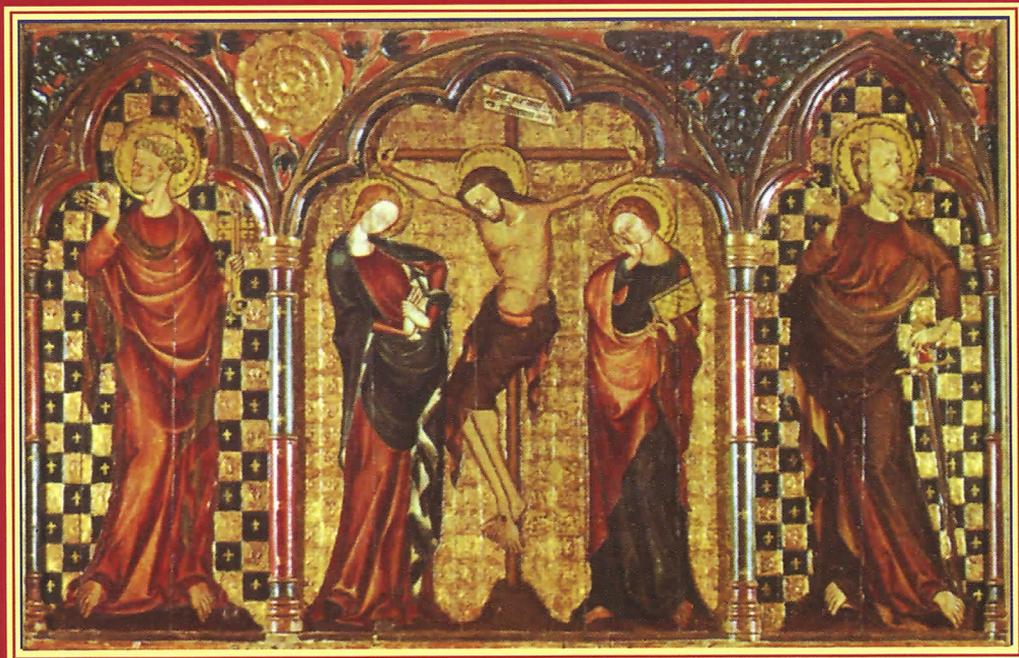


Medieval East Anglia



Edited by CHRISTOPHER HARPER-BILL

MEDIEVAL EAST ANGLIA

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Edited by
Christopher Harper-Bill

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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University of East Anglia

Preface

The Centre of East Anglian Studies at the University of East Anglia is grounded on three principles. First, that although the Centre is now a constituent part of the School of History, it should be committed to an interdisciplinary approach to the region's past, with due attention being paid to archaeology, art history and literary studies. Secondly, regional and local history should not descend into parochial antiquarianism, but rather should be set in the widest context of England and western Europe. This is particularly important for the medieval period, when East Anglia was one of the most prosperous regions of Latin Christendom. Thirdly, there should be vigorous interaction between the staff and students of the Centre and that wider community of archaeologists and historians, amateurs in the best sense of that word, who have over many years done so much to enhance our knowledge and understanding.

The papers printed in this volume represent the bulk of the proceedings of a conference held at CEAS from 8 to 12 September 2003. The majority of the lectures were given by members of UEA, but we are particularly indebted to those scholars from other universities, in Australia and the USA as well as Britain, who responded to our invitation to speak. Among these were Dr Benjamin Thompson and Dr Mark Bailey, whose valuable contributions were not available for publication, although Dr Bailey's paper will constitute the core of a chapter in his forthcoming book on the social and economic history of late medieval Suffolk. Many valuable comments and questions came from an enthusiastic audience which included many associate members of CEAS. Several of our distinguished visitors commented on the value of such a meeting which bridged the artificial gulf between university departments and the flourishing historical communities of the two counties.

I am grateful to the Dean of the School of History, Professor John Charmley, both for his enthusiastic support for the conference and for authorising the subvention of publication costs from Miss Ann Ashard Webb's Bequest. I received much cheerful support, moral and practical, from the secretary of CEAS, Mrs Jenni Tanimoto. I would also like to thank Dr Lucy Marten for preparing the index. As so often, I am grateful to the publishers, and particularly to Caroline Palmer, for undertaking publication and efficiently executing the task.

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Abbreviations

<i>AgHR</i>	<i>Agricultural History Review</i>
<i>ANS</i>	<i>Anglo-Norman Studies</i>
<i>Antiq. Journ.</i>	<i>Antiquaries Journal</i>
<i>Arch. Journ.</i>	<i>Archaeological Journal</i>
<i>ASC</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> , ed. D. Whitelock <i>et al.</i> (London, 1969)
<i>BAA</i>	British Archaeological Association
<i>BAR</i>	British Archaeological Reports
<i>Bates, Regesta</i>	<i>Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum: The Acta of William I (1066–1087)</i> , ed. D. Bates (Oxford, 1998)
<i>BIHR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
<i>BL</i>	British Library
<i>Blomefield, Norfolk</i>	F. Blomefield and C. Parkin, <i>An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk</i> , 11 vols (London, 1805–10)
<i>BRUC</i>	A.B. Emden, <i>A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500</i> (Cambridge, 1963)
<i>BRUO</i>	A.B. Emden, <i>A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500</i> , 3 vols (Oxford, 1957–9)
<i>Cal. Feudal Aids</i>	<i>Feudal Aids: Inquisitions and Assessments relating to Feudal Aids, with other Analogous Documents</i> , 6 vols (HMSO, 1899–1921)
<i>CChR</i>	<i>Calendar of Charter Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office</i> , 6 vols (HMSO, 1903–27)
<i>CCR</i>	<i>Calendar of Close Rolls</i> , 67 vols (HMSO, 1902–63)
<i>CEAS</i>	Centre of East Anglian Studies, UEA
<i>CFR</i>	<i>Calendar of Fine Rolls</i> , 22 vols (HMSO, 1911–63)
<i>CIM</i>	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous</i> , 7 vols (HMSO, 1916–69)
<i>CIPM</i>	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem and other Analogous Documents</i> , proceeding (HMSO, 1904–)
<i>CPL</i>	<i>Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland</i> , proceeding (HMSO and Dublin, 1894–)
<i>CPL, Petitions</i>	<i>Petitions to the Pope, i, 1342–1419</i> (HMSO, 1897)
<i>CPR</i>	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls</i> , 60 vols (HMSO, 1901–74)
<i>CRR</i>	<i>Curia Regis Rolls . . . preserved in the Public Record Office</i> , proceeding (HMSO, 1922–)
<i>CYS</i>	Canterbury and York Society
<i>DB</i>	Domesday Book
<i>DCN</i>	Dean and Chapter of Norwich
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>

EA Arch.	East Anglian Archaeology
<i>ECHR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
EETS	Early English Text Society
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
es	extra series
<i>GDB</i>	<i>Great Domesday Book, Library Edition</i> , ed. A. Williams and R.W.H. Erskine, 6 vols (London, 1986–92)
GECC	<i>Complete Peerage of England . . .</i> , ed. G.E. Cockayne, new edn by V. Gibbs et al., 13 vols in 14 (London, 1910–59)
<i>HMCR</i>	<i>Historical Manuscripts Commission Reports</i>
Hudson and Tingey, <i>Records</i>	W. Hudson and J.C. Tingey, eds, <i>The Records of the City of Norwich</i> , 2 vols (Norwich, 1906–10)
<i>JBAA</i>	<i>Journal of the British Archaeological Association</i>
<i>JBS</i>	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>Jocelin of Brakelond</i>	<i>The Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond</i> , ed. H.E. Butler (London, 1949)
KLC	King's Lynn Council
<i>LDB</i>	<i>Little Domesday Book: A Facsimile</i> , ed. A. Williams and G.H. Martin, 3 vols (London, 2000)
<i>LFPD</i>	<i>Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII, 1509–1547</i> , 22 vols (HMSO, 1864–1932)
<i>Medieval Norwich</i>	ed. C. Rawcliffe and R. Wilson (London, 2004)
<i>Monasticon,</i>	W. Dugdale, <i>Monasticon Anglicanum</i> , ed. J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinel, 6 vols in 8 (London, 1817–30)
NA	Norfolk Archaeology
NCC	Norwich Consistory Court
NCR	Norwich City Records
ND	Norwich Domesday Book
<i>New DNB</i>	<i>New Dictionary of National Biography</i> (Oxford, 2004)
NRO	Norfolk Record Office
NRS	Norfolk Record Society
ns	new series
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
os	old, or original, series
PCC	Prerogative Court of Canterbury
PRO	Public Record Office
PRS	Pipe Roll Society
<i>PSIA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History</i>
reg.	register
RHS	Royal Historical Society
RO	Record Office
<i>RRAN</i>	<i>Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum</i> , ed. H.W.C. Davis, C. Johnson, H.A. Cronne and R.H.C. Davis, 4 vols (Oxford, 1913–68)
RS	Rolls Series
<i>SCH</i>	<i>Studies in Church History</i>
<i>SR</i>	<i>Suffolk Review</i>
SROB	Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds
SROI	Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich

SROL	Suffolk Record Office, Lowestoft
SRS	Suffolk Records Society
ss	supplementary series
<i>TEAS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society</i>
TNA	The National Archives (formerly Public Record Office)
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
UEA	University of East Anglia, Norwich
<i>VCH</i>	<i>Victoria County History</i>
<i>VE</i>	<i>Valor Ecclesiasticus</i> , ed. J. Caley and J. Hunter, 6 vols (Record Commission, 1810–34)

Introduction

THE PUBLICATION of this volume of essays presents an opportunity for a brief and necessarily selective survey of the progress of East Anglian medieval studies over the last quarter century, and to suggest avenues of profitable research for the future.¹ The chronological limits of this conspectus are largely limited by the editor's own knowledge to the long period from the Conquest to the eve of the Reformation, and with a few notable exceptions, it deals only with books and excludes the voluminous, and often very valuable, periodical literature, much of it published in *Norfolk Archaeology* and *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History*.

Crucial to the advance of historical knowledge is the publication of primary sources, in editions which combine the highest standards of scholarship with accessibility, which can be achieved by the provision of detailed abstracts of documents in Latin. For the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the most important source for almost every aspect of society is the huge corpus of charters, for the most part title deeds, but revealing far more than merely the transfer of properties. The pioneer in this field in East Anglia was Barbara Dodwell, who in 1985 published the second of two volumes of *Norwich Cathedral Charters* for the Pipe Roll Society (ns 40, 46). For Norfolk little has been done since, although an edition of the cartulary of Castle Acre priory is in progress. For Suffolk much has been accomplished in the last quarter century in the Suffolk Charters series of the Suffolk Record Society, established by the late Professor R. Allen Brown. Since 1979 the charters of ten religious houses and one lay estate have been published in seventeen volumes.² Here the mountain of the Bury St Edmunds cartularies remains to be scaled (although all the twelfth-century charters are in print in various places).³ For Norfolk one of the most urgent tasks is the edition of the numerous cartularies and collections of original charters, which have been remarkably little exploited since the work of Blomefield.

The charters of the bishops of Norwich, a crucial source for the organisation of the church and religion, are in the course of publication as part of a series which has transformed our knowledge of the church in England in the two centuries after

¹ I am grateful to Brian Ayers, Robert Liddiard, Carole Rawcliffe and Sarah Salih for their contributions to this survey.

² Suffolk Charters (Woodbridge, 1979–2001). Volumes so far published cover Leiston abbey and Butley priory, Blythburgh priory, Stoke by Clare priory, Sibton abbey, Clare Augustinian friary, Eye priory, Bury hospitals, St Bartholomew's Sudbury, Dodnash priory, and the Pakenham family.

³ R.M. Thompson, *The Archives of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds* (SRS 21, 1980).

the Conquest.⁴ For the later middle ages, only one of the Norwich episcopal registers has been published.⁵ It is unfortunate that these volumes contain almost exclusively records of institutions to livings, but there are contained therein a few more interesting entries, which if published along with the many original episcopal documents surviving in various archives would provide a useful insight into ecclesiastical administration in the two and a half centuries before the Reformation. Meanwhile, to compensate for the paucity of material in the Norwich registers, Archbishop Morton's Canterbury register contains, in its comprehensive record of the 1499 vacancy of the see, perhaps the most detailed picture of any English diocese over a six-month period.⁶ A particular aspect of episcopal activity, the campaign to eradicate heresy (which may have been seen by medieval bishops and modern historians as more widespread and dangerous than it actually was) is revealed by an edition of Bishop Alnwick's proceedings against suspected Lollards between 1428 and 1431.⁷ Orthodoxy, certainly, is the overwhelmingly predominant theme of the wills from the archdeaconry of Sudbury edited by Peter Northeast.⁸ Such documents are an extraordinarily important source for social and economic, as well as religious, history, and there is a need for further editions from other parts of the diocese; those from the prosperous little ports of North Norfolk might prove particularly interesting. One of the most important contributions to the history of late medieval monasticism in England, which has been curiously neglected in the recent surge of publications on the pre-Reformation church, is David Dymond's splendid edition of the register of the Cluniac priory at Thetford, which again is a rich source for economic as well as religious history.⁹ The same may be said of Claire Noble's calendar of the Norwich cathedral priory gardeners' rolls and of Martin Heale's forthcoming edition of the account rolls of Hoxne and Rumburgh priories.¹⁰ An edition of the long series of accounts of Mettingham College, which run from 1402 to 1516, would be an extremely useful undertaking.¹¹

Among secular records published are important collections relating to Bishop's Lynn and to the Holkham estate;¹² a miscellany of selected accounts,

⁴ C. Harper-Bill, ed., *English Episcopal Acta*, 6, *Norwich 1070–1214*; 21, *Norwich 1215–1243* (British Academy, 1990–2000); two further volumes covering 1244–1299 are in preparation.

⁵ P. Pobst, ed., *The Register of William Bateman, Bishop of Norwich, 1344–1355*, 2 vols (CYS 84, 90, 1996–2000).

⁶ C. Harper-Bill, ed., *The Register of John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1486–1500*, iii, *Norwich Sede Vacante, 1499* (CYS 89, 2000).

⁷ N.P. Tanner, *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428–31* (Camden 4th series 20, 1977).

⁸ P. Northeast, ed., *Wills of the Archdeaconry of Sudbury, 1439–1474: Wills from the Register 'Baldwyne'*, i, 1439–1461 (SRS 44, 2001).

⁹ D. Dymond, ed., *The Register of Thetford Priory, 1482–1540*, 2 vols (British Academy and NRS, 1995–6).

¹⁰ C. Noble, C. Moreton and P. Rutledge, eds, *Farming and Gardening in Late Medieval Norfolk* (NRS 61, 1997), pp. 1–93; the Hoxne and Rumburgh accounts are forthcoming from SRS.

¹¹ BL, Add. MSS 33985–33990.

¹² D.M. Owen, ed., *The Making of King's Lynn: A Documentary Survey*; W. Hassall and J. Beauroy, eds, *Lordship and Landscape in Norfolk, 1250–1350* (British Academy, Records of the Social and Economic History of England and Wales ns 9, 20, 1984–93).

extents and inventories of Framlingham,¹³ and the Dunwich Bailiffs' Book, which provides a fascinating insight into maritime activity.¹⁴ The rich store of information contained in the fourteenth-century court rolls of Walsham-le-Willows provides a strong argument for the publication of more such series.¹⁵ Obvious *desiderata* are editions of the scattered charters of the East Anglian tenants-in-chief; we cannot really comprehend major dynasties such as the Bigods, the Clares and the Warennes, whose political stance was crucial to national history, until their documentation is properly presented. Another major need is the publication of some at least of the records of the general eyre in Norfolk and Suffolk,¹⁶ and also a continuation of the feet of fines beyond 1216, to replace the mere listing of names of parties provided long ago by Walter Rye.¹⁷

Great emphasis has here been placed on the importance of modern editions of medieval Latin texts. Some might question this need, in an age when manuscripts can be electronically reproduced and downloaded. They remain, however, for all but the most expert, difficult to read, with contractions of case endings which often obscure the meaning for those not at ease with Latin, while personal and place names, and often dating limits, will remain obscure. It is, moreover, a comprehensive index of both persons and places and of subjects which will reveal the full significance of any administrative record. A good edition has an almost unlimited shelf life, while some monographs, producing in ever escalating numbers to satisfy the quantitative demands of the university Research Assessment Exercise, can all too often prove ephemeral. It is incumbent upon all medieval historians who through good fortune are blessed with adequate Latinity to produce as many editions as possible, and upon the universities to provide adequate training in the language for research students, who through no fault of their own have not been taught Latin at school. If this cannot be done, we will face soon a situation in which the range of accessible sources will not expand, whereas in fact the untapped manuscript material for medieval East Anglia is almost limitless.¹⁸

Despite the caveat above, much valuable work has been published on the ecclesiastical history of the region. Tim Pestell has recently produced a perceptive study of East Anglian monasticism from its origins in the seventh century to 1216, emphasising the continuity of sites and cults over the Norman Conquest.¹⁹

¹³ M. Bailey, ed., *The Bailiffs' Minute Book of Dunwich, 1404–1430* (SRS 34, 1992).

¹⁴ J. Ridgard, ed., *Medieval Framlingham: Select Documents, 1270–1524* (SRS 27, 1985).

¹⁵ R. Lock, ed., *The Court Rolls of Walsham le Willows, 1303–1399* (SRS 41, 45, 1998–2002).

¹⁶ For listings, see D. Crook, *Records of the General Eyre* (PRO Handbook 20, 1982). It is hoped that an edition of the first surviving Suffolk eyre roll will shortly be published by the SRS.

¹⁷ For fines to 1215, see B. Dodwell, ed., *Feet of Fines for the County of Norfolk (1198–1202); Feet of Fines for the County of Norfolk (1202–15) and of Suffolk (1199–1214)* (PRS ns 27, 32, 1950–58); for mere listings thereafter, not always accurate, W. Rye, *A Short Calendar of the Feet of Fines for Norfolk* (Norwich, 1885); *A Calendar of the Feet of Fines for Suffolk* (Ipswich, 1900).

¹⁸ Two recent very useful archival listings are F. Meeres, *Guide to the Records of Norwich Cathedral* (NRO, 1998), and D. Allen, *Ipswich Borough Archives, 1255–1835* (SRS 42, 2000).

¹⁹ T. Pestell, *Landscape and Monastic Foundation: Establishment of Religious Houses in East Anglia, c. 650–1200* (Woodbridge, 2004).

The architectural history of Norwich cathedral has been expertly treated by Eric Fernie, with a complementary treatment, devoted especially to the use of monastic space, by Roberta Gilchrist,²⁰ while the general history of the mother church of the diocese has been comprehensively surveyed in a collaborative volume.²¹ Another collection of essays treats the medieval abbey of Bury St Edmunds, although here the emphasis is predominantly architectural and artistic, and there is much more to be said, along the lines charted by Antonia Gransden.²² The study by Carole Rawcliffe of the hospital of St Giles in Norwich is a model of its kind, exploiting a remarkable archive to investigate ecclesiastical, medical and economic history.²³ The nunneries of the diocese have been the subject of two recent treatments.²⁴ The wealth of testamentary evidence provides the basis for Norman Tanner's examination of religion in late medieval Norwich²⁵ and, with emphasis also on architectural and artistic evidence, for Judith Middleton-Stewart's analysis of religious beliefs and aspirations in the rural deanery of Dunwich.²⁶ In recent years the significance of guilds or fraternities as an index of the healthy state of late medieval religion has been strongly emphasised, and those of the East Anglian diocese have been perceptively analysed by Ken Farnhill.²⁷ The brilliant, if controversial, revisionist view of English religion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by Eamon Duffy is crammed with East Anglian evidence.²⁸

Relatively little has appeared on the political history of East Anglia in the central middle ages, although the way forward is indicated by short but incisive studies of the honour of Eye and of the role of 'the Easterners' in the opposition to King John.²⁹ Robert Liddiard's study of castle landscapes in Norfolk provides a valuable insight into the ethos and mentality of the Anglo-Norman baronage,³⁰ to balance the image of majesty presented in Sandy Heslop's reassessment of the

²⁰ E. Fernie, *An Architectural History of Norwich Cathedral* (Oxford, 1993). R. Gilchrist, *Norwich Cathedral Close* (Woodbridge, 2005).

²¹ I. Atherton *et al.*, eds, *Norwich Cathedral: Church, City and Diocese, 1096–1996* (London, 1996).

²² A. Gransden, ed., *Bury St Edmunds: Medieval Art, Architecture, Archaeology and Economy* (BAA Conference Transactions 20, 1998); cf. Gransden, 'Legends and Traditions concerning the Origins of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds', *EHR* 100 (1985); 'Baldwin, Abbot of Bury St Edmunds, 1065–1097', *ANS* 4 (1981); 'A Democratic Movement at the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds in the Late Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries', *JEH* 26 (1975).

²³ C. Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul: The Life, Death and Resurrection of an English Medieval Hospital* (Stroud, 1999); see also her *The Hospitals of Medieval Norwich* (Norwich, 1995).

²⁴ R. Gilchrist and M. Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia* (Norwich, 1993); M. Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1998).

²⁵ N.P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370–1532* (Toronto, 1984).

²⁶ J. Middleton-Stewart, *Inward Purity and Outward Splendour: Death and Remembrance in the Deanery of Dunwich, Suffolk, 1370–1547* (Woodbridge, 2001).

²⁷ K. Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia* (York, 2001).

²⁸ E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion, 1400–1580* (Yale, 1992).

²⁹ C. Lewis, 'The King and Eye: A Study in Anglo-Norman Politics', *EHR* 103 (1989); B. Feeney, 'The Effects of King John's Scutages on East Anglian Subjects', in *East Anglian and Other Studies presented to Barbara Dodwell*, ed. M. Barber *et al.* (Reading Medieval Studies 11, 1985).

³⁰ R. Liddiard, 'Landscapes of Lordship': *Norman Castles and the Countryside in Medieval Norfolk, 1066–1200* (BAR British Series 309, 2000).

architectural history of Norwich and Orford castles.³¹ Much can be extracted from works with a wider focus, such as the studies of the aristocracy by David Crouch and Judith Green,³² while a valuable prosopographical tool is provided by Katherine Keats-Rohan's survey of persons named in sources from Domesday Book to the *carte baronum* of 1166.³³

Much more has been published for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A major trend in recent historical studies of later medieval English politics has been the in-depth exploration of regional communities of gentry and nobility and their relations with government. East Anglia, with its rich archives and unrivalled Paston correspondence,³⁴ lends itself especially well to this type of research. In a series of articles Roger Virgoe examined the political life and the gentry of the region.³⁵ A remarkable trilogy by Colin Richmond places the Paston family, warts and all, under the historical microscope and provides an intimate account of local politics during the Wars of the Roses;³⁶ he had previously produced a study of the Suffolk gentleman John Hopton.³⁷ The nature of royal power during the earlier part of the fifteenth century has recently been reassessed by Helen Castor, who offers a rather different interpretation to Virgoe.³⁸ Philippa Maddern has explored levels of crime and disorder across the region, both in town and country; much of her work concentrates on the unruly 'fur collar criminals' among the gentry.³⁹ There is much of interest for the late medievalist in Diarmaid MacCulloch's study of Tudor Suffolk.⁴⁰

Many of the most important advances have been in the field of landscape history. We now have two excellent historical atlases,⁴¹ twin investigations of the origins of the shires,⁴² and two surveys of the landscape which include valuable syntheses of the medieval evidence.⁴³ From these works, and from many specialised articles published over the last quarter century, we now know much more about the nature of settlement in medieval East Anglia, especially concerning

³¹ T.A. Heslop, *Norwich Castle Keep: Romanesque Architecture and Social Context* (Norwich, 1994); 'Orford Castle: Nostalgia and Sophisticated Living', *Architectural History* 34 (1991).

³² D. Crouch, *The Imagery of Aristocracy in Britain, 1000–1300* (London, 1992); J.A. Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England* (Cambridge, 1997).

³³ K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, *Domesday People* (Woodbridge, 1999); *Domesday Descendants* (Woodbridge, 2002).

³⁴ N. Davis, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1971–6).

³⁵ Many are reprinted posthumously in R. Virgoe, *Crown, Government and People in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. C. Barron, C. Rawcliffe and J.R. Rosenthal (Norwich, 1997), with full bibliography.

³⁶ C. Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: The First Phase* (Cambridge, 1990); *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: Fastolf's Will* (Cambridge, 1996); *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: Endings* (Manchester, 2000).

³⁷ C. Richmond, *John Hopton: A Fifteenth-Century Suffolk Gentleman* (Cambridge, 1981).

³⁸ H. Castor, *The King, the Crown and the Duchy of Lancaster, 1399–1446* (Cambridge, 2000).

³⁹ P. Maddern, *Violence and Social Order: East Anglia 1422–1442* (Oxford, 1992).

⁴⁰ D. MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors* (Oxford, 1986).

⁴¹ P. Wade-Martins, *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk* (Norwich, 1993); D. Dymond and E. Martin, eds, *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk*, 2nd edn (Ipswich, 1999).

⁴² T. Williamson, *The Origins of Norfolk* (Manchester, 1993); P. Warner, *The Origins of Suffolk* (Manchester, 1996).

⁴³ D. Dymond, *The Norfolk Landscape* (Bury St Edmunds, 1985); N. Scarfe, *The Suffolk Landscape*, 3rd edn (Chichester, 2002).

common edge drift. Landscape archaeologists have examined how and why this pattern developed in the first place and have suggested how social and economic forces were shaped by the environment to produce a highly idiosyncratic pattern of intensive settlement.⁴⁴ For the later period, Bruce Campbell's pioneering work has extended over decades and reached its fruition in a magisterial work based heavily on regional evidence.⁴⁵ He has demonstrated definitively that medieval agricultural techniques were not backward and that parts of East Anglia, particularly East Norfolk, were capable of producing yields not matched elsewhere until the agricultural revolution. Campbell, together with Mark Bailey, has given us a much clearer picture of the East Anglian economy in all its diversity.⁴⁶ Moreover, his article on the impact of successive fourteenth-century crises on the peasants of Coltishall provides an admirable backdrop to the events leading to the Peasants' Revolt, which has been examined in Suffolk by Chris Dyer.⁴⁷ Another noteworthy study of peasant communities is Jane Whittle's study of the development of agrarian capitalism in Norfolk in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁴⁸

Urban life in medieval East Anglia remains under-researched, and we await scholarly histories of Bury St Edmunds, Ipswich and Yarmouth, while much remains to be explored even at Lynn. The way forward may lie in collaborative volumes, such as the recently published *Medieval Norwich*, which brings together the work of fourteen contributors.⁴⁹

There are many opportunities for further research on the cusp of documentary and landscape history.⁵⁰ Currently we have little knowledge of the nature of urban hinterlands, and not only those of the regional capitals of Norwich, Ipswich and Bury. It would be interesting to examine how the multitude of market towns, spread out at almost equidistant intervals across the region, affected the nature of rural society. On a similar theme, it would be instructive to link monastic, castle and urban studies and to set them in a broader context. Was there a pattern here distinct from the rest of England? It has already been cogently argued that there was a regional style of architecture,⁵¹ and this question of distinctiveness should be explored across a wider front. Another fruitful approach might be a project on

44 T. Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes: Settlement, Society, Environment* (Macclesfield, 2003); see the references to the copious literature in his article in the present volume.

45 B.M.S. Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture, 1250–1450* (Cambridge, 2000); see bibliography therein for his earlier publications.

46 M. Bailey, *A Marginal Economy? East Anglian Breckland in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989).

47 B.M.S. Campbell, 'Population Pressure, Inheritance and the Land Market in a Fourteenth-Century Peasant Community', in R. Smith, ed., *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984); C. Dyer, 'The Rising of 1381 in Suffolk', *PSIA* 36 (1980).

48 J. Whittle, *The Development of Agrarian Capitalism: Land and Labour in Norfolk, 1440–1580* (Oxford, 2000).

49 C. Rawcliffe and R. Wilson, eds, *Medieval Norwich* (London, 2004).

50 There are exemplars in the field of ecclesiastical history; e.g. J. Blair, ed., *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition, 950–1200* (Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, Monograph 17, 1988) esp. chapters 1, 12, 13; R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London, 1989); N. Batcock, *The Ruined and Disused Churches of Norfolk* (EA Arch. 51, 1991).

51 Heslop, *Norwich Castle Keep*, pp. 62–4.

'charters and the landscape', combining the expertise of two distinct disciplines to investigate the evolution of the landscape in areas for which there is extensive twelfth- and thirteenth-century documentation. Such a genuine link between archaeology and written sources would be very desirable. On a wider front, the North Sea and Baltic connections of the region – cultural, social and economic – remain very much underexplored, as do the wider commercial activities of East Anglia's international merchants. The archival deposits for the region are, in fact, so rich that in many respects the surface of an almost limitless resource has barely been skimmed.

The state of archaeological research has recently been assessed within the context of an overarching Regional Research Framework, published in two parts in 1997 and 2000 and currently undergoing review.⁵² This framework explored both urban and rural themes, highlighting the key issues of demography, social organisation, economy, culture and religion, and environment as those where research has had significant impact and may be expected to develop further. It noted successes, such as the work on the origins of towns as exemplified in Norwich, the integrated approach to urban studies adopted in King's Lynn, and innovative approaches to data collection in rural Norfolk through fieldwalking, extensive area excavation and collaboration with amateur metal-detectorists. It also, however, highlighted extensive lacunae in knowledge and understanding, to which the research agenda and strategy seek to direct attention

A wide range of priorities has been established. Work in rural areas seeks to explore population distribution and density, as well as to investigate life expectancy and ethnic origins. Characterisation of settlement forms and functions, leading to the creation of settlement diversity models and testing, is recommended, as is work on the extent and specialisation of agricultural activity. Understanding of changes in land use, of craft production, of the impact of colonists and of the role of the church would all benefit from archaeological research.⁵³ Similarly, in towns there is a need for intensive study of settlement patterns through time, quantification of population density and mobility, correlation of population levels with economic indicators for urban sustainability, analysis of immigration and emigration as factors in development, exploration of commercial and industrial activity, study of the development and dissemination of urban values and assessment of the social and economic impact of the church.⁵⁴

Research is also developing methodologically. The advent of new technologies has coincided with more holistic approaches to historic environmental study to provide powerful tools for both data collection and analysis. An important example is GIS (geographical information systems), the deployment of which is allowing the mapping and assessment of historic landscape character, often with

⁵² J. Glazebrook, ed., 'Research and Archaeology: A Framework for the Eastern Counties', i, 'Resource Assessment'; ii, 'Research, Agenda and Strategy', *EA Arch. occasional papers* 3, 8 (1997–2000).

⁵³ K. Wade, 'Anglo-Saxon and Medieval (Rural)', in Glazebrook, 'Research and Archaeology', pp. 25–6.

⁵⁴ B. Ayers, 'Anglo-Saxon, Medieval and Post-Medieval (Urban)', in Glazebrook, 'Research and Archaeology', ii, pp. 29–31.

startling results. This character assessment is being combined with more detailed study, such as historic fields survey, to reveal patterns of enclosure, adaptation and change through time which transform understanding not only of rural settlement and land usage, but also of social organisation and even the origins of polities.⁵⁵

In towns, the particular challenges of the complexity of the urban environment, together with the relative richness of the historic resource, has necessitated the creation of urban archaeological databases, also GIS-based, which enable different types of evidence to be mapped, viewed and compared, revealing connections, patterns and potential. Modelling of past urban landscapes is now becoming possible, updated by new discoveries and enhanced by extant structures, preserved street alignments and data from archaeological excavation, cartography, documents, drawings and photographs.

The use of such tools is supplemented by a new awareness of the potential for extracting meaning from relict landscapes and features. One example is the considerable attention now being paid to spatial analysis; another is the close examination of the processes which led to landscaped forms, townscape features and individual structures and sites. The potential of scientific data also continues to grow, increasing understanding of chronology, environmental change, agricultural and industrial processes, domestic life and the consequences of dense social interaction. Archaeological research is now moving rapidly from a concentration upon points within the landscape towards the addressing of more comprehensive questions: who are we, where did we come from, how have we adapted our environment, how have we survived and thrived?

Turning finally to literary culture, medieval East Anglian literature is coming into critical visibility; thinking in regional terms has enabled us to see that a substantial proportion of extant literature has ties to this region. In more recent literary criticism historicised and contextualised methods of reading have revealed previously neglected texts. East Anglian material has been to the forefront of reading cultures which examine the whole range of literate practices – not only the writing, but also the commissioning, translating, exchanging and illustrating of texts.⁵⁶ Such approaches, enabling the study of manuscripts, patrons, readers and non-literary writings, are building up a picture of a lively and varied literary culture.

The study of drama has progressed along similar lines. Traditionally, the northern civic cycles have dominated discussion of medieval drama, and the classic analyses have placed the plays in the context of civic records helpfully

⁵⁵ E. Martin, 'East Anglian Fields', EA Arch. forthcoming.

⁵⁶ Important recent studies include R. Hanna, 'Some Norfolk Women and their Books', in J.H. McCash, ed., *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women* (Georgia, 1996); R. Beadle, 'Prolegomena to a Literary Geography of Later Medieval Norfolk', in F. Riddy, ed., *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts* (Cambridge, 1991); G.M. Gibson, *Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1989); R. Krug, *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, 2002); S. Delaney, *Impolitic Bodies: Poetry, Saints and Society in Fifteenth-Century England: The Work of Osbern Bokenham* (Oxford, 1998); G. Lester, *Sir John Paston's Grete Boke* (Woodbridge, 1984).

collected by Records of Early English Drama (REEDS). More recent criticism has come to recognise the unparalleled richness and diversity of medieval East Anglian drama, consisting of two (idiosyncratic) cycle plays and a clear majority of surviving single plays. Records of dramatic, festive and ceremonial activities are plentiful, but apparently unrelated to the play texts: only a few documents relating to the Norwich cycle can be connected with any extant dramatic texts. REEDS has just begun to edit the East Anglian records, and the results will no doubt enable further work. Criticism of East Anglian drama has placed it in relation to a network of non-dramatic literature, visual arts and religious practice;⁵⁷ particular attention has been devoted to the Croxton Play of the Sacrament.

That remarkable pair, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, feature very heavily in the modern critical landscape, most often in the context of either women's or mystical writing.⁵⁸ It is perhaps unfortunate that it is unusual for these mystics to be studied alongside other notable East Anglian literary figures such as John Lydgate, Osbert Bokenham, John Capgrave and John Metham. The sheer size of Lydgate's canon is daunting, but much of his work has been re-edited in recent years. Critics are interested in his political addresses, post-Chaucerian hagiography and his scripts for ceremonial occasions.⁵⁹ There has been a detailed and innovative analysis of Bokenham's saints' lives.⁶⁰ Little attention has been paid recently to Capgrave, with the exception of his St Katherine, which is often mentioned in surveys of hagiography, sometimes along with Lydgate and Bokenham, creating a mini-canon of East Anglian vernacular hagiographers. Overall, study of the region's literature and drama is on an upward curve, and here again interdisciplinary studies seem to offer the best way forward.

This survey has necessarily been selective, but enough major work has been noticed to demonstrate clearly the volume of scholarship on medieval East Anglia over the last quarter century. It should also be apparent how much remains still to

⁵⁷ J.C. Coldewey, 'The Non-Cycle Plays and the East Anglian Tradition', and A.J. Fletcher, 'The N-Town Plays', in R. Beadle, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (Cambridge, 1994); Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*; T. Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2004); V.I. Scherb, *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Madison, NJ, 2001).

⁵⁸ Margery has recently received more attention than Julian; see L. Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (Philadelphia, 1994); A. Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World* (Harlow, 2002); J.H. Arnold and K.J. Lewis, eds, *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge, 2004).

⁵⁹ J. Simpson, '“Dysemol Daies and Fatal Houres”: Lydgate's Destruction of Thebes and Chaucer's Knight's Tale', in H. Cooper and S. Mapstone, eds, *The Long Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1997), and 'Bulldozing the Middle Ages: The Case of John Lydgate', in S. Copeland and D. Lawton, eds, *New Medieval Literatures*, 4 (Oxford, 2001); A.C. Spearing, 'Lydgate's Canterbury Tale: The Siege of Thebes and Fifteenth-Century Chaucerianism', in R. Yeager, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Studies* (New Haven, Conn., 1984); L. Patterson, 'Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate', in J. Cox and L. Reynolds, eds, *New Historical Literary Study* (Princeton, 1993); P. Strohm, 'John Lydgate, Jacque of Holland and the Poetics of Complicity', in D. Aers, ed., *Medieval Literature and Historical Inquiry* (Cambridge, 2000); C. Sponsler, 'Alien Nation: London's Aliens and Lydgate's Mummings for the Mercers and Goldsmiths', in J. Cohen, ed., *The Post-Colonial Middle Ages* (London, 2000).

⁶⁰ S. Delaney, *Impolitic Bodies*; C. Hilles, 'Gender and Politics in Osbert Bokenham's Legendary', *New Medieval Literatures* 4.

be done, in both editorial and interpretative work. It has become increasingly obvious in recent years that one of the major avenues of advance in medieval studies is through regional studies. The prosperity and population density of Norfolk and Suffolk throughout the middle ages is almost a guarantee that work on this region is of wider national, and indeed international, significance. The history of every East Anglian market town or parish church is, of course, worth studying in its own right, but local historians should avoid parochialism and be constantly aware of the wider context, of the western European economy or the development of the common religious life of Latin Christendom, which can be illuminated by their research in microcosm.

Christopher Harper-Bill

Explaining Regional Landscapes: East Anglia and the Midlands in the Middle Ages

Tom Williamson

Introduction

HISTORIANS have long recognised that the medieval settlement patterns and field systems of ‘greater East Anglia’ – here defined as Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and the eastern parts of Hertfordshire – differed markedly from those of the Midlands (Fig. 1).¹ The latter was essentially (although with notable exceptions) a ‘champion’ district: by the thirteenth century the majority of people lived in nucleated villages and farmed their land in extensive open-fields of ‘regular’ form, that is, in which holdings were evenly and sometimes very regularly spread throughout the territory of the vill, and in which one ‘field’ – a continuous area occupying a half or a third of the vill – lay fallow each year. The arable usually took up the overwhelming majority of the land: unhedged open-field strips ran all the way to the boundaries of the township and, in many districts, the only grassland was the areas of meadow which occupied the low-lying alluvial soils.² In greater East Anglia, in contrast, a bewildering variety of agrarian arrangements could be found, all of which deviated, to varying degrees, from this familiar textbook norm.³ In most districts there was a relative abundance of woodland and wood-pasture, grazing and hedges, making for what sixteenth-century commentators described as ‘woodland’ landscapes. Only on the lighter soils extending down the western side of the region – from the ‘Good Sands’ of north-west Norfolk, through Breckland, onto the chalk scarp of south-east Cambridgeshire

¹ H. Gray, *English Field Systems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1915); G.C. Homans, ‘The Explanation of English Regional Differences’, *Past and Present* 42 (1969), pp. 18–34; A.H.R. Baker and R.A. Butlin, eds, *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1973); B. Roberts and S. Wrathmell, ‘Peoples of Wood and Plain: an Exploration of National and Regional Contrasts’, in D. Hooke, ed., *Landscape: the Richest Historical Record* (London, 2000), pp. 85–96; B. Roberts and S. Wrathmell, *An Atlas of Rural Settlement in England* (London, 2000).

² The best discussions of the medieval landscapes of the Midlands are provided by D. Hall, ‘The Origins of Open-Field Agriculture: the Archaeological Fieldwork Evidence’, in T. Rowley, ed., *The Origins of Open-Field Agriculture* (London, 1980), pp. 22–38; *idem*, *Medieval Fields* (Aylesbury, 1982); *idem*, *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire* (Northamptonshire Record Society 38, Northampton, 1993).

³ M.R. Postgate, ‘Field Systems of East Anglia’, in Baker and Butlin, eds, *Studies of Field Systems*, pp. 281–324; D. Roden, ‘Field Systems of the Chiltern Hills and their Environs’, *ibid.*, pp. 325–374.

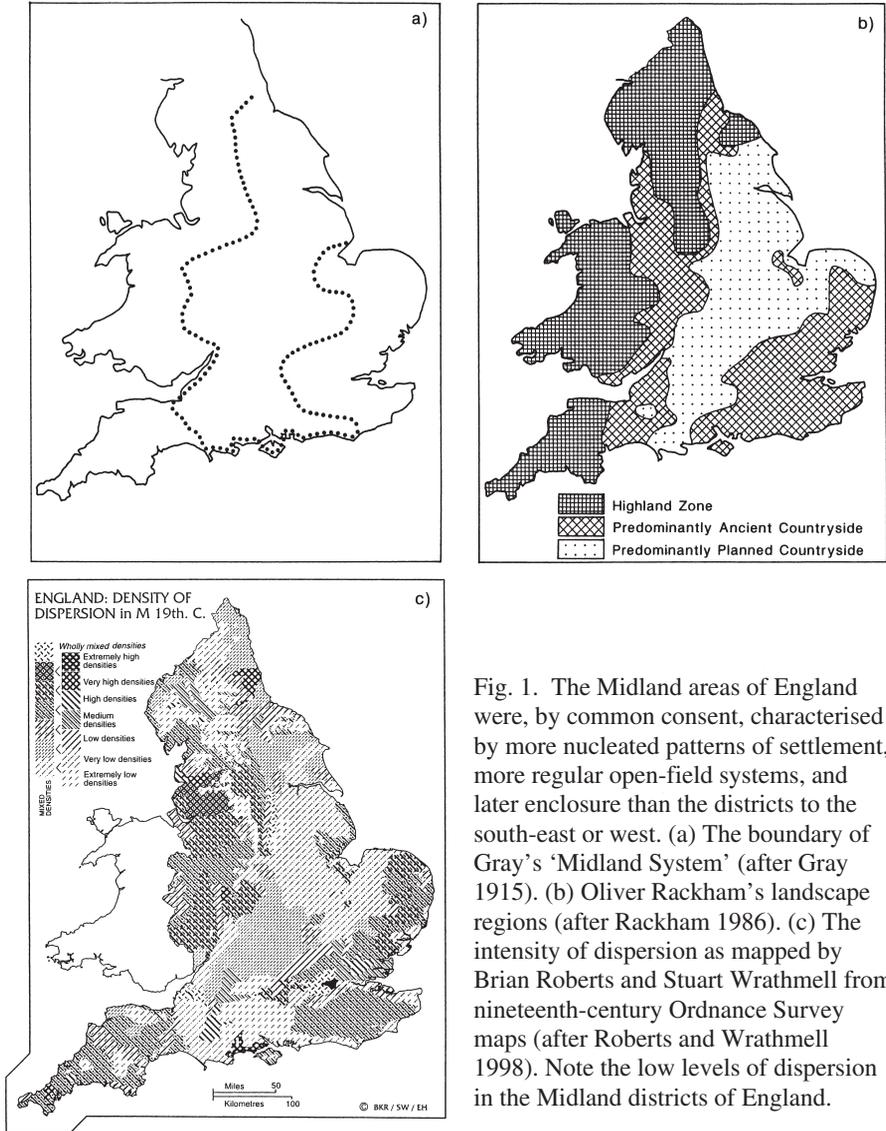


Fig. 1. The Midland areas of England were, by common consent, characterised by more nucleated patterns of settlement, more regular open-field systems, and later enclosure than the districts to the south-east or west. (a) The boundary of Gray's 'Midland System' (after Gray 1915). (b) Oliver Rackham's landscape regions (after Rackham 1986). (c) The intensity of dispersion as mapped by Brian Roberts and Stuart Wrathmell from nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey maps (after Roberts and Wrathmell 1998). Note the low levels of dispersion in the Midland districts of England.

and north-west Essex – could landscapes broadly analogous to those of the Midlands be found, with villages farming extensive areas of open, intermixed arable. But even here there were differences. Settlement was often poorly nucleated, with 'villages' resembling loose congregations of hamlets rather than the tight clusters of houses common in many Midland areas. Indeed, in Norfolk the separate identity of these distinct foci was often emphasised by the proliferation of parish churches, with places like Barton Bendish or Ringstead having two, three or even more.⁴ Moreover, although holdings were often spread evenly

⁴ T. Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes: Settlement, Society, Environment* (Macclesfield, 2003), pp. 84–88.

through the fields, especially in Breckland, the arable usually occupied a smaller proportion of the land area than in the Midlands.⁵ Extensive tracts of heathland usually existed on the poorer ground, on which large sheep flocks were grazed. These were systematically folded by night on the arable, when it lay fallow or after harvest, to provide the constant flow of nutrients required to keep this light, easily-leached land in heart. Instead of two or three large 'fields', rotations were usually organised around discontinuous areas of fallow – fallowing was by furlong rather than field – an arrangement associated in part with the widespread institution of the *fold course*. Under this particular version of sheep-corn husbandry, the manure was a manorial monopoly: the tenants might benefit from the dung dropped by the sheep as they roamed over the fallows by day, or immediately after the harvest. But the intensive night-folding or 'tathing' was the prerogative of the manorial lord which the tenants could only enjoy in return for a cash payment.⁶ The sheep were organised into flocks dominated by the stock of the lord and under the care of a manorial shepherd. But because there were usually a number of manors in a vill, each had its defined 'fold course' which included both upland heath and arable land, each of which was, by custom, allowed to carry a certain number of sheep. Often there were only two or three courses but sometimes many more: Elveden in Suffolk had eleven, Weeting in Norfolk twelve.⁷ 'Courses' sometimes crossed parish boundaries, for manor and vill were poorly integrated in many East Anglian districts. It is often assumed that the fold course 'system' as described in post-medieval documents had remained largely unchanged since early medieval times but, as Mark Bailey has demonstrated, the rather rigid and exclusive arrangements there described seem to have evolved in the later middle ages from something more complex and flexible.⁸

Elsewhere in East Anglia – on the dissected boulder clay plateau which comprised the majority of the region, on the northern silt fens on which settlement expanded in late Saxon times, on the poor acid soils of the Suffolk Sandlings, and on the fertile loams of north-east Norfolk – in all these areas, both settlement and agrarian arrangements differed more markedly from Midland norms. Open-fields dominated the landscape almost everywhere but they were highly irregular in character, and highly variable in form. In the south and west of the region – in eastern Hertfordshire, Essex, and parts of southern Suffolk – they were most prominent and continuous on the light soils, in the major valleys cutting through the clay plateau, or towards its southern and eastern margins.⁹ The heavy soils of the plateau itself were characterised by smaller areas of open arable, intermixed to varying extents with enclosed fields, commons, woods and deer parks. Some measure of communal regulation was often applied to both enclosed and open

⁵ M. Bailey, *A Marginal Economy? East Anglian Breckland in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989); M.R. Postgate, 'The Field Systems of Breckland', *AgHR* 10 (1962), pp. 80–101.

⁶ K.J. Allison, 'The Sheep-Corn Husbandry of Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *AgHR* 5 (1957), pp. 12–30.

⁷ Postgate, 'Field Systems of East Anglia', p. 315.

⁸ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, pp. 43–5.

⁹ Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes*, pp. 101–9.

arable, but cropping was generally flexible in comparison to Midland practice and fallowing was usually by individual furlongs rather than by fields.¹⁰

To the north and east – in northern and north-eastern Suffolk, and across most of Norfolk – open fields generally occupied a much greater area of land, often extending across the territory of the vill regardless of soil type, leaving only areas of common land unploughed. Holdings were seldom evenly scattered and the arable was rarely, if ever, divided for fallowing into two or three continuous ‘fields’. In consequence, field nomenclature was often highly complex. In Hemsby in north-east Norfolk, for example, thirteenth-century surveys make no mention of ‘fields’ as such, but instead record the location of strips in terms of no less than 100 divisions of which the largest covered less than 30 acres.¹¹ On the more fertile soils, most notably in north-east Norfolk, virtually no communal controls were maintained over farming. Cultivators planted what and when they wanted, and even fallowing was a matter for informal agreement between neighbours – when it happened at all, for by the thirteenth century the adoption of a number of innovations, including the widespread cultivation of legumes, had often removed the need for year-long fallows altogether.¹² Elsewhere the situation was more complex. Where open fields were of limited extent and intermixed with land held in severalty, regulation might be largely limited to the organisation of fallowing and communal grazing. But where – on the lighter clays of central Norfolk, or in the Sandlings – they were extensive, more detailed controls were often enforced, sometimes involving ‘fold courses’ of the kind we have already met on the light lands to the west.

All these various forms of ‘irregular’ field system – and I have, of necessity, greatly oversimplified the complex reality of medieval agrarian arrangements – were associated with settlement patterns which similarly varied but which were everywhere more dispersed than in the Midlands. Variations largely mirrored those in field systems. In southern and western Suffolk, Essex and east Hertfordshire, small nucleations associated with hall/church complexes, and hamlets bearing Old English names and often appearing as distinct vills in Domesday Book, were located beside the more extensive areas of open field on the valley sides. Particular fields were often associated by name with an adjacent hamlet: in Elmton in north Essex the hamlet of Lea lay on the clay plateau above Lea Field while in Arkesden, even at the time of enclosure, Minchins Field bore the old medieval names of the settlement known for centuries as Becketts, and in Chrishall the field book of 1597 shows that the inhabitants of Buildings End held much of their land in the adjacent ten-acre common field called ‘Bildon Hill Feylde als Bulls Herne’.¹³ On the heavier soils lying between these ribbons of lighter land a mixture of ring-fence farms and small hamlets, often grouped around diminutive greens, could be found (Fig. 2). To the north and east, in

¹⁰ Roden, ‘Field Systems of the Chilterns’, pp. 343–4.

¹¹ B.M.S. Campbell, ‘The Extent and Layout of Commonfields in East Norfolk’, *NA* 28 (1981), pp. 5–32.

¹² B.M.S. Campbell, ‘Agricultural Progress in Medieval England: Some Evidence from East Norfolk’, *EcHR* 2nd series 36 (1983), pp. 26–46.

¹³ Essex RO: Q/RDc26; D/Dyo1; Vm 20, fol. 18.

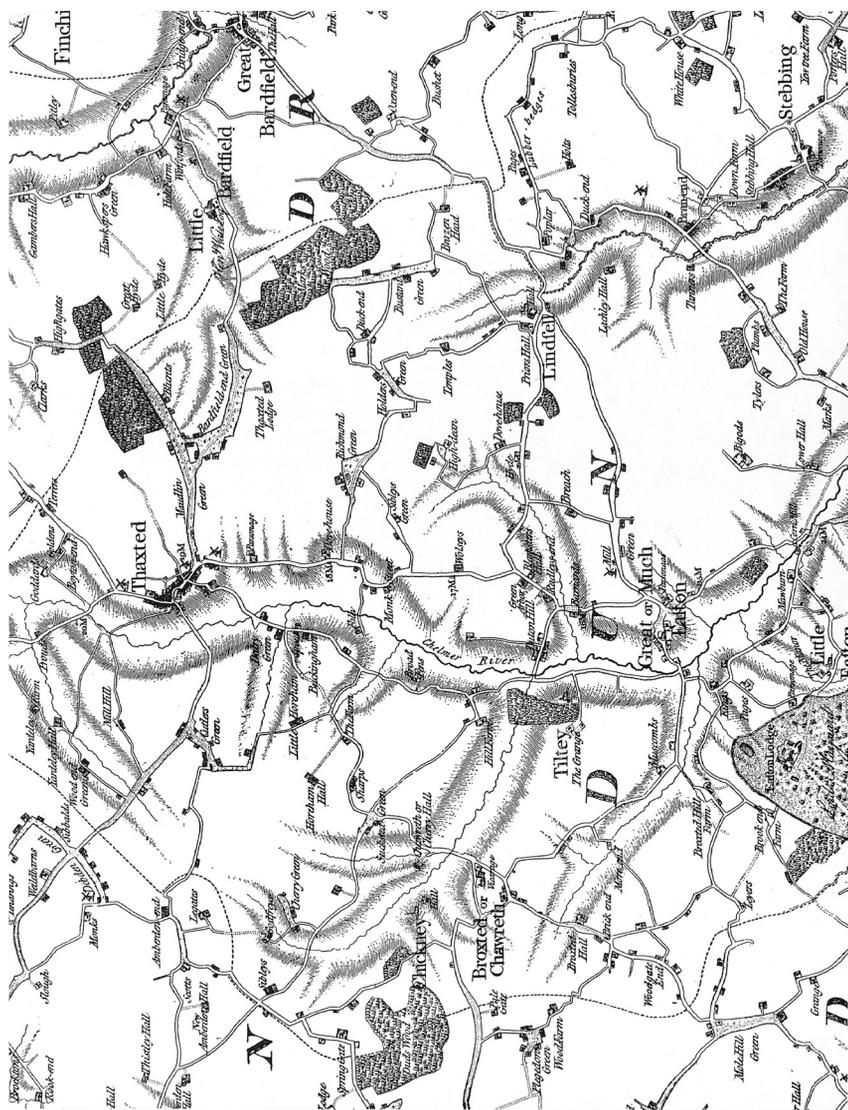


Fig. 2. The landscape around Thaxted in Essex, as depicted by Chapman and André in 1777. Typical Essex boulder clay countryside, with some large nucleations of settlement like Great Bardfield or Thaxted in the main river valleys, and a scatter of isolated farms, some located beside small greens, on the surrounding clay plateau.

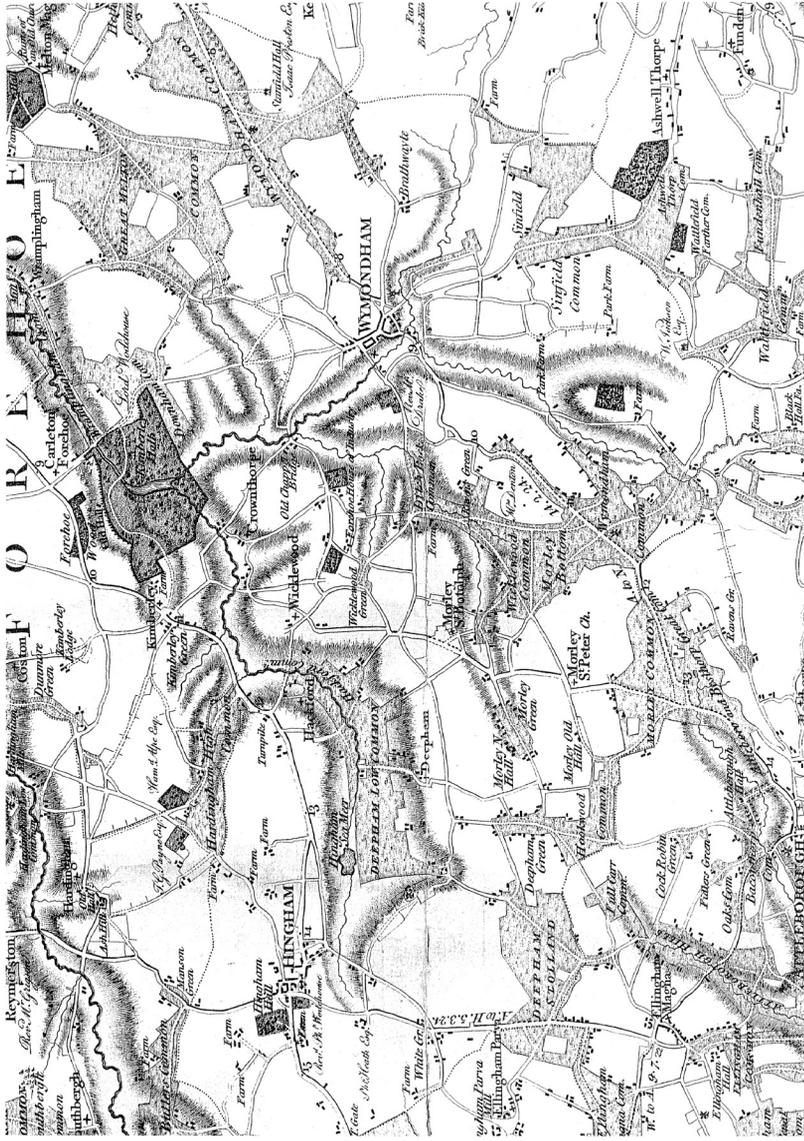


Fig. 3. Common-edge settlements in mid Norfolk, as shown on William Faden's county map of 1797. Most of the commons shown were enclosed by parliamentary act during the following twenty-five years.

contrast – in Norfolk, and across much of northern and eastern Suffolk – parish churches often stood peripheral to, or quite isolated from, the principal areas of settlement. These were clustered around areas of common land which were usually much more extensive than the small greens and ‘tyes’ found to the south. They occupied damp, peaty areas in the floors of major valleys or – in clayland districts – slightly concave depressions in the plateau surface (Fig. 3).

Traditional explanations and their problems

How should we explain the differences between the champion Midlands, and the more complex landscapes of East Anglia? To an earlier generation, they were the consequence of ‘ethnic’ factors – that is, they reflected the social habits and agrarian practices of Dark Age settlers. For George Casper Homans, East Anglia’s idiosyncrasies were thus the consequence of Friesian settlement;¹⁴ while to Howard Gray they were the consequence of Romano-British survival, mediated to varying degrees by the effects of Scandinavian settlement – in contrast to the Midland counties in which the dominance of the ‘Midland System’ reflected the ‘thorough Germanisation’ of this part of England in the course of the fifth century.¹⁵ But there are many problems with these views, not least the facts that – as numerous archaeological surveys carried out over the last three decades have confirmed – nucleated villages in the Midlands were not introduced in the fifth and sixth centuries, but instead developed in the course of the Middle and Later Saxon periods; while the main differences between East Anglia and the Midlands, in terms of settlement at least, seem to have developed even later, in the period between c.1000 and 1200.

In all regions of England the immediate post-Roman period saw a marked contraction of settlement, with in particular a retreat from areas of heavier soil. Early Saxon settlement continued to display the essentially dispersed appearance characteristic of the Roman period, but it was also highly mobile, with settlements changing site every generation or so, drifting slowly around the landscape.¹⁶ At Witton in north-east Norfolk, for example, eight Romano-British settlements were discovered through fieldwalking, but only four areas of early Saxon occupation; through limited excavation and intensive surface collection it was possible to establish that only one of these sites – the largest – was in use throughout the fifth and sixth centuries. Of the others, one was occupied in the fifth century, one in the sixth, and the third could not be dated accurately.¹⁷ At West Stow in Suffolk a spread of settlement covering some 1.8 hectares was

¹⁴ Homans, ‘The Explanation of English Regional Differences’.

¹⁵ Gray, *English Field Systems*, p. 415.

¹⁶ C. Arnold and P. Wardle, ‘Early Medieval Settlement Patterns in England’, *Medieval Archaeology* 25 (1981), pp. 145–9; G. Foard, ‘Systematic Fieldwalking and the Investigation of Saxon Settlement in Northamptonshire’, *World Archaeology* 9 (1978), pp. 357–74; H. Hamerow, ‘Settlement Mobility and the “Middle Saxon Shift”: Rural Settlements and Settlement Patterns in Anglo-Saxon England’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 20 (1991), pp. 1–17.

¹⁷ K. Wade, ‘The Early Anglo-Saxon Period’, in A.J. Lawson, ed., *The Archaeology of Witton, near North Walsham, Norfolk* (EA Arch. 18, Dereham, 1983), pp. 50–69.

shown, by careful phasing, to have resulted from the gradual eastward movement of three ‘halls’, and associated sunken-featured buildings – probably the residences of three family groups. Each ‘hall’ was rebuilt twice during the period the site was occupied, from the early fifth century to the early eighth, when the area was finally abandoned.¹⁸

In all areas – in East Anglia and the Midlands alike – the eighth and ninth centuries were characterised by increasing stability of settlement and, in some places, by the development of sizeable nucleations. Middle Saxon settlements were generally located close to what are now parish churches or – in parts of Hertfordshire and Essex especially – other early manorial foci.¹⁹ The principal regional variations in settlement with which we are here concerned seem to have developed rather later – in the period after c.1000. In the Midlands, existing settlements generally expanded *in situ* as population rose during late Saxon times, often gaining planned additions and sometimes being subject to comprehensive re-planning. But in East Anglia, settlement became increasingly dispersed.

In Norfolk, and in adjacent areas of northern and eastern Suffolk, the settlements clustered around parish churches began to break up, and farms and cottages drifted away to the edges of greens and commons. Although Peter Warner’s suggestion that this process had started in north-east Suffolk as early as the ninth century does not appear to be supported by the available archaeological data, a number of field surveys – most notably, Andrew Rogerson’s study of Fransham in Norfolk – leave little doubt that this process had begun before the Conquest.²⁰ Here two large, nucleated late Saxon settlements – associated with the parish churches of Great and Little Fransham – were supplemented by a further sixteen small sites (presumably single farmsteads), twelve of which were certainly and two very probably on common edges. Around 1100, the nucleated settlements were themselves abandoned, leaving their churches isolated within the fields. The move to the commons seems to have accelerated in the post-Conquest period, and by the thirteenth century the majority of farms and cottages in northern and eastern East Anglia lay beside a green or common, or on the roads leading to one. Some, it is true, remained close to parish churches, or manorial halls, but the importance of common-edge settlement was unquestionably the most distinctive feature of the medieval landscape of the region.

Towards the south and west of the region late Saxon settlement was already noticeably more dispersed than in the Midlands, with hamlets scattered along the principal valleys, probably already associated with areas of open arable.²¹ But in

¹⁸ S. West, *West Stow: the Anglo-Saxon Village*, vol. 1 (EA Arch. 24, Ipswich, 1985), pp. 151–2.

¹⁹ T. Williamson, ‘The Development of Settlement in North West Essex: the Results of a Recent Field Survey’, *Essex Archaeology and History* 17 (1986), pp. 120–32.

²⁰ A. Davison, *The Evolution of Settlement in three Parishes in South East Norfolk* (EA Arch. 49, Dereham, 1990); A. Davison, ‘The Field Archaeology of Bodney, and the Stanta Extension’, *NA* 42 (1994), pp. 57–79; A. Davison and B. Cushion, ‘The Archaeology of the Hargham Estate’, *NA* 53 (1999), pp. 257–74; A. Rogerson, ‘Fransham: an Archaeological and Historical Study of a Parish on the Norfolk Boulder Clay’ (unpublished PhD thesis, CEAS, 1995); P. Wade-Martins, *Village Sites in the Launditch Hundred* (EA Arch. 10, Dereham, 1980); P. Warner, *Greens, Commons and Clayland Colonisation* (Leicester, 1987).

²¹ Williamson, ‘The Development of Settlement in North West Essex’, p. 129.

post-Conquest times numerous new settlements were established on the clay plateaux between them. Some of these new farms stood alone, within their own fields, but others were clustered around green and 'tyes' much smaller than the commons found in northern East Anglia. Here, however, there was no wholesale migration to common edges, and churches were, and still are, usually associated with a village or hamlet: dispersion represented an addition to, rather than a replacement of, an existing settlement pattern. Moreover, the margins of green and tyes seem to have been settled slightly later than the larger commons in the north – usually after c.1100 – and often by comparatively low-status farms – moated sites are seldom found beside them.²² In this region, green-edge settlement appears more as a form of 'overspill' from the old-established sites in major valleys, socially distinct from most of the ring-fence farms of the surrounding plateau.²³

We do not know how far the development of field systems mirrored that of settlement patterns. In the Midlands, 'regular' open fields may have been laid out as early as the eighth or ninth centuries, as settlement became more stable and nucleated; but most probably developed in increasingly regular form during later Saxon times – paralleling the replanning to which many villages appear to have experienced.²⁴ If East Anglian field systems had ever displayed regular, 'Midland', characteristics then these were comprehensively lost in the course of the later Saxon period, as settlement expanded and drifted across the landscape.

Variations in settlement and field systems, both between the Midlands and greater East Anglia, and within the latter region, thus developed during late Saxon times. They were not the consequence of the differing social practices of Dark Age settlers. Partly because of this evidence, but also because of changing fashions in historical explanation, most modern researchers would now argue that variations in the medieval rural landscape were the consequence of more definable social and economic factors, most emphasising the importance of differences in demographic pressure in the later Saxon and early medieval periods. According to ideas originally advanced in the 1960s by the historian Joan Thirsk, rising population was the key factor in the emergence of Midland open fields. Demographic expansion led to the disintegration of holdings and the emergence of a landscape of intermingled strips through the combined effects of partible inheritance and assarting, and to the contraction of reserves of pasture and a crisis in grazing. As pasture dwindled farmers were obliged to make more intensive use of the marginal grazing offered by the aftermath of the harvest, and by the fallows. But where lands lay intermingled in unhedged strips, it was hard to maximise the potential of these resources unless neighbouring cultivators timed their

²² E. Martin, 'Greens, Commons and Tyes in Suffolk', in A. Longcroft and R. Joby, eds, *East Anglian Studies: Essays presented to J.C. Barringer* (Norwich, 1995), pp. 167–78; E. Martin, 'Rural Settlement Patterns in Medieval Suffolk', *Annual Report of the Medieval Settlement Research Group* 15 (2001), pp. 5–7.

²³ T. Williamson, *The Origins of Hertfordshire* (Manchester, 1990), pp. 185–7.

²⁴ T. Brown and G. Foard, 'The Saxon Landscape: a Regional Perspective', in P. Everson and T. Williamson, eds, *The Archaeology of Landscape: Studies presented to Christopher Taylor* (Manchester, 1978), pp. 67–94.

operations in concert. It would be difficult for one farmer to graze his strips as they lay fallow, if adjacent lands were still under crops. Farmers were thus drawn inexorably into increased co-operation, a process which culminated in the institution of a continuous fallowing sector which occupied a half, or a third, of the land of the village.²⁵ The most recent version of this theory is that proposed in 1997 by Christopher Dyer, Carenza Lewis and Patrick Mitchell-Fox, who argued that subdivision and intermixture of holdings through inheritance and exchange, and dwindling supplies of pasture, together led to a crisis in farming and recurrent disputes amongst cultivators.

A peaceful option for a long-term resolution of their difficulties involved the inhabitants reorganising their numerous farms and hamlets into common fields where the problems of competition would be minimised. The animals of the whole community were pastured together on the land which lay fallow or awaited spring cultivation. The land was subject to a cycle of fallowing which gave it a chance to recover some fertility.²⁶

But a number of scholars – starting with Bruce Campbell in the 1980s – have questioned whether population pressure alone would have been enough to bring about such a drastic change in the landscape, arguing that peasant farmers would not in themselves have been able to bring about changes in landholding of sufficient magnitude. For this, the hand of lordship was required, if only to ‘hold the ring’, and act as arbiter of the new dispensation: ‘strong and undivided lordship would have been most favourable to the functional development of the commonfield system’.²⁷ The emergence of open fields and nucleated settlements in the middle and later Saxon period would fit in well with the views of many scholars regarding the disintegration of large estates and the emergence of local, territorial lordship.²⁸ Local lords would have been keen to improve the efficiency of peasant agriculture, for upon its health the viability of their own home farms – *demesnes* – depended.

The corollary of these views, of course, is that where ‘regular’ open fields failed to emerge it was because population growth or strong lordship were lacking: areas like Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex or Hertfordshire were areas of sparse (or late) settlement, weak manorialisation, or both. Yet while these arguments are frequently repeated, there is remarkably little evidence to support them. In the late Saxon period, when the main regional differences seem to have been emerging, East Anglia, Essex and east Hertfordshire were – together with ‘champion’ Lincolnshire – the most densely settled areas in the whole of England. This was

²⁵ J. Thirsk, ‘The Common Fields’, *Past and Present* 29 (1964), pp. 3–29; *idem*, ‘The Origins of the Common Fields’, *Past and Present* 33 (1966), pp. 142–7; H.S.A. Fox, ‘Approaches to the Adoption of the Midland System’, in T. Rowley, ed., *The Origins of Open-Field Agriculture* (London, 1981), pp. 64–111.

²⁶ C. Lewis, P. Mitchell-Fox, and C. Dyer, *Village, Hamlet and Field: Changing Medieval Settlements in Midland England* (Manchester, 1997), p. 199.

²⁷ B.M.S. Campbell, ‘Commonfield Origins – the Regional Dimension’, in T. Rowley, ed., *The Origins of Open-Field Agriculture* (London, 1981), pp. 112–29.

²⁸ R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (Leicester, 1997).

probably because of environmental circumstances – the relatively dry climate which today ensures that these same districts represent the principal grain-producing region of England. In early medieval times relatively high yields, and dependable harvests, presumably allowed a sustained increase in population, in contrast to the situation in many central and western areas where yields were lower and periodic harvest failures tended to check demographic expansion. Indeed, a comparison of population densities at the time of Domesday with the pattern of arable land use mapped in the 1940s by the Land Utilisation Survey shows a remarkably close correlation (Fig. 4).

It might be thought that we would be on safer ground arguing that variations in tenurial organisation was the key factor in the emergence of regional differences, for Suffolk and Norfolk were, after all, the most notoriously ‘free’ areas in medieval England, and at the time of Domesday were characterised by a high density of multi-manorial villis and, in particular, a high density of freemen and sokemen. But these circumstances – again, almost certainly the consequence of a climate ideal for cultivating cereals (reliable harvests retarded the decline of free peasants into debt) – were also shared with ‘champion’ Lincolnshire (Fig. 4), while, more importantly, southern parts of East Anglia – Essex and east Hertfordshire – were often highly manorialised. Indeed, by the thirteenth century many of the villis in these districts were characterised by manors with particularly large demesnes, of 300 or more sown acres, which were heavily dependent on labour services.²⁹

Areas like Hertfordshire or Essex are often seen by historians as districts of ‘late settlement’ because Domesday records substantial quantities of woodland within them.³⁰ But large areas of woodland did not, evidently, preclude the existence in these same areas of populations as dense as those in champion Midland counties, where woodland had often been completely cleared by the time of the Conquest. Indeed, what is particularly intriguing is that the variations in population density recorded by Domesday, and which were maintained throughout the medieval period, appear to have been very poorly correlated with the extent of arable on the one hand, and of woodland and pasture on the other. Northern East Anglia thus retained vast areas of unploughed common land into the eighteenth century, but was nevertheless always a more densely populated district than, say, Northamptonshire, where ploughlands generally extended without interruption to the very boundaries of villis. A high proportion of arable land did not, in other words, necessarily mean a dense population.³¹

If neither demographic factors nor tenurial ones are sufficient to explain the broad regional variations in landscape and settlement with which we are here concerned, it seems reasonable to seek answers elsewhere – in the natural environment, and in the various farming systems this engendered. Modern historians have neglected such mundane factors, but some earlier researchers saw them as crucial in moulding the medieval landscape and, in particular, in the genesis of open fields. Frederick Seebohm in his *English Village Community* of 1890 thus

²⁹ B.M.S. Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture, 1250–1450* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 86.

³⁰ A view repeated from W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London, 1955), pp. 86–94; to Roberts and Wrathmell, ‘Peoples of Wood and Plain’ (2000).

³¹ For a fuller discussion of this point see Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes*, pp. 52–61.