SHRUNKEN SETTLEMENTS IN WEST SHROPSHIRE: THE ALL SOULS 1602 MAP OF ALBERBURY

By ROBERT SILVESTER[1]

Introduction

In what is perhaps one of his less acclaimed works, *History on the Ground. Six Studies in Maps and Landscapes* (1957), Maurice Beresford, a founding father of the Deserted Medieval Village Research Group, turned to early cartography to elucidate what he had encountered in his fieldwork in the Midlands and north-east England. I suspect that I wouldn't be alone in acknowledging the influence of this particular volume on my own research over the years, while its wider impact has been highlighted by Paul Harvey amongst others (1996, 51). Of the maps that Beresford employed in his analyses of the English landscape, several of Elizabethan date were sourced in the archives of All Souls College in Oxford: that for Whatborough in Leicestershire surveyed by Thomas Clerke in 1586, and those for the manors of Salford in Bedfordshire and Maids Moreton in Buckinghamshire, both prepared by Clerke's successor, Thomas Langdon in 1596.

The maps in All Souls have long been acknowledged as one of the finest collections of Elizabethan estate maps in the UK. 'Unsurpassed' was the term that Beresford himself employed in 1957, remarking too that Robert Hovenden, the then Warden of All Souls, had 'recorded the landed endowments of his college for all time by commissioning a fine series of estate plans unequalled in their day for clarity and precision' (Beresford 1984, 117). R. H. Tawney (1912) may have been the first to utilise the All Souls maps in the form of cartographic transcriptions in his study of sixteenth-century agrarian change, while over the past half a century, several maps in the series have been reproduced because of their depictions of the medieval open fields that survived into the early modern era: by Beresford for Padbury in Buckinghamshire as well as for the three villages mentioned above (Beresford and St Joseph 1979, 31), and by Alan Baker for Weston Pinkney in Northamptonshire and again for Padbury (1973). It was an approach that appears to have been initiated late in the nineteenth century by J. L. G. Mowat whose reproduction of open-field maps in middle England also mined the collections held in Oxford's colleges (1888). Other Hovenden maps have been used by Sarah Bendall in a study of Romney Marsh on the Kent/Sussex border (1995), by Naomi Hutchings (1989) on enclosure at Whatborough, and more generally by Peter Barber (2007) in a seminal paper on English mapmaking. Yet despite these publications, much of the All Souls material is little known, there is no detailed study of the maps as a series and no published catalogue.

Thomas Langdon was one of several surveyors commissioned by Hovenden and his cartography, spread across the years from 1592 to 1605, is gathered into five portfolios, each with a varying number of maps in it. Originally there were some ninety maps, but regrettably four relating to the college's estates in south Wales can no longer be traced. Properties owned by All Souls were distributed across many English counties (Trice Martin 1877, vii) and the majority of the estates are represented in the Hovenden collection (Figure 1). Although several of Langdon's maps are copies of earlier drawings, many represent fresh surveys. Some can be classed as conventional estate maps depicting discrete landholdings, but not all, for a number addressed specific property issues where land was in contention between All Souls and local landowners. This was certainly the case with one of the better known maps, that of Whatborough, where ownership was contested by Lord Cromwell, and the initial spur for Hovenden's mapping programme appears also to have originated from a controversy over land, in this case in Middlesex (Eden 1983, 71).

While most of All Souls' estates lay in south-east England and the southern Midlands, the most north-westerly outlier was at Alberbury in western Shropshire, a former Grandmontine priory whose lands were granted to the college in 1441 soon after its foundation. Three of the maps for the parish, prepared in 1593 at a stated scale of perches that equates to 1:3168, display the fragmented college landholdings around Alberbury village with its satellite settlement of Eyton, and include one of woodland known as Peckenhall Wood where ownership was disputed by local farmers. The fourth map is different (Hovenden Map V.I; Figure 2). Drawn nearly a decade later in 1602 and presented at the much smaller scale of 1:19,008, it depicts a large area around the former priory of just over 30 square miles, described at the time as the 'precincte of the parish of Alberbury' which encompassed the two ecclesiastical parishes of Alberbury and Cardeston and spread into a portion of the former that lay across the Welsh border in Montgomeryshire. With south at the top of the map, it shows the River Severn, to the west the imposing volcanic hills known collectively as the Breiddens, the boundaries of Alberbury's numerous townships, the more significant thoroughfares, various blocks of woodland, and houses both in settlement clusters and as individual dwellings which were distributed sporadically across the two parishes. Unlike a standard estate map, no attempt was made to distinguish the lands actually owned by All Souls within this large area, other than (curiously) the strips in the open field of Eyton. The map's title is not furnished with a cartouche, the colouring is restrained and the decoration less elaborate and imposing than on
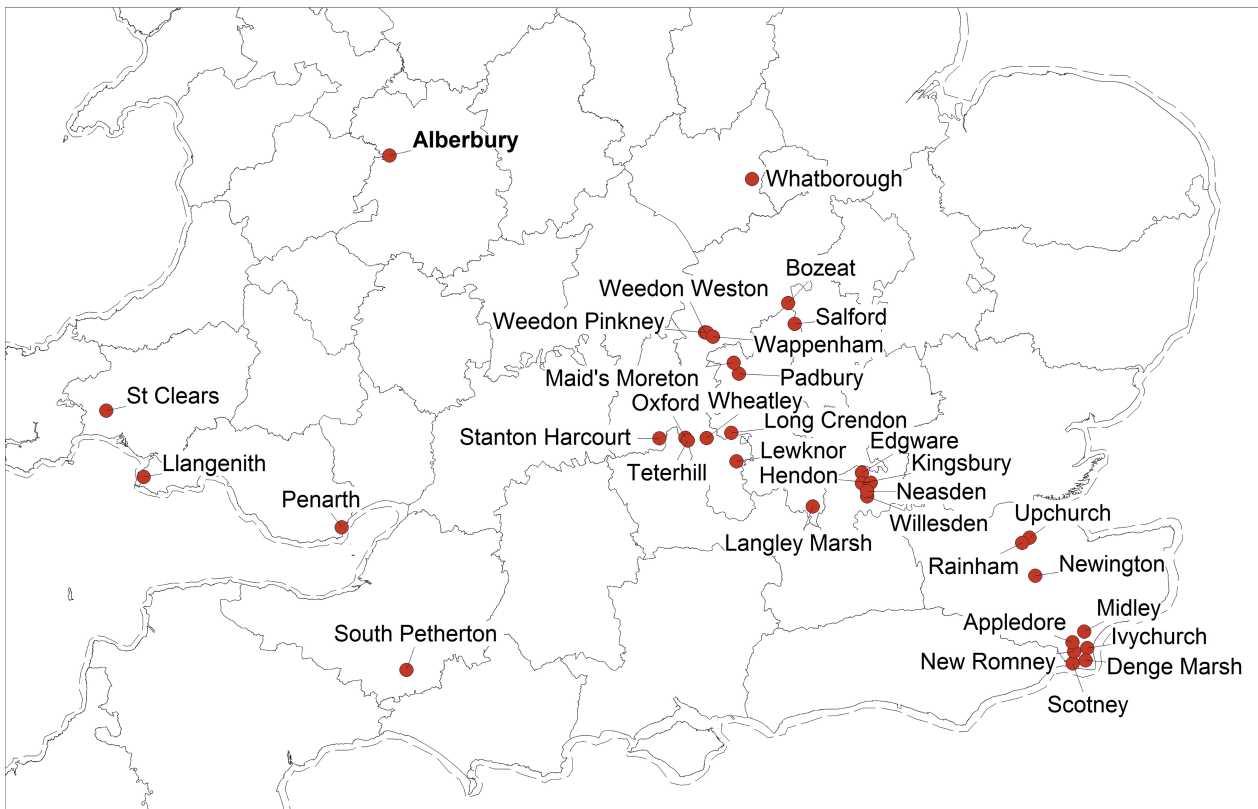
[1] University of Chester.

Figure 1   All Souls' estates represented by maps in the Hovenden series.

Langdon's other maps in the Alberbury series. More utilitarian, it was evidently designed not to assert or challenge ownership of the land but to present the existing state of affairs for All Souls, and as Langdon noted in its titular inscription, it was a 'description of the precincte of the parishe of Alberbury …. in whiche the tithes are belonging unto ye parsonage impropriate there and is parcel of the possessions of the warden and college…'.

What catches the eye on the 1602 map are the clusters of dwellings dotting the map which reflected the presence of numerous hamlets. Ford Hundred of which Alberbury was a part was assessed in the *Victoria County History* over 50 years ago (VCH 1968), and was influential in revealing that hamlets had been particularly prevalent in western Shropshire and that many had subsequently shrunk or in some cases disappeared entirely. Previously, simple lists had been produced of 'deserted medieval villages' in Shropshire in a form that was standard across England, but was not a convincing guide to the realities of settlement patterning in this western part of the county. The VCH study of Ford identified named townships within the ecclesiastical parishes and presumed that the settlement within each was most probably nucleated and conveniently termed a hamlet.[2]

Medieval and early modern documentation – which included the Elizabethan maps from All Souls – showed that numerous households were in many cases present at those places. Many had later disappeared and one of the strengths of the VCH assessment was that these could be itemised – more helpfully than had hitherto been the case – as deserted or shrunken hamlets.

The purpose of this paper is *not* to question the usefulness of the understanding that the VCH put in place, but rather through the medium of this early map of Alberbury parish, to tease out and illustrate some of the complexities of the settlement forms involved, the variety of changes that occurred and some of the difficulties of recognising patterns rather than concentrating on large numbers of individual cases.

Settlements on Langdon's map (Figure 3)

We can start with those settlements that lay in Montgomeryshire and have not benefitted from the VCH's research. For those of us working in Wales it is a perennial cause for regret that there is no Welsh equivalent of the *Victoria County History*.[3] Crew Green (*Crewe Greene*),[4] the only nucleation named on Langdon's map that carries this suffix, has previously been assumed to be

---

[2]   In this paper the term 'hamlet' is used in its conventional (and Shorter Oxford Dictionary) sense of a small cluster of houses. Angus Winchester in a paper in 2000 revealed that in the north of England it could have an alternative use to describe an administrative subdivision of a parish, with no implications as to the nature of settlement within that sub-division. He has pointed out to the writer that this particular usage is not restricted to northern England but might occur anywhere in the country (A. Winchester: pers. comm.). I have, however, found no evidence that it was used in this sense in the VCH Shropshire volume in 1968.

[3]   A GIS metadata table of all the settlements enumerated in this paper together with their 'characteristics' has been lodged with the Shropshire Historic Environment Record.

[4]   Italicised names are those given on Thomas Langdon's map to differentiate them from the modern name forms.

Figure 2   Thomas Langdon's map of Alberbury parish from 1602, with south to the top. Reproduced by permission of the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford.
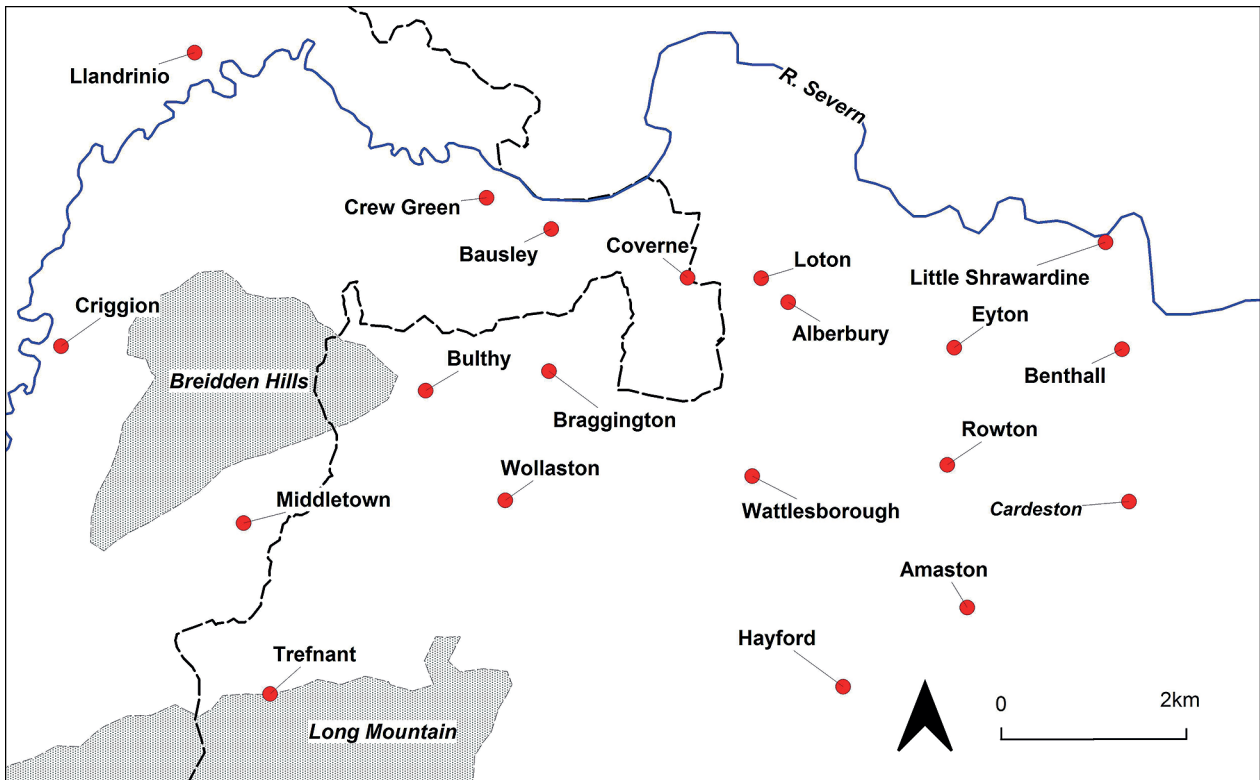
42

Figure 3   Location of settlements shown on Langdon's map.

a relatively modern development. Its showing in 1602, however, points to a medieval origin for a settlement form which is largely unacknowledged in and around western Shropshire, even if its physical characteristic as a green can only be dimly perceived in the eight cottages shown around it (Figure 4). Middletown (*Middleton)* has a different story. To differentiate shrinkage from settlement shift is not feasible here, for the hamlet moved a quarter of a mile northwards to cluster along the turnpike road in the wake of its construction in the mid-eighteenth century.

Settlement shift is more evident with Criggion (*Cruggion*) which in 1602 consisted of a chapel with several dispersed dwellings, lying on the valley floor of the River Severn in the shadow of the Breiddins (Figure 5). Modern Criggion, just over a mile to the north-east and also sheltering beneath the hills though further from the river, comprises little more than a hall, a church and a couple of houses. Possibly, sporadic flooding on the

Severn plain may have forced the abandonment of the earlier scattered buildings, but the relocation of the local gentry, the Eyton family, to present-day Criggion may also have been influential. The external features of the hall, the date of the Eytons' appearance in the Alberbury parish registers and the first baptism in 'ye chappell where it now stands' can all be pinned down to the 1670s (Barton 2006, 77; Scourfield and Haslam 2013, 102). Not that the earlier chapel was entirely lost in the flood waters. When a vestry was appended to Criggion church in 1842 a Romanesque doorway in red sandstone was incorporated in the build: although undocumented, the likely source of the salvaged architectural stonework is the earlier chapel (Figure 6).

Figure 4   Crew Green and Bausley in 1602.

Figure 5   Criggion in 1602.

Figure 6   The doorway from Criggion chapel, re-used in the later church.

Figure 7   Llandrinio with the parsonage and its moat in 1602.

Settlement shrinkage is at its most marked in Bausley (*Baldesley*). Straddling the more northerly of the two main routeways from Shrewsbury into Wales and the one that ran through Alberbury itself, Bausley was a substantial hamlet in 1602 (Figure 4). By the 1870s there was only one farm and three cottages, and while the name survives in the label applied to the modern community, the early settlement itself has gone unrecognised by the local authority's signmakers. Finally in Montgomeryshire, the parochial settlement of Llandrinio lies across the Severn from the Alberbury tithe area. Langdon's depiction of the place is instructive for though sparse in dwellings, he drew in the faint outline of an enclosure next to the church (Figure 7). Evidently representing a moat which is described in a Welsh poem of 1430x70 as surrounding a late medieval parsonage, this is the only known cartographic depiction of the feature, although LiDAR and recent drone photography suggest that some remains of the moat ditch survive (M. Walters, pers. comm.).

Turning now to Shropshire, the clusters of dwellings shown by Langdon number 21, two of them the parochial centres of Alberbury and Cardeston (*Carson*) which should be classed as villages rather than hamlets. Included in this total are two settlements – Shrawardine (*Shradon magna*) and Vennington – which like Llandrinio were included by Langdon to display the broader geographic context for his map but lay outside the tithed area of Alberbury parsonage. We have to be

cautious in assuming that Langdon was consistently accurate in depicting the number of dwellings for each hamlet. Eyton, lying a mile to the east of Alberbury, had been mapped at a considerably larger scale in 1593 and this earlier work confirms that there were five dwellings spread along a circuit of lanes that framed what may once have been another green. Similarly the adjacent hamlets of Benthall and Little Shrawardine with six tenants in 1601 (VCH 1968, 191) equate well with the two sets of three dwellings shown by Langdon in 1602. On the other hand, the detailed mapping of Alberbury in 1593 depicted eleven houses together with the castle-cum-hall (Figure 8). On the smaller-scale mapping of 1602 only six were shown (Figure 9). Although one might suspect that the varying numbers of dwellings shown by Langdon could bear some relationship to the number of tithe payers in the communities, this has yet to be substantiated.

It should be mentioned here that one of the earlier, larger scaled maps from 1593 (Hovenden Map V.III) insets a location plan of the environs of Alberbury, at much the same scale as that of 1602. Evidently a precursor for the later plan, it has a more limited geographic coverage, and also reveals differences from its later counterpart. Most obvious is that north is more conventionally orientated, at least to the modern mind, at the top of the map. More relevant to the present assessment are the settlements shown with a dot in a circle superimposed on a pictogram of a single building, in the fashion of Mercator and Ortelius rather than Christopher Saxton. Regardless of the putative size of the settlement no clusters of buildings appear anywhere on this 1593 location map. Other differences include variant spellings, to be expected at this date, and include Wattlesborough for *Watlesbrow house* in 1602 (for which see below) and *Praggington* for Braggington though no settlement pictogram is associated with the name. More likely an error, modern Bausley (and *Baldesley* in 1602) is named as *Brinpoith* in 1593. In the landscape of 1593 Langdon drew in both Alberbury and Rowton (*Roughton*) windmills, neither of them shown in 1602, while more intriguing is Peckenhall to the west of Alberbury, a name attached only to a woodland tract in the late sixteenth century, but also named was the otherwise unknown *Peckenhall Moate*.

Figure 8   Alberbury on the map of 1593. Reproduced by permission of the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford.

Figure 9   Alberbury on the map of 1602.

others gentry houses. The VCH's documentary research is invaluable in fleshing out the picture. The decline of the small hamlet at Wattlesborough just to the north of the more southerly route from Shrewsbury into Wales can be attributed to the erection of a hall there soon after 1711; Benthall, signified by its three dwellings documented in 1601, was apparently superseded by a single farm in the second half of the seventeenth century; while Amaston continued as a recognisable hamlet until the 1690s and perhaps later, but about 1800 it was replaced by Heath Farm. With some settlements, the decline may have been gradual. Hayford (*Heyforde*) with three dwellings and a mill in 1602 (Figure 10) was down to a single farm in the 1870s; but perhaps its shrinkage was earlier, for John

The number of dwellings in each hamlet aside, the settlement picture presented by Langdon is clear. Within the parishes of Alberbury and Cardeston there were 21 nucleated settlements in 1602. Many lay within townships that carried the same names, though Langdon was not wholly consistent in defining and naming these administrative areas of which there were at least fifteen in Alberbury. Two of the nucleations were the parochial centres, mentioned above, and Wollaston (*Willaston*) with a chapel of medieval date, was and remains smaller. But over the three centuries that separate the early large-scale Ordnance Surveys maps of the 1870s (offering a more useful base for comparison than modern mapping) from the All Souls map, eleven or just over half shrank from hamlets to single holdings, some of them farms,

Figure 10   Hayford on the map of 1602.

45

Rocque did not show it on his county map in 1752, and Greenwood's in 1827 marked only the mill. Similarly at Little Shrawardine (*Shradon pua*) the three houses of 1602 may have continued in much the same form into the early nineteenth century, but the settlement appears to have shrunk to a single farm by the end of the century. Nor, on the VCH's evidence, were the core villages unaffected: Alberbury itself was re-planned in the 1780s with cottages demolished and the main road diverted (VCH 1968, 189), Cardeston is said to have shrunk at about the same time, and Great Wollaston is believed to have been reduced in size by 1779.

Earlier settlements

Langdon's map offers a snapshot of the settlement pattern at the turn of the seventeenth century, mostly nucleated but with some individual properties that presumably represented small farmholdings and the occasional gentleman's residence, as with *Mr Williams' Hall,* modern Hallmill near Vennington. An additional interest lies in what it does not show. Shropshire has long been remarked for its hamlets. It is a characteristic singled out in *Region and Place* (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, 52), but long before that by Trevor Rowley, who cited the VCH's focus on this aspect in Ford Hundred (Rowley 1972, 107; VCH 1968). The VCH had identified numerous hamlets in medieval and Tudor documentation, and produced a distribution map of its own showing no fewer than 70 that it classed as hamlets in the whole hundred (1968, 182). It is no surprise, then, these figures have fed into Shropshire's reputation as a county of hamlets. Yet while VCH's collation and presentation of a broad range of detail is one of its fundamental strengths, and for Ford Hundred provides invaluable supplementary information on the factors behind and the chronology of settlement decline, it can also be an impediment, the detail submerging broader trends. Documented settlements in the hundred were defined initially by VCH as hamlets or townships, an understandable caution given that the documentary evidence with its dependency on the township as the descriptive unit rarely differentiated between nucleated communities on the one hand and scattered and dispersed dwellings on the other. But on the distribution map the term 'township' was omitted (1968, 182) and the accompanying list named 22 shrunken hamlets in this part of western Shropshire with three more deserted, at least nine of them absent from Langdon's map of 1602. The possibility that some townships might have had dispersed populations is ignored, even though the documentary evidence is insufficiently strong to support such a presumption.

Changes in western Shropshire's settlement pattern throughout the Middle Ages are in general difficult to pin down, and this can have less to do with the quantity of the evidence, and more to do with its interpretation and depiction. One issue is geographical. Pinpointing the location of medieval settlements is far from straightforward, though some commentators tend to adopt a casual approach to this facet of the study. Yet to move beyond a paper exercise we need to be able to place every manor and putative hamlet in the landscape. Even for the settlements that have suffered

contraction rather than abandonment since the early seventeenth century, the overriding assumption has been that the earlier settlement lay beneath or very close to the later surviving farm. In many instances that is a reasonable deduction, but not always. Bulthy (*Bulchey*) was apparently a sizeable settlement in 1602 when six dwellings were shown lying immediately to the east of the Breidden Hills. VCH, on the basis of some supposedly significant common-field names, plumped for a location by the modern Bulthy Hill Farm; the county HER prefers Bulthy Farm 600m to the east, while closer inspection of Langdon's survey suggests from *Bulchey's* location relative to the township boundary and other hamlets nearby, that it lay close to Bank Farm, a further 600m eastwards. It might be added that there is no field evidence that favours any one of these locations. Similarly the proposed medieval hamlet at Trefnant is, on the solitary evidence of a couple of 'moat' field names, allotted to a place where a mill operated in later centuries. In 1602 the mill was shown but there was no contemporary nucleation in the township, and the farms incorporating the same name lie nearly a kilometre higher up the hill close to the old road from Shrewsbury to Welshpool, where two eighteenth-century county maps placed Trefnant.

In this part of western Shropshire few surface traces have been recognised that might home in on earlier settlement, and this situation carries over to the far side of the Severn, for Montgomeryshire contrasts with areas further south in the modern county of Powys where settlement earthworks are more prevalent (Silvester and Kissock 2012, 154). Aside from the occasional motte and moat, the Shropshire Historic Environment Record (HER) records perhaps eight putative hamlet sites with adjacent ridge and furrow (though of unknown date), and no more than three where other, generally unintelligible, earthworks have been recorded. Only two places have produced excavated material. A small evaluation at Loton, a reputed hamlet just beyond the western edge of Alberbury that was first documented in the thirteenth century, exposed a fifteenth-century building (Hall and Sambrook 2016). Braggington, first recorded in 1255, is more intriguing, and not just for the results from Philip Barker's rescue excavation on a D-shaped ditched enclosure in 1963 threatened by agrarian improvement. The work revealed the foundations of a timber-framed house which on the evidence of pottery was built in the early fifteenth century and abandoned in the late seventeenth, and in another part of the enclosure iron-working remains that appeared to date from the first decades of the sixteenth century or perhaps a little earlier (Barker 1966). Advised by the VCH researchers, Barker initially referred to Braggington as a hamlet in his report, including the term too in the title of his paper, but in the concluding discussion asserted 'that the enclosure is a form of defended manor-house site, dry instead of moated, with the village clustered round it, is not borne out by the evidence' (Barker 1966, 133), hinting at his unease with the terminology. Thomas Langdon did not depict Braggington on his 1602 map, which is understandable in that the hall there was not built until around 1650, but seemingly at odds with the claim in the VCH of nearly a dozen families there in the earlier seventeenth century, and in apparent contradiction of

the dating evidence from the enclosure. It might be tempting to see Langdon's omission of Braggington as a cartographic oversight. But Barker's report gives a detailed survey of Braggington in 1301, part of the larger manor of Wattlesborough. All sixteen inhabitants were Welshmen and classed as free tenants, holding between them in excess of 166 acres; but while the size of the individual holdings is itemised, no information appears that locates their dwellings, and several are known to have had other land holdings elsewhere in Wattlesborough manor. In 1419 the five tenants in Braggington, now identified as a Welshry[5] within an English manor, continued the practice of bearing Welsh names (Barker 1966, 131). Despite the very limited published analysis of the physical appearance of settlement forms in Welshries over the border in central Wales, one of the general characteristics is a dearth of nucleated communities. Braggington with its solitary and somewhat unusual enclosure points to a dispersed pattern of settlement, not a hamlet. There is also some map evidence of dispersed settlement in a lost place called Coverne on the boundary of Shropshire and Montgomeryshire, between Alberbury and Crew Green. Three dwellings were shown in 1602, and the more detailed map of 1593 confirms that this was not a nucleated settlement but rather cottages dispersed on the banks of a stream.

Some documentary evidence strongly supports medieval depopulation of existing nucleations. With Wattlesborough manor, for instance, no fewer than eighteen tenants held parcels in a single field in 1379. By 1542, the number of taxpayers was down to five, and in 1602, somewhat ambiguously, Langdon gave the name *Watlesborow howse* to a group of three houses. As noted above, a century later Wattlesborough had succumbed to the requirements of the landowner, for the hall was the only dwelling on the site. Closer to the Severn, the two well-tenanted 'hamlets' of Loton and Hayes near Alberbury are believed to have been depopulated between 1516 and 1532 when several Shrewsbury butchers leased the land, expelled the tenants and turned the land over to pasture. Other settlements – Armaston and Little Woolaston, for instance – are thought to have shrunk in the fourteenth century, while conversely Hayford said to have had only a single farm and a mill as far back as 1281, is shown as a cluster of dwellings in 1602.

The wider picture

Langdon's map displays only the single parish of Alberbury, while the approach adopted by VCH in 1968 extended to the other parishes in Ford Hundred, a total area of more than 35,000 acres across only five parishes. The list of hamlets that had shrunk after *c.* 1200 ran to 51 (including those in both Alberbury and Cardeston) with seven deserted settlements. The adjacent hundred of Condover, a larger area of just over 42,000 aces with seventeen parishes, lying south-east of Ford and arcing around the southern side of Shrewsbury, contained a

higher proportion of fertile lowland than Ford. There, more hamlets survived into the present day: 22 (as against twelve in Ford Hundred); and, numbering 31, commensurately fewer shrunken hamlets.

Unfortunately for any assessment of medieval settlement, this method of tabulating information on shrunken hamlets was not continued in later VCH volumes. The Telford volume in 1995 and that for Wenlock and the Shropshire Hills three years later, both covering central areas of the county, concentrated on the parish descriptions. Decoding these is not straightforward: they hint at some settlements in decline, not least those where documented medieval open fields had existed in the vicinity of more recent single farms, but overall the impression (and it cannot be claimed as any more than that) is that settlement shrinkage is less marked in these central regions than further west.

Not that the VCH has been alone in identifying shrunken settlements in the county. The early DMVRG survey incorporated several such settlements in its preliminary list of desertions (SNL 1957), and site-specific research has subsequently highlighted individual examples at Pickthorn in Stottesdon in the southern part of the county, Stitt in Ratlinghope in the Shropshire Hills (both Rowley 1972), and in the parish of Wheathill in the Clee Hills – also in southern Shropshire – where the medieval settlements of Wheathill itself and Bromdon have been reduced to single farms and Egerton has been deserted (Everson and Roberts 1993, 65). Trevor Rowley's more landscape-focused research flagged both shrunken and deserted villages in the extreme south of the county around Brown Clee (Rowley 1972, 112) and undoubtedly a systematic trawl though the county HER would deliver further examples. Since the 1970s there appears to have been little new research. While Shropshire's inclusion within an extended zone of small settlements and hamlets stretching along the Welsh border is now well-established (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, 52), it remains little more than speculation to suggest that settlement shrinkage – or as Beresford put it 'depopulation, but not total depopulation' (1971, 19) – was more prevalent in the hilly areas of the west and south of the county than on the lowland plains.

As a postscript, however, let us fall back on historic cartography. Shropshire is remarkable for the number of known late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuscript maps that survive. With more than 130 it is comparable not with its neighbours Montgomeryshire (four), Herefordshire (22) or even Cheshire (55), but with the cartographically rich counties of south and eastern England. Many of the maps are of single landholdings, that is estate maps in their conventional sense, and thus of peripheral assistance in visualising nucleated settlement forms; but other map types, particularly legal dispute maps and lordship maps with their potentially wider geographical coverage, are of more interest, as three examples illustrate.

Two of the maps display lowland areas in central Shropshire. The 1635 map of Crudgington (Shropshire Archives 972/7/1/9), one of several early maps of the low-lying Weald Moors to the north of Telford, displays seven nucleated settlements, only one of which shows signs of shrinkage: *Meeston* (today Meeson) with around fourteen dwellings had shrunk to a couple of houses and

[5] Defined by Adams (1976, 184) as 'that part of a marcher lordship where the Welsh lived according to their own customs and laws', Welsh traditions may have become diluted but not excised over time.

a farm by the end of the nineteenth century, the farm incorporating a hallhouse with a dendrochronological date of 1502 (Newman and Pevsner 2006, 274). A map of 1631 of the lordship of Wem (Shropshire Archives 972/7/1/49) presents a similar picture, with several nucleations in addition to the town of Wem itself, but only two suggesting a degree of shrinkage. Edstaston, to the north of the town, is today significantly smaller; straggling along a minor road, the hamlet of five houses plus the church had reduced in the late nineteenth century to a church, a farm and a gentry house. North-west of Wem, a gentry mansion at Horton had succeeded a small common or green with seven dwellings and a hall around it in 1631.

The third map is different. Seemingly a legal dispute or more probably an administrative map centred on Babynch Forest (now Babbin's Wood) near Oswestry, it survives in two versions (National Library Wales/Aston Hall 2777 and 4675) and is of earlier origin, probably from the later sixteenth century. A picture map rather than an accurate survey, the area that it depicted is close to the Welsh border and thus not dissimilar to the All Souls map of Alberbury which lay ten miles to the south. Of the nineteen settlements on the Babynch map, three – Oswestry, Selattyn and Whittington – remain as modern towns or villages, but remarkably thirteen have shrunk to farms and gentry houses, and three have entirely disappeared.

Conclusions

What is important in Alberbury is not the precise number of settlements in decline over the centuries, for here the documentary and landscape evidence is likely to remain inconclusive and, in some cases, contentious. Rather, as with the environs of Babynch Forest, it is the scale of settlement shrinkage in an area that formed only a portion of a single hundred in western Shropshire. While one or two settlements, such as the parochial centres of Alberbury and Cardington, experienced periods of both growth and reduction or even shift,[6] the underlying pattern for the majority was one of reduction. That decline in settlement size was not synchronous, but spread across the centuries and ranged from the abrupt to the prolonged. Thomas Langdon's mapping of All Souls' interests in its Alberbury estate provides a chronological snapshot at a specific point in time and, because of its geographic range, a record that is out of the ordinary. In the overall history of the locality, the year 1602 carries no particular significance, but to the modern researcher this map presents the earliest visualisation of an ever-changing settlement pattern.

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

Adams, I. H. 1976. *Agrarian Landscape Terms: a Glossary for Historical Geography*. London: Institute of British Geographers.

Baker, A. R. H. 1973. Field systems in medieval England. In A. R. H. Baker and J. B. Harley (eds), *Man Made the Land*. Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 59–68.

Barber, P. 2007. Mapmaking in England, ca. 1470–1650. In D. Woodward (ed.), *The History of Cartography. Volume 3, Part 2. Cartography in the European Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1589–1669.

Barker P. A. 1966. The deserted medieval hamlet of Braggington. *Transactions Shropshire Archaeological Society* **58.2**: 122–139.

Barton, P. G. 2006. The township of Criggion in the manor of Nethergorther. *Montgomeryshire Collections* **94**: 69–90.

Bendall, S. 1995. Enquire 'when the same platte was made and by whome and to what intent': sixteenth-century maps of Romney Marsh. *Imago Mundi* **47**: 34–48

Beresford, M., 1957 and 1984. *History on the Ground. Six Studies in Maps and Landscapes*. 1st edition Guildford: Lutterworth Press. 2nd edition Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing.

Beresford, M.W. and St Joseph, J. K. S. 1979. *Medieval England: an aerial survey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dyer, C. 2017. The origin and early development of the Medieval Settlement Research Group. *Medieval Settlement Research* **32**: 1–6.

Eden, P. 1983. Three Elizabethan estate surveyors: Peter Kempe, Thomas Clerke and Thomas Langdon. In S. Tyacke (ed.), *English Map-Making, 1500–1650*. London: The British Library, 68–84.

Hall, J. and Sambrook, P. 2016. Loton Park, Alberbury, Shropshire: Evaluation Report (Trysor Rep. 2016/539). Unpublished report by Trysor Archaeological Services.

Harvey, P. D. A. 1996. English estate maps: their early history and their use as historical evidence. In D. Buisseret (ed.), *Rural Images. Estate maps in the Old and New Worlds*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 27–61.

Hutchings, N. 1989. The plan of Whatborough – a study of the sixteenth-century map of enclosure. *Landscape History* **11**: 83–91.

Kain, R. J. P. and Oliver R. R. 2001. *Historic Parishes of England and Wales*. Colchester: History Data Service.

Mowat, J. L. G. 1888. *Sixteen Old Maps of Properties in Oxfordshire in the Possession of the Colleges of Oxford, Illustrating the Open Field System*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Newman, J. and Pevsner, N. 2006. *The Buildings of England: Shropshire*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press

Roberts, B. K. and Wrathmell, S. 2002. *Region and Place. A study of English rural settlement*. London: English Heritage.

Rowley, T. 1972. *The Shropshire Landscape*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Scourfield, R. and Haslam, R. 2013. *The Buildings of Wales: Powys*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Silvester, R. J. and Kissock, J. 2012. Wales: medieval settlements, nucleated and dispersed, permanent and seasonal. In N. Christie and P. Stamper (eds), *Medieval Rural Settlement. Britain and Ireland, AD 800 – 1600*. Oxford: Windgather Press, 151–71.

SNL. 1957. Deserted mediaeval villages. *Shropshire Newsletter* **2**: 3–4.

Tawney, R. H. 1912. *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.

Trice Martin, C. 1877. *Catalogue of the Archives in the Muniment Rooms of All Souls' College*. London: Spottiswoode and Co.

VCH. 1968. *The Victoria County History of Shropshire. Volume VIII*. Oxford: Oxford University Press for the University of London Institute of Historical Research.

Winchester, A. 2000. Dividing lines in a moorland landscape: territorial boundaries in upland England. *Landscapes* **1.2**: 16–32.

---

[6] VCH claims 31 houses in Alberbury township in 1662, 'most of which stood in the hamlet', implying expansion in the seventeenth century.