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BEATING THE BOUNDS

THE Rev. Ignatius Fuller was placed in the rectory and parsonage of Sherington in January 1647 by order of the Committee for Plundered Ministers.¹ As a recent graduate of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, he had come there, as one would have expected, with puritan leanings, and although like many others at the time he found it expedient to conform in 1661, he departed as time went on far from the Anglican orthodoxy of the day and in later life was reputed to be a socinian. Non-conformity, with active centres at Newport Pagnell and Olney, was also on the increase among his parishioners, and as early as 1664 the churchwardens were reporting to the archdeacon of Buckinghamshire that over thirty² adults were refusing to go to church. The rector himself did not escape their censure and on 25 September 1673 they presented at the archdeacon's court

Mr Ignatius Fuller for not repairing the chancel there and not reading the Litany. And for not saying Glory be to the father in the tyme of devine service and for not Reading prayers on Holy days and the Litany on Wednesdays and Fridays and for not catechising the children in our parish chyrch and for not going in procession yearly.³

Disagreement on points of doctrine aroused passion in those days and in this case no doubt it led to the estrangement between parson and parishioners implied by his refusal to perform a number of routine ecclesiastical duties and to support the age-long custom of beating the parish bounds. Old age, moreover, did not seem to mellow his views on good-fellowship if one may judge from the substance of a return sent by the churchwardens to the bishop of Lincoln in 1707, when he had been rector for 60 years.⁴ This described in detail the church land and goods, the rating of tithe and certain obligations which custom demanded of the rector, including

And the parson is to Dine all the inhabitants of Sherinton att Christmas: upon Low Sunday the parson is to Dine all that pay tythe lambs. And the parson is to make A drinking for the inhabitants going there Perambulations one yeare att the gate of Mercers Wood and one other yeare att the corner of How Wood.

¹ E112/289/34. ² D/A/V/7, f. 13 d. ³ D/A/V/9, f. 12 d. ⁴ Lincoln Terrier, 1707.

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In a footnote the rector subscribed to the general statement but excepted the claim for ‘Diners [and] Drinkings’ which drew from four of the leading inhabitants the written rejoinder ‘what the Rector has excepted we whose names are hereunto subscribed Do Clame as our Lawfull Rights—John Ruddy, Thomas Knight, Ed. Hooton, Thomas Richards’.

Before the provision of ordnance maps these perambulations, generally performed during Rogation week, were necessary to prevent disputes over boundaries in places where the open common fields and waste intermingled with those of adjoining parishes. As the parishioners claimed a ‘drinking’ at the rector’s expense it is probable that an endowment for it had become vested in his office. No record of such has survived, but about the year 1190, when Gervase de Carun was parson of Sherington,¹ his brother Richard the squire had given a rent charge of 8*d.* to support an altar light. This was still being paid at the reformation, and may have been diverted to the rector for the purpose mentioned, as is known to have been the case at Clifton Reynes.²

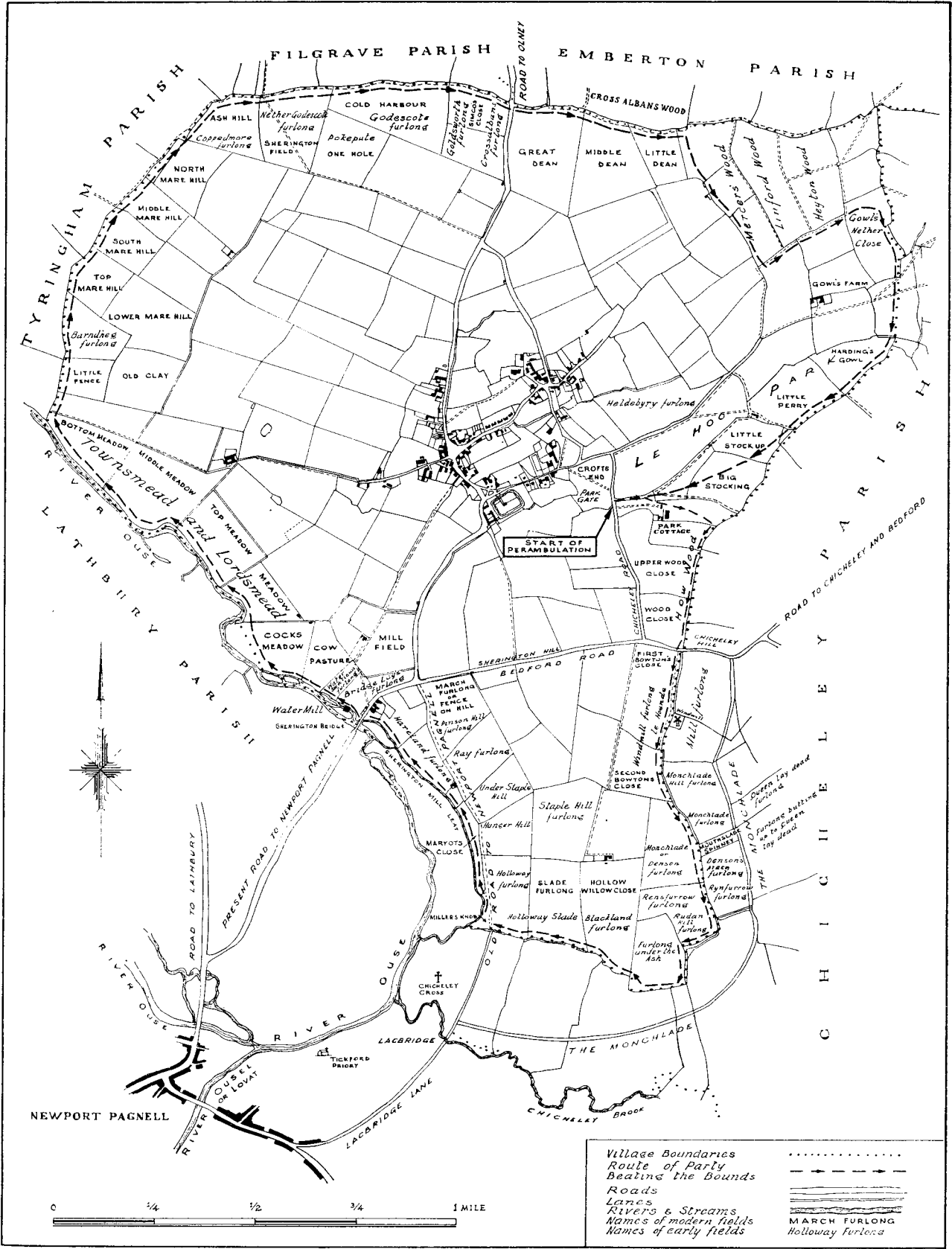
Gervase de Carun, like Ignatius Fuller, was parson for a long time (1171–1228). In his earlier years the canonical prohibition of marriage was by no means universally accepted and married priests were still to be found in office. Gervase was one of those who were persuaded to conform but, as with Ignatius at a later period, it was a question of expediency rather than of conscience, for after his death his property is found vested in four beneficiaries, three of whom were Richard, son of Gervase, sometimes called Richard, son of the parson, Simon, son of Gervase, and John, son of Hawisia, names that tell their own story.³

Gervase and Ignatius represented two very different clerical types and were representative of two widely separated epochs, nevertheless both of them spent their whole working life in Sherington and must have known intimately every ridge and furrow in the fields. Let us suppose that they keep company with a group of present-day parishioners to beat the bounds of Sherington (Map 1), comparing and contrasting the lie of the land as it is today (Map 2), as it was in 1700 (Map 3) and as it almost certainly had been in 1200 (Map 4).

The road from Croft’s End in Sherington towards Chicheley firsts dips as it leaves

¹ As will be discussed later (pp. 29–30) Gervase was not, strictly speaking, parson of Sherington but was priest of the church and farmer of the church lands. In his day, however, he was always referred to as Gervase the parson and it is convenient to retain the title.
² *R.B.* vi, 406.
³ KB26/111, m. 6d, 8; J11/62, m. 32d.

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Map I. Beating the bounds.

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the village and then climbs slowly until it reaches the high ground at the Newport Pagnell-Bedford road corner. About a third of the way up the hill on the left-hand side is a small building described on the ordnance map as 'Park Cottage', a name that is closely woven into Sherington history. In Parson Fuller's time the enclosed ground on which the cottage stood was called 'Park Close' and the gate leading to the road 'Park Gate'. Behind the close, on a ridge of high ground running south along the Chicheley border to the corner at the main road, was a stretch of wood called 'How Wood'. The vista has altered somewhat in the meanwhile, as the wood was grubbed up early in the eighteenth century, but the change would appear even more remarkable to Gervase the parson. In his day Park Gate did not belie its name but led into le Hoo (OE *hōh*, ridge or spur of land) Park, which extended to about 80 acres in a north-easterly direction along the Chicheley border as far as the holding marked 'Gowles farm' on the ordnance map. Together with ten acres of the adjoining le Hoo (later, How) Wood it had been given to Gervase himself sometime before 1193 by his father William and his brother Richard. Park Cottage must be very near the site of the old gate into How Wood, which was traditionally one of the two starting-points for the perambulations.

Until the dispersal of some of the manorial holdings in the early years of the seventeenth century the north-east sector of the village, bounded on the west by the Olney road and on the south by the Bedford road was all demesne except for a small area at the fork between the two roads. The rest of the land, other than the meadows skirting the river, some scattered cow pasture and a few private closes, was in open common fields worked, in Gervase's day, on the two-field system with West Field and South Field separated by the pathway leading to Tyringham (Map 4), and in Parson Fuller's day on the three-field system with Marehill (or Dropwell) Field to the north, Little Field, and then Windmill Field to the south (Map 3).

When the parishioners emerge from the southern end of How Wood (now Upper Wood Close and Wood Close) (Map 1) and walk across the Bedford road they will enter what was, before the Enclosure Award of 1797, one of the great common fields; the Windmill Field of Parson Fuller and the South Field or more simply the 'field towards the sun' of Gervase.¹ As they continue their walk they will pass through a succession of enclosed fields that have trivial names recalling ownership in the last century. Before the Enclosure, however, the common fields were

¹ BASRB, IV, 74.

[illegible]

Map 2. Field map of Sherington, c. 1950.

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parcelled out into furlongs, and in the present instance the first of these was called le Hoende (1313) because it extended to the end of the high ridge; the name was changed late in the thirteenth century to Windmill furlong when the prior of Tickford erected such a mill on the far side of the parish boundary with Chicheley.

The next furlong, which sloped gently downhill, is interesting for many reasons. Part of it was in Chicheley parish and the two portions were tilled from east to west across the boundary in common. Such overlapping, though unusual, explains the need to register the parish boundaries each year. The early name for the furlong was Monchlade (c. 1270) and in Sherington it became later (1750) Monthslade or Denson furlong. In Chicheley the name has persisted and on the ordnance map there is a wood called Mouthslade Spinney in the position occupied by the old furlong. Monch is a reduced form of minchen (OE *mynecen*, nun) and the name means nun's path. This path or track—the Monchlade—was used as a short cut by light traffic going to Newport from the east, especially when floods interfered with the river crossing at Sherington. It branched off from the main highway at the foot of Chicheley hill (Map 1) and passing south through a shallow declivity it swung round on the brook side of the parish boundary with Sherington to join Lacbridge lane a short distance north of the small bridge there. It fell into disuse when the stone bridge over the Ouse was built late in the fifteenth century but there are a few references to it under the name of Blackbird lane in the eighteenth century, a change that emphasized its passage through outlying grazing land.¹ It was closed by Act of Parliament in 1753² and the land taken into the Chester estate.

The Monchlade, which joined the main London road at a point close to the Newport Pagnell bridge over the Ousel, must have got its name from the nuns attached as sisters³ to St John's Hospital for lepers there.⁴ This hospital by the bridge is not recorded before 1246,⁵ but there is evidence that the track itself may have been of much more remote origin.

Among the Chester muniments is a complete survey of Chicheley open fields made in 1557,⁶ and from information given it can be deduced that a furlong bearing

¹ *English Place-Name Society*, xiii, 335. Theley ground under the Ash furlong (Map 3) was referred to as Blackbird grounds in 1763 (D/Ch/157/8).

² See p. 244.

³ *Cal. Pat.* 3 Ed. I, p. 91.

⁴ F. W. Bull, *History of Newport Pagnell*, (1900), pp. 212–33.

⁵ J11/56, m. 12d.

⁶ It was made for Anthony Cave by two professional surveyors Ambrose Saunders and Clement Vincent. The acreage of every land (selion) and furlong is recorded: there were three open fields extending to 1360 acres, 132 furlongs and 4621 selions.

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the arresting name Quene lay dead was situated alongside the Monchlade at a point close to the present-day Mouthslade Spinney. As it is referred to a century or so later in the shortened form of 'the queen furlong', one's first reaction is to wonder who the lady bearing such an august title can have been. Consideration shows that of all the consorts of post-conquest kings the only one whose body could have been in the neighbourhood for a short time after her death was Eleanor of Castile, in whose memory a number of Eleanor Crosses were erected by Edward I. She died at Harby near Lincoln on 25 November 1290 and her cortège on its way from Stony Stratford to Woburn on 11 December might well have taken the route through Newport Pagnell so as to avoid a notoriously difficult winter crossing of the Ousel at Fenny Stratford. During a halt the bier could have rested in the chapel of Tickford priory, but it would be straining credulity to argue that it might have been taken half a mile along and up the Monchlade into Chicheley field. Three other furlong names in the 1557 survey recall the queen,¹ and it is doubtful if these would all have been changed at a date as late as 1290, whatever the circumstances.

In the middle ages *quene* could indeed represent OE *cwēn*, 'a queen', but equally well OE *quean*, 'a woman', and in the present instance, where we deal with a spot so far distant from anywhere, the homely derivation is the more probable one. Quene does in fact occur as a local surname in the thirteenth century² and as the late Professor Ekwall has pointed out, Deadwin Clough in Lancashire was *dede-quenclough* 'the clough of the dead woman' in 1324.³ The furlong name can thus be regarded as a remarkable instance of the tenacity of tradition in England and is evidence that the border lands between Sherington and Chicheley came under tillage at an early date.

At the far end of Monchlade furlong the ground levels off and there was a small furlong, again shared between the two parishes, called Rensfurrow (1663) or Rynfurrow (1557);⁴ after which the ground slopes gently down the south-eastern corner of the village on another shared furlong called Rudan hill (OE *ryden*, clearing).

Turning right at the boundary corner the parishioners will come to two large adjoining fields which have been kept as permanent pasture since the time of the Enclosure Award and are still stamped with the pattern of the pre-Enclosure furlongs

¹ Furlong buttyng up to Quene lay deade (10 acres), Dead meede furlong (6 acres) and Dead meede lees (3 acres).

² SS 857, undated charter of Agnes Quene de Turvey.

³ *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names*.

⁴ No early example of the name has been found and the meaning is obscure.

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shown up by relics of the old ridge and furrow tillage. Along the southern border the first of these was the furlong Under the Ash (*subtus Eysse* c. 1240 'under a clump of ash trees'). The original ashes must have withered and fallen more than a thousand years ago, but ashes still grow in the hedgerows of the two modern fields. Next comes Blackland furlong (Blakelond, 1238; OE *blaec*, black). The upper and higher ground of the second large field has an ancient balk running north to south down the centre, with the worn ridges and furrows of Skerdingswell furlong to the left and of the furlong on the 'Homer side of Hollow Willow Bush' on the right. The present field is called Hollow Willow, thus preserving this old and intimate furlong name. The next and last furlong on the southern boundary was Holloway furlong and slade (Holloway, 1704; nether holloway, 1623; le Nethereweys, 1316, 'sunken or lower road'), recalling the old road to Newport to be discussed later. When this fell into disuse in the seventeenth century the thin strip of land was absorbed into Upper Holloway furlong as four extra selions.¹

Continuing on the track alongside the rivulet the parishioners will pass a number of fields that run up the hill to the right; these represent the old furlongs and retain their names: Hunger Hill (hungerhul, 1238; OE *hunger*, poor crops); Under Staple Hill (Stapulhul, 1333; OE *stapol*, hill with a post on it); Ray Furlong (Ray, 1238; probably OE *ryge*, rye); and March Furlong (March Furlong, 1763; Standhill Marsh furlong, 1628; Stanihul, 1238; OE *stan*, stone). Abutting the stream to the left there will be a small close called Millers Knob which had other names during the ages, suggesting its peculiar shape: Bacon's womb, 1575; le Toung, 1332 (OE *tunge*, tongue of land). Next comes Maryot's close² formerly le Elong (1322), probably an abbreviation for Elond furlong (OE *ēalond*, river land) and then Hareland, 1325, land frequented by hares. Finally, there is the present Newport road, the vicinity of which has undergone many changes over the ages.

In the days before a bridge was built on the site of the present one at Sherington the ford then in use must have been impassable at times when the Ouse was in flood. For this reason the original road between the two towns went a more indirect and slightly longer way round (Map 1). Known later as the 'old road to Newport', it was a continuation of the Olney highway in Sherington from a point where it cut the main highway from Chicheley. From there it ran almost due south and skirting

¹ D/Ch/182/15. Release 1792: '4 roads shooting to the deep slade and was the old road'.

² Richard Maryot was lord of Cave's manor in the fifteenth century.

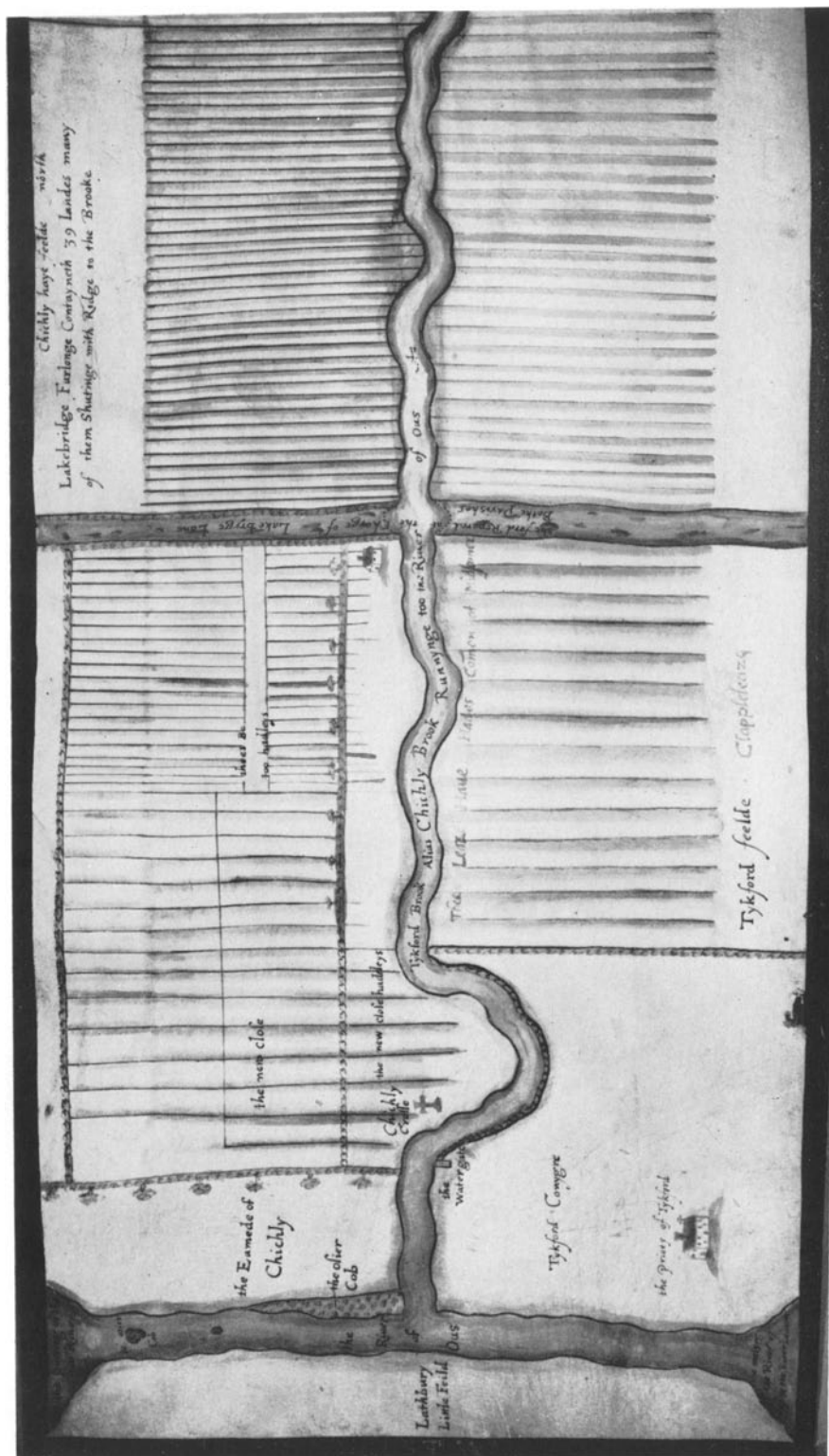
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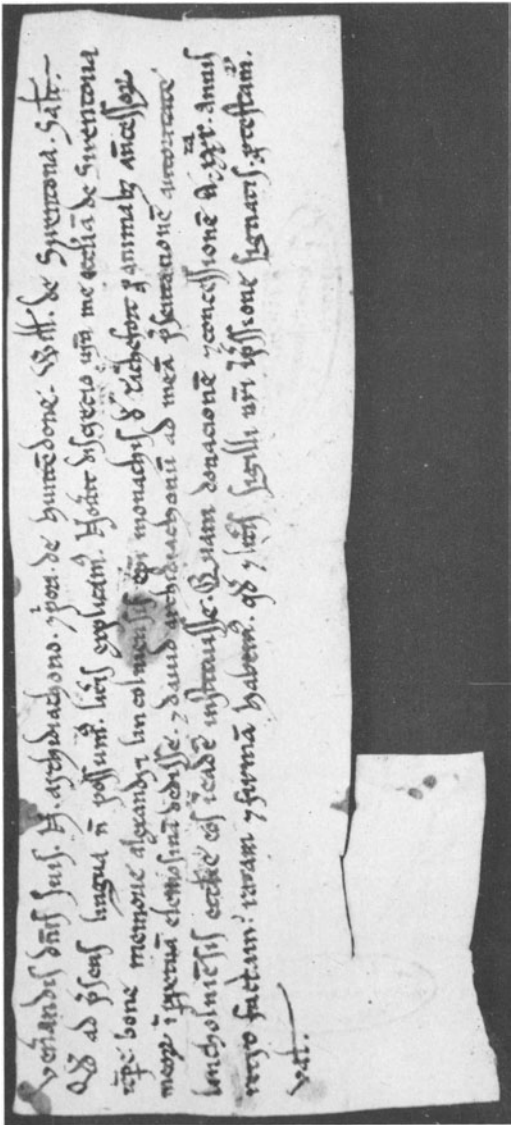
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More information



1 Chicheley Brook and Lake bryge lane c. 1620



ii Letter of William de Sherington confirming his gift of Sherington church to Tickford priory in 1140