Medieval settlement relocation in West Cambridgeshire: three case-studies

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ABSTRACT

Planned nucleated settlement (often hand in hand with the creation of open fields) and subsequent settlement shift is a recognised common component in the complex development of the medieval landscape in much of central and southern England. Taylor has commented that 'present day perceptions are perhaps inclined towards ... postulating a process of nucleation which began perhaps in the eighth to ninth centuries and continued into the thirteenth, by which time the deliberate creation or replanning of villages was involved' (Taylor 1992, p. 8).

This paper raises the examples of three settlements in west Cambridgeshire which demonstrate a new, and more complex, context for planned settlement. The apparent regularity of these three sites does indeed suggest planned settlement, and in two cases this has been recognised in print (RCHME 1968, p. 122; Taylor 1983, pp. 204-5). Re-examination suggests that this orderly appearance may owe equally as much to the siting of the new settlement over an underlying regular open field landscape as to deliberate settlement planning. Detailed analysis of the 'text' of settlement suggests an earlier date for this process for two of these examples than has previously been postulated for the process in general.

The nature and origins of planned medieval rural settlement have received much attention, particularly over the last fifteen to twenty years (Taylor 1983; Lewis et al. 1997). Processes of change have been interpreted in ways which allow for the complexity of development — settlement shift or decline, the addition of new settlement elements and/or their metamorphosis into new forms (RCHME 1968 and 1972, see individual village descriptions; Taylor 1983, Ch. 9; Roberts 1987, Ch. 10; Lewis et al. 1997). Movement of settlement onto previous open field land has also been documented, but almost always as the result of processes associated with the twelfth century or later, while Peter Wade-Martins' work in Norfolk and Bob Silvester's work in Marshland has been influential in demonstrating the extent of settlement drift towards greens and commons throughout the medieval period (Taylor 1992, pp. 8-9; Roberts 1987; Wade-Martins 1980; Silvester 1988).

The most detailed study of settlement over arable land has been made in north-west Lincolnshire where a significant number of settlements lay over earlier ridge and furrow...
(RCHME 1991, pp.13-15). In general, this settlement reorganisation appears to have taken place during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, although it is significant that the authors comment that

Neither in West Lindsey, nor elsewhere in England, is there any direct documentary evidence to indicate that the process of laying out villages over fields was as common as the archaeological evidence suggests. This may mean that it, therefore, took place in the pre-Conquest period before detailed documentation on such developments began. On the other hand it may be that documentation does survive, but as yet has not been recognised. (RCHME 1991, p. 14)

The authors go on to give an example from the thirteenth century (RCHME 1991, p. 14).

In Cambridgeshire it is probably true to say that almost every village in the county contains at least one apparently planned element. In such as have been published, the assumption — almost certainly generally correct — has been made that the origins of the plan are probably to be found between the ninth and eleventh centuries (RCHME 1968 and 1972; Roberts 1992, p. 25; Oosthuizen 1993, p. 94). There are many examples which indicate colonisation of arable land, but these can almost always be explained in terms of the processes characteristic of a similar period to that adduced in Lincolnshire, that is, c. 1100 to 1350.

For example, planned and unplanned extensions over former open field land as a result of medieval population growth can be seen at any number of sites. At Burwell North Street, Cambridgeshire, the rapidly expanding medieval population led to large-scale unplanned colonisation of open field strips for settlement on either side of a curving field way, which may have originated as a headland.

The settlement was in place by the mid-fourteenth century (RCHME 1972, pp. 17-18). Planned extensions were a similarly common response to population growth — Jack Ravensdale demonstrated this process at Cottenham, Cambridgeshire, and it has also been shown at Sawston, Cambridgeshire (Ravensdale 1974, pp. 121-6; Taylor 1992, pp. 13-15).

In many cases, planned and unplanned settlement shift onto former arable land appears to have been the result of particular events: for example, the grant of a market charter at Caxton, Cambridgeshire, in 1247 coincided with deliberate settlement movement from a focus around the church, set just under one kilometre from Ermine Street, to field land along the Roman road itself (RCHME 1968, pp. 34-5; Taylor 1992, p. 7). While at Spaldwick and at Somersham, both in Cambridgeshire, the villages were moved onto new, planned, sites to make way for large gardens surrounding episcopal palaces in the twelfth century (Taylor 1989b, pp. 71-5; Taylor 1989a, pp. 211-24).

This paper takes three examples of later settlement over earlier arable in west Cambridgeshire. A very detailed examination of the field and documentary evidence — beyond the scope of the Royal Commission's brief — suggests that, by contrast with the situation in west Lindsey, two cases appear to have been associated with events following within a generation or two after the Norman conquest, while the third is considerably later and may be a post-medieval shift. The core areas of the village plans show, or appear to show, evidence of planning; and the same parts of these settlements also appear to fossilise elements of an underlying open field system. These settlements must have either been deliberately moved or gradually shifted onto the lands of open field furlongs from a previous settlement(s), evidence for the site(s) of which yet to be discovered. It follows that the initial — quite possibly nucleated — settlement, contemporary with the establishment of open fields in that parish, almost certainly lies elsewhere, and that until we know more about the predecessors of these villages, we cannot say whether settlements in these parishes remained dispersed or were nucleated at the time that this open field landscape was laid out.

There are two major sources of evidence for settlement analysis in south Cambridgeshire: on the one hand, there is the evidence of maps, sometimes supported by documentary evidence or aerial photography. Disappointingly few parishes have maps much earlier than those drawn up for their Parliamentary enclosures, though some possess draft enclosure maps and/or tithe maps. On the other hand, there is field evidence against which maps can be measured and tested. It consists of surviving earthworks (ridge and furrow, moats, standing structures), of some physical geography in the widths of surviving tenements, and in hedgerow dating. It is rarely possible to use fieldwalking or excavation results as the areas under consideration have generally been under occupation or grass for many years.

The three examples discussed in this paper are Toft, Great Eversden and Comberton, three contiguous villages in the Bourn Valley west of Cambridge, which have previously been assumed to be the successors of primary nucleated settlements (Fig. 1). Toft and Great Eversden have been interpreted as grid plan villages while Comberton is a row village (Taylor 1983, pp. 204-5; RCHME 1968, p.122; CRO Q/RDc 57). The mid-nineteenth-century morphology of these settlements varied widely: Toft was (and is still) a polyfocal settlement, Great Eversden dispersed and Comberton a compact village. In all three cases, closer examination of these plans suggests that they are the result of settlement relocation rather than primary nucleation.

1. TOFT (Fig. 2)

Toft lies on the northern slopes of the upper
course of the Bourn Brook. The village is noticeably polyfocal: the church is separated from the main settlement by several closes, under pasture, with only the rectory and the vicarage nearby. Most building in the village is strung out along the north-south and west-east stretches of High Street, which forms part of the main road leading between Cambridge and Bedford. There is another noticeable cluster of houses along Brook Street.

Toft's is a difficult village plan to interpret. It has been suggested that the original village appears to have been laid out on a grid plan, though this was apparently distorted by later expansion and alteration. The latter must have occurred by the end of the century when Toft was small and in decline. There is no indication of any improvement in this situation until the 17th century when a series of new houses was erected in several places, mostly on older abandoned crofts (Taylor 1983, pp. 204-5).

However, close examination of the field evidence suggests that the village overlies open field furlongs, and that it is the regular structure of these furlongs, enclosed piecemeal during and after the later Middle Ages, which gives Toft the appearance of a grid plan.

The grid-like appearance of the settlement is superficially convincing, particularly on the north-south axis, where the High Street and School Lane provide the plan with an apparent regularity. However, significant problems arise in tracing a grid pattern on the west-east axis. There are a number of lanes and field boundaries on this axis, but few are linked to the same alignments. The only line which shows true continuity is that of the old Lot Way, a riverside route of probable prehistoric origin, whose importance is emphasised by the fact that it links many of the churches of the Bourn Valley: Barton, Comberton, Toft and Caldecote (Fox 1923, pp. 169-70; O.S. TL 35/45).

Problems in sustaining the argument for a grid through lanes and field boundaries are exacerbated by substantial medieval ridge and furrow surviving in good condition in Close A, which raises two incompatible hypotheses in explaining the village plan: ²

1. If Toft was a grid plan village, then these cultivation remains lie over the lanes and tofts of the medieval village. The village must therefore have shifted from the grid well before about 1300 as this area was unlikely to have been brought under the plough after 1300: the retreat from arable began and gained pace after the late thirteenth century so it is unlikely that land would have been taken under the plough after that date (for example, see Taylor 1973, pp. 131-49). Yet this was a period of considerable population expansion, when the tenant population rose from twenty-one in 1086 to about fifty in 1279 (VCH Cambridgeshire V 1973, p. 128).

2. If these parts of the village are a grid settlement deserted as the consequence of population decline, then this process is most likely to have occurred after about 1300 — in 1329 only about twenty-nine people paid the subsidy (ibid., p. 128). In this case the existence of ridge and furrow over this earlier settlement is hard to explain.

These differences can be resolved if the explanation of a grid plan is discarded in favour of the notion that the underlying structure of the
village plan reflects open field furlongs. Several pieces of evidence support the latter hypothesis:

1. Some of the property boundaries along High Street are curved in the characteristic backwards 'C' which indicates that these tofts were taken in from open field lands (CRO Q/RDc 23; Taylor 1982, p. 24). The house platforms of some crofts, such as Firs Farm and its northern neighbour, overlie ridge and furrow (CUCAP AIR92 and BZE2). There are no heads or headlands at the junction between croft and cultivation, indicating that the former overlie the latter and therefore postdate the ridges. Hedgerow dating indicates that the hedges dividing these properties were planted c. 1400. There are no houses along High Street earlier than the seventeenth century (RCHME 1968, pp. 209-10). This evidence is consistent with enclosure of arable for pasture in the late medieval period, the trebling of the village population between 1563 and 1630, from fourteen families to fifty, and with a post-medieval date for the expansion of the settlement over fields to the west of High Street.

All this tells us is that by the early modern period the village lay more or less on its present site. It offers no clue to the site(s) of earlier settlement: evidence for the latter lies in photographs held by the Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography (hereafter CUCAP) which show settlement remains north and south of the Bourn Brook in the areas shown in Fig. 2 (CUCAP: ACP53 and AIR 91-93). Both sites now lie under pasture. A medieval date for these settlement remains is suggested by the fact that they are respected by those medieval cultivation remains which survive.

2. Medieval ridge and furrow in Closes A and B, together with aerial photographs, demonstrates that Church Lane originated as a fieldway along a headland which divided the north-south furlongs on either side of it (CUCAP: AIR 93; Hall 1982, p. 10, fig. 6). The well-defined heads at the south of Close A (Pl. 1) are cut off from their headland (Church Lane) by the intervening hedge which is shown on the enclosure map. When under plough, this field system evidently extended from Comberton Road in the north to the settlement lying along the Bourn Brook. The ridges were not ploughed after the hedge was planted, as there is no sign of secondary heads a little to the north of
the heads along the south of Close A as one might expect if subsequent ploughing had taken place.

3. The dating of the hedge between Close A and Church Lane is therefore crucial to the argument as it presents a terminus post quem the ridges in these closes were no longer ploughed. If ploughing ceased in the early modern period, it might be possible to sustain the argument that the ridges overlie an earlier settlement; if ploughing ceased during the Middle Ages, the possibility of an underlying settlement is less convincing.

An examination of the southern hedge along Close A produced a consistent count of five hardy species per thirty metres, using Rackham's list of acceptable species (Rackham 1986, pp. 191-5). It was probably planted c. 1400 to enclose a common pasture for the increasing number of sheep in the village. The ridges were therefore formed in the period leading up to the late fourteenth century. This, together with their relative height of up to 1 metre in places, suggests that they do not overlie a decayed grid village. Close A appears to have had its origins in the field system of the parish, rather than in the decay of the village plan.

4. Some of the small closes west of Close A (Closes D and E) also contain traces of ridge and furrow running north-south (these can be seen on the ground as well as from the air (for example, on CUCAP: AIR 93)). The irregular character of the lanes dividing these closes from each other and from Close A, together with their lack of consistent east-west alignments with other lanes or hedgerows, suggests that they too originated as fieldways along balks and around medieval enclosures rather than as the decayed lanes of a grid plan village.

Toft's history may therefore be reinterpreted as follows. Open field land was laid out between the church and the western brook, probably in the early Middle Ages. It is possible that, as in Launditch Hundred, Norfolk, middle Saxon settlement lay around the now deserted church, but there is no evidence to support or contradict this (Wade Martins 1980). Aerial photographic evidence suggests that medieval settlement(s) possibly lay on either side of the brook — despite the fact that land to the southern side of the brook lies in Kingston parish — of which the modern settlement along Brook Street is a survivor. Arable in Close A was enclosed as common pasture for the village sheep in the later Middle Ages. The furlongs south of Church Lane remained open rather longer, as some were available for allotment in 1814. Some small-scale enclosure of just a few ridges also occurred between Close A and the High Street, a likely process in a community of small landholders. By the early modern period, some settlement had shifted onto the lands, possibly already enclosed, of a furlong lining the western side of the modern High Street, part of an increasingly prominent route between Cambridge and Oxford. The village plan did not originate as a planned grid — nevertheless the underlying grid of its open field furlongs is an important clue to its beginnings.
3. GREAT EVERSDEN (Fig. 3)

Great Eversden is a dispersed village lying on the southern slopes of the valley of the Bourn Brook as it widens out towards its confluence with the Cam in the east. The settlement is concentrated along the High Street, and along Wimpole Way. There is another small cluster around the church (Pl. II). The manor-house, together with some farms, lies at the far end of the High Street, nearly 750 metres west of the church.

Great Eversden is listed by the Royal Commission as a decayed grid plan village (RCHME 1968, p. 122). There are two main problems in sustaining the hypothesis. First, although the village plan is superficially regular, there do not appear to be sufficient alignments between hedgerows, footpaths and lanes to support the theory of a planned grid village. The alignments of the west-east main streets and lanes shown on the 1811 enclosure map are seductively grid-like, but closer examination shows that they fall into two contrasting sections.

1. West of the Full Brook, the most truly grid-like section of the plan is defined by the High Street and its two parallel lanes, x to the south (its western length now lost) and y (now closed) further over to the north, continuing the line of the road from Kingston. These three lanes are connected by the lane leading from Kingston to the High Street.

2. East of the Full Brook a double-row settlement rather than a grid is suggested by Church Lane (Pl. I) and Wimpole Way, parallel lanes north-south, interconnected by several short lanes.

A second problem in accepting a grid plan for Great Eversden lies in the medieval cultivation remains in closes south, east and north of Manor Farm. These lie within the apparent grid, and can still be seen from the ground as well as from the air (CUCAP: SH51, AAV90 and 93-4, BLA54-6). They are mapped in Fig. 3. If this ridge and furrow lies over decayed and deserted tofts, the latter must have been ploughed up before 1350, at a time when arable was being extended. However, this is the very period at which the population of the village was apparently growing and tofts were in demand.

Population decline in Great Eversden appears to have occurred in the later Middle Ages, a period unlikely to have seen ploughing in deserted tofts as arable was more generally being converted to pasture than vice versa (e.g. Taylor 1973, pp. 131-49). It is more likely that the High Street and other lanes shown on the enclosure map in 1811, and which appear to confirm a grid plan, originated as fieldways. These were given more a more formal appearance when some strips were enclosed. Enclosure in the village was documented by 1600, while hedgerow dating along the northern and southern hedges of Close X suggests the process was already under way by the late fourteenth/ early fifteenth centuries (VCH Cambridgeshire V 1973, p. 63).8

Nor do the two moated sites support the hypothesis of a grid plan. As Fig. 3 shows, Manor
Farm is surrounded by cultivation remains on all sides, which suggests it was planted over an existing field system (CUCAP: AAV91 and 93-4, BLA5/6; RCHME 1968, p. 126). Moreover the regular plan of its elaborate concentric rectangular moats suggests they were created at one date during the high Middle Ages between about 1150 and 1350 (RCHME 1968, pp. 121, 126, Monument 21; Wilson 1985, p. 28). Documentary evidence suggests this interpretation: the manor was created after the Conquest, by amalgamating the land of twenty-three sokemen. None of these men owned more than an average of 120 acres, and a pre-Conquest origin for the site is unlikely (VCH Cambridgeshire V 1973, pp. 60-1; Rumble 1981, 31:7). Many twelfth- and thirteenth-century moats in Cambridgeshire were apparently newly sited on arable or common pasture land (Oosthuizen 1993, p. 93). The proximity of the spring in Bath Spinney, whose waters fill the moats, is a sufficient reason for the manor's present site. The position of the moat at the apparent head of a grid-plan village should rather be interpreted as a manor situated near water on arable land at the time of its creation in the high Middle Ages.

The second moated site [Z] has produced no evidence of occupation earlier than the thirteenth century (RCHME 1968, p. 125, Monument 19). Cultivation remains to the west suggest that, like Manor Farm, it was sited over arable lands (there is apparently continuous ridge and furrow running across closes X and Y, now cut across by a later hedge and ditch which separates the two closes).

The only sustainable evidence of settlement planning apparent on the 1811 enclosure map is in the line of tofts between Wimpole Way and Church Lane focused on the north-south routes which have linked the Mare Way and the Bourn Brook since the prehistoric period (CRO Q/RDe 19; Oosthuizen 1996b, p. 20; and cf. Warner 1996, pp. 48-52). The row is defined by common back boundaries and is subdivided into common property widths.

However, the boundaries between a number of properties follow a backward 'C' curve, indicating that the planned settlement may have been laid out over arable land: see for example, the boundaries between closes 61/62:63, 67:69 and 70:73. Further to the west of Wimpole Way, however, the curving boundaries (for example, between closes 54:55:56/57), irregular toft lengths and irregular shapes of some closes (for example, 56, 56, 24, 25) suggest encroachment over an underlying medieval field system as the medieval population expanded (CRO Q/RDe 19). The clustering of the church, Rectory Farm, guildhall, Town House and Pound Close (Close 36) at or near the intersection between Church Lane and the High Street, in contrast with other older buildings which face Wimpole Way, may be the consequence of alternating changes in emphasis between these two lanes as each became the
major local link between the Mare Way and the Bourn Brook over the centuries.\(^9\)

The original planned single-row settlement in Great Eversden may be no earlier than the later eleventh century. After the Conquest, Guy de Raimbeaucourt, the new Norman lord, consolidated nearly three-quarters of the land of both parishes, previously separately owned by twenty-three sokemen, into one manor (\textit{VCH Cambridgeshire} V 1973, pp. 60-1). The previous owners appear to have been dispossessed and/or reduced to villeinage as the tenants of this manor did not include any sokemen in 1086. The creation of new patterns of ownership and social structure in the later eleventh century may well have gone hand in hand with the creation of a planned nucleated settlement.

The church is not part of the regular row plan, and therefore either pre- or postdates the settlement. There is some evidence to suggest that it was built before 1066.

1. The church was first mentioned in 1092 when most of its tithes were given to Barnwell Abbey by Picot, the Norman sheriff of Cambridgeshire (\textit{VCH Cambridgeshire} V 1973, p. 65). Picot’s contemporary reputation was for miserliness: he is more likely to have acquired the church in 1066 than to have built it between 1066 and 1092 (\textit{VCH Cambridgeshire} I 1998, p. 356). This suggests a pre-Conquest origin for the church.

The church appears initially to have served both parishes (\textit{VCH Cambridgeshire} V 1973, p. 59). Picot’s holding of 60 acres, which included the church, was held of Guy de Raimbeaucourt and so derived from sokemen who had held it in 1066. The church may therefore have been founded by the sokemen in the parish before the Conquest. Evidence from other parts of East Anglia makes it clear that sokemen as well as manorial lords were involved in the foundation of churches (Warner 1986, p. 39; \textit{VCH Cambridgeshire} V 1973, p. 59).

3. The church appears to have been sited on an irregular piece of open ground, in close proximity to the medieval pound and the later guildhall. All three are communal facilities, often sited on communal land (Roberts 1987, pp. 103(b), 153(a)). It is some distance away from the manor, which would be unusual if it had originated as a manorial church (cf. Oosthuizen 1993, pp. 96-7; Oosthuizen 1996b, p. 28). Set in the centre of the Eversden unit, on communal land at the intersection between ancient routes, and outside the planned settlement, the position of the church makes better topographical sense in a dispersed landscape with no manorial lord.

4. If the church had been built in the same period that the row-plan may have been laid out, it would have been incorporated into the row. As it is not, the church and the nucleated settlement are probably of different dates.

This evidence gives tentative support to the proposition of a pre-Conquest origin for the church, at an earlier date than the settlement.

Plate III: Great Eversden: View along Church Lane looking south towards the Mare Way Ridgeway. One of the prehistoric tracks between the upland and the Bourn Brook which was re-used as the back lane of the medieval settlement.

This leaves the question of the date of the open fields in Great Eversden unanswered. As the nucleated settlement appears to have been laid out over open field lands and furlongs, it seems that the open fields may already have been laid out by the time of the Conquest. Is it possible that the conversion from dispersed to open field farming was undertaken communally in Great Eversden before 1066? At enclosure, manorial holdings in the two parishes were so complex that the two parishes could not be distinguished; this would be consistent with a pattern of open field holdings divided between twenty-seven different sokemen owners in 1066, each owning an average of between 12 and 120 acres (Rumble 1981, 14,46; 26,37; 27,1; 31,7). Furthermore, as furlongs appear to have been more important than open fields in the organisation of arable land in the Eversdens during and after the Middle Ages, perhaps this reflects the reorganisation of dispersed sokemen’s farmsteads into an initial two-field system covering both parishes, based on already existing fields (\textit{VCH Cambridgeshire} V 1973, p. 63).

As happened in the north-eastern portion of Haslingfield, an underlying, possibly early, regular field pattern may have been converted to open field furlongs (Oosthuizen 1996a, p. 19, n.10; Oosthuizen 1996b, p. 20). The surviving lanes and
cultivation remains in Great Eversden, as well as those shown on the 1811 map, are aligned on the ancient north-east/south-west axis linking the rideways to north and south with the Bourn Brook which divides them (CRO Q/RDc 19). It is difficult to know whether this is because this makes topographical sense, or whether it is because more ancient boundaries were utilised when the communal fields were organised.

In conclusion, it seems that at Great Eversden an open field landscape may have existed by the mid-eleventh century. It was at that time divided among twenty-seven owners, with a central church serving both modern parishes. After the Conquest a single-row settlement was laid out between Wimpole Way and Church Lane over open field furlongs, later expanding southwards and westwards as the population virtually doubled between the eleventh and late thirteenth centuries. Two moated manors were dug into the open fields during the high Middle Ages. The grid plan suggested by the Royal Commission reveals the underlying structure of part of an open field system rather than specific settlement planning.

4. COMBERTON (Fig. 4)

Comberton is a compact settlement whose character was more noticeable at enclosure than it is today, when it has been augmented by the addition of several modern estates. The main settlement faces the main street, which follows the same main road between Cambridge and Bedford as the High Street of its neighbour, Toft. In the post-medieval period a substantial suburb of houses was built in Swaynes Lane. The church lies isolated from the village, with only the rectory and vicarage in attendance.

The church, rectory manor and late medieval vicarage lie near the crossing of an ancient north-south trackway which linked the site of a Roman building south of the church with the Romanised ridgeway to the north running between Cambridge and Eltisley, and the Lot Way running east-west.

The village lies some distance away from the church, on a completely different axis: that is, the west-east main road between Barton and Toft (the modern successor to the Lot Way along the northern bank of the Bourn Brook). To the south

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Fig. 4. Comberton (after the map CRO/RDc 57)
of West Street and Cambridge Lane the village appears to be a conventional planned settlement. The two back lanes, internally consistent in their alignments and also aligned with each other, are good indicators of planning, together with common property widths of about seven yards or multiples thereof.

Property boundaries north of West Street reflect the curve and width of medieval ridge and furrow (CRO Q/RDC 57). These are intakes from open field furlongs, whose origin is confirmed by their stepped common back boundary, made as the village population expanded, probably during the high Middle Ages when 'encroachments upon the commons were made for building' (CRO Q/RDC 57; VCH Cambridgeshire V1973, p. 176).

Domesday Book records that before the Conquest there was one major manor in Comberton (Green's), part of the king's ancient demesne, with other blocks of land owned by sokemen. This latter land was confiscated after 1066 and reapportioned between new Norman lords; a significant proportion was used to form a second manor (Burdelys) created by Picot, the Norman sheriff of Cambridgeshire (Rumble 1981, 1:6 and 32:14). Curiously, in each planned block the copyhold and freehold tofts of the two manors and of the rectory lie intermingled (CRO Q/RDC 57). It is difficult to make sense of this: if the village were planned out after the Conquest, each manor's land would have been more likely to have been laid out in separate blocks (e.g. Roberts 1987, pp. 202-5). As the two manors are not separated in this way, the village appears instead to have been laid out over existing open field furlongs where sokeman, villein and demesne lands were intermingled in a pre-Conquest open field layout where the relationship between the king's manor and the villein and sokeman tenants was clearly understood. When Picot formed Burdelys from land confiscated from the sokemen's field, his lands were distributed about the parish in a pattern which referred to pre-Conquest tenurial relationships rather than post-Conquest manorial holdings.

(The acreage of the customary lands of the two secular manors, as shown on the enclosure map, had remained relatively unchanged since the mid-thirteenth century: in 1840 Green's manor included 277.5 acres of customary land, compared with c. 315 acres in 1279; while Burdelys included 65.5 acres of customary land compared with 87 acres in 1279 (VCH Cambridgeshire V1973, p. 183). The distribution of customary land shown at enclosure is therefore probably largely similar to that of the mid-thirteenth century.)

It appears that the settlement was brought to its present site after the Conquest as part of a deliberate planning process which may have utilised an underlying system of land division to form the basis of the settlement's structure.

The dating of Green's (the king's pre-Conquest manor) and Burdelys (Picot's post-Conquest manor) manors might help to narrow the timing of this planned settlement shift. Neither manor is aligned on or incorporated with the village.

The present site of Green's manor at the head of an ancient green some distance from the rest of the village is unlikely to be the initial manorial site, if indeed that ever existed. Green's was owned by Edward the Confessor in 1066 as part of 'the king's ancient demesne' (Rumble 1981, 1:6). The manor was small, assessed at 2.5 hides (300 acres) and was included in the farm of the county until the late twelfth century (VCH Cambridgeshire V1973, pp. 177). It appears to have been farmed after the Conquest from the county manor at Madingley, conveniently (for him) held by the Norman sheriff Picot, given his own manor at Comberton (VCH Cambridgeshire IX 1989, pp. 166-7). In 1200 Green's was granted to John Mers, whose family held it until 1318 (VCH Cambridgeshire V1973, p. 177). As at Great Eversden, this period is most likely to have seen the creation of the present manorial site: the moat is a regular rectangle, consistent with a date between about 1150 and 1350, when most moats appear to have been dug, and with the proliferation of subinfeudations and new manors in the same period (Wilson 1985, p. 28; Oosthuizen 1993, p. 93).

Burdelys, a manor of about 240 acres, was created by Picot after the Conquest with land appropriated from four sokemen. It lies between the village and the church, close to the Tit Brook which fills the moat. The manor was an outlier of Picot's manor at Madingley until about 1110 (VCH Cambridgeshire V1973, pp. 179-81). The manorial history is complex, with frequent subinfeudations and some divisions. Sufficient continuity of ownership to assign a date for the moat is difficult to assess; the most likely candidates are Eustace Picot (fl. 1166) and his daughter (d. by 1181) who married into a prominent local family, the Burdelys (ibid., pp. 179-81. A late twelfth-century date is consistent with the regular shape of the moat and with a likely date for its creation (Wilson 1985, p. 28).

As neither manorial site is integrated with the planned settlement, they are likely to postdate it. Given that both moats are likely to have been dug around the late twelfth/early thirteenth centuries, the settlement was probably laid out between the Conquest and about 1200. Documentary references indicate that the settlement was on its present site by the early thirteenth century (VCH Cambridgeshire V1973, p. 175).

As has been shown, a system of open fields had already been laid out by the time this settlement was created. It is possible that the present settlement was preceded by a nucleated settlement, whose site is at present unknown, contemporary with the creation of the open fields (Hall 1981, pp. 36-8; Taylor 1983, pp. 130-1). There are tentative indications that at least part of this earlier settlement may have lain in the area around the church,
which also includes the vicarage and rectory (cf. Wade-Martins 1980).

1. The church was given to Barnwell Abbey in Cambridge by Picot in 1092. He presumably acquired it along with the lands he confiscated from sokemen in the village after the Conquest (VCH Cambridgeshire V 1973, p. 185; Warner 1986 p. 39).

2. The land of Rectory Manor was made up of land confiscated from three other sokemen which had been amalgamated into Heved's manor in 1066. Heved's demesne had come into Barnwell Abbey's hands by 1250 (ibid., p. 181). It is a curious coincidence which unites the church, possibly built by sokemen, with demesne land created by appropriating sokeland. This may indicate that part of the pre-Conquest settlement may have lain around the church, on the basis that the sokemen were unlikely to build the church away from their settlement, unless settlement in the parish was still dispersed despite the existence of an open field system.

3. There is some field evidence around the church which might indicate the extent of this settlement. Figure 4 shows an irregular oval block of land defined by field boundaries and lanes which centred on the church in 1840 (CRO Q/RDc 57). This area contrasts with, and appears to be respected by, the more rectangular field boundaries around it, suggesting that it predates this more regular layout. It was exclusively owned by the Rectory manor (derived from Heved's manor) in 1840, and it is tempting to suggest that this ancient curved boundary may indicate part of settlement land confiscated in 1066.

Comberton therefore appears to have been laid out over open field furlongs between the late eleventh and mid-thirteenth centuries as part of a process of deliberate planning which incorporated the regular elements of an underlying open field, whose layout predated the settlement. The earlier settlement is unknown, although there are some indications that it may have lain around the church.

CONCLUSIONS

In each case closer examination has suggested that these sites, initially supposed to have represented the initial late Saxon nucleation, should be reinterpreted as secondary (or later) relocations to new sites overlying open field furlongs, often soon after the Norman Conquest. In each case, too, the evidence demonstrates a complex process in which the regularity of an underlying field system has been overlain by the additional regularity of a relocated planned settlement.

These case studies give a new dimension to Roberts' observation of the power of lords to readjust settlement by expanding their demesne over arable or settlement within a manor, by focusing — at two sites in particular — on the apparent changes in settlement brought about by new Norman lords in the later eleventh century (Roberts 1987, p. 94). Nevertheless, there are significant differences in process between these examples from Cambridgeshire and the re-planning of settlement after the 'Harrying of the North' in North Yorkshire and Durham, although a similar date is suggested for two of the Cambridgeshire examples. In Cambridgeshire it has yet to be proven that destruction on the scale experienced in the north of England occurred and necessitated settlement re-planning. It seems more likely to have followed on, in Great Eversden and Comberton, from the reorganisation of land — particularly sokeman land — into new Norman manors, hand in hand with the consequent reordering of the social hierarchy.

This work does not generally, with the exception of Great Eversden, address the important points raised by Lewis et al. (1997) in their sophisticated study of the origins of planned field systems and settlement. They have suggested that these origins may lie in a co-ordinated effort between landlords and peasants, where economically appropriate, to maximise their agricultural productivity, by a process whose cultural diffusion may have been very similar to that of the enclosure movement which followed nearly a millennium later towards the end of the eighteenth century (Lewis et al. 1997, pp. 236-7).

The processes which these three settlements illustrate appear, however, to be subsequent to this initial period of large-scale landscape planning. In the cases of Comberton and Great Eversden the creation of moated manor-houses in the twelfth century outside the main village settlement is not consistent with the suggestion of an indirect lordly role in which the lords built manors and founded churches, so providing an initial nucleus around which a settlement might develop (Lewis et al. 1997, p. 209). (It should be possible to test this latter hypothesis, by the way, through careful settlement analysis: the gradual movement of freeman farmers and villein tenants towards a manorial centre is more likely to produce irregular settlement around the centre; the characteristics of planned settlements — tofts of equal width sharing a common back boundary — suggest a more immediate process with a defined population limit in mind.)

If the manorial sites at Comberton and Great Eversden were integral with twelfth-century replanning, the nucleated settlements and manorial sites would bear a more formal relationship with each other. In each case the planting of the moated sites outside the settlement, on land not apparently occupied by housing, suggests that the settlement preceded the moat. At Toft, the history of the modern settlement is much more obscure. In all three cases the preservation of the boundaries of underlying ridge and furrow demonstrates the secondary (or later) nature of the settlement.
At Comberton and Great Eversden, in particular, a lordly role in this secondary process is suggested simply by the underlying sequence of settlement motifs and the chronology which may explain them. Only Great Eversden may throw a glimmer of light on the interplay of individual power and communal authority between lords and tenants which may have initiated nucleation in the first place — in this case a process which appears here to have been initiated without lordly influence.

The evidence from these three very different settlements does not challenge the concept of village planning, or of village planning on the basis of a grid layout. Instead it offers a deeper understanding of the processes involved, as well as of the ways in which the available evidence can be put to use. Its only ‘moral’ is that settlement plans in open field areas need careful examination to distinguish them from settlements, like these in west Cambridgeshire and west Lindsey, where villages appear to have moved onto open field land — in different periods and for a wide variety of reasons — from earlier dispersed and nucleated sites.

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PRIMARY SOURCES

Cambridgeshire County Record Office (CRO) : Toft Enclosure Map CRO Q/RDc 23
Comberton Enclosure Map CRO Q/RDc 57
Great Eversden Enclosure Map CRO Q/RDc 19
Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography (CUCAP)

FOOTNOTES

1. Hedgerow dating has sometimes been the subject of controversy. It has been accepted here partly on the authority of Max Hooper, who developed the technique in this part of England, and partly on the authority of Oliver Rackham (Hooper 1971, pp. 6-13; Rackham, 1986, pp. 194-202).
2. The width (7-9 yards) and backward-S curve of the ridges indicate that these cultivation remains are medieval (RCHME 1968, p. lxvi).
3. The population growth, decline and growth of Toft over the relevant centuries is recorded as follows (VCH Cambridgeshire V 1973, pp. 128, 152):
   - 1086 23 households
   - 1279 I c. 50 houses
   - 1327 29 people paid subsidy
   - 1359 7 out of 13 tenements in the lord's hand on Avenel's Manor
   - 1377 76 people assessed for poll tax
   - 1525 33 people paid subsidy
   - 1563 14 families
   - c. 1630 c. 50 families
4. Hedgerow dating in 1996 along surviving hedges in this part of Toft consistently produced results which averaged five species per 30-metre length.
5. This area, although enclosed by a late medieval hedge, was counted as common land in 1815 when it was allotted as part of the process of enclosure (CRO Q/RDc 23). The number of sheep and the quantity of meadow and pasture increased in the parish in the later Middle Ages (VCH Cambridgeshire V 1973, pp. 131-2).
6. Villeneue disappeared in Toft between the mid-thirteenth century and late fourteenth centuries, resulting in a lack of copyhold tenure on the manors (VCH Cambridgeshire V 1973, pp. 131-2); in 1815 only four out of thirty-five allotments were of more than 50 acres, and most were fewer than 10 acres (ibid., p. 132).
7. The recorded population of Great Eversden is as follows (VCH Cambridgeshire V 1973, p. 60):
   - 1086 26 tenants (includes Little Eversden)
   - 1279 46 messuages
   - 1327 54 assessed for tax in both parishes
   - 1377 148 people assessed for poll tax
   - 1525 22 tax payers
   - 1563 16 households
8. Hedgerow dating around Close X in 1996 produced an average of five species per 30 metre length, suggesting a possible age of about 580 years for these hedges — that is, suggesting that they were planted in the early fifteenth century. Line X along the southern side of Close X is defined by two hedges: that on the southern (outer) side produced two five-species lengths, that on the northern (inner) side produced one two- and one three-species lengths. Both sides of the lane are shown on the enclosure map. This suggests that the outer hedge was used to enclose the field in the later Middle Ages, while the inner hedge was used to define the path, possibly in the eighteenth century.
9. The Rectory was probably created in the twelfth century (VCH Cambridgeshire V 1973, p. 62); the 'Town House' (Close 64) was bought with money willed in 1703 (ibid., p. 68). Pound Close (Close 36) presumably contained the village pound.
10. Domesday Book implies that these sokemen were reduced to villeinage by Picot (which is entirely consistent with his contemporary reputation (VCH Cambridgeshire I 1938, p. 356)): it states that his manor was made up of 2 hides and 2 acres which had been confiscated from nine sokemen, which had been divided before the Conquest between two manors of seven royal and two variously committed sokemen respectively. In 1086 there were seven villagers on his manor and it is tempting to see these as the seven royal sokemen who had owned the land before the Conquest; there were also eleven bordars (Rumble 1981, 32,14).
MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT RELOCATION IN WEST CAMBRIDGESHIRE  

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