

THE BOUNDARIES OF WOTTON UNDERWOOD

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The Wotton Underwood charter of 845, by which Berhtwulf, King of the Mercians, granted Wotton Underwood to his thegn Forthred, has been described as the only reliable example of a solemn royal diploma being issued in the vernacular.¹ It is also either the first or the second Buckinghamshire charter to define an estate by its bounds, though these are far less detailed than was the general practice later. Mawer and Stenton² concluded that since the Mercian kings had no Chancery 'the charter in question, written for a local thegn, was doubtless written locally'. If so it is a unique record of the speech of the Vale of Aylesbury just before the Mercian kingdom was shattered by the Danish invasion. The language is early Mercian with the appropriate umlauts and with *o* instead of *a* before nasals, as in *lond*, but with some forms which are archaic and some which are unique.

The manuscript is preserved in the library of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury as Charta Antiqua C1280 (no. 9 in the Red Book). Facsimiles have been published by the Ordnance Survey³ and the Palaeographical Society,⁴ and the text has been printed by Kemble,⁵ Birch,⁶ Earle⁷ and Sweet,⁸ but the best edition, with annotation and translation, is by Florence E. Harmer.⁹ None of these editors knew where *wudotun* was; Dr. Birch placed it at Wootton in Gloucestershire, and Mawer and Stenton seem to have been the first to identify it with Wotton Underwood. Dr. Michael Reed has recently republished part of F. E. Harmer's text and translation, with a discussion of the boundary survey.¹⁰

Since the manuscript has deteriorated during the past century, we are in part dependent on the readings of earlier transcribers. The editors have tidied up the somewhat erratic word-division of the text and have in general not followed its free use of stops, though Dr. Birch reproduced them. It may therefore be useful to present the text *literatim*.

Recto

line

- 1  IN nomine dñi. Ego berchtwulf cyning. sile forðrede minum
ðegne. nigenhigida lond. inwudotune
- 2 in ece erfe him to hiobbanne & to siollanne ðaem ðe hit wille mið
eaðmodre hernisse him to ge
- 3  eornigan. ofer his daeg. cisseðebeorg feowertreowe hyl. & eanburge
mere. tihhanhyl. &ut bigeht.
- 4 tu higida lond in erfe. ece. & he salde tolond ceape .xxx. mancessan. &
nigen hund sciſt. wið ðaem londe.

- 5 **X** hī inece erfe. Ic berhtwulf.rex. ðas mine gesaldnisse trymme
&faestna in cristes rode tacne
- 6 & in his. ðaere haligran - -.a ¹¹ & in his wotona gewitnisse.
aerist. saeðryð regina. cyneferð episc.
- 7 **X** alchhun. epī. berchtred. epī. deorlaf. epī. ceored.epī. wichred. aḡ
aldred. aḡ. mucel. dux. hunber
- 8 cht. dux. burgred. dux. aefstan. ¹²
cyneberht. dux. sigred. dux. alberht.
dux. aldred. dux. mucel. dux
- 9 hunstan. dux. eadwulf. beorneð. wulfred.
mucel. aldred. wicga. eadgar. baldred.
werenberht.
- 10 eadred. aeðelwulf. pr̄. heaberht. pr̄.
ecghun. ecgheard. beornhaeð. aldred—.

Verso
line

- 11 and we aec alle bibeodað. ðe aet
ðisse gewitnisse werun on cristes
noman. & on his ðaere haligran
- 12 gif aenig monn. ðas ure gewitnisse
incerre. on owihte. ðaet he aebbe
ðaes aelmaehtgan¹³
- 13 godes unhlisse (?) & his ðaere
haligran up in heofnum ðaes we him
gebeod()n maege.¹⁴

Endorsement in 12th-century hand:

Inutile.

Endorsement in 18th-century hand:

Grant of land from King Bertulf — not
dated but Bertulf was King of Mercia
and fought with the Danes AD 850 ¹⁵
and Cynibert () was living AD 864.

Endorsement in 19th-century hand:

C 1280.

The following translation of a rather difficult text is offered in an attempt to bring out the exact force of each word and inflexion:

In the name of the Lord. I King Berhtwulf grant to Forthred my thegn land of nine hides in Wotton in everlasting inheritance for him to hold and to grant to him who is willing to request it from him with humble service, after his day: *Cissedebeorg*, *Feowertreowe hyl*, and *Eanburge mere*, *Tihhanhyl*, and out along (the) *Geht*, land of (two) hides in inheritance everlasting. And he gave as price of (the) land 30 mancuses and nine hundred shill(ings) for him (to hold) the land in everlasting inheritance.

I King Berhtwulf strengthen and confirm this my grant on the sign of Christ's cross and on the () of that His holy (lady) and with the witness of his Witan:

First, Saethryth, Queen	Hunstan, ealdorman
Cyneferth, bishop [of Lichfield]	Eadwulf
Alhhun, bishop [of Worcester]	Beornoth
Berchtred, bishop [of Lindsey]	Wulfred
Deorlaf, bishop	Mucel
Ceo(l)red, bishop [of Leicester]	Aldred
Wichred, abbot	Wicga
Aldred, abbot	Eadgar
Mucel [Esning], ealdorman	Baldred
Hunberht, ealdorman	Werenberht
Burgred, ealdorman	Eadred
Aefstan	Aethelwulf, priest
Cyneberht, ealdorman	Heaberht, priest
Sigred, ealdorman	Ecghun
Alberht, ealdorman	Ecghheard
Aldred, ealdorman	Beornhaeth
Mucel, ealdorman	Aldred

And also we all, who were at this attestation, order in the name of Christ and of that His holy one, if any man changes in any way these our attestations that he have shame (*or sorrow?*) from the almighty God and that His holy one up in heaven. Of that we are able to command him.

In line 2, *mið* is for *mid*, 'with'; the latter form occurs in a Worcestershire vernacular text of 836, which happens to relate to a lease to ealdorman Mucel Esning who witnesses the Wotton charter.¹⁶ However, *mið* occurs in the Epinal glossary and the Lindisfarne gospels. In *eaðmodre*, 'humble-minded', *eað* is for the normal *ead*, and the Middle English form is *edmede*; the second *d* is probably not crossed.

The verb in lines 2-3 is taken by F. E. Harmer as *earnian*, 'earn', but it may be *geornian*, 'yearn (for), desire, request' though the effect is much the same; Forthred could leave Wotton to whosoever sought it from him, commending himself to him by obedient service. Without such a provision the traditional rules of inheritance would have applied, since testamentary disposition of ordinary land (folkland) was unknown to the customary law (folkright). A power to devise could only be conferred by a legislative act. Probably this, rather than exoneration from fiscal burdens, was the primary

purpose of a *landboc*; indeed, bookland came to mean land which was at the holder's free disposal, even to the exclusion of his family. It was apparently not envisaged that Forthred would dispose of the estate during his own lifetime; faithful service to him was to be recognised after his death.

Line 3 now gives a series of place-names which are undoubtedly points on the boundary of the estate. Dr. Reed prints *cisse ðe beorg*, but there is no such word-division in the manuscript, and in view of the scribe's tendency to cross his d's we can emend to *Cissedebeorg*. Dr. Reed identifies this site, where the bounds begin, with 'a prominent hill in the north-east of the parish, overlooking Akeman Street', but this is too slight a rise in the ground to be called *beorg*, and its highest point, 279 ft., is well inside the parish. It is a general rule that *landgemaeru* are strictly on the boundary.

It is submitted that the obvious starting point of the bounds is the southernmost point of the parish as at Olney¹⁷ and at Monks Risborough. This is also its highest point, 517 ft., at the top of a long finger of land which projects right into Ashendon. The local cleric who drafted the charter may well have intended to define the estate by its four corners, as the four chi-rho monograms in the margin may suggest; these would be halts and turning points in the perambulation, where suitable ceremonies took place. If so, *Cissedebeorg* and 'Four-tree Hill' describe the same point; it is not clear whether there is a stop between them (Birch, who took special note of the scribe's dots, did not see one). *Beorg* would be taken in the sense 'barrow'; a mound rather than a mountain. The four trees would then surround the barrow, the probable site of which (grid reference SP 702141) has been dug away. The boundary runs steeply up the hillside, embraces this site just below the summit, which commands a superb view, and runs down again. Dr. Reed rightly suggests that the hill 'must have been of some significance to have required a long finger of territory to give access to it. There was, perhaps, rough grazing of some value on the steep hillside'. There is indeed an area of about 20 acres of such grazing on Bidwell Hill, as it is now called; but Wotton had some 500 acres of better and more accessible common pasture in Wotton Lawnd, which before the enclosure occupied the west of the parish. Stronger reasons can be suggested. The hillside contains copious springs, which used to supply Wotton House, and it is to these that the present name of the hill refers. A bidwell is normally a spring or well where prayers were offered, though a *biddere* can be a petitioner to man as well as to God. The significant viewpoint at the top of this finger of land immediately adjoins the moot-hill of Ashendon hundred, and the special relationship between the jurisdictions of the hundred and of the royal estate may explain this curious salient.

Before the grant to Forthred, Wotton was clearly part of the great royal estate centred on Brill and comprising the forest of Bernwood, but Ashendon and Pollicott would already have been outside it. This put the tenants of Wotton in a privileged position. In the words of F. W. Maitland:¹⁸

... in early history the king appears as the first of all franchise holders, the first in point of greatness and the first, it may well be, in point of time. The king's estates are (to borrow a word from abroad) 'immunities', perhaps the oldest of all immunities; they stand outside the normal, national system of justice, police and finance. Inside them there prevails a royal, which is also a seignorial, justice, and which remains distinct from the ordinary justice of the realm, even when that is done in the king's name. The tenants in the

ancient, the permanent, manors of the crown, enjoy many 'liberties' which flow from the king's rights, they are to a very high degree exempt from all justice, save that which is done among them by a court which they constitute . . . They have not to attend the moots of the shire or the hundred . . . The king profits by these immunities; his manors are governed from within; the cultivators of his demesnes cannot be distracted from their duties to him.

This accurately states the position in the eleventh century, and *mutatis mutandis* it would be true of the ninth, since Bernwood formed part of the immemorial endowment of the Mercian kingship. Nevertheless cases must have occurred when a man from this privileged estate stole something from someone outside it, or otherwise injured him, and was liable to pay compensation as well as fine. Where was justice to be done, at Ashendon or in Bernwood? The king's men owed no suit to the hundred court and could not be forced to cross the boundary of the king's land. The obvious solution was for payment to be made on the boundary; if necessary a mixed tribunal could meet there.¹⁹ When the hundred moot assembled just outside the boundary of this ancient demesne of the Crown, the king's men could gather just inside, on the barrow on Four-Tree Hill; and both sides could meet together to do justice in cases which concerned both. Rowley Hill, the meeting-place of Rowley hundred, just inside the boundary of the privileged estate of Chetwode and Hillesden, provides an analogy, though in that case the whole liberty was in the hands of a subject.

An even more precise analogy is provided by Thingoe, the assembly mount of the eight and a half hundreds of Bury St. Edmunds; this was marked out not by four trees but by four *hogas* or mounds, which constituted one of the bounds of the area of special jurisdiction granted to the abbey, being at a point where the boundary of that *banleuca* turns sharply.²⁰ The similarity to the Bernwood/Ashendon situation is singularly precise. We have a privileged estate²¹ lying within a larger district; the moot-hill of the latter is at a corner of the bounds of the former, and is marked by four mounds corresponding to the four trees of the Wotton charter. It would seem probable that the four benches of the moot were set out within the space so defined, and that the special peace of the meeting prevailed therein. It may be relevant that under general legislation (probably declaratory of existing practice) the hundred court met every four weeks, and that anyone who defied its decision four times was to be outlawed, after incurring a quadrupled penalty.²² [There are other instances of the prevalence of quadruplicity in Anglo-Saxon law; four men were to witness the purchase of anything worth more than four pence, and in *Solomon and Saturn* occurs the far from luminous question 'What are the four ropes of the doomed man?']

The earliest instance of the moot-stow of a hundred being located on the boundary of a privileged estate seems to be the site of the hundred court at Becontree Heath, on the northern bounds of the 40-hide estate including Dagenham which was granted by Hodilred to Barking Abbey in 687.²³ This assumes the development Centinces triow; *be Centreow; Becontree. In this case the court was held beside one tree rather than within an area defined by four (the hundred tree of Waddesdon on the bounds of Over Winchendon may provide a parallel), but a single sacred tree might well be within a quadrilateral enclosure. The 'holy oak' where the bounds of the Chetwode-Hillesden liberty begin and end was surrounded by ditches which have given rise to a small

rectangular protrusion of Buckinghamshire into Oxfordshire; but as this identification differs from that previously proposed by the writer and adopted by others, it must be the subject of a separate note.

The rights and duties of the villagers of Wotton would in principle have been unaffected when the king put Forthred between himself and them; but after the Conquest it was not treated as ancient demesne. The Norman lawyers restricted that category to what had been the manors of St Edward the Confessor as recorded in Domesday Book; they would not look further back.

The present interpretation of the charter implies that there are four boundary marks, not five, and that they can most naturally be identified with the four corners of the estate. As usual, the bounds begin at a cardinal point and proceed clockwise, or rather sunwise. Descending the hill, the southern boundary of Wotton is well defined on the ground by a stream rising on Bidwell Hill, a lane leading to Lawn Farm, which takes its name from 'Part of the Lawnd from the Pond towards Brill',²⁴ and then, at least until recently, by an ancient hedge as far as the triple boundary of Wotton, Dorton and Brill. This corner of Dorton was still wooded in 1649.

The next point is *eanburge mere*, which we are to seek in the south-west corner of the parish. Dr. Reed suggests that 'the lady Eanburh may have been the tenant of an estate to the south or west of Wotton', that is, in Dorton or Brill. Thus he takes *mere* as *mære*, 'boundary', but it could equally well be *mere*, 'pool, lake', which often glosses *stagnum*. The south-west corner of Wotton is low-lying and must often have been waterlogged, as the name Rushbeds Wood still conveys. The area was drained with some difficulty through the Rushbrook into the Yeat brook whose old course constitutes the northern boundary of Wotton.

The boundary between Wotton and Brill runs up a streamlet between Rushbeds Wood and Grenville's Wood, 'M^r Grenvil's Woods' in the survey²⁵ made by George Sergeint for Richard Grenville in 1649; it was the wood of an earlier Richard Grenville in the 1298 perambulation of Bernwood Forest.²⁶ Just beyond the source of this streamlet the land rises slightly to 300 ft, and the boundary swerves to take in a deserted medieval hamlet on the height of land. The perambulation appears to supply its name, Siketon, the hamlet by the syke, 'right against the forest fence', which seems to have been slightly diverted to exclude it. There is no trace of Siketon in the very detailed 1649 survey,²⁷ the site being then in 'Cleare Feild hooke, Part of Wooton'. Clearfields is the long northern extension of Brill parish, assarted from the king's wood early in the 14th century. In place-names *sīc* is often used of a watercourse forming a boundary, especially in flat country. In this case the boundary follows the syke downstream from its source by the lost hamlet. It is described in the opposite sense in the 1298 perambulation as running from Todeleshall corner between the king's wood and the wood of Richard Grenoile de Wotton to Siketon.

The next bound is *tihhanhyl*. This is taken by Dr. Reed as Windmill Hill (261 ft.) but this is well inside the boundary and is thus not eligible. We need a site at the projecting north-west corner. Tittershall Wood is in the right place, but there seems no satisfactory phonetic connection between *tihhanhyl* and the present name. The *hh* might have developed to *k*, as in Beckenham from *Beohha ham* and Cockfield from *Cohhanfeld*, but it would hardly have yielded a dental consonant. The intermediate forms are wildly inconsistent; besides *Tod(e)leshall* in the 1298 perambulation, they

include *Tudreshull* in 1372²⁸ and 1444,²⁹ *Totterell* in 1649,³⁰ but *Tithershil(l)* in the survey of the same year, and *Thithenhall Wood* in 1833.³¹ *Tittersall*, a pasture in Ludgershall in 1580³² seems to be the same name. Lipscomb in 1847 gives a variety of names: *Tydershall Wood* in a Wotton context,³³ but under Long Crendon he considers that 'Tidershall Wood, sometimes written Tether-hill, Tidershill and Tittersell . . . probably derives its name from the ancient Hundred' (i.e. Ticheshele) 'in which it was surveyed' in Domesday Book.³⁴ This is supported by a 16th-century map³⁵ in which Tittershall is called *Ticheselle*; but one suspects Elizabethan antiquarianism. Mawer and Stenton do not list this or any of Lipscomb's forms; they consider the second element to be *hyll* (the topography just permits this, in this area of low relief) and follow Zachrisson in taking the first element as a personal name *Tyddel*. The wood itself was a detached part of Long Crendon by the time of Domesday, with pasture for 100 swine,³⁶ and was shared in equal parts by the lords of Crendon after that manor was divided in 1275;³⁷ but it was almost encircled by two arms of Wotton Lawnd, one described in 1649³⁸ as 'A Corner of Wooton lawnd between Cleere Feild and Tithershill Wood' and 'S^r Robert Dormers close lately part of Wooton Lawnd', the other as 'Goosham Corner part of Wooton Lawnd'. It is difficult to place *Tihhanhyll* anywhere but hereabouts. Whether or not the wood was in Wotton in 845, the later boundary runs round three sides of it.

The precise site of the third bound is probably Tittershall Hatch, the triple boundary of Wotton, Brill and Ludgershall; *haec(c)*, when not on a stream, usually means a hatch gate, often between parishes, or giving access to a forest or chase. The Archdeacons Court Book for 1576 - 84 in the County Record Office records a dispute concerning tithe claimed by the Rector of Ludgershall. The defendant's house, which he declared to be in Wotton, was 'late builded upon Ludgershall Common' (f.27) and is elsewhere described as at Tythersill Hatch. The two parishes inter-commoned, but it was said that the wood adjoining the house paid tithe to Ludgershall (f.30). Evidence was given that forty years before (i.e. until about 1539) an oak tree had stood on the disputed ground, with other bushes, between Tyddershill and Clerefeyld (in Brill); that it belonged to the Lord of Wotton as part of Wotton Lawn except a strip of ground going up to Tyddershill Hatch which was no part of Wotton Lawn; that for 55 years (i.e. since 1524) the parishioners of Wotton had encompassed the disputed ground in their yearly perambulations, but that the parishioners of Ludgershall first began to encompass it in their processions 8 years before (in 1571; f. 46v-47). All this points to a gospel oak on the rising ground at the triple boundary, just outside the wood.

The last bound in line 3 is *ut bigeht*, which Sweet took as one word, but which is to be read as *ut bi Gekt* (*G* denoting a semivowel), 'out along the Yeat', a name for the tributary of the river Ray which forms the boundary of Wotton for two miles. The name survives in Yeat Farm and occurs in the Boarstall cartulary³⁹ (*Tochewyke super Yhyt* for Tetchwick) and in the 1649 survey⁴⁰ (The Yeat Furlong). The same name is applied to several of the streams which unite to form the river Ray, and to the main stream.⁴¹ It is derived from Late British **ie xta*, 'speech', and was borrowed before this had become Welsh *iaith*, but presumably after the final syllable had been lost. In his discussion of the name Professor Jackson⁴² assumes that this part of Bucks was settled by the English early in the sixth century, and uses this as evidence relevant to the date of the shift from *x t* to *ith*; but without making any such assumption, it seems well

established from his other examples that this change occurred in the late sixth century. It is suggested that Jackson's method can now be reversed, and that those of his results which are sufficiently supported from other areas can be used to date the settlement of Buckinghamshire. *χt* with long articulation (in effect *χtt*) was palatalised to *χ'tt*, which became *itt* by a shift in syllabic division (before 600, preceding the new quantity system) and then *ith* early in the seventh century, if not before. This is a remarkable development to be compressed into two generations or so, but it was a period of social collapse on the British side, and many other linguistic changes were occurring simultaneously. Final syllables had been lost during the first half of the sixth century. The conclusion is that *Geht* could have been borrowed from *ieχt* down to the third quarter of the sixth century, though not much later. This is consistent with a new wave of settlement following the fall of Aylesbury in 571, making Bernwood a British enclave. The fact that *Geht*, unlike *Tama*, was treated as indeclinable may indicate that it was felt to be a wholly foreign word, and that the settlers around Bernwood, unlike those in the Icknield belt a century earlier, were not bilingual.

The *tu* at the beginning of line 4 was apparently added in another ink, now faded, to supply a lacuna. The form *higida* (archaic, for *hida*) implies that a numeral is required, though it is in the margin and is not inflected as it should be. Possibly it was added later when the omission was noticed, and was hardly intended as part of the sentence. The sense is 'and land of (two) hides out along the Yeat'. This suits the north and north-east part of the parish boundary very well; it follows the old line of the brook, since straightened, encloses Yeat Farm and Moat Farm, representing the two hides at a distance from the village centre, turns down Akeman Street (the Portway in 1649⁴³) for half a mile, and returns southwards, between Ham Field and Westcott Field, and then along the Ashendon Brook and up Bidwell Lane to the starting-point.

The common boundary of Wotton and the ancient parish of Waddesdon, which includes Woodham and Westcott, is described in minute detail (but of course in the reverse direction, since all movements are sunwise) in the Waddesdon Bounds Book,⁴⁴ which records the marks on trees or in the turf which are to be renewed during the septennial Rogationtide perambulation, most recently in 1974. Most of these are crosses *x* or *+*; a few are *χ*, which may be a degenerate form of the chi-rho monogram; but in three cases, out of nearly 150 bounds of Waddesdon, a mark *88* is prescribed, and each of these seems to have a special significance. The first is in Moor Close at the northernmost point of Over Winchendon, where the bounds of that parish as mered in its charter of 1004 begin and end,⁴⁵ and where the first day's perambulation of Waddesdon ends on Rogation Monday and on Tuesday, after a short service, the second begins. The second mark *88* is in the north corner of Bancell's Meadow (cf. Bancell Peice and Bancell Furlong in the 1649 survey⁴⁶) where the Wotton boundary following the 'old brook' meets 'Ackeman Street'. This point, where the boundary leaves the Yeat and turns along the Roman road towards Aylesbury, seems of greater significance to Wotton Underwood than to its neighbours; the occurrence of the special mark in the Waddesdon bounds may again point to some kind of ceremony to mark a joint encounter, though none is held now. The third such mark is at the triple boundary of Doddershall, Quainton and Waddesdon; with its usual conservatism, the Bounds Book still regards the lost village of Doddershall as a distinct township, and records where its common boundary with Waddesdon begins and ends. It would appear that a land-

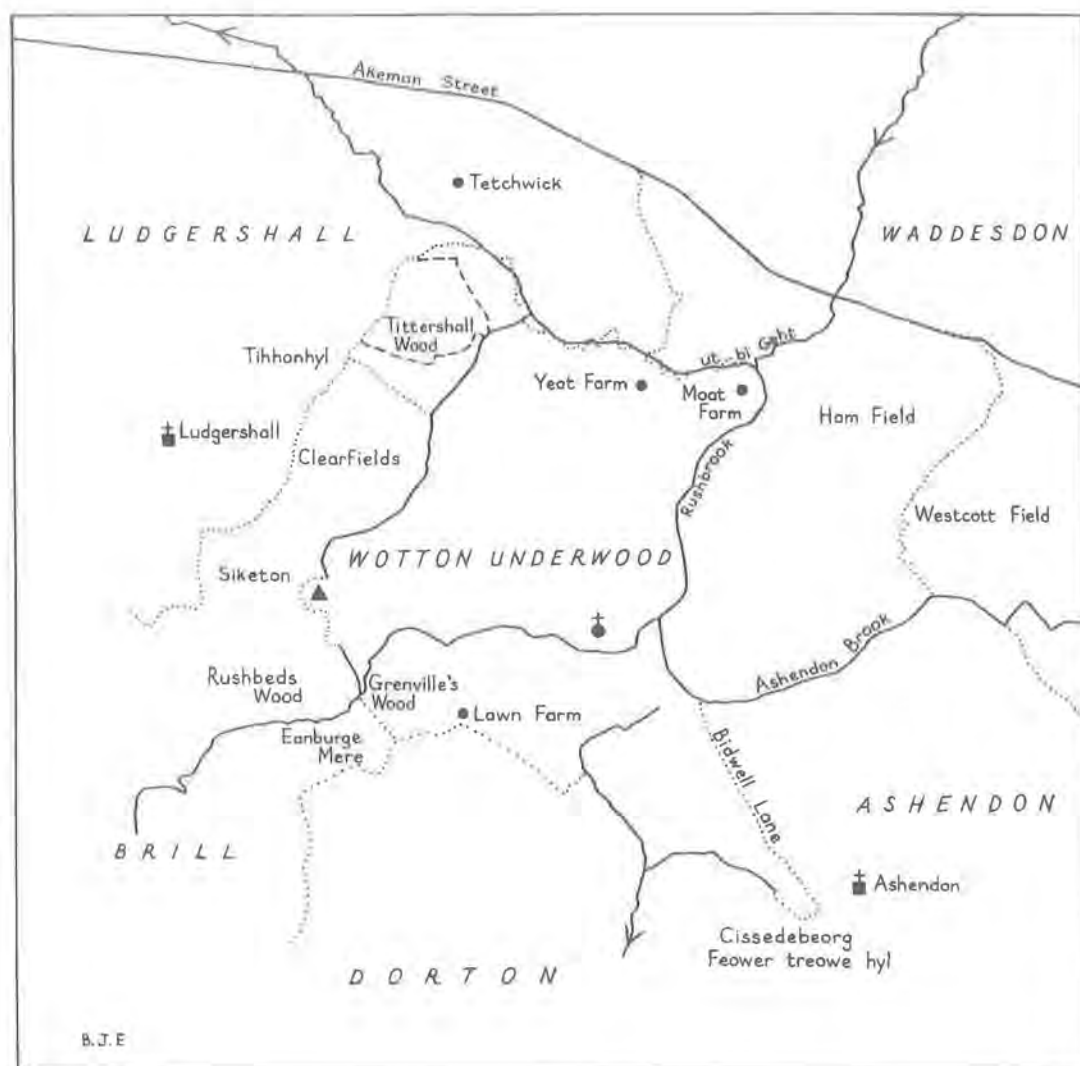


Fig. 1. Wotton Underwood.

marking convention has persisted locally for over a thousand years, no doubt with continuous adaptation, in connection with other Christian and pre-Christian boundary customs. This is surely one of the most astonishing examples of folk-memory in England. The Waddesdon 'pioneers' who hallow their bounds by renewing these marks are giving a highly literal application to 'trymme and faestna in Cristes rode tacne' in the Wotton charter, to which we must return.

The two hides in line 4 are probably included in the nine mentioned in line 1, the text indicating that they were out beyond the rest, along the river; alternatively, they might be an addition to the estate, making eleven hides in all. Wotton was assessed at 10 hides in the 11th century, but the rounding of the figures to fit into an Alfredian

scheme of 5-hide units might have been either upwards or downwards. However, the price mentioned in line 4 seems to settle the matter. The mancus was a unit of account, amounting to 30 pence. Thus both sums mentioned (*xxx mancessan & nigen hund sciſſ*) are divisible by 9; this strongly suggests that the price paid by Forthred was 100 pence and 100 shillings for each of the 9 hides. F. E. Harmer considered that the former sums, amounting to 30 mancuses, were paid in gold, the latter in silver.

The Mercian king was raising ready money by disposing of part of the ancient Crown lands; there is, however, no indication that he released Wotton from the burden of the king's *feorm* or from any other royal dues. The Boarstall cartulary⁴⁷ shows that Wotton owed suit of oven to the *caput* of the estate at Brill in the 14th century, and several other villages around Bernwood rendered various services. Wotton ceased, however, to be part of the forest, except for a short period between Richard I's time and the implementation of the 1217 Charter of the Forest. At other times it was within the purlieu of Bernwood Forest, and the villagers had rights of pasturage within the forest, subject however to agistment fees, so that they were not compensated when Bernwood was disafforested in the 17th century.

The sale of Wotton to Forthred seems to have been for full value, and there is no hint that the transaction had any pious motive. There is no religious proem following the formal invocation, and the price paid is frankly stated; this is by no means common form. Nevertheless the rest of the document takes on a strongly ecclesiastical tone. In line 5 the king confirms his grant with the token of Christ's cross, and in line 6 he adds some other sanction. Unfortunately there seems to have been a word following *haligran* which the scribe could not read.⁴⁸ The form *haligran* is in any event irregular. As a noun, *halig* means whoever or whatever is holy; *haligran* seems to be a genitive, and Sievers⁴⁹ took it as a genitive plural. One would indeed expect a reference at this point to God and His saints (e.g. 'on Godes gewitnesse and on ealra his haligra', Birch no. 403); but *ðære* can only be a feminine singular, genitive or dative. A genitive plural would require *ðara*, and at this date they would hardly be confused. What may well have happened is that the charter was sanctified by being placed under the protection of a female saint whose relics were in the local minster. An obvious candidate is St Osyth of the Mercian royal house,⁵⁰ foundress of St Mary's, Aylesbury, whose feast is on 3rd June. An earlier king of Mercia, Wulfhere, had placed his hand on the altar at Thame and subscribed the sign of the holy cross to confirm the great donation to Chertsey Abbey made by his *subregulus* Frithuwold,⁵¹ perhaps the same as Osyth's father Fredeswald. The lacuna may at least be good evidence that the surviving manuscript is not the original, but a contemporary copy⁵² made by a painstaking scribe who was baffled by an unusual word at this point. Since the text is written on both sides (to save parchment?) it could well have been a file copy. If it is the original, one might perhaps suppose that the anathema was an afterthought for which there was no room except on the back.

The king records in line 6 that he is acting in his great council; *wotona* is presumably for *wiotona*. The Mercian Council is *wiotan* in the Chronicle A-text for 853. By writing *his wotona* the draftsman momentarily forgot that he was speaking in the king's name.

The list of witnesses (lines 6 - 10) is critical for the dating of the charter. Margaret Gelling⁵³ gives outer limits 843 - 855, Dr. Reed 840 - 852; Mawer and Stenton date it 845 at p. 103, but 848 at p. 113, following Birch; Sawyer gives 844 - 845, while

Dorothy Whitelock accepts F. E. Harmer's date, 845. The argument seems conclusive: Alhhun's predecessor at Worcester witnesses a charter on Christmas Day 844, and Cyneferth had ceased to be Bishop of Lichfield by 8th November 845 when his successor witnessed an exchange of lands. This points to the spring or summer of 845 as the only period when all the witnesses would have been present together at the Witan.

It was in the grantee's interest to ensure that whoever challenged the grant would find himself excommunicated in every diocese; all the Mercian sees are accounted for except Hereford, and Deorlaf may well have been assistant bishop there; he (or someone of the same name) became bishop of the see at some time after 857. The witness list is headed by the Queen and includes five bishops, two abbots, probably ten ealdormen, two priests and fourteen who were probably thegns. Mawer and Stenton rely on the spelling *Ceored* (line 7) for Ceolred, bishop of Leicester, as explaining the early forms of Chearsley, four miles from Wotton Underwood. A local priest would have spelt his bishop's name as it was pronounced locally.

Line 13 is no longer legible and presents several difficulties. The reading *unhlisse* seems doubtful; the accusative of *unhlisa*, 'dishonour' should be *unhlisan*, and possibly we should read *unblisse*, 'misery, sorrow'. Birch's reading & *his ðaere haligran unlu* . . . suggests that he wanted *unlust* (presumably 'displeasure') to balance *unhlisa*; but other transcribers do not support him. The reference to the *halig* being in heaven (accepting *up in (heo)fnum*) confirms that a person is intended here, and therefore also in lines 6 and 11. Florence Harmer did not translate *ðaes we (him?) gebed(a)n maege*. *Maege* is subjunctive, followed by an infinitive *gebeodan*, 'command, enjoin' which should take a dative, but *ðaes* is a masculine or neuter genitive. The clause seems intended as an additional warning to reinforce an anathema which is comparatively mild by later standards.

Presumably this little charter found its way to Canterbury Cathedral because Wotton was a Canterbury peculiar.⁵⁴ The 12th-century librarian considered it useless, but he did not throw it away.

After 845 the history of Wotton is a blank until 917, when a marauding band of Danes from the army of Northampton came by night upon unprepared men, and captured no small number of men and cattle between Bernwood and Aylesbury.⁵⁵ Nothing is known of the descent of Wotton from Forthred to Eddeva wife of Ulward who held it in the Confessor's time with right to sell. It was worth £8 a year to her and £7 in 1086,⁵⁶ when there were ten ploughteams with meadow sufficient for five of them, and woodland to feed 200 swine. Three of the ploughs were on the demesne, and 10 villeins with 13 bordars had 7 ploughs in the open fields. There were five slaves, probably descendants of the British inhabitants of Bernwood.

The land out along the Yeat became a separate manor of Ham, sometimes called Fieldham as opposed to Woodham to the north; at least from the 13th century it had a separate court,⁵⁷ which used to be held by the Mercers' Company at Moat Farm, otherwise Moat House or Ham Hall.⁵⁸ The Grenvilles held the principal manor from the 12th-century to the 20th. They were responsible for destructive enclosure in 1744, but they built new rows of cottages about 1817; the population of the parish rose from 212 in 1801 to 344 in 1821 and they cannot be charged with depopulating it. Their great mansion was rescued from the housebreakers in the nick of time and is now in good hands. The County Council was persuaded in 1979 to designate the splendidly

designed parkland and lakes, which replaced Wotton Lawnd, as an 'area of attractive landscape'; steps are being taken to restore its former glories, and the parish as a community is far from moribund, despite the dispersal of the historic village centre. But the full story of Wotton under Bernwood, on the boundary between the forest and the field, is for others to tell.

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4. Palaeographical Society, *Facsimiles of Manuscripts and Inscriptions*, ed. E. A. Bond and E. M. Thompson (1873 - 83), vol. II, pl. 24.
5. J. M. Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, no. 243.
6. W. de G. Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, no. 452.
7. J. Earle, *A Handbook to the Land-Charters and other Saxon Documents* (1888), p. 122.
8. H. Sweet, *Oldest English Texts*, no. 48.
9. F. E. Harmer, *Select English Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (1914), pp. 5 - 6, 42 - 3, 81 - 2, 130.
10. M. Gelling, *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley* (1979), pp. 184 - 7.
11. Two flourishes, then perhaps a dot, then final *a* with a long shaft; this is not the scribe's usual form but it also occurs in *aedelwulf* and *aldred* in line 10.
12. Harmer differs from other editors in reading *aesstan*.
13. Birch reads *aelmaehtigan*.
14. The last line is now illegible. Birch could read *godes unhlis . . . and & his ðaere haligran unlu . . .* but no more. Harmer could read *gode . . . and his ðaere haligran up on . . . fnum ðaes we in . . . beod() n maege*.
15. Most texts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle give 851.
16. Translated in Whitelock, *op. cit.*, p. 479.
17. A. C. Chibnall, *Beyond Sherington* (1979), p. 3.
18. Sir F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *The History of English Law*, 2nd edn. ed. S. F. C. Milsom (1968), p. 384.
19. F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond* (Fontana Library, 1960), p. 325.
20. C. R. Hart, *The Early Charters of Eastern England* (1966), p. 57.
21. So highly privileged that the authenticity of King Edmund's charter of 945 has been questioned.
22. The Hundred Ordinance, I Edgar c.1; c.3.1.
23. Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
24. 'A Plot and true Description of the Mannour of Wooton-Underwood in the County of Bucks, For the Wo^r Richard Grenville Esq^r: Admeasured Anno 1649.'
25. *Ibid.*
26. Exch. Accts. Forest Proc. K. E. bdle. 1, no. 8, translated in *V.C.H. Bucks* (1908), ii, 132.
27. 'A Plot and true Description . . .', *op. cit.*
28. Chan. Inq. p.m. 45 Edw. III (1st nos.), no. 22.
29. Chan. Inq. p.m. 23 Hen. VI, no. 33.
30. Close, 1649, pt xxiii, no. 20.
31. Ordnance Survey one-inch map, 1st edn.
32. Exch. Dep. Mich. 22 & 23 Eliz. I, no. 16.
33. G. Lipscomb, *Hist. and Antiq. of the County of Buckingham* (1847), i, 601.
34. Lipscomb, *op. cit.*, i, 209.
35. Lipscomb, *op. cit.*, i, 51; dated 1560 - 70, i, 605.
36. Domesday Book i, fo. 147. The wood is not named, but it could be nowhere else.
37. *V.C.H. Bucks* (1927), iv, 38; *Cal. Fine R.*, 1270 - 1307, p. 58.
38. 'A Plot and true Description . . .', *op. cit.*

39. H. E. Salter ed., *The Boarstall Cartulary*, Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxxviii (1930), p. 183.
40. 'A Plot and true Description . . .' *op. cit.*
41. See note 10; M. Reed, *The Buckinghamshire Landscape* (1979), pp. 74 - 5.
42. K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (1953), pp. 408 - 9. At. p. 345, "Ight (Berk. - Oxf.)" is a slip for "Ight (Buck. - Oxf.)".
43. 'A Plot and true Description . . .' *op. cit.*
44. The writer is greatly indebted to the parish officers of Waddesdon for allowing him to transcribe their Bounds Book.
45. A. H. J. Baines, 'The Boundaries of Over Winchendon', *Records of Bucks*, xix, pt. 2 (1972), pp. 169 - 73.
46. 'A Plot and true Description . . .' *op. cit.*
47. Salter, *op. cit.*, pp. 194 - 7, 199 - 212.
48. See footnote 11.
49. Sievers, *Angelsächs. Gramm.*, s. 304, n.2, cited by Harmer, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
50. C. Hohler, 'St Osyth and Aylesbury', *Records of Bucks*, xviii, pt. 1 (1966), pp. 61 - 72.
51. Whitelock, *op. cit.*, pp. 440 - 1.
52. P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (R. Hist. Soc., 1968), no. 204, at p. 122; handwriting mid-9th century.
53. Gelling, *op. cit.*, no. 146, at p. 73; cf. p. 184.
54. Bacon, *Liber Reg.*, p. 505.
55. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A-text, s.a. 920 (for 917); trans. Whitelock, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
56. Domesday Book, i. fo. 147.
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58. Lipscomb, *op. cit.*, i. 604 - 6.