

THE OLNEY CHARTER OF 979

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The only pre-Conquest document referring to Olney is a grant by King Ethelred to his kinsman Ælfhere, ealdorman of Mercia, in 979. The Bucks Archaeological Society celebrated the millenary by beating the charter bounds, which are preserved in an excellent 12th-century copy and throw light on more than one period of the history of Olney. They give a description of the countryside, accurate at the time and readily intelligible today, which can be explained in terms of earlier phases of settlement.

The Relation of the Charter to the Settlement Pattern

The early history of the valley of the Great Ouse between Buckingham and Bedford is almost a blank, though intensive investigations by the archaeologists of the new city of Milton Keynes may be expected to fill in the outlines for the sub-Roman and settlement periods. Even if *Bedcanford* of the annal for 571 is Bedford,¹ it does not follow that the subsequent settlement was by the conquering Saxons; what seems to have happened is that the destruction of Catraut's kingdom of Calchvynydd, which is said to have extended from the Chilterns to Northampton,² opened the way to Anglian settlement. The heathen Middle Angles lost no time in settling intensively along the whole of the Nene valley from the Fens to its source,³ and the Vale of Aylesbury already had a mixed population;⁴ but the editors of *The Place-names of Buckinghamshire*, after assembling the indications of Anglian settlement in the upper Ouse valley, concluded that it was appreciably later than that on either side, perhaps as late as that of the western midlands.⁵

Along the valley of the Ouse, the Ouzel and their tributaries lie valuable alluvial deposits, flanked by valley gravels laid down during inter-glacial and post-glacial periods as a result of river action widening the valley floors. From Belgic times onwards, the stiff clay away from the rivers could never have attracted settlement until population was pressing upon resources. Moreover, the clays were usually heavily wooded. To the north lay Whittlewood (*Moreyf*), Salcey Forest and the mysterious *Bragen*, of which Yardley Chase is only a remnant. To the south lay the forests of Bernwood, Chetwode and Whaddon Chase.

The ancient parish of Olney, covering 3366 acres on the left bank of the Great Ouse (including part of that river)⁶ is a fair sample of the Ouse valley, including some of the best land in the area and some of the worst. The height varies from about 170 ft. in the river-meadows to over 350 ft. along the Northamptonshire border. As the land rises, oolitic soils give place to cornbrash and then to Oxford clay; there appear to be no plateau gravels in Buckinghamshire north of Newport Pagnell.⁷ The town of Olney is on a gravel terrace, some 12 to 40 ft. above the present level of the Ouse.

The well-drained river-gravels attracted settlement at all periods of pre-history, and their peculiar distinction is that there it is often possible to study complete ancient landscapes. Their extent, however, is quite limited. Clearance for agriculture proceeded along the little valleys of the Ouse tributaries before it moved uphill, and by the early 10th century it was approaching the Ouse – Nene watershed. The county boundary, which lies a little to the south-east of the height of land, must have been finally determined soon after the establishment of the *burh* of Buckingham in 914,⁸ even though the first references to *Buccinghamscir* are a century later.⁹

The Forest: Bragenfeld and Yardley Chase

It was suggested by Mawer and Stenton¹⁰ that Cold Brayfield, a village east of Olney, may contain the pre-English name of Yardley Chase. Professor Ekwall pointed out¹¹ that the name must be identical with that of Brafield-on-the-Green ten miles away, and that the *Bragenfeld* of a grant made by Edgar to ealdorman Beorhtnoth in 967¹² might refer to either (Sawyer¹³ assigns it to Cold Brayfield). Ekwall's original suggestion was that the first element contained the British name for the forest area of which Yardley Chase is the chief survivor; but in a note¹⁴ which may have been added in proof he suggested OE **bragen* 'brain', and this was followed in *English Place-name Elements*¹⁵ s.v. *brægen*, *PN Northants*¹⁶ left the issue open ("the element *Bragen*-taken as some old name for the area later known as Yardley Chase"). One might expect the name for an ancient forest, especially a forested summit, to be Celtic; not far away are Brill and Brickhill, which are respectively from British words for a hill, with *hyll* added by uncomprehending Angles.

In the settlement period, the forest must have extended from the Ouse valley almost to Northampton. To the south-west, it was probably linked to Salcey Forest through Ravenstone Great Wood and the Horton woods, and on the other side it may have adjoined the forest of Bromswold, the Bruneswald of *Gesta Herewardi*.¹⁷ Thus the south-eastern boundary of Northamptonshire ran through a continuous chain of woodlands separating two quite different bodies of settlers. *AET Bragenfelda* can hardly relate to the forest itself, but rather to open areas on its flanks; *feld-land* is frequently contrasted both with *wudu-land* and with *dun-land*. The site of Cold Brayfield is rather bleak; the estate is 'aliquantulum ruris' in 967 and the hidage is wanting in the MS., probably because Cold Brayfield had been grouped with Lavendon for fiscal and administrative purposes; it is treated as part of Lavendon in Domesday. The location of the hundred centre at Bunsty (Buna's *stow*) in Gayhurst suggests that the settlement of the northern part of Bunsty hundred was relatively late.

The Text of the Charter

The text of the royal grant to AElfhre is preserved in MS. 60 f. 35 of the Society of Antiquaries, written c. 1150, in an 18th-century copy of this (Soc. Antiq. MS. 131) and in a 13th-century transcript, lacking the bounds, in the *Liber Roberti de Swapham* (Dean and Chapter of Peterborough). The text has been published by Dugdale,¹⁸ Kemble,¹⁹ and Pierquin.²⁰ Until recently the only published comments seem to have been a brief mention in the *Victoria County History*²¹ and a citation by Professor Dorothy Whitelock.²² In 1979 Dr. Michael Reed published a translation and elucidation of the bounds, following a study in the Wolverton and District Arch-

aeological Society's Newsletter, which however adopts a wrong starting-point and does not recognise that the ancient parish of Olney included Warrington.²³

The Soc. Antiq. MS. 60 text is an excellent one, calling for only three slight emendations, already silently made by J.M. Kemble. The Latin is somewhat heavily contracted, and in four or five cases there may be doubt about the extensions. Kemble made two unnecessary emendations, normalised the names of the witnesses, altered *th* to *þ* or *ð*, interchanged those letters according to his own principles, and capitalized what seemed to him to be proper names. Thus it appears desirable to present a fresh text.

In the following transcription *e* is replaced by *æ* but *E* becomes *Ea*. All abbreviations are extended, the letters supplied being italicised. A stroke over a vowel is expanded as *m* following. The more drastic abbreviations are discussed in the notes. The lines are those in Soc. Antiq. MS. 60, cited as A (Kemble's text being K). Lines 3 – 9 (*quamquidem . . . mercanda sunt*) are based on a Northamptonshire charter of 944,²⁴ Edmund's grant of Badby, Dodford and Everdon, cited as B. The resulting text is as follows:

De Oleneze

1. REGNANTE in perpetuum domino nostro Ihesu Christo. Sacrae
2. autem scripturae aedictafona catholicorum patrum
3. nos aminonent ut memores simus quam quidem
4. transeuntis mundi uicissitudo cotidie per in—
5. crementa temporum crescendo decrescit. et ampli—
6. ando minuatur. Crebrescentibusque repentinis ua—
7. riorum incursu *ūm* ruinis uicinus finis terminus esse cunc—
8. tis in proximo cernitur. Iccirco uanis ac transilibus
9. rebus mansura caelestis patriae premia mercanda sunt.
10. Hinc ego Aethelredus annuente altithrono an—
11. glorum basileus ceterarumque gentium triu*ū*atim persis—
12. tentium gubernator et rector. quandam modicam
13. numinis mei particulam .x. uidelicet mansas
14. in illo loco ubi dicitur Ollaneg cuidam mihi oppido
15. fideli comite atque consanguinitate coniunc—
16. to qui a gnosticis noto nuncipatur uocabulo AElfere
17. libens perpetualiter concedendo in aeternam hereditatem
18. donabo. quatinus uita comite hilariter possideat. et
19. post se quibuscumque uoluerit cleronomis liberaliter dere—
20. linquat. Maneat igitur meum hoc immutabile do—
21. num aeterna libertate iocundum cum uniuersis quae deus
22. caelorum in ipso telluris gramine ad usus hominum
23. procreauit. pascuis. pratis atque siluis riuulorumque
24. cursibus. exceptis tribus. expeditione et pontis ar—
25. cisue constructione. Si quis autem hanc nostrae munifi—
26. centiae dapsilitatem uersatur deprauare temptauerit.
27. sciat se obstaculum irae dei incurrere. et in ultimo
28. examine coram Christo et angelis eius rationem reddere.
29. His limitibus prefatum rus undique circumcingitur.

30. þis sint þara .x. hyda land gemære æt Ollanega.ærest on
 31. calewan were andlang lace into halgan broce. andlang bro-
 32. ces to halgan welle. of þere welle to dene æccre. of dene æcre and-
 33. lang dene to ðreo gemære. of ðrim gemærum on ecgan croft.
 34. of ecgan crofte on ða dic. andlang dices on þone feld. þæt and-
 35. lang wyrtruman on hildes hlæw. of hildes hlæwe on þone stan.
 36. of ðam stane on ðone broc. andlang broces inon use. andlang
 37. use on wilinford. of þam forde andlang use to kekan were. of ke-
 38. kan were andlang use on caluwan wer.
 39. Scripta est hæc scedula anno ab incarnatione domini
 40. nostri Ihesu Christi, dcccc.lxxviii. His testibus consentientibus
 41. quorum inferius nomina karaxata indentur
 42. Ego Æthelred rex ad confirmandum roborandumque hoc
 43. meum donum signum sanctæ crucis impressi
 44. Ego Dunstan dorobernensis æcclesiæ archiepiscopus consensi
 45. Ego Osuuold eboracensis æcclesiæ archiepiscopus adqueiui
 46. Ego Adeluold uuintoniensis episcopus confirmaui
 47. Ego Ælfstan episcopus consensum dedi. Ego Ælfric episcopus
 48. Ego Æscuuig episcopus dictaui. Ego Eadhelm episcopus
 49. Ego Ælfstan episcopus solidaui. Ego Sigar episcopus
 50. Ego Ælfeah episcopus annui. Ego Æthelsige episcopus
 51. Ego Athulf episcopus subscripsi. Ego Ælfstan episcopus. Ego þeodred episcopus
 52. Ego Ælfere dux. Ego Ætheluuine dux. Ego Æthel-
 53. uuard dux. Ego Byrhnoth dux. Ego Eaduuine dux.
 54. Ego Æthelmer dux. Ego Thored dux. Ego Osgar abbas
 55. Ego Æthelgar abbas. Ego Goduuine abbas. Ego Alfuuold minister
 56. Ego Æfuuard minister. Ego Ælfric. Ego Æthelsige. Ego Alf-
 57. gar. Ego Æthelsige ministri

Variant Readings

1. REGNANTE inppetuū A; : Regnante in perpetuum K
2. edicta, fona K
3. ammonent K
qm̄ q'dem A; quom quidem B; quoniam quidem K
6. crescentibusque B.
8. Idcirco B
10. Æðelredus K
11. triuatim A; triviatim K.
14. m'A; mihi K; perhaps for meo.
15. comitate K
16. q'agnosticis A
17. hæreditatem K
19. p̄se A; post se K; perhaps for postea
20. g'A; igitur K; perhaps for geæ (see note)
22. coelorum K
inipso A

23. \bar{p} creavit A; possibly for *perprocreavit* (see note);
cf. B, cum omnibus utensilibus quae Deus
coelorum in ipso telluris gramine creavit.
24. Cf. B, sine expeditione et pontis arcisve instructione
25. Siq's A
27. ire A
28. æxamine A
30. Dis sint đára K
31. Calewan were K
32. Đere K
33. Þreó gemáere K
of Þrim gemárum K
34. on done feld K
đæt K
35. wýrttruman A
on Hildes hláw, of Hildes hláwe K
36. Use K
37. Use K
Wilinford K
Kekan were K (bis)
38. Use K
Caluwan wer K
39. ē A; est K; possibly for *erat*.
42. Ego (with decorative capital) A; + Ego K;
K adds + before Ego throughout.
43. Æðelred K
scē (for sancte) A.
44. Dorobernensis K
45. Eboracensis K
46. Æðeluuold Uuintoniensis K
50. Ælfheah K
Æðelsige K
51. Ađulf K
Đeodred K
52. Ælfhere K
Æðeluuine K
ÆðeluardK
53. Býrhnoth A; Byrhtnođ K
54. Æðelmaer K
Đored K
55. Æðelgar K
Ælfuuold minister K (m' perhaps lost in binding of A)
56. Æðelsige K
Al/gar A, but f perhaps lost in binding
57. Æðelsige K

Notes on the Text

The form in the sidenote, *De Oleneze*, contrasting with the Ollaneg, æt Ollaneg of the text, shows that the name could still be trisyllabic in the mid-12th century. The latest trisyllabic form is Oleneye in the 1233 Liberate Rolls; but the Domesday Commissioners called the place Olnei, so that usage must have varied for the next century and a half. The 979 charter forms are the only evidence for a double *l*, and so for the name **Olla* postulated in *PN Bucks.*²⁵ Even the single *l* is dropped in Ouneya 1207, Ouneia 1208, Auneye 1227. Though lost or almost lost in pronunciation, it has been maintained in the spelling Olney(e), which soon became standard. Mawer and Stenton commented "It is possible that **Olla* may have been a short form of *Ōslāf*, but the name may well be very ancient, and its origin consequently lost". *Ōslāf* would also account for the neighbouring Lavendon, since Lafa must have been a short form of a compound name ending in *lāf*. Alternatively, **Olla* may represent a *British* name, since Olney was an important Romano-British township; possibilities include Olludio²⁶ and Ollototis.²⁷ On balance, however, one is inclined to postulate a seventh-century *Ōslāf* who gave half his name to Olney and half to Lavendon, and whose claim included both, and probably Weston Underwood too; it is Weston by Laundene 1281 as well as Weston by Olney 1344. Of this vast estate, 40 hides by later reckoning, Olney was his 'island' because it is almost completely surrounded by watercourses. The situation was perhaps not unlike that in ninth-century Iceland, where the first-comers made over-extensive settlements, until Harald Fairhair declared that no one should settle land more widely than he and his crew could carry fire round in one day, starting when the sun showed in the east.²⁸ Waddesdon, with its two-day perambulation, is a surviving example of a large and ancient estate, containing several distinct settlements, which retained its identity and became one parish.

In line 3, Kemble reads *ammonent*, 'put in mind' (in a friendly way; not quite 'admonish') but the reading of A seems to be *aminonent*: if so, some such sense as 'impel' is required, at least if *autem* implies contrast and is not simply a copula. In line 7, *incursum* should be *incursuum*; the error occurs in B, which the draftsman was following. *Triviatim* is Kemble's emendation for *triuatim* in line 11; it could mean 'publicly, in the public ways',²⁹ but here the later sense 'on all sides, round about' seems to be needed. In two Burton Abbey charters the corresponding formula has *in circuitu*.^{29a} In line 14, *m'* could be read as *meo* instead of *mihi*; cf. 'cuidam meo militi nomine *Æðelwig*' in an Oxfordshire grant of 995;^{29b} 'cuidam pontifici meo mihi que dilecto, nomine *Ælfrico*' in B. *Quatinus* in line 18 is an admissible form for *quatenus*; it also occurs in the Brayfield charter;^{29c} the lawyer's sense 'so that, in order that'³⁰ is required, not 'seeing that'. In line 19, Kemble takes *p̄se* as *post se*, as in the Brayfield charter; but it seems to be one word, and if so may be *postea*. *g'* in line 20 may be for *igitur*, but it is so drastic an abbreviation that one might suggest *Geæ* or *Gææ*, 'of the earth', especially in view of the other quasi-personification of the earth (as productive) in line 22, 'in ipso telluris gramine' (from B). In extending abbreviations, two forms of *p* have been taken as *per* and *pro*, and *p̄* as *pre* (*præ* K). In line 23, *p̄creavit*, with a double note of contraction, might possibly represent 'perprocreavit' with intensive *per*; the parallel passage in B has 'creavit', but the draftsman was striving to outdo his exemplar, as in line 6, where 'crescentibus' (echoing the previous line) becomes the obscure 'crebrescentibus'.

In the words of William of Malmesbury,^{30a} the custom of that time excuses the diction; but the style is certainly inflated almost to the point of absurdity. As the charter is almost exactly contemporary with Æthelweard's chronicle, and as Æthelweard was among the witnesses, one looks for the rhetorical devices which pleased his circle, and especially for Greek words. The Greek *basileus* for 'king' (with the suggestion of 'emperor') was almost common form, and the reading *geæ* in line 20 (*gea*, the earth) is conjectural; but *gnosticis* (line 16) is found in the Linslade³¹ and Newnham³² grants to Ælfgifu, Æthelweard's sister, in 966, and the hybrid *ædictafona* in line 2 at once recalls *bradifonus* 'slow of speech' in his chronicle.³³ Kemble sought to improve the style by reading 'Sacrae autem scripturae edicta, fona catholicorum patrum . . .' but the emendation is unnecessary. In line 19, *cleronomis*, 'inheritors', is another link with the Linslade and Newnham grants, which have 'quibuscumque voluerit cleronomis inunem derelinquat'. The same clause occurs in the Aspley Guise charter of 969³⁴ but the Brayfield charter of 967 has 'cuicumque voluerit heredi derelinquat'. Κληρονομος (from κληρος, 'lot, legacy', and νομος from νεμειν, 'to dispense, share') is a better word in the context than *hæres*, since it envisages a deliberate apportionment of a man's inheritance, instead of a universal succession, normally by descent.³⁵ The word 'cleronomy' for 'heritage' has been copied from one dictionary to another since 1730,³⁶ but even the OED editors could find no instance of its actual use. The Aspley Guise grant has 'gnosticis' (as in line 16), 'onomate', 'barathri' and 'caraxantur' (cf. 'karaxata', line 41) as well as 'cleronomis'. In a Burton Abbey charter of 1048 *cleronomi* is glossed *id est heredes*, the reference, however, being to the heirs of eternity.^{36a}

Translation

The following translation is offered.

Concerning Olney

Our Lord Jesus Christ (is) reigning for ever; yet the holy writings (and) commanding voices of the catholic fathers admonish us that we should be mindful how indeed by the passage of time (*lit*, the increases of times) the vicissitude of the transient world every day decreases through (this) increase and is lessened by (this) enlargement; and by things which become frequent (*or* which are spread abroad), the onset of sudden disaster of manifold kinds, the near and final end is perceived by all to be at hand. For this reason the enduring rewards of the heavenly fatherland are to be purchased with vain and transitory things. Hence I Ethelred, by the assent of Him enthroned on high, King of the English and continuing governor and ruler of the rest of the surrounding peoples, will give a certain small part of my authority, namely, 10 hides in that place which is called Olney, to a certain ealdorman, exceedingly faithful to me, and joined to me by kinship, who is called by those who know (him) by the famous name Ælf(h)ere, willingly granting (it) to him for ever, in everlasting inheritance, in order that he may possess it joyfully while his life lasts, and thereafter leave it freely to whatever inheritors he wishes. Therefore may this pleasant gift (*or* May this pleasant gift of earth) endure in everlasting liberty, with everything which the God of the heavens has (ever) brought forth in that earth's herbage for the use of man, pasture, meadow and woodlands, and the courses of brooks, excepting (these) three (things): army-service and the construction of bridges and fortresses. But if (any) deceiver shall attempt to

pervert the bounty of our munificence, let him know that he incurs the obstacle of God's wrath, and at the last judgment must render account before Christ and his angels. The aforesaid estate is surrounded on all sides by the following bounds. These are the land-boundaries of the 10 hides at Olney. First, at the bare weir; along the stream into the holy brook; along the brook to the holy spring (*or* the saint's spring); from the spring to the (cultivated) field (cleared) in the valley; from the field in the valley, along the valley to the triple boundary; from the triple boundary to Ecga's croft; from Ecga's croft to the ditch; along the dyke as far as the open country; then along the woodland verge to Hild's mound; from Hild's mound to the stone; from the stone to the brook; along the brook into the Ouse; along the Ouse to the ford growing with willows; from the ford along the Ouse to the keach weir; from the keach weir along the Ouse to the bare weir.

This document is (*or* was) written in the year 979 from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, those witnesses consenting whose names are written below.

- I, King Ethelred, to confirm and strengthen this my gift, have impressed the sign of the holy cross.
- I, Dunstan, archbishop of the church of Canterbury, have consented.
- I, Oswald, archbishop of the church of York, have acquiesced.
- I, Ethelwold, bishop of Winchester, have confirmed.
- I, Ælfstan, bishop, have given consent.
- I, Ælfric, bishop.
- I, Æscwig, bishop, have pronounced.
- I, Eadhelm, bishop.
- I, Ælfstan, bishop, have made firm.
- I, Sigar, bishop.
- I, Ælf(h)eah, bishop, have assented.
- I, Æthelsige, bishop.
- I, Athulf (Æthelwulf), bishop, have subscribed.
- I, Ælfstan, bishop.
- I, Theodred, bishop.
- I, Ælf(h)ere, ealdorman.
- I, Æthelwine, ealdorman.
- I, Æthelweard, ealdorman.
- I, Byrhtnoth, ealdorman.
- I, Eadwine, ealdorman.
- I, Æthelmær, ealdorman.
- I, Thored, earl.
- I, Osgar, abbot.
- I, Æthelgar, abbot.
- I, Godwine, abbot.
- I, Alfwold, king's thegn.
- I, Ælfward, king's thegn.
- I, Ælfric, I, Æthelsige, I Alfgar, I, Æthelsige, king's thegns.

Notes on the Translation

Annuo is literally 'nod with the head' and so 'give assent (by nodding)'. The word is needed in line 10 to maintain the alliteration 'Æthelredus annuente altithrono anglorum . . .' but it is not inappropriately used of an expression of the Divine will; Vergil has 'annuit et totum nutu tremefecit Olympum'.³⁷ The verb is used again in the witness list for the assent expressed by Bishop Ælfheah of Lichfield.

Numen was originally 'nodding' and so came to denote divine will or power: 'numen quasi nutus dei ac potestas dicitur' according to a 6th-century grammarian,³⁸ but according to Varro³⁹ it can relate to the will, might or authority of powerful persons: 'numina sunt, quous imperium maximum esse videatur'. The *numen* of Ethelred (line 13) must refer to jurisdiction rather than mere property; some part of his regality is being transferred to his kinsman, reserving only the three burdens from which land was hardly ever exonerated (*tribus exceptis causis que ab omnibus notissime constant* in an Oxfordshire grant of 984 to Ælfwine, the king's writer⁴⁰). It is interesting that these include the construction as well as the repair of bridges and strongholds. The Linslade, Newnham and Aspley Guise charters cited above have 'exceptis . . . expeditione pontis arcisve restauratione'; the Ardley (Oxon.) charter has 'populari expeditione, arcis constructione, pontis restauratione'. It looks as if the doctrine (inconvenient to bridge-masters) that the number of 'county bridges' could not be arbitrarily increased originated about this time. Olney bridge probably did not exist in 979, but perhaps its construction was envisaged.

If the Olney charter stood alone, *oppido* could be parsed as the ablative of *oppidum* 'town, stronghold', the translation (reading *meo*) being 'in that place which is called Olney, a certain town of mine, to the faithful ealdorman . . .', but in the grant to the king's *scriptor* cited above, the corresponding clause is '*in loco qui dicitur æt Hlæwe cuidam mihi oppido delecto fidelique ministro videlicet meo scriptori*'; this cannot be construed in this way because of *mihi*. We must conclude that *oppido* is the rare and archaic adverb 'exceedingly, outstandingly' which is not found in Cicero and was regarded by Quintilian as obsolete; but in the 10th century this would have been a challenge to revive it. Thus the charter cannot be used as evidence that Olney was fortified or had any urban character in 979.

In line 18, 'vita comite' has been taken as 'while his life continues' rather than 'in life, (in his capacity) as *comes*'. This is because it occurs in the Aspley Guise and Ardley charters already cited, the grantees being respectively a king's thegn and a king's reeve, *miles* and *præpositus* but hardly *comes*.

In line 20, *gramen* should be 'grass' but is obviously meant to include all crops; probably the draftsman had in mind the Psalmist's 'herb for the service of man'⁴¹ (the Linslade charter has a quotation attributed 'psalmigraphis'). The distinction between meadow for mowing and pasture for grazing was fundamental in medieval agriculture, and was maintained until quite recently; it is a feature of 19th-century tithe awards, and some European countries still make the distinction in their agricultural censuses.

Rivulus (line 23), the diminutive of *rivus*, might translate *broc* or *lacu*, but would hardly refer to the Great Ouse, as to whose ownership the charter is silent. Presumably the intention was to convey full rights over the minor streams, but not over the river, which was in effect a public highway: *flumina publica sunt, ideoque jus piscandi omnibus commune est*. Rights of fishery would of course go with each 'weir', but these

were probably fish-traps at the side of the river or on a backwater, rather than dams across the main stream.

The Authenticity of the Charter

The charter appears to have no suspicious features. The political situation in 979, discussed below, makes a royal grant to Ælfhere very likely; *prima facie*, it is surprising that such a modest grant is the only one to him which has survived from the years 975 - 83, but since he led the anti-monastic reaction in Mercia during those years he was unlikely either to endow religious foundations or to entrust his muniments to their care, so that their chance of survival was exiguous. The witness list is right for the date, and the formulae of subscription used by the bishops, where present at all, are correct but seem relatively unenthusiastic. The language has some points of agreement with that of Æthelweard's Chronicle, which in its present form must surely date from 975 - 79. It will be shown that the bounds are those of Olney, including Warrington and what became Olney Park, but excluding Weston Underwood to the west, and with an eastern boundary with Lavendon much simpler than at present. The bounds are concisely but precisely described, in terms wholly appropriate to the late 10th century, when clearance and settlement on the poorer soils along the county boundary was at an intermediate stage.

The Occasion of the Charter

In 979 Ethelred can barely have reached the age of fourteen, though this may have been considered just old enough for him to rule without a formal regency. He was gentle in speech and deeds, and on Edgar's sudden death in 975 a strong faction among the nobles had preferred him to his half-brother Edward, who inspired terror even in his own household. After some months of violent contention, approaching civil war, Edward was crowned, but two years later, on 18 March 978, he was murdered at Corfe by some of the thegns of Ethelred, whom he was visiting. Ethelred escaped all suspicion of complicity (though his mother did not) but it was not forgotten that he succeeded to the throne through the worst deed for the English people since first they came to Britain.⁴² Edward's kinsmen did not avenge him, but he was honoured as a saint and martyr — *deo amabilis rex et martyr gloriosus Eadwardus*.⁴³ It is difficult wholly to accept the statement in the Peterborough chronicle that Ethelred was consecrated king at Kingston very quickly after his accession with much rejoicing by the councillors of the English people. The C-text appears to mention two consecrations under 978 and 979; perhaps the former was swift and simple, within a few weeks, while the second, at Kingston in May 979, was according to the solemn rite of coronation which St Dunstan had prepared for Edgar in 973, and which is substantially that still in use. Two archbishops and ten diocesan bishops took part; the present charter is witnessed by both the archbishops and by twelve other bishops, ten of whose sees are readily identifiable. A great council following the coronation seems the most likely occasion for the grant.

During the short reign of King Edward the Martyr, Ælfhere, ealdorman of Mercia since 956, is said to have prospered, appropriating enormous revenues, and, because of the king's youth, to have destroyed monasteries and dispersed the monks and plundered widows time and again. His wrath was particularly directed against the new

monastic foundations which Edgar had ordered St Ethelwold to institute. He seems to have had popular support in Mercia, acting with the advice of the people and the outcry of the crowd. 'Let the monks be expelled, hurled down, derided, suppressed, bound, beaten, that not one may remain in all the land of the Mercians!' This 'blast of the mad wind from the west' was successfully resisted by ealdormen and thegns in the eastern counties, despite popular clamour. The bishops were agitated and the anonymous Life of St Oswald has hard words for those (unnamed) leaders who assented to or did not resist the expulsion of monks and their replacement by married clerics.⁴⁴

Ælfhere declared his loyalty to Ethelred, but actively promoted the cultus of Edward; he arranged for the removal of the martyr's body from Wareham, where it had been buried without honour, to Shaftesbury in 980. He retained power, at least in Mercia, until his death in 983, and was succeeded as ealdorman by his son Ælfric, who is accused in a letter of Pope John XIV of seizing and pillaging the estates of Glastonbury;⁴⁵ threatened with excommunication, he was exiled in 985, and opposition to the new monasticism came to an end. Ethelred's first grant of land north of the Thames to a religious house is dated 983.⁴⁶

Some Witnesses of the Charter

The first three witnesses after the King were all canonized. St Dunstan (c. 909 - 988) became Archbishop of Canterbury in 959 after his return from banishment. St Oswald of Worcester (c. 925 - 992) had been Archbishop of York since 972. St Ethelwold (c. 908 - 984), compiler of the *Regularis Concordia*, was consecrated Bishop of Winchester in 963; the *Adeluuold* of the MS. is a bad form for Æðelwold. Dunstan consented to the grant, but Oswald only acquiesced. He may have recalled the climax of ideas in Cicero and taken only the first step.

... tu quum es commotus acquiescis (cease to oppose),
assentiris (assent), approbas (approve).⁴⁷

Of the twelve bishops, Ethelwold of Winchester, that great founder and builder, confirmed the grant, Ælfstan, bishop of London, gave his consent; the second Ælfstan, probably of Rochester, made the grant firm. Of the Mercian bishops, Ælfheah of Lichfield expressed assent, Æthelwulf of Hereford subscribed, and ÆEscwig of Dorchester is said to have pronounced; he would have had a special interest in a grant in his own diocese, and perhaps *dictavi* conveys something more than the rest of the verbs signifying acceptance; he used it again in the Ardley charter. At the foot of a draft or formulary (Sawyer 917) apparently drawn up for use at the witan in 1007, we have '*Ego Winsy(y)ge monachus qui hoc testamentum dictitavi atque perscripsi*'. The bishops outside Mercia were not under the same pressure; the other six present, Ælfric of Wilton, Eadhelm, Sigar (Sigegar) of Wells, ÆEthelsige of Sherborne, the third Ælfstan, probably of Ramsbury, and Theodred are not credited with any formula of assent, and probably gave none. Expressions like *adiuvavi*, *conclusi*, *conlaudavi*, *consecrav*i, *consignavi*, *consolidavi*, *corroboravi*, *impressi*, *sustentavi*, *vegetavi* were available, to which words of praise for the king's benevolence were sometimes added. If such terms were not used on this occasion, it was surely because the West Saxon bishops were unwilling to use them. Nevertheless the bishops' presence as witnesses amounted to concurrence, however reluctant, in the anathema; any opponent of the grant would find himself excommunicated in each diocese represented.

The abbots and lay witnesses were not expected to add any such potent expression of their will. Ælfhere witnessed the grant to himself, and his name is followed by that of Æthelwine, ealdorman of East Anglia, who gave the site of Ramsey Abbey to St Oswald, and who had said in King Edward's time that he could in nowise suffer, while he lived, that the monks, who by God's help maintained all the Christianity in the kingdom, should be expelled from it.⁴⁸

Æthelweard, ealdorman of Dorset⁴⁹ and probably of other western counties;⁵⁰ had been elevated to the rank by Edgar about 973. He was an active benefactor of the Church and became the leading patron of vernacular literature, but is best remembered for the Latin chronicle which he composed for his kinswoman Matilda, abbess of Essen (949 - 1011). He terminated the work with Edgar's reign, giving it a happy ending (the last words are 'Fabii quæstoris patricii Etheluerdi foeliciter explicit liber quartus') though he intended to add chapters on the rule of Edward and his murder and on the reign and deeds of Ethelred.⁵¹ After the Danish raids of 980 he could hardly have claimed that since Athelstan's victory at Brunanburh no fleet had remained here, having advanced against those shores, except under treaty with the English:

Uno solidantur Britannidis arva, undique pax, omniumque
foecundia rerum, nec usque ad istas motus adhæsit sine
littora (*for oras?*) Anglorum foedere classicus.⁵²

Æthelweard was almost certainly the brother of Ælfifu (Elgiva), wife of King Eadwig until their marriage was annulled by Archbishop St Oda on the ground of their (fairly remote) consanguinity. Ælfifu received extensive estates, mostly in Buckinghamshire but also in Hertfordshire and Dorset, and Æthelweard remained favourably disposed towards Eadwig, the 'All-fair' who deserved to be loved.

Byrhnōth was Byrhtnōth or Brihtnōth (in a Suffolk charter Bæorhtnōth⁵³), ealdorman of Essex from 956 until his heroic death in 991. He was almost certainly the Beorhtnōth, *comes*, who received Brayfield from Edgar in 967. He was one of Edgar's original adherents, and was among the patrons of the new monasticism; this may account for the survival of the great poem on the battle of Maldon. The biographer of St Oswald describes the battle and may well have known the poem; he strongly approved those who preferred to end their life by a warlike death rather than live in shame.⁵⁴ After Maldon and again in 994, Æthelweard was engaged in the less heroic but not less necessary task of negotiating a truce with the Danish army.

Eadwine was ealdorman of Sussex, and Æthelmaer of Hampshire; both died in 982 and were buried in monasteries.⁵⁵ Earl Thored was the sole representative of Ethelred's Scandinavian subjects.

Abbot Osgar was probably the monk whom St Ethelwold sent across the sea to the monastery of St Benedict at Fleury to learn the customs of the rule. Of the six king's thegns (*ministri*) who witnessed the Olney charter, Ælfwold was probably Æthelwine's brother, 'tall of stature, pleasant in speech, dignified in aspect', whom the biographer of St Oswald likens to Judas Maccabæus. 'I wish to preserve the things that are mine, and give them willingly to whoever pleases me and is obedient to my authority. If indeed Christ is prince of all things, shall He not have the portion which religious men give to Him? . . . By Him who caused me to be reborn, I will not tolerate that such men be ejected from our territories.'⁵⁶ Ælfwold had received Aspley Guise from Edgar in

969. Ælfric had been granted land at Wylve in Wiltshire by Edward in 977.⁵⁷ Ælgar was to receive estates at Ebbesborne, Wilts. in 986 and at Wylve in 988.⁵⁸ One Æthel-sige received land at Æsce⁵⁹ and another, or the same, an estate at Bromley, Kent,⁶⁰ both in 987.

The Extent of the Grant; Neighbouring Estates

Early in the 10th century, most of North Buckinghamshire had been divided into 5-hide and 10-hide units (where possible the latter) to provide a basis for the apportionment of military service and national taxation. The boundaries of Olney must date from this time, but are probably much older, as the unit is natural enough. Its 10-hide assessment, recited in the charter, remained unchanged in 1086, when the Domesday Commissioners found land for 10 ploughs; 10 ploughteams were there, and there was meadow sufficient for 10 teams (this is almost too neat) besides woodland to feed 400 swine. Three of the ploughteams were on the three hides in demesne; the other seven were worked by 24 villeins and 5 bordars, and there were 5 *servi*. The manor was worth £12, and had been worth the same in the Confessor's time, (i.e. before the harrying of 1065), when the thegn 'Borret' (Burgred) held it; it had not been subdivided, except that one sokeman, his man, had 1½ virgates which he could sell.⁶¹ Burgred's successor at Olney was the Bishop of Coutances, and Olney became the head of the Bishop's fief. There is nothing here to suggest any urban features; the local market centre was the new borough of Newport Pagnell.

In contrast, Weston Underwood, the next 10-hide unit upstream, had been much fragmented. The principal estate of 7½ hides, with land for 7 ploughs, sufficient meadow for them, and woodland to feed 200 swine, had been held in the Confessor's time by 10 thegns, men of Burgred. These holdings were all acquired by the Bishop of Coutances. A man of Ælfric also had 3 virgates there, which do not seem to be accounted for in 1086. The Count of Mortain, whose lands became part of the honour of Berkhamsted, held one hide and two-thirds of a virgate, consisting of land for one plough (though only two oxen, a quarter of a plough-team, were available, with two bordars to work them) with meadow for one team and woodland for 20 swine. This small and wasted estate had been held before the Conquest by 3 thegns, two holding 3²/₃ virgates, the third one virgate. Finally, the Countess Judith,⁶² widow of Earl Waltheof, whose lands became the honour of Huntingdon, had 3 virgates, with land for half a ploughteam (which was there), sufficient meadow, and woodland for 20 swine; this land had been held by Ulvric, a man of Waltheof. Probably the Danish habit of dividing into thirds clashed with the Anglo-Saxon preference for halves and quarters. Some of the thegns at Weston clearly had quite small holdings. The 7 sokemen of the Domesday Survey were presumably pre-Conquest thegns; there were also 4 villeins, 5 bordars, a certain Frenchman and 3 *servi*.⁶³ Society was more diversified than at Olney.

Downstream from Olney, Lavendon with Cold Brayfield and Newton Blossomville seems to represent a 20-hide unit, though the ownership was extraordinarily fragmented both before and after the Conquest and the hidages do not appear to add up. This looks like an area of primary settlement on the oolite and especially the cornbrash. In the 11th century, and almost certainly in the 10th, it was of greater value than Olney and more populous, though it had a significantly higher ratio of bordars to villeins, and the meadow was no longer quite sufficient for the ploughteams. None of the numerous

pre-Conquest thegns in Lavendon is described in 1086 as a sokeman, though one of them, Chetel, continued to hold his half-hide in Cold Brayfield as a king's thegn.⁶⁴ This was an area of scattered farms, some of which became manors; the fiscal unit took its name from the central settlement at Lavendon, Lafa's valley. (The formation of a short form from the second element of some such name as the *Öslāf* suggested for Olney is curiously paralleled in the next township, Warrington, Wearda's farm, from a name such as *Æthelweard*). The choice of a centre which gave its name to an area of civil administration may well have preceded and promoted the growth of a village at that centre; in some forest parishes, such as Chetwode, no such nucleation occurred.

The Identification of the Bounds

The charter bounds of Olney are in the repetitive form (first at A; from A to B, from B to C, . . ., from Z back to A) which is calculated to impress them on the mind. In the MS. the English text of the bounds is in a smaller hand than the rest of the grant, and this probably reproduces a feature of the original. An inference drawn by J. M. Kemble⁶⁵ is noteworthy.

The passage which describes [the bounds] is sometimes inserted in the body of the instrument, sometimes appended to it, and is very often in a different hand from that of the grant itself. It seems as if, the grant being duly made, it was left to the grantee and certain public or local authorities to settle its boundaries, according to ancient prescription, and to have them formally inserted in the document, when once fixed and ascertained. The boundaries are thus frequently called *termini notissimi*, and there are instances where they are stated to be so notorious as to require no description: in both cases we must assume them to be under the guarantee of the *visnetum* or neighbourhood, as to this day the bounds of a parish are; and we shall not take an unwarranted liberty if we suggest that the remembrance of them was kept up in a similar way.

The view that charter boundaries were under the guardianship of popular tradition should be confined to the case (which is however the commonest one) where an estate was coincident with a township or group of townships. At Olney the condition is satisfied; the grant relates to the medieval parish, consisting of the township of Olney (with Olney Park) and the hamlet of Warrington, but excluding Weston Underwood, which, though a dependant chapelry of Olney until 1376, was a distinct vill before the Conquest, and with a simplification of the boundary between Olney and Lavendon; the charter bounds follow a brook all the way down to the Ouse, instead of wandering from it on both sides. The time and the reason for this last change are discussed at (12) below. An ecclesiastical sanction for the custom of perambulation would reinforce the tradition, but it is not certain that Olney had a church in 979; the estate no doubt antedated the parish, and tradition assigns the foundation of the original parish church, at the north end of the town (thus, quite close to the Romano-British settlement centre), to the time of Cnut;⁶⁶ a 'Churchyard Elm' and a spring called 'Christen Well' preserved the memory of the site for centuries after the present church was built near the river about 1323.

At least in the popular mind, there must surely have been a connection between (*ge*)*mære*, 'boundary', and the other senses of *mære*, 'famous', 'of sterling worth' and (as a noun) 'a declaration'. Boundaries are *omnibus noti, vulgari relatione cogniti*, or the like. In an age which had forgotten the very idea of a map, and when few but clerics and nobles were literate, boundaries were best remembered by clear and concise descriptions and by periodical perambulation following these descriptions. The boundary of Olney was defined in part by natural objects – the river Ouse, with an ancient ford, one of its tributaries, two brooks, one with a holy spring, the course of a valley; in part by man-made features – two weirs, a croft, a dyke, the verge of a forest, the mound of an ancient warrior. In one case a boundary stone is specified; in another, a triple boundary-point is mentioned without further specification, and this must surely imply reliance on popular knowledge in the three townships, perhaps reinforced by some ceremony. (In contrast, the Aspley Guise charter has 'to þære apuldre þær þa þreo land gemæru togædere gaþ . . . on þone ealdan coll pytt þær þa þreo gemæru togædere gaþ'). It is suggested that the Olney survey was not specially made for the occasion (as probably at Chetwode and Hillesden, where it was the charter of 949 which created the privileged liberty) but that it records a traditional perambulation of an ancient estate. The specified points are well spaced round the circuit; two intermediate points on the Ouse are not strictly needed to define the boundary, but were probably specially marked in some way.

The word for 'from' is uniformly *of*. The word for 'to' or 'on to' is *in, into* or *to* as far as the Northamptonshire boundary, but then uniformly *on* until that boundary is left behind. Along the river Ouse, 'to' is represented by *inon* (for *innan*), *on*, *to* and again *on*. The variation may be quite pointless, but it may possibly be significant that a change in usage occurs at the county boundary, which is the first triple boundary after the start. There is a parallel in the Writton grant of 904⁶⁷ (a 'twin' of the Monks Risborough charter of 903⁶⁸) which has mainly *on*, but with two *to* sections; the two MS sources used by Birch⁶⁹ agree in this small detail, except at one point where one has *to* and the other *on*.

At the starting point 'ærest on calewan were', *on* has been translated 'at', as it takes the dative. This starting point is at the south-western corner of the estate, which is also its southernmost point. It is not the point on the boundary nearest to the settlement centre, but it is the nearest cardinal point to that centre, which in 979 was probably some way back from the river. The initial direction is northwards. The bounds run 'the right way round the clock' (i.e. sunwise), a rule which is invariable in Buckinghamshire. They could be (and probably were) perambulated in one day, given an early start at sunrise in May. If the charter was in fact approved at Ethelred's coronation a fortnight after Easter a formal perambulation (*ymbgang*) to hand over the estate at the Rogationtide gang-days would be conveniently timed. The King uses the future tense *donabo*, implying that the charter does not itself effect the grant; it is the contract rather than the conveyance, which would probably be made on the site with symbolic actions.

The bounds are as follows:

(1) *ærest on calewan were* (First, at the bare weir or at Calewa's weir)

Near this point, which has grid reference SP876 502, the course of the Great Ouse is sinuous; there are now two small islands and another larger one (Caleware Holme),

which has been an osier-bed but is now covered by thorn-bushes. The *wer* was probably a fish-trap of basketwork rather than a dam across the main stream, though the present parish boundary, which runs midstream above 874 503 and below 876 502, shifts to the north bank, apparently to put the weir and associated features into Tyringham-with-Filgrave. Presumably therefore it was chosen as the start of the Olney bounds simply as a cardinal point, not as part of the estate.

The name of the weir has survived in Filgrave as a field-name, the run of forms collected by Professor A. C. Chibnall ^{69a} including:

Caleware medeplott	c. 1455
Calworth	1674
Callworth	1709 enclosure agreement
Calworth Leys,	} 1837 estate map
Hill Calworth,	
Square Colworth	

The 1674 and 1837 references confirm that the weir became a mill-site. When Filgrave adopted a three-field system in the later Middle Ages, one of the three open fields took the name of Caliware or Kaliware Field, the adjoining river-meadow being Caleware mese.

The first element appears to be *calu* (*cal(e)wan* in oblique cases), 'bare, bald, lacking vegetation'. It is usually applied to hills, bare downs, or clearings. Perhaps it seemed worthy of note that the *wer* was not screened in any way. The fishery rights must always have been of value. Since the opening of the Emberton Country Park, incorporating old gravel-workings, a riverside path to the site has become available along the south bank of the Ouse, and is much used by anglers.

In the modern name, *wer* has been replaced by *worth*, 'enclosure', which though very rare in place-names in Buckinghamshire is found in medieval field-names. The Calworth fields are on the rising ground south of the river at this point; there seems no indication that this was a habitation site, though it would have been quite suitable.

(2) *andlang lace into halgan broce* (along the stream into the holy brook).

The *lacu* which separates Olney from Weston Underwood is now a small stream called the Ho Brook. Its confluence with the 'holy brook' of the charter is at 873 513. It runs under the road from Olney to Weston at 874 510 to the west of Overs Hill. Its earlier state in this neighbourhood is recalled in a folk-memory recorded in 1803.

This stream, according to tradition, was frequently so swelled, that it was dangerous to attempt a passage, and Weston being then a hamlet to Olney, the clergy made application to the Pope for leave to build a church at Weston, alleging the danger of proceeding to Olney for the purpose of worship, or of burying the dead. His Holiness assenting to their request, Weston has ever since been a separate parish. It is, however, worthy of remark, whilst noticing the above tradition, that the building of a bridge over the brook (which has lately been effected) would have been attended with little expense compared with that of erecting a church at Weston. ^{69b}

This tradition is 'neither wholly false, nor wholly true'. The parish of Weston Underwood was in fact set up by a papal bull in 1376,⁷⁰ but there was a chapel of ease previously, in which the sacraments were administered but which had no right of burial. To be left with a corpse on the wrong side of the flood was no small grievance. This chapel, a 'field church' in terms of Edgar's legislation, could have originated either before or after the Conquest, probably at a time when Olney and the principal estate at Weston Underwood were in the same hands. It had already been rebuilt by John Olney, who had found it small and in ruins in 1368 and was buried there in 1405.⁷¹ After 1376 its perpetual curate was presented and paid by the rector of Olney. The lord of the principal manor of Weston claimed the right of presentation in 1567, and had secured it by 1670.⁷²

Above the bridge, lately built in 1803, the Ho Brook is bounded on the west by Overbrook Spinney, otherwise the First Spinney, the 'Shrubbery' of Cowper's poems and letters, with its 'glassy stream', 'spreading pine', 'alders quivering to the breeze' and 'moss-grown alley'. A winding path gave access to the moss-house in front of a beautiful round pond.⁷³ Lipscomb (I. vii) calls this stream the Adder.

A *lacu* appears to be something less than a river but more than a *broc*, which in turn is more copious than a *riðig* or *sic*; the smallest flowing watercourse seems to be a *dic*, though this may also be a dry ditch. 'Lake' in the sense 'watercourse' has not survived in Buckinghamshire dialect, and 'stream' is perhaps the nearest equivalent. With the control and general diminution of watercourses through improved field drainage and increased usage of water, 'brook' has come to be used of streams which a thousand years ago would have been too large and too wide to be called *broc*.

Above the watersmeet at 873 513 the charter boundary, which is also the parish boundary, continues up the smaller watercourse. It would appear that the name Ho Brook is also applied to this section,⁷⁴ and this would suggest 'holy brook' as its origin; however, the main stream rises at 864 537 in Howbrook Copse in Yardley Chase across the Northamptonshire border, and the forms Holbroke 1565⁷⁵ and Hollow Brook Coppices 1672⁷⁶ indicate that the first element is *holh*, whether in the sense 'in the hollow' or 'with hollow banks'; either would be appropriate. It may be that a 'hollow brook' and a 'holy brook' have fallen together; and, to add to the confusion, both rise on the *hoh* known in 1274 as Arnho⁷⁷ which separates the Ouse basin from that of the Nene.

(3) *andlang broces to halgan welle*

(along the brook to the holy spring – or the saint's spring)

The closest translation would be 'along(side) of the brook', the local idiom preserving the genitive construction. The brook rises at or near 870 534 on the southern edge of Olney Park, but this would leave no room for the two following bounds, and the spring which was sanctified by its associations or special virtues was probably at 872 517, where (the writer was informed) the springs shown on the 2½-inch Ordnance map still rise within a pond formed to accommodate exotic water-fowl. The spring was, it seems, distinguished for its purity, and this explains a passage in *The Task*:⁷⁸

... the dweller in that still retreat
Dearly obtains the refuge it affords.
Its elevated site forbids the wretch

To drink sweet waters of the crystal well;
 He dips his bowl into the weedy ditch,
 And heavy-laden brings his beverage home
 Far-fetched and little worth . . .
 So farewell envy of the *Peasant's Nest*
 If solitude make scant the means of life
 Society for me!

The present writer visited the Peasant's Nest, fancifully so named by Cowper but called by its present owner Pheasant's Nest, and was informed by a workman that there was no access from the house to the springs; 'they were on another farm'. The 'weedy ditch' is the other arm of the brook, in Weston Underwood.⁷⁹ Thus a boundary which was probably old in 979 has had practical effects in the 18th and even the 20th centuries. Also today, farm boundaries frequently coincide with parish boundaries, and this has permitted the Ministry of Agriculture to retain the civil parish as its basic unit for analysis of the agricultural census.⁸⁰

(4) of þere welle to dene æccre

(from the spring to the [cultivated] field [cleared] in the valley)

Probably *æcer* is here used in its early sense of a piece of wild undeveloped land cleared for cultivation, not as a measure of area. At present 'Dene Acre' would not be at all distinctive, but the name was presumably given to the *first* arable field established in the valley (*denu*) above the holy spring; this would be the dene 'acre', the rest of the upper valley of the brook being uncleared or at least uncultivated. It probably remained so in 979 and even in 1086; the 400 swine of the Domesday record presuppose, on G. H. Fowler's reckoning, about 1,000 acres of woodland,⁸¹ nearly a third of the parish. A possible site for this first ploughing is where the footpath from Olney into Yardley Chase crosses the brook near the 250 ft. contour at 872 524. This path passes Hungry Hall (now Hungary Hall) and crosses the main valley of the Ho(w)brook at 863 526. There is a Danes Close in that valley,⁸² probably with the same meaning; It adjoins Broadroad (*rod* in the sense 'clearing in a wood', a familiar element in Northamptonshire).

The form *æccre* has the regular doubling of *c* when *r* immediately follows. The grammarians say that in *æcer* the single consonant of the nominative singular (protected from gemination by the new vowel developed when *s* was lost from **akrs*) was levelled though the whole declension;⁸³ but it is submitted that the *scriptor* of the bounds took down exactly what he heard on Gang Monday 979, and that the 12th-century scribe reproduced the English *literatim*, whatever he may have done to the Latin. In the form *æcre* which follows in (5), the word would be less strongly stressed. A new vowel sometimes developed in cases other than the nominative singular (e.g. *æcyres* Birch 1216, *æcera* Birch 1217); indeed it may have been difficult to distinguish between such an obscure vowel and a doubling of the *c*.

(5) of dene æcre andlang dene to ðreo gemære

(from the field in the valley, along the valley to the triple boundary)

The triple boundary, the first such point encountered since leaving the Ouse, is that of Olney (Bucks), Weston Underwood (Bucks) and Yardley Hastings (Northants).

It is clear that the surveyor was thinking in terms of existing administrative units, which were to become parishes. The three meet at 863 532, the north point of Kilwick Wood. This presents a slight difficulty. It is clear both from the *lacu/broc* distinction and from the later parish and estate boundary that the charter boundary follows the valley of the smaller stream; but if we proceed up that valley to its head we fall short of the county boundary, and would reach it at about 866 535, a quarter of a mile from the triple boundary point. It is necessary to swerve to the left out of the upper valley, along a hedge across rising ground between the two streams. Perhaps in 979 the boundary was more obvious, separating open ground in Olney from an enlarged Kilwick Wood.

By a coincidence, the point 866 535 is now itself a triple boundary, that of Yardley Hastings, Olney Park and Olney; but Olney Park, which became extra-parochial and then a separate civil parish, was not formed until 1374.⁸⁴ To the south and south-west of the Park lay part of the common fields of Olney, enclosed under an award of February 1768; to the south-east lay the 'beastes pasture'.⁸⁵ This tends to confirm that the tongue of land to the west of the dene belonged to Olney from a fairly early period, and that the charter bounds could with advantage have been slightly amplified at this point; it would have been sufficient to add *and swa* before *to ðreo gemære*. If the point where the boundary leaves the valley bottom was not regarded as a separate landmark in the perambulation (it is not a sudden turn) such a conjunction could easily have been omitted in recording the traditional description.

(6) *of ðrim gemærum on ecgan croft* (from the triple boundary to Ecga's croft)

The change from *to* to *on*, which is used for 'to' from this point as far as (12) has been mentioned above. There would probably have been a change in the party accompanying Ælfhere's reeve, the Northamptonshire foresters coming in at this point. Ecga's farm probably included the small area of Olney west of the dene along which the holy brook flows, though apparently it was not holy above the holy spring. The county and parish boundary has sharp turns at 864 536 and 866 535, and the farm buildings may well have been in the angle at the former point; The prevalence of nettles may be evidence. The adjoining Kilwick in Weston Underwood also implies an outlying farm.

The short stretch of county boundary from the triple boundary point at 863 532 to 864 536 follows the main stream of the Ho(w)brook, with a hedgerow belt on the Northamptonshire side. Ecga is presumably a short form of some name with *ecg* as first element, though it is an odd coincidence that the croft is on the edge of the county and of the forest. A curious parallel occurs in a Mercian grant of 884 which may have been made in Buckinghamshire (*acta est in Hrisbyri*):

þæt up of ðan broce in Egbryhttige croft.⁸⁶

A Meopham charter of 939 has

on þone oran foran wiþ eastan ecgulfes setl.⁸⁷

(7) *of ecgan crofte on ða dīc* (from Ecga's croft to the ditch)

This is a short, fairly straight stretch of hedgerow from the right-hand turn at 864 536 to the left-hand turn at 866 535. Here the definite article is feminine; yet

in the next bound (*andlang dices*), *dic* is taken as masculine. As in the Hillesden-Chetwode bounds, this may be an example of natural gender; the translation would then be 'from Ecga's croft to the ditch; along the dyke...'. This would suit the local topography, but further investigation of features described as *dic* is needed in other counties.

Bosworth⁸⁸ treats *dic* f. as 'ditch', *fossa, excavatio*, but *dic* m. as 'dyke', *vallum*. Toller⁸⁹ in his Supplement thought that 'the instances given under m. and f. may probably be taken together' and the OED, s.v. *dike*, considered the early existence of this sense in English doubtful; 'probably all the OE quotations for which it is assumed in Bosworth-Toller belong to *ditch*'. This surely goes too far; a word for a dyke, the positive counterpart of a ditch, was obviously needed, and Luke xix. 43 is a clear case where *dic* translates *vallum*, 'bank'. The negative or feminine sense would be commoner in charters, since in digging a boundary ditch one usually throws up the resulting bank on one's own side, and the boundary then follows the ditch rather than the bank.

Certainly Bosworth overstated the case; he rendered 'Ðær Severus het dician and eorþwall gewyrca' as 'there S. commanded to raise a bank and to make an earthwall' though Bede's Latin is 'Itaque Severus magnam fossam firmissimumque vallum... duxit'⁹⁰ Again, in citing a lease by St Oswald dated 978,⁹¹ Bosworth translated 'ondlong riðiges on ðone dic' as 'along the ridge to the dyke', instead of 'along the streamlet to the ditch'. This is a case, contemporary with the present charter, where *dic* is masculine but has the sense 'ditch'. In the same charter we have 'up ondlang broces ðæt hit cymæð on anne micelne dic eastriht in fos'. On the other hand, Old Saxon *dic* and Old Frisian *dik*, 'dyke, dam', Dutch *dijk*, 'dyke' and German *deich*, 'mound' are all masculine and all relate to positive, raised features. In the Scandinavian languages the corresponding word means 'ditch' and is of neuter gender. In late Old English one can hardly expect complete consistency of usage, especially near the Danelaw border, but where there is a change of gender in consecutive clauses of the same charter it certainly looks as if a contrast was intended. Dr. Reed has taken the point but has reversed the senses.

(8) *andlang dices on þone feld* (along the dyke as far as the field [open country]).

From the turn at 866 535 to 879 542 the county boundary is marked by a bank and ditch, now much overgrown, separating Olney Park (now Olney Park Farm) from Grimpsey's Copse in Yardley Chase. A small clearance on the Northamptonshire side has left the south end of the dyke within a free-standing hedgerow belt.

Grimsey's Copse (Grymsee 1565, assart de Grimeseth 1247) is taken in *PN Northants*⁹² as 'Grim's hay', an enclosed part of the forest, associated with Grim; (*ge*)*hæg* is a fairly common element in this heavily wooded area. If the association with Grim arose in Christian times, he would be the Devil or some other evil being; if however this boundary between settlers in the Nene valley and those on the upper Ouse was established before the conversion, it could well have been placed under the protection of Woden, the traveller and guide and protector of memory, and this grove could then have been a cultic centre. Woden or Grim is much more frequently associated with dykes than with woods; in Denmark, Odin appears only once in combination with a word for woodland, in Onslunda (Othænslundæ 1401) in Skaane, which may be 'the

memorial of an ancient and primitive cult-place'.⁹³ Those who recited the bounds may well have preferred not to mention the name of the principal heathen god, even in the substituted form, since it must once have inspired terror; thus they gave the surveyor (who may have been a cleric) a simplex form rather than a place-name proper.

When the boundary was established, perhaps as early as the seventh century, and for some centuries afterwards, it must have run through woodland on both sides. In 1608 Olney Park still had 3,854 trees;⁹⁴ the south-west corner of the Park was called Sylle woode (Seley wode, 15th century).⁹⁵

At 870 542 the boundary crosses the brook which flows by Pasture Farm and Olney Hyde to the Great Ouse, its lower course constituting the original eastern boundary of Olney which will be met at (12) below. This brook rises at 866 546 in the wood called Olney Lane End, almost on the height of land called the Arnho (eagle's hoo) which has given its name to Arniss Copse. A stream which flows northwards rises only 300 yards away. The use of *hoh* for watershed is paralleled by 'Wippa's hoo' on the Hillesden-Chetwode boundary. The priority of the Nene Valley folk is suggested by their having retained the highest ground and the springs on both sides.

Crossing the brook and leaving Olney Park and Grimpsey's Copse behind, the boundary emerges into open country; at first an acute-angled field, with the woods of Yardley Chase continuing on the left, and on the right a belt of trees along the brook, forming the northern boundary of Olney Park. The gore of the field has been blunted by replanting.

Feld is here taken as 'tract of open country' rather than 'open field'. The contrast is with the woods then extending on either side. It was not a small clearing (that would have been *leah* or *rod*) but the western extremity of open land extending to Olney Hyde and Warrington. The clearance would have been by settlers, but at this date probably for common rough grazing rather than cultivation, since the site is remote from any settlement centre.

(9) *ƿandlang wyrtruman on hildes hlæw*
(then along the woodland verge to Hild's mound).

ƿ for *ƿæt*, with the meaning 'then', is not found elsewhere in the bounds, and may be significant here. It suggests a halt, after which the procession is resumed. The point where the party emerged from the gloomy woodlands into open country would be very suitable for a Gospel reading; the Badby charter of 944, which the draftsman of the present grant appears to have used, has 'ƿæt on Fealuweslea, ƿær Ælfric biscep redan het' which one might translate in this sense. In any case, it would now be past mid-morning and time for lunch.

There is at present no consensus as to the precise sense of *wyrtruma*. It seems clear that it is a linear feature; that the feature is usually if not invariably at the edge of extensive woodland (as here); that it is indistinguishable from *wyrtwala* (at Witney the terms are interchanged in successive charters⁹⁶); and that the general sense is 'root of the forest' or the like. An examination of the bounds in the Chetwode-Hillesden grant suggested to the writer that it meant not simply the boundary of a wood but a composite verge, consisting of a timbered hedgebank with a perimeter track inside the wood. This is the sense required here for the long stretch of boundary from 870 542, where we enter the *feld*, at least as far as Spotley on the Northampton-Bedford road,

The larger-scale Ordnance maps indicate a boundary-stone at 880 550, marking the triple boundary of Warrington, Olney and Yardley Hastings, but this is not significant in the context of the charter. It is taken by Dr. Reed as *ðreo gemære*, but the preceding stretch does not run along a valley (*andlang dene*). Warrington, formerly Wardington, is first mentioned in the 12th century⁹⁷ and appears not to have been separated from Olney until 1232.⁹⁸ It became a distinct civil parish, maintaining its own poor and its own highways, but it has never had a church or chapel of its own, remaining part of the ecclesiastical parish of Olney, though with its own church-warden until after 1829.⁹⁹ A small brook runs by this stone, and was adopted as the first section of the Olney-Warrington boundary, which is thereafter tortuous and clearly not primitive; it may represent the northern limit of the open fields of the hamlet of Olney Hyde, first mentioned in 1261,¹⁰⁰ which had twelve customary tenants in 1411¹⁰¹ but is now reduced to a single farm.

When the *wyrtruma* crosses the main Northampton-Bedford road it has a distinct kink, marked by a boundary-stone and well at 886 556. This is the triple boundary of Warrington (formerly in Olney), Yardley Hastings and its eastern neighbour Easton Maudit. The names Spotley Corner (6" map) and Spotley Cottages (2½" and 6" maps) represent Spottlowe,¹⁰² Spott's mound. The writer's first thought was that Spott had replaced Hild at some date after 979; but although the extensive estates of Wulfric Spott seem to have extended into Northamptonshire, there is nothing to connect him with Yardley Chase. If this is not *Hildes hlæw*, the charter bounds pass the site without mention; but on balance this does not seem too unlikely, as the *wyrtruma* with its perimeter path continues along the county boundary, and the features at Spotley are all on the Northamptonshire side.

The name *Hildes hlæw* should have given **Hilleslow* and then **Hillsley* or the like; no such name has been found, but the name of the same Hild seems to account for Hill's Copse, the general name of the woods bounded by the last section of the *wyrtruma*. 'Copse' is applied to a large section or quarter of the forest. The names Old Pastures and Long Furlong for parts of this area indicate clearance (for grassland and arable respectively) with subsequent reforestation. The whole area now belongs to the Forestry Commission and is regarded as part of Yardley Chase, though not in Yardley parish.

A possible site for *Hildes hlæw* is at 892 559, the south-western corner of Hill's Copse (taken to include Old Pastures). At this point the perimeter ride turns away from the county boundary, and the boundary path changes sides; thereafter it is a footpath in Bucks. There used to be a tiny pond just to the south.

(10) *of hildes hlæwe on þone stan* (from Hild's mound to the stone)

This section of the boundary, still separating Buckinghamshire from Northamptonshire, is marked by a hedge in the latter county and a footpath in the former. There are two triple boundaries in quick succession; Warrington (Olney), Easton Maudit and Bozeat at 900 562 and Warrington (Olney), Bozeat and Lavendon at 903 561. At the former, the Easton-Warrington footpath crosses the county boundary, which here turns half-right; this is the northernmost point of Buckinghamshire. At the latter, the charter bounds leave the county boundary, which turns half-left for a short distance. Midway between these points the county boundary crosses the Olney-Wellingborough

road, and a well is indicated just inside Northamptonshire. All that can at present be said of the site of the stone is that it was in this neighbourhood. It may have been a boundary-stone on the main road, or may have been a hundred yards either side to mark one of the triple boundaries, probably the second, where Northamptonshire is left behind. Modern Rogationtide practice elsewhere suggests a halt at the stone for some ceremony and for refreshment.

The county boundary continues eastward to Three Shire Wood, where it meets the old Roman road from Fenny Stratford (*Magiovinium*) to Irchester. Since this road constitutes the boundary between Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire all the way from Three Shire Wood to Dungee Corner, with only the slightest deviations, it must have continued in use during the settlement period, no doubt in a sad state of decay, but still serving as a track along the watershed. In contrast, the stretch from Olney past Lavendon Abbey to Three Shire Wood appears to have been abandoned, because of the difficulty of crossing streams, and replaced by the Wellingborough road through Warrington, with a link along the Bucks-Northants boundary from the point discussed above to Three Shire Wood. The diversion of Akeman Street at Fleet Marston offers a parallel.

(11) *of ðam stane on ðone broc* (from the stone to the brook)

The Warrington (Olney)/Lavendon boundary leaves the county boundary at 903 561 and immediately passes through Northey Farm, 'north' in relation to Lavendon, Olney, Warrington or indeed Buckinghamshire. (During the penal times the Nonconformists of Olney are said to have met here, only a few yards from Three Counties Point, to facilitate escape into Bedfordshire or Northants). The boundary is on the height of land east of the Olney-Wellingborough road until it descends to the brook north-west of Sixteen Acre Farm, at 902 545. It runs fairly straight, except that from 903 553 to 902 548 it departs from the obvious hedge-line to pick up a field on the Lavendon side. A slight diversion may be suspected, possibly connected with the 12th-century exchanges postulated below; but in this vicinity the hedges shown on the Ordnance maps have been removed in the interests of the combine harvester, so that inspection of the area is now unhelpful.

(12) *andlang broces inon use* (along the brook into the Ouse).

The description is clear enough; at 902 545 the boundary met and still meets the brook which flows down from 898 558. In 979 the bounds followed this brook until it joined the brook coming from Olney Lane End and Olney Hyde (see [9] above) at 897 531, and continued downstream to the river at 898 524, just above Cowper's 'Poplar Field'. In contrast, the present Warrington-Lavendon boundary is excessively tortuous; it turns away from the brook south-west of Sixteen Acre Farm, follows a piece of the old Roman road (here a bridleway) for about 200 yards, curves away *north* so that it follows the brook upstream, then goes westwards to the Olney-Wellingborough road, south along that road and back eastwards to the brook at a point just west of the site of Lavendon Abbey; then instead of following the brook to its confluence with the Ouse, it swerves away from it and zigzags to a point a quarter of a mile down the river (902 524). Such a boundary could hardly be primitive, and a 10th-century surveyor would have been much exercised to describe it. It is suggested

that it arose in the 12th century as a result of exchanges between Lavendon and Olney. Lavendon Abbey was founded c. 1155, and its original endowment comprised the site and adjacent fields, pieces of arable land, wood and meadow in the neighbourhood.¹⁰³ The founder, John de Bidun, sheriff in 1154, seems to have secured for the Abbey the land outside its gates with a frontage on the main road; in return the hamlet of Warrington, then still in Olney, obtained its own frontage to the Great Ouse – in fact, the whole river; the parish boundaries return to midstream below Lavendon Mill and Ford. The lower part of the brook, which had been the external boundary of Olney in 979, remained and still remains an internal boundary separating the township of Olney from the hamlet of Warrington within the ecclesiastical parish of Olney. This implies that Warrington was a distinct entity some twenty years before its first recorded mention, but that is likely enough.

The acquisition by Lavendon Abbey of a road frontage proved a doubtful blessing. In 1397 the Abbot complained of poverty, as his house (Lavendon Grange) was hard by the common way and the demands for hospitality were too heavy a burden to bear.¹⁰⁴ The Viatores suggest that 'if this Roman road was then "the common way" it passed his door' but they admit that 'the course of the road from the Grange is not particularly good, surviving only in distorted farm lanes'.¹⁰⁵ In fact the highway referred to was probably the Wellingborough road, about a quarter of a mile from the Abbot's dwelling. Since there was no religious house in Olney, impecunious travellers passed through that town and sought harbourage which the Abbot could hardly afford but could not refuse.

The form Use (thrice) should have been cited from this charter in the list of river-names in *PN Bucks.* p. 1. The form is cited by Ekwall¹⁰⁶ and in *PN Northants* p. 3, where the date of the charter is wrongly given as 937; further, this is not a Northamptonshire reference. Milton,¹⁰⁷ followed by Cowper,¹⁰⁸ has Usa as the Latin form. The name Ouse is certainly pre-English and quite probably pre-Celtic, though still Indo-European, from *udso-, containing *ud-, 'water'. Professor Jackson comments 'We should not lose sight of the possibility that some names which have an IE look and are not obviously either Germanic or Celtic may be due to non-Celtic Indo-European elements among the prehistoric immigrants to Britain'.¹⁰⁹

(13) *andlang use on wilin ford* (along the Ouse to the ford where willows grow).

The expression 'along (the) Ouse' is somewhat lacking in precision. Of the mile of river below Olney Bridge, part now belongs exclusively to Olney, part is shared with Clifton Reynes and a small section belongs to Clifton alone. These distinctions could have been made in the charter, had they then existed; the appropriate terms are *middan streame* (or *æt midne stream*) and *be healfan streame*, later easily misunderstood as 'taking half the stream'. Probably the Ouse was considered as a navigable river and so a public highway.

The *Victoria County History*^{109a} considers that Wilinford was the ford by which the present main road through Olney crossed the Ouse, and this seems most probable. Mr. E. H. Bailey of the Wolverton and District Archaeological Society drew attention to a 'shallow' at about 895 517 which was dredged out in 1956, and this has been suggested¹¹⁰ as the site of Wilinford; but this was on the assumption that the starting point *on calewan were* was the site of the present Olney Mill near Olney Bridge, which

is now known to be incorrect (see [1] above). If the "shallow" were indeed Wilinford, the next bound (*kekan ware*) could be placed at Olney Mill; on balance, however, the VCH identification still seems acceptable as the crossing is important and very ancient. The first element in its name would be the **wiligen* postulated for Willenhall, the form **wilig* being Anglian for West Saxon *welig*, a willow; *English Place-name Elements* suggests that **wilig* is very old. The ford at 888 509 was a double one, the northern passage being in Olney, the southern in Emberton. The northern stream turned Olney Mill, which in 1086 was worth to the lord 40s and 200 eels.¹¹¹ The strip between the two, which has widened in the past two centuries, was called the Mill Dam.¹¹² The Viatores¹¹³ comment that 'it is inconceivable that the neighbouring Roman stations of *Magiovinium* and Irchester would be without reasonably direct communication, and likely that such a route would pass midway through Olney, one of the three major Romano-British settlements in North Bucks'.

The course of the Roman or Romanized road through Fenny Stratford, Simpson, Woughton-on-the-Green, the Woolstones, Willen, past Newport Pagnell and on through Sherington and Emberton has been meticulously examined by Mr. C. W. Green. The route is probably pre-Roman; Sherington is a late Iron Age site developing into Roman, and the habitation sites at Olney north and south of the present town are Belgic as well as Roman. At the south end of the fords, this road from *Magiovinium* meets the Roman road from Alchester and Water Stratford.

The northern ford was replaced by a bridge which was out of repair in 1334;¹¹⁴ an indulgence was granted towards its restoration.¹¹⁵ It was rebuilt in 1619, and was subject to a toll payable to the Duchy of Lancaster.¹¹⁶

The southern ford was not bridged until the reign of Queen Anne, making communication with the south possible throughout the year. It is said that Sir Robert Throckmorton of Weston Underwood provided the materials and William Lowndes of Astwoodbury the labour, so that their frequent visits need not be interrupted when the customary ford over the second arm of the river was impassable during high floods.¹¹⁷ In *The Task*¹¹⁸ the post comes in

. . . o'er yonder bridge,
That with its wearisome but needful length
Bestrides the wintry flood.

This bridge is said to have been of extraordinarily irregular appearance; it was rebuilt in 1832.

(14) of þam forde andlang use to kekan ware

(from the ford along the Ouse to the keach weir or Keka's weir.

If Wilinford were somewhere downstream from Olney Mill, connecting Olney with Clifton Reynes, it would be possible to identify this bound with Olney Mill, or rather with the weir at the head of the Mill Dam (887 510). If on the other hand Wilinford is now represented by Olney Bridge (888 509), that weir is so close that it would hardly have been mentioned separately, and probably we should look for a site at some distance upstream. The Ouse must be taken as the southern arm of the river, along which the boundary still runs above the weir at 887 510. The two streams part at a withy-bed at 877 504, close to the triple boundary of Emberton, Filgrave and Olney; this seems

the highest admissible point. The weir would have served Emberton, and much the most likely site is 883 504, where a small island and a close called Millcroft^{118a} indicate the site of Emberton mill.

The key to the first element may be the Bucks dialect word 'keach', to draw or dip for water. In 1893 the 'public keech ponds' in the Naphill district were said to be in a filthy condition.¹¹⁹ The same term was used at Quainton in 1926 of the ponds on the green, and the verb was used at Wendover of emptying a sump or cesspool.¹²⁰ The *English Dialect Dictionary* gives 'keach-hole' as "a place scooped out of the bed of a river to collect water for domestic purposes";¹²¹ Cowper's peasant at the Peasant's Nest (see [3] above) may have had one to 'dip his bowl into the weedy ditch', and it is suggested that the villagers of Emberton came to *kekan* weir for their water. Wright's citations for 'keach' in this or a like sense show that the word is distinctively South and West Midland, extending across the plain from Bedfordshire to Shropshire. A connection may be suggested with an Anglian form of West Saxon *ceac* 'pitcher, jug, basin, ladle'.

(15) *of kekan were andlang use on caluwan wer*

(from the keach weir along the Ouse to the bald weir).

The parish boundary is midstream, but shifts to the north bank for a short distance so as to leave *caluwan wer* in Filgrave. Hence it is appropriate that Caliware Field should be found on the Filgrave side of the river.

The form *on caluwan wer*, rather than *on calewan were* in (1) above, shows that there was a difference in attitude towards the action. At (1) the party were at rest before starting out; at (15) they were still in motion towards the finishing-point. Thus the convention that *on* takes the accusative when motion is implied seems to have been maintained throughout; and this small detail increases one's confidence in the 12th-century scribe, copying the charter carefully at a time when his own speech would hardly have preserved the distinction. The whole description is appropriate to a real rather than a merely notional journey round the bounds. The Badby charter, which was almost certainly used in drafting this grant, distinguishes between the bounds themselves and making the circuit of them. 'Ðis sint þa landgemæra and se embegang þara landa . . .'

The mention of successive weirs on the same river is probably due to their social and economic importance. There is a parallel in the bounds of East Ling, Somerset, granted to Athelney by Athelstan in 937, which are preserved in a Middle English form;¹²² 'from Toteyate to Hengest-were: from Hengest-were unto Hornwere; from Hornwere unto Shirwold lode, eftsones into Gorlake'.

The Local Significance of the Olney Charter

It may be inferred that Olney was a royal estate before 979, probably part of a larger estate from which Cold Brayfield had been granted by Edgar to Byrhtnoth in 967. Ethelred's grant placed Olney, with over five square miles of cleared and uncleared land, in the hands of a single great absentee lord, and it remained so both before and after the Conquest. There were and are no landed gentry; Cowper could say 'the poor poet is the only squire'.¹²³ Newport Pagnell became the market and service centre of the area; in 1086 it was recognised as a borough, while Olney had

no one above the rank of villein. The Olney market was claimed by prescription, not by charter, but it is not mentioned before 1206¹²⁴ and Olney does not definitely emerge as a manorial borough until 1237.¹²⁵ It was never incorporated, and no burghal institutions survived in the 19th century; it had a parish council from 1894 to 1974, when it assumed the status of a town.

The charter shows that a thousand years ago cultivation or at least clearance for grazing had reached the county boundary along much of its length in Olney, though *dene æc(c)re* and *ecgan croft* recall an earlier phase of settlement when individual pioneers were clearing their plots. Changes in the county boundary were almost impossible after the 10th century, but parish boundaries within the county could still be changed by local initiative in the 12th, if the civil and ecclesiastical authorities were in agreement; a new township, effectively a civil parish, could emerge in the 13th century, and a park could become extra-parochial in the 14th.

These medieval developments have somewhat distorted the charter bounds, which though described in detail are basically very simple. The limits are the Great Ouse on the south, the 'holy brook' on the west, a straightforward boundary drawn through *Bragen* forest on the north, just short of the watershed, and another brook on the east side. *Ecgan croft* lies just to the west of the natural boundary, and may represent a slight change made before 979; probably well before, as it has affected the county boundary. (Several other distortions of this boundary further west, between Yardley Chase and Salcey Forest, may have a similar origin; one is inclined to date the Hrafn who gave his name to Ravenstone c. 900). A ninth-century grant of the same estate would probably have had only four *landgemæru* instead of sixteen; the Wotton Underwood grant of 845, relating to a somewhat similar estate on the edge of Bernwood, only defines the corners.¹²⁶ All the turning points on the Olney boundary are well-defined on the ground, except (10) to (11), and that was accordingly provided with a boundary-stone, the only one mentioned.

The original Olney is among the simplest and most satisfactory of the 10-hide units in North Bucks. It was no doubt a nucleated settlement from the first, as it had been in Roman times and even earlier. Elsewhere in North Bucks fiscal units were put together somewhat artificially, either in the last years of Alfred or by Edward the Elder after the establishment of the new county borough of Buckingham in 914. The neighbouring Lavendon is a clear case where several different small villis and individual farms were combined into one administrative area which took the name of its central settlement; administrative unity and the effects of the Danish raids would then make for nucleation. At the same time the woods were steadily being cleared; Newport Pagnell was surely not the only township on the Ouse with men *qui manent in silva*.¹²⁷ It is no accident that so many 9th and 10th-century royal charters relate to estates which at the time of the grant were on the internal frontier; Crown and magnates had a common interest in the orderly development of such land.

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22. D. Whitelock, in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. P. Clemoes, (1959) 79.
23. M. Gelling, *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley* (1979) 176 – 8; see note 74.
24. Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, no. 792 (Sawyer 495).
25. *PN Bucks* (1925) 12.
26. K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (1953) 306, citing *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* vii, no. 73.
27. Jackson, *op. cit.*, citing *Ephemeris Epigraphica* ix, p. 570.
28. Gwyn Jones, *The Norse Atlantic Saga* (1964) 140, citing Hauksbók 294.
29. Found once in Marcianus Capella (5th cent.).
- 29a. P.H. Sawyer, *Charters of Burton Abbey* (British Academy 1979), nos. 14, 25.
- 29b. Kemble, *Cod. Dipl.*, no. 1289 (Sawyer 883).
- 29c. See note 12.
30. Ulpian in *Digest* 4.2.14.
- 30a. William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Regum Anglorum* (ed. W. Stubbs, R.S. 1887 – 9), s. 132.
31. Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, no. 1189 (Sawyer 737).
32. Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, no. 1176 (Sawyer 738).
33. Æthelweard, *Chronicon* iv.9 (the poem on Edgar's coronation, with its reference to 'Argivæ gentis magistri').
34. Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, no. 1229 (Sawyer 772).
35. 'Hereditas est successio in universum jus, quod defunctus habebat tempore mortis': Gaius, *Dig.* 50.16.24.
36. *Oxf. Engl. Dict.* s.v.
- 36a. *Charters of Burton Abbey*, no. 38.
37. Vergil, *Aeneid* ix, 106.
38. Sextus Pompeius Festus.
39. M. Terentius Varro, *De Lingua Latina* vii.5, s. 85.
40. *Charters of Burton Abbey*, no. 24.
41. Psalm civ, 14.

42. A. S. Chron. (D) s.a. 979.
43. Kemble, *Cod. Dipl.*, no. 824 (Sawyer 1043; post-Conquest, but all the better evidence of the continuing cultus).
44. J. Raine, *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops* i. 443.
45. *Engl. Hist. Docs.* I (1955) no. 231, at p. 824. The alternative attribution to a later Pope John (XV to XVIII) writing to a later Ælfric, killed in 1016, seems much less probable.
46. Kemble, *Cod. Dipl.*, no. 1279 (Sawyer 843).
47. M. Tullius Cicero, *Academicæ Quaestiones* ii, 46.
48. *Engl. Hist. Docs.* I (1955) no. 236, at p. 841.
49. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum* (R.S.) p. 298.
50. Kemble, *Cod. Dipl.*, no. 698 (Sawyer 891): 'Occidentalium prouinciarum dux'.
51. Fragments of Cott. Otho A x, published by E.E. Barker, *Bulletin Inst. Hist. Research* xxiv (1951) 46 - 62; *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (1962) 34.
52. Æthelweard, *Chronicon* iv. 5; the order of words is very odd.
53. D. Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (1930), no. XIV (Sawyer 1494).
54. *Engl. Hist. Docs.* I (1955) no. 236, at p. 843. The poet makes it clear that the defeat and death of Byrhtnoth were due to his reckless pride (*ofermod*), but Oswald's biographer has nothing but praise for him.
55. A. S. Chron. (C), s.a. 982.
56. *Engl. Hist. Docs.* I (1955), no. 236, at p. 841.
57. Kemble, *Cod. Dipl.*, no. 611 (Sawyer 831).
58. Kemble, *Cod. Dipl.*, no. 655 (Sawyer 861); no. 664 (Sawyer 868).
59. *Charters of Burton Abbey*, no. 25 (Sawyer 863).
60. Kemble, *Cod. Dipl.*, no. 657 (Sawyer 864).
61. Domesday Book i.fo. 145b; *V.C.H. Bucks.* i (1905) 240b.
62. William Cowper wrote to Lady Hesketh on 13 September 1788 "A mile beyond this oak [Yardley Oak or 'Cowper's Oak'] stands another, which has from time immemorial been known by the name of Judith, and is said to have been an oak when my namesake the Conqueror first came hither" (Wright, *op. cit.*, 124).
63. *V.C.H. Bucks.* i (1905), 240b, 246b, 273b. The sokemen may well have been the descendants of Scandinavians who settled on the north bank of the Ouse after Alfred and Guthrum had made that river their boundary, and before the treaty of Tiddingford in 906; cf. H.C. Darby, *Domesday England* (1977) 62 - 3.
64. *V.C.H. Bucks.* i (1905), 240b, 241a, 246a, 273b, 276a. Lavendon provides the classic case where a group of thegns answered to the Crown through one of their number.
65. J.M. Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici* iii (1845), p. viii.
66. Wright, *op. cit.*, 23.
67. Kemble, *Cod. Dipl.*, no. 338; Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, no. 606 (Sawyer 371).
68. Kemble, *Cod. Dipl.*, no. 1081; Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, no. 603 (Sawyer 367).
69. MS. Bodl., Wood A1, f. 206b; Glastonbury MS. at Longleat, f. 341 (Sawyer cites this as Longleat 39, fo. 185 rv).
- 69a. A.C. Chibnall, *Beyond Sherington* (1979) 3, 202 - 5.
- 69b. James Storer, *Rural Walks of Cowper* (1803), cited by Wright, *op. cit.*, 176 - 7.
70. *Cal. of Papal Letters* iv. 224; *V.C.H. Bucks* i (1905) 295, iv (1927) 502, n. 25.
71. *V.C.H. Bucks* iv (1927) 500, 502, n. 26.
72. Feet of F. Bucks, East. 9 Eliz.; Hil. 21 & 22 Chas. II.
73. Wright, *op. cit.*, 177 - 8.
74. D. C. Mynard, 'Olney's Anglo-Saxon Charter'; Wolverton and District Archaeological Society News Letter, no. 11 (1967), map.
75. Compton MS. *penes* Marquess of Northampton; *PN Northants* (1933) 154 - 5.
76. Misc. Books Land Revenue (PRO).
77. *PN Northants* (1933) 153, citing *Inquisitiones post mortem*.
78. W. Cowper, *The Task*, bk. i, 237 - 243, 247 - 9.
79. Wright, *op. cit.*, map at p. 1.

80. A comparison by Professor J.T. Coppock of parish and farm boundaries in the Chilterns convinced the writer of the propriety of this course.
81. Assuming 2½ acres of wood for each pig: G.H. Fowler, *Bedfordshire in 1086* (1922) 62 - 3; Darby, *op. cit.*, 172.
82. Wright, *op. cit.*, 120.
83. G. L. Brook, *Introd. to Old English* (2nd edn. 1962), paras. 74, 82.
84. Inq. a.q.d. file 384, no. 12; *V.C.H. Bucks.* iv (1927) 432.
85. Duchy of Lancaster Maps and Plans, no. 41. The enclosure award is in the Bucks Record Office. The consonantal cluster *-sts* is unpronounceable in Bucks dialect, and becomes *-stes*.
86. Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, no. 552 (Sawyer 219).
87. Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, no. 741 (Sawyer 447).
88. J. Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dict.* (1898) 203 - 4.
89. T.N. Toller, *A.S. Dict. Suppl.* (1921) 151.
90. Bede, *Hist. Eccl. I.v.* (*Venerabilis Baedae opera historica*, ed. C. Plummer [1896] i. 17).
91. Kemble, *Cod. Dipl.*, no. 620 (Sawyer 1336).
92. *PN Northants* (1933) 154.
93. Kr. Hald, 'The Cult of Odin in Danish place-names' in *Early English and Norse Studies*, ed. A. Brown and P. Foote (1963) at p. 106.
94. Rentals and Surv. (Duchy of Lancaster), bdl. 1, no. 10.
95. *Ibid*; *V.C.H. Bucks* iv. (1927) 432.
96. M. Gelling, *PN Oxon.* ii (1954) 323, 489 - 490.
97. *PN Bucks.* (1925) 15 (Drayton Charters c. 1175).
98. *V.C.H. Bucks.* iv (1927), 433 - 5; *Testa de Nevill* (Rec. Com.) 261.
99. This is evidenced by the initials of the three churchwardens on the weathercock.
100. Assize R. 58, m. 30.
101. Mins. Accts. (Duchy of Lancaster) bdl. 637, no. 10344.
102. *PN Northants* (1933) 155, citing 1565 Compton deed.
103. Dugdale, *Mon. Angl.* vi. 888.
104. *Cal. of Papal Letters*, v. 73.
105. The Viatores, *Roman Roads in the South-East Midlands* (1964) 333.
106. E. Ekwall, *English River-names* (1928) 313.
107. J. Milton, *Epitaphium Damonis* l. 175.
108. W. Cowper, *On the Death of Damon*, l. 248.
109. K. Jackson, *op. cit.*, 195 n.1, 342.
- 109a. *V.C.H. Bucks.* iv (1927) 429.
110. See note 74.
111. D.B. i. 145b.
112. Wright, *op. cit.*, 332.
113. The Viatores, *op. cit.*, 332.
114. *Cal. Pat. 1330 - 4*, p. 517.
115. Linc. Epis. Reg. Memo. Dalderby, fol. 90d.
116. Add. MS. 5839, fol. 157b; Wright, *op. cit.*, 17.
117. Wright, *op. cit.*, 19.
118. W. Cowper, *The Task*, bk. iv, 1 - 3.
- 118a. Chibnall, *op. cit.*, 135, 197.
119. *Records of Buckinghamshire* vii. 294.
120. H. Harman, *Buckinghamshire Dialect* (1929) 153.
121. J. Wright, *Engl. Dialect Dict.* iii (1902) 400.
122. Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, no. 715 (Sawyer 937).
123. *Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. W. Benham (1870), xxxvii.
124. *Rot. Lit. Claus.* (Rec. Com.) i. 531.
125. Assize R. 56, m. 36.
126. Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, no. 452 (Sawyer 204).
127. D.B. i. 148b.