

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vi
List of Plates	vi
Lists of Figures and Tables	vii
Foreword	viii
Introduction	ix
1 Open fields and their records	1
2 Open Field operation	8
3 Methods of reconstruction of Open Field Plans	36
4 Field types	51
5 The demesne	66
6 The medieval farm, the yardland	77
7 Land use and resources	95
8 Estates	107
9 Origin of open fields	125
10 Ashby St Ledgers	140
Appendix	154
Gazetteer of field-system types	165
Abbreviations and bibliography	371
Glossary	373
Index	375

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Edmund J. King, Department of History, University of Sheffield, for editing and improving this volume.
- Patrick I. King, former archivist of the Northamptonshire Record Office, for much help over many years with the Northamptonshire manuscript collections.
- Rachel Watson and the staff of the Northamptonshire Record Office.
- The staff of the British Library and Public Record Office.
- Glenn Foard for permission to publish Plates 1 and 2, Steve Upex for permission to use Plate 5 and Rachel Watson for Plates 3, 4, 6 and 7.
- Peterborough City Council and the Nene Valley Research Committee for providing travel expenses to the Soke during 1975-7.
- Clive Burch for organising the fieldwork program of the Soke of Peterborough. Alan Mould, Eric Westaway and the late Pip Clifton for making many farming introductions. Edward and Heather Parry for arranging fieldwork in the Helmdon area. Susan Ranson for pointing out the interesting field systems of Crick, East Haddon and Litchborough, and for arranging many farming contacts. Jane Cooper for plotting the demesne of East Haddon and W.G. Callis for help with identification of Mears Ashby furlongs.
- Norman Groome for assistance with difficult medieval records, for making available his knowledge of the records of the Duchy of Lancaster, and for work on the Higham Ferrers field books.
- Paul Martin for accompanying me on field visits since 1972.
- The landowners and farmers of Northamptonshire, too numerous to for all to be named individually, who have so readily allowed access to their land for mapping open-field remains. Among them Mr. R. Ashby, Captain L. MacDonald-Buchanan, M. C., Mr. C. Davidge, Mrs. Rosemary Eady, the late W. W. S. Gibbard, Miss C. V. Lancaster, The Hon. Mrs. M. Lane, Mr. B. Measures, Mr. B. B. Rice, Mr. L. Stopford Sackville, Lady Juliet Townsend, Sir Hereward Wake, Bart., M.C., D. L., Mr. G. Ward-Hunt, Messrs BQ Estates, Burghley Estates, Compton Estates, Easton Neston Estates, Fitzwilliam Estates and Spencer Estates.

LIST OF PLATES

(between pages 20-1)

[Jacket] Higham Ferrers by John Colbeck, 1737

- 1 Aerial photograph of Brockhall ridge and furrow, enclosed 1611
- 2 Aerial photograph of Naseby ridge and furrow, enclosed 1820
- 3 Muscott field book, 1433
- 4 Little Addington draft enclosure map showing furlongs and land-use in 1830
- 5 Titchmarsh manorial park showing a furlong partly enclosed in 1304 and 1772, with different degrees of ridging
- 6 Northampton ploughing team, 1632
- 7 Map of Higham Ferrers, 1737

LIST OF FIGURES

End papers Northamptonshire parishes

1 Brixworth fields and furlongs in 1422. The block demesne (stippled) lies next to the village and a manorial park lies to the south-west	10-11
2 Ashby St Ledgers fields and furlongs in 1715. The demesne is represented by open-circle stipples and leys are marked with solid stipple. The dates of leys are the earliest known record; undated leys were created in 1712	24-5
3 Distribution of leys in randomly selected Northamptonshire townships	27
4 East Haddon enclosed field-names from sources dated 1774-1932	43
5 East Haddon reconstructed fields and furlongs, 1598. For a key to the furlong numbers see pages 277-80	45
6 Newton Bromswold furlongs in 1800	48
7 Examples of field types; for more detail see each parish in the Gazetteer	56
8 Brockhall furlongs. The dispersed demesne of 1574 is marked black; in the south-west it has not been fully identified	67
9 Raunds fields and furlongs in 1739. The demesne of the Lancaster manor (Burystead Farm) is marked black and the land belonging to the Gloucester Fee estate is shown in grey. Cotton township boundary (at the west) and areas of former woodland (north and east) are marked as broken-line boundaries	70-1
10 Graph of Higham Ferrers Hundred Domesday returns related to parish sizes. For township identifications see the place-names on Figure 11	83
11 Townships in the Higham Ferrers Hundred showing the extent of medieval settlement, meadow and woodland	116
12 Great Doddington furlong plan showing a large-scale layout. The thick black lines emphasize the alignment of lands in nine furlongs suggesting that the furlong divisions are secondary	134
13 Mears Ashby fields and furlongs showing a compact demesne (Hall Field) and regular tenurial cycles of 40 lands in the west of the parish	136

LIST OF TABLES

1 Extent of Stowe IX Churches, 1327	5
2 Brockhall field book, 1606	6
3 Work-service required for demesne farming	19
4 Newton Bromswold furlong sizes and abuttals	47
5 Townships and their field numbers listed by century	52
6 Townships with multiple fields	54
7 Types of demesne	72
8 Yardland sizes and topography	79
9 Hides and yardlands in various townships	84
10 Acreage of Northamptonshire hides	85
11 Names and locations of deserted Saxon sites	130
12 Ashby St Ledgers meadow divisions, 1715	143
13 Ashby St Ledgers meadow doles 1715, arranged by owners	145
14 Ashby St Ledgers furlong names and abuttals	148-51
15 East Haddon furlong sizes and abuttals	277-80

FOREWORD

Open fields, spanning the Middle Ages and early modern period, have been studied by local and national historians for many years. This book attempts to explain fully the nature of the open fields of Northamptonshire before they were enclosed to form the 'modern' landscape of hedged fields. It begins with a description of the appearance and operation of the fields and follows with a discussion of the many types of information that are revealed by further study, ending with evidence for their origin. A chronological approach to the subject would make it more difficult to explain, as much information throwing light on the origin of the fields is contained in complex tenurial and fiscal records and in the physical structure of the fields themselves.

The county of Northampton is taken as it was before changes were made in 1888, before which it had remained unaltered since the twelfth century.

These studies bring together and revise articles and other work published over the last 25 years as well as introducing much evidence hitherto unpublished. I should be grateful for any information to add to the Gazetteer from those who have made detailed studies of a parish or region of the county. I may be contacted through the Northamptonshire Record Society or Northamptonshire Record Office.

David Hall

Hargrave 1995

INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire is part of the south-eastern Midlands, running from the edge of the Cotswolds near Banbury to the fens at Peterborough. The River Nene and its valley form a prominent feature dividing the county lengthways from Badby to Warmington, after which it forms the southern boundary against Huntingdonshire. The River Welland and its steep valley sides mark the northern county boundary from Market Harborough (Little Bowden) to Easton on the Hill, falling to gravel terrace at Maxey and continuing through fen ground to Crowland.

In the Middle Ages the fen of Peterborough covered more than 9,000 acres, and, with the extensive gravel terraces of the Nene and Welland overlooked by a backbone of stone and dry heathland, the Soke of Peterborough forms a distinctive region. Farther west lie three large areas of wooded country, the forests of Rockingham, Salcey and Whittlewood. Although covering many thousands of acres these woods were much dissected by tongues of arable and had villages all around them. The villages often had much less than half their area under the plough, and the forest settlements are another regional type with good resources of grazing and fuel.

The most striking feature of the county was its open-field land, stretching almost unbroken over the uplands and along the Nene Valley. Within this region nearly all the ground was cultivated, having very little woodland, heath or pasture.

The historical studies described below have been made in parallel with fieldwork mapping of each parish. Surveys take place in winter, recording ridge and furrow and archaeological sites. The work began in 1961 and to date 249 of the 315 parishes in the county have been surveyed field by field (79 percent), the results being presented as parish maps at the scale of six-inch to the mile (1:10560).

Physical survival of ridge and furrow is good at the west of the county where undulating clay terrain has favoured animal rearing rather than arable. Much destruction of pasture ridge and furrow fields has occurred during the course of the survey, caused partly by expanding towns and quarries, but mostly by conversion of grass into arable for corn production. There was ploughing of much pasture during the 1939-45 war, and measurement of the destruction rates show that since 1940 a general county-wide reduction of ridge and furrow to between 8 and 21 percent of what survived in 1940 has occurred. In the east this means that many places have only a single field of ridge and furrow remaining. In the parishes of Strixton and Wollaston there were 73 fields in 1940, 42 in 1947, 15 in 1970 and only 10 in 1990. It is hoped that some of the surviving ridge and furrow will be preserved.

Northamptonshire is fortunate in that it is rich in documents detailing land holding. Many land-owning families settled in the county during the 16th to 18th centuries and their records remain intact. Archives of estates established in the 16th century (such as those of the Fitzwilliams, Cecils, Montagus and Spencers) contain medieval and later material, some of monastic origin, collected partly as title deeds and partly accumulating in the course of estate management. Among the copious surviving records, the

most useful and comprehensive sources are detailed surveys of every single strip, called field books (of which 44 have so far been identified). The quantitative information provided by field books and Parliamentary enclosure 'quality books' has been used to identify fields, furlongs and meadows on the surveyed plans. It is then possible to study the field structure, the type of demesne, how the tenants' lands were laid out and many other matters. As well as field books, the archives contain charters, account rolls, court rolls, surveys, rentals, deeds and other records dating from the 13th century onwards.

Although the detailed evidence presented here is from Northamptonshire, its open-field parishes and large 'nucleated' villages are typical of all the Midland region. It serves as a model for much of lowland England, especially the central belt that runs from Dorset to north Yorkshire. The studies have thrown light on several aspects of open fields that have long been debated nationally, and some old controversies have been resolved now that a large body of evidence has been examined.

The layout of great fields and changes made over time have revealed considerable complexity; in a sample of 157 parishes that were still open-field in the eighteenth century with a single settlement, only 39 had one simple three-field system. It has been assumed that Midland field systems were run on a three-fold cultivation (sometimes two-fold) and have not changed much. The Northamptonshire evidence shows that townships were mainly two-field in the thirteenth century, changing continuously until almost all villages operated a three-course system by the eighteenth century. There is no evidence for a widespread change from two to three fields during 1250–1350 in response to population pressure, as suggested by Gray in 1915. The number of fields was greater than three in some places after 1500, although they were usually grouped into three blocks for cropping. Multiple fields occurred in many of the forest townships, probably caused by assarting.

As well as the widespread change from two to three fields within one township, there are examples of amalgamation of separate systems. Weedon Bec had two two-field systems united into one three-field arrangement in 1583, and Barnack absorbed the fields of the neighbouring hamlet of Pilsgate during the 15th century, giving rise to multiple fields. Raunds and Ringstead shared between them the fields of the deserted Cottons, and Higham Ferrers and Newton Bromswold divided the fields of deserted Buscott.

Manorial demesnes, the home farms, long the subject of debate, are found to occur in two types, either as compact blocks of land, or with lands dispersed throughout the fields. There were probably always these two forms; no evidence has been found for the conversion of one into the other, with the implication that one type was an original layout. It is possible that block demesnes, such as those for Higham Ferrers and Watford, are characteristic of local central manors. Block demesnes were often enclosed in the sixteenth century, before, and independent of, the remaining open fields.

The medieval farm, the yardland, was a holding of strips scattered throughout the fields. Its size varied and has been found to relate to the topographical location, small yardlands being characteristic of regions of good soil in the Nene Valley and large yardlands being found in areas where there was once woodland or heath. The large ones are attributed to intakes of marginal land made after an initial fixed-sized yardland allocation; a larger size being preferred rather than adding to the number of yardlands which would lead to increased taxation.

Regular ordering of lands occurred in many field systems. A 32-yardland estate at the East End Fields of Hardingstone had a repeating cycle of 32 names throughout its

furlongs; one land of the cycle representing one yardland. Analysis of terriers and field books shows that probably all townships had their lands laid out in a regular manner. An ordered structure seems to have been created before the thirteenth century, since the older the record the more likely it is to show tenurial regularity. The number of yardlands in many cases directly relates to the Domesday assessment of 1086. Field systems are often physically laid out in relation to the tenurial cycle (a furlong being one or more cycles), so, remarkably, the physical layout of the fields reflects eleventh-century fiscal returns. Even more remarkably, Domesday returns often reveal a uniform artificiality, first demonstrated by Round, and this must have been assigned to the vill when the fields were laid out, well before 1086.

Archaeological information, much of it discovered in Northamptonshire, shows that strip fields are no older than the Saxon period, since they overlie many settlement sites of the period 450-*c.*750. The historical evidence shows directly that named furlongs existed in the twelfth century, and analysis of relationships between yardlands and the Domesday fiscal returns shows that medieval farms were in existence at that time. It seems, therefore that field systems were created before 1066 according to the yardland data, and after *c.*750 AD from the archaeological findings. Strips were laid out on a large scale initially, with long lands that later (before the mid-twelfth century) became divided into small Midland furlongs.

Archaeological fieldwork has shown that the settlement pattern is more complicated than it seems, and this is further confirmed by the field systems. It is not unexpected that parishes having more than one vill frequently have more than one field system, usually one for each settlement. It was unexpected to find that apparently straightforward nucleated, single-parish, settlements, such as Braddon and East Haddon, had two separate field systems. In none of these cases does the manorial history since 1066 account for such a complexity, and its origin is likely to be in the Saxon period.

At the township level, a few 'lost' estates can be identified from their morphology, long boundaries easily being identified in a furlong pattern, as at Silsworth in Watford. Other townships have been identified from the detailed tenurial and topographical evidence provided by field books, the two field-systems of Raunds serving as an example.

At the regional-estate level some eleventh-century holdings revealed in 1066 and 1086 by the Domesday Survey could be interpreted as 'multiple estates'. In such an arrangement each component township specialised in a particular type of produce, fish and hay being provided by places with river and meadow, and timber and fuel coming from townships having woodland. The concept can be tested viewed from the layout of fields and settlements. For the Higham Ferrers Hundred the new evidence from the disposition and shape of townships shows that although such estates may well have functioned during the eleventh century there is doubt about their early creation from large tracts of land. The observed result is more likely to have been achieved by purchase and aggregation.

This book consists of two parts; the first is a series of essays providing detailed evidence on particular topics, and the second part is a detailed gazetteer describing each individual parish and township.