

THE EFFECT OF THE WARS OF THE ROSES ON CHESHAM

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Chesham was probably more seriously affected by the Wars of the Roses than many places in England. The reason for this was, at root, the stubborn loyalty of its lords of the manor to the Lancastrian cause. A number of Chesham's manorial documents shed light on the various threats, some perceived and some real, that it suffered, and on the ways it reacted to them.

The Church issued a document reminding all of the tithes due to it, fearing that the lord of the manor might forfeit the manor and, in consequence, that the Church might lose its tithes. The contemporary court records show that the lord of the manor's representatives and retainers in Chesham were not prepared to display their lord's unwavering loyalty, but took a decidedly flexible and compliant line in their dealings with authority as fortunes fluctuated over the course of the Wars. A third document, a Copy Book, contains a copy of a deed in which the lord of the manor left a large parcel of land to his son. He did this at a time in the conflict that might well indicate that he was taking measures to soften the effects of the inevitable outcome of his own intractability.

The documents just mentioned contain, incidentally, much information about the town and its hamlets, as do other near-contemporary documents, notably rentals. By reconciling all these contributions, it is possible to construct an account of the physical arrangement of greater Chesham that provides the context of the events described here, and also brings out some of the reasons that Chesham emerged from the Wars in such good shape.

INTRODUCTION

The progress of the Wars of the Roses was followed with more interest in Chesham than in many other parts of the country. The direct involvement of its lords of the manor was a cause of concern, as was the question of who might hold the manor when its lord fell foul of events as, inevitably, he did. In these and other ways, the effects of the Wars on Chesham were considerable.

In a box of documents forming part of the Cavendish Archive held in the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (CBS) there is a document relating to tithes in Chesham. It is described as a 'memorandum of the glebes, tithes, etc. appropriated to the Abbot and convent of Leicester and to the endowment reserved to the chaplain, c.1468'. It was not a normal practice to generate reminders that tithes were due and to whom they should be paid. But this document, which is clearly dated Hocktide 1468, was issued in the middle of the Wars of the Roses, and is a salutary indication of the effects the Wars had on Chesham and of the particular concerns it caused.

Chesham's manor court records reveal its awareness of the Wars, and also the care it took not to upset the reigning monarch, whether Lancastrian or Yorkist. Unlike its lord of the manor, the town kept its head down and, indeed, endeavoured to keep its head. This is most evident in the headings of the court rolls, the part which would obviously be read first. They are worded to convey an unqualified allegiance to the reigning monarch and, on one occasion and in an ingratiating fashion, to a new and distinguished lord of the manor.

The contribution of the court rolls is enhanced by a Copy Book, which contains copies of court records from the time of the Wars as well as copies of other contemporaneous documents. The Memorandum of the Tithes mentions the holdings on which tithes were due, giving, for example, the names of fields and indications of their locations. The indications are at best sketchy, but by supplementing them with information from near-contemporary documents – in fact, rentals – it is possible to deduce their locations. The supporting documents also mention other aspects of the town,

making it possible to recreate its layout complete with its main features as it was in the fifteenth century. The evidence from the documents also reveals how small and sparsely populated Chesham's hamlets were at the time.

Another issue that emerges from reading these documents is that during the fourteenth century the land in Chesham was continually in demand. The Duke of Gloucester, soon to reign as Richard III, sought to acquire the manor and finally did so. Also at this time the population of Chesham was falling, and the land which in consequence became available was soon snapped up, usually by outsiders. The likely reason for this desirability is then explored, and it emerges that a major factor was the synergy produced by the complementarity of the hamlets and the town.

This article aims to develop these themes to show that Chesham, in its remote location, was well aware of developments in the country, was affected by them and reacted to them. In doing so it also aims to use information acquired incidentally to create a sketch of the physical structure of the town, and to show the nature of its hamlets, which could be seen as slight and precarious. That this was not so is demonstrated by Chesham's attractiveness to outsiders.

THE RENEWAL OF THE TITHES

The Pipe Rolls for Buckinghamshire record that in 1167 Robert Sifrewast gave 100 marks for his lands in Chesham (Fowler & Hughes 1923, 242). The Victoria County History notes that the Church of Chesham was 'from early times' attached in part to the Sifrewast's manor and that the same Robert 'granted to the Abbey of St Mary de Pré, Leicester that part appurtenant to it' at some time before 1199. A vicarage was instituted at a date before 1209, and consisted of half of all the altar offerings and the lesser tithes (Page 1925, 215). The introduction to the part of the CBS catalogue dealing with Chesham underlines the existence of the manor with the laconic sentence: 'A manor of the Sifrewast family developed in the twelfth century'. This manor had no formal name, and was referred to simply as 'Sifrewast's fiefdom' in Chesham's fourteenth-century manor court rolls. It was not until 1405 that the name Chesham Bury was first used for it.

This brings us to the Memorandum of the Tithes. The document is one of only two to be described

in any detail among the large number in the box with the CBS reference D-CH/E/6. The description cited above is the cataloguer's own and, while it is accurate, it does not repeat any form of words appearing in the document itself. Neither the word 'memorandum' nor any word connoting reminder is present: the word 'renewal', however, does occur. Its context is the following severe précis of the near-impenetrable and unpunctuated late medieval text of the preamble:

...all the tithes from Chesham Leicester due by custom to the rectory and parsonage of the Abbot of the monastery of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Leicester are being renewed at Hocktide, 1468.

The difficulty here is that it was not the usual practice to issue a document either for the renewal of tithes or as a reminder of them. In fact, the term 'renewal of the tithes' had a technical usage to do with how tithes should be levied when, unusually, a second crop could be taken from land in a year when good weather permitted it (Toller 1808). The document gives the impression of being a hybrid, or perhaps just a muddling, of a court of recognition, held to renew existing holdings for a new lord of the manor, and a deed, although it was not the custom to issue one for such a purpose.

So, why was this document produced? To shed some light on this, it is necessary to explain the circumstances affecting Chesham at the time. The following account follows Seward (2007) in its recounting of details of the Wars of the Roses.

The document was issued during the Wars of the Roses, the civil war fought to determine whether the Lancastrian or the Yorkist branch of the royal family should provide the monarch. The de Vere Earls of Oxford, the lords of the manor of Chesham, were deeply involved in the conflict. Known as the 'fighting earls', they had fought for the reigning monarch since well before any Lancastrian assumed the throne, and had always been loyal. With such a background, they were implicitly and naturally Lancastrian. And so, in 1461, after Henry VI had been defeated at Towton and replaced as monarch by Edward IV, the incumbent Earl of Oxford (John, the 12th Earl) found himself in difficult circumstances. Early the next year he was caught in a conspiracy to overthrow Edward IV, was arrested, taken to the Tower and

executed. His son, another John, was allowed to succeed him and in due course to inherit the family estates, which had been confiscated on his father's arrest, although he was not allowed to reoccupy the family's stronghold at Hedingham Castle until 1464. Edward seems to have thought this leniency might obtain the new earl's loyalty, but he proved an intractable Lancastrian, and was soon plotting against Edward while making little attempt to conceal the fact. Edward tolerated this for some time but, in 1468, had him arrested, taken to the Tower and tortured. He gave up his co-conspirators, who were duly executed, but he himself was, inexplicably, soon released, although with his lands confiscated.

This is the point at which the Memorandum was issued. There is no direct evidence to link its issue with the events just recounted, but the coincidence is remarkable. The rector of Chesham, Leicester, having seen one lord of the manor executed and his lands confiscated, and another apparently about to follow suit, must have feared for his tithes. It may have struck him that a reminder to the King that the tithes on the land he had just confiscated were due to him was necessary.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE COURT ROLLS

In the event, the 13th Earl of Oxford was soon released from prison and was pardoned by Edward for all his offences in April 1469. He regained his lands, and took up residence again in the castle at Hedingham. Later the same year, Henry VI returned to the throne after the Yorkist defeat at Edgecote. His return was short-lived, however, for after suffering defeats at Barnet and Tewkesbury in April and May 1471, he was captured and killed in the Tower in May with, according to one account, the Duke of Gloucester (Richard III to be) among those present in the Tower at the time (Seward 2007, 250). Soon after this, with Edward IV back on the throne, the Duke of Gloucester was in possession of the Earl of Oxford's lands.

The headings of Chesham's court records bear witness to these events and, in doing so, reveal certain sensitivities to the circumstances of the time. Accordingly, for each of the courts held between 1461, when, following his father's execution, John de Vere became the 13th Earl of Oxford, and 1471, when Edward IV replaced Henry VI for the second time, the court heading records

that the court was that of 'John, Earl of Oxford'. Prior to this, name of the lord of the manor had been mentioned at the occasional court, but never at successive courts. Between 1461 and 1471 it was mentioned at each of a sequence of six courts. The courts were held in June 1462, April 1464, April 1466, October 1466, April 1467, May 1468, May 1469 and October 1470. The heading of the first began:

Chesham. View of Frankpledge and first court of John Earl of Oxford ...

while that of the others began:

Chesham. View of Frankpledge and court Baron of John Earl of Oxford ...

This insistence demonstrates an insecurity that may be readily understood by considering what had happened to the Earl's father, and the fact that he, too, was at the time on the disadvantaged side in a civil war.

The complete headings of the courts held in May 1469, October 1470 and November 1471 are even more revealing. Each court was the only one held in its year. The respective headings were:

Chesham. View of Frankpledge and court Baron of John Earl of Oxford held here on Monday the first day of May in the 9th year of the reign of Edward IV

Chesham. View of Frankpledge and court Baron of John Earl of Oxford held here on Monday after the Feast of St Luke in the 49th year of the reign of Henry VI and the first of his restoration

Chesham Bury. Court held here on Monday after the Feast of the Apostles Simon and Jude in the 11th year of the reign of Edward IV

The earliest court certainly was held in the ninth year of the reign of Edward IV. But the second could be said to have been held in the forty-ninth year of the reign of Henry VI only by completely ignoring the reign of Edward IV and treating those years as if Henry had reigned throughout them. Similarly, the third court could be said to have been held in the eleventh year of the reign of Edward IV only by ignoring the return to the throne of Henry

and treating those years as if Edward had reigned throughout them. The court understood the need to appear to be with the side in power at the time. (The CBS references for the court records referred to above in this section are D-BASM/18/149 to 157.) The heading of the court held in April 1477 (CBS reference D-BASM/18/160) begins:

Chesham. View of Frankpledge and court Baron of the most illustrious prince the Duke of Gloucester ...

This unprecedented fawning reference to the lord of the manor is a recognition of power, a sign of submission and, perhaps, a sign of fear. In any case, this and the other examples show that, in Chesham, there was a pragmatic awareness of how to do what was necessary to survive in difficult and dangerous circumstances.

THE COPY BOOK

Among Chesham's manorial documents is a copy book: its CBS reference is D/BASM/18/356. The book itself dates from the sixteenth century and contains, among other things, copies of Chesham's manor court rolls from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The copies are all in date order. The first part of the book contains partial copies of particular courts, although the coverage soon becomes less sparse, and after about 1500 the entries are complete copies of successive courts. It would seem that the book's earliest usage was to record matters relevant to particular interests, but that later on it became a second copy of the court records – a back-up copy in modern terminology.

Two particularly interesting things may be noted about these copies. First, there are some for which the original court records from which they were copied have not survived. One example is the court held on 20 July 1482, which falls between the courts recorded on the rolls with CBS references D/BASM/18/161 and 162. There are quite a lot of other such cases, which shows that not all of the records have survived, but this one has particular significance as it records that 'the most illustrious prince the Duke of Gloucester' continued to hold the manor. He probably still did in the next year, when he became King Richard III. The second matter is that the copies are annotated and marked with crosses in exactly the same way (and, to my

eyes, in the same hand) as the original records (Marshall 2017). That the written records of the Copy Book were available for inspection and searching would suggest that they were seen to have the same legal force and authority as the original written records themselves.

The Copy Book does, however, contain more than copies of court records. The first few pages and the last few contain a trace of the descent of copyhold land; copies of deeds; and items which should have been the concern of the manor court, but with which no court is identified, so that they may have been settled without the court and validated by being recorded in the Copy Book. In short, the Copy Book seems also to have been used, although on a small scale, as a cartulary.

The entry listing the descent of copyhold land illustrates one way that the Copy Book had come to be used. The descent provided background to the concerns of the manor court and of a rental, but in itself it was not a matter of direct concern to them. For this reason, there was no obvious place to write it down. The Copy Book seems to have become the place in which to record such misfits for future reference. The entry itself, which is undated, is written in English and appears under the heading 'A note on coppiehold land – Asheridge', is:

Note that the land William Smyth did hold by coppie [was] a messuage and 40 acres of land in Asheridge

The said William had issue Anne married to John Lyving and after to Thomas Williams

The said Anne and Thomas sold the land and messuage to Robert Lee who had issue of Antoine Lee

The said Antoine Lee sold the land and messuage and the said 40 acres of land to <unfilled blank space> Wedon where four of the said become free

In the final sentence a blank had been left for Wedon's first name (there were a great many Wedons in Chesham over a long period) but it was never filled in. It also records that after the sale, four of the forty acres became freehold land.

One of the deeds in the Copy Book records, in a formula usually used in such documents (Thorley 1998, 45–48), the granting by John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, to his son, also called John, of 'my messuage called Partridges ... in the hamlet of

Ashley Green in the parish of Chesham Higham'. The father and son in question are not identified precisely but could be only the twelfth and thirteenth earls or the fifteenth and sixteenth (see the family tree in Innes-Smith 2000, 6–7). The doubt is not resolved by the date on the copy, which is clearly wrong. That date is 1492 (the eighth year of the reign of Henry VII, as the copy has it), at which time the twelfth earl had been dead for 30 years, and the sixteenth would not be born for another 24 years!

The matter can be resolved, though, as the document mentions Robert Brudenell. He is also listed, as Robert Brudenell of Stoke, as one of those who failed to attend the manor court of 1469 (CBS reference: D/BASM/18/155), and is surely the person who inherited the manor of Stoke Mandeville in 1430–1 (Page 1925, 360). The dates mentioned here ensure that it is the twelfth Earl of Oxford who is making a grant to his son. The date of the document remains unclear but, since the son was born in 1442 and the father died early in 1462, it would probably have been at some time towards the end of the 1450s. In the light of this, it is possible that the deed may represent some effort on the part of the twelfth earl to protect the family lands in anticipation of forthcoming danger. This, in turn, could explain why it was recorded in the Copy Book, an item perhaps more likely than most to survive the perils of the time.

The locations of the various pieces of land associated with the message are described with great precision. For example, the location of the parcel of land consisting of three fields (they were called Partridge's Field, Broad Field and Lamb Field) and two crofts (*Lyttel Erors* and *Saunder's Croft*) was described as:

next to Mawdlyn Grove and Segwys Lee on the east, with the road from Chesham to Berkhamsted on the north, and the road from Nashlethe to The Grove on the south.

Because of the references to the roads, this description still makes sense on a modern map. The modern road from Chesham to Berkhamsted leaves Chesham heading north along a valley bottom as the Berkhamsted Road, before turning sharply right up the steep valley side on Nashleigh Hill, which at the top of the hill soon becomes Ashley Green Road. There is also a turning at the

top of Nashleigh Hill from which modern roads lead past The Grove, which is usually referred to as Grove Farm on modern maps. (See the Street Atlas of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes (4th ed.) 2010, 144–145.) Accordingly, it is possible to identify the general location of the parcel of land but, since the names Mawdlyn Grove and Segwys Lee have not persisted, not the precise location.

The other pieces of land associated with the message called Partridges can be roughly located, usually because the descriptions of their locations also relate their positions to roads. They were scattered across the landscape to the south of Ashley Green and at some distance, at least two miles, from Chesham town. The next section aims to provide some context for the message and its lands so as to assess its value and understand why it might have been worth passing on.

THE MAP OF FIFTEENTH CENTURY CHESHAM

The court rolls for the years of the Wars of the Roses provide details of the population of the town at that time. It is useful to examine this because it shows not only that the town was quite small but also that it was undergoing considerable change. In addition, this provides a useful context for examining the structure of the town. The Memorandum of the Tithes helps with this by providing some details of the lands on which tithes were due, including the names of fields and indications of their location. Later documents, notably a rental of 1535 (CBS reference D-BASM/18/361) and the Chesham Tithe Map of 1843 (CBS reference D-BM/T/51), provide supporting evidence that helps to identify their location: they also include information about other fields and the significant landmarks of the town. From these sources it is possible to construct a simple map showing the extent of the town and its main features.

Several of the courts held between 1450 and 1480 give details of the annual head penny contribution required of all the unfree males aged twelve or more. (The CBS references of their records are D-BASM/18/148 to 151, 153 to 155 and 160.) The totals, that is, the totals for the town and its hamlets, for each of the years for which it was recorded are shown by the upper trace in Figure 1. The lower trace shows the numbers for the town alone. There are accepted ways of converting these totals to overall populations but, without doing this, it is

possible to see that the overall population would have been in the hundreds, probably little more than five hundred at its greatest. In normal times the population, even as it fluctuated, was usually almost equally divided between the town and the hamlets, but during the Wars, as we shall see, this was not always the case. And, despite the fluctuations, the general trend was for the population to decrease, with one period of recovery followed again by decrease.

There were six hamlets, of which Ashley Green and Botley were the only ones to report male populations in excess of 20 at any time. Ashley Green, for example, had a male population of 27 in 1453 although by 1466 it had dropped to just 5. Figure 2 shows how the population of Ashley Green varied during this period. At the other extreme, Asheridge always reported a male population of 4 or 5, except that in 1464 it reported 8. At some time in the period, the population of every hamlet dropped to 6 or fewer.

The state of affairs in Ashley Green during this period could be summarised by saying that, compared to Chesham town, its population was never large and that it fluctuated wildly. Even so, it had a considerable amount of land, either arable or for grazing, associated with it. This meant that

despite a small number of inhabitants, it could create appreciable wealth, especially in areas that were not labour-intensive, such as grazing sheep. Similar remarks apply to the other hamlets, although they were even smaller.

Turning to the town, the lands there on which tithes were due were in Church Field, Bury Field and Dungrove Field, as well as more specifically in 'Several in Churchfield' and in 'Several by Aldeworth'. Both Dungrove and Severals can be found on the Tithe Map, and are situated above and to the east of the valley occupied by the town. A farm called Dungrove Farm still stands above the valley today, and the pattern of the strips into which the land used to be divided can still be detected in some of its meadows. Severals is covered by a housing estate. Neither Bury Field nor Church Field appear on the Tithe Map. Both Several and Church Field, however, are mentioned in the rental for Chesham Bury dated April, 1535. The reference to the former states that John Turnour 'also holds one piece of land in Dungrove Field next the Several style', from which we can deduce that Several was adjacent to Dungrove Field with nothing (not even Church Field) in between. The references to Church Field include the following:



FIGURE 1 The population of Chesham during the Wars of the Roses

William Tredway ... also holds 6 acres and more in Church Field

The heirs of Joan Lome ... also hold a tenement with a garden and 3 acres of land in Church Field

Henry Ponde gentleman holdeth ... one piece of land lying in Church Field

John Burton holds by copy of the Lord's Roll 6 acres of land whereof 3 acres lyeth in Church Field and the other 3 in Dungleve Field

He (John Burton) also holds another piece of land in Church Field

These entries in the rental could be taken to mean that a unitary field called Church Field existed and was divided into a number of holdings, or that the holdings in the common fields on which tithes were due were *in toto* referred to as Church Field. The latter view seems more likely in view of the following entry, which happens to relate to the first entry in the Chesham town section of the Memorandum of the Tithes:

John Adkin and Henry Adkin hold certain lands called Coppid Thorne in the field called Church Field next the way leading from Chesham toward Bellingdon and abutting the common field called Pull Field

The lands referred to here cannot be in, or even near, Dungleve for Bellingdon lies to the west of the town. Also, today's road named Pullfields, on the Pond Park estate in the west of the modern town, was, according to Arnold Baines (1995, 16), so named because it lies on the site of the common field called Pull Field. The common fields were in the town because, as we have seen, that was the only place large enough to make it worth having one.

The rental also reveals features of the town, usually by locating a field or a house in relation to it. There was, for example, 'a cross in the middle of the town', another cross referred to as 'Higham cross', 'the stone bridge' (presumably the only one), a 'cottage called a Gatehouse', Amy Mill, and Pillory Green. The roads and lanes mentioned included 'a section of the King's Highway leading from Chesham to Tring' (only one highway could squeeze through the valley at Chesham and in contemporary documents it was referred to in other ways, including 'the road leading from Wycombe to Berkhamsted'), as well as Amy Mill Lane and 'Well Lane leading from the vicarage of Chesham Leicester toward Chesham'. An entry that mentioned 'a field called Bury Hill containing 40 acres next the churchyard' indicates that there



FIGURE 2 The population of Ashley Green during the Wars of the Roses

was plenty of open space within the perimeter of the town.

Figure 3 shows a sketch map of the town as it appeared in the fifteenth century. It includes the locations of the features mentioned above. The street plan is preserved in the modern town. The houses on Church Street shown in Figure 4 are, with the exception of the church, the oldest upstanding structure to survive: they are according to Pevsner (1994, 239) 'a fourteenth century house with hall and cross wing'. Medieval market crosses are rare in Buckinghamshire today. The survivor at Brill, shown in Figure 5, may give some idea of the appearance of Chesham's one-time cross. More detail about the earlier features that still remain but are not mentioned above is given in Marshall (2011).

In outward appearance, then, the town seemed, and probably was, quite wealthy. The existence of the road from Chesham to Berkhamsted played a part in this by giving access to the latter's market and wealthy wool merchants, but Chesham's own vibrant market in land, its mills and its artisans also contributed their share. Chesham was in many respects self-sufficient, essentially because the agricultural activities in the hamlets and the artisanal activities in the town complemented each other so well.

A CHANGING PLACE

The population graph of Figure 1 indicates that considerable change was occurring in Chesham during the Wars of the Roses. First, between 1453 and 1462 the population decreased by a third. The usual equality between the urban and rural populations was maintained as the population level fell. At the next two head counts, those of 1464 and 1466, the drop had ceased and a small recovery had begun: new inhabitants had moved into the town, to the extent that the proportion living there jumped first to 55% and then to 62%. The town's population then remained the same for the next three years: at this time the new arrivals moved into the hamlets. The usual balance was restored in 1467, in 1469 the proportion in the town had dropped to 44%, and in 1477 it was down to 42%. The causes of these changes are not clear, but the effect of the Wars themselves must have contributed to the instability.

The court records that provided the head counts

and the contemporary records of the other manors within the Parish of Chesham list further events of the time, among which were unusual legislation; land clearance; and the rapid take-up of land that became available as a result of the decreasing population.

The unusual legislation was recorded at the court of 1468 and consisted of the unprecedented issuing of two ordinances, one prohibiting the ownership of goods or property outside the manor under a penalty of 20 pence and the other banning fishing in the water within the manor under a penalty of 40 pence. Both measures were severe and palpable money-raising ploys, even if they were attempting to deal with an increase in unlawful behaviour.

A typical example of land clearance was recorded at the court held in 1468 for The Grove (CBS reference D-BASM/18B/8), a small manor within the manor of Chesham Higham (Marshall 2010). One entry notes that 'John Bury cut down oaks and ashes to the number of 60 and more without permission.' This was a considerable effort, the purpose of which would almost certainly have been to convert forested land to land suitable for grazing sheep.

As for taking land, the Chesham court of 1453 records the taking up of the following recently available holdings: 25 acres of land, once John Partridge's; 30 acres of land, once William Trudy's; a messuage and 12 acres of land, once John Turnour's; 12 acres of land, once John Austin's; and more. Among those taking such newly available land were people whose names had not appeared in the court records previously. These newcomers would, sooner or later, have realised the benefit of either living in a hamlet near to their land or of putting someone there to look after it for them, thereby boosting the population of the hamlet.

A pattern of events had developed. Measures were taken to control emerging disruptive behaviour; land was cleared so that sheep could be grazed on at least some of it; and land which became available as the population dwindled and newly cleared land became available, was quickly taken. This same pattern had developed in the years after the Black Death and had led to a significant increase in sheep farming (Marshall 2014). The recurrence of the trigger pattern would have encouraged a second wave of sheep farming, which would have prospered rapidly by building on the experience already gained.

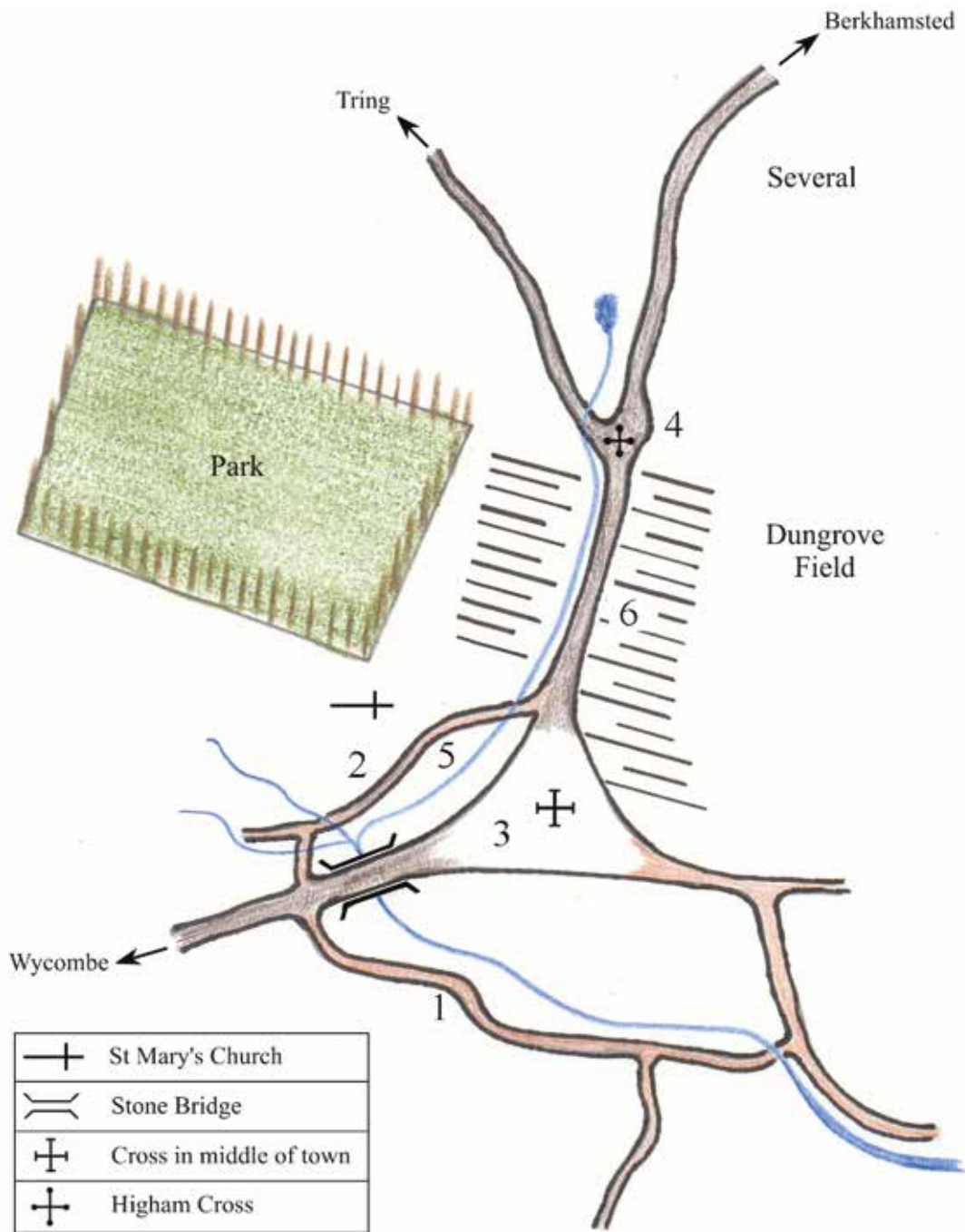


FIGURE 3 Map of the town of Chesham in the fifteenth century. The features located on it are: 1 Amy Mill Lane, 2 Church Street, 3 Market Place, 4 Pillory Green, 5 Fourteenth-century house, 6 Thirteenth-century 'new town'



FIGURE 4. The fourteenth century house in Church Street

Although more sheep than before were being grazed soon after the Black Death, it took some time for this to become explicitly apparent in the court records. The first mention of a personal possession with any connection to sheep was the listing of a sheepskin (*j pellis cum lanitia*) among the belongings of Richard Carter, who died in 1368 (in the court record with CBS reference D-BASM/18/62). It was not until 1382 (in the court record with CBS reference D-BASM/18/83) that anything as mundane as a pair of shears (*j par forpices*), for example, was recorded among the possessions of the deceased husband of Christine Gromet. Since all his other possessions were tools, such as a threshing rake and an iron fork, sheep-shearing had been just one of his seasonal activities, which shows that some degree of organization was in place by the time the second wave of sheep farmers appeared on the scene.

The records for the manors and estates into

which the Sifrewast land fragmented in the fifteenth century, which included Blackwell Hall, Mordaunt's Fee and Ashley Green, provide further evidence concerning land clearance in the more remote parts of greater Chesham and the outsiders who took land in Chesham. The Ashley Green court records for 1470 and 1474 (CBS references D-BASM/18A/11b and 11c) both have references to three instances of land being taken for a specified rent and for 'services that are at present unknown'. This formulaic phrase is not to be taken at face value, and probably meant that the services due, on what was newly-cleared land, had not been set. It is possible that there was no intention to set them, although the scribe may well have imagined that this long-established practice would be followed. In any case, the appearance of significant amounts of new land supports the idea that land had been newly cleared. The 1474 court also lists among its defaulters 'William Bulstrode, draper, of London',



FIGURE 5 The market cross at Brill

who held ‘a tenement in the town of Chesham’ and ‘Richard Carter of Cheapside’ who held ‘lands at Whelpley Hill’. They were two of a number of outsiders who had taken holdings in Chesham at this time, and show that it attracted people with money to spend or to invest even from the capital.

The records of the outlying places are almost entirely devoted to recording land and property transactions. They show no interest in the use of the land, and so provide no explicit information concerning the presence of sheep or, indeed, of any other animals. There are, though, certain implicit indications, one of which is the presence of numerous people from Berkhamsted, such as ‘John Prat of Berkhamsted’ and ‘William Alyngton, Lord of The Maudeleyn,’ a manor in Berkhamsted. The importance of the wool merchants of Berkhamsted to the sheep farmers in the remoter parts of Chesham after the Black Death has been explained by Marshall (2014, 132–133), and their importance persisted into the next century. In addition, two fifteenth century rentals reveal that there was a fulling mill in Chesham. A rental for Blackwell Hall ‘in the time of Alicia Bardolf’ (CBS reference D-BASM/18A/31), who held the manor at the time of her death in 1416, lists a fulling mill held by William Dunford for an annual rent of 24s. The second rental (CBS reference D-BASM/18A/30), which is undated but from the fifteenth century, has in Mordaunt’s Fee ‘a fulling mill called Mordaunt’s mill’, which was rented for 6s 8d per annum. The discrepancy in the rents is striking and, in view of the fact that the rents of other properties appearing on both rentals correspond, it is tempting to think that there were two fulling mills. The fact that Blackwell Hall and Mordaunt’s Fee were once two parts of the same manor does, however, make this unlikely. In any event, the presence of at least one fulling mill, and the combination of the previous presence of sheep farmers with the recurrence of conditions that encouraged more, do strongly suggest that sheep farming assumed increasing importance at the time.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This article has attempted to describe the effects of the Wars of the Roses on Chesham. The account is based in the main on three contemporary sources, namely a Tithe Renewal, the manor court records of the time and a Copy Book, although other

contemporary and near-contemporary documents have been used as well.

It is shown that the Church in Chesham found it necessary to issue a reminder of the tithes due to it because it feared that the involvement in the Wars of successive lords of the manor would result in their forfeiture of the manor and so endanger the receipt of the tithes due to the Church. The issued document, in describing the lands on which the tithes were due, incidentally provides a considerable amount of information about the layout of Chesham, information which is complemented and enhanced by the other documents used here.

The contemporary manor court rolls reveal that the Church was not alone in its concerns. They show that even if the lords of the manor were prepared to act recklessly, their officials and retinue were not, and that they were at pains to give every appearance of being loyal to the side in power no matter which it might be.

Almost all the content of the Copy Book consists of copies of manor court records. A number are copies of originals that no longer exist, including one recording that the Duke of Gloucester held the manor shortly before he became king, so that he probably held it up to the time that he did assume the throne. The Copy Book does, however, contain copies of other types of document, including a deed recording that the twelfth Earl of Oxford granted land in Chesham to his son not long before his execution, which might suggest that he, along with almost everyone else in Chesham, knew what was coming to him. This deed also describes the location of the granted land precisely, thereby providing useful information about the land associated with the hamlets scattered across Chesham’s hinterland.

A rental of 1535 provides correspondingly detailed information about the town. After reconciling this and all the other available information about the town and its hamlets, which includes numerical data on population and population change, it is possible to create a convincing account of the physical arrangement of greater Chesham in the late Middle Ages and so to provide a context for the changes described here.

Clearly, Chesham survived the disruption and dislocations of the Wars of the Roses, both local and nationwide, and managed to emerge as a quite prosperous place. Some of the reasons for this not inconsiderable achievement that emerge from the

account given here are the synergy that had developed between the town and its hamlets, the vibrant land market that attracted many outsiders who may also have helped the hamlets to survive the difficult times, and the proximity of Berkhamsted with its successful market and prosperous merchant traders.

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