

Enclosure in North Buckinghamshire, 1500–1750

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IT IS BECOMING increasingly apparent that Parliamentary enclosure, even at its most intensive, as in such counties as Oxfordshire, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, was, for many individual parishes and villages, but the last phase of a very protracted process, a process which had been going on at least since the twelfth century.¹ This is as true for north Buckinghamshire as it is for any other part of the country. To study only half of a county may perhaps call for a word of explanation. The topography of Buckinghamshire south of the Chiltern scarp differs so markedly from that of the north of the county that it has imposed its own terms upon the evolution of agricultural practices. Enclosure of open fields in the Chilterns and the Thames valley is at once more piecemeal, more protracted and far less well-documented than it is in the north of the county.²

Recent research has shown that only 35 per cent of Buckinghamshire as a whole remained to be enclosed by private Act of Parliament in the eighteenth century. This figure conceals wide differences between one part of the county and the next, ranging from 57.7 per cent of Cottesloe Hundred and the 48.8 per cent of Aylesbury Hundred, through the 27 per cent of Ashendon Hundred to the 9.1 per cent of Desborough Hundred and the 7 per cent of Burnham Hundred.³

We can, however, look at these figures the other way round, and say that in Cottesloe Hundred 42.3 per cent was enclosed without an Act of Parliament, 51.6 per cent of Aylesbury Hundred and 73 per cent of Ashendon Hundred, and much of this enclosure had already taken place before the opening decades of the eighteenth century and the beginnings of the Parliamentary enclosure movement. It is this, clearly very extensive, enclosure which is marked on Fig 1 (see page 144) and which forms the subject of this paper.

I

Enclosure from common arable, meadow, pasture and woodland and from royal Forest can be documented from the end of the twelfth century, but it is only at the end of the fifteenth century that the social and economic problems which enclosure could create — depopulation and desertion of villages, decay of tillage, unemployment, poverty and vagabondage — compelled some half-hearted attempts to halt it. An Act of Parliament of 1489 (4 Henry VII, c.19) 'against pullyng down of Tounes' was largely ineffective. It was followed by a royal proclamation in 1514 against the engrossing of farms, and a further Act of Parliament in the following year. This Act would also have remained without effect had not Wolsey in 1517 obtained a royal commission to enquire what houses had been demolished, what land had been converted from arable to pasture and what parks had been enclosed since Michaelmas 1488.

Buckinghamshire is one of the counties covered by this commission, the returns to

¹R A Butlin, 'The enclosure of open-fields and extinction of common rights in England, c.1600–1750', in H S A Fox and R A Butlin, eds, *Change in the Countryside: Essays on Rural England, 1500–1900* (1979), pp 65–82.

²On the differences, topographical and otherwise, between north and south Buckinghamshire, see my *The Buckinghamshire Landscape* (1979).

³M E Turner, *English Parliamentary Enclosure* (1980), pp 39–42.

which have long been in print.⁴ These returns show that over the county as a whole enclosure amounted to 898½ acres, or 1.93 per cent of its total area. This figure covers wide variations between the north and the south of the county, from the .09 per cent of Desborough Hundred to the 4.46 per cent of Ashendon Hundred. The largest recorded enclosure was that of 960 acres at Doddershall in Quainton, the smallest the four acres recorded in Hillesden. These returns are very interesting in themselves, but they are certainly not a reliable guide, either to the extent or to the distribution of enclosure up to that date, even if only because the commissioners were not empowered to look further back than 1488. At least three enclosures, known to have taken place before 1517, find no place in these returns, at Creslow, at Snelshall in Tattenhoe, and at Tetchwick in Ludgershall.⁵ Knowledge of them depends upon the chance recovery of casual notes in documents. The full extent of enclosure before 1517 must remain unknown and unknowable.

The discrepancies between the returns for Buckinghamshire to the 1566 commission of enquiry and the other surviving documentary evidence for enclosure are even more noticeable, although it must not be forgotten that no Buckinghamshire returns to the 1545 commission survive. On this occasion, 1566, 406½ acres of enclosed or converted land are recorded, representing some 0.87 per cent of the total area of the county.⁶ The largest recorded enclosure was at Thornton, where 560 acres were said to have been enclosed, twelve houses of husbandry and the parsonage house decayed. At Caldecote in Newport Pagnell 490 acres had been

converted from tillage to pasture. At Milton Keynes 240 acres were converted and seven houses of husbandry decayed. The smallest enclosure recorded was at Twyford, where three acres were said to have been converted from arable to pasture. Enclosures which slipped through the net include 100 acres of Abbess Park in Burnham before 1565, the New Park in Boarstall in about 1553, a close of land at Cheddington enclosed in the time of Henry VIII, enclosures at Barton Hartshorne made before 1558, and an enclosure made at Hartwell in about 1550.⁷ Once again this cannot be an exhaustive list, and further additions to it depend entirely upon the survival, and the discovery, of casual documentary references.

A further commission of enquiry into enclosure and depopulation was issued in August 1607, provoked by the widespread outbreaks of violence and unrest earlier in the year, especially in Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire and Bedfordshire, outbreaks which appear to have been directed almost exclusively at enclosures.⁸ The articles of enquiry looked at enclosure and conversion from 1578 onwards, but did not take account of enclosure of pasture and waste. In any case the commission was declared 'against law'. The returns for Buckinghamshire record 7077 acres, 1.52 per cent of the area of the county, as having been enclosed, converted or severed, 80 houses of husbandry decayed and 86 persons displaced. The returns themselves contain much interesting detail: Great Pollicott was described as a whole hamlet turned to pasture; three small plots of land in Oving, of 1½, 2 and 3 acres, were converted to pasture for the maintenance of milch kine for housekeeping; at Broughton in Bierton 80 acres of arable were converted into ley ground; at Brill 240 acres were enclosed and

⁴I S Leadam, ed, *The Domesday of Enclosures, 1517-1518* (1897, 1971 reprint).

⁵Creslow, *VCH Bucks*, III, p 365, Snelshall in Tattenhoe, British Library, Add MS, 37069, f113, Tetchwick, in Ludgershall, A H Thompson, ed, 'Visitations in the diocese of Lincoln, 1517-1531', Vol 1, *Lincoln Record Society*, 33 (1940), p 80.

⁶E F Gay, 'Inclosures in England in the Sixteenth Century', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 17 (1903), pp 576-97. The originals PRO E 178/424, have deteriorated considerably since Gay's time and his figures cannot now be checked.

⁷PRO E 134 7-8 Eliz Mich 1. PRO E 134 25-26 Eliz Mich 7. PRO STAC/2/6, Nos 11 and 12. PRO STAC/4/5/8. Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, Hartwell 402/39.

⁸E F Gay, 'The Midland Revolt and the Inquisitions of Depopulation of 1607', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, New Series, 18 (1904), pp 195-244.

converted to pasture, causing a hundred cottages to be in great want and decay; and there is substantial confirmation of the activities of John Temple at Stowe described below.⁹ Nevertheless, as with the preceding returns, a great deal of enclosure went unrecorded, as much of the evidence analysed below makes clear.

All of the returns made by these successive bodies of commissioners from 1517 to 1607 contain much very interesting detail about individual enclosures, but it is apparent that a great deal escaped them, so that the seeming air of precision about the acreages they record affords no basis whatsoever for any quantitative study of enclosure during this period. Indeed, from the Buckinghamshire evidence at any rate, it may not seem implausible to suggest that by and large the commissioners learnt only of enclosure which for some reason proved to be contentious, since they failed to record almost all of the enclosure by agreement discussed in the next section. Enclosure by this method was taking place by the 1550s, and may well have become the most usual method of enclosure during the seventeenth century, although it is impossible to substantiate what is in reality nothing more than a subjective impression.

II

The earliest enclosure with some pretence to being by agreement so far traced for Buckinghamshire is that of 1551 by which Master Hampden was permitted to enclose twenty acres and more in Hartwell in return for an undertaking not to keep a rabbit warren.¹⁰ This falls only one year after the earliest enclosure agreement so far traced on the Chancery decree rolls, that of 1550 for Condoover in Shropshire.¹¹ Rabbits at this time were a source of considerable profit,

both for their carcasses and for their fur, but they also cause great damage to grain and pasture and in a number of agreements of this period an undertaking not to keep a rabbit warren forms part of the conditions for enclosure. This occurred at Great Billing in Northamptonshire, for example, in 1629, and in 1611 Dame Mary Digby, lord of the manor of Gayhurst, gave up her rights to common of pasture over an enclosure of forty acres in Lathbury in return for an undertaking not to build a rabbit warren.¹²

The next enclosure by agreement so far discovered is that made in about 1584 for Loughton.¹³ Here it was stated that for the general good of all the inhabitants it was agreed that, the price of hay and grass having become excessive in recent years, each inhabitant should enclose for himself a piece of ground to be taken either at the outside of the field or else adjoining the town, according to how he can agree with his neighbours. Every man was then to abate his commoning in proportion to the number of acres he had enclosed. The agreement was put into writing, but so liberal an arrangement was wide open to abuse, and it was the enclosing of two common drift or cartways that brought it into Star Chamber.

Two agreements were made for the enclosing of lands in Stowe, in 1587 and in 1599. In both cases the agreements were made between John Temple and his tenants. In the first he was permitted to keep enclosed Grove Meadow, of nine acres, accepting restrictions on his rights to common of pasture. In the second, by making a series of exchanges, he was able to enclose a piece of land, 73 acres in extent, arable, ley and meadow, in the Netherfield in Stowe.¹⁴ This enclosure was recorded in the 1607 returns, although it was noted that it was done by exchanging lands with the inhabitants of Stowe, and with their consent.

⁹PRO C 205/5/2. The documents have deteriorated considerably since Gay's time and it has proved impossible to check his figures.

¹⁰Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, Hartwell, 402/39.

¹¹PRO C 78/85/15. See M W Beresford, 'The Decree Rolls of Chancery as a Source for Economic History', *Economic History Review*, Second series, 32 (1979), p 1, note to Table 1.

¹²Northamptonshire CRO SS 3683. Buckinghamshire CRO D/CA 13/6.

¹³PRO STAC/8. 141/16.

¹⁴Huntington Library, Stowe Papers. Temple Land Papers, Bucks, 1572-1607. Box 2. L8.5.

The Temples were at first interested in sheep rather than cattle. Early in the seventeenth century clothiers from Coggeshall, Braintree, Malmesbury, Thaxted and Chipping Camden were making their way to Stowe in order to buy wool.¹⁵ However, the wealth that the sheep brought led in due course to wider social aspirations, a baronetcy, and a shift in the motives for enclosure. When Sir Peter Temple took in twelve acres of Stowe Waste and the ground called the Heuinges or Wood Common it was for the better enlarging of his park. The final enclosure of Stowe did not take place until later in the seventeenth century.¹⁶

From the early years of the seventeenth century enclosures by agreement become much more common, although this impression may simply be the consequence of the better survival of documents. At least a dozen agreements are known for Buckinghamshire, and for several more parishes, Gayhurst, for example, we know that there was an agreement to enclose, but the document itself has disappeared.¹⁷ Yet more will undoubtedly come to light when the Chancery decree rolls are fully explored. These rolls, now in the Public Record Office, are of particular importance because in order to give full legal validity to an enclosure agreement it was often made the subject of a law suit, more or less fictitious, in Chancery, and the decision of the court served to confirm its terms.¹⁸ Chancery was not the only court used, however. Agreements could be confirmed in Common Pleas and Exchequer by a variety of means, including fines and recoveries, but these

records are even less well-known than those of Chancery.¹⁹

Glebe terriers can provide a great deal of indirect evidence as to the progress of non-Parliamentary enclosure, and those for Buckinghamshire have been studied by Professor Beresford.²⁰ Only occasionally, however, do they give a precise date for enclosure, they do not survive for every parish, and by their nature they can yield only very rarely indeed any insight into the reasons or motives for enclosure.

There is yet a further documentary source which is so far almost entirely unknown as far as enclosure agreements are concerned. In all questions relating to the glebe, its enclosure and exchange, and to tithe, it had become customary by the Restoration to seek the consent of the bishop. He issued a Commission of Enquiry into the terms of compensation, and then gave his consent in writing if the terms were discovered to be satisfactory. Such Commissions for Kingsey and Great Linford are known from documents in the Buckinghamshire County Record Office, and another for Tyringham confirmed in 1709 has been found in the Registers of the bishop of Lincoln.²¹ More will undoubtedly come to light when this source is fully explored.

Articles of agreement to enclose frequently contain an elaborate recital of the terms and motives, but in fact how far each was a genuine agreement is difficult to say. In some cases there were too many tenants involved for them all to have been brow-beaten, and in others the words do have a genuine ring about them. In yet others pious words clearly cover high-handed actions.

The lords of the manors at Astwood in 1613 were Tyringham Norwood and Godfrey Chibnall. Their motives for

¹⁵ Huntington Library, Stowe Papers. Wool Book. ST 48.

¹⁶ E F Gay, 'The Rise of an English Country Family. Peter and John Temple to 1603', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 1 (1937-38), pp 367-90.

¹⁷ G. Lipscomb, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham*, 4 (1831), p 142.

¹⁸ M W Beresford, 'The Decree Rolls of Chancery as a Source for Economic History', *Economic History Review*, Second series, 32 (1979), pp 1-10; E M Leonard, 'The Inclosure of Common Fields in the Seventeenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, New series, 19 (1905), pp 101-46; M W Beresford, 'Habitation versus Improvement: The Debate on Enclosure by Agreement', in F J Fisher, ed, *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England* (1961), pp 40-69.

¹⁹ See my 'Pre-Parliamentary Enclosure in the East Midlands', *Landscape History*, 3 (1981), p 61.

²⁰ M W Beresford, 'Glebe Terriers and Open-field Buckinghamshire', Part 1, *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 15 Part 5 (1951-2), pp 283-98, Part 1, *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 16 Part 1 (1953-4), pp 5-28.

²¹ Buckinghamshire CRO PR 120/3/1, DU 1/48/5-6. Lincoln RO Register 36, f 125.

consenting to enclose seem almost too good to be true. The inhabitants, the agreement declares, had often requested some reasonable stint of cattle in the common fields, and also the enclosing of the fields so that every man could enjoy his share in severalty. Norwood and Chibnall were willing to listen 'for that they saw by experience that the poorer sort of the said parish were much oppressed and wronged in the taking and using of the said Commons by the richer sort of the said inhabitants who commonly did putt into the said Common field a greter number and proporcon of Cattell than belonged to their lands lying in the said Comon field'. They therefore assembled the inhabitants together and an enclosure was agreed. It would, among other things, save the charges of a neat-heard, hog-heard and pinder, and much corn and grain from damage by cattle trespass. Articles of agreement were made in 1614 and confirmed in Chancery in 1617.²² Nevertheless, enclosure did not affect all the common fields in Astwood. There were still four fields, Church, East, Trotts and Argents, Trotts said to be in East Field season, to be enclosed by private Act of Parliament in 1836-1840, but the Act affected only 328 out of the 1281 acres in the parish, only fractionally more than a quarter.

At Chearsley, as at Stowe, two attempts were made at enclosure.²³ The first articles of agreement were made in October of 1624, with the object of dividing up, enclosing and holding in severalty the meadows of the village. This was because the meadows lay close to the river Thame and other brooks, and were frequently inundated with water. They were particularly 'fruitful, mellow and tender', and so were overstocked, leading to sheep rot and cattle murrain. In addition, there was no convenient pasture for milch kine save among the corn and grain. This caused much loss when the cattle broke loose, and many disputes among neigh-

bours. As a consequence many inhabitants had to hire pasture for dairy cattle away from Chearsley. Enclosure, it was thought, would put a stop to all these disputes and inconveniences, and a surveyor, Mr Thorpe, was employed to carry this out.

The second agreement was made in 1666. Once again it was shortage of pasture for cattle that was given as the reason. This time, however, parts of the arable were enclosed, and the inhabitants chose those parts 'lying far from home and far distant from their several messuages and habitations', a clear example of cost benefit analysis. The remainder of the arable was then to be divided into four fields, part to lie fallow, the rest to be sown with several sorts of grain according to the course of husbandry agreed to be used in Chearsley. An enclosure Act for Chearsley was obtained in 1805. Unfortunately the enclosure map does not survive. There are no other early maps for Chearsley and so we cannot tell exactly where these first enclosures actually lay, but they cannot have been very extensive since the Act of 1805 affected 917 acres of a total parish area of 942 acres.

Other agreements make it clear that in fact they were doing little more than legalizing enclosures which had already taken place. At Great Horwood, for example, the landlord, New College Oxford, farmed out the manor and the demesne, and a subtenant managed to enclose some part of the demesne, removing many of the ancient boundaries. It was agreed in Chancery in 1611 that all the enclosures and exchanges should be confirmed and that the College should enclose a further thirty acres of the demesne.²⁴ At Ashendon in July 1634 it was agreed by Richard Grenville and other farmers, lessees and tenants that Richard, having already enclosed with hedge and ditch a piece of ground within the common fields called Sheep Walk, should keep it in severalty, freed from all demands for common, for

²² PRO C 78.291/5.

²³ PRO C 3. 333/1, 398/110. (1624). PRO C 5. 594/109. (1666).

²⁴ PRO C 78. 171/3.

seven years. In return he agreed to pasture no more than sixty sheep over the common fields and to abide by the ancient customary stint of sixty beasts and 30 sheep for every yardland, plus sufficient horses.²⁵ It is still possible to trace in the landscape today the bounds of the Sheep Walk enclosed by Richard Grenville in 1634.

The clearest statement of the motives for agreeing to enclose the common open fields comes from Great Linford. Here an agreement was drawn up in 1658, and it has every appearance of being a genuine agreement. In Great Linford, the agreement recites, a great part of the land lies open and unenclosed and commonable.²⁶ Many spoils, trespasses and destructions occur daily by reason of the escape of cattle into the corn and grass, causing disputes, actions, quarrels and troubles between neighbour and neighbour. An enclosure was agreed, a surveyor appointed to mark out each person's land 'as near adjoining to their dwellings as with conveniency may be', and with due respect to the quality and the quantity of their lands. Referees were appointed to decide on fencing, and on compensation for tilth already prepared, and the enclosure was to be executed with all speed. A Decree in Chancery confirming the enclosure was obtained in 1662, and the bishop of Lincoln, in his open primary visitation held at Stony Stratford in July 1662, confirmed the changes made affecting the glebe, being assured that the 28 acres allotted to the rectory were not only much better in value than the ancient glebe but also 'being laid out together so near to the said parsonage were much more convenient, commodious and profitable'.²⁷

The difficulties and disputes over managing the open common fields which undoubtedly lay behind many agreements to enclose were very real. Population pressure, with all

that it entails of new mouths to be fed and new farms and cottages to be provided with land, was putting severe strain on the open field system in many north Buckinghamshire villages in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and increasingly elaborate codes of practice were required to keep things going. At the heart of the problem was the proper balance between arable and grazing. If the arable were extended too far then there would be insufficient grazing for the indispensable draught animals, without which the arable itself could not be cultivated. At the same time there was an increasingly profitable market for wool, hides, meat and dairy produce. In some villages the problem was solved by the careful regulation of the existing open field system, as at Padbury for example, where elaborate regulations, basically designed to preserve the balance between crops and animals, were drawn up as late as 1779.²⁸ In other villages the inhabitants, scrapping a traditional, familiar, well-tryed system of communal risk-spreading, threw caution to the winds and leapt into the unknown dangers of enclosure and possessive individualism. It must have taken a lot of courage to do.

However, not all enclosure in north Buckinghamshire was carried out in a spirit of compromise, or even of far-sighted self-improvement. The tenants of the manor of Pollicott in Ashendon complained bitterly in 1599 of the 'unconscionable dealings' of their lord, Thomas Palmer. He and his son enclosed the better half and took it into their demesne. The whole was formerly let for £24, and now they demanded £150 for the half. When leases expired Palmer demanded impossibly high rents, but assured the tenants that their livings would be better than before if they took their land into severalty. They made some doubt about the statute, but Palmer assured them that he would bear them out, and promised to meet

²⁵ Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, Ashendon 3/59.

²⁶ Buckinghamshire CRO, DU 1/48/1.

²⁷ Buckinghamshire CRO, DU 1/48/3. It has not yet been found in the Chancery Decree Rolls. The bishop's decree is DU 1/48/5.

²⁸ Buckinghamshire CRO, PR 162/18/1.

their costs of hedging and ditching. Once enclosure was completed, Palmer refused to carry out his side of the agreement and sued them at common law for their rents.²⁹ There is at present no further record of what must have been a very unpleasant affair, although the enclosure is mentioned in the 1607 returns. Enclosure at Wolverton and at Aylesbury seems to have been carried out with a similar degree of ruthlessness, whilst the Chancery decree which confirmed enclosures at Grandborough seems to have settled a bitter dispute over the stopping up of lanes and cart ways.³⁰

The surviving documentary evidence makes it clear that the reasons and motives lying behind enclosure were often very complex, not least because as much was carried out by yeomen and husbandmen as by landlords. The story of the way in which Anthony Cave, over a period of at least two decades, steadily bought out tenants and freeholders in Chicheley, so that by 1616 he had 1088 acres of enclosed pastures in a parish of 2070 acres, has been told elsewhere.³¹ He, like John Temple of Stowe, was perfectly well aware of the money to be made from grazing sheep over enclosed pastures, and just how valuable these pastures could be is apparent from a survey of enclosed lands made by the Deputy Lieutenants in 1620. Mr Palmer's enclosures in Pollicott were worth £410 a year, those of Sir Henry Lee at Burston were worth £597 and those of Sir Richard Wenham at Twyford were valued at £900 a year.³² These are the enclosing landlords of tradition, although it should not be forgotten that not all enclosing landlords were equally successful. The three sons of Roger Nicholl, lord of the manor of Willen, ruined themselves by enclosing the parish in about 1650, and had to sell up and get out.³³

But many peasant farmers, whether yeomen or husbandmen, freeholders or copyholders, were equally well aware of the advantage to be gained from enclosure, and there is plenty of evidence of hard bargaining, both among themselves and with their landlords, in order to make sure that they did not lose out. The inhabitants of Great Pollicott seem to have been both foolish and unlucky when compared with the inhabitants of Oving, whose enclosures in 1620 were valued at £500, whilst 'divers persons' in Oakley had grounds newly enclosed worth £400. Small proprietors of this kind would appear to have been motivated by two principal reasons. First of all the monumental inconvenience of the open field system is mentioned so often in enclosure agreements of this period that it must be accepted as one of the most important reasons for enclosure. Secondly, it is clear that many small proprietors were short of pasture by this time, not so much for the grazing of sheep as for the grazing of cattle, whether as draught animals, as milch kine, or as at Nash in 1702, because of the large numbers of cattle that the inhabitants were constrained to keep to provide dung and compost for their arable lands.³⁴

Nevertheless, enclosure by agreement suffered from a number of severe disadvantages. The consent of *all* proprietors was required, and this was sometimes difficult to obtain, and the death of any one of them before an agreement could be enrolled in Chancery could vitiate months of protracted negotiations. This happened at Chearsley in 1635,³⁵ and at Leckhampstead the death of the rector in 1625 threw a complex agreement into confusion.³⁶ Further, even when agreement had been reached, it could at any time in the future be questioned by a dissatisfied party or his successor. Thus in 1683 the rector of Milton Keynes brought a suit in the Court of Exchequer to overthrow

²⁹ PRO C 3.285/7.

³⁰ British Library, Add MS, 5839, pp 433-4. Birmingham Reference Library, MSS Nos 508622-5. PRO C 78 300/2.

³¹ A C Chibnall, *Beyond Sherington* (1979), pp 76-82.

³² Bodleian Library, Willis MS 30.

³³ British Library, Add MS 5839, f 411.

³⁴ Buckinghamshire CRO DX/434.

³⁵ PRO C 3. 398/110.

³⁶ PRO C 78/640/6.

an agreement to enclose the parish, to which he had been a party, made some twenty years before, because, it was alleged, when he ploughed the lands allotted to him in exchange for the glebe he found that they yielded poor crops, and their value declined from 23s an acre to 18s an acre.³⁷ The only way in which these disadvantages could be overcome was by obtaining a private Act of Parliament. This was a method of enclosure adopted only very slowly and it did not become at all popular or widespread before the second half of the eighteenth century. There were only three enclosure Acts for Buckinghamshire before 1760, the first being in 1738 for Ashendon where, as we have seen, fairly extensive enclosure had already taken place, and enclosure by agreement continued in very rare cases into the early years of the nineteenth century.³⁸

Thus the final phase of the enclosure movement in north Buckinghamshire makes a cautious and hesitant beginning.

III

But agreements, however amicable, and disputes, however bitter, record only part of the enclosure that was taking place over north Buckinghamshire between 1500 and 1750. Other enclosure was taking place quietly and without formal record. Only chance documentary references hint at what was going on, and much must have taken place without finding its way into any written record at all. Much was piecemeal, involving only very small plots of land. Much must have been carried out by individual villagers and could scarcely have been distinguished from squatting, its continuance depending upon the indifference and the inertia of neighbours. Thus in 1611 John Symons was presented in the manorial court of Prebend End and Gawcott for building a cottage in the common field of

Gawcott at Southwell and enclosing a plot of land there. Only a deed of 1708 reveals that the medieval deer park of Great Brickhill had by this date been divided up into eight closes. A deed of 1677 mentions in passing enclosed lands in Lavendon.³⁹ An elaborate terrier of his estate at Wotton Underwood written out in 1657 by the same Richard Grenville who had enclosed lands at Ashendon describes 854 acres of enclosures and 1168 acres of open and common fields.⁴⁰ His own capital messuage occupied four acres. The adjoining close was once of 32 acres, but he had pulled down two cottages and taken in their closes to increase it to 35 acres. This he had then divided into two; one half was mown and the other grazed in alternate years.

That survey of enclosed lands in Buckinghamshire made in 1620 by the Deputy Lieutenants already mentioned reveals yet further enclosures that would otherwise have gone unrecorded; at Drayton Parslow, for example, at Ivinghoe, Cublington, Bragenham and Whitchurch, at Chilton, Oving and Singleborough. At Ashendon, it was said, Mr Benedict Winchcombe had a sheep walk for 300 sheep. At Wing, Lord Dormer's enclosed lands supported 2810 sheep and were worth £904 a year. At Quarrendon the enclosures of Sir Henry Lee were worth £2100 per annum. Surviving formal agreements to enclose clearly cover no more than a fraction of the enclosures that were taking place in north Buckinghamshire in the years between 1550 and 1750.

IV

It was not only the arable that was affected by enclosure in north Buckinghamshire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Wood and waste were equally affected, especially those areas where intercommoning was still practised. Thus much of Lenborough Wild, where tenants from Gawcott, Buckingham

³⁷ PRO E 134 35 Charles II, Easter 21.

³⁸ The minute book of the privately appointed commissioners for the enclosure of Edgcott, 1800-01, is in the Berkshire County Record Office, D/EW1 EH2.

³⁹ Buckinghamshire CRO D/AR/2/21. f 3. D/Du/2/16-17. D/C/1/215.

⁴⁰ Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, Wotton Underwood. 422/42.

and Hillesden intercommoned, was enclosed and divided up in 1662, and in 1669 the waste on Ovinghill was ordered to be surveyed so that it could be divided up, and arbitrators were appointed to settle disputes.⁴¹ But the really large-scale enclosure of waste and woodland in north Buckinghamshire came with the disafforestation of the Forest of Bernwood in the 1630s.

The bounds of the Forest were fixed in the thirteenth century and then remained unchanged until disafforestation.⁴² A Royal Forest was by no means an area of impenetrable woodland. It was, rather, an area subject to the Forest Laws, an area where the deer were given consideration over everything else. Within the Forest of Bernwood were a number of villages, of which Brill and Boarstall were the largest. Each had its own open fields cultivated in strips. One of the earliest of English maps, made in about 1440, illustrates this very clearly.⁴³

By the middle years of the sixteenth century it is apparent that much enclosure and clearing had been going on in the Forest. A survey made in 1587 records 723 acres enclosed, and other documents of about the same time speak of yet further enclosures, five hundred acres in Boarstall and above six hundred in Brill.⁴⁴ Some of this enclosure was undoubtedly done to protect the coppice trees, since the wood and timber were by this time becoming more valuable than the deer, now more of a nuisance than anything else, but much more enclosure was done in order to convert woodland and arable into pasture. At least 7600 sheep were grazing in the Forest, imposing what must have been intolerable pressures upon the natural regenerative powers of the woodland.

A commission to disafforest Bernwood was issued in 1623, but the inhabitants of Brill, Boarstall and Oakley did not like the

terms under which they were to be compensated for the loss of their grazing rights, and so a new one was issued in 1626. The inhabitants of the Forest still found the terms objectionable and there were a number of disturbances, with fences and hedges being pulled down and cattle turned into the new enclosures. Enclosure and disafforestation were finally agreed upon in 1635.⁴⁵ Within little more than a generation the surviving woods had been almost entirely felled, the tree roots grubbed up, the land divided up into closes by means of hedges and ditches, and then turned to arable or pasture. A map of part of Boarstall parish made in 1705 shows how far this clearing had gone by that date.⁴⁶ New, isolated, farms had already begun to appear in the new landscape. Old Arngrove, Pasture and Upper Panshill Farms are all seventeenth-century in origin. At the very end of the seventeenth century there seems to have been a sudden and rapid fall in population. As late as 1676 it is likely that there were about 130 inhabitants in the village, but a map of 1697 shows no more than seven cottages in addition to the manor house, then still standing behind the gatehouse.⁴⁷

V

Enclosure, however carried out, could affect the landscape, the economy, the settlement pattern, the social organization, and the demography of a village to a greater or lesser extent, and the more extensive the enclosure the greater its impact.

We are fortunate in having for Great Linford two maps, one made before the enclosure agreement of 1658 described above, and the other made after. These have already been discussed elsewhere,⁴⁸ and so it is sufficient to mention that to compare them is to appreciate that enclosure by agreement

⁴¹ Buckinghamshire CRO D/AR/2/47, DP/AR/23A/66, No 2.

⁴² See my *The Buckinghamshire Landscape* (1979), p. 75.

⁴³ Reproduced in colour in 'Buckinghamshire Estate Maps', *Buckinghamshire Record Society* (1964), Plate 1.

⁴⁴ British Library, Lansdowne MS 47, Nos 3-5.

⁴⁵ Buckinghamshire CRO D/AF/2/3.

⁴⁶ PRO MR 447.

⁴⁷ Buckinghamshire CRO Ma/AF/266. W H Summers, 'Population Returns for Buckinghamshire, 1676', *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 8 (1903), pp 146-52.

⁴⁸ See my *The Buckinghamshire Landscape* (1979), p 178.

could have as profound and as dramatic an effect upon the landscape of a village as anything brought about by Parliamentary enclosure. Great Linford was transformed. New hedges, ditches and roads appeared. A new pattern of closes replaced the old open fields. A landscape emerged that must have been both neater and greener than that which it replaced. The picture is reinforced by a comparison of two glebe terriers for the village. One of 1607 describes in minute detail the exact location of 22 acres of arable glebe land, divided into no fewer than 34 pieces, lying scattered over three fields, the Woodfield, Middle Field and Field next Newport. Another of 1690 lists briefly 28 acres of enclosed ground lying in four closes adjoining the parsonage orchard.⁴⁹

The agreement for the enclosure of Great Linford was completed in 1658. An estate rent book of the early eighteenth century reveals the changes which fifty years of enclosure could bring to the economy and the social structure of the village.⁵⁰ At Lady Day 1714 fourteen tenants paid a total of £1048 10s in rents. Of these fourteen, six were grouped to form three partnerships. One partnership consisted of Ralph Coleman of Fenny Stratford and Samuel Shilborn of Great Brickhill. They paid £110 a year for a three-year lease of 203 acres of pasture divided into three closes, Kents Ground of 80 acres, Great Cowpen Meadow of 21 acres and Neath Hill of 102 acres. Of the total of eleven farms, only five seem to have included a house, and only three appear to have had any ploughed land, and that in small quantities. In other words, enclosure in Great Linford had turned almost the whole of the parish down to pasture and this was leased out to prosperous tenants, several of whom had no obvious connection with the parish but instead were butchers, graziers and dairymen concerned with supplying the London market.

There was no marked homogeneity among these fourteen tenants. They ranged from John Gilpin, who paid £120 a year for 113 acres of pasture divided into four closes, to Richard Haire, who paid £48 a year for 83 acres, of which 57 were in one field, the Horse Ground. But the difference between Gilpin and Haire was as nothing compared to the difference between this group of tenants and the next, twenty cottagers who between them paid a total of £23 8s 8d a year. They included six day labourers, a coachman, two women, one of whom was a lacemaker, Henry Knight, who had been Mr Gilpin's pasture keeper and was now old and poor and paid nothing, a blacksmith, a shepherd and a carpenter. Enclosure in Great Linford had served to sharpen the social and economic differences between well-to-do tenant farmers on the one hand, and agricultural labourers and the poor on the other.

The impact of enclosure upon Great Linford in the late seventeenth century is unlikely to have been unique. It is merely better documented than most of the villages of north Buckinghamshire, and differences in their experiences are likely to have been differences of scale rather than of substance.

Enclosure could mean the gradual dispersal of farmsteads away from the village into the comparative isolation of the newly enclosed lands. This development probably took place more slowly than that dispersal of settlement which followed Parliamentary enclosure, but it was very real nonetheless. Knowlhill Farm and Muxwell Hill Farm in Middle Claydon both owe their origin to the enclosure carried out by Sir Edmund Verney in the early seventeenth century. Tenants could sometimes be attracted to take up leases of the newly enclosed lands if houses were erected for them, so that, when the constable of Middle Claydon made return to the High Constable of Ashendon Hundred in 1634 concerning the conversion of tillage to pasture he could write that, although Sir Edmund Verney had converted between 30

⁴⁹ Buckinghamshire CRO D/A/GT Box 6.

⁵⁰ Buckinghamshire CRO DU/4/10.

and 40 acres of land to pasture there had been no decay of houses in the parish, 'for though there be some howses downe yett there are more erected in theyr places'.⁵¹

The impact of enclosure upon the demography of individual townships is particularly difficult to assess, and that for two reasons: first of all each village community has its own unique history, and enclosure is but one of the variables, and one which cannot effectively be isolated save in the most obvious instances where there is definite documentary evidence to show that enclosure was rapidly followed by depopulation. It is the long-term impact of enclosure which it is almost impossible to assess satisfactorily. The second reason is the absence of reliable demographic statistics. Two ecclesiastical surveys, one for 1563 purporting to be a count of the number of families and the second for 1676 a count of communicants, provide the basis for estimates of total population numbers at those dates.⁵² Both present very real problems of interpretation, and the information that they yield cannot be pressed very far. Unfortunately there is no further source from which to estimate population before the census of 1801. It would be possible to link these population estimates for individual parishes by the aggregative analysis of their registers, where they survive, but this is too complex a task to be done within the confines of this paper. Nevertheless it is clear that only a small handful of villages were severely affected by depopulation in north Buckinghamshire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Stowe, Wotton Underwood, Gayhurst, Boarstall; and the first three were the consequence of aristocratic taste in landscape gardening rather than any desire to replace arable by pastoral husbandry.

Enclosure during the period under consideration did not lead to any large-scale depopulation. Its impact upon the demographic history of individual townships was diffuse and indirect. It seems to have been but one of a large number of factors at work, and to assess the relative importance of all of these in any one township over a period of two hundred years would require research at microscopic level.

VI

This paper has been concerned first of all to draw attention to the importance of pre-Parliamentary enclosure in north Buckinghamshire. Of 138 parishes within the region, 52 were entirely enclosed without Act of Parliament, and of the other 86 there is incontrovertible evidence for at least half of them of enclosure during this period and before the passage of their enclosure Acts of Parliament. All of the parishes within which this pre-Parliamentary enclosure took place are indicated on Fig 1, although because of the nature of the documentary evidence it is impossible either to give any kind of indication as to the areas of land involved or to provide any more precise dating.

Secondly it has been concerned to draw attention to the importance of enclosure by agreement during this period. The enclosures listed by the various commissions of enquiry during the period 1517 to 1607 have long been known and it is now well apparent that they record only a small part of the enclosure that took place between 1500 and 1750. Quite by 1550 the practice of enclosing by means of an agreement amongst all the proprietors involved had been adopted, and this may well have become the most usual form for enclosure upon any scale. Our detailed knowledge of individual enclosure agreements must depend either upon the survival of the original articles of agreement or else upon their being recorded for some purpose in a court of law. In the absence of both of these sources we cannot tell whether or not the enclosure recorded in other

⁵¹ Buckinghamshire CRO Claydon Correspondence, microfilm, Reel 2.

⁵² W H Summers, 'Population Returns for Buckinghamshire, 1676', *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 8 (1903), pp 146-52. J Cornwall, 'An Elizabethan Census', *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 16 Part 4 (1959), pp 258-73.

documents was by agreement or not. It is for this reason that no attempt has been made to differentiate the type or method of enclosure on Fig 1. For some villages the glebe terriers tell us approximately when enclosure took place. Pitchcott, for example, was enclosed between 1664 and 1690; Lathbury was 'lately enclosed' in 1674; and Cuddington was part enclosed by 1703. Much other enclosure was taking place without any kind of written record at all, and our knowledge of it must depend upon the chance survival of casual references in a wide range of documentary sources. For some villages there is not even this. There is no indication at all as to when either Worminghall or Shabbington were enclosed.

Thirdly, it has attempted to indicate that, like Parliamentary enclosure, enclosure carried out by whatever means during this period could affect waste, common and woodland as well as arable, and that it could have the same or very similar effects upon the landscape of individual villages.

In Maids Moreton and Padbury, north Buckinghamshire has two of the classic examples of the Midland open field system as it had developed by the end of the sixteenth century.⁵³ Both parishes were taken up with huge open fields divided into thousands of strips. There were less than 100 acres of enclosures in Maids Moreton in 1595, and none in Padbury in 1591. Both remained unchanged until enclosure by Act of Parliament in the late eighteenth century. They must be considered the exception rather than the rule for northern Buckinghamshire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

⁵³ See M W Beresford, *History on the Ground* (1957), pp 65-86 and M W Beresford and J K St Joseph, *Medieval England* (second edn, 1979), p 31.

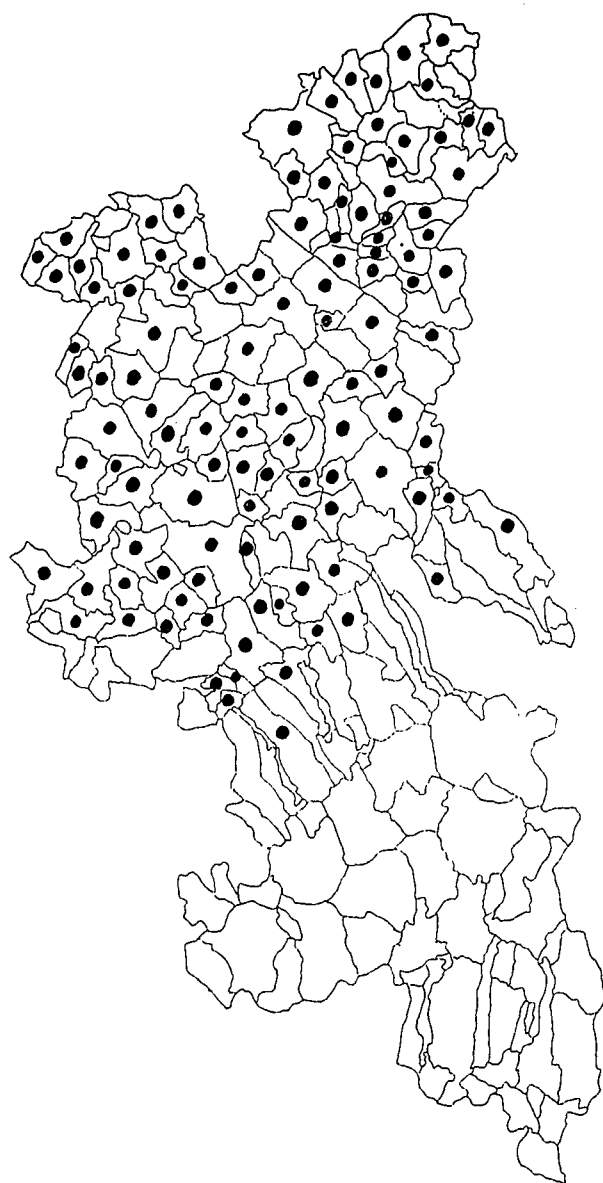


FIGURE I
Parishes in which pre-Parliamentary enclosure is recorded