

# Villages and their Territories Part I

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## Introduction

Over the past 25 years it has been one of the great achievements of Leicestershire and Rutland fieldworkers to reveal that behind the medieval village lay a dispersed pattern of early Saxon farmsteads and hamlets (Liddle 1994; Bowman 1996). This overturning of the older view (e.g. Hoskins 1957b) that the origins of our villages lay in a 'pioneering' landscape of the early post-Roman centuries has led to a new set of questions concerning their creation. The purpose of this paper is to stand back somewhat from our sherd distributions to review some of the institutional and natural influences that helped to mould the early medieval village and its territory. Any researcher pondering the landscape implications of their finds must be struck by the importance of boundaries to medieval people. In a way quite unlike our present time, local boundaries were well known because they were such a vital part of everyday life, delimiting economic, legal and ecclesiastical jurisdictions. Central to our present theme are the overlapping patterns of authority, property and tenorial arrangements that defined rights to the partitioning of the countryside into commons, fields and meadows.

## The Village Territory and its People

Even after its appearance as the focus of settlement, the village has never been a timeless entity; its 'site' is a place of constant movement and change as old house sites are abandoned and new ones created, and this is as much a fact in the time after nucleation as in a period of shifting dispersed farmsteads. For the peasant farmer, the boundaries of their arable fields, woods and pastures have always been the most significant ones, and it is now usual for discussion of territorial divisions to focus on the 'township' rather than the ancient parish (Winchester 1997). But it is not at all clear that a carrying back of the term 'township' to embrace all sub-parochial land units is appropriate in an early medieval and pre-Conquest context. Notwithstanding the fact that as a term of local government, it has never applied to the whole country, the English word 'township' (OE *tun-scipe*) is the equivalent of the Latin *villata* meaning the 'community of a vill' (Reynolds 1984, 103-4). A vill was not a unit of settlement but an area of public administration and it was the community of the vill, headed by the vill-reeve (*tungerefa*), which was taxed or held to account. There is still much to be learnt about the pre-Conquest character of the vill, which may well have been the equivalent of the late Saxon 'tithing' (Williams 1999, 89). We do know that vills were sometimes combined for meeting public obligations, as represented by a 1280 list of Leicestershire 'complete

vills' (*villa integra*), although these may have no deeper significance, and the earlier institution of the small hundred (Nichols 1815, xlvi; Slade 1956). But the basic administrative unit remained the vill or *tun*, a land unit that could confusingly embrace a number of discrete hamlets whose inhabitants shared public burdens as a composite part of the community of the 'whole' vill.

## The 'tunscape' and the 'geld'

It is worthwhile to rehearse what we know about the structure of a village territory as it appears to us in the light of the 12th century, before which almost everything that can be said about 'neighbourhood communities' is speculative (Reynolds 1984, 121, 138). Each community consisted of a core cluster of house and cottage farm tenements standing in the midst of its territory (Fig. 1). In this world, the possession of a 'house' meant more than a mere dwelling – each tenement comprising the house plot (*messuage*) along with attached rights to arable, meadow and the miscellaneous resources of common 'waste' (Rösener 1992, 172). Thus the 'house' granted its occupier a place in the 'community of shareholders' amongst which the resources of a village territory were divided. As an institutional source of communal rights, the 'house' was a deeply rooted one surviving until the eve of enclosure when they could still be called 'ancient messuages or common-right houses' long after their appurtenant arable land had been sold off (Nichols 1804, 731).

The institutional significance of the 'house' tenement is demonstrated by the way in which vill-based fiscal assessments relate to actual farming units. In Leicestershire, the standard farm holding was measured as a fraction of a *carucate*, the duodecimal unit of taxation recorded in Domesday Book and the c.1130 Leicestershire Survey (Morgan 1979; Slade 1956), namely, the *virgate* representing the English yardland. These standard farm units were not mere accounting abstractions for fiscal purposes – they related to real measured peasant holdings. Thus the close link observed between the number of yardlands in a township and the *carucates* of Domesday Book now seems unassailable (Bowman 1996, 134-6). Even where a tax/yardland ratio is less obvious, a standard duodecimal or octagonal holding framework is evident and the commonplace totals 96, 48, 32, and 24 yardlands cannot be accounted for by organic growth. Indeed, the commonplace repetition of these numbers points to a relationship with units of government for the apportioning of public obligations. The conclusion is that, by and large, the regular tax liability cast upon vills fell upon the peasant geld-payers to be distributed amongst standard yardland holdings on a *pro rata* basis.

Before the mid-12th century no clear distinction was

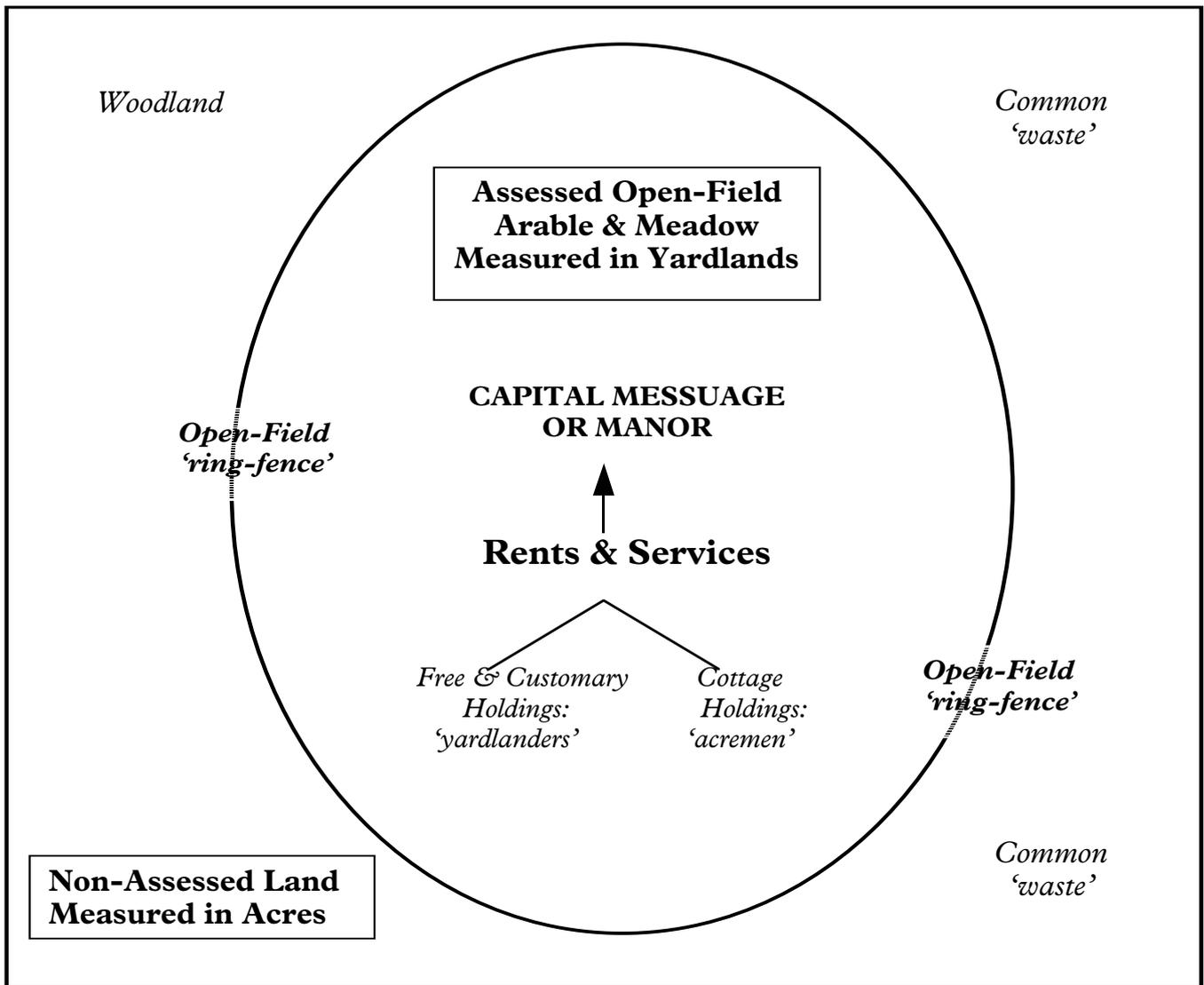


Fig. 1. The basic division of land in a typical early medieval township.

made between rents and services paid to lords and taxes owed to the king. In practice this meant that the yardland tenement was the unit of assessment for apportioning the required sums of money, units of corn, hens, eggs and days of work or whatever dues custom dictated was attached to the land and its occupiers. Once the assessment liability of a land unit or township was established it was most probably left to the peasant community to measure and divide the land amongst themselves into strips by use of a perch without reference to professional land surveyors. Although the size of the yardland varied, in Leicestershire it was commonly around 24 acres of arable (Hilton 1947, 9-10; Howell 1983, 90). The characteristic of the yardland as an assessment of land as opposed to the person of the peasant cultivator meant that over time the yardland remained a remarkably stable tenurial unit remaining a live measure of open-field rateable size as late as the 18th century.

This division of tax liability among the ploughlands of tenant farms is further shown by the institutional distinction separating the assessed (i.e. tax-paying)

open-field arable from the non-assessed woodland and 'waste' (a word implying land yielding no tax). The interface between these two categories of land found expression in the open-field 'ring-fence', elsewhere called a 'town-wall', 'ring-garth', 'head-dyke' etc. As the areas of cultivation expanded beyond the 'ring-fence' the new intakes were incorporated into the common field system and managed by the yardland community. The importance of the 'ring-fence' would be related to the quantity of 'waste' still lying within the boundaries of a township, and it is of interest to note that at both Hugglescote and Shepshed their open-field 'ring-fence' is mentioned at the time of enclosure simply because of the amount of remaining 'waste' to be apportioned (Nichols 1804, 1017; 1811, 759).

We know that each yardland farm was defined in terms of their component lands lying in the open-fields and it is unfortunate that field books describing their township-wide layout appear not to survive in Leicestershire. However, a regular order of lands scattered across two or three open-fields seems to have prevailed before 1200 – analysis of land terriers and

medieval deeds all lead to this conclusion; for how long before we have no way of telling (Bowman 1995, 134-5). The farming of the assessed land was organised by the yardland community with common grazing rights on the stubble and fallow fixed in proportion to the size of each holding. Lordship as such seems to have little part in these arrangements. Although one or more manorial foci might be identified within a village territory, tenurial fission between lords rarely led to separation of fields after the Norman Conquest – the open field system continued being farmed and organised by the community as a whole. The lord's demesne or home farm could be scattered with the lands of the peasants or held as a discrete block, although there is no evidence in Leicestershire for *inland* demesne in the sense of it being tax exempt – demesne was *warland* (OE *wara*: 'defence') paying the king's geld. Tax paying for lords and peasant alike was something not to be avoided for it bestowed confirmation of title to lords and the mark of 'free' status for the peasantry.

Certainly, at the time of the 1086 Domesday inquest the great mass of the English peasantry who farmed the open-fields were still regarded as nominally 'free' due to their holdings liability for geld (Stenton 1971, 477-9, 515-6; Harvey 1988, 50, 56; Roffe 2000, 63, 122, 235). Thus, the Domesday commissioners are said to have counted 'those living in cottages (*tuguria*) as well as those living in houses (*domus*) with a share in the fields' (EHD II, 912). Of course, this distinction between a 'house' and 'cottage' dweller had little to do with comfort of abode – it was a vital legal and tenurial categorisation of people alluded to above. The *villani* and sokemen stand together as 'householders' whose various customary dues were encompassed within the catch-all term *villanus* meaning 'member of the vill – a *tunesman* whose holding granted full rights of membership into the local community.

On the other hand, the 'cottage' dwellers formed a distinct sub-class of peasant smallholder. In Domesday, the imported and ephemeral term *bordar* was generally, if inconsistently, used for the English class of cottager (*cotsetla*) who appear in the early 11th century *Rights and Ranks of People* (EHD II, 876; Lennard 1951). A typical 'cottage' tenement was around 5 acres and must be distinguished from those cottage holdings that were little more than garden plots or entirely landless, both of which went unnoticed in Domesday Leicestershire. We are concerned here, therefore, with that core group of cottagers who had a stake in the fields and commons. The very fact that *bordars* are counted with a vill's plough-teams points to their share in the arable and, like the yardland, these cottage lands had a long institutional history. The five *bordars* at Kibworth Harcourt, for example, can be linked to later customary cottage tenements, each with 5-6 acres, in just the same way as the 48-yardland tenements relate to the 12 Domesday geld carucates (Howell 1983, 132). Whatever their social origins may have been, these cottage tenements had

certain rights of common and a recognised, if inferior, place in the village community.

Some thirty years after 1086, the Burton Abbey surveys continue to show liability to pay tax to be the key to classifying tenure and land. Everywhere a distinction is made between the *inland* demesne of the lord and the *warland* tenants who acquitted their holdings against the king's geld. The contrast is made explicit in the entry for Appleby Magna where we are told there was 'no *inland* which is without the king's geld'. Here then, both the demesne and the 'land of the men', farmed by *villani* and *censarii* ('rent-payers'), defended itself against 4-geld carucates. In fact, it is possible to deduce from the survey that originally there were probably 24 virgates in demesne and 24 more held by 'the men' – a standard 48 virgate structure (Bridgeman 1916, 244-6, 279-80).

The relationship between 'free' man and king was under threat in late Anglo-Saxon times and increasingly so in the century after the Conquest. One way that this could happen was exempting tenants from geld liability thus transferring payment to the lord's pocket, an act that, as David Roffe states, would be a small step away from declaring that 'the land was *inland* and its occupiers unfree' (2000, 235). But evolving social relationships in the countryside were not simply a matter of increasing *manorialisation*; the demise of the 'geld' as a scheme of national land taxation can be judged to part of the process of downgrading the social status of the *villani* to that of the villein of the 13th manor. So whereas before the mid-12th century the 'land of the men' could still be declared as public land in the sense it was 'geld-paying' (as described in the c.1114-1126 Burton Abbey surveys), thereafter private rents and services usurp the old public fiscal relationship.

The problem is that we have no evidence for a community partitioning tax by carucate or hide before the shift of public finance to per capita levies or taxes on movables after the 12th century. Nevertheless, a continuity of practice is implied when levies such *tallage* or *scutage* amerced the *villata* and the village of Nether Broughton in northeast Leicestershire serves as a good example (Nichols 1795, 109-14). Here, the Domesday 12-carucate rating is clearly linked to the 48 virgate or 96-bovate holdings (bovates/oxgangs were standard farming units in northeast Leicestershire) into which the village fields were nominally divided in the 13th century. The vill was held for the service of one knight's fee rated at 40s., distributed at a *pro rata* rate of 10d. per virgate. Likewise an annual rent of 10s. for castle-guard was apportioned so that each bovate was charged 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. (1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. x 96 = 10s.) – a levy still being raised in the early 16th century!

More revealing still was the imposition of a 40s. royal tallage in 1269. Its apportioning and collection was the responsibility of the '*villata*', the 10s. expenses of the four men nominated for taking the money to London being paid by all the inhabitants. This was assessed at a

rate of 10*d.* on each yardland holding, while cottagers with cattle paid 1/2*d.* for each cow, ox or horse and 1*d.* for every 4 sheep; the men without land paid 1*d.* (*ibid.* 112). In effect, this is a social structure formalised into, on the one hand, common-right house and cottage holders and, on the other, the landless or nearly so. Here, then, we have an example of the community dividing and apportioning amongst themselves a common levy that appears similar, at least in the mechanism of its collection, to pre-Conquest territorial assessments. As expected, the yardlanders of Broughton appear as the bedrock of agricultural 'shareholders', and as a general principle we may not be too far away from the mark in seeing a deep-rooted joint responsibility to render regularised land assessments as a vital force cementing a 'shareholding mentality' amongst participating households. In other words, the communalizing effect of collective financial obligations provide us with one *raison d'être* for the open-field shareholding village territories we have pictured for the 12th century.

Behind this allotting of dues amongst the individual farms of Broughton we can also detect the critical importance of rights to common – the beasts of the cottagers are levied a separate charge while the stints that went with each yardland farm had presumably long been determined by custom – at a rate of 1*d.* for 4 sheep the stint would have been 40 sheep per yardland. Rights of common in the 'non-assessed' woodland and 'waste' are the clearest expression of villagers treating land as corporate or collective property. The key to this, of course, is to recognise the *tunscipe* or 'village community' to be a 'peasant community' of resident householders whose detailed communal regulation of the land was deeply rooted in the past.

### Assarting and the 'waste'

With the decay of the old land tax after the mid-12th century, the rationale for the tenemental structure it embodied disappeared and it is in this context that we must surely judge the appearance of wide-spread assarting as an 'innovation of the twelfth century' (Dyer 1994, 22). In practice this meant a great sea change in the way assarts (taking in of land from the 'waste' for cultivation) were treated – new intakes now being measured in acres rather than virgates and held on distinctive terms. In fact, we should not underestimate the proportion of some early post-Conquest village territories still remaining to be opened up from the 'waste', principally in the west of Leicestershire (Hilton 1947, 60-1; 1954, 180-1). For example, in 1273 assarts at Barrow-Upon-Soar were consistently distinguished from standard holdings – 'x holds one virgate and one assart' or 'y holds one assart' or 'clearing', the latter term implying an intake yet to be measured (Farnham 1930, 50). The same tenurial distinction is found at Castle Donington in the mid-15th century where 'foreland' (i.e. 'outlying land') tenants held odd strips (*selions*) or acres whose likely origin was assarted land lying outside the

open-field 'ring-fence' and the old assessed core of yardland farms (Farnham & Hamilton Thompson 1925, 61). Where the 'waste' remained abundant it created new possibilities of individual enterprise, particularly for townships close to Charnwood Forest and Leicester Forest where assarting gave rise to new settlement.

It is well known how often a collective interest in the 'waste' is revealed through the telltale configuration of township boundaries converging on areas of old intercommoned land carved up between surrounding communities – Leicestershire, as elsewhere, abounds with such places (Beresford 1957, 32-6; Hooke 1998, 74-80). Three examples will serve to illustrate this phenomenon.

### Charnwood Forest

Charnwood Forest was the largest tract of remaining 'waste' in medieval Leicestershire most of which remained common pasture until its 19th century enclosure (Fig. 2). Of the four great manors of Charnwood, the juxtaposition of manor site and 'waste' at Whitwick and Shepshed and originally also at Barrow and Groby, show they were ideally placed for the exercise of lordly control of the extensive forest pasture. The assertion by lords of their property rights in the 12th and 13th centuries can be traced through the location of parks and monastic sites. However, the ensuing disputes over pasture rights bares witness to the conflict between the lord's authority over the land and a more deeply rooted sharing of the 'waste' by the surrounding communities (Hilton 1954, 164; Hooke 1998, 218-19).

By the 11th century some islands of cultivation had already developed within Charnwood. Thus, Charley, a member of the manor of Barrow, is credited in Domesday with 4 carucates of untenanted 'waste' along with a marginal notice of 'find out the value', implying the suspected presence here of assessed arable land which, for reasons of administrative failure, lack of tenants or (unlikely in the case of Charnwood) military devastation, yielded no value. Reported finds of Roman pottery in the vicinity of Charley hint that these fields might not be primary Anglo-Saxon intakes. We are on more certain ground in tracing assarting with the numerous 'hay' names ('a hedged or fenced enclosure') within Charnwood, which recall new lands held in severalty (i.e. outside the common fields) created after the late 12th century. Fine examples are found in the south of Charnwood at Old Hayes and Bondman Hay (Squires and Jeeves 1994, 56) and when looked at with similar examples within Leicester Forester to the west of Leicester such as Basset and Knoll House (Fox and Russell 1948) we can see how the colonisation of the 'waste' could lead to a dispersed settlement pattern away from the surrounding villages.

### Coleorton Moor

In the area around Coleorton Moor, there developed a landscape of dispersed settlements and irregular fields



Fig. 2. Charnwood Forest: Manors and Townships.

that is truly remarkable for Leicestershire (Fig. 3a). The primary explanation lies in the extensive outcrop of coal measures stretching from Coleorton Moor and Swannington Common in the south to the commons of Gelsmoor and Newbold in the north. Indeed, the recorded 18th century custom of taking acre plots from the waste for houses and digging coal illustrates how this straggling pattern of settlement probably evolved (Nichols 1804, 731-2, 739-40). Coal prospecting in Swannington is first noted in 1204 where also a lawsuit of 1293 stated it 'lawful for each freeman to approve the waste [for coal] according to the size of his free tenement' (Owen 1984, 19-27, 41). Even so, the

configuration of land units converging onto these open moors and woodland probably signals a pattern of shared grazing rights laid down well before the activities of medieval coalminers. Today, Breedon Cloud Wood, a remnant of the Domesday wood of Tonge, is a reminder of this even more archaic pattern of land use (Squires and Jeeves 1994, 104-9), with the place-name of Tonge ('a tongue of land') a probable reference to its projecting boundary staking a claim to the wood-pastures.

#### Burbage Common

Surviving rights to ancient common land have left very little legacy in the present day landscape but Burbage

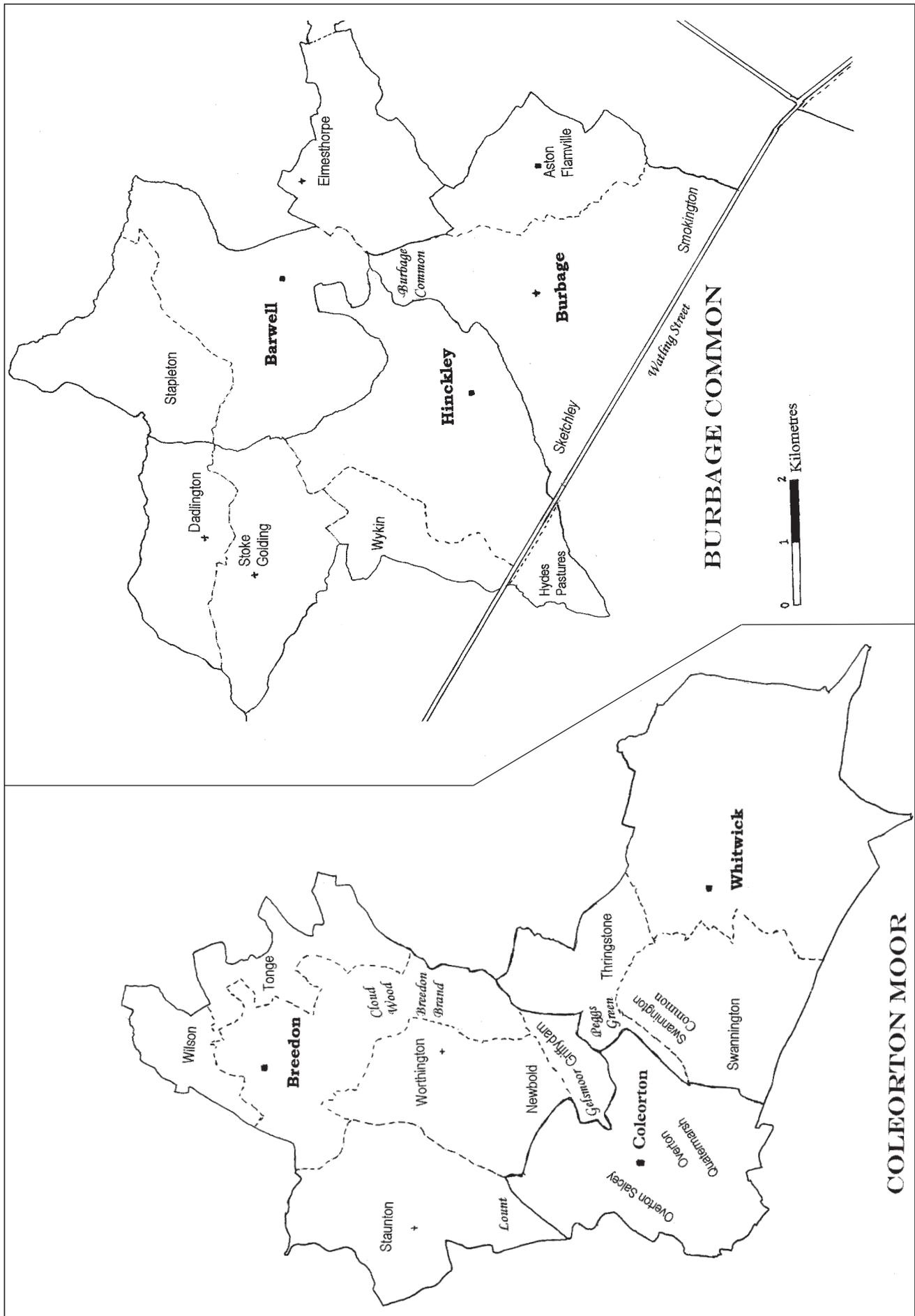


Fig. 3. Township Boundaries around (a) Coleorton Moor & (b) Burbage Common.

Common is one notable exception (Fig. 3b; Hoskins and Stamp 1963, 122-3, 296, 310). Here we find three primary vills converging on a watershed location around which, as Squires suggests, 'was one general area [approximately 800 acres] of grazed woodland shared at least of the time of Domesday Book by all three manors' (Squires 1991, 41). Earl Leofric (d.1057) held Burbage and Barwell before their donation towards the foundation of Coventry Abbey in 1043, and it is likely that the manor of Hinckley was also once part of this pre-Conquest multi-vill 'estate' complex.

The example of Charnwood Forest (exceptional in terms of its scale) and the more typical cases of Coleorton Moor and Burbage Common demonstrate how proximity to the 'waste' moulded territorial divisions – township boundaries were drawn to encompass as much as possible a full range of local resources – arable, meadow and areas of wood-pasture. Other than where large tracts of 'waste' remained (Charnwood and Leicester Forest), these boundaries were stabilised long before the time of documentation. Moreover, the fact that in historic times the stinting of cattle and allocation of other common rights was set in relation to 'ancient' tenements such as the yardland, might tempt us to envisage a territorialization of rights connected to the growth of lordship and the process of *manorialisation*. In this model, discussion of land divisions is closely associated with words such as 'estate' and 'manors', which invoke modern notions of the private ownership of land and a control over its cultivators. In much the same way, the 'top down' explanation of village origins emphasises a reorganisation under the direction of lords (page 131 below).

However, we should resist this rather simplified picture of seigniorial power being only catalyst of change in the countryside. It is probable, for example, that in many places the parcelling out of intercommoned land had only a tenuous connection with control of the countryside by lords and it is reasonable to say that before the formalisation of boundaries there existed a framework of much older established rights to land and intercommoned grazing. In prehistoric times, membership of a community was probably organised through kinship networks rather than via a corporate body of 'villagers' or tenants of land associated with particular 'estates' or manors. It is quite possible that the process of a territorialization of peasant rights had as much to do with the establishment of firmer administrative units of government over communal bonds of locality as the power of manorial lords over land and people. These issues take us to the heart of the debate over township origins, the formal definition of which has commonly been placed within Anglo-Saxon times – a period recently called the 'Age of Boundaries' (Hooke 1998, 63).

## Township Origins

The much debated antiquity and origin of the township territory has still left us with no clear consensus, although the great age of township formation had certainly long past by the time of the Domesday inquest. Before 1086, we enter a 'dark-age' of landscape documentation – the 1046 charter for Ayston in Rutland (3 *cassati*) being the only surviving local example with a boundary clause. In fact, Ayston is a case of a late manorial place-name change following the transfer of property rights to a king's thegn and alerts us to the danger of using place-names as a guide to the progress of settlement (Cox 1994, 171-2). With no meaningful chronological sequence to work to, the character of the early vill or township can only be viewed within the context of a wider administrative landscape.

### Multi-vill Territories and the *tun-scipe*

Following Hoskins's pioneering study of the landholding of a late Saxon thegn around Hallaton (1957b, 8-10) and Phythian-Adams's examination of the land unit surrounding Claybrooke Magna and its possible link with the *territorium* of *Venonae* (1978), the reconstruction of pre-Conquest multi-vill land-units is now a commonplace technique of landscape research (Bourne 1986). Detailed examples include those for putative territories centred on Ratby (Cain 1990, 20-1), Great Glen (Bourne 1996) and Market Bosworth (Foss 1996). The assumption has generally been one of fission, although late Saxon 'estates' are just as likely to be a product of accretion rather than relics of archaic patterns of landholding (Roffe 1996). In their earliest form, however, large multi-vill territories were almost certainly organised areas of government for the collection of food and service rents to a central collecting centre rather than a unified farming unit.

Students of Domesday Book have continued to take fascination in resurrecting the 'village' assessments it embodied and to traverse the same ground again can still teach us much about the pre-Conquest administrative landscape. A good example is a complex of vills centred on Pickwell and Somerby in High Leicestershire, connected by the payment of soke dues and patterns of tenure (Fig 4a & 4b). The Domesday commissioners were looking for a lord's hall (*aula*) or manor (*manuerium*), the point of interest being that this was the place to which a nexus of soke dues were rendered. In Leicestershire manors can be identified by the *tenuit* formula '*A* holds *y* carucates in *x*'; by contrast, 'in *X* there are *y* carucates of land' generally points to dependant sokeland (Roffe 1996, 111). In this, our example is consistent, each manor had its own demesne farm and the TRE holder is usually identified. The duodecimal pattern of assessment is clear, with 3 carucates being its basis. But it is of more interest to note the combined 24-carucate rating of Pickwell, Somerby and Newbold, which appears to have a wider significance – it is the largest rating recognised throughout

<b>Vill</b>	<b>Entry (Morgan 1979)</b>	<b>Demesne</b>	<b>manor</b>	<b>TRE</b>	<b>TRW</b>	<b>Subtenant</b>	<b>sokemen</b>	<b>villani</b>	<b>bordars</b>	<b>slaves</b>	<b>other</b>	<b>Tax Assessment</b>	
												<b>1086</b>	<b>c.1130 Original?</b>
Pickwell & Leesthorpe	29,10	✓	M	Ordmer	Guerche	Buterus	26	7	9	14		14c	15c
Newbold	14,33	✓	M	(Alfwold)	Ferrers	Hugh		4				3c	3c
Somerby I	14,31a	✓	M	Alfwold	Ferrers	Roger		5	2		priest	3c 2b	5c
Somerby II	19,19	✓		Wulfnoth	Bursar			6	3			5c 3b	3c
Somerby III	1,3		soke of Rothley	King	King			?	?			1.5c	6c
Burrough I	42,1	✓	M		King's sergeant	Herbert	1		6	4		4c	
Burrough II	42,4		sokeland		King's sergeant	Herbert						6b waste	12c
Burrough III	14,32	✓	M	Alfwold	Ferrers	Roger		4	1			2c 3b	3c
Burrough IV	29,12		Soke of Pickwell		Guerche							1c	1c
Little Dalby I	29,19	✓	M	Alfwold	Guerche	Robert	4	5	1	0		4.5c	5c 1b
Little Dalby II	29,21		Soke of Pickwell		Guerche		3					2.5c	1c 7b
Little Dalby III	14,31b		Manor of Somerby (14,31a)	Alfwold	Ferrers		16				priest	5c	5c
Godtorp	29,11		soke of Pickwell & Somerby		Guerche				2			3.5 c	3c
Withcote I	29,20	✓	M	Alfwold	Guerche	Alfwold		1				1.5c	1.5c
Withcote II	19,20				Bursar							1.5c waste	3c

Fig. 4a. Interlocking landholding around the Pickwell/Somerby soke in 1086.

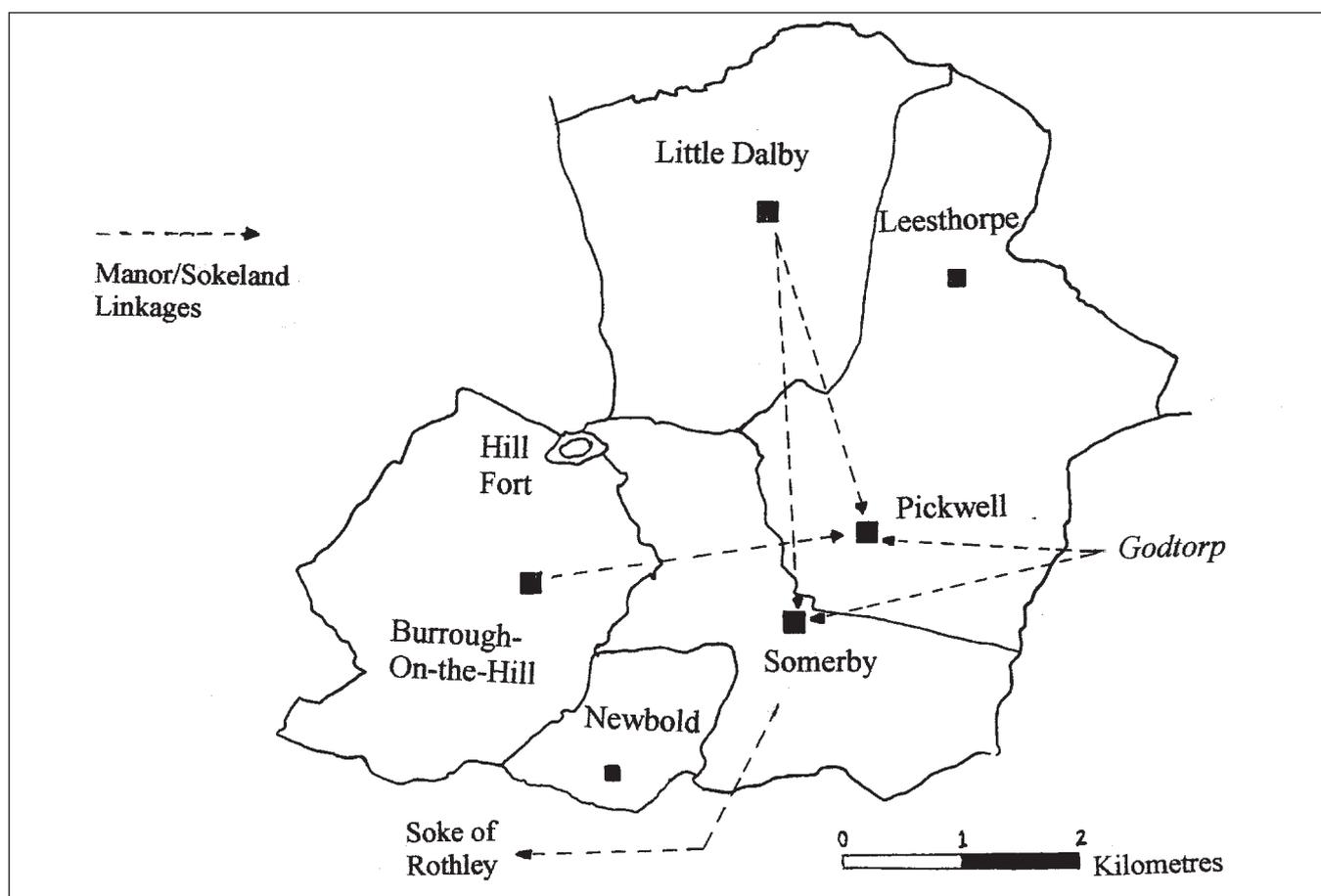


Fig. 4b. Territorial Boundaries around Pickwell and Somerby.

Leicestershire to be associated with land units for which a territorial integrity can be observed (see further below). However, despite its appearance as a discrete multi-territory the Pickwell complex as a whole is unlikely to represent an ancient entity. The pre-Conquest holders were not king's thegns (i.e. booklords) – they held 'freely' but not with full jurisdiction and were presumably in the soke of another lord. The whole complex has the appearance of having been carved out of a larger administrative territory, the likely contender being one centred on Melton Mowbray, held before the Conquest by the major Mercian thegn Leofric son Leofrin. Melton Mowbray has long been recognised as the probable site of a Mercian minster church (Everitt 1985, 98-9) and in reconstructing its considerable territory we can reasonably see the outline of an administrative unit that once included all the southern portion of Framland wapentake.

The fact that the outlines of archaic territorial organisation can be reconstructed for lands with ecclesiastical connections is not surprising (the configuration of boundaries converging on the 'parochial core' of Misterton is an interesting example) – the church rarely divided or sold its estates so their holdings tended to be the most enduring in the Anglo-Saxon landscape. Unless held in hand by the king other land holdings were subject to frequent alienation making it much more difficult to reconstruct earlier patterns. More

to the point, the word 'estate' commonly used for a multi-vill land units is misleading because it invokes modern perceptions of 'real estate' and the immovable ownership of land – pre-Conquest lordship was nothing of the sort. The landlord or booklord (a holder of land conferred by royal charter) had rights *over* land, which embodied the nexus of dues determined by custom previously owed by the peasantry to the king. It was the word *terra*, 'land', as used in Domesday Book and commonly in early charters that constituted this reference to a landlord's rights over land (Campbell 1986, 110-16; Roffe 2000, 28-33). Below the lords, however, the peasantry maintained their own rights of property regulated through customary practice (see below).

Indeed, there are good reasons to argue that an underlying pattern of villas was in place by the 7th century which, even at this early date, formed part of a coherent administrative landscape. This much is suggested by the few surviving instances of early charters stating that blocks of assessment were to be 'assigned to their own names and places' (Blair 1991, 25-6). The implication is that behind the more usual laconic words of the charters lies a countryside not so very far removed from the chequerboard of 10th century villas (Campbell 1986, 110). Recognising early discrete 'townships' to be the base land unit for the agrarian activity of the peasantry casts doubt upon the theory that it was later

Saxon multi-vill fission (Fox 1981, 98-102; Hooke 1998, 117, 120) that generated a significant impetus for rural reorganisation (Bowman 1995, 206-8; Hadley, 2000, 209). Thus, by late Saxon times fieldwalking has shown that many vills contained a single village core and open-field system but there is little doubt that many of these territories had been the fundamental building blocks of administration and organised farming communities before the period of nucleation. Above all, then, it appears that the 'small worlds' or 'village' territories of peasant communities endured over long periods of change in the countryside and it is at this scale of land unit that our attention should focus.

### The Primary Vill Zones of 'macro townships'

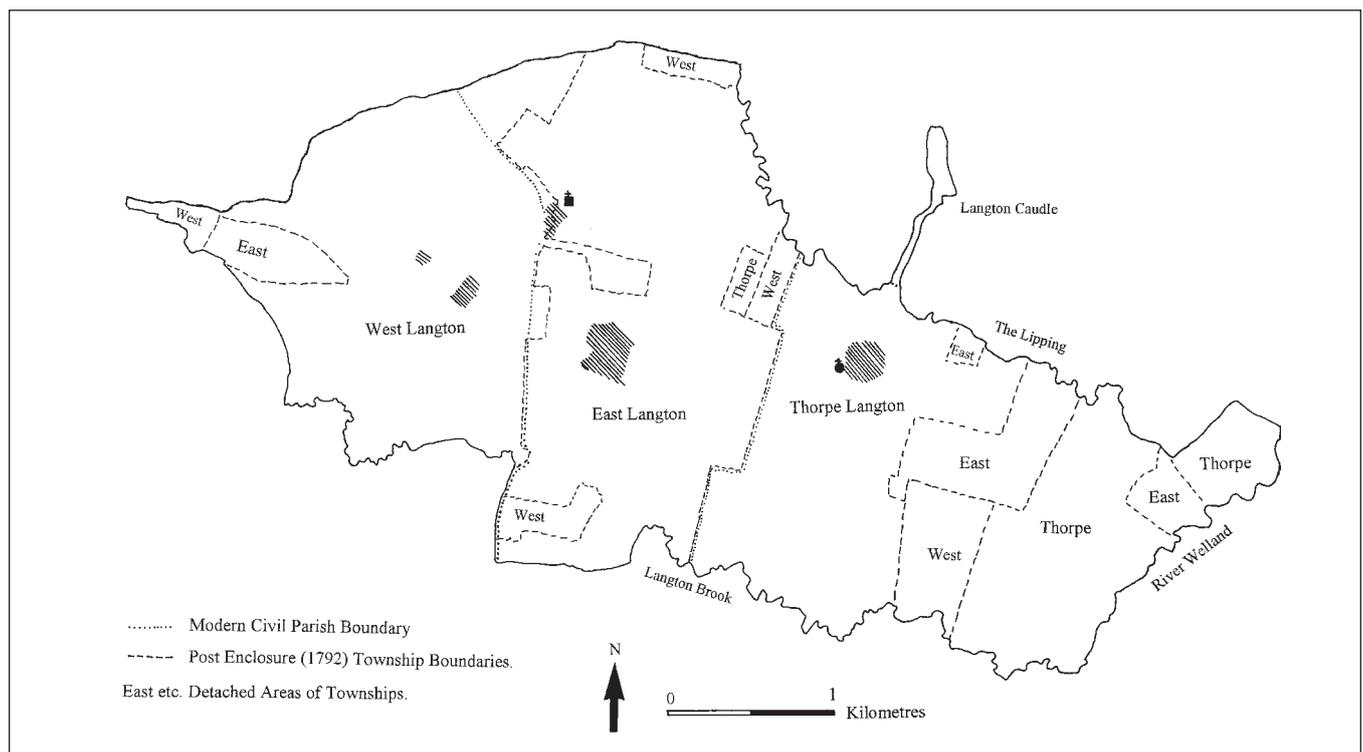
The primary or core land units of administration and communal life have been called 'macro-townships' to emphasise their earlier dispersed settlement background but also points to the frequent presence of integral sub-vill land units, often bearing a *torp* or anonymous *cot* place-name. Primary vills generally have place-names that are topographical or bear habitative generics in *ham*, *tun*, *worth* and the Scandinavian *by* (Bourne 2003). Some were central places in their own right, others presumably once parts of multi-vill territories – most obviously where their names act as directional pointers – the 'east', 'west', 'north' 'south' and 'up' *tuns*, (e.g. Great Easton, Weston DMV, Kings Norton, Sutton Cheney, Upton). The many other places bearing 'late' personal names were, like Ayston, coined when the land was granted to a new lord. Integral sub-vill land units might be linked to developing patterns of authority in the

countryside, as new manors were created or lordly independence asserted. But the presence of sub-townships may equally be due to the incomplete nucleation of settlement within territories of long standing and often the carving up of a primary land unit is simply noticed by distinctive prefixes such as East and West, Magna and Parva, Great and Little or Nether and Upper. All such split-townships were almost certainly in place by late Anglo-Saxon times (Bowman 1995, 123-6), and where they are regularly assessed, as at Kibworth Harcourt and Beauchamp (12 carucates each), a pre-10th century origin is very likely.

Greater Langton, comprising the sub-vills of East, West and Thorpe Langton (the hill top Church settlement was never a township with its own field system), provides us with a fascinating example of a spit-township with a shared field-system (Fig. 5; Bowman forthcoming a). Here, a complex intermixing of township lands were plainly described in a 1650 Article of Agreement: 'the farms and houses in the said three towns do lye intermixed one with another', and that following any enclosing of lands 'each town shall common by themselves'. A later Act (1744) meticulously documents every landholder's common rights in direct proportion to the number of yardlands held – the standard stint of 30 sheep and 4 cows being maintained right down to fractions of 2 legs of a cow – a striking reminder of the origin of the yardland as an assessment of land rather than levy on people or houses.

Greater Langton is, in the context of Leicestershire, an atypical example of incomplete nucleation – the three sub-townships managed their common grazing rights as

**Fig. 5. The intermixed township boundaries found within Greater Langton following the 1792 enclosure award. This arrangement represents a tidying up by the enclosure commissioners of an even more intermingled open-field township structure.**



a single whole while farming their arable independently (for the probable agrarian explanation of the resulting complex intermixing of 'town' lands see page 131). Such arrangements are unlikely to postdate the Domesday inquest. By then, the tenurial fission of Greater Langton was complete – West Langton had been donated to Peterborough Abbey in around 985 (Hart 1975, 38, 335), and Thorpe Langton is given separate notice in Domesday. That this was once a unified land unit is evident enough from the place-names but fiscal arrangements also point to its original administrative unity – the three hamlets combine to give a standard 24-carucate assessment (Bowman 1996, 132). The fact that even at the time of enclosure the number of yardlands in Greater Langton were recorded as a whole appears to confirm that a standard tax rating had been distributed amongst a dispersed community sharing resources within a coherently defined land unit. It seems, therefore, inconceivable that the 'community' of Greater Langton did not already have a recognised identity before the imposition of the small hundredal system in the 10th century (see page 127).

More typically the open-fields of land units of a similar tax rating and statute acreage to Greater Langton were organised around a single village core. In this, good examples can be found at Wigston Magna and Husbands Bosworth whose fields appear to have contained the expected 96 yardlands (i.e. 4 x 24 carucates) (Hoskins 1957a, 22, 248; Nichols 1798, 464). Elsewhere, settlement and administrative fission was on more discrete linear lines than Greater Langton (as with the two Kibworths) although it is usually quite clear that the resulting land units (or sub-townships) were once elements within a primary township. The Breedon complex provides an example (Fig. 3a). This whole territory (excluding Staunton chapelry, a post-Domesday acquisition) formed the small hundred of Tonge in the c.1130 Leicestershire Survey where a 24-carucate assessment was equally divided between Tonge and Worthington (Slade 1956, 18, 44-45, 88; VCH *Leics.* i, 349). Clearly there were two vills here – Tonge and Worthington. Tonge is described 'with its appendages' in Domesday Book and the c.1130 Survey; the attribution of these dependencies is made clear from the 1334 Subsidy where Worthington and Newbold are taxed together but the hamlets of *Andreskirk*, Tonge and Wilson are entered under Breedon-on-the-Hill (Glasscock 1975, 161). Langley seems to have been severed from this territory with the endowment of Langley Priory in c.1150.

A series of 18th century open-field maps (Hartley 1984, 11, 39-31) for Breedon, Tonge, and Wilson show how their interlocking boundaries suggest an original territorial unity. A c.974 grant included 3 *cassati* at both Breedon and *Wifeles Dorpe*, showing these townships were in place by the 10th century (Hart 1975, 37, 69). Stenton's identification of *Wifeles Dorpe* with the hamlet of Wilson has been questioned (Fellows Jenson 1978, 121), but there seems no good reason to doubt that this

*thorp* is the same as the later *tun*, a dependent *thorp* status being entirely in keeping with the Wilson land unit (Stenton 1910, 78). The purpose of the charter was to reconstruct the endowment of the late 7th century monastery at Breedon-on-the-Hill, originally established by *princeps* Friduric in 675 x 691 (Hart 1975, 32a, 67; Dornier 1977; for similar grants in Surrey and the family connections of Friduric see Blair 1991, 7, 25-6, 103-4). It is quite conceivable that the original 20 *manentes* of Breedon formed a discrete block of land similar in area to that of the 24-carucate Tonge hundred. More certainly, the Breedon/Worthington complex again shows how a regular tax assessment could embrace a number of sub-townships, each farming their own arable but at the same time maintaining an older territorial framework of shared rights to common land, in this case the woods and moorland around Breedon Brand.

The cases of Greater Langton and Breedon demonstrate the complexity of ways in which large primary 24-carucate 'townships' could be subdivided. Furthermore, the fact that land units of this size can be recognised throughout Leicestershire tempts us to connect them with putative 20 hide territories of the Mercian period. More certainly, the administrative organisation of the Anglo-Saxon countryside displays signs of both enduring institutional rigidity and a flexibility to changing patterns of authority exercised over the land

### The Hamlet Zones of 'micro townships'

It also is possible to recognise another type of discrete land unit characteristically located in an outlying watershed countryside. Rather than being the result of late Saxon colonisation or the spread of cultivation, these predominantly small hamlet territories have the appearance of deeply embedded land units in the landscape. In other words, their boundaries are generally coherent, showing little sign of fission from a primary territory. For assessment purposes, though, they were often grouped with their larger neighbours – these hamlets were not 'townships' in the Anglo-Saxon sense of that word, but the names they bare – *hid*, *wic*, *cot* and the like – are suggestive of origins that potentially take us back to a pattern of pre-village settlement surviving into the medieval period.

The archaic meaning of *hid* – 'the hide' – refers to a unit of tax assessment and its use as a place name points to discrete working units or 'whole' hides surviving on the ground just as we know the subdivided hide became open-field tenements. Holdings of this size were the mark of the social status of a 'free' person above a humble peasant cultivator. There are two local examples: a lost 'Hide' in Egleton, Rutland, and the hamlet of 'The Hide' (Hydes Pastures), a former chapelry of Hinckley lying in Warwickshire until its transfer to Leicestershire in 1888 (Cox 1994, 84; Nichols 1811, 722-3). One plausible explanation for this anomalous position is that 'The Hide' belonged to an early territory based around the manor of

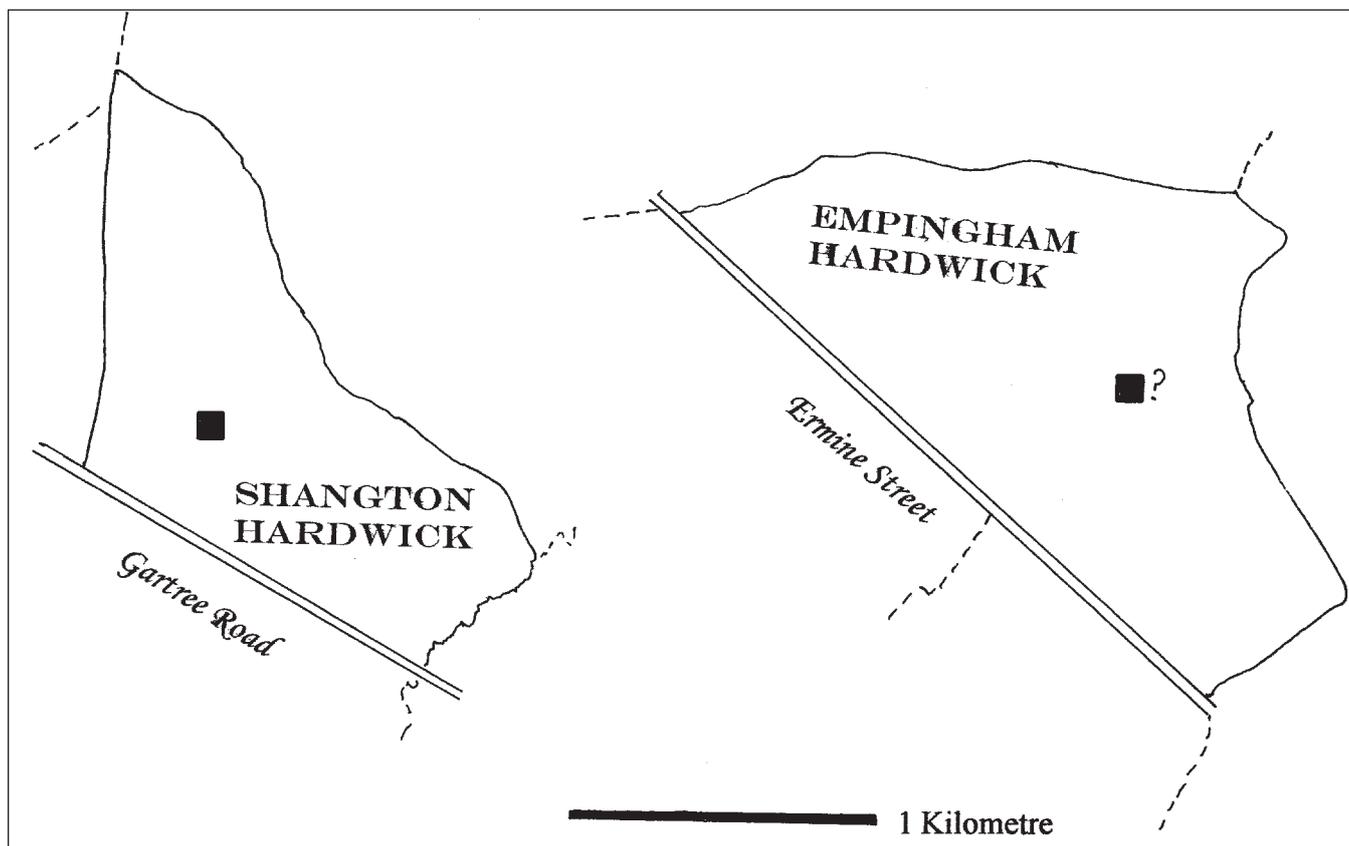


Fig. 6. Shangton Hardwick & Empingham Hardwick.

Hinckley/Burbage before the fixing of the shire boundary in the 10th century (Fig. 3b). The location of Hydes Pastures fits in well with the observations made by Rosamond Faith (1998, 35) that 'hide farms' were generally distinct land units commonly located on the edges of parishes.

Some place-names in *wic* suggest a similar background. One of the meanings of *wic* is an outlying or dependent pastoral farm/hamlet and it is noticeable that relatively few *wic*-names are associated with an individual (Smith 1956 ii, 257-63). Thus Wykin, a plural form of *wic*, might have been the communal herding farms of a middle Saxon territory centred on Hinckley/Burbage (Fig. 3b). Hardwick (the 'herding *wic*') land units probably also had an original dependant relationship to other places. Local surviving examples are Hardwick in Shangton and Hardwick in Empingham (Fig. 6), together with a lost Hardwick in Kirby Bellars, probably located around an isolated moated site (Hartley this volume, Fig. 2), while another is indicated by the present day Hardwicke Lodge Farm in Narborough commemorating one of the names of the open-fields (Cox 1971, 290, 522; Hartley 1987, 11 & Fig. 28; Nichols 1811, 815). In both examples it appears that a *wic* has become absorbed in open-fields. The two surviving Hardwicks were Domesday outliers of more distant manors – Empingham Hardwick a berewick of Skillington, Lincolnshire, and Shangton Hardwick sokeland of the royal manor of Great Bowden – which illustrates not only their discrete identity but also harks

back to an earlier territorial organisation of the land.

With regard to place-names in *cot*, 'the cottage(s)', a distinction might be drawn between anonymous *cots* and those bearing a personal name. Many of the former appear to be subsidiary places sited close to the heart of early estates. Examples include Walcote (DB: *Walecote*) near Misterton, Far and Near Coton in the vill of Market Bosworth and Cotes in Prestwold. Another is Westcotes, lying outside the west gate of Leicester in the manor in Bromkinthorpe which Domesday stated 'belongs to Leicester with all customary dues,' and thus fits well into the close association between some *cots* and urban centres noted by Dyer (Dyer 1994, 247-50; VCH Leics. iv, 380-3). Whereas these *cots* look like integral subunits within a primary vill, the outlying *cots* have the appearance of discrete land units on the periphery of 'estates'. Examples include: Cotes de Val (DB: *Toniscote*); Kimcote (DB: *Chenemunescote*); Brascote (DB: *Brocardescote*); Huncote (DB: *Hunecote*); and Hugglescote and it is surely significant that most are given independent notice in Domesday.

Outlying hamlet land units are often documented in the 13th and 14th centuries, surviving as little compact manors surrounded by tiny open-field systems whose territory may be no more than 300 or 400 acres. Examples of these tiny open-field communities include Cotes de Val (Goodacre 1994, 36), Shangton Hardwick (Bowman 1996, 139) and Empingham Hardwick (Fig. 6), all of which are only fleetingly recorded before enclosure for sheep pastures in the 14th or 15th

centuries. When they were given separate in Domesday, such places are frequently assessed at only 1 or 2 carucates. Thus:

1 carucate of land in *Toniscote*: 2 ploughs possible. They are there with 4 sokemen (3, 5).

2 carucates of land in Newbold and Brascote: Land for 3 ploughs. 3 *villani* have 1 plough (13, 11).

It is tempting see such territories as the land of a similar early hidage. Their presence reminds us of the possibility that early and middle Saxon farms or hamlets occupying marginal locations within a predominantly pastoral countryside could have survived the period of nucleation that drew their more numerous valeland neighbours into larger 'village' communities. If so, at least some early medieval hamlet 'townships' may have had a long-standing territorial identity set apart from and presumably pre-dating the open-fields systems of the core primary townships (in the case of the Hardwicks a Roman origin is not improbable)

### The 'Colonising Zone' of new townships

Of course, we cannot entirely exclude the possibility of a late creation of 'new' discrete township land units perhaps linked to an expansion of population and cultivation. Certainly, where pasture remained plentiful township boundaries are likely to be undefined until a relatively late date. We have seen that post-Conquest colonisation outside the boundaries of old core of assessed yardlands is shown by the parcelling out of land into independent farms assessed in acres after the mid-12th century. But these 'assart' farms are obviously not new village territories evidence for which is far more difficult to detect and interpret. It is in the 'wastes' of Charnwood Forest that we are likely to glimpse the final stages of 'township' formation and it is here that a kind of 'verbal archaeology' may show the stages of settlement and new assessment of land (Fig. 2).

The first mention of a place-name is, of course, irrelevant in this matter – none are recorded in Domesday. But a chronological significance can, perhaps, be attached to how tenemental structure was organised. Tenements at Woodhouse ('the houses in the wood') and Lynford (Newtown Linford) seemed to have been measured in acres rather than virgates – a strong indicator of farms established after the mid-12th century. In contrast, the virgated structure of Swithland could point to a long established pre-Conquest settlement (Farnham 1930, 15, 41-2, 49-50, 100-101, 108), a conclusion supported by its pure Scandinavian name ('a grove cleared by burning') presumably coined in the 10th century. Newtown Linford was recorded as Linford (1293) and independently assessed under that name in the 1334, the later application of 'Newtown' (1326) being possibly coined in recognition of a change in status in relation to the parent manor of Groby. Can we, then, seek an administrative explanation for some 'new' places? There are 5 places in Newton and another

5 Newbolds in Leicestershire with one Newbottle in Rutland that imply a new 'dwelling house' of higher status than a peasant farmstead (Cox 1971; Cox 1994, 151). Is it, then, possible that these names were coined with the elevation of an existing, or recently partitioned land unit into a tax-paying entity in its own right, with the tenant farms now being assessed within the territorial context of the 'new' *tun* rather than as the administrative particle of another? In any case, the application of the prefix 'new' to a place-name must mean they are new in some respect to their surrounding settlements even though their bearing on the direct colonisation of the 'waste' remains unclear.

### Township Classification and Taxation.

We have argued that in the 12th century peasant farms in Leicestershire were characteristically organised within a core of assessed arable land 'ring-fenced' from the non-assessed 'waste'. The casting of systems of assessment under political authority must have helped to solidify the boundaries of communal rights to land and thus define the territory of the vill or *tun-scipe*. Figure 7 attempts to show a simplified classification of six broad *township-types*. This does not pretend there has ever been a static period in the evolution of settlement or their territories – a flexibility of choices were open to local communities, most obviously in the ways in which large units of assessment could be broken down into sub-vill/township units. But a case can be made for a high degree of institutional rigidity in the relationship between local communities and units of land assessments in the period c.650 to 1150. Thus where early charters exist, a remarkable correlation between Domesday and early hidages can often be demonstrated or surmised and it seems likely, as John Blair observes, that tax assessments 'moulded the development of land-management throughout the Christian Anglo-Saxon period' (Blair 1994, 78-9; Hart 1992, 297).

Moreover, this is a world where vills appear to be mere counters that could be shifted from one administrative unit to another, or from one lord to another and indeed split between lords. For how long the tillers of the soil had been bound together as territorial communities rather than one based upon ties of kin is unknown but the evidence of Greater Langton discussed certainly points to a pre-10th century context. It is perhaps significant that the connection between rights over land within a locality and the possession of a housed tenement can be traced to our earliest English laws of the late 7th century, by which time it also appears that small land units had already been assigned their own tax rating. Above all else, we should consider the fact that these units of assessment were levied on the *land itself* and not on the person or 'house', and it is this particular characteristic that presumably helped mould communities, settlement forms and field organisation until the 12th century demise of land taxation.

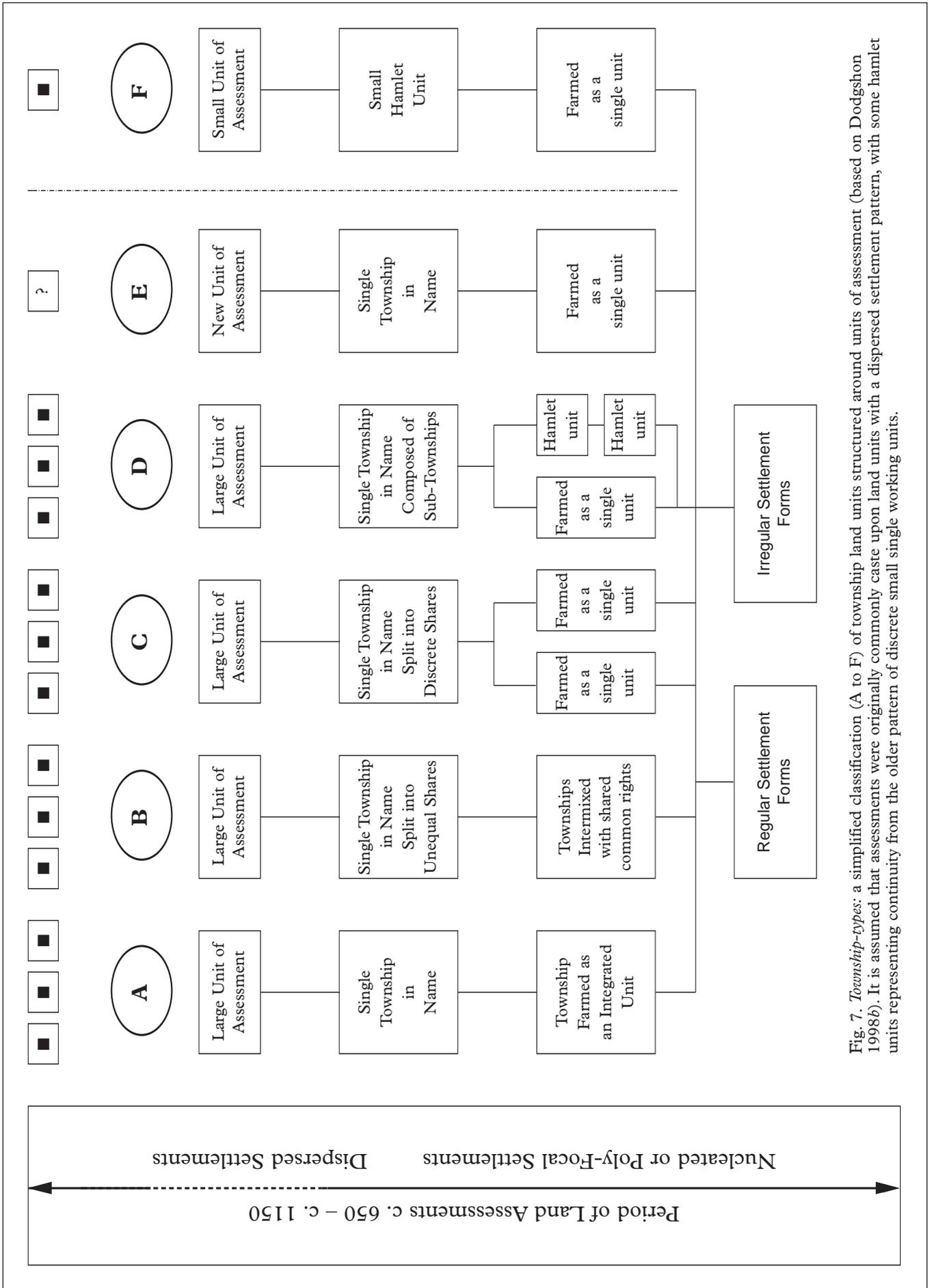


Fig. 7. *Township-types*: a simplified classification (A to F) of township land units structured around units of assessment (based on Dodgshon 1998b). It is assumed that assessments were originally commonly cast upon land units with a dispersed settlement pattern, with some hamlet units representing continuity from the older pattern of discrete small single working units.

## Conclusion

In his discussion of rural society in Carolingian Europe, Chris Wickham observed that words used to describe places, commonly *vici*, *loci* and *villae*, translate as references to ‘villages and their territories’ (1995, 529–31). Enough has hopefully been said here to show that these small community territories were indeed the key social world of the peasantry long before the time of the Domesday inquest of Leicestershire. In the hands of administrators, terms such as *vicus*, *tun* and *vill* could gloss any “village” territory regardless of its place-name or settlement form, and words such as *vicani*, *villani*, and *tun-scipe* speak of neighbourhoods with bonds of communal life (Reynolds 1984, 154). Over time, a closer recognition of areas of joint responsibility for

obligations and dues must have solidified the boundaries of shared rights within a locality. It is reasonable to presume that once defined, the basic pattern of ‘village’ territories were unlikely to have been vastly altered by changes in the political or administrative hierarchy. Thus, historic transitions from Mercian to Scandinavian, English to Norman or even Roman to Saxon would in principle have had little effect on how local peasant communities worked together. In seeking to determine when the core village territories of Leicestershire were first mapped out it might just be that archaeological fieldwork can provide us with some further guidance.

## Acknowledgements and References

see *Villages and their territories – Part II*.