

8 Post-Medieval Northamptonshire (1500-1750)

DAVID HALL

THE COUNTRYSIDE

Open field, familiar as ridge and furrow, was the predominant form of agriculture at the beginning of the period. There was still 97 percent of the county open in 1500, falling to 23 percent by 1800. Nearly all of the remainder was thereafter rapidly enclosed, only one place, Lutton, remaining open until 1866 (Hall 1997 363).

The operation, management and social structure of open-field holdings are available from copious records (Hall 1995). In most parts of the county, farmers were tenants of the landed gentry or lesser lords of the manor who owned estates comprising

most of one or more parishes. In the north-west, however many farms were freehold by the mid 18th century. Practical aspects of farming organization are indicated by open-field orders made at manorial courts. Details of farming work, such as yields and stock breeding, are recorded in 17th and 18th century glebe books and tithe books of clerics who farmed in hand.

Ridge and furrow has been fast disappearing over the last 50 years, caused mainly by ploughing. By 1992, 85 percent of the ridge and furrow surviving in 1940 had been destroyed, irrespective of whether there was a lot or little in 1940 (Hall 1993, 24). In January 1999, new vertical photography of the



8.1 Ridge and Furrow overlain by enclosure hedges at Braunston. Reproduced by permission of the Historic Environment Team.
© Northamptonshire County Council

43 best preserved townships in the East Midlands showed that many had lost ridge and furrow. Overall the total amount of recorded ridge and furrow fell from 7,640 ha in c.1990 to 6,761 ha in 1999. This loss (11.5%) highlights the vulnerability of the monument class.

The landscapes of hedged fields resulted from enclosure over many centuries. Of the 390 townships in the historic county (pre-1964, including Peterborough) 65 percent were parliamentary (1733-1901) and 35 percent were non-parliamentary. The term 'parliamentary' refers to enclosure processes that included commissioners, which differ from places where Parliament ratified a private agreement between a few parties.

The non-parliamentary enclosure profiles are; 15th century 3% (of 390); 16th 13%; 17th 15%; 1700-32 2%. A further 2% were enclosed privately after 1732 (Hall 1997, 398; fig 4). The early enclosures lie in a patchy north-western swathe from Banbury to Rockingham Forest. Many small and deserted townships are included, some that had late monastic enclosure. They lie in the part of the county that had up to 90 percent open field arable. This is the region most likely to be converted from arable to pasture because of its great shortage of grazing. Lack of pasture had partly been accommodated before enclosure by introducing a high percentage of leys, often more than 35 percent, within the fields (Hall 1995, 22-27).

Details of each township enclosure and the subsequent infilling of plots are very varied. Early enclosure was usually made for sheep farming and had large fields. These were further subdivided, mainly during 1750-1850, as the economy changed to mixed farming with arable crop rotation in the enclosed fields but retaining some closes under permanent pasture.

The mechanics of Parliamentary enclosure have been fully described by Tate (1967) and several Northamptonshire details are available (Hall 1997, f.n. 17, p.354). The social aspects of enclosure are the subject of ongoing research. Recent work by Neeson (1993) is by no means the final, or an accurate, account. Enclosure was the beginning of a change from small to larger farms that has gone on to the present day. The fate of the small landowner in the Corby area after enclosure has been studied by Moore-Colyer (1997, 1999). Many opted out of farming, probably often by choice.

Forests and woodland are an underrated part of

the Northamptonshire landscape. Many thousands of acres of woodland survive, much of it under the management of the Forestry Commission. There was much more woodland in the 18th century than now, when it had not changed a great deal since the late Middle Ages, except for some sparking during the Commonwealth period. Most woodland removed since 1825 was pulled up in the 1860s, after formal enclosure, which took place from 1798-1856. There were further inroads during the 20th century with wartime aerodromes and clearance for agriculture.

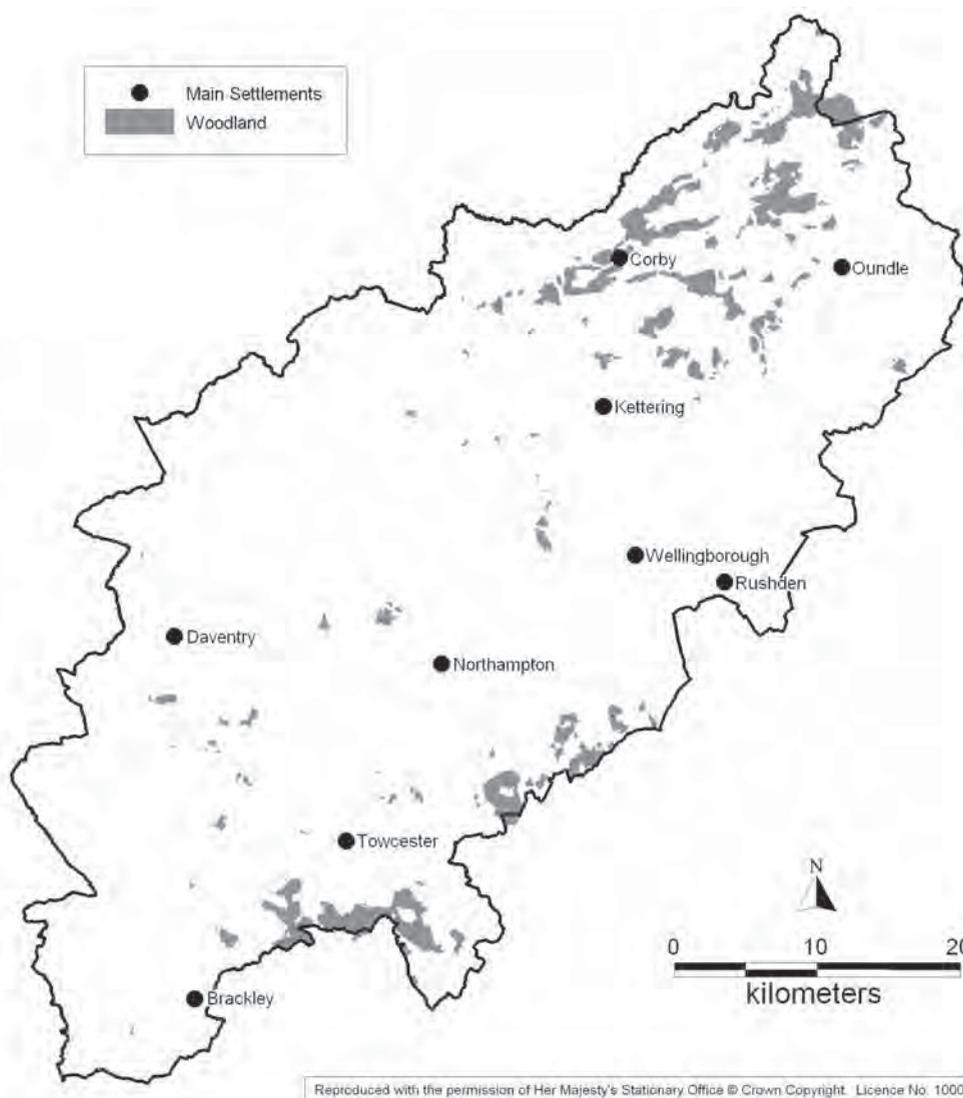
The forest consisted of coppices, plains, ridings, lawns and lodges, most of which have medieval origins. Veteran oaks surviving in lawns and elsewhere are in need of protection. All woods under the management of Forest Enterprise have been surveyed for archaeological remains. The Forestry Commission is currently supporting a scheme to replant woodland in the forests of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire. Whittlewood Forest has had its historic landscape mapped by Northamptonshire Heritage and South Northamptonshire Council (Hall 2000). It is now possible to develop a management policy for the area with suggestions for restoration of woodland to its former location, should this be required.

The management of crown woods is very fully recorded from the 16th century. Only a few details can be found for coppice sales in private woods, e.g. Farthingstone in the 16th and 18th centuries (NRO Th 2047). Very little historical evidence exists about industrial activity, such as charcoal burning. A moderate amount of new woodland was planted on some of the large estates (e.g. Althorp and Easton Maudit), where ridge and furrow is visible beneath the trees. Modern woodland records are held by the Forestry Commission, and include woodland diaries.

PARKS & GARDENS

The gardens of Northamptonshire cover a wide range of types and some have major archaeological remains. In scale they vary from the extensive works of the great houses to the gardens of farmhouses. As well as private gardens, there are those of public institutions, 19th century and later, such as workhouses, hospitals and asylums, municipal parks and cemeteries, although these have had little study so far.

A few earthwork gardens where a great house no



8.2 Eighteenth-century woodland.

longer survives, such as Wakerley and Harrington, are scheduled monuments. Some gardens are protected because of their association with monastic or manorial sites. Scheduled sites are the only ones that are preserved. More difficult to manage are gardens currently in use (the majority); these are likely to change or be put to a different land-use. Since there is no protection, gardens can be

destroyed by horticulture or agriculture without notice. The surviving documents are varied; e.g. the extraordinary scheduled terraced gardens at Harrington have no known record (Fig 8.3).

Gardens have research value because they relate to the wealth of the owners and their social status, and reveal changing fashions. Documentary work is required on the evolution of gardens in relation to the



8.3 Terraced gardens at Harrington. Reproduced by permission of the Historic Environment Team.
© Northampton County Council

social structure of the county. Archaeological study of gardens should include those with good historical records, although in some cases, archaeology is the only source of information about major gardens, e.g. at Paulerspury.

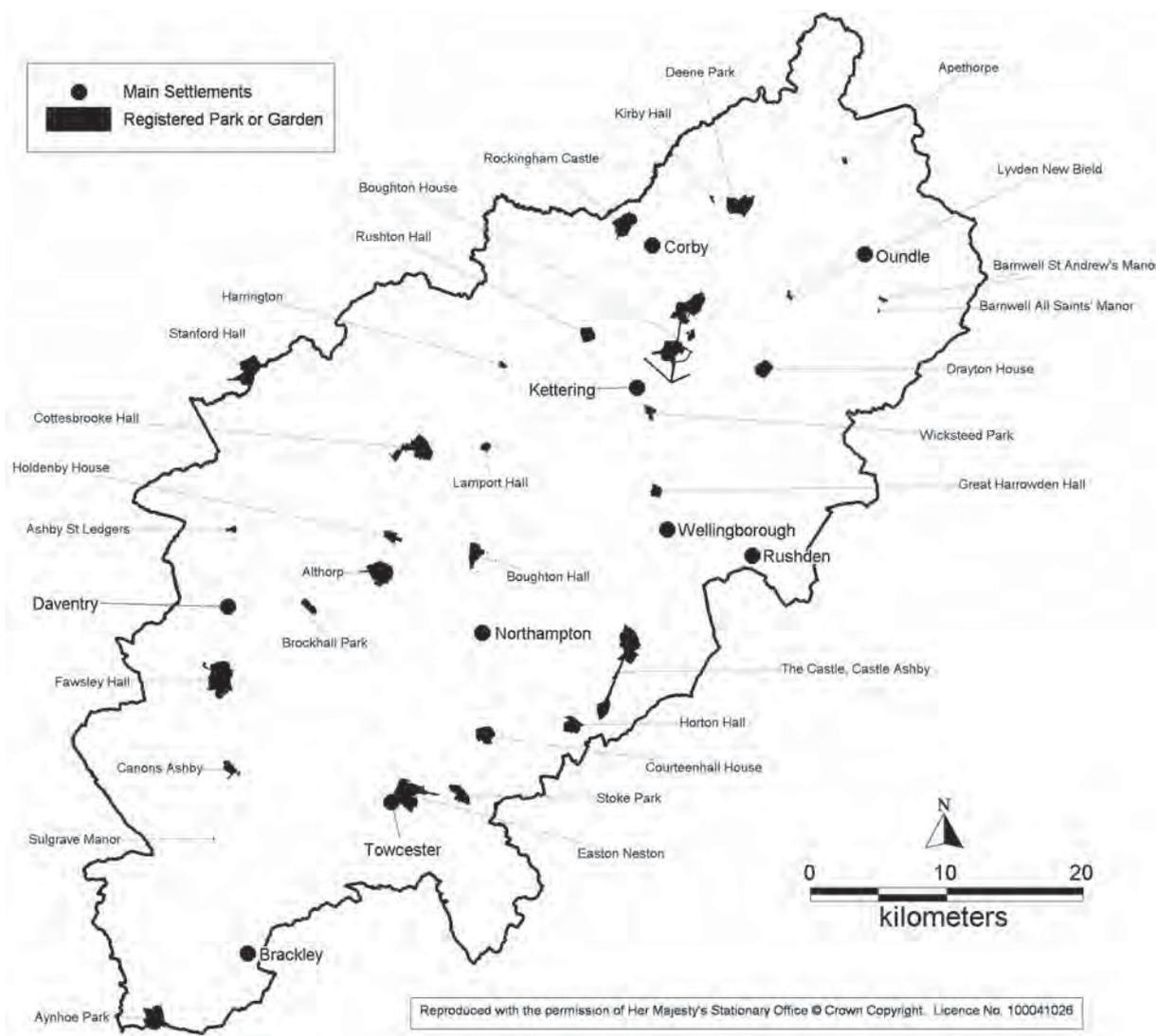
SETTLEMENT

Villages in Northamptonshire were mostly nucleated. Medieval dispersed settlement in the Whittlewood and Salcey Forest regions had shrunken so much by the 18th century that it cannot be distinguished from dispersed farmsteads in enclosed landscapes, except by fieldwork.

The population in the post-medieval period was predominantly rural and changed little before 1800. Some gentry families were accused of depopulation and conversion of arable to pasture in 1517, e.g. at Deene (NRO Bru A.iv.19). Bridges (1791, ii, 163) notes that Easton Maudit had a reduced population due to enclosure (c.1639).

Population estimates for c.1720 (Bridges 1791) show the major towns clearly. Earlier databases are available from the 1524 Lay Subsidy and the 1676 Compton Census. More detail is available from the county hearth tax returns. A full report on Northamptonshire towns (Foard forthcoming) will enable the chronology of change to be studied in detail.

Northampton saw growth but its size was still smaller than the 13th century town, areas remaining undeveloped within the walled area. Ten towns survived the 14th century recessions while other places survived as market villages or were revived in the 15th century. There were also new market village foundations, notably Brigstock, and re-foundations in the 16th century at Kings Cliffe, Aynho and Weldon. Welford market was moved to West Haddon. Village markets filled minor marketing niches in thinly populated areas of the county distant from the main towns. None ever grew to significant size and most failed fairly quickly, except for Rockingham,



8.4 The locations of parks and gardens on the English Heritage Register.

which had a high population for its acreage suggesting non-agricultural functions. Rockingham is significant for the study of small settlements because all the buildings and tenements around the market place were demolished and cleared in 1645. Extensive earthworks remain, providing a major archaeological resource.

The dominant towns were those that had been

important in the 13th and 14th centuries. Kettering continued to eclipse Rothwell, and Wellingborough to eclipse Higham Ferrers. This was based both on the transfer of general commercial functions but also, during the 17th and 18th centuries, upon the first stages of large-scale specialisation in the textile and shoemaking industries.

Wool trade existed early in the period, but was

8 • POST MEDIEVAL NORTHAMPTONSHIRE (1500-1750)

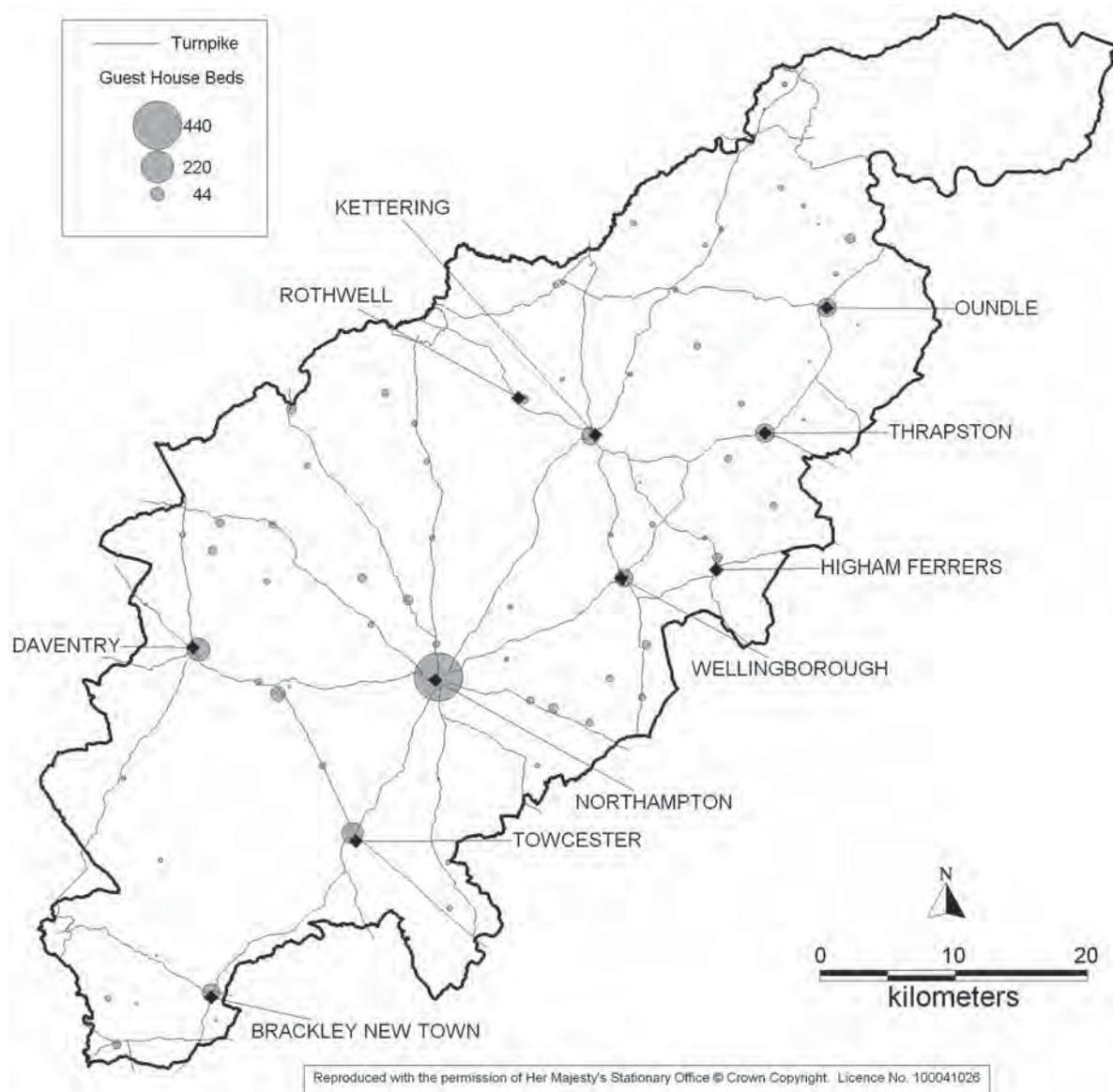


8.5 The relative sizes of market settlements in 1524

probably in decline, with a transition, during the 16th century, from wool to leather. The wool market at Oundle was infilled before 1565 while leather searchers were appointed to Higham market in the mid 16th century, and by the later 17th century there was a significant leather fair at Rothwell.

Kettering and Wellingborough saw major development in the later 17th and 18th centuries

with the specialisation and intensification of the worsted and shoemaking industries respectively. Other small towns, Oundle, Daventry, Brackley, Thrapston and Towcester, remained as the main commercial and service centres for their district, shown by the range of specialist services provided in 1777, such as attorneys, surgeons etc (Hatley 1973). While Thrapston, like Rockingham, served



8.6 Guesthouse beds & turnpikes, 1800

marketing functions and the ubiquitous agricultural component, the other towns had a broad but limited industrial base, with no concentration on a major industry or trade. Oundle had a 16th century glove-producing trade, which continued to 1777, but never provided the basis for development to compare with the 18th century specialisation at Kettering and Wellingborough. Northampton retained a broad and

substantial industrial and commercial base; the 1524 subsidy reveals the importance of the broadcloth and the leather trades, the last a specialisation that intensified by 1777, moving increasingly towards shoemaking. The service, distributive and food trades comprised 40% of the occupations of Northampton in 1524, showing the importance of marketing. The textile and leather trades represented

17% and 25% of all trades respectively. Farming comprised just 6% of the occupations.

By the later 17th century, Towcester and Daventry, sited on major routes, specialised on servicing major through traffic. Other towns, including Northampton, Wellingborough, Kettering and Brackley also had significant trade from important through routes, shown by the numbers of guest beds and stabling for horses in 1686. The scale of commerce at towns can be assessed from the number of alehouses and inns, which represent accommodation provision for visitors, though the impact of servicing through traffic needs allowing for.

Small towns were based around the marketplace, with rows of shops and stalls. There was development of permanent structures in the main towns with shops fronting market places, as well as a continuation of market place infilling. Apart from recent work in St Giles' Street, Northampton (Shaw 1997), no significant excavations have examined the development of Northampton or of any other town in post-medieval Northamptonshire.

Communications and the scale of transport activity on particular roads can be mapped from the records of alehouses (1630), guest beds and stabling (1686 and 1800). The last two are related to major roads recorded on the maps of Ogilby & Morden, and the later turnpikes (Fig 8.6).

There were substantial changes in the road network in the 18th century as a result of turnpiking which have distorted the early post-medieval road network. Mapping of the pre-turnpike road pattern is necessary to understand both urban development and the potential of through traffic for the support of service industries. The impact of the development of coaching in the later 17th and 18th century and its effect on towns such as Towcester and Daventry needs study.

The English Civil War has several sites of interest in the county (Foard 1994). Northampton, a major parliamentary garrison of national importance, was defended during 1642-1647. Major defensive works were made around the town and the castle and the south and west bridges were fortified. There is no earthwork survival of the town defences but they are well documented. Areas outside the walls near St Andrews and St Edmunds were cleared of houses. Reconstruction of the likely circuit of defences from documentary evidence has been completed and needs testing archaeologically. Earthworks at the castle site probably include some Civil War works.

Rockingham was an important parliamentary garrison 1643-1647. Buried archaeology is likely, and there are some documentary sources including a plan of the defences of the motte, but no detailed study has been made on the earthworks or the historical record. Towcester was a royalist garrison for the main army during October 1643 to January 1644. Refortification occurred mainly along the Roman defences with the castle-motte earthwork re-used as an artillery platform. Two sections made over the Civil War ditch revealed little archaeological evidence.

Grafton Regis was the site of a minor royalist garrison during October-December 1643, fortifying a country house. It has high potential for well preserved buried archaeology and the documentary record of the siege is good. Musket balls are scattered on the surrounding land, where there is absence of modern development and scope for analysis of details of the military engagement by metal detecting.

At Naseby a major battle of the highest national importance occurred (Fig 8.7). Extensive artefact scatters have been recovered. Burial sites are known and others are likely to exist, though none has had modern excavation. Extensive action and possible subsidiary skirmish sites have been located. Naseby can be used to study the nature of actual deployments relative to the ideal of the military manuals. It also represents one of the best testing-grounds for the development of the archaeological study of Civil War battles because of the excellent documentary and historical topographical record, and the lack of modern development. Evidence has been lost by uncontrolled metal-detecting for musket balls, and the site should be protected by scheduling.

INDUSTRY

Northampton had a significant production of leather and shoes in 15th and 16th centuries. Tanners were recorded at Rushden in 1462 for fouling the brook with lime and tanning bark. Higham Ferrers had an officer who checked leather quality by 1539 and thereafter until the 17th century. Butchers were to bring hides as well as meat to the market or meat could not be sold, showing that hides and leather were considered important (Hall and Harding 1985, 229-32). The leather trade comprised 25% of the occupations in Northampton in 1524 compared to 17% for the textile industry. Morton (1712, 23)



8.7 The Monument marking the Naseby Battlefield

noted that ‘mighty numbers’ [of shoes] had been sent to foreign plantations and to the army in Flanders.

Curriers and Whittawers cured skins to give a supple product suitable for glove production etc. Tanners supplied the shoemaking and other leather trades. In 1524 there were 15 tanners in Northampton and 5 curriers and whittawers. By 1777, all three were concentrated in urban centres.

It is not yet known how important the leather industry was at the beginning of the 16th century. Whether it already concentrated on shoes or if it was primarily urban based. The relationship between the development of shoe production and the production of leather from pastures in the county remains unknown and whether there was a significant shift from wool to leather.

A broadcloth industry was well established in

Northamptonshire in the Middle Ages. It required fulling of cloth followed by stretching or tentering. The location of the industry can be approximately identified from the distribution of fulling mills and of tentering areas, and suggests a concentration of the industry in the Nene Valley between Northampton and Fotheringhay. The distribution relates reflects the availability of water-power and continued until the mid 18th century but had ceased by 1777. The pattern is supported by the distribution of dyers, with dyeworks known at Brigstock before 1725, Wellingborough in 1767, and Northampton had seven dyers in 1524 and two in 1777. In 1524, the broadcloth industry in Northampton was second only to the leather industry. It appears to have been supplanted before 1777 by worsteds.

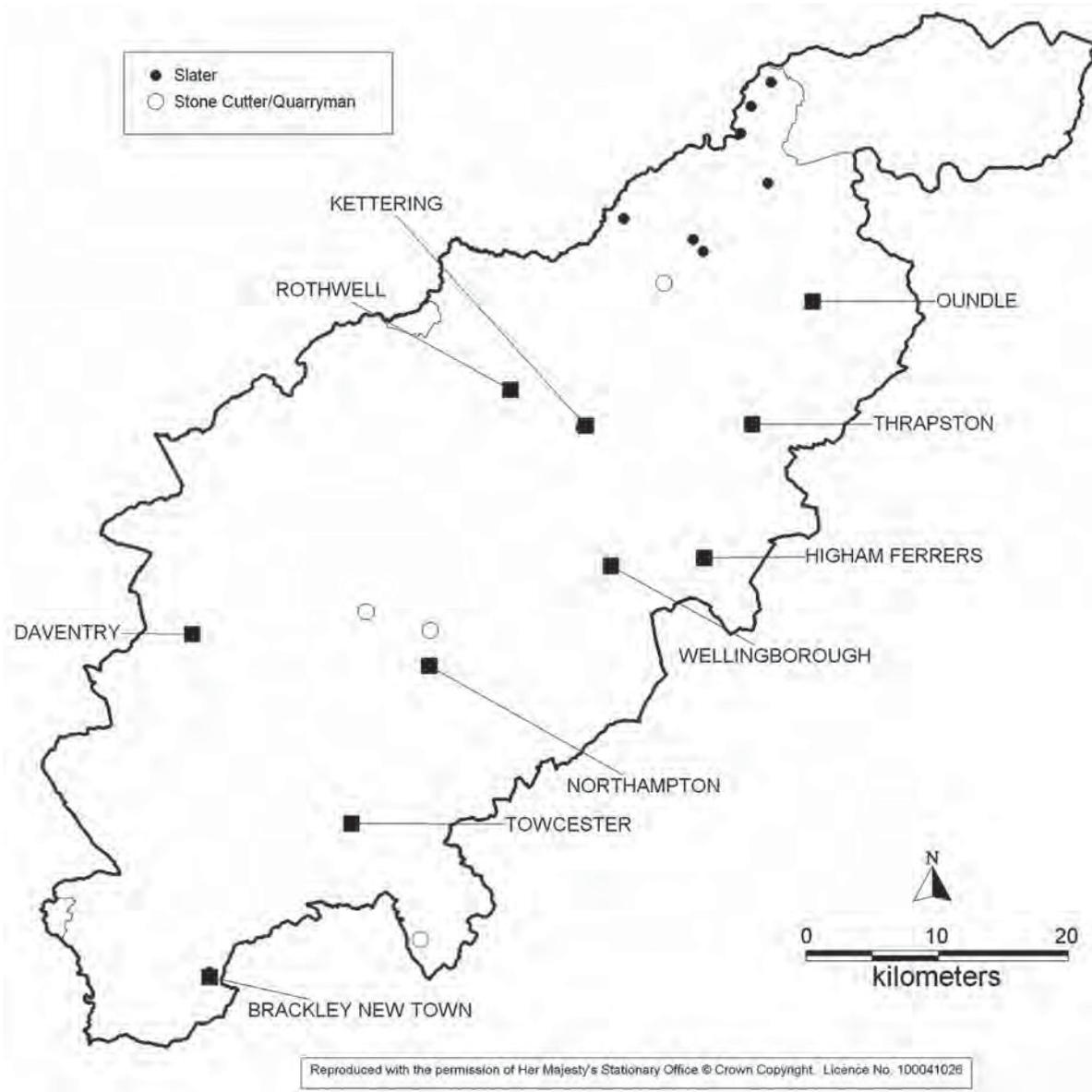
A worsted industry was introduced into Kettering



8.8 The Location of woolcombers and weavers, 1777

in the mid 17th century (Randall 1970, 1971). There were no woolcombers recorded in Northampton in 1524 even though it then had a significant textile industry, but by 1777 there were 19 woolcombers with 59 weavers. It comprised two main components: woolcombing, the processing of wool into yarn, and weaving to produce finished cloth. The process

did not require fulling and tenting. In 1777 the industry was concentrated in the north-west of the county, with much woolcombing at Long Buckby and nearby, and weaving being centred at Kettering. This suggests that the production of the wool was in the west of the county, where there was early enclosure, but it is not known what proportion of the



8.9 Slaters and quarries, 1777

wool was imported. It is possible that the worsted industry developed in the north west of the county where the broadcloth industry was not practicable because of lack of watermills for fulling.

Building materials used in the county were wood, stone, brick and cob. Wood was available in forests and the early enclosures. Northampton had many

wooden buildings before the fire of 1675, but they are now rare being mainly concentrated in north-western villages

The greater part of the county lies on a limestone belt. Good quality stone came from the well-known quarries at Easton on the Hill, Weldon and Harlestone. There were, however, local stone quarries in most

parts of the county except the north-west. Good quality stone was needed for jambs, quoins and dressings, but the famous quarries were by no means the only suppliers. King's Cliffe was used for Burghley in the 1580s (Till 1997). Parry (1987) has discussed Helmdon stone, and Hudson and Sutherland (1990) describe many Northamptonshire building stones.

In the 17th century, Raunds 'marble' was much esteemed (Morton 1712, 107), and quarries at Maidwell are described in 1806 referring to the quality of stone and lime produced from them (NRO IL 2892). One of the quarries, Dale stone pits, still visible on the ground, was called *standelvis* in 1316 (NRO FH 3021).

Slates likewise are sourced from many local quarries as well as the large and better known ones such as Collyweston (Figure 6). At Higham Ferrers a *slatt pit furlong* is recorded in 1567 and 1789; on the ground there is a depression in the field surface with small pieces of thin flatstone scattered about. Tiles from Newbottle and Charlton are frequently referred to in 15th-century manorial building-accounts at Preston Capes (NRO Knightley court rolls A iv, 8 & 24).

The distribution of stone slates on extant buildings reveals three regions. The main one is in the north-east of the county, centred on Collyweston and Easton on the Hill but there are other lesser foci picked out by the 1777 list. Two other regions seen in surviving buildings suggest minor slate production, at Northampton and at Brackley in 1777.

Collyweston and Easton on the Hill have quarry pits and associated working areas surviving as earthworks. The historical record of this subject has not been assessed, and work is needed to identify quarries and working areas in all the production centres. The draft enclosure maps of both places give detail of the small quarries. Some of the limestone quarried was burnt to prepare quicklime for mortar. Closely related were 'mortar-pits' used for poorer quality mortar. They were often located where a natural clay contained lime that conferred good binding properties.

Early brick buildings are rare because of the ready availability of stone. Another contributory reason was the shortage and expense of fuel needed to make bricks. Early brick was used for chimneys, hearths and in high status buildings like royal park lodges and episcopal palaces. The manor house at Edgcote had brick in the 15th century (imported

from Calais: Driver 1997, 320). At Easton Neston, in 1511, bricks used for chimneys were probably made on site. There was a brick making family called West in the Cleyley Hundred during the 17th century; they were possibly itinerant brickmakers, but their activities leave little trace on the ground or in documents. Fawsley dower house is made of early brick and Yardley Hastings rectory is a Queen Anne brick structure. Towcester had brick buildings in the 18th century, and there were kilns of the same date at Brigstock, and Boughton (Kettering), probably using fuel from the nearby forest. Brick-making did not occur on the large-scale until coal was available via canals.

Cob is a method of construction using solid earth walls lying on a low stone plinth, rendered to prevent weathering. The current distribution of cob buildings is very much at the north-west of the county where building stone is in short supply (Seaborne 1966). There may have been such buildings elsewhere, but they have long been replaced by stone or brick.

Ceramic production was not a very important activity countywide. There was production of coarsewares at Glapthorn into the 16th century (G. Johnson forthcoming) and potting continued at Potterspury into the 18th century, by that time only making coarseware that did not weather very well (Bridges 1791, i, 316). A kiln at Paulerspury yielded pottery dated to the 17th century (Hall 1974). It is not known when these wares were superseded by products from major centres such as Staffordshire.

BUILDINGS

Buildings demonstrate many aspects of the past. As well as their intended functional structures, they throw light on commercial and industrial activity, indicate the wealth of the builders, reveal building patterns of vernacular architecture, and the show the varied use of building materials.

The spatial organization of great houses and their relationship to the surrounding landscape needs study, such as the impact on the environment and the size of land-holdings. Economic and social aspects of running a large house are also of interest, since the staff often formed a community separate from nearby villages.

Research into the history of farming in the county as revealed through buildings is needed. The resource of surviving farm buildings and farm-houses is extensive, however, the current level of



8.10 19th century labourers cottages at Sywell

threat is high, since this category of building is probably being lost to demolition and conversion at a greater rate than any other type. Some villages have historical surveys made building-by-building, e.g. Mears Ashby (1577), places in the Kettering and Raunds areas (1730s) and much of the Grafton Regis Estate (1720s). Many historic farmhouses are listed, but the associated farm buildings tend not to be. They need recording and are currently even more threatened because of low farming returns. They have potential for understanding agrarian history, and the adaption of buildings to more mechanized farming during the late 18th and early 19th century.

Specialized building types associated with rural

trades and small traditional industries are of interest. These buildings are at high risk of loss and may contain much useful information. Some buildings can be identified because they were used for very specific purposes, e.g. granaries might have very hard, smooth lime-ash floors. Buildings belonging to butchers, blacksmiths etc, have received little attention. The large number of surviving buildings offers a high potential for further study and it is necessary to decide how to select suitable samples.

Rows of purpose-built labourers' cottages are mostly of country estate origin. A late 18th century example survives at Achurch. Many estate villages have a high proportion of labourers' cottages of 19th-

century date, e.g. at Strixton and Sywell. Squatters' cottages are referred to at Abthorpe and King's Cliffe in documentary records, but it is doubtful if any survive. Cattle End, Silverstone, seems to have been built as encroachment in a forest riding.

Only a few early shops survive; an 18th example in the Drapery, Northampton, is listed, and there was one until recently at Kings Sutton. A possible 15th shop occurs in Towcester, and Higham Ferrers offers potential because shop sites have not been cleared away for road widening. Inns measure the wealth of towns in terms of visiting commercial activity, and even where altered, outbuildings and stables can often be identified. The buildings of tradesmen such as butchers and bakers probably can be identified if not too much changed.

Medieval churches are well recorded in terms of architectural history and their archaeology is con-

trolled via the faculty system for any structural alterations. However, details of the fabric of churches are not satisfactorily recorded. No system of recording Nonconformist buildings exists and there is currently a problem with redundant chapel conversions, some of which have buildings dating before 1750.

There are a very few pre-1750 industrial buildings, such as the pin factory at Long Buckby. This was a small scale activity that used an existing barn. Likewise whip-making at Daventry and the workshops of the woollen industry in the north-west are unlikely to have had many purpose-built structures.

Buildings hold information about economy and industry and about social matters. It is essential to decide what to record, and to engage planning consents to determine research objectives. Research based on the analysis of buildings can confirm from the physical evidence what relates to data



8.11 An early nonconformist chapel at Creton. The earliest chapel on the site dated from 1694 while the core of the current building was constructed in 1793.

from written sources. It can also extend the depth and scope of understanding suggested by historical documents. For some buildings, where no written records survive, the physical information is the only data source

Buildings fall naturally into two groups, those dated and those undated. Many listed buildings are dated (usually qualitatively) in their description to within 25 years or so. From these examples it is possible to attribute dates to unlisted buildings on stylistic and contextual grounds. Although for most management purposes this is adequate, for

research it is necessary to have accurate dating. This can sometimes be provided from documents. Dendrochronology has not yet been much utilized in Northamptonshire; it is more difficult to apply in this county than other regions. A sample needs 80-100 rings because timber that grew on claylands has less annual ring variation than material from elsewhere, so necessitating the development of local sequences. Funding needs acquiring for this work, as it is now a major research tool. A sampling policy also needs establishing to create the local dating sequence.