

Dagnall and Elm Green (Wicken)

Archaeological evidence of two deserted medieval hamlets at Dagnall and Elm Green in the parish of Wicken has been found. Unfortunately, the documentary sources do not record anything about the history of these settlements. These notes offer some possibilities regarding the lordship of these places.

No evidence of a tenant named 'de Dagnall' has been found so far in documents relating to Wicken. Might this indicate that the hamlet at Dagnall was held by an ecclesiastical institution in the Middle Ages? There are three possibilities.

1. St James's Abbey, Northampton received at least two gifts in the 12th or early 13th centuries. Roger Greenworth gave 4 acres of land and Robert son of Hamo de Wike £1 5s. in rent from messuages and crofts held by John de Mauleye.
2. Snelshall Priory received at least three grants of land and rent in the mid-13th century, of which the most important was that of 35s. 4d. rent due from 15 tenants given by William de Northampton, which had been granted to him by the lord of Wick Hamon, John son of Alan of Wolverton.
3. Bradwell Priory was granted a carucate of land worth 2 marks a year by the daughter of Hamo de Wike in the 13th century.

The moated site lying to the south of the close called Elm Green (according to the tithe map of 1838) lay within an area of pasture known as Great Leys and Little Leys. There is a possibility that it too, like Dagnall, belonged to one of the three religious houses listed above. There is no conclusive evidence to suggest that it was the keeper's lodge belonging to the medieval park. Indeed, the moated site may well have been located outside the park, on its southern boundary, judging from the lack of enclosure to the south of Elm Green.

No evidence has been found to suggest that either Dagnall or Elm Green was held by the lords of Wick Dive or Wick Hamon in the Middle Ages. The lord of Wick Dive, however, received £3 rent from free tenants in 1272. Might this have been due from Dagnall or Elm Green? Evidence also survives of two freehold estates held by laymen in the 16th century. However, the locations of these properties within the parish have not yet been identified.

The lords of both manors engaged in assarting in the 13th century, holding in excess of 10 acres each. While the possibility that Dagnall and Elm Green were created as a result of assarting cannot be immediately discounted, most of the parish's medieval woodland seems to have been located to the north of the village.

To return to the three religious houses, none of which seem to have held land in the village of Wicken itself, the size of Bradwell Priory's holding – a carucate – suggests that it may have been the lord of one of these hamlets. In addition, an account of Snelshall Priory's lands reveals that 2s. was collected for the 'farm of the site of the manor', an unusual wording, indicative perhaps of a grange at the centre of Dagnall or Elm Green.

Most of the former monastic land in the parish was acquired by the Spencer family, lords of both Wick Dive and Wick Hamon, in the 16th century and merged into the unified estate. The names attached to these lands in the post-medieval period appear not to have preserved any memory of their former ownership by the religious houses.