describe areas cleared of trees for farming and is evident in many placenames. It came to describe the main divisions of the common arable, the “great fields” in which the tenants of the manor held their individual strips, pooling their resources (ploughs and oxen) to cultivate both their own land and the lord’s demesne. These fields are sometimes termed “open-fields”, but COMMON-FIELDS is preferable as the management was agreed by the village assembly or the manorial court. The great fields characteristic of the Midlands occurred in Cambridgeshire, but were only found in the adjacent area of Essex - the north-west corner of the county. Elsewhere in Essex the common-fields were very much smaller and based on hamlets (greens, tyes and ends) rather than a village.

Both common-fields and demesne lands were often divided into SHOTS or FURLONGS with their own name (see below); those in the common-fields were then further subdivided into strips or plots held by individual tenants.

From the 17th century “field” has served to denote any tract or enclosed area of farming land.

GLEBE (ME from L “gleba”): portion of land going with clergyman’s benefice.

HIDE (OE “hid”): originally an amount of land for the support of one free family and its dependants; the area estimated at 120 acres of arable. By 1066, it appears to have become a fiscal measurement, and something of a minefield for the unwary.

MANOR (OF “manoir”, L “manere”, to stay): a territorial unit that was originally held by feudal tenure, by a landlord who was not necessarily noble, and who himself was a tenant either of the Crown or of a mesne (OF “mesne”, middle) lord who held land directly of the Crown. In the Middle Ages the manor was the fiscal and economic unit, which included the demesne (see above) and the rest of the land which was farmed by tenants or used as common pasture and waste. In the Essex Domesday Book, all holdings of whatever size were deemed to be manors.

PARISH (L “paroecia”): following the conversion of Essex, minster parishes were established with boundaries probably coterminous with the huge secular estates of that time. Due to their wealth, the minsters suffered in the Danish invasions. From the later 9th century, many secular lords established their own churches beside the manor house - a church was a status symbol. Small estates without churches associated with larger ones that had, thus establishing the unit of the parish, whose boundary followed the perimeter of the group. There are commonly two or three Domesday Book manors per parish in Essex. Under the Tudors, the parish superseded the manor as the unit of local government.

PURPRESTURE (OF “prehendere”): a private enclosure upon a public highway, etc.

RIDGE-AND-FURROW: a strip of land “ideally” 220 yards long by 11 wide (a furlong by 2 perches). This was ploughed concentrically inwards, leading the land to rise along the centre of the strip, which is often called a SELION (a ridge of land between two furrows, OF “seillon”, furrow). Ridge-and-furrow is plentiful in midland England where land has remained unploughed since enclosure, but very rare in Essex.

SEVERALTY (ME from AF “severalte”): individual or unshared tenure.

SHOT: the strips, or selions, were aggregated into a FURLONG (OE “furh”, furrow, “lang”, long) or SHOT. The “ideal” shot would be a square furlong (220 yards square) or 20 selions, but in practice the shapes and sizes would vary, being fitted to the lie of the land and constraints such as water-courses. “Shot” appears quite often in Essex field names, particularly on former demesne land.

TOFT (OE from ON “topt”): a homestead with right of common; land once occupied by one.

TOWNSHIP (OE “tunsceip”): a distinct area of settlement smaller than the parish. The term occurs elsewhere in England (“townland” in Ireland), but is unknown in Essex.

VIRGATE (L “virgata”): in Essex generally 30 acres.

RECOMMENDED READING

Aston, M “Interpreting the Landscape - Landscape Archaeology and Local History”, Routledge, 1985

Hoskins, WG “The Making of the English Landscape”, Hodder and Stoughton, 1955
The third edition, 1985, was updated by C Taylor with the author’s approval

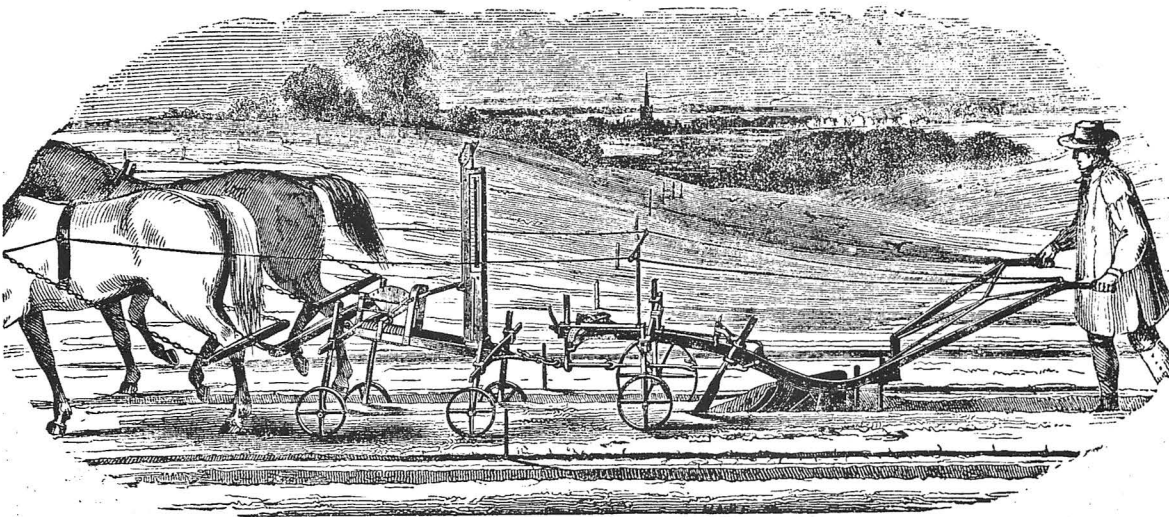
Hunter, J “The Essex Landscape - a Study of its Form and History”, Essex Record Office, 1999

Pitchforth, H “A Hidden Countryside - Discovering ancient tracks, fields and hedges. Based on a study of Witham in Essex”, 2001. Helen Pitchforth, 10 Avenue Road, Witham, CM7 9BD

Pryor, F “Farmers in Prehistoric in Prehistoric Britain”, Tempus, 1998

Rackham, O “The History of the Countryside”, Phoenix Giant, 1986

Strachan, D “Essex from the Air - Archaeology and history from aerial photographs”, Essex County Council, 1998



From an 1850 catalogue by Bentalls of Maldon, a leading firm producing agricultural machinery. The engraving shows a dynamometer (a device for measuring the draught of a plough), coupled between the horse and the plough.

