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A.C. Chibnall  
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BUCKINGHAMSHIRE VILLAGE

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# SHERINGTON

FIEFS AND FIELDS OF A  
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE VILLAGE

BY  
A.C. CHIBNALL  
FELLOW OF CLARE COLLEGE  
CAMBRIDGE



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TO MARJORIE  
*the mother of yet another*  
*John Chibnall*

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ABBREVIATIONS

CLASSES OF PUBLIC RECORDS, WITH THEIR  
CLASS NUMBERS

CHANCERY

C 1	Proceedings, Early
C 2	Proceedings, Series I
C 3	Proceedings, Series II
C 47	Miscellanea
C 54	Close Rolls
C 60	Fine Rolls
C 66	Patent Rolls
C 72	Scutage Rolls
C 93	Charitable Uses
C 131	Extents for Debt
C 132	Inquisitions Post Mortem, Series I, Henry III
C 133	Inquisitions Post Mortem, Series I, Edward I
C 134	Inquisitions Post Mortem, Series I, Edward II
C 135	Inquisitions Post Mortem, Series I, Edward III
C 136	Inquisitions Post Mortem, Series I, Richard II
C 137	Inquisitions Post Mortem, Series I, Henry IV
C 138	Inquisitions Post Mortem, Series I, Henry V
C 139	Inquisitions Post Mortem, Series I, Henry VI
C 142	Inquisitions Post Mortem, Series II
C 143	Inquisitions ad quod damnum
C 145	Inquisitions Miscellaneous

COURT OF COMMON PLEAS

CP 25(1)	Feet of Fines, Series I
CP 25(2)	Feet of Fines, Series II
CP 40	Plea Rolls
CP 43	Recovery Rolls

ABBREVIATIONS

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

DL42      Miscellaneous Books

EXCHEQUER OF PLEAS

E13      Plea Rolls

EXCHEQUER, TREASURY OF THE RECEIPT

E36      Rentals and Surveys

EXCHEQUER, QUEEN’S REMEMBRANCER

- E101      Accounts, various
- E106      Extents of Alien Priories
- E112      Bills and Answers
- E136      Escheator’s Accounts
- E149      Inquisitions Post Mortem, Series I
- E150      Inquisitions Post Mortem, Series II
- E178      Special Commissions of Inquiry
- E179      Subsidy Rolls, etc.
- E199      Sheriffs’ Accounts

EXCHEQUER, AUGMENTATION OFFICE

- E301      Certificates of Chantries and Colleges
- E314      Miscellanea
- E315      Miscellaneous Books
- E318      Particulars for Grants of Crown Lands
- E322      Surrenders of the Monasteries

EXCHEQUER, LORD TREASURER’S REMEMBRANCER

- E357      Escheator’s Enrolled Accounts
- E359      Enrolled Accounts, Subsidies
- E368      Memoranda Rolls
- E372      Pipe Rolls

EXCHEQUER OF RECEIPT

- E401      Receipt Rolls
- E403      Issue Rolls

ABBREVIATIONS

JUSTICES ITINERANT

Jl 1            Assize Rolls, Eyre Rolls, etc.

COURT OF QUEEN’S BENCH

KB 26        Curia Regis Rolls

KB 27        Coram Rege Rolls

COURT OF REQUESTS

Reg. 2        Proceedings

STATE PAPER OFFICE

SP 22        State Papers, Domestic

COURT OF STAR CHAMBER

St. Ch. 5     Proceedings, Elizabeth

St. Ch. 7     Proceedings, Elizabeth Adenda

St. Ch. 8     Proceedings, James I

SOCIETIES AND PUBLICATIONS

<i>BASRB</i>	<i>Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, Records Branch</i>
<i>BHRS</i>	<i>Bedfordshire Historical Record Society</i>
<i>BRS</i>	<i>Buckinghamshire Record Society</i>
<i>BSR</i>	<i>Buckinghamshire Sessions Records</i>
<i>CRR</i>	<i>Calendar of the Curia Regis Rolls</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>LRS</i>	<i>Lincoln Record Society</i>
<i>NRS</i>	<i>Northamptonshire Record Society</i>
<i>OHS</i>	<i>Oxford Historical Society</i>
<i>ORS</i>	<i>Oxfordshire Record Society</i>
<i>PRS</i>	<i>Pipe Roll Society</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Records of Buckinghamshire</i>
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>VCH</i>	<i>Victoria County History</i>
<i>YASRS</i>	<i>Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

DOCUMENTS

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE, AYLESBURY

- D/A/GT/- Buckinghamshire Archdeaconcy, Glebe terriers, etc.
- D/A/V/- Buckinghamshire Archdeaconcy, Visitation Books
- D/A/We/- Buckinghamshire Archdeaconcy, Registered Wills
- D/A/Wf/- Buckinghamshire Archdeaconcy, Filed Wills
- D/C/- Deeds deposited by Major Chester
- D/Ch/- Deeds deposited by the author
- Tyr. D Deeds of the Tyringham Estate, not yet (1963) calendared

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY,  
MUSEUM, AYLESBURY

- BAS Deeds deposited

MERCERS' COMPANY, MERCERS' HALL, LONDON

- ECL Evidences of Dr Colet's lands
- MAC Court of Assistants Minute Books
- MCR Court Rolls of Mercers' manor in Sherington
- MRW Mercers' Register of Writings
- RCL Register of Company Lands
- SAB Surveyors' Account Books

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE RECORD OFFICE, DELAPRE ABBEY,  
NORTHAMPTON

- NRO Deeds deposited
- SS Stopford-Sackville muniments

COLLECTIONS

- T Throckmorton Muniments, Coughton Court, Warwickshire

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MY early studies on Sherington owed much to the sympathetic encouragement of the late Mr Frederick William Bull, solicitor and local historian of Newport Pagnell, who stimulated my interest by letting me read the notes he had made during the course of his professional career on many important Sherington deeds. Somewhat later he allowed me to rummage freely through the contents of numerous old tin boxes left derelict in his office store-rooms; there, at my leisure, I was able to browse through a miscellany of records that revealed in an illuminating way the day to day business of a local attorney in a bygone age; there I learnt to understand and appreciate the writings with which such attorneys clothed fines and recoveries, those barebones of the Public Record Office, and how they dealt with many a homely problem outside the dull routine of conveyancing. The knowledge acquired in this unconventional but happy way laid the foundation of the latter half of the present work and I recall his friendship and help with deep gratitude. I would also like to express my warm thanks to the late Professor Eilert Ekwall of Lund for his kindly collaboration in the study of the Sherington field-names. My own contribution has seldom exceeded a demonstration of the local background and the interpretations finally adopted reflect his erudition.

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Lastly, I must thank the President and Council of the British Academy for a generous grant towards the cost of publication.

## INTRODUCTION

THE essays on the history of Sherington presented in this book are the outcome of sporadic work started in 1919 as a simple family inquiry which has since developed into a comprehensive study of certain aspects of the feudal and economic growth of the village. Fortunately perhaps it was not realized at the outset what a wealth of record material would ultimately be brought to light, all of which has needed detailed attention. Certain manuscript as well as printed sources of information at the Public Record Office and the British Museum had already been sifted and edited for the *Victoria Country History of Buckinghamshire*,<sup>1</sup> but the writers concerned with Sherington had not had at their disposal the title deeds and other muniments of the four main estates there. All of these were of manorial or reputed manorial status, yet the records of three of them showed without any deep study that they had been built up within the last hundred years or so by collecting farms that had once been in independent ownership, for there was a series of deeds going back to the seventeenth century for each individual farm. The fourth estate was owned by the Mercers' Company of London as trustees of the endowment provided by John Colet, Dean of St Paul's, for St Paul's School in 1509. In this case the records included a fairly complete set of Court Rolls, Account Books and various Minute Books. Other sources that have yielded valuable information include the Throckmorton muniments at Coughton Court, Warwickshire, the Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire Record Offices and the lumber room of the late Mr F. W. Bull, solicitor of Newport Pagnell.

Examination of the deeds belonging to the owners of the four estates mentioned above gave the impression that collectively they represented the major part if not the whole of the agricultural land in Sherington during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the open-field system of tillage still prevailed. To interpret many of these old documents there was need for a contemporary map showing the lay-out of the open fields, the furlongs and the meadow lands that existed prior to 1797, in which year all the old boundaries were swept away on implementation of the Enclosure Award. No such map, unfortunately, appeared to

<sup>1</sup> *VCH Bucks*, IV, 451.

## INTRODUCTION

have survived, but as the deeds in private ownership incorporated a number of terriers in which the land was referred to in terms of fields, furlongs and strips (selions, ridges), it seemed worthwhile to attempt to reconstruct the strip map that might have been drawn by a surveyor visiting the village for that purpose a decade or so before the Enclosure Award, say around 1770.

No difficulty was experienced in showing that the three great common fields—called in the eighteenth century Dropwell or Marehill Field, Middle or Little Field and Windmill Field—comprised the major part of the land in the south, south-west and north-west sectors of the village respectively, and that the common meadow abutted on the river between Sherington bridge and the Tyringham boundary. The furlongs, however, presented a jigsaw puzzle that was only partially solved at this stage. The majority were readily allocated a position in the particular common field to which they were assigned in the terriers, but a few others seemed to belong elsewhere. It was noted at the time that in the furlongs of the former group the strips were rarely consolidated, whereas in the latter they were nearly always in compacted blocks often extending to several acres. It was a fair surmise that these consolidated furlongs were, or had once been, demesne, and that they probably belonged to the north and north-east sectors of the village, an area for which there was insufficient evidence for a full reconstruction in the terriers then under review.

An informative series of demesne terriers for the late sixteenth century was available, and as these could probably provide the missing information it was decided to start afresh and attempt to reconstruct the strip map for the year 1580. In keeping with expectation the demesne lands were found to lie exclusively in the east, north-east and south-east sectors of the village respectively, forming a quarter-circle bounded on the west by the Olney road and the south by the Bedford road. The area registered by the terriers in the form of arable land, pasture and wood amounted in all to 611 acres, whereas according to the Ordnance Survey map the sectors concerned covered 605 acres. The agreement between the two values was remarkably close and strengthened the opinion that the demesne had been correctly interpreted. The reconstruction of the rest of the map was completed without difficulty (Map 3). Fortunately the terriers covered such a large proportion of the open-field arable land and meadow that it was possible to deduce the extent of the cowpasture, an elusive item in rural topography because it is usually referred to in terms of so many ‘cow-commons’ instead of acres.



## INTRODUCTION

These studies brought to light two facts of outstanding importance. In the first place there were in Sherington at the end of the sixteenth century four manors or reputed manors called Linford, Cave, Fitz John and Mercers' respectively and the estates attached to these, together with certain small properties held freely of the Mercers' manor, accounted within a few acres for the whole of the land in the village. Early in the next century the first three of these estates were dispersed among the local farmers and it was not until comparatively recent times that economic conditions brought about a re-aggregation into three new units showing but little kinship with the old manorial estates. The deeds available enable the change-over from one set-up to the other, reflecting the interplay of economic forces during the period, to be followed in detail. Secondly, the observation that the demesne land was located exclusively in its own sector and none of it was dispersed among the strips in the great common fields suggests that piecemeal consolidation of the usual type had not occurred but that the demesne had been created 'en bloc' or in a succession of large blocks at a time when drastic and deep-seated changes were possible as, for instance, they were at the Conquest. It was anticipated, therefore, that the same distribution of the land would be found to occur at a somewhat earlier date and this was confirmed when a terrier of the Linford manor demesne for 1312 came to hand.

A detailed examination of the manorial and other relevant deeds showed that, except for a case of give and take among the open-field lands of Linford manor, all four of the Elizabethan estates had come down from about the year 1300 without significant alteration. There had, however, been a change in the meanwhile from the ancient two-field to the three-field system of tillage. It appeared probable, therefore, that the strip map of 1580 could be used as a basis for the reconstruction of one for the year 1300 and the map was drawn accordingly. The changes in the field system were incorporated and only such furlongs as had been noted in contemporary or earlier deeds were named. The gaps were surprisingly few. The map is unique for its date, and has been of great service in helping to put into the right perspective many of the disputes over land in Sherington that are recorded at length in the thirteenth-century plea rolls.

Although few title deeds for the thirteenth century have survived much information has been garnered from other sources. During this period the principal manor was still in the hands of the family named Carun who had held since the days of

## INTRODUCTION

Henry I, and whose last male representative Roger de Carun died in 1301 leaving an heiress Sibyl who later married Richard de Linford. At the beginning of the century only one subsidiary manor, that of Cockfield, had been sub-infeudated, but by 1300, as has already been mentioned, there were four manors or reputed manors in the village. Extents made at inquisitions, squabbles over land recorded at length in assize and plea rolls, as well as widows' claims for dower, have all helped to illustrate and integrate the diverse changes in ownership of the demesne lands between 1220 and 1300. These can, indeed, be followed with surprising exactness. The open-field lands called for a more elaborate investigation as they were often cited in terms of rent instead of acres, but the assembled data show that the whole of the acreage available in 1300 was already under tillage at a much earlier date.

To interpret the land history of Sherington beyond 1220 one is forced to depend less on factual knowledge and more on inference. The danger inherent in such a predicament is obvious and when writing the essays collected in this book the author has kept in mind an apothegm of Vinogradoff<sup>1</sup> which no local historian can afford to ignore.

More is known, of course, about later than about ancient times, and this will make it necessary on many occasions to turn to well ascertained later facts in order to form a judgment about ancient conditions. But it is not necessary to invert the sequence of epochs in the sketch of historical development, and by following the chronological order we may guard against carrying into the distant past conceptions of comparatively modern growth. It is not so much the fact of studying later stages before the earlier that constitutes the method of investigation from the known to the unknown, as the careful distinction between evidence and inference, and the systematic use of both.

The chapters follow a chronological order, but it is recognized that in places the reader may be left in some confusion as to the views expressed unless he has been made aware of certain unique features in the village history that do not emerge until later. This may apply especially to the early periods discussed in the first two chapters of the book, and accordingly it has been thought wise to include this short introduction, which has been limited by design to an exposition of various aspects of landholding in the village.

<sup>1</sup> *The Growth of the Manor*, pp. viii-ix.