

Chapter 15: Aspects of the wider landscape: a discussion

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PALAEOLITHIC

No Palaeolithic remains were identified in the fieldwalking exercise. Palaeolithic finds have been previously reported to the west of Northfield Farm, although the SMR co-ordinate placed the finds in Long Wittenham (SMR 9782, Hewitt 1895, 120-1).

MESOLITHIC (*Figure 15.1*)

The fieldwalking exercise recovered Mesolithic flintwork from Fields 2, 3, 5 and 6. The flint assemblage contained few diagnostic artefacts, but the technological traits of the assemblage were more suggestive of a later, rather than early, Mesolithic date. The fields containing Mesolithic flintwork were all situated on the gravel terrace and particular concentrations of Mesolithic material were recovered from Fields 3 and 6, which lie relatively close to the edge of the Thames.

The SMR adds two tranchet axes recovered from Northfield farm (SMR 3174 and 9784) and it is possible that some of the supposedly Neolithic flint located on the edge of the gravel terrace (SMR 15412) is in fact Mesolithic (G. Lambrick *pers. comm.*) In addition, a burin was recovered from the surface of a field between Long and Little Wittenham during a geophysical survey and a few Mesolithic flints were recovered from the 2005 excavation behind Little Wittenham Manor and from the 2003 excavation on Castle Hill. An obliquely blunted point from Castle Hill may belong to an earlier Mesolithic industry.

The scatter of Mesolithic artefacts across the Long and Little Wittenham parishes appears to be relatively light, with perhaps a slight indication of increased activity towards the edge of the gravel terrace moving down towards the floodplain. No fields on the floodplain were walked and the excavations on the floodplain in 2004 were limited. It is therefore possible that further sites exist, but have not been discovered. Indeed, whilst the alluvial sequence on the floodplain is not deep, it has the potential to have masked significant Mesolithic sites. The light scattering of later Mesolithic flintwork, without any distinct concentration, is perhaps characteristic of the activity in the region; in the middle Thames Valley, for example, most excavations along the course of the Maidenhead to Windsor flood alleviation scheme and at Eton Rowing Course produced some later Mesolithic flint, but no significant concentration were identified (Lamdin-Whymark forthcoming).

NEOLITHIC TO EARLY BRONZE AGE (*Figure 15.2*)

The fieldwalking revealed a scatter of Neolithic to early Bronze Age flintwork across many of the fields walked, but particularly among those on the gravel terrace. Neolithic to early Bronze Age activity was particularly poorly represented in Field 1, although the excavations at Hill Farm revealed an early Neolithic pit and a scatter of residual Neolithic flint across the excavation area. Previous fieldwalking in the field to the west of Hill Farm also located Neolithic flintwork (Eeles *pers. comm.*). This scatter may however have been quite localised and many not extend into the area fieldwalked for this project. An early Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowhead was also recovered from excavations on Castle Hill, and Neolithic flint was apparently among

the material recovered from fieldwalking south of the car park in advance of a gas pipeline.

The scatter of flintwork located on the gravel terraces is difficult to characterise and date. No diagnostic early Neolithic artefacts were identified, although it was only possible to date a number of the flints to Mesolithic to early Neolithic. Comparatively few previous early Neolithic findspots are recorded in the Long and Little Wittenham parishes in contrast with the density of features associated with the Dorchester monument on across the river to the north east. Fragments of the blade of a Seamer-style axe were recovered from the field to the north east of Field 4.

Early Bronze Age activity was identified in many of the fields walked on the gravel terrace, but did not form significant scatters of material. A sherd of Biconical urn was recovered from Field 4, which, from its fresh condition, appeared to have been recently disturbed from an archaeological deposit. A barbed and tanged arrowhead was also found in Field 5 among a broadly contemporary scatter of struck flints and a stone rubber. A small number of flints recovered from Field 2, including two knives and a finely flaked plano-convex knife from Field 3 may also be assigned a late Neolithic/early Bronze Age date. Previous finds from the study area include two barbed and tanged arrowheads west of Northfield Farm (SMR 9782). A scatter of barrows is evident from cropmarks across the gravel terrace, suggesting that the landscape was by now quite open. A Beaker burial and pottery was also found just across the river on the high ground of the churchyard in Clifton Hampden (SMR 5582).

The late Neolithic/ early Bronze Age activity appears to be widely spread across the Study Area. No dense scatters have been identified, although a slight concentration of flintwork at the northern edge of Field 5 is perhaps significant.

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE AND LATE BRONZE AGE (*Figure 15.3*)

Later Bronze Age activity (as indicated from the pottery) was primarily focussed on Field 1, although a few sherds of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date were recovered from Field 5 on the gravel terrace. Later prehistoric flintwork was identified in Field 1 and also Field 6. A few sherds of later Bronze Age pottery have also been recovered from the 2005 excavation behind Little Wittenham Manor.

The Middle and Late Bronze Age pottery scatter in Field 1 was mainly located on the level Northern half of the field close to Hill Farm. Residual middle and late Bronze Age pottery has also been found in the excavations at Hill Farm, and late Bronze Age pottery in Trench 15, although no Bronze Age features have been identified. In addition a late Bronze Age Carp's Tongue sword chape was found while metal-detecting next to Trench 15. It is therefore likely that a focus of middle and late Bronze Age activity existed in the area, but has yet to be located by excavation. Together with the known late Bronze Age activity in the car park area at Castle Hill, and the presence of further Bronze Age pottery in Trench 14 to the west, this suggests an extensive but unintensified area of activity across the plateau south of Round Hill and Castle Hill.

The project failed to clarify the date of the extensive field and enclosure system on a north-west alignment just west of Northfield Farm, but a Bronze Age date for this still appears plausible. No prehistoric pottery was recovered from Field 3, the cropmark site of a presumed Bronze Age field system. This is not to suggest that the field system could not be of a Bronze Age date, as such field systems often contain

very limited artefact assemblages (eg Eton Rowing Course), but the fieldwalking exercise, unfortunately, cannot assist in dating these cropmarks.

The geophysical survey and excavations within Castle Hill established that a hilltop enclosure was established at around the turn of the 2nd-1st millennium BC, with which the activity on the plateau to the south is presumably connected. This site is one of a small class of such Bronze Age enclosures, and the presence of decorated pottery of a type found on sites along the east coast of England, and imported stone in the ditch, suggests a site of high status.

EARLY AND MIDDLE IRON AGE (*Figure 15.4*)

Relatively little early and middle Iron Age pottery was recovered in fieldwalking. The pottery is largely concentrated in Field 1, although a few sherds probably dating to the Early Iron Age were found in Field 5. The scatter in Field 1 is complemented by an earlier fieldwalking exercise prior to the digging of a gas pipeline south of Castle Hill. This covered the eastern half of Field 1, and although the recording only distinguished Roman and prehistoric pottery, there is a concentration of prehistoric pottery across the northern part of the field running east from due south of the car park. The overall distribution of Iron Age pottery correlates well with the distribution of geophysical anomalies which appear to be of Iron Age form. Excavations in Trenches 15 and 19 in Field 1, and at Hill Farm, have further confirmed the presence of a widespread complex of Iron Age archaeological features, apparently representing an extensive settlement extending around the southern slopes of the hillfort.

The size of the settlement indicated by the geophysical survey is very extensive, covering an area of 800 m by at least 250 m, and the limits of the settlement have not yet been reached on the south or east. This must rank as one of the largest Iron Age settlements in the Upper Thames valley, presumably reflecting its position immediately outside the tribal defended centre.

Comparatively small numbers of later prehistoric sherds were recovered from the fields on the gravel terrace, but a small number of sherds from Field 5 appears to indicate some activity in this area. This is significant as it suggests possible Iron Age antecedents to the Roman settlement alongside the cropmark trackway here; similar hints of Iron Age activity are also known at the Roman cropmark complexes on the trackway leading north past Northfield Farm. A few sherds have also come from behind Little Wittenham Manor. Iron Age activity has now been confirmed in all the principal Roman settlement areas in the Study Corridor, suggesting that the Roman period saw a reorganisation and formalisation of the pre-existing settlement pattern, rather than the imposition of an entirely new settlement pattern.

No Iron Age pottery was recovered from Field 4 adjacent to the rectangular enclosure now dated by trenching at Neptune Wood to the Earliest Iron Age. This serves as a warning that other Iron Age sites may remain to be discovered even within the areas already walked.

LATE IRON AGE AND ROMANO-BRITISH (*Figure 15.5*)

The fieldwalking exercise has added significant data on the Roman landscape. The scatter of pottery in Field 1 indicates an general scatter of early Roman activity across the Northern half of the field. The later Roman pottery exhibits a more clustered distribution pattern, with a focus to the south east of Hill Farm. The same area is also the focus of a concentration of Roman ceramic building material, including tegulae, imbrices and tile reused as tesserae. The scatter of ceramic building materials

indicates the presence of a building, probably of similar date and construction to the structure examined by Time Team in 2003 *c* 250 m to the east.

A significant assemblage of early Roman pottery was recovered from Field 5, that can tentatively be used to date the previously unphased cropmark site within the field, and add another significant Roman settlement to Baker's interpretation of the cropmarks (1999). The early Roman emphasis of the material from this field is particularly important, both because early Roman activity is less well-represented generally within the Study Area than later Roman activity, and because of its implications for the date of the Roman trackways.

The Roman assemblages from Fields 3 and 4 are small, but have an emphasis on the later Roman period. The assemblage in Field 4 is associated with cropmarks which morphologically appear to be Roman. The pottery is slight clustered to the northern edge of the field, where the cropmarks are densest; a large portion of an Old Red Sandstone rotary quern was also recovered from this area of the site. Excavations at Neptune Wood just east of this confirmed that the cropmark trackway running west across Field 4 is Roman, and that it is continuous from here to the junction with the cropmark trackway running north past Northfield Farm. The trenching at Neptune Wood also recovered boundaries of an associated field system to the north of the trackway, linking with the fieldwalking evidence from just east of College Farm (Hinchcliffe 1998), which also found Roman pottery in this area.

The scatter of pottery in Field 3 is of a lower density than Field 4. The scatter is not associated with cropmarks and the slight increase in density towards the northern edge of the field is away from the closest Roman site to the south east. Fields 2 and 6 contained low density scatters of Roman pottery; no early or late Roman emphasis was observed. The fields were clearly peripheral to the main areas of Roman activity.

Excavations in Clifton Meadow confirmed the Roman date of the south-north trackway, and showed that this continued much of the way across the meadow towards the modern Thames. It appears that the gravel terrace extended further north here than elsewhere, providing a shorter crossing, hence the position of this trackway. There was also evidence for paddocks or other small enclosures alongside the trackway here.

The trackway system has produced pottery of various dates within the Roman period, but evidence from Northfield Farm (Gray 1978) that it was established early in the Roman period is now supported by the early Roman date of the settlement in Field 5, which seems to have a fairly regular layout alongside the trackway, and the possible late 1st/early 2nd century date of the field ditches parallel to the trackway at Neptune Wood.

Geophysical survey did not confirm whether the trackway continued south of the junction towards the settlement between Hill Farm and Castle Hill, largely due to the very similar alignment of medieval furrows in the field south of the modern road. There are slight hints of a continuation of at least one of the ditches, but further survey would be needed to clarify this.

The settlement below Castle Hill has now been shown to be extensive in the Roman period, with a villa-like building within a rectangular enclosure approached by trackway of several phases, and with a second probably larger enclosure beneath and south of Hill Farm containing a second building that had a tiled roof and was at least partly built of masonry. Further Roman enclosures and large field boundaries suggest a settlement of possible three or four farmsteads, and the continuation of burials in and around the Iron Age hillfort.

SAXON

Saxon sites are often difficult to detect in fieldwalking as the pottery is often black or brown in colour, and thus difficult to observe in the field, and is also fragile, hence easily destroyed in the plough zone. Despite their small numbers, therefore, the Saxon sherds recovered from the Wittenhams are of significance. The recovery of five sherds from Field 4 is of particular interest as the field lies within an area of known Saxon activity. To the west an extensive Saxon cemetery with some 188 inhumations and 46 cremations was excavated in the 1860s, while in the field to the east possible SFBs have been identified on aerial photographs (SMR 5822). The recent trenching at Neptune Wood has revealed two early or middle Saxon pits (OA 2005d). The sherds from Field 4, therefore, indicate a broad area of Saxon activity probably relating to the early origins of Long Wittenham.

The sherds recovered from Field 5 are too few to indicate the nature of activity here, but may at least suggest the continued use of the east-west Roman trackway from Long Wittenham to the river, and thence to Dorchester. The recovery of a few sherds of early-mid Saxon pottery from behind Little Wittenham Manor in Trench 16 provides the first material evidence for Saxon settlement in the village, and the late Saxon sherds are welcome additions to the documented evidence for the existence of a settlement here before Domesday. The single sherd from Field 1 can be added to previous finds of Saxon pottery west of Hill Farm (Fig. 1.2 No. 16) and north of Castle Hill (Fig. 1.2 No. 10), indicating some continuing Saxon activity in the area, but cannot be further interpreted.

MEDIEVAL

The distribution of medieval pottery from fieldwalking adds little to our understanding of medieval landscape. The scatter of medieval pottery is relatively consistent across the Long and Little Wittenham parishes. The distribution in Field 2 is, however, notably lower than that of the other fields and the pottery in Field 3 primarily consists of post 1550 AD red earthenware, reflecting the peripheral location of these fields to the medieval settlement foci. The significance of the hammered coins in Field 1 is unclear as it is the only field in which a metal detector was used. It is however notable that the coins represent a broad range of dates across the medieval period, and therefore probably represent no more than casual loss. The medieval finds most likely represent manuring scatters from the villages at Little and Long Wittenham onto the open fields.

POST-MEDIEVAL

Post-medieval ceramics, building materials, clay pipe, worked stone and glass were spread broadly across the six fields, and assist little with any examination of land use or settlement in Long and Little Wittenham in the post-medieval period.

ASPECTS OF THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE *by Julian Munby*

Landscape and land-use

The medieval landscape, established in the Anglo-Saxon period, and modified in the early modern period, survived as the basis of village life until the early 20th century. Little Wittenham was in an area of active middle Saxon settlement, represented by a series of cemeteries that have been found in Milton, Sutton Courtenay and Wittenham, and the important settlement site at Drayton/Sutton where numerous sunken huts have been found surrounding a high-status habitation with large timber halls. At Long Wittenham the prolific cemetery of nearly 200 burials excavated in 1860 dates from the 5th to early 7th century and lay south-west of the present village. Immediately south of the centre of the village aerial photography has revealed an L-shaped arrangement of three hall houses surrounded by traces of smaller huts, which are likely to be an Anglo-Saxon habitation of some status, and similar to the Drayton/Sutton site.

The whole of the Thames-side landscape from Abingdon to Wittenham lay within the Domesday Hundred of Sutton, centred on the royal estate at Sutton Courtenay. Although Sutton and Steventon were the only parts of the hundred still in the King's hands in 1086, most of the other manors had royal origins, as can be seen from a tabulation of what is known of their early estate history (see Table 15.1).

If there were early estates, royal or otherwise, centred on Sutton and Wittenham, then it is at least possible that primary settlements were at these sites, and that it was only later that the separate manors were formed nearby, and that the primary settlement was replaced by the three or four villages around it. There is little doubt that Sutton (whatever its size) was a royal manor, for King Aethelred issued a charter from there in 868 (Sawyer 338a). It is an attractive model that a single central settlement was mother to a series of daughter settlements, though it might equally be argued that the number of cemeteries in the vicinity calls for a number of early settlements spread across the later parishes. What is clear is that the large estate was being broken up in the 9th and 10th century, as discrete settlements were granted away, and King Aethelred's gift to Aethelwulf *princeps* of ten hides in Wittenham in 868 AD seems to be an authentic document. How it later passed to Abingdon Abbey (founded in c.966 AD) is uncertain, though it was the Abbey that preserved the document with its descriptive account of the estate boundaries.

The Anglo-Saxon charter bounds of surrounding villages show that some kind of open field farming was perhaps already established, with 'furrows' serving as boundary markers. Thus the landscape may already have been farmed in large areas of common field arable, divided into separate furlongs. Archaeological evidence from Yarnton, Oxfordshire has suggested that the origins of the medieval farming system are to be found in the 10th century. Few woodlands are mentioned, but there are frequent references to mere (boundary) ditches, moor and marshes, partly because of the belt of wet land surrounding the streams in the along the east-west band of gault clay from Milton to Wittenham. The River Thames does not feature much except for the use of fords and weirs as marker points. There were more fords than now (e.g. in Appleford and Wittengham/Clifton), while the weirs show the importance of freshwater fish management in the economy and diet.

Wittenham may have originated as a single settlement, and the group of probable saxon halls appearing on an aerial photograph may be just such a nucleus, but by the late 9th century Little Wittenham was clearly separate from Long Wittenham.

This process of village formation is as yet imperfectly understood, and as has been found at Drayton/Sutton the early centres may have been outside the later nucleated villages. By the time it was described in Domesday Book (1086) it would certainly have had its own field system, with arable fields, commons and hay meadow, and areas of woodland. Churches are not consistently recorded in Domesday Book for Berkshire, but a church is mentioned at Little Wittenham, and this may have been because of monastic ownership.

The land-use respected the underlying geology and soil quality, and can be seen as a continuation of the prevailing system in neighbouring parishes of Long Wittenham, Didcot, the Hagbournes, North Moreton, and Brightwell. Alongside the Thames were hay meadows, always a most valuable asset and well protected by hedges and historic bounds. Behind that the open fields (generally two large fields of intermixed strips shared amongst villagers) would have presented an uninterrupted extent of fields without hedges. The characteristic ridge-and-furrow pattern of ploughing has been detected from aerial photographs over much of the land surrounding Wittenham. The common pastures, on the southern edge of the village, were joined with the commons of neighbouring villages and were not divided off from them.

Some villages (e.g. Steventon) were still practising open-field farming when the railway arrived in the 19th century, and there the tithe map shows the long strips of arable that were held by individual farmers in a scattered array across the parish. Intermingled arable strips and a common crop rotation was only one aspect of the system, and the more important element may have been the common grazing of the unenclosed field after harvest. At Wittenham the open fields had long disappeared by the time of the earliest maps, but they survived long enough to be described in the 'glebe terriers' describing the lands of the church in the 17th and 18th centuries. The strips of land held by the church in the open fields are there described with names that can be related to the field names recorded later in the tithe map. These names, including Moor, Short, Peas, Lank, Deep Furrow, Clay, Town, Gollands, Standhill, and Mere were the names given to furlongs, the internal divisions of the open fields. The location of these names on the Tithe Map can thus give a general indication of the extent of the medieval arable fields. The farming units were 'yardlands' of perhaps 10 to 15 acres, and there were 40 of these in 1774, 27½ held by the lord of the manor and 12½ by other farmers, but amalgamated into only four farms (there were apparently six in 1776).¹

Alongside the peasant farmers the Abbot of Abingdon had the manorial farm in demesne. A small amount of evidence is to be found from some of the few surviving monastic records, which include an account of the Abbot's reeve at Wittenham for 1384/5. This refers to pannage of hogs (i.e. wood pasture), the sale of a horse, and the receipt of various animals and hens given as customary payments. At a time (after the Black Death) when labour services were often being commuted for cash payments, we find that 17 customary tenants were paying the abbey rather than ploughing, hoeing and performing their autumn boon-days. On the other hand the costs of 74 men helping with the ploughing included ale and herrings to feed them. The abbot also employed two ploughmen and a shepherd.² Much earlier records show

¹ Sources: 1774 survey, 1776 manorial deeds, 1786 Glebe Terrier (Wilts R.O.), Tithe Map.

² R.E.G. Kirk (ed.), *Accounts of the Obedientaries of Abingdon Abbey*, Camden Series (1892), 143-5.

that the Abbey had a mill and associated fishery in the 12th century,³ which is a reminder of the importance of freshwater fish in the medieval diet, and the significant association of mills and fish weirs on the Thames (an important enough issue to be mentioned in Magna Carta).⁴

The practise of open-field farming in Wittenham is also revealed by the probate inventories of 16th to 18th-centuries. In 1580 John Selwood owned at his death 'in the field' 5 acres of wheat, 10 ac of barley, 6 ac of pulse and 8 ac fallow [D/A1/115/188]. Three farmers who died in 1597 can be compared: Elizabeth Barnes had 2 ac and a yard of wheat and 6½ ac barley 'in Wittnam field', and 11½ ac of 'tilth ground'; Humphrey Battyn had 5 ac wheat, 11½ ac barley, and 6½ ac of pulse (together with 3 ac of meadow 'and three swathes'; Margery Elton had 2½ ac of green corn, 7 ac barley, 11 ac tilth ground, and in Long Wittenham field 1 ac wheat and 3½ ac barley [D/A1/41/86; D/A1/41/90; D/A1/65/88]. This suggests a complex rotation, possibly of three fields, but an individual choice of crops. The use of fields in Long Wittenham is interesting, but there is no general evidence to suggest that they were run together with little Wittenham as a single farming system.

The open fields disappeared in the 18th century, as the peasant farms were gradually absorbed into the manor, and arrangements were made between the few surviving landowners to enclose the strips of arable land (e.g. the rectorial glebe). Commons were similarly absorbed by formal enclosure, or by agreement between the few surviving farmers who no longer had the need of common grazing. By the time of the 19th-century tithe surveys the modern pattern of discrete farms was established in Little Wittenham, though with the virtual single ownership of the land in the parish farms could be re-arranged as wished (as shown by the creation of Hill Farm). One small hamlet in the open fields on the edge of Long and Little Wittenham survived long enough to be shown on Rocque's map of 1761, and has been identified on aerial photographs but had disappeared by the early 19th century.

The informal landscape arrangements for agriculture were overlain by some features of a more designed landscape. In the 17th and 18th century order was being brought to the countryside by enclosure, new farming practices, and by imposing designed landscapes. Many country houses had formal (and then less formal) landscapes designed around them in gardens, and where possible extending further out into the surrounding landscape. The classic local example is Nuneham Courtenay, where the views comprised a sweeping extent across the Thames valley towards Oxford, and 'improvements' included the removal of an entire village. On the south side of the Thames there are rather fewer landscapes in the immediate vicinity, and it is notable that the Wittenham planting seems to have been confined to rides and avenues and resisted the temptation to plant a mock castle or ruin on the hilltop. It would appear from Rocque's 1761 map of Berkshire that there was a formal planting of trees around the manor house, including an avenue from the clumps to the manor, and geometrically aligned rides through the wood. The woodland rides were still apparent on the 1840 Tithe map, but there is almost no trace of this surviving now.

Individual features of the landscape have their own story. The woodlands may partly be grown over old fields (ridge and furrow indicative of medieval arable has been found in them), but the villager's use of them in the late 19th century (chapter in

³ John Hudson (ed), *Historia Ecclesie Abendonensis: The History of the Church of Abingdon*. Oxford Medieval texts (2002), 273, 395.

⁴ Cap. 33: 'Henceforth, all kiddles [i.e. fish-weirs] shall be removed from the Thames, the Medway and throughout all England, except along the sea coast'.

Cornish) was described as a centuries old tradition. The discovery of a wooden water pipe in the ponds at the manor house has suggested a degree of water management possibly associated with fishponds. The chance survival of financial accounts of the Thames ferry in the late 18th century shows the importance of the river both as a barrier and a means of communication.

Further transformations in the late 19th and 20th century saw the final changes to modern farming systems. Many of the enclosed fields shown on the 1838 map and 1844 Tithe map had disappeared by the time of the 1st edition OS map in the 1870s. The enclosed land was once more re-opened by running farms and fields together. The use of huge steam ploughs enabled this (cf the Machine Man pub), as did later the mechanical tractor, superseding the age-long use of horses on the farm. Modern farming is reasonably well recorded, with very detailed financial accounts of Hill Farm in the late 19th century (including farm labour, and steam ploughing), while there is a certain amount of oral history of 20th-century farming (Didcock et al.), and newspaper records of the war-time ploughing of the clumps.

The roads and tracks through the parish have changed with time, and the necessity of changing patterns of fields and enclosure. The main roads and lanes linking villages are less likely to change, and most are as shown on Rocque's (not wholly reliable) map in the mid 18th century on approximately their modern routes. Some minor paths between furlongs in the open fields disappeared at enclosure, or became more regular around the edges of rectilinear fields.

Within the village there were more lanes than the present public roads. The footpath through the manor garden and passing northwards toward Long Wittenham is joined by a back lane coming from the west behind the properties on the main street. These may have linked a series of greens or public spaces, and the lanes have perhaps only recently ceased to be fully open rights of way. This route from Long Wittenham (more easterly than the current road) may have served as a more direct route towards the ferry or river crossing at Little Wittenham.

Landholding

The difference between Long Wittenham, where there are many freeholders and Little Wittenham, where there was one dominant landholder (the manorial lord) and restricted landholding by a small number of copyholders is important. As Wittenham Abbots the manor had no resident lord, but a monastic steward (a few of whose records survive). The continuity of the ownership by the Dunch family from 1552 (after the Dissolution) until 1719 is shown by their memorials in the church, while the manor survived until broken up in 1925 - coinciding, incidentally, with the end of manorial system (by the Law of Property Act, 1925).

The villagers/peasants held their land 'by copy of court roll' (thus 'copyholders') and at one time might each have held a standard holding in the village fields called a 'yardland'. The village landholding can be reconstructed on paper if not on a map. The parsonage (Glebe) terrier of 1786 describes the village as consisting of 40 yardlands, but as is shown by the manorial title deeds and the parish rates that there were about four landholders by this date, each holding several yardlands. Each yardland had a name, and is likely to have been associated with a particular house in the village (see Table 15.2).

The arrangements of the individual holdings between fields has been described above.

The inventories of small landowners show the acreages of sown crops. Wheat, barley, rye and pulses predominate. Many had a few 'store' pigs (e.g. 3, 4, 6) and working horses (3, 3, 4), or a modest flock of cattle (4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 6, 10, 11) or sheep (6, 8, 10, 10, 10, 16, 30, 80) and hens or ducks, bees. Villagers might own their own ploughs, harrows, wagons or carts (long/dung) carts with 'dung pots', and one had a (presumably hand) corn mill (French 1617).

House and Home

The earliest evidence for the physical extent of the village is to be found on Rocque's map of Berkshire (1761). Although not necessarily wholly reliable, this indicates that the village did not extend south of the road junction at the entrance from Long Wittenham, but that there were some houses on the east side of the road leading to the church and River Thames. Buildings around the manor and church are indistinct, but the formal planting of avenues and woodland walks from the manor are clearly shown. The 1840 tithe map is a valuable record of the disposition of village houses, and also lists the occupants (see following table). At that time the buildings were in separate groups rather than being in a continuous built-up street frontage. The main block of houses nearer the river has a regular shaped area behind it where closes and paddocks have been taken into the properties. This block largely comprised the church, manor and rectory [69-72], though one cottage and garden [82] lay behind the manor farm. As mentioned above, the present footpath through the manor house garden towards the cottage may perhaps represent a former green, which could explain the farmbuildings being set back from the road. The cottage [82] is at the junction of the footpath and back lane, and other cottages [62, rear of 59] were also built on the back lane, though each of these also have cottages on the main street. The next block of houses consisted mostly of farmbuildings, described as the parson's homestead [nos. 58-60] but belonging to the manor. Opposite these on the east side of the road was another farm [53]. The main group of occupied houses lay in a single block at the south, beyond the road to Wittenham [43-56], and these, not being shown on Rocque's map, should post-date 1761.

Most of the buildings on the Tithe map still survive, and few have been built subsequent to 1840; this 'fossilisation' of the historic village is a little unusual, though more likely to happen in a closed village with a single manor and few opportunities for obtaining land for new building. Of the few new buildings, Hill Farm made its appearance in the 19th century, but has not lasted.

The early post-medieval houses can be reconstructed from the wills and inventories. These give the names of the various rooms and the furnishings within them. So far there has been little success in linking the inventories and particular houses (or any surviving ones), but there is plenty of material for describing the material possessions of farmers and other householders. The inventories also include beasts and crops growing in the fields, so there is another insight into the farming practices in the village. Full transcripts of the inventories (and some wills) are available. Little is known of the early manor house, which was demolished and rebuilt in 1789.

The buildings described in inventories range from two-room cottages to three-room and larger plans, of which a selection of typical examples have been chosen for illustration (Figs 15.10-12)

The smaller houses described in inventories have two-room plans. William Barnes (1578) [D/A1/40/80] had a house with two named rooms, a kitchen and chamber, the former with a table, bench and chair and the chamber or parlour with a bed and three 'coffers'. Although this sounds like the meanest cottage it was the home of a modest farm with 4 horses, four cattle and thirty sheep. Richard Blandy a tailor (1710) had a hall with table and chairs, and a fireplace, a shop that is not described, and a sparsely furnished kitchen. Upstairs there was a chamber over the hall with a bed and other furniture, and a chamber over the shop with a variety of furniture (but no seats). Beyond the kitchen was a buttery and brewhouse, but these may not have been very large.

Three-room plans had the chamber (with bedding), hall and kitchen in a single sequence, as with Margery Elton (1597) [D/A1/65/88], but there is no suggestion that there were any rooms upstairs (or indeed that any room apart from the hall was heated). William Millman (1682) [D/A1/98/148] seems to have had a chamber (where he died) in line with hall and kitchen, and a chamber over the hall. The hall was heated with a fire, and the kitchen had a 'furnace'.

Houses with three bays and a chimney are fairly standard post-medieval houses in the area, and examples can be seen at Barn Cottages (in timber) and Church Farm House (in brick), though it is not always certain whether they originated as single homes or pairs/rows of cottages. With a 'lobby entrance' below the chimney stack, the hall would be on one side (with the chamber beyond), and the kitchen on the other side.

The larger plans tend to be varieties of this three-room plan, with further outhouses behind. Elizabeth Lawrence (1669) [D/A1/94/43] had three upper chambers with beds in, and a series of domestic and farm offices that must have been in a back range, with a cheese loft and chamber over the kitchen perhaps in the back wing of the house. This farm had three barns as well as a malt and brewhouse, but was not as extensive as Francis Laffer's farm in 1719, with stables, cow and cartsheds, barns and granary. There are now few barns surviving in the village, and indeed few farmyards.