

Sheepcotes: Evidence for Medieval Sheepfarming

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SHEEPCOTES were late medieval buildings for the shelter of flocks and the storage of fodder, among other functions. They are visible as earthworks and are recorded in documents. This study uses mainly Gloucestershire examples to provide insights into medieval sheep husbandry, and changing patterns of land management.

The remains of sheepcotes are a type of archaeological site insufficiently explained or understood. The first part of this article will define their characteristics in size, construction, and location, using both material and documentary evidence. The second part will consider their functions and their wider significance, in terms of the rural economy and agricultural techniques, and as features of the settlement pattern and rural landscape. Sheepcotes were built and used over the whole of England and in parts of continental Europe. Reference will be made to evidence from a number of English regions, but this study is based on Gloucestershire and in particular the Cotswolds, where the material remains are prominent, and for which there is an abundance of documentary evidence.

Documents from the 12th century onwards make reference throughout England to sheepcotes and sheephouses. The Latin word for such buildings, *bercaria* (plural *bercarie*), appears in surveys and accounts of the 13th and 14th centuries as a type of manorial building almost as often as barns, byres, and stables. The word *bercaria* (sometimes Englished as ‘bercary’) came to mean by extension a whole sheep-keeping unit, both the building and its associated pasture. Because sheep are no longer kept in houses as they once were, historians have found *bercarie* puzzling. They have wrongly interpreted them as fodder stores, or lambing sheds, or are simply baffled: ‘it is difficult to see how the large number of beasts . . . could ever have all been accommodated in such houses’.¹ The standard medieval Latin word-list mistranslates the word *bercaria* as a ‘sheep fold’, implying a temporary, open, fenced enclosure, and this influential work has perpetuated misconceptions about their nature and use.²

There is no excuse for such difficulties, because the best known medieval writer on agricultural matters, the 13th-century ‘Walter of Henley’, advised that ‘sheep be housed from Martinmas (11 November) until Easter’, and gives a number

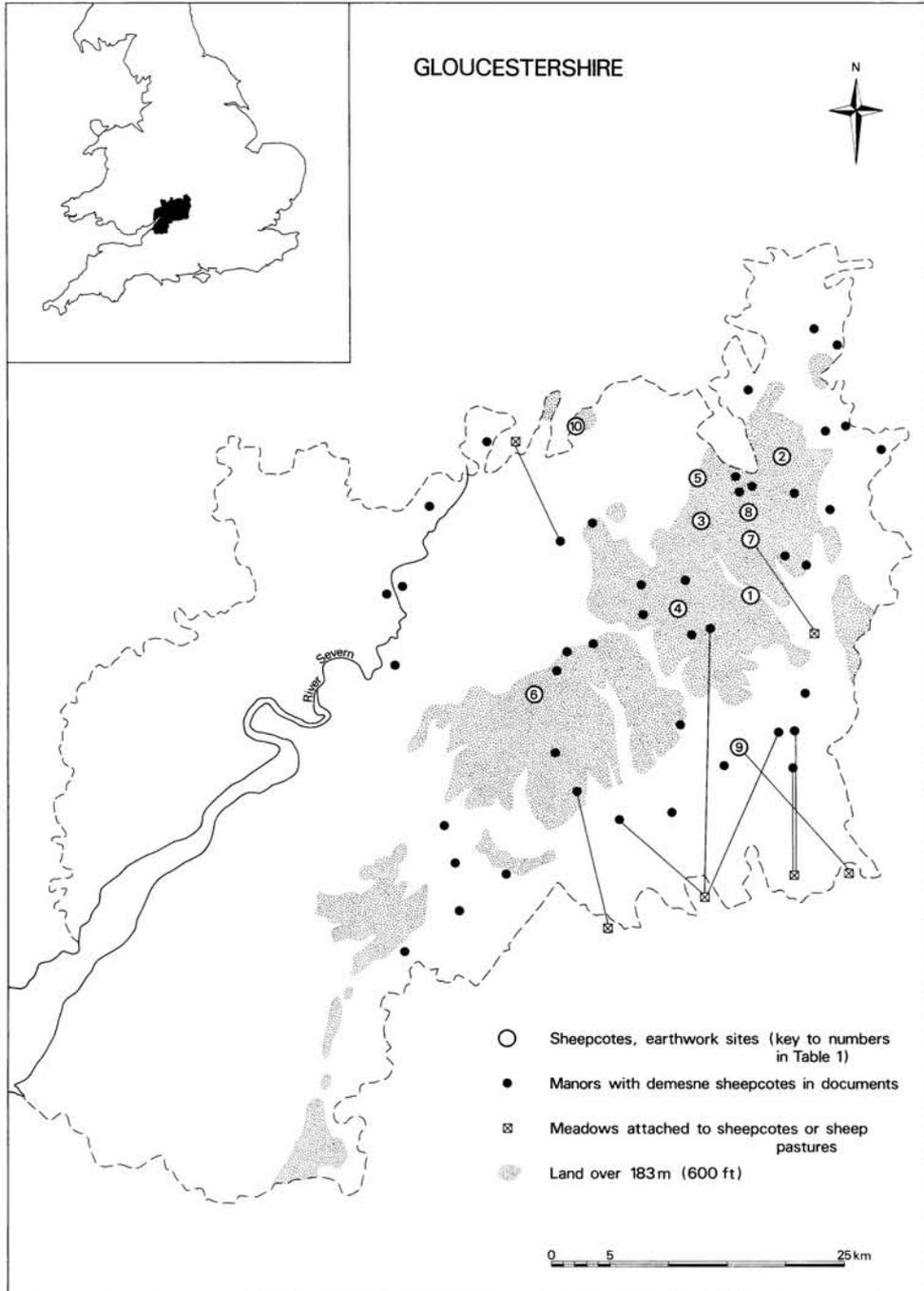


FIG. 1

Showing uplands, places with documentary references to manorial sheepcotes, meadows linked with sheepcotes, and sites with physical remains of sheepcotes.

of additional details about the use of sheepcotes.³ Later agricultural writers also mention the practice.⁴ A 16th-century phrase for something out of place, 'a goat in a sheepcote' shows how proverbially commonplace these structures had become.⁵ To dispel any lingering doubts, an illustration of activities for the month of December in the 15th-century manuscript, the *Très Riches Heures* of the Duc de Berry shows a flock of sheep closely packed in a long narrow building.⁶

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR SHEEPCOTES

Complexes of buildings and enclosures for stock management, both for sheep and cattle (vaccaries) have been recognized in the north of England. A substantial site at Dundale in the North Yorkshire Moors has been surveyed and published, and a structure consisting of a double range of narrow buildings has been excavated at Priors Rakes on Malham Moor.⁷ Further survey work has been proceeding on similar sites on the estates of Bolton Priory.⁸ These establishments were very large and elaborate, reflecting the scale and specialization of stock rearing on these extensive upland pastures. Long buildings associated with smaller buildings and enclosures have been discovered by aerial photography in the Upper Lune Valley in Westmorland.⁹ Less elaborate sites have been identified in the south, for example, a rectangular earthwork enclosure containing a long flint-walled building at Corton Down, Boyton, Wiltshire, associated with medieval pottery and a horse shoe, was rather hesitantly identified as a 'sheep-fold'.¹⁰

In the Gloucestershire Cotswolds a number of sites have been planned and published, again with some expressions of puzzlement over their function. One at Elmont in Beckford, on Bredon Hill, was called a 'farmstead', and another at Chalk Hill, Temple Guiting, was excavated as a Roman building in 1883, and again more expertly in 1957, when medieval pottery was found and the structure identified as an 'outlying farm'.¹¹ These two sites have given encouragement to the view that nucleated villages did not entirely dominate the settlement pattern of the Cotswolds, because these could be seen as representing a scatter of isolated farms.¹² A third example, an earthwork 39 m long adjacent to the deserted village site at Upton in Blockley, was described as a barn.¹³ In addition to these three examples, another seven sites have now been identified, and their earthworks planned. They have been discovered from aerial photographs, as by-products of field work on deserted village sites, and by systematic searches of upland areas where documents record the former existence of a *bercaria*. Documentary references show that these sites were once very numerous, and sheepcotes are recorded on forty-five Gloucestershire manors in the period 1200–1540. The surviving archaeological sites of course represent a small sample of the buildings which once existed (see Fig. 1).

The dominant features of each site are the earthworks of the foundations of a long building or buildings, and the better preserved examples are illustrated in Figs. 2–4; the characteristics of both the buildings and associated structures are summarized in Table 1. Small-scale excavations on two of the sites have confirmed that substantial building foundations lie beneath the prominent earthworks, and

indeed walling is visible on some sites where the turf has been eroded. The buildings vary in length from 23 to 65 m (75 to 214 ft.), and are usually 6 to 8 m wide (20 to 26 ft.). (The measurements have been made to mid wall, to the nearest half-metre, because of the difficulty in judging precise wall edges on earthwork sites).

At least three of the buildings seem to narrow at one or both ends, giving them a 'boat-shaped' appearance. These, and some irregularities such as inconsistent alignment of walls, may be distortions arising from the nature of earthwork remains, but appear in some cases to reflect extensions or alterations made to the buildings during their period of use. Seven of the buildings are of similar length, that is between 39 and 46 m, suggesting that their builders had some notion of a standard size. The building at Hawling differs from the others in its greater width and the arrangement of its entrances, which were apparently on opposite sides, near to the mid point of the long walls, as in a barn. The others tended to have entrances in one long wall only, and sometimes there appear to have been two (though in the case of earthwork sites, such as the building at Pinnock which has had modern trackways driven through it, original entrances cannot easily be distinguished from later damage). Four of them seem to have been built with one long wall close to major walls or boundaries of apparently medieval date, so they would have been easily accessible from one long side only, confirming the absence of the opposed doorways so characteristic both of barns and dwelling houses (Fig. 5).

Excavations at the Chalk Hill site showed that the long building had foundation walls which were *c.* 0.60 m wide and 0.60 m high, built of dry stone apparently to a height of nine courses, with heavier stones at the base of the wall.¹⁴ Six courses were visible in an eroded section of the wall of the Pinnock building. A large platform of collapsed stonework apparent at one or both ends of at least five of the buildings indicates that they had stone gables. At Chalk Hill in the long building glazed ridge tiles were found, but no stone slates, suggesting that the roof had been of thatch but with tiles to protect the ridge.

On some sites the long building alone is visible, but at Elmont, and at Chalk Hill and Kineton Hill (both in Temple Guiting) smaller buildings stood nearby. At Elmont one was sited at the N. end of the long building, at right angles, and the two structures formed two sides of an apparently walled yard. Another small building of familiar peasant-house type stood about 30 m to the E.¹⁵ At both of the Temple Guiting sites there were small buildings at the end of the long building, and judging from the complexity of the earthworks these had been through more than one phase of construction (Figs. 6 and 7). Excavations at Chalk Hill revealed substantial walls in one of the smaller buildings, with 20 courses of dry stone, and the base of a splayed window-opening with a socket for a vertical iron bar. At Elmont likewise the smaller building described by the excavators as a farm house shows high quality construction, with a wall in one place standing to a height of a metre with at least 10 courses of stone, and a well-built fire place. The small building at Chalk Hill had been roofed with Cotswold stone slates. There were poorly preserved traces of a small structure to the S. of the long building at Stanton

TABLE I
 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR GLOUCESTERSHIRE SHEEPCOTES See also Figs. 2-7

<i>Site (Parish)</i>	<i>Map Reference</i>	<i>Dimensions¹</i>	<i>Details of Construction</i>	<i>Location (height above O.D.)</i>
1. LOWER HARFORD (NAUNTON)	SP 130224	28.5 m × 6 m	simple rectangle, no sign of gables; 2 gaps in long wall (E.) probably entrances	in SW. corner of D.M.V. site, in Windrush valley (143 m).
2. UPTON (BLOCKLEY)	SP 153345	39 m × 6 m/6.5 m	narrow at ends, so apparently bow sided; 2 gaps in W. wall, 1 in E. wall. More than one phase of building?	on E. side of rectangular terraced area, immediately SE. of D.M.V. site, in a minor valley (229 m).
3. PINNOCK (TEMPLE GUITING)	SP 076279	42.5 m × 7 m	substantial stone wall, 6 courses visible in eroded section; much damaged, so that 6 gaps are not all original entrances.	on W. side of valley, which contains D.M.V. site (225 m).
4. HAWLING (HAWLING)	SP 068233	42 m × 9.5 m/10 m	internal cross walls and apparently opposed doorways near centre; gap which might be other entrance in E. wall. The lack of straight alignments in long walls suggests a two phase building.	on N. side of valley containing the D.M.V. site of Roel, and shrunken parts of Hawling (229 m). Overlies a toft boundary of Roel D.M.V.
5. STANTON (STANTON)	SP 084342	(1) c. 43 m × 7 m (2) c. 45 m × 7 m	(1) 2 gaps in E. wall; N. end damaged by quarry. (2) much eroded, so no details visible.	on Cotswold escarpment, on E. edge of parish, 1.5 km E. of village (270 m). Associated with enclosure.
6. MANLESS TOWN (BRIMPSFIELD)	SO 933114	46 m × 7 m/8 m	very pronounced earthworks at ends, implying gables. Cross wall 14 m from end with entrance in E. wall. 2 phases of construction?	on D.M.V., overlying toft boundary, 1.5 km to SW. of Brimpsfield village (259 m). Rectangular enclosure and possible paddocks nearby.
7. CHALK HILL (TEMPLE GUITING)	SP 126263	56 m × 7 m	heavy rubble spread at ends suggests gables. 2 gaps in long S. wall. Excavation showed walls 0.6 m wide.	on E. edge of parish 2.5 km from nearest village (Barton). Associated with a smaller building and paddocks and pens (213 m).
8. KINETON HILL (TEMPLE GUITING)	SP 122273	65 m × 8 m/9 m	heavy rubble spread at N. end. No evidence of entrances?	on E. edge of parish, 2.5 km from nearest village (Kineton). Associated with smaller buildings and 6+ paddocks (213 m).
9. BIBURY (BIBURY)	SP 120067	(1) 23 m × 8 m (2) 26 m/36 m × 7 m/8 m	(1) simple rectangle, no clear entrances. Damage to corner. (2) gables, entrance to E. 2 phases, with northern extension?	adjacent to village (and manor house), to E. At junction of linear earthworks, on edge of meadow (107 m)
10. ELMONT (BECKFORD)	SO 977374	c. 43 m × c. 6 m	narrow building linked to yard and other small structure, excavated 1938. 10 course stone wall.	on upper slopes of Bredon Hill, 1.5 km from Beckford village (122 m). Associated with paddock and ?sheep wash.

¹ Measured to mid-wall, to nearest half metre.

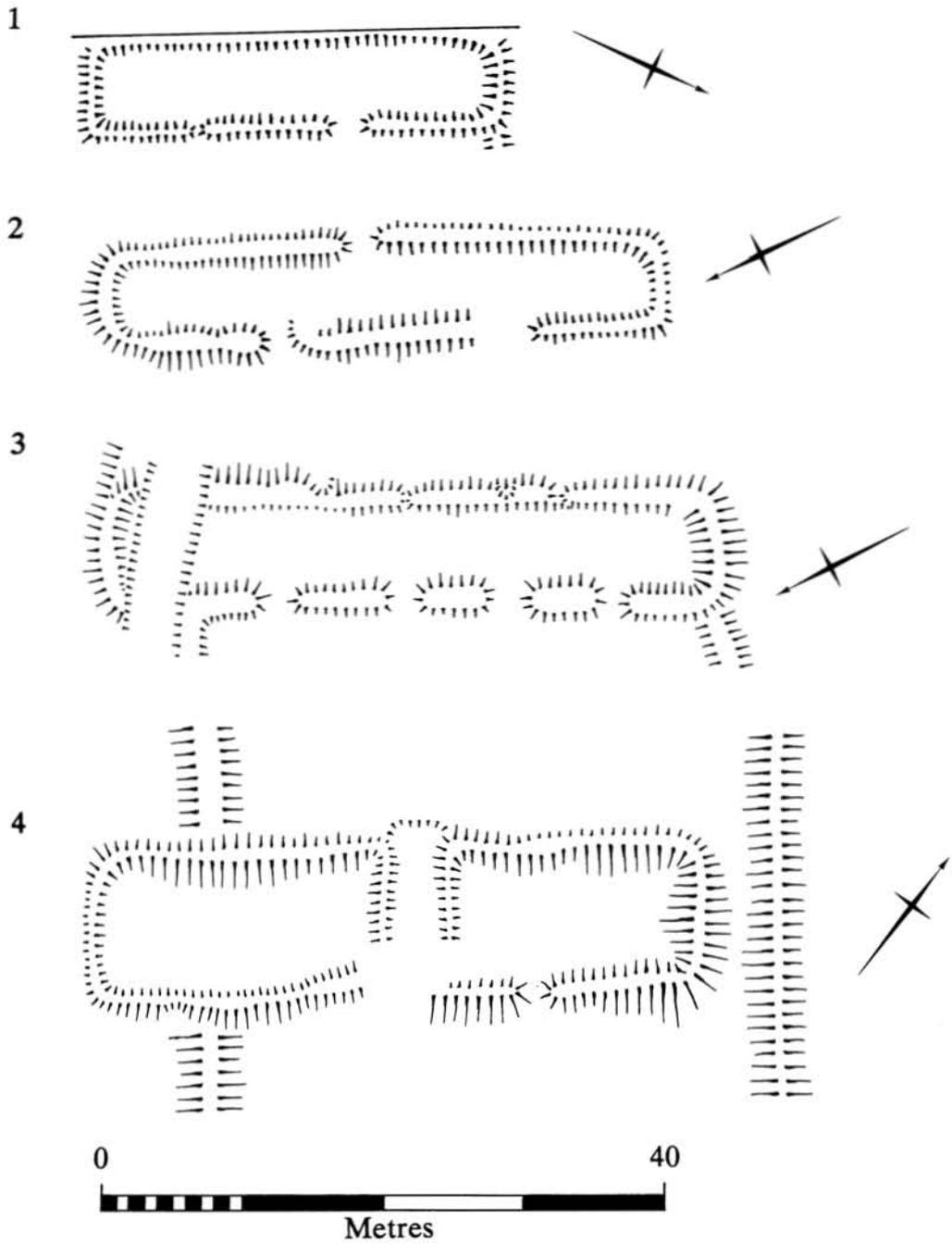


FIG. 2

Earthwork sites identified as sheepcotes: 1. Lower Harford; 2. Upton; 3. Pinnock; 4. Hawling (see also Table 1).

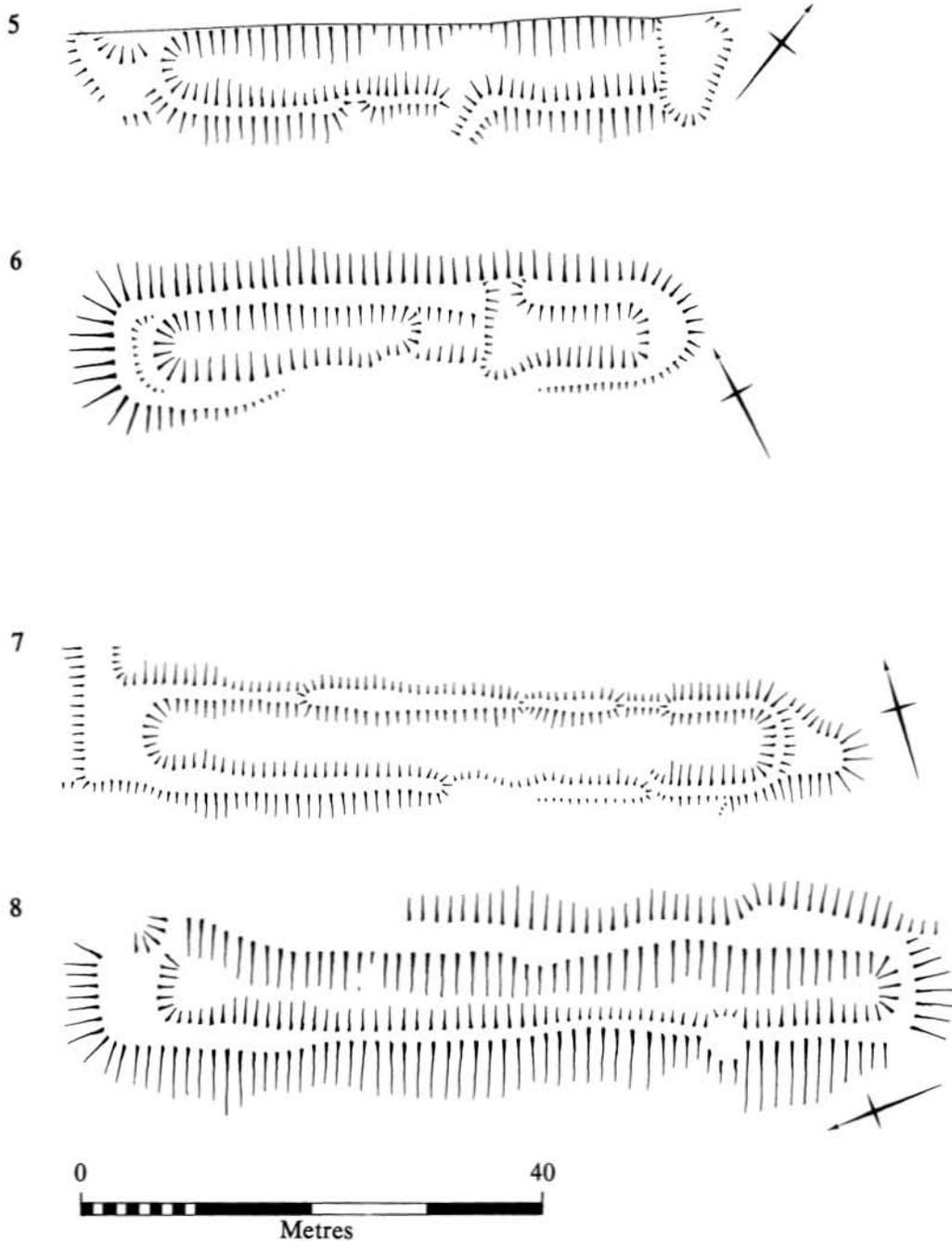


FIG. 3

Earthwork sites identified as sheepcotes: 5. Stanton; 6. Manless Town; 7. Chalk Hill, Temple Guiting; 8. Kinton Hill, Temple Guiting (see also Table 1).

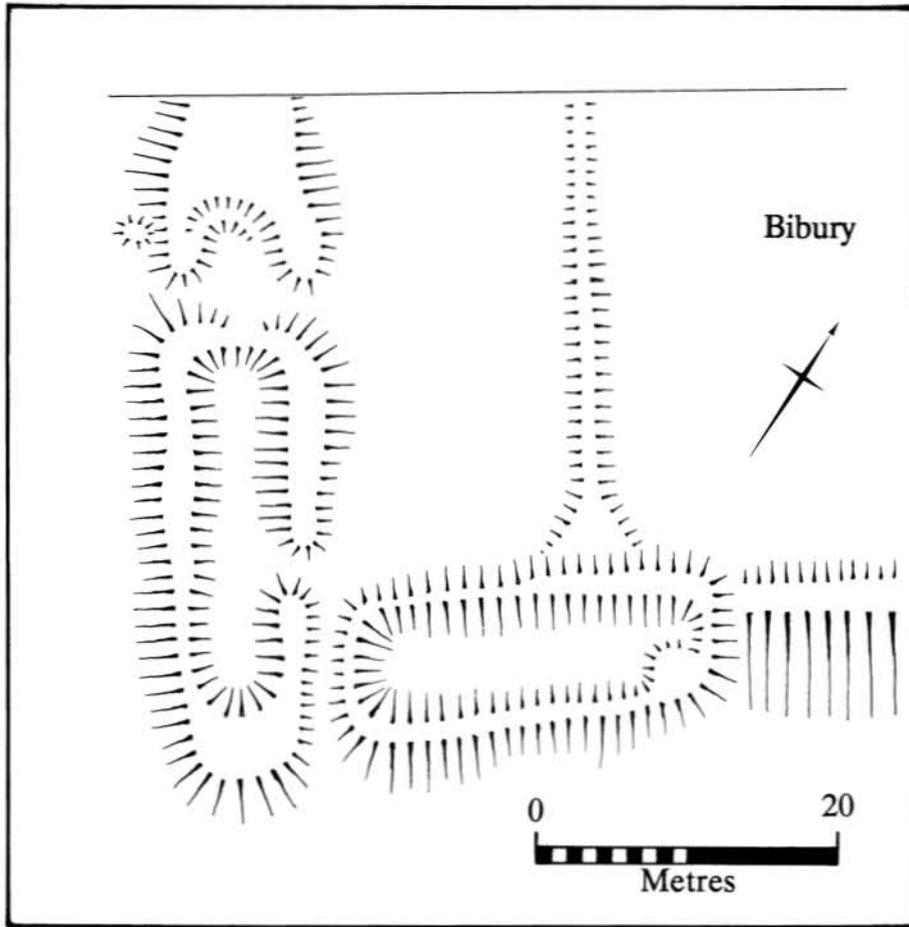


FIG. 4

Earthworks at Bibury (no. 9 in Table 1). The foundations of two buildings are visible. The W. building has an extension to the N. The E. building lies on the intersection of a major E.-W. linear earthwork, and a less prominent bank joining it from the N.

(Fig. 5), and a possible small house-like earthwork on the E. side of the Brimpsfield building, but as this lay on a former village site, this feature may well pre-date the sheepcote.¹⁶

The enclosures in or near which the buildings stood could be very simple, like the indistinct rectangle, *c.* 50 m across, apparently linked to the Upton building, or traces of a boundary bank at Stanton (Fig. 5), but at Elmont, Chalk Hill, Kineton Hill, and Brimpsfield there are a number of well-defined enclosures. At Elmont the plan drawn before destruction shows three paddocks of irregular shape, one of which was 200 m long, and the other two in excess of 80 m. At Chalk Hill five or six rectangular enclosures lay to the S. of the long building, each *c.* 30 m long and of varied width, and three apparent pens to the N., terraced into sloping ground, one measuring 10 m by 10 m and the other two *c.* 10 m by 15 m (Fig. 6). There

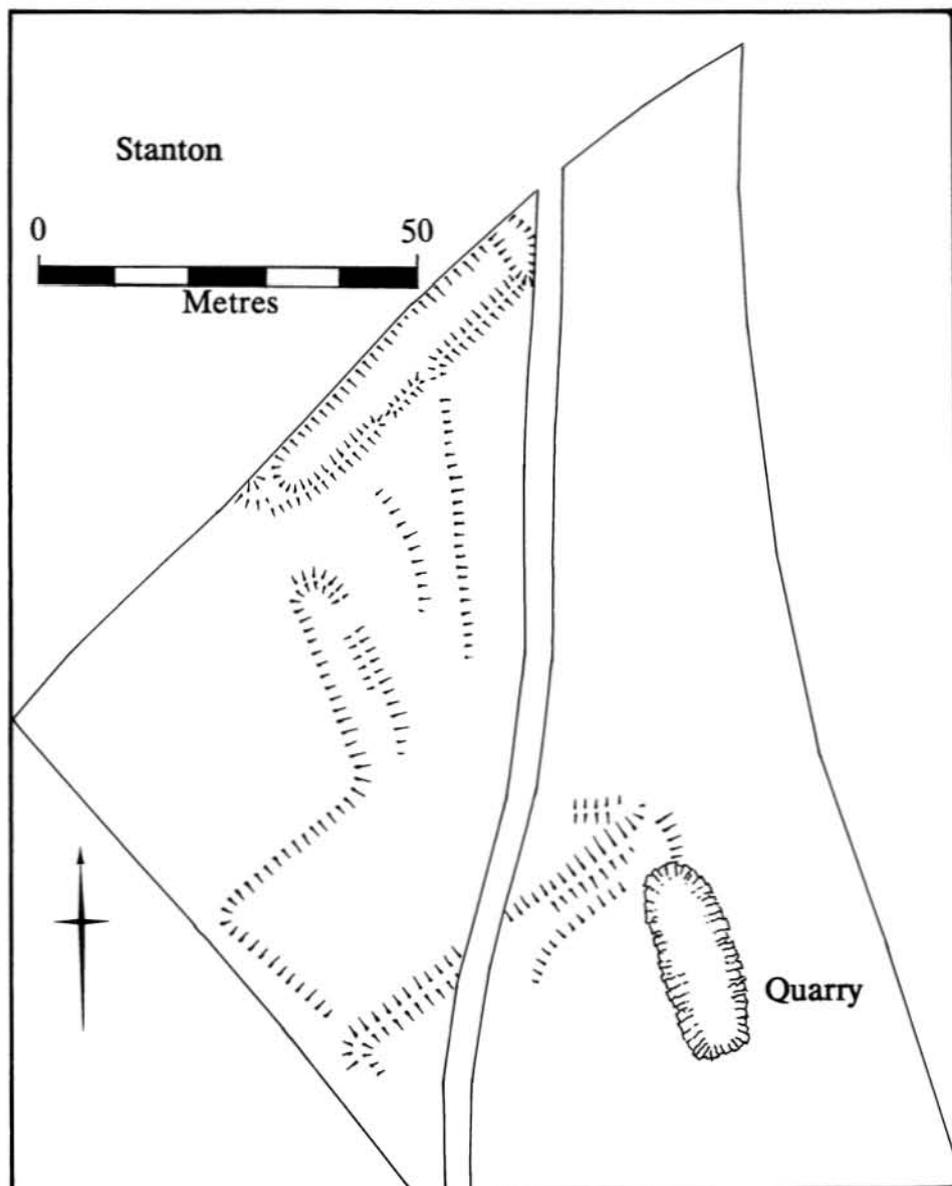


FIG. 5

Earthworks at Stanton. Well-defined earthworks marking the foundations of a long building lie to the N. alongside a modern stone wall which also marks the parish boundary. To the S. are less well-defined traces of the foundations of two buildings, and of an apparent enclosure. The S. building resembles the N. one in size, but is less well preserved.

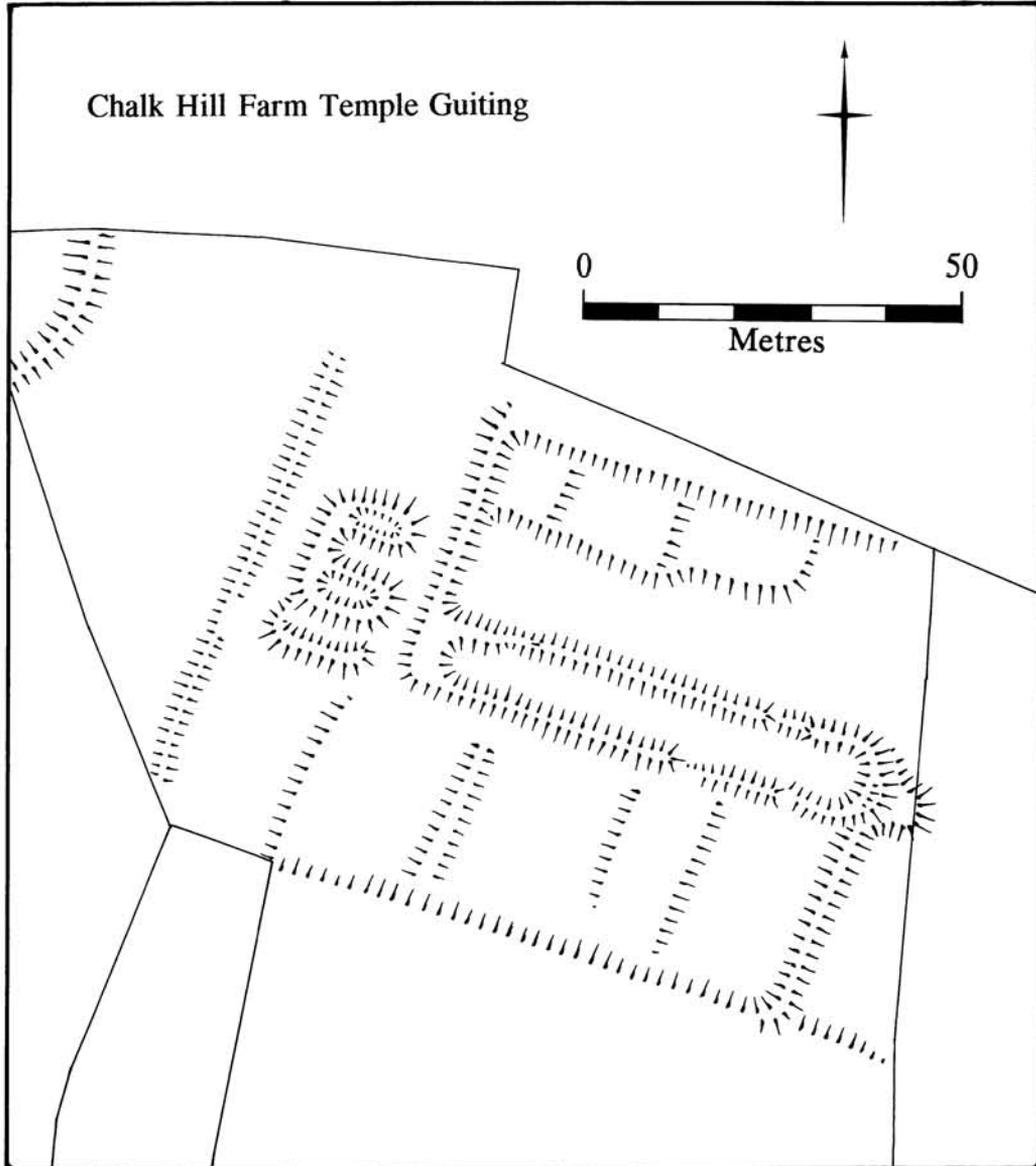


FIG. 6

Earthworks at Chalk Hill Farm, Temple Guiting. A long building foundation is associated with foundations of a smaller building to the W., and enclosure to the N. and S. The curved edge of a pond lies to the NW.

were at least six larger rectangular enclosures at Kinton Hill, each of *c.* 0.2 hectares ($\frac{1}{2}$ acre), the edges being defined by low banks and lynchets which could mark either walls, or hedges (Fig. 4). Two of these linear earthworks run together, perhaps to form a funnel for driving stock, or this may represent two phases of

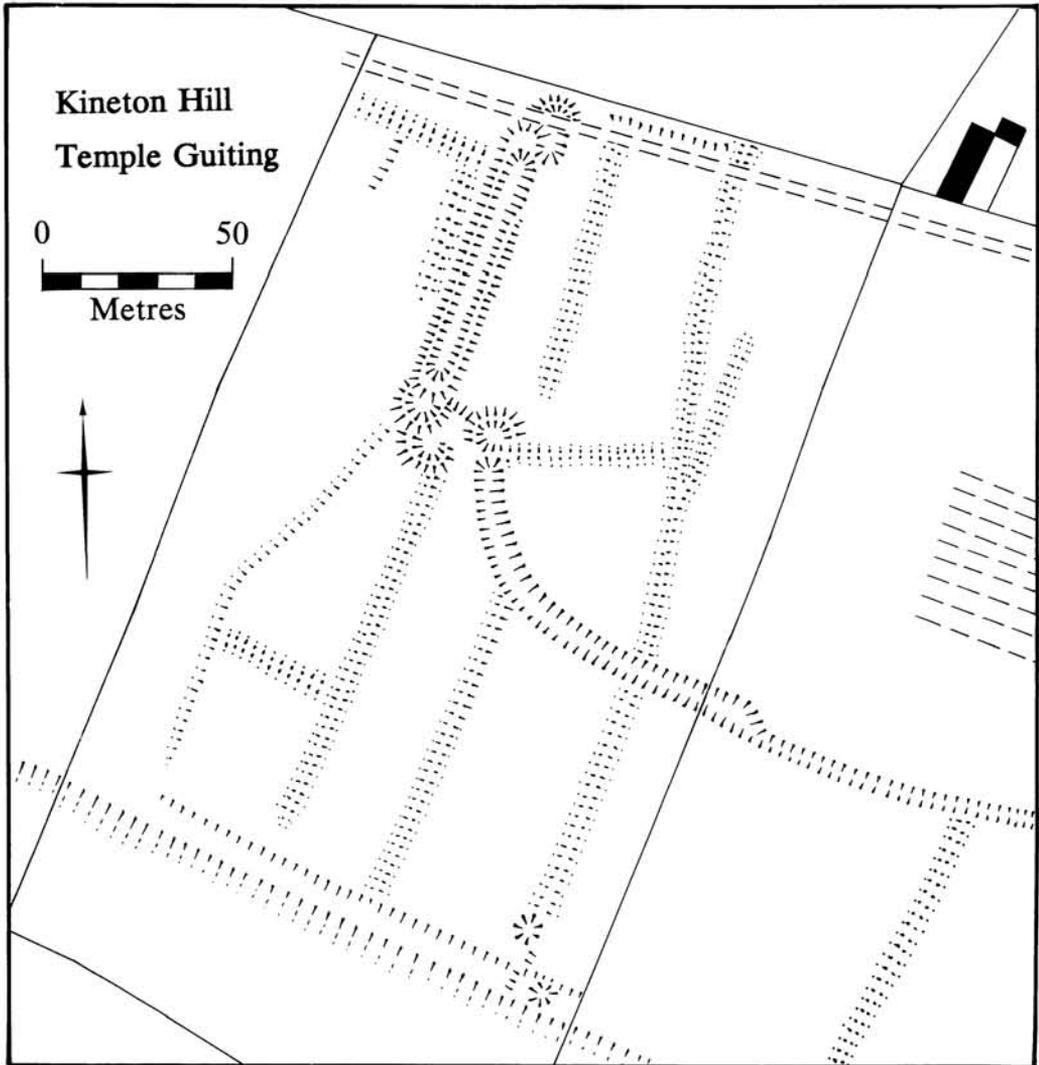


FIG. 7

Earthworks at Kinton Hill, Temple Guiting. A long building foundation is associated with foundations of smaller buildings to the N. and S., and enclosure banks defining rectangular paddocks. A holloway to the SE. of the long building is later in date than some of the banks.

enclosures. Certainly the site is a multi-period one, as a holloway cuts through some of the enclosures and runs up to the S. end of the building. There seem to be at least two, or perhaps three enclosures, to the NE. of the Brimpsfield building, similar to those at Chalk Hill, *c.* 20 by 20 m each (Pl. VIII, A). These may represent pens for animals, perhaps for keeping apart stock of different age or gender.

The sites as a whole, as well as the major buildings, show a number of phases, with underlying earlier features which may mean that some of the linear earthworks

are survivals of prehistoric or Romano-British field systems (see p. 160 below). Within the medieval period the sites have in some cases been through major changes, when villages were deserted, and in the period of the use of the sheepcotes there have been reorganizations, represented at Stanton by the apparent abandonment of one long building and its replacement by another (Fig. 5). The buildings themselves were remodelled, judging from the irregularities of the earthworks already noted, and the two phases of flooring found in the Chalk Farm excavations. At Bibury one of the buildings seems to have been extended to the N., and the earthworks of the E. one are sharper and better preserved, suggesting a different method of construction, perhaps at a later date (Fig. 4). After the buildings fell into disuse the sites have suffered many vicissitudes.

The dating evidence from Elmont consists of some 12th- and 13th-century pottery, but the excavators believed that 15th-century material was more likely to be contemporary with the 'farmstead' structures.¹⁷ Tiles and pottery from Chalk Hill were dated to the 13th century. The buildings at Hawling and Brimpsfield both overlie the toft boundaries of deserted villages which are likely to have been in decay by 1400, providing a *terminus post quem*.¹⁸ Harford and Upton were deserted in the late 14th century, and the long buildings are likely to post-date those settlements.¹⁹ It might be thought that some of the sites are post-medieval, as sheepcotes are known to have been used into the 17th and 18th centuries, but estate maps of 1603 which do *not* mark the Temple Guiting and Harford buildings provide a *terminus ante quem*.²⁰ Likewise the Bibury and Hawling sites had disappeared before 18th-century maps were drawn.²¹ These sites seem to have functioned in the 13th–15th centuries and gone out of use by the 17th–18th centuries.

The earthworks are found in a wide variety of locations. Most of them were built in isolation from settlements, four of them on hills or near to upland pastures, and three others, which overlie or are adjacent to the sites of deserted medieval villages, must have been remote from permanently inhabited settlements at the time of the sheepcotes' construction and use (Pl. VIII, B). The Bibury buildings stood near to an existing village on the edge of a meadow; and two other sites, though built on the remains of abandoned peasant houses, must have co-existed with a settlement that remained in being, albeit shrunken. Two sites are in river valleys, but most occupy high ground, between 213 and 270 m above OD. They were often located in slight valleys or dips that provide some shelter, but their orientation does not seem to have paid much regard to the prevailing wind, as buildings running N. to S. are equal in number to those with a long axis running E. to W. Entrances however tended to face to the E. or the S.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE FOR SHEEPCOTES

Documentary evidence survives for some of the sites surveyed above. The Stanton building is almost certainly the one that stood in the 'close . . . of the sheepcote' mentioned in a lease of 1401, and which also appears as *Schephey* in an order made in the manor court of Stanton in 1466.²² The Bibury pair of sheepcotes

are mentioned in accounts of the manor in the years 1371–95, and one of them is very likely to be the new *bercaria* built in 1392–94.²³ For a number of other manors — Blockley, Brimpsfield, and Temple Guiting — documents mention sheepcotes, but they are not likely to refer to the particular sites planned. But such evidence, together with that gathered from many other manors for which there is no visible archaeological evidence, helps to fill out a general picture of the construction and use of these sites. A great deal of the information comes from the archives of the large church estates — the bishopric of Worcester, Gloucester Abbey, Westminster Abbey, Winchcombe Abbey, and Llanthony Priory — and indeed nine of our ten sites lie on church manors. This partly reflects the high proportion of the Cotswolds that was held by ecclesiastical magnates, and partly the tendency for their archives to survive. These sites should not be thought to have been peculiar to such lords, as some are likely to have been built by laymen — Brimpsfield was in secular hands, and if the Temple Guiting buildings were constructed after the dissolution of the Templars in 1312, that manor was then held by laymen.²⁴ All landlords used sheepcotes, and the survival of so many church-owned sites is partly a matter of chance.

The documents show that sheepcotes usually had stone foundations or walls, as accounts contain references to the payment of masons who worked on the *bercaria* at such manors as Avening, Blockley, and Bourton-on-the-Hill.²⁵ When the Stanton sheepcote was leased out, the lord agreed to provide building stone for repairs. Stonework to a considerable height is implied by the payment at Blockley for the construction of a gable (*'pynon'*) in 1383–84 and at Bourton-on-the-Hill in 1366–67 a wall of a sheepcote was built to a height of 12 ft. (3.7 m).²⁶ A great deal of carpentry was also involved. At Avening in 1380–81 a 'couple' of timbers is likely to refer to a pair of crucks, and this is expected because cruck framing was predominant in Gloucestershire at the time. These could either have been full crucks built on low foundations, or raised crucks embedded in high walls. The former is suggested at Avening in 1378–79 by payments for walls of timber and wattles, and on a lowland manor, Todenham, three bays of the 'great sheepcote' were built in 1379–80 of elm timber and wattles; high walls and raised crucks are implied by the 1366–67 Bourton-on-the-Hill reference already mentioned. An important part of the carpenters' work was to insert the beams and joists of the 'tallots' or hay lofts, which at Avening in 1380–81 were called 'two solars called Tavelottes in the sheep house for putting hay in'. The buildings were fitted with doors, two at Blockley in one building, and a 'great door' (implying that there was also a small one) at Bourton-on-the-Hill. Doors were sturdy affairs, judging from the nails and hinges bought for the sheepcote at Todenham in 1277–78, and they were fitted with locks and keys.²⁷ Much of the maintenance of the woodwork of sheepcotes involved refitting them with pens (*presepia*) and stalls (*stalli*) which were made of poles or split timber, and withies. We might wish to identify these with some of the enclosures on the earthwork sites, but the documents indicate that their size was relatively small and that they were internal structures — at Chaceley they were 14 ft. long, and a Brimpsfield account of 1379–80 states precisely that *2s. od.* was spent 'making pens and stalls in the wethers' sheepcote'. Evidently then small

compartments within the building were provided for the sheep — six are mentioned at Bibury (1394–95), six new ones at Todenham (1378–79), twelve at Bishop's Cleeve (1393–94) and fifteen, seven old and eight new, at Chaceley (in 1368–69). The accounts for this last manor also mention a '*cradull*' of wood 26 ft. long, which probably refers to a feeding rack suspended above the animals.²⁸

Most of the Gloucestershire *bercarie*, according to the documents, had thatched roofs. Much more expensive stone slates seem to have been introduced in the late 14th century. At Bibury for example, the existing sheepcote was thatched, and the new one of 1392–94 was provided with a roof of 16,000 slates and 48 crest tiles; and a new construction at Blockley a decade earlier used 28,700 slates from the quarries at Snowhill, again with ceramic crests. At nearby Bourton-on-the-Hill by the 1360s one of the two sheepcotes had a roof of thatch and that of the 'upper sheepcote' was covered with slates.²⁹

The building accounts mention the number of bays in sheepcotes — in the late 14th century three bays were added at Todenham, an eight-bay building was constructed at Blockley, and one of the Bourton-on-the-Hill buildings contained eighteen bays.³⁰ The 'standard' length of some of the earthwork sites suggests that they were constructed in consistent numbers of bays. Four of the buildings which came near to a length of 42 m (140 ft.) may well have been originally of twelve bays of about 12 ft. each. The largest of them, Kinton Hill, could have contained eighteen bays, the same as that documented at Bourton-on-the-Hill. Assuming that cruck construction was used, we can gain some insight into the superstructure of the buildings by comparison with standing cruck barns such as those at Swalcliffe (Oxfordshire), and Lacock (Wiltshire), both within the Cotswold region.³¹ Their width (6.6 m and 7.5 m) is similar to that of most of our sites, and they carried roofs to a height at the apex of 8 m to 9 m. A considerable roof space would have been a necessary feature of sheepcotes to accommodate the tallots or hay-lofts. The documents confirm the archaeological evidence in showing that these buildings were commonly altered, often requiring major repair work, or were extended by adding bays at one end.

A final problem concerns the amount of ventilation in these buildings. The stone foundations, cruck timbers, thatched or slated roofs suggest that these were solid and weather proof structures. Modern experts in sheep husbandry would argue that the health of the animals would depend on a good flow of fresh air, which would imply openings at the top of the walls. These are indeed shown on the contemporary French illustration of a sheepcote (p. 138), though this may have been an artistic convention so that the interior would be visible. The only standing building identified as a sheepcote, dated to the 16th century, at Tichborne in Hampshire, apparently had an open side, but there is no evidence for this in medieval Gloucestershire.³²

The documents are not at all specific in explaining the function of the enclosures visible near to a number of our buildings. The sheepcote at Arlington in the early 16th century was associated with a 'separate close' and that at Stanton lay in a 'several close', and the 'hoggasters' sheepcote' at Minchinhampton in 1329–30 was surrounded by a hedged close. An 'adjacent croft' and 'adjacent close' appear

in descriptions of sheepcotes at Lower Swell and Twynning.³³ But our surveys of earthworks (especially Figs. 6 and 7) suggest that sheepcotes could be surrounded by a number of paddocks or small fields. One can only note the careful categorization of sheep in the manorial accounts — they are treated separately as rams, ewes, wethers (castrated adult males), hoggasters or jercs (two-year-olds, male or female), yearling lambs, and new lambs. A distinction is also made between the useful animals and 'kebb', useless, sterile or sick animals, which each year had to be taken out of the flocks and sold. One can appreciate the need for putting different types of animal into separate enclosures on occasions when sheep were gathered in one place, and it may well be that our paddocks were used at various stages of the shepherd's year for this purpose.³⁴ The evidence for such enclosures is here entirely derived from the material remains.

Archaeology also tells us much more than the documents about the location of sheepcotes. Manorial accounts sometimes indicate the place where a sheepcote stood by mentioning an adjacent building. We might be told, for example at Todenham in 1318–19, that a sheepcote lay near to the barn door, and in the next year that, of the two sheepcotes, one lay near the bakehouse and the other near the dovecot.³⁵ From many such references it is clear that sheepcotes were often part of the complex of buildings in the manorial farmyard (*curia*). Perhaps because of their size and the constricted space available in the *curia* itself, a number seem to have been set a short distance apart from the other buildings. At Bourton-on-the-Hill for example in 1398–99 the 'new' sheepcote was 'below the curia', presumably on the eastern side of the present farm site. The Cutsdean grange of Winchcombe Abbey in 1390 had a sheepcote 'near the great gate', and at Bishop's Cleeve in 1413 the sheepcote was 'outside the gate of the manor'; the Quinton building was 'near the church', which lay next to the manor house.³⁶ Only very rarely does a document suggest that sheepcotes were sited on remote pastures, like the 15th-century Minchinhampton reference to the '*bercaria super le Doune*', and otherwise we are able to make deductions, as at Stanton, where a 1443 by-law mentions fences from *Schepheycorner* (the sheepcote site) to *Staneweyhegge*, clearly the E. parish boundary, on the hill above the village.³⁷ The two types of evidence complement each other, as documents alone will tend to inform us of sheepcotes in or near the *curia*, the archaeological evidence having been removed or covered by later building activity in still-functioning farmyards, while the earthworks are best preserved on upland locations.

FUNCTIONS OF SHEEPCOTES

Sheepcotes were in universal use by Gloucestershire landlords. Almost every manor with a sizeable demesne for which there are documents was provided with a sheepcote. Many indeed had two, distinguished by such descriptions as 'old' and 'new', or 'upper' and 'lower', or 'great' and 'small'. Sometimes they were identified by the type of animal which they accommodated — wethers, hoggasters, ewes and so on. In all, at any one time between 1250 and 1550 there must have been at least 300 sheepcotes in use on demesnes in the county. It must also be stressed that they

are found in every part of England. Documents sometimes give their dimensions: 88 and 100 ft. long at Little Humber (Yorkshire) in 1339, 100 ft. long at Fingrith in Essex in 1392, 100 ft. by 14 ft. at Appledore (Sussex) in 1352, 60 ft. by 19 ft. at Rimpton in Somerset in 1347-48, and 80 ft. by 16 ft. at West Wycombe in Buckinghamshire.³⁸ Building accounts, or valuations of destroyed buildings, show that they could be well-built and valuable structures — more than £11 was spent on a Norfolk example, £8 on one in Suffolk, and the materials of one pulled down in Lincolnshire were said to be worth £10.³⁹ Those on the estates of the bishopric of Winchester have been studied systematically, and in the late 13th century about sixty are known of which seventeen were separate from the manorial *curia*, and at least three lay in a ditched enclosure.⁴⁰ A dramatic indication that sheep were housed in the winter is provided by a complaint that a building of the vicar of Bishop's Itchington in Warwickshire had been burnt down in December 1380, and forty sheep perished in the flames.⁴¹ Documentary evidence from other parts of the country can also push them back earlier than in Gloucestershire. A lease of Kensworth (Bedfordshire) in 1152 describes a building for sheep 39 ft. by 12 ft., and one for lambs 24 ft. by 12 ft.⁴² The bulk of the detailed evidence for the functions of sheepcotes comes from the records of demesne agriculture, but it must be noted here that in addition to the sheepcotes belonging to the lords of manors, there were many more on peasant holdings, both in Gloucestershire and other parts of the country, which will be discussed below.

Clearly sheepcotes were regarded an important and necessary features of the management of manorial sheep flocks, and five functions can be ascribed to them.

Shelter. They provided winter shelter for animals, traditionally from early November (Martinmas, November 11) until April. Marshall, in his account of practice in the 18th century, mentioned the rule of thumb that 1 square yard (0.84 sq. m) was regarded as sufficient accommodation for each sheep.⁴³ Now this formula fits our buildings very well. The 'standard' size that we have noted, of a building about 40 m by 6.5 m, or of twelve bays using the medieval terminology, would have had a floor area of about 300 square yards (251 sq. m). Now it so happens that in the late 14th century 300 sheep were commonly assigned to a single shepherd, and often when landlords were estimating the capacity of a pasture they would mention the number 300. In the late 13th century the Northcumbe pasture in Temple Guiting was said to be capable of carrying 300 wethers, and leases, like those in the early 16th century state that 300 sheep could be kept at Salperton and Daglingworth. The Downs at Charlton Abbots were capable of feeding 500 sheep in the summer and 300 in the winter.⁴⁴ The longer eighteen-bay buildings represented by the site at Kineton Hill and in the documents from Bourton-on-the-Hill would, using the same formula, have held about 500 sheep, which is another figure which recurs in estimates of the capacity of larger pastures.

According to the modern agricultural writers the animals would go out onto the pasture in daylight and return indoors at night, but were kept under cover for a longer time during spells of cold or very wet weather. There can be no doubt of the close association between these buildings and the wintering of sheep, and in the

case of wethers, the sheltering of flocks on upland pastures. The wethers were the most important producers of wool, and it was believed that 'cotted' sheep produced better fleeces and would be saved from disease, such as the much feared rot.⁴⁵

Fodder stores. The sheepcotes were needed as stores of feed for wintering flocks. The tallots in the roofspace had a considerable storage capacity, and large quantities of fodder were delivered to the sheepcotes in the summer and autumn. Hay was mainly used — fourteen cart loads for example were reported in September 1388 to be kept 'at the sheepcote' at Bibury. When demesnes were leased out to a farmer, but the lord retained a sheep flock, the farmer was required to provide fixed quantities of hay to the lord's sheepcote — sixteen wainloads at Salperton, twenty-four wainloads at Maisemore, and forty at the main Llanthony Priory sheepcote on the outskirts of Gloucester.⁴⁶ Sometimes the accounts give details of the quantity actually consumed — at Minchinhampton in 1378–79 eight wainloads were given to 200 wethers, and twenty-one wainloads to 171 hoggasters. Two years later at Avening 273 wintering hoggasters consumed thirty wainloads of hay, together with peas and oats.⁴⁷ We see in these figures the tendency for the demesne managers to give more feed to the younger animals.

Sheep were also fed with peas, vetch, pulse (a mixture of peas and beans), and oats, often stored unthreshed and given to the animals in that form, so taking up a great deal of storage space. The quantities given in each winter varied between two and six quarters, depending on the severity of the weather and the age and health of the flock. Farmers in their leases were also expected to provide straw for the sheepcote, which may have been partly for feed. Walter of Henley advised that after a flock had been out in bad weather when they had not been able to graze, a mixture of hay and straw should be fed to them, because if given hay on its own the hungry animals might tend to swallow the hay without chewing.⁴⁸ But the straw would mainly have been used for bedding.

These large quantities of hay, grain in sheaf, haulm, and straw may well have exceeded the capacity of the tallots. Indeed we are told at Bourton-on-the-Hill, where the sheepcote stood next to the *curia*, that in 1349–50 the hay was put in the barn and hay house as well as the sheepcote.⁴⁹ In more remote sites, where there were no spare barns nearby, there could well have been purpose-built hay houses, which would explain at least one of the smaller buildings noted at the Temple Guiting and Elmont sites. There are also references to stacks of hay and corn near the sheepcotes.

The upland sites which were built at some distance from meadows and cornfields had to be accessible by road for the carts and wains (the latter being two-wheeled ox-drawn vehicles) bringing hay, grain, and straw. The 1603 estate map of Temple Guiting shows roads from the valleys passing near to the sheepcotes — indeed Kineton Hill was adjacent to the then main road from Guiting to Stow-on-the-Wold (Fig. 8).⁵⁰ At Stanton also the principal route from the village in the valley on to the hills passed within a few yards of the site.

Lambing. Sheepcotes sheltered ewes at lambing time. In 1379–80 a pound of candles was bought for the Brimpsfield shepherd and his boy 'to have light in the

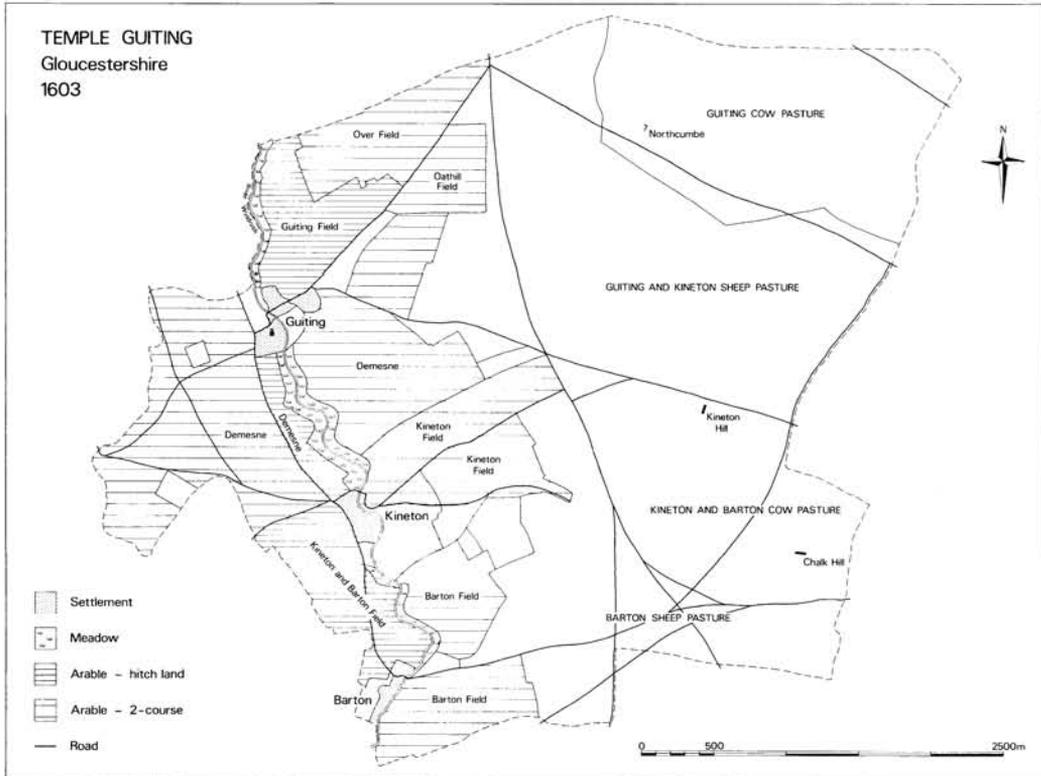


FIG. 8

Temple Guiting in 1603. The pattern of land use resembles that of the later middle ages. The medieval sheepcotes are not marked in 1603, presumably because they had gone out of use, but their location is shown here. The sites of Chalk Hill and Kineton Hill are known from earthworks; Northcumbe is known only from documents and is marked conjecturally. The sheepcotes are placed on the pastures on the upland E. of the parish. In the valley to the W. lay the three villages of Guiting, Kineton and Barton, a small amount of meadow in the valley of the Windrush, and the arable, some of which was cropped every year (hitch land) and most every other year. The demesne arable lay between the common fields of Guiting and Kineton.

sheepcote at night in the lambing time'.⁵¹ The normal practice of diligent employees is revealed at Admington in 1379 by the misconduct of the shepherd, who was presented to the lord's court because he did not 'lie in the sheepcote at the time of lambing'.⁵²

Administration. Sheepcotes may also have served as centres for the management of sheep-farming of the manor or estate. The smaller buildings on the upland sites would have provided useful storage space for the varied equipment and materials used in sheep husbandry — hurdles and stakes, tar and grease for smearing the sheep as a precaution against scab, various medicines, reddle for marking, supplementary feed for lambs, such as draff (brewers' dregs) or grain, or containers for the cows' milk sometimes given to lambs. In addition a secure store was needed for wool and sheepskins, the main saleable products of the sheep flock. The skins

would be acquired throughout the year, as mortality took its inevitable toll, and shepherds were under strict orders, enforceable by auditors, to produce a skin for each sheep that died. The presence of such valuable commodities would explain the barred window found at the Chalk Hill site. Some ewes in the 13th century were milked in the summer, so dairying operations, including cheese making, would have been a seasonal activity at the upland sheepcotes.⁵³ The practice seems to have diminished in the 14th and 15th centuries, as priority was given to the production of high quality fleeces. However, a lease for Sevenhampton in 1380 mentions the obligation of the farmer to provide food for a dairymaid as well as a shepherd.⁵⁴ Also the pottery, in particular that of the 15th century found at Elmont, which included a bowl suitable for dairying, might suggest that the activity continued, even unofficially as a profit for the shepherds and therefore not recorded in the documents. Another use for the pottery appears in an account for Avening in 1378–79, which under the sheep costs includes a payment for clay pots to contain grease.⁵⁵

A number of large estates, in the Cotswolds as in other parts of the country, centralized the management of their sheepflocks, putting them under a master shepherd or sheepreeve. The high point of the year came when the sheep from all of the manors were gathered at a central place for the annual shearing in June. Estates designated a manor for this purpose, Blockley for the bishopric of Worcester, Bourton-on-the-Hill for Westminster Abbey, Sherborne for Winchcombe Abbey, and Brimpsfield for the earls of March.⁵⁶ It would be tempting to set this grand occasion at an upland sheepcote, with thousands of sheep converging on the site from distant manors, to be washed and sheared, and the wool packed for sale. As well as the master shepherd, the shepherds in charge of each manor's flock, together with the temporary hired labour for the shearing, a major estate official — steward or receiver — would attend, and negotiate the sale directly with some great woolmonger. Unfortunately the upland sheepcotes would not have been suitable sites for such operations, because none of them are located near abundant supplies of running water for washing. There are ponds near the Brimpsfield and Chalk Hill sites, and a minor stream at Upton which would have been useful water supplies for other purposes, but not as sheepwashes. Only at Elmont are there earthworks suggesting a sheepwash. The sheepcotes at or near the manorial *curia* would however be used on these great gatherings, because they were located near streams, and manor houses would provide comfortable accommodation for the officials and the merchants.

The upland sheepcotes would have served as headquarters for management in the summer, because the numbers of sheep then increased, as flocks from the valleys were driven up onto the hills. They would be accompanied by shepherds who would have stayed for weeks or months, presumably living in buildings of cottage type like those visible at Elmont and Brimpsfield. It was at that time that the stores of equipment would have been used, and any dairying carried out.

Source of manure. Valuable accumulations of manure came from sheepcotes. Walter of Henley advocated scattering straw and spreading marl on the floor every

fortnight, so that at the end of the winter a rich mixture would have been available to spread on the land.⁵⁷ Rudge, writing in the early 19th century claimed that the deposits could be six feet deep.⁵⁸ The cleaning of the sheepecotes and spreading of the manure is not always recorded because this was a task for the full-time employees of the manor. That the dung was sufficient in quantity to involve a significant amount of labour in its removal is indicated by the twenty workmen employed on the task in 1393–94 at Bishop's Cleeve, and the utilization of between twelve and twenty-four 'winter works' (peasant labour services) at Bourton-on-the-Hill in the 1360s for 'cleaning dung from the sheepecote'.⁵⁹ As mentioned in the context of the transport of foodstuffs, the carriage of cartloads and wainloads of dung meant that all sheepecotes had to be accessible by road.

The main method by which sheep were used to fertilize the fields was of course by folding the animals on the arable so that they would both spread the dung themselves and tread it into the ground. Most sheepecotes were located near the arable fields, especially those at the *curia*, but also more remote ones, like that at Bishop's Cleeve in the late 14th century on the site of an abandoned peasant house at Woodmancote, 2 km or so from the manor house.⁶⁰

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SHEEPCOTES

AGRICULTURAL TECHNIQUES

Medieval agriculture was until recently much criticized and underrated. Agrarian historians were ready to point out the deficiencies of almost every aspect of cultivation, such as the inadequacy of fertilizers, the poor yields, and the wasteful use of land. The economic contraction of the 14th and 15th centuries seemed to be a logical consequence of poor technology. Attitudes have changed, partly because the study of regional farming methods have shown that techniques varied a great deal and that intensive methods were practised in parts of the country. More sensitive analysis of sources has revealed that the managers thought about alternative methods and learned from example and trial and error. Peasants were by no means averse to innovation, such as the adoption of horses rather than oxen as means of traction. A decision not to change, such as from a two-field to a three-field system, could well have arisen from careful consideration of the disadvantages of such an 'improvement'. Medieval technology in general seems more effective if viewed in long-term perspective — corn yields per acre, for example, in *c.* 1300 were comparable with those of the early 18th century.⁶¹

Views of medieval agriculture have been radically revised in the case of animal husbandry. The productivity of sheep, if judged in terms of fleece weight, was inferior to that achieved by modern farmers — 0.45–0.9 kg (1–2 lb.), compared with modern 1.8–2.3 kg (4–5 lb.) — but the discrepancy is much smaller than in cereal yields, where 20th-century yields are eight times better than those of the Middle Ages. This reflects the care taken in such matters as supplementary feeding.⁶² An insight into the medieval approach to animal husbandry comes from Walter of Henley's advice for an estate manager to observe the flock's behaviour

towards the shepherd — if the sheep shy away, this will suggest that they are not being treated with sufficient kindness.⁶³

Sheltering sheep in purpose-built sheepcotes was clearly part of a pattern of caring for animals that gave good cash returns. Though the origin of sheepcotes is a matter of obscurity, because of a shortage of detailed documentary sources before 1200, or much total excavation of manorial sites, we must be tempted to associate our earliest records of these expensive structures with the large-scale wool export trade in the 12th century.⁶⁴ When really substantial housing for sheep was being built in the 13th and early 14th centuries the wool trade was booming, and estates expected to receive between a tenth and a third of their income from wool sales.⁶⁵ In the late 14th and 15th centuries wool exports declined, but home demand for the raw material grew as English cloth-making expanded. Estates still expected to profit from sheep farming by keeping their pastures under direct management long after they had leased their relatively unrewarding arable lands to farmers. Cotswold wool was especially profitable, ranking second only to the product of the Welsh marches in the league table of prices. At the time when a number of sheepcotes were being built to very high specification (including stone slate roofs), in 1380–1400, Cotswold wool fetched £8–10 per sack, compared with a national average of £5–6. Each Cotswold fleece, which was again heavier than average, was worth to the producer 8*d.*–12*d.*⁶⁶

Sheepcotes represented a considerable investment. When an eight-bay sheepcote (at Blockley) cost more than £11 (and this total does not include such items as the carriage of stone) and five bays of slate roof (at Bibury) came to £6, we can estimate that in the 1380s and 1390s a 'standard' twelve bay building would have required expenditure of about £20, and more than £30 was needed for an eighteen-bay sheepcote.⁶⁷ Before the Black Death pushed up the price of labour, and when thatched roofs were normally provided, these costs would have been less — perhaps only £10 for a twelve-bay sheepcote. These sums accounted for a substantial proportion of manorial revenues. For example Bibury, a manor of middling size, generated income for its lord of £20 to £30 per annum, and the cash profit from wool was calculated in 1393–94 at £12. Constructing a sheepcote absorbed about a half of the profits from the sheep over the two years that it took to build.⁶⁸ The initial work was followed by quite frequent repairs and maintenance: here the thatched roofs, much cheaper at first, needed the most frequent attention.

The estate managers who were willing to spend so much on sheepcotes were clearly convinced that they produced worthwhile profits. When we enquire further into the precise role of the buildings in sheep management, we find a rather complex and shifting picture. The great estates, with their centrally administered sheep flocks, evolved in the 13th and 14th centuries a pattern of transhumance which allowed them to make the best use of varied pasture resources. Flocks were moved on to higher ground in the summer, so that estimates were made of the capacity of pasture like that in 1299 for Bishop's Cleeve (a manor which included a large share of the grazing on Cleeve Hill) of 1,000 in the summer and 200 in the winter.⁶⁹ The animals left on the hills in the cold season tended to be the more mature and hardy animals, especially the wethers. Ewes and lambs often went on

to upland pastures with their shepherd for a short summer season — between May and August at Bibury, though on some manors they stayed until the traditional date for the end of hill grazing, 11 November. The shepherd at Aylworth according to a lease of 1380 was to live on the manor with his charges from 3 May until 11 November.⁷⁰ In such a pattern of management the estate provided both sheepcotes on the hills for wethers, and those in the valleys for the ewes and younger animals. On the Gloucester Abbey estate, for example, where this type of transhumance seems to have persisted into the early 16th century, the Aldsworth sheepcote on the uplands housed 360 wethers, while 240 ewes, after spending the summer at Aldsworth, were kept in the sheepcote at Maisemore in the Severn valley.⁷¹ The sheepcotes on the hills were in almost continuous use, because after providing shelter from November to April, they then acted as summer quarters for the shepherds coming from the valleys in May. The lowland buildings changed their function in the spring as lambing began.

New arrangements for sheep keeping emerged from the general change in agriculture and estate management in the late 14th and 15th centuries. Landlords leased out the demesnes to farmers, often in the first stage retaining the sheep operation under their own control. Later the flock might be farmed out, in one case at $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ per animal per annum. And finally the pasture and flocks would also be leased out. The farmers were often ambitious peasants (initially in many cases the reeves who had managed the manor for the lord), gentry, merchants, entrepreneurs in the cloth industry, and occasionally clergymen. These administrative arrangements had important consequences for agriculture, because the separate leasing of pasture and arable split apart formerly integrated sectors — previously the sheep had been partly fed from the products of meadows and arable, and had returned fertility to the fields from their droppings. The farmers usually took on one manorial demesne only, or if they expanded their operations put together new combinations of demesnes acquired from different landlords, often aiming at some degree of specialization. The advent of leasehold and the arrival of the farmers tended therefore to break up the old links between valley and hill, and disrupt the former patterns of transhumance. We sometimes find in this period self-contained flocks of wethers on the hills, of which the numbers were maintained by purchase from lowland breeding flocks, rather than by transfers within an estate.

These changes affected the sheepcotes and their uses in a number of ways. Firstly it is no accident that so much of our documented evidence for sheepcote construction, repair and extension comes from the late 14th century, when lords were preparing to lease out their manors, and wished either to equip themselves with good quality buildings if they were retaining the pastures in hand, or for inclusion in the lease, when the state of buildings would influence the level of rent to be negotiated. When bishop John Carpenter of Worcester bought a piece of land at Dowdeswell for the endowment of Westbury College in 1463, he established it as a pasture, ridding it of bushes and building a new sheepcote, to be in a position to rent it out to a tenant for the maximum possible return.⁷² Secondly the responsibility for managing and indeed building sheepcotes was taken over by

farmers, like that at Stanton, where the lord agreed to provide major building materials, but the initiative to carry out work and the money for labour came from the farmer. Some new leaseholds, for example the pasture created after the desertion of the village of Upper Ditchford in Blockley, may have been provided with sheepcotes by the farmer. Certainly the existence of two sheepcotes is first mentioned in a lease of 1507, about 30 years after the conversion of the land into an enclosed pasture.⁷³ It is therefore possible that some of the sheepcotes which survive as earthworks were in fact built or at least altered and maintained by lessees rather than the landlords.

In one respect many sheepcotes maintained links that went back to the internal coordinated arrangements of the old great estates. Hay was in short supply in the Cotswolds, where river valleys were too narrow to contain much meadow land. The great estates overcame the problem by associating distant meadows in the river valleys (especially the Thames) with upland manors. So Bibury obtained its hay from a meadow at Inglesham in the Thames valley in Wiltshire, at a distance of 12 km, and the Knights Templar at Temple Guiting acquired a meadow near Bourton-on-the-Water 10 km down the Windrush. We find in the leases of the late 14th to early 16th centuries that sheepcotes continued to draw on hay from meadows in the Thames valley, Daglingworth from Minety, Salperton, and Wall in Aldsworth from Latton, Aldsworth, and Coln St Adlwyn from Kempsford (see Fig. 1).⁷⁴ Not all of the supplies were so self-contained, and one notes in a dry spring season the sheep at Lowesmore (in 1329–30) being fed on hay purchased in Wiltshire villages around Malmesbury at a distance of 13 km. Farmers who were not provided with access to traditional meadows must have had increasing recourse to the market.⁷⁵ Corn for feed — oats and peas — came from the arable fields of the estate, under the system of direct management. As agriculture became more specialized, the farmers again must have bought these foodstuffs.

All of the discussion so far has focused on the demesne sheepcotes, either under the control of lords' officials, or in the hands of farmers of demesnes. Peasants kept more sheep (if their small flocks are added together) than did the lords, judging from tithe records which show perhaps 3,000 in the parish at Bishop's Cleeve in the 1390s, compared with about 300 kept by the lord of Cleeve manor.⁷⁶ Tax records, like that for Minety in 1313, suggest that the animals were unevenly distributed, with individual flocks of 20, 40, and 60 animals, but 15 of the 22 peasants assessed for taxation apparently had none at all.⁷⁷ Peasant sheepcotes are frequently mentioned in manorial court records, because their tenants were failing to keep them in repair. In 1452 John Goselyn of Stanton had a ruinous hall, barn, and sheepcote, and in the same year, of seven buildings said to be in a ruinous state at Charlton Abbots, three were sheepcotes.⁷⁸ Peasant buildings were not as specialized as those of lords, and the absence of references to sheepcotes on some holdings need not mean that the sheep were not housed. Indeed a normal peasant practice may be revealed in a complaint at Admington in 1443 that a peasant who had apparently taken on a share of the leased demesne had put sheep in the *barn* for the whole of the winter.⁷⁹ Still, not all peasant sheep were as well accommodated as those belonging to the lords, judging from a by-law from Prior's

Marston in Warwickshire in 1453 which limited each yardlander to keeping 80 sheep, of which all but 20 should be kept in a building (*in domo*). A not dissimilar assumption of partial housing seems to be implied by a Roel by-law of 1452, which enjoined tenants not to keep sheep in winter outside their 'close, fold or house' (*clausum, foldum, vel domum*).⁸⁰ Even if we estimate conservatively that only one in three of peasants with 6 hectares (15 acres) of arable or more (sheep keeping was closely tied to the overall scale of the farming operation) had a sheepcote on his or her holding, then the number of peasant sheepcotes in Gloucestershire would have exceeded 3,000. It is frustrating to look at plans or aerial photographs of deserted village sites with well-preserved earthworks such as Hullasey, Hawling, Farmington, Roel, and Upton and see groups of two, three or four buildings associated with each peasant holding, but not to be sure of their individual functions. In the case of Roel/Hawling one notes buildings sited near to the large crofts at the backs of the tenements, and it is tempting to identify these as sheepcotes, from which animals would have had easy access to the closes on which they could graze in the winter. Among the excavated buildings at Upton was a two-bay structure, AA, 9.5 m by 4.5 m (29 ft. by 13 ft.) internally, interpreted as a byre or store because it had no hearth, and was provided with a single door in the E. wall. The building's entrances and floors had been altered at various times, at one stage having a pitched stone floor and well-built drain. This, or the less well constructed room of comparable size to the S., AB, could well have served as accommodation for sheep at some time. Reference to sheepcotes in court rolls, together with the types of building observed on village sites, suggests that peasant sheepcotes were often of two or three bays, 9 m to 14 m long, with cruck framed superstructures based on stone foundations.⁸¹ They would shelter, using the formula applied above, 40 to 60 sheep. More acquisitive peasants with larger flocks — 300 are sometimes recorded in the 15th century — could have kept them in larger cotes. That at Harford illustrated above (Fig. 2), which seems to have been built into the back of a toft, perhaps when that part of the village was still inhabited, might have belonged to such a prosperous tenant. Alternatively large flocks may have been kept in barns or other buildings not constructed for the purpose, or put into flimsier shelters. The peasant sheepcotes, though smaller in size than those of manorial lords, represented a greater proportional investment: two- or three-bay buildings would have absorbed a middling peasant's surplus income for a number of years.

In other respects also peasant sheep husbandry is likely to have had some similarities with that practised on the demesnes. Peasants grew oats and legumes, for example, which they consumed (in Gloucestershire) in relatively small quantities themselves, and which were used in part to feed animals. Peasants were less likely to enjoy the advantages of estate connections between scattered manors, so they would not have had the same access to distant meadows, and the main evidence for peasant transhumance is found in the local movement of flocks on to the upland common pasture attached to their own village. Peasants were involved in some complex contracts for the renting out of animals, and it is by no means inconceivable that peasants living in a valley would arrange for their sheep to be pastured in the summer by a peasant in a hill village. There are records of disputes

over the lending or hiring of animals, and general complaints that peasants were overexploiting common grazing by taking in the stock of strangers.⁸²

For lords, farmers and peasants the sheepcotes played an important part in a system of husbandry which sought to make the best use of resources, and which involved considerable effort to keep animals warm, healthy, and well fed. Sheepcotes had a role in the old estate structures, on the later more specialized pastures, and in the sheep husbandry of the peasantry.

SETTLEMENTS AND LANDSCAPES

The Cotswold landscape is often imagined to have been dominated in the Middle Ages by large areas of open pasture, like the sweeps of grassland now preserved by their conversion to recreational purposes at Minchinhampton Common and Cleeve Hill. The evidence from pre-Conquest charters, Domesday Book, surveys of the 13th century, and the early modern maps made before enclosure, show that the region contained very large areas under cultivation, and many villages had little space for permanent pasture. The majority of the sheepcotes stood near manor houses and in villages, and the animals obtained much of their grazing on the stubbles and fallows of the corn fields.

The permanent grass in many villages therefore consisted of relatively small areas of hilltop, steep valley sides and other inaccessible or uncultivable land in the midst of a largely arable landscape. There were some more extensive areas of pasture, for example on the high land between the valley of the Windrush and the Dickler, extending from Bourton Downs and Upton Wold in the north to Swell and Temple Guiting in the south, totalling about 40 square kilometres.⁸³ There were a number of sheepcotes on this pasture, those at Swell, Cutsdean, and Snowhill known only from documents, but two Temple Guiting buildings are preserved as archaeological sites (Figs. 6 and 7). The agrarian landscape of Temple Guiting is shown on the 1603 map, which reflects late medieval conditions, with the valley land (about a third of the total in the parish) under cultivation, and the remainder as pasture on which three sheepcotes stood (Fig. 8). In the 13th and 14th centuries the whole agrarian system would have functioned in an integrated way, with the sheep receiving some feed from the stubble and straw of the arable, and helping to fertilize the fields. But the system was not entirely self-contained, as much hay came from a meadow 10 km away, and the ultimate goal was the production of wool for distant markets.

In the 14th and 15th centuries the upland pasture expanded and the numbers of sheepcotes increased. This was partly a piecemeal process as the arable shrank in size, and partly the result of the abandonment of whole village territories; on such sites as Upton sheepcotes were built to exploit the new pasture.

Before the Middle Ages the uplands had been used in rather different ways. At least six of the sheepcotes lie on or near Romano-British settlements.⁸⁴ It has already been suggested that some of the earthworks associated with the sheepcotes such as the boundaries of closes may have originated as parts of Romano-British or late prehistoric field systems. On the uplands near a number of sheepcote sites

thin scatters of Romano-British pottery occur, which were presumably deposited with manure on arable, and occasionally earthworks of field systems survive, pointing to a pattern of land use in which no doubt, as in the Middle Ages, settlements clustered along the river and stream valleys, but farmsteads and cultivation also extended over the hills.⁸⁵ In a sense the modern scatter of farms and large scale cereal growing (including areas that were open pasture in the Middle Ages) represents a reversion to a pre-medieval use of the uplands.

Should we regard the upland sheepcotes as seasonal settlements? They do represent a rather specialized exception to the rule that in the period 1200–1550 the population of the Cotswolds were concentrated in nucleated villages. It would be wrong to call them ‘farmsteads’ or ‘outlying farms’, but they were sometimes occupied by shepherds: in bad weather the shepherd must have stayed with his flock to keep them fed; shepherds were expected to sleep at the sheepcote in the lambing season also, which would bring the lowland sheepcotes, even those in or near to the *curia*, into temporary residential use; finally in the summer itinerant shepherds accompanying flocks from the valleys, and dairymaids if the ewes were milked, could have been accommodated in the upland sites.

Sheepcotes took on another role in relation to settlement in the 14th and 15th centuries, when they occupied the deserted sites of former villages. At Upton, Roel, Harford, Brimpsfield, and Pinnock by about 1400 a single building stood among the ruins of peasant houses (Pls. VIII, A, B). In the 16th century it was a commonplace that villages had been replaced by a sheepcote, though not always purpose-built:-

‘The townes goe downe, the land decayes,
Of cornefeldes playne leyes,
Gret men makithe now a dayes
A shepecote in the church’.⁸⁶

In some cases the sheepcote may eventually have been converted into a permanent dwelling. We know that Llanthony Priory’s sheephouse near Gloucester had become a farm house in the 17th century, and the same transition may explain the origins of a number of isolated farm houses that now stand on or near to deserted village sites.⁸⁷ A very long term transition to a permanent settlement has taken place at Cutsdean, where a sheepcote described in a lease of 1390 had been replaced by a field barn in the 19th century but has now been converted for residential use.⁸⁸

CONCLUSION

The identification and location of sheepcotes throws new light on a number of aspects of medieval farming, settlement, and landscape. We can define them as permanent and sometimes substantial structures, in a variety of locations, sometimes accompanied by ancillary enclosures and buildings, which were designed primarily to provide shelter for sheep in winter, but which were used for a number of other purposes. Their identification resolves some mysteries of ‘farmstead’ sites which seemed anomalies in the settlement pattern. A combination

of archaeological and documentary evidence reveals their construction and functions. They played an important part in sheep farming, both by lords and peasants, and help us to appreciate the levels of investment and the careful husbandry of the period. Their use changed with the decline of the great estates and the emergence of leasehold farms in the late 14th and 15th centuries. They were the only settlements in some upland areas, and even then only in certain seasons, but can be seen as representing a phase of upland land use different from that prevailing both before and after the Middle Ages.

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NOTES

¹ *Walter of Henley and other Treatises on Estate Management and Accounting*, D. Oschinsky (ed.) (Oxford, 1971), 182–83; for more scepticism, *The Duchy of Lancaster's Estates in Derbyshire, 1485–1540*, ed. I. S. W. Blanchard (Derbyshire Archaeol. Soc. Record Series, 3, 1967), 11n. They are treated in matter-of-fact style in I. Kershaw, *Bolton Priory. The Economy of a Northern Monastery 1286–1325* (Oxford, 1973), 82, 121. They are described in R. Trow-Smith, *A History of British Livestock Husbandry to 1700* (London, 1957), 113–14, 159–60; N. Harvey, *A History of Farm Buildings in England and Wales* (2nd. edn., Newton Abbot, 1984), 25–27.

² R. E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List* (London, 1965), 48.

³ Oschinsky, op. cit. in note 1, 336–39.

⁴ J. Mortimer, *The Whole Art of Husbandry* (London, 1707), 180.

⁵ John Skelton, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. J. Scattergood (Harmondsworth, 1983), 365.

⁶ J. Longnon and R. Cazelles, *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (London, 1969), plate 3.

⁷ H. E. J. Le Patourel, 'Rural Building in England and Wales', in E. Miller (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, III, 1348–1500* (Cambridge, 1991), 878–81.

⁸ Information from Stephen Moorhouse.

⁹ N. J. Higham, 'An Aerial Survey of the Upper Lune Valley', in N. J. Higham (ed.), *The Changing Past. Some Recent Work on the Archaeology of Northern England* (Manchester, 1979), 35.

¹⁰ P. J. Fowler, J. W. G. Musty and C. C. Taylor, 'Some Earthwork Enclosures in Wiltshire', *Wilt. Archaeol. Mag.*, 60 (1965), 62–66.

¹¹ L. M. Threipland, 'Medieval Farmstead on Bredon Hill', *Trans. of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeol. Soc.*, 67 (1946–48), 415–18; R. C. Baldwyn and H. E. O'Neil, 'A Medieval Site at Chalk Hill, Temple Guiting, Gloucestershire, 1957', *Trans. of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeol. Soc.*, 77 (1958), 61–65.

¹² M. Aston and L. Viner, 'The Study of Deserted Villages in Gloucestershire', in A. Saville (ed.), *Archaeology in Gloucestershire* (Cheltenham, 1984), 282.

¹³ R. H. Hilton and P. A. Rahtz, 'Upton, Gloucestershire, 1959–64', *Trans. of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeol. Soc.*, 85 (1966), 87, 90.

¹⁴ Baldwyn and O'Neil, op. cit. in note 11, 64.

¹⁵ Threipland, op. cit. in note 11, 417.

¹⁶ A plan of this site is to be published by Ms N. Smith of the R.C.H.M.(E.).

¹⁷ Threipland, op. cit. in note 11, 416; G. C. Dunning, 'Report on Medieval Pottery from Beckford', *Trans. of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeol. Soc.*, 67 (1946–48), 410–12.

¹⁸ For the date of desertion of the village of Roel (to which the earthworks at Hawling belong), see D. Aldred and C. Dyer, 'A Medieval Cotswold Village: Roel, Gloucestershire', *Trans. of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeol. Soc.*, 109 (1991), 139–70; the Brimpsfield settlement is likely to have shared the fate of similar nearby upland

hamlets, such as Bidfield, which was uninhabited by 1380; C. Dyer, 'Deserted Medieval Villages in the West Midlands', *Economic Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., 35 (1982), 23.

¹⁹ C. Dyer, 'The Rise and Fall of a Medieval Village: Little Aston (in Aston Blank), Gloucestershire', *Trans. of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeol. Soc.*, 105 (1987), 176; Hilton and Rahtz, op. cit. in note 13, 83–84; P. Rahtz, 'Upton, Gloucestershire, 1964–68. Second Report', *Trans. of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeol. Soc.*, 88 (1969), 93–94.

²⁰ Corpus Christi College, Oxford (henceforth C.C.C.), Map 64, 65.

²¹ Gloucestershire Record Office (henceforth G.R.O.), D678, box additional; D363/P4.

²² G.R.O., D678/66A; 95.

²³ Hereford and Worcester County Record Office (henceforth H.W.C.R.O.), ref. 009:1 BA 2636/159, 160.

²⁴ *Victoria County History of Gloucestershire*, vii, 143; C.C.C., F1, Cap 1, Fasc. 1, Ev. 1–28.

²⁵ P.R.O., SC6 856/23; H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/157 92007; Westminster Abbey Muniments (henceforth W.A.M.), 8288.

²⁶ P.R.O., SC6 Henry VIII/1240; H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/157 92007; W.A.M., 8295.

²⁷ P.R.O., SC6 856/23 (both 1378–79 and 1380–81); G.R.O., D1099 M30/1, 14 (1277–78 and 1379–80); H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/157 92007; W.A.M., 8318 (1398–99).

²⁸ W.A.M., 21092; P.R.O., SC6 850/22; H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1, BA 2636/160 92061; /193 92627 12/12 (Bibury and Cleeve); G.R.O., D 1099 M30/130.

²⁹ H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/159 92049 2/7; 157 92007; W.A.M., 8289–8296.

³⁰ G.R.O., D1099 M30/14; H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/157 92007; W.A.M., 8309.

³¹ N. W. Alcock, *Cruck Construction* (C.B.A. Research Report, no. 42, 1981), 3. A possible still-standing medieval sheeppcote is embedded in the row of cottages at Bibury known as Arlington Row. N. J. Moore, 'Arlington Row, Bibury, Gloucestershire: early conversion of an industrial building?', *Vernacular Architecture*, 25 (1994), 20–24, identified it as an industrial building, but no known industrial building conforms with its size and shape, whereas a document of 1520–21 refers to a sheeppcote at Arlington, and implies by a reference to willow trees that it lay near to the river, as does the Row. It has raised crucks, and is 6 m wide (internally). The roof rises to 7 m at the apex.

³² E. Lewis, E. Roberts and K. Roberts, *Medieval Hall Houses of the Winchester Area* (Winchester, 1988), 113–15.

³³ *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, vi, ed. H. E. Salter (Oxford Historical Society, C1, 1936), 262 (Arlington); P.R.O., SC6 Henry VIII/1240 (for Stanton, Swell, and Twynning); SC6 856/21 (Minchinhampton).

³⁴ M. L. Ryder, *Sheep and Men* (London, 1983), 672, refers to 'handling pens'.

³⁵ G.R.O., D1099 M30/6, 7.

³⁶ W.A.M., 8318; G.R.O., D678/98C; H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/162 92115; Magdalen College, Oxford, Quinton 75/12.

³⁷ P.R.O., SC6 858/4; G.R.O., D678/94.

³⁸ P.R.O., E142/48; *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, vi, 1392–99, nos. 13 and 14; Harvey, op. cit. in note 1, 25–27; C. Thornton, 'The Demesne of Rimpton, 938 to 1412: a Study in Economic Development' (unpublished Univ. of Leicester Ph.D. thesis, 1989), 140–41; the West Wycombe example, from the Pipe Rolls of the Bishopric of Winchester, was kindly given to me by Dr C. Thornton.

³⁹ Staffordshire Record Office, D641/3/D/2/5/2; M. Bailey, *A Marginal Economy? East Anglian Breckland in the later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 251; *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, iv, 1377–88, 104.

⁴⁰ I am grateful to Dr C. Thornton for supplying these figures from his unpublished research into the farm buildings of the bishopric of Winchester.

⁴¹ *Rolls of the Warwickshire and Coventry Sessions of the Peace 1377–97*, E. G. Kimball (ed.) (Dugdale Soc., 16, 1939), 100–02.

⁴² *The Domesday of St Paul's*, W. H. Hale (ed.) (Camden Soc., 1857), 128–29.

⁴³ W. Marshall, *The Rural Economy of Gloucestershire* (London, 1796), II, 200.

⁴⁴ *Historia et Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*, W. H. Hart (ed.) (Rolls Series, 1863–67), I, 322–23; P.R.O., SC6 Henry VIII/1240.

⁴⁵ T. Rudge, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Gloucester* (London, 1807), 310; Marshall, op. cit. in note 43, II, 200–02.

⁴⁶ H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/160 92059; P.R.O., SC6 Henry VIII/1240; Gloucester Cathedral Library, Register C, pp. 82–84; P.R.O., C115/L2/6691, fo. 61 (I owe this last reference to Mr John Rhodes).

⁴⁷ P.R.O., SC6 856/23.

⁴⁸ Oschinsky, op. cit. in note 1, 338–39.

⁴⁹ W.A.M., 8282.

⁵⁰ C.C.C., Map 64.

⁵¹ P.R.O., SC6 850/22; the practice was commended by Marshall, op. cit. in note 43, II, 202.

⁵² G.R.O., D678/98.

⁵³ That milking ewes was a common practice in 13th-century Gloucestershire is suggested by the calculation made in the Gloucester Abbey accounting treatise that the milk of 30–40 ewes made 1 wey (*pesa*) of cheese and butter: Oschinsky, op. cit. in note 1, 472.

⁵⁴ P.R.O., C115/K2/6684, fo. 39.

⁵⁵ P.R.O., SC6 856/23.

⁵⁶ H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/157 92007; R. H. Hilton, 'Winchcombe Abbey and the Manor of Sherborne', in H. P. R. Finberg (ed.), *Gloucestershire Studies* (Leicester, 1957), 111–13; P.R.O., SC6 850/22.

⁵⁷ Oschinsky, op. cit. in note 1, 338–39.

- ⁵⁸ Rudge, op. cit. in note 45, 310.
- ⁵⁹ H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/193 92627 12/12; W.A.M., 8289-8300.
- ⁶⁰ H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/193 92627 12/12.
- ⁶¹ For this new thinking see B. M. S. Campbell, 'People and Land in the Middle Ages', in R. A. Dodgshon and R. A. Butlin (eds.), *An Historical Geography of England and Wales*, 2nd edition (London, 1990), 69-121; J. Langdon, *Horses, Oxen and Technical Innovation: the Use of Draught Animals in English Farming from 1066-1500* (Cambridge, 1986); H. S. A. Fox, 'The Alleged Transformation from Two-Field to Three-Field Systems in Medieval England', *Economic Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., 39 (1986), 526-48; B. M. S. Campbell and M. Overton (eds.), *Land, Labour and Livestock: Historical Studies in European Agricultural Productivity* (Manchester, 1991).
- ⁶² M. J. Stephenson, 'Wool Yields in the Medieval Economy', *Economic Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., 41 (1988), 368-91. This author links declining fleece weights with a colder climate in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Some might be tempted to associate climatic change with the building of high quality sheepcotes.
- ⁶³ Oschinsky, op. cit. in note 1, 336-37.
- ⁶⁴ T. H. Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1977), 6-9.
- ⁶⁵ R. H. Hilton, *A Medieval Society: the West Midlands at the End of the Thirteenth Century* (2nd edn., Cambridge, 1983), 77-78, 80-83.
- ⁶⁶ T. H. Lloyd, *The Movement of Wool Prices in Medieval England* (Economic History Review Supplement, 6, 1973), especially 41-43.
- ⁶⁷ H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/157 92007; / 159 92049 2/7.
- ⁶⁸ C. Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society: the Estates of the Bishopric of Worcester 680-1540* (Cambridge, 1980), 145-47.
- ⁶⁹ *The Red Book of Worcester*, M. Hollings (ed.) (Worcestershire Hist. Soc., 1934-50), IV, 327.
- ⁷⁰ P.R.O., C115/K2/6684, fol. xlvi.
- ⁷¹ P.R.O., SC6 Henry VIII/1248.
- ⁷² Dyer, op. cit. in note 68, 173-74.
- ⁷³ P.R.O., SC6 Henry VIII/1240; Dyer, op. cit. in note 68, 250-51.
- ⁷⁴ H.W.C.R.O., ref. 009:1 BA 2636/159, 160; *Chronicon Abbatiae de Evesham*, W. D. Macray (ed.) (Rolls Series, 1863), 262, 277; P.R.O., SC6 Henry VIII/1240; SC6 Henry VIII/1248; Gloucester Cathedral Library, Register C, pp. 122-24, 236; *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (Record Commission), 1810-34, II, 463-64.
- ⁷⁵ P.R.O., SC6 856/22.
- ⁷⁶ Dyer, op. cit. in note 68, 329.
- ⁷⁷ Hilton, op. cit. in note 65, 107-08.
- ⁷⁸ G.R.O., D678/62.
- ⁷⁹ G.R.O., D678/94.
- ⁸⁰ Northamptonshire Record Office, Spencer Roll 214; G.R.O., D678/62.
- ⁸¹ Aldred and Dyer, op. cit. in note 18, 150-51; Hilton and Rahtz, op. cit. in note 13, 84-106.
- ⁸² R. H. Hilton, *English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), 50-52 gives examples of the type of case. At West Littleton and Tormarton in the 1490s by-laws attempted to prohibit tenants from receiving sheep and cattle of outsiders in agistment on the common pasture, and pasturing their animals outside the manor: Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson, B317.
- ⁸³ Part of this pasture was called *Mideldoune* in the 12th century: H. P. R. Finberg, 'A Cotswold Boundary Dispute', in H. P. R. Finberg (ed.), *Gloucestershire Studies* (Leicester, 1957), 114-16.
- ⁸⁴ Bibury lies near to a Roman building, and is sited on a linear earthwork with possible Roman origins: information from Mrs E. Bishop; B. Rawes and E. D. Gander, 'An Ancient Quarry at Manless Town in the Parish of Brimpsfield', *Trans. of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeol. Soc.*, 96 (1977), 79-82; Threipland, op. cit. in note 11; Baldwin and O'Neil, op. cit. in note 11; Aldred and Dyer, op. cit. in note 18; Hilton and Rahtz, op. cit. in note 13.
- ⁸⁵ Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *Iron-age and Romano-British Monuments in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds* (London, 1976), xlvi-xlix.
- ⁸⁶ M. W. Beresford, *Lost Villages of England* (London, 1954), 65.
- ⁸⁷ *Victoria County History of Gloucestershire*, IV, 396; J. Rhodes, note on 'Gloucester Sheephouse', *Glevensis*, 23 (1989), 26.
- ⁸⁸ G.R.O., D678/98C. Site at SP 093315.