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978-0-521-07824-5 - The Domesday Geography of South-East England

Edited by H. C. Darby and Eila M. J. Campbell

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

BEDFORDSHIRE

BY EILA M. J. CAMPBELL, M.A.

There have been four other attempts to reassemble on a geographical basis the Domesday entries for Bedfordshire. The earliest was an analysis of the hidage alone in a communication to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1828.¹ The next to appear was *A Digest of the Domesday of Bedfordshire* by the Rev. William Airy.² Although Airy had completed his analysis by 1873, it was not published until after his death. It covered many items of information besides hidage, and it won the approval even of J. H. Round:

It was, most happily, pointed out to the author [Airy] by the Rev. Joseph Hunter 'that what we want is not translations but analyses of the surveys of the several counties' (p. viii). To this most true remark we owe it that Mr Airy resolved to give us a 'digest' instead of that usual 'extension and translation', which is perfectly useless to the Domesday student.³

Round used Airy's analysis to demonstrate the prevalence of the five-hide unit in Bedfordshire.⁴ Airy was followed by F. W. Ragg, who tried to reconstruct the original order of the villis in each hundred. Ragg's tabulation of the Bedfordshire assessments was used by F. H. Baring in his *Domesday Tables*;⁵ Baring did not tabulate anew the 'teamlands, teams, values and men of each vill' but referred his readers to Airy's analysis.⁶ But the most interesting of these earlier analyses is that by

¹ C.C., 'On the ancient division of counties into hundreds', *Gentleman's Magazine*, xcvi, Pt. 2 (London, 1828), pp. 99–102.

² W. Airy, *A Digest of the Domesday of Bedfordshire, being an analysis of that portion of the Domesday Survey which relates to the county of Bedford, and a key to the facsimile edition of the same published by Government*. Edited by his son, the Rev. B. R. Airy (Bedford, 1881).

³ J. H. Round, *Feudal England* (London, 1895; reprinted 1909), p. 55, quoting from W. Airy, *op. cit.* p. viii.

⁴ J. H. Round, *op. cit.* pp. 55–7; see also *V.C.H. Bedfordshire*, I (London, 1904), pp. 191–3.

⁵ F. H. Baring, *Domesday Tables for the counties of Surrey, Berkshire, Middlesex, Hertford, Buckingham and Bedford and for the New Forest, with an appendix on the Battle of Hastings* (London, 1909), pp. 172–91.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 173.

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G. H. Fowler, who assembled the entries anew, ‘reconstituting every vill and hundred as far as possible’.¹ He arranged the information given for each holding in a set of tables, the value of which cannot be overestimated. His analysis was accompanied by a set of nine maps on a scale of 2 miles to the inch; these maps are a most interesting experiment and are the more valuable because he wrote the accompanying text with an eye on the physical features of the county. Fowler’s work marked a distinct advance in Domesday analysis, and his maps, although not above criticism, will always remain a most interesting pioneer achievement. He was very conscious of the many difficulties which one encounters in analysing the Domesday folios:

It is [he wrote] probably humanly impossible, in such detailed work as these Tables and the subsequent computations, for a single-handed student to escape error. The mere copying and rearrangement is difficult enough to achieve with any accuracy; as the greatest living Domesday Scholar complains ‘No one who has not analysed and collated such texts for himself can realise the extreme difficulty of avoiding occasional error. The abbreviations and the formulæ employed in these surveys are so many pitfalls for the transcriber, and the use of Roman numerals is almost fatal to accuracy.’²

The Domesday county of Bedford corresponds more or less to the modern county, but there are some important differences. In the north-west, five places—Farndish (216, 216b, 225b), Podington (215b, 216, 225b), Newton Bromswold (210, 220b), Rushden (210, 212b, 225b), and Stanwick (210b, 221b)—were surveyed partly under Bedfordshire and partly under Northamptonshire; only Farndish and Podington are now in Bedfordshire. There was a similar intermingling along the Huntingdonshire border; there, the Domesday village of Keysoe, consisting of four holdings, was described partly under Bedfordshire (212b, 216b) and partly under Huntingdonshire (205b, 207b), but the second of the Huntingdonshire entries tells us that a holding of one virgate ‘lay in Bedfordshire but paid geld in Huntingdonshire’ (*Jacet in bedefordscira sed geldum dat in huntedschire*). The Bedfordshire village of Pertenhall was surveyed under Huntingdonshire (203b, 208) because it rendered geld and service there; the first entry notes: *Haec terra sita est in Bedefordschire sed*

¹ G. H. Fowler, *Bedfordshire in 1086: An analysis and synthesis of Domesday Book* (Quarto Memoirs of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, Aspley Guise, 1922).

² *Ibid.* p. 4, quoting from J. H. Round, *Feudal England*, p. 20.

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geldum et servitium reddit in hontedunescyre (203 b).¹ In 1086 Everton seems to have straddled the boundary between the two counties (207, 217 b), and only the second holding has been reckoned in Bedfordshire. Of the unidentified *Hanefelde* (211 b), rubricated under Stodden hundred in the

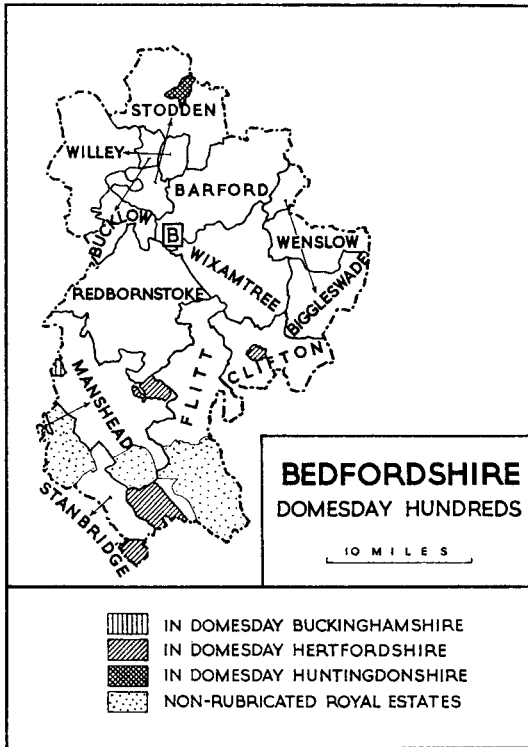


Fig. 2. Bedfordshire: Domesday hundreds.

B indicates the Domesday borough of Bedford, assessed at half a hundred. Those royal estates, unrubricated in the Domesday Book, are shown as part of the respective hundreds in which they later appeared (see p. 6).

Bedfordshire folios, we are told that it 'lay always in Kimbolton' (in Huntingdonshire) but by right was always assessed in Bedfordshire (*jacuit semper in Chenebaltone, sed Warram dedit semper iuste in Bedefordscira*); in the present analysis *Hanefelde* has been assumed to be a lost place

¹ Both entries refer to the same holding at Pertenhall; the second tells us only that 'King Edward had the soke' (*habebat rex Edwardus socam*).

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in Bedfordshire.¹ One-sixth of a hide belonging to Easton, a berewick of Spaldwick in Huntingdonshire, was recorded as paying geld in Bedfordshire (208).² Swineshead, transferred to Bedfordshire as recently as 1888, was naturally surveyed under Huntingdonshire (205b, 206, 208), while Tilbrook, which only became a part of Huntingdonshire in that year, was entered under Bedfordshire (211b). In the west, the eleventh-century settlement of Edlesborough straddled the border between Bedfordshire

The Domesday County and the Modern County of Bedford

A. *Transferred from Domesday Bedfordshire to Modern Counties*

To Buckinghamshire
Edlesborough (part)

To Huntingdonshire
Easton (part)
Tilbrook

To Hertfordshire
Holwell

To Northamptonshire
Newton Bromswold (part)
Rushden (part)
Stanwick (part)

B. *Transferred from Other Domesday Counties to Modern Bedfordshire*

From Hertfordshire
Barwythe
Caddington (part)
Kensworth
Meppershall (part)
Polehanger
Westoning

From Huntingdonshire
Keysoe (part)
Pertenhall
Swineshead

From Northamptonshire
Farndish (part)
Podington (part)

¹ W. Airy thought that this holding might have been in the neighbourhood of Honey Hill near the boundary between the modern parishes of Kimbolton and Pertenhall (*op. cit.* pp. 47–8). There was also another holding in *Hanefeld* (218b).

² Some confusion has arisen about Easton (*Estone*). There are a number of other entries in the Bedfordshire folios relating to an *Estone* (210 *bis*, 211b *quater*, 213, 216 *bis*, 216b), and Round suggested that these referred to the Huntingdonshire village—see (1) J. H. Round in *V.C.H. Bedfordshire*, I, p. 215; (2) F. M. Stenton in *V.C.H. Huntingdonshire*, I, p. 322. But ‘there is no doubt that “Estone”, Beds., was Little Staughton’ in Bedfordshire; see Ada Russell in *V.C.H. Huntingdonshire*, III (London, 1936), p. 42.

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and Buckinghamshire (149b, 215), but the village now lies wholly in that county. In the south, six Bedfordshire villages were surveyed partly or wholly under Hertfordshire—Barwythe (138), Caddington (136, 211),¹ Kensworth (136),² Meppershall (142, 216b),³ Polehanger (137b) and Westoning (132b).⁴ Holwell (210b, 211) was transferred to Hertfordshire

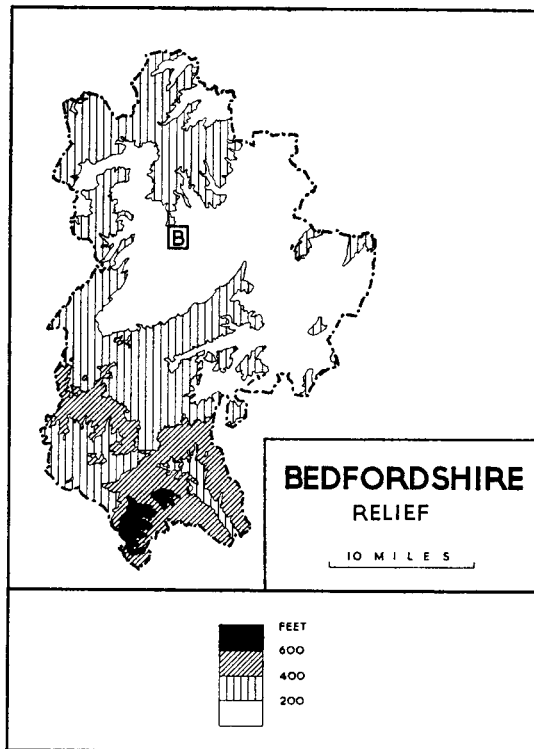


Fig. 3. Bedfordshire: Relief.

B indicates the Domesday borough of Bedford.

¹ Caddington became wholly part of Bedfordshire in 1888.

² Transferred to Bedfordshire in 1888.

³ The Bedfordshire entry for Meppershall (216b) notes: *pro iiii hidis se defendit in Bedefordscire. Terra est iiii carucis. In Herefortscire ipsa villa se defendit pro iiii hidis et una virgata. Terra est iiii carucis.* The Hertfordshire entry (142) states: *Haec terra est appreciata in Bedefordscyre cum alia terra.*

⁴ The entry for Westoning concludes with the statement: *Hoc manerium tenuit Heraldus comes et jacuit et jacet in Hiȝ (i.e. Hitchin in Hertfordshire). Sed Wara huius manerii jacuit in Bedefordscire T.R.E. in hundredo de Maneheue (i.e. Manshead) et ibi est Manerium et fuit semper, et post mortem R.E. non se adquietavit de gildo regis.*

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as late as 1894. Thus, while some of these changes reflect ancient fiscal or tenurial arrangements, others are due to relatively recent adjustments of the county boundary. They are summarised in the table on p. 4.

Within the Domesday county there were nine hundreds and three half-hundreds.¹ In addition there were the borough of Bedford (209), assessed as a half-hundred 'for the host and for ship service' (*in expeditione et in navibus*)² and the royal demesne, assessed at 95 hides in 1086.³ Thus it seems, as F. W. Ragg suggested, that Domesday Bedfordshire comprised the equivalent of twelve hundreds.⁴ Fig. 2 shows one attempt to reconstruct the Domesday hundreds of the county. We hear incidentally of a pre-Domesday hundred, the mysterious *Odecroft*, which is mentioned only once in the Bedfordshire folios;⁵ at the end of the entry for Sewell we read:

In Odecroft hundredo jacuit T.R.E. Radulfus taillebosc in manerio houstone (i.e. Houghton Regis) eam apposuit concedente Willielmus rege per crementum quod ei dedit (209b).

In a similar manner, Biscot had been taken out of Flitt hundred and placed in Luton, a royal manor without hundredal rubrication:

Hanc apposuit Radulfus talliebosc in Loitone manerio regis per crementum quod ei dedit et foris misit de hundredo ubi se defendebat T.R.E. Et contra sumpsit alias v hidas de alio hundredo et posuit in Flichtham hundredum (209b).

Seventeen hides had also been added to Leighton Buzzard (209).

¹ The hundreds were: Barford, Biggleswade, Clifton, Flitt, Manshead, Redborn-stoke, Stodden, Willey and Wixamtree. The half-hundreds were: Bucklow, Stanbridge and Wenslow.

² Bedford is not styled *burgus* but it is entered at the beginning of the Bedfordshire folios (209), and the burgesses of Bedford are noted as land-holders on folios 209 and 218.

³ The 1086 assessment of the royal estates amounted to 95 hides—Biscot, 5 hides (209b), Houghton Regis, 10 hides (209b), Leighton Buzzard, 47 hides (209), Luton, 30 hides (209), and Sewell, 3 hides (209b); only Biscot is rubricated under a hundred heading, and it is placed in Flitt hundred; see: (1) G. H. Fowler, *op. cit.* p. 55; (2) J. H. Round in *V.C.H. Bedfordshire*, I, p. 217.

⁴ Noted by J. H. Round in *V.C.H. Bedfordshire*, I, p. 217. It is interesting to note that Maitland accepted that there were twelve Domesday hundreds, but he tells us that he took this figure from Stubbs; see F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1897), pp. 459 and 459, n. 2.

⁵ G. H. Fowler suggested that the name may be represented today by Woodcroft manor in Luton (*Bedfordshire in 1086*, p. 56). See also *V.C.H. Bedfordshire*, II (London, 1908), p. 354; III (London, 1912), p. 391 n.

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SETTLEMENTS AND THEIR DISTRIBUTION

The total number of separate places mentioned in the Domesday Book for the area included within the modern county of Bedford seems to be 145, including the borough of Bedford.¹ This figure, however, may not

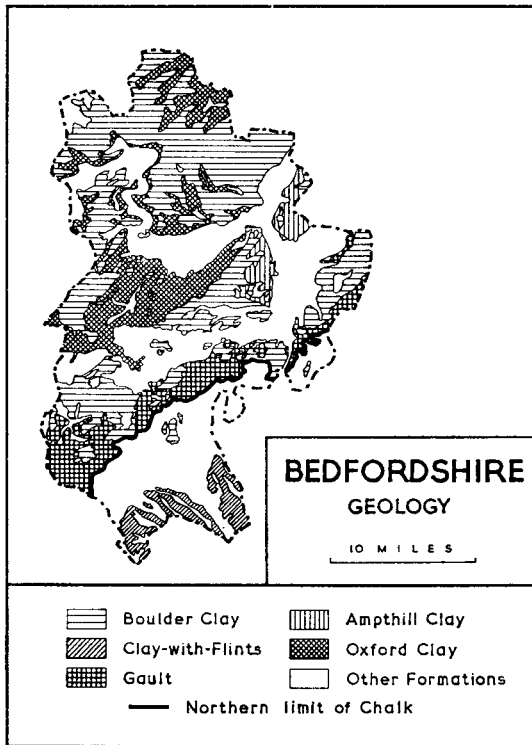


Fig. 4. Bedfordshire: Surface geology.

Based on (1) G. D. Nicholls, 'An introduction to the geology of Bedfordshire', *Bedfordshire Naturalist* (1947), no. 2, pp. 9-16 (Beds. Nat. Hist. Soc. and Field Club, Bedford, 1948); (2) Geological Survey One-Inch Sheets (New Series) 203 and 238, and Quarter-Inch Sheet 16.

accurately reflect the actual number of separate settlements in the county in 1086. In the first place, we cannot tell whether Upper Dean and Lower Dean, adjoining villages today, were distinctive units in the eleventh

¹ Bedford is not specifically styled *burgus*, but 'the burgesses of Bedford' are noted on fos. 209 and 218.

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century;¹ their distinctive appellations are later in date.² The Deans may well have been separate settlements in 1086, but they have been counted as one in the present total of 145. On the other hand, Great Barford (213b *quater*) and Little Barford (210b, 216b) have been counted as separate places although their appellations are not recorded in the Bedfordshire folios; but they are not adjoining villages, and they were rubricated under different hundreds.³ Then, again, it is possible that some of the large manors, e.g. Leighton Buzzard (209) and Luton (209), may have included more than one settlement apiece when the survey was made.

The total of 145 includes a few places regarding which very little information is given; the record may be incomplete, or the details may have been included with those of a neighbouring village. Thus Pertenhall (203b, 208) answered for 1 virgate (*i virgatam terrae ad geldam*),⁴ had land for 1 plough-team, and was worth 5*s.* in 1086, as in 1066, but we are told nothing about its population or its other resources. The entry for Elvedon (216b) tells us that it was assessed at 1 hide and 1 virgate, that there were 1½ plough-lands which were being worked, that there was meadow for 1 plough-team and wood for 34 swine, and that its value, which had fallen from 15*s.* *T.R.E.* to 10*s.* *quando recepit*, had not recovered by 1086; but there is no mention of any people. Of Shirton (216), which answered for 1 virgate, we know only that its value fell from 2*s.* in 1066 to 12*d.* in 1086. Then, again, we are told nothing at all about the resources or value of a holding of 1 virgate in Sudbury (216), save that it belonged to the

¹ There are four Domesday entries for *Dene* (209b, 210, 211b, 218b).

² Upper Dean was known as *Overdeane* in 1430 and Lower Dean as *Netherdeane* in 1539; the curious *Middeldene* of 1287 has not survived. For the history of these names, and of all other names mentioned in this chapter, see A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire* (Cambridge, 1926).

³ Cockayne Hatley is *Hatelai* in the Bedfordshire folios (217b, 218). There are two other villages nearby with the surname *Hatelai*, i.e. Hatley St George and East Hatley, but they are on the other side of the county boundary and were surveyed under Cambridgeshire in the Domesday Book; they are rubricated under different hundreds, so that separate settlements are presumably implied. But at one time the three parishes must have formed a single unit. Today the Domesday *Cravenhest* (213) is represented by Gravenhurst and its hamlet Little Gravenhurst, but Gravenhurst (*alias* Upper Gravenhurst) and Little Gravenhurst were separate parishes in 1888. The two Aspleys of today, Aspley Guise and Aspley Heath, represent the Domesday *Aspeleia* (213); Aspley Heath was constituted a civil parish only in 1885.

⁴ The normal formula in the Huntingdonshire folios in which Pertenhall was surveyed.

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church of St Neots.¹ No statement is made about the population of Gladley (217), yet its resources included 1 plough-land on which 4 oxen were at work, meadow for 1 plough-team, woodland for 100 swine, and a mill rendering 16s.

Not all the Domesday names appear on the present-day map of Bedfordshire villages. Some are represented by hamlets, others by individual farms or houses. Thus *Salchou* (213) is now the hamlet of Salph End in the parish of Renhold, and *Chaelestorne* or *Calnestorne* (212, 213b, 215 *bis*) is the hamlet of Chawston in Roxton. *Polehangre* (137b) is represented by Polehanger Farm in Meppershall, and *Putenehou* (212b) has given its name to Putnoe Farm in Goldington. *Segenehou* (i.e. Segenhoe, 216) survives in the name of a house in Ridgmont. The Domesday *Chenemondewiche* (210b) survived, until 1804, in the name of Kinwick Field in Sandy.² These are but some of the changes in the Bedfordshire villages. To them must be added two unidentified names, *Cudessane* (211b, 214)³ and *Hanefelde* (211b, 218b). Whether these names will yet be identified or whether the places they represent have completely disappeared, leaving no record or trace behind, we cannot say.⁴

On the other hand, a few villages on the modern map of Bedfordshire are not mentioned in the Domesday Book. Their names do not appear until the twelfth or thirteenth century, and presumably, if they existed in 1086, they are accounted for under the statistics of neighbouring settlements. Thus the earliest record of Dunstable is from 1123, but, as W. Airy noted, its locality may well have been described in the Domesday entries for Houghton Regis (209b) and Sewell (209b), from which the parish of Dunstable was formed at a later date.⁵ Souldrop dates only from 1196,⁶ and

¹ It is possible that the unassigned holding of 2 hides and 3 virgates rubricated under Barford hundred on fo. 217b may refer to another holding in Sudbury; see J. H. Round in *V.C.H. Bedfordshire*, 1, p. 258, n. 3.

² See (1) G. H. Fowler, 'Domesday Notes II—Kenemondwick', *Pubs. Beds. Hist. Rec. Soc.* v (Aspley Guise, 1920), pp. 61–73, especially p. 73; (2) E. Gibbons and E. Arden, 'Map of the Parish of Sandy in the County of Bedfordshire'; a copy of this map accompanies the relevant Parliamentary Inclosure Award of 1804 [Bedfordshire Muniments, *MA 14*].

³ See J. H. Round in *V.C.H. Bedfordshire*, 1, p. 216.

⁴ There are also six anonymous holdings entered in the Bedfordshire folios; they are rubricated under the hundreds of Barford (217b), Biggleswade (214b), Manshead (214), Stodden (218b) and Willey (210, 218b) respectively.

⁵ W. Airy, *op. cit.* p. 45; see also J. H. Round in *V.C.H. Bedfordshire*, 1, p. 194 n.

⁶ Airy assigned an anonymous holding in Willey hundred (210) to Souldrop; see (1) W. Airy, *op. cit.* p. 45, and (2) J. H. Round in *V.C.H. Bedfordshire*, 1, p. 225 n.

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Wrestlingworth from about 1150, but G. H. Fowler showed that the resources of the latter were included in the account of Cockayne Hatley (217b).¹ Billington and Stanbridge in Manshead hundred date respectively from 1196 and 1165, and Chellington from 1242.² Whether or not some of the missing names refer to estates that were in fact in existence in 1086 we cannot say, but it is clear that others refer to settlements which were founded at a later date; most of the post-Domesday names are in the Chilterns.

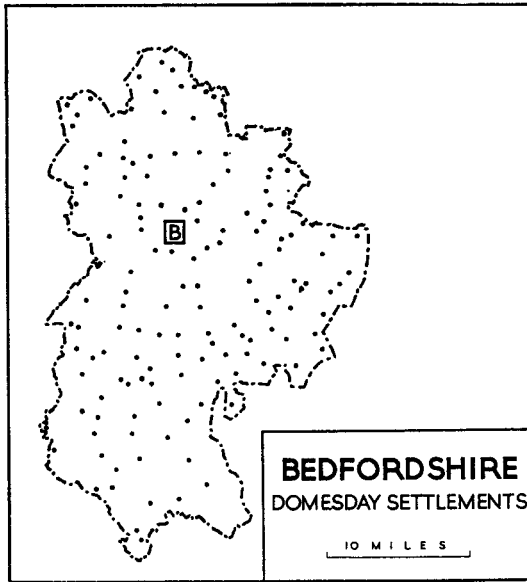


Fig. 5. Bedfordshire: Domesday place-names.

B indicates the Domesday borough of Bedford.

The distribution of Domesday settlements is surprisingly even (Fig. 5). Villages were as frequent on the hills in the west as in the low-lying Vale of Bedford. But, in detail, three lines of villages stand out on the map; two follow the valleys of the rivers Ouse and Ivel, and the third is associated with the belt of loamy soils developed on the conspicuous level surface below the northward-facing scarp slope of the Chilterns. Villages in the Chilterns themselves were mainly in the valley of the Ver.

¹ G. H. Fowler, *Bedfordshire in 1086*, p. 58. But note that Wrestlingworth has not been included as a separate village in the present count of 145 settlements.

² J. H. Round thought that an unassigned holding in Willey hundred (210) might possibly relate to Chellington (*V.C.H. Bedfordshire*, 1, p. 225, n. 4).