

## THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE CHOROGRAPHIES OF NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK

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In 1938 Mrs. Christobel Hood published from a copy in her possession an edition of *An Historicall and Chorographically Description of Norfolk*,<sup>1</sup> a hitherto unpublished manuscript of the first decade of the seventeenth century. In her Introduction to the *Chorography*, as the great Norfolk antiquary Francis Blomefield had termed it, she presented her reasons for ascribing this anonymous manuscript to the distinguished late Elizabethan surveyor and author of *Speculum Britanniae*, John Norden the elder. On the front fly-leaf of the original manuscript of the Norfolk Chorography, now in the Bodleian Library, the eighteenth-century antiquary Tom Martin of Palgrave noted that 'there was another of the same hand and size with this, relating to the county of Suffolk, which the late Peter Le Neve Esqr. took to pieces and plac'd each town alphabetically amongst his collections for the county.'<sup>2</sup> Several hundred fragments and transcripts of this companion Suffolk volume have now been traced in six different English manuscript collections and reconstructed for publication, forming about 90% of the original text.<sup>3</sup>

In view of this mass of extra material from the Chorographer's hand it is appropriate to reconsider Mrs. Hood's suggestion that the Chorographies were written by Norden. Current trends in historical studies have also encouraged us to re-examine the question of authorship. Since Mrs. Hood published her edition of the Norfolk Chorography there has been a great deal of interest in the antiquarian movement of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as well as in the cultural pursuits of the gentry within their county communities. In these circumstances it is important to establish whether the author of the Chorographies was a local man and from what social *milieu* he emanated. This article, then, seeks to reopen the question of the Chorographer's identity and to offer some new suggestions as to authorship.

Whoever the Chorographer was, he was among the earliest historians of East Anglia, since his compilations can be dated to between 1600 and 1605. In the text specific dates for various entries range from 1600<sup>4</sup> to 1604,<sup>5</sup> while numerous references culled apparently from the 1600 edition of Camden's *Britannia* are among the first material to have been transcribed into his manuscript notebook.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the Suffolk Chorography has several references to Sir Anthony Wingfield of Letheringham as a living person; his will was proved in February 1606.<sup>7</sup> The Chorographies can therefore lay good claim to be the first surviving attempt at a full-scale topographical survey of the two counties in the manner pioneered by William Lambarde in *The Perambulation of Kent* thirty years earlier. In Norfolk there is no extant survey earlier than the Chorography; in Suffolk, the unfinished county survey attempted by Robert Ryece is thought to have been begun about 1602, but its surviving copies were not given their final form until 1618-19 and 1622-29.<sup>8</sup>

In view of the Chorographies' early date, it is all the more unfortunate that their compiler was so reticent about his identity. Neither the Bodleian manuscript, Mrs. Hood's copy of it, nor any of the Suffolk fragments bear any direct clue as to their authorship, apart from a somewhat unsatisfactory statement by Tom Martin which is also part of his note on the fly-leaf of the Bodleian manu-

script: 'The late Reverend Dr. Tanner, Chancellor of Norwich and afterwards Bishop of St. Asaph, said that this book was the handwriting of Thomas Beckham, D D., Rector of [blank] . . . see the beginning of the Suffolk book for a fuller account of the author.

'The beginning of the Suffolk book' has recently been discovered in the Bury St. Edmunds Record Office, but, alas, it gives no account at all of the author! Even so, Peter Le Neve, who owned both the Norfolk and Suffolk Chorographies and who was sufficiently interested in them to dismember the Suffolk volume in order to fit its contents into his vandalistic filing system, shared Bishop Tanner's opinion as to their authorship. He wrote a note in the Somerleyton section of the Suffolk Chorography, where the compiler had mentioned 'Mr. [John] Quaynt-forthe' saying that this Wentworth was no 'relative to the old family but of a different name as it should seem by *this auter Dr. Beckham who lived at this time.*'<sup>9</sup> Le Neve, like Martin, seems to have had some reservations about this attribution to Beckham since he did not communicate it to his amanuensis, Thomas Allen, who in the course of filing by parish the contents of the Suffolk volume habitually referred to it as the work of Robert Ryece (author of the *Breviary of Suffolk* mentioned above), or simply as 'MS. 1602' — the date traditionally assigned to Ryece's work.<sup>10</sup>

Mrs. Hood searched in vain to find a Thomas Beckham whose qualifications, age and background fitted him for the authorship of the Chorographies. She noted Dr. Edward Beckham of King's College, Cambridge, who held the livings of Gayton Thorpe and South Pickenham in Norfolk; but since he died, aged 76, in 1714, he could scarcely have been the author of a manuscript which was completed in the early seventeenth century.<sup>11</sup> She might also have discovered that the Beckhams were an established family of minor gentry in late sixteenth-century Norfolk and that their two extant pedigrees show two Thomas's of the right date. One has Thomas Beckham of Fakenham, son of Robert of Creake; the other concentrates on the Narford branch of the family and has Thomas, second son of Walter of Knapton, son of Robert of West Acre.<sup>12</sup> Neither Thomas, however, appears to have taken orders; nor does their home country — west Norfolk — receive much prominence among the areas which the Chorographer described with first-hand detail.

Mrs. Hood was right to reject Dr. Edward Beckham as the compiler of the original manuscript, but she also rejected him as the copyist of the manuscript she was editing because, erroneously, she dated her copy to c.1617. In fact its style of handwriting leaves no doubt that this copy was made in the late seventeenth or even early eighteenth century. Once this point is established Dr. Edward Beckham re-emerges as a possible copyist of the original manuscript. Indeed, he becomes a strong candidate since he had also transcribed a 'Valor Ecclesiasticus for Norfolk & Suffolk with patrons & incumbents in 1672' from 'Mr. Hilary Bayley's [book]'.<sup>13</sup> We should not, perhaps, worry too much that a verbal tradition ascribed the authorship to Thomas rather than Edward Beckham. The more serious problem is to explain how both Le Neve and Martin could confuse a late-seventeenth-century transcriber with the late-sixteenth-century compiler.

An explanation is not difficult once the provenance of the original Chorographies is established. During the seventeenth century they passed into the library of that great scholar-doctor and author of *Religio Medici*, Sir Thomas

Browne of Norwich. They appear in his library catalogue as

No. 20 – An Historical & Chorographical Description of Suffolk.

No. 27 – An Historical & Chorographical Description of Norfolk.<sup>14</sup>

Browne provides no attribution of authorship in his catalogue, although he did so for other manuscripts in his collection whenever possible. When he died in 1682 the Chorographies, together with other manuscripts, passed to his son Sir Edward Browne M.D., who lived in London. They were stated to be in the latter's possession by Edward Bernard in his *Catalogi Librorum Manuscriptorum Angliae et Hiberniae* which was published in 1697. Their titles had changed a little, but not sufficiently to raise doubts that we are still on the track of the Chorographies:

4186.6. An Historical and *Geographical* description of Norfolk.

4187.7. An Historical and *Geographical* description of Suffolk.<sup>15</sup>

It is therefore reasonable to assume that the original texts of the Chorographies remained in the Browne family until Edward died in 1708, that from at least 1682 they were in London, and that they were known to antiquaries after 1697, if not earlier.

In these circumstances it would not be surprising if Dr. Edward Beckham, already a transcriber of ecclesiastical if not antiquarian data, had obtained permission to transcribe the Chorographies in order to make them available within the diocese. His transcript of the Norfolk Chorography survived to be edited by Mrs. Hood; that of the Suffolk volume still remains to be discovered; when it is, we may well obtain that 'fuller account of the author' which Martin claimed to be at 'the beginning of the Suffolk book'. It looks as if Beckham's copies had been made by 1696, since in that year Le Neve made an abstract of the information in the Halesworth entry of the Suffolk Chorography.<sup>16</sup> Once Beckham had made his transcripts it was perhaps understandable that the hitherto anonymous Chorographies should have become attached to the name of the transcriber. It would therefore have been 'Beckham's Chorographies' that Tanner saw while he was Chancellor of Norwich from 1701-13. The originals did not re-appear in the county until Le Neve acquired them, probably some time after the death of Edward Browne in 1708. He certainly possessed them by 1720 and shortly afterwards commenced his dismemberment of the Suffolk volume. If this be a correct reconstruction of the provenance of the original manuscripts and how they came to be copied, it is difficult to explain how Le Neve attributed authorship of the original manuscripts to Edward Beckham whom he must have known as the late-seventeenth-century copyist. All that can be said by way of explanation is that Beckham had died in 1714 and his copy had probably vanished before Le Neve gained possession of the originals. That Tom Martin should have made a similar mistake is more easily explained. He lived a generation later and apparently did not make his note ascribing authorship to Thomas Beckham until both Tanner and Le Neve were dead.<sup>17</sup> He would therefore be recollecting that he had heard Tanner speak of 'Beckham's Chorographies' without necessarily knowing that copies had ever been made.

Since the handwriting of Dr. Edward Beckham closely resembles that in Mrs. Hood's copy of the Norfolk Chorography, it seems reasonable to remove Thomas/Edward Beckham from our list of possible authors by reinstating him as the copyist who produced Mrs. Hood's text.<sup>18</sup> This at least clears the decks for the search for a compiler of the original Chorographies.

Mrs. Hood was right, albeit for the wrong reasons, in looking elsewhere for a more convincing Chorographer. She went to considerable lengths to give the credit to John Norden the elder, and her case was superficially a most attractive one, although it was based solely on stylistic comparison with Norden's known topographical work in the published and unpublished sections of his great unfinished survey of Britain, *Speculum Britanniae*. The comparison is indeed very close. Even the title – *An Historicall and Chorographicall Description of Norfolk* – echoes the title of the first part of *Speculum Britanniae*, *An Historicall and Chorographicall Description of Middlesex*, published in 1593, and the scheme of the East Anglian Chorographies is clearly based on Norden's work.<sup>19</sup>

The Chorographies open with a general Introduction whose content is remarkably similar to that of Norden's Introductions, including descriptions of the boundaries, the rivers, the nature of the soil, and lists of Hundreds. The main texts, like Norden's, are alphabetical gazetteers, in which the Chorographer left a blank page or half-page for every parish in Norfolk and Suffolk, and added information as he got it, partly as a result of personal observations, partly using documents and printed works. He followed Norden's convention in heading each place described with an alphabetical symbol for the Hundred and a number symbol for the rural deanery in which it stood, although he added a symbol for the appropriate archdeaconry as well. Norden at his most detailed has much the same interests as the East Anglian Chorographer; his style is similar, particularly in his descriptions of church monuments, although none of his known works have the threefold division into *spiritualia* (description of tithe customs, glebe-land etc.) *temporalia* (description of manors, leets, tenurial customs etc.), and church notes, which is characteristic of the East Anglian Chorographer's firsthand observations on parishes.

It is very tempting to fit the East Anglian Chorographies into the sequence of Norden's known works: Middlesex, published in 1593, the Home Counties and Channel Islands, ready in manuscript in 1595, Hertfordshire, published in 1597, and after a long gap, the publication of Cornwall and Northamptonshire in 1610. The dates established for the Norfolk and Suffolk Chorographies, 1600-05, lend particular attraction to this hypothesis because we know that Norden was working in East Anglia during 1600 and 1601, making an elaborate survey of Sir Michael Stanhope's estates around Orford,<sup>20</sup> and the area around Orford is quite thoroughly covered in the Suffolk Chorography. One could also link the abandoning of work on the Suffolk and Norfolk notebooks about 1605 with Norden's grant on 30 January 1605 of the Surveyorship of the Duchy of Cornwall,<sup>21</sup> and the consequent shift of his interests to Cornish antiquities which produced his greatest work, *A Topographicall and Historicall Description of Cornwall*.

However, the hand of the Chorographer of Norfolk and Suffolk as evidenced by the two original manuscripts is not the same as John Norden's, as comparison with the numerous attested examples of Norden's hand will show.<sup>22</sup> Mrs. Hood's elaborate exposition of the principles of seventeenth-century calligraphy in her Introduction betrayed a rather superficial grasp of early-modern palaeography, and it was this weakness that led her to ignore this obvious objection to a Norden attribution. Nor is it possible to get round the difficulty by suggesting that the early seventeenth century manuscripts of the Chorographies were copies of Norden's original made by someone else. The entries in both volumes were made piecemeal over a period of time, as is shown by different shades of ink which appear in single entries and in the personally observed entries which are of

various dates up to 1604. Clearly both manuscript volumes were working notebooks, not the work of a copyist, despite the neatness with which they were written. There is no reason why the Chorographer should not have realised the obvious utility of Norden's scheme of description as demonstrated in his published works and directly copied it; we know that he had access to the latest antiquarian work in print from his use of the 1600 edition of Camden and from his reference under Blythburgh in Suffolk to Hieronymus Henninges' *Theatrum Genealogicum*, a book published at Magdeburg in 1598.<sup>23</sup>

With a certain amount of wishful thinking Mrs. Hood dated her own copy of the Norfolk Chorography 'with certainty . . . to approximately the same date' as a Norden manuscript of 1617 in the British Museum, and was therefore enabled to suggest that it 'would seem to be very possibly a transcript by . . . John Norden the younger' of his father's work. However, this suggestion is impossible; the character of the hand in Mrs. Hood's manuscript is in fact of c.1700 and therefore far too late for a surveyor who was already working with the elder John Norden in 1617.

If, as appears certain, John Norden the elder did not compile these Chorographies, who did? Their hand, apart from not being that of Norden, has so far defied identification; it is a rather ordinary secretary hand of c.1600, although the italic that the Chorographer habitually used for writing proper names and transcribing inscriptions has a more individual character. Comparison with attested examples of the hands of other antiquaries will eliminate such unlikely candidates as William Hervey, Clarenceux King of Arms and the author of Suffolk's earliest extant church notes,<sup>24</sup> John Barkham, D.D., Nicholas Charles, Dr. John Dee, William Dethick, Sir Simonds D'Ewes, John Doddridge, Sir John Hayward, William Lisle, Sir Henry Savile, John Selden, John Speed, Richard Verstegan,<sup>25</sup> Richard Carew, William Lambarde, and Sir Henry Spelman.<sup>26</sup> Other sources bar Richard St. George, the Cambridgeshire antiquary John Layer,<sup>27</sup> the Norfolk-based Anthony Harison,<sup>28</sup> and Robert Ryece<sup>29</sup> the Chorographer gave only a cursory mention of Ryece as patron at Preston in Suffolk,<sup>30</sup> which seems to indicate that he was not even aware of Ryece's antiquarian interests. Neither do there appear to be any references to the existence of the Chorographies in the correspondence of these antiquaries.

Without any other direct evidence it is advisable to turn back to the content of the Chorographies themselves as a basis for some picture of their elusive compiler. Analysis of their structure suggests that he lived in Norfolk or Suffolk since he presents a worm's-eye rather than a bird's-eye view of these counties. Instead of describing them in their entirety, he depicts their wood-pasture regions to the total exclusion of their sheep-corn districts. This bias is so evident that it is difficult to escape the conclusion that he moved exclusively within a wood-pasture society.

The point is best exemplified from his activities in Norfolk, where the wood-pasture and sheep-corn regions are more evenly balanced and can be more accurately plotted than in Suffolk (see Fig. 1). As already mentioned his entries are of two types: those which he culled from printed and manuscript sources, and those derived from first-hand knowledge and observation 'in the field'. All the parishes for which he appears to have had first-hand information have been plotted on Fig. 2, differentiating as far as is possible, between those parishes which he personally visited and those for which he may have received information from other people. A comparison of Figs. 1 and 2 reveals the extent to

which he concentrated his own fieldwork within the wood-pasture region. Even when the parishes which may have been recorded by others are taken into consideration the pattern remains unchanged. Our Chorographer virtually ignores the light-soil areas of Norfolk. The same is true of Suffolk, where he records few direct observations from parishes in the 'Sandlings' and 'Breckland' regions.

His wood-pasture bias also appears to have influenced his data-collecting from printed and manuscript sources. Here, at least, he might have been expected to take an overall county view since he was merely copying information, largely from administrative records. In fact, however, he omitted to transcribe information for a large number of west Norfolk parishes, with the result that he describes nearly three times as many parishes from the eastern half of the county as he does from the western.<sup>3 1</sup> This discrepancy owes something to the fact that parishes in south-eastern Norfolk are considerably smaller than those in the western parts, but, even if allowance is made for this, the ratio of eastern to western parishes recorded in the Norfolk Chorography would still be in the order of five to two.

This regional bias is also apparent in the short descriptive passages with which the author prefaces both his Chorographies. Suffolk receives the fullest treatment:

The nature of the soyle . . . is divers as my selfe can testifye havinge travayled in most parts of the same. That part of it which is called the *Woodlande* and *high Suffolck* is exceeding fruitfull, comparable to any part of Englande for pasture for oxen and kine, not so good for sheepe. In this part of the contrye are made butter and cheese in exceeding great quantitie of wonderfull goodnes comparable to any in the Realme. The commoditie therof is unspeakable unto the inhabitants of the same amongst which are very many yeomen of good credit and great liberalitie, good housekeepers. But the wayes and common roades in this contrye are verye fowle and uncomfortable in the winter tyme to travayle in. The other parts westerlye of the contrye are very fruitfull also, but the *Woodland* carryeth the chiefe credit for goodness of grounde. That part of the contrye that is nere unto the sea is nothing so fruitfull neyther so commodious for cattell as the other, but more fitte for sheepe & corne. The soyle also about Burye to Newmarket warde, Mildenhall, Elden, Barton etc. is mostly heathye and barren, fit only for sheepe and conyes although in some places of the same there be some spots of good and fertile ground as their botomes and meadowes.<sup>3 2</sup>

Clearly, as our Chorographer claims, he knows his Suffolk; but his graphic and intimate description of the 'Woodlande and high Suffolck' region contrasts markedly with his rather dismissive remarks about the Sandlings and Brecklands. It would, however, be wrong to make too much of this difference in emphasis since it reflects fairly accurately the merits of the respective regions. The central wood-pasture area undoubtedly did dominate the economy of Suffolk.

The introduction to the Norfolk volume displays a similar bias towards the wood-pasture region, albeit with less justification in terms of its economic importance in relation to that of the sheep-corn region:

It is a populous and fruitful country. . . . Corn it beareth very good and in great plenty in most parts of the Shire. Some part of the ground in it is wonderful fat, and comparable for goodnes with the *Woodland* in Suffolk,

so much renowned for the fertility thereof. As about Pulham, Wanton [Wacton], Tybenham, Buckenham, Attleburgh, Shipdam, Dereham etc. The chiefest Corn-country in all the Shire is Flegg Hundred and the Country adjacent Fakenham, Walsingham and Swaffham next unto it.<sup>33</sup>

The cryptic comments upon the corn-growing areas, which accounted for two-thirds of the county and produced most of its wealth, are similar to those in Camden's *Britannia*. Camden, on the other hand, makes no reference to a Woodland area, let alone to one 'comparable for goodness with the Woodland in Suffolk.'<sup>34</sup> This passage, coupled with the manner in which the Chorographer names those parishes which effectively defined the western and northern limits of the wood-pasture region, reveals a grasp of detail which must surely derive from the author's experience, and suggests that he wished to encourage the Woodland farmers to shun their fellows in the north and west of the county and look southward to a kindred society and economy in central Suffolk.

Such an attitude would have merely reflected a well-attested clash of economic and administrative interests between the landowners of the corn-growing regions and those of the dairying regions of Norfolk and Suffolk in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The former prospered by exporting their grain, much of it across the North Sea; the latter, by maximising their production of dairy produce for the London and Norwich markets and relying upon government embargoes on corn exports to secure adequate corn supplies in times of dearth. The issue was starkly presented by the corn growers in the 1630s:

The Woodland and pasture part [of Norfolk] is sustayned cheefelye by graseinge, by Dayries and rearinge of cattell . . . . The Champion part is of another nature, consistinge wholly in effect of Corne & sheepe . . . . To constrayne the Tilthmen of the Champion to carrye their Corne to the Marketts of the Woodland parts were verye greivous.

Nor, as they contended, was it necessary, since the Hundreds of Flegg, 'seated betwixt Yarmouth and Norwich', provided 'very greate supply' for the markets of both Norwich and the 'Woodland parts'.<sup>35</sup> In making this point they were underlining the fact that the economic links of the Broadland region — an area well recorded by our Chorographer — lay within the wood-pasture orbit.

A similar clash of interests between the landowners of south Norfolk and those in the northern and western parts appeared when the county was asked to compound for purveyance in 1593. Magistrates representing each of these regions reacted so differently to the Council's proposals that the wood-pasture regions proceeded to compound for the provision of 'oxen muttons and styrke' while the corn-growing regions refused to compound for the supply of corn and poultry. These interest groups had also clashed in the late 1580s when some magistrates in south Norfolk and north Suffolk attempted, under royal patent, to levy a county-wide rate in order to repair those 'very fowle and uncomfortable' roads mentioned by the Chorographer. On this occasion the gentry from the light-soil regions led widespread opposition to this levy on the grounds that 'they should receive little or noe profit by the makinge of the saide highe waye'.<sup>36</sup>

If the Chorographer's selection of parishes and his biased descriptive Introductions suggest that he was a wood-pasture resident, analysis of his recording itineraries may yield clues as to where he lived within this extensive region. His systematic nature serves us well, since at the outset he laid out a notebook for each county, entering each parish alphabetically and usually allowing a half page

for recording its data. Subsequently his on-the-spot recording often outgrew its allotted space and overflowed into an appendix which developed sequentially rather than alphabetically, thereby revealing the order in which he visited these parishes. This order, when plotted (Fig. 2), provides some valuable clues as to the circumstances under which he compiled his notebooks.

He appears to have collected information on some parishes in the course of journeys from Norwich or a parish a little to its south. One or more such journeys to Cambridge, via Lopham (where he could have forded the Waveney), Bury St. Edmunds and Newmarket, would have enabled him to record the west Suffolk parishes of Barrow (25), Kentford (26), Great Livermere (27), and Ixworth (28). Two journeys into the Midlands, one via Dereham, Litcham and Wisbech, the other via Dereham, Swaffham and Downham Market, could account for most of his minimal recording in west Norfolk – that for Narborough (2), Gressenhall (51) and Outwell. A return journey from Ipswich, via Woodbridge, Halesworth and Bungay, may have provided the occasion for his recording the east Suffolk parishes of Woodbridge (29), Letheringham (30), Pettistree (31), Framlingham (32), and Wissett (33).

Structural analysis also suggests that the Chorographer sometimes arranged to visit a district with the specific intention of recording a group of parishes – or so it would seem from his sequential recording of Mendlesham (3), Thorndon (4), Gislingham (5), Bacton (6), and Cotton (7) in north Suffolk. An expedition to the area north-west of Yarmouth would account for a similar pattern of recording for the parishes of Acle (18), Ashby-with-Oby (19), Winterton (20), Hemsby-on-sea (21), Ormesby St. Margaret (22), Caister (23), Mautby (24), Burgh St. Margaret (25), and Rollesby (26). Another piece of planned fieldwork, this time in north-east Suffolk, may be posited from the sequential recording of Westhall (11), Brampton (12), Shadingfield (13), Sotterley (14) and Ellough (15).

Examination of the numbered parishes in Fig. 2 reveals, however, that by no means all the Chorographer's first-hand recording can be accounted for by positing either planned field-work or occasional visits undertaken in the course of business. A particularly recalcitrant group of twenty five parishes situated around and to the south of Norwich has been defined by the circle drawn on Fig. 2. These parishes fall into neither sequential groups nor routes, but rather display a randomness which suggests that they have all been recorded at different times – a pattern of recording which would be most likely to pertain for the parishes nearest to the Chorographer's home. Since the groups of parishes recorded sequentially all lie outside the circle on Fig. 2, it is reasonable to surmise that they are some distance from the Chorographer's residence, requiring a deliberate expedition, possibly lasting a day or two, while those furthest away were most conveniently visited in the course of other business. All in all this analysis of the Chorographies' structure suggests that the compiler lived to the south of Norwich, possibly towards the centre of the circle on Fig. 2.

Evidence to support this surmise appears in the introductory section of the Norfolk Chorography where the compiler rather tediously depicts the course of each river by listing the towns and villages through which it passes.<sup>37</sup> 'The Braden' he writes, 'rises at West Bradenham and goeth by Necton, the Pickenhams, Kissingham [Great Cressingham], Bedney [Bodney], Langforth [Langford] . . . Stoke (where there is a bridge) . . . and so into the Greater Ouse.' These passages, even to the spelling of the place-names and the omission of the river Stiffkey, are derived from Saxton's map of Norfolk. The Chorographer does, however, take



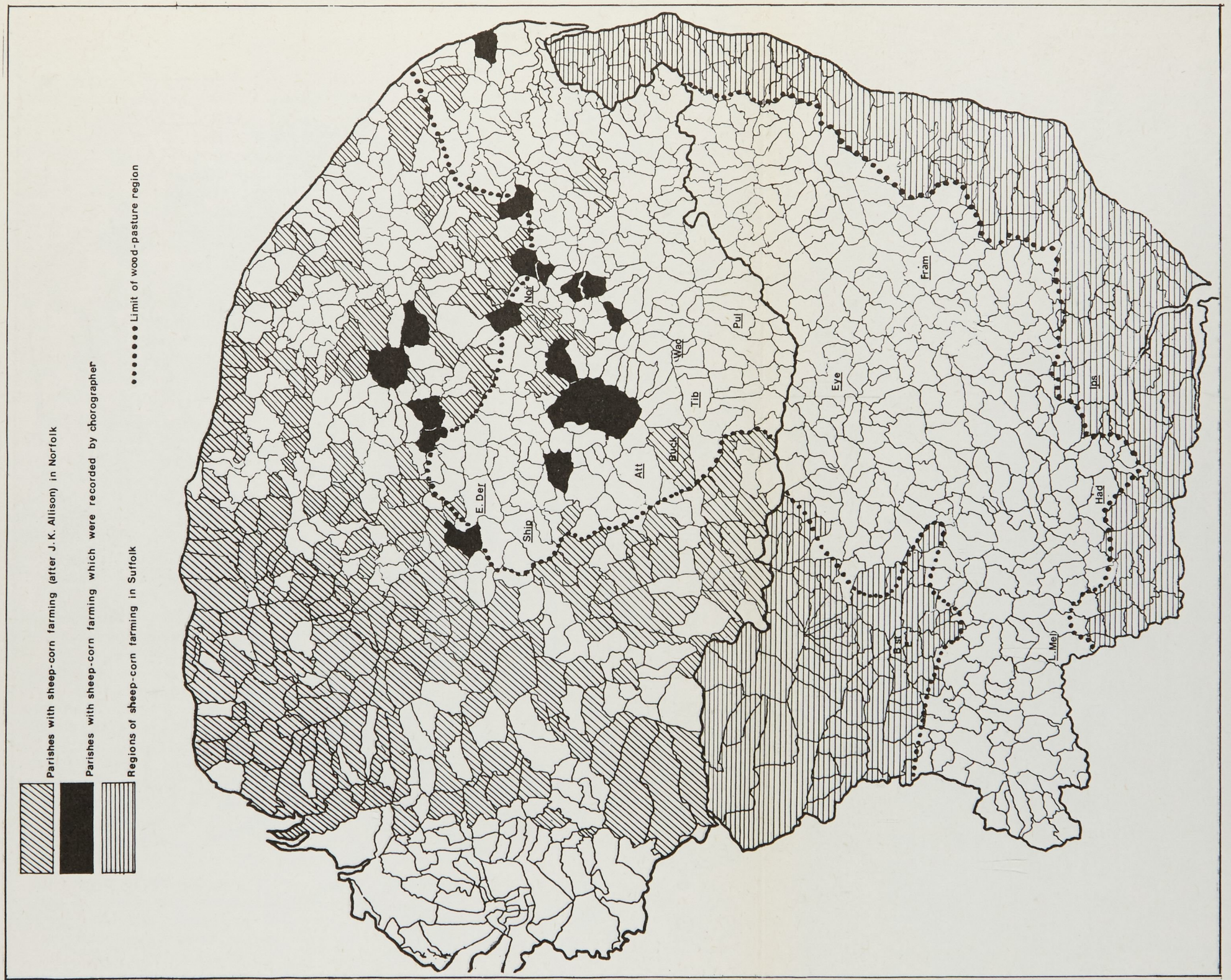


Fig. 1  
The sheep-corn and wood-pasture farming regions in Norfolk and Suffolk

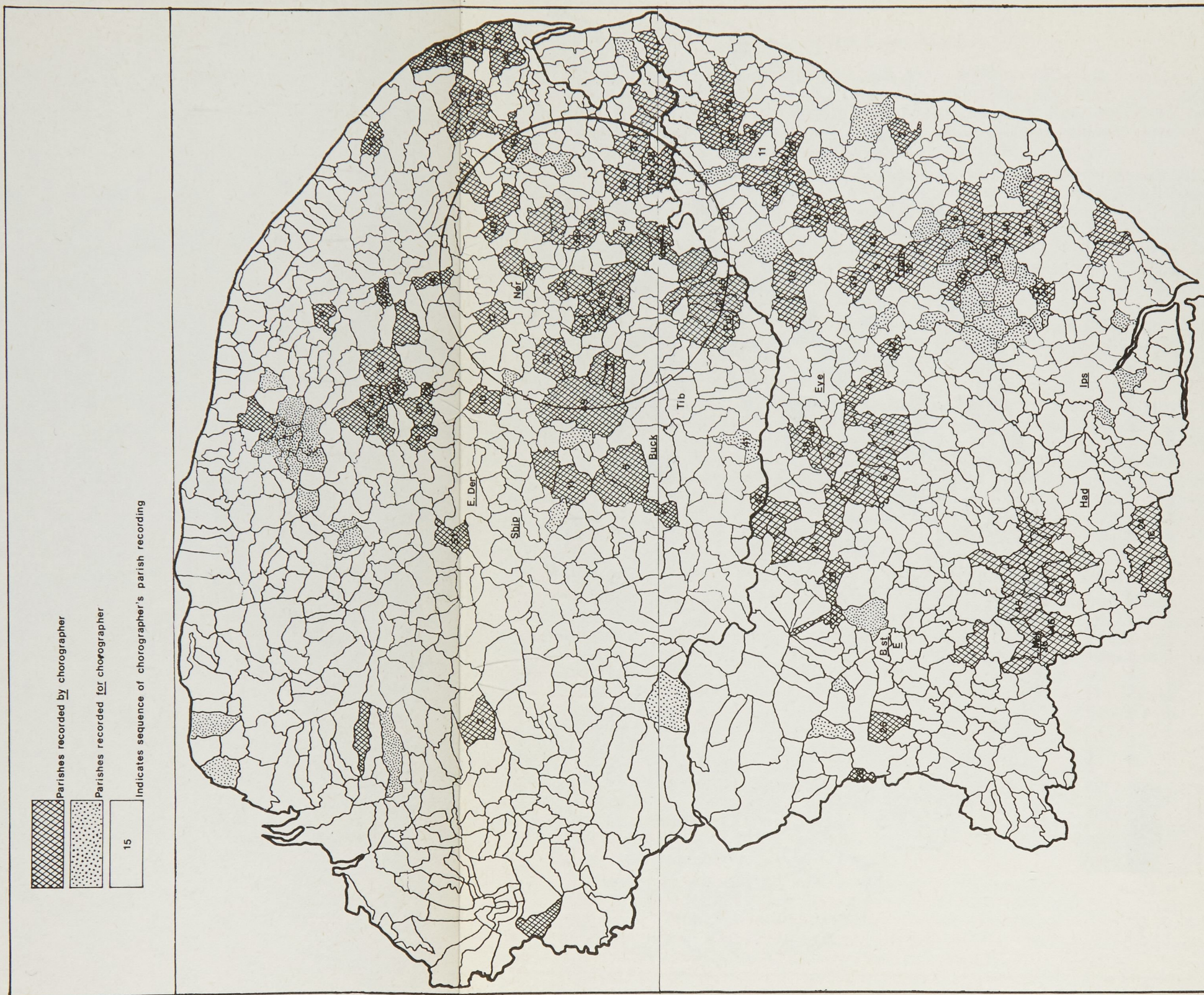


Fig. 2  
Parishes for which the Chorographer recorded information derived from direct observation

some liberties. For instance, he omits any description of the course of the Great Ouse and its Marshland tributaries. Of more significance for our present argument, he supplies information – particularly about river crossings – when describing the rivers to the south and east of Norwich. Thus he notes bridges at Harford, Barford, Earlham, Itteringham, Coltishall and Acle which were omitted in Saxton's map. He comments upon other bridges in the manner of a traveller who has known them in all weathers. Acle has 'a fair bridge', Bungay 'a stone bridge', Beccles 'a fair stone bridge', St. Olaves 'a new stone bridge', while at Harleston there is 'a bridge called Shotford bridge'. His description of other river features in south-east Norfolk suggests the familiarity of a native. In a rather muddled sentence he tells us that 'Buckenham (where is a Ferrye) [is] called by the name of Buckenham Ferry when more probably it ought to be called Carlton Ferry, for the ferry house standeth in Carlton and not in Buckenham.' Yardley, he maintains, 'is commonly called Hardley . . . [and] by the river standeth a Cross called Hadley Cross which parteth the liberties in the river between Norwich and Yarmouth'. At Reedham he notes that there is 'a Ferry called commonly Redham Kaye', while Ellingham is 'where the Stadth is where all the wood is laden that is carried out of the Woodland to Yarmouth'.

The foregoing analysis suggests that the Chorographer was an East Anglian rather than a 'foreigner' like Norden, and that he probably lived in the wood-pasture region to the south of Norwich. On the other hand he had strong interests which drew him into Suffolk, where, as he put it, he had 'travayled in most parts of the same'. There is some evidence to suggest that he may have been a Suffolk man domiciled to the north of the Waveney: he laid out the Suffolk volume prior to that for Norfolk; proportionally he made slightly more and fuller entries based on direct observation for Suffolk than for Norfolk, and his introduction to the Suffolk volume is more detailed and graphic than that for Norfolk.

Analysis of the composition of these Chorographies tells us nothing about their compiler's social or occupational *milieu*. To ascertain his views, beliefs and social background it is necessary to examine the content of the Chorographies. He was evidently a sympathiser with the 'Commonwealth' notions which had gained a fashionable currency during the reign of Edward VI and which were to survive into the more radical atmosphere of the Interregnum. In his preliminary notes on Ranworth in Norfolk he notes of Mr. Henry Holdich that his 'worthy father was a great protectour and defender of the commons in the contry about him against those Lords whose consciences are as large as any common whatsoever.'<sup>38</sup> Again, when retailing Camden's story of the miraculous growth of peas on the shore at Aldeburgh during the 1555 famine, he adds that while a rational explanation of the occurrence is likely 'yet in it are we to consider the great goodnes of God who in that scarcitie in this mannour provided for the poore, on whome hardhearted Richmen could not fynde in their hearts of their abundance to bestow some small portion.'<sup>39</sup>

Like most of his literary contemporaries, the Chorographer was not averse to spicing his work with occasional pious remarks, as the last quotation illustrates. However, he also betrays a sympathy with the difficult economic situation of the lower clergy which was far less usual. Under Stoke by Nayland in Suffolk, he fulminates against the 'irreligious and unconscionable composition betwene the Bishop, patron and incumbent' which deprived the vicar of his fine house; under Brent Eleigh he sarcastically notes 'ther ought to be 10 or 12 acres and a pension of 8 marc. per annum paid to the Vicar but if the Vicar can keep himself

honest they that detain those gleabes and marks from him will take order he shall be an honest poor vicar.<sup>40</sup> The patron of Brent Eleigh, who was probably the culprit, happened to be an absentee Catholic recusant,<sup>41</sup> but even godly Protestant gentlemen were not exempt from the Chorographer's critical scrutiny if they were usurping church revenues; under Cookley in Suffolk, he tells us that 'Mr. Attorney Generall Sir Edward Cooke detaynes 2 acres worth 40s yearly and others in the towne other parts of the gleabe.'<sup>42</sup>

The Chorographer therefore reveals a certain clericalism, which is underlined by the clerical bias of the documentary material that he uses in his text. He seems to have had access to diocesan records kept in Norwich, for one of the most important of these documentary sources was the early fourteenth-century diocesan survey of parishes which was already known as 'Domsday Book' when he was writing. This book, which lists each benefice with its patron, its estimated value in marks, and the amount of its procurations and synodals, is still preserved among Norwich Cathedral archives in a copy probably written by the Cathedral sacrist Richard Middleton between 1420 and 1440, although the content is of c.1300. The Chorographer may have been working from a different copy now lost, for although his Domesday text is usually more abbreviated than the Middleton copy, it contains one or two extra pieces of information.<sup>43</sup> However, he was certainly using diocesan, or more specifically, episcopal records, when he quoted from fifteenth-century surveys of episcopal manors in Suffolk, from the Bishop's Registers and from the Diocesan Institution Books; he also used some of the medieval wills proved in the Consistory Court of Norwich. Apart from this, his main documentary sources were a copy of the Royal Inquisition of 9 Edward II into the lords of townships known as the *Nomina Villarum*, several copies of which were circulating in manuscript among late sixteenth-century antiquaries,<sup>44</sup> and an updated abridgement, c.1580-90, of the original *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535,<sup>45</sup> a *Liber Valorum* recording the values of benefices, Tenths rendered, and names of patrons; such a document would be among the working papers of a diocesan official.

One should not exaggerate the radicalism of the Chorographer's Commonwealth ideas. He rails against Kett's 'execrable rebels' in a conventional manner,<sup>46</sup> and far from showing any antagonism to the gentry class as such he reveals a definite attachment to one particular group of gentry families of East Anglia, a group either partly Roman Catholic in belief or at least opposed in temper to the radical Protestant gentry who tended to dominate East Anglian life during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. This group had as one of its leading figures that stormy petrel of East Anglian politics, Sir Arthur Heveningham of Ketteringham in Norfolk and Heveningham in Suffolk, who the Chorographer describes as 'that worthy knight . . . the [blank] knight in order of his house'.<sup>47</sup> It is not often that the Chorographer attempts to elaborate on the antiquity of any gentry families which figure in his text, but here he displays a deference to Sir Arthur's interest in genealogy, at least as far as his own lineage went; an interest which impelled Sir Arthur to sponsor an elaborate family pedigree which traced the Heveninghams back to one of the knights that watched Christ's sepulchre.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, both Ketteringham and Heveningham earned personal visits from the Chorographer.

The Chorographer in the course of his church notes at Hethersett goes out of his way to make sneering remarks about Heveningham's enemy Edward Flowerdew, Baron of the Exchequer. He speaks of Flowerdew's father's 'covetous

desire of the leade' from the chancel roof which caused the removal of a tomb to the south aisle of the church, and finally says that the Baron himself 'for want of a gravestone of his friends cost is covered with one taken of another man's grave.'<sup>49</sup> In the Suffolk Chorography occurs his only original mention of a road: 'that famous lane so much spoken of for myre and dirt', Christmas Lane near Metfield.<sup>50</sup> Sir Arthur's efforts to collect money for the repair of Christmas Lane against the opposition of Flowerdew and a substantial part of East Anglia's ruling elite during the 1580s and 1590s had been one of the *causes célèbres* of his troubled career in East Anglian politics, and this must have been known to the Chorographer.<sup>51</sup>

The Heveninghams were closely related to the Rouses of Henham, Dennington and Badingham in Suffolk, and both Badingham and Dennington were among the places visited and described by the Chorographer. The Rouses included a number of religious conservatives in their family, but not as many as their relatives the Hobarts of Hales Hall near Loddon in Norfolk.<sup>52</sup> Hales Hall was at the centre of one of the areas which the Chorographer visited himself, and he seems to have taken a particular interest in the family. Under Monks Eleigh in Suffolk, he notes Attorney-General Sir James Hobart's origins in the village; remarks about the family also occur under Milden and Oulton in Suffolk and Loddon, Holt and Intwood in Norfolk.<sup>53</sup>

The Pastons were another east Norfolk family with Roman Catholic leanings who frequently occur in the Norfolk Chorography, and they had close links with the Heveninghams; Sir Arthur Heveningham's eldest son married Bridget the daughter of Sir William Paston in 1601.<sup>54</sup> Paston properties, history or monuments are mentioned under nine different parish-headings, and information which must have been gleaned from a Paston source occurs in the Ellough entry of the Suffolk Chorography.<sup>55</sup> Mr. Edward Doyly of Shotesham who supplied the Chorographer with information about his home village, also came from a family of conservative religious sympathies, and Mr. Henry Holdich's 'worthy father' John, who, as we have seen, gained the Chorographer's admiration, was conservative in religion as well.<sup>56</sup>

It is nevertheless unlikely that the Chorographer was himself a Catholic sympathiser; in his entry for East Dereham he translates Camden's comment on St. Withburga with a perjorative ring: 'because she was most farre from lasciviousness and levitie was accounted a goodesse'.<sup>57</sup> Neither did Sir Arthur, in all the abuse hurled at him by his various adversaries, ever suffer the accusation of Popish sympathies; his battles with his radical Protestant fellow-gentry seem to have been inspired by differences of political attitude and of personality. Political alignments in Elizabethan East Anglia tended to be influenced as much by family ties as by ideology, and if the Chorographer bore any allegiance to the Heveningham/Rous/Hobart alignment, it was likely to be for the former reason.

What impression, then, do we gain of the Chorographer from the text of his works? A man of 'commonwealth' sympathies, with a clerical bias and access to diocesan records, and aligned to the Heveningham circle in county politics. The Commonwealth ideas do not provide much of a clue, but the other two characteristics are more suggestive. In particular they indicate that the Chorographies may have a connection with two brothers named Browne, John and Thomas, members of the lesser Norfolk gentry, whose papers are preserved along with much correspondence of Sir Arthur Heveningham and of successive Bishops of Norwich among the papers of the Doughtys of Hanworth, one of whom married

the daughter and coheir of John Browne.<sup>5 8</sup>

The brothers were the sons of Edward Browne of Caister next Norwich, later of Poringland, one of a family of substantial yeomen from Tacolneston, himself a lessee of lands of the Dean and Chapter of Norwich and a deputy of Thomas Godsalue, at one stage Principal Register to the Diocese of Norwich.<sup>5 9</sup> John was secretary first in the 1580s to Sir Robert Wodehouse of Kimberley, a magnate with anti-Puritan inclinations;<sup>6 0</sup> after Sir Roger's death in 1588 he became secretary to Sir Arthur Heveningham, a post which he seems to have continued to hold into the seventeenth century. He was a meticulous secretary, who compiled a manuscript precedent book for a county magnate's everyday use in local administration from Sir Arthur's correspondence together with two other precedent books for private legal business from Sir Arthur's and his own papers. Sir Arthur esteemed him sufficiently to propose a match between his own son Charles and Browne's daughter in 1612.<sup>6 1</sup>

John's younger brother Thomas was secretary successively to Bishop Edmund Scambler and then to Bishop William Redman, through the good offices of Robert Redmayne, Chancellor of the Diocese;<sup>6 2</sup> however, when John Jegen was made Bishop of Norwich on Redman's death in 1602, Browne was replaced by Anthony Harison, compiler of that invaluable compilation of diocesan administrative papers, the *Registrum Vagum*. Browne was briefly feodary of the diocese and steward of certain episcopal manors under Bishop Scambler, and continued to act as deputy Steward of diocesan manors to his friend, Scambler's son Adam.<sup>6 3</sup> On one occasion at least he borrowed a "booke", apparently of deeds or other details of diocesan administration, from Adam in order to copy it out for his own use.<sup>6 4</sup> He lived at Poringland even after his elder brother had inherited it from Edward, and gained considerable wealth. His career ended tragically when he drowned himself at Poringland in 1611, provoking an unedifying scramble by Sir Edward Coke as steward to the Earl of Arundel for the Liberty in which Poringland lay, to seize his goods as a *felo de se*.<sup>6 5</sup>

The Browne brothers between them, therefore, boasted access to diocesan records, a professional interest in diocesan administration, close links with Sir Arthur Heveningham and his circle, and a family house at Poringland — a parish in the centre of the region in which our structural analysis located the Chorographer. Further evidence strengthens the case that one or other may have compiled the Chorographies and tips the balance marginally in John's favour. Edmund Doyly, who provided the Chorographer with his information about Shotesham, was not only a patron of Poringland but also a friend of John Browne.<sup>6 6</sup> One of the Brownes, probably John, even quoted an entry from the Norwich Domesday Book when setting down details of the livings of Great and Little Poringland among his private papers.<sup>6 7</sup> An entry in *Bibliotheca Martiniana*, the catalogue of the sale of Tom Martin's library in 1773, may be relevant: '4499. Antiquarian Collections relative to Norwich, by John Browne of Norwich; very fair, 5s.'<sup>6 8</sup> The Chorographer omitted any account of Norwich in his work, and promised his readers 'a larger and playne description' of the city.<sup>6 9</sup> It is tempting to suggest that John Browne's collections represent this missing work, even if one objects that Tom Martin ought to have noticed the similarity in the hands of these 'collections' to that of the Chorographies if such a similarity existed, since he possessed them both.

If the Chorographies were written by John Browne, clerk to Sir Arthur Heveningham, this would explain the Suffolk orientation of the compiler, since the

Heveninghams hailed from Heveningham in north Suffolk and had moved to Ketteringham only in the mid-sixteenth century. The bulk of their estates lay in Suffolk where Sir Arthur maintained a presence as an active J.P., unusually assiduous in his attendance at quarter sessions. His social ties with parts of Suffolk have already been noted. Authorship by Thomas Browne would better explain the clerical basis of the Chorographies and their heavy reliance upon diocesan sources. They could well have been planned as two parts of a diocesan survey, although it is less easy to explain the selective nature of the recording with its heavy concentration on south-east Norfolk and central Suffolk.

A substantial body of evidence, therefore, suggests that either John or Thomas Browne may have compiled the Chorographies. This attribution raises the possibility of a family connection between the Brownes of Poringland and Sir Thomas Browne, the mid-seventeenth-century owner of the Chorographies. Such a connection would both explain the presence of these manuscripts in his library, and strengthen the case for fathering the authorship upon the Poringland Brownes.

Traditionally Sir Thomas is supposed to have had *no* connection with Norfolk before he settled in Norwich on the suggestion of old college friends.<sup>70</sup> His pedigree shows that his family came from Upton in Cheshire and that his father, also called Thomas, settled as a merchant in Cheapside.<sup>71</sup> It is interesting, however, that in 1906 Walter Rye raised the possibility that Sir Thomas might already have had relatives in the city.<sup>72</sup> His father had two brothers, Edward and William, about whom nothing is known. John and Thomas Browne of Poringland had a 'kinsman' Edward Browne of Norwich and a 'brother-in-law' Edward Browne who were probably one and the same person.<sup>73</sup> Was this Edward Browne also the uncle of Sir Thomas? The latter's other uncle, William, might be identified as Alderman William Browne of Norwich, a flourishing draper in the parish of St. George Tombland, who styled himself 'esquire' in his will of 1639.<sup>74</sup> These are tantalising hints, but, alas, no more.

Nor can our case be clinched on the evidence of handwriting. A considerable quantity of papers written by both John and Thomas Browne passed into the possession of their son-in-law Robert Doughty, and have survived as part of the Aylsham Collection in the Norfolk Record Office. These papers show that both brothers had small neat secretary hands which closely resemble the Chorographer's handwriting. Both, however, consistently formed certain letters in a sufficiently different manner from the Chorographer to leave little doubt that the hands are not identical. Until the Chorographer's hand can be positively identified, the attribution of the Chorographies to the Brownes of Poringland must remain in doubt and the identity of a remarkable pioneer of East Anglian studies remains an open question.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Chorography of Norfolk*, ed. Christobel M. Hood, Norwich, 1938. Hereafter cited as Hood. Her MS. is now Norfolk Record Office 31.5.73. (P186D).

<sup>2</sup> Bodleian MS. Gough Norf. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *The Chorography of Suffolk*, ed. D. MacCulloch (*Suffolk Records Society* XIX, Ipswich, 1976). Hereafter cited as MacCulloch. For an account of the provenance of the fragments of this Chorography, see pp. 6-8.

<sup>4</sup> Hood, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> MacCulloch, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis of the use of the *Britannia* in the Chorographies, see MacCulloch, pp. 141-4.

<sup>7</sup> Public Record Office, PCC 7 Strafforde.

- <sup>8</sup>C. G. Harlow, 'Robert Ryece of Preston', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology* (hereafter cited as *PSIA*) XXXII (1973), 43-70.
- <sup>9</sup>Cambridge University Library MS. Hengrave 11, f. 96r.
- <sup>10</sup>MacCulloch, pp. 2, 11.
- <sup>11</sup>Hood, p. 21. Beckham was the author of two pamphlets denouncing Quakerism.
- <sup>12</sup>British Library MSS. Harleian 1164, f. 67r and 1363, f. 44r.
- <sup>13</sup>*Historical Manuscripts Commission. Twelfth Report. Appendix IX*, 1891, p. 164. We are grateful to Dr. R. Virgoe, for this reference and for many constructive comments and suggestions.
- <sup>14</sup>*The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. S. Wilkin, 1836, iv, 470-71.
- <sup>15</sup>Edward Bernard, *Catalogi Librorum Manuscriptorum Angliae et Hiberniae*, ii, Oxford, 1697, p. 111.
- <sup>16</sup>MacCulloch, p. 1.
- <sup>17</sup>Peter Le Neve (1661-1729); Thomas Tanner (1674-1735); Thomas Martin (1697-1771).
- <sup>18</sup>Gayton Thorpe Register no. 1. We are grateful to the Reverend G. W. R. Berry for permission to consult this register.
- <sup>19</sup>Hood, pp. 21-63.
- <sup>20</sup>*Orford Ness. A selection of Maps mainly by John Norden. Presented to J. A. Steers*, Cambridge, 1966, p. xiii.
- <sup>21</sup>*Calendar of State Papers Domestic, James I*, xii, 43.
- <sup>22</sup>See, for example: British Library MSS. Harleian 570 (a MS. copy of the Chorography of Middx, 1593), and Add. 31853 (a fair copy of Norden's description of the Home Counties and the Channel Islands, 1595), or Cambridge University Library MS. Mm. 3.15, ff. 20-2 (a complaint from Norden to the Crown).
- <sup>23</sup>MacCulloch, p. 30.
- <sup>24</sup>British Library MS. Add. 4969.
- <sup>25</sup>British Library MS. Cotton, Julius CIII.
- <sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, CV.
- <sup>27</sup>*Monumental Inscriptions and Coats of Arms from Cambridgeshire*, ed. W. M. Palmer, Cambridge, 1932, pl. xxxiii-xliii.
- <sup>28</sup>Norfolk Record Office, Norwich Diocesan Archives, HAR/1.
- <sup>29</sup>*PSIA*, xxxii (1973), pl. v.
- <sup>30</sup>MacCulloch, p. 59.
- <sup>31</sup>He collects data on 89 parishes in West Norfolk and 245 parishes in East Norfolk.
- <sup>32</sup>MacCulloch, pp. 19-20.
- <sup>33</sup>Hood, p. 67.
- <sup>34</sup>W. Camden, *Britannia*, 1610.
- <sup>35</sup>*State Papers relating to Musters, Beacons, Shipmoney etc. in Norfolk*, ed. W. Rye, Norwich, 1907, pp. 180-84.
- <sup>36</sup>A. Hassell Smith, *County and Court*, Oxford, 1974 (hereafter cited as Smith), pp. 253-65 and 293-302.
- <sup>37</sup>Hood, pp. 68-71.
- <sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 139.
- <sup>39</sup>MacCulloch, p. 25.
- <sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 64, 50.
- <sup>41</sup>*PSIA*, vi. (1888), 361.
- <sup>42</sup>MacCulloch, p. 37.
- <sup>43</sup>The Chorographer, for example, gives the amount of the synodals at Herringfleet which are omitted in the Middleton version. See MacCulloch, p. 47.
- <sup>44</sup>A selection is listed by Vincent Redstone, *PSIA*, xi (1902), 174.
- <sup>45</sup>Under Norfolk the Chorographer's extracts from the *Liber* mention the Earl of Leicester as still alive (Hood, p. 131); he died in 1588. For Suffolk they mention John Higham after his knighthood in 1578 (MacCulloch, p. 28).
- <sup>46</sup>Hood, p. 169.
- <sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 121.
- <sup>48</sup>British Library MS. Harleian 4031, f. 239.
- <sup>49</sup>Hood, p. 113.
- <sup>50</sup>MacCulloch, p. 55.
- <sup>51</sup>Smith, pp. 253-65.
- <sup>52</sup>Public Record Office STAC 5 H5/12; Norfolk Record Office Ayisham 16.
- <sup>53</sup>MacCulloch, pp. 51, 56, 57; Hood, pp. 125, 116, 121.
- <sup>54</sup>Smith, p. 159.
- <sup>55</sup>cf. Hood, p. 127 and MacCulloch, p. 41.
- <sup>56</sup>Smith, pp. 214 and 226.
- <sup>57</sup>Hood, p. 99; cf. English edition of Camden translated by Philemon Holland, 1610, p. 482: 'whome because shee was piously affected, farre from all riotous excesse, and wanton lightnesse, our Ancestours accounted for a Saint.'



<sup>58</sup>The Doughty papers are in the Aylsham collection of the Norfolk Record Office. For genealogical material on the Brownes, see Aylsham 27.

<sup>59</sup>Norfolk Record Office Aylsham 27 (will of Edward Browne), 180 (Browne's file of papers as deputy to Godsalue); *The Registrum Vagum of Anthony Harison*, ed. T. F. Barton (Norfolk Record Society XXXII, 1963), p. 87.

<sup>60</sup>Norfolk Record Office Aylsham 347 (receipt of George Kemp for Sir Roger Wodehouse, 1581); Smith, p. 222.

<sup>61</sup>Norfolk Record Office Aylsham 347 (Wm Payne to John Browne, 1589), 129, 53, 130, 16 (Sir Arthur Heveningham to John Browne, 1612).

<sup>62</sup>Norfolk Record Office Aylsham 15 (Thos Browne to Robt Redmayne).

<sup>63</sup>Norfolk Record Office Aylsham 153 (Thos Browne's patent of office from Edmund Scambler); *The Registrum Vagum*, p. 88; Norfolk Record Office Aylsham 15 (Adam Scambler to Thos Browne, 1604).

<sup>64</sup>Norfolk Record Office Aylsham 15 (Adam Scambler to Thos Browne, 2 Jan. s.a.).

<sup>65</sup>Norfolk Record Office Aylsham 16.

<sup>66</sup>F. Blomefield, *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, v (1806), p. 447; Norfolk Record Office Aylsham 16 (Edmund Doily to John Browne, 1612).

<sup>67</sup>Norfolk Record Office Aylsham 10 (note on benefices).

<sup>68</sup>*Norfolk Antiquarian Miscellany* iii (1887), 395.

<sup>69</sup>Hood, p. 132.

<sup>70</sup>*The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. S. Wilkin, 1836, I, pp. ix, xxv.

<sup>71</sup>*The Visitation of Norfolk, 1664*, eds A. W. H. Clarke and A. Campling (Norfolk Record Society IV, 1933), i. 37.

<sup>72</sup>W. Rye, *Norfolk Antiquarian Miscellany* 2nd series i), pp. 83-5.

<sup>73</sup>Norfolk Record Office Aylsham 16 (Edw. Browne to Thos Browne, 31 Aug. s.a.), 27.

<sup>74</sup>Norfolk Record Office CCN 18 Green.