

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE HARGHAM ESTATE

by Alan Davison with Brian Cushion

SUMMARY

A fieldwalking survey has thrown light on the origins of the village of Hargham, known to have been cleared in the late 17th or early 18th century. In addition, evidence of Wilby as a shrunken village has emerged. The documentary background has also been examined.

INTRODUCTION

The Hargham Estate lies immediately south-west of Attleborough and is centred on the deserted village of Hargham. It includes all the old parish of Hargham barring the extreme southern tip, a small portion of Attleborough, an eastern strip of Snetterton, the north-western corner of Wilby and a small western part of the parish of Old Buckenham. Wilby and Hargham are now within the Civil Parish of Quidenham.

Physically, the area is a plateau reaching 40m O.D. only in the extreme south-west; much of it lies just above or below 30m. Some dissection of this surface has been caused by small tributaries of the Thet; one of these rises near New Buckenham, another drains Old Buckenham Fen and is joined by a third which rises near Attleborough. Their valleys show signs of poor drainage though modern improvements have been made. The area is underlain by chalk but is covered by variable deposits of glacial drift. Much of this is classified as Glacial Sand and Gravel rich in flints, but there are patches of the chalky boulder clay of the Lowestoft Till, particularly around Hall Farm, Hargham and within Wilby. The valleys of the streams have alluvial floors but there are patches of river terrace sands and gravels and, in Wilby, some more clay-like deposits. Away from the streams, drainage is varied. There are some water-filled pits or ponds and, in wet seasons, so-called 'wet holes' or boggy patches appear in some fields. It is possible that these reflect the existence of underlying lenses of clay which produce perched water tables just beneath the surface. Drainage in the south-eastern part of the estate seems more difficult as is shown by numerous deep ditches, some of them flowing for appreciable periods.

The soils developed on these glacial deposits in the northern and south-eastern sections of the estate are classified as loamy or coarse loamy brown earths; to the south and south-west, separated from these by the sandy or peaty soils of the valley floor of the New Buckenham stream, are soils described as brown sands which are liable to wind-blow.¹ This portion of the estate appears to be typical of Breckland; the remainder is more marginal to this description though there are patches of light sand liable to blow in dry spring weather.

Method of Survey

Each arable field was fieldwalked using the line-walking or transect method; the transects were at intervals of 10m. An exception was made for two fields in the north-west where transects were at 30m intervals; these were known to have been rarely-cultivated heathland until very recent times. When interesting discoveries were made, closer inspection was carried out. Two areas were subsequently re-examined by students of the Centre of Continuing Education (Extra-Mural) of the University of East Anglia.² All finds were submitted to Andrew Rogerson and Peter Robins for identification.

PREHISTORIC and IRON AGE



Fig. 1 Pre-Roman evidence

The Fieldwalking*Pre-Roman Activity*

Worked flints occurred widely across the area (Fig. 1). In general, however, finds were more numerous in the eastern part of the estate where soils tend to be heavier. Many were of mediocre quality and most were probably Late Neolithic with a proportion, fresh in appearance, of possible Bronze Age or even Early Iron Age date. A few finds could be of Mesolithic or Early Neolithic date, particularly from sites in the south-east and north.³ Much of the flint was probably local in origin and collected from surface deposits. Most of the tools were scrapers or retouched flakes or blades. The most notable finds were a discoidal knife or small adze blade⁴ and a plano-convex knife.⁵ The greater incidence of finds in the east may give a false impression of prehistoric activity as considerable areas of northern and central Hargham are concealed by woods and grassland. Support for this suggestion comes from finds made on two fields in northern Hargham.⁶

Eight concentrations of crazed flints ('potboilers') were found during this survey, three within Attleborough, three in Hargham and two in Old Buckenham. Three are very close to modern stream channels, the five others are in ill-drained places in deeply-ditched areas. A

small sherd of dark grey sparsely flint-gritted pottery, possibly of Iron Age date, was found on one of the Attleborough concentrations. Some sixty years ago 'hearths' were reported at three sites '500 yards south of (Hargham) church'. These also appear to have been close to a stream.⁷

Isolated finds made over the years since the early 19th century include a Palaeolithic gouge and a possible Neolithic axe, a Palaeolithic hand-axe, a bifacial long point, a polished flint axe and part of another and various other flint axes found near the railway or the stream by the main Norwich road. It is, apart from one or two instances, impossible to locate precise findspots but most appear to have lain in northern Hargham.⁸

Although finds of early pottery were made during the survey most appeared to be of the Iron Age. Eleven sherds found on a field in Snetterton⁹ were possibly earlier and there were five gritty and grogged Bronze Age sherds also found there. A further Bronze Age sherd was found nearby in Hargham. It is quite likely that some others, tentatively identified as Iron Age but lacking marked characteristics, could be of earlier date, particularly as the evidence of Late Neolithic or Bronze Age flintwork is so widespread.

Tumuli afford more substantial evidence from the Bronze Age. One, marked on Ordnance Survey maps at TM 0130 9231¹⁰ is no longer visible because of destruction by ploughing and wind-blowing. In 1933, when it was excavated, it was described as being 2 feet high and about 90 feet in diameter. A multiple cremation was found but there was no pottery. On Hargham Heath, among trees and bracken-covered, are a possible small bell barrow¹¹ and a round barrow.¹² Outside the estate, at the southern apex of Hargham parish, are the remains of another barrow called Gallows or Gibbet Hill.¹³

Iron Age, or probable Iron Age, pottery is quite widespread but is more in evidence in the south-eastern part of the estate (Fig. 1). The larger, more westerly of the two major concentrations¹⁴ is centred on a low sandy knoll overlooking the New Buckenham stream (1). Most of the finds are probably of this period though some, including a T-shaped rim reminiscent of Neolithic form, may be earlier. Most are of a gritty fabric but there are also some sandy sherds. One rim was decorated with internal and external slashes, five bodysherds had finger-nail impressions and another had grooved decoration in what appeared to be a V-shape. There were also three carinated bodysherds, one with horizontal grooving. The smaller, more easterly concentration¹⁵ is centred on a low sandy but distinct mound at a similar distance from the same stream (2). Here gritty fabrics considerably outnumber sandy ones. They include one bodysherd with a horizontal groove below a narrow band of diagonal slashing and a rim with small stabbed decoration along the top while one of the sandy sherds has finger-tip decoration. One of seven sherds of flint-gritted pottery found on another site was large with finger-nail impressions.¹⁶ It is notable that the two major sites occur in an area where the incidence of worked flints appears greater.

The Romano-British Period (Fig. 2)

Activity in Romano-British times was also concentrated towards the east and south-east. The strongest centre was on a low terrace bordering the New Buckenham stream (1).¹⁷ Most of the finds were of greyware but there were small quantities of Samian, oxidised, shelly and East Anglian Colour-Coated wares together with one amphora bodysherd. There were no convincing signs of building materials. Associated with this site were a few gritty Iron Age sherds, one with internal finger-nail impressions.

A second large centre (2)¹⁸ is clearly associated with iron Age activity. The quantity of pottery was less but of greater variety and included Samian, Oxfordshire Colour-Coated, oxidised ware and Nene Valley mortaria and sherds with profuse fine white grits. Some fragments of tiles were

ROMANO-BRITISH

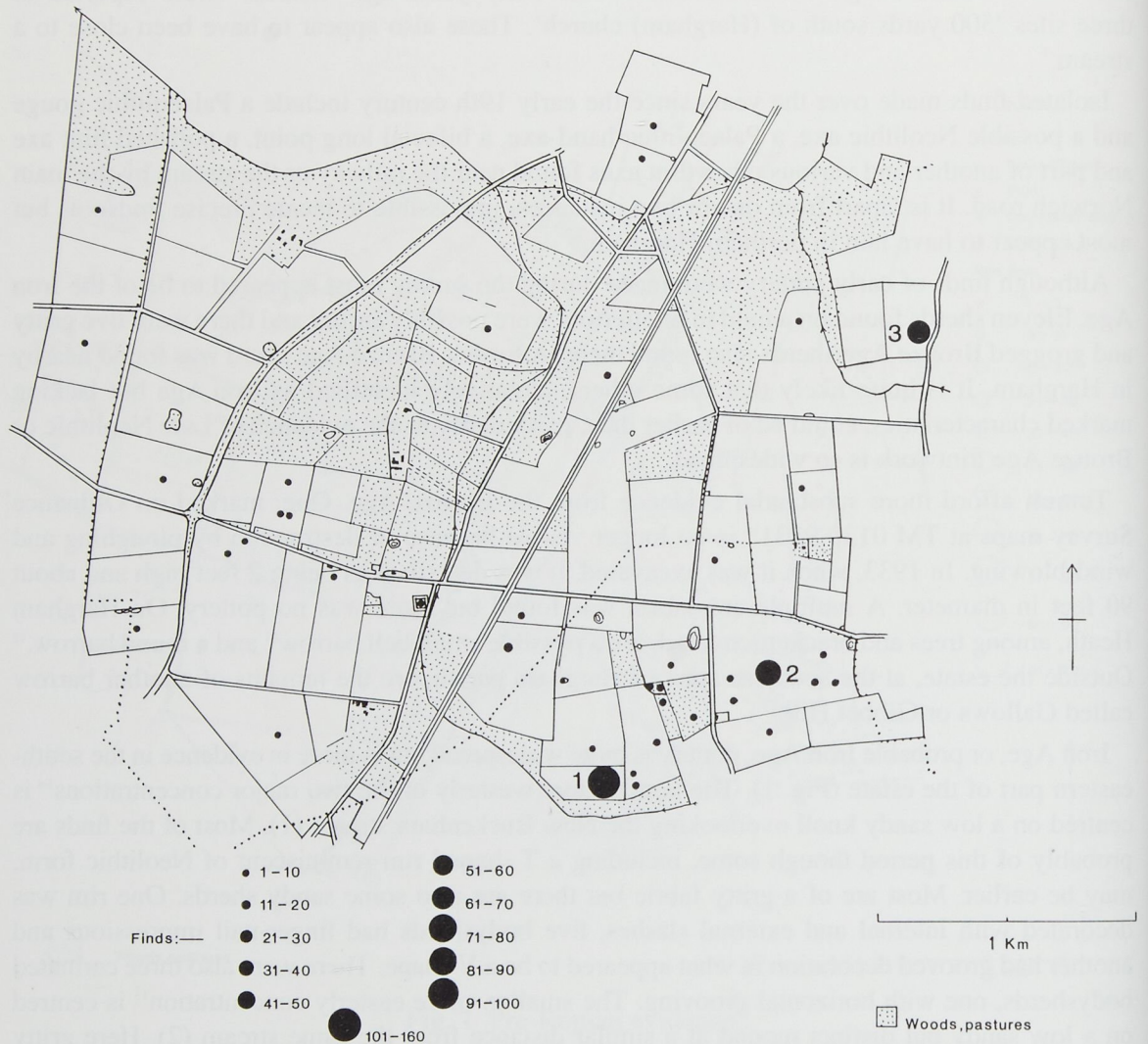


Fig. 2 Romano-British evidence

identifiable as Romano-British. An aura of scattered finds linked the two major sites but very little was found near the other major Iron Age concentration.

A third, much smaller site (3)¹⁹ to the north of the Old Buckenham stream yielded mainly micaceous greyware although single sherds of Samian and Nene Valley Colour-Coated Ware were found. Much of the pottery was heavily abraded. Iron Age pottery is thinly scattered in the vicinity.

Over the remainder of the estate there is only a thin and intermittent scatter of finds despite the presence of a branch of the Peddars Way passing through Hargham.²⁰

Early and Middle Saxon Evidence (Fig. 3)

Convincing signs of Early Saxon activity have not been found. A solitary bodysherd with organic and fine grit tempering, probably of this period, was found in northern Hargham.²¹ Towards the southern extremity eight sherds, the majority sandy and organically tempered, were more likely to be Early or Middle Saxon, rather than Iron Age. Part of a multi-period scatter, including Romano-British and Middle Saxon sherds, their precise identification poses

EARLY AND MIDDLE SAXON FINDS



Fig. 3 Early and Middle Saxon evidence

difficulties. There was no sign of the possible Saxon cremation cemetery reported as being discovered in a field in Hargham in 1859.²²

A marked Middle Saxon settlement, signalled by the presence of Ipswich-type Ware existed in Hargham. The core appears to have lain roughly where a road, diverted northwards late in the 19th century, formerly existed and there is a substantial field scatter surrounding the site but preponderantly skewed southwards. Of over 120 sherds there was a slight bias towards the sandy fabric, one piece of which bore stamped decoration. There were a few burnished sherds, as well as a few Middle Saxon sherds not of Ipswich-type.

A scatter of Ipswich-type Ware in the south-eastern quarter of the estate appears distinct and may well consist of outliers of some site on or near the village of Wilby.

Late Saxon Times (Fig.4)

The core of settlement in Hargham persisted; considerable amounts of Thetford-type Ware occur mingled with finds from the earlier period and there were small quantities of St Neots-type and Early Medieval Wares as well as a single sherd of unglazed Stamford Ware. Field scatter away from the centre is slight but does suggest exploitation of most of the higher ground in the parish. St Neots-type and Early Medieval Wares are scattered towards the east of the main concentration suggesting the beginning of an eastward drift.

Late Saxon pottery also occurs in a distinct pattern in the south-east quarter of the estate. To some extent this coincides with the distribution there of Ipswich-type pottery. There is also a detached cluster of finds on the sandy knoll which carried evidence of Iron Age activity. To some extent this reflects the more intensive search carried out there for Iron Age evidence but it clearly represents more than a field scatter as finds there from other periods were relatively few.

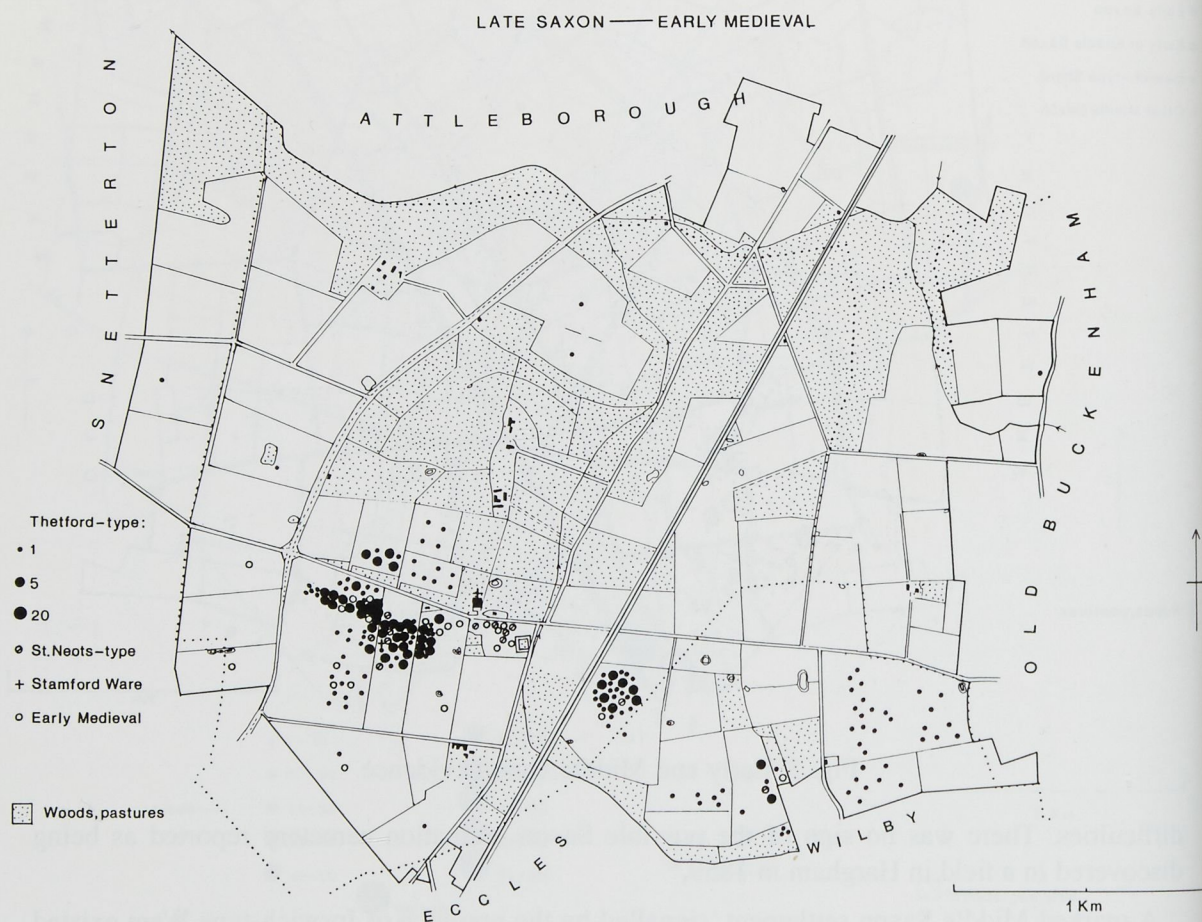


Fig. 4 Late Saxon evidence

Medieval Times (Fig. 5)

The distribution of finds suggests widespread exploitation of the landscape; there are a few examined areas where medieval pottery does not appear to be present.

The centre of the settlement in Hargham clearly moved eastwards with considerable concentrations of pottery close to the church and to a moated site. The westernmost field which had carried evidence of Middle and Late Saxon activity yielded only just over 5% of the total of unglazed medieval sherds recovered from the putative village area. Of the pottery found in the concentrated area extending across four fields, only just over 7.5% was glazed, almost all of it Grimston Ware. Again, the concentration seems related to the line of the former road. Small quantities of pottery retrieved from molehills on grassland round the church point to a possible extension of the settled area. The intensity of the medieval field scatter increases to the north of Wilby. Much of this pottery was gathered from molehills on earthworks and from a small wooded enclosure suggesting that the quantity actually present there would be much greater. A portion of a blue phyllite suspended hone, with point-sharpening grooves still visible, was found on the floor of the wood.

Within Attleborough minor settlement points appear to have developed along or close to the line of the Roman road.

MEDIIEVAL



Fig. 5 Medieval evidence

The Late Medieval and Post-Medieval Periods (Fig. 6)

Appreciable quantities of Late Medieval and Transitional Ware are present in Hargham, particularly from the two fields nearest the church. Of the combined total of medieval and Late Medieval and Transitional pottery finds, the latter accounted for some 16%. Considerable quantities of post-medieval pottery, mainly of Glazed Red Earthenware but including stonewares, were present. The stoneware, apart from pieces of Bellarmine bottles and Westerwald vessels, included two later sherds, each with unusual bust medallions.

Of the Wilby grouping, Late Medieval and Transitional pottery accounts for some 9% of the total of medieval and Late Medieval and Transitional pottery collected. Hardly any post-medieval finds were made here.

LATE MEDIEVAL — POST — MEDIEVAL



Fig. 6 Late medieval and post-medieval evidence

Earthworks*Hargham Moat*

This feature²³ has been damaged on its south-eastern side by the construction of a road late in the 19th century. The rectangular platform appears to be intact and measures about 34m from east to west and about 44m from north to south. The entrance is on the northern side. The southern part of the platform is irregularly scarped: it is not clear whether this represents the limits of a built-up area or reflects the removal of rubble for some purpose. The moat is usually filled in the wetter months and is rarely completely dry. There is no apparent link with a watercourse but there may have been one in the past. Not only does the straightened New Buckenham stream pass close by to the east but a small stream fed by a spring upslope to the west passes within a few feet of the southern arm of the moat. It is quite probable, however, given its low-lying situation that the moat was supplied by inflow from the water table. The structure is now quite densely wooded and the surface is concealed by woodland litter. A few sherds of medieval pottery have, nevertheless, been found together with one Romano-British sherd, presumably cast up when the platform was made. The presence of numerous tile fragments, many glazed, bears witness to the former existence of a building.

Hargham Village Earthworks

Slight remains of earthworks²⁴ exist under grassland immediately to the east of the churchyard. The curving ditched outline of a small subdivided enclosure shown on Hayward's map of 1629 (Fig. 7) still survives, together with a north-to-south internal division. The line of the old Hargham to Attleborough road can still be traced running from the eastern

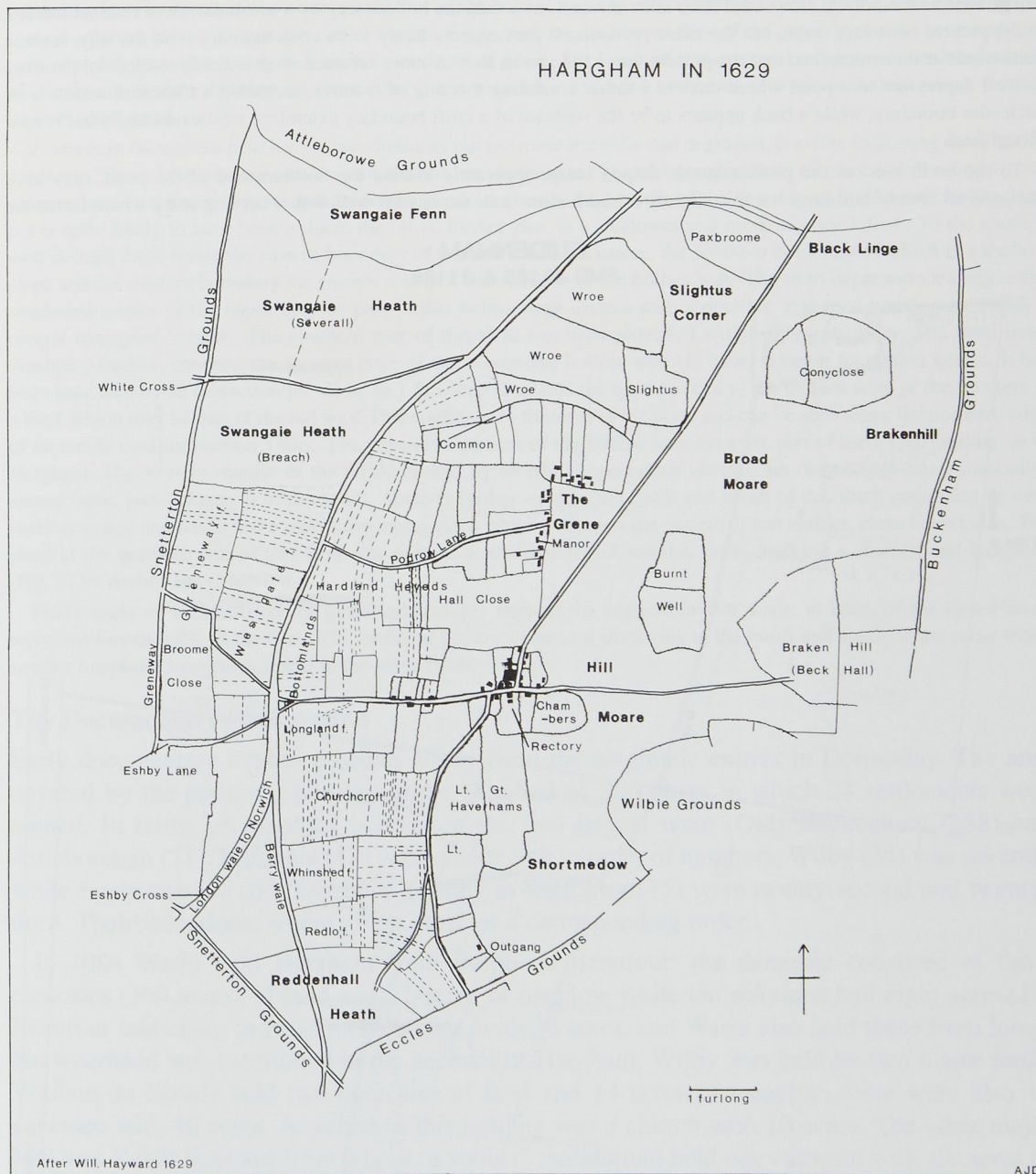


Fig. 7 Hayward's map of Hargham, 1629

wall of the churchyard north-eastwards across the pastures.²⁵ Within the park the ditched outline of Hayward's Hall Close survives in part as does that of the smallest part of the Wroe.

Earthworks north of Wilby Hall by Brian Cushion (Fig. 8)

These lie within 7ha of almost flat grassland and have been curtailed by ploughing to the west and, possibly, to the north while the south-eastern corner of the grassland, apparently largely featureless, has been ploughed before restoration as pasture.²⁶

The most convincing feature is a sinuous hollow way (1) between 8m and 14m in width, extending northwards from the outbuildings of Wilby Hall. Levels on either side vary such that the eastern side is about 0.5m higher than the way while the western side approaches 1m. The way becomes less distinct just north of an east-to-west depression which is cut on its northern side by a small pond; construction of a field boundary and a culvert may be responsible for the degradation of the way.

The east-to-west ditch, almost 1m deep at its greatest, now cuts the hollow way by a much narrower channel leading to the present boundary drain, but the more pronounced part appears likely to be contemporary with the way. It turns northwards at its western end and the present fence follows its line. A more subdued ditch extends south from the east-to-west depression to a point where there is a rather confusing meeting of features, including a truncated east-to-west enclosure boundary, while a bank appears to be the remnant of a croft boundary extending westwards into what is now ploughland.

To the north-west of the pond a low L-shaped scarp, apparently joining the northern end of the pond, may have enclosed an area of buildings but this slightly raised feature does not accord well with a curving scarp which forms the

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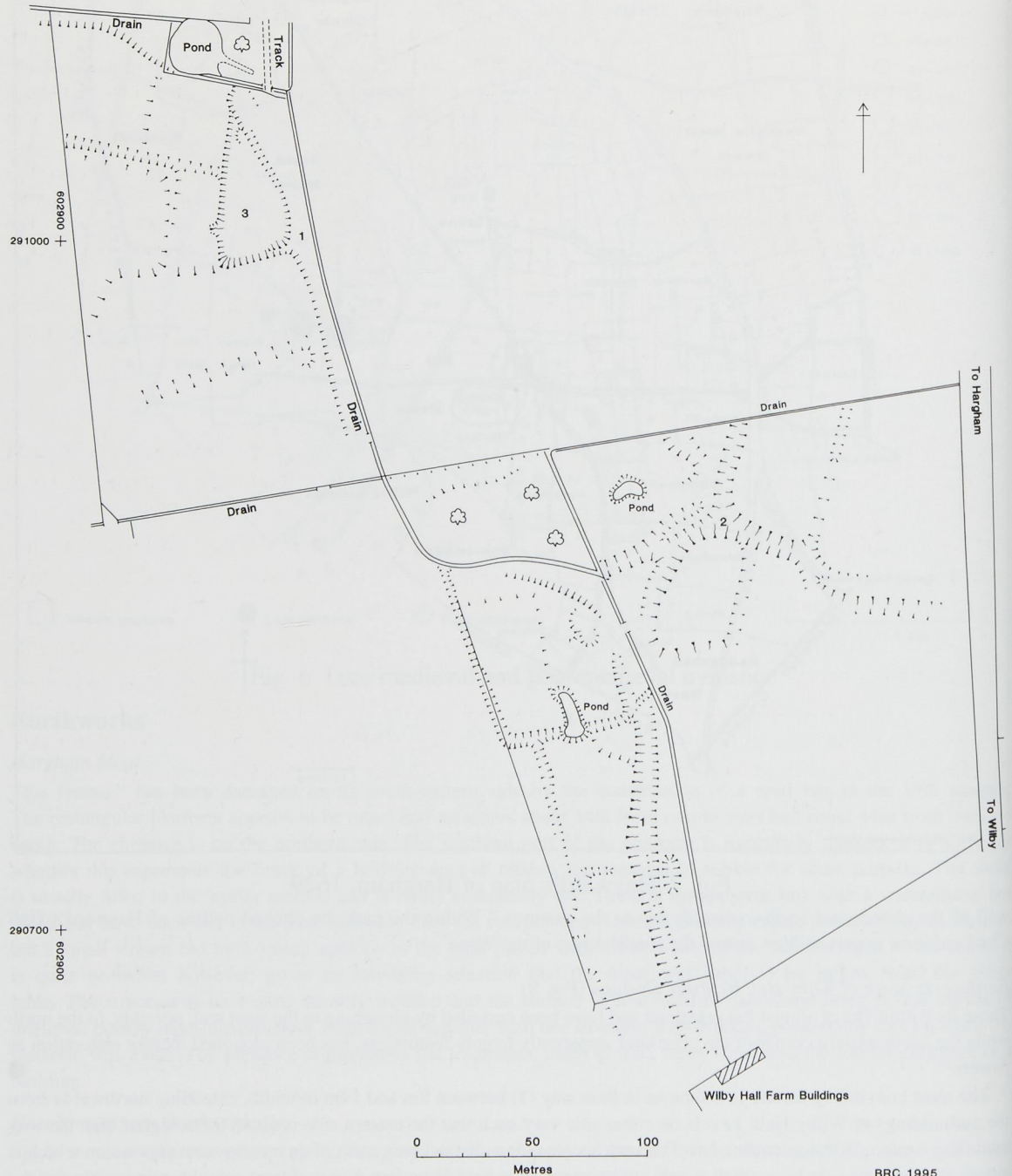


Fig. 8 Earthworks north of Wilby Hall

southern edge of a continuation north-westwards of the hollow way (1). The curved southern margin of the small copse to the north may have followed this earlier feature. Finds made on the littered floor of the copse were mainly of medieval pottery and suggest that it may well have formed part of a toft. The limits of the supposed toft are now unclear because of deeply-cut modern ditching on three sides but it may have extended eastwards into the next field where there is another small pond.

Features in the eastern field have some similarity but are more irregular and degraded, possibly indicating more varied functions. There is a sinuous east-to-west depression, deepest at (2) and becoming less distinct and dividing before petering out. Two linear features subdivide the area to the north, the broader of the two almost resembles a hollow way but is more likely to have been a ditch; the other, further east, is a shallower and more degraded ditch. To the south, a well-defined ditch forms the eastern boundary of a raised ovoid enclosure, the southern boundary of which is a shallow slope and the western boundary the eastern side of a continuation of the hollow way. The short depression leading to the south-east corner of the copse may be part of this hollow way system with a possible Y-shaped junction enclosing a central triangular 'island'. The southern part of this field has been ploughed within living memory. The third field, Washpit Meadow, contains the western edge of the continuing hollow way (1) being 0.8m at maximum height. It has been truncated by an extraction pit (3) up to 1.5m deep. Towards the northern end of the eastern edge of the pit there is a bank which may be part of the old way. This continues to the west of the pond and can be seen along the northern edge of an arable field for another 180m. The general alignment of the hollow way suggests part of a road leading on to Hargham. The western margin of the pit is reached by an east-to-west ditch about 0.5m deep which has a markedly-spread bank, part-flanking it to the south. There is further subdivision north and south of this ditch consisting of very shallow scarps and banks and a more convincing ditch which continues the pattern of toft and, or, close boundaries. The pond at the northern end of this field was used as a sheepwash and wooden posts marking a channel and indicated (Fig. 8) by dashed lines, survive.

Finds made on molehills on the grassland strongly support the suggestion that some, at least, of the raised areas represent former tofts. In the first field medieval pottery occurs on platforms to the north and south of the pond while smaller quantities have been found in the other fields.

The Documentary Background

Early documentary evidence comes solely from the enigmatic entries in Domesday. The area covered by the present estate lay in the Hundred of Shropham in which 24 settlements were named. In terms of recorded population the two largest were (Old) Buckenham (188) and Attleborough (71). Hargham (17) was seventeenth in order of numbers, Wilby (34) was seventh, while Snetterton (7) and 'Essebeia' (Ashby in Snetterton) (5) were twenty-second and twenty-third. Their valuations, where given, were of a corresponding order.

In 1086 Warin held Hargham from Ralph de Beaufour: the demesne consisted of three carucates (360 acres) of land and 12 acres of meadow while ten sokemen had eight acres. De Beaufour laid claim to two Freemen here, with 20 acres, and Warin also held these from him.²⁷ No woodland was mentioned in the account of Hargham. Wilby was held by two major lords. William de Ecouis held two carucates of land and 14 acres of meadow; there were also 12 sokemen with 40 acres. Attached to this holding was a church with 10 acres. The other major lord was Ralph Baynard from whom 'a soldier' (solidarius) held one carucate with six acres of meadow. Roger Bigot also had one freeman in Wilby. Woodland seems to have been slight as it was said to be sufficient only for 15 pigs.²⁸

The subsequent standing of the five villages with lands within the estate can be assessed. By 1334 Hargham had apparently become one of the less significant places in the hundred: of 21 villages contributing to the Lay Subsidy, Hargham ranked 20th in order of size of payment.²⁹ Wilby shared tenth place. Old Buckenham, Attleborough and Snetterton were all comparatively highly taxed; all had a commercial side to their activities. Attleborough acquired a market by 1226, Old Buckenham by 1285 and Snetterton in 1315.³⁰ Contributions to the Subsidy were revised in 1449 and changes in prosperity had become obvious. Hargham now paid the lowest sum for the hundred but Wilby still ranked tenth. Snetterton was granted a reduction of over 36%, the largest for the hundred, Old Buckenham (over 24%) had the sixth largest; Wilby was

allowed almost 17%, Hargham 14% and Attleborough 12.5%.³¹ Snetterton had obviously suffered; in 1428, one of its two parishes (St Andrew) had been given exemption from the parish tax since it had less than ten households.³² By the early 16th century there appeared little to choose between Hargham and Wilby; each had about the same number of contributors and paid similar sums to the 1524-5 Lay Subsidy.³³ The five places appearing lesser on both counts were soon to be deserted or severely shrunken. The Hearth Tax returns of 1672 suggests that the two villages were still closely comparable.³⁴

After 1086 Hargham remained as one manor, held at first by the de Herkeham family, probably Warin's descendants. At the end of the 13th century they granted it to Warine Hereford. His son settled it on his mother, now married to Thomas de Lavenham. In 1346 de Lavenham was shown as holding Hargham but some time later he passed the manor and advowson to Maud de Lancaster, widow of William de Burgh. After the death of her second husband she took the veil at Campsea where she had already founded a chantry. This was later removed to Bruisyard and in 1401 the Abbess of Bruisyard was shown as holding the knight's fee in Hargham once held by de Lavenham.³⁵ It consisted of a capital messuage, 160 acres of land, 3 acres of meadow, 10 acres of pasture and 20s rent in Hargham and in some other villages in north-east Norfolk.³⁶ In 1538 Bruisyard and Hargham were acquired by Nicholas Hare who soon sold Hargham to John Green who already had the manor of Beck Hall in Wilby. Descendants of Green in the female line possessed Hargham after 1580. In 1587 one of these sold it to Henry Gurney and, after further changes of ownership, it was sold to Sir Ralph Hare. It remained with the Hares long after the village had been deserted. The desertion occurred between 1680 and 1708 and has been described elsewhere.³⁷ Hargham was mapped in 1629 by William Hayward³⁸ and the accompanying description survives.³⁹ The map (Fig. 7) shows three groups of houses in the village; one near the church, a second a little further west along the street and an L-shaped cluster, including the manor house, facing the Green. A later field book and map of 1681⁴⁰, an updating of Hayward's work, shows little change apart from the disappearance of one building immediately north of the church.

Scanty evidence of the pre-1629 landscape exists. Encroachment on the common seems to have happened at various times. A deed of 1339⁴¹ concerned a ditched pigtle with a messuage and croft on one side and common land on the others suggesting an intake. The Coney Close (Fig. 7), an enclosed 'island' in the common, may well have been a medieval intake made when manorial rabbit warrens became a feature of the landscape. The demesne enclosures all called the Wroe⁴², totalling 40 acres, also seem to have been intakes. A document of 1502⁴³ recording a newly built-upon messuage called Saletts mentioned, in passing, the Wroe as common. A deed (1611) referred to access from the messuage in Sellets Close by a way leading to the common pasture 'called le Wroo Corner'.⁴⁴ The survival in 1629 of a tiny area of common here completely surrounded by enclosure is suggestive. An Exchequer Deposition in 1601⁴⁵ records that 'some 50 years since' John Grene 'did enclose all the said grounds . . . from the said common' and 'did take . . . divers parcels of the waste and soyle of Hargham Common'. Grene was also said to have been punished in the leet court of Hargham for setting up a pound on the common.

The new house on Sellets in 1502, assuming that this was not merely the repetition of an old formula, shows that before the 17th century the village was by no means static in shape; new building may have been matched by abandonment elsewhere. The moat went unrecorded in 1629 and 1681. Comparison with modern maps shows that it must have lain in the demesne enclosure called Chambers. A court roll entry of 1470⁴⁶ records the summoning of William Fuller for an offence concerning the hedge on 'Chambres hous' pasture, while an earlier one of 1458 mentions damage done by pigs in Halle Grove. It is thus possible that the moated structure still existed at

this time with pasture and a grove nearby. However, the site had been clearly abandoned and deemed unworthy of notice by 1629. This may have happened soon after 1538 when the manor passed into lay hands. At some time a new manorial site was chosen further north and facing the common. The new building of 1502 must also have been in this northern group; it is possible that they were established as part of an otherwise unrecorded northern movement.

There are several records of a windmill in Hargham. Court roll entries of 1476 and 1477⁴⁷ both mention a windmill; the entry of 1476 deals with an unlicensed sale of the mill and its subsequent transfer to new tenants. It stood on a piece measuring 17 perches and 3 feet in length and 5 perches and 6 feet in width 'by the rod' measuring 16½ feet (283.5ft x 88.5ft). The new tenants were to repair the mill using two oaks 'j for a poste et alia for an exaltre' (*sic*). An entry in 1502 refers to this or another mill with land attached as the metes and bounds there were newly set. No windmill or memory of such a mill appears in the field books.

In 1629 and 1681 a tenement and croft lay on the eastern side of the rectory. This appears to be the property mentioned in a court roll entry of 1476 as Benetts 'formerly built upon' being sold without licence of court. A later entry in the same year that the vendor had built upon pasture called Bennets a house 'called a halle'. Perhaps the hall house replaced an earlier building.

The Exchequer Inquiry of 1600⁴⁸ included a deposition that the Prioress of Bruisyard (through her bailiff or steward) or her farmer (tenant paying rent for the manor) maintained a foldcourse for 500 sheep. Again, there is no evidence to decide whether the farmer or steward lived in the moated house or in the manor house shown on the maps of 1629 and 1681. This house was soon to be replaced by the present Hargham Hall. An Exchequer Deposition of 1696⁴⁹ records that at that time the whole of Hargham except for one cottage was in the occupation of Sir Nicholas Hare and that John Turvey became shepherd to William Gall of Hargham in 1685 and continued so for some four years. For three years he tended sheep on all parts of the common except the Green and Shortmeadow. Towards the end of this period Hare made it plain that he intended to live in Hargham and take the sheepcourse into his own hands as he was ready to furnish the new house he had built there. This points to 1689 as being the year in which the present Hall was completed.⁵⁰ The date of the creation of the park is unknown; it was in existence by 1797⁵¹ and was extended eastwards between 1839 and 1846.⁵²

There were two manors in medieval Wilby, broadly continuing the Domesday division. Blomefield's statement⁵³ that the Domesday holdings were of equal extent seems wrong as the lands of Ecouis were obviously more extensive and had a larger recorded population while the church was associated with them. This appears to have become the capital manor and to have absorbed the small Bigot holding. The larger manor was held by the Boylands for many years⁵⁴ and then came to the Cursons in the 15th century; by the time they sold it to the Lovells it had become known as Wilby Hall *alias* Curson's. In 1665 it was purchased by Robert Wilton. The other manor, by the late 13th century, was held by Robert de Beckhall. A de Bek family held land in Banham in 1316⁵⁵; on the other hand, the small stream flowing through Wilby was called the Beck in 1619. In the early 16th century this manor was sold to John Green Gent. of Wilby; in 1564 the Green estate in Wilby was shared among five heiresses who sold to John Wilton. Later, when Robert bought Wilby Hall, the two manors were consolidated; subsequently, one of the Wiltons sold to Ralph Hare of Hargham. Doubtless the lands of the two manors would have been intermingled to some extent and, if Blomefield⁵⁶ is correct, lands belonging to manors in neighbouring parishes also lay in Wilby. It is obvious also from the maps of 1629 and 1681 that a salient of Wilby land has since been transferred to Hargham.

No early map of Wilby has come to hand but a survey giving a description of the lands survives.⁵⁷ It has been dated 1619 but it does include a description dated 1566 which has among

the names of witnesses that of Edward Grene, a name which also appears in the description of furlongs. It seems likely, therefore, that the survey is, in the main at least, of 1566. The site of a manor is mentioned as being in decay ('modo in decasio') 'cum le mote' and an adjacent close. There was also a great enclosure of 36½ acres called Hall Close and an enclosed meadow of 13½ acres, a 'sheepes close' of 4 acres all in the vicinity, and in a close next to the last Edward Grene held two pieces of 5 acres and 1½ rods separated by 2 acres of demesne land. Edward Grene, according to parish register entries, was a cadet member of his family; his sons Guy and John were baptized in 1541, while the entries recording the burials of Thomas Grene (1565) and his young son Francis (1580) refer to them as being lord of and heir to Beckhall respectively. This leaves in question the identity of the decayed manor house as no other building of this status is mentioned in the survey. Examination of the entries in the survey shows that a preponderance of topographical names can be placed with confidence in the southern part of Wilby and the survey is accompanied by descriptions of the warren and foldcourse again clearly located in the south.

There is no reference to the bounds of Hargham, though those of Eccles and Banham are mentioned. The maps and surveys of Hargham state that land called Brakenhills to the east of Hargham belonged to Mr Wilton 'being demesne of Beckhall' although a marginal note of 1681 disputed this. This together with the salient of land already mentioned, contrasting with the absence of any reference to Hargham and the bias to the south shown by the topographical names, suggests that the Wilby survey deals with lands belonging to Wilby Hall *alias* Curson's rather than Beckhall. The lands described in the survey, appearing largely if not completely south of the Beck, comprise an area of roughly two-thirds of the parish. It is interesting to note that in 1086 the proportion of land belonging to the larger holding in relation to that of the other was in the ratio of 2:1.

The present Wilby Hall stands within the remnant of a substantial moat on the northern side of the Beck. It has been dated to the first half of the 17th century, although very much in the Elizabethan tradition.⁵⁸ The existence of the moat suggests an earlier building on the site; alternatively a remnant of an earlier house may be embedded in the present structure. There is a site to the south of the Beck which may be that of the decayed manor house of 1566; a trapezoidal moated platform, since cut by the diversion of the road past the existing Hall, survives partly in arable and partly in pasture land. This moat and other enclosures were shown on an aerial photograph of 1946.⁵⁹ It is possible that the finds and earthworks in the northern part of Wilby are associated with Beck Hall.

Comment

Although finds of flints were widespread there were variations in density which were exaggerated by the considerable cover of woods and grasslands. Despite this there was a riverine bias in the distribution, a feature in keeping with the Breckland pattern of human activity where higher ground lacks surface water supplies. However, the marginal nature of the estate, virtually astride the boundary of Breckland, is revealed by a greater incidence of surface water in the east and this may be reflected in the increased density of finds at a distance from streams. It is possible that settlements may be equated with some of the clusters of finds near streams, but this is not a safe assumption.

More definite suggestions can be made concerning Iron Age settlement. A very thin scatter of finds points to a degree of overall exploitation but the two marked concentrations have an eastern bias. Each is located on a sandy knoll or ridge overlooking heavier, less easily-drained soils.

Of the Romano-British evidence, probably the most notable feature is the apparent dearth of finds in the western portion of the estate and the absence of activity close to the line of the

branch of the Peddars Way linking Stanton Chair in Suffolk with Crownthorpe in Norfolk. The straightness of the present road which appears to preserve the line of the Roman road is temptingly deceptive and seems to have misled Margary when he commented 'North of Eccles Road this route traverses some low and wet ground but its existence in such direct continuation of the alignment to the south of East Harling seems to make it very probable that this is a part of the same route'.⁶⁰ It is clear that this cannot be so as the present road has disfigured a medieval moat. Hayward's map (Fig. 7) reveals the original course of the road and may give a truer indication of the Roman alignment. The concentrations of Romano-British finds do not slavishly mirror those of the previous period but the focus of activity in the south-east is broadly similar.

Early Saxon activity in the area is problematic. The report of the discovery, in 1859, of a cremation cemetery suggests that evidence may remain to be found. The location of the cemetery is unknown. The description of its discovery states that remains of from twenty to thirty urns, probably Saxon, were found together with calcined bones. As none of the pottery has survived it is possible that the urns were of the Late Bronze Age. The site was simply described as 'in a field on his (Sir T. Beevor's) property at Hargham'.⁶¹ It seems that this must have been in the northern part of Hargham: a perforated stone axe hammer found in 1850⁶² was said to have been discovered 'near the same spot urns found and several tumuli exist'. The two tumuli in northern Hargham have been noted. At the time of the discovery much of the area was heathland or woodland marked 'Hargham Common' and 'Sheepwalk' on the 1st Edition of the Ordnance Survey map. The possibilities can be narrowed to three fields. Two of these have been closely examined without result.⁶³ The third contains a low mound, is very close to the New Buckenham stream and may thus be the most likely findspot.⁶⁴

The Middle Saxon distribution within Hargham is interesting as it shows a shift of emphasis westwards into lighter soil and is close to the line of the Roman road. The 'ham' place-name is generally regarded as a possible indicator of very early English settlement. Proximity of 'ham'; names to pagan cemeteries has been noted in Suffolk. In Norfolk 'ham' names are found in areas considered favourable for agriculture in Early and Middle Saxon times.⁶⁵ The assertion that 'hams' signified core settlements from which later stages of settlement foundation spread seems intriguing in the case of Hargham.⁶⁶ Despite the clear evidence of a strong Middle Saxon beginning the place was to become relatively minor. The scatter of finds in the south-eastern quarter of the estate, as has already been suggested, seems to be the aura of a centre at Wilby. If so, this gives an interesting slant on settlement history. Wilby, Ashby (DB *Essebeia*) and the Rocklands have been described as a group of Scandinavian place names around the headwaters of the Thet.⁶⁷ It is assumed here that 'by' is the Old Scandinavian for farmstead, village or settlement, not dissimilar from the old English 'tun'. If that is so, the presence of Ipswich-type Ware suggests that Wilby may have been an existing settlement which underwent a change of name at some point after an influx of Scandinavian settlers and not an entirely new foundation. The presence of an Early Saxon cemetery in Rockland may be comparable.⁶⁸ Domesday gives three early variants of the name: WILEBEY, WILGEBY and WILLEBEIH.⁶⁹ Wilby in Suffolk is similarly named WILEBEY (twice) and WILEBI (twice).⁷⁰ Interpretation of the Norfolk name has been suggested as 'farmstead by the willow trees' or 'circle of willow trees'; for the Suffolk place the second has been offered. The Old English 'beag' is suggested in both instances, in the first case as an alternative to 'by'.⁷¹

The distribution of Late Saxon finds in Hargham shows little change from the Middle Saxon pattern, although an eastward drift had begun. It is at this point that limited documentary evidence is provided by Domesday Book. Although there is no mention of a church it is possible that one was built when the eastward expansion began. It is likely that this movement also

reached the margin of common land as the church still stood in a peripheral position in Hayward's day. It is probable also that Warin's hall stood somewhere near the church. A fairly strong aura of finds lies to the north of Wilby with some signs of concentration near the earthworks north of Wilby Hall. It is possible that the presence of Middle and Late Saxon property close to the earthworks indicates early activity there. The most intriguing feature in the south-east of the estate, however, is the Late Saxon concentration on a site apparently abandoned after the Iron Age. This area, as Hayward shows (Fig. 7), lay within Wilby. There is no obvious explanation for this detached cluster.

The eastward movement in Hargham was consolidated by medieval times and a moated site, probably the manor house of the de Herkehams, was now in existence. Moats began to appear after c1150 and construction became more widespread in the 13th century.⁷² A small lobed enclosure east of the church shown by Hayward suggests an intake from the common and limited surface finds date it, tentatively, as medieval. The considerable quantities of finds made immediately to the south confirm the settlement which appears to have begun in Late Saxon times. The area of the Wroe, apparently once common, also yielded some medieval pottery pointing to a rather earlier intake than that suggested by the document of 1502.⁷³ The distribution of medieval finds gives no obvious site for the windmill mentioned in the documents, unless a minor increase in density to the south-west of the main nucleus may be considered. The medieval documentation of Hargham is not sufficient for much comment and it is Hayward's map which provides a suitable basis for discussion. The most obvious feature of the medieval and post-medieval distributions is the clear correlation between Hayward's inhabited areas and the concentration of finds. Particularly marked is the site of the Rectory. Medieval pottery is widely distributed over most of the arable ground shown by Hayward as well as the disputed Braken Hill. Omitted from the distribution are the areas of Swangey Heath, Paxbroom ('several heath' according to Hayward) and Conyclose. The relation of Hargham's commons as shown by Hayward to what are even today ill-drained gravelly soils is also notable. A minor point of interest is the sequence of pottery finds made near a deep steep-sided pit called 'Engine Pit'. This pit dates from at least 1681⁷⁴ and may be older. The 'engine' may refer to a windlass which would have been needed to raise the spoil.⁷⁵ The most glaring divergence between Hayward and the distribution map is the absence of archaeological evidence for the northern group around the manor where grassland does not permit fieldwalking. There is thus no firm indication from either source of the date when this cluster was established.

The evidence from the Wilby part of the estate is interesting. The area of the detached cluster present in Late Saxon times was no longer actively exploited in the medieval period but the scatter of pottery extended right up to the parish boundary. The intensity, not surprisingly, increases on and around the earthworks north of Wilby Hall. The documentary evidence for this has been reviewed. Faden's map of 1797 shows a road leading north from Wilby church to the west of the Hall and then turning abruptly eastwards to the north of the Hall to take its present course. It is fairly obvious that the hollow way continues the line of this road northwards from the abrupt bend. Evidence of other earthworks south of the Beck cited already⁷⁶ shows Wilby to be a shrunken village. Documentary evidence already reviewed points to no particular cause of decline but suggests that it took place gradually after the 14th century. Finds made just inside the parish of Old Buckenham indicate full exploitation of land there while within Attleborough cultivation appears to have reached the parish boundary, with some outlying settlement points being established on the sites of the present Potmere Farm and Cottage. In Snetterton pottery occurs in the fields bordering the Hargham boundary but the northern fields are largely blank. These were heathland in 1681⁷⁷ but a solitary find near a deep pit may be a sign of medieval

activity there. One field does show a higher incidence of finds; it was examined twice because of the presence of early pottery but, despite this, the amount remains unusually high. The field was enclosed in 1681 and thus may have been more heavily manured in earlier times.

Conclusion

Despite the rather large proportion of the landscape under permanent vegetational cover, the survey has been of particular interest. The area extends across the approximate boundary between the light Breck soils and the heavier boulder clays to the east and there has been an opportunity to compare their affect on human activity. The existence of two 17th-century maps and accompanying surveys has allowed close comparison of documentary and archaeological evidence. The late desertion of Hargham has been described elsewhere⁷⁸; this survey has thrown light on the earlier history of the village and revealed a surprisingly vigorous Middle Saxon nucleus which drifted eastwards to become a relatively minor medieval common-edge community. Lastly, some evidence demonstrating shrinkage in Wilby has been obtained.

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1. Soil Survey of England and Wales: Soil Map of Norfolk, 1/100000.
2. Finds made are included in the distribution maps.
3. Siles and Monuments Record (henceforth SMR) 29945, 29950, 29630, 31105.
4. SMR 29944.
5. SMR 29960.
6. SMR 29630, 29631.
7. SMR 9151, 9152, 9153.
8. SMR 9145, 29630, 24145 in 29631, 9150, 9147, 9148, 9144. Those which can be plotted have been included in Fig. 1.
9. SMR 29946.
10. SMR 9154. Excavated by H. Apling. The cremation was identified by Miss Tildesley as the remains of two men, a young woman and a small child.
11. SMR 9155.
12. SMR 9156.
13. SMR 9157.
14. SMR 29960.
15. SMR 30658.
16. SMR 31186.
17. SMR 30835.
18. SMR 30658.
19. SMR 30655.
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23. SMR 9185.
24. SMR 11926.
25. Sir T. Beevor has recently (1995), in an unpublished dissertation for the Certificate in Field Archaeology and Landscape History of the University of East Anglia, traced the course of this road on through woodland to pass behind a house set back against Laundry Plantation and merge with the line of the Haverscroft road.
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44. CUL Buxton MSS Box 49.
45. Public Record Office E134/43 Eliz. Easter 26: summary transcript, Hargham Hall.
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