

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**A Thematic History of the
Staffordshire Parish of Rocester
From Domesday to the Present.**

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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by
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Introduction

In 1990/91 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit undertook a landscape survey and documentary research project centred on the parish of Rocester in Staffordshire (fig.1). The following report outlines the parish history from the period of the Norman Conquest to the present day, drawing evidence from historical documents, maps, and the findings of the landscape survey to date, touching briefly on the earlier history of the area. This parish-based project follows on from three seasons of excavation undertaken by B.U.F.A.U. between 1985 and 1987 on the site of a Roman fort and associated civilian settlement in Rocester, and is intended to continue the history of the area up to the present day, complementing our already much-enlarged knowledge of the Roman period of settlement here.

Methodology and Presentation

Most studies which have sought to understand the history of a locality in England have used the parish as a basic level of definition. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. The parish system has gradually evolved over a period of about a thousand years in this country to a stage where, as early as the 17th century, it had become the basic unit of not only ecclesiastical, but also administrative, local government, covering virtually the entire country. This longevity has meant that the parish is also the dominant level at which primary evidence for local history has been collected and catalogued, and, in addition, it provides a manageable scale at which to work.

The parish study itself has a history which spans over two centuries, *The History of Myddle* written by Richard Gough between 1700 and 1706 being, perhaps, the best known early example. While many of these histories are antiquarian in form and content, rarely looking beyond the proverbial parish-pump, in recent years this type of study has been revitalised,

largely through the efforts of landscape historians and archaeologists. Instead of the narrow subject matter of the history of the church, manor or important families of the area, new problem-orientated sets of questions are now asked of the raw data, concerned with understanding patterns of settlement, or the functional changes which have shaped the landscape over time; and by placing the history of a parish within a larger-than-local-history context, the truism that the past is all around us has been increasingly borne out in various studies.

However, there are certain pit-falls associated with a parish-based approach which should be recognised. For example, on the one hand, certain activities—especially within the economic sphere—need to be assessed within a broader perspective than that of the parish alone, while, on the other hand, it should be remembered that the parish was an evolving organ of localised government, competing with, and developing out of, other forms of administration, such as the hundred, the manor, or the vill. This means that the parish was not a static territorial entity; and, for example, the progressive rationalisation of the boundaries of the parish of Rocester, which can be traced through cartographic sources since the 19th century, says a lot about the wider development of this area.

Local studies such as the Rocester survey can contribute to the more detailed history of this, as yet relatively unexplored, area of north Staffordshire. However, there is a danger of falling into the trap of being 'antiquarian', discovering and reporting events of the past, peoples' lives, past institutions, buildings or other material remains, simply because they are from the past (Hilton 1973,390), or because of the imperative of contextualising an archaeological investigation of the Roman occupation into the broader history of Rocester. Again, it should be stressed that Rocester was

not chosen as a study area because of the quality of surviving documentary evidence, or because its development highlights important localised adaptation or response to general historical trends in this part of Staffordshire. There is simply not the necessary comparative evidence available to make an assessment of this kind. Therefore, in order to achieve a more worthwhile but less comprehensive history, a thematic style has been adopted to focus attention on what appear to be the wider historic problems illuminated by the history of the parish, thus also minimising some of the problems of constructing a meaningful continual historical narrative from an essentially fragmentary documentary record.

This report is divided into three main sections, each highlighting a theme in the historical development of the parish. After an initial discussion of the parish and its broader context, the first section focuses on the changing shape of the landscape around Rocester, the patterns of land-holding, and the progressive development of the land economically. The second section explores the later intrusions of industry and communication-infrastructures into the rural setting of the parish, a process which began to occur in the late 18th century, and finally the history of the village and its people are considered. The conclusion attempts to summarise the findings of this enquiry, and reinsert the development of the parish into its wider context. A number of possibilities for further research arising from this study are then outlined at the end of the report.

Previous Studies

While no specific study of the history of the parish of Rocester has been made to date, various aspects of the village's past have been briefly considered in broader histories or antiquarian studies (Erdeswick 1717; Dugdale 1693; Redfern 1886; Wrottesley 1906; Gray 1915; VCH 1970; and Palliser 1976). The V.C.H. commentary on the history of the abbey at Rocester is by far the most comprehensive account, in which a sense of the wider history of the area between the 12th and 17th century begins to emerge through a few tantalising references (VCH 1970, 247-251). Various articles in the series 'Collections for a History of Staffordshire' (SHC), edited under

the auspices of the William Salt Archaeological Society, provide many invaluable insights into the history of the area; indeed, this series provides an initial point of reference for any historical study of Staffordshire. Finally, there is a brief outline of the history of the parish in the introduction to the 1906 edition of the parish registers, which, although mainly antiquarian in tone, contains elements of primary research.

Of the many antiquarians who have studied Staffordshire, perhaps the lawyer Sir Simon Degge (1613-1703) should have been the best acquainted with Rocester, as for part of his life he lived nearby at Uttoxeter. While most of his work seems to have been lost, his survey of changes in land-ownership in Staffordshire, which appears in the revised edition of Erdeswick's Survey of Staffordshire made in 1844, provides important clues to the pattern of land-holding within the parish. Dugdale provided a partial account of the history of the abbey in 1693, while Plot makes some salient points concerning the rural economy of the area (Plot 1686). Stebbing Shaw did not get around to considering this part of Staffordshire before he died in 1802, although Rocester is mentioned in a footnote in the first volume of his projected county history (Shaw 1798, 34). Perhaps the most individual historical account of Rocester is given by Redfern in a supplement to his History of Uttoxeter (Redfern 1886).

Unfortunately, no specific description of Rocester was found in the various travelogues known to cover Staffordshire, but Leland provides some interesting details concerning the markets of 16th century Uttoxeter, within whose hinterland Rocester must have lain (Toulmin-Smith 1964), and Celia Fiennes provides a few notes on the 17th century landscape around Rocester as seen from her much-worn saddle (Morris 1982).

The Parish in Context (fig.2)

The parish of Rocester lies four and a half miles north of the market town of Uttoxeter, on the southern periphery of what Palliser has classified as the South Pennine Fringe of northern Staffordshire. This area was formed by the cutting by the various rivers, including the largest the Dove, of a limestone belt which broadens out

into a more lowland landscape around Rocester. Today, the parish covers an area of approximately 1000 hectares, but it extended further east into parts of Denstone, and north beyond Quixhill, before a number of boundary rationalisations occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries. The River Dove clearly defines a natural boundary between the peaklands of Derbyshire and the gentler landscape of Staffordshire at this point – a contrast succinctly captured in the 18th century proverb ‘Derbyshire for wool and lead, Staffordshire for beef and bread’, and more picturesquely described through the eyes of a lone horseman, making his way to Rocester (Rosseter) one evening in 1799, in George Eliot’s Adam Bede:

“That rich undulating district of Loamshire to which Hayslope (Ellastone) belonged, lies close to a grim outskirts of Stonyshire, overlooked by barren hills as a pretty blooming sister may sometimes be seen linked in the arm of a rugged, tall, swarthy brother; and in two or three hours’ ride the traveller might exchange a bleak treeless region, intersected by lines of cold grey stone, for one where his road wound under the shelter of woods, or up swelling hills, muffled with hedgerows and long meadow-grass and thick corn; and where at every turn he came upon some fine old country-seat nestled in a valley or crowning the slope, some homestead with its long length of barn and its cluster of golden ricks, some grey steeple looking out from a pretty confusion of trees and thatch and dark-red tiles.”

(Eliot 1859,61–3)

Not only did the Dove Valley define a natural barrier between the peaklands of Derbyshire, but also within the geography of the river valley, Rocester, which lies on a fan of glacial scree forming a slight but significantly drier knoll above the alluvial floodplain, represents the northernmost lowland area before the countryside becomes hillier as the valley narrows, climbing towards the limestone peaks of the South Pennine Fringe. This knoll accumulated behind the protective barrier of the Barrow Hill, which is the first of the foothills.

The varied topography and geology of the valley has exercised a strong influence on the exploitation of the land and the pattern of settlement. First and foremost, the valley has acted as an important line of communication along which people have moved from very early times. A significant cluster of Neolithic finds and Bronze Age barrows has been located in this area (2500–700BC), and though these, together with evidence of even earlier settlement, have primarily been found on the higher lands to the north, their present distribution may simply reflect both the less-concentrated exploitation of the highlands, and the limitations of current archaeological techniques of discovery.

Secondly, as settlements began to be established, various factors combined to make Rocester an attractive site. Situated on the northern boundary of the rich landscape of the Lower Dove Valley, the scree knoll allowed access across both the Churnet and Dove, but was not prone to flooding. Access from east to west became strategically important during the Roman conquest of this region in the later 1st century A.D., when a fort was built here on a branch of the Ryknild Way running from Chesterton to Little Chester. While the importance of this east–west routeway declined after the departure of the Romans in the 4th century, in the medieval period the proximity of Rocester to Uttoxeter, the growing regional market centre of the Lower Dove Valley, confirmed this region’s importance in shaping the economic development of the area, at the expense of the poorer, more-sparsely populated Moorlands to the north.

The Parish

The present parish boundaries reflect both the influence of the physical environment and historical processes which will be examined in more detail below. Not surprisingly, the eastern bounds of the parish of Rocester closely follow the natural boundary of the River Dove, with the exception of a large meadow to the north-west of the village and a block of land around Monk’s Clownholme in the south-east. The southern limits of the parish also mirror the natural line of the watercourses of both the Nothill Brook and

the Alders Brook, which, like the River Churnet, all feed into the Dove in the south-east corner of the parish. The north-easterly return of the parish boundary from the Nothill Brook to the meandering course of the River Churnet runs cross-country, and it is this boundary that has been most susceptible to revision.

At Stubwood the rectilinear course of the boundary reflects the intervention of a 19th century Parliamentary Enclosure, while, at other points it follows the boundaries of field systems such as Woodhouse Fields or the Riddings, the latter name giving a clue to the likely origins of these fields in the clearance of woodland in the 12/13th centuries. Strip-shaped detachments shown on the pre-Second World War Ordnance Survey maps of the area provide additional topographical evidence to support this interpretation, although these have now disappeared after boundaries were rationalised. In the north, the parish boundary now appears to follow the outline of the estate at Barrow Hill, which probably has 19th century origins, and then proceeds along the northern extent of another estate at Dovecliff, the other side of the B5030 Ashbourne road, although it is known that the parish once extended as far as Quixhill.

It is not possible to say exactly when the legal status of a parish was conferred on Rocester. While it appears to be highly probable that it was closely linked to the establishment of the abbey here in c.1141-46, the possibility of an earlier parochial foundation cannot be precluded, for although no mention is made of a church in 1086, Domesday is an unreliable source of evidence for church distribution (Sawyer 1978 and 1985). Indeed, research currently in progress raises the possibility that Rocester had a Saxon minster church (S.Bassett pers.comm.). The foundation charter of the abbey at Rocester clearly states that there was a church here, which, in addition, possessed chapelries at Waterfall and Bradley-in-the-Moors, but although the weight of evidence points towards this church holding parochial status there is still an element of uncertainty. Because the granting of parochial status was closely related to the colonisation and improvement of the countryside, it is most likely that parochial status would have shortly followed

the foundation of the abbey, if it had not happened before. Certainly, by the late 12th century Bishop Clinton had granted the abbey the same liberty 'in its parish' as Burton Abbey possessed in its parishes (*B.M.Harl.M.S.3868*).

Unlike other more prosperous areas of the country, Staffordshire did not have its parochial system frozen in the 13th century. Rocester was certainly one of the 84 parishes listed in the county in 1291, but by the 1500s that figure had risen to between 125 and 150, figures which reflect the slower development of the county (Palliser 1976,74). By the end of the 16th century the parish was the basic unit of both civil and church government in Staffordshire, ministers and churchwardens combining secular and church functions. The Poor Law Acts of 1601, which organised provision of poor relief on a parish basis, confirm this.

The origins of the territorial unit comprising the parish of Rocester also remain unclear. Rocester, (11th-century Rowecestre, 12th-century Roffecestre, 13th-century Rowecestre), lay within the jurisdiction of the Saxon hundred of Totmonslo. Totmonslo (Tatmons Tumulus) is a hamlet in Draycot-in-the-Moors, a high spot on an area of thinly-settled moorland where the hundred court would have met (Gelling 1988,194). The Saxon shire of Stafford, of which Totmonslo was one of the five hundreds, was created in the 10th century from the old kingdom of Mercia, and the eastern boundary of any estate including Rocester would have corresponded very closely to that of the shire, which in turn followed the natural barrier of the Dove.

The Normans imposed a manorial system of landholding which cut across the previous units, such as the hundred, parish, or vill. The manor of Rocester was held by the King at Domesday. Evidently Rocester was the centre of a large manor with appendages in Derbyshire, for the men of Rocester, Combridge, Nothill, Wootton, Roston, Waterfall and Bradley, all had to render their services and suit of Court there. If the 12th century parish closely correlated to the abbey's estates, which were based on this manor, it would have been far larger than it was some five centuries later. The later fragmentation of the parish, as

areas such as Denstone, Waterfall, and Quixhill became separate parishes or were assigned to other parishes, is an illustration of the gradual improvement of the remoter areas of Staffordshire between the 13th and 16th century. Furthermore, it suggests that Rocester, being the 'mother' parish, was the most economically advanced settlement in the area.

Finally, in the absence of pre-Conquest Charter evidence often recording the bounds of parochial estates, Aston's point that these religious and civil boundaries are often a lot older than any association with churches or local authorities, should be borne in mind, given Rocester's importance within this region from at least the 12th century (Aston 1985,40)

The Making of the Landscape Around Rocester

It was the landscape historian W.G.Hoskins who first showed how the evidence drawn from the contemporary British landscape could reveal a lot about the activities of our forebears in a systematic manner; and while the final chapter of *The Making of the English Landscape* is a dismal chronicle of the ravages inflicted on the post-war English countryside, the book concludes with the following affirmation that: 'most of Britain is a thousand years old, and in a walk of a few miles one would touch nearly every century in that long stretch of time' (Hoskins 1955). However, like many historical 'discoveries' it was in fact a rediscovery. For example, in the late 18th century it was observed of Staffordshire that:

"In many parts of this county, there are evident marks of a cultivation far more extended than any thing known in modern times; most of our common and waste lands have on them evident marks of the plough; marl and clay pits of great size are found in most parts...I have observed on the rubbish and spoil of these pits, timber trees of from one to two hundred years growth. No history I have read, or tradition I have heard, give any insight into the time when these exertions were made; but the traces of them are evident".

(William Pitt 1794)

The following section is intended to give just such an insight into the time when the 'exertions' which have shaped the countryside around Rocester were made, albeit some two hundred years after Pitt had recognised the problem. Piecing together such a history is not an easy matter, for while the contemporary landscape may represent a palimpsest of previous activities, it is primarily a record of the most recent change. Another point of reference is the Tithe Survey of 1848, and working retrogressively from this datum point, using scattered documentary references within an understanding of the functional constraints imposed by the geography of the area, some tentative hypotheses can be made. It is also necessary to place the particular development of the parish within the broader setting of the making of the landscape of this part of Staffordshire, in order to understand something of its detailed history – changes which are probably best understood in terms of the processes which were applied to the countryside in order to extract the economic potential of the land.

Land Use (fig.3)

The Norman Conquest – like that of the Romans nearly a thousand years previously – made little immediate difference to the patterns of agriculture and settlement which had developed previously. Comparative evidence from Domesday, together with the relatively low number of hundreds in the shire, suggests that Staffordshire was a relatively undeveloped and sparsely-populated area in the 11th century. Although 'much of the county was probably in early days an unimproved forest' (Gray 1915), this situation changed markedly in the following centuries. Even when considered against the background of the improved understanding we now have of the pre-Conquest period through archaeology and aerial photography, which suggests that the landscape of Britain was more densely populated than other sources had led us to believe, it is clear that the process of assarting (from the Old French *essarter* – to grub-up trees) was widespread in Staffordshire in the 12th and 13th centuries. Place-names such as 'Riddings' refer to this process, and Palliser has noted that 'the landscape of the Dove Valley, especially

west of Marchington, is covered by a tangle of numerous winding lanes, linking hamlets surnamed Green' (Palliser 1976,64), a clear indication of Medieval enclosure; indeed, a 16th century surveyor described this area as 'former woodland, now by mens industry converted into tillage and pasture' (Shaw 1798,45).

However, this process was by no means universal, mainly occurring in those areas best suited to colonisation—that is, the richer lowlands of the river valleys. The moorland region, which Rocester borders to the north, was slower to develop, and, because of the harsher nature of the country and climate, different forms of exploitation and colonisation were used to harness the potential of the land. In the late 1500s Camden wrote that this land 'was so rugged, foul and cold, that the snows continue long undissolved, so that at a country village called Wooton, seated at the bottom of the Weaver Hill the neighbours have this saying among them: Wotton-under-Weaver, where God never came'. In this inhospitable region a number of religious houses were founded in the 12th century, and their impact on the pattern of land use was to be no less important than their spiritual activities.

The geography of the parish was a major factor in determining the pattern of land use. The clearest distinction that can be made is between the alluvial floodplain of the valley bottom and the higher land rising northwards and to the west of the parish. Plot rather ambitiously compared the flooding of the Dove meadows every spring to that of the Nile, noting that the inhabitants of the valley believed that 'In April, Dove's flood is worth a king's good' (Plot 1686). Therefore, the land capable of sustaining arable cultivation around Rocester was limited to the higher ground which was often some distance from the village itself.

Arable

The development of a variant of the Midland Open Field System at Rocester highlights some of the peculiarities of this area, which appears to be an amalgamation of both upland and lowland development. While almost all villages and hamlets probably had some open-field arable attached to them in the Middle Ages, it appears that only in the nucleated villages of the lowland

area did the system of three or more fields become firmly established. In the upland area the open-field system often failed to develop fully, and, where it did, frequently disappeared early; alternatively, some areas underwent later, wholesale conversion to pasture.

It has not been possible to reconstruct precisely the areas of open-field cultivation at Rocester from the limited documentation, but further concentrated research might reveal more clues to their location. The following hypotheses are mainly based on the results of an initial landscape survey (Jones 1991), combined with a knowledge of the topography of the area. Earthworks near the village, representing the fossilisation of the arable strips of medieval farms as ridge-and-furrow, are confined to the south-facing slope of Barrow Hill, although other traces may be apparent in the fields to the southwest of the town, by the Churnet. Nevertheless, these fields represent a small area, confined to the better-drained soils.

The earthworks on Barrow Hill may correspond to the open-field called the 'Barrowell Field', which was the largest open-field in the early 16th century (*Land Rev.M.B.183 ff128-131*). The other area, if indeed it is ridge-and-furrow, might correspond with the 'Newtown Field'. However, this interpretation is extremely tentative, based on the name of one field given in the Tithe survey of 1848, the shape and pattern of the fields here, and observations which indicate that this field is probably the best drained in the river valley to the south of the town, and therefore might have been drained and brought into arable by the villagers, giving it the name Newtown Field. These areas of ridge-and-furrow may merely represent the survivals of a more extensive system but this is unlikely, for Gray has shown that the open-field system at Rocester was never significant (Gray 1915,87). Rather, it would appear that the nucleation of settlement at Rocester represents the particular richness of the surrounding pasture, and not any arable potential. The area around Uttoxeter was famous for its dairy farming from at least the 16th century, and it is likely that the agricultural economy of Rocester would have been dominated by pastoral farming from this period if not earlier.

Place-name evidence, extensive survival of ridge-and-furrow, and other landscape evidence suggest that the field system belonging to Rocester was more extensive than that at Quixhill, (Quikeshull in the 13th century, Quikeshulle or Quixhull in the 14th century), scattered references indicate that it too possessed an open-field system, while at Waterfall, further to the north, there is a fine 17th century map showing the village open-fields and woodland from which they were cut. Assarts appear to have been made into the Stubwood since medieval times, although the Yates map of 1775 (fig.5), shows that a sizable remnant of woodland still survived into the late-18th century. The small hamlet of Alders was probably a product of this gradual colonisation. Such strips, which were cut in small blocks from the waste, are typical of marginal cultivation, and were often only cultivated for a short period of time by poorer people, in a medieval precursor of the 'slash and burn' techniques seen today in South America. It is likely that such piecemeal assarting accounts for the numerous detached pieces of land on the western border of the parish, as seen on pre-20th-century maps.

In Domesday the apparent lack of correlation between the listed agricultural resources, (which were mainly quantified in terms of arable), and the values of many Staffordshire manors appears to indicate that arable farming was not the only input into the economy of the area from an early period. Rocester, with eleven plough-teams and a value of £8, is an outstanding example of a manor with an unusually high value – equivalent to Uttoxeter – in view of the listed resources. Therefore, it is likely that other forms of wealth, such as pastoral farming, contributed to the value of the manor.

Pastoral Farming

The evidence appears to suggest that pastoral farming has always been an important factor in the agricultural economy of Rocester, since Norman times at least. Because pastoral farming does not leave any readily-identifiable traces, (like ridge-and-furrow), on the landscape, any quantification of its extent requires documentary corroboration. However, between 1140 and 1538

this is limited because the documents produced by the abbey itself have not survived. Therefore, it is necessary to compare evidence from better-documented local abbeys in order to gain a fuller picture of the impact of the abbey on the agriculture of the area. Three houses were established in close proximity to one another in this region in the later 12th century; two, Rocester and Calwich, were Augustinian, and the other, at Croxden, was Cistercian. Both these orders derived a considerable income from the medieval English wool trade, and evidently one of the factors which determined the location of these religious houses in the area of the Moorlands was the potential for extensive sheep farming. An indication of the potential income from sheep farming is given by Bolton Priory, a middle-ranking Augustinian monastic settlement whose extensive records have been studied, where as much as 23 per cent of the income of the house was derived from wool. One conclusion of this study is that as a profit-concern pastoral farming was probably far more significant than arable cultivation for abbeys such as these (Kershaw 1973).

In addition to farming the demesne, the abbeys often acted as 'middlemen', buying wool grown privately and then selling it, along with their own, to the great Italian merchant companies, including the Bardi of Florence, whose representative, Francesco Pegolotti, compiled a list of monasteries producing wool in England in the mid-14th century. While the accuracy of this list is in doubt and must be treated with some caution, Rocester is recorded as '*marchi 12 il sacco, e annone da 10 sacca per anno*', which is roughly half the amount of Burton or Croxden, which suggests that the abbey was not as heavily-committed to wool production as a number of others in the area, although Rocester was included along with other Staffordshire houses in a request from Edward III for wool to finance his campaign against France in 1347 (*Cal.C.I.R. 1347*). It is possible that the abbey concentrated wool production in the upland areas of its demesne, including its possessions in Derbyshire, although it is also possible that the comparatively low figure given by Pegolotti could also have been the result of pestilence which was rife in the early 14th century. Most abbeys appear to have lost

large numbers of animals, but significantly when the canons of Rocester are recorded as 'being obliged to go out and seek alms like beggars' in 1318, the cause was attributed to cattle, rather than sheep, pestilence (VCH 1970,248).

Not only does the evidence point towards Rocester being a district where pastoral farming replaced arable at an early date as the main agricultural activity, but also it would appear that in the lowland area around the village it was cattle, rather than sheep, that predominated. By the 16th century, when the first records of cattle farming appear, Uttoxeter and lower Dovedale had already established a reputation for specialised farming, especially for butter production, and Leland commented on the size of the market in the 16th century, writing that 'the men of the town useth grazing for there be wonderful pastures upon the Dove'. By the 17th century the trade in butter and cheese was said to clear £500 a day at the Uttoxeter market which led some cheesemongers from London to set up a factory there (Plot 1686). While the Land Revue undertaken in Henry VIII's reign only recorded eight sizable tenancies-at-will in the open-fields, several small tenements, each comprising a messuage and some acres in the common meadow, were mentioned, indicating the widespread practice of animal husbandry. Later, in 1582, the proceedings of the Chancery Court record an incident in which Thomas Trentham of Rocester 'about last summer was possessed of 40 fat kine', which he sold to a butcher in Uttoxeter for £80 (SHC 1938,129). Unfortunately for Trentham, but not for the historian, part of the payment, which was by bond, was lost by Trentham and found by a third party who refused to pay the debt, leading to the proceedings being recorded. The cattle trade was to become particularly important for Rocester and the surrounding area in the 19th century, and this is dealt with in detail below.

Other types of Land Use

Stubwood was the main area of woodland, located in the west of the parish. It appears to have been the main area of 'waste' or commonland, where animals could be grazed, timber hewn, and small areas cleared, cultivated and

settled by the poor. It is now recognised that the 'waste' was an important element of the agricultural economy of a parish right up to the widespread enclosures of the 18th and 19th centuries, and, as such, would be carefully managed (Aston 1985,112). Although this particular area of waste was known as woodland, it should be realised that this does not usually imply a continuous covering of trees, like the woods and forests of today. The Yates Map of 1775 shows the remains of the waste shortly before they were enclosed by Act of Parliament in 1800. Of particular interest is the line of settlements scattered around the eastern periphery of the waste, where the enterprising poor had carved-out small-holdings from the land.

Another element of the pre-industrial agricultural economy whose importance has only recently been emphasised is that of fisheries and fish ponds. These were particularly associated with monasteries or country houses, where fish were cultivated both to keep a well-stocked table for guests and also to provide a rich source of protein in an often-deficient medieval diet. While there is no evidence for fishponds close to the abbey at Rocester, this is not surprising because of the close proximity of the Dove. In the 14th century the Abbot claimed the right of fishery from Quixhill to Combridge to take 'pike, bream, salmon, and all other types of freshwater fish' (SHC 1891,160). Woodseat House provides the only local example where a large number of ponds were managed specifically to provide fish, but these ponds were dug much later, in the 18th century.

Land Holding (fig.4)

While the Norman Conquest made little immediate difference to the pattern of agriculture and settlement, it led to a massive change in the pattern of land ownership when the manorial system was imposed across the countryside. In Domesday the manor of Rocester is returned as belonging to the King by the escheat of the Saxon earl Algar, the King being by far the largest landowner in Staffordshire. Afterwards, it was assigned to the Honor of Chester, and in 1141-46 Richard Bacon, a nephew of the earl of Chester, granted it to the Augustinian Order for an abbey.

Although, in general, the Augustinian order did not have as bad a reputation as the Cistercians for depopulating its demesnes and turning common-pasture and arable over to large-scale production centred on granges, it is apparent that some antagonism between the abbey and its under-tenants existed. The example of the fisheries has been mentioned above, but, in addition to this, numerous legal cases are recorded concerning property, common-land, and pasturage rights, especially in the 13th and 14th centuries (SHC 1891,106,158-9; SHC 1970,176,227,248). One case, heard before the Court of Star Chamber in the early 16th century, is of particular interest, giving an insight into local custom and ritual; it concerned a dispute between John Madeley and Ralph Fitzherbert over certain lands in Quixhill, in which it was claimed that: 'the said Ralph went openly through the town of Quixhill with a white wocok in his hand calling forth of the houses the old folk and also children showing openly to them that he had received season of the said lands, praying them to remember the same and thereafter to bring record of by that remembrance and to ken that they had seen the white wocok' (SHC 1955,75-78,183-7).

The domination of the abbey over the land was to be broken by the Dissolution in 1538, the fate of the lands of the abbey at Rocester being typical of the county and country-wide scramble for monastic land by the nobility and gentry. The sale of the manor lands meant that no one family ever again dominated the land-holding pattern in the parish in the way that the abbey had done, although a sizable portion of the abbey lands had passed securely into the hands of the Trentham family from Shropshire by 1560 (*Cal Pat.R.* 1560). Through marriage these lands passed to the Cockayne family of Northamptonshire, but due to a series of financial difficulties many of the farms were subsequently conveyed to William Bainbridge, amongst others, in 1674 (*N.R.O.* C3007,3083, and 3089). By the 1840s the Bainbridges were the major land owning family in Rocester, Woodseat House having been built in 1774 as their country seat. The Earls of Shrewsbury owned some land to the north of the parish, and about 17 cottages in the village itself (*S.R.O.D240/E/5/2/1*).

Although the open-fields and common-meadows were still in existence at Rocester in the early 16th century, they were progressively enclosed from that time up to the 19th century. The only Parliamentary Enclosure in the parish occurred when the waste at Stubwood was cleared and fenced in 1800, but, like most of Staffordshire, much of the land in Rocester had already been enclosed through agreement between private parties. When Celia Fiennes rode through this area en route from Ashbourne to Uttoxeter in the mid-17th century she remarked that 'this country is well wooded and full of enclosures'; therefore it is likely that the transfer of much of the land in the parish from monastic to lay hands may have provided the incentive to enclose the open-fields and town meadows. Unfortunately there is no record of these transactions, but, as noted above, the probable traces of the outlines of furlongs within the open-fields can be traced to the south of the town by the Churnet, and to the north by Barrow Hill. The town meadows have been located through the collation of documentary and landscape evidence, one lying to the northeast of the village on the other side of the Dove, and the other to the south of the village.

It is to be expected that one of the implications of enclosure was that many of the farmsteads which used to be located in the village itself would have moved, and the larger farmsteads which can be seen dotted around the landscape of the parish may then have grown in importance, or may even have been built at this time. However, there are still three farms in the village today, which may be an indication that the enclosure of primarily pasture land resulted in a smaller disruption of the farming pattern in villages like Rocester than in arable areas elsewhere. Another notable feature of the post-Dissolution landscape was the growth of the country houses and estates in the area, a phenomenon commented on by George Eliot in *Adam Bede*. Woodseat, Barrow Hill, and Dove Flats, all appear to date from the late 18th and early 19th centuries and were evidently centres of large farming estates. The glebe terriers of the parish record the fact that after the Dissolution the church retained no property in the village, apart from the graveyard and the parish-church, and all the tithes which had been paid to the abbey were purchased by

members of the gentry, with the exception of a few small tithes on hay and animals.

Communications

The pattern of communications within the parish reflects the position of Rocester at a crossing point of both the Churnet and Dove on an east-west axis, on the one hand, and its location on the north-south-aligned Dove valley, on the other. Although the road system has been improved in places since at least the mid-18th century, its basic form can still be traced back with certainty as far as the Yates map of 1775. The Roman Ryknild Way reflected the importance of maintaining an east-west line of communication across the Derbyshire peaks, and the line of this road can still be traced across the parish today. However, it is likely that the Uttoxeter to Ashbourne road along the Dove valley began to assume a greater importance after the Roman withdrawal in the 4th century. The Saxons used the natural routeways provided by river valleys as a means of colonisation of this region, and it has been argued that the position of the royal and episcopal manors on the border of Totmonslow, along the valley of the River Dove up to the upland region just beyond Rocester, indicates that communication along the Dove was important by the time of Domesday (VCH 1958,8). Certainly, in the medieval period, as its market expanded, Uttoxeter became the nodal point of communication in this area.

Mills, Industry and Transport

"We must have something beside Gospel i' this world. Look at the canals, an' th' aqueducts, an' th' coal-pit engines, and Arkwrights mills there at Cromford; a man must learn summat beside Gospel to make them things I reckon."

(Eliot 1859,53)

This statement, made in the opening chapter of Adam Bede, outlines some of the main themes that George Eliot sought to explore in her study of a north Staffordshire village towards the end of the 18th century, changes which are captured in stasis by the Yates Map of the county finished in 1775 (fig.5). The argument from which this quote is taken was concerned with the zeal of evangelical Methodism, but Eliot is conscious of

the wider changes that were occurring in the lives of the village folk at this time, of which the Methodist revival was but one expression. For, while in essence the book is an examination of the nature of faith, the impact of the beginnings of industrialisation and the accompanying tensions within the older social order of the countryside, are key elements within her narrative.

The changes which Eliot saw occurring in Ellastone, (where Adam Bede was set), were perhaps even more remarkable in the neighbouring parish of Rocester. While both villages lay on the same road, between the traditional market centres of Uttoxeter and Ashbourne, Rocester was closer to Uttoxeter and better placed to take advantage of the improvement in communications by road which reinforced Uttoxeter's importance as a regional market-centre in the late 18th/early 19th century. The expansion of the market at Uttoxeter gave an important stimulus towards agricultural modernisation within its hinterland, especially in the field of dairy farming for which it had a reputation as early as the 16th century (Toulmin-Smith ed.1964). Furthermore, by 1808 a branch of the canal system linking this agricultural area with the industrial centre of the Potteries to the north was built through Rocester, shortly to be followed by the railway in 1849. The improvements in communication attracted industry; in the early 1780s Richard Arkwright established a cotton mill here on the Dove, which must have dominated the life of the village in much the same way as the abbey had previously. By at least the early 19th century, and probably before, Methodist dissent was strong in the village. Significantly, Methodism was particularly appealing to the new class of industrial workers who had often emigrated from the land to the new places of employment.

While it would be totally misleading to classify a medieval corn-mill as an industrial centre, the earlier history of the mills at Rocester will be considered here because it highlights the enormous differences between the factory system and more traditional forms of production, a change which must have been particularly apparent to the people in villages like Rocester living through the first stages of the Industrial Revolution.

The first reference to a mill at Rocester is found in Domesday; it is one of the 63 recorded in the county, although the actual figure was probably higher (Palliser 1976,71). Mills were an important part of the manorial economy; at Rocester the mill rendered 10 shillings, or one sixteenth of the total economic value of the manor. It has been argued that arable farming must have been significant to supply the mills (Birrel 1962), however, while this may be true of the lowland areas of the county, it is unlikely that Rocester ever had a significant area of arable cultivation in the Middle Ages (Gray 1915,87). Therefore, it seems likely that this mill must have served a wider area, which raises the possibility that Rocester may have been an important part of a large pre-Conquest estate. Two mills are recorded at the foundation of the abbey in the 1140s, although one of these may have been located in one of the numerous grants of land that were outside of the manor itself (VCH 1970, 247); it is unlikely that the site of the second mill corresponds to the SMR entry at SK 1062 3927, on the west side of the village, which appears to post-date the Yates map of 1775.

In 1554 there is a reference to a fulling mill in Rocester as also having belonged to the monastery and which commanded an annual rent of 78 shillings (*L&P, F&D 1539,590*). Records of the deaths of a fuller and a webster appear in the parish registers in the early 17th century (Wrottesley 1906,34-37). Both types of mill probably co-existed side-by-side, the fulling mill probably processing the wool which the abbey produced. Certainly, when Richard Arkwright purchased the property for £820 in 1781 both types of mill were still in operation.

The two mills were rapidly converted into a cotton spinning plant, one of the earliest in the county (Sherlock 1976,57). While cotton-spinning was never one of Staffordshire's major industries, the mill at Rocester was part of a regional and county-wide trend, for in the late 18th century many new cotton factories were started on the banks of the Dove and Trent, at Fazely, Tamworth, and Burton, in addition to Arkwright's first venture at Cromford in Derbyshire (Pitt 1794, 171). While the numbers of mills and people employed in the cotton

industry in Staffordshire was always relatively small – in 1838 there were only 15 mills employing about 2,100 persons – the impact of the factory system of production on a rural village such as Rocester would have been considerable. The mill required an unprecedented influx of labour into the village; by 1835 200 people were said to be employed at Rocester (*Ret.Textile Fact.1836*), and even if all these people were not directly employed at the mill, but did outwork in their homes instead, the different attitudes required to work must have set them apart from the traditional rural inhabitants of the village (Joyce 1980).

Nevertheless, certain continuities can also be discerned; as Mauss has noted, 'technology is only traditional activity made more effective' (Mauss 1973, 371). The factory still used the Dove for its power supply, and the improvement of the communications which occurred in the late 18th century, would have been an important consideration influencing the decision to build the cotton mill at Rocester, for without them the supply of raw materials and distribution of the finished products would have been impossible. An accident which killed Thomas Shipley while loading cotton onto a waggon at Uttoxeter in 1800 confirms that before the canal was built the factory at Rocester was supplied via the carrier system through Uttoxeter (Wrottesley 1909,197).

The Arkwright involvement in the venture at Rocester appears to have been relatively shortlived. By 1783 a north-south range, 24 bays long and 2 bays wide, had been built next to the corn-mill which still remained at work. This range can still be seen today, standing on the eastern limit of the complex. It was powered by two waterwheels which necessitated the construction of a large mill-race and pond to the north and an extension of the tail-race to the south, built on 1757 square yards of the village cricket pitch, bought in 1782 (*S.R.O. D642/2/14*).

To pay for all this construction work the mill had to be successively mortgaged in the late 18th century, to such an extent that the Arkwrights appear to have lost control of the business (*S.R.O. D642/2/2-4,6,7*). The business is attributed to Richard Bridden in 1798 when a collection amongst his workforce to fund the war against

Napoleon raised £3-9s-3d (SHIC 1970,219). By 1814 Richard Bridden, one of the mortgagees, willed the mill as part of his estate to his son; Richard Arkwright the younger was a trustee, but he later severed all rights given in the will (F. Peel pers.comm.).

The demise of the Arkwright interest is probably an indication of the hazards of venturing capital in an industry requiring a heavy initial investment. Moreover, the mill at Rocester was located in a peripheral area of a county which was not able to compete economically with the centre of the industry in Lancashire. Although the mill here has managed to remain in production for over two centuries, when other larger concerns have been forced to shut down, production always appears to have been hampered by lack of investment capital; a similar phenomenon can be seen in the decline of another peripheral spinning industry, the linen industry in Northern Ireland. The Bridden family, like the Arkwrights before, had to raise money to improve the mill through mortgages, which paid for further extensions to the mill and new machinery. The first extension ran westwards at right-angles to the original block, and was similar in design and construction, being four storeys high and 12 bays long. A second, later extension ran southwards again and was built by 1833 (Sherlock 1976).

The mill was bought by an established Lancashire spinner called Thomas Houldsworth in 1833. The mill had been offered for sale or lease since 1831 when it was described as having three waterwheels generating a force of 70 horsepower from the Dove. In addition, the property included 'an excellent dwelling house, and 39 cottages for the workers' and presented 'to capitalists not only a safe and beneficial investment for the purposes of business, but a respectable, retired, healthy, and comfortable country residence' (Sherlock 1976,186). Clearly the Briddens were going for the hard-sell, although something of the appeal of this 'industry in the country' can also be sensed—in many ways the power of the employer in the mill-village was the closest equivalent to that of the lord of the manor of earlier times.

The period of Houldsworth's ownership appears to have been one of the most stable,

under a business-family of proven ability with the necessary capital to invest, and with a mill that had been built-up at the expense of its previous owners. The Tithe map of 1848 shows that a great deal of additional land was added to the Houldsworth estate at this time, which indicates a certain confidence in the management of the business.

However, after the death of Thomas Houldsworth's nephew Henry in 1868, the mill appears to have been closed down for a period, and was never to be controlled solely by one family again. In 1876 it was purchased by the Lyons brothers of Tutbury, after which the business was known as the Tutbury Mill Company. The waterwheels were replaced by turbines, built by Meadows of Belfast at a cost of £5,700, but the company appears to have run into difficulties by the early 20th century, and thereafter the mill has been owned by a number of different companies. In the later half of the 19th century the mill became increasingly devoted to fulling rather than spinning, such that, by 1901 it was entirely devoted to the former. Electricity replaced water power this century, and today the mill ponds and dams can only be traced from earthworks to the east of the mill, by what is now the football ground, although their location can be seen on older Ordnance Survey maps. In comparison, most of the mill-races can still be seen feeding and leaving the mill.

The improvements in communications that occurred in the late 18th century were an important prerequisite for industrial growth. Before this, from about the 16th century, individual parishes had been responsible for the upkeep of the roads and bridges in their jurisdiction not covered by existing agreements between private parties. The limitations of this system were such that eventually all roads were taken out of parish hands by the 19th century; this is apparent when in 1699 the people of Rocester had to appeal to the Quarter Session Court at Stafford for £30 to repair the Churnet Bridge in Rocester (Wrottesley 1906,96).

The road improvements of the 18th century were primarily carried out by means of Turnpike Trusts, which had a wider brief than the previous parish-based bodies responsible for the general

upkeep of roads in their area. In 1750 the road network in Staffordshire was still in a rudimentary form, dominated by the major trunkroads traversing the county from south to northwest (SHC 1988,75). However, as a traditional marketing centre, Uttoxeter acquired a turnpike connection to the Potteries and Derby in the 1750s, and in the next decade the road up the Dove Valley from Uttoxeter to Ashbourne, via Rocester, became turnpiked. Only much later, in the 1790s, was the old Roman road, running east-west across the parish, turnpiked; this improvement was probably an important factor in the enclosure of Stubwood in 1800. A toll-house is shown on the Tithe map on this later road (PRN 2176, N.G.R: SK1043 3922).

Tenders for the canal between Froghall and Uttoxeter were invited on July 8th 1802, but it was not finally built and opened until 1811. It provided a link between Uttoxeter and the Potteries via Leek, but shortly gave way to the railway, which was built along its path through much of Rocester parish. Only a short stretch of the canal can still be seen today, where it was retained to form an elongated pond in front of the now ruinous Woodseat House. Tied to the contours of the Dove Valley, the canal passed close to the western side of Rocester village, and a wharf and warehouse can be seen on the Tithe map of 1848 in an area called Lime Kilns. The warehouse was probably built to store the materials for the cotton mill and other heavy goods that would have been increasingly carried by the canal rather than by the road-based carriers. A short distance away, near the bridge over the Churnet, there was a waterman's public house, called appropriately, if a little unimaginatively, 'The Boat'. In a short period between 1781 and 1811 the inhabitants of Rocester, who would normally have led a somewhat insular existence, mainly encountering the outside world on market days in Uttoxeter, were jolted into a new age, where far closer contact with life outside the parish must have become increasingly the norm in their everyday lives, because of the combined impact of improved communications and industrialisation.

The main-line from Uttoxeter to the north was opened in 1849 at the height of 'railway mania', only a year later than the line from Derby to

Stoke. This connected the settlements along the lower stretch of the Dove valley directly to the urban centres of the Potteries, and to Uttoxeter, Burton, Derby, and even London to the south. By 1852 a branch-line had been opened up to Ashbourne which divided from the main-line at Rocester; its course can still be seen curving away from the north of the village towards the Dove. The status of this line, together with the later date of its construction, confirms that the connection between Uttoxeter and the Potteries had become of prime economic importance during the 18th century. Although the old canal warehouse was retained after the railway was built, and probably continued to store the raw cotton and the finished products for the mill, the arrival of the railway had other repercussions for the local economy.

Rapid urban growth, periodic outbreaks of cattle plague in town dairies, and fierce rivalry between railway companies, stimulated the growth of a country milk trade to London and other towns after 1860 in Staffordshire and other counties. The area around Uttoxeter, already geared towards milk production, though mainly for cheese and butter, was ideally placed to respond to this new demand. Proximity to a station was the crucial factor for the country milk supplier, because of the expense of labour and of horses carrying churns on a return journey twice a day. Unfortunately, given the absence of local evidence, it is impossible to say to what extent the dairy industry modified its production around Rocester, although by 1890 the *Agricultural Gazette* reported that 'milk was the chief article on which the farmer depends' in the Rocester area (*Agric.Gaz.* 1890,485). However, sales by farmers are known to have been restricted in the Churnet and upper Dove valleys because of the absence of regular rail services in the early morning and late evening as late as 1899 (*Staffs. Advertiser* 19/2/1899). To what extent this would have affected Rocester, which was far closer to Uttoxeter, is unclear.

After the 1870s cheese production was revitalised in the Dove valley because of the conversion of production from the traditional Derbyshire cheese, which was generally considered inferior, to Cheddar; and because of the introduction of more efficient factory methods

of production and management. In 1874 the capacity of the three factories in the Dove valley, together with four others in Derbyshire, was equal to the milk of 2,330 cows in a year, out of a total of 9,650 cows in the six Dove valley parishes, including Rocester (*Agric.Gaz.1889*). By 1889 it was observed that milk from the Rocester area was generally made up at factories into cheese and butter (Sheldon 1909,252); this does not necessarily contradict the statement of 1890 that the farmers of the area were dependent on milk, for milk-production was geared to seasonal trends, generally in winter towards straight milk-production, and towards cheese and butter the rest of the time. A cheese factory was opened at Rocester in 1893 (VCH 1958,192), which confirms the importance of this trade in the late 19th century. However, evidence from Sudbury in the Dove valley suggests that milk-production may have been important as early as the 1860s, because the tenants of Lord Vernon had opposed the building of a cheese factory there until 1871, because of the success of their milk trade (Sturgess 1990,51).

Rowley has said of Rocester that 'the mill which still dominates the east of the settlement, together with the workers cottages, makes the community an outstanding mill settlement of the Industrial Revolution' (Rowley 1978,144). However, it would appear that the development of Rocester in the 18th and 19th centuries is more complicated than this statement implies. Was Rocester a 'model mill-village'? The impact of industrialisation on the village will be discussed within a broader historical context below.

The Village and People

According to the historian Christopher Dyer a great deal of sentimental lumber has surrounded the study of the English village for more than a hundred years. The image of a neat set of thatched cottages, inhabited by an 'imagined community' of stout yokels, and clustered round a church spire, is a reflection of the real historical experience of urbanisation and industrialisation which has led people to see a way of life there which seemed, in retrospect, more simple and innocent, and less alienating (Dyer 1985,27; see also Williams 1978, Anderson 1983, and Wright 1984 for a broader discussion of the country and

the city, and images of a national past).

However, he argues that in seeking to strip away the layers of myth and sentiment surrounding the pre-industrial village the scepticism of some historians reached the point where the existence of a village community was virtually denied; for example, Macfarlane (1979) stressed the importance of individual over collective action, while Campbell (1981) stressed the role of the landlord as the motive force behind the creation of field systems. Indeed, one of the traps into which an archaeologically informed approach to the understanding of the landscape and settlement can fall is a tendency to neglect the conditions of human agency, resulting in a landscape full of the relicts of human activity, but devoid of people.

The following account will attempt to show something of the lives of the people of Rocester, as well as the more formal history of the development of the village. Any attempt to assess the history of the people who lived in villages is dogged by the lack of documentary evidence up until the 19th century. The sources which contain information about the village, such as those relating to the manors, central government, and the church, need to be treated critically to recreate a picture of the everyday running of the village. In the case of Rocester even these sources are limited and do not possess a full chronology of information. Therefore, the following discussion is mainly confined to incidents and conflicts of sufficient intensity to warrant their recording for posterity, in documentary form.

The Medieval Village

We know that in the medieval period the village gradually evolved into a real unit of government controlling its own fields and inhabitants, partly for its own interests and partly for those external authorities such as the landlord, church, or state. The regulation of the fields was its most important function, although no English village managed to attain the privileged self-government of continental rural communities (Dyer 1985,29). The extent to which this self-government was separate from, influenced by, or overlapped with, the administration of the landlord was subject to a number of factors; indeed, the history of the village in England is

characterised by its diversity. For example, at Rocester the presence of the abbey meant that lordly control over the life of the village was relatively centralised and rigid for a period of almost 400 years.

The earliest reference to Rocester, in the Domesday survey of 1086, tells us very little about the village; 18 villains and 10 bordars are mentioned with 9 ploughs at Rowecestre. It is difficult to infer anything specific from Domesday; for instance, these figures often do not include families or lesser tenants, and from other comparative evidence it is clear that one entry could include a number of dispersed settlements within an estate. It is therefore impossible to accurately gauge the population of the village at this time. Both Rocester and Combridge were described as villis in the foundation charter of the abbey in the 1140s. However, the term vill did not necessarily refer to a concrete grouping of homes and fields; rather it was a unit of government. Rocester was evidently the more important settlement as the second charter states that the manor court was held there. The abbey acquired extensive control over the people of its estates, including rights of sac and soc, toll and team, and waif and wreck; i.e. rights to adjudicate and punish the men of the manor, the power to compel those men to do service at the court, the right to sell in the manor market free of toll, the right to force someone to give the name of a thief if they held stolen goods, and the right to try any thief caught in the manor. However, this responsibility worked both ways; for instance, in 1269 the abbey had to pay for certain of its lands to be tilled (*Cal Pat R. 1269*).

It has been recognised that the small abbeys and priories of the Augustinian and Cistercian orders played an important role in the colonisation of upland areas, like the moorlands of Staffordshire, in the 12th and 13th centuries, by improving the agricultural potential of the areas they controlled. The running of these estates often led to conflicts of interest between the canons and the peasantry; for instance, at Vale Royal Abbey in Cheshire, evidence from the Ledger Book shows how many of the nearby villages were in a state of near-anarchy as a result of the curtailment of their customary land-rights

by the canons (Brownbill 1914). Because none of the documentation compiled by the Augustinian canons of Rocester has survived, it is not clear to what extent the sample of surviving documentation is representative of the periods and types of conflict that arose between the abbey and the local people. However, evidence from a number of court cases shows that the canons were often forced to assert their rights and authority in law, which signifies a breakdown of the normal spheres of negotiation in the village.

In the late 13th century a number of problems seem to have arisen between the abbey and the Gresley family of Drakelow. In 1271/2 one Elias de Gresley killed one of the household of the abbot at the bridge outside the vill after a dispute. Certain lands in Kingston had been given to the abbey by William de Gresley about 1240, and by 1275 Sir Geoffrey de Gresley is recorded as having acted forcibly against the abbey, which may have resulted in the election of Robert de Gresley as abbot in 1285/6 (SHC 1955, 37–176). However, these problems do not appear to have greatly affected the abbey, for in 1283 the canons were granted the right to hold a Thursday market at Rocester, and a yearly fair on the vigil, feast, and morrow of Saint Edmund (15–17th of November). It is now thought that the granting of markets does not necessarily imply a growth in the economic importance of the village or town in which they were held, being instead a device to impose tolls on previously free exchanges, in which case the market was another indication of the growing influence of the abbey over the economic life of the village (Sawyer 1981). Disputes between the abbey and people were not confined to questions of economic power and authority. In 1331 the inhabitants of Rocester claimed that by ancient custom they should receive the sacrament in the parish church rather than in the conventual church as the canons claimed (SHC 1880, 256). The bishop decided that the parishioners could attend either church, which shows that the canons did not have totally unregulated control over the life of the village.

In the late 14th century an internal feud appears to have split the abbey, and a number of references to the 'great disturbances and wrongs done to the abbey' and its 'grievous oppression by

malefactors of the parts adjacent to the abbey' were made (*Cal.Pat.R.1385-7, 1398*). The background to this long-running dispute appears to have been connected with the hostility to Abbot Cheswardine by some of the canons who had expelled him and hoped to elect another abbot in his place.

Even when judged against the background of a medieval society which was generally violent, with a homicide rate well in excess of that of modern urban U.S.A. (Hanawalt 1971, 261-73), Rocester appears to have been in a state of some anarchy at this time. In 1375 one of the rebellious canons, Richard of Foston, was said to be wandering from place to place posing as the abbot of Rocester (*Cal.Pat.R.1374-5*), and possibly in the aftermath of this affair three canons were ordered to be arrested (*ibid.* 1381). Cheswardine had been cleared of the accusation of having harboured a murderer by 1385, but resigned in 1386, and for a short time the King was forced to take the abbey into his own hands (*ibid.* 1385-9). In 1408 violent activities appear to have reached a head at Rocester, when Hugh de Erdeswicke, Thomas Swynnerton, and the Myners brothers with 80 men arrayed themselves in manner of war at Rocester, and issued a challenge to Sir John Blount, Constable of Newcastle to fight man to man, after they were accused of regularly indulging in robbery and murder. Nothing appears to have come of this incident, and by 1410 the malcontents were forced to give themselves up (*ibid.* 1408-10).

Very little is known of the history of the village between this period and the Dissolution, except that the abbey was granted another market in 1440, this time on a Friday, and two yearly fairs, one on the Monday after Whitsunday and the two days following, and the other on the feast of Saint Maurice and the two days following (*Cal.Chart.R.1440*).

The Village in the 16th and 17th Centuries

Just before the Dissolution the abbey community numbered seven at Rocester, while in a list drawn up of families in the Archdeaconry of Stafford in 1532/3, the population of Rocester numbered around 160 (although these figures often include people who had been dead for some time), in Combridge around 65, and in part of

Denstone about 30 (SHC 1976,109).

The Dissolution of the abbey at Rocester came in September 1538 when Abbot Grafton and eight other canons surrendered the monastery and all its possessions to the Crown. An account of the sale of St Michaels Chapel, which proceeded shortly after in October, notes that the glass and iron were sold to John Forman, the timber to William Laughtenhouse, and the 'shyngle' of the chapel to William Bagnall (VCH 1970,250). Therefore, it seems likely that part of the abbey church became the parish church, as suggested by Erdeswick in 1717. The house and most of the lands of the monastery were leased in 1539 to Edward Draycote, one of Cromwell's servants, later reverting to the Trentham family (*L&P 1539*). According to Degge, this house was only pulled down later in the 17th century (Erdeswick 1717,491n).

Whether the spiritual life of Rocester was genuinely poorer for the passing of the abbey is an unanswerable question. The conclusion of one ecclesiastical historian that the continued existence of almost all the houses of Augustinian canons 'would have served no useful purpose whatsoever' seems a little harsh (Knowles 1959,465). In 1524 a visitation to Rocester Abbey had concluded that observance was generally satisfactory, even if some of the canons visited alehouses after the divine service (*L.D.R. B/IV/111,50*). W.G.Hoskins, in *The Age of Plunder* uses the following quote from Thomas More's *Utopia* to sum up the plunder of the church: "When I consider and weigh in my mind all these commonwealths which nowadays anywhere do flourish, so God help me, I can perceive nothing but a certain conspiracy of rich men procuring their own commodities under the name and title of the commonwealth" (Hoskins 1976,121).

Certainly the demise of the abbey must have had an immense social effect on Rocester, as one set of lords was replaced by another. The land sales following the Dissolution favoured the nobility and gentry almost without exception. The Earl of Shrewsbury, and Richard Trentham of Shrewsbury, both acquired large parts of the abbey estate at Rocester, and this must have provoked some disquiet in the population. A local yeoman called William Laughtenhouse,

who had bought the timber of the church, gained the lease of a farm and cottage in Rocester from the Crown in 1539-41 (*Cal.Lib.R.1540/1*). However, this happened after Laughtenhouse, together with other riotous persons, had entered the farmhouse and seized it by force from John Sharpe who submitted a petition on the matter to the Star Chamber in 1538 (*Bundle 29,63*). This farm, which had been owned by the abbot, was called Laughtenhouse Farm, so Laughtenhouse had presumably farmed it from the abbot. Sharpe must have lost the case by 1540 when Laughtenhouse was granted the lease from the Crown, but this incident highlights the social intricacies at a local level accompanying the transfer of property that occurred after the Dissolution.

After the exceptional events following the Dissolution, the history of the village lapses into virtual obscurity again. Some indication of the range of the villagers' occupations is given in the parish registers, when for a short period between 1599 and 1620, under the curate Robert Smyth, such details were included alongside entries relating to marriage or burial (Wrottesley 1906,30-49). Given the relatively short timespan for which these occupations are given, and the size and randomness of the sample—being merely a record of those people in the parish who either died or married in a 21 year stretch of time—only an outline of the range of occupations and their relative frequency can be deduced. Not surprisingly, the commonest groups mentioned are yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers, the number of husbandmen confirming the relative importance of pastoral farming in the area. In addition, a few sheremen are mentioned which points to the continuing importance of sheep farming almost half a century after the demise of the abbey. A fuller, webster and a few carpenters complete the list.

The alekeepers, who kept the houses whose pleasures the canons had found so difficult to resist, should not be forgotten in any list of the regular activities of the village. Drink played an important part in the popular culture of the early modern period (Burke 1978); even funds for the church were raised by 'church ales', which were simply mass drinking-sessions. Although drink,

as the Temperance Movement later in the Victorian period claimed, could be 'the opium of the masses', it could also provide the 'dutch courage' to incite social disturbances; for this reason alekeepers were subject to an increasing degree of regulation, and the growing efficiency of Elizabethan local government has left a record of such dealings.

In the 1590s the constable of Rocester, Edward Bakeon, reported that all was well with the alekeepers of the village (SHC 1930,325); in 1594 Richard Taylor, a husbandman, applied to keep an alehouse, an application which must have been accepted, for in 1596 Taylor, along with John Bacon, George Gilbert, Robert Buckley and William Prince, was listed as an alekeeper. This extraordinary number fell to three at the beginning of the 17th century, but by 1602 had risen to four. It appears that the alehouse also supplied food, because both Richard Taylor and Edward Felthouse are described as victuallers in 1603, while George Gilbert appears to have moved to Waterfall (SHC 1932, 1935 and 1940). These numbers should be considered against a background of the population in the village which was probably around 200, given the general increase in population which occurred in the latter half of the 16th century (Hoskins 1976,11). Indeed, Maitland observed somewhat wryly of the late medieval period, that 'it becomes a serious question whether we can devote less than a third of the acreage of sown-land to the provision of drink' (Maitland 1897,507). Harrison observed, in his *Description of England* (1577), that the typical village usually had between 40 and 60 families; in 1532, 24 families excluding the canons were listed as living in Rocester, which probably made its population in the late 16th century in the lower part of Harrison's average.

The Hearth Tax of 1666 provides a limited picture of the village towards the end of the 17th century. There are a total of 37 separate households listed as liable to pay the tax, which, taken together with an unspecified number of people who were exempted from payment because they were too poor, would give a figure roughly corresponding to Harrison's average for a late 16th century village within the

constablewick, confirming that the village of Rocester was still relatively small in comparison to the average. The largest figure of hearths is for Rocester Hall, which was probably utilising some of the old abbey buildings acquired by Richard Trentham after the Dissolution. These buildings are described as 'clearly taken down' which confirms that the abbey buildings only survived for roughly a century after the Dissolution. The hearths total 24, being divided between John Addams with 14, and Richard Salt with 10. Apart from Jonathan Woodnoth who had six hearths, only four other households are described as having three or more hearths, which indicates that the rest of the population in the constablewick was not particularly well off. Defining a population figure based on the Hearth Tax returns cannot be done with any accuracy, but it is likely that they indicate a population of between 180 and 250 (SHC 1927,192-5).

Recusancy and Dissent

The religious legacy of the Henrican reforms was to leave another set of records giving an insight into the religious persuasions of those people in Rocester who did not conform to the norm, the recusants and dissenters. Staffordshire was identified by government agents as a 'problem county' in the late 16th century, where 'large numbers of the people are generally evil inclined towards religion, forbearing attendance at church and using broad speeches in alehouses and elsewhere' (Greenslade 1965,29). The strength of Roman Catholicism in the county stemmed largely from the continued adherence of many of the local nobility and gentry to the cause. Both the Earl of Shrewsbury, and the Trentham family, who had purchased much of the abbey property at the Dissolution, were Catholic, and the Trenthams were to suffer the compounding of their estates during the Civil War (*Cal.Comm.Compounding.1650/1*). In 1588 only three recusants were recorded at Rocester; 'Thomas Madeley, gent. his wife, and Ellen wife of Richard Smith, yeoman', although another list from the early 1590s has nine people listed in Rocester, including the above and Thomas Chetwynd (SHC 1928,145; SHC 1979,48). The accuracy of these lists must be open to question, for clearly the upper classes were not included,

and recusancy was often attributed to the wife in order to minimise the social disruption to a family.

The impact of the Civil War on small villages like Rocester is unclear. The Earl of Shrewsbury noted that a number of horsemen was billeted in the village, possibly when Prince Rupert burnt the houses of some people who refused to join the King's Army near Uttoxeter in the early stages of the war (SHC 1979,37). The Moorland region of Staffordshire was reputed to be generally of Parliamentary sympathy, and after the war, in a list of active Parliamentarians made in 1662, seven people from within five miles of Rocester, Anthony Foster Smith, Richard Salt, Christopher Gallimore, Thomas Nash, Thomas Tatton, Thomas Fletcher and George Goodwin, were given as having served against the King (SHC 1958,56).

A survey of recusancy taken around the same time, 1657, recorded five recusants in Rocester; Robert Hewson and Mary his wife, Anthony Chetwynd, Anne Adams and Dorothy Whetton (SHC 1958,97). While it seems likely that the balance of opposing religious sympathies within and around the village would have been roughly equal, this sympathy is unlikely to have surfaced in any war-like way, it was not a common people's war and most would have kept quiet and remained neutral. It seems clear that Rocester lay within the jurisdiction of Parliament for most of the war, as the Parliamentary Committee at Stafford was able to order that Sir Christopher Trentham live 'in his Dairie house at Horton Hay', and pay rent to them, while their lawyer was released from prison at Stafford to visit Mrs Trentham at Rocester on condition that he went only to Rocester and did not attempt to make contact with the enemy (SHC 1955,83-105). However, in common with most of the nobility and gentry who had supported the King, the Trentham family did not lose their estate, which passed by marriage to the Cockayne family, the Viscounts Cullen.

Protestant non-conformity, or dissent, generally received a greater degree of unofficial toleration before the Act of 1689. The Civil War and Commonwealth period gave a stimulus to dissent; in 1651 the founder of the Quakers, George Fox, visited the county for the first time,

and Quakerism became particularly strong in the Moorland area in the northeast, which had been Parliamentary in tendency during the Civil War. This tradition of dissent may account in part for the later success of Methodism in the 18th century. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, paid his first visit to the county in 1738 and his last in 1790. Methodism was mainly successful in the new manufacturing areas and, in particular, amongst people of small means who had recently moved there to work; as Dinah, the woman preacher in *Adam Bede* says:

"But I've noticed, that in these villages where the people lead a quiet life among the green pastures and the still waters, tilling the ground and tending the cattle, there's a strange deadness to the word, as different as can be from the great towns like Leeds...how rich is the harvest of souls up those high-walled streets where the ear is deafened by the sound of wordly toil. I think maybe it is because the promise is sweeter when life is so dark and dreary, and the soul gets more hungry when the body is ill at ease."

(Eliot 1859,137).

Before the building of the cotton-mill in the early 1780s the reactions of the people of Rocester were probably very similar to Dinah's description of the country folk of Ellastone, and it is unlikely that there would have been more than a handful of dissenters in the village. Significantly, Eliot has the character of Dinah come from a mill-village in Derbyshire where there was a thriving Methodist community. She says that the village had changed "so far as the mill has bought people there, who get a livelyhood from it, and make it better for the trades-folks." (*ibid.*133). And, in a reference to the different social relations that accompanied industrialisation, Dinah goes on to say that "I work in it myself, and have reason to be grateful, for thereby I have enough and to spare" (*ibid.*133). While this comment is suggestive of the unprecedented economic freedom of the Lancashire 'mill-girls', it is unlikely that the peripheral cotton industry of Staffordshire, which was often short of investment capital, could have given the same type of wage levels as those of the Lancashire industry; it is

more likely that conditions here would have been more akin to those in the linen industry of Northern Ireland, where wages were often up to 20 per cent lower.

The growth of dissent in the village can be traced in the list of registrations of dissenting chapels and meeting houses in Staffordshire, which was required by the Act of 1689. By 1800 the first house in Rocester, occupied by Joseph Sadler, was registered. He may have moved, for in 1812 he applied for another registration. The first chapel to be registered at Rocester in 1813 belonged to the Primitive Methodists. It was registered in the name of Hugh Bourne, one of the founders of this fiercely evangelical Methodist sect which left the main body of the church in the early 19th century, formally adopting the name Primitive Methodist in 1812 (Morris 1969).

Bourne's style was that of conversation-preaching, prayer, and open-air evangelism, a style that is powerfully depicted by Eliot through the character of Dinah in *Adam Bede*. Women were prohibited from preaching by the Methodist Council in 1803, and this was indicative of a general move towards respectability and the conservatism of an established organisation. It was this clash of styles that eventually forced Bourne and a companion called Clowes to split from the Wesleyan Methodists. The charismatic style of Bourne, Clowes and others set in motion a revival in the north of Staffordshire which undoubtedly included Rocester. Primitive Methodism made its early converts almost entirely amongst the working classes of colliers, labourers and factory workers and it is very likely that it was primarily amongst those recently-arrived inhabitants of Rocester that the 'flock' was drawn.

This first Primitive Methodist chapel was called the Bethel Chapel, and was situated near the Churnet Bridge, opposite one of the rows of mill houses which had been built for the employees of the mill by 1848 (fig.6i). In 1851 it was capable of seating 170, but by 1887 it was no longer considered suitable, and collections began for a new church, which was built in 1889 entirely with money collected by the congregation. The Bourne Chapel can still be seen today on the High Street, and was the

headquarters of the archaeological project in the village between 1985 and 1988. The building itself is unassuming, and has been described as 'a quiet expression of an uncluttered faith' (Ferris 1989,29). It is also a concrete example of the Victorian ideal of self-help. The working classes of the early 19th century were largely illiterate, and Primitive Methodism as a democratic organisation offered many opportunities for the exercise of talents. Men and women could become preachers, class leaders, treasurers or teachers; the workings of the chapel provided a route to social 'respectability', and the new chapel probably indicates the extent of the success of that mission here in Roccester during the 19th century. One aspect of this respectability that has often been remarked on by labour historians was the capacity of Methodism, of whatever form, to transform class-consciousness to the sphere of social and religious difference, to the detriment of trade unionism – that is a workplace identification of interest. For example, recalling his early life in the Potteries one working-class man wrote:

"Methodism frowned upon trade unionism as much as on poaching. Even a working-class man, though suffering himself from palpable injustice, if he were a class leader or local preacher would warn his fellows against 'the wiles of the Devil' often supposed to be found in trade unionism."
(Greenslade 1965,33)

The Mill and the Village

Undoubtedly, Arkwright's decision to build a cotton-mill at Roccester had an enormous impact on the historical development of the village, leading Rowley to claim that it is an outstanding example of mill settlement of the Industrial Revolution (Rowley 1978,144). Factory villages constitute a unique, but numerous, form of settlement, particularly characteristic of the first stages of the Industrial Revolution. They grew in response to the needs of the machines for a reliable pool of labour, at a time when these industries were often located in rural areas because of their need for water-power, and when transportation was rudimentary.

Today, these settlements are evocative of an alternative vision of industrialisation, one more closely partnered with nature, and where the 'profit-motive' was mediated by a concern for the needs of the workforce. The apex of this vision is contained in the twin concepts of the 'model-village', and 'paternalism'. However, just as our understanding of the pre-industrial village can be clouded by a tendency to romanticise the past, so too it should not be forgotten that these two concepts represent a conscious attempt to mediate the social contradictions associated with the factory system on behalf of the employers. This contradiction is unmasked by the tone of the publicity which accompanied the sale of Roccester Mills in the 1830s, where the property 'presented to capitalists not only a safe and beneficial investment for the purposes of business, but a respectable, retired, healthy, and comfortable country residence' (Sherlock 1976,186). While many of these villages represented an important means of improvement in the quality of life, including housing stock, the needs of the employer were, nevertheless, pre-eminent.

In the cotton industry the type of labour most often required was female, a fact that has earned the industry the nickname of 'the patriarchal thread'. As one French employer put it: 'Let us not forget that women are for our industry a question of life and death, and that we must take care of them' (Chenut 1978,25). An advertisement from the Uttoxeter New Era of 1855 confirms this was also the case at Roccester:

"Dobblers and winders wanted at Roccester Cotton Mills. A few families consisting for the most part of females from 14 years of age and upwards, or single women, who will meet with constant employment. Learners will have reasonable assistance while learning their business. N.B. Widows with large families will be preferred, and none need apply whose characters are indifferent"

Therefore, it seems likely that a large percentage of the new population influx into the village in the 19th century would have consisted of working women. This would further have distinguished the new inhabitants from the

traditional villagers, and would also have reinforced the dominance of the employer over the workforce, as unions were exclusively male preserves. The only recorded case of local industrial problems found during research for this paper occurred in the 1870s when the cotton-mill was closed down for a period by the successor to Henry Houldsworth after reports of malpractice (F.Peel pers.comm.).

The population of the village in 1801, when the first census material becomes available, was 899. This obviously includes the first in-rush of people who came to work at the mill. There was a second pronounced rise between 1811 and 1821, when the population figure is 1,037, which obviously coincides with a further expansion of the mill. The figures rise progressively until they jump from 1,175 to 1,341 between 1861 and 1871, which suggests that the last set of mill cottages along West View were built in this decade.

While there is some evidence of changes being made in the village which would have improved the quality of life, they are hardly exceptional when judged against the general developments which occurred from the mid-19th century, as technology and local government improved dramatically. The housing with yard privies and no gardens, while representing an improvement on earlier stock, is not exceptional in design. A school was built in the 1850s with the help of the employers, though a schoolmaster had been present in the village as early as 1713 (Wrottesley 1909,177). Self-help through the various dissenting churches would have provided education, and a Union Friendly Society was set up in 1832, largely through the efforts of Quakers and Methodists to provide medical, death and housing provision (*S.R.O. 4301*). Against this background it is not really possible to label Rocester a 'model' mill-village.

The Village Form (fig.6ii)

While the cotton-mill and its associated housing has made an enormous impression on the plan-form of the village, Rowley's assertion that Rocester is an outstanding example of mill settlement of the Industrial Revolution is perhaps an over-simplification, and does not do justice to

the complexity of the development of the village (Rowley 1978,144). While the mill-complex still dominates the east of the settlement, and, together with the workers cottages, comprises an important plan-element in the morphology of the village today, in fact this development occurred over a period of almost a century. The terraces along Dove Lane and West View were only built in the later 19th century, and it is the combination of these, together with the mill and the curious green-like expanse of Abbey Field, which gives the east of the village the character of a 'model' mill settlement.

Rocester is not an example of a 'planted' mill settlement and, therefore, it is likely that the plan elements associated with the mill would have accommodated themselves primarily around the pre-existing arrangement of the village. The earliest map of sufficient detail to be able to discern the spatial development of the village is the Tithe map of 1848, and so, unfortunately, the elements of Arkwright's original mill settlement have been subsumed within those of the early 19th century. However, this map clearly shows how the mill settlement tended to develop around the periphery, rather than the core, of the village.

The location of the mill itself was obviously determined by the course of the River Dove, but it is clearly situated in a zone of land that would have been prone to flooding, and therefore unattractive to settlement prior to the drainage work that accompanied the construction of the mill. Some of the earliest mill-housing appears to have been carved from part of a field called Smithy's Croft, on the north side of the west end of the High Street. As noted above, the location of the Bethel Chapel in this vicinity suggests that mill housing was present here by the early years of the 19th century. The other concentration of early mill-housing appears to be to the south of the High Street, an important component of which was a row of houses, demolished in the 1960s. Like the other terrace by the Churnet Bridge, this housing was planted on a pre-existing plan form, but here it appears that this land may have been occupied before these houses were built, because regular property boundary lines can be seen to extend some 100 metres behind the road, entirely unconnected with the properties to

the front. A row at right angles to the road, listed in 1848 as being owned by J.E. Bridden, reinforces this view, being an attempt to utilise the limited space of one pre-existing plot. The terraces along Dove Lane and West View complete the development of mill-housing within the village, being built some time between 1848 and 1886 on what were described as allotments in the Tithe survey of 1848. In common with the other mill-houses, these houses form self-contained units with only small gardens or yards to the rear – a characteristic which distinguishes them from the earlier messuage-plots within the village.

The form of the village plan pre-dating the mill complex is more difficult to determine accurately from any residual elements which can now be seen or inferred to have existed. While most of the older housing-stock in the village is mainly late 18th to early 19th century in date, the pattern of tenements and messuage-plots near the junction of the High Street and the Ashbourne Road indicates that this area was probably the core of the village settlement. Indeed medieval timber-framing has been noted in the building above the bank here (B. Meeson pers. comm.).

Although the fabric of the parish church can tell us very little about the earlier history of the village, its position some distance away from the main junction is significant. Given that documentary evidence appears to substantiate Erdeswick's claim that the parish church was originally part of the abbey, the location of the present church, which was substantially rebuilt in the late 19th century, and the abbey are closely inter-related. The large rectangle of land surrounding the church, and defined by Church Lane, West View, the Mill Lane, and the High Street to Ashbourne, must correspond closely to the abbey precinct. West View, which is only a track on the Tithe map, probably indicates the extent of the land not prone to flooding from the Dove in the east, before the drainage works associated with the mill were built. The boundary traversing this block of land, from east to west up to Church Farm, has been shown by excavation to correspond with a medieval paved trackway towards the church, which is itself based on an earlier Roman road, and was probably the approach-road to the abbey from the village

(Ferris 1990). There is evidence that another medieval trackway, again echoing a Roman road, also traversed the abbey precinct from north to south, intersecting the abbey-approach somewhere near Abbey Farm, called Church Farm on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch map of 1881. The continuation of this road to the south can still be seen today, and is used as access from the farm to the meadows beyond. The plot of land called Buck's Orchard, of which this trackway defines the southern perimeter, was described in a survey of 1853 as containing five standing stones four of which were in a line (S.R.O.1176/A/16/1b).

Although there is no way of dating these features, given that no development of this land was made until the council housing was built in the 20th century, it is possible they may have represented part of the abbey property. The curious, four-sided feature in Abbey Field has been identified as a post-medieval formal garden, probably associated with the hall formed from part of the abbey complex by the Trenthams, just after the Dissolution. Therefore the evidence appears to point towards the location of the abbey buildings as in the vicinity of the present Abbey Farm. In addition, while no conclusive evidence to support Palliser's supposition that the rectangular street pattern may reflect the Roman civilian settlement at Rocester has been found to date, equally this possibility cannot be precluded (Palliser 1976, 143).

Conclusions

Travelling through Rocester today, possibly en route for Alton Towers, probably the greatest impression that is left of Rocester in the minds' eye is the massive bulk of the JCB factory, surrounded by an expanse of landscaped lakes and gentle, be-gardened slopes – a testimony to the capacity of the JCB-machine to transform our landscape environment.

Whatever this visitor might see, contemporary Rocester no longer conforms to an image of an idyllic pre-industrial village like the one described by Eliot's lonely 18th century horseman. In the 20th century Rocester not only acquired the JCB factory and rows of grey, incongruous council housing, but also lost the railway in the Beeching

cuts, leaving a modern set of earthworks around parts of the village which echo another period of economic and population movement from the periphery to the core in the 14th century. Perhaps this later history is best left to the sociologist, the cultural resource manager, or even some current villager, for the aim of this study has been to map out the history of the village between the Roman period and the present day.

A schematic attempt has been made to summarise the changing relationship between Rocester and its landscape, primarily during the medieval period (fig.7). It is necessarily simplified; therefore, in summary, the following points can be made from which a model of the particular development of this area can be offered, and comparisons made with the regions of the Staffordshire Moorlands or the Lower Dove Valley. The points are made in chronological order, although some attempt at ranking in order of importance is also made.

It would appear that, from at least Domesday, pastoral farming was an important component of the agricultural economy of the area. This type of farming was best suited to the lowland geography of the Lower Dove Valley, and its continued development over the period under discussion meant that the making of the Rocester landscape became more closely tied to that of this area than the Moorlands to the north.

An arable system of open-field agriculture was never fully-established here. While this is primarily a characteristic of the upland areas, it is also consistent with land-use constraints imposed by the geography of the area. Evidence of assarting is primarily confined to the Stubwood area, to the west of the village. Indeed, if Rocester had established a specialisation in pastoral farming early on, then the river valley may have been deforested perhaps as early as the Roman period of occupation.

Although only a few records of the economic activities of the abbey have survived, it appears that the Augustinian order at Rocester was never as heavily committed to sheep rearing as the other upland foundations. This may have been a result of the established bias towards cattle rearing in the area.

The proximity of Rocester to the regional market centre of Uttoxeter, which is known to have specialised in the sale of dairy produce from at least the 16th century, must have had a profound influence on the economic development of the area, further confirming its orientation towards pastoral farming.

Most enclosure within the parish was carried out by means of negotiation between private parties, which is typical of most of Staffordshire. This may reflect the desire of the 'new-moneyed' landlords, who had acquired extensive estates in the county after the Dissolution to properly manage their newly-acquired estates. Therefore, the transition from open-field to private farming techniques probably occurred between 1550 and 1700.

In the 18th century improved communications and technology, accompanied by enclosure, transformed much of the Staffordshire countryside, rural industries harnessing the power of many of the Staffordshire rivers. The cotton-mill at Rocester, although situated in a peripheral part of the county, although never important in anything other than a local sense, is remarkable for having survived over 200 years. The growth of Primitive Methodism was probably one expression of the impact of the factory system on the primarily-rural population.

Despite the increasing incursions of industrialisation, pastoral farming remained the key element in the local economy, and even expanded in response to the growing requirements of the industrial areas to the north and south of Staffordshire.

Since the Second World War the success of the JCB factory at Rocester has dominated the economic development of the village, drawing in a workforce from a wide area, including Uttoxeter. It has led to the reshaping of much of the landscape of the west of the village, although the mill continues to dominate the east. The growth of the tourist industry in the area of the Dove Valley is a 20th century phenomenon, and within this context Rocester's Roman heritage has become an important attraction.

Finally, as the aim of this research project was to explore the history of Rocester through

documentary research, this has meant that the pre-Conquest history of the parish could only be touched upon briefly. Given the constraints within which any research takes place, a note should be made of questions which remain outstanding, or which could, given the time, be covered in more detail. Very little is known about the history of northern Staffordshire between the end of the Roman administration in 410 A.D. and the Norman Conquest of 1066. It has not been possible to consider here questions of possible continuity between Roman and later periods as raised by Professor Finberg and others (Phythian-Adams 1978). Given the enormous chronological gaps in the evidence, little else can be achieved without extensive archaeological investigations, although it should be noted that the landscape survey, which was begun in conjunction with the documentary research, may, when combined with other forms of retrogressive analysis, allow some insights to be made into this 'dark age'. Another potentially rewarding field

for further investigation would be the history of the mill-village, especially if documentation relating to the Bridden or Houldsworth periods of ownership could be found. This, tied into other 19th century records such as the census returns, Poor Law records, or records of the various churches might allow a fuller picture to be drawn of the impact of the factory system on Rocester in the late 18th and early 19th century.

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A Note on the References used

All journals consulted have been abbreviated in the main text. The following prefixes have been used to denote the various repositories of documentary material: B.M.: British Museum; L.D.R.: Lichfield Diocesan Registry; N.R.O.: Northamptonshire Record Office; and S.R.O.: Staffordshire Record Office.

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SVA

LOCATION OF ROCESTER

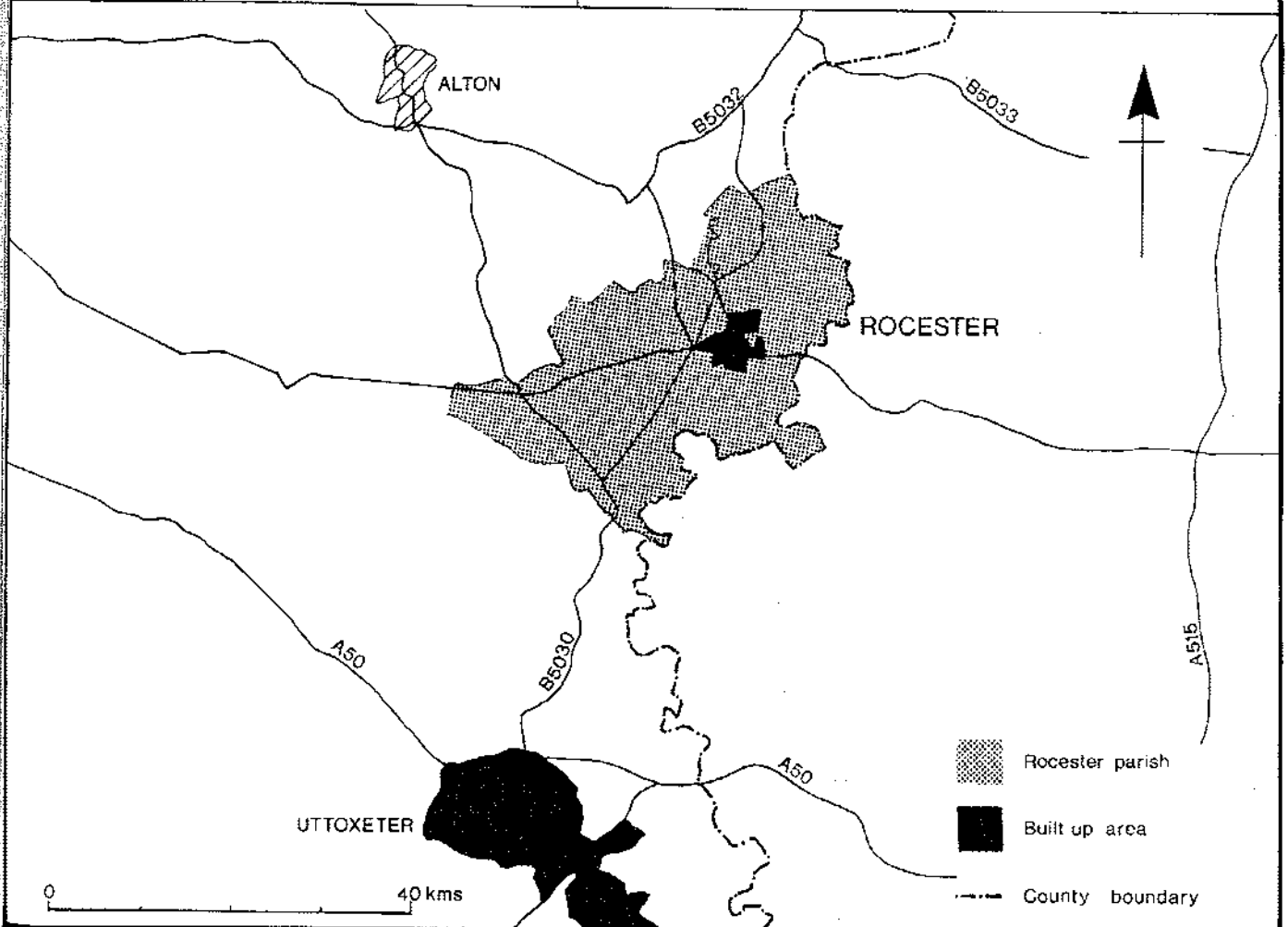
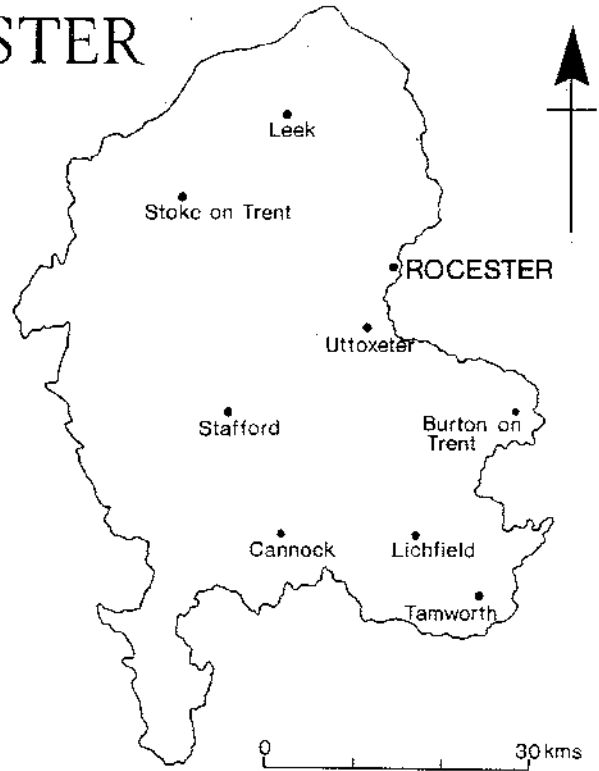
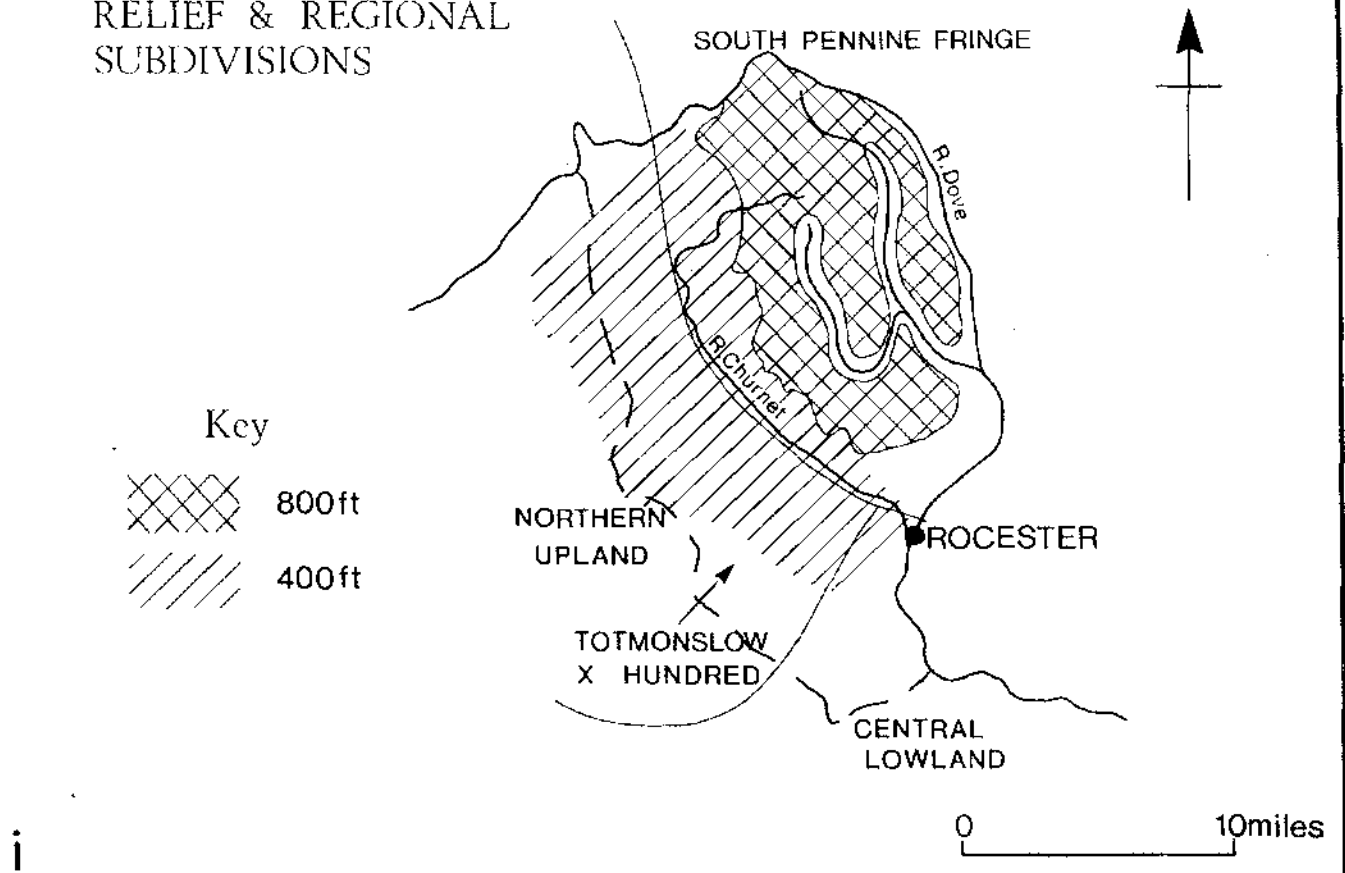


Fig. 1

ROCESTER IN CONTEXT

RELIEF & REGIONAL SUBDIVISIONS



EARLY HISTORICAL FEATURES

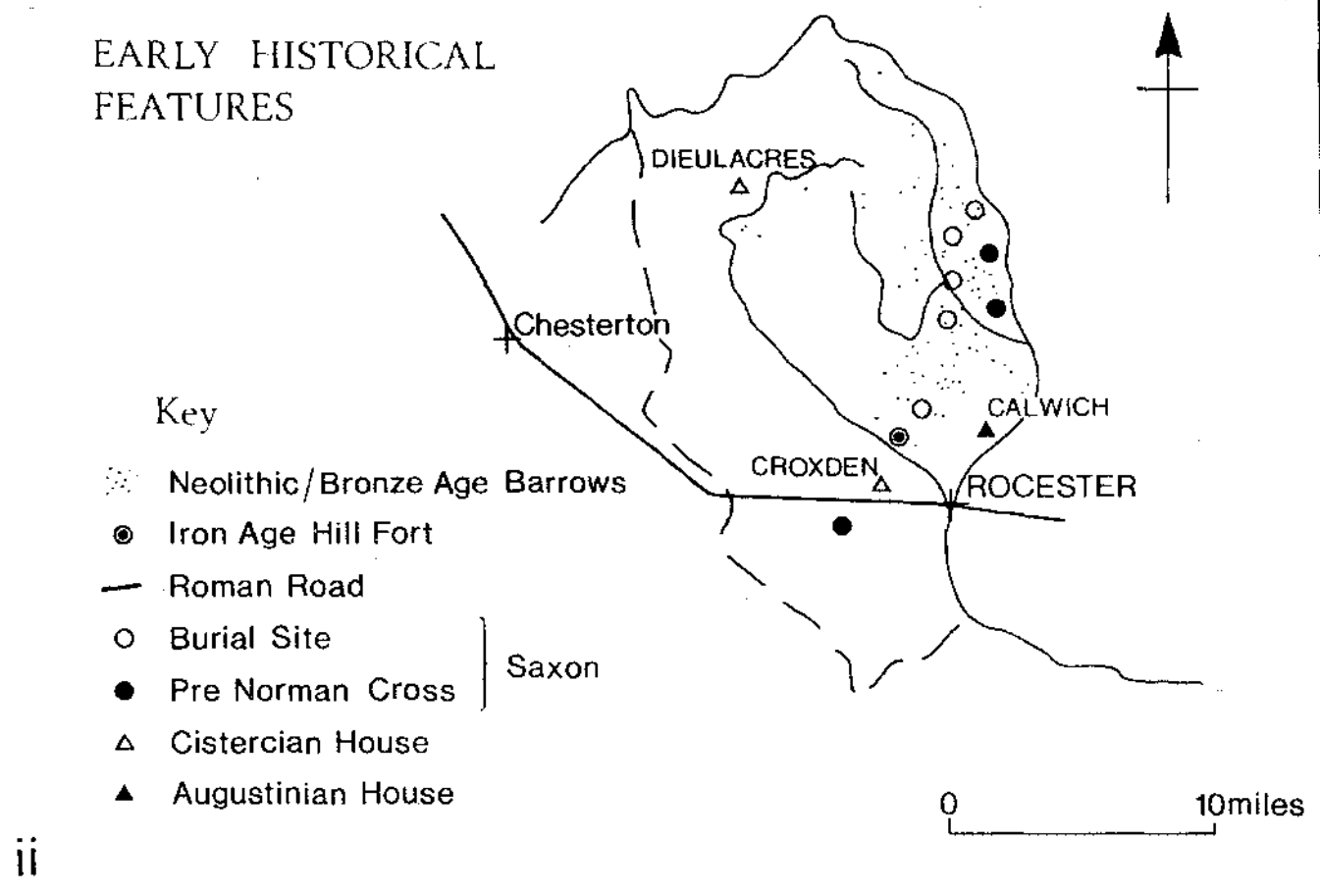
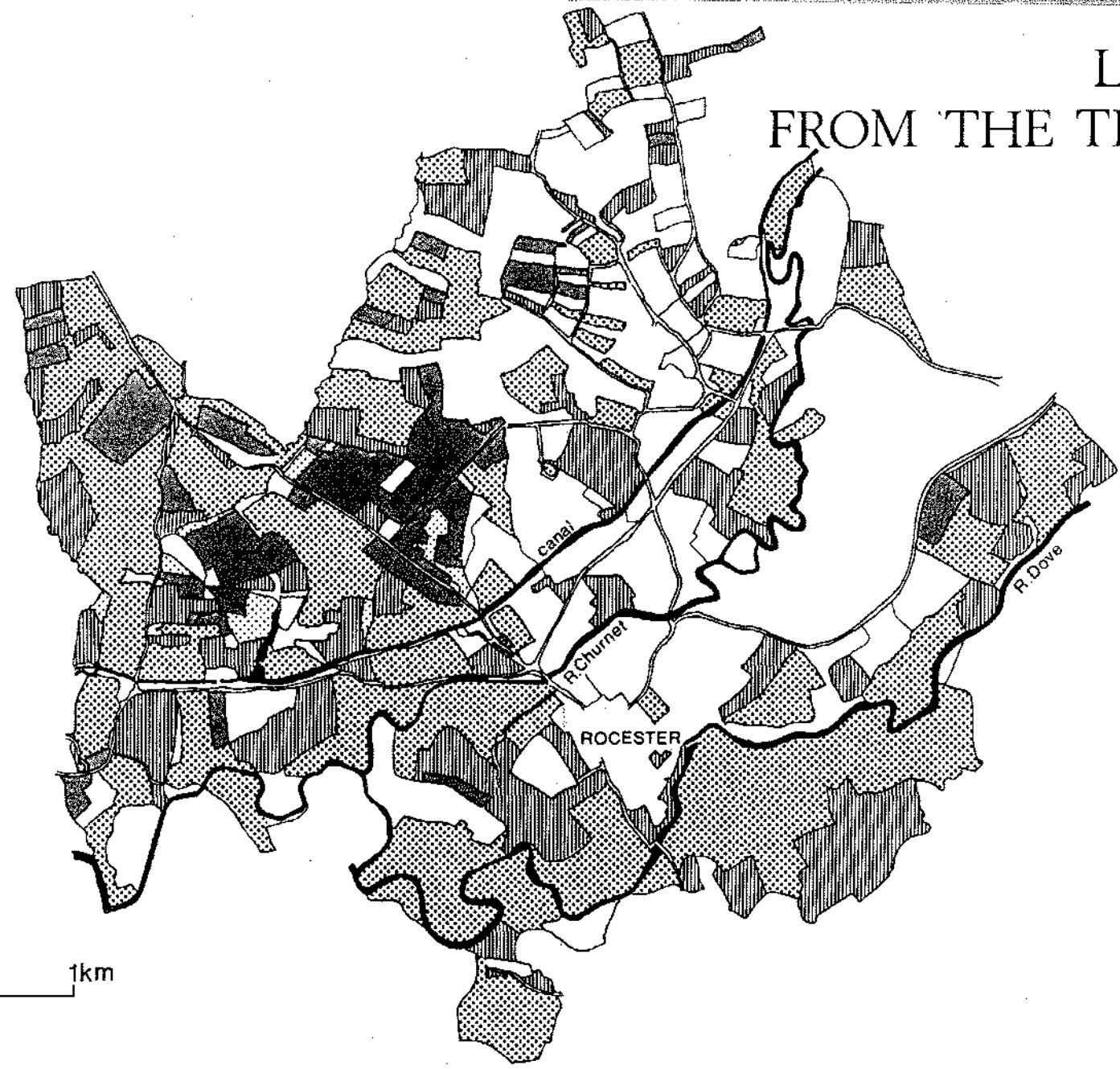


Fig. 2

LAND USE FROM THE TITHE MAP OF 1848




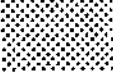


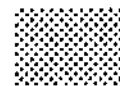
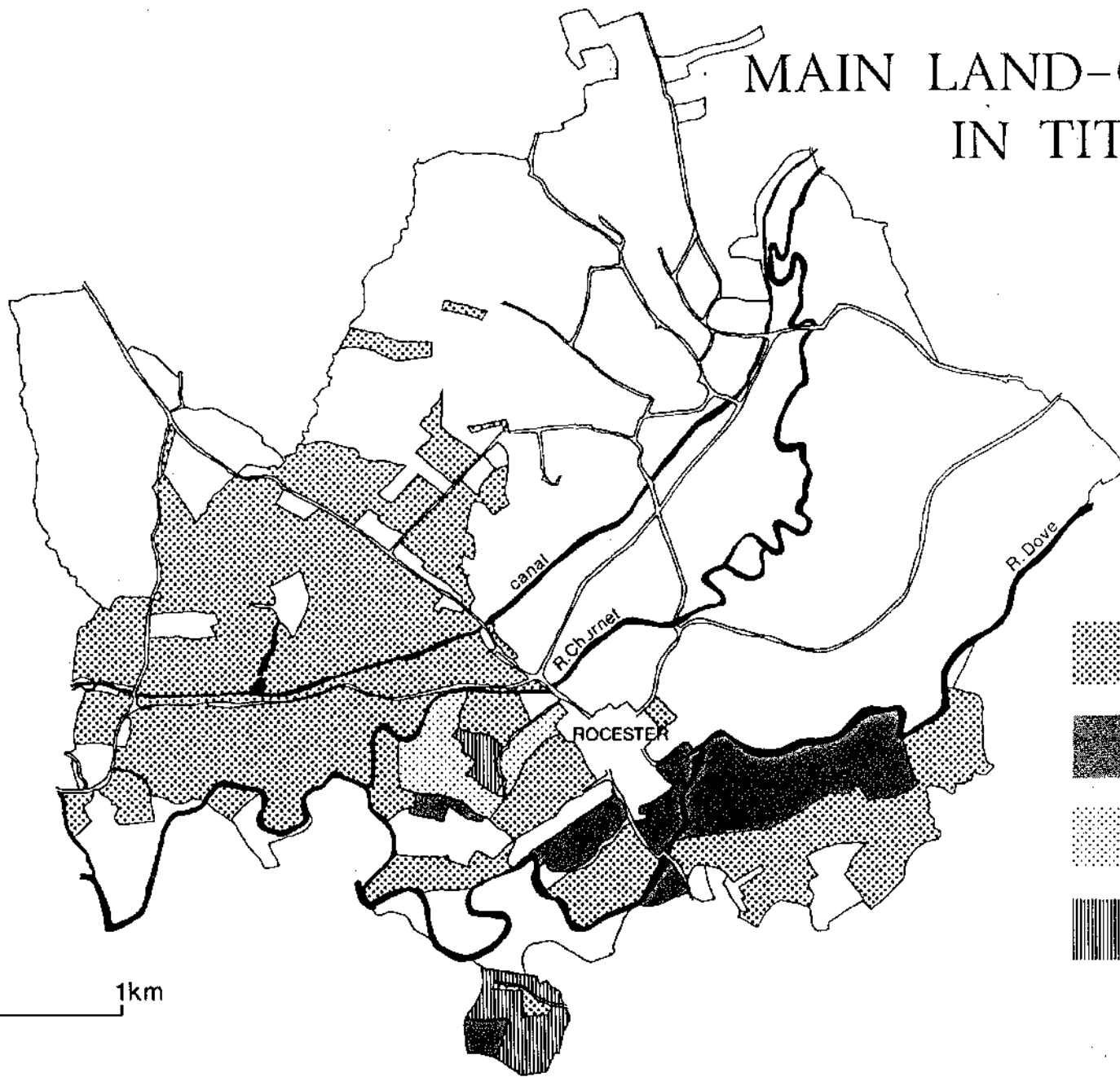
-  Arable
-  Pasture
-  Meadow
-  Woodland

Fig. 3

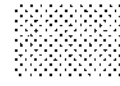
MAIN LAND-OWNERSHIP IN TITHE SURVEY OF 1848



BAINBRIDGE W.A.



HOULDSWORTH T.



ATKINS W.



WATSON C.

0 1km

Fig. 4

DETAIL OF YATES MAP 1775

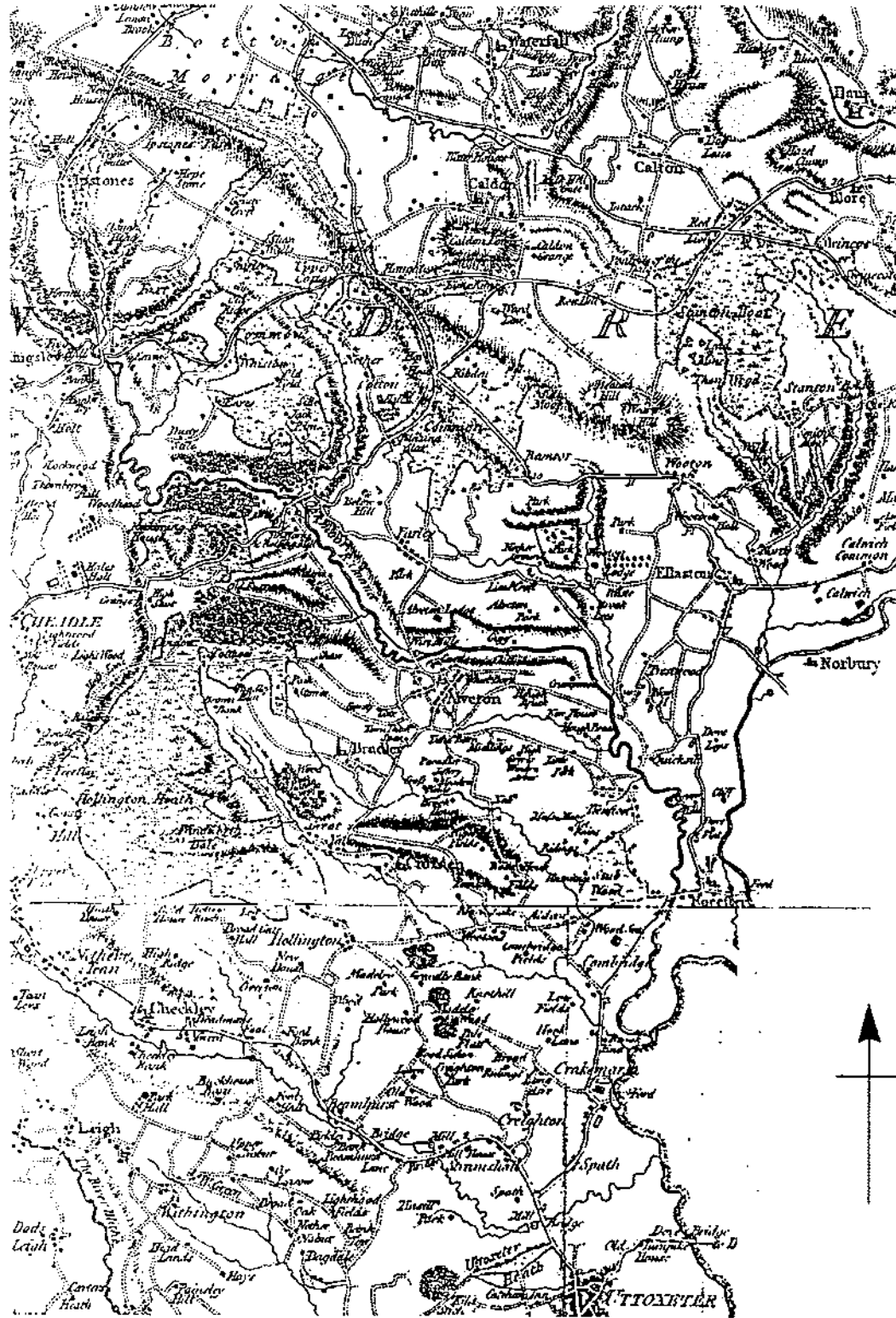


Fig. 5

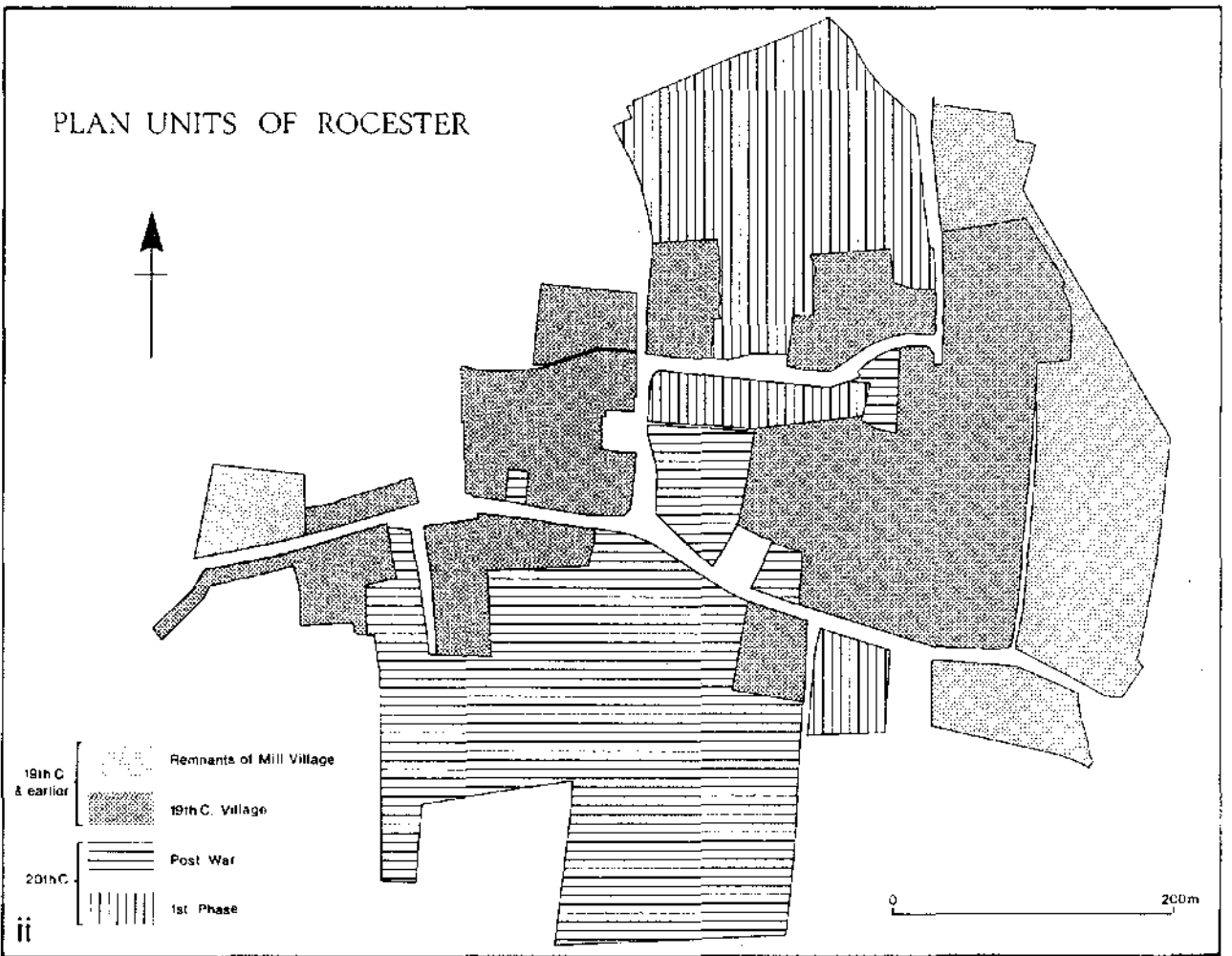
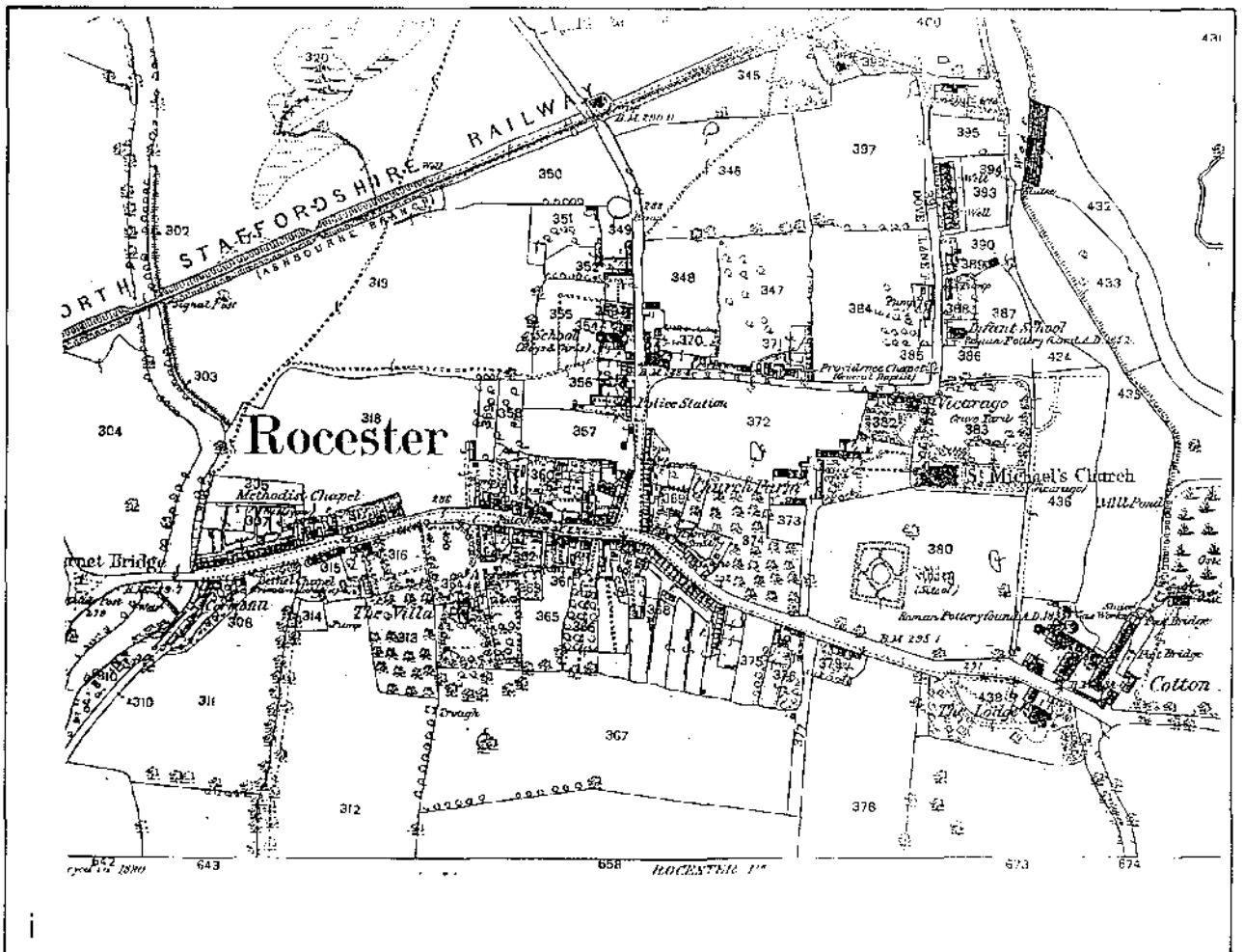


Fig. 6

ROCESTER IN ITS LANDSCAPE

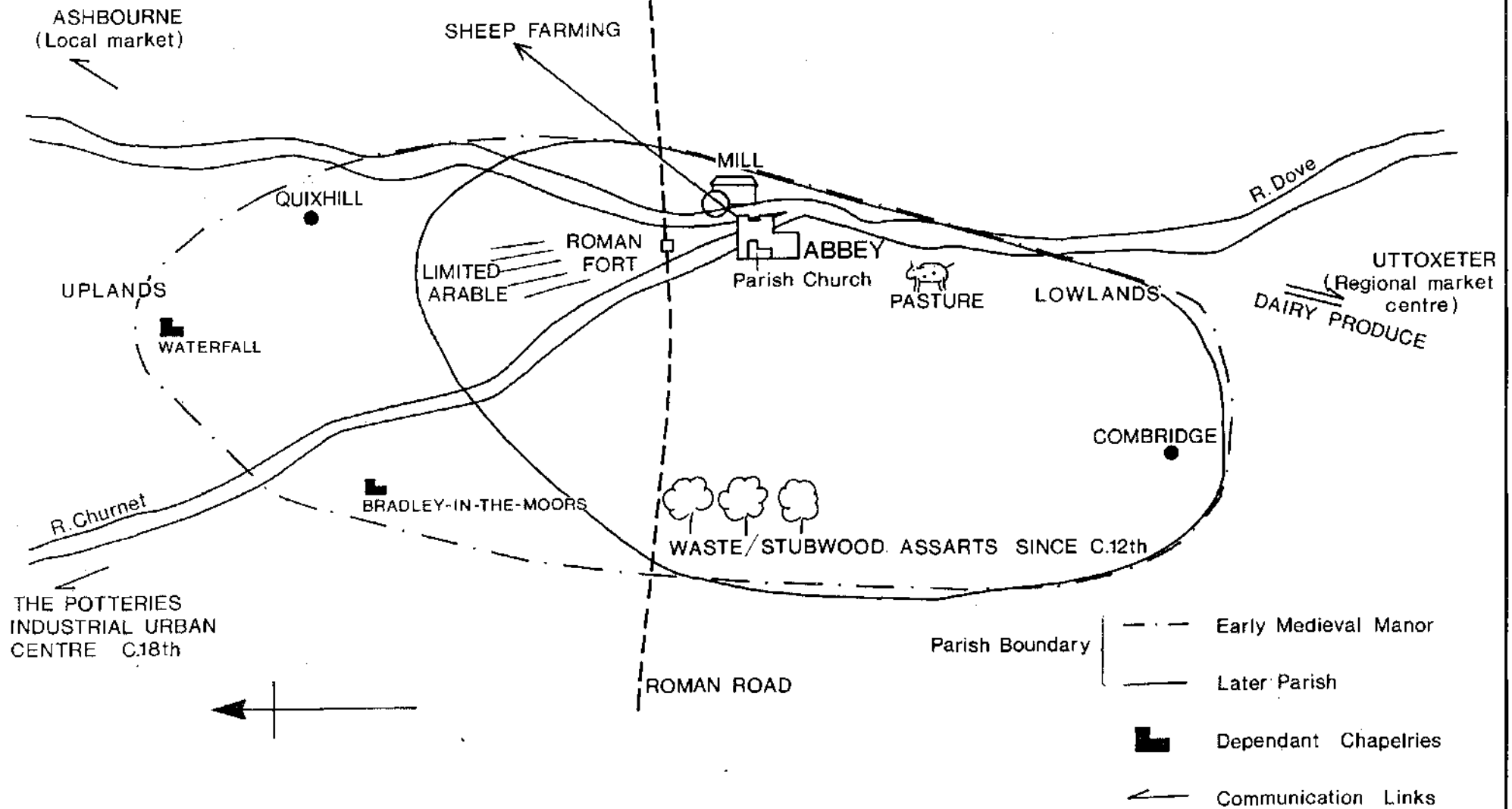


Fig. 7