

The Luffield Priory Grange at Monkbar, *Northamptonshire Archaeology* (2003)

Richard Jones

The origins and development of the monastic demesne of Monksbarn can be traced in eighteen documents contained in the Luffield Priory cartulary. These provide valuable information regarding the nature of the agricultural resources of the grange, its general location and size. Cartographic analysis and archaeological fieldwork has allowed the site of the grange and its lands to be accurately identified and the arrangement of landuse to be defined..

Monksbarn has its origins in a grant of 80 acres of land in a corner of Norton Wood made by William de Clairvaux to the priory in c. 1220-5.¹ This land lay between two assarts, one made by Galfridus, son of Peter, from his wife's land, the other by Henry de Perie from land owned by Count Baldwin. The land also neighboured an arable holding of Galfridus de Pauely. A second document of the same date allowed the monks to cultivate these 80 acres, saving one third of the crop for William himself, and to fold their animals thereon.² The demesne was further added to either at the same time or immediately thereafter (1225-35) with the acquisition of an assart and two acres of woodland from John Marshall from whom William de Clairvaux held his original gift.³ This close landholding tie between the two grantors might suggest that the grants were made together and thus should be dated to 1225. A further addition was made in c. 1240 with the grant by Henry de Perie of his small assart lying between his great assart and that of the priory, located on the road called *Wodekespat*.⁴ This accumulated landholding remained in the priory's hands for a further 110 years until it was finally leased in 1351 to Adam de Cortendale and his wife for two lives, the first document to mention the manor by name.⁵

The lease of 1351 places Monksbarn in the manor of *Pyre* (West Perry or Paulerspury) so it might be expected that the site of the grange should lie within the parish of the same name. Despite mention of the wood within which the land lay, abutting landholding arrangements and the naming of a road along which the land must lie, there are few topographical details which can lead to a precise location for the grange. Norton Wood, for example, belonging to the royal estate of Greens Norton, was measured in 1086 to be four leagues by three leagues (4-6 miles long by 3-4.5 miles wide),⁶ located across a vast territory which incorporated both Silverstone and Whittlebury, but which also stretched north-west as far as Blakesley and

¹ LC 167

² LC 171

³ LC 168

⁴ LC 174

⁵ LC 177

⁶ *DB Northants* 1.6

Adstone. This woodland must have been divided into several blocks, all with corners which might accommodate Monksbarn. It might be conjectured from the evidence, however, that since a large part of Norton Wood lay within Whittlebury parish which shared a common boundary with the manor of Paulerspury that the grange might be located at some point close to this line.

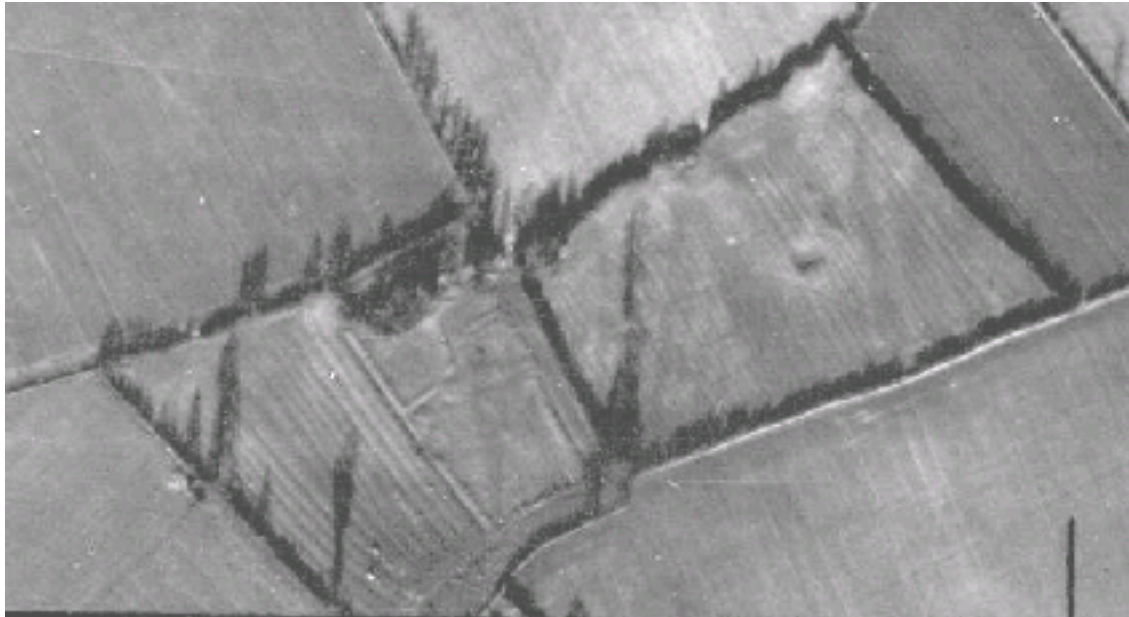
The first identifiable name appears in a lease dated to 1424 wherein the priory granted the manor of Monksbarn to Sir John St John with all its lands except *Monkeswode*.⁷ A Monks Wood appears on the c. 1608 map of Whittlewood Forest (Fig. 1).⁸ It lies 700m north-west of the Whittlebury village and only two fields away from the current Whittlebury/Paulerspury parish boundary. The map shows a series of eight smaller enclosures to the north of the wood and a large open field to the north-west called *Monks Field*. All these fields and enclosures lie in a northern salient of the Whittlebury part of Norton Wood. Running along the north-western edge of Monks Wood and between the small enclosures is a track leading eventually to Pury End. This single name survival thus provides the best clue to the general location of the grange, an argument further strengthened by the coincidence of the few topographic and administrative features described by the documents which appear together on the c. 1608 map.

Aerial photographs clearly show a rectangular enclosure c. 150m x 90m, which while now standing in a large bowtie shaped field (SP 699 451, see Fig. 3), must formally have stood within the smallest of the enclosures shown on the c. 1608 map.⁹ This earthwork has now been totally destroyed by the plough, but the air photographs show that it was surrounded by a low bank and exterior ditch. It was unequally divided into two parts, the smaller northern part containing prominent linear earthworks, the larger southern division clear of internal works. Ridge and furrow is clearly discernable immediately to the west of the enclosure and ground inspection within the small copse to the north reveals a sunken area fed by a stream which might have acted as a fishpond or water reservoir (Fig. 4).

⁷ LC 182

⁸ NRO Map 4210

⁹ RAF VAP CPE/UK/1926, 3235-6, 5235-6



This site has been interpreted as a medieval forest-edge farmstead, but must now be interpreted as the actual site of Monksbarn grange and later manor.¹⁰ Typologically, the enclosure bears a remarkable resemblance to other known grange sites, for example Barton Court (Oxon)¹¹ and Holeway (Warks),¹² and woodland manors such as Heybarne (Bucks). Some of the internal arrangements of the late medieval manor of Monksbarn can be gleaned from a lease dated 1376.¹³ After a description of the lands belonging to the manor the following structures are described: *illas domos vocatas aulas tres bayes uersus austrum extendentes versus boream et vnam bayam et dimidiam alterius domus uersus aquilonem* (those buildings called halls, three bays long southwards extending to the north and one and a half bays in the other building towards the north). This appears to suggest at least two large buildings within the complex, both set on a north-south axis. Although the earthworks visible on the aerial photographs cannot be assigned to these two buildings directly, both could have easily be accommodated within the northernmost of the two internal divisions, their north-south orientation following the long axis of the enclosure (Fig. 4).

With the location of the grange precisely located, it is clear that the c. 1608 map preserves the arrangement of the surrounding land and allows the clear development of the grange to be followed (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). To the south-west of the track to Pury End, six enclosures are depicted and their acreages given (Monks Wood, 40-0-3; Nicolls Wood, 12-2-32; Burtons Sart, 7-0-5 and 4-3-30; and two unnamed plots, 13-3-32 and 10-3-10). These thus cover an

¹⁰ RCHME *SW Northants*, 169.

¹¹

¹² Dyer, C. 1991 *Hanbury: Settlement and Society in a Woodland Landscape* Dept. of English Local History Occasional Papers 4th series no. 4, 35.

¹³ LC 179

area of c. 86 acres, a figure which accords well with the original 80 acre grant of William de Clairvaux in c. 1225. To the north of the track, the grange earthworks lie in a small enclosure of 3-2-12 acres, and this might well represent the small grant of an assart and two acres made by John Marshall. The c. 1240 grant of his small assart made by Henry de Perie specifies that this lies between his great assart and that of the monks and abutting the *Wodekespat*. *Wodekespat* must be the name of the track running from Whittlebury to Pury End shown on the c. 1608 map. Henry's great assart must be the open field called Monks Field in c. 1608 to the north-west, while his small assart can only be the two enclosures to the north-east of the grange (in c. 1608 *The Breach*, 14-3-32; and an unnamed close, 7-1-16). If this arrangement is accepted, this also locates the assart of Galfridus son of Peter mentioned in c. 1225 to the south west of Monks Wood in parkland depicted on the seventeenth century map, and implies that Galfridus de Pauely land must lie in the open fields of Paulerspury to the north-east.

The documents make clear that the grange supported a mixed agrarian system of arable and pasture from the outset. Arable production is made explicit in the agreement made between William de Clairvaux and the priory in c. 1220-31.¹⁴ This system certainly predates the creation of the grange, the monks inheriting rather than creating *de novo*, a working landscape. Immediately after the transfer of this land, for example, the priory made an arrangement with Geoffrey de Insula concerning access to pasture on their new demesne, conceding that eight of his demesne oxen and the animals of his manor of Hecumdecote (Heathencote) might be folded on the fallow arable, implying that this was existing customary right.¹⁵ Woodland or wood pasture also appears to have been preserved within the demesne throughout the priory's tenure. Woodland was mentioned explicitly in the original grant of John Marshall in c. 1225¹⁶ again in a release and quitclaim made by William de Stapleford in c. 1235-45¹⁷ and much later in the lease of 1351.¹⁸ This appears, however, to have been restricted to one part of the grange lands since no woodland was included within the half of the manor leased in 1376 to John Hauerkus.¹⁹ This lease records the presence of arable, meadow, feedings and pasture but woodland is absent from this extensive and detailed list.

The reconstruction of the estate relies upon evidence to be gleaned from aerial photographs and from fieldwalking evidence. Ridge and furrow, for example can be clearly defined immediately south west and north west of the grange itself. This runs downslope towards the stream which forms the north-western boundary of the demesne. The selions terminate, however, 20-30m from the stream and suggest that beyond the headland an area of meadow

¹⁴ LC 169

¹⁵ LC 180

¹⁶ LC 166

¹⁷ LC 165

¹⁸ LC 177

¹⁹ LC 179

was preserved along the stream banks. South-east of *Wodekespat*, interlocking furlongs can also be found in the two modern fields south of the grange, again arranged to run predominately downslope towards a second stream flowing north-east towards Pury End.²⁰ Low-density scatters of medieval pottery have also recovered from the field south-east of the grange, the result of medieval manuring. However, the documents make clear that the principal manure source was the animals that could be folded onto the fallow arable and after the summer ploughing and this would leave no archaeological trace.²¹ In this instance, therefore, the total absence of medieval pottery scatters cannot be taken as absolute evidence that these areas lay beyond the ploughlands although it might still be expected that a few sherds should have made their way onto the arable fields. The high proportion of the estate containing ridge and furrow suggests that woodland was not extensive and may have been restricted to the peripheries of the demesne, perhaps managed in long and thin blocks such as Long Hedge just to the south-west.²²

Fieldnames from the early seventeenth-century Whittlewood map do not help the reconstruction of the medieval landscape since it can be shown there had been significant changes of use. Monks Wood, for example, contains ridge and furrow attesting that it had formerly been arable land. In fact this landuse change had already taken place by 1424 when Monks Wood was precisely described as a wood.²³ A slightly different chronology can be surmised in the enclosures north of Monks Wood. Granted to Sir John St John in 1424 this was, as we have already seen, exclusively arable, meadow and pasture land. It is also an area which has produced medieval pottery from fieldwalking. Yet the names Nicolls Wood, Burtons Sarte and The Breach all have woodland connotations and must therefore imply regeneration of woodland between 1424 and the enclosure of the fields at some point before 1608.

Few blocks of territory within Whittlewood Forest can be identified and their landscape histories traced so precisely than that of the grange at Monksbarn. Several key points emerge from documents and the archaeological fieldwork. First, it is clear that the process of assarting here was well underway by the first quarter of the thirteenth century. Three large assarts, those of Henry de Perie, Galfridus son of Peter, and William de Clairvaux (held from John Marshall) can be identified, together with two smaller assarts of John Marshall and Henry de Perie. These two small assarts and that of William de Clairvaux, forming a discrete estate lying on both sides of *Wodekespat* became the grange demesne, an area of some 110 acres. This leads to the second key point, that the monks inherited rather than created this

²⁰ RAF VAP CPE/UK/1926, 5236.

²¹ LC 165 and 180

²² NRO Map 4210

²³ LC 182

estate. It was already largely cleared of woodland and was under the plough by 1225. The agricultural framework had thus been established before the foundation of the grange and this was to alter little before the leasing of the manor in the mid-fourteenth century. Woodland regeneration, witnessed by the fieldnames which appear on the c. 1608 map, must therefore have taken place only once the estate had been taken out of demesne. Thirdly, it is clear that the boundaries between Whittlebury and Paulerspury have changed considerably. The documents specifically state that the grange lay in West Perry or Paulerspury but by 1608 it lay in Whittlebury. The complication appears to arise from the fact that this part of West Perry and large parts of Whittlebury were held as detached parts of Norton. Finally, the practice of folding animals onto the fallow arable as the principal means of manuring, rather than using farmyard manure containing domestic refuse, warns against the strict use of medieval pottery scatters as a definitive indicator of the location and extent of arable fields.