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Medieval Northamptonshire

GLENN FOARD

THE SHIRE

The shire, administered from Northampton, was defined in the late Saxon period and remained largely unchanged in extent until the late 19th century. It included the Soke of Peterborough and several hamlets now attached to Banbury in Oxfordshire. Most of the county looked to Northampton and the Nene valley as its core. On the north east, Peterborough was an important satellite centre which was however an integral part of the county because on its north, east and south, unlike today, it was encompassed by a vast tract of largely unoccupied fenland. On the north west, west and south west the peripheral areas of the county looked, as today, towards adjacent counties, with the towns of Stamford, Market Harborough, Rugby, Banbury and Stony Stratford being the dominant centres.

Northamptonshire was administered through 27 'hundreds' in 1086. While various major estate centres controlled the hundredal administration, the hundred moots or meeting places were typically in isolated locations. Six of these were possibly associated with prehistoric burial mounds and others with distinctive topographical features such as groves, and most may prove to have been significant pagan religious sites. Each hundred comprised a number of townships, the smallest administrative unit, usually coincident with the territory of a single village and its land, although many aspects of administration were applied at a manorial level. Purpose-built moot halls are only typically found in towns where separate market courts were held, and in the three self governing boroughs, Northampton, Brackley and Higham, where borough courts were held. Apart from the possible example at Kings Sutton, there is no standing medieval example of a court house, but the sites of a number of moot halls are known in market places in the main towns. Lockups are occasionally found with the markets, but there is no surviving example of medieval date. The vast majority of manors had lesser punishment places including stocks, pillory and ducking stool:

a number of examples of the former survive, some probably of medieval origin. Some manors also had the right of a gallows but only a few sites are known, typically on main roads away from the settlements and sometimes set on mounds.

LANDSCAPE PHASES

The medieval landscape of the county evolved through three main phases. It originated in the period 900-1000, characterised by re-planning of the field systems and rural settlements, associated with a process of manorialisation and accompanied by the development of Northampton as a major urban settlement. This was firmly based upon a phase of major capital investment during the 10th century and many of the major trends that characterise the medieval, in demography, economy and society have their origins at this time. The second phase, from 1000 to the early 14th century saw continuing, rapid agricultural intensification and expansion onto all but the most marginal land with an increasingly intensive exploitation of woodland. In addition the specialisation and intensification of all forms of activity is reflected in a progressive 'formalisation' of the landscape. Accompanying this there was major demographic and settlement growth and large scale town foundation. This reflects an intensification of the market economy, which penetrated to the very heart of rural life. In this the towns were crucial, both as the conduit for much of the growth of local commerce and at the other extreme regional and international trade. Also of importance, but generally neglected in recent study, were the developments in communication and especially of industry in both rural and urban contexts: on these communication a good deal of the urban expansion must have been based. The third phase began in the early 14th century when demographic growth and agricultural intensification had reached a limit. The famines of 1315-22, compounded by an increasingly wet and cold climate, took a major toll on population and led to a brief but significant economic recession. There

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7.1 Early hundreds, hundredal manors and hundred moots

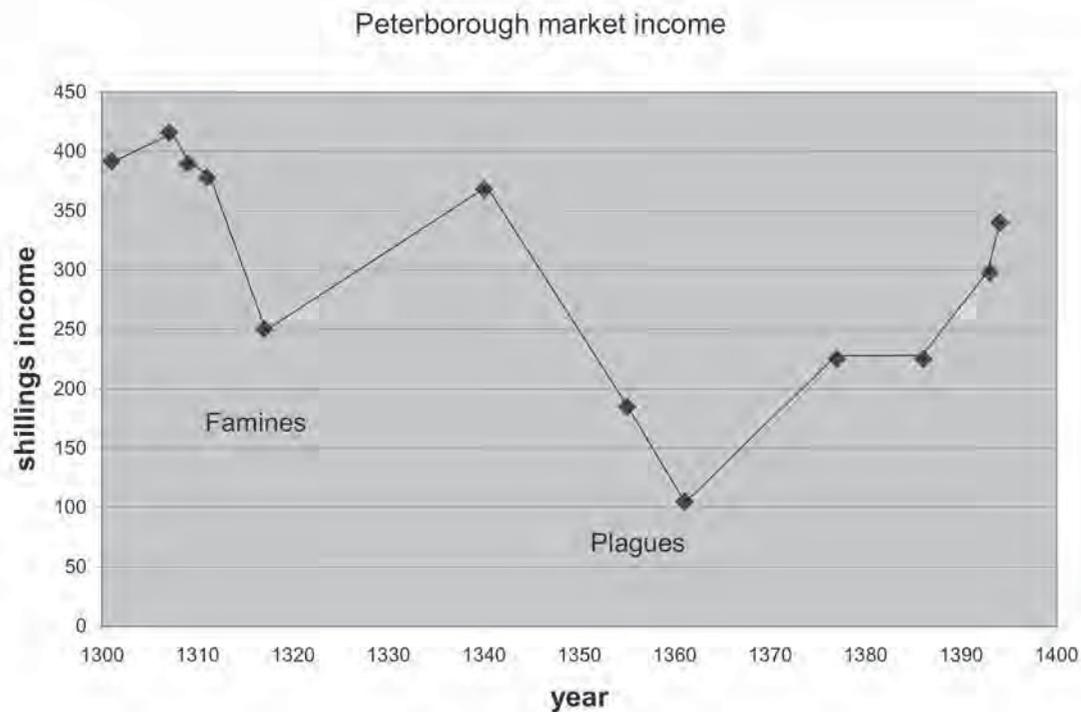
had been a partial recovery, both demographic and economic, by the 1340s but then, with the arrival of the Black Death in 1348-9 and successive visitations of the plague in the following decades there was a dramatic demographic collapse, particularly in the years 1361 and 1368-9. There was shrinkage of villages and abandonment of marginal agricultural land, a massive economic recession with decay

of most market villages and decline of the small towns and of Northampton itself, reflecting the major decline in commerce and industry. The 15th century saw the first stages of a demographic and economic recovery which led to a distinctively post medieval world. Most importantly in landscape terms there was a major agricultural restructuring. Although much land will have been temporarily

abandoned through lack of tenants, especially with migration of tenants from marginal to vacant tenements in wealthier villages, only limited areas reverted permanently to heath and furze. The major agricultural changes of the 15th century involved a reduction in the intensity of exploitation and in particular a conversion to sheep pasture in selected, mainly marginal, townships, in response to changes in grain prices only indirectly linked to the demographic decline. The increasing specialisation in sheep farming, beginning in the 15th century and accompanied by enforced depopulation and enclosure of certain townships, was paralleled by an increase in the amount of pasture in unenclosed townships. There were a handful of attempts at founding new markets but with little success. Commercial activity after the Black Death was to be far more tightly concentrated in the main towns and a very few villages without the wider network of market villages that characterised the 13th and earlier 14th century.

THE EVIDENCE

The medieval period is the earliest for which we have significant survival of detailed documentary evidence and of historic buildings to complement the archaeological record. The archaeological evidence is characterised by a lack of consistent information on monuments of most classes. Though large numbers of archaeological monuments are known, the vast majority, such as mill, manor, peasant tenement and grange, have only been identified from documentary sources. Neither has there been much synthesis of the evidence for medieval Northamptonshire since Steane's study from 1974, completed well before most of the major 20th-century excavation and survey projects were underway (Steane 1974). There are the introductions to the various RCHME volumes and the essay in the RCHME Atlas (RCHME 1980) while a few specific themes have received their own studies, notably open fields and rural settlement (Hall 1995; Lewis et al 1997). However, without



7.2 Graph of Peterborough market income

much more such work it is difficult to judge how representative our excavated examples actually are of the medieval landscape as a whole. Only through extensive mapping from documentary sources has it been possible to begin to address these limitations to provide here a coherent story, drawing also upon the unpublished historic landscape projects conducted by Hall, partly in association with Northamptonshire Heritage (eg Hall 2001).

Most major earthwork sites were surveyed by RCHME in the 1970s-80s, with additional work by Brown and others, while Hall has conducted a unique but as yet largely unpublished countywide survey of Northamptonshire's medieval and post medieval open field systems and other associated land use (Hall 1995). This evidence has recently been presented and analysed for a quarter of the county in the Rockingham Forest Project (Foard et al 2004) (see Fig 7.3). A range of other ground and aerial survey has taken place on earthwork and ploughed sites, including the recording of patterns of manuring as defined by pottery scatters at Raunds and the definition of the extent and character of the medieval iron and charcoal industries in Rockingham Forest. Recently, the Extensive Urban Survey has reviewed all archaeological and much of the documentary and topographical evidence for all smaller medieval urban settlements and market villages in the county (Foard et al 2001), complemented by other work by Laughton (Jones et al 2000). In addition, a major research project is currently under way by the Medieval Settlement Research Group to study the character and evolution of Saxon and medieval settlement and land use for part of Whittlewood Forest in Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire. This will provide a complement to the study of the largely nucleated settlement and champion landscape examined in the Raunds Area Project (Jones 2000; Parry forthcoming).

A range of major excavations have taken place in both the Raunds area and in the medieval town of Northampton. There have been seven other major excavations of medieval monuments ranging from complete tenements to monastic sites, while a further 15 less extensive but still significant excavations have taken place on other monuments, including various excavations in the pottery production villages of Stanion, Potterspury and Yardley Gobion. There have been at least 72 other minor excavations. Despite this, the vast majority of the medieval monuments in the county and most types of site and

themes have never seen any significant excavation. Intensive investigation, required through the planning process in advance of development, looking at a wide range of sites, particularly in medieval rural and urban settlements, is beginning to raise the level of knowledge of small towns towards that already achieved for Northampton. There are however many important themes which have received relatively little investigation. For example industry, with the exception of pottery production, has not seen systematic study either in a rural or an urban context.

The ceramics of the county are however relatively well studied and a countywide ceramic type series has been compiled, accompanied by an assessment of the current state of knowledge and the priorities for future investigation and enhancement (Blinkhorn 1996). This ceramic sequence means that it is possible in most parts of the county to provide fairly close dating of stratified evidence from ceramics alone. However carbon 14 and perhaps even archaeomagnetic dating will be critical in certain issues, as for example in the identification of iron bloomeries of late Saxon and medieval date from earlier furnaces, because in most cases these remains lie outside medieval settlements and there is very little associated ceramic evidence. For historic buildings the use of dendro-chronology will also be of importance, but at present only a handful of such dates have been obtained for medieval buildings in the county.

Countywide architectural surveys have been conducted by the RCHM in the early 1980s on the country houses (RCHME 1996) and on the medieval churches, though unfortunately the latter has yet to be published. In contrast the survey of vernacular buildings was restricted to a small part of the north east of the county (RCHME 1984). In addition there have been detailed, but as yet unpublished, studies of the historic buildings of Oundle by Heward, while there has been a review of the county's larger medieval secular buildings (Woodfield 1981). However the vast majority of the vernacular buildings in Northamptonshire have not been surveyed and so we know little of the lesser medieval buildings that might survive. There will be few if any from the 11th to 13th centuries other than churches survive. A significant number of manor houses remain from the 14th and 15th centuries, but only a handful of lower-status buildings have been identified. Occasional discoveries are being made, as with a recent identification of a small medieval hall

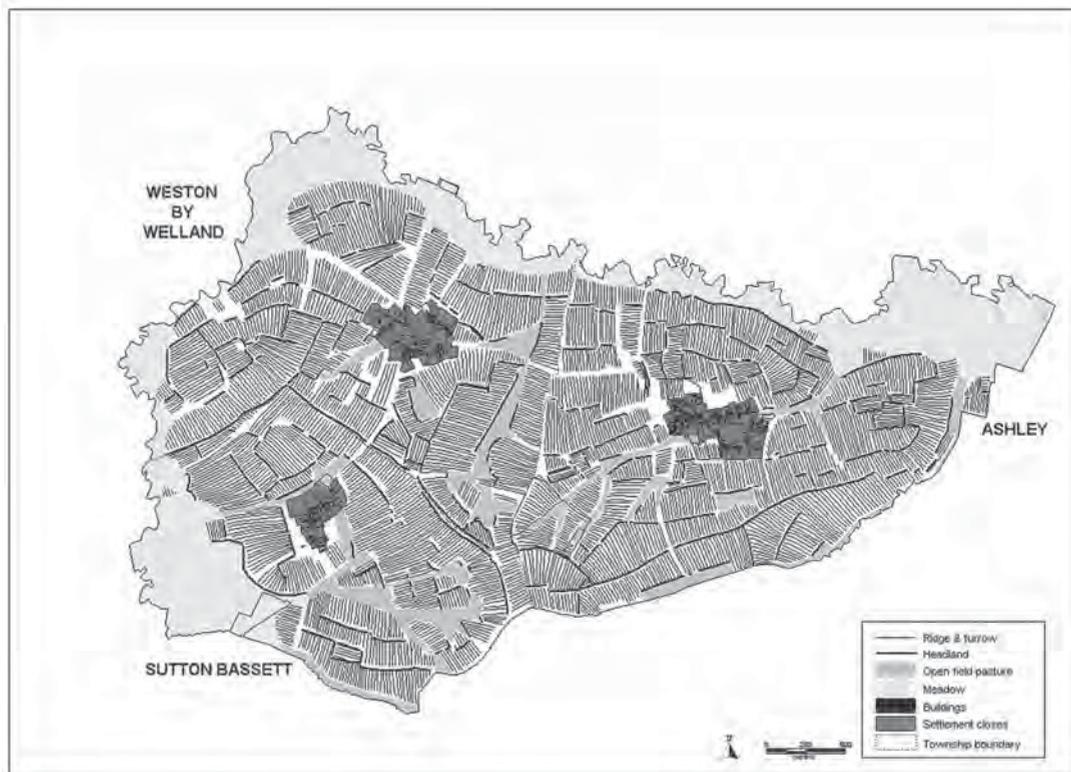
house at Gretton. On the basis of the 677 structures surveyed by RCHM in north east Northamptonshire it seems probable that something of the order of 125 medieval houses may survive countywide, but as few as 40 of these are likely to be of below manorial status. However, as the RCHM study excluded any substantial small town it is possible that the numbers surviving in several settlements, notably Higham Ferrers and especially Oundle, might significantly inflate this figure.

Documentary sources are sparse before the 13th century, though various key documents exist in addition to the Domesday Survey, particularly for certain monastic and royal estates (eg Martin 1978 and 1980). From the mid 13th century onwards the sources become increasingly common both at an estate and countywide level. However there is great variation in the quality and quantity of medieval documentation between different manors and townships, with the royal and especially some of the monastic estates being exceptionally well documented while many of the estates of lesser

secular lords are often very poorly documented. There is a high level of continuity, particularly in plan form of settlements, of tenurial structure and of many individual monuments through to the post medieval. Thus, there is a high potential for the use of post medieval documentation, particularly maps and detailed surveys, to provide a topographical framework for both documentary as well as archaeological study of the medieval period. Such reconstruction has been completed for each of the small towns in the county and a few villages, but far more comprehensive coverage is required (Foard et al 2001).

AGRICULTURE

Intensive mixed farming in the form of a common field system was established in the late Saxon period for each community across almost the whole county. The manorial and each of the tenants' land was typically distributed through much of the field system in long narrow cultivation strips now represented by



7.3 Open field township in the Welland valley (Foard et al 2004)

the earthworks known as ridge and furrow. In most cases a two or three year rotation was practised, changing between cereals and fallow. Common pasture on the arable after harvest and on the fallow was supplemented in many townships with hay and then after mowing by pasture on the floodplain meadows which were too wet to plough or, where it existed, pasture and pannage (seasonal feeding of pigs on acorns) in woodland and on heathland. Indeed many of the townships seem to have been laid out to exploit this range of resources. Many of those in the Nene Valley for example originally stretched from river meadows up to woodland on the boulder clay watershed or had detached portions of land within more distant woodland. There was very little pure pasture retained within the field systems themselves. Domesday shows this system in place countywide with a dense distribution of water mills already reflecting the high intensity of grain processing which would characterise medieval Northamptonshire. The timing of the transition to intensive mixed farming can probably be dated both

by the archaeological investigation of these mills and through investigation of the rapid alluviation that took place in the river valleys as ploughing destabilised the soils across vast tracts of the county. Excavations at Raunds and elsewhere seem to show this beginning in the 10th century, but far more research is needed in other lesser river catchments countywide to confirm this picture (Robinson 1994).

While some of this land use change may have represented the clearance of woodland, much of the marginal boulder clay land had probably previously been pasture or lightly wooded 'wold'. In some other regions of medieval England such extensive tracts of downland, heath or wood pasture were never cultivated, for there the marginal land was not presumably as suited as the boulder clay to intensive cultivation. By 1086 probably the only land remaining in the county for conversion to arable was the woodland, which then survived in just two main areas, in Rockingham and Whittlewood/Salcey forests. Between the 11th to 13th centuries these saw



7.4 The floodplain meadows of the Nene at Irchester revealed by winter floods.
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extensive assarting (clearance for agriculture) to accommodate the rapidly growing rural population. At first these new lands were probably integrated into the common field systems but later assarting apparently resulted in independent land holdings, some containing their own separate hamlets and farms. At the same time there was increasingly intensive exploitation of the best agricultural land at the heart of the common field systems, the main peasant farms being subdivided to support increasing population. There was also intensive manuring to maintain land fertility, as can be seen by the concentration of pot sherds from domestic rubbish scattered on the fields, particularly close to the settlements (Parry forthcoming).

Excavations at Raunds and elsewhere have also begun to provide an insight into the range and relative

importance of crops and animals produced in this mixed farming regime from the late Saxon through to the late medieval (Robinson 1994). A surprising additional contribution to the understanding of the agricultural economy is also beginning to come from study of the crop and weed types preserved in the smoke blackened thatch of a small number of our medieval buildings. Several examples of such buildings are known to survive in the county, best exemplified by the case surveyed at Great Doddington. It is important that we identify all the rest before modernisation leads to the destruction of this unique evidence for a long lost agricultural economy (Letts 1999).

Meadow was a discrete component of many open field systems which was located on the alluvial floodplains of the river valleys. It probably came into



7.5 One of the best preserved and most easily visible areas of ridge & furrow near Crick.
Photo: Glenn Foard



7.6 A landscape in Rockingham Forest in the late 16th century showing deer park, coppice woodland, open field and pastures. Reproduced by permission of Northamptonshire Record Office from the Finch Hatton Archive (NRO FH272)

existence as a result of the large scale alluviation in the late Saxon period, the land no longer being suitable for cultivation due to the periodic flooding. Much more needs to be done to recover evidence about the meadows from pollen preserved in waterlogged deposits in buried river channels. The high rent value of the meadow reflected its great significance in providing grazing and hay for the support of stock in an otherwise intensively arable landscape, since continuing alluviation probably maintained a high level of soil fertility despite annual cropping for hay. Only the common pasture of the woodland and the small areas of heathland and tiny areas of marsh or 'mor', seem to have provided any comparable grazing potential outside the open

field systems for the townships which lacked access to the extensive meadows of the main river valleys. This relative lack of common pasture contrasts dramatically with some other regions of England, outside the 'central province', where there were vast tracts of common pasture on downland or heathland on which communities could graze their stock.

Northamptonshire's field systems have exceptional survival of both documentary as well as archaeological evidence. The latter is best seen in the townships of the north west of the county like Great Oxendon and Lilbourne. Hall has conducted a survey integrating documentary with archaeological evidence to reconstruct the varying pattern of medieval field systems across the whole county.

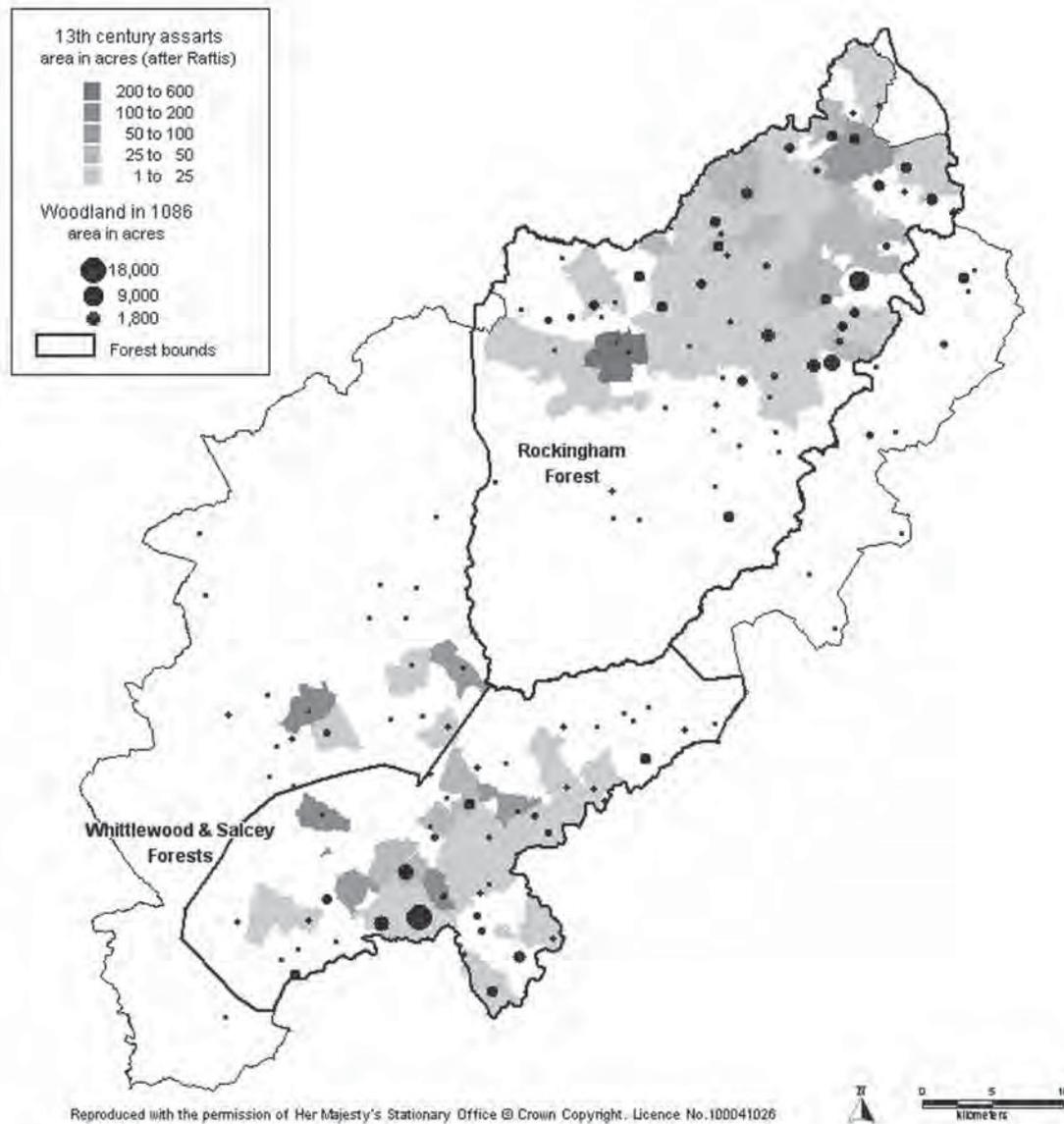
This nationally unique study, when published, will provide a remarkable insight into the nature of the agricultural landscape and rural economy of the whole county (Hall 1995). It will also reveal important clues as to the origins of the field systems, for it was the establishment of intensive mixed farming which produced the massive increase in the production of grain which made possible the urbanisation of medieval England.

WOODLAND HEATH AND MOOR

Heathland was never extensive in Northamptonshire, being concentrated in four main areas: on Northamptonshire Sand and Ironstone immediately north of Northampton and around Guilsborough; on limestone south of Brackley, part of a wider heathland stretching into Oxfordshire; and in the north of the county near Easton on the Hill, part of a much more extensive heathland mainly within the Soke of Peterborough (Hall 1997). Some heaths have produced extensive evidence of prehistoric and Roman settlement and field systems and even early-middle Saxon settlement, for example on Brampton Heath, suggesting that the transition to heathland may only have occurred in the Saxon period. Substantial areas of heath were undoubtedly converted to common field during the medieval period, but even at the height of agricultural expansion in the early 14th century some areas remained under heath because it was such poor quality land and because of its value for pasture and other products. With the recession of the mid 14th century the extent of heathland expanded again as a result of desertion of the poorest ploughland, only to be lost to agriculture once more following parliamentary inclosure in the 18th and 19th century. For the small number of townships which had rights over the heathland it was probably an important source not only of pasture but also of fuel (turf & furze) in place of those provided elsewhere by woodland. A few rabbit warrens and deer parks, as at Long Buckby, were also laid out on the heathland by medieval lords. Whereas on poor sandy or limestone soils there was a reversion to heathland as a result of the recession of the 14th century, some marginal clay land reverted to 'furze', areas of common pasture covered with varying density of gorse. A good example is seen in the 1810s at Brayfield on the Green, recorded on the Ordnance Survey Surveyors Drawings in the British Library. These furzes were also lost to agricultural

improvement in the 18th and early 19th century and so their distribution can only be reconstructed from detailed documentary research. Both heathland and furze probably developed as a result of low intensity grazing on land that had been abandoned for arable during the recession. However, unlike the reversion in the 5th or 6th centuries AD it seems that sufficient grazing continued to stop a regeneration of woodland.

Woodland was the second major land use in medieval Northamptonshire after arable farming (Foard 2001). Extensive areas of woodland lay largely on boulder clay, in Rockingham Forest between the Nene and the Welland, and in Whittlewood/Salcey Forests between the Nene and Ouse. Despite the late Saxon and medieval clearance, even by the early 14th century, large tracts of land remained covered by trees. Throughout the medieval period this had a major impact on the character and development of settlement and the economy in those regions of the county. The extent of woodland in the medieval period is difficult to reconstruct but can be estimated from the mapped distribution of post medieval woodland combined with the evidence from Domesday and of medieval assarting. With the increasing pressure on land the management of the woodlands also became more intensive with the laying out of coppices enclosed by banks and ditches. The coppice wood was periodically harvested and then dead hedges constructed and maintained on the banks for a few years to protect the re-growth from the browsing of deer and stock. For communities in these regions, the woodland was important not only for wood products but also for grazing of stock. Indeed some tracts of woodland may have been cleared through intensive grazing, for some common pastures of the post medieval contain extensive distributions of charcoal hearths (see below) showing that they had been wooded at some time in the medieval period. However by far the greatest impact on the woodlands was clearance for agriculture. Early in the medieval this appears to have continued by the incorporation of land into the common fields of existing nucleated settlements. By the 12th or early 13th century however woodland clearance seems to have resulted in land held in severalty and with some of these areas being farmed from new isolated settlements. These ranged from large manorial establishments, of which Biggin Grange in Oundle was by far the largest, to minor farmsteads.



7.7 Domesday Woodland and 13th-century assarting with forest bounds of 1286

HUNTING FORESTS AND DEER PARKS

The main woodland areas became royal forests after the Norman conquest, administered for the king primarily for the management of deer, though the territories also encompassed large areas of arable land and settlements (Pettit 1968; Steane 1973a). The forests were progressively expanded in the 12th

and 13th centuries, but in 1299 the forest bounds were redrawn to encompass a much smaller area, concentrating mainly on the surviving woodland. In addition to royal hunting in the forest, which is documented as early as 1086 in Rockingham and Whittlewood, there were a number of private hunting preserves in the forests, most notably Geddington Chase and Yardley Chase, attached



7.8 Remnants of woodland in the heart of the medieval forest, around Lyveden.
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to major medieval manors. However much of the management and hunting of deer by the 13th century, by both the crown and other lords, was in clearly defined deer parks mainly laid out within the woodland. A few parks were created in the 12th century but most were established in the 13th and some in the earlier 14th century, at the height of intensification of the exploitation of the medieval landscape. A few more were established in the later 15th century (Steane 1973b). Although some deer parks may have decayed in the late medieval period, most were not disparked until the post medieval. Hunting lodges were constructed in most parks while some manors, such as the royal manors at Geddington and Rockingham, were developed as major hunting lodges. There were also a number of small medieval parks adjoining manor houses or other residences, as at Fotheringhay Castle with its Little Park, which may have served a similar recreational function to the post-medieval parks associated with country houses. These and a few

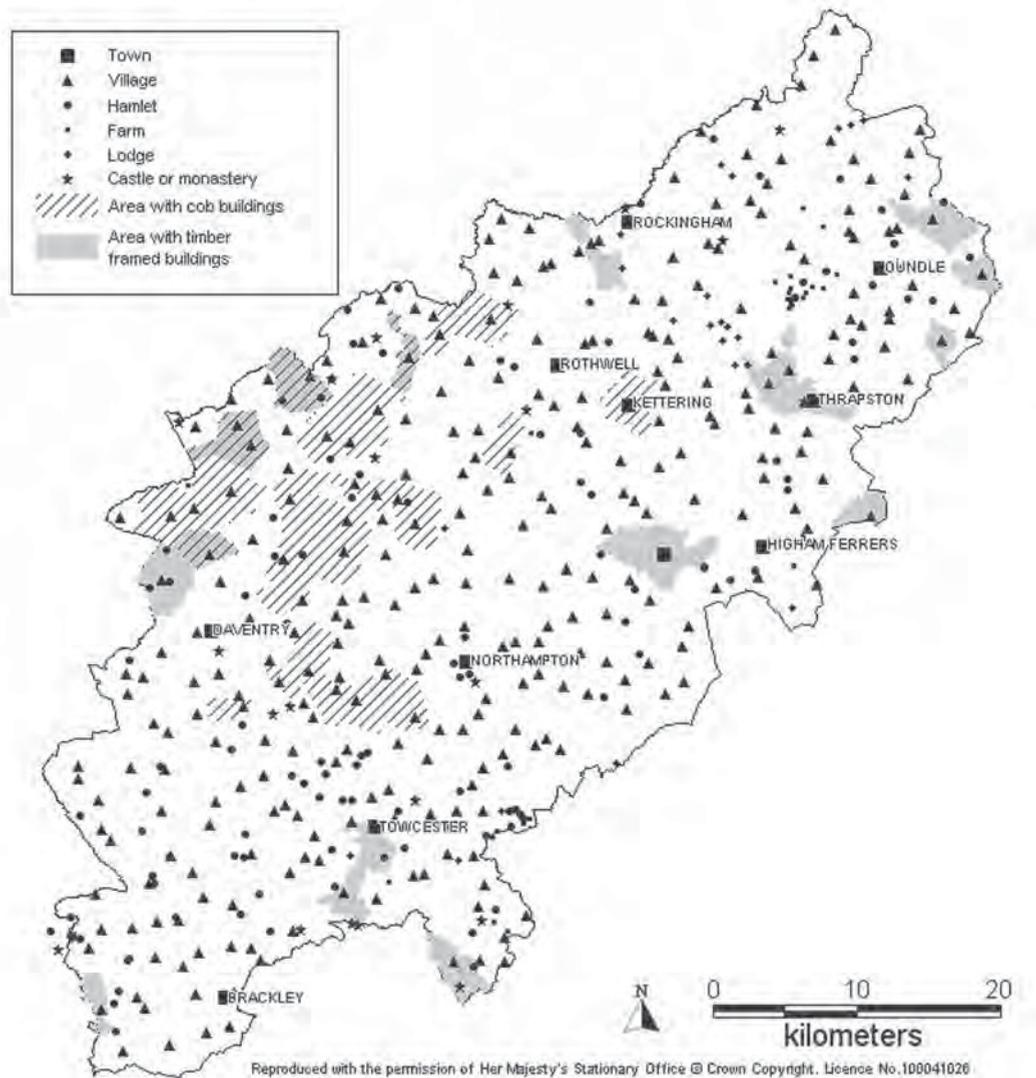
other parks, such as the Queens Park at Brigstock, were created from agricultural land. A few parks were also created on heathland, but most were within woodland, with areas being cleared for lawns for both grazing and the hunt. The continuing discovery of small numbers of parks suggest that a significant number still remain to be identified while many more require definition of their boundaries and identification of their lodges. The earthworks of the pales, now surviving just as a bank with an internal ditch, but originally surmounted by a deer-proof timber fence, vary enormously in scale, from features up to two metres high as at Biggin near Oundle to almost non-existent banks as at Grafton Regis. A few were even constructed with stone walls rather than timber pales, as at Moulton Park, but the only surviving examples are probably of post medieval date, as with the remarkable 2 metre high wall surviving around part of Harringworth Park. A number of park lodges are known as earthworks, for example the moated Old Lodge in Brigstock Great Park, while at least two

have surviving medieval lodge buildings, at Higham Park and Harringworth Park.

RURAL SETTLEMENTS

Medieval Northamptonshire was characterised by a highly nucleated settlement pattern, usually with a single nucleated village within a single township. There were some hamlets with their own land unit, however other hamlets or farms lay within the

same township as a nucleated village (Brown et al 1975). A dispersed settlement pattern existed in just three small areas of the county, in the Lyveden valley in the south east part of Rockingham Forest, at Hartwell in Salcey Forest and in the southern part of Whittlewood forest. The latter two were part of a wider pattern of dispersed settlement in north Buckinghamshire. This pattern may prove to be the result of late colonisation of woodland, but there are hints, in the concentration of hamlets



7.9 Medieval settlements with areas of known cob and timber frame construction indicated

around Towcester, that in part there may be earlier origins that will cast light on the whole process of settlement nucleation in the Saxon period. Occasional castles, manors, churches and monastic sites of medieval origin, due to strategic and other considerations, also lay in isolation. The only widely-distributed dispersed components of the settlement pattern were the medieval water mills and, mainly in the woodland zones, the deer park lodges. The settlement pattern of the open field landscape is relatively well known, due to the high level of nucleation and the ease with which old enclosed land can be identified from post medieval sources. However, in the woodland areas, especially in Whittlewood, where there were extensive areas of ancient enclosure and large areas of land never incorporated within open field, a significant number of isolated farms and one or two hamlets probably await identification.

The size and wealth of settlements in the medieval period can be assessed from Domesday and the various 14th century national taxations, with the 1524-5 subsidy providing a final assessment for the period (Lewis et al 1997). This shows a pattern of higher wealth in the townships on the permeable geologies, particularly in the Nene and Ise valleys where there was extensive good quality agricultural land and access to meadow. In contrast the boulder clay capped higher ground was generally poorer and had a lower density of population, as were the townships of the north west which lacked both meadow and woodland resources.

Although there are notable exceptions, like Raunds and Warmington where there has been intensive excavation or like Irthlingborough which has exceptional documentary sources, the settlements themselves have yet to reveal much of their history and character. The large number of deserted and shrunken villages provide extensive evidence of the character of medieval settlement without the confusion of later occupation, but it must be remembered that they are unrepresentative: these tended to be smaller villages or hamlets on the more marginal land (Allison et al 1966). Earthwork surveys have been conducted on most of these sites, revealing the plan form. Occasionally, as at Blatherwycke and Catesby, aerial survey in very dry conditions can add remarkable detail of buildings and tenements, but only where the buildings had stone foundations. Where cob or timber framing was the norm for building construction then the evidence

from the earthworks is far more difficult to interpret and, as at Clay Coton, may not yield clear results even from excavation. Those deserted sites which have been damaged by ploughing can yield extensive surface scatters of pottery telling something of their origin and growth, but only one or two of the ploughed sites, such as Newbold in Catesby, have been systematically field-walked. Equally few sites have seen any significant excavation, the most complete examples being the tiny hamlet of West Cotton in Raunds (Chapman forthcoming) and the unpublished excavations at Faxton.

Excavations have taken place within surviving villages, in an attempt to provide a more representative picture of medieval settlement than that derived from deserted sites. However these have usually addressed restricted issues of village origins, as at Warmington, and industrial production, as at Stanion and Weldon. Even where major excavations have taken place within living villages, as at Raunds, the evidence has been mainly from deserted areas with surviving earthworks. Investigation of occupied areas, during redevelopment or infilling, produces far poorer results but is important in completing the picture of the topography and chronology of settlement development. The settlements which have seen major decline, such as Fotheringhay, are likely therefore to be the ones where future investigations have the greatest potential.

Detailed documentary research on settlements such as Irthlingborough and Kettering has shown the great complexity of our nucleated settlements with varying function and status of tenements. At Kettering for example, in 1400 the virgate tenements were concentrated in one part of the settlement. In contrast in Irthlingborough, in addition to the manor of the Abbot of Peterborough, there were a number of subsidiary manors with tenements concentrated in different ends of the village and interspersed with a number of freehold tenements. While a great deal of the expansion of the 11th and 12th centuries may have been accommodated by infilling, within the framework of regular but often unoccupied plots that had been laid out in our villages with the Great Replanning of the 10th century, later growth seems to have required the addition of new rows, sometimes called Newlands. Such rows are identifiable because they are wholly of cottagers or other tenements with little field land. Expansion was also achieved by the subdivision of virgate (often circa 30 acre) or even carucate (circa 120 acre) farms to create a



7.10 Excavations of medieval tenements at West Cotton. Reproduced by permission of Northamptonshire Archaeology © Northamptonshire County Council

larger number of smaller holdings of half or even quarter virgates. This shows how unrepresentative the excavation of just a few tenements may be in a village which may have comprised as many as 50 or 100 (Foard, in preparation).

Few if any medieval peasant houses are likely to

survive in the county, though there are a few late medieval examples of the homes of the wealthiest farmers. Until the 12th or 13th century, most buildings apart from important manors and churches are likely to have been of timber with earth set posts or sill beams. At Raunds, in the heart of the stone area,



7.11 A hollow way running south from Kirby Hall with peasant houses and farms on either side.
Reproduced by permission of The Historic Environment Team © Northamptonshire County Council

Furnell's manor was only rebuilt with stone from the late 12th century. Post-medieval standing buildings provide a broad guide to the likely zones of medieval building traditions after this transition; the types comprised stone, cob and timber frame roofed with thatch, stone slate and tile. The limited number of excavations in the county can be related to this pattern though the evidence from some excavation is equivocal. At West Cotton complete construction in stone is indicated for peasant buildings in the 13th century. At Faxton cob building is attested from the 12th-13th century when a transition was noted from timber construction, while in the 14th century some stone buildings were identified.

Northamptonshire, with its large number of well preserved earthworks sites of deserted and shrunken villages, is well placed for the study of the dramatic changes which began with the famines and then the plagues in the 14th century. There are a few places like Catesby where the combined study of extensive late medieval documents and well preserved settlement remains provide a valuable insight into this period of recession, depopulation and reorganisation of the agricultural economy. However it is unclear what

proportion of tenement clearance was due to the impact of the famines and plagues rather than the major losses known from conversion of arable to sheep farming in the 15th century.

MANORS AND APPURTENANCES

The driving force within the medieval rural landscape was the manor. As a result of subinfeudation, manors increased substantially in number during the medieval period. The vast majority of the manor sites still remain occupied but only a small number have surviving medieval fabric from either the manor itself or the ancillary buildings. A significant number of manor sites do survive as earthworks, but many more especially of the smaller manor are likely to remain unrecognised within our village earthworks. Most of the substantial surviving medieval secular buildings are manor houses (Woodfield 1981), but only one standing medieval manor house has been subject to major excavation, Nassington Prebendal Manor (Baile 2002). Although an important manor originating in a royal estate centre and held in the medieval period by the Bishops of Lincoln, the site



7.12 Shutlanger manor house. Photo: Glenn Foard

has revealed what is likely to have been a common story. It originated in the late Saxon period and was rebuilt and expanded throughout the medieval. A similar sequence but of somewhat lower status has been revealed in the excavation of Furnell's manor at Raunds and of another probable manorial site at West Cotton in Raunds. Furnell's showed the whole grouping of buildings with a hall with associated rooms, detached kitchen/brewhouse, dovecote and an associated church and cemetery. What was not clearly resolved from the Furnell's or the West Cotton excavations was the issue of the scale and character of the structures associated with the demesne farm. Medieval documents from other manors reveal the range of buildings that are to be expected, including beast houses, barns, granary, malt house and sometimes even a horse driven malt mill, most if not all of which may be expected to lie in an associated courtyard adjacent to the main residence. Other components might lay adjacent such as the gardens and orchards or more

distant still, such as the sheepcote, rabbit warren and fishponds. At Higham Ferrers there was even a vineyard. Demesne farm complexes appear to survive in good condition on a number of earthwork sites, such as Mallows Cotton, but individual items such as dovecotes or sheepcotes are rarely identifiable. As yet, no demesne farm courtyard with a wide range of buildings has been excavated, although a small number of ancillary buildings were examined in major excavations at West Cotton near Raunds. Recently the barn, malting and dovecote of a subinfeudated manor have been excavated at Irthlingborough. The character of these manorial sites can be seen from a handful of surviving medieval buildings across the county, such as the manor houses at Shutlanger and Nassington, the medieval barn at the de Bray manor at Harlestone and the dovecote at Nassington.

Unlike deer parks, the warrens established for breeding rabbits could lie close to the manor, as with the stone walled 'conigree' adjacent to Higham Ferrers castle. This was large enough to also contain



7.13 Fishponds at Braybrooke. Reproduced by permission of The Historic Environment Team
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fishponds providing better protection for both from the depredations of peasant poachers, though some warrens lay at the very edge of the township as at Whiston (Brown 1974). There are many known but many more to be discovered and, unlike the deer parks, they were not concentrated in the peripheral woodland zone. At Fotheringhay for example the ‘pillow mound’ in which the rabbits were to burrow was laid out on top of ridge and furrow, the Master of the College there having laid out the warren on top of former common field strips adjacent to the village (Foard et al 2001). Rarely did these warrens have lodges, probably because they were both small and often close to the manor itself, but a handful of medieval warreners’ lodges are known. There is a similar association of warrens to woodland and heathland as seen with deer parks but there are also significant numbers in association with settlements and on enclosed open field land.

Fish from both river fisheries and, increasingly

during the medieval period, from specially constructed fishponds, were a significant component of the demesne economy. Fishponds have been subject to detailed study through earthwork survey because they produce physical remains out of all proportion to their relative importance (Steane 1970). In contrast, the fisheries in the rivers, which may have had a far greater importance to the demesne economy have received little attention, being known archaeologically only from the weights for the eel traps which were typically associated with mills. Most manors constructed fishponds but the scale of fishponds varied enormously from the major complexes such as Braybrooke and Harrington to the tiny moated ponds such as that belonging to Higham Ferrers College. Fish were also bred in moats and other man made bodies of water such as mill ponds. The proliferation of fishponds during the medieval period is yet another example of the intensification of the rural economy.

MONASTIC HOUSES AND ESTATES

In 1066 there was just one monastic house in Northamptonshire, the great fenland abbey of Peterborough. The Abbot was then one of the major landowners in the county, while various other abbeys such as Ramsey, Crowland and Evesham had important estates in the Northamptonshire. In contrast, by the later medieval period, there were 65 monastic houses across the county. Of these 16 were abbeys or priories, 21 hospitals, 15 hermitages and 7 secular colleges, while hermits and anchorites are also recorded in a number of Northamptonshire parishes. These lesser monastic sites were progressively established and endowed by manorial lords and other wealthy residents, the trend being for smaller establishments as time progressed, finally shifting in the later medieval

period towards the foundation of secular colleges, chantries and even of grammar schools rather than monastic establishments. The main concentration of monasteries was in Northampton and its suburbs, where there were 16. The other main towns in the county generally included several monastic houses, mainly hospitals, except where the manor was owned by a major monastery, as with the Peterborough Abbey manors of Kettering and Oundle and the Crowland manor of Wellingborough.

There were extensive antiquarian excavations on Canons Ashby priory (Audouy 1991) and Pipewell Abbey and lesser work on Fotheringhay College and Higham Ferrers College. Major modern excavation, as yet unpublished, have been completed on Grafton Regis hermitage (Parker 1981) and recently on the church, ancillary buildings and especially the cemetery of St James's Abbey in Northampton's



7.14 St John's Hospital, Northampton.

western suburb. Extensive earthworks survive for the sites of Pipewell Abbey and Perio Hospital near Southwick. Following the dissolution in the 1530s a number of the monasteries were converted into country houses, as at Delapre by Northampton and at Catesby, but in every case later demolition or conversion means that all standing evidence has been destroyed. There are however surviving buildings at St John's Hospital Northampton, St John's Hospital Brackley and Higham Ferrers College, while there are parish churches which were integral to several other monasteries, including Canons Ashby priory and several of the Colleges, as at Irthlingborough and Cotterstock.

The estates of monastic houses are generally the best documented of medieval estates and the national surveys of 1291 and 1535 provide a unique picture of the distribution of these estates. Though in some respects they may have been atypical, they offer a high potential to explore various aspects of the medieval demesne economy, especially through the integrated investigation of central house and dependent holdings through both archaeological and documentary evidence (Page 1936). However only Badby Grange has yet been extensively excavated although other sites appear to survive as earthworks at Cold Ashby and Braybrooke.

THE CHURCH

Although Domesday mentions only one church in the county, the recording of priests in 59 other manors almost certainly indicates the presence of other churches. However many more churches must have been omitted from the record: churches with Saxon work, such as Greens Norton and Earls Barton, are in manors for which no priest was recorded. More than 380 churches and chapels are known from documentary, architectural and archaeological evidence to have existed in Northamptonshire by the end of the medieval period. Of these only four lie isolated outside a medieval settlement, at Great Oxendon (Fig 7.15), Harrington, at the important fair site at Boughton Green and at Wadenhoe next to a probable manorial site. Excavations have taken place in at least 24 churches, but of these only two were major antiquarian excavations, at Canons Ashby and Irthlingborough, with just two major modern excavations at Brixworth and the nationally important excavation of both church and cemetery at Raunds Furnells (Boddington 1997). Although the

RCHME have studied all the standing churches in the county, detailed architectural analysis has taken place only at Brixworth and on Earls Barton tower, both to examine Saxon fabric (Richmond 1986).

Manor and church were typically closely related, with the devolution of manorial authority frequently being accompanied in the late Saxon period by devolution of ecclesiastical authority, the lord often constructing the church immediately adjacent to the manor house, as at Furnell's manor in Raunds. In a few cases the Saxon pattern seems to have survived through the medieval period, where the fragmentation of the authority of old minster churches was never completed. Hence at Towcester for example a large parish encompassed a number of separate settlements, some having their own subsidiary chapel but other hamlets lacking any church or chapel. In most cases however the ecclesiastical arrangements, which had become largely fixed by the 13th century, were of a single township and village with a single parish. Although manorial authority was frequently fragmented below this level, this rarely occurred with parishes: only 11 villages are known to have had two churches. Of these 7 had two separate parishes (Aldwinckle, Barnwell, Blatherwycke, Cranford, Irthlingborough, Maidwell, Rushton, and probably Raunds). The others are subsidiary chapels at Warmington, Weedon Bec and the standing buildings at Harringworth and Charlton, and it seems likely that some additional chapels will be identified in future in other villages. Urban churches represent a distinctive group. There are four towns with more than one church: Northampton had nine churches and at least two chapels, with multiple parishes; Brackley two churches and two parishes, Oundle two or possibly three chapels in addition to the parish church, all in one parish, and Higham Ferrers an additional chapel in one parish.

Accompanying the churches there were rectorial farms for the support of the priest, comprising a large tenement, typically adjacent to the church, with land in the common fields and other rights as well as the income from tithes. Many of these rectories were appropriated by monastic houses, who diverted most of the income to their own house and appointed a vicar, who had a much smaller glebe and the income of just the small tithes, to provide for the spiritual needs of the parish. None of these rectories or vicarages have been examined archaeologically.



7.15 Great Oxendon Church. Photo: Glenn Foard

While most medieval churches continue in ecclesiastical use today, the best archaeological survival is likely to be in the small number of churches, like Furnell's in Raunds, which were deserted in the medieval or even the post medieval period, as with Catesby in the 16th and Clopton in the late 19th century. In some cases, as at Catesby, Boughton Green and Brackley St James, the abandoned churches continued to have functioning churchyards into recent times but there are at least 28 deserted churches, while other undocumented early medieval churches similar to that at Furnell's probably await discovery. A few isolated finds of burials within medieval settlements, as at Titchmarsh, may indicate sites of such chapels, while others lie in some of the deserted villages in the county. The combination of well preserved church and cemetery in association

with extensive settlement remains as at Blatherwycke or Sulby may offer the greatest potential for the integrated study of a church and its community, both the buried population itself and their farms.

TOWNS, COMMERCE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Commerce must have expanded rapidly in late Saxon and early medieval Northamptonshire, and with it came urbanisation. Periodic fairs are likely to have been the earliest commercial foci of the Saxon market economy, before the first towns were re-established in the county. Some fairs will have been located at hundred moots or other religious sites. Only one possible early fair site can be suggested at present, that at Boughton Green, associated with a

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7.16 Settlement remains at Blatherwyke, visible as parchmarks.
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7.17 Towns, markets, villages and major roads

holy well and turf maze which are almost certainly of pagan origin. Other fairs were possibly at major estate centres, where the earliest documented markets and fairs are found. Many new annual fairs were established in response to the rapid growth in the medieval economy in the 12th and 13th centuries, almost all located in towns and market villages. They continued to serve an important commercial function enabling large scale exchange of often

specialised goods, though there is little documentary evidence for them other than their foundation charters and records of the tolls collected by the lord. However it was the proliferation of weekly markets which was the most important indicator of the speed and extent of commercial development countywide. They were intimately linked to the development of towns, though as the 13th century progressed more and more markets were founded in

settlements which never succeeded in making the transition from village to town. In 1086 one borough and three other market settlements were recorded in the county. By 1349 there had been attempts to found markets in a further 36 places (Goodfellow 1987). Though a few grants were apparently never implemented and some markets failed very quickly, the majority did function if only in most cases on a very modest scale. While most of these settlements remained just market villages a small number, especially the earliest foundations, developed as true towns. The competition was intense. While Northampton in the later 13th century considered its exclusive hinterland should extend 12 miles, as far as Wellingborough and Towcester, the lesser towns will have mainly served a territory of about 7 miles radius. Any new town foundation attempted within this zone usually led to failure. Of the 13th-century foundations there were only two that were successful in the long term, Wellingborough and Kettering ultimately supplanting their neighbours.

At the conquest Northampton was the county's only borough and probably its only true town (Foard 1995). It expanded beyond the defences of the Saxon *burh* with the planning of a new borough soon after the conquest and then subsequently expanded along the major roads and also along new subsidiary streets, possibly part of a regular, planned growth. This growth saw the transformation of the town with a new commercial focus around the market place, just outside the gates of the original *burh*, accompanied by a realignment of the major road system with a new bridge on the London road. However significant parts of the area encompassed by defences in the early 12th century seem to have remained largely undeveloped. The first comprehensive overview of the industrial and commercial base of the town is in 1524, which reveals the textile (broadcloth) and leather trades represented 17% and 25% of trades respectively (Dyer 1978). However the service, distributive and food trades comprised 40% of the occupations



7.18 Higham Ferrers market place and medieval market cross. Photo: Glenn Foard

of Northampton, showing the importance of basic marketing for the county and particularly the town's immediate hinterland. In contrast, farming comprised just 6% of the occupations. Despite the importance of the cloth industry in the 11th to 13th centuries, there is little significant evidence of that industry from excavations. This may in part be because the industry was concentrated in areas of the town which have not been the subject of modern excavations, as is suggested by the presence of the Scarlet Well, so named from the effect of the dyers activity there.

Borough status was granted to several other towns which grew out of villages in the 12th and 13th centuries, notably Higham Ferrers and Rothwell, but only one new planned town became a self-governing borough. This was Brackley, which had risen by the 13th century, through the profits of the wool trade, to become by far the largest and wealthiest of the county's towns, after Northampton. The non agricultural tenants of other towns such as Oundle and Daventry were also granted burgage tenure

with its various freedoms, but these settlements did not achieve self governing borough status (Brown 1991). In contrast Wellingborough and Kettering, where the artisan cottagers were never granted any special freedoms, grew rapidly at the expense of their adjacent boroughs of Higham Ferrers and Rothwell. All of the towns, even Northampton, retained their open fields and in some of the small towns there were as many tenants employed in agriculture as were involved in commerce and industry.

There are just two market settlements where extensive archaeological remains survive as earthworks, the shrunken settlement of Rockingham and the deserted Lower Catesby, neither of which were much more than market villages. Most of the county's market settlements and especially the true towns are still occupied today, some having been intensively redeveloped in the 19th and 20th centuries. The topography of these settlements is sometimes complex but for some settlements it can be reconstructed in detail from documentary sources, revealing clear evidence of the nature and



7.19 Daventry market place in the 1970s. Photo: Glenn Foard

chronology of urban growth. With such evidence it is then possible to effectively target archaeological investigation when redevelopment takes place and in Brackley, Oundle, Daventry and Towcester this has begun to reveal important information about the character of the county's medieval urban settlements (eg Soden 1996). The most intensively studied town still remains Northampton where tenement rows in a number of streets have been excavated (eg Williams 1979).

The wool trade was probably the most important commercial activity in Northamptonshire, with some merchants directly involved in international trade. This brought high wealth for some merchants, notably in Northampton and Brackley, which was invested in substantial town houses and, particularly in Northampton, will have contributed to the construction of the town's defences, monastic houses and churches. The county was also a producer of broadcloth and this also formed a significant component of the urban commerce. It is not yet clear how quickly trade in leather and leather products grew, forming the foundation for its dominance of the county's industry and commerce in later centuries. The towns also of course provided a wide range of goods and services to their local hinterlands with the larger towns having the widest range. Hence we find in Northampton and Brackley the trades range from ironmongers to goldsmiths.

The market place with its shops and market stalls was the focus of commercial activity and attracted to it many of the major houses and in the late medieval period the inns and alehouses, where many of the deals were struck. Particular goods were typically segregated into sections of the market place with wool markets and drapery rows being represented in various towns as well as the ubiquitous butchers rows. Market places probably started as large open areas but rapidly saw infilling with the construction of rows of permanent shops and of temporary stalls. The stalls became increasingly permanent and some shops were later converted into tenements. Market halls were set on the market place, but no medieval example survives in the county and unfortunately the remaining shop rows and market halls were cleared away with the Improvement Acts of the 19th or earlier 20th century. Only in Higham Ferrers and Northampton do significant rows still survive on their medieval footprints, but it is highly improbable that any medieval structures will survive in either case.

While commerce was the initial and core function of all the towns it did not have major labour requirements: only if a settlement also developed a significant industrial base would it grow into a substantial town. Hence several of our towns, such as Thrapston, have been successful since at least the early 13th century as local trading centres but remained smaller than the wealthier villages. While Thrapston and Rockingham were filling gaps between older established towns and never threatened their neighbours, others like Brackley were successful and supplanted neighbouring centres. Only in Northampton and Brackley has excavation yet begun to reveal significant evidence of industrial activity in urban tenements and this must be a target for future urban excavations.

Urban decline began in the county well before the Black Death, as excavations in Castle Lane Brackley have shown. Northampton and other towns in the region were suffering in the later 13th century from the flight of the cloth industry to rural areas. Decline was dramatically compounded by the agricultural crisis of 1315-22 and finally by the massive recession which accompanied the successive plagues from 1349 onwards. Urban decline is seen not only in the desertion of numerous tenements and some shops and stalls in the successful towns, but also and even more clearly in the collapse of the village markets, particularly in the second half of the 14th century. The attempts at re-founding some markets in the later 14th and 15th centuries may indicate a limited revival, as with the establishment of a new market in the village of Brigstock in 1466-7, but they were few in number and only two had even limited success. The major recovery probably did not come until the 16th century.

A knowledge of the pattern of communications contributes to a full understanding of the process of urbanisation, being essential to a towns' interaction with their hinterland and its links into wider national and international trade. It will also of course be important for the understanding of other issues such as the strategic location of castles. Hence Clifford Hill, the largest castle motte in the county, was constructed to control the Clifford where the road between the important towns of Bedford and Northampton crossed the Nene, an early medieval precursor to Billing Bridge. There seems to have been a major enhancement of the road network perhaps when the *burhs* were established in the early 10th century or soon after, for a network of

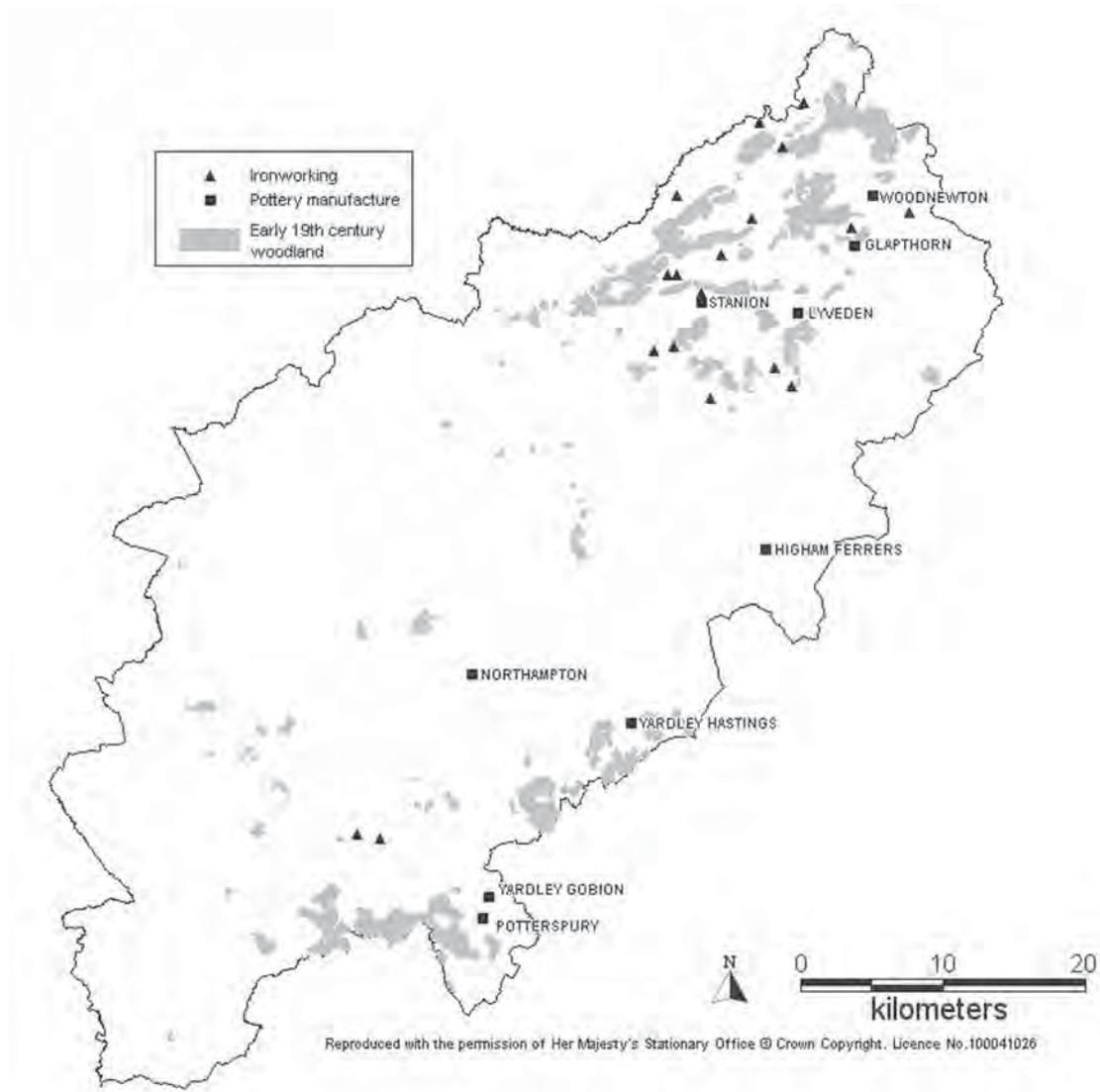
new roads, some named as portways, is recognisable linking the major towns in the region. When these routes are studied in detail they appear to avoid many villages and, as at Brackley and Grafton Regis, to cut across the early road network yet elsewhere they are followed by the medieval township boundaries. Later in the medieval period more modest changes included the upgrading of fords to bridges, some lords promoting their towns through the construction of bridges and diversion of major roads to pass through their town, as for example at Oundle. Unfortunately the road network of the county was transformed in the 18th and 19th centuries with turnpiking and parliamentary enclosure. As a result the pattern of local and national roads is now poorly understood and any study must begin with the reconstruction from documentary sources of the pattern of major roads prior to the 18th century from sources such as Ogilby's Itinerary of 1675 and the late medieval Gough map. This can be refined using evidence of medieval bridges (Goodfellow 1985) and of hermitages, hospitals and chapels, which were in many cases associated with major roads, to begin to reveal the major medieval road network (Foard, in preparation).

Though the possibility has been often suggested, no convincing evidence has been demonstrated from archaeological or documentary sources for substantial water borne trade along the Nene above Wansford, prior to canalisation in the 18th century. In the 15th century, when a scheme was being considered to open navigation to Fotheringhay, it was specifically stated that the Nene was not navigable above Wansford due to the presence of bridges, of which there were numerous medieval examples between Wansford and Northampton. None of the other rivers in the county are of sufficient size to have supported river transport. Water transport was however important for the county in terms of the export trade, through road links to ports outside the present county. Throughout the medieval period London is likely to have been the dominant port through which Northamptonshire's engaged in international trade, continuing London's pre-eminence as the *wic* serving Mercia in the Saxon period. However the new ports on the Wash at Boston and Kings Lynn, together with the latter's fenland transshipment port of Holme, will have become key outlets especially for international trade from the eastern half of the county.

INDUSTRY

Medieval industry in the county was briefly reviewed by the Victoria County History in the 1920s but otherwise it is largely a neglected subject both from a documentary as well as an archaeological perspective, with the notable exception of the pottery and, thanks to recent work, the iron industry. The most important industry in the medieval period was probably cloth manufacture with leatherworking increasing in importance by the late medieval. Iron production was clearly important in the 11th and 12th centuries but had disappeared by the end of the medieval period. The scale, range and significance of all other industrial production is poorly understood, as is the degree to which the industries were urban as opposed to rurally based. The only countywide data is as late as 1777 which, although prior to industrialisation, may be massively different to medieval Northamptonshire. It does however show that of the four most common trades even the most urbanised, shoemaking, only 45% of production was in urban settlements, though several urban settlements could be dominant with for example Northampton and Wellingborough having 20% and 16% of all shoemaking respectively. For weaving and woolcombing, a textile industry that was by far the dominant single industry in the county in 1777, the figures were 28%, 22% respectively. The evidence of the trades recorded in the various towns from medieval documentary sources would suggest a broadly similar pattern, though there may be major exceptions, such as Northampton prior to the late 13th century when it appears to have had a major broadcloth industry. There are of course certain industries which were almost wholly rurally based due to the location of the raw materials, as with the processing of agricultural produce, such as malting which has been examined archaeologically at Raunds, and the various stone industries.

Broadcloth production may have provided the main industrial base for the growth of medieval Northampton and some or most of the small towns, but it is unclear how significant it was on a national or regional scale. Broadcloth required fulling, tentering and dyeing and, until the introduction of water driven fulling mills in the mid to late 13th century, fulling was by hand and so will have been conducted within the settlements. Under restrictive practices of the guilds, it continued thus for far longer in some boroughs, probably including



7.20 Medieval Ironworking and pottery production with early 19th century woodland

Northampton, even after the introduction of the fulling mill. This may explain the later 13th-century flight of the industry into the villages and small towns from Northampton and other major towns including Leicester, Stamford and Coventry. Archaeologically fulling mills and dyeworks should be relatively easily identified, though their small numbers within the medieval landscape of the village may render them difficult to locate without documentary evidence.

Scarlet Well Street, Northampton probably locates dyeworks in Northampton, perhaps significantly in the north west part of the town which showed the greatest degree of depopulation in 1610. Post medieval dyeworks are also known from documentary sources in Brigstock and Wellingborough with only the late 13th century dyeworks in Kettering known from the medieval documents outside Northampton. Similarly medieval fulling and tentering is known



7.21 Evidence of charcoal burning hearths at Brigstock. Reproduced by permission of The Historic Environment Team
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from documentary evidence in Northampton, but medieval fulling mills have been identified in documentary sources from only a handful of other places, including Wellingborough and Kettering. Other textile production undoubtedly existed on a smaller scale in various places for there is archaeological evidence of production at West Cotton and records of flaxlands in places such as Higham Ferrers and Kettering, while linen shops are recorded from 14th-century Higham Ferrers. Leatherworking may have overtaken cloth production as the most important industry in the county by the 16th century, as it certainly had in Northampton, but the scale of the industry in the medieval period is not well understood. Leather was tanned and processed in the county not only for production of shoes but also for gloves and other goods. Medieval street names in Northampton record industrial specialisation in a number of areas of the town, Tanner Street lying in the south west corner of the town. However as yet only very limited excavation evidence has been recovered here for the medieval tanning industry.

In 1086 Northamptonshire had a substantial iron industry centred on Whittlewood and Rockingham forests and this continued into the 12th century and beyond (Foard forthcoming; Bellamy et al 2001). Large scale iron production required vast quantities of fuel and hence the forests also supported a major charcoal burning industry. The iron industry had decayed by the end of the medieval period but the chronology of and reasons for the decline is not understood. The charcoal industry has been extensively mapped through aerial survey while recent work has provided C¹⁴ dating to the late Saxon and early medieval period for major slag heaps in Rockingham forest. An ironworking tenement of the 12th century has been excavated at Lyveden, furnaces at Stanion and Little Weldon while there was an unpublished amateur excavation of a probable forge site in Great Weldon village. In contrast to the Roman period however there is no evidence to suggest that the forges or other reprocessing in the important iron industry was focussed in Northamptonshire towns, the medieval forges being



7.22 Medieval pottery from the kilns at Stanion. Reproduced by permission of Northamptonshire Archaeology.
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in forest villages like Weldon and Geddington. Other metalworking is recorded from documents in several urban settlements but the only extensive archaeological evidence for other metalworking is again in a Rockingham Forest village, the copper and lead working recently excavated at Southwick.

While early medieval pottery production was, at least in part, urban based and has been demonstrated in Northampton, from the 12th century onwards major pottery industries existed in Whittlewood and Rockingham forests (Foard 1991). Another production site is expected in the south west of the county and there is an outlier at Yardley Hastings of the north Buckinghamshire industry. There is a single urban kiln of the late medieval known from Higham Ferrers. There have been various excavations of kilns at Stanion, Yardley Gobion and Potterspury, but only at Lyveden has there been the extensive excavation of a complete potter's tenement (Steane et al 1967-75).

In particular villages the production of building materials, notably high quality stone and stone slates, were important components of the economy

(Steane 1967). Weldon was a major stone producer exporting stone for the construction of major buildings in the county and beyond, and in the south of the county Helmdon was another important centre. Stone slate production was most intensively developed at Collyweston and Easton on the Hill, but other production centres are known including from the Northampton and Brackley areas. In the post-medieval period both at Weldon and Collyweston the quarrying took place in the open field, with at Weldon even cottages apparently being constructed in association with the quarries. Whereas the landscape around Weldon has been largely destroyed by modern mineral extraction, extensive quarry earthworks survive at Helmdon, Charlton, Collyweston and Easton, but because most of the industries continued through to the 18th or 19th centuries it is unclear which earthworks, if any, relate to medieval production.

Corn mills were an almost ubiquitous manorial appurtenance with 168 already recorded in 1086 and many more constructed in later centuries. The appearance of windmills to supplement the



7.23 A stonemason depicted in a stained glass window from Helmdon. Reproduced by permission of The Historic Environment Team © Northamptonshire County Council

water mills is seen increasingly with the growth of population and arable agricultural production from the 12th century onwards. A third type of mill is also recorded on some manors, the horse driven malt mill. There are a number of windmill mounds surviving as earthworks and a few levelled sites recognised from cropmarks. However, as many mill sites continued in use into or were newly built in the post medieval, so medieval water and windmills are difficult to identify. In addition some watermills existed for other industrial purposes, related to full-

ing and possibly also forges for the iron industry. There have been complete excavations of a water mill at West Cotton and a windmill at Lamport.

MILITARY

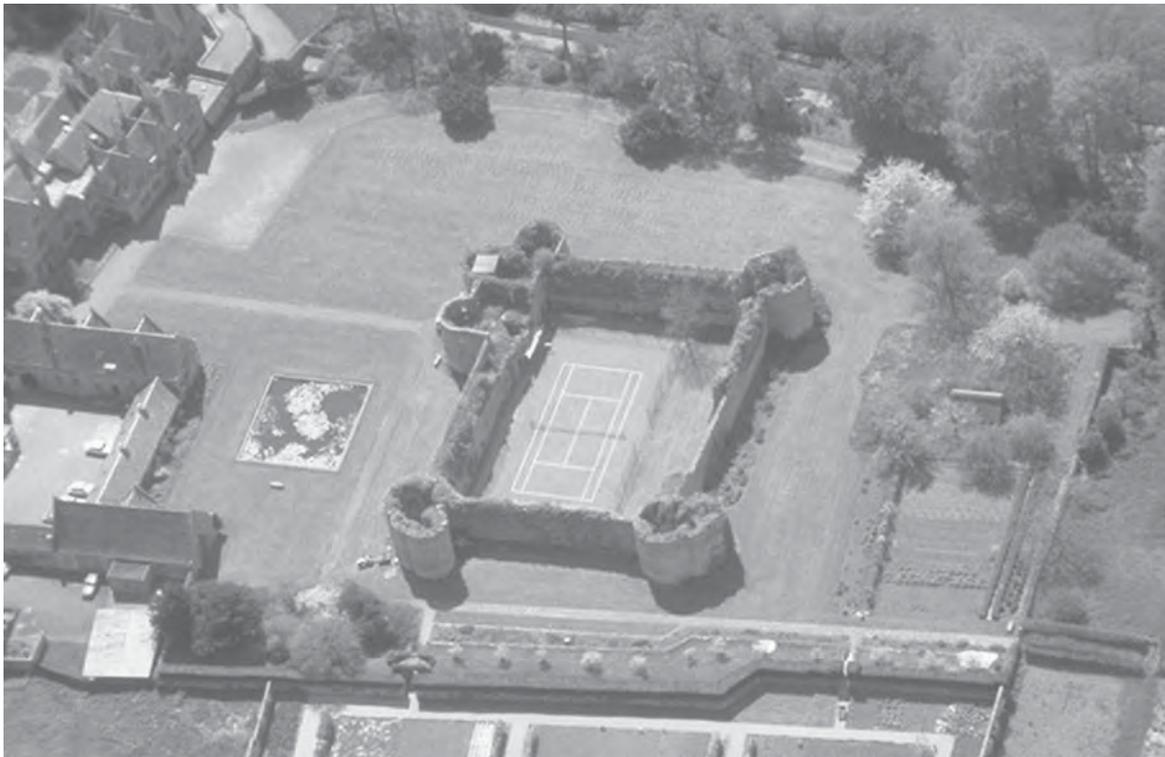
Excavations at Sulgrave have suggested that the defences of some medieval sites may have originated prior to the conquest but most, although sometimes constructed on earlier manorial sites, were almost certainly new constructions representing the im-

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position of Norman control in the century or so following the conquest. Only a handful of castles continued in military use after the 12th century and even less were newly constructed, the best example being Barnwell. However, a number of the sites, such as Towcester, continued as manorial sites long after they ceased to serve any defensive function. Northamptonshire had at least 36 castles and fortified manor houses and a further seven are suggested by place-names or unconfirmed archaeological evidence. It was only in the early 1970s that Thrapston Castle was identified and hence several other sites may still await identification, as for example at Irthlingborough where an 18th-century document refers to the Castleyard. It is likely that significantly more fortified manor houses have yet to be located. Most of the castles were originally of earth and timber but three, including Northampton, were probably constructed from the outset in stone with some of the others acquiring stone walls at a

later date. However with the notable exceptions of Rockingham and Barnwell, all that survives on most sites today are the earthworks. The best known site is however Sulgrave where there have been extensive excavations. In contrast to the castles, little is known of the fortified manor houses, except for the extensive antiquarian excavation of a site in Titchmarsh.

Rockingham castle was built by the king while Northampton and Higham Ferrers were constructed by the earl of Northampton and William Peverell. These are well documented and Northampton, though now largely destroyed, has been examined in detail (Giggins 1999; Klingelhofer 1984). In contrast, most other castles are poorly documented including several which are completely unrecorded, possibly because they were erected in the civil war of 1139-1141. The undocumented sites however include several castles like Castle Dykes which had substantial stone structures and like Weedon Lois which was an important estate centre.



7.24 Barnwell castle. Reproduced by permission of The Historic Environment Team
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Most castles were located in settlements and probably in most cases replaced an undefended manor at an important estate centre. Often, as at Brackley and Rockingham they also controlled important roads. However a few seem to have been located in isolated sites for purely strategic reasons, as with Castle Dykes, Clifford Hill and Fineshade. All the main towns in the county, except those held by monastic houses, seem to have had a substantial castle (Northampton, Brackley, Towcester, Thrapston, Higham Ferrers and possibly Rothwell) as do a significant number of the market villages (Rockingham, Fotheringhay, Long Buckby, Lilbourne, Culworth, Wollaston, Barnwell). This seems to be a clear reflection of the coincidence of castles with manorial centres of major lords who were the main driving force behind market and town foundation.

Although many towns in the county had castles, only Northampton had town defences. The late Saxon *burh* defences at Towcester may have survived into the medieval period but there is no reason to believe they were maintained. In contrast the Saxon *burh* at Northampton was replaced by one of the most extensive circuits of stone defences and gates anywhere in England, probably by the Earl of Northampton in the early 12th century. Most of the circuit survived to be depicted on John Speed's map of 1610, except on the west and south west sides, where recent excavations have revealed the course and character of late Saxon and the medieval defences (Chapman 1998).

In 1264 Northampton's defences were put to the test and found wanting, during the rebellion of

Simon de Montfort when the town was stormed by forces loyal to the king. A monument related to the siege was found in the town in the 19th century but no other evidence related to the siege has been recovered. There were two other major military actions in the county in the medieval period. Rockingham Castle was taken back by siege by the king in circa 1220 but the scale of the action is uncertain and while no other sieges are recorded, it is possible that the second castle at Lilbourne, on the hill overlooking the village, represents a siege castle.

There were two major field engagements in the county in the medieval period, during the Wars of the Roses. The Battle of Northampton, on 10th July 1460, took place in the area of Delapre Park and saw the king captured by the Yorkists. The presence of an earthwork called the Battle Dyke, possibly a park pale, used in the battle as a defensive position for the Lancastrian camp, provides a potential for a substantial buried archaeological feature. Recorded in later terriers of the field system, if located the dyke has the potential to provide a key topographical focus for the investigation of the battle. Extensive artefact distributions from the battle may also survive across the park, but there has been no survey to confirm the potential. The other major action was the Battle of Edgcote, on 26th July 1469. The exact location of the battle is disputed but there is a high probability that the traditional site on 'Danesmoor' is correct: archaeological survey is required to confirm the site. A mass grave recorded in the 19th century on the edge of the village might represent battle-related burials (Smurthwaite 1995; Haigh 1997).