

# FIELDS AND FARMS IN A HILLTOP VILLAGE

JOHN CHENEVIX-TRENCH

The hilltop villages of the Chilterns have always been difficult to fit into any pattern worked out for the development of the English village community. Common field, where it exists at all, appears broken up into small scattered parcels, mingled with small tenant closes and large demesne fields, so that H. L. Grey questioned whether "simple 2 or 3 field arrangements were ever existent there". But he added, "there may have been such in the earliest days, and the later irregularities may have arisen from the addition of areas won from the forest"<sup>1</sup>. Much the same question troubled Elizabeth Levett<sup>2</sup>.

This paper attempts to answer it for one such village, Coleshill near Amersham; and though no generally applicable answer is likely to exist, the results may at least be suggestive for other areas.

Although only a hamlet of Amersham, Coleshill's area (over 1,800 acres) is greater than that of many parishes, and its settlement pattern is a very diverse one: besides a small nucleated village,<sup>3</sup> which kept its common fields until 1816, there are scattered farms of many different dates. It will be seen too that the common fields, like so many in the Chilterns, present anomalous features for which explanations must be sought.

That Coleshill is not particularly rich in records is of course a handicap, but by using field-work and place names to supplement the documents it is possible to build up a surprisingly complete picture. In any case, that I should write about Coleshill is determined by the fact that I live there.

But it is one of the minor oddities of the place that for a man to say, "I live in Coleshill", has not always meant the same thing to everybody. Before going any further a definition is needed.

Today the name Coleshill is used for the area in the south of Amersham parish which until 1844 lay in a detached part of Hertfordshire. But the modern Coleshill was not the whole of this "Little Hertfordshire": part of Beaconsfield parish — the whole area north of Ledborough Lane and Longbottom Lane — also lay within it. For administrative purposes the county authorities needed a name for the whole of this area; and from Tudor times onward the name they used was Coleshill.<sup>4</sup>

This seems never to have corresponded to local usage. A man living, in say, Oldfields Farm would have said he lived in Beaconsfield, Herts, not in Coleshill. In the hamlet of Winchmore Hill, which was bisected by the county boundary and lies partly in Coleshill and partly in Penn, a man living on the Hertfordshire side of the boundary could describe himself in his will as being "of Coleshill" or of "Amersham, Herts".<sup>5</sup>

1. Gray, H. L. *English Field Systems*, 1915.

2. Levett, A. E. *Studies in Manorial History*, Oxford, 1935.

3. A 'nucleated' village is one whose houses are clustered together round a green or a church, in contrast to one composed of scattered farmsteads and hamlets.

4. PRO, Subsidy Rolls, E 179/121/155 et. seq.

5. E.g. Bucks Record Office, Wills, D/A/We/22/114 and D/A/We/20/164.



but then as now he probably thought of himself as a Winchmore Hill man.

If we go back further still the application of the name Coleshill becomes extremely obscure. Until some time in the 15th Century the name used by officials for the whole of "Little Hertfordshire" was La Stock, or Stock, though at that time too local people distinguished between Hertfordshire Beaconsfield and Hertfordshire Amersham; to them it was only the latter that was La Stock.<sup>7</sup> The name Coleshill was certainly in use at this time, but it is found only attached to people, in the personal name "de Coleshull" (a Hughenden family), not to any identifiable locality. Possibly it was applied only to what was later called Coleshill Green (now the common).

The southern boundary of what local people called Stock or Coleshill — that it to say Hertfordshire Amersham, roughly the modern civil parish — was considered significant enough to be marked on the ground by a series of crosses. Three of them survived until 1816, and are described in the perambulation of the parish which prefaces the Amersham Enclosure award. One stood at the foot of White's Hill, at the point where the boundary makes a right-angle turn from a north-south to an east-west line, and two more where it changes direction in Winchmore Hill. The map suggests at once that there should have been at least one more, between White's Hill and Winchmore Hill, at the point where the boundary makes another right angle turn in Marrod's bottom. And so, almost certainly, there was; for Marrod must be Old English '(ge)maer-rod', a boundary cross. It may be relevant that one of the possible etymologies for Winchmore Hill would derive the name from Old English *wincel*, an angle or corner, and (ge)maer-rod, a boundary; an angle in a boundary precisely describes the site.<sup>8</sup>

The crosses were in position for at least 500 years: the one at White's Hill is mentioned in a charter of 1334, where it is called 'Maldecrouch', and the name *maer-rod* must have arisen considerably earlier than this. They marked a parochial or villar boundary, not a manorial one: the land now occupied by Owls Ears Wood, formerly White's Hill Pightles, was left on the Beaconsfield side of the line, although part of the manor of Amersham.

I shall for the most part respect this ancient boundary, for it is clear that south of it lay a quite distinct community whose history is part of the history of Beaconsfield; but I shall make forays across it for evidence whenever necessary. To avoid confusion I shall use the name Coleshill to denote the area as a whole, even when discussing the period before this name superseded Stock.

Coleshill first appears in the records as a detached part of the Manor of Tring, which in turn was a member of the Honour of Boulogne. In 1151, along with Tring, it was granted to the Abbey of Faversham in Kent, by King Stephen,<sup>9</sup> who was married to the heiress of the Count of Boulogne. In the following reign the English lands of the Honour reverted to the Crown and Coleshill for some reason went with them, though the Abbot was confirmed in possession of Tring. This severed Coleshill's connexion with Tring for ever, and in 1175 Henry II granted it at farm to William de Mandeville, Earl of Essex and Lord of Amersham, who paid six pounds a year for it.<sup>11</sup> Five or six years later, by an unrecorded transaction, it seems to have been acquired by Earl

7. Bodleian, MS Charters, Bucks, esp. 899, 902, 965, 971.

8. The first recorded form of the name is Wynamerhill, 1559 (PRO, Feet of Fines, CP25 (2) 259). But a Coleshill taxpayer in 1296 was called John atte Wynch', suggesting that 'Winch' represents the original form, and moreover that it denotes a topographical feature.

9. Westminster Abbey MS 3448. I owe this reference to Mr. Gerald Elvey.

10. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, I, 688, IV 574.

11. *Pipe Roll Soc*, IX, 26; XXI, 74; XXVIII, 128. The service by which Coleshill was held was a quarter of a knight's fee: the holder was obliged to meet a quarter of the cost of maintaining a knight on active service.

William as his own fief, to hold by military service. Thereafter it was held "as of the Honour of Mandeville"<sup>12</sup>, and by the late 13th-century its former connection with the Honour of Boulogne had vanished from men's memories: Coleshill was not one of the Hertfordshire vills which, in 1278, mistakenly and vainly claimed the privileges attaching to Ancient Demesne of the Crown, by virtue of having been part of that Honour.<sup>13</sup> Long before this however — in fact before the end of the 12th century — Coleshill had been subinfeudated to the de Quarrendon family, who continued as mesne, or intermediate, lords under the de Mandevilles and their successors the de Bohuns until about 1285.<sup>14</sup>

It is unclear whether the whole of Coleshill was ever contained within the bounds of a single manor. It is possible — the evidence will be discussed later in this article — that the area east of the Amersham-Beaconsfield road may have been manorially separate from a very early date — perhaps from the first. The Manor of Stock seems to have comprised only the land west of the road; and at some stage, probably around the end of the 12th century, this original manor was itself divided in two. The eastern half was held for several generations, until the late 13th century, by a branch of the de la Stock family, as mesne tenants of the de Quarrendons;<sup>15</sup> and it is probable that another branch at one time held the western half, later acquired by Walter de Agmondesham,<sup>16</sup> the eminent lawyer and later Chancellor of England. This survived into modern times as the Manor of Coleshill. The eastern portion later became known as the Manor of Stockbury. A fourth manor, Tomlins, also had toe-holds within the confines of Coleshill. Each of these manors will be discussed in more detail in due course, in the context of their land, and this summary is intended only to make clear some of what follows.

Coleshill occupies the summit of the hill to the south of Amersham, and extends a mile or so along the two ridges which branch from it to south-east and south-west. The space between the ridges is largely occupied by a prominent spur which projects southward from the western ridge; the village is spread along the spine of this spur, which at its southern end falls away into a narrow-bottomed valley forming, at this point, Coleshill's boundary with Beaconsfield and Penn.

The soil is composed of peri-glacial deposits, mainly clay-with-flints, but with some large pockets of flint-free sandy-clay and a few seams of almost pure sand. The chalk beneath lies at depths varying from up to fifteen feet on the hill-tops to only a foot or so in the valley bottoms. The land can never have been very good. Ongar Hill was formerly Hunger Hill<sup>17</sup> and though the etymology is debatable it is very likely that the word meant just what it says; a little way off lies Starvacre (now a wood); and, in the early 17th century, one reason why Stockings Farm was not expected to command a good rent was that it was only "Chiltern upland"<sup>18</sup>.

In fact Coleshill was rather marginal land, and would not have attracted the earliest English settlers. In an earlier article<sup>19</sup> I have given reasons for believing that it was at first used only as forest grazing by communities in Hertfordshire, and that this continued for the first three hundred years of the English period. During this long span

12.CP 25 (1)/86/40/153.

13.PRO, Assize Rolls, Just 1/324a/38.

14.*Book of Fees* II, 1431; PRO, Assize Rolls, Just 1/325/9.

15.*Bracton's Notebook*, ed Maitland, 845.

16.CP 25 (1) 86/39/136.

17.BRO, PR/4/26/6-12. Since this, the earliest reference known to me, is dated 1707, no certain etymology is possible.

18.Bucks. Arch. Soc. (BAS), 31/56.

19.Chenevix Trench, J, 'Coleshill and the Settlement of the Chilterns', *Records* XIX, 1973.

of time we may picture Coleshill as a triangular clearing about 500 yards long, with a pond, the Clenemer<sup>20</sup>, and perhaps some seasonally occupied huts at the northern end, set in what had probably become rather patchy forest (This description would no doubt serve for the origin of most of the "Green" villages of the Chilterns). Settled arable agriculture, I suggested, was the work of Danish settlers in the 10th century, a date consistent with those calculated, using Dr. Max Hooper's method<sup>21</sup> for Coleshill's oldest hedges. With few exceptions these are found along stretches of what were formerly the boundaries of the common fields.

At the time of their enclosure in 1816, four common fields were found in Coleshill: Coleslett Field, then 39 acres, south of the village; Claremore Field (later corrupted to Claymore), 40 acres, east of the village; Gospel Field, 60 acres, to the north west, and Church Field, 74 acres, immediately north-east of Gospel Field, between it and the county boundary — which at this point was also the limit of the Manor of Amersham. There are moreover, clues to show that there had once been a fifth common field within the borders of Coleshill. In its south west corner is an area of some 74 acres bounded by roads or tracks, the ancient Westwood, and Winchmore Hill village. Part of this is occupied by a field called Cowleys (now built over) whose name suggests that it may have been pasture from an early date, and part by the closes and 'backsides' attached to the houses of the village. The greater part of the remainder is occupied by a large field, formerly two, called Hither and Middle Collins; and at its northern end was once a field called Long Collins, now a wood known as Coleshill Larches.<sup>22</sup> The hedges dividing these three fields from the fields called Great Tomlins and Further Worleys are not older than the 14th century, and before this the whole area, of 48½ acres, must have been a single field, all on a gentle, even, well-drained slope, most inviting to early settlers.

That this was a common field is shown by the former name of part of Long Collins: The Butts.<sup>23</sup> This word is part of the terminology of the common fields. It meant either the ends of a parcel of strips where they abutted on the headland, or a group of short strips filling some awkward corner between furlongs. The shape of Long Collins, a clumsy 'L', shows that the latter is the sense here.

Although the 'textbook' common field system consists of three — or more rarely two — enormous fields, by Chilterns standards five is quite a modest number. Mr. David Roden has detected no fewer than twenty-five at King's Langley and thirty at Berkhamsted — all, of course very small.<sup>24</sup> A multiplicity of small common fields is in fact quite usual in Chiltern townships. But in spite of appearances Coleshill was not a five-field village. For it is clear that 'Collins Field' belonged to Winchmore Hill. It was the counterpart of Horsemore Field on the Penn side of the boundary, of which a rump remained unenclosed until 1855.<sup>25</sup> We do not know whether Winchmore Hill once had a third field<sup>26</sup> or whether it was a two-field village. But we know that there was no such thing as a one-field village, and the presence of Horsemore implies another field, on the other side of the township, where 'Collins Field' lies.

Even today the 23 acres of Westwood interpose a palpable barrier between the fields of Winchmore Hill and those of Coleshill. In the Middle Ages the wood was much

20. *Missenden Cartulary* (Ed. Jenkins), ii, no. 310.

21. *Hedges and Local History*, Standing Conference for Local History, 1971.

22. BRO, Tithe Map, Amersham 1840.

23. BAS, Coleshill Rental 1630.

24. Roden D., 'Field Systems of the Chiltern Hills and Kent' (with A.R.H. Baker) *Trans. Inst. Brit. Geographers*, 38, (1966).

25. BRO, Penn enclosure award, 1R/77R.

26. There would be room for one in the area, S.E. of the village, occupied by the fields of The Glory.

larger (see Map, p.411), and the impression of a barrier much more marked. It represents, in fact, the uncleared forest between two independent settlements. Winchmore Hill is not an outlier of Coleshill, nor a hamlet of Penn, but a self-contained nucleated village in its own right, with its own miniature field system; and its common fields were laid out with no regard at all for the county boundary: they 'overflowed' into Coleshill.

This is true, too, of other parts of the Winchmore Hill field system. Just on the Penn side of the boundary lies the farm called The Glory, whose name recalls this area's long standing connection with the Glory in Wooburn. Both 'Glories' came into the hands of the Agmondesham family, and were in fact treated as a single property — one virgate (30 acres) of which is recorded as lying in Hertfordshire.<sup>27</sup> From 1281 the Agmondeshams also held the western manor of Coleshill<sup>28</sup>, but the Wooburn property was their principal seat hereabouts. In 1294, however, two members of the family paid tax in Coleshill: one, Adam de la Glorie, was the biggest tax-payer in the vill, assessed on goods worth over £12; his father Walter was assessed on only 30 shillings.<sup>29</sup> Adam must have been occupying Coleshill Manor; Walter's 30s represents the produce of a much more modest holding, which must however have been part of the family's main estate, since he was head of the family. It came, in fact, from certain fields of The Glory which lay on the Hertfordshire side of the county boundary. These fields can be identified with some confidence by looking at the map. Great and Little Fagnall, and little Tomlins, are clearly encroachments across the boundary, and together with Great Tomlins their combined extent is just over 29 acres — as good a virgate as one could wish for.

A very similar situation is suggested by the fact that Edmund, Earl of Cornwall, paid tax in Coleshill in 1296<sup>30</sup>, also on a modest sum (33s 11d). The Earl at that time had the wardship of the Manor of Segraves in Penn, and the land which raised the produce on which this tax was levied must have been a cross-boundary extension of the Segraves estate. I am inclined to identify this with Hertfordshire Farm, a hypothesis which could neatly explain the name.<sup>31</sup>

Winchmore Hill and Penn were not the only communities to spread across the boundary. What is now the Queen's Head public house, half-way between Winchmore Hill and Amersham, was formerly known as Sylvester's Whielden<sup>32</sup> and was a farmstead of great age: the curving embanked hedge surrounding it is nine hundred to a thousand years old. And it is clear from the map that it and Hollandean Field do not belong to Coleshill — though they lie within its boundaries — but to the hamlet of Woodrow, of whose fields they form an extension. The documentary evidence, though late, tends to bear this out: from 1640, and no doubt earlier, the people who paid Hollandean's quit rent to the lord of the Manor of Coleshill were landholders in Woodrow.<sup>33</sup>

Away on the opposite side of Coleshill, in its extreme eastern corner, the Tithe Map of 1840 shows a small field called Whelpley's Platt. Today the hedge which defined it has gone, and with it one of the few traces in Coleshill of what was once an important

27. *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1429-35 p.43.

28. CP 25(1)/86/39/136.

29. E 179/120/3.

30. E 179/120/5.

31. It may be the land in Amersham conveyed to Stephen de Segrave by Humphrey de Bohun, according to W.H. Hastings-Kelke, *Records II* (1863), giving a reference which I have not been able to trace.

32. PRO, Chancery Proceedings, C1/443/25.

33. BAS, Coleshill Rental 1640, BAS 9/56. Woodrow Rental 1629.

farm. Whelpley's Farm first appears by name in the records in 1377,<sup>34</sup> though its surviving hedges show that is probably at least three hundred years older. It is regularly referred to as lying in Bucks and Herts, and the farmhouse itself seems to have been in Herts.<sup>35</sup> Evidently, for whomever first cleared the fields of Whelpley's, the boundary might have not existed.

But if the boundary had not in some sense already existed, why, when it was finally defined, did it slice so arbitrarily through the land of the communities bordering Coleshill? Of course if by 'boundary' we mean an agreed, defined line on the ground, there can have been nothing of the kind. But the idea of the boundary, the rights which it was ultimately drawn to delimit, must already have existed, or they would not have taken precedence over the territorial integrity of the new settlements, and the rights of those who came to assert lordship over them — rights which the boundary, when finally defined, entirely ignored. These pre-existing rights were pastoral ones irrelevant to agriculturalists, but very useful to anyone in Hertfordshire who wished to establish rights of lordship or jurisdiction.

The boundary on the map follows lanes, hedges, in one place a medieval park pale — all post-pastoral features. But it also shows a preference for the floors of 'bottoms' or re-entrants wherever its general trend allows it to follow them, and these are just such features as are used in surviving pastoral societies today to define tribal grazing grounds — of whose limits, unmarked though they are, the herdsmen are perfectly well aware. In such societies — I think particularly of the Somalis — the core of any claim to grazing rights over an area, the touchstone that gives it legitimacy, is possession of the watering place at its centre; and it may well have been so in the dawn of England too. The Clenemer may have had a political as well as a practical importance in the establishment of Coleshill.

In this temporary desuetude of the boundary we have, I believe, a clue to the origin of Church Field: not a Coleshill field at all, but the last rump of one of the great common fields of Amersham, originally a triangular area covering several hundred acres, with its apex at Amersham church and spreading across the county border at its southern end. It can never have been continuous with Gospel Field; New Road was made in 1816<sup>36</sup> in the wide hedgerow which separated them, a hedgerow flanked by high lynchet banks which still survive — to the south a "positive" lynchet (formed by soil accumulating over the centuries), to the north a "negative" one (formed by soil being washed away). The hedges on these banks are the last traces of the great hedgerows, and they are at least nine hundred years old.

So Coleshill turns out after all to have been a 'normal' three-field village, though on a miniature scale. If we assume that the three fields were originally roughly the same size (as a three-course rotation communally applied would demand) none can have been much bigger than about 80 acres, for this is the limit set to the size of Gospel Field by a number of physical constraints; Whielden Lane to the north-west, Church Field to the north-east, a thousand year old hedge to the east, and to the south the demesne closes round the Manor House, together with Stock Grove, (see Map p.411), Westwood and Hollandean. That Gospel Field did occupy the whole of the area available to

34. *Calendar of Close Rolls 1374-77* p.483.

35. BRO, Drake Papers, D/Dr/1/15; D/Dr/2/54; Marriage Cert. of Thos. Butterfield 1670, Friends House, London.

36. Herts Quarter Sessions, 10 Jan 1816.

it is shown by the fact that in 1615 it abutted on Stock Grove (then the name of a large wood, now vanished)<sup>37</sup> and probably it originally embraced all the fields now called Mush Dean. 'Hither Mush Dean' is on the Gospel Field side of this group of fields, which shows that they were named from the point of view of someone standing in the common field, who thought of them as being part of it.

Three fields of about 80 acres each would be a good fit for the Domesday Book entry for Coleshill: "In this vill there is a berewick where eight villagers have two ploughs..." ('this vill' is Tring; a 'berewick' meant a corn-growing daughter settlement at a distance from its parent – a detached 'limb' of a manor). 80 acres was the standard area which a plough team was supposed to be able to plough in a year; so in a three-course rotation of two crops and a fallow, two plough teams would be needed for three fields of this size. But already by the time of the Domesday survey this neat primitive symmetry had been disturbed. For the entry continues, "...and there could be a third" (i.e. a third plough team). Statements of this kind are extremely common in Domesday Book, and their meaning has been much debated; but, to quote J. S. Moore, "it is doubtful whether the phrase... refers to the possibility of extending the cultivated area. Normally this phrase seems to emphasize 'understocking'".<sup>38</sup> In other words there was more land under cultivation than two plough teams could properly cope with, and in practice some of the land must have been fallowed every other year instead of one year in three. At Coleshill this additional land may have been the result of extensions to Claremore and Coleslett Fields; on the other hand the 80 acres which a plough was supposed to 'go' in a year is a theorist's figure, and refers to reputed acres, generally smaller than statute ones.

In any case, at Coleshill two factors were making for instability in the system under which, in theory, each villager had land in strips evenly distributed throughout the common fields. One of them has already been touched on: the fact that Claremore and Coleslett Fields had room to expand while Gospel Field did not. The other was a social fact with important economic consequences: in no record from later centuries is there any hint or memory in Coleshill of villeinage or its servile disabilities. All the tenant land in the later Manor of Coleshill was held freely, by homage and fealty only<sup>39</sup> and the tenures must have been created before the Statute of Quia Emptores in 1290. Beaconsfield charters contain references to villeins<sup>40</sup>; we have a complete list of the services due from a villein in Amersham<sup>41</sup>; for Coleshill there is nothing whatever like this. But a more conclusive kind of negative evidence is that though copyhold arable was common in Amersham and Woodrow, there was none in Coleshill; and since copyhold is the legal descendant of villein tenure, its absence is good evidence that villeinage had not become established there.<sup>42</sup> This was no doubt one of Coleshill's Danish legacies, for it was in the Danish areas of England that a free peasantry proved most tenacious after the Norman conquest.

One of the consequences of this freedom would have been that Coleshill peasants could sell or dispose of their land as they pleased, and the results of this were far

37. BRO D/16/1.

38. Moore, J.S. "The Domesday Teamland: a reconsideration". *Trans. R. Hist. Soc.* 1964. (5th Ser. 14).

39. BAS, Coleshill Court Rolls.

40. E.g. Missenden Cartulary; ii, no. 417.

41. PRO Inquisitions Post Mortem (i.p.m.) C133/92/8 (8).

42. a) The word which I have rendered as "villagers" in the quotation from Domesday Book above is of course *villani*, but in 1086 this had not everywhere acquired its technical legal meaning.

b) There were copyhold tenements in the 18th and 19th centuries, but they were cottages built on the manorial waste

advanced at a comparatively early date. These were unequal distribution of holdings, a tendency for holdings to be consolidated by sale or exchange and held in severalty, and social stratification within the ranks of the peasantry (see Appendix). Together with the unequal scope for expansion in the three common fields, these are all traceable in the 13th century.

Nationally, the 13th century saw an explosion of population, with a great extension of the area under cultivation, and intense pressure on land. This could have tragic consequences: in 1223 Henry de la Sere was killed in the Hertfordshire portion of Beaconsfield, in the course of a dispute with Nicholas de la Penne about ploughing up a pasture there<sup>43</sup>. Other less violent disputes involved the turbulent de Cantelo family. In 1262 Richard de Cantelo's Coleshill neighbours broke down the bank he had made to enclose a piece of pasture<sup>44</sup> (Richard said they also shot arrows at his dogs, though the jury thought otherwise).

By this time, if not earlier, the expansion of Coleslett Field had brought it to the southern boundary of the vill. A rent charge granted to Missenden Abbey by Henry Sampson de la Stock in 1272 arose from a plot in a 'cultura' called Sampsonesbreche, which extended as far as a feature known as Maldemareputh.<sup>45</sup> The word 'cultura' like 'butt', is part of the terminology of the common fields; it means furlong, in the sense of a group of parallel strips. Maldemareputh can be identified as the valley which forms part of Coleshill's southern boundary. 'Puth' is pit, which is commonly applied to a narrow-bottomed valley, rather than a man-made hole. Mare is Old English 'maer' meaning boundary; the whole name is thus 'boundary valley of Malde', and the element 'Malde'<sup>46</sup> occurs also in Maldecrouch, the name of the boundary cross at White's Hill (see p. 408, above). 'Breche' is related to 'break', and means ground broken by the plough. So Sampsonesbreche is the land first ploughed by one Sampson – a name borne by two members of the de la Stock family, Henry Sampson's father and great uncle, or possibly great grandfather.<sup>47</sup>

There are now two fields called Further and Nether Branch in this area; and 'branch', a frequently occurring field-name, is simply 'breche' with an intrusive 'n'.<sup>48</sup> Also in this area is a field with the suggestive name of Long Furlong.

Henry Sampson did not inherit this land – he had bought it a couple of years earlier<sup>49</sup> – and this makes it likely that the eponymous Sampson was the earlier one. If so, the extension of cultivation into this area can be placed in the first quarter of the 13th century.

By this time Coleshill could boast seventeen plough teams<sup>50</sup>, and though precise

43. *Curia Regis Rolls*, 509, 598.

44. Just 1/322/8d.

45. *Missenden Cartulary*, ii, no 311.

46. "Malde" may well be Old English *mael*, a cross (which would develop regularly to *mal*) plus the substantival suffix – *de*. This has collective force, so that "malde" would mean a group or series of crosses. If this is correct it places the erection of the crosses firmly in the Old English period. There was a Maldefurlong in Kingshill (*Missenden Cartulary*, 119) and for this Miss E. C. Vollans has proposed a quite different etymology, based on Old English "marlede", treated with marl ('Evolution of Farmlands in the Central Chilterns', *Trans. Inst. Brit. Geographers*, 26). I do not think this is acceptable: r is unlikely to have been lost so early, and in any case one does not marl crosses or boundaries. However, it must be added that there is no evidence to associate Maldefurlong with crosses.

47. The genealogy of the de la Stock family can be partially worked out from the Missenden Cartulary, with some help from *Cur. Reg.* XIII, 176, and the Assize Rolls (Just 1/323/23).

48. This implies, I think that Coleshill lay within the area where Old English long 'ae' became 'a'.

49. CP 25 (1)/284/20.

50. *Book of Fees*, p. 331.

calculations based on figures like this are hazardous, it is safe to say that this is close to the limit for which there was room on the land. In 1294 there were 31 taxpayers<sup>51</sup>, and since in that year there was no lower limit to the value of the goods taxed, this is probably the full tally of those Coleshill landowners who had a building in the vill where grain could be stored and animals housed. It is obvious that with fewer than twenty ploughs between them, many must have depended on communal cultivation. It is also clear that their average holding was quite large: allowing 350 acres for woodland and 100 for waste, the average holding works out at 43 acres. Subtracting from the total two demesnes of 150 acres each, and the 90 acres of Stockings, the average peasant holding is the conventional virgate of about 30 acres. But actual holdings varied between very wide limits. Only two of these peasant holdings can be certainly identified today: one is that of William Basse, who farmed the 103 acres of Ledborough Farm<sup>52</sup>; the other is that of Osbert Podifot and his son Peter, whose surname survives in Puddifants, a field-name on the northern county boundary. If this was their entire holding they had only 11¾ acres; but they may also have had land in Bucks.

Henry Sampson granted altogether 48s 3d rent to the Abbey<sup>53</sup>, and all the holdings from which it arose lay in the area south and east of Luckings Farm. It turns up after the Dissolution as a detached portion of the Manor of Peterleystone, the name then given to part of the Abbey estates.<sup>54</sup> Customary rents such as these could remain unchanged for centuries, and the holding for which Alard le Blund (Alard White) was paying 16s in 1275 is the same as that for which Edmond Roffe was paying the same sum in 1535.<sup>55</sup> Other correspondences can also be noted. Holdings which so long survived intact must already have been consolidated at the time of the original grant.

They were not the only ones. Just north of Further Branch are two fields bearing almost identical names: Hareland and Hare Lands. None of the possible etymologies for this name is very satisfactory: all the land here is stony, much of it 'hoar' or grey with stones, all of it abounds with hares. None of these attributes would distinguish one field from another. The names of its holders would; and the de la Hare family did in fact hold some of the land covered by Henry Sampson's grant. A common meaning of 'land' is a strip in a common field, and the survival of the name in a plural form suggests that this is the meaning here. It would then mean the strips of the Hare family. Here is further evidence suggesting a consolidated holding.

Hare Lands is now part of Luckings Farm, and the nucleus of this farm was probably one of these consolidated holdings. It certainly originated at about the same time, for it takes its name from the Lovekin family: Richard Lovekin or Louekin lived in Coleshill in the early 14th century.<sup>56</sup> The broad green lane leading to it is bordered by hedges about seven hundred years old, and apart from the narrow strip of tarmac along one side probably looks – in summer – much as it did when it was first trodden.

Another consequence of freedom of alienation was that each individual's holdings were unevenly distributed among the common fields (as can be inferred from Henry Sampson's grant), and uniform communal cropping must already have broken down.

51.E 179/120/2.

52.MS Ch Bucks.

53.*Missenden Cartulary*, ii no. 326.

54.BAS 58/51.

55.PRO, Rentals & Surveys, SC6/Hen VIII/238; BAS, 11/24.

56.E 179/120/8.

To see the actual workings of the local land market at this time it is necessary to cross the parish boundary into Beaconsfield, where from the mid 13th century to the late 14th a multitude of dealings in peasant land are displayed for us in the Bodleian Library's collection of Buckinghamshire charters. Most of these relate to Beaconsfield and some twenty to land in North Beaconsfield, the Hertfordshire part of the parish. The plots which change hands are often very small – sometimes only an acre or two, once 3 perches. Sometimes they are described in such terms as “my piece of land in such-and-such a croft”<sup>57</sup>, and it is clear that in this area single closes could be in divided ownership, much like furlongs in a common field.<sup>58</sup> Evidently fragmentation of holdings was going on as well as consolidation; the evidence does not allow us to say why.

In Coleshill proper, the market was equally active: a striking feature of the contemporary taxation returns (The Subsidy Rolls, E 179/120) is the high rate of turnover among our landholders. That there was fragmentation here too is suggested by the size of Agnes de la Hare's holding. The 6d rent she paid can only have been for a fraction of the Hare land. But above all, the charters show a steady movement towards concentration of land in fewer hands. In North Beaconsfield much land ends up in possession of the Gregory family.<sup>59</sup> And that something of the sort was also happening in Coleshill is suggested by the graphs in the Appendix. These use figures from the Subsidy Rolls to show that in the generation from 1294 to 1323 there was a tendency for the lower tax-payers to become relatively more numerous, the higher and middle sorts fewer, suggesting concentration of land in fewer hands. Interpretation of the figures is not a straightforward matter, partly because of the presence in the lists of absentee landowners: not only magnates like Edmund of Cornwall, Humphrey de Bohun, Hugh de Berwick, and Walter of Amersham, but lesser men like the Trots, who lived in Wycombe,<sup>60</sup> and Henry Sampson's brother John, an Amersham man.<sup>61</sup> (He may have been his brother's tenant, Henry himself being a busy civil servant and pluralist<sup>62</sup>). The Amersham element among Coleshill landowners may indeed have been greater than surviving records show: Amersham men could go straight to Claremore Field, by a road which led nowhere else.

It was in demesne strips – or as we would say, the Home Farm land – in the common fields that consolidation was most enduring, being unaffected by subsequent fragmentation. The manor of Coleshill had 15 acres of demesne lying all together in Church Field, 8 acres lying together in Gospel Field and no less than 33 in Coleslett Field, the rump of which was nearly all demesne in 1615<sup>63</sup>. This manor also had a large demesne field in severalty – Cantlett Field, just east of Westwood. In 1615, this covered 38 acres, but had probably been larger in the middle ages – perhaps as much as 60 acres (see Map, p.411). The field called Great Tomlins must have been the consolidated demesne arable of the detached portion of Tomlins Manor which lay near Winchmore Hill.

Another fundamental change was also taking place at this time, though the evidence for it is very scanty. This was the enclosure of common pasture. An assize brought by

57.MS. Ch. Bucks, 971, 982.

58.In Wooburn, Southfield and Edesfield were described as 'shots' – i.e. furlongs, implying that each contained no more than one 'bundle' of strips. *Feet of Fines, Bucks*, (Bucks Record Society) p.47.

59.MS Ch. Bucks. 1107, 1112, 1097, 1087.

60.CP 25 (1) 87/52/36.

61.Just 1/36/10. This is not the John who held the eastern manor and who died in 1270.

62.*Cal. Pat* 1266, 1268, 1269.

63.BRO. D/16/1.

Richard de Cantelo in 1279, claiming disseisin of common of pasture, failed because the jury found that the three acres of woodland and moor in which common was claimed had been granted to the alleged disseisor by John de la Stock of the eastern manor, to hold in severalty.<sup>64</sup> There must have been many other instances which did not lead to a dispute, or of which no record has survived, but which led to Coleshill being in later centuries rather ill-provided with common pasture, having little but the 70 odd acres of the Green.

The eastern limit of Coleslett Field is represented by the present boundary between Luckings and Ongar Hill Farms, an undeviating line which must have been drawn before piecemeal clearances had reached it from either side. Unfortunately there is not enough hedge left along it for reliable dating, but it is clearly ancient, since other hedges butt on it and part of it is heavily lynched. The early history of Ongar Hill is not much illuminated by the evidence of hedges, for few have survived; but at least it can be said that none of its field-names, present or past, show any common field affinities. This is to be expected; for it can be shown that it was the demesne arable of Stockbury Manor.

Stockbury Manor emerges as a rather shadowy entity from the pages of the Victoria County History; but much is explained by the name. The suffix 'bury' is very commonly used – especially in Bucks – to denote the demesne land of a manor, often formed into a manor in its own right. On this interpretation Stockbury should be that part of the original Manor of Stock which remained in the hands of its lords after the western part, later the Manor of Coleshill, had been granted to a sub-feoffee. However, it was not quite as simple as that. For the manor of Coleshill was in later times known sometimes as Old Stock<sup>65</sup>, as though it, and not Stockbury, were the seat of the original manor, and its manor house the hall of the lord. Moreover Stockbury contained land which was not demesne: it produced 20 shillings of assized rent for Humphrey de Bohun in 1299.<sup>66</sup> At this time, too, Stockbury was still rather confusingly known, like its twin, as la Stock, although the original manor had already been divided for at least thirty years; John de la Stock had died seized of the eastern part, later to be Stockbury, in 1270.<sup>67</sup> (That he held Stockbury and not the western manor is shown by the very close correspondence of the rents paid to him, and, thirty years later, to Humphrey de Bohun; 20s 1d. and 20s respectively; against 31s for the western manor<sup>68</sup>.) The division of the manor was doubtless the work of the de la Stock family themselves, the separated eastern part going to a junior branch. The map shows that the land of the manor falls naturally into three parts, and only in the southern part would a division have entailed the drawing of a new boundary. This is the function of the hedge between Luckings and Ongar Hill; it is the physical scar of the division of the manor. The senior branch would have retained the western half, with the original hall. For the new eastern manor a new hall was built, represented today by the house called Bowers Farm. As late as 1581 this was still known as Stock, to distinguish it from Old Stock<sup>69</sup>. There is no evidence to show when all this took place, but it had happened by the time of John's father Adam, who died

64. Just 1/323/23.

65. BAS, Coleshill Court Rolls.

66. PRO, I.p.m. C 133/92/8 (7).

67. PRO, I.p.m. C 132/38/7.

68. CP25 (1)/86/39/136.

69. PRO, Proceedings in the Court of Requests, REQ 2/133/48.

about 1227.<sup>70</sup>

Some time in the late 13th century the eastern part of the manor reverted to the overlord, Humphrey de Bohun, as the result of events which had their roots in the financial difficulties of the de Quarrendon family. In the early 1230s Geoffrey de Quarrendon had died without ever taking seisin of one of his Buckinghamshire properties, because he could not afford to redeem it on attaining his majority.<sup>71</sup> His grandson Geoffrey seems to have been in similar straits: his Claydon land was eventually acquired by the man who had been granted its wardship during his minority<sup>72</sup> and Geoffrey was constrained to grant away some of his Hertfordshire property in return for being kept in food and clothing for life.<sup>73</sup> The grantee was the then Lord of Amersham, Henry de Bohun, a son of Earl Humphrey de Bohun VI, who lost no time in asserting his new lordship, so that the men of Coleshill found themselves, to their indignation, obliged to attend Henry's seigneurial court.<sup>74</sup> (The court ordered a distraint on beasts belonging to Henry Sampson, whose men forcibly resisted.<sup>75</sup>) Henry seems to have held Amersham from the 1250s to his death in the 1280s<sup>76</sup>, presumably by his father's grant, and on terms which entailed the manor to his brothers and their heirs in default of heirs of his own. This would have resulted in Amersham and its appurtenances going to his nephew, Humphrey VII, who had succeeded his grandfather as earl in 1275. The extinction of the de la Stock interest is obscure. John left issue, another John, and this John too had a son and heir called John. But evidently the family was in economic decline. They seem to have moved to a lower rung of the tenurial ladder, and John II alienated some substantial blocks of land, totalling 90 acres, in respect of which his widow had to sue for her dower.<sup>77</sup> In any case, the upshot is not in doubt: the eastern Manor became a demesne manor of the de Bohuns and so acquired the suffix '-bury'. But Earl Humphrey may have felt his title was less than impeccable. He had it confirmed in a 'test case' brought by Walter de Agmondesham in 1284.<sup>78</sup> Eventually (though not until the 16th century) Stockbury became merged in the Manor of Amersham, losing its separate identity. This explains the existence in the common fields of Coleshill of land which in later centuries paid quit-rent to the lords of Amersham.<sup>79</sup>

Medieval Stockbury was credited with 120 acres of demesne arable.<sup>80</sup> When the Ongar Hill land was first accurately surveyed in 1637 it had 119½ acres.<sup>81</sup> But this, perversely, is probably pure coincidence. 120 acres was the notional size of that imprecise measure, a carucate or ploughland; and to say that a piece of land contained 120 acres was simply a way of saying that it was one carucate, of which the actual size could be anything from 30 acres upwards. The case for regarding Ongar Hill as the Stockbury demesne rests on two quite other facts: first, that of all the Stockbury lands only Ongar Hill continued into the 17th century as part of the Amersham estate,

70. *Curia Regis* XIII, p.176.

71. *Calendar of Inquisitions*, I, 193, p.307; *Cal. Pat.* 1281-1292 p.29.

72. *Cal. Close* 1269-1272.

73. *Just* 1/323/11.

74. *Just* 1/323/55d. VCH Bucks is in error in ascribing this action to Henry's nephew, Earl Humphrey.

75. *Cal. Pat.* 1272-81, p.471.

76. *Cal. Close*, 1256, p.38.

77. *Just* 1/323/23; De Banco Rolls, CP40/173/497 and 179/279.

78. CP25 (1) 86/40/153. That this line was not levied as a conveyance is shown by the fact that the querent, Walter de Agmondesham, acknowledged the Earl's right in return for no more than a sore sparrowhawk.

79. BAS, Amersham Rentals.

80. I.p.m., C133/92/8 (7).

81. BAS 30/56

and second that there is really no room for a carucate of whatever size anywhere else in Stockbury, for north of Bowers Lane (now Magpies Lane) lay Claremore Field, and the demesne closes round Bower's Farm.

Part of this demesne land was in the possession or occupation of the Birch family in the late 13th and early 14th centuries, but there is no indication of the tenure by which it was held.<sup>82</sup> Possibly, however, this is evidence that the Stockbury demesne was already being leased. Many demesnes were reducing their acreage in the second half of the 13th century, parts being let out at farm; and in Coleshill by the beginning of the 14th century virtually no demesnes were being cultivated directly by their lords. The de Bohuns and the Agmondeshams had not disposed of their Coleshill land, but their names disappear from the Subidy Rolls. They had let their demesnes, and the produce was being taxed in the hands of their tenants.<sup>83</sup>

For Claremore Field there are no early documents to help elucidate its history (apart from one which makes it plain that its name is derived from that of the village pond, the 'clear mere'<sup>84</sup> ('clear' having here the sense of 'clear of trees', although within living memory it was also clear in the sense of pellucid). The southern part of the area available for its expansion is now occupied by Bowers Farm, (formerly, as we have seen the manor house of Stockbury), some of whose fields must once have been furlongs in Claremore Field. But the roughly square enclosure in which Bowers farmhouse stands is not itself such a furlong; the hedges of surrounding fields butt onto it, and it represents the first clearing made for the manor house, at a time when all around was still forest, before Claremore Field had spread this far. This suggests a 12th century date.

Claremore Field never extended to the summits of the ridges; in its northern part at least, its 1816 limits were the original ones. Here, on its western side, are two of the oldest lengths of hedge in Coleshill, and beyond lie closes with names which show that they were once meadow land. Today we use the words meadow and pasture almost interchangeably, but to our ancestors they were at opposite ends of the economic scale. Meadow was the most valuable of all land, worth, in Amersham, up to 4 shillings an acre; Coleshill arable was worth only 3d.<sup>85</sup> If people in the middle ages called a field a meadow they meant that it produced the hay without which the plough beasts could not survive the winter. Great Meadow, Fish Pond Mead, Le Mead and Goose Meadow – these can never have felt the plough in the era of village self-sufficiency.

They are not likely to have been valued at a 4 shillings an acre, or anything like it, for the best meadowland was only to be found in the flood plains of streams and rivers. But the retentive clay that caps the hills makes this the wettest part of Coleshill, with many springs and small ponds. It was the nearest thing to good meadowland that a hilltop village could find, for with one invidious exception there was no riverside meadow for Coleshill.

The exception was Stockbury Mead, seven acres of first class meadowland beside the Misbourne, nearly a mile from the nearest part of Coleshill. Its name shows that it was in some way appurtenant to Stockbury Manor. Rights to various acreages in it

82. MS Ch. Bucks 899, 973.

83. E 179/120/8 c.f. E 179/120/5.

84. *Missenden Cartulary*, ii no. 310.

85. I.p.m., C 135/48/2.

went with a number of properties,<sup>86</sup> and this gives it at first sight the appearance of a common meadow. But it was not, for lord, freeholder and copyholder all had rights in common meadow; the properties which shared Stockbury Mead were all leasehold. And some of them were not in Coleshill at all, but in the manor of Tomlins.

Tomlins was a late-formed Manor, stitched together – perhaps in the second half of the 14th century<sup>84</sup> – from the Amersham estates of the Agmondesham family. Two fragments of it lay in Coleshill: the Hertfordshire portion of Whelpley's Farm, and the fields at Winchmore Hill which formed an extension of the Agmondesham's Glory property in Penn. But the bulk of its land – 450 acres out of a total of nearly 500 – lay around the northern and north eastern marches of Coleshill, on the Buckinghamshire side of the boundary. There was also land in the common fields of Coleshill. The manor house, later Tomlins Farm, lay at the top of a short lane branching off Gore Hill; its site is marked today by a scatter of tiles and fragments of brick.

The Buckinghamshire land included Quarrendon Farm as well as the greater part of Whelpleys (in the 18th century there is actually a reference to "Tomlins alias Quarrendon Farm.")<sup>88</sup> It is clear that one of the constituent elements of Tomlins was the former Amersham estate of the Quarrendon family, and that the Agmondeshams were the de Quarrendons' successors in title there, just as they were in the western half of Coleshill. The later history of Stockbury Mead is therefore intelligible if it is taken to be the de Quarrendon's demesne meadow, and to have shared in the general tendency for demesne to be let at farm. Any commercially attractive lease of the arable and pasture in the de Quarrendon demesne must have included rights in the valuable riverside meadow; and thus we find Stockbury Mead divided between farms under the two lordships – those of Amersham and Tomlins – which ultimately succeeded that of the de Quarrendons.

In these arrangements Coleshill had little share. Only Stockings and Whelpleys Farms had shares in Stockbury Mead, and of these only Stockings lay wholly within the bounds of Coleshill.

To the early history of these and other farms to the east of the Amersham-Beaconsfield road we must now turn. The Domesday Book description of Coleshill seems to show us a nucleated village with three rather small common fields, and these we have identified – all of them lying to the west of the road. Are we to infer from this that the land east of the road was uncultivated in 1086? This would depend on the assumption that the land was manorially linked with the rest of Coleshill, and that consequently, if described at all in the Domesday Book, it must be under the entry for Tring. Such an assumption would be unsafe. "Little Hertfordshire" was demonstrably not a manorial unity at the time of the Survey, for North Beaconsfield was a separate manor and had lost its links with whatever Hertfordshire community had fathered it.<sup>89</sup> East Coleshill may likewise have had an independent link with Hertfordshire, and lost it by 1086; its Domesday description would then be submerged in the figures for Amersham. Against this must be set the fact that in the 12th century Coleshill's annual value to the revenue of the Honour of Boulogne was £6<sup>90</sup>, and that in later centuries the

86. BAS 12/56; BAS 31/56.

87. The eponymous 'Tomlin' is probably Thomas Agmondesham the younger. The Amersham estate of Thomas the elder (d.1352) was hardly large enough (C135/114/23).

88. BRO, D/Dr/54.

89. It is the unnamed manor described at the end of the section of Domesday Book dealing with the Bucks land of the Bishop of Lincoln.

90. *Pipe Rolls*, Vol. XII, p.34, et alibi.

western manor was worth only 30s to the overlord.<sup>91</sup> Since this was the more valuable of the two, the land west of the road could not have yielded more than £3 in chief rents, and the balance can only have come from the farms in the east. If these were part of the Honour of Boulogne they were linked with Tring. This land was certainly part of the Manor of Amersham in 1337,<sup>92</sup> and was then known as the "land of Braynford", which then and later was carefully distinguished from the Manor of Stockbury.<sup>93</sup> The name survives today in that of Brentford Grange; it derives from the de Braynford family, who held part of the land during the 13th century, until obliged to sell up to pay a Jew a debt in 1272.<sup>94</sup> The buyer was Henry Sampson, and this was no doubt the land in respect of which Geoffrey de Quarrendon's widow, Alice, sued him for her dower in 1287.<sup>95</sup>

There are indications that the Brentford settlement was of a particularly primitive type – a type whose widespread traces in our area were, I think, first recognised by Mr. Gerald Elvey. It may conveniently be labelled the Three Households type, and consists characteristically of three single-family holdings; the land of each holding narrows to an apex at the homestead, and the homesteads are grouped round a central green, which often contains a pond. Apart from Three Households itself, near Chalfont St. Giles, there are good examples at Widmer End near High Wycombe, where Grange Farm is the sole survivor of the lost hamlet of Pirenore, and also round Holloway Farm and Overs Farm, both in Beaconsfield. Poland Green, in the north west corner of the North Beaconsfield, is probably another; only one farm, formerly Whites and now The Grange, is to be seen here today, but there was also the holding based on Polands Green Great Field, formerly known as Poley's, from the 16th century tenants, and before that as Beard's, having been farmed in the middle ages by the Berde family.<sup>96</sup> There may have been another based on the vanished Pegges Water<sup>97</sup> and comprising Ledborough and Oldfields Farms together with another, now lost, whose existence can be inferred from references to the land of the Young family in Beaconsfield charters.<sup>98</sup>

The land of these hamlets was originally cultivated in common, and probably they represent the undeveloped embryos of nucleated villages. Field names contain traces of an unenclosed past: in North Beaconsfield there was a Westfield and a Nestfield (=Eastfield), the latter at least having more than one occupier,<sup>99</sup> and Henry de la Sere was killed in the 'campo' (or open field) of Beaconsfield, Co Herts. Nestfield is probably the same as Estcroft, which suggests the small scale of these common fields. But this was the area of the land dealings described on p. 416, and it would be a mistake to make too much of the fact that small closes were in divided ownership; this could be due to division by alienation, rather than to common cultivation surviving into the late 13th century.<sup>100</sup> Without the stimulus to collectivism provided by a developed village community, the tendency to hold in severalty must have been strong from the start.

91. Rentals & Surveys SP13/G\*/3.

92. I.p.m., C 135/48/2.

93. Rentals & Surveys. SC6/759/27. It is necessary to emphasise this point, since the *Victoria County History* treats them as alternative names for the same property.

94. *Cal. Pat.* 1266–72, p.261: Just 1/1216/4.

95. Just 1/325/9. Her son Robert had made an unsuccessful attempt to recover the land in 1281 (De Banco: Rolls, CP 40/42/38d).

96. MS Ch Bucks, e.g. 1091; E179/120/3; PRO, Star Chamber Proceedings, STAC 4/7/33.

97. MS Ch Bucks, 1112.

98. MS Ch Bucks, 902, 921, 1058, 1095.

99. MS Ch Bucks, 902, 965.

100. On this point, see D. Roden, *Fragmentation of Fields and Farms in the Chilterns*. Historical Studies, XXXI (Pontifical Inst. of Medieval Studies, Toronto). 1969.

In the Brentford land too there was an open space called The Green, where there was a pond, and in 1637 it was possible to trace the outlines of three large fields, though somewhat obscured by internal subdivisions and the fact that a large area had at that time reverted to woodland. Behind the names of the subdivisions may be discerned two of the original names: Braynford Field and Ryehill.<sup>101</sup>

In 1337 'the land of Braynford' was said to amount to 720 acres.<sup>102</sup> If this is taken literally it is far too much, but in fact it is another instance of carucates or ploughlands being allotted their notional 120 acres apiece, and 720 acres is simply another way of saying six carucates. By the 14th century 'carucate' signified nothing much more precise than 'holding': it meant the unit of arable land worked by one farmer. Six carucates can be fitted onto the map if Stockings, Whelpleys, and Highfield Pightles are allotted one each, leaving three for the Brentford land – three family holdings grouped round the Green, as the hypothesis requires.

There is nothing to show when this three-family settlement was first cut out of the wild, nor whether by Saxons or Scandinavians. Very little hedge survives and most of it is the result of a 19th century rearrangement. But it clearly belongs to the time when the hills were first being opened up for settlement, and like Coleshill probably belongs to the early 10th century.

Stockings has an intact hedge system, which can be dated to the 13th century. It is a clearance made during the great period of agricultural expansion, and no doubt on seigneurial initiative, since it was taken straight into severalty. The three enclosures south of Bottrell's Lane, rectangular and of equal size, look as though they had been laid out as the farm's arable. The name preserves a memory of the process of clearance: it means the place where tree stumps are made – i.e. where trees are cut down. It does not appear in the records until 1375, and then in a personal name, that of William atte Stocken.<sup>103</sup>

Whelpleys is older; its hedges suggest a date during the 11th century. The name probably derives from John de Whelpley, who sold certain land in Amersham to Thomas de Agmondesham in 1326.<sup>104</sup>

Nothing at all is known of the early history of the Highfield land, and as it has now gone back to woodland its hedges cannot be dated. Its reversion to woodland is but one example of an ebb and flow of cultivation which has marked Coleshill's history from the earliest times. The frontier of the trees has never been still for long; and while much woodland has been lost, much has also regenerated, on arable land which has been allowed to go back. Thus Owlsars Wood (a name of obscure etymology) was once two fields, called Whites Hill Pightles in the 17th century,<sup>105</sup> and, in the 14th Isabelcrofts, probably because they were the dower of Isabel, widow of Richard de Cantelo.<sup>106</sup> In the early 17th century one of the carucates of the Brentford land had similarly reverted: the map of 1637 shows the state of affairs at a time when the arable was on the advance again after the long recession of the late middle ages; but it still shows numerous fields on which the hedgerows have encroached, in some cases leaving only a small clearing in what must have become mature woodland.

101.BAS 30/56.

102.C 135/48/2.

103.Just 1/1494.

104.CP 40/260/1(2).

105.BAS 30/56.

106.MS Ch Bucks, 973.

The conditions likely to have been arrived at by about 1300 are shown on the map on p.411. After this the population collapse which – as is now known – began even before the Black Death, led to a reduction in the arable acreage. In 1340 a third of the land in the parish of Amersham which used to be sown was described as being uncultivated,<sup>107</sup> and although this statement, being part of a tax return, must be treated with caution, it would hardly have been made if it had had no basis in fact at all. In the next century conditions seem to have been even worse: in the subsidy of 1439 a reduction in quota was allowed for vills which were “poor, desolate, waste and desert”. Coleshill’s abatement, at 29s 4d. was greater than its entire contribution to the subsidy of 1323.<sup>108</sup>

The map shows two major woods which have been entirely lost: Stock Grove and Stockbury Wood. Stock Grove, however, before being cleared in the early 17th century had more than doubled in size during the retreat of cultivation: 20 acres in 1281,<sup>109</sup> 52 in 1615.<sup>110</sup> This growth was at the expense of the demesne arable in Cantlett Field. Its original extent is indicated by the big lynchet south of Stock Grove cottage.

Westwood too may have spread before retreating again. Two statements as to its extent in the later middle ages survive, hard to reconcile either with each other or with any likely reality. In 1419 it was said to be two leagues (three miles) in circuit<sup>111</sup>; in 1522 to cover 140 acres.<sup>112</sup> Both measurements are very much larger than the present day wood: larger even than the area suggested, on the map, for 1300, which takes in the suggestively named Grove Fields beyond the Winchmore Hill road. It is very difficult to see where the additional acreage can have been, unless across the county boundary in Woodrow.<sup>113</sup> But the figures can only be interpreted as showing woodland pressing very hard on arable in the later middle ages.

Another temporary advance of woodland is indicated by the name of Oldfields Farm in North Beaconsfield, which must have received its name when whoever reclaimed it from invading scrub, probably in the early 16th century, found old hedgebanks to tell them that men had ploughed there before. Here one field name, Clear Craft (from Clear Croft) tells its own story of resistance to the spreading hedges.

Coleshill’s only surviving 13th century field name, Ridgrove, hints at an even earlier cycle of clearance and reversion. For the name, on the face of it, means the cleared grove; yet when first recorded in 1279 it is applied to woodland.<sup>114</sup> However the form in which it is recorded renders the etymology ambiguous, and it would be a mistake to make too much of this evidence. Other land was left to tumble to pasture for a while without reverting to scrub. In the late 15th century this fate befell even the chief

107. *Inquisitiones Nonarum* (Record Commission).

108. E. 179/120/91.

109. CP 25(1)/86/39/136.

110. BRO. D/16/1.

111. PRO, Duchy of Lancaster. DL/43/14/4.

112. Rentals and Surveys, E36/150.

113. That part of Westwood lay in Bucks is not impossible. It was included within the traditional bounds of Wycombe Heath (PRO, Exchequer Depositions, E 134, 18–19 Eliz/Mich/7), which at this point probably followed the county boundary along Whielden Lane. The bounds of the Heath are set out in an interesting document in the possession of Mr. Frank Winter; this is an early 19th C. copy of a 17th C. exemplification of what purports to be an early charter conferring rights of common on a number of vills. The exemplification of which it is a copy is almost certainly a forgery, but this does not lessen its value as topographical evidence.

114. CP 25(1) 86/27/81 (now 93). The name appears as Redegrofe, of which the first element should on formal grounds be derived from *reade*, ‘red’, rather than *rydd*, ‘cleared’. The second could be either *graeft*, a trench or pit, or *graeft*, a grove. But neither red pit nor red grove makes topographical sense here, and a better base is perhaps *reedgraeft*, ‘the grove by the clearing’, which is acceptable both etymologically and topographically. However *rydd-graeft* is not impossible.

demesne field of Amersham, the Bury Field.<sup>115</sup> Abandonment of cultivation is shown too by Coleshill field-names such as Furze-Field, and also by Dell Field or Dell Piece: Dell signifies a man-made pit for winning chalk or clay, and men do not dig pits in fields which they are ploughing. Alternatively of course these fields may have been virgin waste until the Tudor boom brought them under the plough, but this does not square with the evidence for medieval pressure on pasture.

On the whole it is true to say that although there is in aggregate rather more land under cultivation now than in 1300, the difference is not marked and there are places where farmland lost since then has still not been reclaimed.

The tax returns too seem to show us a marked decline in agricultural output after 1300, with an 88% fall in the aggregate value of taxable goods in Coleshill as a whole between 1294 and 1323. The highest individual assessment fell by 85%; and while the lowest shows no significant difference (11s ½d against 13s 6d) this only reflects the fact that there was a threshold to the value of goods which bore tax: increasing numbers of people fell below this limit, so that 31 tax payers of 1294 had shrunk to 13 in 1322.

The decline was real, but these figures exaggerate it. Harvest yields in the Chilterns were indeed falling at this time; the figures from the Bishop of Winchester's manor at West Wycombe show that the 10-year average for the yield per acre of wheat was 11% less for the period 1309-1318 than for 1283-1292.<sup>116</sup> But tax was levied only on the marketable surplus; grain consumed on the holding, and the animals needed to work it, were exempt.<sup>117</sup> Consequently quite a small reduction in yields could have a much greater effect on the taxable margin. There is of course no means of knowing how much of the decline was due to lower yields and how much to land going out of cultivation; both factors, as we have seen, were operating.

A later article will trace Coleshill's recovery from this creeping catastrophe, up to the point at which enclosure destroyed the foundations of the rural civilisation of England.

115. Rentals & Surveys SC 6/Hen VII/1476. The land is described as "warectus", of which the usual meaning is "fallow", but it is unlikely that a bailiff's accounts would draw attention to something that had occurred in the normal course of husbandry.

116. J. Z. Titow, *Winchester Yields*, (Cambridge 1972).

117. J. F. Willard, *Parliamentary Taxes on Personal Property* (Cambridge Mass. 1934).

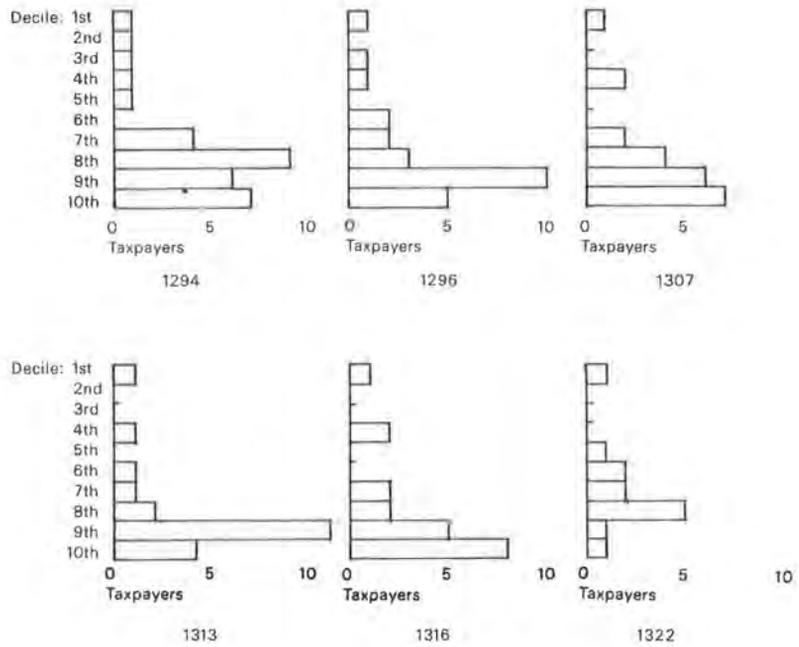


Fig 1: Distribution of taxable wealth

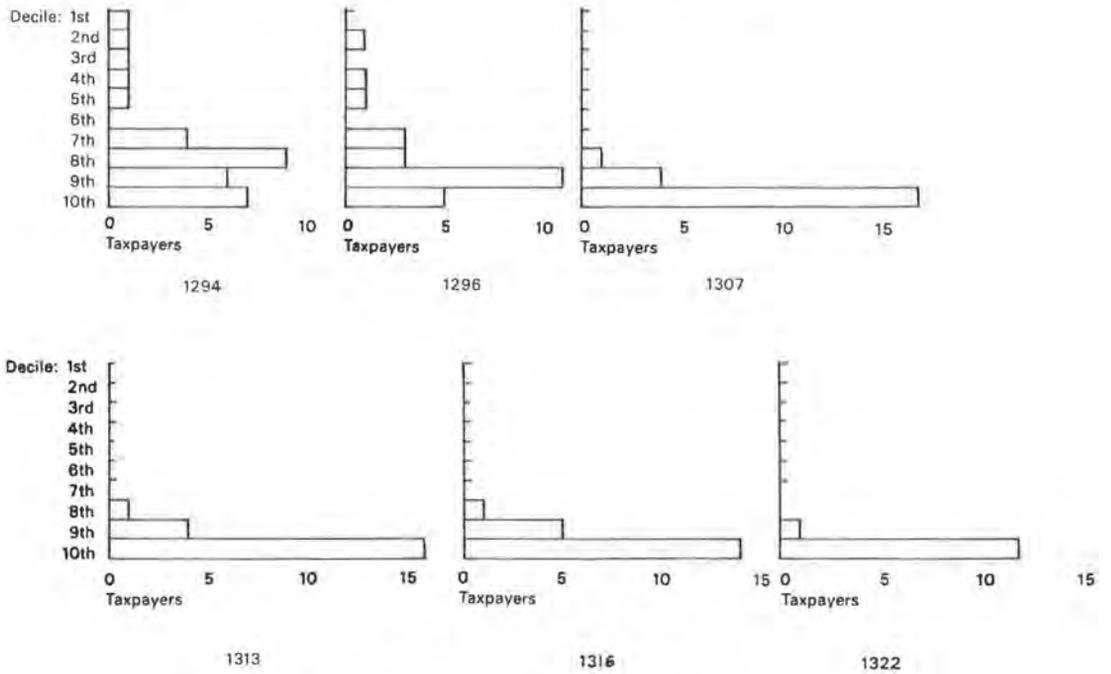


Fig 2: Taxable wealth compared with 1294

## APPENDIX

The chances that affect the survival of documents have treated Hertfordshire's Medieval Subsidy Rolls more kindly than Buckinghamshire's. Although Coleshill is not represented in all the surviving rolls, we have, for this small part of modern Buckinghamshire, a series of seven returns, spanning the years from 1294 to 1323, in which individual tax payers are listed, with the sums paid by each.

The lists can be usefully analysed in a number of ways, but there are some subjects on which they cannot be made to yield reliable information. For example, when the taxpayers are arranged in rank order, it is found that the position of some individuals changes significantly from subsidy to subsidy. It is very unlikely that this reflects equally significant changes in their relative economic status. A man's taxable surplus could be affected by accidental misfortune, or by the size of his family. William Basse, who comes at the bottom of a list of 31 names in 1294, had risen to fifteenth place by 1307; but his land, Ledborough Farm, had not changed in area.<sup>118</sup>

I have lately learned (through the good offices of Mrs. Jean Davis) of the existence of an eighth roll. It is for the year 1291, and it had escaped my notice because the Coleshill names were included in the list for Aldbury, Herts. No doubt the Exchequer clerks were confused, like others after them, by the fact that there was a "Stock" in Aldbury. A distribution diagram based on it would show the same pattern as 1294. The reference is E179/120/2.

The rolls can never be treated as complete lists of residents: they exclude landless men, of whom, in the absence of villeins, there must have been a number to work the demesnes; and they include non-resident land-holders, if they had farm buildings where crops were stored and animals kept. Only for one year, 1294, have we anything like a complete list of holdings; in other years the existence of a lower limit of taxability excluded the poorest farmers.

Moreover the rolls may not always be properly compiled. William Basse, for example, is absent from the roll for 1296, but this may not be because he was too poor. Probably, like his successor in title, John Ledborough in 1332, he was being taxed in Bucks.<sup>119</sup> The farmhouse was only a few yards inside Hertfordshire. The same mistake seems to have been made with the Podifot holding on Coleshill's northern boundary. It may also have occurred elsewhere, for example at Whelpleys, but it happens that the Basse and Podifot holdings are two of the few that can with certainty be located.

The graphs were compiled on the basis that the returns give a reliable view of the proportions in each of what we would nowadays call the various tax-brackets. The figures given for tax paid are first multiplied by the inverse of the fraction applied to the subsidy in question, so as to convert the figure for tax paid into a figure for taxable wealth. The resulting range of taxable wealth is then divided into ten equal bands and the number of taxpayers in each of these deciles is then plotted. The first set of graphs shows the distribution of tax payers within the range obtained for each subsidy year, and thus shows changes in the relative distribution of wealth between the recorded taxpayers. The second set plots the distribution in each year against the deciles obtained for 1294 and thus shows changes in the apparent overall prosperity of the vill. The very marked fall after 1296 is perhaps more likely to be due to some change in the basis of assessment than to an actual decline in yields, of corresponding magnitude. The usefulness of the figures for 1322 is much reduced by the small number of individuals listed (only 13), and the limited range of their taxable wealth (11s ½d to £1.17s.6d).

118.E 179/120/3, 8.

119 *Early Taxation Returns* (Ed Chibnall) Bucks Record Society, p.44.