

## THE LONGEVITY OF FIELD-NAMES: A CASE STUDY FROM SHERINGTON

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*By treating the field-names of a parish as a 'population' in the statistical sense, it is possible, if one has complete lists of names at intervals throughout history, and if one can be confident that the names in any list relate to the same units as those in the previous list, to calculate the half-life of the population: the number of years after which half the names have disappeared. The same concept is applied in nuclear physics, though the analogy is not exact, since the decay of atoms in a radio-active element is a purely random process; but it is a valuable measure of longevity. The maps referred to in the text are in Professor Chibnall's Sherington.*

Nearly every field in Buckinghamshire and in England has a name, and many have had a succession of names during the ages, but local historians have been slow to appreciate their intrinsic interest and their value as sources of agrarian history. In contrast, major place-names have been the subject of study and speculation for at least three centuries. In 1876 the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* introduced the name 'toponymy' for this branch of onomatology, but in 1882 the *Athenaeum* doubted whether such terminology was tolerable, and it has not been widely used.

In 1924 the English Place-Name Society was formed with the help of the British Academy to carry out a systematic survey of place-names, but its first county volume, relating to Buckinghamshire, published in 1925 and about to be reprinted, regarded 'true' place-names as these appearing on Ordnance maps or, if lost, having had a similar public character. The editors, (Sir) Allen Mawer and (Sir) Frank Stenton, had inevitably found in their sources a good deal of material relating to field and other minor names, but found it impossible to deal with them systematically because "in the first place they are too numerous, in the second many of them are without much interest, consisting largely of forms which are common in all field-names: further it is but rarely that one has a succession of forms for an individual name".<sup>1</sup>

A change in the Society's policy was evidenced by the Northamptonshire survey, published in 1933, in which the same editors' pioneering attempt to connect medieval with modern field-names was facilitated by lists of names in current use, collected by some 200 county schools and by volunteers recruited by the County Record Society.<sup>2</sup> The latest completed, for the little county of Rutland, published in 1994, is nearly twice the length of the first, for Buckinghamshire; it had the advantage of a full listing of field-names made by the Rutland Home Guard in 1943 for its own purposes.<sup>3</sup>

For the present purpose, field-names may be regarded as including the names of all pieces of land forming part of the agrarian economy. This definition extends to the names of small woods, greens, pightles, dells and small streams, springs and ponds, but not buildings, highways or industrial sites. Any such name had a beginning and may already have had an end. It was generated when a description acquired sufficient acceptance by those who had occasion to mention the feature described; it dies when it ceases to be used – not necessarily because the feature ceases to exist; a parcel of land not infrequently changes its name while retaining its identity. On the other hand, both major and minor place-names once current may take on a life of their own, and may survive quite radical changes

in the referent. The village of Milton Keynes is a small and outlying portion of the New City to which it has given its name and even its local pronunciation, with which members of the eponymous Keynes family (from Cahaignes) by no means concur.

At all periods, field-names have been different from major place-names in three respects: they are far more numerous, more local in use and more transitory. A rural parish may have more fields than households; their names can be repeated within a mile or two without great inconvenience, and can be created or replaced by what looks like caprice, but is attributable to

... a will that wills above the will of each  
Though but the will of all conjunctively.

When a piece of land is held in severalty, the initiative in naming or renaming it usually comes from the landholder (owner or occupier), but under the open-field system of agriculture, which prevailed in north and central Buckinghamshire for a thousand years, each furlong (the unit of cultivation) normally had several occupiers; any one of them might take the initiative in proposing a name, but acceptance by others was necessary to promote it from idiolect to dialect. A peasant wishing to dispose of an odd strip might choose to describe it as lying in the furlong "against the crow nestes" and the steward of the manor would then enter it as in Crowsnest furlong. So far, this is a *hapax legomenon*, and in a few years the crows may be gone; but the next time this or a neighbouring selion is sold or devised the attorney may assist the survival of the incipient name by adopting the description which he found in the court rolls. This, however, would not go on indefinitely unless the name were genuinely current.

Some parishes have maps showing the layout of their open fields, divided into furlongs and selions (strips, stitches, ridges, lands or slipes) with their ancillary meadows, pastures, copses and closes. With further good fortune, such a map, or a terrier relating to it, may provide a full identification of the names of furlongs and closes before enclosure changed the old boundaries, either more or less drastically. The Tithe Awards provide corresponding maps and lists for c. 1840, except where tithes, traditionally collected in kind, had been commuted

before 1836;<sup>4</sup> and there are modern title-deeds, estate records, and lists of field-names compiled by recent enquirers. Even when the medieval records are full enough to enable a map with names to be constructed for (say) the thirteenth century, its compilation from a mass of documents involves exceedingly laborious and minute research, not always felicitous. The editors of the Boarstall cartulary thought such a reconstruction impracticable, and a previous editor of the *Records of Bucks* warned the present writer against it some fifty years ago. Professor A. C. Chibnall (1894–1988) showed that it could be done, and his *Sherington*<sup>5</sup> should have initiated a new phase of place-name studies; but scholars may well have been deterred by his acknowledgement that work which started in 1919 as a simple family enquiry developed into a comprehensive study of muniments, pursued during the leisure intervals of a distinguished scientific career, involving other disciplines, aided by the British Academy and not completed until 1965. His sequel, *Beyond Sherington* (1979) dealt in a similar way with adjoining villages and lost hamlets; the 'F.R.S. & S.A.' on its title-page was at that time unique.

When one has comprehensive particulars of the field-names of a parish or estate at two different periods, one can ascertain what proportion of the initial stock of names had fallen out of use, and what names had come into use for old or new parcels of land. The field-names of a parish can be regarded as a 'population' in the statistical sense, subject to generation and decay. It should be possible to establish some measure or measures of their longevity; but this approach requires fairly strong conditions for its practical application. The source material must provide exhaustive coverage of the same area at two or more widely separated dates, in a form which allows the individual parcels of land to be identified and so matched.

For an elementary stage of this exercise, the 'half-life' is suggested as an appropriate measure of the rate of survival of a population of field names. It is the period after which, under the conditions considered, half the names initially existing are lost. The obvious analogy with the decay of atoms of a radioactive element is manifestly imperfect; an atom has no individuality, and its spontaneous disintegration appears to be a

perfectly random event. In contrast, every field-name has its own characteristics; it may be common or rare, prosaic or fanciful, beautiful or cacophonous. A Chesham terrier of 1629<sup>6</sup> includes a Greeneway Grove in Chartridge hamlet and a Pigg-hoggeswick in Botley; the former name surely deserved to survive, yet it has become Ayres Wood from its owner in 1738, while the latter was modified only to Upper and Lower Pigsfoot before these closes were built over, and their names lost.

A field-name may describe the size, shape, location, outlook, soil, produce, productivity or tenure of the field, or may commemorate some person (often a past owner or occupier) or some event, including its own creation. Its meaning may remain obvious, or may become impenetrably obscure. Any of these factors may affect its continued acceptability. Nevertheless a generalised measure of the mortality of the field-names of a particular area during a particular epoch may not be without value.

Hardly any medieval estate maps exist (that for Boarstall, 1444, is a treasure of our County Record Office)<sup>7</sup> and most parishes are less fortunate than Sherington in their records. Even for these, the furlongs may often be mapped from air photographs, especially those taken by the Luftwaffe in 1940,<sup>8</sup> but they will be nameless. For Sherington, Dr Chibnall's work has rendered the proposed approach easy and fruitful. His first chapter ("Beating the Bounds") and Map 1 define the bounds of the parish, which are quite simple; they appear not to have varied (even when the Ouse changed its course), and were reasserted until the eighteenth century by the customary sunwise (or, as we say, clockwise) perambulation at Rogationtide, for which the Rector was expected to "make a drinking".<sup>9</sup> Map 2 shows the field-names in local use c. 1950, ranging from those of Anglo-Saxon origin to "trivial names recalling ownership in the last [nineteenth] century" – though these are no less part of the continuing historic record than those similarly recalling Tudor, Norman or earlier landholders.

Next, Map 3 presents the corresponding local usage in 1580, when the number of minor names was probably near its maximum. Piecemeal enclosure from the fourteenth century onwards hardly endangered furlong-names, and each scrap of

newly enclosed ground demanded and usually received a name; in contrast, cottages were not usually named. Map 3 was based on a fine series of documents held by the Worshipful Company of Mercers,<sup>10</sup> by the author, the Record Offices and our Society, and by local landowners and solicitors, especially F.W. Bull, the venerable historian of Newport Pagnell. Between them, these accounted for almost the whole of the parish, so that the map is complete as to the general arrangement of furlongs and closes. It provides a name for almost every piece of land bigger than a garden.

The outstanding achievement of *Sherington* was however to reconstruct the map and terrier for the year 1300, before the change from a two-field to a three-field system, with triennial instead of biennial fallowing in the open fields. This move towards "high farming" was achieved at some time between 1514 and 1561, probably at Thomas Chibnall's instance c. 1530, the Chibnalls<sup>11</sup> and others participating in friendly interchange of selions, which did not affect the identity of the furlongs, though it may perhaps have tended to perturb their names. Map 4 identifies those furlongs which are named in sources dating from c. 1330 or earlier, and the gaps are not serious; only one furlong, Threthomes, remains unlocated. To construct such a map for 1200 or any earlier date would have involved uncertain interference rather than certain knowledge, since it is not until c. 1220 that local records became abundant.

Maps 3 and 4, in the pocket at the end of *Sherington*, were engrossed some time before the book was completed, and in a few cases the text provides better forms, or at least interesting variants or alternative names. Thus, Bothingsdole (Map 4) is an unlikely reading; Gotburyc(s) dole as at p. 291 is preferable, though Professor Eilert Ekwall suggested Stocburycsdole. Full lists of field-names in 1300, 1580 and 1950, with Professor Ekwall's notes on the Old English or Middle English elements involved, were kindly made available to the present writer.

A preliminary question is what constitutes survival. For the comparison between 1300 and 1580 this presents little difficulty, as there were few alterations in the boundaries of furlongs, and changes in their names occurred simply because

the collective will had so decided. Le Hoo Park, assarted from Le Hoo Wood in Norman times, was broken up, and some new furlongs and closes, mostly small, were created elsewhere, duly acquiring names. The second period, however, includes the major upheaval of Parliamentary enclosure in 1797–99. The Commissioners drew new field boundaries without much regard to the furlongs, and the names of the new fields were left to be assigned by the allottees or by usage. Some deeply conservative husbandmen retained the word 'furlong' as a denominative element, but often a newly assigned parcel of land was called 'field' rather than the 'close' or 'piece' which might have been expected, though for the time being 'field' retained its arable connotation. The shift in meaning from Anglo-Saxon *feld* 'open country' through the medieval open field to the modern field, which is a hedged close, is the subject of an appended note.

The Commissioners' meticulous mensuration meant that the correspondence between the old furlongs and meadows and the post-enclosure fields could not be close. For example, the medieval Comade was probably identical with the Elizabethan Cowmead, but was not coterminous with the modern Cow Mead. What appealed to the village mind was that this was still west of Hazlemead and south of Long Greenditch furlong (now represented by Long Grannige). This was enough to secure the retention of a familiar name in an unfamiliar landscape. In some cases, more radical adaptations were needed and were made. Fence Furlong lay north of Clay Furlong, the balk between them running east and west, but the corresponding new fields were to be divided by a hedge running north and south. Nevertheless both names survived, losing their generic element, yet not becoming simplex. The new western close was called Little Fence; it adjoins the Tyingham Fence on the parish boundary (Fences Farm is in Tyingham). The eastern close became Old Clay or Old Clays.

The ancient name Walcot(e) was displaced from the west to the east of the small stream rising at Bradenwell or Dropwell, making it a slightly misleading guide to the location of the Welshmen's cottages. As Walcot came to occupy most of what had been Foxenhill furlong, the new Foxen Hill was displaced to the north-west so that it lay to the

north-east of Cow Mead instead of to the east and south-east. However, no better fit of old names to new areas could have been devised. Elsewhere the allottees were content to replace historically significant names by those like Six Acres or Big Field (twice) which deserve the reproach of triviality more than those which record ownership. Yet on the whole the field-names of Sherington survived the enclosure with fewer losses than might have been expected. The new fields were of much the same size as the furlongs, at least the older furlongs, and this facilitated the transference of names. A translocated name will be counted as surviving, but where the meaning rather than the name has survived (e.g. Willow Bed piece for Le Salu, One Hole for Pokeput, Church Yard Close for Dedcroft) one cannot claim continuity. Sometimes the first or qualifying element survived while the second or generic was replaced; thus Brendeho has become successively Burnt Leys Piece and Big Burnt Hill, while Bardheg has shifted through Barend Hedge to Barn Hole, with loss or change of meaning. Wartrou (OE *wearg-trēow* 'felon-tree') was corrupted to Water Thorn when the riverside gallows, disused after the early twelfth century, was forgotten. Such changes have not been regarded as renaming. On the other hand, the *cultura subter Quarreya* has been regarded as a mere translation of Pusty furlong (ME *put-sty* from OE *pytt-stig* 'path to the stone pit'). Again, Linolewelle furlong, named from a spring in *Linhole*, the hollow (*holh*) where flax (*lin*) was grown, is a different name from Whitwelle Bush, the same furlong, named from the same 'clear spring'. An interesting case of successive renaming is a small riverside piece, Le Tounges, which became Bacon's Womb and then Miller's Knobs, referring to its two protuberances, though their shape may well have changed.

With these explanations, we can proceed to a numerical examination of changes in the stock of field-names in Sherington. It seems advisable to consider separately the four fields of the 1300 map, grouping the woods, meadows, cowpastures, stonepits and private closes with the open fields in which they lay, or which they adjoined. The South and West fields were almost certainly older than the North and East fields, which were lord's demesne and were probably not cleared until the eleventh century; all the woodland surviving in

TABLE I.  
FURLONG AND OTHER MINOR NAMES IN SHERINGTON, 1300

	(1) Names in use in 1300	(2) Names in (1) surviving in 1580	(3) Names in (1) surviving in 1950
<b>Common Fields</b>			
South Field	48	35	13
West Field	28	22	10
<i>Total, S. &amp; W. Fields</i>	76	57	23
<b>Demesne</b>			
North Field	18	5	2
East Field	10	4	1
<i>Total, N. &amp; E. Fields</i>	28	9	3
<b>Total, All fields</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>26</b>

1300 was on the north and east sides of the parish. The West field had once been called the North field, but the most primitive descriptions of the original open fields seem to have been 'towards Filgrave' and 'towards the sun'; the thought was of sunrise, not sunset.

Table I indicates the extent of the survival of the names in use in the 1300's (i.e. those for which there is written evidence dating from c.1220 to c.1330).

Thus 62 per cent of the early names survived after 280 years and 25 per cent after 650 years. This points to a half-life of about 325 years for the medieval names considered as a whole. The half-life can be assessed for the two periods separately, using tables of negative compound interest; the estimates, to the nearest decade, are 410 years for 1300-1580, but only 280 years for 1580-1950.

This, however, is still an over-simplification of the situation. Since the North and East fields remained in demesne throughout the Middle Ages, the evidence enables us to examine the hypothesis that names in the common fields, where there were several free tenants in each furlong, were less likely to perish than those in the demesne fields, because they were mentioned by more people, or at least more frequently, and perhaps also because those who had occasion to mention them were more firmly settled in the village.

The Domesday return indicates that in 1086 the

lord's demesne land could normally have been cultivated by his slaves. He could have called on the villeins and bordars for boon-work in harvest, but otherwise they would have had little occasion to enter this part of the parish or to mention any furlong-names that may have existed. This complete separation of the demesne from the common fields was not typical of 'champion' countryside, but after the subinfeudation of 1189 some of the demesne furlongs passed into divided ownership, and any not previously named would have needed names, even if only of the 'Le Tenacres' type. The herbage rights were still confined to those with severalty interest, but various common-field freeholders and other tenants managed to buy rights of pasturage to supplement their inadequate grazing, and they could then resist any attempt to enclose pieces of the demesne fields. Their interest was sufficient to call for furlong-names in general usage, but the demesne furlongs would still be mentioned far less frequently than the furlongs in the old common fields where the villagers concerned spent more of their time.

In the South and West fields, 75 per cent of the names known to have been current in 1300 were still in use in 1580. In the North and East fields, only 32 per cent had survived. A chi-squared test confirms the statistical significance of the difference well beyond the 0.1 per cent level. The half-life of the former group estimated from the 1300-1580 experience is a remarkable 670 years, that of the latter only 170 years. The conclusion is

TABLE 2.  
FURLONG AND OTHER MINOR NAMES IN SHERINGTON, 1580

	(1) Names in use in 1580	(2) Names in (1) not recorded in 1300	(3) Names in (2) surviving in 1950
<b>Common Fields</b>			
South Field	81	46	10
West Field	54	32	5
<i>Total, S. &amp; W. Fields</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>15</i>
<b>Demesne</b>			
North Field	40	35	8
East Field	32	28	8
<i>Total, N. &amp; E. Fields</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>16</i>
<b>Total, All fields</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>31</b>

that names in the original common fields were more firmly fixed in the collective mind than those in the demesne, and thus more resistant to change.

After the three-course reform, evidenced in 1561 but probably adopted some decades earlier, conditions in the two parts of the parish were much more similar. The furlongs in the four fields were rearranged into three (Marchill or Dropwell, Middle and Windmill fields) which continued until 1797, with no significant formal changes except the provision of headways from the merestone in each furlong in 1682, and the introduction of balks between selions and of additional sward for Lammas lands in 1722. There was however a progressive consolidation of small units, and an influx of cottagers displaced by enclosure from neighbouring villages. Of the names in use in 1580 which are known to have survived from 1300, some 39 per cent were still in use in 1950; in what had been the South and West fields the proportion was 40 per cent, and in the small sample representing the former North and East fields 33 per cent. The difference is not significant on these numbers, and Occam's razor accordingly instructs us to attribute the half-life of 280 years, estimated for this cohort of ancient names for 1580-1950, to both parts of the parish.

The question arises whether field-names which had already lasted a long time had on average a prospect of survival different from these of more recent coinage. Table 2 shows what has happened to the field-names recorded on the 1580 but not on

the 1300 map; for comparison with Table 1, the names are still grouped according to their location in what had been the original fields.

These figures suggest that names which are evidenced by 1580 but not at the earlier period were less likely to survive in modern times than the early names. Out of 141 such names only 31, some 22 per cent, appear on the 1950 map; this implies a half-life of about 170 years. In contrast, the survival rate for the older stratum of names over 1580-1950 has been shown from Table 1 to be 39 per cent, with a half-life 280 years. A chi-squared test indicates that on these numbers such a disparity has a probability of only 1 per cent of arising by chance, and the suggestion is supported. In one case, Elbrough, the Alborough Furlong of 1580, the name is almost certainly older than 1300, though not on record. If this were deemed to be in use at the earlier date, the conclusion would be marginally strengthened.

Many of these newer names refer to furlongs of late origin, or to small closes, whose names were not likely to be widely current, and were therefore more liable to be forgotten or changed. The closes in the former Le Hoo Park seem to have been particularly liable to vary in size as well as in name; presumably they were not permanently hedged. Indeed, in the former demesne furlongs which changed their name before 1580, there is not one clear case of survival until 1950.<sup>12</sup> For the former South and West fields, the survival rate of the

newer names is as high as that of the older names in the same fields which had remained in use.

During the past four centuries, the stock of field-names has been depleted. For several fields in the south-east corner of the parish, beyond Far Farm, the old names appear to have been forgotten, but no new ones were noted. In 1580 there were 207 field-names in use, in 1950 only 142. Of these 85 were post-Tudor; 57 had survived from 1580 or earlier, of which 26 could be traced back to 1300; one might expect most of these to be of pre-Conquest origin.

Throughout middle England the number of living field-names has further diminished since 1950 as hedges have been grubbed and fields thrown together. This process has had a greater effect on our name-board than the loss of agricultural land for development, which often perpetuates field-names as road-names, making them much more widely known than before, and stabilising their form, since roads are not often re-named.<sup>13</sup>

Even when a field retains its identity, the risk that it may lose its name is increased by the mobility of the local population, and especially by the continuing fall in the numbers employed or self-employed in the fields, which are emptier than at any time since the Black Death. Casual and recreational access by ramblers or residents is no substitute for a lifetime working in the same fields.

In the past, the recording of a field-name has not greatly affected its chance of survival. Court rolls, terriers and title deeds are not widely read, and the Ordnance maps, which are in constant use, do not name fields. The Tithe Awards had a stabilizing effect on usage, as it became customary to refer to them in particulars of sale. The publication of *Sherington* is likely to have more influence on the survival of names than any previous written record. Anyone can refer to it, and probably most of the principal inhabitants have seen it or at least know of it and of its author, whose memorial window is by the children's corner in St. Laud's church. In future one will not be sure whether the use of a field-name is a genuine survival or a conscious revival due to Dr Chibnall's remarkable book.

### *Field-names and settlement history*

Before the early thirteenth century, the records which have made a map of the open fields possible fail us; but those fields were already fully exploited, subject to the constraint imposed by the limited feed available for livestock. The map reveals a scheme which seems calculated to resist change; but at Sherington, as elsewhere, the open fields, tilled co-operatively, were a Dark Age innovation, and perhaps the furlong-names may throw some light on their history.

The merits of the site of Sherington have been recognised for at least twenty centuries. Belgic remains have been found to the west of the present churchyard, and Roman pottery and coins further downhill. The village is on the Magiovinium – Irchester road, which was used by traffic from London and Verulamium to Lincoln.<sup>14</sup> The writer accepts the view that the Ouse Valley was opened to Anglo-Saxon occupation by the *Biedcanford* campaign, dated by the Chronicle to 571, and that this destroyed a British regime which had survived in what had been the canton of the *Catuvellauni*.<sup>15</sup> There may indeed have been a sub-Roman kingdom encompassing also the Trinovantes, with either London or Verulamium as its capital.<sup>16</sup> Probably the first English overlord of Sherington (who was not necessarily the *Scira* whose name it bears) took over a going agricultural concern, however shrunken or run-down. The use of subjugated Britons, evidenced by *Walcot* and perhaps by the *servi* in Domesday, make it unlikely that new settlers had to make a fresh start.

F. W. Maitland, who emphasised the devastating nature of Dark Age warfare, doubted whether there is any village in England that has not been once, or more than once, a deserted village.<sup>17</sup> If Sherington was at any time deserted, it was probably in the late sixth or early seventh century; but its best land is to the west and south-west of the village, and none of the furlongs in those directions, within half a mile of the village, or down to the Great Ouse, had names which suggest any kind of clearing; they refer to springs or wells, to water-courses, to slades (a 'watery' term in North Bucks).<sup>18</sup> *Rowha(l)fdeves*, 'rough head(land) edge', implies that the ground rising to Elbrough (old *burh*) was not cultivated when the name was given, but not that it was wooded.

Beyond the half-mile radius we have names like Breche, Foxinhul 'fox-hill', Skregrethornhul 'scrag-thorn-hill' (corrupted to Staggering Hill) and Rys from *hris* 'brushwood'; the form Price might suggest a Celtic derivation from *prys*, synonymous with *hris*, but Ekwall preferred to derive it from a wrong division of 'up Rys'. Without placing undue emphasis on any one name, the general impression is that the cultivated area was surrounded by a belt of land which had once been cleared but had reverted to scrub. The question is how long it was out of use. In 1917 a 400-acre farm at Drayton in Warwickshire, on land not dissimilar to this, was taken over by the county war agricultural committee after 35 years of total neglect. It was "a mass of hawthorn bushes, briars and ant-hills, with fences overgrown, ditches all silted up, a brook full of obstructions, and the land water-logged".<sup>19</sup> The removal of the scrub with the help of steam-tackle, the clearance of the brook and the restoration of the farm to cultivation took 100 man-years. Without any form of machinery, the corresponding work at Sherington could have extended over decades, even with the labour of Britons, probably no more willing than the prisoners of war who worked at Drayton. But at least the reclamation of this area was undertaken before it had reverted to high forest; the names give no hint of woodland.

The village is rather loosely grouped about two centres, and had two village greens. The *Wēalas* (perhaps those still Welsh-speaking?) may have been relocated westwards from one of them to Walcot, on the frontier of reclamation, perhaps moving their hovels more than once. There could be a connection with *Rereslade*, if *hryre* 'downfall' has the concrete sense 'ruin' which is on record in the ninth century with King Alfred's authority.<sup>20</sup> (At Chesham, the field called Great Cumbers, a mile from the town centre, suggests a similar displacement of natives, for whom however the inoffensive term *Cumbre* was used).<sup>21</sup>

Beyond Walcot lay the Gravenscroft Hedge, outside which stretched the woodland separating Sherington from Tyringham and Filgrave. The names suggest that a concerted attack was made on this, creating a new belt of furlongs which carried cultivation up the hill to the Tyringham Fence. Of their names, Le Clay describes the soil; Barnthege

points to the method of clearance; le Mare refers to the boundary, and Godescote to cottages near God's ground, presumably Filgrave churchyard, which may well be older than the church, itself abandoned in the sixteenth century. This extension of the plough to the bounds of Sherington took place before (probably well before) the Domesday survey.

The two original open fields, the West (previously North) and South fields were separated by the Town Ditch or Gutter along Water Lane. When fully exploited they were almost equal in size (423 against 427 acres) and their expansion probably proceeded in step, until the South Field reached the remote south-east corner of the parish. Stanihul and Hungerhul (from 1238) reflect adversely on the character of the land; Holebrochul was a badger-hill with holes (there is no brook); the Coumbes were hollows running into the hillside, and Stapolhul once had a pole on it. These are on the flank of the broad ridge once called the Hoo (*hōh* 'watershed') later called either Chicheley Hill or Sherington Hill; the boundary between the two parishes ran and still runs along the top. Both flanks must have been wooded, but it is only on the Chicheley side that some scraps of woodland remain. The name Brendehō recalls that a stretch of the hillside was burnt. Hoo Alf may be for Hoo Half, the side (*healf*) of the Hoo; Hoende was at its southern end.

In the time of Edward the Confessor, six of the ten hides of Sherington were held by Edwin son of Borret (Burgred) as one manor; his man Alwin held one hide as another, and the remaining three were held as one manor by King Edward's man Os(w)ulf; these two could grant or sell their land. The Conqueror granted all ten hides to Geoffrey de Mowbray, bishop of Coutances, who kept three hides in lordship,<sup>22</sup> the later North and East fields. It is not unlikely that these comprised Oswulf's holding, that his seat was at Oldbury (Heldebyry 1313, Berrye piece) adjoining Le Hoo Park, and that the name means 'at the old (abandoned) manor-house' with *byrig*, dative of *burh*, used for a fortified house. This could alternatively have been Edwin's manor, but one would expect the principal manor-house to be nearer the Ouse, especially as Edwin also held five hides in Lathbury, just across the river from Sherington. A likely site is Elbrough,

now a field on gently rising ground in what was the South Field; sixteenth-century forms Albor(ri)ow, Alborough support derivation from *ealdeburh*. With the decay of inflexion in the twelfth century, the nominative and oblique cases gave rise naturally enough to two distinct place-names. The bishop would not have needed either house.

In a place so near the Danelaw boundary, one looks for Danish influence on the minor names. There is just a little; in *le Toftes*, the element probably has the Danish sense 'building plot, curtilage'. England furlong has *eng* 'meadow' (which this furlong adjoined). *Skerdingswell* furlong has been half-Danicized. The first element is English *sceard(ing)* 'gap (in a fence or ditch), with *sk-* adopted from the newcomers to this remote corner, who found the local *sh-* difficult, though they did not replace *-d-* by *-ð-*. The fully Scandinavian form would be *Skarthingwell*, as in the West Riding.<sup>23</sup> The substitution of a cognate sound even though there is no cognate word has been called 'philological *lautersatz*'.<sup>24</sup> *Rynfallow* or *Rensfallow* may have Old Norse *rein(n)* 'boundary strip'.

Professor Chibnall considered, but did not state in print, that the original church of Sherington was probably down towards the river Ouse (if so, perhaps at Elbrough?). As in other villages in the district, it was a chapelry of Crawley minster (St Firmin) served by visiting canons. After the Conquest the parochial structure followed the manorial geography. The bishop of Coutances built a parish church up the hill and dedicated it in honour of St. Laud (Lauto rather than Laudus), his sixth-century predecessor, an equally energetic prelate, whose family estate became Saint - Lô.<sup>25</sup> The dedication has remained unique in England, and can be misunderstood. The Rector had a half-virgate, 15 acres, in the open fields, nearly all in single roods or half-acres, in 38 different furlongs, mostly outlying, so that he needed to co-operate with his parishioners. Crawley minster soon became an ordinary parish church.

In 1086 the bishop had four plough-teams on his demesne, just right for his eight slaves. Elsewhere there were 22 villeins and 6 bordars, with 6 plough-teams. At one virgate per villein and a quarter of a virgate per bordar, their total holdings would

amount to 23½ virgates, with the odd half-virgate for the priest, in agreement with the 6 hides or 24 virgates under cultivation in the open fields. The conventional size of 120 acres for the hide (30 for the virgate) works out well at Sherington, but the jurors told the King's commissioners that there could be one more ploughland. The fourth teamland on the three hides in demesne indicates that additional land had been assarted there; probably the Deans, on rising ground between the Olney road and the surviving woods along the Embleton boundary; the 'Furlong behind the Wood' may have been cleared at the same time. As *denu* 'valley' is inapplicable here, the element must be *denn* 'den, hiding-place'; the specialised sense 'woodland swine-pasture' would be quite appropriate, but it is evidenced only in Kent, Surrey and Sussex and was lost in Middle English.<sup>26</sup> The Domesday return mentioned woodland for 100 swine; Dr Chibnall considered that this included the 84 acres of Le Hoo Park, assarted before 1234, and 78 acres of woodland elsewhere, still remaining in 1312. This would give 1.62 acres per pig, near enough to a conventional 1½ acres. He returned to the subject of pannage in 'The Domesday Woods', the perceptive third chapter of *Beyond Sherington*.<sup>27</sup> One factor affecting the acreage required to support a pig is the ground cover, and Ekwell advised him that the *höfe* 'hove' in *Le Hovenden(e)* was ground-ivy; but Ælfric listed *höfe* as a gloss for *viola*,<sup>28</sup> and the *Leechdoms*<sup>29</sup> point to a plant with a range of colours, forms of which could grow in a garden (*tūnhöfe*) or in wet ground (*merschöfe*) as well as in woodland, as here. The violet family meets the case, though we must not expect strict botanical accuracy in Old English, or in Latin before Linnaeus.

The names of the meadows are also informative; the meadow sufficient for four plough-teams, recorded in Domesday, must have included the 54 acres of river meadow, of which 23½ acres were Lordsmead and 30½ acres Townsmead, by no means in proportion to their respective shares in the arable. The mysterious Wolasale Dole,<sup>30</sup> forming the central portion of Townsmead, may have been separately assigned before a system of 20-rood doles was imposed on the meadow following the subinfeudation of 1189. In addition to the river-meadow, the Domesday return probably included the 20 acres of *le Pittel*, the pigtle attached to

Oldbury. This would give a reasonable 2.3 acres per ox for the four teams for which the meadow was expected to suffice. It was only in small villages with long river-frontages that the meadow could support all the plough-oxen, though the shortfall was greater in Sherington than elsewhere in the Three Hundreds of Newport. Of the 97 acres of cowpasture inferred from later records, the lord had 20 and the tenants 77. This helped to redress the imbalance between Lordsmead and Townsmead; the meadow and pasture together would have provided 2.2 acres per ox for the tenants' holdings. This makes no allowance for the additional fodder from the town closes or from the arable, but against this there were other farm animals besides oxen. Various patches in the open fields were reserved as Lammas lands, variously described as leys, glades, slades or swards; their owners could tether beasts or horses on them from 11th May to 1st August, when they became common.

One lost furlong name is of singular interest. *Monchelade* had become nameless even before its final oblivion through the impact of the bypass which has restored peace to the village centre. It was so often spelt with *-ch-* that the first element must be a reduced form of *myn(e)cen* 'nun', ME *monchyn*; 'monk' is ruled out. Those who used this 'nuns' path' (*lād* 'track, passage across a stream') were not the monks of Tickford Priory but the sisters of St. John's Hospital for lepers by Newport Pagnell bridge, founded before 1240, which had a few selions in Sherington and Chicheley. Sisters are not named after 1328; the house fell into decay, but was refounded in 1615 as an almshouse called Queen Ann's Hospital.<sup>31</sup> This furlong, along with Rudenhill, from *Rydenhul* (*ryden* 'clearing'; also lost and not replaced) was shared with Chicheley, suggesting a joint enterprise. The name, lost in Sherington, has survived as that of a spinney in Chicheley, though corrupted through Monchslade and Monthslade to Mouthslade.

If the conclusions reached above as to the relative stability of furlong names in the common fields are accepted, inferences from the ample documentation of the thirteenth century to the illiterate settlement period may not appear too hazardous. The medieval records appear to reflect an agrarian situation which had stabilised before

the Norman Conquest. The freehold rents, especially a penny a year for half a virgate, seem to be of respectable antiquity. Some tenants owed nothing but suit of court. No manorial waste is mentioned in any record, except for the village greens of the upper and lower halves of the 'town' and the wayside verges. Once this stage was reached, any further expansion of tillage would have to be into the ancient woodlands to the north and east of Sherington, a process which was not quite completed until the eighteenth century, when the last of the Hoo or Howe Wood became the Wood Closes.

A system of husbandry found appropriate in the tenth century, and common to northern Europe, was reformed in Sherington by general agreement in the sixteenth century and lasted, though sadly in decline, until the end of the eighteenth, when an agrarian revolution recognised and confirmed the transformation of agriculture in Sherington from an immemorial co-operative way of life into a competitive commercial industry. For his scattered strips, the Rector received a compact parcel of 'Rectory Allotments'. Few cottagers could show a valid title to their exercise of common rights, and on enclosure most of them retained no more than a cottage and garden; even these often had to be sold before they could claim parish relief. Dr Chibnall recognised that after enclosure poverty was endemic in Sherington until recent times; in his final chapter he deliberately left the story incomplete, in the hope that the later history might be told by one who knows the village intimately and understands what it means to its present residents. Such a local historian may well be encouraged by the knowledge that, just two centuries ago, stubborn adherence by some villagers to old names prevented the community from losing its collective memory.

#### *Note on the Connotation of 'Field'*

In Old English, *feld* meant open ground, not encumbered by rocks, trees or permanent buildings; it could be contrasted with woodland, marsh or steep hills.<sup>32</sup> For the settlement period, no narrower meaning need be considered; but with the prevalence of the open-field system in the tenth century, the word came to mean arable, the dominant use of agricultural land, rather than pasture or meadow.<sup>33</sup> The open fields, unlike the furlongs within them, were bounded by hedges, and this

came to be seen as the defining factor. By the fifteenth century, one could speak, without contradiction, of a close called (say) Blackfield in the fields of Whitemarket. In Welsh, though not in Cornish, the word for 'hedge' (*cae*) even came to denote 'field', the land within the hedge.<sup>14</sup>

To the onlooker, the salient features of the open field were its openness and its extent. Hence Shakespeare's 'field of stars', Dryden's 'fields of air', Newton's 'gravitational field' – all unbounded. But to those who worked in the open field, to whom it was simply 'the field'<sup>15</sup> and who took its arable use for granted, what mattered was its physical separation from whatever lay outside. With general enclosure, the second shift in the meaning of 'field' was complete. The old open fields often extended to several hundred acres, while the new 'fields' were a tenth or a twentieth of

the size, but they were hedged, and were therefore fields. Initially, at least, they were the cornfields which the Corn Laws sought to safeguard. Hence in Tithe Awards 'field' could be used specifically for arable land, as opposed to meadows and pastures as well as to orchards, parks, gardens or waste. Later in the nineteenth century, the steep decline in the arable acreage threatened to carry England back to 'the pastoral state', and 'field' inevitably came to include enclosed grassland, though still not orchards, pleasure grounds or rough grazing. In Richard Jefferies' *The Life of the Fields* (1884), 'the fields' are the countryside generally, though he could still contrast the field with the mead as well as the wood. But for over a century the urban Englishman's concept of a typical field has been an area of grassland of modest size, grazed by cows or sheep and bounded by a hedge.

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2. J. E. Gover, A. Mawer & F. M. Stenton *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire* Cambridge 1933, Preface vi – vii
3. B. Cox *The Place-Names of Rutland* E.P.N.S. 1994, Preface ix
4. See W. E. Tate *The Parish Chest* Cambridge 1969, p. 134–143. Under the Tithe Act, 1936, stock to provide compensation for the final extinguishment of tithe rent – charge was itself to be finally redeemed on or before 1st October 1996
5. A. C. Chibnall *Sherington: Fiefs and Fields of a Buckinghamshire Village* Cambridge 1965
6. [G. Eland] 'The Shardeloes Muniments' (Part II) *Records of Bucks* (1944), 14 (pt. iv) 210–235, at pp. 229, 232
7. Reproduced in H. E. Salter and A. H. Cooke ed. *The Boarstall Cartulary* 1930 and elsewhere
8. O. Rackham *The History of the Countryside* (1986), p. 32. Now in the National Archives at Washington
9. Churchwarden's return in Lincoln Terrier, 1707 (the claim was not admitted by the Rector)
10. The Mercers' Company held an estate at Sherington from 1511 to 1919 as trustees of Dean Colet's endowment of St. Paul's School. Their last attempt to hold a manor court failed in 1890, apparently for want of a beanfeast
11. *Sherington*, p. 162 gives a genealogical table for the Chibnalls of Sherington from 1339. It includes fifteen Johns, and *Sherington* is dedicated to the mother of yet another John Chibnall. One of them sold the estate in 1789, when the land was worn out for lack of green crops, and it was dispersed in 1842
12. The furlong '*iuxta le Aubeles*' (ME *aubel*, white poplar), east of the Olney road, became Dean Piece, which persisted; however, this was not a new name, but one which had extended its reference
13. A. Room *The Street Names of England* (1992), pp. 50–59
14. Route 175 in *The Viatores Roman Roads in the South-East Midlands* (1964), 332–4, p. 441
15. K. Rutherford Davis *Britons and Saxons: the Chiltern Region 400–700* (1982), pp. 37–50. It is not now eccentric to believe in a sixth-century British power around St. Albans
16. K. R. Dark *Civitas to Kingdom* (1994), pp. 86–89 Cf. K. Bratigan *The Catuvellauni* (1985), pp. 175–92
17. F. W. Maitland *Domesday Book and Beyond* (1897); Fontana Library ed., 1960, p. 424
18. A *sted* could be a damp valley, or a patch in the open field too wet for grain. See: M. Gelling *Place-Names in the Landscape* 1984, p. 122–3
19. J. Sheail *Agricultural Administration* (1974), i, 141–154, citing Warwickshire Record Office, AL/CR 73/1–2
20. 'Ne timbreþ he no healle ac hryre' translates 'non habitaculum sed ruina fabricatur' in Gregory, *Cura Pastoralis* c. 49
21. See: Anna M. Thomas, Shirley Foxell and A. H. J. Baines 'The Weedon Charity in Chesham', *Recs. Bucks.* (1973), 19, pp. 302–16
22. *Domesday Book* 1, fo. 145d
23. A. H. Smith *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire* (1961), iv, 71; (1962) vii, 83, 90
24. A. S. C. Ross *Studia Neophilologica* xxx, 111f
25. K. E. Kirk *Church Dedications of the Oxford Diocese* 1946, p. 64
26. See: M. Gelling *op. cit.* p. 234
27. A. C. Chibnall *Beyond Sherington* (Phillimore 1979), pp. 15–17
28. Ælfric, Glossary in Codex Junii 71 (Bodl.) p. 41; first published in E. Somner, *Dictionary Saxonico-Latino-Anglicanum* (Oxford 1659), p. 63 no. 132
29. O Cockayne ed. *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft* (1864–6), ii, 94, iii, 344

30. Later Woolsale, Wolla(s)sale; Wolfamshawe c. 1260 and Woolstone 1761 are bad forms. Ekwell suggested *Wulfhelmes haga*, but the second element could be a riverside *heath*
31. *Sherington*, pp. 6–7; *Beyond Sherington*, p. 81, 183; *Vict. C. Hist. Bucks.*, i. 393, iv. 420–1; F W Bull, *Hist. of Newport Pagnell*, (1900), pp.212–33; Pat 3 Ed. III pt. 1, m. 23
32. See: A. H. J. Baines 'Turville, Radenore and the Chiltern *Feld*', *Recs. Bucks.* (1981), 33, pp. 4–21
33. See: M. Gelling *op. cit.* pp. 235–45 for a full discussion
34. O. J. Padel *Cornish Place-Name Elements* (E.P.N.S. 1985), p.44
35. As with Joseph Mayett, hayward of Quanton field 1825–8; see his admirable *Autobiography*, ed. Ann Kussmaul (Bucks Rec. Soc. 1986, p.84). He records his significant dreams; in the first he was in a 'ground' (outlying cowpasture); in the last, in the (open) wheat field at Aldbury (8–9, 96)