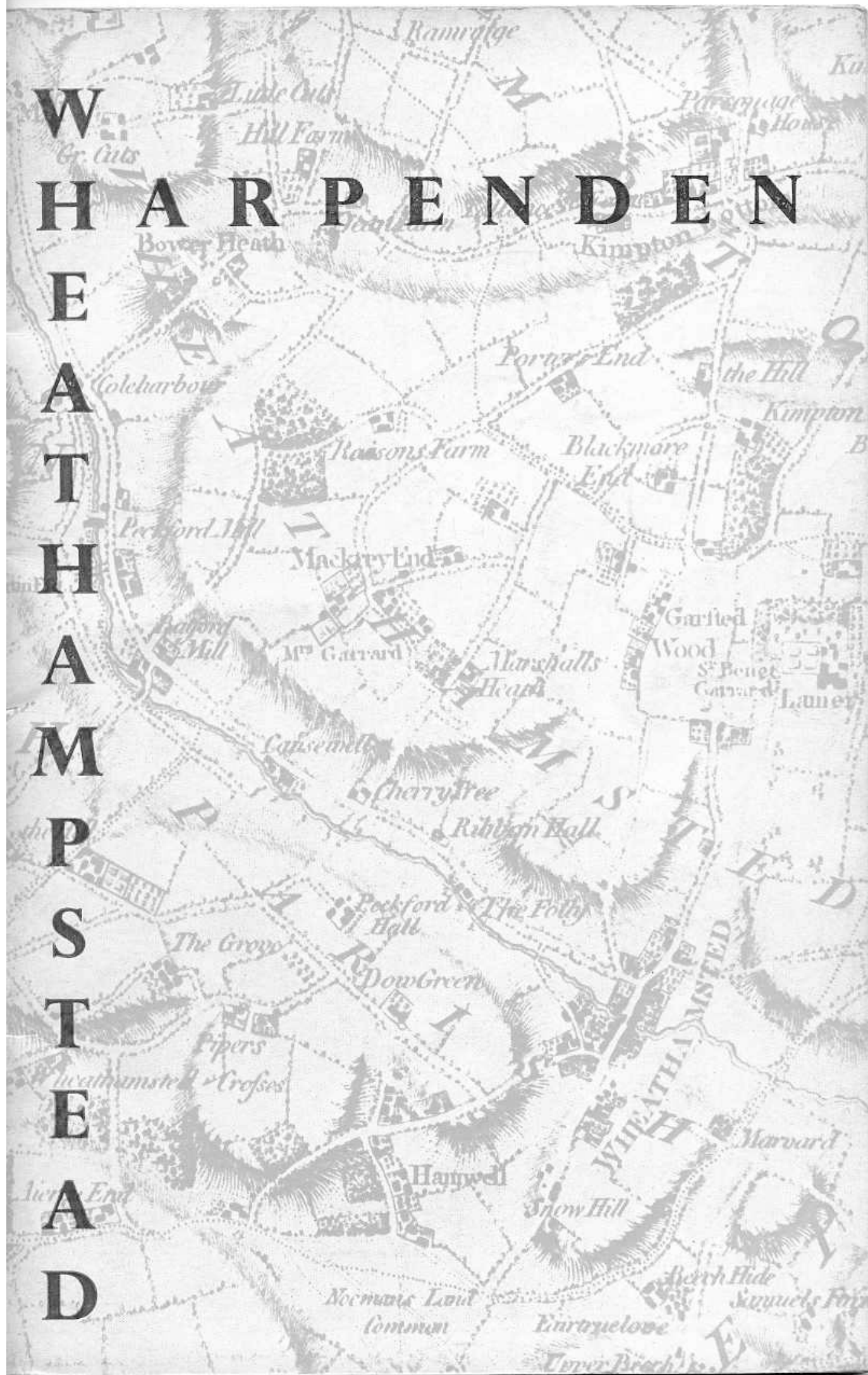


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WHEATHAMPSTEAD and HARPENDEN

I

The Settlement of
Wheathampstead and Harpenden

1973

HARPENDEN and ST. ALBANS Branches
of the WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION

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Introduction

A correspondent in *Hertfordshire Countryside* No. 74 asked: 'Is there any history of Wheathampstead . . . in preparation?' The introduction to *The Story of Harpenden*, published about twenty years ago, opened with the statement that 'there ought to be a full length book on Harpenden'. It is our hope that this booklet and its successors will meet both these needs. Wheathampstead and Harpenden may seem two different places to many of their present residents, but for much of their history they have been closely intertwined and indeed were one ecclesiastical parish until 1859. It is appropriate that the history of the two parishes should be told together.

This has become possible because two groups of local residents who have been studying local history have joined together. From 1969 to 1973 the St. Albans branch of the Workers' Educational Association organised a tutorial class which studied Wheathampstead. In 1970 the Harpenden branch of the W.E.A. organised a similar class to study Harpenden. Both these classes have been under the auspices of the University of Cambridge Board of Extramural Studies and taken by Lionel M. Munby, who was the tutor of a similar class which produced *The Story of Harpenden*. Tony Baggs acted as tutor when the two classes were studying local buildings.

The intention of this first booklet is to open the reader's eyes to the history which is to be found locally in the landscape of the two parishes, to explain some local names, and to tell the story of man's first settlements here. It ends with a sketch of local society in the middle ages. The next booklet will describe the many changes which occurred locally in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and introduce the reader to individual personalities and local families. Thereafter several booklets will carry forward the themes of the first two publications to our own day, while others will deal with particular aspects of our society such as the churches and chapels, the development of local government, and the history of local schools. Since, with the help of Tony Baggs and the cooperation of their owners, we have made special studies of old houses in both parishes, we hope to publish a booklet on local buildings. When all the booklets are published it will be possible to read them as one book, presenting a coherent history of the two parishes.

The text of this first instalment has been written by Lionel Munby but it has been carefully considered by the active members of both classes, whose names are given below. Many other people have taken some part in one or other of the two classes. Naturally some people have contributed more than others to particular parts of our work. As far as the present booklet is concerned we owe the

study of the boundary to Ian Freeman; the local geography has been unravelled by Eileen Haines; Roman sites have been located and interpreted by Eric Humphries; and Paul Barton, Mary A. Coburn, and M. Tomkins have all provided important information and ideas. R. A. Staines has drawn the plans.

Our thanks are due to the Harpenden and St. Albans branches of the W.E.A., to members of both classes, and to others without whose financial help this publication would be impossible. We are grateful to the County Archivist and the staff of the County Record Office at Hertford, to the staff of the Public Record Office, to the Keeper of the Muniments at Westminster Abbey and his staff, to the Clerk of Harpenden U.D.C., to the rectors of Harpenden and Wheathampstead, and to many private individuals for making documents available to us, for letting us explore buildings, and for giving us the benefit of their knowledge and experience.

Margaret Back	Nora Freeman	Margaret Pankhurst
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P. A. Blunt	Eileen Haines	Una Richards
Eric Brandreth	Jane Harris	Rosemary Ross
John Carpenter	J. Harrod	Karen Saffery
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Elisabeth Field	Margaret G. Jones	M. Tomkins
John L. R. Fisher	Edmund Knight	Mary Wilson
Kathleen Foreman	G. P. McSweeney	Pat Wilson
Ian Freeman	Hazel MacVitie	

References in square brackets are to the source of the quotation. Original documents are referred to by the letters and numbers under which they are listed in the Hertfordshire Record Office. The Victoria County History of the County of Hertford, from which we have obtained much of our information about the middle ages, is referred to as V.C.H. There is a chronological table in the appendix.

I

THE SETTLEMENT OF WHEATHAMPSTEAD AND HARPENDEN

Wheathampstead and Harpenden today are two separate places, two different kinds of communities, separate Anglican parishes, and will stay under separate local government authorities until 1974. But this has not always been so: before 1859 they were in one ecclesiastical parish; at the time of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 the whole area was one estate belonging to Westminster Abbey. To find out how two different communities have emerged and to appreciate the true nature of their differences, we must go back to their common beginning. In doing this we shall find that there were and still are more similarities between the two places than might be apparent at first sight. History lurks just below the surface: the appearance of a village, its street pattern and its field shapes, and many of the names of places in the neighbourhood are the products of centuries of human activity.

The best place to begin our story is in the middle, at that moment in time when 'hwaethamstede' and 'herpedene', as they were then spelt, are first mentioned in a surviving document and, moreover, a document which describes in great detail their boundary. This is an eleventh century deed, in which Edward the Confessor granted an estate to Westminster, his favourite abbey. The document is dated 1060, six years before William the Conqueror's victory at Hastings. In it King Edward describes 'a holy piece of the countryside, which consists of ten hides of land held in common in a place which the local inhabitants call in their own speech "hwaethamstede" '; belonging to it were 'fields, meadows, pastures and thickets of woods'. The whole was granted to Westminster Abbey in perpetuity, free of all burdens of public service and tax payments. The document ended with the bounds of Wheathampstead, which were given in Old English and described in sections, with identifiable landmarks at the beginning and end of each stretch. Before examining this in detail we should explain that a hide was about 120 acres of land and that it is particularly significant that the ten hides, some 1,200 acres, were described as in common ownership at such an early date. While the estate was still heavily wooded, there had been by 1060 substantial woodland clearance and a prospering farming community was in existence.

What were the bounds of this community? The first attempt to identify them was made by the authors of *The Place-Names of Hertfordshire*, published in 1938 [pp. 54-55]. They used a fourteenth century copy of Edward the Confessor's Charter. Since they wrote, what seems to be the original has been discovered at Rothamsted; it is now in the Hertfordshire Record Office [D/ELW Z224] and this is

the text which we have used (see Plate 1). The authors of *Place Names* were correct in their identification of the first five points, Marford, the Devil's Dyke, a valley, the deer's clearing, and a long hedge. But then they were led completely astray, probably by their false identification of 'herpedene' with the A6 between Harpenden and St. Albans.

In attempting to reconstruct the estate boundary, we have been helped by a seventeenth century document which describes in great detail 'The Bowndes and preambulation of the parishe of Harpenden' (see Fig. 1); these were recorded in the early seventeenth century and preserved in the Wittewronge Papers [D/ELW Z3]. The description covers the south-west, west, and north-west boundary of the old joint parish of Wheathampstead and Harpenden. The Harpenden Tithe Award Map of 1843 shows the same boundary as was described in 1650. The Wheathampstead Tithe Award Map of 1840 shows the old parish boundary on the north, east and south-east. In 1935 local boundaries were altered; the present boundaries of the Harpenden U.D.C. and of Wheathampstead Parish are identical with the old joint parish boundary on the north and south, but not on the east and west (see Fig. 2). In reconstructing the Saxon boundary we have made use of these old boundaries, explored a great deal of the boundary on foot, and had the benefit of a visit by and discussion with Professor H. P. R. Finberg, and the advice of Mrs. Margaret Gelling, both of whom are experts in

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Fig. 1 The last part of the seventeenth century perambulation of the bounds of Harpenden parish. Transcribed in Appendix One B.

the study of Anglo-Saxon boundary charters. It will be noticed in what follows that for a great deal of the distance the present parish boundaries are the same as those of the estate granted to Westminster Abbey. This is one indication of how old are our two parishes.

There are some uncertainties in the journey along our boundary which follows. It is a voyage of exploration in the imagination, on the map and on the ground, on which we want to take you. It is one which you can make for yourself and in making it you can test our interpretations and put forward your own. Map references are given and they can best be followed on the Ordnance Survey 2½ inches to 1 mile Sheets TL 01, TL 11 and TL 21. Fig. 2 shows as many of the points described as is practicable. In our description we refer to the boundary in 1060 as the estate boundary; to the parish as described in the early seventeenth century and shown in nineteenth century maps as the pre-1935 boundary; and to the local government boundaries as they were in 1973 as the present boundary. We follow the Old English charter from point to point; it begins at Marford:

The Boundary of Westminster Abbey's Estate

1. FROM 'MAERFORDE' TO THE 'HEADIC'

Marford (186141) is the first and the last point of the estate boundary. The old ford may have been slightly to the east of the present one; there is physical evidence for a ford down-stream, where the Roman road (221)* crossed the River Lea. The pre-1935 boundary ran south from the present ford and passed just to the east of the Headic, now called the Devil's Dyke.

2. FROM THE HEADIC ALONG THE VALLEY INTO THE DEER'S CLEARING

The valley is the depression along which Dyke Lane runs. The estate boundary was NOT on either of the ridges, but in the bottom. Nomansland was the deer's clearing. Perhaps this was the beginning of this piece of common waste, so often disputed between St. Albans and Westminster Abbeys. The present boundary runs parallel with Dyke Lane and to its east, and then across Nomansland.

3. FROM THE DEER'S CLEARING TO THE LONG HEDGE.

A long hedge can still be seen running south-west from the end of the cart track opposite Westend Farm. The present boundary runs along it, joining it at 161122, north of Round Wood. This hedge is on the line of a Roman road (210), which the Viatores point out must have been 'out of use' by the time of Edward the Confessors's grant and 'already only a field boundary'. [p. 75].

* Local Roman roads have been numbered by The Viatores in their book, *Roman Roads in the South-East Midlands*, according to a system put forward by Ivan Margary (see Fig. 3 p. 16).

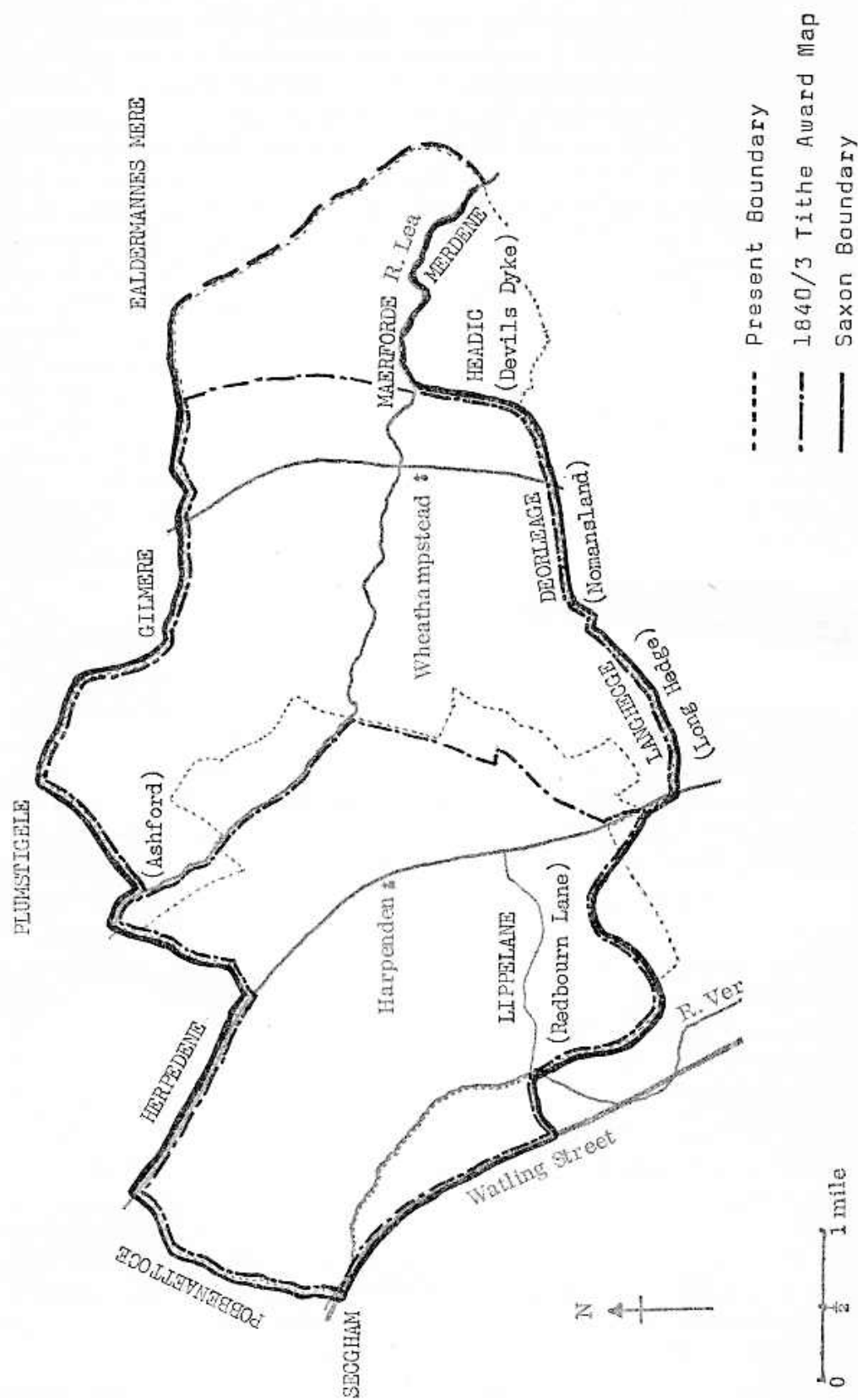


Fig. 2 Parish Boundaries

4. THE LONG HEDGE THAT COMETH TO 'LIPPELANE'

The authors of *The Place-Names of Hertfordshire* argued that the long hedge of the estate boundary ended north of Pismire Spring, at 153115, and that 'lippelane is probably the old track which comes up from Sandridge in a north-westerly direction to join Ayre's End road' [p. 55]. There are two good reasons for rejecting this view; lippe probably comes from an Old English word *lippa* meaning a lip, which could be used of a steep slope; and the Sandridge track curves downhill past Pismire Spring. Secondly, the long hedge can be followed much further across country to where it ends in a lane with a really steep slope, 113128.

The present hedgeline and the old Roman road diverge opposite Well Wood at 155116; the road continued south-west, the hedge curves to the west. The Sandridge track, and then a railway cutting, cross the hedge which continues almost to the modern A6. This hedge is the present boundary. It is surely significant that between the railway line and A6 the hedge bifurcates at 148112 where the parishes of Wheathampstead, Sandridge and St. Michael's meet, and the southern branch marks the Sandridge—St. Michael's boundary.

Across A6, some 200 metres (220 yards) to the north-west at a layby, 141115, the continuation of the long hedge can be picked up. It can be followed clearly on an air photograph taken in 1947 (Plate 2) and, except where modern housing development at Beesonend has removed it, the hedge can still be seen. It sweeps in a series of S bends to end where the road from Hatching Green to Redbourn is crossed by a railway bridge, just east of the river Ver. This is a far better 'lippelane' than the Sandridge-Ayre's End track. Just by the railway bridge where the present hedge ends, 113128, the road is really steep — 1 in 9.

Between A6 and this road the hedge marks the pre-1935 parish boundary. The seventeenth century perambulation describes the boundary here field by field and it is clearly identifiable as that marked by the long hedge. It was described as 'cominge downe to a laune called green laune' and as 'devided by Moundes' on the west. The hedgebank can still be clearly seen on the western side of the hedge from 120115 to the hedge's end in 'green lane', our candidate for lippelane, now known as Redbourn Lane.

5. FROM THE STEEP LANE TO 'SECGHAM'

Secg means sedge, reed or rush. Secgham means river meadow where sedge grows. The perambulation leaves no doubt that secgham was near Friars Wash, 090148, at a ford where Watling Street and the river Ver meet. The perambulation describes the boundary as taking in half Watling Street 'unto an Ashe Tree called Segam ashe—then turninge towards the easte—tackinge in a laune called segame laune'. The ford marked by the sedge and later by an ash was an important public meeting place. The *Victoria County History* pointed

out that the sheriff's tourn was held at 'Segham Assh' and suggested that the Hundred court of Dacorum Hundred may have met there. The Hundred was a sub-division of the county, a medieval local government unit which combined functions like those of a District Council with those of Petty Sessions. It met regularly; the Sheriff, who administered the Shire, had several deputies who normally presided over Hundred Courts. From time to time, however, the Sheriff himself took charge; this was the Sheriff's tourn. The area around Friars Wash is physically very similar to the meeting place of Broadwater Hundred, just north of the Roebuck Inn on the old A1. They are both open flat areas where a main road is close to water. The present boundary between Redbourn Lane and Friars Wash is on the river Ver; the pre-1935 boundary was Watling Street. We cannot be certain which was the Anglo-Saxon estate boundary, but Watling Street is the most likely. As the authors of *The Place-Names of Hertfordshire* comment, it may seem 'strange (that) no mention is made (in the Anglo-Saxon deed) of Watling Street' [p. 55], but Professor Finberg assures us that such an omission of the most obvious feature is not uncommon.

6. FROM THE RIVER MEADOW WHERE THE SEDGE GROWS TO 'POBBENAETTOCE' OR 'BOBBENAETTOCE'

It is impossible to understand the meaning of 'pobbenaeettoce' or to locate it precisely. A fourteenth century copy of Edward the Confessor's grant has 'pollenaestoece' which is not much more intelligible. However, the seventeenth century boundary was described as continuing up Segame Lane, which is now known as Watery Lane, passing several fields until it came to a lane leading from 'Pepsalleand' to Annables, and as crossing the lane into a close called 'Popletts'. Popletts may be the fields called Little Poplars and Long Poplars in the Harpenden Tithe Map, and Long Popnalls in the Flamstead Tithe Map. Poplars Farm is in this area. The perambulation description fits the present boundary. Whether this was the Saxon estate boundary too we cannot say. Pepperstock in Flamstead parish, on the county boundary with Bedfordshire, is the local name most close to 'pobbenaeettoce'. Perhaps it is more than a coincidence that in the area in which this problem boundary marker must have been sited there is evidence for so many later, similar sounding names: Pepperstock, Pepsal End (Peppeshull in 1258), Poplars and Popnalls.

7. FROM 'BOBBENAETTOCE' TO 'HERPEDENE'

Dene means valley; herpe probably comes from a word meaning military road or highway. This is the source of Harpenden's name. The authors of *The Place-Names of Hertfordshire* correctly argued that this 'point is clearly the spot where the boundary crosses the valley which gives its name to Harpenden' [p. 55], but they identified this valley as one to the south of Harpenden, which is impossible.

Not only would this throw out the identification of almost all the other points on the Anglo-Saxon estate boundary, but A6 to the south does not run through a valley, nor is it on the line of a Roman road. Between Harpenden and Luton, A6 follows a Roman road (213) and this runs along the bottom of the beginning of the dry valley in which Harpenden stands. The present boundary meets A6 at 099169; the ground here falls about twenty-four metres in less than 1000 (85 feet in 3300) down to the A6 and rises thirty in about 500 metres (100 feet in 1650) on the other side. The herpedene of the Saxon estate boundary was surely here. Mrs. Gelling has identified the valley referred to as the one between Luton and Harpenden, but assumes that the Old English word 'hearpe' meaning harp, was used. However, she found it 'very difficult to say why . . . harp should have been used to describe' the valley. [*The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain* compiled by Margaret Gelling and others, p. 104]. We have followed *The Place-Names of Hertfordshire* in rejecting the harp interpretation.

8. FROM THE VALLEY OF THE HIGHWAY TO THE ASH AT THE FORD

The ash at the ford had become 'Ashford Bridge' by the seventeenth century, 'Ashbridge' on Dury and Andrews large-scale county map of 1766, where it is shown as the bridge across the Lea, just south of East Hyde, 128172. The hedge on the west side of the road from the bridge to the lower Luton road (B653) contained several ash saplings in 1973.

The present boundary follows A6 to 122157, the bottom of Thrales End Lane, and then turns northwards across country to Ashford Bridge. The perambulation describes this section of the boundary as following the highway leading from Luton to Harpenden 'unto a place called shearemare and so leavinge the sayd highwaie'. The bottom of Thrales End Lane is the southern-most point of Bedfordshire, where a mere, a boundary mark for the county or shire, might well have been placed. The area is still known locally as Shire Mere, pronounced 'sheer mare'.

9. FROM THE ASH AT THE FORD TO 'PLUMSTIGELE' (the stile, or possibly the steep ascent, marked by plumtrees).

The ground rises steeply on the northern side of the Lea valley. The Saxon estate boundary must have turned uphill, but exactly where we cannot tell. Neither a stile nor an area of plumtrees can be precisely identified; wild plums or bullaces (*prunus domestica*) are not found in the neighbourhood today, but wild cherry (*prunus avium*) abounds. However Great and Little Plummers farms in Kimpton parish just beyond the north-west corner of Wheathampstead parish are said to get their name from a 'pool (mere in Old English)

by the plum-tree' [*Place-Names*, p. 16]. From Ashford Bridge the perambulation turns 'by the Rever eastward unto a Mylle called hydd Mylle'. This is also the present boundary. At Hyde Mill Wheathampstead and Harpenden parishes met before the 1935 boundary changes. From this point the perambulation follows the pre-1935 boundary between Harpenden and Wheathampstead, while the present Wheathampstead boundary, like the pre-1935 one, turns uphill, through East Hyde Park, past Great and Little Cutts Farms, to turn again south-eastwards just south of Great Plummers Farm.

10. FROM 'PLUMSTIGELE' TO THE HOLLOW TREE

It could hardly be expected that a hollow tree in 1060 would be identified in 1973! But Holcroft's Spring, between Batford and Raisins Farm, and Raisins itself, *may* represent continuations of the name in the area. Spring is the Middle English word for a copse or young plantation; a croft is an enclosed field; and *hol* or *holh* are Old English words for a hole or hollow. Holcroft's Spring today is a field cleared from the northern part of Sauncy Wood and the fields to its north, between it and Whitepightle Wood, 154168, were called Nether and Hither Holcroft at the time of Wheathampstead's Tithe Award.

The present boundary changes direction at 145182, running south-east past Bishey Wood to 156176 where it turns southwards past Raisins Farm to Raisins Cottages, 159167. This was the pre-1935 boundary and it may also have been the Anglo-Saxon estate boundary, but it seems more likely that the estate boundary is marked by a surviving long chain of hedgerows which are a little to the south and, in fact, form the northern edge of one of the Holcroft fields. It would appear that there was once a continuous wood joining Sauncy Wood and Whitepightle Wood, and that this was the original Hollow Tree Wood. The hedgeline, in fact, follows the county boundary beyond Chiltern Green, dividing Kimpton from East Hyde. Its antiquity is further suggested by the fact that existing lanes are distorted out of line where they meet and cross it.

If we accept this hedge-line as marking the northern boundary of the estate granted to Westminster in 1060, it would begin at 143179. The line then runs south-south-east along a lane to B652 which makes two right angle bends where the hedge-line crosses it. In fact, the road and the hedge-line coincide for about 200 metres (220 yards); the road then turns south-west, while the hedge continues south-east to join another minor road for a short stretch, turning eastwards through Whitepightle Wood to Raisins Farm. The name of this farm *may*, itself, contain an echo from the Anglo-Saxon boundary mark, the hollow tree (*hole beame*). For there was an Anglo-Saxon word, *raesn*, meaning a plank or beam, from which Raisins, locally pronounced as reason, may come.

11. FROM THE HOLLOW TREE TO THE 'GILMERE'

The significant element is mere, a pool. Gil cannot be explained for certain, but it probably comes from an Old English word *gyll* which means deep, narrow valley, but is related to two old German words; *gülle* meaning a pool, and *gole* meaning a swamp. Blackmore End, 171166, is on the present boundary and by the old hedge-line, which in fact coincide for about two miles, from Raisins Cottages to the east. Blackmore commemorates in its name a black pool; there are two dried up pools at 174164, in the triangle formed by B651, the road from Gustardwood to Blackmore End, and the present boundary. This would seem to be the area of gilmere; perhaps one pool had a muddy bottom and became known as the black pool.

12. FROM THE GIL POOL TO THE ALDERMAN'S POOL

There is a pond by the parish boundary and the hedge-line, near Harepark Spring, 191165. This is where Ayot, Kimpton, Sandridge and Wheathampstead parishes meet, but more than this all four parishes were in different Hundreds. A meeting place of four Hundreds could well have been marked by the county alderman.

13. FROM THE ALDERMAN'S POOL INTO 'MERDENE' (the boundary valley) AND SO INTO 'MAERFORDE'.

This is the most difficult part of the estate boundary to reconstruct. There are several contenders for the boundary valley. The pre-1935 boundary turns directly south at 186166, 500 metres (547 yards) to the west of Harepark Spring, passing to the west of Bride Hall, to join the Lea at Marford. Where it crosses the Wheathampstead to Codicote road, at 188149, the road dips sharply. From here the pre-1935 boundary is in a slight valley; it joins an old track on the route of a Roman road (221) for the last 500 metres before the ford. The ground falls forty-five metres (150 feet) from the highest point to the ford. Whether this boundary could have been described in 1060 as passing through a valley is arguable. According to the authors of *Historic Sandridge* 'the St. Albans Abbey records of the fifteenth century confirm' the boundary as shown on the tithe map. So this is an old boundary. There is, however, a more clearly marked valley running south along the edge of Lamer Wood from 178165 which turns south-east to Lamer Home Farm and continues to the ford. Most of this is marked out by footpaths or tracks.

The hedge-line which marks the entire northern boundary of the estate does NOT turn southwards, but continues eastwards, turning south-eastwards near Shaw's Corner to curve in to meet the Lea south-east of Waterend. In fact, the present boundary is much closer to this hedge-line than the pre-1935 one was, which is not surprising because geographically this area belongs to Wheathampstead rather than Sandridge, to which it used to be joined

only by a narrow strip of land at Coleman Green. The area between the hedge-line and the pre-1935, eastern parish boundary of Wheathampstead was the territory of Bride Hall Manor, which the *Victoria County History* points out 'was held as of the manor of Sandridge', an old estate of St. Albans Abbey [Vol. 2, p. 434]. According to the *Gesta Abbatum*, this land had been given to the abbey by Thurflada, and the grant confirmed by Henry II and by John [Rolls Series Vol. 28, p. 507]. If Edward the Confessor had included the area of Bride Hall in his grant to Westminster, the estate boundary could have been that of the hedge-line and the boundary valley would then be the Lea river valley itself, and this would make sense of 'and so into Maerforde'. It is, however, difficult to believe that the loss of Westminster property to St. Albans would not have left some record. In any case, the boundary circle was complete, ending at Marford where it began, and with the single exception of this last section it has proved possible to discover where it was.

The Local Geography

What kind of place was it that Edward the Confessor gave to Westminster Abbey in 1060 A.D.? The parishes of Wheathampstead and Harpenden lie on the dip-slope of the Chilterns and at their north-eastern end. A little further eastwards, the Chilterns get smaller and are known as the East Anglian Heights. The Chilterns form a plateau which dips gently towards the south-east at an angle of about seven degrees; this plateau is dissected by many magnificent long valleys, most of which run in a north-west to south-east direction. There are three such long and wide valleys which have determined the geography of our area: to the west, the Ver valley has been used, at least since Roman times, as a route through the Chilterns using the gap at Dunstable; the modern boundary between Harpenden and Redbourn runs along the Ver. To the east, the Lea valley provides another easy route through the water gap in the Chiltern escarpment at Luton; the Lea was the pre-1935 boundary between Harpenden and Wheathampstead for about one third of its length; and the Lea valley has been used in part by two railways. Between the Ver and the Lea lies the dry valley in which Harpenden stands; there is no well defined gap through the Chilterns at its northern end which could encourage the development of a through route. The Ver enters the pre-1935 parish at about 110 metres (350 feet) above sea level, near Friars Wash, and leaves it at about 95 metres (310 feet) where it is crossed by Redbourn Lane. It is a very small stream and its flow is enlarged by the treated sewage of Flamstead and Markyate. The Lea enters the parish near Hyde Mill at about 110 metres (350 feet) and leaves it near Marford at 76 metres (250 feet).

The flow of the Lea, too, is largely due to the effluent from Luton's sewage works, which are half a mile from the parish boundary and which add nine and a half million gallons a day to the natural flow of two million gallons. The Harpenden dry valley is about 120 metres (396 feet) above sea level near the Kennels in the north and around 90 metres (300 feet) at Nomansland in the south-east. On both sides of each of these three valleys, the plateau rises to more than 122 metres (400 feet) above sea level; at one point only, near Lady Bray, earlier Poplars Farm, the ground rises to 152 metres (500 feet) above sea level. The greater part of the two parishes is undulating or hilly and near to 122 metres (400 feet) above sea level.

The physical geography of the area is greatly influenced by its geology. Although the underlying rock is chalk, hundreds of feet deep, little of it can be seen, except on some valley sides, since it is hidden by a thick covering of later deposits; these are of clay with flints, sometimes associated with pebbly clay and sand such as can be found to the north of Harpenden. These deposits are of importance: they have influenced the local soils, and so the land-use and the scenery; the vegetation, at the climax of its natural development, was deciduous forest, and the soils provide good farmland. Where the clays are fairly stone-free old brick pits may often be discovered. Along the three valleys there occur river gravels much worked in the past; they are believed to be the result of weathering in the tundra-like conditions of the Ice Ages. A large area of such gravel at Nomansland is thought to indicate the position of a glacial lake which overflowed at one time down Devil's Dyke.

This geography has had a considerable influence on the development of the area. The river valleys provided access routes for early settlers, who cleared the ground between the two rivers and exploited the possibilities of the dry valley. The nature of the surface soil and the subsoil influenced where early peoples settled and how they and their successors farmed. We have seen that Harpenden got its name from the dry valley in which it lies. Wheathampstead, it is stated by the authors of *The Place-Names of Hertfordshire*, means wheat homestead [p. 55], but is this reasonable? It does not seem logical that the name given to an early settlement should be that of a crop which was grown everywhere and for which the locality could not have acquired a special reputation until the settlement had been in existence for a considerable time. Cussans was his usual forceful self on the subject: 'Wheat has no more to do with Wheathampstead than has Maize or Mangold Wurzel' [J. E. Cussans, *History of Hertfordshire*, Hundred of Dacorum, Vol. III p. 325]; he means, of course, with the name Wheathampstead. The older explanation of the name, the wet homestead, fits both the nature of the early settlement by the river with its water meadows, and also the traditional local pronunciation of the name as Whet rather than Wheat.

Both the Lea and the Ver valleys were made use of by the earliest settlers in the neighbourhood of whom we have definite evidence. Before men came here almost all the area, except for the gravel, sand and alluvial deposits along the river valley, must have been heavily wooded, dense oak forest with thorn undergrowth and with marshes wherever there were springs or streams. Many of these have left evidence of their importance in local place names. For example, Amwell, *hamm wielle* in Anglo-Saxon, was the spring by the enclosed or cleared plot; while Castle (earlier Causewell) Farm was *caerse wielle*, the cress spring. Prof. E. J. Salisbury, a distinguished botanist and a Hertfordshire resident, has stated that 'there used to be a spring by the roadside' at Amwell 'in wet weather' and that Causewell Farm was 'formerly famous for its extensive watercress beds and crayfish parties'. [*Place-names* p. 56]. One corner of Broadbalk Field on Rothamsted Experimental Station's farm has been left undisturbed since 1882. It is reverting to the kind of dense woodland which once covered much of Hertfordshire. This must have been unattractive to early settlers who were few in numbers and had plenty of space to choose from.

There is a field called Wheelers on the north-west boundary of Harpenden parish; the Anglo-Saxon word *hweol*, from which it probably comes, means a wheel and it has been suggested that in this context it could mean a henge, i.e. a circle of stone or wood. Only if air photography or excavation produced corroborative evidence, however, could we build much on this name. Antlers used as tools have been found in the alluvial soil at Batford, a few flints from the Old Stone Age in the Lea valley and in the gravel of Nomansland Common, and New Stone Age flints somewhere in Wheathampstead, which tell us no more than that hunters passed this way thousands of years ago. But once people came to settle, the valleys became all important.

The Valleys and the Early Settlers

Sometime after 100 B.C., a sophisticated group of invaders from the continent moved up the rivers Thames and Lea. They came from the area which is today Belgium. These Belgae made the first permanent settlements in the area. Presumably the Lea offered itself as the first tributary on the north of the Thames and the invaders followed it to its source. They penetrated as far as the line of the Chilterns and the East Anglian Heights, where they took over the settlements and the fortifications of earlier Iron Age invaders, who had entered the area, coming from the east along the chalk watershed.

By using the Lea, the Belgae came right into the area that was to become Wheathampstead and Harpenden. The most obvious evidence for their arrival is in the Devil's Dyke, through which Sir Mortimer Wheeler cut a trench in the 1930s. He commented that

'it is the work of men with wealth, power, arrogance; but it is the work also of men who were still, for one reason or another, uneasy in their adopted land'. [*Antiquity* Vol. 7, 1933 pp. 21-35. 'Belgic Cities of Britain' by R. E. M. Wheeler, p. 30]. The view which Wheeler held was that the Devil's Dyke was one part of the earthwork fortification of a great oval fort, the opposite side of which was represented by the Slad. The oval shape, to the south, is outlined by lanes and roads which run through Lower Beech-hyde Farm. But there is no indication of how the oval might have been closed to the north, where the ground slopes down to Marford.

Wheeler identified what he believed to be a fort with the first 'capital' of the territory conquered by the Belgae, the stronghold or *oppidum* which Julius Caesar stormed in 54 B.C. With the article which he wrote in 1933, Wheeler put Wheathampstead in the centre of early British history. Julius Caesar had invaded Britain in 55 B.C. He came back in 54 B.C. to subdue the Belgae, who were helping their cousins resist the Romans in Gaul. Caesar crossed the Thames to find the Belgic king, Cassivellaunus, in his oppidum. These are his words:

'Caesar learnt that he was not far from Cassivellaunus' stronghold* which was protected by forests and marshes, and had been filled with a large number of men and cattle. He marched to the place with his legions, and found that it was of great natural strength and excellently fortified. Nevertheless, he proceeded to assault it on two sides. After a short time, the enemy proved unable to resist the violent attack of the legions, and rushed out of the fortress on another side. A quantity of cattle was found there, and many of the fugitives were captured or killed.' [Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*, trans. by S. A. Handford. Penguin p. 139].

Caesar's description would certainly apply to the Devil's Dyke area if it was a fort. On the northern valley side it could well have been 'protected . . . by marshes'. But recent excavations of the remarkable early Iron Age fort of Ravensburgh Castle in Hexton by Mr. James Dyer have produced much earlier Belgic pottery than Wheeler found at the Devil's Dyke and clear evidence that the fort was 'slighted', that is the ramparts were partly pulled down, on two sides. Mr. Dyer believes that Ravensburgh was Cassivellaunus' stronghold and argues that the Wheathampstead site was never a fort because the Slad is a natural not a man made depression, and that no amount of searching, not even air photography, has produced evidence for the completion of the oval; in effect it is an illusion. However it is difficult for those who have walked along the Slad and the Devil's Dyke to see why the former should not be man made as much as the latter, and the northern end of the oval is

* 'The Britons apply the term "strongholds" (*oppidum*) to densely wooded spots fortified with a rampart and trench, to which they retire in order to escape the attacks of invaders'.

the most likely to have been completely obliterated by cultivation. Only another trial excavation can carry the argument further. But if this was not Cassivellaunus' oppidum, what would the Devil's Dyke be? 'The Belgae' wrote Sir Mortimer, 'were more than riverside villagers. They exploited the rivers, appropriated the fords, used and controlled the river system as part of a scheme of valley and cross-valley highways. This was substantially a new phenomenon in pre-historic Britain'. [*Antiquity* p. 33]. There was an important Belgic settlement in Prae Wood above a ford over the Ver and another at Welwyn by the Mimram. They were joined by a track. Between the Ver and the Lea, this 'cross-valley highway' was impressively fortified. Beech Bottom Dyke has been traced from A6 to the north of Sandridge village. It is conceivable that the Devil's Dyke is only its continuation to the Lea. It is argued that there was a secondary settlement at the Wheathampstead end of the Dyke and that from about 10 B.C. the Prae Wood site was developed. In any case, the Devil's Dyke is a formidable piece of construction to have been undertaken by a few people with fairly primitive tools. They must have had some compelling reason for creating such a defence above Marford.

Wheathampstead's claim to have been the first Belgic 'capital' remains in the balance. Wheeler's excavation of the Devil's Dyke was only an incidental part of his excavations at Verulamium. More modern excavation could well turn up evidence for much earlier Belgic settlement. Until the Slad is trenched, it is not really possible to decide whether it is a natural or man made phenomenon. In any case, it seems, at the very least probable, that somewhere in this neighbourhood there was an important Belgic settlement; whether a fort or not we cannot at the moment of writing say for certain.

From this settlement, Belgic farmers moved up the Lea valley. The most important known local Belgic site is that in the area of the former Great Northern railway station, now being developed as a housing estate. For here was found a beautiful pair of bronze bucket handles of Belgic workmanship, now in Wardown Park museum at Luton. (See Plate 3a). They are designed as rams' heads and look like the property of a wealthy farmer. There was presumably a Belgic farm in the neighbourhood, on the slope overlooking the Lea. Further up the Lea valley, north of the National Children's Home farm, there used to be a wood, Ashen Grove, near the top of the slope looking down on the Lea. In this neighbourhood an area of burnt earth suggests Belgic occupation: as does much smooth and very worn pudding stone, which might be the remains of querns or pestles. On the other side of the valley and considerably further away from the river Lea, 'a hoard of 250 Belgic and Roman coins' was found in 1851 in 'Prior's Wood, some 300 yards (275 metres) west of the road' just inside Ayot St. Lawrence parish [*Roman Roads*, p. 94].

Some Belgic settlers seem to have continued up the river and worked through the woods to the Ver valley, clearing away the trees

to make farms. Two roads, connecting the Ver and the Lea were probably Belgic trackways, straightened and improved by the Romans. One ran from Cold Harbour, east of the Lea, to Bylands on Watling Street, west of the Ver; the other ran from the Lea, up Coles Lane/Dark Lane to the Ver near Redbournbury. The Harpenden section of Roman road 211, which joins the Ver at Friars Wash and the Lea at a ford, may well have been a third local Belgic 'cross-valley highway' before being made up by the Romans. A number of fields on the Rothamsted estate, which would have become accessible from the first of these tracks, had areas of high phosphorus content, which suggests long periods of human occupation. There is no evidence of chemical treatment of these fields by Sir John Lawes. The soil texture is noticeably different and fine soil falls into the furrows. Although no pottery has been found in association with these areas, they may well be early Belgic sites. The track from Cold Harbour to Bylands passes through an area, significantly later called Blackcroft, at its crossing with the Roman road 213. This area has not been examined. The significance of the name is made clear in the Ordnance Survey's *Field Archaeology* handbook which points out that 'many Roman sites have been found in fields called Blacklands or similar names implying a darker tinge of soil. This may be caused by the accumulated dirt of a long occupation, or by the burnt matter after a building has been destroyed by fire'. [H.M.S.O. 1970. p. 9].

Collye Grove, the site of Harpenden's most interesting Roman building (see pp. 19-21), had been occupied by the Belgae before the Roman tomb was built. Little Blakes, another significant 'black' place name, is at the junction of two Roman roads 211 and 213 at Cootersend, and this is only a few fields south of Ashen Grove which we have seen has produced archaeological evidence of Belgic occupation. Another Belgic site was discovered in Crabtree Lane [St. Albans & Herts. *Architectural & Archaeological Society Transactions* 1936-38 p. 306]. There may well be other Belgic settlements concealed under some of the many Roman sites which have not yet been excavated.

Roman Roads

In 43 A.D., about one hundred years after Julius Caesar's invasions and his capture of Cassivellaunus' fortress, the emperor Claudius ordered the invasion and conquest of Britain. For four hundred years southern Britain was Roman. In Hertfordshire, Belgic farms were transformed into Roman villas and new areas cleared from the woodland. A Roman city grew up at Verulamium, below the Belgic site in Prae Wood, and its proximity must have had a great influence on settlement in Wheathampstead and Harpenden. The Romans built a remarkable road system on the basis of the Belgic

track-ways. The local road system radiated from Verulamium. Many of these roads passed through the area which is today Wheathampstead and Harpenden; using these roads the Romans were able to extend the area of Belgic settlement; later the English followed them. The routes of these roads as worked out by the Viatores are shown in Fig 3.

Watling Street, the modern A5 and road No. 1 to the Viatores, was one of the great Roman roads from London which passed through Verulamium. Later English settlers gave it the name of Watling Street; this came from the tribe who took possession of the old Roman site at Verulamium, the *Waeclingas*. It was the pre-1935 parish boundary in the west. A Belgic cross-country track to Welwyn, which began by the Beech Bottom Dyke, became a Roman road (21a). It crossed Sandridge parish, running through Coleman Green to the river Lea at Water End ford. None of this route was in old Wheathampstead parish, although it is in the modern one. Just south of Coleman Green a road forked off to Baldock (221). It ran between the Devil's Dyke and the Slad, along the line of Beech Hyde Lane, to 'the old ford' across the Lea, 'the present ford at Marford being situated seventy yards (sixty-four metres) to the west'. [*Roman Roads* pp. 93 and 95].

Road 211 connected Ermine Street with Watling Street at Friars Wash. It is a ridgeway which followed 'the chalk ridge to the north of the Lea valley. It shows signs of Roman origin in the straightness of its alignments, and changes of direction on hills, and the directness and excellent planning of its course across hilly and rather difficult

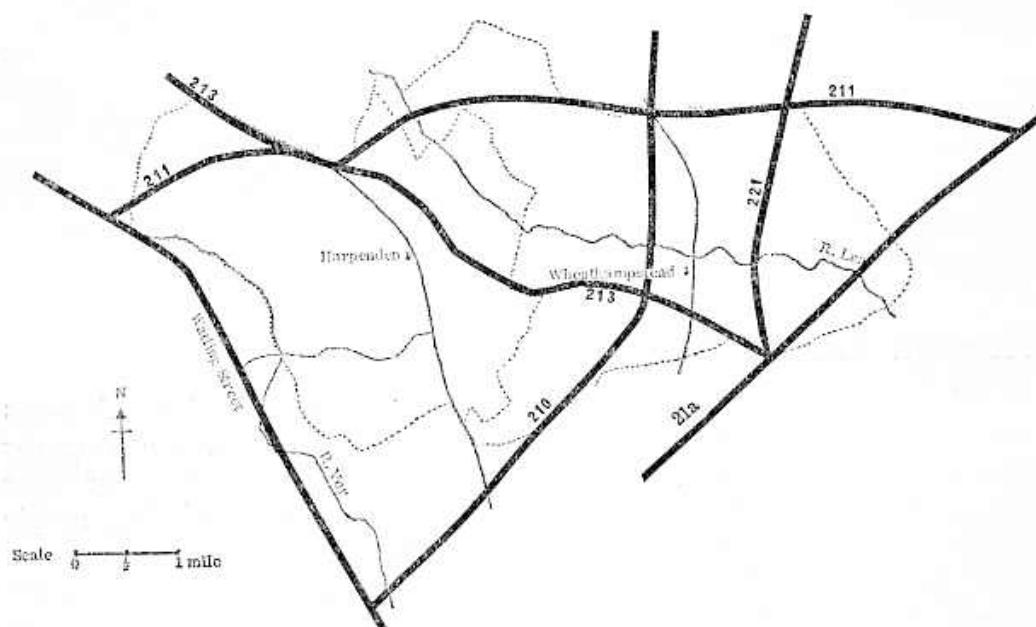


Fig. 3 Roman Roads

country'. Coming from the east, the road entered old Wheathampstead parish passing very close to Bride Hall and crossing 221; it ran in a straight line to the Gustard Wood — Kimpton road just north of the Cross Keys public house. The pre-1935 parish boundary followed the road line between Blackmore End and Raisins Cottages and this road remained in use until 1874. From Raisins the road ran straight to Bower Heath, a name which may imply the existence of an early dwelling, and on to the escarpment over the river Lea. Here the alignment changed to the south-west and the road crossed the river at a ford 'about fifty yards down-river from the Harpenden Water Company's pumping station. Both track and ford were in use within living memory. A cart track, marking the course, ascends the re-entrant on the southern ridge of the valley to Cootersend Lane'. The road continued in a straight line to 'the Herts.-Beds. county boundary, running at first on the line of a former hedgerow' and joined 213 (A6) at the Thrales End Lane junction. Half a mile along A6 to the north at 'the junction with Kinsbourne Green Lane . . . the road leaves the county boundary and Road 213 and turns westwards on the modern road across the green for two-thirds of a mile'. This is in a straight line with the road line from Raisins to the Lea escarpment. 'The divergence along the valley . . . was obviously made to avoid the sharp spur of high ground on which Thrales End Farm is situated'. The Roman road continues well north of Annables, in a straight line to the high ground in the neighbourhood of Long Spring where 'the alignment makes a final turn to south-westwards towards Friar's Wash' [*Roman Roads* pp. 99, 102-3]. The estate which Edward the Confessor granted to Westminster Abbey, the area which became our two parishes, is, in fact, within a box formed by these four Roman roads, 1, 21a, 221 and 211. They carried much further the process which the Belgic settlers had begun, that of opening up the ground between the river valleys.

In fact, three or four further Roman roads ran through the middle of the area. The most important and the most interesting was 213 which connected Cheshunt with Dunstable. It crosses 21a and 221 just north of where they forked. This area south of the Devil's Dyke was an important meeting place of Roman roads. 213 ran along Beech Hyde Lane for a short distance then to Lower Beech Hyde Farm and along a footpath to Wheathampstead Hill and in a straight line to Brewhouse Hill; 'from the summit of Brewhouse Hill a straight length of modern road, with wide verges in parts, known locally as the "Top Road", runs for 600 yards (550 metres) along the west of the ridge to the south of the Lea valley. This "Top Road" is crossed 220 yards (201 metres) west of the top of Brewhouse Hill, by . . . 210, . . . West of Down Green, this ridgeway begins to meander and curves round the southern edge of the Aldwickbury Estate, as far as Piggotshill Lane. Thence a footpath continues the ridgeway across the high ground to Crabtree Lane, by The Granary.

From The Granary a wide, unmade lane, known as Granary Lane, continues the course north-westwards along the summit of the ridge . . . as far as Station Road'. After a gap the route followed the footpath which used to run through the playing fields of St. George's School from Stewart Road. The road ran across the railway and the National Children's Home to Hollybush and Ambrose Lanes to Cootersend, where it turned to join 211 and the present A6 at its junction with Thrales End Lane. 213 (A6) became the parish and county boundary from Thrales End Lane to just south of Gibraltar Farm [*Roman Roads* p. 176].

An unnumbered road has been traced from Watling Street, just south-east of Beaumont Hall, to Baldock. It can be seen as a ridge in fields south and east of Hammondsend (M.R. 120112) and traced along Oakfield Road in the West Common estate, which still has a stretch of old hedgerow. From here it ran across Harpenden Common to Crabtree Lane, crossing 213 near The Granary; the Lea was crossed at Batford. Both Belgic and Roman pottery have been found near the ford. The Roman road passed to the west of Mackerye End, passing out of Wheathampstead on the line of the lane to Raisins Cottages and Porter's End. The crossing of this road and 213 near The Granary was particularly significant. Crabtree Lane was once known as Top Street and The Granary was Upper Top Street Farm. 213 was known locally as the Top Road. There seems to have been an early hamlet, Top Street, by this cross roads. Toppy Street is referred to in 1436.

There was another road from Verulamium (210) which went to the Hitchin neighbourhood. The parish boundary south of Ayre's End runs along this road which is still marked by the long hedge described in the 1060 charter. The Viatores commented on this description: 'it would thus appear that this stretch of the Roman road was out of use by that date, and was already only a field boundary'. [p. 75]. But it was a boundary so clearly defined that it has remained in existence to the present day. The road passed through the buildings of Westend (earlier Bull) Farm; its route to Amwell was along the old road known as Bull Lane. After crossing 213, it turned directly northwards to cross the Lea south of Lea Valley Cottages. 210 then ran uphill to Heron's Farm where it was sectioned in 1961, and passed out of Wheathampstead after crossing the Kimpton road just south east of Blackmore End.

Even the old boundary between Harpenden and Wheathampstead, in one place, ran along what may well have been a Roman road, Marquis Lane. As the seventeenth century perambulation put it, 'and so alonge by the ould Reaver to Battford Bryge footte, then Leavinge the Sayd Rever it goeth alonge a Laune called Streett laun green about one hundred powles, then it goeth up a laune called cowles laun'. It is surely significant that the Lea ceased to be the boundary just here, although the river and the parish run parallel for a little

distance. A Roman road was an even better boundary mark than the course of a shifting and perhaps flooded river. Street is a name which suggests a made road, i.e. for the Anglo-Saxons a metalled Roman road, and the old Street Lane continued into Wheathampstead parish through fields which still show abnormal stoniness.

Roman Sites

The Roman roadbuilders broke away completely from the river valleys. Their roads made possible a greater spread of settlement. There are fewer known or suspected sites in the area of Wheathampstead parish than in Harpenden. But this is probably only because Harpenden has been more thoroughly studied. Even though the roads opened up the hinterland, valley sites could still be desirable ones: a Roman tumulus, or burial mound, was found in Folly Field by the river Lea, between Cold Harbour and Pickford Mill. Cold Harbour is, itself, a name which many people believe to have been frequently given to abandoned Roman buildings, and snail shells of a type associated with Roman occupation have been found in the neighbourhood, as have other Roman objects (see Plate 3b). 'A barrow about fifty feet (fifteen metres) in diameter at the base and twenty

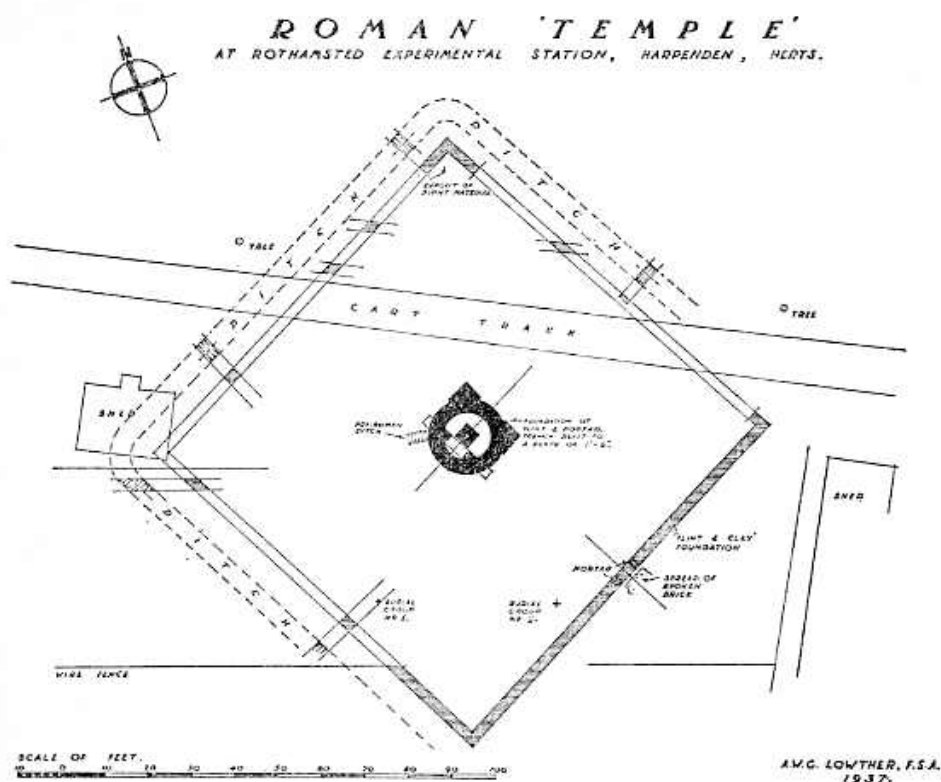


Fig. 4

By Courtesy of the St. Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society.

(six metres) high, . . . was opened in November 1827 or 1829 and was found to contain a rude and massive cist, in the shape of a round box . . . , resting on a rectangular base, . . . the whole being cut out of one block of hard calcareous grit. It was covered by a rectangular lid of the same size as the base, with a circular groove in the centre to fit on to the box. Within this had been deposited a square pale green glass bottle with reeded handle'. [V.C.H. Vol. IV, p. 153]. The sarcophagus was deposited in the British Museum.

A most important site, a Roman villa or farm, was discovered by Eric Humphries near the Ver. He describes it as follows: 'In 1968 when one of the watermeadows on the Ver (see Fig. 3) was ploughed up after what was probably many years of pasture, I found evidence of a very extensive Roman villa with many tesserae, pot sherds, tiles, etc., including some tesserae made of flint suggesting the villa went through a later phase of repairs. A region of dark soil marked a well-used rubbish heap with many oyster shells and animal bones. Since that time I have found minor sites associated with the villa and there is every reason to suppose that a flourishing Roman community lived in this valley. Judging from two coins found, the villa existed in the second century and continued in occupation into the fourth. The villa was probably right on the bank of the Ver for there is evidence from maps that the bed of the river has been moved deliberately within the last 300 years. The fact that the villa was on the river in a very low-lying spot indicates that even in Roman times there was comparatively little danger from flooding and perhaps the river bed was dry at intervals just as today'.

There seems to have been another extensive Roman settlement, well away from the river valleys, just north of Redbourn Lane, between Deacon's Spring and Hatching Green. On the 1623 'plot of the demeanes of the Mannor of Rothamsted', an early estate map, a field in the curve of Redbourn Lane is called Black Croft; evidence for a Roman building, broken pottery, roof and hypocaust tiles, has been found here. The finds in what was once Black Croft Field have been paralleled by similar finds, of roof and hypocaust tiles, on Highfield further east, and in what was called in 1623 Harwood's Field, the ground north of Hatching Green and south of Rothamsted's newest building. A third area of Roman settlement has been found just to the north and west of Collye Grove; Roman pottery was found on Hoos Field, when it was deep ploughed some years ago; and other evidence has come from Great Knott Field just to the south and west. These finds are particularly significant because Collye Grove, as we have mentioned, was the site of a mausoleum or tomb which was excavated in the early 1930s and was shown to date from the second quarter of the second century A.D. (see Fig. 4). A square piece of ground was enclosed by a wall; fragments of a statue suggest that there may have been a central figure on a pedestal. An urn (cremation) burial, three flagons of a screw neck



PLATE 2 Air Photograph of S. W. Harpenden, taken in 1947
Based upon the Ordnance Survey photograph with the sanction of the Controller
of H.M. Stationery Office, Crown Copyright reserved.



3A Belgic Bucket Handles
By Courtesy of the Wardown Park Museum, Luton



3B Roman lamp found in the railway embankment near Cold Harbour, in the possession of Mrs. M. A. Coburn
PLATE 3



PLATE 4 The 'Guildhall' (Bury Farm Cottages) at Bury Green, Wheathampstead.

By Courtesy of Mr. D. Godfrey-Evans and Mr. A. Johnston
Photograph by P. Clarke

type, a Samian dish and other objects were found. Such a memorial suggests that an important Romanised Briton lived somewhere near. 'Two silver coins of Gallienus and Salonina (?Valerian) (A.D. 253-68) and a "third brass" of Postumus (?259-69) were turned up in (Harpenden) churchyard about 1860'. [V.C.H. Vol. IV, p. 153]. Upper Top Street Farm, the Granary, built in 1650, had 'large blocks of stone from an older building, and in the chimney some half-columns and a carved fragment, thought to be Roman. They have been there for the last sixty years', it was claimed in the *Victoria County History*, published in 1914 [Vol. IV p. 153]. Roman bricks were found in its superstructure when it was demolished a few years ago to make way for a new estate, and oyster shells were found on the site. Oysters were eaten in large numbers in Roman times. We have seen that The Granary was at a significant road crossing, and Belgic and Roman pottery was found in Crabtree Lane in 1938 [*Hertfordshire Advertiser*, Aug. 26, 1938].

There have been a number of other Roman finds in the neighbourhood. The onetime owner of 11 Moreton End Lane found various fragments in his garden, one of which was a Roman *mortarium*, an open bowl like a mortar. When extensions were made to Roundwood school recently, some broken Roman pottery and part of a Roman roof tile were found. Surely exploration of Wheathampstead's fields would produce evidence for similar Belgic and Roman sites to those found in Harpenden. Placenames may suggest areas in which to begin looking. Roman tiles have, in fact, been found in Pollards field near Cross Lane. 'A *folles* of Constantius Chlorus (A.D. 296-305) was found in a field at The Dyke Nurseries, close to the line of' Roman road 213 [*Roman Roads* p. 167]. The *folles* was a bronze coin washed with silver introduced by Diocletian in 296; it was large, about twenty-five millimetres (1") in diameter. 'Four coins in the late fourth century were found in a gravel pit south of the Wheathampstead--Codicote road' very near Roman road 221 [pp. 93-5].

The Coming of the English

Some 400 years of Roman rule changed Britain; our own locality was opened up by roads. The woodland on the upland plateau between the valleys was cleared in part, and many settlements made. But Harpenden and Wheathampstead today do not stand on sites chosen by the Belgae and the Romans. It is the Anglo-Saxon invaders, the English, as they became, to whom we owe the beginnings of our modern communities. To appreciate what may have happened, we must not think of the invading Anglo-Saxon army or armies defeating a Roman army and taking over the country quickly. The transformation of Roman Britain, or the major part of it, into England took centuries. To understand what this meant locally, we need to

know that a Romanised area, centred on Verulamium and with the Chilterns at its back, faced very early Anglo-Saxon settlers in the Hitchin area and survived until its defeat in a battle in 571 A.D. The authors of *The Place-Names of Hertfordshire* argued that in the sixth century Hertfordshire was 'a debateable land' in which a Celtic language was being spoken after the Anglo-Saxon occupation had begun. They added that 'The Anglo-Saxon peoples first obtained effective possession of Hertfordshire late in the course of their conquests'. [pp. XVI and XV]. Wheathampstead and Harpenden would have been very much a frontier area and certainly not settled early by the Anglo-Saxons.

What happened in the long period during which Hertfordshire was 'a debateable land'? When they finally reached our area, did the Anglo-Saxons find woodland and waste everywhere, except along the river valleys, or were there earlier settlement sites which they could occupy? Woodland regenerates very quickly in our neighbourhood. The mere existence of Romano-British settlement sites does not mean that they were still farmland when the Anglo-Saxons arrived. There are many local places called Grove; the name comes from an Anglo-Saxon word with the same meaning. The way in which they used this word suggests that the Anglo-Saxons distinguished places so named from woods proper. Could the word grove have been used, sometimes at least, for abandoned settlements overgrown with shrubs and trees? We have seen that Ashen Grove, near Cootersend Lane, has produced evidence of human occupation. Is it not significant that the neighbouring copse, with no such evidence, was called Longlands Wood? Considerable evidence has been found for Roman occupation at several Grove sites. Great and Little Greyfields — grey, in this case, is a corruption of grove — were near The Granary in Crabtree Lane. Dellings Grove was the round wood from which the road and school, where Roman remains have been found, are named. Collye Grove is the site of a Roman mausoleum. Grove Pasture was near the bottom of Moreton End Lane, another area of Roman finds. Black is another place name which suggests not merely Roman occupation of an area, but also that the Anglo-Saxons, who named it, were looking at an abandoned or destroyed site.

The first local Anglo-Saxon settlement was almost certainly at Wheathampstead and this was the nucleus from which came the people who finally cleared the whole area. In 1886 interesting remains of an Anglo-Saxon burial were found in Wheathampstead 'to which the probable date of 628-34 has been attributed' [*The Origins and Forms of Hertfordshire Towns and Villages* by William Page in *Archaeologia* Vol. LXIX 1917. Second Series Vol. 19, published 1920, p. 58]. The V.C.H. reported that 'an Anglo-Saxon glass bowl and a curious Frankish bronze pot of late sixth or early seventh century work were found near Wheathampstead railway station' [Vol. II p.

297]. The siting of the centre of Wheathampstead is most significant. William Page, editor of the Hertfordshire V.C.H., argued that 'the Teutonic immigrants of the sixth and seventh centuries . . . were an agricultural people and chose their settlements and laid them out purely with regard to agricultural convenience. The selection of the site was not made at haphazard. It was essential, of course, that it should be either on a water-bearing stratum or near a stream. The village, with its self-contained community ruled in a patriarchal manner, was placed on high land at a convenient distance, anything from a quarter of a mile to a mile, off a road or river and overlooked its territories which sloped away from it. This position was chosen both for protection and that the village might be in the midst of its territory'. Wheathampstead, he argued, was a typical 'early nucleated settlement off the line of the Roman road from St. Albans to Colchester' [pp. 47-8, 58].

The core of Wheathampstead, between the church and the ford or the tragically destroyed Town Farm and the ford, is an almost perfect example of a site chosen as Page suggests. The church is nearly in the centre of a box made by three Roman roads and the river Lea, and between a quarter of a mile and three-quarters of a mile from the nearest point on each road. The four roads radiating from the cross roads by the Town Farm site lead directly to the Roman roads and to the ford over the Lea. Why this ford rather than Marford was chosen by the Anglo-Saxon settlers we cannot tell. They may have found it a better ford or merely have been keeping away from the Roman road which had replaced the Belgic trackway, for security.

The Anglo-Saxons may have moved away from the Roman roads, but they clearly used them. Even if Roman settlement sites were overgrown when they arrived, most of the Roman roads must still have been sufficiently open to make access into the woodland easier. Many grove sites are near Roman roads. There is other suggestive evidence that early Anglo-Saxon woodland clearing sometimes began from Roman roads. There are fields called Readings or Ridings, which name comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *hryding* meaning a clearing, in the north of Harpenden, just west of Kinsbourne Green. This is on the northern side of Roman road 211. There are other similarly named fields between Harpendenbury Farm and the railway line, just south of the Roman road which was made on the line of the Belgic trackway between Bylands and Cold Harbour. Another field lies just south of Cootersend, in the north-west angle of the crossing of this road and road 213.

There are other names which may have arisen from such settlements, made in the woodland by people using Roman roads for access. Breaches Field — from *braec* which means brushwood or land broken up for cultivation — lies across road 210 in Wheathampstead parish. The Anglo-Saxon word *tūn*, which becomes the

ending -ton, 'originally meant "fence or hedge", then "land enclosed by a fence", and gradually, by a natural process, it came to be used of an enclosure with a building, "a farmstead", and later "a hamlet or village" as well as "an estate or manor".' [*The Origin of English Place-Names* by P. H. Reaney. 1960 p. 138]. There are four such local place names: Barton, Luyton or Leyton, Moreton and Norton. Three of them are near Roman roads; Barton and Norton are on Watling Street, and Moreton End Lane is part of the Bylands-Cold Harbour road. One man who came this way and settled here has left us his name. Cyne was buried near road 211 and Kinsbourne, Kenesberne in its earliest recorded form of 1201, commemorates his burial place or *berne*. Roman roads not only provided easy access routes for the Anglo-Saxon settlers, they had a much longer lasting effect. They continued as access routes, as roads, and they were used as boundaries, as we have seen in following the estate boundary of 1060.

Open Field Farming along the River Valleys

Although the Roman roads made local penetration into the wooded uplands easier for the Anglo-Saxons, they must have used the river valleys from the beginning. The river had much more water in it then and the river banks would not have been heavily forested so making access on foot or horseback as well as by boat relatively easy. It could be that a later wave of invaders, the Danes, came this far north up the Lea. They certainly had a fort near Ware and in 886 the Lea became the frontier agreed between Alfred and the Danes. There was a bridge somewhere near the end of Ox Lane, which as late as 1598 was called Holderness Bridge (in the will of Thomas Nichols). Holderness may mean the ness, that is headland or cape, of the hold, an officer of high rank in the Danish army.

From the first continuous settlement in the area of which we can be certain, around St. Helen's church and the ford by the Bull Hotel and the mill, the Anglo-Saxon farmers advanced their clearing of woodland and cultivation all along the Lea valley at least as far as Pickford Mill and perhaps to Hyde Mill, on the county boundary. We know this because four watermills existed by 1086; they are recorded in Domesday Book, the great national census which William the Conqueror ordered in that year; and only five mills appear in later records. They are Wheathampstead Mill at the bottom of the High Street, Leasybridge, Batford, Pickford or Bungey and Hyde Mills. There was certainly early settlement as far up the river as Batford, for Bata, perhaps an earlier miller, was another of the few Anglo-Saxons who have left us their names. By 1086 there must have been settlement at least as far to the west as Pickford Mill. A similar movement occurred up the Ver valley.

We must imagine that within a couple of hundred years of the end of Roman rule, by the mid-seventh century, there may only have been settlement at Wheathampstead, perhaps at Kinsbourne Green, just possibly in the Ver valley by Harpendenbury and at or near Top Street. Aldwickbury may have been an early settlement site, Aldwick means the old dairy farm, and road 213 'curves round the southern edge of the Aldwickbury estate' [*Roman Roads* p. 176]. This estate was known as Piggotshill until modern times when the name Aldwick was given to it, but the fields in the neighbourhood were called Aldwick which suggests that there was a settlement here before members of the Pigot or Picot family gave it their name. There was as yet no Harpenden. From these beginnings it took centuries for the whole area to be cleared and made ready for farming. The process which we can see going on after the Norman conquest must have begun much earlier. As late as 1086, there were less than 1,200 acres under the plough as compared with nearly 6,000 in 1905, when there were 2,218 acres of permanent grass as well, much of which had probably been ploughed up earlier. In 1086 the surviving woodlands provided feed for 400 swine and this suggests substantial wooded areas; in 1905 there were 267 acres of woodland left. The population of the whole area of the two parishes in 1086 was very small, perhaps 100 to 180 people.

All along the valley slopes lay the great open, common fields of the middle ages (see Fig. 5). Common then meant the unhedged arable fields, which were cultivated by peasants who had a strip here and a strip there but no consolidated farm. Once the harvest was in, the animals belonging to all the strip owners grazed the stubble indiscriminately, each man having grazing rights in proportion to his arable acreage. Such was the medieval Common. The areas which we call Commons today, like Harpenden Common, Nomansland Common and Gustardwood Common, were at that time areas of rough grazing, common waste as contrasted with common arable. A good example of these common fields is in the area on either side of the Lea between Hyde Mill and Cold Harbour. The modern fields here are rectangular and the hedges, like those on both sides of the Lea, are less heavily timbered than on the plateau. Similar fields can be seen south of the old railway line to Hemel Hempstead, between Rothamsted and Harpendenbury Farms. The shape of these fields is no accident, for these areas were once open fields. What we see today are fields produced by swapping strips until a single owner controlled a furlong, that is to say, an area of ploughed strips all running in one direction. The furlong as a unit of measurement originated from these medieval furlongs. For 220 yards (201 metres) was the length of an average open field strip and so of the furlong.

With a furlong in one ownership it was sometimes possible to take it out of the system of common cultivation and to hedge it. This process took centuries: an agreement of 15 October, 1754

between local landlords binds them to make 'a ditch and plant Quick for a hedge by the side of the Roadway leading from the Corner of a certain Field called seven Acres unto a certain Hedge belonging to Lodge Field', and to plant the same crop in their 'several and respective peices of land'. These pieces were earlier described as 'lying despersedly on the east side of a certain Comon Field called Batford Comon'. [27124A]. When Tithe Maps were made, in 1840 for Wheathampstead and 1843 for Harpenden, there were still many such strips in existence. Pickford Common, between Cold Harbour and Batford, was largely open field in 1840 and the fields which are there now are clearly based on the old open field furlongs, as their shape shows. The whole of the housing development since the second world war, at Batford, is on what was Batford Common, another great open field. The furlongs in this field had names like Gibraltar shott and Finley Corner shott; shot was an old word for furlong.

Pickford and Batford Commons were, of course, in Wheathampstead parish until 1949. Facing them across the river in Harpenden were Westfield Common and Manland Common. It is only when we remember that land on both sides of the Lea belonged to one estate that the name Westfield makes sense; it was the westernmost of Westminster Abbey's open fields in the Lea valley, even though it is in the north-east corner of Harpenden parish. Manland is an interesting name; 'it is just possible that this land provided the Maundy dole distributed to the poor on Maundy Thursday' [*Place-Names*, op. cit. p. 39]. Manland was Mandilond in 1306. Pickford got its name from *pic*, which meant spur of land; while Batford, as we have seen, may come from an old English name Bata. Manland and Westfield contained the last areas of strips which we know to have survived. In 1923, Mr. F. A. Harris, Clerk to the Harpenden Urban District Council, had to carry through an Enclosure to obtain land for the cemetery at Westfield; there were still strip owners with grazing rights over each other's strips. At least one inhabitant of Sauncey Avenue had grazing rights on Manland Common.

The activities of Anglo-Saxon farmers which had begun to produce these open, common fields were, no doubt, systematised after 1060 by Westminster Abbey's officials. The villagers of Wheathampstead, servile tenants of the abbot, directed by the abbot's officials, must have gradually cleared the ground around the village centre and up the Lea valley. Working together they could remove obstacles which were too much for small family units. We learn from Domesday Book that by 1086 half the available arable land was shared between the priest and fifteen families of local peasants, while the other half was a home farm, demesne it was called, from which food was provided directly for the abbey's use.

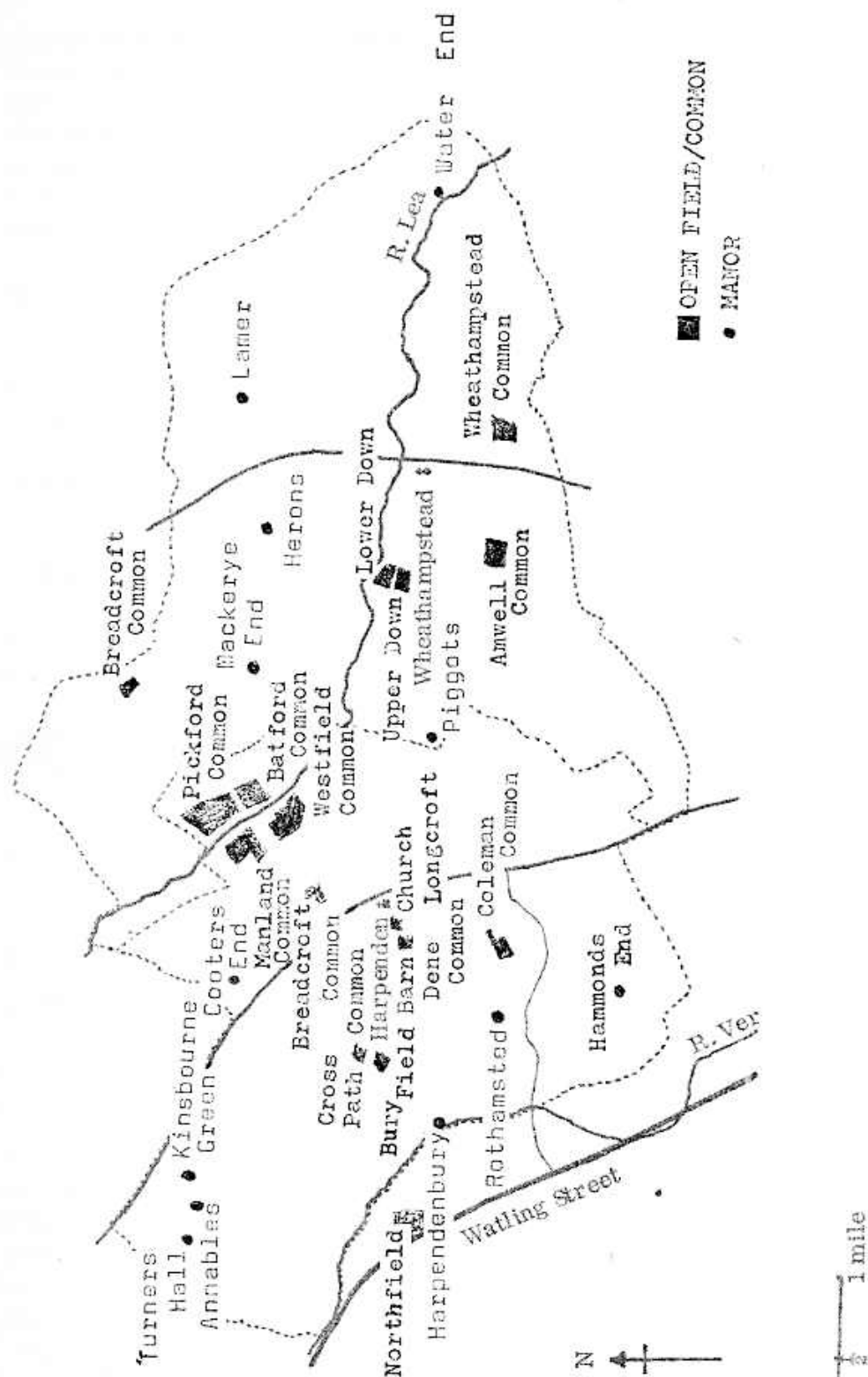


Fig. 5 Open fields and Manors

At an early date Westminster Abbey divided their new estate into two manors, that of Wheathampstead proper and a manor known as Kinsbourne or Harpenden. The two names of this latter manor are as suggestive as is the location of its lands and buildings in later years. Harpendenbury Farm, the manor house or grange of Kinsbourne manor, is in the extreme west of the parish. There is a magnificent and vast tithe barn, with six crown posts in its roof, a fine building. The house itself has a Victorian wing but the main part is medieval: the roof has a crown post and the first floor rooms reveal their medieval splendour. The site is on the river Ver by a ford at the intersection of two tracks, one of which leads from Bylands on Watling Street to Cold Harbour on the Lea, and the other of which runs along the Ver valley to join the lane to Kinsbourne Green in the extreme north-west of Harpenden. Kinsbourne Green, we have seen, was probably an early settlement site. The manor house of the Wheathampstead Manor, if there ever was a substantial manor house, was very probably in the neighbourhood of Bury Farm, west of the Church. Wheathampstead Place was *not* Westminster Abbey property. Certainly the Abbey's demesne land was farmed from Bury Farm: in the fifteenth century the tenant of Bury Farm had to provide food and drink for visiting abbey officials. There is a house here which appears to have been a medieval guildhall (see Plate 4). Could this have been used to hold meetings of the manor court? When we consider the physical relationship, the siting of these two manorial complexes and their related open field systems, we can visualise how Westminster Abbey opened up their estate in a kind of pincer movement. In the west, they worked southwards from Kinsbourne Green and eastwards from Watling Street and the Harpendenbury site, converging on Rothamsted. In the east, they worked up the Lea valley and cleared uphill southwards towards Top Street and the dry valley, Herpedene, and northwards towards Mackerye End and Bower Heath.

Settlement of the Uplands

We have seen that the Anglo-Saxons used the Roman roads to penetrate the wooded, upland plateaus between the two river valleys. The main area of Wheathampstead and Harpenden — they cover some 10,279 acres — remained wooded and there may have been woodland regeneration in the 'Dark Ages' of the fifth to seventh centuries. The description of the two parishes made just before 1908 for *The Victoria County History* serves to show the changes men had made before modern housing covered much of the landscape. 'The land is mostly arable, and produces excellent wheat. It is well wooded, and the combinations of hill and valley, pasture, common, arable and woodland produce some pleasing and picturesque views.

There are two parks in the parish — Rothamsted and Lamer — which are both well stocked with timber. The commons and greens are numerous and extensive'. [Vol. II (1908) p. 294]. The reference to 'greens' is significant, for the clearing of the uplands was not achieved by the work of an organised community, nor did it produce the great open fields which once lay on either side of the Lea and Ver.

'The place-names of the county as a whole suggest that except in the extreme north it was thickly wooded when the Anglo-Saxon settlement began, and that it afforded little scope for the foundation of large villages, or the early development of large scale communal agriculture. It is not the village, but the hamlet or single farmstead, which dominates the map of Hertfordshire. It was through the clearance of timber and the gradual breaking up of rough ground that the way was prepared for these minor settlements, and many of their names reflect the circumstances of their origin. "End and Green" are common, as would be expected in a county of numerous small hamlets'. [*Place-Names*, pp. XIV & XX]. These Ends and Greens were the sites of isolated farmsteads or little hamlets and they were created by peasant farmers working over centuries to clear the dense woodland and make the landscape we know today. Sometimes, but only rarely, the names of the pioneers have survived. Thus Cootersend is recorded as the home of John and Edith le Cotere in 1272 and 1305. They probably bore the name which they gave to their home because they were cotters, poorer peasants of post-Conquest times who usually had only a cottage and about five acres of land. Or Cootersend could have been a settlement of earlier cotters, and John and Edith taken a name from their dwelling place. When a place bears a person's name, we cannot always be sure whether someone gave their name to the place or whether the reverse occurred, because many early surnames came from place names. Mareschalesgrene, mentioned in early fourteenth century Court Rolls, was connected with a certain Adam le Mareschal in 1272-7. It is unlikely that he or his ancestors had been Marshals; the medieval French name more often meant 'one who tends horses, especially one who treats their diseases' and is 'used of a shoeing smith, a farrier and a horse doctor' [*The Origin of English Surnames* by P. H. Reaney, 1967, p. 158]. Ayre's End, Aries End in 1705, may have given Thomas Ayre, who is mentioned in Quarter Sessions in 1597, his name. Much earlier it could have got its name from an Aries or Aris(s) who came from Arras in the Pas-de-Calais [*Surnames* pp. 37 & 72]. The Hammond, who gave his name to Hammondsend, was also Norman French in origin; a Thomas Hamond appeared in the Assize Rolls for 1287. The man, who gave his name to Sherlocks End, may have been an Anglo-Saxon with a bright or shining 'lock of hair' [*Surnames*, p. 235]. The names of other pioneer settlements in the woodlands come from natural features, like Down Green from

dun which meant a hill, while Hatching Green comes from another Anglo-Saxon word *haecc* which meant a forest gate.

There are nineteen Ends and eighteen Greens in the area of the joint parishes (see Fig. 6). Some, like Westend or Mackerye End, are still much as they must have been for hundreds of years. Others, like Hatching Green and Kinsbourne Green, have been built over and around, but even here the old greens survive. All over the two parishes then are names which go back to the earliest continuous human settlements in the forest and there are surviving greens which may have been the first pieces of ground cleared of trees. The built up character of much of modern Harpenden conceals at first sight the fact that this part of the parish was as much an area of hamlets and single farmsteads as Wheathampstead still is. In fact, there is no evidence for the existence of Harpenden as a community until the late twelfth century. What seems today, and has for centuries seemed, to be the centre of a nucleated village, the area around Harpenden church, may well have been no more than one more Green in the woodland as late as the Norman Conquest. There is no mention of Harpenden in Domesday Book.

Just as with the open fields, the process of creating small clearings continued long after the Norman Conquest. 'The development of this district was still going on in the thirteenth century, when the Abbot of Westminster was dividing his great manor of Wheathampstead into holdings of a carucate, or 120 acres, upon which houses were built and hamlets sprang up'. [*Archaeologia*, p. 60]. There are two ways in which the pioneer settlers, who cleared their little patches in the forest and built log-cabins of the trees they cut down, have left their mark for us to see. Between Ayre's End and Cross Farm, the fields, even today, are irregular in shape, as can be seen from air photographs and maps. There are some similar fields around Rothamsted Manor, at Bylands House on A5, near Faulkner's End in Harpenden parish, and around Dane and Hill Farms in the extreme north-west of Wheathampstead parish. Fields shaped like this are, probably, still following the boundaries created when they were first cleared from the woodland. Lumps of Hertfordshire pudding-stone, glacial conglomerate to the geologists, or tree stumps too big to be removed by the labour and primitive tools of early settlers were left in situ and the field shapes adapted to them. One would expect that in some cases, at least, the hedges in these areas would have high hedge-banks with large timber and many varieties of trees and bushes in them. Fields like these are very different from most of the fields in Harpenden and Wheathampstead parishes which were once open, common fields. Many of the fields around the Greens and Ends have always been hedged and farmed in severalty*. Although no useful results have so far come from the few attempts made locally to use Dr. Hooper's methods for dating hedges, they might

* Severalty means 'individual or unshared tenure' (C.O.D.)

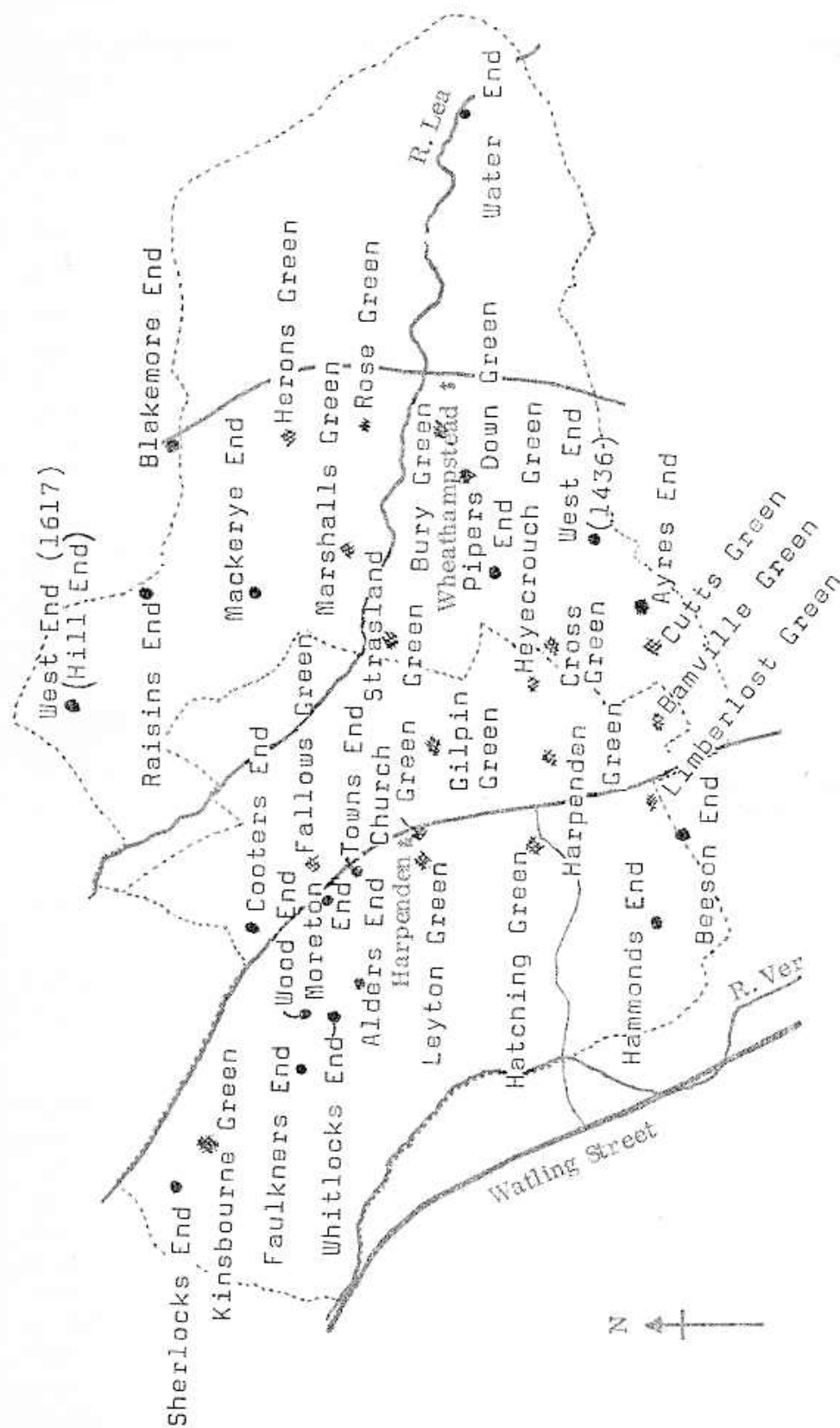


Fig. 6 Ends and Greens
(Gilpin Green is a modern name)

be worth mentioning for others to practise. Roughly speaking, if all the different kinds of plants out of which a hedge could be made if they grew alone, e.g. oak, elm, beech, roses, elder, hazel, sloe and privet, are counted for a hundred metre stretch, the number of different plants counted should approximate to the number of centuries since the hedge was planted. Hedges in which dog's mercury and wood anemones are found probably represent original woodland rather than planted hedges [see *Hedges and Local History*, N.C.S.S.].

The original settlers have not only left behind them the shapes of the fields which they made but also many of the names which they gave to their fields and homesteads. These remind us of the long drawn out woodland clearing which made it possible for human beings to live here. Rothamsted probably means rook-frequented homestead — Prof. Salisbury commented 'rooks' nests are very frequent in the elms of this neighbourhood'. Field names tell the same story: in Harpenden, Great and Little Thrift Fields come from *fyrhthe*, a wood or woodland. Ditches was in 1487 Dycheholt, then Dychefeld; holt means a wood or thicket; does the change of name in 1487 tell us when this wood was cleared and the ground ploughed? Many names come from such clearing of woodland. Lea House and Ley Croft Field, in Wheathampstead, get their names from *leah*, a wood or clearing in a wood. Stocking Wood, in Wheathampstead, comes from *stocking*, a piece of ground cleared of stumps. Great Innings, in Harpenden, comes from a post-Conquest word *inning* which meant land taken into cultivation. A croft was a small enclosed field; some may have originated as fields made out of the woodland; Holcroft Spring in Wheathampstead was one such, as were Leycroft and Woodcroft Fields. Other similar names which we have already met, are Grove, Brache and Readings.

Woodland was not the only natural covering to be removed before the land was fit for cultivation. Gustardwood got its name from the juniper and gorse bushes which grew and still grow there; both were *gorst* in Old English. Rush Meadow, in Wheathampstead, explains itself. Other names describe the soil, like Clayshots; Sauncy Wood was Saunsethe in 1333 which 'looks as if it might be a compound of *sand* and *seath*, a pit' [*Place-Names*, p. 58]. Some names come from animals: Hog Moor and Ox Croft are self-explanatory; Bragdell was badger dell and Culver Croft or Culvermad pigeon meadow. Bower Heath, in Wheathampstead, and Bower Hill near Harpendenbury, came from *bur*, a cottage or dwelling. Many names describe physical features or the shape of a field. Agdell Field, in Harpenden, comes from *haca*, a bend; Great and Little Urn Fields, in Harpenden, Calves Hens on the Rothamsted estate, and Adam Hearn Field, in Wheathampstead, come from *hyrne*, an angle or corner; Little How Field from *hoh*, a spur of land. Leasybridge, incidentally, may come from *hlype* and *saete*, the settlers or dwellers by the leap or steep place.

The essential framework of our local landscape was created by the fourteenth century and a surprising amount of it can still be discovered or uncovered below later accretions. Modern changes, in particular those due to large-scale house building, will be described in a later chapter. The men who cleared away the primeval forest also created human communities, which had to manage their affairs. To understand how this was done, we must explain what the manor was.

Local Manors and their Courts

A manor was much more than a modern estate. Ownership of a manor could give to its 'lord' widespread legal powers over the other inhabitants. The estate business was conducted through a manorial court baron, criminal business through a court leet. These courts were regular meetings of the local tenants, who provided a jury called the homage, and were presided over by a representative of the lord of the manor. They continued to meet and function, much as in the middle ages, into modern times. Thus Henry Frowyk, Steward, signed the record of 'a Court Baron of Edward Bardolfe, Esq., holden the 24 of March 21 Jacobi (i.e. 1623, the twenty-first year of the reign of King James I) at which the Homage consisted of the following persons:

Thomas Vyall	Christopher Chapman
Thomas Halsey alias Chambers	John Neele
John Lewes	Robert Samon
Timothy Neele	Thomas Kilbey junior
Edward Cressey	Thomas Nicholls
William Whitlock	Edward Seabrook
James Choworth	

'Jurors' was written against their names [D/ELW M.35, Folio 35 verso].

Although Westminster Abbey's local estate was divided into two manors — indeed some tenants held land of both manors and paid separately to each of them, there was only one manor court from the time of the earliest surviving Court Roll (1302). Court Rolls were records of the meetings of the Court. They were written on parchment made of sheepskin, and not on paper, and the skins were joined together and rolled up, not cut in pages; this is why medieval records are called rolls rather than books. The Court Rolls of the Wheathampstead manors are in Westminster Abbey Muniment Room and Library. They begin in 1302 but 'there is a long gap for

the reign of Edward III (1327-77) and the beginning of that of Richard II (1377-99). The rolls for this period, it is recorded in 1382, were burnt — we may conclude' in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 [V.C.H. Vol. II p. 309]. Where the manor court met, we do not know; it may have met alternately in the Guildhall, at the Bury at Wheathampstead, and somewhere at Harpendenbury. Cussans suggested that 'a public house, known as the Red Lion, near the church, is the site of the old manor-house of Harpenden' and that 'another public house, nearly opposite, appears by its sign, The Cross Keys, to have been an hostel belonging to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster'. [p. 351 footnote]. But the Cross Keys is not the original name of the pub, and there is no evidence that Westminster Abbey had a manor house in Harpenden main street.

The medieval abbey ran its estates through its court baron but it also had substantial criminal powers. *The Victoria County History* tells us that: 'The abbot and convent of Westminster had in their lands almost every liberty a subject could hold, and we know that they exercised at Wheathampstead the right to hold courts-leet, courts-baron and views of frankpledge'. Frankpledge (free pledge or security) was the old Anglo-Saxon system of keeping the peace, which after the Norman Conquest was supervised by the manor court. Under this system every man, except for knights and clergy, when reaching maturity was grouped with nine others in a tithing — tithing means tenth; one member of each tithing was the tithing man or capital pledge, who was responsible for the good behaviour of his tithing. The Court Leet 'viewed' this system, that is received reports from the capital pledges and acted on them. 'The abbot had his own prison at Wheathampstead and dealt with all manner of trespasses (described in the early rolls as committed against the peace of the abbot and convent, but later as against the peace of the lord the king) before the constable of the peace and the bailiff of his liberty, and took all fines imposed by the justices of the peace or the king's justices in any matter arising within his lands. He had the right of free warren and treasure trove, and claimed the fishery of the river Lea within his liberty, except the piece of water from Marford to Wheathampstead Bridge, which he held jointly with the rector. In 1408 we find a presentment that the lord ought to have in his manor a pillory, stocks and 'cokyng stol' and that the same should be made; and again in 1613, it was ordered that the instruments of punishment called a 'cucking-stool' should be made, one for Wheathampstead and one for Harpenden' [Vol. II, pp. 297-8]. A warren was a rabbit warren; rabbits were 'preserved' like pheasants today and landlords had to have a licence to preserve them; this is what right of free warren meant. A cucking-stool was a 'chair in which disorderly women were ducked as punishment' [*Concise Oxford Dictionary*]. It was a chair on a long arm which moved up and down on a central pivot.

Westminster Abbey's manors were not the only ones in the area. The rector of Wheathampstead had a large grant of land, a glebe farm, which must have been made before the king's grant to Westminster. When a parish was first created and a local priest appointed, the lord of the manor or other inhabitants had to give land for the priest's maintenance; this was the glebe. In return the lord kept in his hands, and could give to anyone else, the right to fill a vacancy with a priest of his own choosing; this was the advowson. As the *Victoria County History* puts it 'A grant of so extensive a glebe is indicative of a Saxon origin. It is unlikely that Edward the Confessor would have excluded the church, the advowson of which has immemorially belonged to the Bishops of Lincoln, from his very full grant of the chief manor to his favourite monastery had it been in his hands at the time; it is, therefore, probable that the church with the endowment was granted . . . before the grant of the chief manor to Westminster Abbey' [Vol. II p. 309]. This glebe became, in fact, a separate manor and rolls survive in the County Record Office for the court baron of 'The Manor of the Rectory of Wheathampstead' for as late as 1768-9 [A.R. 1272].

The tithes paid by Wheathampstead inhabitants were divided between the rector and Westminster Abbey. This came about after a dispute between the Bishop of Lincoln and the Abbot of Westminster who tried to acquire the bishop's rights over the church of Wheathampstead. The dispute lasted from 1217 to 1221 and was settled by the Pope. He gave to Westminster Abbey the building next to Harpenden church, which had been the parson's, and half the rector's share of the tithes. The rector was to have the house, and the court which had belonged to Westminster, the other half of the rector's and all the vicar's tithes; it is not clear whether this house was at Harpenden or at Wheathampstead. The Bishop of Lincoln remained as patron of the church. Nathaniel Salmon, in his *History of Hertfordshire* published in 1728, tells us that 'The Church (Westminster) receives Tythe on one Side of the River, and the Rector on the other; and they change Sides once in three years' [p. 147]. Tithes were payments of one tenth of all produce which had to be made to the church, originally as alms to the poor, but in practice they came to be used for the upkeep of the Church as an institution.

The importance of the river boundary may go back to the very beginnings of a continuous community here. John de Laycestria, the rector in 1278, was involved in disputes with the Abbot of Westminster about the rights which the rector had in the abbey's water-mills and in the fishery of the Lea, among other things. Most of the rector's manor was 'in the north-east part of the parish', north of the Lea, though it did include some 'property in the village, at Marpool, and elsewhere' [V.C.H. Vol. II p. 309]. Wheathampstead Place, a magnificent house with a crown post roof and moulded

beams of c. 1470-5, though much altered later, may have been the rectory manor-house or on its site. It was certainly not the abbey's manor-house. The mill, which bestrides the river opposite Wheathampstead Place, was the abbey's main mill and the miller was often the most important of Westminster's local tenants. One can almost imagine the rector's and the abbot's representatives glowering at each other across the river, each with a foothold in the other's territory.

The rector successfully resisted Westminster Abbey's claims to control his estate. 'In 1278 John de Laycestria, the rector, was called upon by the crown to show by what warrant he claimed view of frankpledge of all his men and tenants, his free court . . . and the amendment of the assize of bread and ale, . . . his claim was allowed'. Assize of bread and ale meant fixing and checking standard measures of quantity and controlling the quality of these goods. There were frequent disputes between the abbot and the rector as to their several rights, the abbot trying to bring the rector within the view of his court-leet, presenting him for obstructing a way in the rectory manor, and, in 1396, for appointing a constable at the rectory court, claiming that his constable had jurisdiction in the rectory manor. The rector seems to have been able, however, to maintain his entire independence of the abbot' [V.C.H. Vol. II p. 309].

At first only the rector and the abbot exercised local authority, but as the abbey's clearing of the woodland was extended from the valleys to the uplands, new local landlords appeared. The areas which were settled only in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries are the northern part of Wheathampstead parish and the area of Harpenden which lies midway between the Ver and the Lea valleys, Annables — Rothamsted — Hammondsend. 'The abbot of Westminster appears to have parcelled out what was probably forest waste into freehold tenements'. The new owner was left free to clear and settle the area as he chose. A survey made in 1528 shows that there were then twenty-seven such properties. During the middle ages they gradually acquired 'varying degrees of independence' of the abbot and some of them 'became recognised as . . . sub-manors', though none of them became completely independent. 'They and their tenants were . . . always subject to the court-leet and view of frankpledge of the abbot. The tenants of both the chief manor and sub-manors seem to have had rights jointly over the wastes, but the soil of the wastes seems to have belonged to the abbot. From the end of the fifteenth century most of these small manors' either broke into still smaller pieces of property or were incorporated 'with the larger estates, now mostly represented under the names of the manors of Rothamsted, Lamer and Annables or Kinsbourne' Hall [V.C.H. Vol. II, p. 298]. Rather than retell the history of all these minor manors, which has been the main theme of all the county histories and is

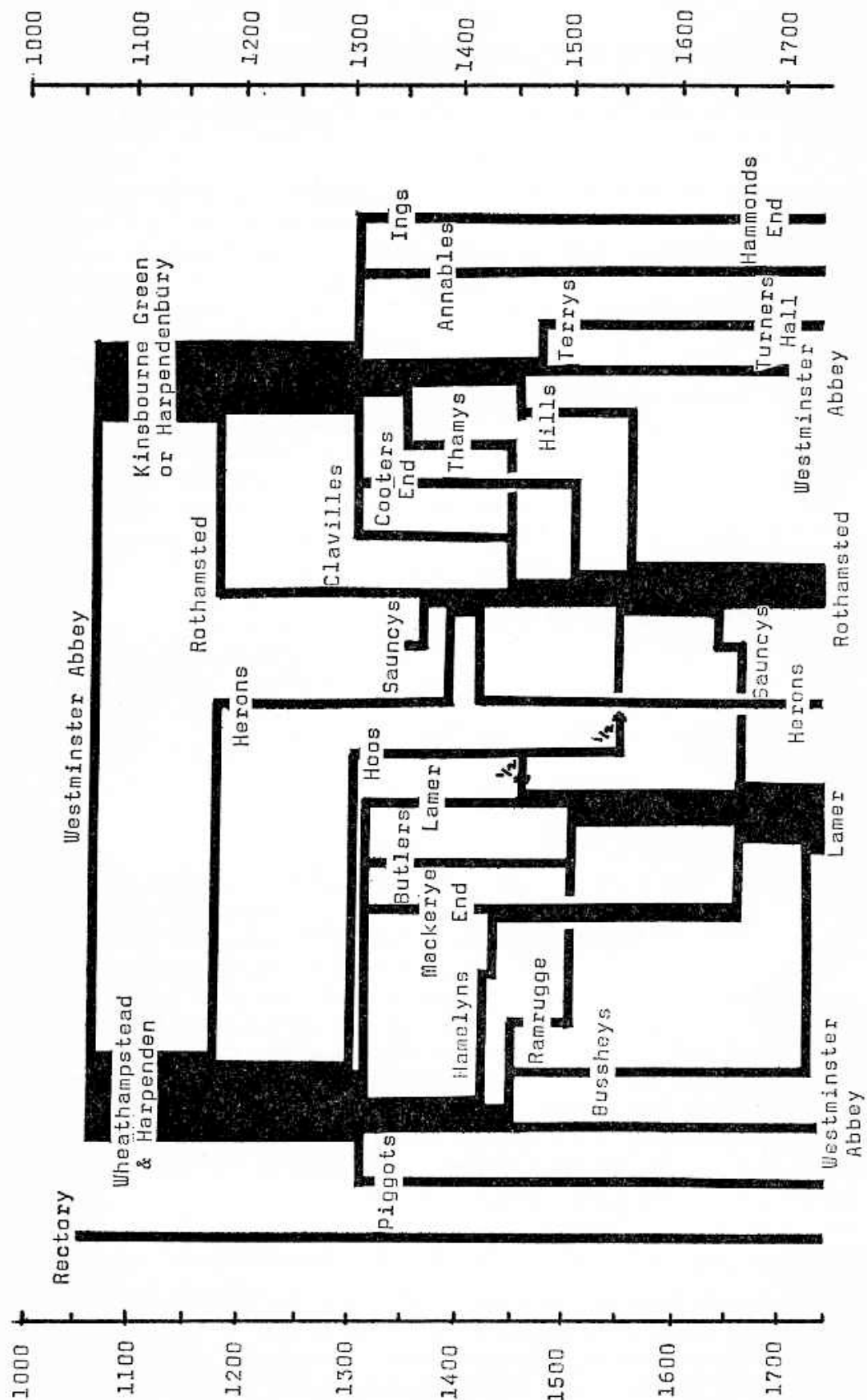


Fig. 7 Local Manors

to be found in full in the *Victoria County History* [Vol. II, pp. 297-309] we have shown their sites as far as they are known on Fig. 5. Fig. 7 makes clear which of the smaller manors were absorbed by larger ones and when this happened.

It may be that the church at Harpenden was built as a by-product of the process of spreading settlement. It was 'a Chappel of ease to Whethamstead' as Sir Henry Chauncy put it [*The Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire*, 1826 edition p. 436], built because St. Helen's in Wheathampstead was too far away for the peasants moving into the dry valley and the land between it and the Ver. This chapel of St. Nicholas was clearly in existence by 1217-21. The earliest surviving part of Harpenden church, the tower, dates from 1470 but descriptions by Clutterbuck and Cussans make clear that the church, before the destructive 'restoration' of 1862, was Norman. This method of bringing the church to the people was common. There was a chapel at Heron's in the north of Wheathampstead: a will proved in 1436 which bequeathed Herons made provision that none of the ornaments of the chapel, missals, chalices of silver and gilt, vestments for the priest or altar fittings should be removed. Canon Davys discovered the remains of a chapel in a cottage at Gustardwood in 1888; this may be Heron's chapel. Ing's manor in south west Harpenden, now Hammondsend, contained a chapel too, and a field there was called Church Croft in 1623. In 1297, William Inge, Chief Justice of the King's Bench and lord of the manor, had obtained a licence for a chantry chapel in his house, as it was so far from Wheathampstead church and Harpenden chapel. But this remained a private chapel, while St. Nicholas's became the centre of a new community. At some time the Roman road (213) was deflected from its upland route through Top Street and followed the dry valley at least as far as Harpenden Common. By 1319 Harpenden was clearly a community of its own. In that year, Pope John XXII granted a licence to the inhabitants of the village of Harpenden to hear mass and perform other religious ceremonies in this chapel. They acquired the right of burial in the chapel and the chapel-yard. Presumably Harpenden had its own curate, working for the rector of Wheathampstead. By the end of the middle ages, Harpenden had become a very real and live community, quite distinct from Wheathampstead. It was a separate civil parish, in effect, with its own officials, constables, beadle and ale taster elected in the Abbot of Westminster's manor court. Separate Harpenden church registers survive from 1562 and there were separate Churchwardens, but until 1859 the church of St. Nicholas remained a chapel of Wheathampstead.

As to the farmers and peasants who were the permanent, working inhabitants of Harpenden and Wheathampstead, the *Victoria County History* gives us some glimpses from Westminster Court Rolls. A custumal of the early thirteenth century, that is a document which

describes local practices or customs, tells us what were the farms of the serfs and what duties and payments they owed for their lands. Serfs or villeins were peasant farmers who could not leave their farms and who owed their lord both the obligations of tenants and the personal services of followers. On the other hand, they could pass on their land to their heirs. There were, according to the early thirteenth century customal, nine and a half virgates of land in the two manors held in the customary way, and two more similar virgates of cotland. A virgate was normally thirty acres of arable land, held in strips of anything from half an acre to two acres scattered all over the great open fields of the manor. Such a holding, with accompanying strips of meadowland and pasture, rights of grazing over the waste, and of collecting timber from the woods, was the normal holding of a well-off peasant serf for much of the middle ages. Cotland was land held by cotters, or cottagers, like those who gave their name to Cootersend. Cotters, *cotlandi* in Latin, usually had only a cottage and some five acres of arable land.

In 1086, at the time of Domesday Book, there were fifteen peasant families, probably all owners of virgates. By the early thirteenth century there were nine such holdings still and one owner of half a virgate. In 1086 there had been twelve bordars and nine cotters; there was not much difference between bordars and cotters; in effect there were twenty-one small holdings, cottagers, in 1086. Unfortunately we do not know how many shared the two virgates of cotland in the early thirteenth century; it can hardly have been much more than a dozen people. So in this group too, there seems to have been some reduction in numbers. 'The cotlandi owed the same services' as virgate owners, 'except the carrying, but their services were in proportion to the size of their holdings'. The cotlandi had in addition 'to marl six acres'. Marling, in Hertfordshire, meant lightening heavy clay land with chalk, dug from below the clay.

The obligations of each virgate owner reveal how the abbey's home farm or demesne was partly farmed by the labour of its serfs. Each virgate owner 'owed every week from Michaelmas to Christmas four works (that is four days' work), and so throughout the year, except on feast days, and on Saturdays he was bound to carry to Westminster half a quarter of wheat or a quarter of oats. He ought also to plough and harrow yearly sixteen acres, and owed a quarter of a quarter of good seed corn and one quarter of barley at the feast of St. Martin. They all ought to mow the meadow and do certain other mowing' [p. 298]. From this account one wonders how a virgate owner ever farmed his own virgate. He probably could not have done so without the work of his wife and children.

It must not be assumed from this that there was any decline in population between 1086 and the date of this customal; the decline was only in the number of families holding servile farms

in the abbey's manors. Much more land was cultivated in other new sub-manors by their servile tenants and there were, no doubt, many new free tenants whose obligations to their manorial lords would have been much less burdensome. One thing we know about these freemen is that they were fishermen and cared for their rights! For in 1278 they complained to the king's visiting judges that the Abbot of Westminster, Hugh Blundel, had tried to stop them exercising their customary right to fish the Lea. The Abbot was fined and the right of free fishing proclaimed.

To manage their home farms (demesne lands), to oversee the fulfilment of these customary services, and to administer justice in the court leet, the abbey required a number of local officials. The titles and names of some individual office holders are indexed at Westminster. They are listed in the appendix. Some familiar local names obviously go a long way back. Other local names, and occasional incidents in the lives of local people, can be gleaned from the printed *calendars*, or indexes, of central government records. For example, we learn that in 1263 William Trap and Cecily his wife and their daughter, Katharine, are said to have been killed at Wheathampstead, but how and why and by whom we do not know! We learn that in December 1265 Simon de Jarwell, the parson, was given protection until midsummer 1266, but again we do not know why or from whom [*Calendar of Patent Rolls*, Vol. 5 pp. 251 & 515]. On such snatches of Sunday newspaper type gossip endless speculation but no certainty is possible. Rather different gossip must have been fermented at the time by Edward III granting a house and land to his mistress, the notorious Alice Perrers. The property was described as consisting of a well-built house, formerly the property of Roger Kynnesberne, with one hundred acres of arable land, three acres of meadow, two groves (three and a half acres) of wood, and some rents. Kinsbourne Hall, today Annables, seems the most likely property. Incidentally, we learn two further things: that after Alice's death the Abbot of Westminster had occupied the property without obvious title to it; and that while the annual rent for arable was less than 1p (2d) an acre, meadow was worth 10p (2s.) an acre. This suggests how valuable was grass feed for the plough beasts [*Calendar of Inquisitions*, Vol. 4 p 11].

Leaving gossip and speculation, we return to the point with which we began. William Camden wrote of Hertfordshire, in 1586, 'scarce is there any one county in England that can show more footsteps of antiquity'. And Sir William Beach Thomas, who lived at Wheathampstead Place, wrote in 1950, 'You can scarcely walk a mile anywhere without enjoying some sense of the rich continuity of its history'. Not surprisingly he found this 'sense of history' most 'tangibly spread abroad' in 'the village with which I am most familiar' [*Hertfordshire*, 1950, pp. 1-2]. It has been our purpose to begin our history by revealing this continuity in some detail.

Appendix ONE

- (A) Translation of Edward the Confessor's Charter of 1060 (see Plate 1).
- (B) Early seventeenth century perambulation of Harpenden parish (see Fig. 1)
- (C) Translation of section of Domesday Book (1086) which refers to Wheathampstead.
- (D) Manorial officials whose names are in an index in Westminster Abbey Muniment Room.
- (E) Chronological Table

(A) TRANSLATION OF DOCUMENT DISCOVERED AT ROTHAMSTED DATED 1060 AND SIGNED BY EDWARD THE CONFESSOR AND HAROLD WHO SUBSEQUENTLY BECAME KING AND DIED AT THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS.

† In [the name of] Jesus Christ our Lord who reigns for ever. The equilibrium of this world, as it turns, begins to waver and soon it will fail for speed. Therefore all men living in this world must hasten, while there is time for business in this transitory life — lest men, because of the instability of things, fail, in spite of unceasing mental activity — to reach out to the kingdom of eternity. Remembering these things, therefore, I, Edward, by the bountiful grace of God king and governor of the whole British land, so that I may deserve and sue for the saving intercessions of the heavenly key-bearer, that is to say Peter the apostle, and so as to obtain rock-like support, to whatever degree, by the service of being bound to Christ, I give willingly and freely to his servants in the convent which is called Westminster a certain holy parcel of land, namely, ten hides of common land situated in a place which the inhabitants of that district call in their own speech Wheathampstead, to be possessed for ever by hereditary right. That house, with all things that pertain to it, its fields, meadows, pastures and thickets of wood, shall remain exempt, so that it shall never be charged with burdens, that is to say, neither of military service, nor bridge-building, nor breach of peace [grithbryce], nor arrest of thieves [infangtheof]. And, that I may include all things at once, it shall be free of the king's reeve, the bishop's reeve, the earl's reeve or that of any man, but all dues that shall have arisen from the demesne in the above mentioned holy place shall be excused for ever. If, however, anyone should wish to augment or amplify our generous gift, may the omnipotent God grant him increase in this life and eternal happiness in the life to come. If on the other hand — which we do not desire — anyone should try to infringe in any way the terms of this chirograph which we have made, whether he brings forward ancient or modern considerations, let him know that he shall be bound by the fetters of

anathema and interdictions and separated from the kingdom of God, unless he shall beforehand have made amends. These are the bounds of [the manor of] Wheathampstead: from Maerforde to the Headic. From the Headic along the valley to Deorleage and Langhecge where it touches Lippelane. From Lippelane to Secgham. From Secgham to Pobbenaettoce [?Pobben-at-the-oak] and from Bobbenaettoce to Herpedene. From Herpedene to the ash by the ford. From the ash to Plumstigele. From Plumstigele to the Hollow Tree. From the Hollow Tree to Gilmere. From Gilmere to the Alderman's Mere. From the Alderman's Mere to Merdene and so to Maerforde.

The munificent distribution of this bounty was thus made in the sixtieth year of the millenium of the incarnation of our Lord and in the thirteenth indication, with the agreement of these witnesses whose names are had below:

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| † I EDWARD, king of all Britain, have given royal confirmation to my aforesaid gift with the seal of the holy cross. | |
| † I, EDITH, consort of this same king, joyfully have confirmed this royal gift. | |
| † I, Stigand, archbishop, have joyfully impressed the triumphal trophy of the holy cross on this royal gift. | |
| † I, Kynsin, archbishop, am careful diligently to put the sign of the cross on this conveyance. | |
| † I, Herman, bishop, have agreed | † I, Aelfgar, earl |
| † I, Leofric, bishop, have agreed | † I, Gyrth, earl |
| † I, Ealdred, bishop, have agreed | † I, Huglin, thane |
| † I, Wulfwi, bishop, have agreed | † I, Esgar, thane |
| † I, Harold, earl | † I, Rauulf, thane |
| † I, Tosti, earl | † I, Rodbeard, thane |

(Translated by Anthony Palmer)

(B) THE BOWNDES AND PREAMBYLATION OF THE PARISHE OF HARPENDEN.

Att Hyde myll the parishes of Luton and Wheathamsted meete and then the Sayd parishe of Harpinden goeth alonge by the Reaver South East unto a place wheare a Mylle stoud called Bungey myll Nowe Tacken Downe and so alonge by the ould Reaver to Battford Bryge footte then Leavinge the Sayd Rever it goeth alonge a Laune called Streett laun green about one hundred powles then it goeth up a laune called cowles laun upon the Southwest part unto a highwaie that leadethe from Harpenden church unto Nowmans land then goeth a Longe the sayd highwaye about Fifty powles Eastward and then Turneth in at a gatte called halpeney gatte Southward and so Alonge the Balcke of the sayd cloase called halpeney formerly a laune & so straite between two howses the owne called weystocke Beinge in Harpinden & so crosse a common called Bamellwood unto

a place called My'ell Elmes southward in the highwaie leadinge from Harpenden to St. Albans and so along in the sayd highwaie southeaste about Twellve powles & then Turninge in at a laune called Beasoneand laune About twellve powles southweste whear leavinge Wheathamsted parishe wee Meette with Redborn parishe and so southweste tackinge into Harpinden feeldes called Shepperdes crofts peny crafte bones close shorthill cloase platbymare craft underwood heatherwood wood cloase Ingeswood Inges felldes Rowgravefeld stoneyhill and so cominge downe to a laune called green laune weste as they are devided by Moundes unto a Rever & from the Rever in the Myddell of the laun to Redborn townseand whear wee com to a highwaie Leadinge from Redborn to Margatt Street Northward called Watling street Tackinge in halfe the sayd highwaie unto a place called Whitthill whear wee leave Redborn parishe and Mette with Flampsted parishe & so going one in the sayd highwaie unto an Ashe Tree called Segam ashe Northwards then Turninge Towards the Easte parte tackinge in a laune called segame laune whear Leavinge the sayd laune wee tacke in two feeldes called Stubcraftes yonges feeld whellers and so cominge to a laune Leadeinge from pepsalleand to Anables crossinge the sayd laune into a cloase called popletts about Tenn polles unto an Ashe tree & so crossinge the sayd cloase Northward whear the diches of Both hegges Meette then Tackinge all the sayd cloases called poplattes & camockefeeld Longe purfordes & Ocken grove all on the easteparte & so cominge to a highwaie Leadinge from Lutton unto Harpenden whear wee Leave Flampsted parishe & Meett with lutton parishe & so turninge Towards the easte and southpartes Tackinge in halfe the sayd highwaie unto a place called shearemare & so leavinge the sayd highwaie tackinge in a Lyttell cloase formerly part of a cloase called Blackes feeld & the cloase above the Barne Two closes called Nynenges & shearfeeld so wee com to a Laune Leadinge from Cotterseand unto Ashford Brigge Northeaste wheare wee Turne by the Rever eastward unto a Mylle called hydd Mylle Formerly Mentioned.

(C) TRANSLATION OF SECTION OF DOMESDAY BOOK WHICH REFERS TO WHEATHAMPSTEAD (1086).

The abbot of St. Peter of Westminster holds Watamestede (Wheathampstead). It is assessed at 10 hides. There is land for 10 ploughs. In the demesne are 5 hides. There are 3 ploughs on it, and there could be 2 more. A priest and 15 villeins have 5 ploughs between them; and there are 12 bordars, and 9 Cottars, and 4 mills worth 40 shillings. Meadow is there sufficient for 4 plough teams, pasture sufficient for the live stock, woodland to feed 400 swine. Its total value is and was 16 pounds; T.R.E. (in the time of King Edward the Confessor, i.e. just before the Norman Conquest in 1066) 30 pounds. This manor was and is part of the demesne of the Church of St. Peter. [V.C.H. Vol. I, p. 312].

(D) MANORIAL OFFICIALS WHOSE NAMES ARE IN AN INDEX
IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY MUNIMENT ROOM.

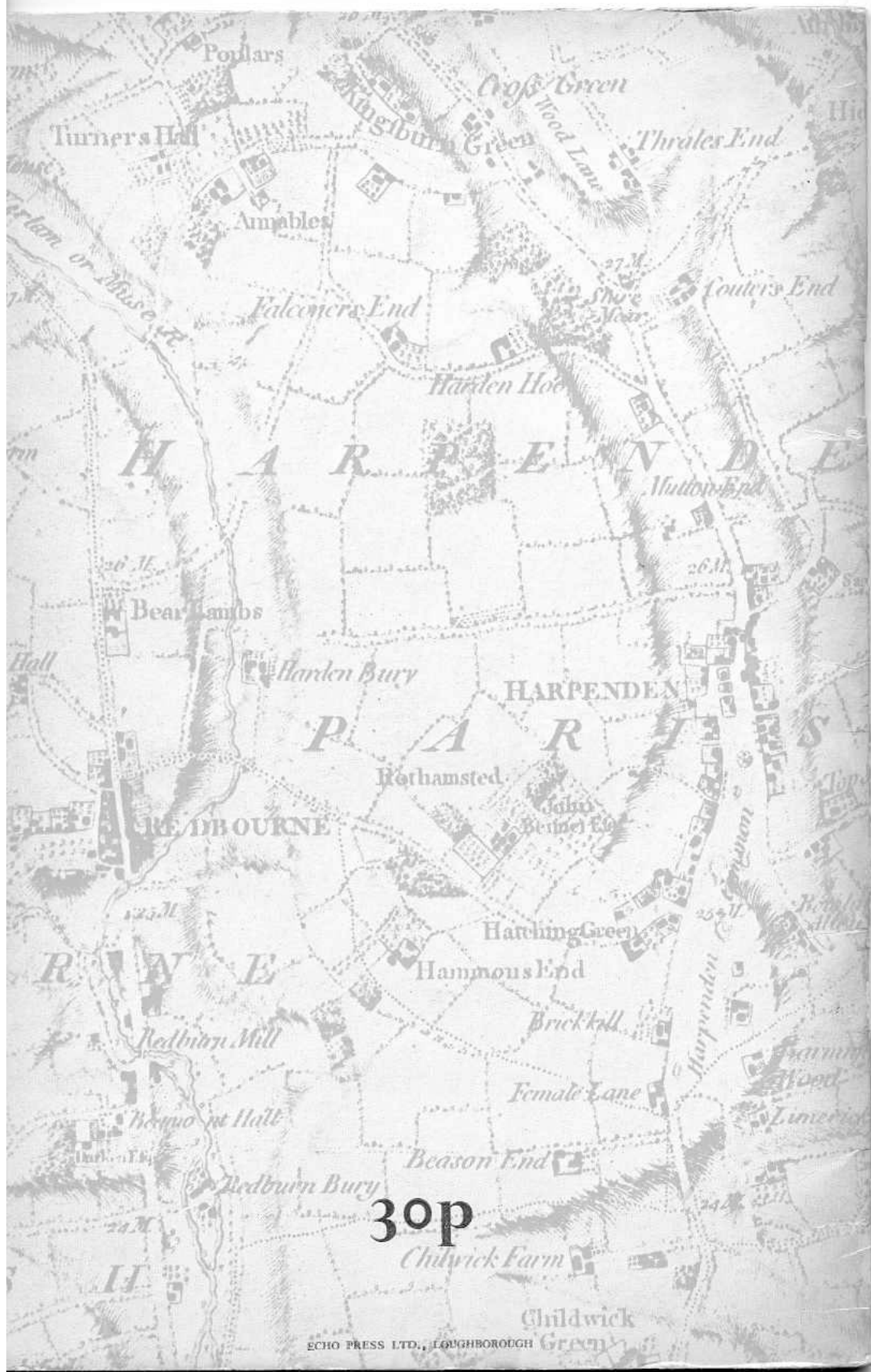
The posts referred to are Bailiff (B), Bedell (Bd), Collector of Rents (C), Farmer (F), Provost (P), and Serviens (S). What follows is an alphabetical list of the names with an indication of which office(s) each person held and when.

Alured	1271-2	P
William Balle	1397-8	S
John Coupere	1379-80	P
" "	1388-9, 1393-4	S
John de Estone	1340-9	S
" "	1346	B
Richard Gadde	1511-15	Deputy F
William Geldeston	1511-12	C
Adam Grondwyne	1388-9, 1393-4	Bd
Thomas Le Hunte	1271-2	P
Geoffrey (Le) Hunte	1349-50	P
John Kekwyche	T.H. 8 (1509-47)	C
Roger Kyng	1397-8	Bd
John Lawdy	c. 1511-15	F
Richard Merlawe	1406-7	S
Richard de la Wodeforde	1339	B
John de la Wodeforde	1346-7	B

(E) CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

The following dates will, it is hoped, guide the reader through events which may not be familiar and which provide the framework for the story.

- c. 80 B.C. Arrival of settlers from across the Channel — the Belgae.
- 54 B.C. Julius Caesar invaded Britain and stormed Cassivellaunus' stronghold.
- 43 A.D. Successful Roman invasion of Britain.
- 60 Revolt of Boudicca (Boadicea) and burning of Verulamium.
- By 410 Effective Roman military occupation and defence of Britain had ended.
- c. 455 Saxon rebellion against the British.
- c. 490 Battle of Mons Badonicus, British victory.
- c. 571 Saxon victory in Beds.—Bucks. area.
- 673 Church synod at Hertford.
- 793 Lindisfarne attacked by Vikings.
- 886 Treaty between Alfred and the Danes; the River Lea was the agreed frontier.
- 1042-66 Reign of Edward the Confessor.
- 1066 Norman Conquest, William I becomes king.
- 1086 Domesday Book.



30p