

# The Anglo- Saxons: Land, Lordship and people



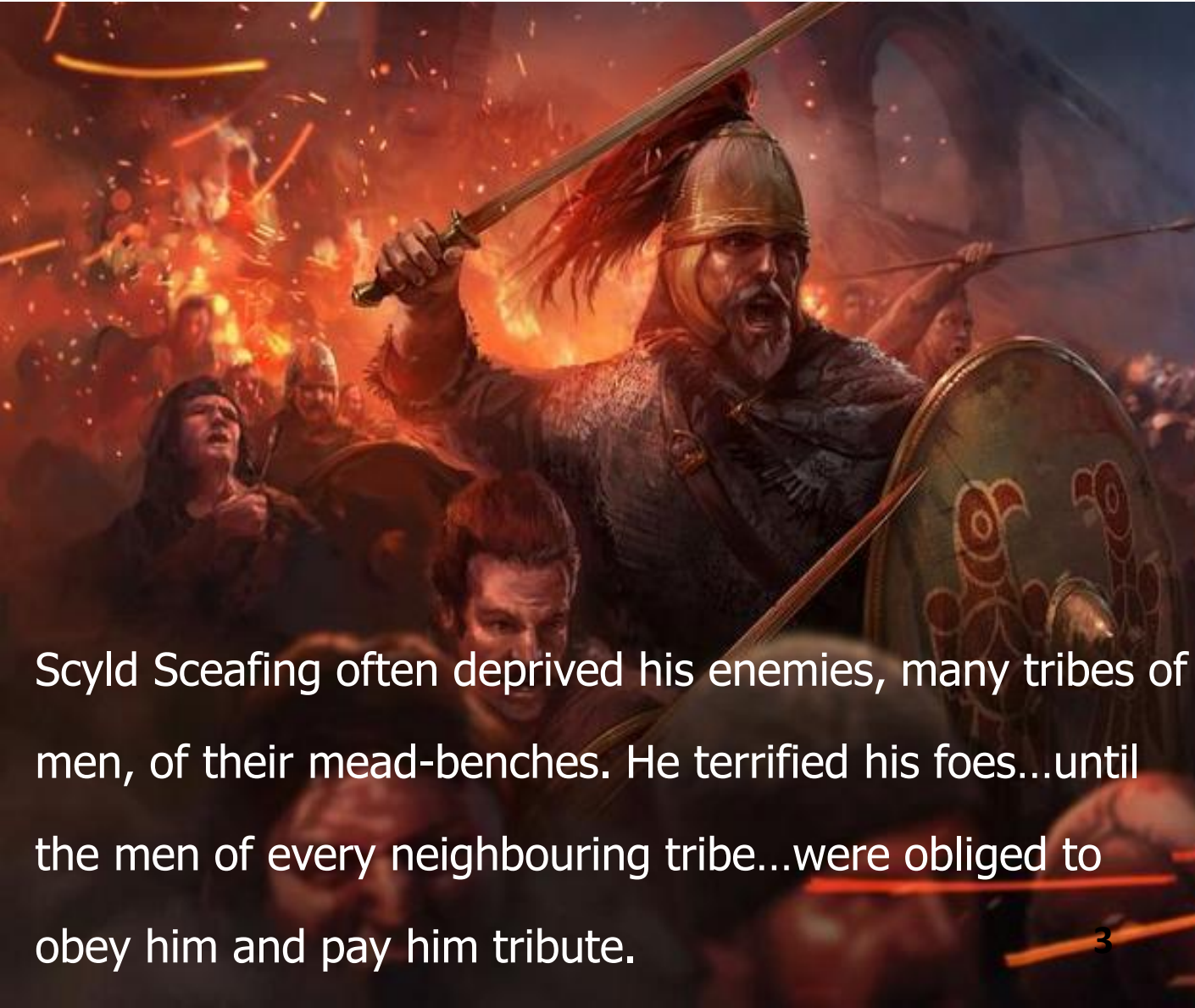
## The national story

- An Anglo Saxon nation with a flat society of Kings, Thegns and free peasants or ceorls...
- ...reduced to servitude under the Normans and the imposition of a feudal society of unfree peasants
- Village England



## Adventus Saxonum

Devastation and chaos as hordes of Germanic invaders sweep into an economically devastated and militarily weak country, wide out the Britons and settle a largely under exploited land



*...these heathen conquerors devastated the  
...cities and countryside...bishops and people  
alike, regardless of rank, were destroyed with  
fire and sword...others...surrendered to the  
enemy for food, although they were doomed  
to lifelong slavery...a few wretched survivors  
captured in the hills were butchered  
wholesale...others...eked out a wretched and  
fearful existence among the mountains,  
forests and crags..."*

*Gildas De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*  
(c.490x530)

Scyld Scaefing often deprived his enemies, many tribes of men, of their mead-benches. He terrified his foes...until the men of every neighbouring tribe...were obliged to obey him and pay him tribute.



## Adventus Saxonum?

- The problems of evidence – Romano British society looks more prosperous and widely settled than before.

## Alternative theories?

- Acculturation – large British survival, adopting the habits and dress of the invaders
- Elite replacement – and driving cultural change
- Ethnogenesis – later development of a foundation myth and identity
- Evolution, a process specific to the British isles over time, driven by Long, medium and short term influences

*The Repton Stone, believed to be Æthelbald, King of Mercians from 716-757, combines British, Byzantine and NW European cultural references*

# With reference of South Oxfordshire

- Map of the heptarchy
- Maps of John Speed, 1600's
- Available free at <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/maps/digital-maps/john-speed-proof-maps>



# Oxfordshire







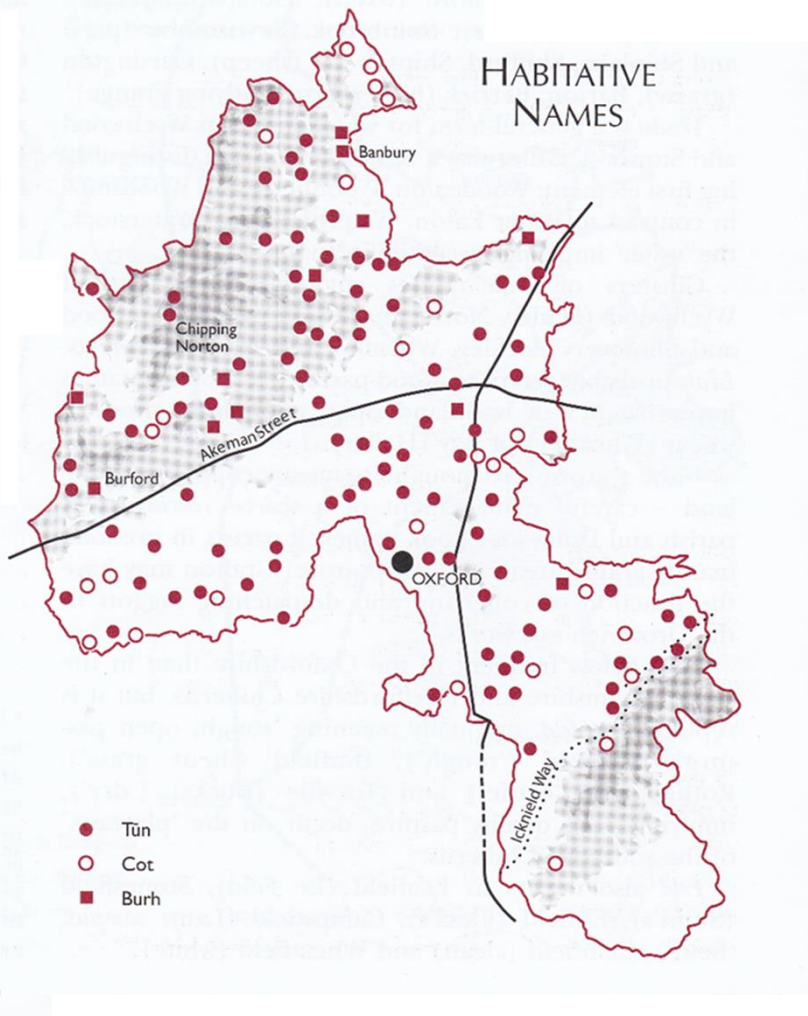
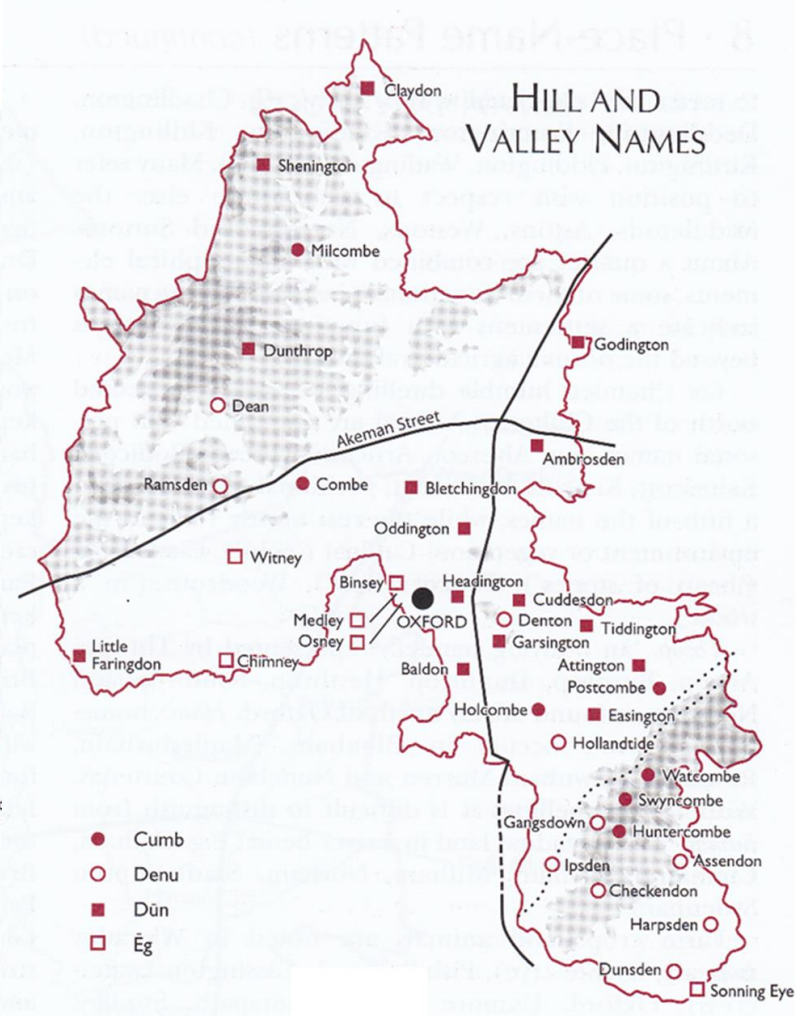
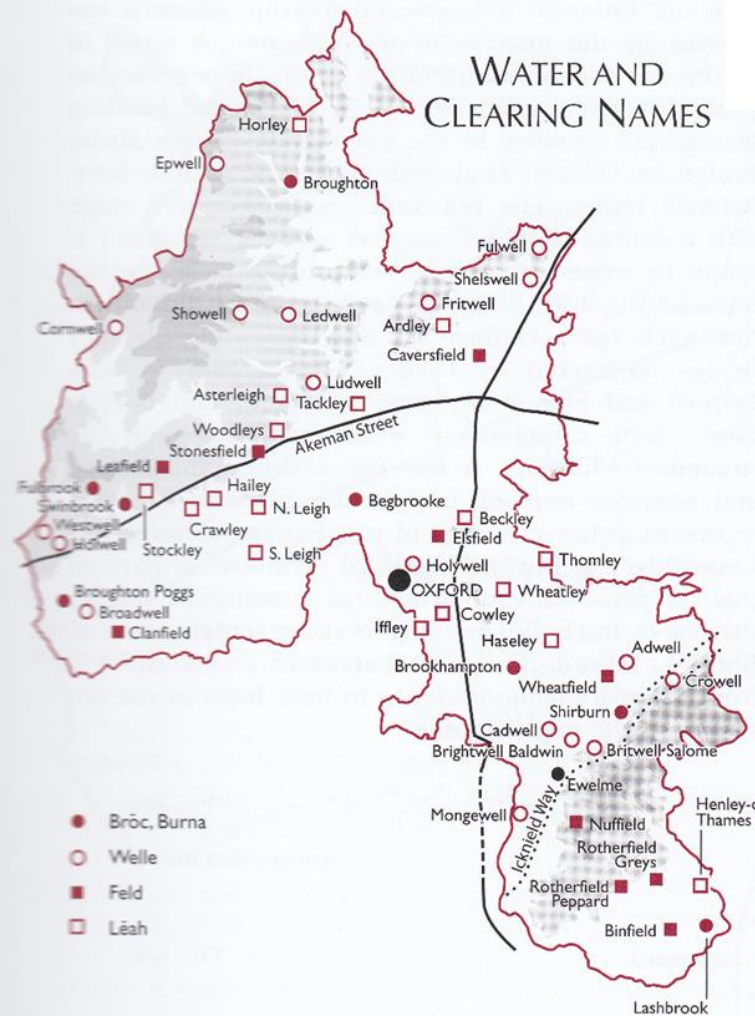
View of the  
Thames and  
the **Oxford vale**  
from  
Whittenham  
Clumps





The Chiltern Scarp – at the highest, 800 feet.  
Upland not highland.

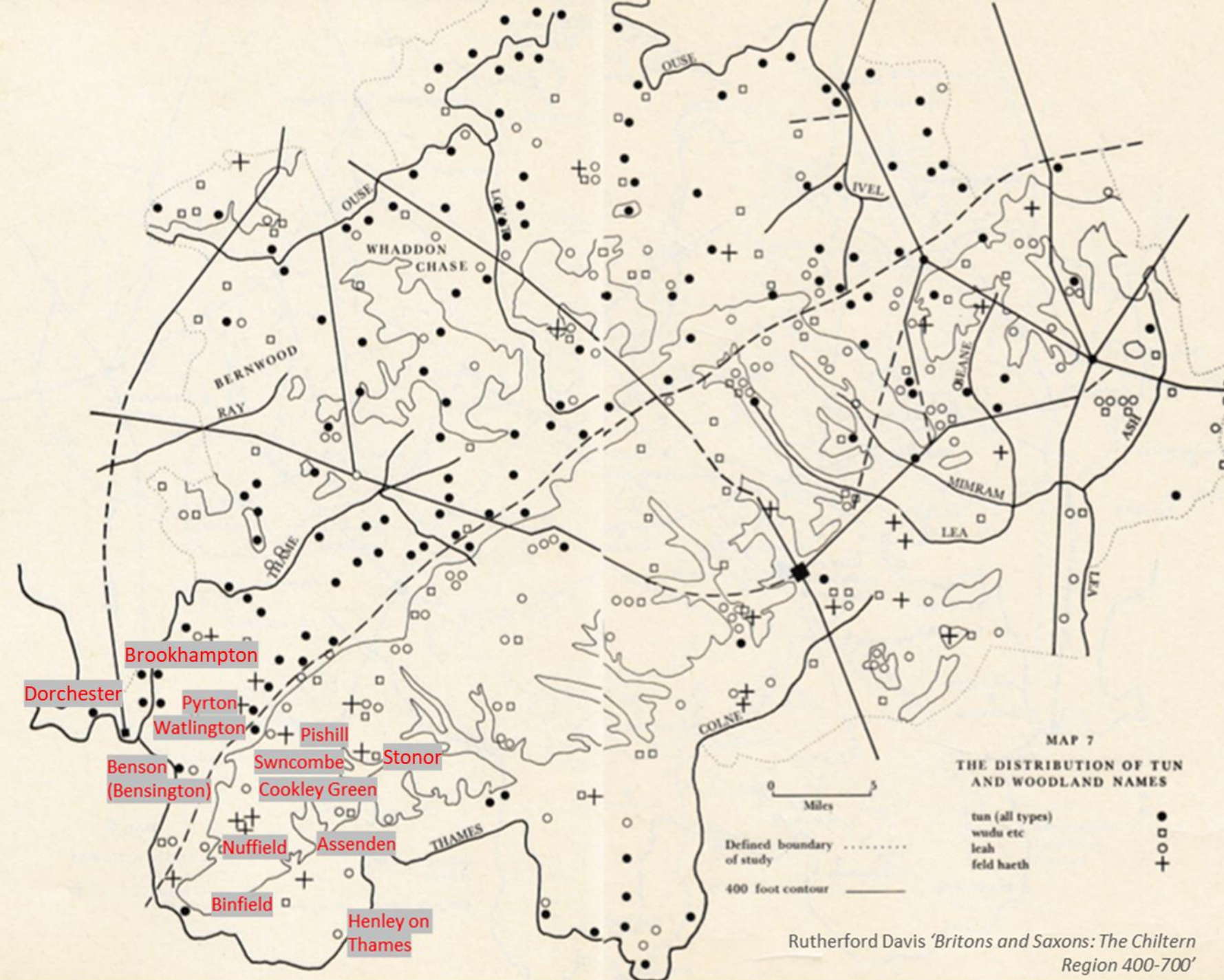




**Oxfordshire placenames**  
 South Oxfordshire (bottom right hand of each map) showing habitative names in the vale and topographical in the upland

# Settlement of the Chilterns

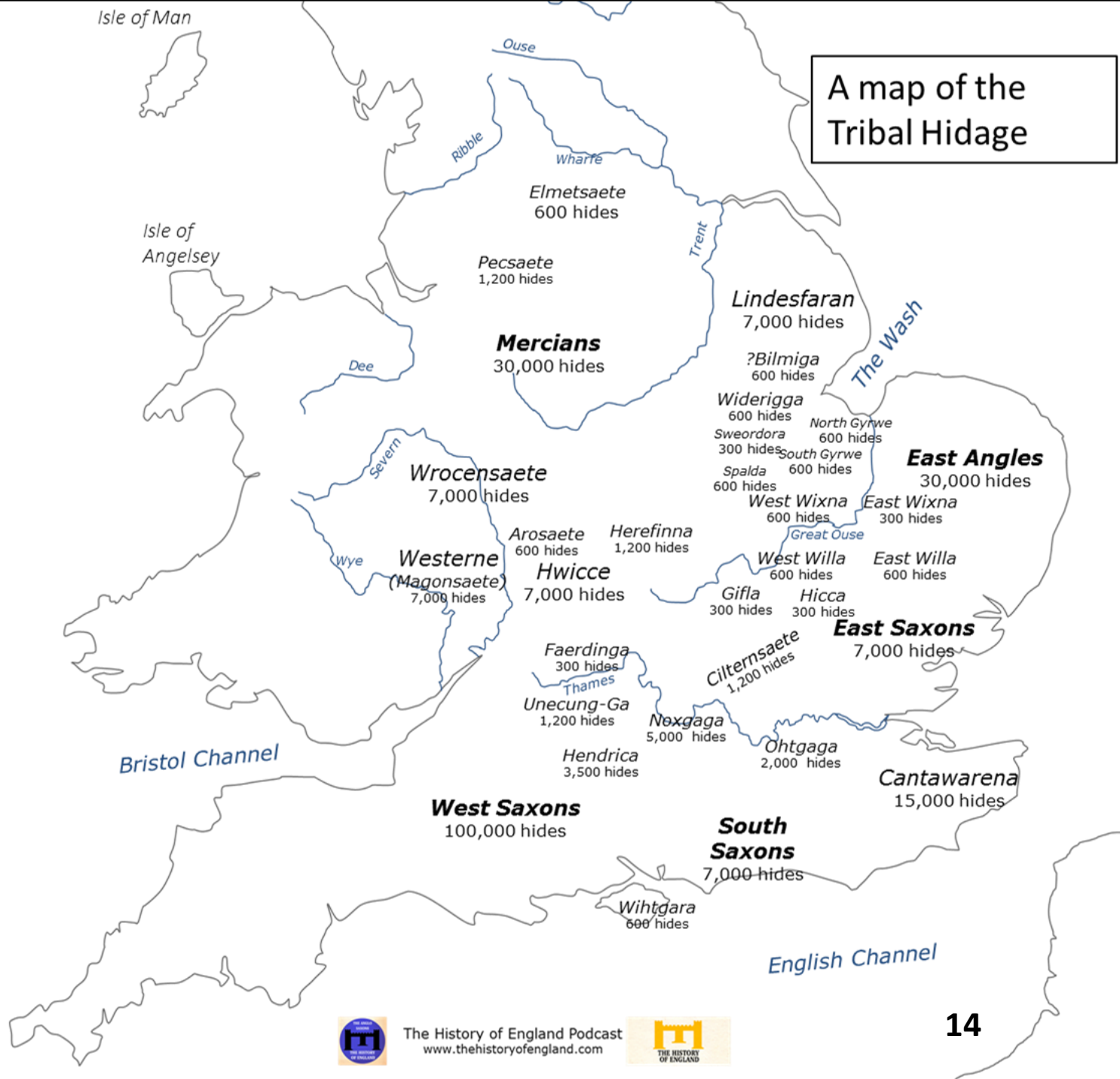
- The spring line
- Ancient paths (Ickneild Way)
- Settlement names in the plains
- Resources & topographical names in the hills



# Fun with place names in South Oxfordshire...

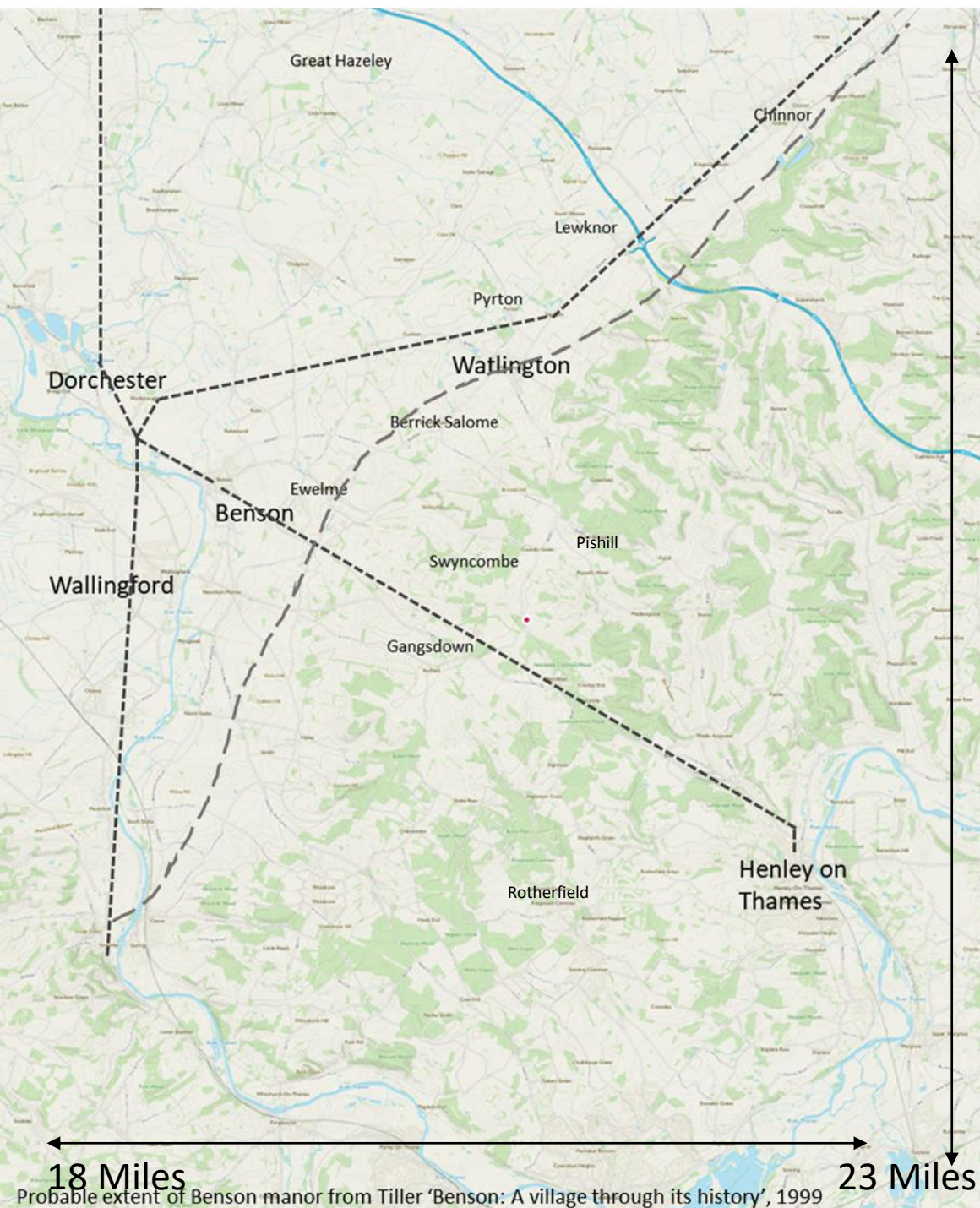


A few handy place name elements		
<b>Hills and valleys</b>		
<i>denu</i>	long valley	Assenden, Dunsden, Harpsden
<i>cumb</i>	bowl shaped valley	Swyncombe, Huntercombe
<i>don</i>	Round shaped hill	Breedon
<i>beorg</i>	Round shaped hill	Warborough, Hanborough
<i>clif</i>	Steep slope, river cliff	Cleeve, Clifton
<i>hyll</i>	Hill	Pishill
<i>ora</i>	flat topped hill	Stonor
<b>Water</b>		
<i>burna</i>	clear stream	Shirburn
<i>mere</i>	pond	Homer, Kidmore, Uxmore
<i>welle</i>	spring	Mongewell, Brightwell, Britwell, cadwell,
<i>æwielm</i>	copious spring	Ewelme
<i>broc</i>	muddy stream	Brookhampton
<i>ford</i>	ford	Lachford, Rofford
<b>Habitative</b>		
<i>hamm</i>	farm, homestead	Sydenham, Stadhampton, Brookhampton
<i>ton</i>	enclosure, estate	Bensington (Benson), Watlington
<i>cester</i>	Camp (Roman)	Dorchester
<i>cot</i>	cottage, small building	Woodcote
<i>Burh</i>	fortified enclosure	Blewbury
<i>ing</i>	People of...	Watlington (Wæcel), Benson (Banasa)
<b>Woodland</b>		
<i>byxe</i>	box-tree	Bix
<i>Heah</i>	high	Henley
<i>leigh</i>	clearing	Henley, Hazeley, Cookley Green
<i>Pirige</i>	Pear Tree	Pyrton
<i>field</i>	open ground close to w	Nuffield, Rotherfield
<b>Other</b>		
<i>stan</i>	flint	Stanley (now Park Corner), Stonor
<i>cealc</i>	chalk, limestone	Chalgrove
<i>rother</i>	cattle, horned beast	Rotherfield
<i>swin</i>	Pigs	Swyncombe
<i>Shep</i>	Sheep	Shepton



# The emergence of Kingdoms

- Emergence of social hierarchies – Ceorls, Thegns Kings
- The Football league table – consolidation of petty kingdoms



## The *scir* of Benson

- Non resident, itinerant kings
- '*feorum*', or tribute from their subjects

### 'Multiple estates'

- Multiple resources
- Distributed & isolated farm settlements
- Specialisation
  - 'Bickerton'
  - 'Rotherfield'
  - 'Swyncombe'
  - 'Pishill'



## Extensive Lordship

### Royal Tribute centre – 'vill'

- Reeve & centre
- Crafts, small infield

### 'Feorum' - tribute

- 1 hide = enough land to feed a household 1 year
- 1 hide = 120 acres
- 100 Hides = a Hundred

*'10 vats of honey, 300 loaves, 12 Ambers of Welsh ale, 30 ambers of clear ale, 2 full grown cows or 10 wethers, 10 geese, 20 hens, 10 cheeses, a full amber of butter, 5 salmon, 20 pounds in weight of fodder and 100 eels'*

*The laws of Ine, c.694*





## Monasteries and Minsters

Minsters = community of secular priests managing a large *parochia* of many settlements

**Bede**, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

“Wherever a cleric or monk came, he was joyfully received by all as God’s servant.

If they came across him on his travels, they ran to him and, bowing their heads, rejoiced either to be signed by his hand or to receive a blessing from his lips; they also paid diligent attention to his words of exhortation.

On Sundays they flocked eagerly to the church or to monasteries, not to refresh the body but to hear the word of God.

If some priest happened to come to a settlement, the inhabitants crowded together, eager to hear from him the word of life; for the priests and clerics came to settlements for no other reason than preaching, baptizing, visiting the sick, and in short to care for their souls.”



- Minster churches at Dorchester and Pyrton
  - Church scot at Martinmas
- Resident, Resident, Resident. Resident.
- Inland estates
  - Pay no geld
  - Demand more from their peasants and tenants

# Inland estate workers: Slaves

- Britons, war, or just hard times?
- 10% population slaves in 1086
- Sermon of the Wolf to the English



*“It’s hard work all right sir, because I am not free.”*



- Skilled/specialised workers
- Tied to the household, shared buildings sunken hut type
- Wage in land
- Freedom at the crossroads

## Inland estate workers: Serfs

- Honourable service – or otherwise!
- Not subject to *geld*

**Bordar**      *borde*, work associated with lord's household, small holding & toft, 3 days' week-work; owes various renders in kind;

*Gebur*      2 days' week-work; owes various renders in kind; receives stock and utensils from lord, who recovers them at boor's death; no church-scot



*"...and on the day of Martin's Mass [he must give] twenty-three sesters of barley, and two hens; at Easter [he must give] a young sheep or two pennies"*



## ‘Warland’

- Outlying lands: *Waru* – ‘defence’
- “Small statesmen...small freemen charged with public duties” (*Vinogradoff*)
- Individual farms & kinship groups
- “*folcland*”: inheritance, family rights
- Participation in public justice – tithings, juries
- “*Fyrdworthy*”, carrying arms
- Free, owing geld and public obligations
  - Military service
  - Bridge repair
  - fortification repair

# Inhabitants of Warland

## **Thegn**

Holds bookland; owes military service, bridge-work, and fortress-work to the king; sometimes other services; church-scot

## ***Geneat***

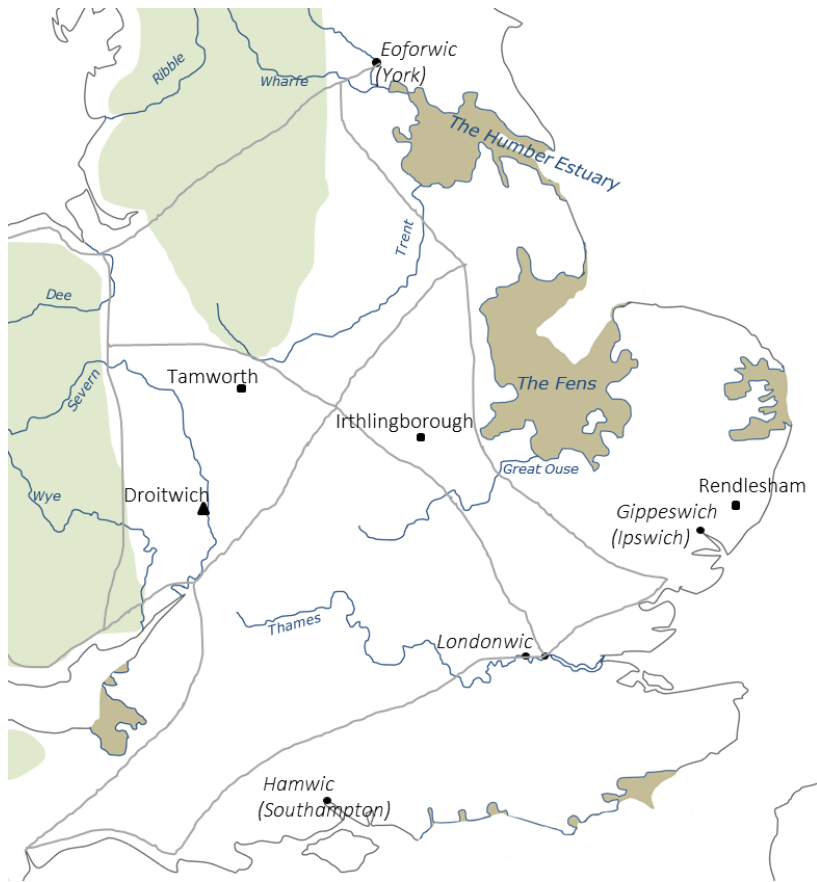
Pays rent; performs defined and honourable services for his lord (i.e. the thegn); e.g. carrying messages, hunting-service, guard-duty; church-scot

## **Ceorl/Cottager**

Owes 1 day's week-work; additional boon-days at harvest time; cultivates as little as 5 acres; may perform thegn's obligations; church-scot



*“...So free that he has his sake and soke and can go with his land wherever he wishes”*

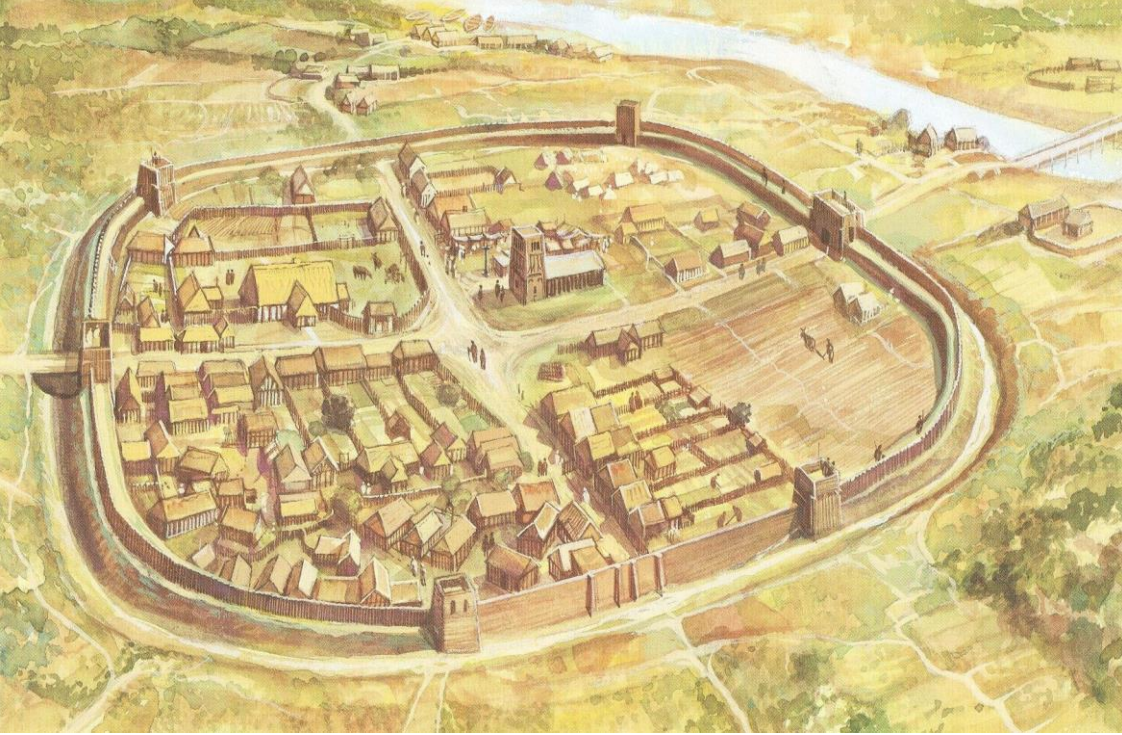


# War and trade

- Early Emporia -7/8<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Viking invasions of 9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries
- 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> century Burghs
- The need for cash:
  - Sinews of war
  - Danish geld
  - Shiny new stuff
  - A growing bureaucracy

*“Goods from overseas brought by ship...I buy precious things that are not produced in this country...purple cloth and silks, precious jewels and goldwork, unusual clothes and spices, wine and oil, ivory and bronze, copper and tin...sulphur and glass and all sorts of things like that.”*  
*(11<sup>th</sup> century merchant)*





# Wallingford

- 6th C pagan burials - 9th C 'new town'
- Connection to countryside – Thegns 'messuages'
- Fairs in the country side – e.g. Swyncombe June fair
- Affects development of Benson

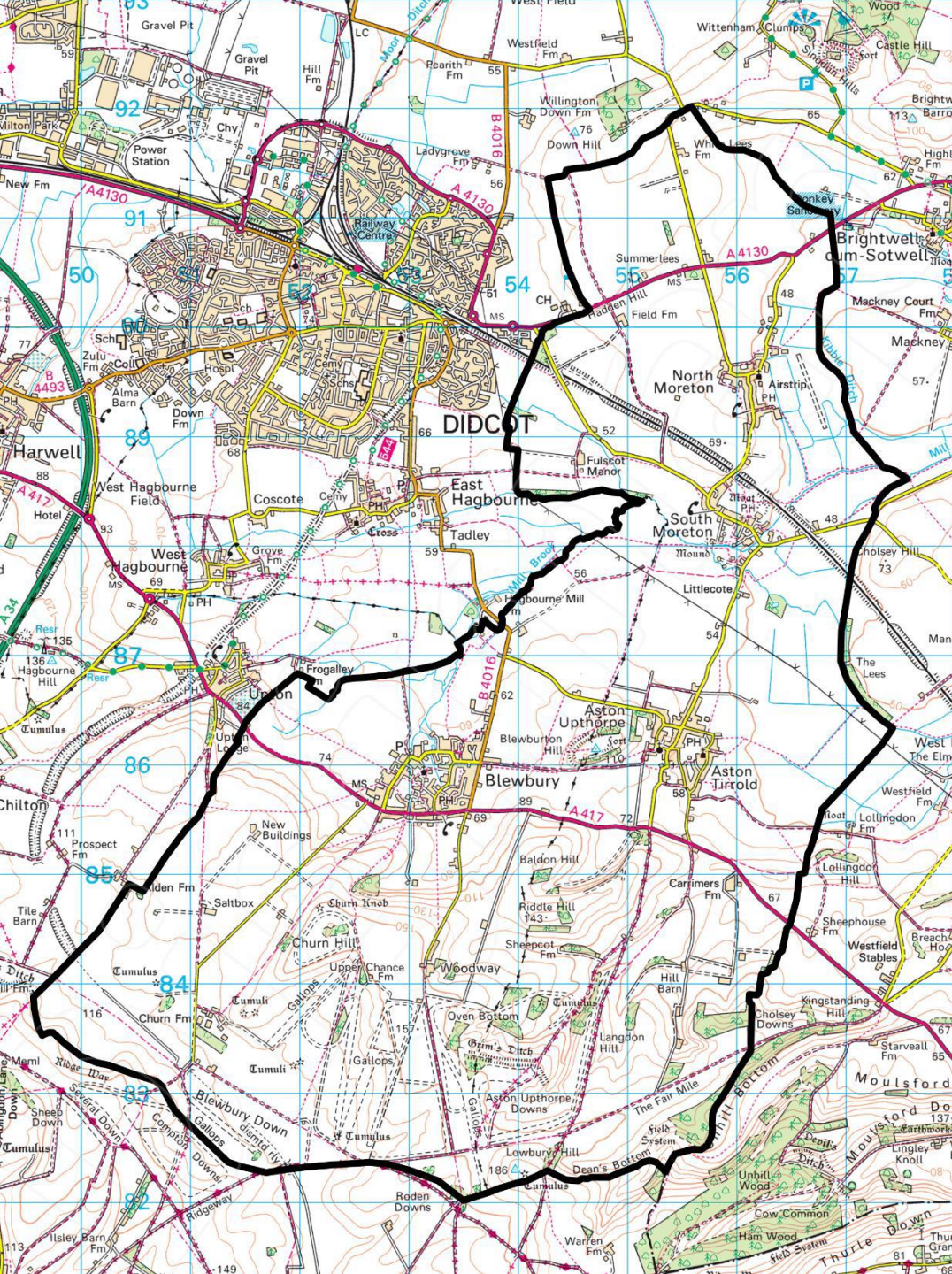






## The Late Anglo Saxon State – the ‘maximum’ view.

- Increasingly sophisticated economy connected by network of towns and high quality coinage
- Response to Viking invasions, conquest of Danelaw, and renewed invasions
  - Calling up the people for war - land and sea
  - Paying off the enemy – vast Danegeld
  - Growing bureaucracy & royal court
- Growth of social hierarchy – a ministerial, Thegnly class, demanding reward, wealth and status

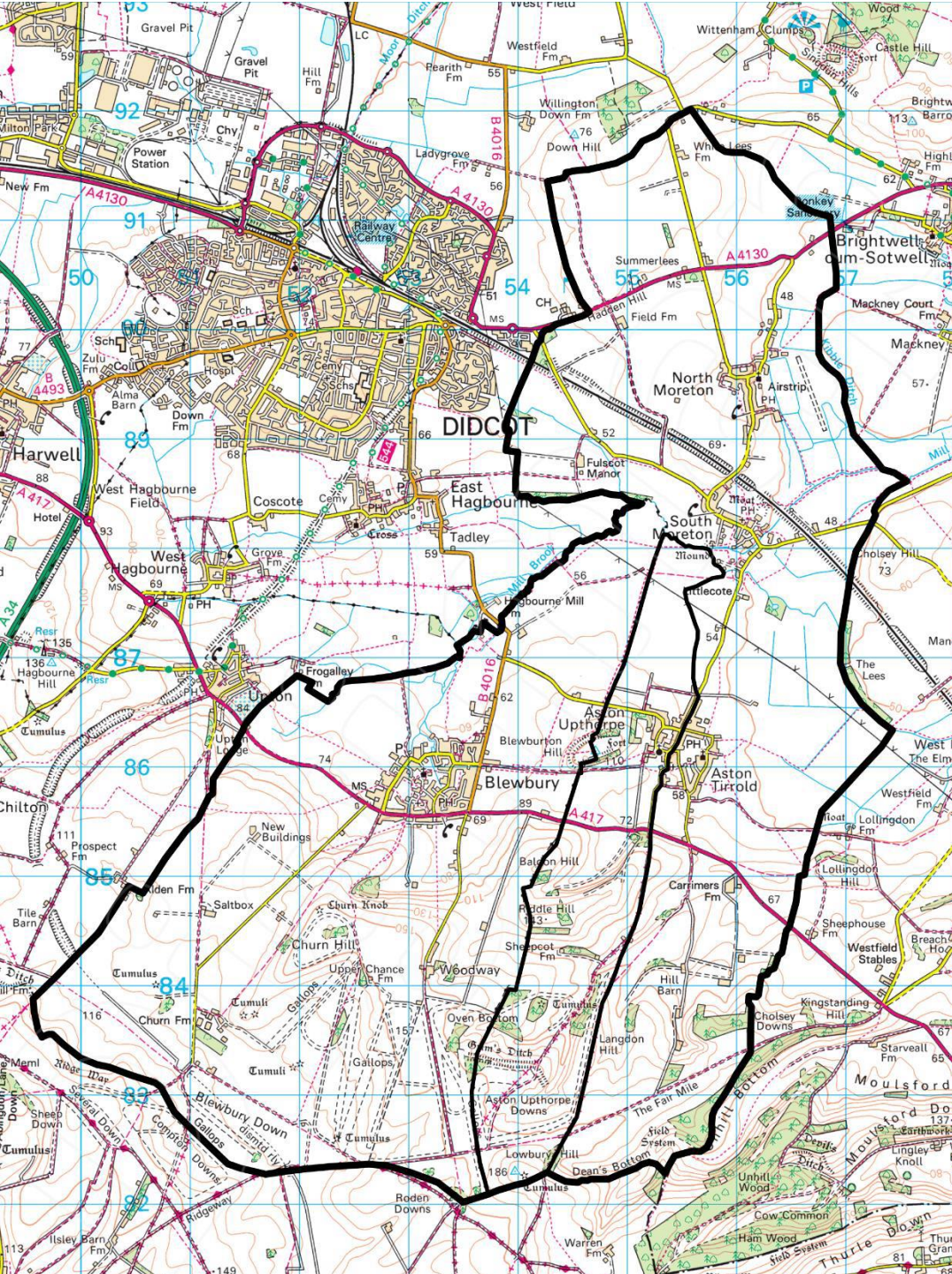


## Carving up England into Manors

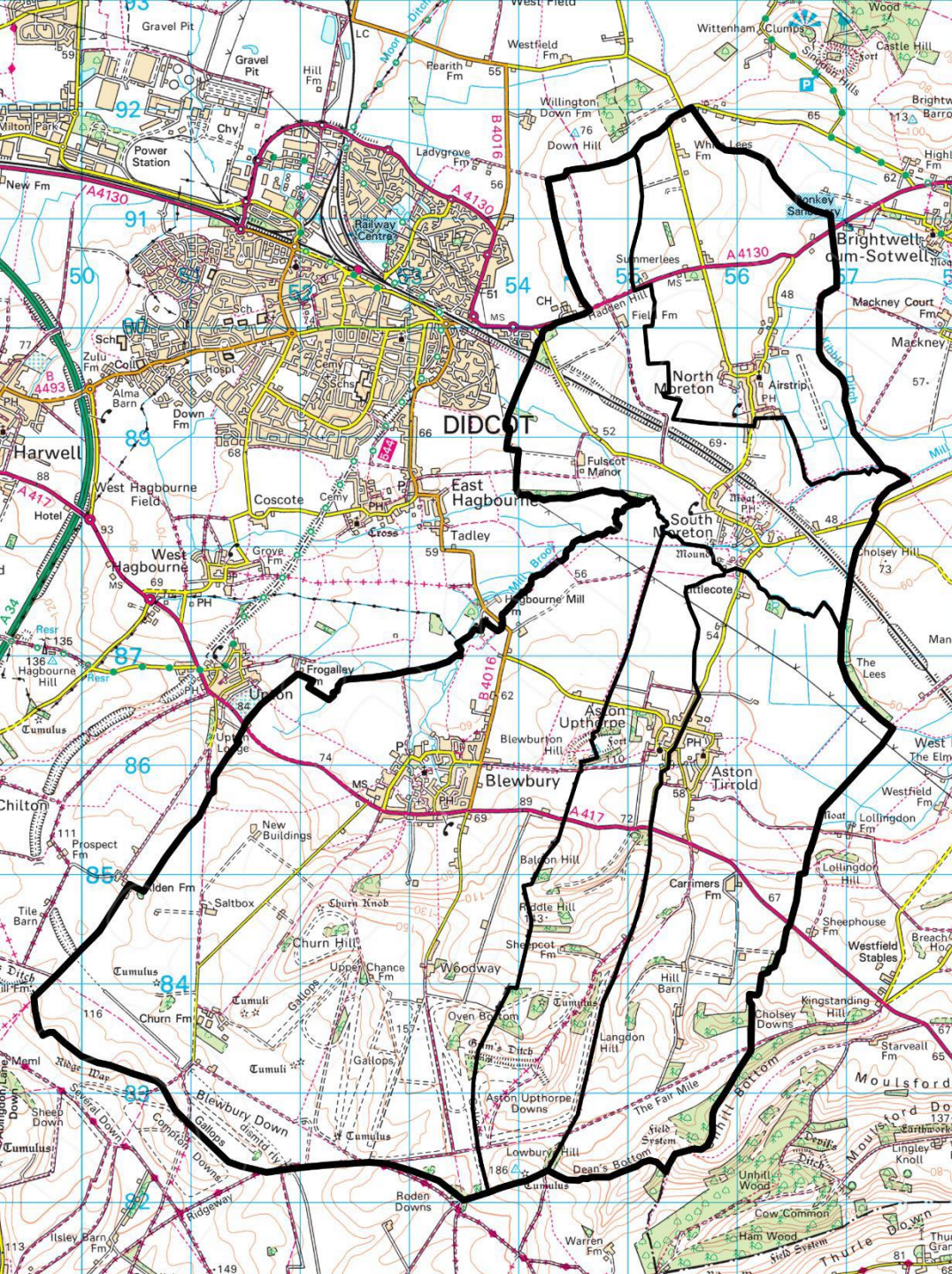
- ‘fissioning’, ‘Manorialisation’
- Land in return for military service for Thegns
- Land for public officers – Earls, Earldorman
- Land for ministers while in post
- Land retained for crown revenue

### Blewbury *scir* (Berkshire)

The undivided territory, as demarcated in a charter of King Edmund, dated 944



A charter of King Edgar for his queen Ælfthryth, dated 964, hives off '10 hides at Aston' from the territory



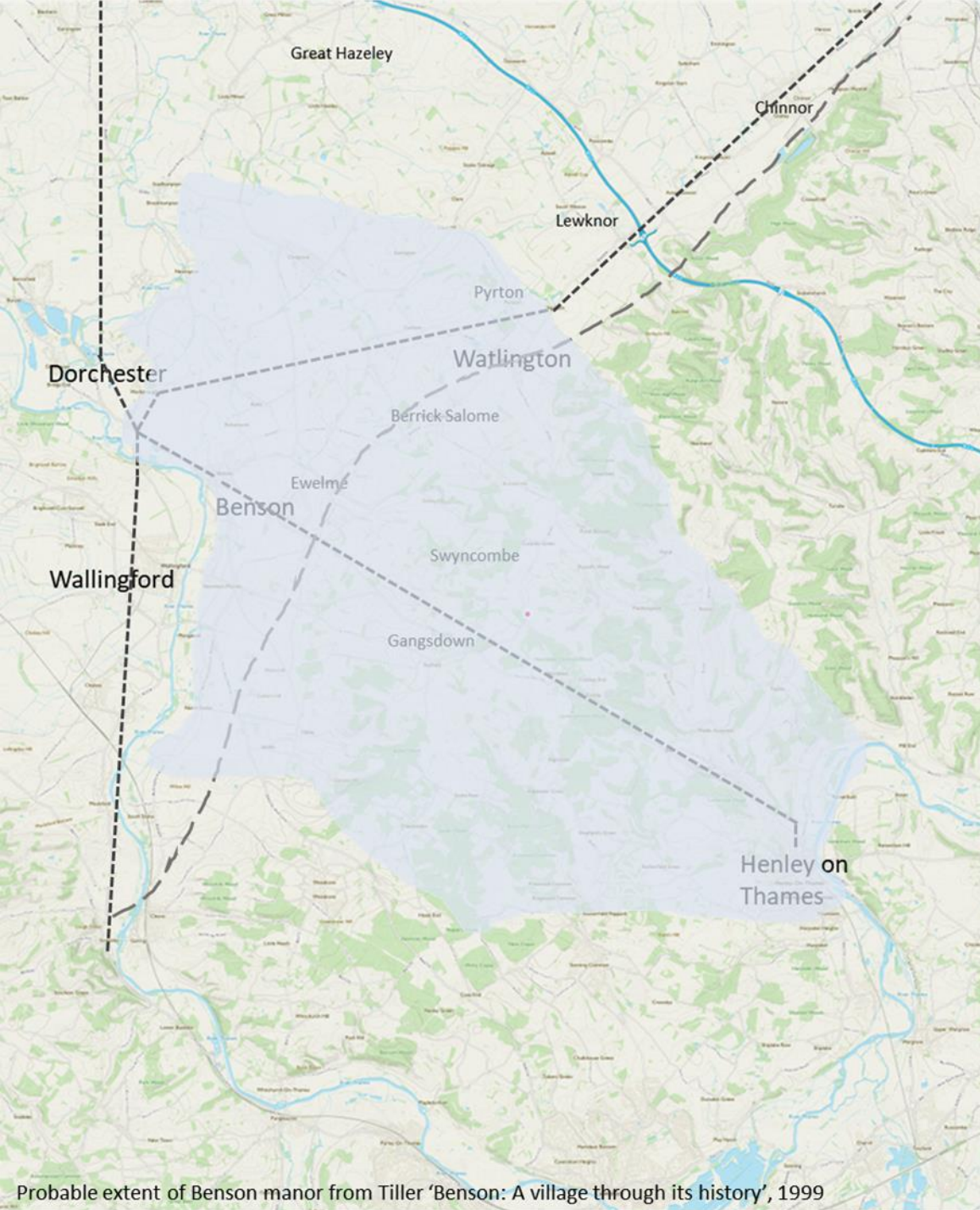
- The territorial unit originally attached to Blewbury with the parishes that grew up within it

- The original scir with rights of jurisdiction

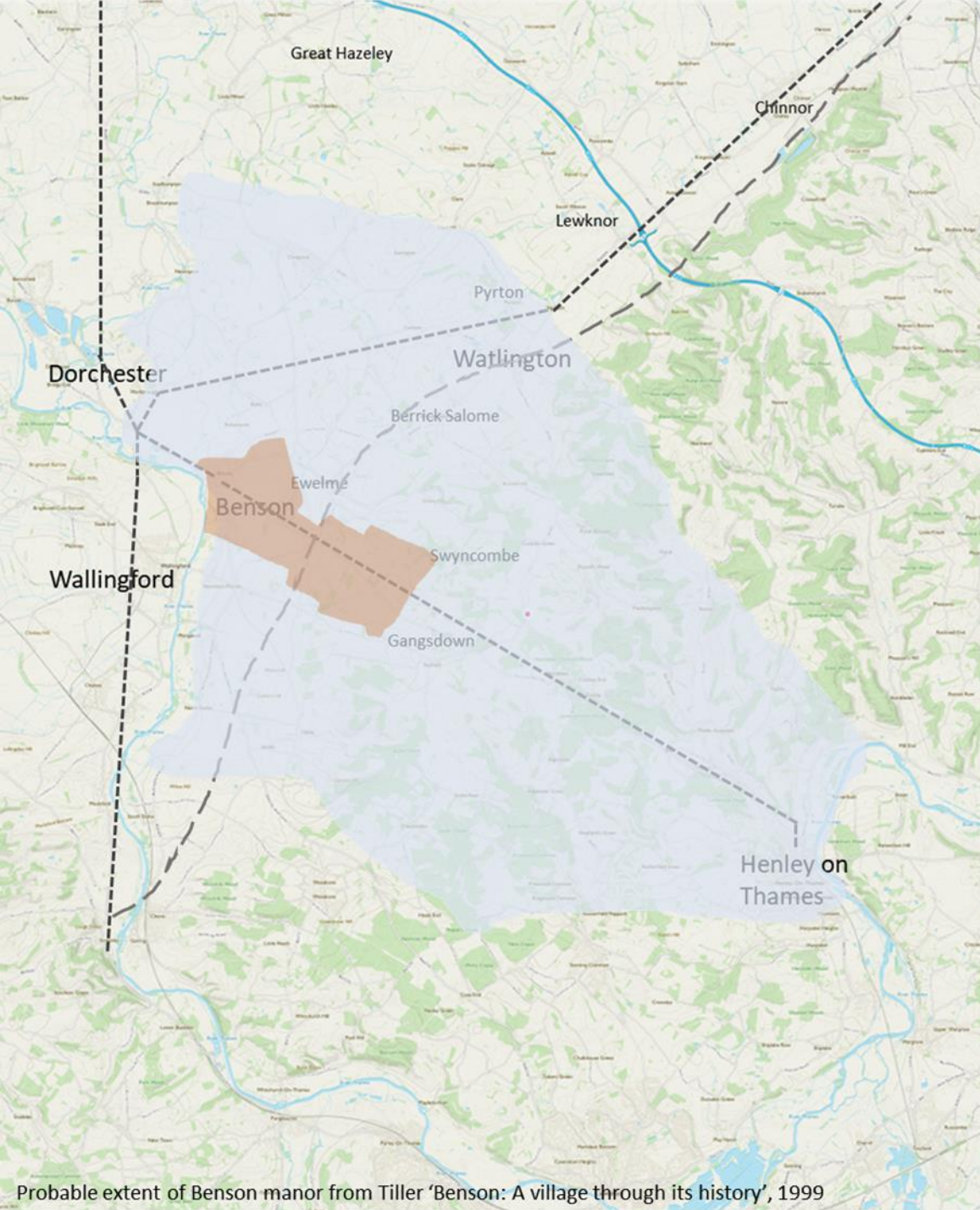


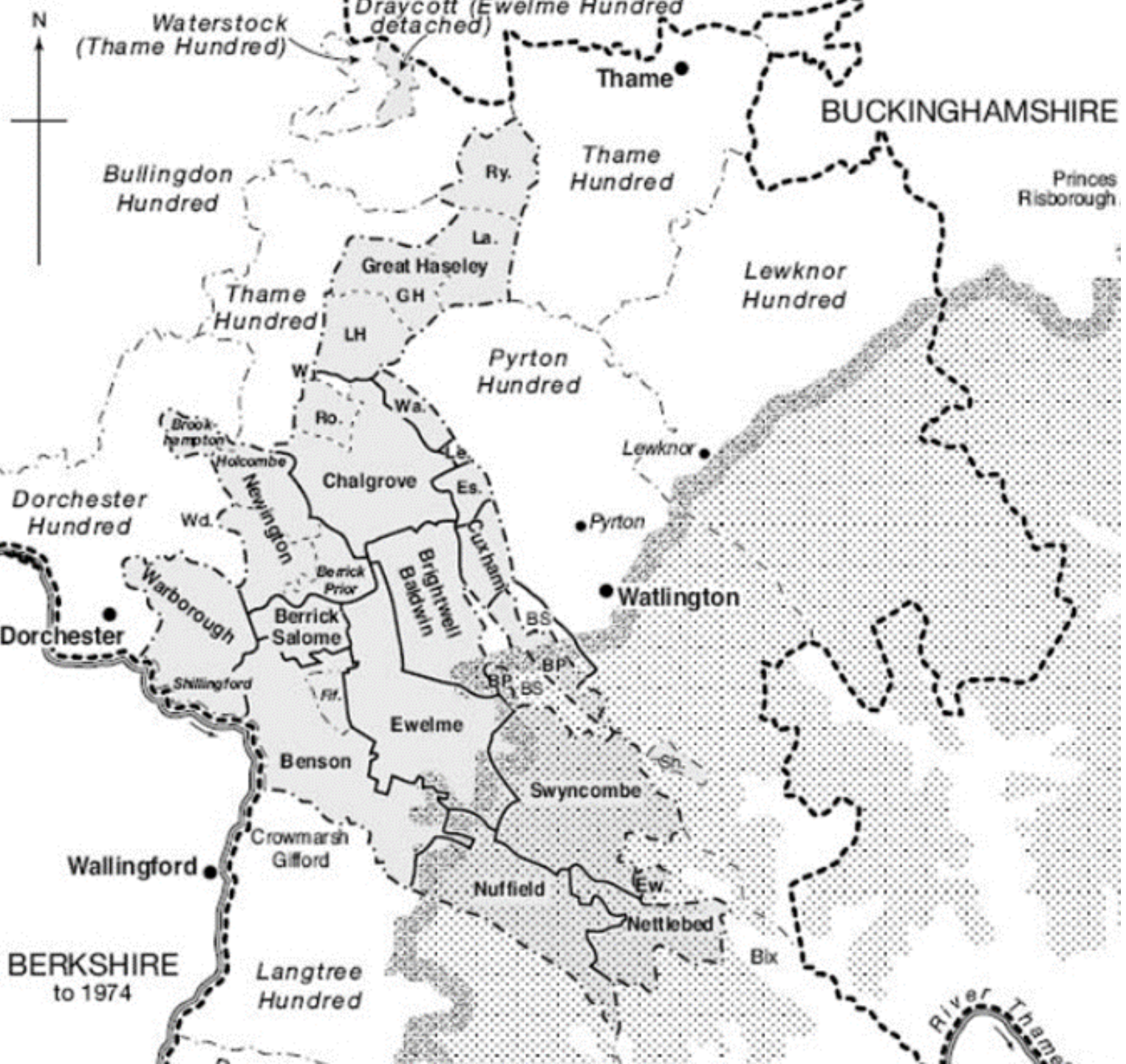
Probable extent of Benson manor from Tiller 'Benson: A village through its history', 1999

# The probable extent of the Royal estate of Benson



The probable extent of the remaining Royal estate of Benson by the time of Domesday after manors granted out

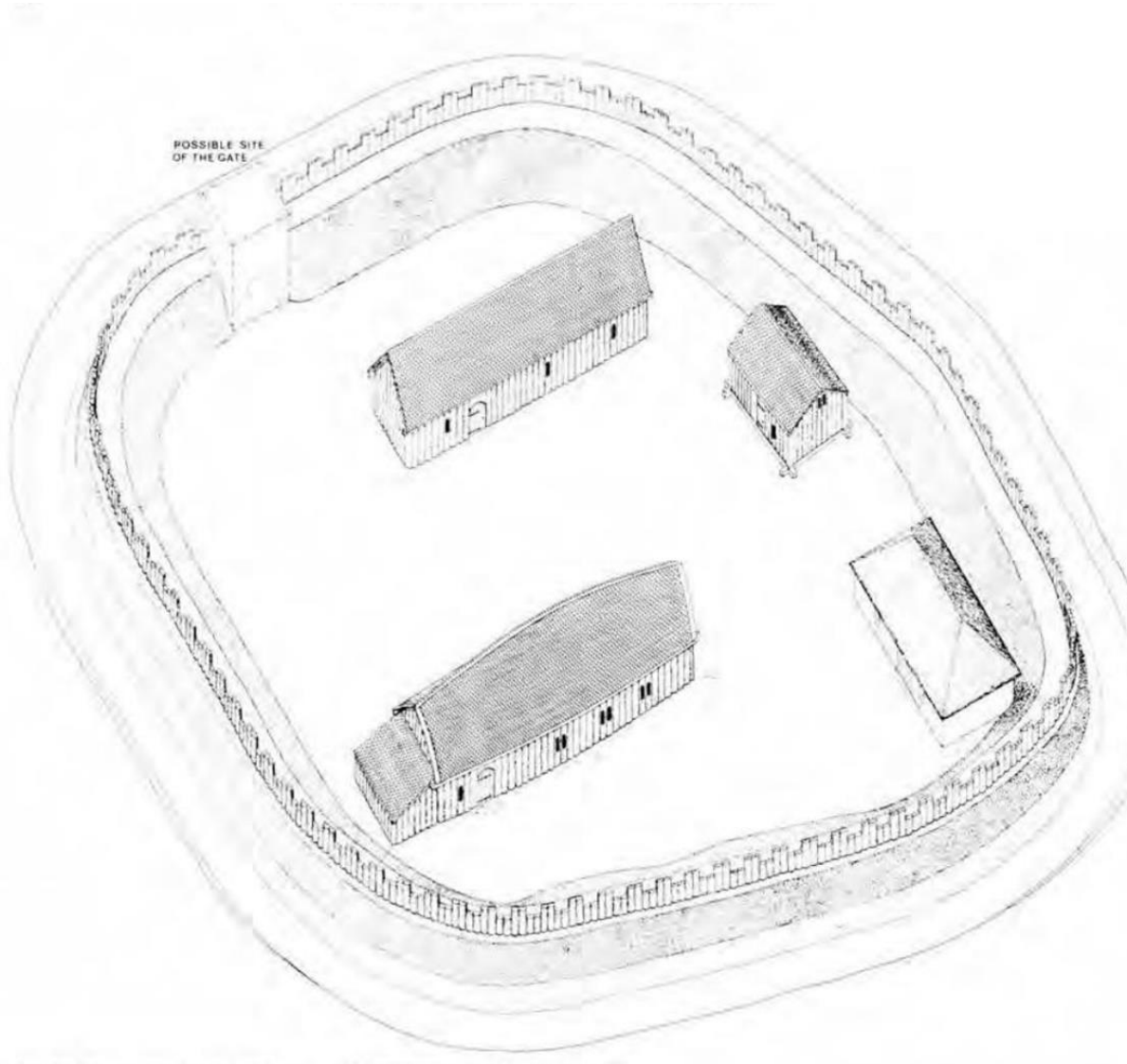




# Benson Hundred

- New manors become contingent with parishes





## New Manors

- Much smaller:
  - 5 hides = 1 soldier (600 acres)
  - Maybe as small as 1 hide
- Resident, Resident, Resident!
- Privatisation
  - Lords hall
  - Thegn's bower
  - Enclosure
  - Local church – removed from Minster control



## Intensive lordship

- Localisation - church, peasants & tenants
- Growth of Inland
- Increasing impositions on peasants – inland and warland
- Becoming more unfree
- Slaves increasingly converted to Bordars & geburs to produce cash
- Pressure to convert payment in kind to cash
- Mills, fairs – other ways to exploit rights

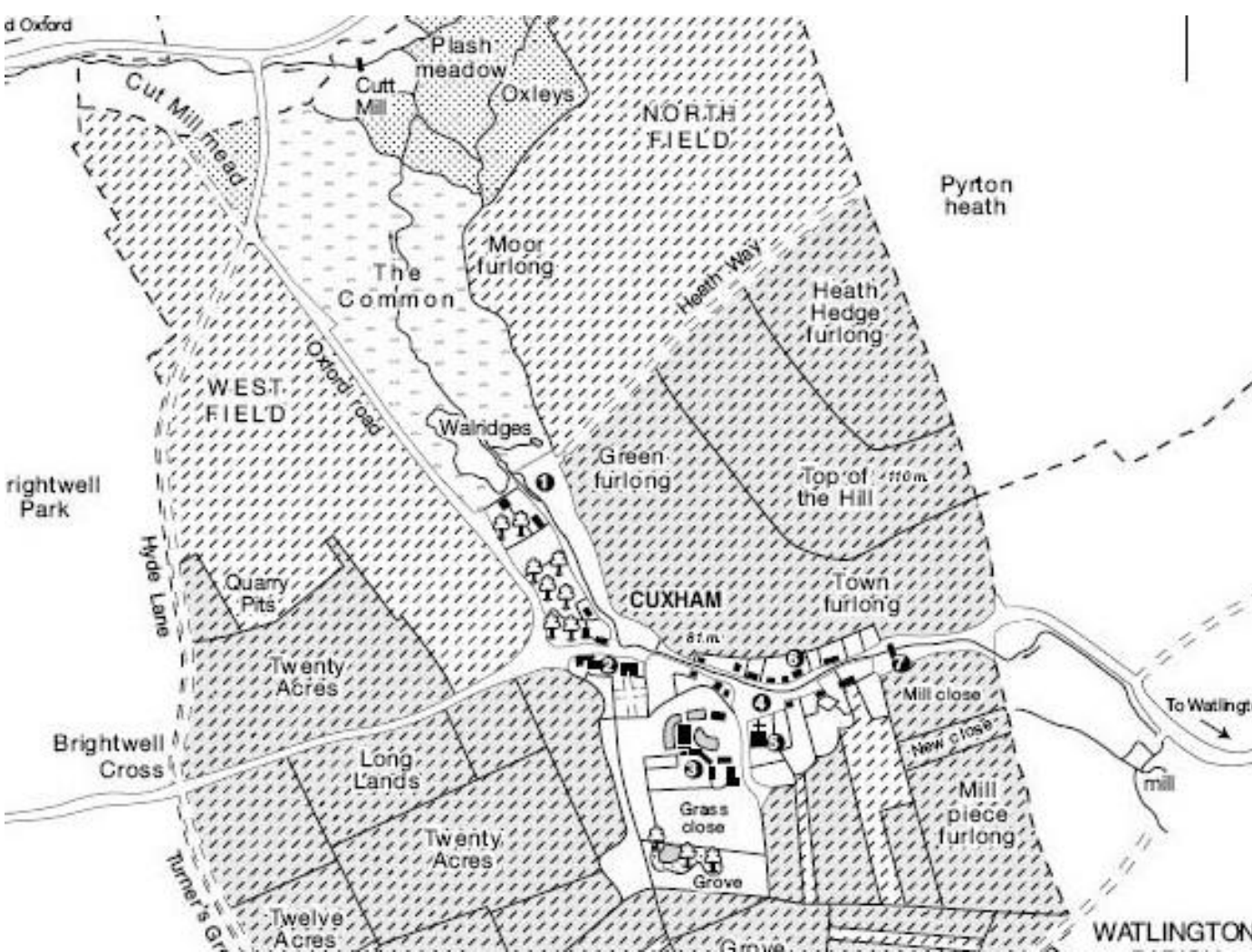


# Agricultural change

## Open field systems

- 2 fields in rotation
- Greater focus on arable, greater range on cereal, wheat
- Owned in common – no chance to withdraw
- Rights shared over resources – meadow, woodland, pasture





## Nucleated Villages

- Planned from above and by peasants
- Easier to share & rationalise resources – or exercise control
- Villages of 12-60 households









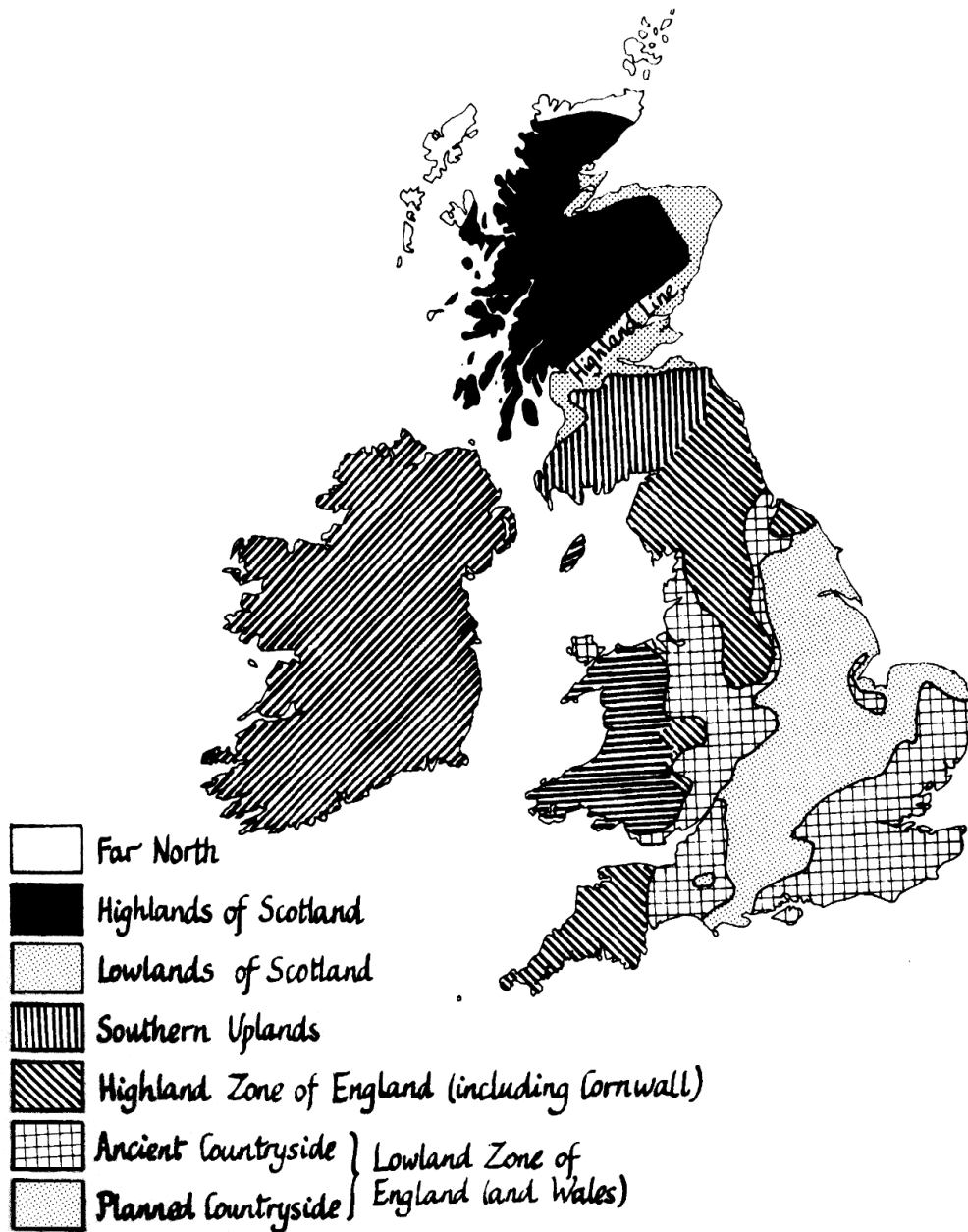








# Lowland England



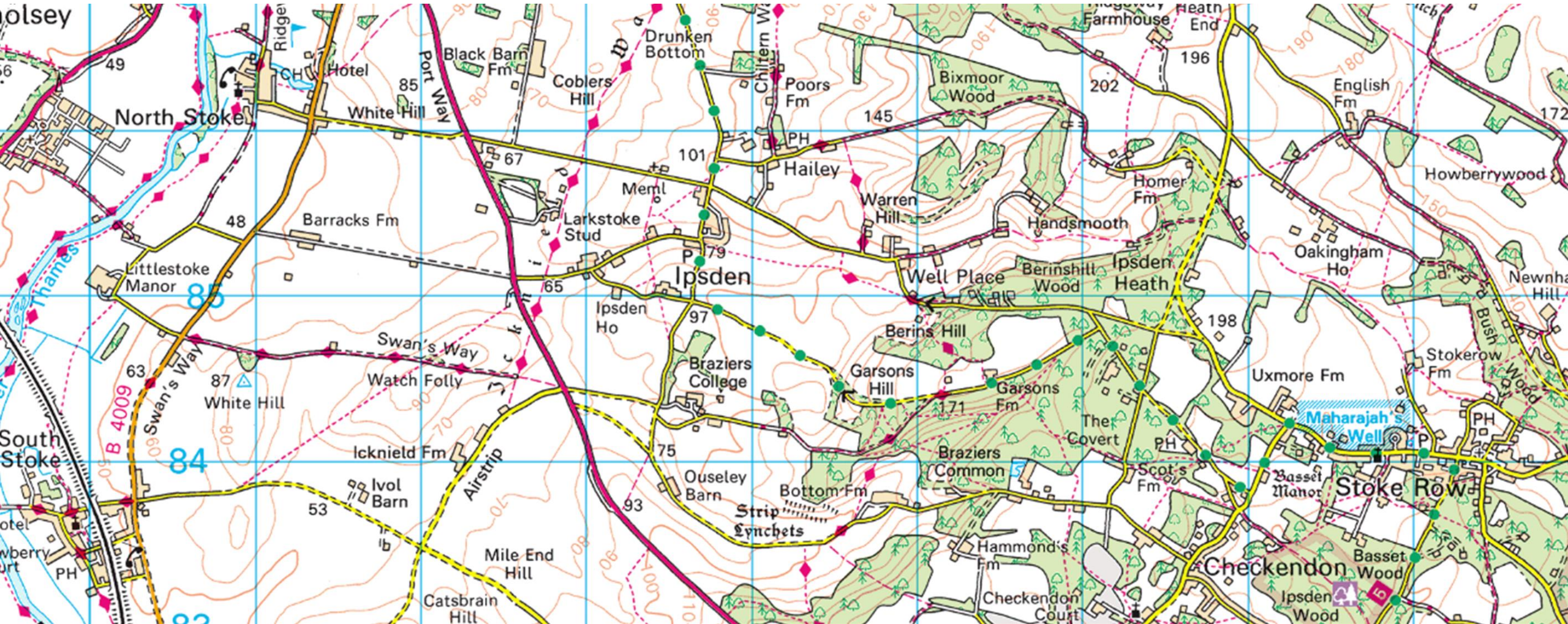
## Ancient

- Hamlets, isolated farms
- Hedges mixed, wide, not straight
- Roads many not straight, often sunken
- Many public footpaths
- Woods many often small

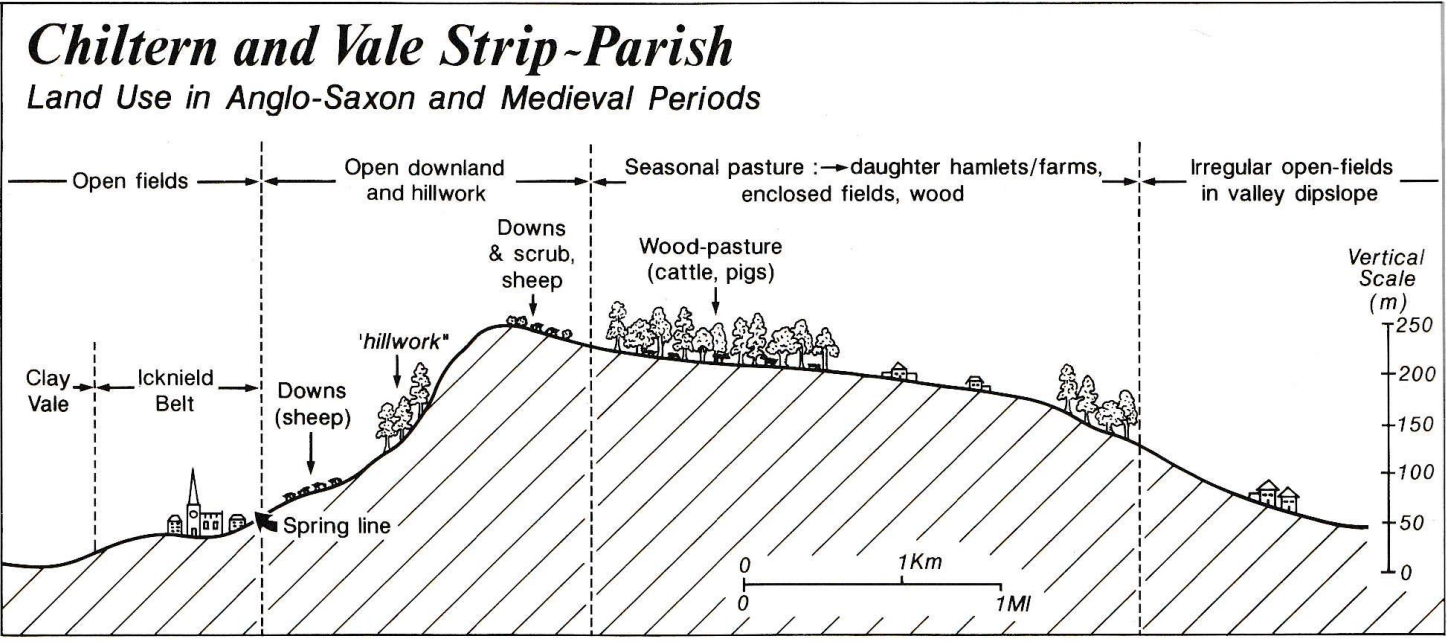
## Planned

- Villages
- Only 18/19C farms isolated
- Hedges straight mainly hawthorn
- Roads few, straight, on surface
- Few footpaths
- Woods absent or few, and large

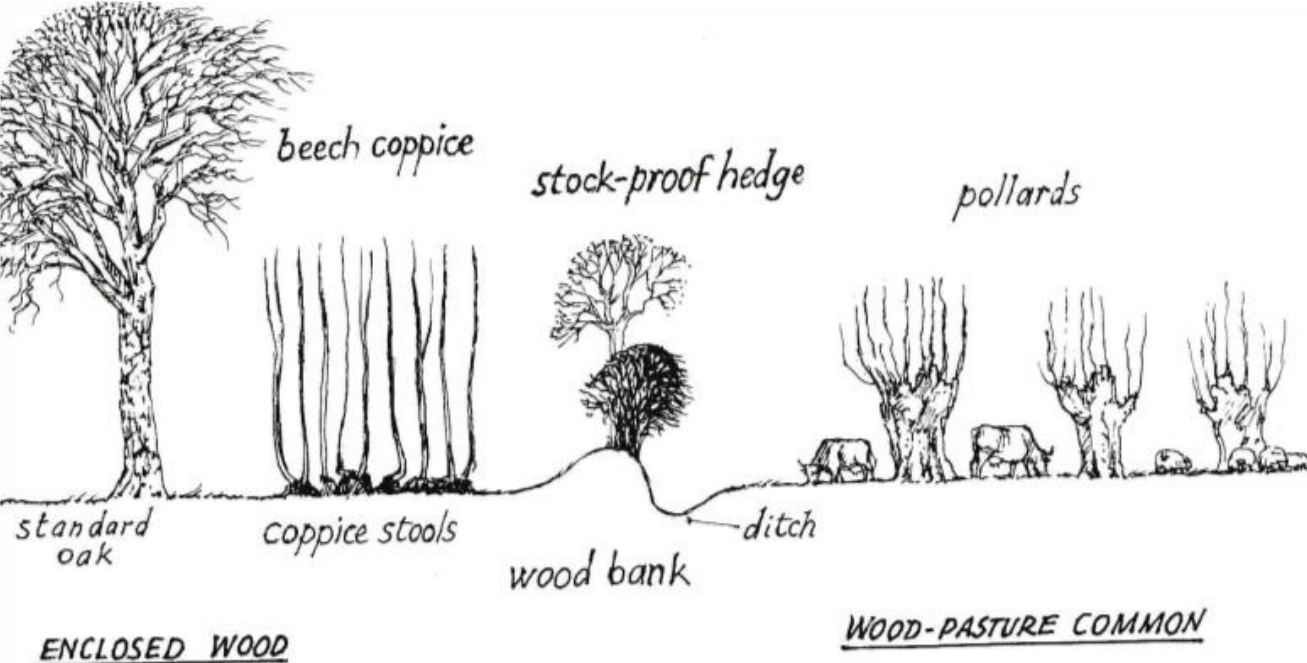
# Planned and ancient in the Benson Hundred



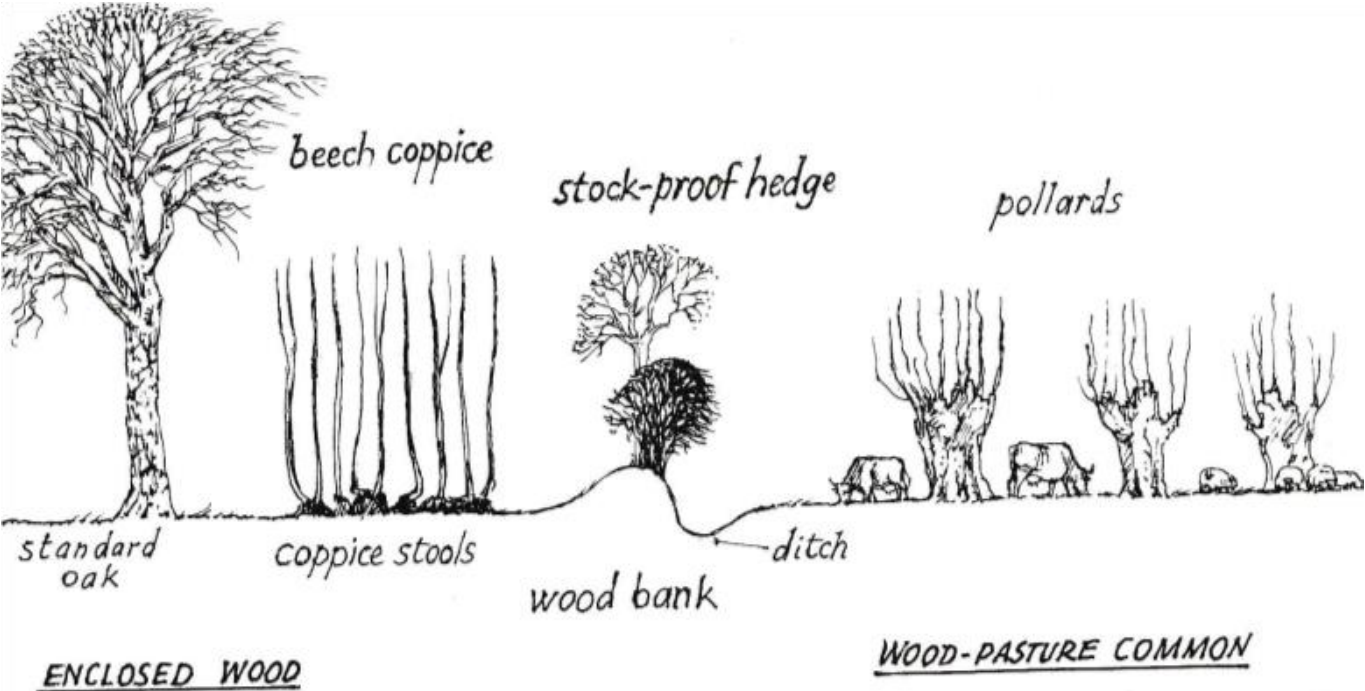
# Impacts of change in the Benson Hundred



# Impacts of change in the Benson Hundred - woodland

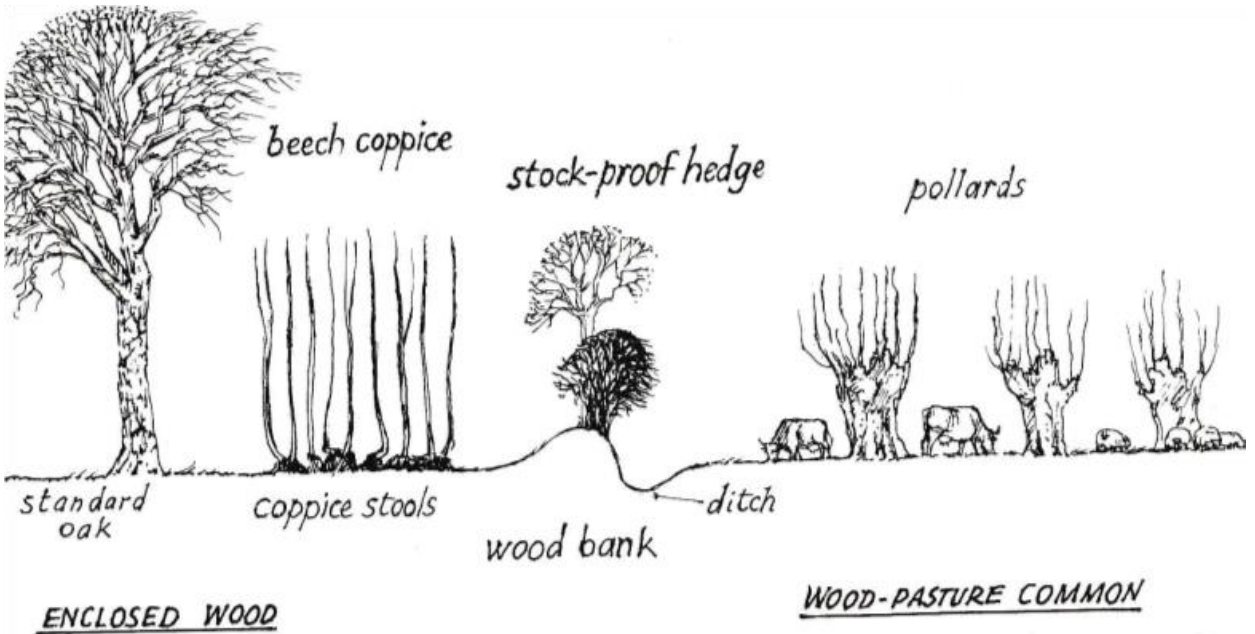


# Impacts of change in the Benson Hundred - woodland





# Impacts of change in the Benson Hundred - woodland





## The Norman Conquest

- All land held by right of conquest by king – the end of *folcland*
- Squeeze new lands and tenants for profits
- Accentuation and acceleration of existing trends
  - Intensification of lordship
  - Privatisation estates and localisation of peasant life
  - Increasing tendency toward unfree status
  - By 1086, 15%-30% free



## The king's Council at Gloucester

“After this had the king a large meeting, and very deep consultation with his council, about this land; how it was occupied, and by what sort of men.

Then sent he his men over all England into each shire; commissioning them to find out how many hundreds of hides were in the shire, what land the king himself had, and what stock upon the land; or, what dues he ought to have by the year from the shire.”

*“These 2 estates which Ordgar holds of Miles he ought to hold of the king. For he himself and his father and uncle held them freely in the time of king Edward”*

*Domesday Book, Oxfordshire, Benson Hundred*



## A Brief Bibliography

Banham, D, and Faith, R: 'Anglo Saxon Farms and Farming' (2014)	The bible on Anglo Saxon agriculture. Slightly nerdy, obviously.
Blair, J: 'The Church in Anglo Saxon Society' (2005)	Blair is a wonderful, eminent and prolific writer on Anglo Saxon England, and this is the place to go for a general survey of the church and its role in Anglo Saxon Society.
Faith, R: 'The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship' (1997)	This is one of the two boss books really – a compelling description of the English peasantry, and how the intensification of lordship changed their lives.
Faith, R: 'The Moral Economy of the Countryside: Anglo Saxon to Anglo Norman England' (2019)	Very interesting discussion of what made society tick – the relationships, responsibilities and customs. All organized towards the proposition that after 1066 society fundamentally changed.
Fleming, R: 'Britain after Rome' (2010)	A very interesting survey because it focusses much more on physical evidence and therefore less on the political story
Higham, N, and Ryan, M: 'The Anglo Saxon World' (2013)	It is wonderful to come across a book on the period which has clearly had the US Textbook treatment – beautifully produced, full colour, stuffed full of diagrams and maps. For a general survey, this in my view, is the best.
Oosthuizen, S: 'The Emergence of the English' (2019)	A very recent work of revisionism from an expert on fenland landscapes. Fascinating if not entirely convincing theory about how people came to describe themselves as English.
Rackham, O: 'The History of the Countryside' (1986)	One of my top five history books. The bible of the English countryside and how it looks as it does.

## A brief bibliography

Here are the books I relied on most in the making of the series