

Saxon and Medieval Settlement-Pattern in the Region of Chalton, Hampshire

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THE present paper offers a brief account of some of the results of field-work carried out in the neighbourhood of the village of Chalton, close to the border between Hampshire and Sussex (FIG. 1). The survey, which began in earnest in 1966 and is still continuing, is concerned with discovering the total settlement-pattern of the area from mesolithic times until the present day.¹ Already more than a hundred occupation-sites have been discovered in an area of approximately five square miles, and since the rate of discovery does not abate, the project cannot be regarded as anywhere near completion. Nevertheless it is felt that sufficient is now known of Saxon and medieval settlement and land-use to warrant the publication of this summary.

THE area with which the survey is principally concerned is the southern part of the hundred of Ceptune, as it is recorded in the Domesday survey (FIG. 3).² The hundred included the parishes of Blendworth, Buriton, Catherington, Chalton, Clanfield and Petersfield. For the purposes of the present discussion Buriton and Petersfield have been omitted, leaving a compact block of parishes measuring some 5 miles in each direction, sited entirely upon the dip-slope of the South Downs. The landscape is typical, undulating chalk downland averaging in height between 200 and 400 ft. in the south and 400 to 600 ft. in the north. Most of the intensive field-work has been carried out in the parishes of Chalton and Blendworth. Later in this discussion reference will be made to the group of parishes immediately to the east, in Sussex, including Compton and the Mardens (FIG. 1).

EARLY SAXON SETTLEMENT: 5TH TO 8TH CENTURY

Before the survey began the only recorded Saxon site was a small cemetery at Snell's Corner, near Horndean, excavated in 1947 in advance of road widening. In all, some thirty-three burials were examined and were ascribed on the basis of associated finds to the 7th century.³

¹ This work could not have been carried out without the enthusiastic help and encouragement of Mr. John Budden of Manor Farm, Chalton. His active participation in the field-work has been vital in ensuring the thoroughness of the survey.

² For a summary of the history of the parish see *V.C.H., Hants*, I (1908), 82-111.

³ G. M. Knocker, 'Early burials and an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Snell's Corner, near Horndean, Hampshire', *Proc. Hants Field Club*, XIX (1956), 117-70.



FIG. 1

MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF CHALTON AND OTHER PLACES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT (p. 1)

The method of discovering new Saxon sites was to walk the fields of the parish regularly under ideal conditions, i.e. after the ploughed land had been washed by rain, and search systematically for the characteristic grass-tempered pottery of the type discovered at the neighbouring site of Portchester Castle in contexts dating from the 5th to 8th centuries.⁴ During the last six years all fields have been examined in this way, usually on a number of separate occasions.

Certain factors militate against the discovery of Saxon sites, in contrast to settlements of iron-age, Roman or medieval date. Not the least of these is the friable nature of the grass-tempered pottery, which tends to disintegrate on

⁴ For a discussion and tentative dating of local Saxon pottery see B. Cunliffe, 'The Saxon culture sequence at Portchester Castle', *Antiq. J.*, L (1970), 67-85.

exposure to weather. This alone will tend to act selectively against discovery, particularly in areas which have been cultivated from early medieval times. Another factor of some significance is the apparent rarity of ceramic containers in the Saxon period. A small Saxon farmstead may be represented by a mere handful of sherds, whereas a Roman farm of equivalent size is likely to produce fragments of many hundreds of vessels.

As a result of the survey five individual locations producing grass-tempered pottery were defined (FIG. 2). Strictly they fall into three groups: a site producing only a few sherds (no. 20), sites producing several sherds together with evidence of extensive Roman occupation (nos. 38, 85 and 86), and the site of a substantial nucleated settlement (no. 41-46, called hereafter Church Down).

Clearly too much significance should not be placed on the occurrence of isolated sherds which might result merely from the manuring of fields, but bearing in mind the scarcity of grass-tempered wares, these locations may be regarded as

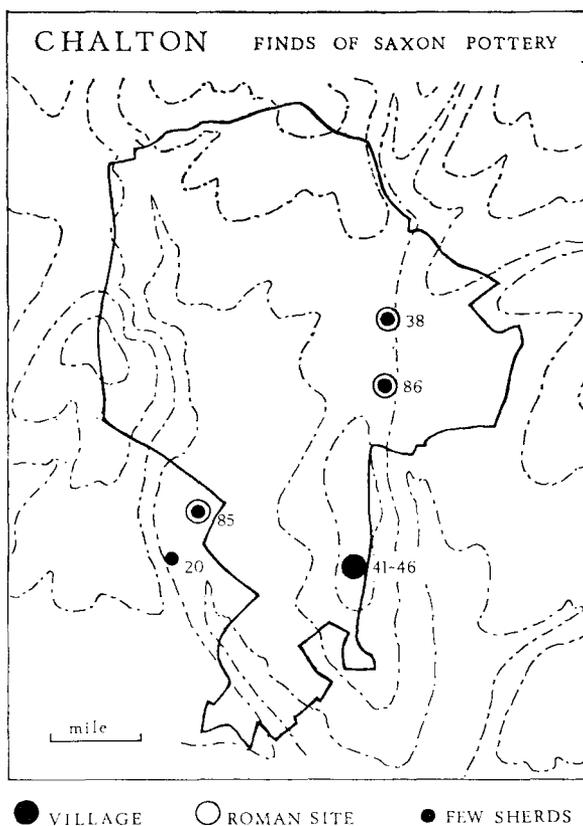


FIG. 2
 FINDS OF SAXON POTTERY IN
 CHALTON PARISH, HANTS (p. 3)
 No. 41-46 = Church Down

potential settlements. The discovery of Saxon sherds on the sites of late Roman settlements is of some interest, since the possibility that the technique of grass-tempering developed among the sub-Roman population has already been suggested.⁵ If this hypothesis proves to be correct, one would expect some sites to show a continuity of occupation spanning the breakdown of the Roman commercial centres of production. Sites 38, 85 and 86 are candidates for this class, but excavation will be required to examine the prospect further.

The most dramatic discovery was that of the nucleated settlement sited on the crest of Church Down at *c.* 430 ft. O.D. Occupation-debris, picked up over an area of 14 acres, included quantities of pottery, loom-weights, iron slag and two glass beads. Evidently the remains represent a village. The fresh nature of the pottery exposed after every ploughing left no doubt that agricultural activities were actively destroying the site. Accordingly a trial excavation was carried out by P. V. Addyman on behalf of the Department of the Environment. The immediate recovery of the ground-plans of two halls has shown the site to be one of national importance and it is now the intention that it should be totally excavated.⁶

Field-work has, then, demonstrated something of the Saxon settlement-pattern of the area. While the evidence is not likely to be complete, it will certainly provide a basis upon which to begin to construct a general model for the South Downs. Four broad conclusions can be offered: (a) settlement includes isolated farmsteads and nucleated settlements; (b) some isolated farms may have originated in the Roman period; (c) some nucleated settlements occupy hill-top sites; (d) sites are discoverable by field-work. Each of these general statements points the way to future work.

As an illustration of what may now be done to follow up some of these generalizations, we examined the implications of the hill-top location of the nucleated settlement in the neighbouring countryside. Two miles to the west of Church Down is an almost identical location occupied now by the village of Catherington, itself a place-name suggesting an early Saxon origin. Limited field-work discovered grass-tempered pottery close to the church, thus confirming early occupation. It is, therefore, likely that modern Catherington is the continuation of a village of early Saxon origin.

Four miles east of Church Down, again occupying a ridge-top position, is the now much-reduced village of Up Marden (Sussex)—another potential Saxon village site if the model is applied. While there is as yet no archaeological evidence for an early origin for the village, Up Marden is mentioned in land dealings of *c.* 800 and *c.* 935,⁷ suggesting that by the beginning of the 10th century it was a settlement of some importance. It remains to be seen if archaeological work can push the origins of the settlement back into the early Saxon period.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶ For an interim report on the first season's excavation see the article by P. V. Addyman, D. Leigh and M. J. Hughes *infra*, pp. 13-31.

⁷ Summarized in *V.C.H., Sussex*, IV (1953), 110-11.

Thus the general model of hill-top villages, applied to a limited area of the South Downs, has some value in a predictive sense. The discovery of hill-top villages farther afield, e.g. West Stow (Suffolk),⁸ Bishopstone (Sussex),⁹ Puddlehill (Herts.), and Wellhead (Westbury) and Ogbourne St. George,¹⁰ both in Wilts., is beginning to suggest that the old beliefs about Saxons settling in the valleys may not be generally acceptable, although, of course, it could always be argued that the hill-top settlements and their grass-tempered pottery represent the continuing sub-Roman population and owe little or nothing to intrusive traditions. Until the cultural affinities of several of these settlements have been worked out in detail, the matter is best left open.

THE LATE SAXON EXPANSION OF SETTLEMENT

The hill-top settlements belonging to the period between the 5th and the 8th centuries contrast dramatically with what we have come to accept as the typical valley settlement-pattern of Domesday England: evidently a significant shift of settlement took place during the last quarter of the 1st millennium A.D. The evidence from Chalton throws some light on the problem.

How late the Church Down village continued in use remains to be decided. The house-type which Addyman has discovered is closely similar to one of the Portchester buildings ascribed to the 8th to 10th centuries, but the absence of gritty wares at Church Down, of the types that were replacing grass-tempered fabrics at Portchester in the 8th and 9th centuries, might suggest that occupation did not last much longer than the 9th century and may indeed have ended some time before. By the time of Domesday two villages are recorded: Blendworth, south-west of Church Down, and Chalton to the north. A third nucleated settlement at Idsworth, not recorded in Domesday, does not appear to have been separated from Chalton manor until the early 12th century.

Field-work in all three villages has produced large samples of pottery, among which the earliest distinctive wares are the wheel-made rilled and rouletted types which have been called Portchester ware. It has been argued elsewhere that this category dates from the 10th and 11th centuries.¹¹ Thus archaeological evidence is consistent with the documentary record in emphasizing the pre-conquest origins of the three valley settlements. A few sherds from Chalton and Idsworth belong to the gritty fabrics which are earlier than Portchester ware, and belong to the 8th and 9th centuries,¹² but so far no sherds of grass-tempered wares have come from these villages.

Summarizing the available evidence, we may say that the Church Down settlement was probably abandoned by the 9th century, while the villages of Chalton, Idsworth and probably Blendworth began to be occupied at about this time. How closely these events were linked it is impossible to say, since the dating

⁸ *Med. Archaeol.*, XIII (1969), 1-20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁰ *Wilts. Archaeol. Mag.*, LXI (1966), 31-7.

¹¹ *Op. cit.* in note 4, 75-80.

¹² *Ibid.*, 72-5.

evidence is too crude and the nature of the earliest valley settlements still unknown. Two alternative explanations present themselves: either the change of siting came about as a single deliberate policy of abandonment and colonization or the three 'colonial' settlements gradually eclipsed the mother village, drawing off its population. On balance the latter seems the more probable.

A variant of this pattern occurred at Catherington. Here, instead of abandonment, the Saxon hill-top village continued in use with one satellite, Clanfield, colonizing the downs to the north. Clanfield is recorded in the Domesday survey but nothing is yet known of its origins from an archaeological viewpoint.

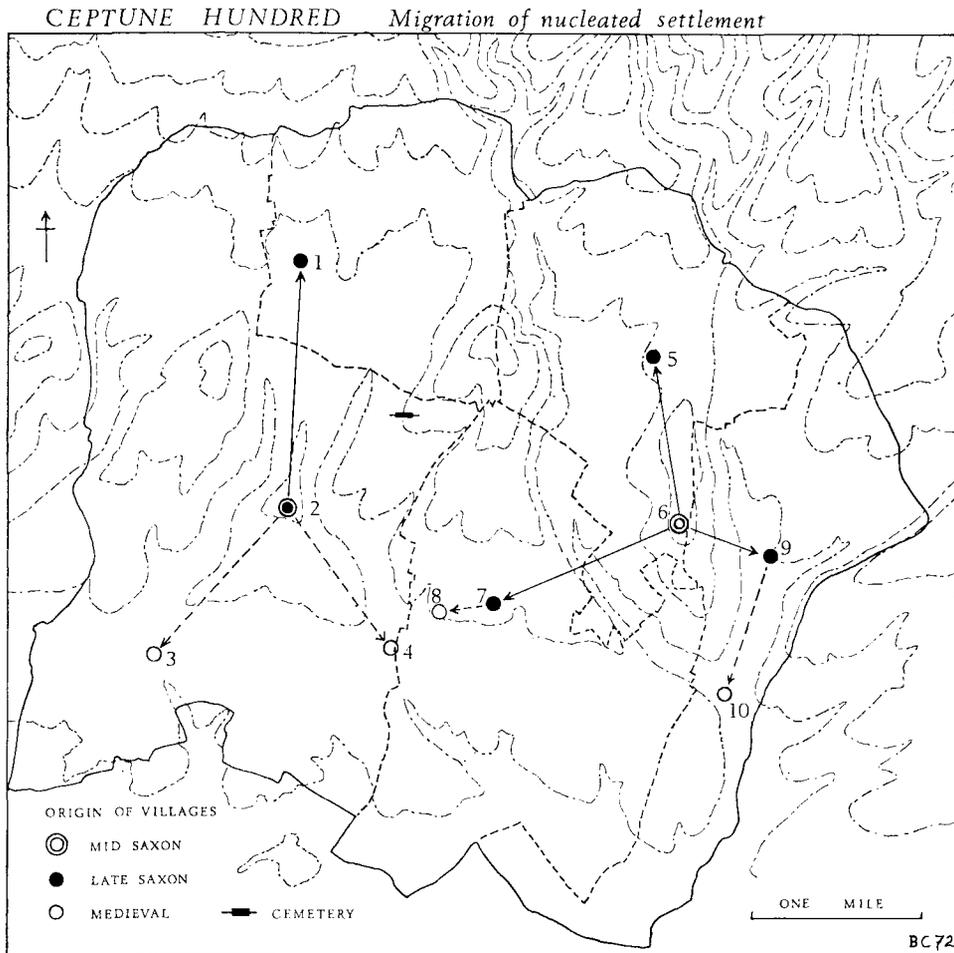


FIG. 3

SAXON AND MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT-PATTERN IN PART OF CEPTUNE HUNDRED, HANTS (p. 7)

1. Clanfield; 2. Catherington; 3. Lovedean; 4. Horndean; 5. Chalton; 6. Church Down;
 7. Blendworth (old site); 8. Blendworth (new site); 9. Idsworth; 10. Finchdean. Contours
 at 250-ft. intervals

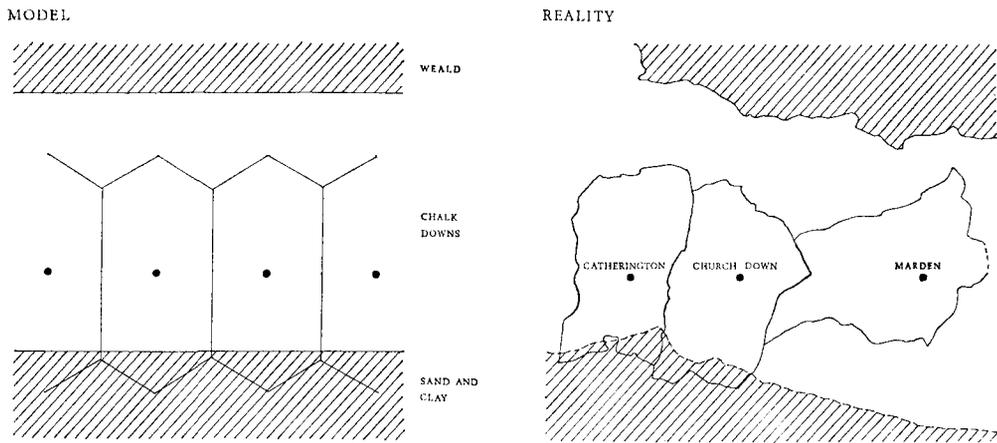


FIG. 4

DIAGRAM SHOWING 'MODEL' AND 'REALITY' OF LAYOUT OF CHALTON AND NEIGHBOURING PARISHES (p. 7)

The process of growth and colonization is reflected in the territories demarcated by the parish boundaries (FIGS. 3-4). It may reasonably be assumed that the lines taken by these boundaries (before readjustment in the later 19th century) reflect a situation at about the time of Domesday and that elements of an older system of boundaries may well have been incorporated and formalized at this time. If Church Down and Catherington are indeed the only large Saxon settlements on this block of downs, the boundaries of the southern part of Ceptune hundred very probably represent the limits of their joint territory, with the line of the north-south parish boundary (later dividing Catherington and Clanfield from Blendworth and Chalton) separating the two Saxon territories. Each of the Saxon villages would then lie towards the centre of a rectangular block of downland, the two areas being almost equal.

It would be wrong to be too deterministic about this interpretation, but in simple terms the two territories each represent hinterlands served from their own central places—that is the two villages. On a completely plain surface these territories would be hexagons (FIG. 4), but in an area like the downland strip colonization into the open downs to the north and the claylands to the south is unhindered, while unlimited lateral expansion is prevented by adjacent settlement; the resulting territory is, therefore, flattened about a north to south axis.

The late Saxon colonization took place within this already imposed structure (FIG. 3). The land of Clanfield was clearly cut out of the original Catherington territory, but the mother village retained the larger part of the area. On the Chalton side of the border it seems that the entire territory of the original Saxon settlement was apportioned almost equally between the three new villages—a fact which suggests that the Saxon village may have been abandoned by the time the boundaries were drawn up.

THE EXPANSION OF SETTLEMENT IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

A close examination of the documentary and cartographic evidence, together with extensive field-work, allows the general pattern of expansion of settlement in the medieval period to be recognized. The main conclusions are summarized in FIG. 5, which represents a conflation of these changes seen against the situation at the beginning of the 17th century. While it must be admitted that this interpretation is somewhat speculative, the main conclusions are not likely to be far from the truth.

The village of Chalton provides a clear picture of development. By as late as the early 19th century the agricultural land was still virtually surrounded by unbroken downland, known variously as Chalton Down, Church Down, Blendworth Down and Windmill Hill. Only at the southern extremity was its agricultural land continuous with that of the neighbouring farms. The medieval fields were probably laid out along the north and south lanes in a band of decreasing width extending for three-quarters of a mile on either side of the village. The western boundaries of the original open-field system were probably marked by two lanes, which survived until recently. By the 14th century a roughly circular park had been created on the north-western extremity of the ploughlands. This may indeed be the enclosure referred to in 1272, when Hamon le Strange was granted the rights of free warren.¹³

Subsequent agricultural expansion colonized a wide strip of downland along the western extremity of the original open fields running up to and partly around the boundary of the park. Large enclosures were also carved out of Church Down to the south of the village—an area which became known as Netherley.

The agricultural land so far described was all farmed from the village, but within the parish lay two isolated farmsteads, Woodcroft to the north-east and Wick to the south. Both must represent the activities of colonists setting up by themselves on wasteland clear of the village fields. Woodcroft was in existence in 1397, when John of Wodecroft is referred to in a dispute on the bishop's register.¹⁴ The land was still freehold by as late as the tithe award in 1816. Even by this date the irregular-shaped fields carved out of the scrub and woodland in the medieval period can still be made out.

The history of the Wick holding is less clear, but the compact area of its fields and the relationship of the village fields to its boundary suggest a definite and organized act of colonization earlier than the expansion of the village in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The settlement-pattern within the parish of Blendworth is similar in many respects to that of Chalton. The village and its open fields lay between Blendworth Down on the north and the heath and forest of Blendworth Common and the Holt on the south. The original limits of the open fields are difficult to make out, but the extent of the village arable by the 17th century can be defined accurately. Within this territory the village nucleus gradually shifted from the old centre to

¹³ *Op. cit.* in note 2, 104.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

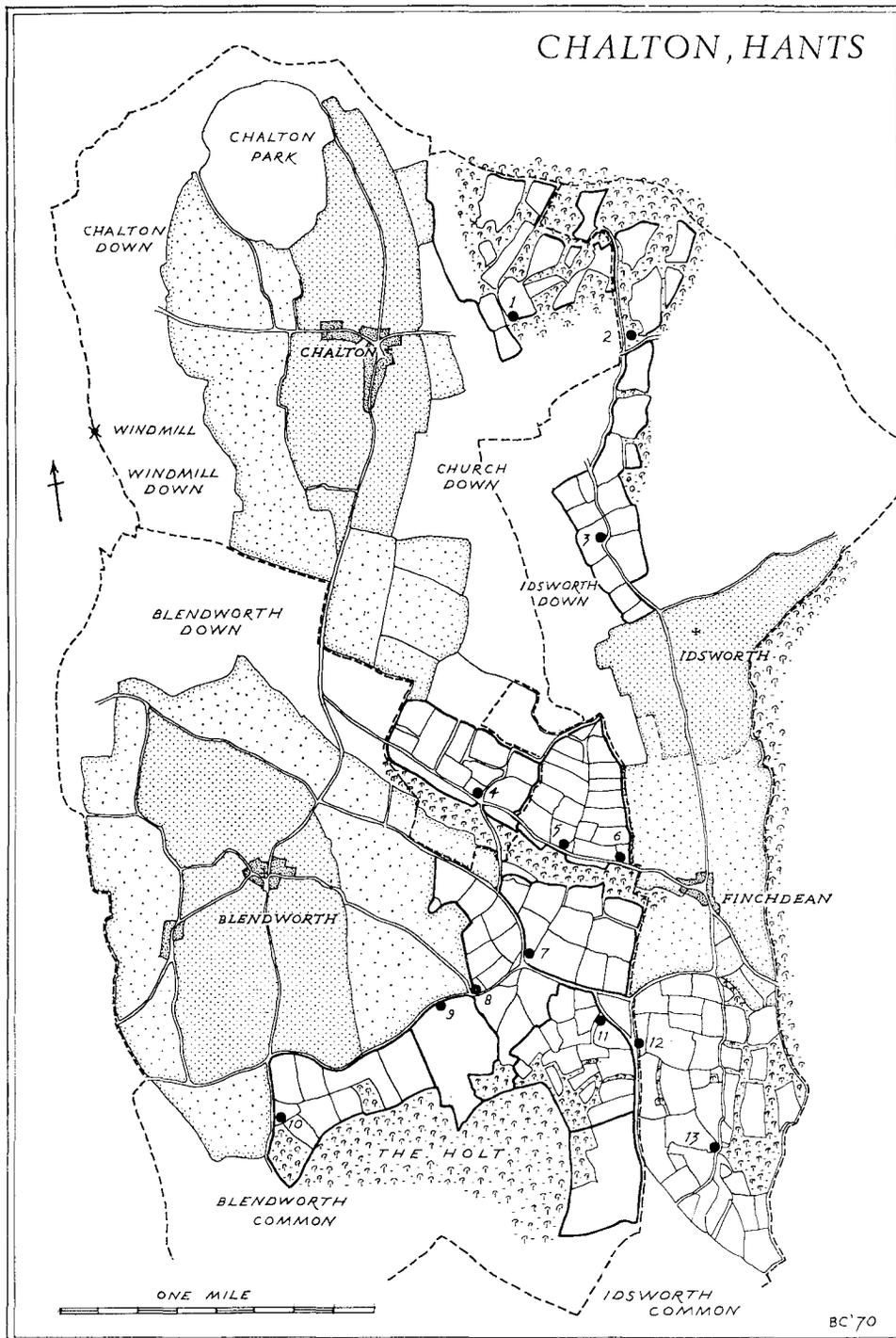


FIG. 5
 INTERPRETATIVE PLAN OF CHALTON, BLENDWORTH AND IDSWORTH PARISHES,
 HANTS (pp. 8, 10)

Close stipple represents the approximate extent of medieval village common fields, open stipple the expansion of arable in late medieval and early post-medieval times. Unshaded areas were still open downland in the early 19th century. Black spots represent farmsteads which colonized the waste in medieval and early post-medieval times. The boundaries of these holdings are heavily outlined.

1. Woodcroft; 2 and 3. unnamed; 4. Wick; 5. unnamed; 6. Murrants; 7. Treadwheel; 8. unnamed; 9. Woodhouse; 10. Pyle; 11. unnamed; 12. Wakefords; 13. Wellsworth

a new focus a quarter of a mile farther west, a movement symbolized by the construction of a new church at the western settlement in 1851 and the demolition of the original church in 1960. The reason for the shift is not immediately apparent, unless it is supposed that the western site benefited economically from its proximity to the growing village of Horndean, set astride the London-Portsmouth road.

Around the eastern and southern fringes of the fields of the village seven or eight colonist holdings were created out of the waste, some of them with significant names like Woodhouse and Woodhouse Ashes, vividly suggesting the process of forest clearance which necessarily preceded their establishment. There is no documentary evidence about the date of their foundations, but all were in existence by the 17th century and several of the sites have yielded collections of pottery of the 13th and 14th centuries. The evidence is, therefore, consistent with a late medieval date for the extension of arable.

The development of settlements in the valley along the eastern side of Chalton and Blendworth parishes is rather more difficult to sort out. Four settlements are recognizable: an unnamed site called here North Idsworth, a quarter of a mile north of Idsworth Church, represented now by a scatter of 10th- and 11th-century pottery; the deserted village of Idsworth, which produces quantities of pottery from the 10th to the 15th or 16th centuries; the present village of Finchdean; and the settlement of Wellsworth, now reduced to a single farm known as Great Wellsworth. On the evidence of the pottery scatters, both North Idsworth and Idsworth were already in existence before the Norman conquest and it may be that Finchdean and Wellsworth also were occupied by this time. Idsworth developed as the principal centre and, following the rebellion of Robert de Belesme in 1102, was constituted as a separate manor, no longer part of Chalton. By the 12th century the community was provided with a small stone-built church, which is now its only surviving building, while an examination of the surrounding earthworks leaves little doubt that the settlement had grown into a village of some size by this time. Less certainty attaches to the nature of Finchdean and Wellsworth, but the absence of churches would suggest that they were centres of limited significance.

The later settlement-history seems to suggest the gradual growth of Finchdean at the expense of Idsworth, until by the 16th century the latter was deserted except for the manor house and the church. The reason for this shift may simply have been the desire on the part of successive resident lords of the manor to improve the quality and extent of their park by encouraging the removal of the peasantry from their sight. By the beginning of the 19th century Idsworth House had grown to considerable proportions, largely under the auspices of the Clark-Jervoise family, but the advent of the railway in 1852 so disturbed the tranquillity that the family moved to a new house a mile away and the old building was demolished save for its stable block, which is still occupied as a dwelling.

SUMMARY AND GENERALIZATION

From the very brief survey of the field-work and documentary evidence given above the following principal stages in the development of settlement-pattern between 400 and 1800 can be detected:

1. *c.* 350–450. Development of large nucleated settlements at the expense of isolated farmsteads. It is possible that some of these centres continued into the time when grass-tempered pottery was in common use (*c.* 5th to 8th centuries).
2. 450–900. Establishment of villages, often on hill tops, as the principal concentrations of population. There may have been a few isolated farms worked at this time.

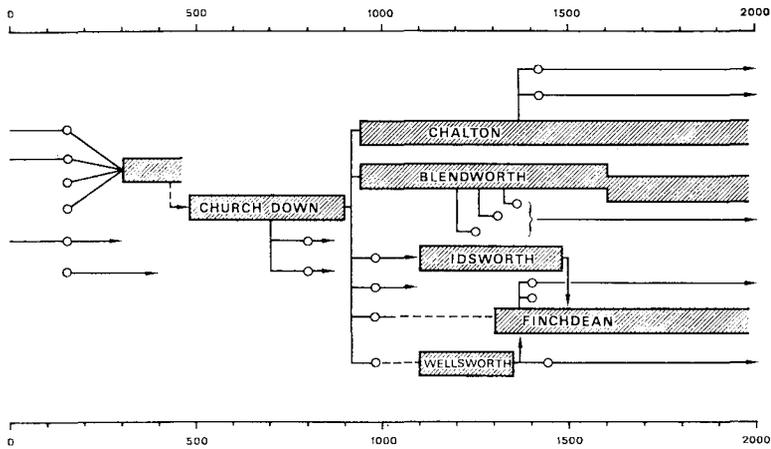


FIG. 6

DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SETTLEMENT FROM ROMAN TIMES IN THE CHALTON REGION (p. 11f.)
(circles = farmsteads; shaded blocks = villages)

3. 900–1000. Shift of population to new locations, often in valley bottoms. Some of the original villages remained in occupation (e.g. Catherington), others were abandoned (e.g. Church Down). A few smaller holdings were established.
4. 1000–1400. Gradual expansion of the village lands with related growth of population. In the later part of this period many new farms colonized the waste beyond the village fields.
5. 1400–1800. General maintenance of the medieval settlement-pattern, but with localized changes, e.g. the shift of the centre of Blendworth and the abandonment of Idsworth.

These generalizations, summarized for Chalton in FIG. 6, may be regarded as a simplified model for movements of settlement on the South Downs. How widely applicable the model will prove to be will not be seen until it is tested both in similar regions and in areas displaying morphological variants.

NOTE

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