

# DESTROYED BY THE TEMPLES: THE DESERTED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE OF STOWE

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*Little is known about the size or physical layout of the medieval village of Stowe, Buckinghamshire, which was removed by the Temple family to make way for their landscape gardens. Even the date of the village's final disappearance is obscure and has been the subject of misunderstanding. This paper examines evidence relating to the manor and village of Stowe between the 13th and 17th centuries and argues that the final period of depopulation occurred during the 1640s.*

## I

The number of deserted medieval villages recorded in Buckinghamshire has steadily increased since Maurice Beresford published his initial list of 'lost villages' in 1954.<sup>1</sup> Fifty-six sites were known in 1968,<sup>2</sup> and according to Michael Reed, 'at least sixty completely deserted villages' had been identified in the county by 1979.<sup>3</sup> This figure was increased to 83 in 1997, some 13 per cent of the 625 recorded villages and hamlets in the county, with many other settlements showing signs of shrinkage since the Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup>

From the outset, Stowe was identified as one of a number of English villages that were removed in the 17th and 18th centuries 'to make way for a Great House or for a rebuilding of an older House; or to give an uninterrupted vista from the windows across the planned acres of the landscape gardeners'.<sup>5</sup> These lost villages were found in many parts of the country and included Wotton Underwood (Buckinghamshire), Milton Abbas (Dorset), Nuneham Courtenay (Oxfordshire), and Hinderskelfe (Yorkshire).<sup>6</sup> For some of these villages maps were made before their destruction, enabling their size and layout to be reconstructed, even in the absence of any physical remains.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, no such map survives to aid the historian of the village of Stowe.

Early 18th-century Stowe has been described as 'the outstanding monument of English landscape gardening ... a visual epic of social and political as well as of aesthetic history'.<sup>8</sup> The gardens at Stowe, like those at Stourhead (Wiltshire) and Castle Howard (Yorkshire), were conceived on a vast

scale, their sheer size setting them apart from the aristocratic gardens of the 17th century and earlier.<sup>9</sup> The transformation of whole swathes of countryside, in which plantations and vistas spread ever further from the centre of the estate, involved not only extensive schemes of earth-moving and tree-planting but also, in some cases, the destruction and relocation of settlements. However, although it has long been known that the village of Stowe was a casualty of the Temple family's ambitions to design the landscape around their house, the timing of the desertion and the size of the community displaced has been the subject of much misunderstanding.

## II

In 1755 the Buckinghamshire historian and antiquarian, Browne Willis, stated that in 1712 the parish of Stowe consisted of 32 houses and a population of 180.<sup>10</sup> His source was the Visitation returns of William Wake, bishop of Lincoln from 1705 to 1716. Wake made four Visitations of his diocese, in 1706, 1709, 1712 and 1715. The Buckinghamshire returns of 1706–12, preserved in a contemporary summary in Christ Church Library, Oxford, have been edited for the Buckinghamshire Record Society by John Broad.<sup>11</sup> Wake's questions revealed an interest in the whole of parish society and included an inquiry about population. According to the returns of 1706, the parish of Stowe 'contains 41 families in it. Among these there is but one dissenter, a Quaker'. Three years later, in 1709, the population seems to have fallen. The returns state: 'Families 32; souls 180; of which one family of

Quakers'. In 1712 there was a further fall: 'Families 30: one dissenter'.<sup>12</sup> The significance of these figures will be discussed later. For now, it is sufficient to note that Browne Willis evidently took his information from the returns of 1709 rather than (as he stated) those of 1712.

The figures published by Browne Willis related to the parish, not the village, of Stowe. The distinction is an important one. Unlike many Buckinghamshire parishes, which contained only one area of settlement, historically the parish of Stowe comprised four: Boycott, Dadford, Lamport, and Stowe itself (Fig. 1). Of these, only Dadford appears to have been a significant centre of population at the beginning of the 18th century. It was here that the families recorded during Bishop Wake's Visitations were most likely to have dwelt. The settlement at Dadford will be discussed more fully below. Boycott was a detached portion of the royal manor of Kirtlington in Oxfordshire from the 11th century or earlier. This administrative anomaly, which endured until 1844, probably originated when Kirtlington was separated from its traditional grazing grounds by the break-up of the large 'multiple estates', which were a feature of the early medieval countryside. Boycott would have provided a suitable area of wood pasture for seasonal grazing by the king's livestock at Kirtlington, about 20 miles (32 km) to the south-west, although the movement of animals may have ceased by the time of Domesday Book, which reveals the practice of arable farming at Boycott and the possession of the manor by another lord.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, the distinction between the parish and village of Stowe has not been acknowledged by most subsequent writers, who lazily assumed that Browne Willis was referring to the village and uncritically transcribed his population figures, sometimes in garbled form. Thus, George Lipscomb declared of Stowe, that 'the village, in 1712, contained only 31 houses and 80 inhabitants; consisting of a few detached farms, and other habitations, which have been since so completely and entirely merged in the gardens and demesnes of Stowe ... that it cannot be, with any degree of precision, attempted to be separately described'.<sup>14</sup> In 1862 James Joseph Sheahan observed of Stowe, 'there is now no village, but the mansion and church are distant 2½ miles N.W. of Buckingham. In 1712 there was a village of 31 houses, but their sites have been completely merged in the gardens

and demesnes of Stowe House'.<sup>15</sup> The author of the Victoria County History, completed in 1915, cited Browne Willis and remarked that 'in 1712 Stowe village consisted of 32 houses and a population of 180, but owing to the encroachments of the owners of Stowe Park it has practically disappeared, the parish church standing within the park grounds'.<sup>16</sup> More recently, Beresford commented that 'in 1710 there were 32 houses and a population of 180' at Stowe, noting correctly that 'the settlement seems to have been moved to Dodford [*sic*], out of the Park'.<sup>17</sup> Finally, John Becket repeated the mistake of his predecessors, noting that 'the village of Stowe had as many as 32 houses and 180 people in 1712, but soon after that it disappeared beneath a new park'.<sup>18</sup> Only Michael Reed has avoided this pitfall, ignoring Browne Willis, and coming close to the truth with the statement that 'the enclosure of Stowe was completed by 1649 and it seems likely that its final depopulation had been accomplished by the end of the seventeenth century, leaving behind only the church discreetly screened from the great house by encircling trees'.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, the village of Stowe probably disappeared about the middle of the 17th century, around the time of Sir Peter Temple's death in 1653. Before we discuss the evidence for this, however, it may be worth reviewing what is known about the manor and village of Stowe in the late Middle Ages. Unlike the volumes of information published about Stowe after 1600, with the exception of a brief article by George Clarke, almost nothing has been written about the parish before the arrival of the Temple family in the late 16th century.<sup>20</sup>

### III

When they first come fully into view, in the late 13th century, the inhabitants of the manor of Stowe appear typical of many peasant communities in Midland England. There were 3 virgate holders, each with 30 acres of arable, 10 half-virgate holders and 4 cottagers. All were unfree or villein tenants, who owed cash rents of 7s. a year for a virgate, 3s. 6d. for half a virgate, and 2s. for a cottage, as well as other servile dues such as merchet, a fine paid to the lord when an unfree woman wished to marry.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the tenants were obliged to work on the lord's demesne at certain times of the year at specific tasks (often called boonworks), such as the ploughing and the harvest. But they were not expected to work on a regular

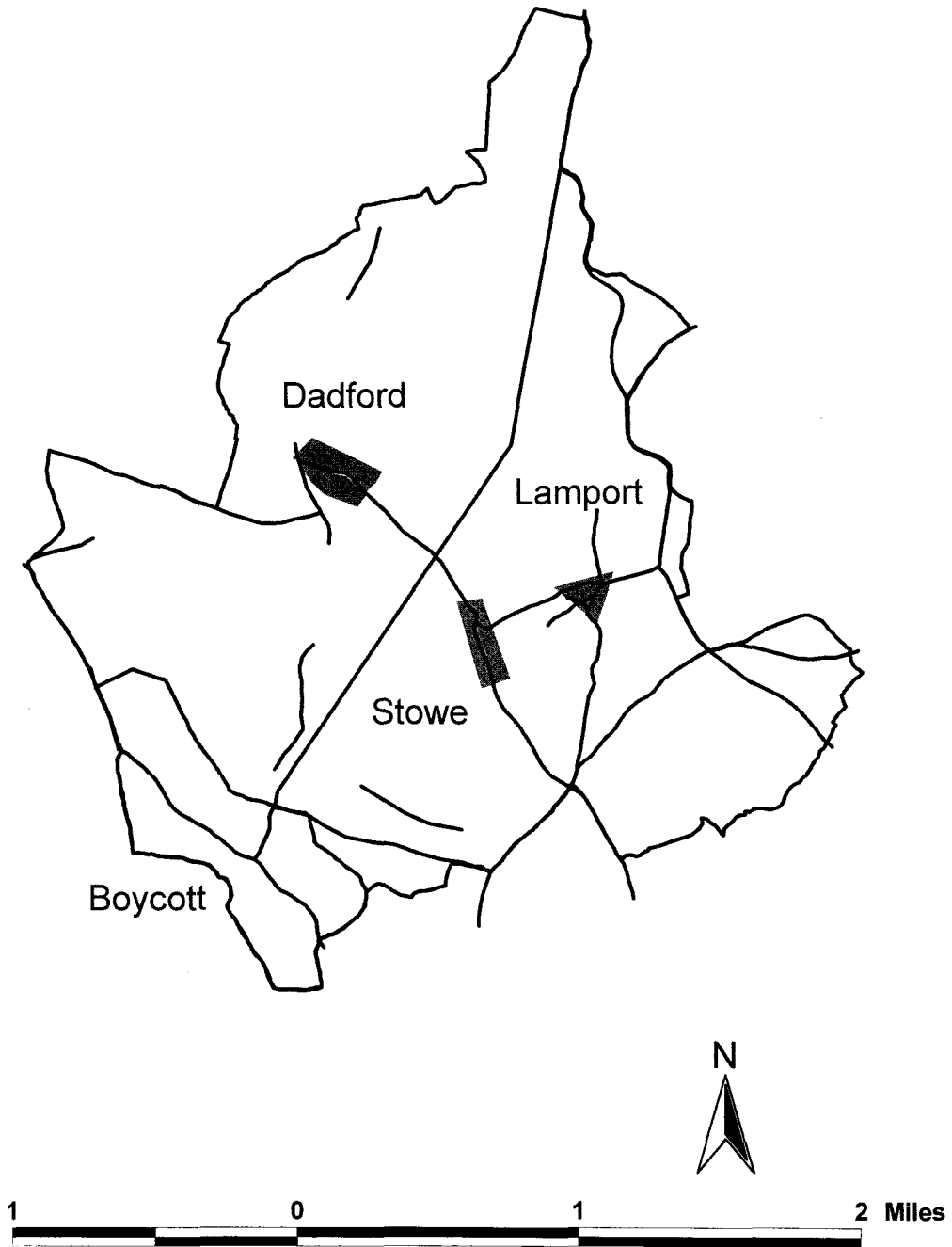


FIGURE 1 The settlements of Stowe parish in the Middle Ages. The boundaries of Boycott are based on 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps. The medieval road system is shown. (Map prepared with the assistance of Richard Jones.)

basis each week, as was the custom on some church estates.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in the 1330s we find the abbot of Oseney, lord of the manor of Stowe, buying fish and brewing ale to feed the ploughmen who performed one of these boonworks before the sowing of the wheat. For other tasks, however, such as weeding, the abbot hired labourers, many of whom were probably residents of the parish, either cottagers who needed to earn wages to supplement the profits of their meagre holdings or household members of the more substantial tenants.<sup>23</sup>

For the most part, therefore, the tenants of Stowe were left to work their own holdings. No records survive to tell us how each household managed their land, but we might expect them to have grown quantities of wheat, oats and dredge (a mixture of oats and spring barley). They probably also owned cattle, horses, sheep, goats, pigs and poultry. Certainly, this was the kind of mixed arable and livestock farming practised by the lord at Stowe before the Black Death and also by the tenants of nearby Leckhampstead, for whom there survives a detailed tax return.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, a number of tenants at Stowe illegally grazed animals such as these in the lord's meadow and grain, for which they were fined at the manorial court.<sup>25</sup> In short, there is little to suggest that patterns of farming at Stowe were much different from other parts of lowland England.<sup>26</sup>

The lands of both lord and tenants at Stowe were distributed over the open fields in strips, commonly of about half an acre each.<sup>27</sup> The remains of the medieval ridge and furrow are still visible on aerial photographs and provide an indication of the extent of the parish's open fields (Fig. 2). The remaining land was probably occupied by areas of wood pasture and Oseney Abbey's park, mentioned in 1267.<sup>28</sup> The open-field method of farming necessitated cooperation among the villagers and ensured that everyone had equal involvement in the system, with both good and bad soil, some land situated near to their homes and some at a distance.<sup>29</sup> The villagers of Stowe shared in the cultivation of their open fields with the neighbouring village of Lamport, the lordship of which was divided between Oseney Abbey and Ralph de Langport in 1279.<sup>30</sup> In the 13th century there seem to have been two fields: a half-virgate granted to Oseney Abbey was said to comprise seven acres in one field and eight acres in the other.<sup>31</sup> Another grant to Oseney, however, reveals the clearance of woodland and its subse-

quent cultivation. A parcel of land called *Le Stockinge* (which means woodland clearing) consisting of half a virgate lay between the abbey's grove and the clearing of John son of Maurice de Langport.<sup>32</sup> The extension of the arable into former woodland probably led to the reorganization of the field system in the late 13th or early 14th century, so that when the Temples surveyed the estate in c.1585 and 1633 there were three fields in Stowe and Lamport, called Windmill Field, Stockhold Field and Netherfield.<sup>33</sup>

The virgate and half-virgate holders of Stowe may have sold some of their produce at the weekly market in order to raise the cash needed to pay rents and taxes and to purchase manufactured goods. The nearest market towns were Buckingham, Brackley and Stony Stratford. In 1314 a weekly market was also granted at the nearby manor of Biddlesden and an annual fair, granted to the monastery in 1230, was staged at Luffield Priory in September.<sup>34</sup> There were thus plentiful opportunities for the inhabitants of Stowe to enter the market place, although we have almost no detailed information about their activities.

The manor of Stowe was held by Oseney Abbey, near Oxford, from 1149 until the dissolution of the monasteries in the mid-16th century.<sup>35</sup> In 1279 the abbey's demesne at Stowe consisted of three virgates (about 90 acres), six acres of woodland, and a watermill, granted by Simon de Langport in c.1200. The advowson of the parish church also belonged to the abbey, which appointed a vicar, having appropriated the living and the right to collect the tithes.<sup>36</sup> The abbey maintained a manor house at Stowe in the 1330s, where there was sufficient accommodation to house the king's huntsman, Richard de Foxle, with 21 men for five days. The abbey's steward also resided at the manor, where he held the manorial court. A slater was employed to repair the roof of the house 'where it was necessary', for which he was paid partly in kind. Stone slates were a common roofing material in the 14th century, often employed to roof high-status buildings such as castles and halls. There was also a barn, in which more than 26 quarters of inferior malt, made from dredge or oats, were stored.<sup>37</sup>

The account roll from which the above information is derived, although fragmentary and undated, is the only one to have survived for Stowe from the period of 'high farming', when lords administered

their lands directly rather than leasing them to others.<sup>38</sup> The beginning of the account is missing, with its list of cash receipts from rents, the sale of produce, and the profits of the manorial court. Among the expenses, we find that the abbey purchased 40 hurdles for a sheepfold at a cost of 3*s.* 4*d.* Money was also spent on the dairy, the harvest, and a variety of manorial servants. The grange account records the payment of malt to those who washed and sheared the sheep, mowed the meadows and made the hay, and to the boy who scared the birds from the grain. Finally, the livestock account reveals that the monks received geese, capons, hens and eggs from Stowe, and kept horses, oxen, cattle, sheep, pigs and goats. There may also have been a number of dogs on the manor, the abbey having secured a charter releasing them from the need under forest law to remove their dogs' claws.<sup>39</sup>

In the 12th and 13th centuries the inhabitants of Stowe lived within the boundaries of Whittlewood Forest. They were thus subject to forest law, the system of justice instituted by the Norman and Angevin kings to ensure the preservation of the deer and the protection of their habitat for the royal hunt.<sup>40</sup> The taking of deer and the clearance of woodland for farming were, therefore, carefully regulated, with those found guilty of infringements by the forest justices liable to a fine or imprisonment. In 1255, for example, it was reported that two dogs which the abbot of Biddlesden's hayward was accustomed to take with him to the fields, probably of Dadford, had been found gnawing on a deer. The dogs evaded capture but the abbot, lord of the manor of Dadford, could not escape a fine of two marks (£1 6*s.* 8*d.*) imposed by the court.<sup>41</sup>

The woods of Stowe parish belonged to the lords of the individual manors, even though activities within them were regulated according to the king's forest law. Woodwards appointed by the lords to manage their woods were required to appear before the forest justices to ensure that the king's interests were being maintained.<sup>42</sup> Thus, William de Hazlewood was in charge of the abbot of Oseney's wood of Stowe at the time of the eyre of 1255.<sup>43</sup> Many lords found the restrictions of forest law irritating and the corruption of forest officials objectionable. In an attempt to overcome this, in 1267 Oseney Abbey secured a charter from the king confirming the monastery's right to take estovers (wood for repairs) from its own woods 'without view and livery and danger of the foresters, verderers or other

bailiffs'. The abbey was also given permission to create a park at Stowe, probably by King John, in which they were able to hunt deer for their own table without fear of punishment by the king's justices.<sup>44</sup> The woods belonging to Oseney were among those disafforested in the late 13th century, according to an examination of Whittlewood's boundaries in about 1316.<sup>45</sup>

For the smallholders of Stowe, those without sufficient arable land to feed their families, the woods of the parish provided the resources necessary to make a living. Unfortunately, the surviving sources for Stowe are too few to allow us a detailed insight into the occupations pursued by these people outside agriculture. But a comparison with other woodland communities in medieval England highlights the range of possibilities: woodworkers, including carpenters, coopers, sawyers and wheelers; bird-catchers, charcoal-burners, iron-workers, potters, rope-makers, and smiths.<sup>46</sup> At Stowe there was a forge, the fuel for which was almost certainly gathered in the woods.<sup>47</sup> Two half-virgate holders in the village in 1279 who were called Smith (*Faber*) may have worked there during slack times in the agricultural year. Another half-virgate holder was called Quarry, indicating that there were opportunities to engage in stone-working as well. Other by-employments included milling. One tenant in Boycott and three in Dadford were called Miller in 1279, indicating no lack of expertise in the grinding of grain or unwillingness to make a profit from the operation.<sup>48</sup>

Such a potentially diversified economy may have shielded the inhabitants of Stowe from the worst effects of the 15th-century recession, when a declining population and falling grain prices reduced employment opportunities in the more arable-dominated countryside.<sup>49</sup> In the neighbouring parish of Akeley, for example, the good series of court rolls surviving from the late 14th and early 15th centuries suggests a relatively thriving peasant community in which few holdings were abandoned and tenants engaged in brewing ale, herding their pigs, trespassing in the lord's woods, and quarrelling with their neighbours over broken contracts and cases of debt.<sup>50</sup> Although lords benefited, to some extent, from the continued prosperity of their tenants, the changing economic and social conditions of the post-Black Death period were generally inimical to their interests: the cost of labour rose, the price of agricultural produce fell, and tenants



FIGURE 2 Ridge and furrow in Stowe parish visible on aerial photographs, and partially corroborated by fieldwork. Areas of medieval settlement are shaded. The medieval road system is shown. (Map prepared with the assistance of Richard Jones.)

were increasingly unwilling to remain burdened by labour services and other servile dues.

As a result of this reversal of fortunes in the relationship between lords and tenants, the abbey of Oseney, like most large landowners, switched from a policy of direct demesne management in the 14th century to one of leasing in the 15th century.<sup>51</sup> Although it is not known when Oseney Abbey first leased the manor of Stowe, in 1478–9 Thomas Saunders accounted for £13 13s. 4d. for the annual farm of the manor and a further £12 2s. 4d. for the rents of the tenants.<sup>52</sup> A brass to Alice Saunders, probably a relative of Thomas, survives in the chancel of the parish church, dated 1479 (Fig. 3).<sup>53</sup> Thomas's lease was renewed in 1485 for 80 years, at which time it included the manor and parsonage, with all the tithes of grain and hay, and the lands, meadows, pastures and closes, together with the watermill.<sup>54</sup> On the eve of the dissolution in 1538, a similar lease, for 90 years, was agreed with George Giffard of Middle Claydon. This was ratified by the newly created bishop of Oxford in 1543, to whom Stowe had been granted by the king. George was succeeded in the lease by his son, Thomas Giffard, who held the manor house, possibly the same house which was repaired in the 1330s, although it is likely to have undergone considerable alteration and rebuilding in the intervening 200 years.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Giffard was the man from whom the Temples first leased and then purchased the manor of Stowe between 1571 and 1590.

Glimpses of the inhabitants of Stowe may be snatched from the occasional document surviving from this period. In 1469, for example, the four churchwardens of the parish – William Church, Richard Freyne, John Howes and John Spencer – were granted on behalf of the community by Oseney Abbey, a piece of ground to the south of Stowe church, 66 feet long and 18 feet wide, for the building of a church house, for which the abbey received an annual rent of 6d.<sup>56</sup> In 1512 a manorial court roll reveals two women – Joan Church and Margaret Spencer – paying the fine to brew ale for sale, a common occupation for women at this time.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, the miller of Stowe was fined for charging excessive tolls and for badly grinding the tenants' grain, while the miller of Boycott allowed the water from the mill-stream to overflow and flood the neighbouring meadow. The boundary stones between the abbot of Oseney's wood and the land of two tenants were also inspected and ordered

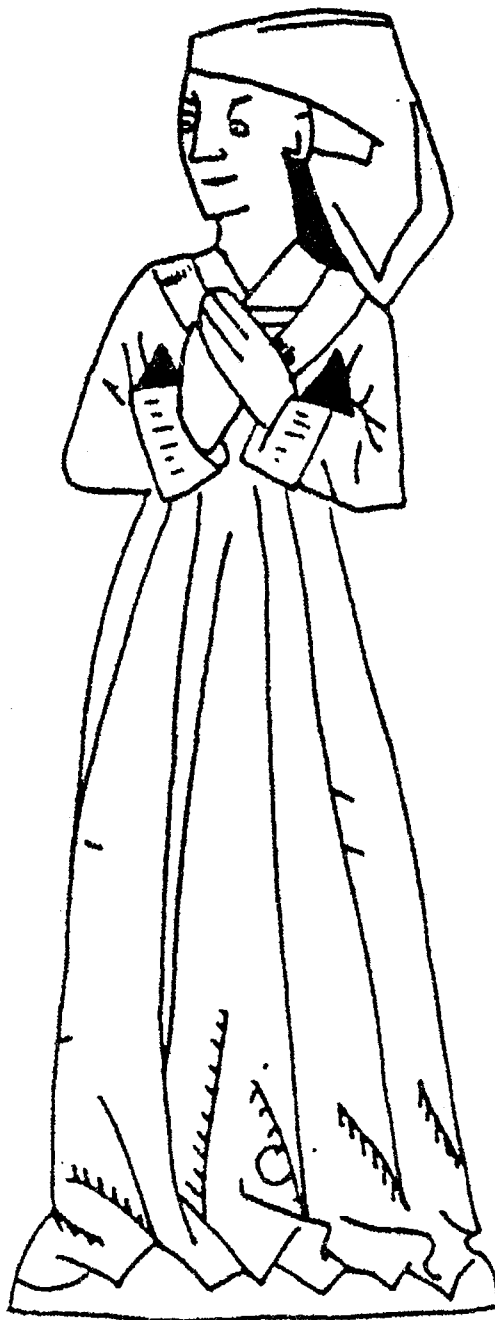


FIGURE 3 The brass to Alice Saunders in the church of the Assumption of St Mary the Virgin, Stowe. Source: M Bevington, *Stowe Church: A Guide* (Stowe, 2001), 15.

to be replaced. A few years later, in 1519, the people of the parish, including eight of the oldest residents, gathered on King Edward the Martyr's day (18 March) to inspect the boundary stones of the churchyard and decide who should replace them.<sup>58</sup> The will of William Sherytt, a resident of Stowe who died in 1559, reveals a small-scale farmer with a mare and colt, two sheep, three hens and a pullet, grain worth four nobles (£1 6s. 8d.), and a variety of household goods including flaxen sheets, pewter vessels and a frying pan, valued in total at £5 2s. 5d.<sup>59</sup> Finally, in 1569 the court at Stowe fined a shepherd for pasturing his sheep amidst the growing grain, in contravention of one of a series of by-laws, listed in 1573, which sought to protect the arable from the cattle, horses, pigs and sheep of the inhabitants.<sup>60</sup>

These references, however sparse, provide valuable evidence of a farming community that was

probably little different from others in Midland England in the late 15th and 16th centuries, such as Sherington in Buckinghamshire or Kibworth Harcourt in Leicestershire.<sup>61</sup> The presence of a sizeable village community in Stowe in the early 16th century is indicated by the surviving tax returns. In 1522, 1524 and 1543 the taxpayers of Stowe were listed separately from those of Boycott, Dadford and Lamport. Thus, in the Muster Survey of 1522, 37 residents were recorded at Stowe, compared with 24 at Dadford and 19 at Lamport.<sup>62</sup> The purpose of this survey was to provide information about the wealthier members of the community who often evaded payment of the lay subsidies. However, attempts to root out evasion by such people were almost entirely unsuccessful. For example, of the 32 taxpayers at Stowe who contributed to the subsidy of 1524, 14 were servants assessed on yearly wages of £1 who were not listed in 1522,

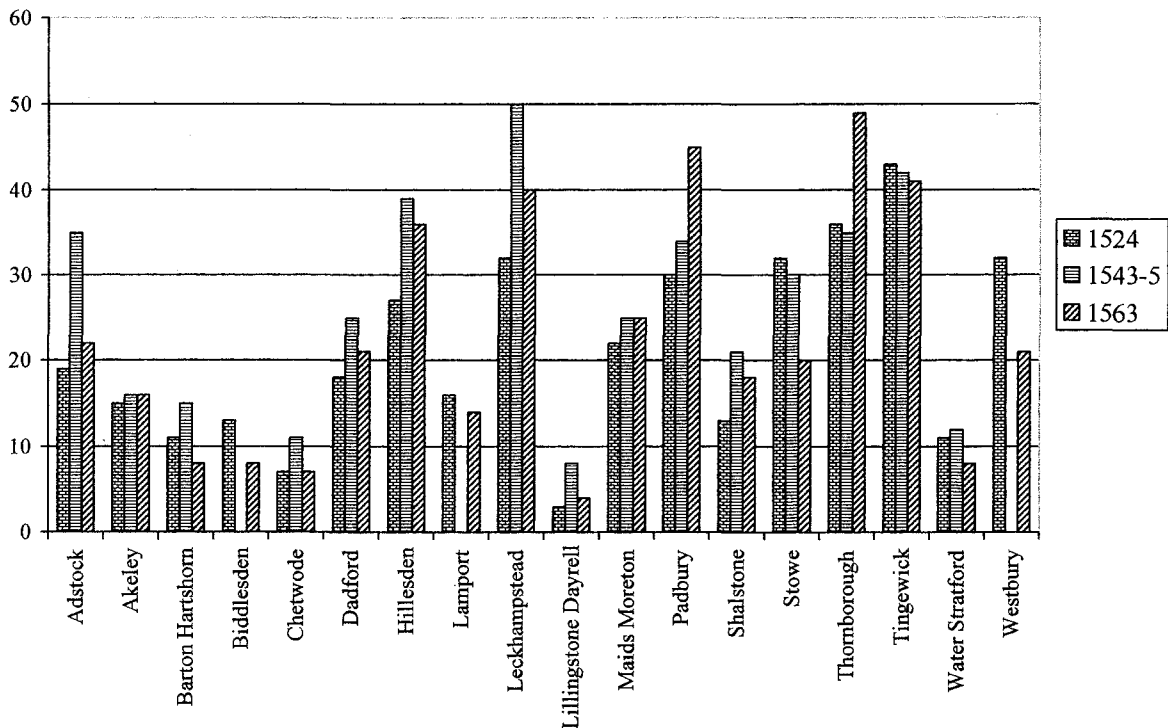


FIGURE 4 The number of taxpayers recorded in selected villages in north Buckinghamshire in 1524 and 1543–5, together with the number of families recorded in the diocesan population returns of 1563. *Source*: J Sheail, *The Regional Distribution of Wealth in England as indicated in the 1524/5 Lay Subsidy Returns*, ed. R W Hoyle, vol. 2 (List & Index Society, Special Series, 29, 1998), 23; J Cornwall, 'An Elizabethan Census', *Recs Bucks*, 16 (1953–60), 266–67.



suggesting that about half of those recorded in the survey failed to make a contribution, and that the number of adult males in the village exceeded 50.<sup>63</sup> In spite of the high level of evasion, the community recorded at Stowe was one of the largest in the area in 1524, with about the same number of taxpayers as nearby Leckhampstead, Padbury, Thornborough and Westbury, and with considerably more than Akeley, Biddlesden, Maids Moreton and Shalstone (Fig. 4). But the lack of similar figures from the 14th or 15th century means that we do not know whether the trend at Stowe, and in the surrounding villages, was one of growth or retreat.<sup>64</sup>

Nevertheless, it is likely that the overall population decline following the Black Death of 1348–9 and subsequent outbreaks of plague had an effect at Stowe, as it did in most other parts of England. Tofts – house sites from which the buildings have been removed – are occasionally mentioned in documents of the 15th and 16th centuries. For example, in 1439 a toft in Lamport was granted together with its arable spread across the open fields.<sup>65</sup> Another toft was recorded in 1573.<sup>66</sup> But there does not seem to have been a widespread abandonment of holdings in this period, and there is no evidence to suggest large-scale engrossment or enclosure. Thus, the inhabitants of Stowe village did not immediately suffer the fate of their neighbours at Lillingstone Dayrell, the last of whom were evicted by their lord in 1491. Likewise, any fall in population at Stowe cannot be compared with that experienced in the Cambridgeshire village of Chippenham, where a source graphically describes ‘whole streets as “clere decayed” and every other house as missing’ in the 16th century.<sup>67</sup>

There is, however, some evidence of stagnation at Stowe. The 16th century witnessed a substantial rise of population in many parts of England.<sup>68</sup> In north Buckinghamshire, the numbers of taxpayers contributing to the subsidies of 1543–5 were generally higher than those recorded in 1524, except at Stowe and a handful of other villages.<sup>69</sup> In 1543 the names of only 30 taxpayers in Stowe village were listed.<sup>70</sup> In 1563, the diocesan population returns recorded 20 families at Stowe (together with 21 families at Dadford and 14 at Lamport), almost certainly an underestimate, although in some neighbouring settlements the apparent decline in numbers is less evident (Fig. 4).<sup>71</sup> Perhaps it may be concluded that the economic climate at Stowe was unfavourable in this period. Following the

establishment of the Temple family at Stowe, the number of tenants fell again, from 37 in 1620 to 28 in 1634.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, an extent of the manor taken in 1637 recorded 30 messuages and 30 tofts, suggesting that, as at Chippenham, half of the housing stock had been abandoned.<sup>73</sup> But the explanation for this development may not have been primarily economic. By this time the Temples had amassed a substantial fortune and the residents of Stowe were beginning to succumb to the ambitions of these graziers turned aristocrats, to transform their house into a palace and their farmland into the most extraordinary set of landscape gardens. Who were the Temple family and how had they succeeded in becoming the masters of Stowe?

#### IV

The economic and social changes of the 15th century meant that sheep farming – in particular wool production – became a more profitable venture for many landowners than the production of grain. The gentry were particularly active in acquiring large blocks of former arable land for grazing, especially in the Midlands and East Anglia. Thomas Dayrell, lord of Lillingstone Dayrell, was just one of many who exploited prevailing economic conditions to transform tillage into pasture. In 1491 he engrossed 8 peasant holdings of 20½ acres each, thereby displacing 40 people from their homes and leading to the abandonment and ruin of 7 messuages and 4 cottages. In total, 164 acres of previously cultivated land were given over to pasture, on which the lord’s sheep were set to graze.<sup>74</sup> Similar enterprises were established by John Spencer of Warwickshire, who later became lord of the manor of Althorp in Northamptonshire, and Peter Temple, also of Warwickshire, who later acquired the manor of Stowe.<sup>75</sup>

The foundations of the Temple family’s extraordinary rise to prominence thus lay in the flocks of sheep grazed on former arable lands in Warwickshire, the lease of which Peter Temple inherited from his cousin in the mid-16th century. The money made from the sale of wool enabled Peter and his son John first to lease and then to purchase the manor of Stowe and other lands in the parish from Thomas Giffard between 1571 and 1590.<sup>76</sup> Having chosen Stowe as their main place of residence, the Temples were not at first concerned to alter established patterns of settlement and farming, although they undertook a limited amount of enclosure in 1587 and 1599.<sup>77</sup> Thus, the inhabitants

of Stowe village continued to cultivate the open fields and exploit the surrounding pastures and woods, much as their predecessors had done throughout the Middle Ages.

In 1620 there were 7 copyholders at Stowe, 10 leaseholders and 18 tenants at will.<sup>78</sup> A survey of the estate in 1633 reveals that the 18 tenants at will each possessed a house and close, meadow, and arable scattered across the three common fields.<sup>79</sup> In total, the house plots occupied an area of a little more than 21 acres. However, no clue is provided in the document as to the location of these tenements, either in relation to the church or to each other. Thus, it is not clear whether these houses formed a relatively compact settlement centred on the parish church, or were more widely dispersed over the landscape, although topographical considerations suggest that the former is more likely. The only building of which we have a description is the priest's house. In 1607 the site of the vicarage, measuring just over an acre and including a walled garden and orchard, lay between the street on the east, a field on the west, a close on the north, and the churchyard on the south. The house itself was of eight bays and two stories, built of stone and half roofed with tile and half with thatch.<sup>80</sup> This building was removed during the Civil War, following the desertion of the village, and was replaced by a new vicarage built to the south of the church, perhaps in an area formerly occupied by tenants' houses. Like its predecessor, however, this building became so badly decayed that a petition was presented to the bishop of Lincoln in 1733 to allow Viscount Cobham to build another house close by.<sup>81</sup> This may be one of the buildings marked on Sarah Bridgeman's plan of the estate, published in 1739, immediately north-east of number 21 on the plan (Fig. 5).<sup>82</sup> In 1761 the vicar complained that this building too was out of repair and was in such 'a low and damp situation, which by the increasing growth of the neighbouring trees in the gardens of the Earl Temple, will become daily more confined and unhealthy'.<sup>83</sup>

Two-thirds of the 18 tenants at will named in 1633 were also listed as tenants in a court roll of 1625.<sup>84</sup> At this time too the total number of tenants recorded was 18 (the 14 residents of Lamport were listed separately). Earlier courts held by the Temple family also listed the names of the tenants of Stowe, of whom there were 23 in 1597, 14 of them sharing surnames with the tenants of 1633, and 27

in October 1600.<sup>85</sup> The business of these courts was similar to that recorded in the 16th century and earlier. In 1625, for example, tenants were fined for not grinding their grain at the lord's mill and for not repairing the stocks.<sup>86</sup> The seven court rolls surviving from the years 1597–1602 record transfers of land between tenants, and a variety of orders relating to the management of livestock and the land, such as the requirement to ring swine and the right to let sheep commons to neighbours. By-laws were issued, concerning the pasturing of livestock on the stubble after harvest, and other similar matters, and fines were collected for their breach. In addition, officers of the manor, such as the constable, tithingmen and hayward (*agillarius*), were appointed from among the tenants.<sup>87</sup>

Several tenants were fined at these courts for breaches of stint, such as Edward Seare, who 'kept a bullock in the field more than his stint' in 1601. According to a later lawsuit, this stint had been introduced in 1590 in order to prevent the commons becoming 'overcharged', to such an extent that the families of Stowe and Lamport 'were utterly disappointed of milk, butter and cheese, which is their whole subsistence they live by, their wives and children, their livings being but small'.<sup>88</sup> The survey of 1633 listed the number of animals allowed in the commons by each tenant. The stint was set at 4 horses, 4 beasts (cattle) and 20 sheep for each virgate.<sup>89</sup> In 1637, however, Peter Temple enclosed the commons of Stowe and Lamport – known as the Hewings – in order to enlarge his deer park.<sup>90</sup> The inhabitants of Stowe and Lamport complained about the enclosure in 1638, which was 'to the detriment of them and their animals', petitioning help from Abel Dayrell, who held a freehold estate in Lamport and who likewise suffered from Temple's action.<sup>91</sup>

The increasingly rancorous and violent dispute which ensued between Temple and Dayrell has recently been examined by Dan Beaver for the light which it sheds on notions of honour, order and hierarchy in early modern England. According to this analysis, 'Stowe park became the site of a violent theatre of honour in the summer of 1642, its cast recruited from the gentry families of north-western Buckinghamshire, their friends and their servants'.<sup>92</sup> For the inhabitants of Stowe, the enclosure of the commons and the expansion of the park were disastrous and may well have encouraged some to leave the village. The destructive actions of

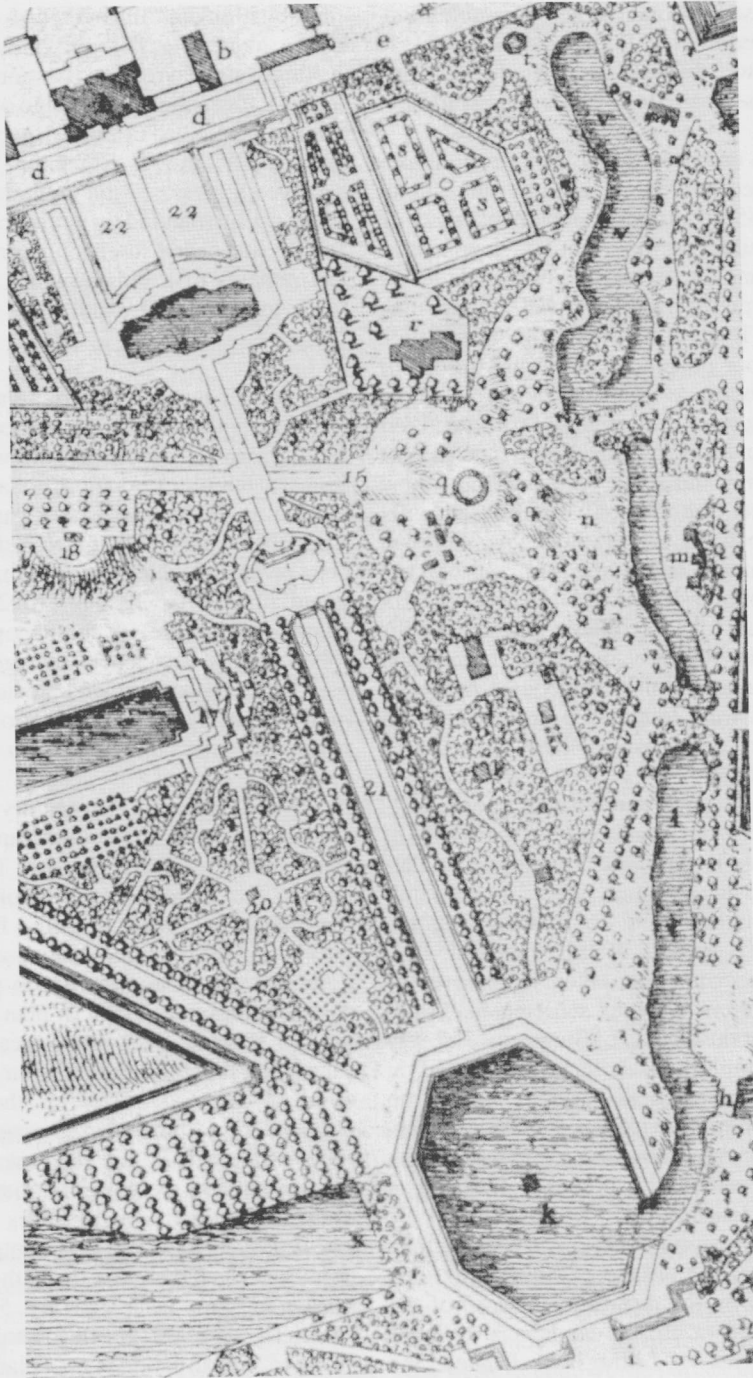


FIGURE 5 Detail of the Elysian Fields from Sarah Bridgeman's plan of Stowe, 1739. Source: P Willis, *Charles Bridgeman and the English Landscape Garden* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2002), pl. 128.

deer were a cause of complaint among arable farmers in Whittlewood Forest in the Middle Ages.<sup>93</sup> In the case of Stowe, this was compounded by Peter Temple's ruthless desire to refashion the landscape of his estate.

According to one account, at least seven houses were depopulated by Peter Temple by the time of his death in 1653.<sup>94</sup> Another document gives an even higher figure, claiming that he 'depopulated ten or twelve ancient farms in Stowe, where the farmers had formerly lived very well, maintaining tillage, [before Temple] had turned them out with diverse other poor people, to the heavy burden of the neighbourhood'. After this clearance, Temple had 'emparked a great part of these farms and their common fields in his own lands ... and made a very large park, storing the same with red and fallow deer'. These deer, we are told, had subsequently 'increased to so great a multitude' that they had 'overrun the country, destroying corn and barking and spoiling [Temple's] own woods, the woods [in Akeley] belonging to New College, Oxford, and Sir Thomas Dayrell's woods'. As a result, the wood commons no longer furnished adequate firewood, and landholders were likely to be ruined, having already suffered damages in 'corn, grass, and goods' valued at £500.<sup>95</sup>

This evidence suggests that the demise of the village of Stowe occurred largely during the 1640s, at a time when Peter Temple was not only depopulating houses, enclosing common ground and expanding his park but also, in 1649, enclosing the common fields.<sup>96</sup> As part of this upheaval, it is likely that the decision was taken to remove the bulk of the villagers to other settlements. Moreover, a number of the tenants of Stowe were closely linked to the Temple household in this period, at least six being employed as servants.<sup>97</sup> Such an association would have made the process of securing the consent of the villagers to being removed to a neighbouring settlement, probably Dadford, a good deal easier to achieve.

Like the neighbouring village of Lillingstone Dayrell, therefore, the village of Stowe was ultimately destroyed by the dictate of the lord of the manor who wished to use the land for a different purpose. In the case of Lillingstone Dayrell, the former house sites and arable fields were given over to the grazing of sheep. In the case of Stowe, deer occupied the land formerly tilled and pastured by the inhabitants. However, whereas archaeological

investigation has uncovered a good deal of evidence about the rise and fall of the village of Lillingstone Dayrell, its location and layout, much less is known about the village of Stowe.<sup>98</sup> The creation of the Elysian Fields, part of the landscape gardens, in the 18th century appears to have removed all trace of the medieval buildings which formerly surrounded the parish church. The Temple family succeeded in erasing completely the material remains of a village which had been in existence for some 600 years.

## V

This paper began by disputing the suggestion that a populous village of Stowe existed in the early 18th century which was soon afterwards removed by Richard Temple, Viscount Cobham (1675–1749) to make way for the landscape gardens designed by Bridgeman and Vanbrugh.<sup>99</sup> Instead, evidence has been presented which suggests that it was Cobham's grandfather, Peter Temple (1592–1653), who was chiefly responsible for the depopulation of Stowe, following his decision to enlarge the estate's deer park by encompassing land previously used as common pasture by the inhabitants of Stowe and Lamport. However, the extent to which the land previously occupied by tenants' houses was completely cleared in the 17th century is uncertain. Peter Temple did not seek to landscape this part of the estate himself. His son, Richard Temple (1634–97), on the other hand, not only rebuilt the old house – presumably the house acquired from Thomas Giffard in the 16th century – but also sought to design a new garden in an area which probably included part of the former village. A plan of *c.*1680, depicting the scheme, does not indicate any dwellings, suggesting that the remains of any houses had been removed (Fig. 6).<sup>100</sup> However, the glebe terriers of 1707–17 reveal that the vicarage, located to the south of the church, lay adjacent to a smith's shop, situated close to the vicar's yard and outbuilding.<sup>101</sup> Thus, it appears that some traces of the former village survived into the 18th century, and may not have been cleared away even by the laying out of the Elysian Fields in the 1730s (Fig. 5).

Where were the former inhabitants of Stowe resettled? Sarah Bridgeman's plan of 1739 and the Ordnance Survey map of 1833 both reveal that the settlement at Lamport survived, a little to the east of the landscape gardens. Some 12 buildings are marked on the Bridgeman plan.<sup>102</sup> The Dayrell

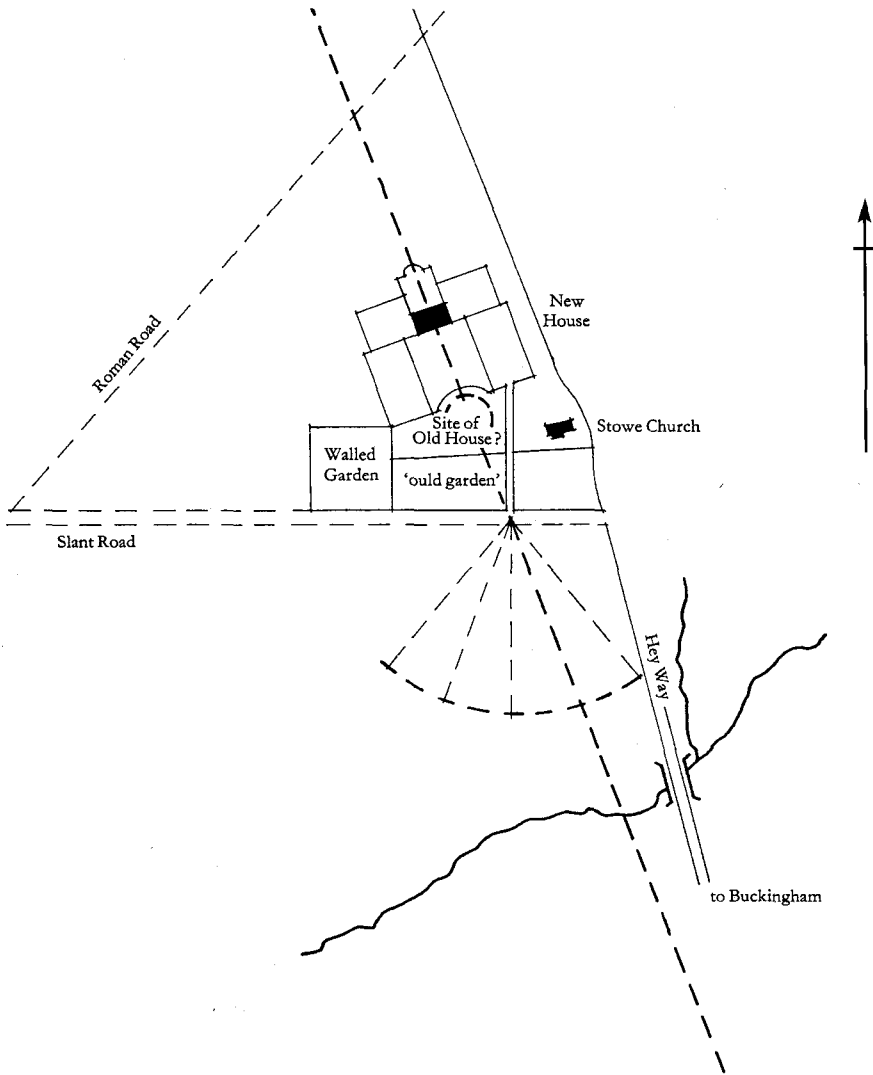


FIGURE 6 An estate plan of c.1680, labelled and redrawn from the original in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Source: P Willis, *Charles Bridgeman and the English Landscape Garden* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2002), pl. 114.

family, with whom Peter Temple was in dispute over the enclosure of the commons in 1637, continued to hold a manor in Lamport until the middle of 19th century.<sup>103</sup> The households depicted in 1739 were most likely the tenants of this estate. But for most of the inhabitants of Lamport – 15 were named in Temple’s survey of 1633 – the upheaval affecting the villagers of Stowe would have been equally disastrous. They too would have suffered

from the loss of the commons and the destructive actions of the deer, and may well have chosen to be resettled. Their most likely destination was the village of Dadford, part of the Temple estate, but on the western edge of the parish, away from the landscape gardens. In the Middle Ages the inhabitants of Dadford farmed their own set of open fields, separated from the field system of Stowe and Lamport by the old Roman road (Fig. 2). The survey of

1633 reveals a sizeable community at Dadford and provides evidence of recent enclosure of arable land.<sup>104</sup> Dadford was the largest settlement in the parish in 1279, with 43 recorded tenants.<sup>105</sup> It possessed fewer people than Stowe according to the tax returns of 1524 and 1543–5, but was slightly larger than its neighbour in 1563 (Fig. 4). Following the depopulation of Stowe and Lamport, the village increased still further in size.

However, Dadford may not have absorbed all those people displaced by Peter Temple. Some may have chosen to leave the parish altogether. Certainly, the population figures listed during Bishop Wake's Visitations – 41 families in 1706, 32 in 1709, 30 in 1712 – suggest that the parish had suffered considerable (and ongoing) depopulation since 1563, when a total of 55 families were recorded.<sup>106</sup> Likewise, the 112 parishioners noted in the Compton Census of 1676 was less than half the number (240) reported in 1603.<sup>107</sup> Only in the censuses of 1801 and 1811, when the population was 311 and 368 respectively, can definitive evidence be found that this trend had been reversed. By this time Stowe parish was typical of much of north Buckinghamshire in containing only one principal area of settlement: Dadford remained, but Boycott, Lamport and Stowe had largely disappeared, destroyed by the Temples and their landscape gardens.

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