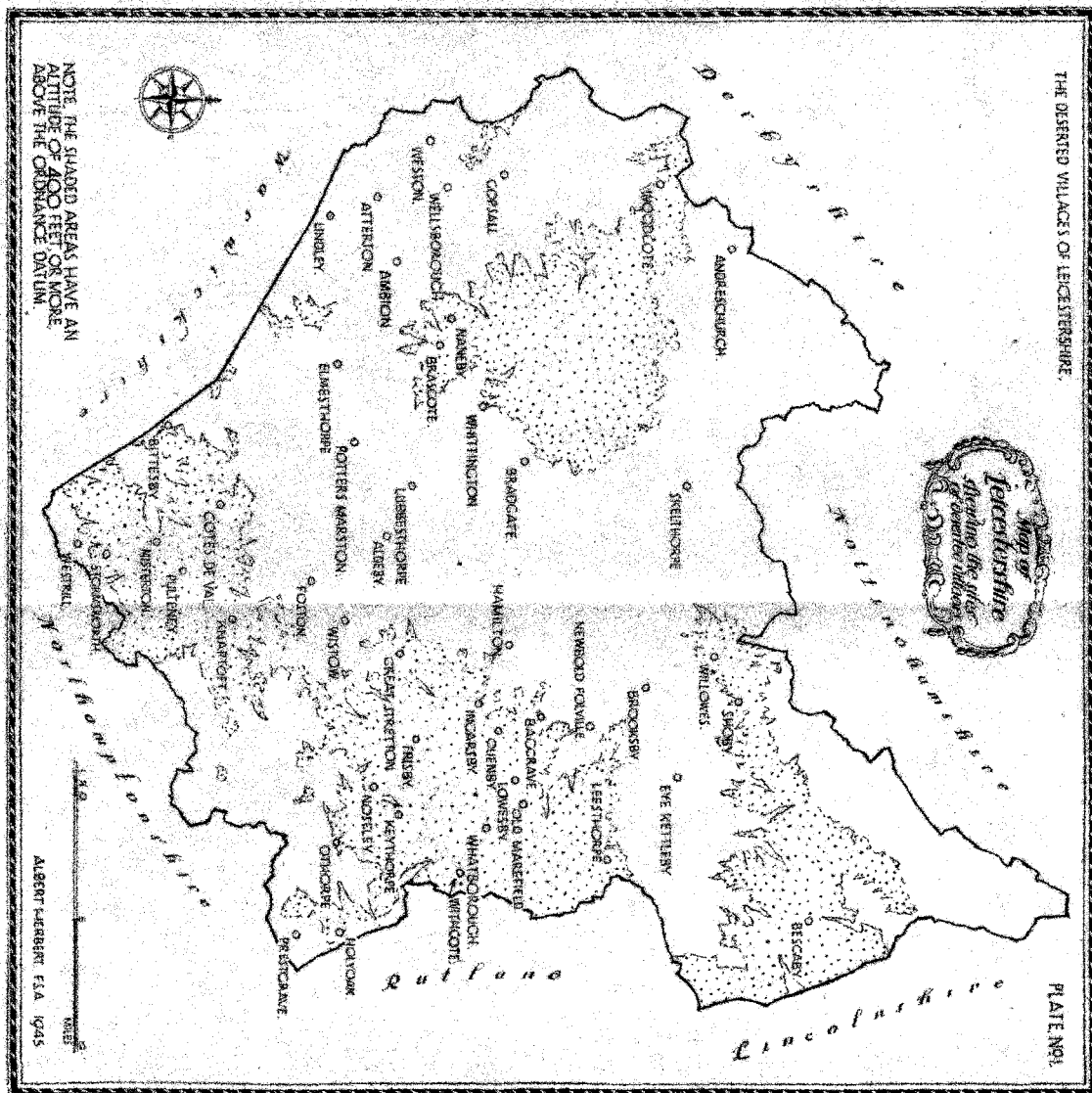


## PLATE NO. 3.



NOTE. THE SHADED AREAS HAVE AN ALTITUDE OF 400 FEET OR MORE ABOVE THE ORDNANCE DATUM.

ALBERT FERNBERG, F.S.A. 1945

# **THE DESERTED VILLAGES OF LEICESTERSHIRE**

**BY W. G. HOSKINS, M.SC. (ECON.), PH.D.**

## The Deserted Villages of Leicestershire

As the sun sets behind the crumpled outline of the Charnwood Hills, the evening light throws long shadows across the pastures of east and south Leicestershire, revealing in many places the presence of shallow ditches and banks that form a distinct pattern, often covering the greater part of a twenty-acre or even larger field. Such patterns may be most clearly seen where they lie upon a slope and are viewed from the opposite side of a valley, as at Ingarsby. In the high light of the middle hours of the day, the pattern is indistinguishable and appears merely as an irregular confusion of bumps and hollows. Often a long abandoned series of gravel pits, especially if the workings were shallow, will present much the same appearance on the ground. These old gravel pits may be found all over Leicestershire, particularly in the east and south, where good road material was scarce, and they are frequently mistaken by the inexperienced student for earthworks of archaeological interest. It is, however, not difficult with a little care and practice to distinguish mounds, banks, and depressions that are of real archaeological significance from these other relics of man's activity in more recent times; most old gravel workings go back no further than the middle of the eighteenth century, when the movement to improve the surface and construction of roads was under way.

The patterned fields of which we spoke are the sites of deserted villages, about which the literature is extremely scanty. Indeed, when I first saw the pattern in a twenty-five acre field at Knaptoft, nearly half a mile west of the ruined church, it was difficult to identify it with any known type of earthwork. Only later did I perceive a resemblance to the known site of the former village of Ingarsby, six miles east of Leicester; and then to a plan of a supposed deserted village near Bingham, in Nottinghamshire, which is printed in Hadrian Allcroft's *Earthwork of England*.

Once this likeness was perceived, it became possible to detect similar sites from the clues afforded by documentary and literary evidence, and to-day one can list nearly fifty such sites in Leicestershire alone, with perhaps others awaiting discovery. There are seventeen sites to the west of the Soar and thirty-one to the east, the complete list being as follows: Aldeby, Ambion, Andreskirk (or Andreschurch), Atterton, Bradgate, Brascote, Elmesthorpe, Gopsall, Lindley, Lubbesthorpe, Naneby, Potters Marston, Skelthorpe, Wellsborough, Weston, Whittington, and Woodcote, all in the western half of the county; and, in the eastern half, Baggrave, Bescaby, Bittesby, Brooksby, Cotes de Val, Eye Kettleby, Foston, Frisby, Great Stretton, Hamilton, Holyoak, Ingarsby, Keythorpe, Knaptoft, Leesthorpe, Lowesby, Misterton, Newbold Folville, Noseley, Old Marefield, Othorpe, Prestgrave, Pulteney, Quenby, Shoby, Storms-worth, Westrill, Whatborough, Willowes, Wistow, and Withcote. The

great majority of these places lay in the east and south of the county, long famous for rich pastures, and all but about four can be shown to have disappeared between 1450 and 1600.

Since Hamilton and Ingarsby are the best known of these sites, it will be as well to describe these first, particularly as the former has already been made the subject of an interesting paper by the late Mr. G. E. Kendall. The "Town of Hamilton," as it has long been called on maps, is in a fifteen-acre field rather more than a mile north of the village of Scraftoft, and about four miles north-east of Leicester. The field lies on the south bank of a stream, beside an ancient fording place crossed by the road from Scraftoft to Barkby; and another footpath—formerly the recognised way from Humberstone to Beeby—runs through the close where the village stood.

The local legend is, of course, that the ubiquitous Cromwell was responsible for the destruction of Hamilton, just as, so I was informed on the spot, he was responsible for the deep trenches at Great Stretton which are actually the remains of a medieval moat. There is a tradition, too, that the site is haunted. Mr. Kendall relates how a native of these parts never passed a certain tree "down Hamilton way" without taking off his hat to it, as a mark of respect and propitiation to an evil spirit. Horses are said to grow restive in the fields round about. "A rider was once brought up in the township close one evening by something indescribable rising up and 'beginning to lean up against him,' from which he only disengaged himself and his horse with the utmost difficulty." It would be interesting to discover whether any other site of a deserted village is associated with similar legends of haunting; I have not myself encountered any such story elsewhere, but this is not to say that these traditions do not exist.

Of the township close, as such sites are frequently called, Nichols says, in the closing years of the eighteenth century: "In this close may yet be traced the lines of many buildings, particularly the chapel and the chapel yard." In a field immediately to the east were "boundaries of gardens, ramparts, and fish-ponds," probably the site of a small manor house says Nichols, correctly. When the meadows in the township close were drained not many years ago, a labourer said that the trenches were driven through "paved causeways." Nothing more is known of this interesting revelation, a fact which must be deplored when one reflects that such a site has nowhere, to my knowledge, been systematically excavated, certainly not in Leicestershire.

Turning now to the facts of Hamilton's history, it appears as a typical little medieval hamlet in the early fourteenth century. It was never a large place, only an outlying settlement of Barkby, with a little chapel of its own dedicated to St. John the Baptist and served three days a week by the vicar of Barkby, the mother church. The taxation lists of 1327 and 1332 contain only seven names, but these lists included only a certain proportion of the population—those with moveable goods to

the value of ten shillings and more—and we know in some places that at least a third, and perhaps a half, of the households of the village escaped the levy, chiefly by reason of poverty. Hamilton probably had a dozen to fifteen families at this time. When the poll tax was levied in 1377 there were only four families listed, and though even the poll tax lists are not an infallible guide to the true population, it is evident that the place had suffered severely from the periodic ravages of the bubonic plague.

In or before 1423, Hamilton's four hundred acres passed to the Willoughbys of Wollaton, and in 1495 the Willoughbys sold out to Thomas Keble of Humberstone, the King's serjeant. The hamlet was already completely enclosed and used for grazing cattle and sheep, for the fine conveying the land (1495) speaks of "400 acres of meadow and 500 acres of pasture in Hamilton and (Barkby) Thorpe, worth £20." No arable land remained by this date. Indeed, the enclosure and conversion to pasture must have occurred some time before this, for the Leicester Abbey rental compiled by William Charyte in 1477 says: "We had formerly a chapel in Hamilton." It seems that the enclosure and depopulation of the hamlet must go back at least to the middle years of the fifteenth century; possibly the population had never recovered from the plague mortality, for there was a further serious outbreak in 1389-90 after the poll tax had revealed only four families living in the place. Land must have been left untenanted here as we know it was on many manors, so that enclosure in the early or middle years of the fifteenth century was easy to bring about. The "town of Hamilton" disappeared, then, some five hundred years ago. Thomas Keble's will, dated 1500, speaks of "the pastures of Hamilton" stocked with cattle. Now it is a lonely site, in a field with a distinct earthen rampart all round it which the modern hedge follows; and within the rampart are the irregular bumps that mark where houses once stood and the shallow depressions that still reveal the line of old lanes and streets in the vanished village. Occasionally, in walking over the field, one may kick up from the turf some fragment of worked stone that comes from the buried chapel of St. John the Baptist.

The deserted site of the village of Ingarsby is about six miles east of Leicester and three miles to the south-east of the site of Hamilton. It lies in a field on the north bank of the same stream, which rises below Billesdon Coplow and flows past Ingarsby and Hamilton to join the Soar just below Belgrave. The present road from Houghton-on-the-Hill to Hungerton passes the site of Ingarsby; and here, too, as at Hamilton, a once-used road crosses the middle of the township close on its way from Tilton to Leicester. From Tilton, which was a meeting-place of old roads, the route seems to have been by the footpath north of the famous Botany Bay fox covert, westward across the fields to Ingarsby; thence through that place to the stream at its south-west corner (where the water-splash on the Houghton road now is) and so up the opposite slope of the valley, past the twelfth-century earthwork on the brow of the hill, and straight into Scraptoft along the top of the clay ridge. A parish boundary

follows this path for about two-thirds of a mile. From Scraftoft the course of the old road appears to have run down the present Scraftoft Lane and straight on into Leicester, crossing the Soar near the site of the Abbey in order to reach Anstey Lane and the western parts of the county. The antiquity of this road need not concern us here, but it is evident that it must have been the direct route between Leicester Abbey and Ingarsby, the richest possession of the abbey in the county. We may well imagine the coming and going of the well-fed canons of Leicester along this grassy lane—a pleasant six mile jaunt on a summer's morning, astride an ambling mare—to inspect their property and to enjoy the hospitality of the grange farm, parts of which still stand embodied in Ingarsby Old Hall.

The manor of Ingarsby had been granted to Leicester Abbey in 1352, all except twelve messuages and twelve virgates of land, and 11d. rent. Of these twelve virgates, nine were bought by the Abbey in 1458 from a neighbouring squire—Thomas Ashby of Quenby—and the remainder in small purchases at other dates. The Abbey thus acquired the entire 1152 acres of the lordship—48 virgates, each virgate being 24 acres, and each acre worth 8d., says Charyte's rental—and in 1469, as the Abbey records show, they enclosed the whole property. There were then perhaps a dozen families living in the village: the poll tax of 1381 lists seven "holders of land at will," one holder of land in fee, one cottager, five servants, and one villein family ("nati"). All others but this one family had escaped the villein bondage by this date. In all there were about a dozen families here in 1381: all but one were economically dependent on the abbey: enclosure was easy. And so Ingarsby suffered the fate of Charwelton in Northamptonshire, formerly a township and now, says Rous, writing just about this time,<sup>1</sup> only "the abbot of Pipewell's grange." Rous's anger rises against the enclosing abbey: "it is a den of thieves and murderers. The profit of the enclosures the monks enjoy . . . but the voice of the blood of those slain and mutilated there cries every year to God for vengeance." He is not suggesting that the profit-seeking monks actually slaughtered their tenants to clear the way for their new arrangements; but the depopulating of the villages had, he says, rendered many lonely roads dangerous for travellers, so infested were they with robbers, and many were the woundings and deaths by night.

Ingarsby, then, which had been a village since the Danes had settled here in the later years of the ninth century, ceased to exist: it became "the abbot of Leicester's grange."

When Charyte compiled his rental of the Abbey's possessions a few years later, the manor was worth £50 per annum clear of all outgoings. By 1535, when the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* was compiled, it had become by

<sup>1</sup>Rous was a chantry priest at Warwick who became interested in the enclosure question about the middle years of the fifteenth century. Many villages in Warwickshire also were being enclosed and depopulated at this time, and Rous lists a number of them in his *Hist. Regum Angliae*, written before 1486.

far their most valuable property in Leicestershire, second only among all their properties to the Lancashire manor of Cockerham. It was now worth £81 os. od. per annum—its value had risen by more than sixty per cent. since Charyte's time, two generations before—and even the Crown was unable to add more to this after the suppression, as it was usually able to do with the badly-managed monastic lands.<sup>2</sup> In 1540 this valuable property was sold by the Crown to Brian Cave, gent., for £1,371 6s. 8d. (roughly £40,000 in modern money) subject to a yearly rent to the Crown of £7 11s. 11½d. payable every Michaelmas at the Court of Augmentations. So the Abbey's richest plum in the county passed to a local squire who took up his residence at the grange farm. Cave also bought, in the same transaction, the rectory and advowson of Hungerton, tithes of hay, &c., in Quenby, and all messuages, lands, woods, etc., in Hungerton formerly belonging to the Abbey "in as ample a manner as the late monastery held them, and as they came into our hand," excepting only the tithes of Baggrave (a hamlet of Hungerton) which the Crown kept in its own hand. All over the country the landed gentry were finding similar handsome pickings in the monastic lands and highly profitable investments in their tithes and advowsons.

Of the site of the village, as it is to-day, an excellent view may be had at evening from the south-west across the valley. A conspicuous rampart runs around the entire western side of the site, following roughly the course of the stream, and to a large extent around the southern side also. At the north-western corner of the site the village rampart joins up with the ramparts and moat of the abbey grange, which was probably the manor-house of the Daungervills before the abbey obtained the property.

The site of the village itself slopes fairly steeply from east to west, down to the stream which forms some sort of defence on the south and west sides of the site. But the eastern side, at the top of the slope, appears to have no defences at all—none, at least, that are visible to-day—which is puzzling. Possibly the ground is so open on this side that a night-watch could not be taken by surprise, whereas on the sides bordered by the stream, with its steep banks, marauders could have crept in unobserved. The earthen ramparts would, presumably, have been surmounted by a wooden palisade, or perhaps by a thick hedge. The fact that villages kept a regular night-watch in the Middle Ages is evidenced by the record of a coroner's inquest at Wigston in 1394, wherein we are informed that one of the four men keeping watch by night "for the afore-

<sup>2</sup>Though Ingarsby itself was not raised in value in 1540 (Ministers' accounts) some of the abbey properties were re-valued at much higher figures by the Crown. Thus the Anstey lands, for example, were nearly doubled in value, and those at Barkby nearly trebled. The revenues from the Quorndon property were multiplied by nearly four, those from Mowsley by nearly three; while property in Market Harborough valued at 1/- per annum in 1535, before the Dissolution, was revalued at £6 19s. 4d. in 1540. On the other hand most of the abbey's biggest estates (*e.g.* Ingarsby, Stoughton, Lockington, and the abbey site itself) were being fully exploited before the Dissolution and were yielding their full economic value.

said town as was the custom " was accidentally killed during a contest with which they were whiling away the hours.

Within the field enclosed by these ramparts and by more modern hedges, there is a rough regularity in the lay-out of the site. The main street of the former village is clearly marked as a hollow causeway running down the slope towards the stream, following the line of the present foot-path from Tilton and Billesdon Coplow, and off it run what appear to be side-lanes between the large bumps that mark the grass-covered remains of medieval houses. These " bumps," of irregular shape and varying size, are usually detached from each other, often at considerable distances, as we should expect; for in the medieval village there was ample room for the small houses of the villagers to stand within their own gardens, crofts and orchards. Contemporary records make it clear that almost every house, farm-house and cottage alike, had its garden and orchard; while the farm-houses had a croft—about an acre of pasture as a rule—adjoining also. Thus the houses of the medieval village were well spaced out along the streets and lanes, and we need not be surprised that twenty or thirty families often occupied a site of as many acres, when we remember also the mill, with its own little piece of ground, the church and its burial-place, and the village green, all of which took up a good deal of space within the ring-fence.

At Ingarsby the line of the main street is now marked by ancient, twisted thorn-trees. These trees are, indeed, almost invariably found on sites abandoned by men long ago; they have strong associations with the human life of past centuries. The level of the street is now well below that of the adjacent land, and though seen from a distance the whole site is markedly rectangular in its lay-out, with banks and ditches cutting up the surface of the field, there is, upon closer inspection, a greater irregularity in the direction of the high banks and a considerable number of hollows of which the exact significance is not clear.<sup>3</sup> There are, indeed, several puzzling features about these deserted village sites that only systematic excavation could conceivably solve.

The main street of Ingarsby seems to have continued across the Houghton-Hungerton road and to have ended at the stream where some masonry is visible near a small bay of water. This may have been the site of the water-mill, which was still in existence in 1599, though the village itself had gone.

One or two other features of the site may be mentioned: at the south-western corner is a large hollow, nearly surrounded by a high bank and now filled with rushes. This has every appearance of having been a large fishpond, possibly one constructed by the abbey after 1352 for its own provisioning, since Ingarsby was always kept in hand by the abbey

<sup>3</sup>They may possibly represent eighteenth-century gravel diggings for the repair of the adjacent road, as the village was built upon a small outcrop of gravel in a large expanse of clay. The disappearance of the village would have made this gravel accessible for repair purposes.



to supply the food requirements of its large establishment. Such additional fishponds, well away from the sites of moated manor-houses with which they are usually associated, are frequently found on lands formerly held by religious houses, especially those lands kept in their own hands for provisioning purposes.

Beyond the fishpond, on the other side of the stream, is a conspicuous rampart of earth with a deep wet ditch on the outer side. This was probably fed from the stream and formed an effective moat at this corner, though why it should have been thought necessary is not now apparent.

Ingarsby is perhaps the most instructive of the numerous deserted village sites in Leicestershire, short of excavation. Its plan is fairly clear: we know its history tolerably well, and the exact year in which it was condemned to extinction in the name of economic progress by the wealthy corporation of Leicester Abbey. To-day, sheep graze over the turf that covers the homes of Thomas Bytyng and Joan his wife, of Thomas Webster and Matilda, and Richard Scheperd and his wife Agnes: and lapwings rise up from the grass-covered lanes where Alice and Margery and Juliana stood and gossiped on a far-away summer morning while larks sang above the growing corn: or where on a black, frosty night the north wind, smelling of snow, nipped round the corner of the barn, and John Lynseye "blew upon his nail" as he returned from the cows, thinking of his bed and Cecily, his wife, waiting for him with hot pease gruel.

Immediately to the north-east of Ingarsby is a tract of rolling country covering several square miles in the hamlets of Quenby, Lowesby, Baggrave and North Marefield. Much of this land was formerly in the hands either of Leicester Abbey or of Owston Abbey, which lay a little further east of Marefield in very pleasant country; and most of the remainder belonged to the Ashbys, long settled at Quenby and subsequently at Lowesby. All four of these hamlets or villages have disappeared as a result of enclosure in the fifteenth or the early sixteenth century; though I have so far located the site of only one of these places on the ground (North Marefield). The others, however, should not be difficult to find.

Baggrave and Quenby, like Ingarsby, were regarded as hamlets of Hungerton, their mother church, and we may take these first. The evidence is rather meagre, but is nevertheless quite conclusive. The report of one of the commissions set up in a vain attempt to stop the depopulation of the countryside, commonly known as the Domesday of Enclosures (dated 1517), tells us that Leicester Abbey had five messuages, two cottages, and twelve virgates of arable land at Baggrave, each virgate being eighteen acres. Thus the Abbey owned 216 acres out of 800 in the lordship; the Templars had owned a good deal in the thirteenth century, and the leper hospital of Burton Lazars a considerable acreage also.

The Abbey lands "were used time out of mind for corn-growing until the aforesaid abbot [John Penny] in the 16th year of the late reign of

Henry the Seventh [1500-1] enclosed the messuages, cottages and lands with hedges and ditches " and turned it all from arable to pasture. Houses were pulled down or left to fall into ruins; five ploughs were rendered idle and thirty persons had left their homes. " The hamlet of Baggrave is desolate and laid waste," says the record.

So far as the abbey lands in Baggrave were concerned, then, we see the five arable farms, each with about forty acres of land in the open fields,<sup>4</sup> enclosed and converted to pasture, so that each laid up its plough. In each the farmer and his family were evicted and forced to seek a living elsewhere, though Heaven alone knew where except in the town; for the same process was going on all over the county, and even where it was not there was little room in other villages for these refugees seeking to make a new start in life. No wonder, as the records tell us over and over again, " they departed in tears."

A year or so after this enclosure, we find the Abbey exchanging lands elsewhere in the county for more property in Baggrave: the new policy was evidently a profitable one and it was desired to extend it. On June 20, 1502, licence was obtained by three laymen to exchange with Leicester Abbey four messuages, and four tofts, 178 acres of arable land, 16 acres of meadow, and 85 acres of pasture in Rearsby, Hungerton and Burton Overy—all belonging to the Abbey and valued at £4 13s. 4d. per annum—for lands of similar value in Baggrave.<sup>5</sup> The actual extent of the new property acquired in Baggrave is not specified, but we may assume that it was roughly equivalent in area to the 279 acres alienated by the Abbey, which thus came to own practically five hundred of the eight hundred acres in the lordship. There is no record that this new property was enclosed, but the Domesday of Enclosures is notoriously incomplete—for Leicestershire above all—and it is difficult to believe that the abbey did not in fact continue its policy of enclosure. That it probably did so is suggested by the fall in the population of the hamlet which is revealed by various later records.

The subsidy lists of 1327 and 1332 contain the names of fifteen or sixteen households at Baggrave, as near as can be reckoned, and these lists do not, as we have seen, embrace every household in medieval villages. We may say that there were perhaps twenty families living in Baggrave at this time. The poll tax list of 1381 reveals twelve married couples here and fourteen other persons, representing perhaps fifteen or sixteen households in all, the decrease since 1332 being due of course to the three great outbreaks of bubonic plague which had occurred in the intervening period. Passing now to the years after enclosure, a muster list of about 1540 shows that the hamlet could then produce only seven able-bodied men between the ages of sixteen and sixty. All these have

<sup>4</sup>Probably rather less, as the two cottages would have had a few acres each also. The average Leicestershire farm at this date had about 36 acres of arable.

<sup>5</sup>*Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1494-1509, 259.*

different surnames and possibly represent seven different households in the parish: in other words, the population had more than halved since the late fourteenth century. A return made to the Bishop of Lincoln about 1562-64 shows a further fall: now there were only two families left where twenty had once been. By 1666, when the hearth tax return was made, only the Hall is listed. The village had totally disappeared.

Just across the fields from Baggrave were Quenby and Lowesby, where the Ashbys were lords of the manor: the profits of enclosure must have been apparent to their eyes in these years. Of Lowesby we know little except that it seems to have been enclosed and mostly turned to pasture in the late fifteenth century: Quenby's ancient fields had disappeared about the same time, certainly before the end of the fifteenth century. Here, too, the depopulation was complete: the twelve or fourteen households listed in the poll tax of 1377 had dwindled to three by 1524, of whom the Ashbys at the manor house were one. One was a labouring family assessed on wages; the status of the other is unknown. Forty years later only the Ashbys remained, looking out over the great park, filled with their sheep and cattle, where later they were to build the finest Jacobean house in Leicestershire.

In this one corner of the county—the lordships of Ingarsby, Baggrave, Lowesby and Quenby, some 3500 acres in all—only eight families were left by the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, where once fifty or more had tilled their land, and, of these eight, four were squires. The Caves were installed at Ingarsby, with another branch at Baggrave, and the Ashbys flourished as of old at Quenby and at Lowesby.

A couple of miles north-east of Lowesby we come to the deserted site of the hamlet of North Marefield, where there is not even a big house and a park to mark the scene of ancient enclosure. Of this site Nichols says: "The Mardefield which is within the parish of Owston, antiently called North Mardefield, and now Old Mardefield, is wholly depopulated; but the site of the village is visible in a close between Owston and Twyford, about a mile and a half from each, about a mile from South Mardefield, and the same distance from Burrow, nearly in a direct line. There are visible traces of streets, lanes, and foundations of buildings; and part of it is inclosed by a moat, but no building remains standing. A small rivulet runs through this close, which contains about 20 acres of very rich land; and the bridle road from Owston to Twyford passes through the spot where it is evident the town once stood."<sup>6</sup>

Marefield had belonged since the time of Henry II to the neighbouring abbey at Owston, a house of Augustinian canons which never became a wealthy establishment. Robert Grimbold, one of the justices of England in Henry II's reign, founded this little abbey and endowed it principally with the whole manor and township of Owston, and the advowson of the church there with its chapels of Marefield and Newbold, some little while

<sup>6</sup>Nichols' *History of Leicestershire* (Gartree Hundred, 765).

before 1166. Newbold, now only a farm-house, lay a mile upstream from Marefield and about a mile across the meadows from the abbey. Like Marefield it had its origin as an outlying hamlet of Owston, and it had acquired a chapel of its own in a way which throws light on the miseries and violence of the twelfth century, especially of the nineteen years of Stephen's reign, when "men said openly that Christ and his saints slept." A Pipe Roll of 1156, at the end of this period of civil war and anarchy, reveals that about half of Leicestershire had been devastated in these years: the Danegeld due from the county amounted to £99 19s. 11d., but of this £51 8s. 2d. is entered as "waste."<sup>7</sup> There is no doubt that the internecine warfare of the earls of Leicester and Chester, who fought on opposite sides during Stephen's reign, brought death and destruction to most parts of Leicestershire.

"The chapel of Newbold," says Nichols, "which was dedicated to St. Lawrence, was at first a temporary oratory erected during a period of civil war (*tempore hostilitatis*) when the inhabitants of this village were unable to reach their parish church. This appears by a bull of Pope Innocent VI, which was issued in 1353 on a complaint made by the abbot and convent of Owston against the inhabitants of Newbold for keeping the chapel open, in prejudice to the rights of the mother church."<sup>8</sup> The reference to "the time of hostilities" is clearly to Stephen's reign (1135-54), as the chapel was standing when Robert Grimbold founded the abbey about the year 1160. The anarchy of these years was such that people dared not walk a mile away from their homes to the village church; and it is evidenced too by the twenty or more small castle sites in Leicestershire that were hastily thrown up during the same period. Every man with property of any considerable value emulated in a small way the earl of Leicester who had castles at many places in the county.

The dispute over the chapel at Newbold was settled amicably. Permission was given by the abbey to the inhabitants of the hamlet in 1361 for the celebration of four masses a week in their chapel during the lifetime of John de Coventry "as a recompense for his many services to the abbey," but with a proviso that "the privilege should not be claimed by any of his heirs, nor prejudice the mother church."

To return to the neighbouring hamlet of Marefield, however: little is known of its history. It is not separately distinguished from South Mare-

<sup>7</sup>H. W. C. Davis, "The Anarchy of Stephen's Reign," reprinted in "*H. W. C. Davis, 1874-1928*" published in 1933. Nottingham was burned twice, in 1140 and in 1153. In 1141 the army of the earl of Gloucester marched across England to the relief of Lincoln, apparently passing through Warwickshire and Leicestershire and probably doing considerable damage on the way. The countryside recovered rapidly from this devastation, for a Pipe Roll for 1162 shows that the item of "waste" had practically disappeared. Similarly, France had largely recovered from the ravages of the war of 1014-18 within six years. The destruction and misery in Leicestershire during Stephen's reign was relatively much heavier than that in France during the first world war.

<sup>8</sup>Nichols, *op. cit.* (Gartree Hundred, 766).

field in the poll tax return of 1381; so we do not know whether it had been depopulated at that date by the various outbreaks of the plague. It seems that much, if not all, of the hamlet had been converted to pasture by the middle decades of the fifteenth century, for in 1463 John Hortop the elder (who probably leased the pasture-grounds from the abbey, as his name is not rooted in this district) sued four husbandmen for hunting a hundred of his sheep at North Marefield with dogs and killing forty, worth £4.<sup>9</sup> Certainly by about 1540, when the muster lists were compiled, the place was wholly depopulated: only South Marefield is mentioned.

The actual site of the old village is in the second field west of the Burrough-Marefield road, beside the bridle-road from Owston to Twyford, and about half a mile north-west of Owston Lodge. The village stood on a bluff of Lower Lias clays above the south bank of a stream which flows west towards Twyford; a small tributary (the rivulet referred to by Nichols) runs northward through the site to join this larger stream. Numerous banks and hollows, making an irregular pattern, lie on both sides of this tributary, though most of the village appears to have been on the eastern side of it.

The lines of former streets may be traced as distinct depressed ways between the enclosing banks. On the southern side ran the Owston-Twyford road, which probably had a few houses strung along it at intervals, each with its garden and orchard, and the larger houses with a small croft adjacent also. What seems to have been a main street runs northward from this road towards the larger stream, and another well-marked street runs roughly parallel with the Owston road, crossing the smaller stream in the middle of the village. To the north of this street is the moat referred to by Nichols, which in the early spring of 1940 was full of water, surrounding a small island which was perhaps fifteen yards square. The moat itself was about fifteen feet wide on an average, as near as one could judge. In view of the smallness of the island, which could not have accommodated a house (particularly one with the usual farm-buildings and courtyard) we must regard the site as that of a fishpond of an unusual type, constructed by Owston Abbey to supplement the supplies of its home-ponds, of which conspicuous traces may still be seen in a field near the present parish church of Owston.

Immediately to the south of the fishpond are well-marked hollows in the turf. One large oval depression, about sixteen feet long by six feet wide, showed traces of what may be foundation walls: two or three courses were visible, in at least two different kinds of stone, particularly at the southern end of the depression. There seemed to be stone courses around all the sides of the hollow, which could be felt under the concealing turf by means of a pointing trowel. This hollow may conceivably represent the original

<sup>9</sup>Farnham MSS.—Marefield. This John Hortop is probably an ancestor of the Hortops of Burton Lazars who rose to affluence in the next century.

size and shape of a small medieval cottage with a sunken floor of an early type (perhaps twelfth or thirteenth century) or it may be a natural phenomenon. Only excavation could decide this point, but these observations are offered in the meantime for what they are worth.

The site of the chapel, erected in the middle years of the twelfth century, could not be traced with certainty. It may have stood beside the more northerly street, as largish pieces of ironstone were partly visible in the turf at one point, which seemed to be roughly shaped into blocks.

Space does not allow of a detailed description of all the known depopulated sites in Leicestershire, but some briefer comments may be made on certain sites which lie to the south of Leicester and Uppingham road in another stretch of country where much ancient enclosure and depopulation may be traced. In this district are the lost villages of Great Stretton, Noseley, Keythorpe, Prestgrave, Holyoak and Othorpe, besides Frisby, which I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

Keythorpe, four miles south-east of Frisby, we know from a law-suit was depopulated about 1450-60 by Thomas Palmer of Holt, esquire, who bought the manor about this time. A yeoman of Skeffington, one John Freeman aged sixty and more, deposed in 1496 that "he heard his mother say that a house in Skevyngton was brought from Keythorpe from Skevyngton's grounds<sup>11</sup> when the town was taken down and set upon his ground at Skevyngton in which house this deponent dwelled the space of eleven years." John Cowper, of the neighbouring village of Goadby, an old man of about eighty, remembered that Thomas Skeffington "bought a house that was set upon certain ground at Keythorpe and led and carried the same unto Skevyngton and therewith builded a fair place in Skevyngton which to this day there remaineth." Most of the village houses, ramshackle structures of wattle and daub on a timber frame, would have been pulled down remorselessly, but Thomas Skeffington was a freeholder living in a house of rather more solid construction. This he carefully demolished so as to preserve the timbers intact, and, having "led and carried" these up to Skeffington by waggon, he proceeded to rebuild his house there. The rest of the village of Keythorpe soon passed into oblivion except as a name: in 1577 the twenty-six acre field in which the village had stood was still called 'the town of Keythorp.' One such name, the 'Town of Hamilton,' is still marked on Ordnance Survey maps; but it seems to be the only name of this type to survive until the present day.

In the south-east of the county, mainly the upland country that made excellent sheep-pastures, is a whole series of vanished villages. Nichols

<sup>10</sup>See *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society*, vol. XXII, part III.

<sup>11</sup>Thomas Skevyngton had a house and a yard of land at Keythorpe, as well as land at Skeffington (his ancestral home) three miles away. More details of this law-suit are given in *Transactions Leics. Arch. Soc.*, vol. XVI, 95-98.

makes reference to the remains of Prestgrave and Othorpe in this district; Noseley, not far away from these sites, seems to have been enclosed and depopulated by the Hazleriggs, who had been lords of the manor since the end of the fourteenth century. Thomas Hazlerigg was cited before the Commission of 1517 in that "he allowed five messuages to decay and six other small messuages he converted into cottages, not for the maintenance of tillage and husbandry." These eleven farms had formerly been employed in husbandry but were converted into pasture for cattle in 1504 or 1505: "in that manner twelve ploughs were displaced," fifty-one people had left the place, and the parish church was in ruins. Sir Robert Brudenell had done the same at Holyoak in the winter of 1496, when thirty people had been evicted from several arable farms to make way for cattle-pastures. "They have departed thence," says the record of the Commissioners, "and are either idle or have perished."

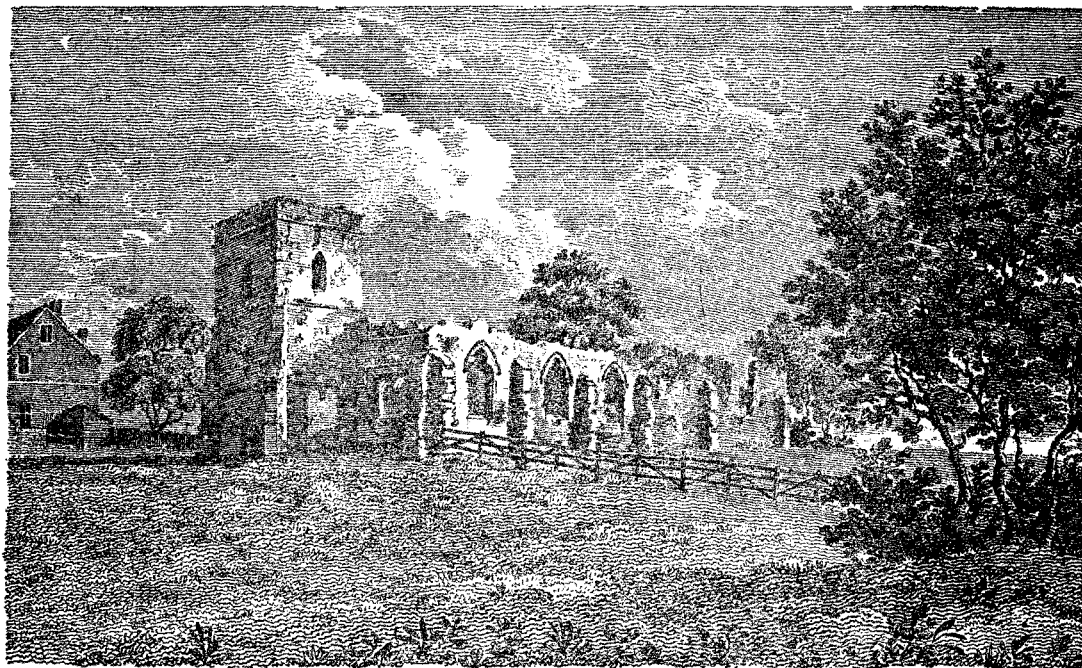
Of the remaining sites of depopulated villages, it appears that the majority of those for which we have any information had been deserted before the beginning of the sixteenth century. Knaptoft was in all probability wholly enclosed and converted to pasture by the Turpins before 1507.<sup>12</sup> Elmesthorpe, Burton tells us, was already deserted in Henry VII's time and Nichols says that when Richard III stopped here on the night of August 17, 1485, no accommodation could be found and his officers slept in the church. In 1279 we find forty or fifty families enumerated in an inquisition; the tax-quota for the village, fixed in 1334 at 39 shillings, had to be reduced by nearly fifty per cent in 1445, presumably because depopulation had already begun. Nichols says that "this lordship, from traditional accounts, is supposed to be one of the earliest inclosures in the kingdom by a ring-fence, the usual mode of inclosing at that time; excepting it being afterwards divided into two or three divisions for the convenience of farming. . . . There now remain some small traces of the village, by a kind of hollow way, which was one long irregular street," Thomas Bradgate, of Peatling Parva, the richest yeoman in the county, was renting the Elmesthorpe pastures from "Master Thomas Harvy" at the time of his death in 1539.<sup>13</sup>

By 1603 only one family remained in the place, at the manor house, and the ancient church was falling into ruin. Some time in the eighteenth century the old hall was pulled down and a farm-house built on the site. The first tenant of this house, says Nichols, "ploughed up the spot that was occupied by the town, and discovered several foundations of buildings, &c." The actual site of the old village seems to have been about half a mile due south of the church which now stands restored to its former use,

<sup>12</sup>A fine of 1507 speaks of 100 acres of meadow and 600 acres of pasture in Knaptoft, the latter being the Middle Field referred to in the inquisition of 1525 (Farnham, *Leics. Medieval Village Notes*, V. 392-93). In 1269-79 there were some 32 households in Knaptoft; in 1524 only 5 labouring families working for the squire, probably in the sheep-pastures.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas Bradgate's will (Probate Registry, Leicester).

ELMSTHORPE, S.W.



THE RUINED CHURCH OF ELMESTHORPE AS IT WAS IN 1792



but must not be confused with the large series of fishponds in the neighbourhood.

At Foston, about seven miles south of Leicester, half the parish seems to have been enclosed before 1549 and the remainder in the early years of the seventeenth century. By the time that Nichols wrote the village had long since disappeared: only the hall and the rectory remained, beside the little church that has stood there since the tenth century, but "there is a tradition" says Nichols, "that twenty teams were formerly kept in this now nearly depopulated village." The tradition was correct. There had been twenty-four or twenty-five families tilling the soil here as far back as Domesday; a record of 1314 enumerates twenty-seven households at that time; and as late as 1524 there were twenty households assessed for the subsidy of that year, which almost certainly included every household in the village.<sup>14</sup> The return of 1562-64 to the Bishop of Lincoln says there were still twenty-one families in the place at that date.

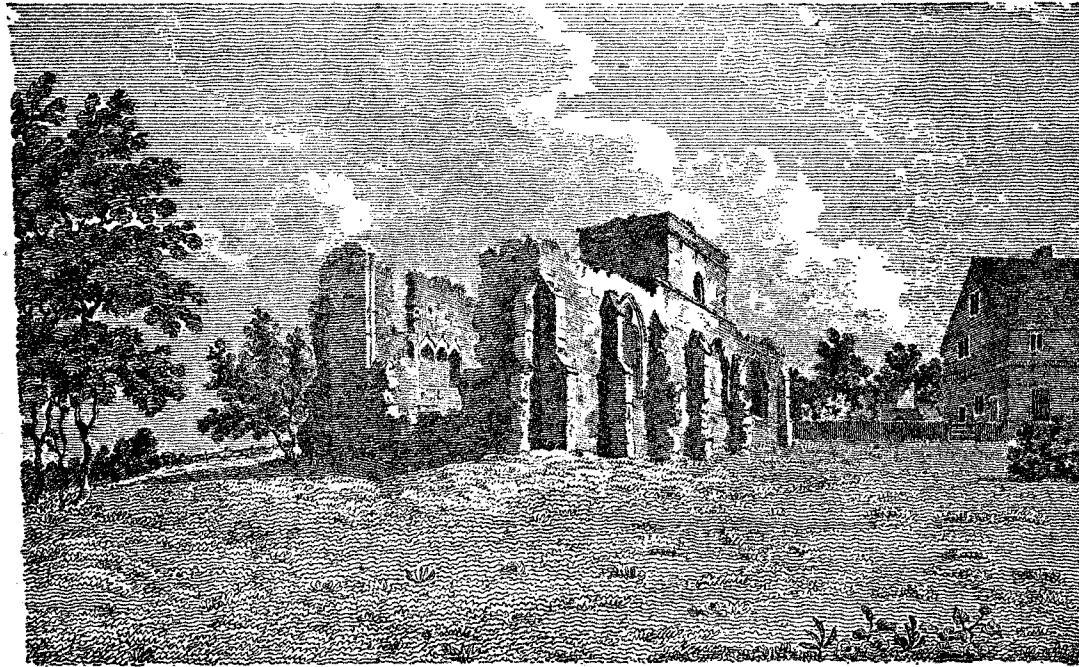
William Faunt—"a man of great learning, wisdom, and judgment, of great esteem and grace in his country" says Burton, who was his grandson—had bought the manor of Foston in 1549 and there he lived until his death ten years later. He was followed by his eldest son William, who was killed in battle in 1574, whereupon Anthony, the second son, inherited the estate. It is possible that one of the two William Faunts was responsible for the enclosure of half the parish, but the evidence is confusing. Nichols says that "from the proceedings in a suit in Chancery, instituted in 1636 by sir William Faunt (who was then the only freeholder in this lordship) against Edmund Carter the rector, it appears that part of the lordship of Foston was inclosed upwards of 60 years previous to that time; and that the remainder thereof had been inclosed in the time of the preceding rector, Randell Carter." But when the Faunts bought Foston from Sir John Thynne in 1549 the fine speaks of *inter alia* 300 acres of meadow and 600 acres of pasture (which amounts to about half the total acreage of the parish), and the inquisitions post mortem of William Faunt in 1575 and of Anthony Faunt in 1588 show no more meadow and pasture than this. We must assume then that the beginning of the enclosure of Foston goes back to some time before 1549. At the time of Anthony Faunt's death in 1588 he had 1,300 sheep grazing on these pastures.<sup>15</sup>

The enclosure of the parish appears to have been completed not long before 1622, when Burton was writing: he speaks of Foston as having

<sup>14</sup>The tax was levied on moveable goods of the value of £1 and upwards, or upon lands, whichever basis brought in most revenue to the exchequer. In addition all persons of sixteen years of age and over, with no moveable goods worth mentioning, were assessed on wages of £1 a year and upwards. Thus practically no adults except vagrants escaped this subsidy and we may feel sure that the subsidy list contains the names of every household in the town or village.

<sup>15</sup>Will and inventory of Anthony Faunt, esq. (Probate Registry, Leicester).

ELMSTHORPE, N. E .



*J. Pridden del. July 8. 1792.*

ANOTHER VIEW OF THE RUINED CHURCH OF ELMESTHORPE IN 1792

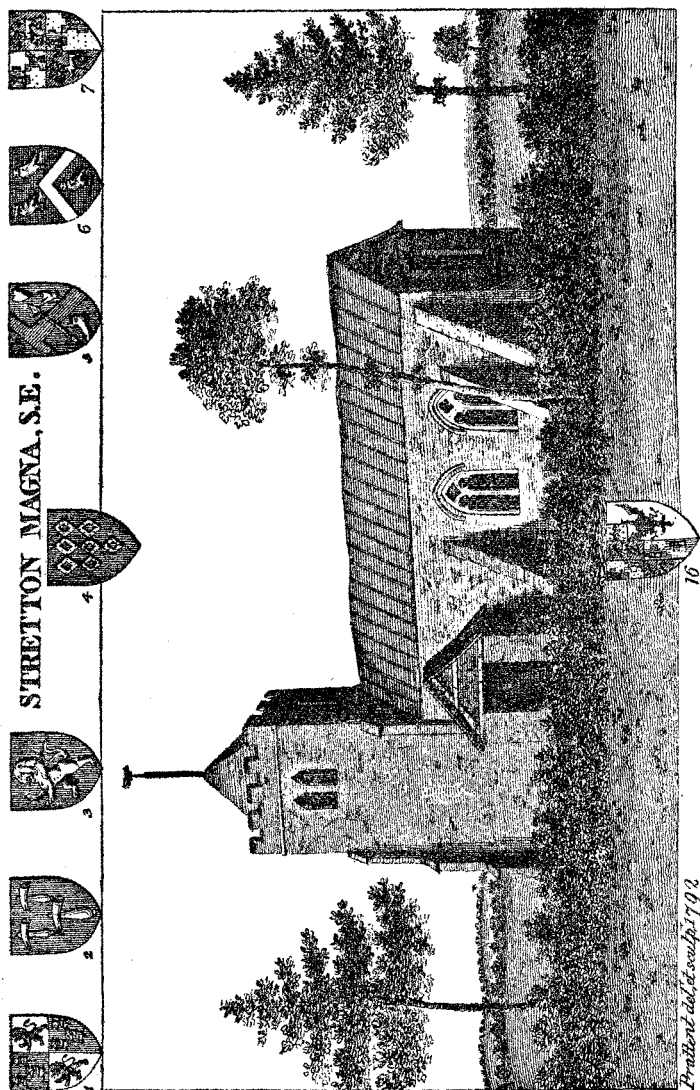
some of the finest sheep-pastures in the county. But only the squire, the parson, and three or four labouring families were left; the "twenty teams" had gone. To-day even the Faunts' fine house has gone—it probably stood where the Hall Farm stands to-day—and the site of "the town of Foston" as I saw it on an autumn morning is an empty field with many long banks and hollows and traces of a long depressed causeway that was probably once the old village street. The field lies immediately to the east of the long narrow spinney by Hall Farm, and on the south side of the by-road that leads in from the Welford Road. Close by are one or two fields of great size, as at Knaptoft, which owe their origin to these Tudor enclosures for sheep-pasture.

Great Stretton, too, seems to have been reduced to four or five families by Henry VIII's time, and subsequently even fewer. The old village lay in the field to the south of the lonely little church on the Gartree road, and in this field one may see conspicuous traces of a moated homestead site. On the rare occasions when this ground has been dug over traces of houses have been found, according to the farmer of this land.

In the extreme south of the county much land was owned by the Caves (the same family as that at Ingarsby and Baggrave) and the Pulteneys. The latter had depopulated their ancestral acres at Pulteney and their adjacent manor of Misterton probably before the opening of the sixteenth century, or at least soon afterwards.<sup>16</sup> Nichols has a little to say on the traces of villages at these places, and also of the more mysterious sites of Stormsworth and Westrill, where no building stands,<sup>17</sup> which were probably enclosed at an even more distant date by Selby Abbey, who had owned these manors before the Caves. Not many miles away, too, was Bittesby, a flourishing village in the late thirteenth century and in 1524 the home of only the Salisbury family. Further details of Bittesby's disappearance are wanting, but a fine of 1572 shows that it consisted of only three messuages, each with garden and orchard, 40 acres of arable, 60 of meadow, and 1,000 of pasture. There were in addition three acres of wood. By this fine the manor was conveyed to Ralph Salisbury, gent., for 17 years at an annual rent of £70. It is interesting to observe in subsequent fines that the process of converting arable to pasture, which was so characteristic of the latter part of the fifteenth century, and of most of the sixteenth, was

<sup>16</sup>In 1524 the subsidy for Misterton lists Sir Thomas Pulteney, kt., at the highest assessment in the entire county (£160 on lands). There was in addition a "clerk" assessed on lands, and, besides these two landowners, no fewer than seventeen labouring families. By 1564 there were only three families left in this parish. At the time of his death in 1540, Thomas Pulteney also possessed (with many other lands) the manor of Pulteney, which then consisted of 1,000 acres of pasture and was probably wholly depopulated. The thousand acres of pasture were contained in two great fields, called Middle Field and High Field in 1547.

<sup>17</sup>Nichols, *Guthlaxton Hundred*, 367.



GREAT STRETTON CHURCH AS IT WAS IN 1792

reversed. By 1640 there were no fewer than 550 acres of arable in the manor again.<sup>18</sup>

Lindley, away on the south-western side of the county, bordering upon Watling Street, was the birthplace of William Burton, the first historian of Leicestershire, and of his brother Robert Burton, the celebrated author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. The Burtons had acquired a share in the manor of Lindley in 1529, when the last John Hardwick's lands were divided up among his six daughters and co-heirs, of whom one, Elizabeth, had married James Burton, a Staffordshire squire, in 1511. This James Burton was great-grandfather to the above William and Robert, and we may therefore assume that William Burton is speaking with full knowledge of the facts when he tells us that "the town was suffered to decay by the last John Hardwick in 1500, the 16th year of the reign of Henry the VIIIth, being one of the first inclosed lordships in all the Hundred." This act of depopulation is not recorded among the surviving returns of the enclosure commissioners of 1517, but these are known to be incomplete for Leicestershire. Here again the records show that there had been a village of some size at Lindley in Edward I's time: now there is nothing but the Hall.

The same thing was happening all over the county where the monasteries were strongly entrenched and had acquired the whole or the greater part of a manor; or where the squire was deeply rooted and there were few or no other freeholders to put obstacles in his way (as at Knaptoft, Foston, Noseley, and elsewhere). Whatborough, high up in the uplands of eastern Leicestershire, was nothing but a sheep-pasture for Launde Priory in Henry VIII's time: shortly before the dissolution of the priory in 1539 the prior, fearing the worst, was disposing of all the monastic goods and we hear of his reducing the number of sheep in "Whatboro' fields" from two thousand to five hundred. The population return of 1562-64 speaks of only one family there at that date, while an early seventeenth century map of the parish marks a field as "the place where the town of Whatborough stood."<sup>19</sup> Bescaby, high up in the north-eastern corner of the county, towards Lincolnshire, had mostly gone by Henry VIII's day and the earls of Rutland hunted the hare across its silent fields when they wanted a day's sport.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>In 1279 Bittesby contained 23 villein families each with a virgate of land and two free tenants with a virgate of land between them—25 families in all. Of this site Nichols remarks: "The lordship seems to have been converted into sheep pastures before Burton's time. It now remains chiefly in that state; and many people are confident, that if the plough were admitted there, the curiosity of the Antiquary might be richly gratified. The irregular and excavated appearance of the grounds indeed seems to have been produced by human art, rather than by the hand of Nature . . . ." (Nichols, Guthlaxton, 117). What Nichols is describing here is undoubtedly the site of the vanished village, depopulated in all probability in the latter part of the fifteenth century or in the first quarter of the sixteenth at the latest.

<sup>19</sup>The map is printed in Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*, facing p. 223.

<sup>20</sup>Hist. MSS. Commission, Belvoir MSS. IV, 295.

At Brooksby, a few miles up the pleasant little valley of the Wreake, the home of the Villers family since the time of Henry III, the squire began enclosing in the fifteenth century. Sir John Villers was cited before the Commissioners of 1517 for having enclosed four farms with hedges and ditches on 6 December, 1492 and converting them from arable into cattle pastures, in which state he had held them until the date of the enquiry. We are told that a hundred and sixty acres were involved in this action, that four ploughs had been laid up and that twenty-four people had left their homes and occupations.

The whole manor of Brooksby contained some eight hundred odd acres. Whether or not there had been any enclosure before 1492 we do not know, for the Commissioners had no authority to enquire back beyond 1488, but it seems likely that the manor had been entirely enclosed and the village wholly depopulated by the middle of the sixteenth century, if not a generation earlier.

Unfortunately we have no sixteenth century subsidy lists or population returns to help us in discovering the fate of Brooksby, but we do know from an ecclesiastical return dated 1603, that the village had entirely disappeared by that time: "Brokesbie in the King's books VII the patrone of Brokesbie being butt one entire household within the said p'ishe is Villiers, Esq."

There is indeed a muster list, compiled about 1540, which sets out (besides four members of the Villers family) no fewer than twenty-two names of able-bodied men at Brooksby, eleven archers and eleven billmen. But I am inclined to think that these were Sir John Villers' personal retinue and not ordinary men of the village, for the muster list adds: "This manor is wholly in the possession of Sir John Villers, knight, which hath harnes for himself and 24 men." Further, there is a record, dated some twenty years earlier, that appears to reinforce this view. In the *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* (vol. 3, 48), there is an interesting letter from Thomas, Marquis of Dorset, to Wolsey, dated 28 January, 1519, in which he says that Leicestershire is in great disorder. Two tame harts, with bells round their necks, belonging to his brother Leonard, have been killed in the night, and their heads set upon stakes, at the suggestion of Sir John Villers. Upon an enquiry being opened "the said Sir John Villers, who was wont to ride with eight or nine horses at the most, came to town with 26 or 30 well weaponed, and himself a sword and buckler by his side, who never used to ride with one before, and set him down upon the bench, the said sword and buckler by his side, facing and braving the quest with his adherents, so that justice could take no place," as Roger Wigston could also say. The letter is written "at my poor lodge of Bradgate."

Villers, Faunts and Turpins all knew each other and went hawking together. Did not Anthony Faunt of Foston leave his favourite hawk Ringbell to "Mr. Villers of Brooksby" in happy memory of lovely summer mornings together, when "they fleeted it carelessly, as they did in the golden world"? All of them were enclosers, and so too were the

Brooksby of Shoby across the valley, and the Purefoys of Fenny Drayton, at the other end of the county, who were also friends and confidants of the Villers. The country gentlemen of Leicestershire, a small county in which everybody of some social position knew everybody else, were not slow to learn from each other the new way of doubling their incomes by turning their estates into sheep pastures and driving away their tenants from the one-time arable farms.

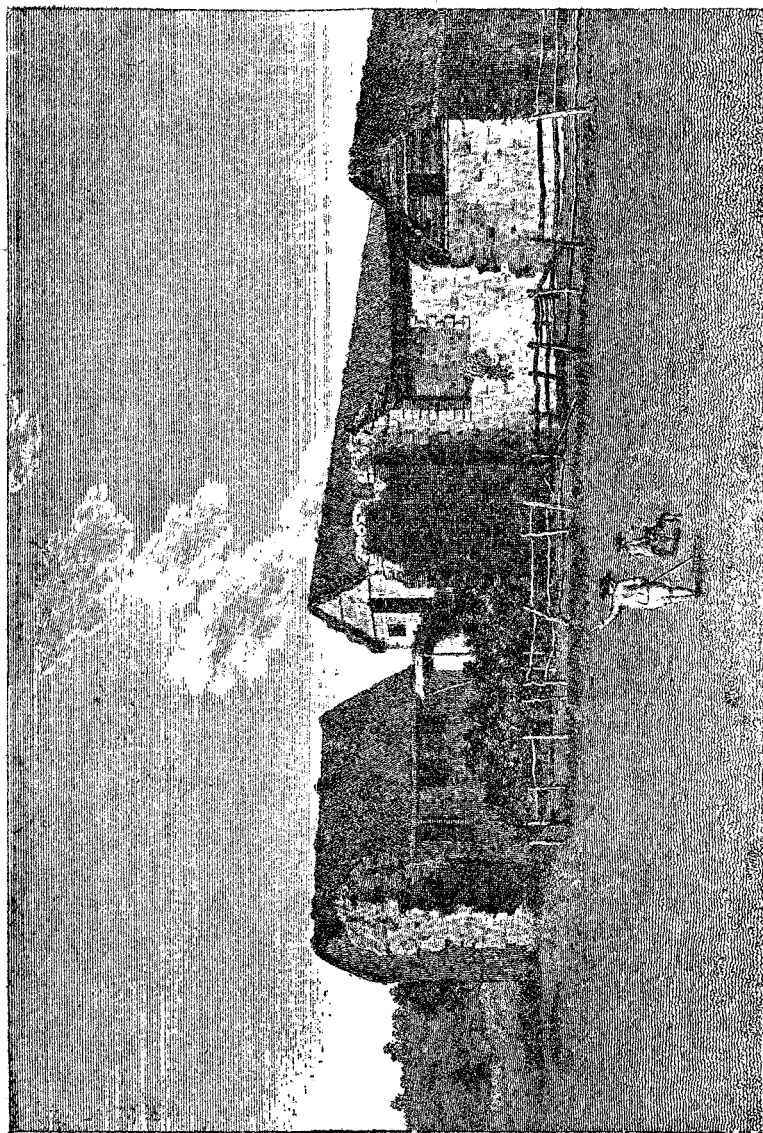
Lubbesthorpe, Leesthorpe, and Willows went as well. Doom fell upon the little hamlet of Willows, in its remote hollow in the wolds that look across the vale to Brooksby, on a December day of 1495, when Sir Ralph Shirley turned all the arable into sheep and cattle pastures, and "thirty persons departed in tears and have perished."<sup>21</sup> Of this place Nichols wrote: "There stood a hamlet of the name of Willoughes in a field of about 37 acres, now called The Township, in which the sites of houses are still discernible; and a hill towards the south-west side of the close is known . . . by the name of the Chapel Hill."

No wonder that at last the patient peasantry of the Midlands rebelled.<sup>22</sup> In May of 1607 came the rising which involved Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and Leicestershire, in which "the diggers," as they called themselves, "violently cut and broke down hedges, filled up ditches, and laid open all such inclosures of commons and grounds as they found inclosed, which of ancient time had been open and employed to tillage." Wherever they marched people sent them spades and shovels, and cart-loads of victuals: and the Diggers of Warwickshire put out a proclamation "to all other Diggers," asking for their help. They were fiercely determined; for, said they: "if you happen to show your force and might against us, we for our parts neither respect life nor living; for better it were in such case we manfully die, than hereafter to be pined to death for want of that which these devouring encroachers do serve their fat hogs and sheep withal." As for the Turpins and the Caves, the Faunts and the Pulteneys, and all the progressive squires who had enclosed their lands for the golden harvest of sheep-farming, they were tyrants who would "grind our flesh upon the whetstone of poverty . . . so that they may dwell by themselves in the midst of their herds of fat wethers . . . They have depopulated and overthrown whole towns and made thereof sheep pastures, nothing profitable for our commonwealth. For the common fields being laid open would yield us much commodity, besides the increase of corn on which stands our life."

<sup>21</sup>*Domesday of Enclosures*, ed. Leadam, I, 234.

<sup>22</sup>There had been earlier disturbances, as for example in 1553 when a number of Leicestershire men were apprehended for "a seditious tumulte" in "plucking upp of a hedge" at a place not specified by name. They humbly submitted and acknowledged their fault and were ordered "at their comyng home to make upp the saide hedge agayne at their costs and charges." They were also bound over for each other's future good behaviour in the sum of £20 until the next assizes, at which they were to appear and publicly acknowledge their fault once more. (*Acts of the Privy Council* (1552-54), 371, 377-8).

LUBBESTHORPE.



THE RUINED CHAPEL AT LUBBESTHORPE



But it was all in vain: the tide of economic progress, no matter what social evils it brings, can never be stemmed in a pagan society. The Diggers' revolt was crushed as all the others had been, and as the seventeenth century goes on we find more and more Leicestershire gentlemen calculating in their notebooks the profits that enclosure would bring them. Most of them reckoned it would about double their rent-rolls,<sup>23</sup> and that was good enough. True, enclosure was no longer as harmful to the community as it had been: the price of wool had fallen and that of grain had risen, so that sheep and cattle pastures no longer swallowed up the villages and hamlets of the Leicestershire countryside.

Yet the damage had been done: some forty or more little communities—perhaps over fifty if we could trace all the sites—had been wiped out of existence in the five generations between about 1450 and 1600. In many of these places a great house still stands as a monument to the wealth that enclosure had created for the few: Quenby and Baggrave, Lowesby and Stanford, Withcote, Noseley and Brooksby. But in other places time and chance have brought the great house to ruin also. Only a doorway and a few old windows remain of Knaptoft Hall, and wainscotting slowly mouldering in a loft; not a trace remains of the Faunts' house at Foston, nothing of Elmeſthorpe; the Shirleys' beautiful hall at Ragdale even now is falling into ruin; and the winter wind flows like a sea over the upland pastures, alike through the broken casements of the squire's house and over the bleached grass that covers the lost villages.

I wish to acknowledge the kind assistance of Mr. Albert Herbert in providing the frontispiece map for this paper and in making his copy of Nichols' *History* available for certain illustrations.

<sup>23</sup>See various papers among the Clayton MSS. at the City Muniment Room, Leicester.