

THE DESERTED MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENTS OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE: A GAZETTEER

By SUSAN OOSTHUIZEN¹

The first list of deserted medieval settlements in south Cambridgeshire (excluding the Isle of Ely) was published in Beresford's *Lost Villages of England*, where thirteen sites were noted: Great and Little Childerley, Clopton, Malton, Whitwell, Wimpole in west Cambridgeshire; Landwade, Barham, Badlingham; Kennet, Silverley, Chilford, and Nosterfield in east Cambridgeshire (Beresford 1954: 343–5). A further three (including both deserted and shifted settlements) were added in 1971: Caxton, Croxton and Castle Camps; but Silverley was discounted (Beresford and Hurst 1989 ed.: 184). This paper adds a further 43 deserted and 24 shifted settlements to those original lists, in a rather more formal distinction between the two.

A complex scholarship based on the identification, interpretation and explanation of abandoned settlement has grown up in the half-century following Beresford's seminal publication. Models of settlement formation and growth have been developed which range from attempts to formalise trajectories of settlement evolution, to the unravelling of processes of nucleation, dispersal and polyfocality, and to hypotheses for explaining the distribution of settlement types in different regions of England (Brown and Taylor 1989; Roberts 1989; Taylor 1992; Taylor 2002; Roberts and Wrathmell 2002;).

Figure 1 shows the disposition of deserted and shifted settlement in south Cambridgeshire (that is, excluding the Isle of Ely). It will be seen that desertions appear to have occurred more or less equally to the west and the east of the river Cam, which forms the local boundary of the Central Province (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002: 10). Although south Cambridgeshire straddles that divide, a comparison of data from south Cambridgeshire with the most recently published national distribution does not seriously challenge the assertion that most desertions occurred within the Central Province (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002: 11). It does reveal a more dense distribution of deserted settlements than was previously known, but there are other areas along the boundary of the Central Province showing similarly dense distributions.

Those familiar with the physical geography of the county will have noted that many deserted settlements fulfil another expectation in that they lie on the least promising land: the (relatively) high boulder clay plateaux to west and east, or the heavy gaults of the river terraces.

There are, however, not that many places in which identifiable events can explain the south Cambridgeshire data. Unlike those parts of Leicestershire so evocatively described by Beresford, most common-field land in Cambridge was cultivated until Parliamentary enclosure and private enclosures tend to be the exception rather than the rule. Just a small number of settlements were

deserted to make way for sheep, and only further handful were removed in the course of emparkment; in other places, market grants or changes to the volume of traffic on a major route were catalytic factors.

It is also uncertain that the distribution reflects either uniformity of settlement type or similar processes at work. There are two reasons for this.

The first is that although the boundary of the Central Province in south Cambridgeshire does divide different settlement types,² the evidence from the Gazetteer indicates that polyfocality with an tendency to dispersal may have been much more widespread in the west of the county in the medieval past than has previously been understood or the apparent certainties of 19th-century mapping may imply, although the west lies within the Central Province.

The second is that Figure 1 appears to show that, across south Cambridgeshire, some parishes appear to be more prone than others to settlement desertion or shift, even though they share much the same underlying geology with other places in which such changes are not apparent. For some, emparkment or early enclosure do provide a straightforward explanation; but there are others where the causes are less obvious. Is it possible that the mobility of medieval settlement has been underestimated (cf. Taylor 1983)?

Influences on settlement mobility in south Cambridgeshire could do with further exploration, especially in cases where there is no obvious actor enclosing or emparking land: for example, an examination of the influence, in a landscape of dispersed settlement, of settlement hierarchy (in which relationships between 'dominant' and 'subordinate' settlements in a parish like Bottisham may be more useful than 'mother' and 'daughter'); or an exploration of the effect on settlement patterns of agricultural exploitation – Figure 1, for example, appears to show little variation in distribution on settlement desertion and shift on heavy soils between the more diversified local economy of east Cambridgeshire and the predominantly arable west. Finally, of course, as Taylor reminds us, functional explanations also have limitations and past idiosyncrasy may never be explicable to historians casting back from the future (Taylor 1983: 227–41).

A note on the gazetteer

The sites listed below conform to one or both of the following criteria:

- a deserted site is one which previously supported a settlement and which retained its name, but at which there is now no more than one dwelling;

² Settlements to the west tend to be strongly nucleated or (where there are large damp commons) polyfocal; those to the east, especially on the clay uplands, are more likely to be dispersed.

¹ *Institute of Continuing Education, University of Cambridge*

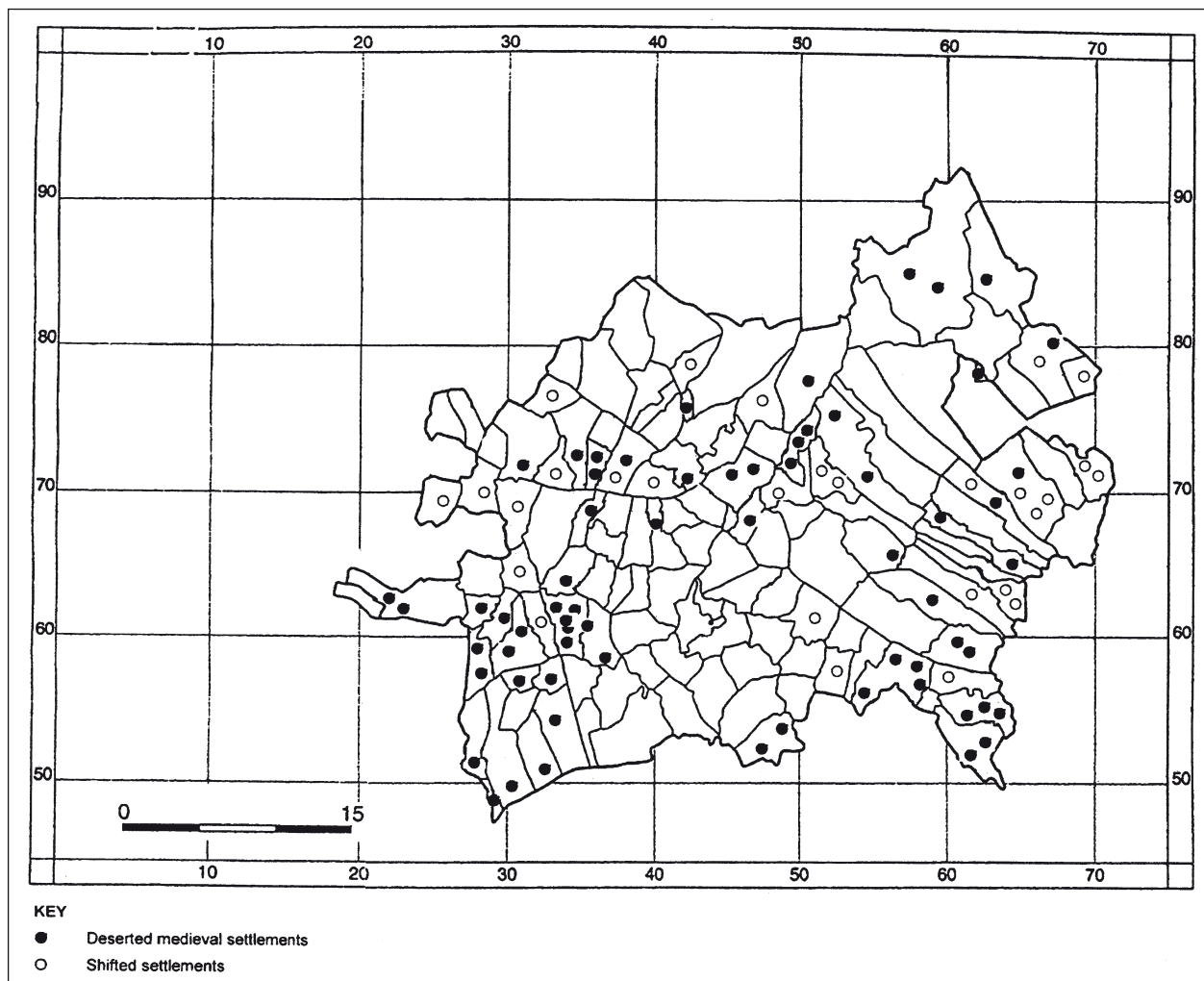


Figure 1 *Deserted medieval settlements in Cambridgeshire.*

- a shifted settlement is one in which both the community and the name have moved to another location.

These criteria are straightforward, being essentially descriptive of the geography of a location. They may not, however, be entirely accurate since they cannot reflect the impact on settlement of complex social and economic relationships and changes. If movements occurred as the result of forcible removal from, or as deliberate avoidance of, the earlier site, 'deserted' might be appropriate. But if the movement from one place to another occurred more or less gradually and, especially where a surviving parish church on its original site provided a continuing link between the past and the present, would communities have recognised 'desertion' as an accurate description of their behaviour? How appropriate is it to include settlements like Tadlow, Wendy or East Hatley which, although by no means deserted today, once teetered on the brink of extinction only to be rescued by modern commuter infill (Taylor 1973: 138; Taylor 1983: 229)?

The lists that follow do not seek to explore such issues any further, but their compilation hides a multiplicity of these kinds of question. Nor do they claim to be

comprehensive since judgments about which data to include are bound to some extent to be subjective – for example, should moats be added to the lists, especially where they appear always to have been isolated? There are a fair number in south Cambridgeshire, and the practice below has been to exclude them unless there is evidence that they acted as a focus for other settlement (Taylor 1973: 90, 124–8; RCHME 1968: lxi–lxvi; James 2000: 37).

Gazetteer

1. Deserted settlements³

Angerhale

(Bottisham). Documented in 1279, last noted 1428; perhaps identifiable with earthworks in Bottisham Park around TL 547 616 (Reaney 1943: 131; RCHME 1972: 1, 13–4; Taylor 1973: 58).

³ Settlements whose precise location is unknown are italicised; asterisks indicate settlements listed in Beresford 1954 and/or Beresford and Hurst 1989. Parish names in brackets after the entry denote the parish in which the settlement was located; a date in the same brackets indicates the last date at which the settlement was documented.

Anglesey

(TL 533 622). First mentioned in the 11th century, the settlement probably lay at or near the medieval abbey (Reaney 1943: 131; Taylor 1973: 58–9).

Badlingham*

First recorded in 1086, 37 people paid the poll tax here in 1334, and there were 9 cottages in 1659, but today only a single farm remains around TL 678 709 (Reaney 1943: 190; Beresford 1954: 344; VCH 10: 373).

Barham*

(TL 574 461). Listed in Domesday Book, the settlement gained a market and fair in 1282. By 1316, however, it was linked with Linton and was subsequently deserted (Beresford 1954: 344; VCH 6: 96).

Barsey

Listed with Shudy Camps in 1272 and may be connected with the moated site at TL 640 455 (Reaney 1943: 106).

Beston

(Great Wilbraham, 1279). Site unknown (Reaney 1943: 347).

Biggin Abbey

(Horningssea). Mentioned in 1260, only Biggin Farm remains with settlement earthworks at TL 487 617 nearby (Reaney 1943: 142; RCHME 1972: 54; CUULM TY1, AFN 96).

Bramston

(Litlington, 14th century). Site unknown (Reaney 1943: 347).

Brookhampton

(Ickleton). Documented north-east of Ickleton c. TL 495 442 in 1338, disappeared after 1612 (Reaney 1943: 95).

Burden Grange

(Borough Green). Noted by 1337, and last documented in 1554 (Reaney 1943: 116).

Castle Camps*

Settlement is believed to have grown up around TL 630 425, near the late 11th-century castle and to have been deserted towards the end of the middle ages (Taylor 1973: 121; Beresford and Hurst 1989 ed.: 184).

Catley

(Linton). There is just a farm surviving at the small settlement located in Linton around TL 541 449 and mentioned in 1279 (Reaney 1943: 110).

Chilford*

(Linton). The name, also that of the hundred, indicates a settlement; Chilford Hall farm at TL 567 489 (Beresford 1954: 345).

Clauertone

(Chesterton, 1280). Site unknown (Reaney 1943: 347).

Clopton*

Listed in 1086; forcibly enclosed for sheep between 1480 and 1520; settlement remains around TL 302 488 (Beresford 1954: 343–4; RCHME 1968: lx, 76–8; VCH 8: 30).

Croydon Wilds

(Croydon). First mentioned in 1285, there were at least 2 moated sites here at TL 515 303 and TL 523 301 (Reaney 1943: 54; RCHME 1968: 75).

Derisley

(Woodditton). Noted in 1240, and again in 1399, it has since disappeared (VCH 10: 83).

East Hatley

Listed in 1086, the medieval settlement was almost entirely deserted, probably in the later 17th century; extensive settlement remains around TL 287 505 (RCHME 1968: 150–1; VCH 8: 43).

Elsworth Wood

Documented in 1279 and again in 1420, the settlement around TL 308 617 is now deserted (Reaney 1943: 167; RCHME 1968: 83, 89; Evans 1981).

Eye Hall

(Horningssea). Noted in 870. Settlement remains of the 13th to the 18th centuries lie south of the 16th-century Hall c. TL 496 636 (Reaney 1943: 146; RCHME 1972: 73).

Gatley End

(Steeple Morden). In existence by c.1234, now just a single farm around TL 295 415 (VCH 8: 111).

Great Childerley*

Listed in Domesday Book; removed when the park around Childerley Hall was enlarged in the 17th century; settlement remains around TL 358 615 (RCHME 1968: 44; Taylor 1973: 144).

Hatley St George

Documented in 1086, the parish was enclosed, and the site of the village emparked, in the reign of Henry III. The location of the medieval settlement is unknown (Reaney 1943: 56, 163; RCHME 1968: 145; VCH 5: 105).

Henny*

(Soham). Listed in 1086, and believed to have stood around TL 557 752 (Reaney 1943: 199–200; Beresford and Hurst 1989 ed.: 184).

Highfields

(Caldecote). A 13th- or 14th-century hamlet of Caldecote, later deserted (VCH 5: 17).

Howes

(Girton). In the south-east corner of Girton parish along the Huntingdon road, perhaps at or near the site of Howes Close c. TL 425 608 (Cooper c.1839–54: 46; Reaney 1943: 177).

Landwade*

(TL 622 682). Documented in 1060, and a thriving settlement in the 14th century, it was depopulated by 1563 (Reaney 1943: 194–5; Beresford 1954: 344; VCH 10: 469–70).

Little Childerley*

Listed in Domesday Book and united with Great Childerley in 1469 for ecclesiastical purposes. Disappeared by about 1500; enclosures there were reported in 1517; earthwork remains around TL 357 615 (Beresford 1954: 343; RCHME 1968: 44; Taylor 1973: 144).

Little Isleham

Recorded in the 1230s, only two or three cottages remained in the 1460s. It is now completely deserted (Reaney 1943: 192; VCH 10: 422).

Little Linton

Although the settlement was mentioned in 1008, by the 16th century one farm remained around TL 556 475 (Reaney 1943: 111; Brown and Taylor 1991).

Little London

(Dry Drayton). Two cottages 'now tenantless, out of repair, and not likely to be inhabited again' in the early 20th century (Reaney 1943: 357).

Littleham

(Soham). Documented in 1349, perhaps near Ham Corner (Reaney 1943: 200, 202).

Malton*

In existence by 1200, decline had set in by the 14th century; one farmhouse now remains at TL 373 484 (Reaney 1943: 79; Beresford 1954: 344; RCHME 1968: 189; VCH 5: 241, 245).

Middletone

(West Wrating, 1319). Site unknown (Reaney 1943: 347).

Midelstone

(Chesterton, 1228). Site unknown (Reaney 1943: 347).

Neuton

(Gamlingay). First mentioned 1229, disappeared by 1279; somewhere on the Heath (Reaney 1943: 347; VCH 5: 70).

Northo

(Also called Northey; Shudy Camps). In existence by 1200, it is believed to have stood around TL 641 441 (Reaney 1943: 105; VCH 6: 49).

Nosterfield*

(Shudy Camps). Listed in Domesday Book, now deserted. Believed to have stood around TL 640 443 (Reaney 1943: 105–6; Beresford 1954: 345).

Odsey

First documented in 1150 when it was granted to the Cistercian grange which is believed to have depopulated it (Taylor 1973: 62; VCH 8: 97–8).

Old Woodbury

(Gamlingay). Settlement remains around TL 214 529 mark the site of this hamlet, mentioned in 1140 and again in 1336 (Reaney 1943: 161; RCHME 1968: 112).

Olmstead Green (Castle Camps). Documented in 1235, now a single farm and settlement remains with two moats around TL 632 411 (Reaney 1943: 102; VCH 6: 37).

Orneldene

(Ickleton, 1455). Site unknown (Reaney 1943: 347).

Overhall Grove

(Boxworth). Moated site occupied between the 11th and 14th centuries; settlement remains around TL 339 633 (Reaney 1943: 165; RCHME 1968: 28, 30–1).

Padloe End

(Burrough Green). No further details are known (VCH 6: 141).

Pincote

(Kingston). A hamlet in Kingston Wood, possibly of the 11th or 12th centuries (Reaney 1943: 163).

Pincote

(Tadlow). First recorded in 1176, but declined from about 1450; it stood around TL 275 497 (Reaney 1943: 66; VCH 8: 128; RCHME 1968: 206–7).

Plumpton

(Waterbeach, 1414). Site unknown (Reaney 1943: 347).

Prestiston

(Barnwell, Cambridge, 1432). Site unknown (Reaney 1943: 347).

Ruddery End

(also called Redreth; Guilden Morden). First mentioned c.1100, but not after 1340 (Reaney 1943: 62; VCH 8: 97).

Shadborough

(Bassingbourn). One of several settlement foci in Bassingbourn, recorded in 1549 but 'decayed' by 1640; c. TL 326 443 (Palmer 1935: 98; VCH 8: 12–3).

Shingay*

(TL 310 473). Recorded in Domesday Book, the settlement was probably depopulated in the 15th century and enclosed in about 1517 (Beresford and Hurst 1989 ed.: 184; VCH 8: 124; Jones 1902: 32; CUULM AAV85, AEM49–55).

Sigereston

(Stetchworth, 1250). Site unknown (Reaney 1943: 347).

Tadlow

Mentioned in 1086, and enclosed in the later 17th century (VCH 8: 127–8; RCHME 1968: 203, 205; Taylor 1973: 144).

Waleuort

(Horningsea). Last noted in 1221 (Reaney 1943: 218).

(le) Waleworth(hell)

(West Wickham). Listed in 1339–40 (Reaney 1943: 218).

Wendy

Documented in 1086, and enclosed in 1656 (Jones 1902).

Westwick

Listed in 1086, north of Oakington. Extensive settlement remains around TL 419 651 (Ravensdale; VCH 9: 108; CUULM ARH 52–6, AWU 68–72).

Whitwell*

(Barton). An independent vill in 1086, the settlement disappeared after 1500. Believed to have stood between TL 402 596 and TL 403 585. (Beresford 1954: 344; RCHME 1968: 12; Taylor 1973: 139).

Wimpole*

At least 5 separate hamlets c. TL 337 510 were gradually cleared in the 18th century when the park was extended (Beresford 1954: 344; RCHME 1968: 225–229).

Wratworth*

(Wimpole/Orwell). An independent vill in 1086, it probably lay in the southern part of Cobbs Wood, and had probably disappeared by the 13th century (Reaney 1943: 80; RCHME 1968: 210; Beresford and Hurst 1989 ed.: 184; VCH 5: 263).

Yen Hall

(West Wickham). Documented in 974, the settlement lay around TL 514 616 and was occupied through the middle ages; a single farm now stands on the site (Reaney 1943: 113).

2. Shifted settlements**Great Abington**

By 1603 had moved from a location around the church to its current site; possibly before 1331 when the park was created (Palmer 1924: 17; Reaney 1943: 99).

Arrington

Moved in the medieval period from its original site

around the parish church to a new focus along Ermine Street, leaving the church behind (RCHME 1968: xxxiv, 1; Taylor 1973: 144; VCH 5: 140–4).

Ashley

Was moved by the Hospitallers by about 1300. Church was isolated and disappeared in the 16th century (Taylor 1982–3: 34; VCH 10: 30).

Babraham

The settlement was moved to its present site in the 16th century, isolating the parish church, when the Hall was emparked (VCH 7: 46; Palmer 1924: 32).

Carlton

Only four taxpayers remained in 1428; a new settlement focus emerged in the 16th century (VCH 6: 148).

*Caxton

Following the grant of a market in 1247, settlement shifted from around TL 301 582 – TL 303 577 to Ermine Street (Beresford and Hurst 1989 ed.: 184; RCHME 1968: 34–5, 42; Taylor 1982).

Chippenham

The southern part of the settlement was moved in 1712 when the park was enlarged (Spufford 1974: 59; Taylor 1973: 166–7; VCH 10: 370, 372).

Conington

Earthwork remains south of the church around TL 320 660 and houses in the existing settlement to the north, suggest that the settlement had moved by the 17th century at the latest (RCHME 1968: 55–6).

*Croxtan

(TL 252 593). Although emparked c. 1811–18 after enclosure, some polyfocal settlements within the park may have been deserted earlier (Beresford and Hurst 1989 ed.: 184; RCHME 1968: 63–4, 70–1; VCH 5: 36).

East End

(also called Caxton End, Eltisley). Occupied in the medieval period but virtually deserted by the 19th century (VCH 5: 47; RCHME 1968: 90, 97–8).

Fen Ditton

Shifted in the medieval period from Green End to an east–west orientation along the Fleam Dyke, leaving settlement remains around TL 482 607 (RCHME 1972: 49, 63–4).

Dry Drayton

Medieval emparkment led to a shift from a site south of the church to its present location (RCHME 1968: 80; CUULM AWA 90–1).

Horseheath

the settlement moved towards the main road between Cambridge and Haverhill in the 15th and 16th centuries after emparkment around Horseheath Hall (VCH 6: 70).

Kennett

Listed in 1086. The church is now isolated (TL 699 683), the settlement having shifted to the south-east (Reaney 1943: 193; VCH 10: 460).

Knapwell

The orientation of the settlement shifted by 90 degrees between 1144 and the 18th century, leaving settlement remains around the church (RCHME 1968: 163; CUULM AZS 57–8).

Landbeach

after 1350 the northern and western parts of the settlement were abandoned (Ravensdale 1974: 131–32).

Longstowe

First mentioned in the late 10th century, the settlement moved south from its original focus around the church, perhaps from the 13th century onwards (RCHME 1968: 173; VCH 5: 121).

Madingley

The settlement moved at an unknown date from a focus around the church to its current location, possibly as a result of 16th-century emparkment (RCHME 1968: 176).

Quy

Settlement site perhaps around the site of the parish church, now disappeared, the village was decayed by the late 13th century (RCHME 1972: 90).

Rampton

Settlement east of the church was deserted for a new site laid out over fields to the west, perhaps when the castle was built in the mid-12th century.

Silverley

Had probably shifted by about 1600; site now occupied by one farm and the ruins of the church (Taylor 1982–3: 37; VCH 10: 37).

Stetchworth

The settlement was enclosed for a deer park during the 16th century, and the parish church isolated (VCH V: 170).

Stow

Originally located around the parish church, but now lying a little distance to the north (RCHME 1972: 90–1).

West Colville

The settlement had moved from the church to Weston Green by 1612 (VCH 6: 182).

Willingham

Mentioned in 1086, only 4 taxpayers remained in 1428. A new settlement focus emerged in the 16th century (VCH 6: 148).

Woodditton

A polyfocal settlement mentioned in 1086, settlement had moved from Camois Farm to Ditton Green, from Church Hall to Little Ditton, and from Trunks Well to Saxon Street by 1300, or perhaps even by 1100 (VCH 10: 82–3).

Abbreviations

CUULM	University of Cambridge Unit for Landscape Modelling
RCHME	Royal Commission on Historic Monuments (England)
VCH	Victoria County History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely

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