

Pre-Conquest Woodland: its Distribution and Usage*

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Abstract

This study demonstrates the extent of the regeneration of woodland after the Roman period, and employs place-name evidence to identify the territorial linkages between midland woodlands and more southerly estates, which were based upon their significance as pastures. Woodland's importance as a resource was indicated by its deliberate management for timber, fuel, and coppice from the seventh century, in addition to pasturage for pigs and horses. The evidence of Anglo-Saxon charters is cited to reinforce doubts as to the quality of the Domesday record of woodland and its use, and the study cites place-name and other evidence to demonstrate that hunting and the use of woods as game reserves were more important before the eleventh century than has previously been recognized.

ONLY a few decades ago many aspects of settlement history were apparently inspired by conceptions of frontier settlement by the American pioneers – groups of hardy settlers – in this case, Anglo-Saxons – establishing their stockaded villages in river valleys and subsequently pushing into a relatively untouched, woodland environment, gradually planting 'daughter' settlements as they proceeded. This view has been regaled with disdain by more recent prehistorians, as aerial photography has revealed evidence of extensive field systems, and hence widespread clearance, throughout eastern and southern England, so much so that woodland has been almost ousted from the scene. Those more closely concerned with the Anglo-Saxon period, however, especially in the West Midlands, have stubbornly refused to concede that all woodland had vanished¹ and now the

wheel seems almost to have turned full circle in some regions, with the scenario recently proposed for Kent by Professor Alan Everitt² who sees the presence of woodland as fundamental to the early English settlement pattern of that county.

Upon the basis of several types of evidence, archaeological, place-name and topographical, he envisages a series of initial 'Jutish' estates being founded in the coastal foothill region of north Kent and in the vale of Holmesdale further inland. From these, further settlements were established, first on the then-wooded Downland and subsequently within the interior Weald itself. Evidence of the early connections between the home estates and their associated woodland is preserved for us in a number of Kentish charters. One hears, for instance, of the *Weowerawealde*, 'the wood of the men of Wye', and of the *Limenwearawealde*, 'the wood of the men of the Lymne region', in an early eighth-century charter,³ while the reference to *ðæm ðenbærum in limen wero wealdo 7 in burh waro uualdo*, 'the swine pastures in the

* This paper is based upon research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council whose support is gratefully acknowledged.

¹ For an excellent description of Old English woodland, see D P Kirby, 'The Old English Forest', in T Rowley (ed), *Anglo-Saxon Settlement and Landscape*. British Archaeological Reports, Br ser 6, Oxford, 1974, pp 120–30.

² A Everitt, *Continuity and Colonization: the Evolution of Kentish Settlement*, Leicester, 1986.

³ P H Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography*, 1968, S 1180; W de Gray Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, 3 vols and index, 1885–99, B 141a.

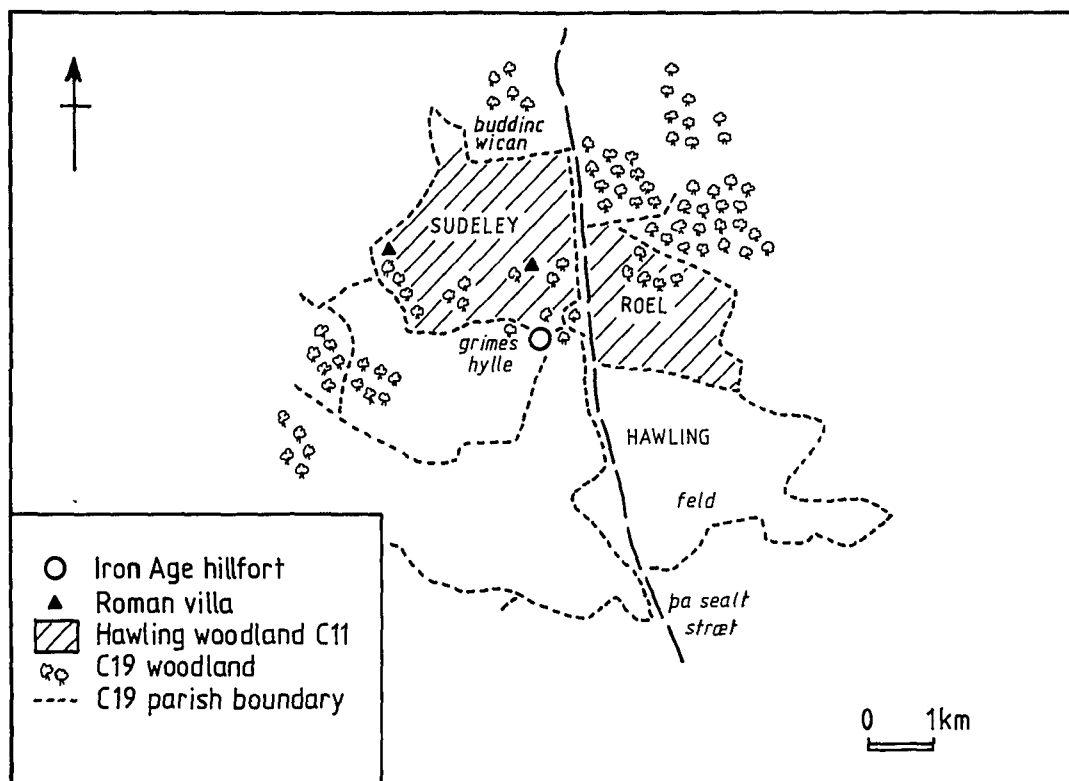


FIGURE 1
The pre-Conquest woodland of Hawling, Gloucestershire

wood of the men of the Lymne region and in the wood of Canterbury',⁴ clearly indicates the usage of these woodland tracts.⁵

Without reinstating the concept of the survival of primeval woodland, there is little doubt that it is possible to identify regions in which woodland was relatively plentiful in early medieval England. In many areas, woodland regeneration seems to have occurred after the end of the Roman period. Roman villa sites lie within the documented bounds of the woodland of Hawling in Gloucestershire (Fig 1), and in Hampshire and Wiltshire Celtic fields and associated enclosures lie well within later woodland which had apparently re-established itself by the middle of the

Anglo-Saxon period at least.⁶ In some cases this may have been related to a degree of economic collapse and perhaps a sharp decrease in population numbers, in others to a changing agricultural economy, but undoubtedly much marginal land went out of cultivation, reverting either to pasture or woodland.

There are some regions in which woodland regeneration may have been actively encouraged for political reasons and it may not be entirely coincidental that the frontiers of some German provinces were also characterized by belts of dense woodland.⁷ In England this seems to have been the case along almost the entire boundary of

⁴ S 125, B 248.

⁵ K P Witney, *The Jutish Forest: a Study of the Weald of Kent from 450 to 1380 AD*, 1976.

⁶ D Hooke in preparation 'The landscape regions of south-central England'.

⁷ W Metz, 'Das "gehagio regis" der Langobarden und die deutschen Hagenortsnamen', in *Beiträge zur Namensforschung in Verbindung mit Ernst Dickenmann*, herausgegeben von Hans Krahe, Band 5, Heidelberg, 1954.

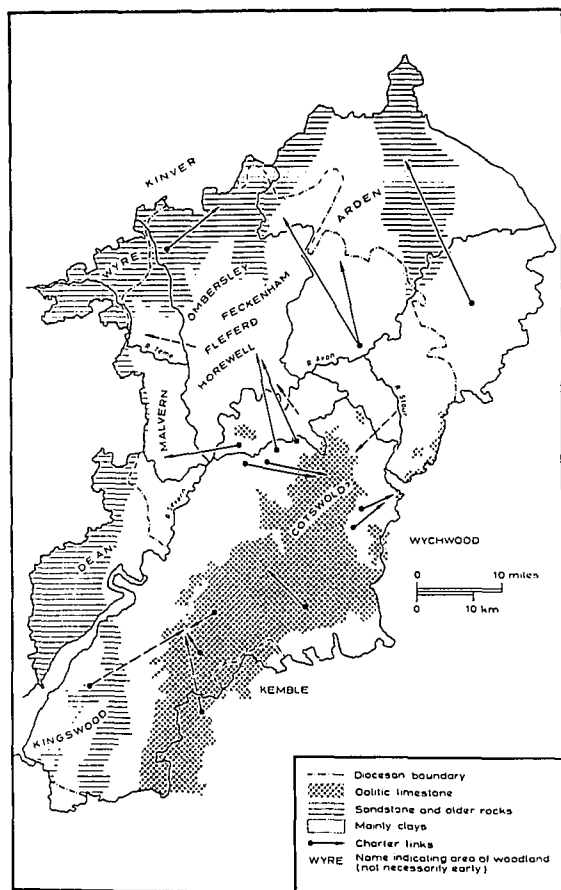


FIGURE 2

The kingdom of the Hwicce: pre-Conquest woodlands and medieval forests.

Source: D Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: the Kingdom of the Hwicce*, Manchester, 1985.

the Hwiccan kingdom, which comprised most of the present-day counties of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, together with the western part of Warwickshire (Fig 2).⁸ Along its northern boundary with Greater Mercia (now the boundary of Staffordshire) lay the later forests of Morfe and Kinver, while within its western boundary lay the woodlands of Wyr, then the more extensive *Weogorena leage*, extending southwards into the region of the later Malvern and Corse Forests before reaching

the river Severn. Beyond, to the south-west, lay the later Forest of Dean. On the southern boundary of the kingdom, the wood of Kemble lay within the basin of the Upper Thames, and beyond its south-eastern boundary lay Wychwood, now in Oxfordshire. To complete the circuit, the boundary with Greater Mercia ran through the middle of the Warwickshire Arden. Similarly, the Magonsætan kingdom in Herefordshire and Shropshire was marked by thickly wooded countryside along its northern boundary with the Wreocensætan in Shropshire.⁹ Many such examples can be cited, among them the great Forest of Selwood which ran along the western bounds of Wiltshire and for long marked the western fringe of Anglo-Saxon settlement in the south-west.

I

One aspect of woodland usage which is of particular interest to rural historians is the utilization of resources revealed in the territorial links between cultivated regions and wooded areas. In Kent, Witney, Everitt and others have been able to show that the woodlands were linked in a system of transhumance, in which they provided pasture which was used seasonally by the riverine and coastal estates. Everitt¹⁰ traces a pattern of drove-ways across Kent which influenced the subsequent pattern of settlement, communications and parish demarcation. Such links are equally clear in Warwickshire and have been examined by Ford.¹¹ The linkage here may have been initially one of transhumance, and a similar pattern of routeways runs across Warwickshire from the wooded Arden to the more heavily cultivated Feldon, some of them

⁸ D Hooke, 'Early units of government in Herefordshire and Shropshire', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 5, D Brown, J Campbell and S C Hawkes (eds), Oxford, forthcoming.

¹⁰ Everitt, *op cit*.

¹¹ W J Ford, 'Settlement patterns in the central region of the Warwickshire Avon', in P H Sawyer (ed), *Medieval Settlement: Continuity and Change*, 1976, pp 274-94.

⁹ D Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: the Kingdom of the Hwicce*, Manchester 1985.

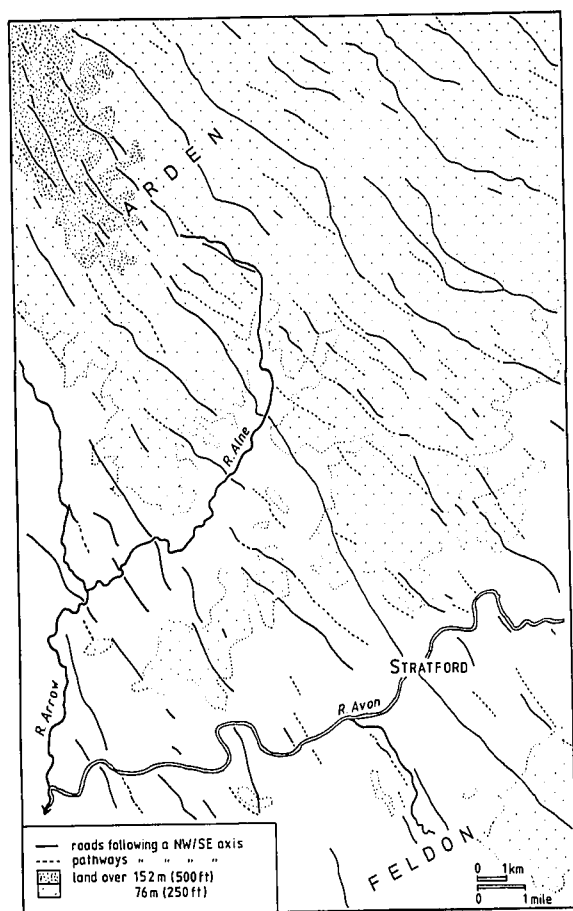


FIGURE 3
Warwickshire trackways linking the Arden and Feldon

referred to in pre-Conquest charters (Fig 3).¹²

The wooded nature of Arden in the Anglo-Saxon period is indisputable. Even in the Roman period, tile and pottery kilns were established to make use of the abundant fuel, and pre-Conquest charters sometimes refer specifically to parcels of woodland here being granted with more southerly estates. Thus a very early eighth-century charter¹³ granted woodland at

Nuthurst in Warwickshire and at King's Norton in north Worcestershire with an estate at Shotton in the Avon valley. Place-names confirm, especially in the distribution of the *lēah* term, the wooded nature of Arden in the Anglo-Saxon period. Permanent vaccaries and granges must soon have replaced seasonal shielings but the territorial links were to survive long enough to become fossilized in administrative links – detached parts of hundreds, manorial connections such as that between the southernmost Feldon estate of Brailes with Tanworth in Arden, and ecclesiastical dependencies between mother and daughter churches. A close scrutiny of the pre-Conquest charter evidence for Worcestershire permits the recognition of a similar pattern of territorial linkages throughout the northern part of the Hwiccan kingdom¹⁴ and there are hints of a similar arrangement within the Magonsætan kingdom to the west.¹⁵

II

The territorial linkages of the kind noted above seem to have been founded upon the utilization of woodland as pasture. This is most often described as a provision for herds of swine, and many pre-Conquest charters refer to swine-pastures or the right to mast. Some of the best-known references are to the *den-bæra* of the Weald, which will not be enumerated here, those attached to Borstal, south of Rochester, said to lie in *commune saltu*, 'in the wood for common use'.¹⁶ Privileges granted to the bishop of Worcester for an estate at Bentley in Worcestershire in 855 included freedom *a pascua porcorum re[g]is quod nominamus fearnleswe*, 'from the pasturing of the king's swine which we call "fern-past-

¹² D Hooke, *Anglo-Saxon Landscapes of the West Midlands: the Charter Evidence*, British Archaeological Reports, Br ser 95, Oxford, 1981.

¹³ S 64, B 123.

¹⁴ Hooke 1985, *op cit*, pp. 78–88.

¹⁵ D Hooke, *Anglo-Saxon Territorial Organization: the Western Margins of Mercia*, University of Birmingham, Department of Geography Occasional Publication No 22, 1986.

¹⁶ S 165, B 339.

king's swine which we call "fern-pasture".¹⁷ Disputes sometimes arose over such rights, as in 825, between an earlier bishop of Worcester and the swine-reeve of the king, over *wudu leswe to su tune ongægum west on scirhylte*, 'wood-pasture at Sinton, towards the west in Scirhylte'.¹⁸ *Swin sceade* and *mæstredenne* are other terms used in charters to refer to such rights of pannage. The use of woodland for swine-pasture stands out in the Domesday survey to such an extent that in southern England woodland is entered in the record according to its swine-rent.¹⁹ Other domestic stock, however, such as cattle, horses, goats, and even sheep, could be pastured in woods.

Many long-distance links had become merely administrative by the late Anglo-Saxon period but still Domesday entries refer specifically to *silua pastilis*, and many large woodland tracts seem to have served as regions of intercommoning for surrounding villas before boundaries were rigidly demarcated. The Forest of Needwood in Staffordshire was used in this way and the Forest of Neroche in Somerset served villas as much as twelve miles away. In the Domesday survey, such woodland is frequently entered under the name of the head manor and this has meant that its presence at that date has not always been accurately shown on distribution maps. Parcels of woodland on the Malvern foothills, for instance, were held by estates situated to the east across the Severn and do not appear in Domesday. The estate of Berrow, for example, was a dependent manor of Overbury on the Worcestershire/Gloucestershire border and the Arden estate of Tanworth in Warwickshire, a dependent manor of Brailes, has already been noted.

There are several place-name terms which seem to relate specifically to such

practices, including the *dens*, or swine-pastures, of Kent. *Stede*, a term which also shows a concentration in south-eastern England, has been studied by Sandred²⁰ who believes it was most usually applied to 'pasture (probably enclosed)'. In Hampshire, at least, the term occurs most frequently on the fringe of wooded areas and Fig 4 shows a sample area which lay within the forest of Bere-Ashley in medieval times. Today the area is known as the Forest of Hursley. After disafforestation several deer-parks were established here, a number of them recorded by the thirteenth century,²¹ but large tracts of woodland survive and, in addition, several extensive areas of common pasture. Three *stede* names appear on the map: Slackstead, Silkstead and Hawstead, all referring to settlements tucked in against woodland near parish boundaries.

Woodland, of course, had other uses and there is little doubt that it was being managed to a certain extent by the seventh century. At that date the Laws of Ine instituted penalties for the destruction of timber trees: 'If anyone destroys a tree in a wood by fire; and it becomes known who did it, he shall pay a full fine. He shall pay 60 shillings, because fire is a thief'.²² For the felling of trees by other means the fine was 30 shillings for three trees. The number of times that parcels of woodland were granted in charters also illustrates the role it played in the regional economy. Sometimes woodland rights are specified, as in an early tenth-century charter of Elmstone Hardwick in Gloucestershire, which included the lease of *ða wudu rædenne in ðæm wuda ðe ða ceorlas brucaþ*, 'the right of cutting timber in the wood which the peasants enjoy',²³ and another

¹⁷ S 206, B 487.

¹⁸ S 1437, B 386.

¹⁹ H C Darby, *Domesday England*, Cambridge, 1977, pp 172-4.

²⁰ K I Sandred, *English Place-Names in -stead*, Uppsala, 1963.

²¹ L Cantor, *The Medieval Parks of England*, Loughborough 1983, pp 34-5.

²² F L Attenborough (1922), *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, Cambridge, pp 50-1; Ine, c. 43.

²³ S 1283, B 560.

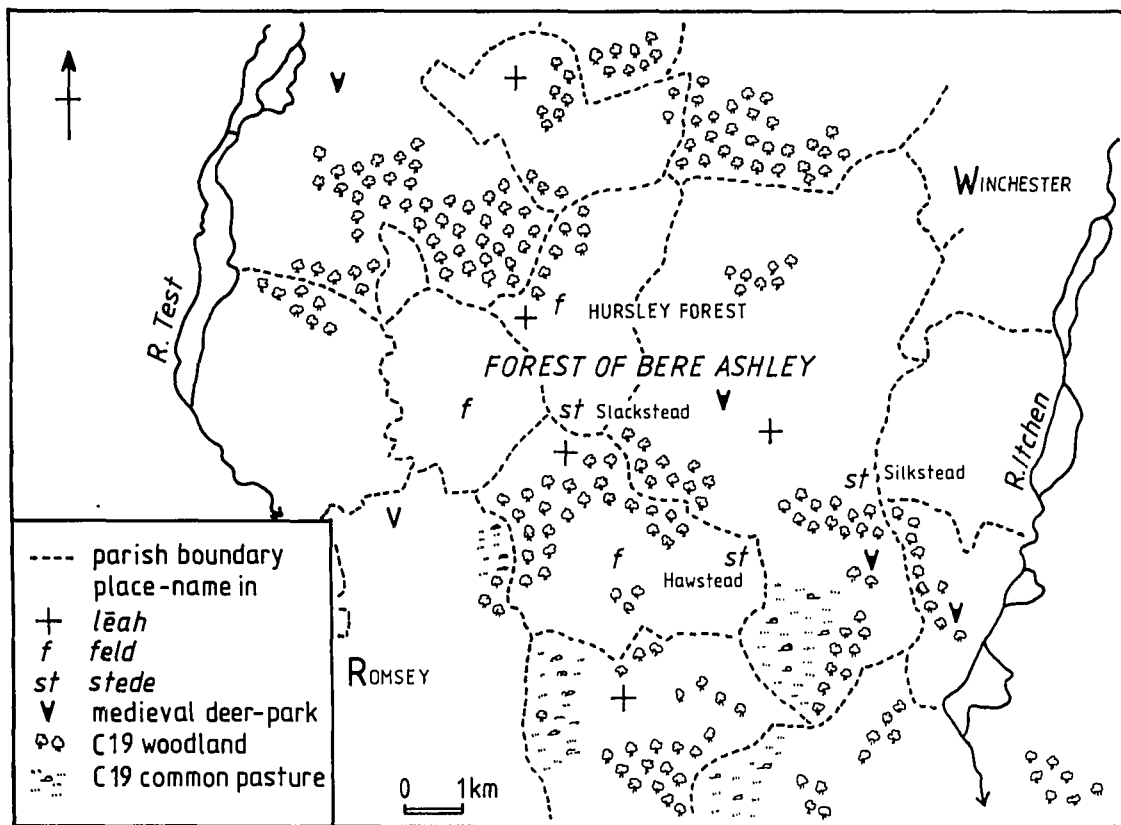


FIGURE 4
Stede place-names in Hursley Forest, Hampshire

tenth-century lease of Thorne in Inkberrow, Worcestershire, which ordered that *seo wudung on gemænan grafe to þordune*, 'the right of cutting wood in the common copse [shall belong] to Thorne';²⁴ another of Seckley in Wolverley, Worcestershire, dating from 866, notes not only pasturage for swine but 'five wainloads of good brushwood, one oak annually and other timber necessary for building, firewood sufficient for his needs and other rights in woodland and open land pertaining to the two *manentes*'.²⁵

Archaeological evidence is now revealing details of a form of building construction in post-Roman times peculiar to Britain, apparently drawing upon both

British and Continental traditions.²⁶ Some of the buildings were particularly impressive, among them the thegnly hall found at Cowdrey's Down, Hampshire, which formed the focus of the seventh-century settlement.²⁷ Shingling for roofs has been found in eleventh-century levels at Winchester and carpentry was sufficiently skilled to produce not only relatively sophisticated buildings but such fine objects as the lyre and maplewood cups of Sutton Hoo, and the flutes in carved applewood and hawthorn from the Danish levels at York.²⁸ Carpenters' tools have

²⁴ S 1305, B 1110.

²⁵ S 212, B 513.

²⁶ S James, A Marshall, and M Millett, 'An early medieval building tradition', *Archaeological Journal*, 141, 1984, pp 182-215.

²⁷ M Millett with S James, 'Excavations at Cowdrey's Down Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1978-81', *Arch Jnl*, 140, 1983, pp 151-279.

²⁸ D M Wilson, 'Craft and industry', in D M Wilson (ed), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, 1976, pp 253-82.

been found, mainly on three sites in Durham, Cambridgeshire and Yorkshire, where ninth/tenth-century levels yielded hammers, adzes, boring-bits, a gouge, a plane, a draw-knife, saws and a wedge. It was, however, the axe which was the basic tool both for felling the trees and lopping the trunks and for forming the wedges used to split the trunk.²⁹

Although woodland was especially plentiful in Worcestershire, covering over half of the land area,³⁰ in that county it had to supply both domestic and industrial needs, for Droitwich was the great inland salt-producing area and enormous quantities of timber were required to fire the ovens where evaporation of the saline liquid took place. A tenth-century charter of Bentley, Holt, includes *siluam necessarium on Bradanleage ad illam præparationem salis*, 'the woodland at Bradley necessary for the preparation of salt',³¹ and the location of places possessing salt rights, many of which, in payment, evidently sent timber to Droitwich, suggests that wood was obtained from a wide area, even beyond the frontiers of the Hwiccan kingdom.³² In Herefordshire, Leominster and Much Marcle held salt privileges which were directly related to the manorial woodland, although in 1086 both were paying 5 shillings each to buy wood in Droitwich for their salt. In the case of Leominster this money was drawn from its own woodlands. There was also an additional render there of 8 shillings for salt, which may represent the commutation of a former service of carting wood to Droitwich to be used as fuel for the saltworks.³³

Similarly, a ninth-century charter of Lenham in Kent³⁴ notes that the wood of Blean in Kent provided cartloads of wood for the manufacture of salt. Here coastal evaporation had been practised on a large scale in the late Iron Age and Roman periods in the northern salt marshes and was still recorded in the Domesday survey.³⁵ In Worcestershire, charcoal may have been used in salt manufacture, for several *colford* crossings of rivers are noted near Droitwich.³⁶ A charter of Apsley Guise in Bedfordshire, dating from 969, seems to refer to *þone ealdan coll pytt* which may have been a reference to a charcoal-pit,³⁷ although other translations are possible.

III

Less is known about the practical management of woodland in the pre-Conquest period. There is a charter reference to a *coppeden ac*, 'a copped oak-tree'³⁸ but rather more to 'copped thorns'.³⁹ *Copped* in the sense of 'polled, without a top', occurs in later-recorded place-names as at Cobdenhill and Copthorne, both in Hertfordshire, both referring to *þorn*, 'a thorn-tree', Copdock in Suffolk (an oak-tree) (1195), and Cowbeach in Sussex (*bece*, 'a beech-tree'). At Coppet in Herefordshire and Copster in Lancashire the reference may be to woods of pollarded trees.⁴⁰ Such trees are also shown in a well-known Anglo-Saxon calendar representation.⁴¹

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ O Rackham, *Ancient Woodland: its History, Vegetation and Uses in England*, 1980, p 115.

³¹ S 1301, B 1087.

³² D Hooke, 'The Droitwich salt industry: an examination of the West Midland charter evidence', *A-S Stu Arch Hist*, 2, D Brown, J Campbell and S C Hawkes (eds), Oxford 1981, pp 123-69.

³³ H Round, 'Introduction to the Herefordshire Domesday', in W Page (ed), *VCH Hereford* Vol 1, 1968, p 295; Domesday Book, fos 180, 179b.

³⁴ S 324, B 854.

³⁵ A Miles, 'Salt-panning in Romano-British Kent', in K W de Brisay and K A Evans (eds), *Salt, the Study of an Ancient Industry*, Colchester, 1975, pp 26-30; H C Darby, *op cit*, pp 265, 267.

³⁶ Hooke 1981, *op cit*.

³⁷ O Rackham, *The History of the Countryside*, 1986, p 81; S 722, B 1229.

³⁸ S 359, B 594 (Stoke by Hurstbourne, Hampshire).

³⁹ S 645, B 994 (Battersea, Surrey); S 351, B 740 (Worthy, Hampshire); S 566, B 909 (Alwalton, Huntingdonshire); these features are now listed in *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*, Dictionary of Old English Project, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, 1938-.

⁴⁰ A H Smith, *English Place-Name Elements, Part I*, E Place-Name S 25, Cambridge 1956.

⁴¹ Anglo-Saxon Calendar, B L Cotton Tiberius B V.

The various terms used in place-names certainly seem to indicate different types of woodland, although it is difficult today to know precisely how these terms were used. Because *holt* usually occurs with a specific species of tree, it has been taken to indicate a wood containing only one species.⁴² *Āholt*, 'oakwood', is common, but ash, lime, beech and wych elm also appear in this context. It probably indicated a managed wood, and there are several names combining *holt* with OE *spere*, 'a spear shaft', indicating 'a wood where (shafts for) spears are got', such as *Spars-holt* which occurs as an estate-name in Berkshire and in Hampshire. Similarly, *Throckenholt*, in Cambridgeshire, indicates 'a wood where throcks were got', a *þroc* being a 'prop, support', as in ploughshares and perhaps, also, trestle tables. The same Anglo-Saxon calendar referred to above shows timber being collected from the woods and in one scene stakes seem to be being hardened in the fire before being used for building. The calendar pictures also show, however, woodland and rough ground being cleared and assarted, and we are reminded of the Old English poem which describes the ploughman as *harholtes feond*, 'the gray enemy of the wood'.⁴³

A number of pre-conquest (probably eleventh century) documents refer briefly to the management of estate woodlands. An estate memorandum notes that an estate forester 'ought to have every tree brought down by the wind' but gives no other indication of his duties, while the swineherd who had to 'drive his herd to the mast-pasture' was presumably familiar with the woods.⁴⁴ The tenants of Hurstbourne Priors had to supply fother of split wood and poles of fencing as rent, stacking it in their own time.⁴⁵ Some

indication of the seasons in which work was carried out is given, for the estate reeve had to cut wood in summer and autumn and chop wood in winter. The calendar picture again seems to show the trees being cut down in summer and it is the November scene which depicts timber posts being heated in a fire. Although archaeological excavation may reveal more about timber techniques there is little descriptive detail in the literature about matters with which almost every peasant in Anglo-Saxon England would have been familiar.

IV

Place-name terms indicating the presence of woodland include the term *lēah*. This is said to be derived from an Indo-European root meaning 'light, shining', but the nearest direct equivalent is the Old High German *lōh*, 'a grove, bush-grown clearing', which implies a similar meaning to that suggested for OE *lēah*: 'a woodland with glades'.⁴⁶ The term may often have had a meaning closely related to economic usage as 'land used for woodland pasture', and was most frequent upon the edges of dense woodland rather than within it.⁴⁷ A Worcestershire charter reference explains that two *lēah* features in Salwarpe were actually woods for the estate boundary ran *betwenan ac wudu 7 wulle lea. 7 swa æfre betwux þam twam wudan in alra broc*, 'between ac wudu and wulle lea and so continuing between the two woods to Alder Brook'.⁴⁸ It may be noted, too, how *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* claims that in 477 a Saxon expedition into Sussex slew many Britons, 'and drove some into flight into the wood which is called *Andredesleag*',

⁴² M Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, 1984, p 196.

⁴³ *The Exeter Book*, Part II, ed W S Mackie, *EETS* 194, 1934, No 21.

⁴⁴ F Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols, Halle, 1903-16, I, pp 444-55.

⁴⁵ S 359, B 594.

⁴⁶ C Johansson, *Old English Place-Names Containing Lēah*, Stockholm, 1975, p 8.

⁴⁷ M Gelling, 'Some notes on Warwickshire place-names', *Trans Birm War Arch Soc*, 86, 1974, p 68.

⁴⁸ S 1596, B 362.

referring to the Weald.⁴⁹ This woodland took its name from the fort of *Anderitum*, Pevensey, meaning 'great ford', but the name of the wood, *Andret*, survived into the eleventh century when it was applied to the New Forest in Hampshire.⁵⁰ The wood was said to extend over 120 miles from west to east and 30 miles from north to south.⁵¹

Woodland was not confined to the margins of the Hwiccan kingdom for it was also noted across the whole north-western section of the region, particularly in the pastoral areas of the Warwickshire Arden, north-west Worcestershire, and, in Gloucestershire, in the Severn Valley and up and over the scarp of the Cotswolds.⁵² There is nothing in this region which contradicts an interpretation of *lēah* as 'woodland pasture' and many *lēah* places were flourishing manors by the time of the Domesday survey. The term is, however, largely absent from the more heavily cultivated Feldon regions, the Vale of Evesham and south-east Gloucestershire. It is difficult today to imagine the appearance of the Anglo-Saxon landscape. Although parts of Worcestershire in the vicinity of the Wyre Forest, in particular, are still well-wooded, this is now largely an open, pastoral or arable county.

Pre-Conquest charters, however, help to reconstruct this earlier landscape. They may suggest that an estate was being carved out of an area of woodland, and occasionally state that an estate actually lay 'in a wooded place' or was itself an area of woodland.⁵³ Wood can readily be detected in the landmarks used in boundary clauses for the same terms occur as are

used in settlement place-names: *grāf*, *hangra*, *holt*, *wudu*, *hurst*, *wald*, *fyrhð* etc. It should not be overlooked that rights to woodland were often granted amongst the appurtenances of the estates being granted or leased and that these were rather more than mere scribal formulae. Normally, these rights in woodland are simply referred to as *siluis*, but *siluiunculis*, 'small woods', are specified at Upper Stratford in the central Avon valley of Warwickshire. The *saltibus* of Wootton Wawen, Warwickshire, and *saltuumque densitatibus* of Steeple Ashton, Wiltshire, may have represented denser woodland⁵⁴ and *silvarumque densitatibus* occurs in a number of Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire charters.⁵⁵ Other variants in the charters of southern England include several references to *nemorum*, *nemoribus*, 'groves'. Even when other rights are specified (usually fields, meadows and pasture), woodland seems often to be omitted in certain areas where it was scarce and the scribal formulae were obviously based upon some recognition of reality. The 'groves' described with their own boundary clauses at *Genenofre* and at Bredons Norton in Worcestershire⁵⁶ were obviously seen as specific areas of woodland of limited extent.

Anglo-Saxon charters are particularly important where they reveal inadequacies in the Domesday data. Very little woodland is entered on the manors of Horner Hundred in the Berkshire folios. This hundred lay within the great bend of the River Thames to the north of Abingdon, an area now taken into the county of Oxfordshire, and most of it had been acquired by the abbey of Abingdon. Indeed, the area may have originally borne a woodland name for the abbey claims to have obtained the large estate of *Æaromundeslee* (*lēah* with a

⁴⁹ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, C. Plummer (ed), Oxford, 1892, pp 14-15.

⁵⁰ A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, 1979, pp 250-2; J. Munby (ed), *Domesday Book*, 4, Hampshire, Chichester, 1982, 17, 4; *Domesday Book*, fo. 44b.

⁵¹ Plummer (ed), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, AD 893, pp 84-5.

⁵² Hooke, 1985, *op cit*.

⁵³ D. Hooke, 'The Anglo-Saxon landscape', in T. R. Slater and P. J. Jarvis (eds), *Field and Forest: an Historical Geography of Warwickshire and Worcestershire*, Norwich, 1982, pp 96-7.

⁵⁴ S 94, B 157; S 727, B 1127.

⁵⁵ E.g. S 474, B 768.

⁵⁶ S 1374, J. M. Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, 6 vols, 1839-48, K 681; S 1405, J. Earle, *A Hand-book to the Land-Charters and other Saxon Documents*, Oxford, 1888, pp 247-8.

personal name) from King Ine in 687;⁵⁷ but this was a troubled frontier region between Mercia and Wessex in the eighth century and these early charters are fabrications, even if they are based on authentic early gifts. Later charters of estates in this area also abound in *lēah* names and it is clear that woodland extended southwards from the present Wytham Great Wood and was particularly dense on the ridge formed by Kimmeridge Clays and Greensand deposits which culminates in *abbedun*, Æbba's hill, now Boar's Hill, which gave its name to the minster estate to the south.⁵⁸ Some woodland still remains: *ydyrleage*, *wadleahe* and *plumleage*, with *wroththangran*, are now represented by Wytham Great Wood, *catleage*, *preosta leage* and *riscleahe* by Hen Wood and associated pockets of woodland, while *bacgan leah* is now Bagley Wood.⁵⁹ Yet none of these appear in the Domesday folios.

Given that woodland is noted for the majority of counties covered by the Domesday survey, it is not difficult to recognize heavily wooded counties when the woodland is entered by dimension, but it is considerably harder to estimate the amount of woodland present in those counties in which woodland is entered according to its swine rent. Some doubt also remains about the full coverage of woodland which had been taken into the king's forest by 1086.

V

'Forest' is a legal term of Norman introduction and it is well-known that enormous areas of land were officially declared subject to forest law under the Norman kings. The importance of hunting in Anglo-Saxon England, however, may well have

been under-estimated, partly because the Laws of Cnut which refer to hunting are known to have been added to after the Norman Conquest⁶⁰ and cannot therefore be taken to be reliable. Hunting rights could, however, be specifically mentioned in charters, and a tenth-century lease of Grimley, Worcestershire, for instance, included amongst the appurtenances of the estate *siluis uenationibus*, 'woods for hunting'.⁶¹ Such rights are found as far afield as *Myletun*, near Kemsing in Kent, recorded in 822⁶² and Benham in central Berkshire, recorded in 956.⁶³ Certain manors were firmly associated with hunting, probably maintaining royal lodges, and *illa uenatione uilla quæ Saxonice dicitur Bicanleag*, 'that hunting vill which is called by the Saxons Bickleigh', referred to in 904,⁶⁴ appears to have been Bickleigh in Devon.

There is ample evidence in the contemporary literature of the type of animals hunted. Ælfric, writing in the later tenth century when in charge of a monastic school at Cerne Abbas in Dorset, states of the hunting of wild boar: *Hundas bedrifon hyne to me, and ic þær, togeanes standende, færllice ofstikode hyne*, 'the dogs drive it towards me, and I stick it quickly, standing there in its path'⁶⁵ (the boar was noted for its formidable tusks). Charters are full of references to the hart (stag), the hind, and the roe-deer, and Ælfric again quotes: *Heortas ic gefenge on nettum*, 'stags I catch in nets'.⁶⁶ Wolves were also hunted. They were vicious predators of domestic livestock but their coats were also of value. There are many references to wolf pits in charters, used presumably to trap these animals. The same method seems to have

⁵⁷ S 239, B 100.

⁵⁸ M Gelling, 'The hill of Abingdon', *Oxoniensia*, 22, 1957, pp 54-62.

⁵⁹ The main charters for this area are S 673, B 1047; S 614, B 971; S 590, B 932; S 663, B 1002; S 757, B 1222; S 567, B 906; S 605, B 924; S 858, K 1283.

⁶⁰ F Liebermann, *op cit*, II, p 185.

⁶¹ S 1370, B 1139.

⁶² S 186, B 370.

⁶³ S 591, B 942.

⁶⁴ S 372, B 613.

⁶⁵ Ælfric, *Colloquium ad pueros lingua latine locutione exercendis ab Ælfrico compilatum*, *Analecta-Saxonica*, B Thorpe (ed), 1846, p 22.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

been used to catch foxes, while beavers, otters, hares, wildcats and martens were also hunted. None of these animals is restricted to a woodland habitat but most of them were more prolific in the wilder parts of the countryside and deer, at least, prefer to have ample woodland for cover. The woods also provided honey from wild bees and numerous 'Honey Brooks' are recorded, especially in Worcestershire.

There is one particular term, however, occurring in pre-Conquest charters which seems to have been connected mainly with hunting. This is the term *haga* and its relevance has frequently been overlooked, Rackham believing it to be merely a variant of OE *hegge*, 'a hedge'.⁶⁷ The term occurs in quite different regions and different environmental conditions to the various *hegge* terms, as can be seen from the Worcestershire and Berkshire evidence. Hedges were frequently recorded in charter boundary clauses in areas where woodland was being assarted and had been pushed back largely to estate margins. Here crops would need particular protection from woodland animals. The *haga* term, on the other hand, occurs most frequently in more remote, less-developed regions where thick woodland was plentiful (Fig 5). There can be little doubt that the term meant something quite distinguishable from the ordinary hedge of living shrubs, although it was associated with enclosure, and was sometimes later glossed by the Latin *sepes*, *sæpes*, 'a hedge, a fence'. It seems, indeed, to have referred usually to a particularly strong type of enclosure fence often found around a wooded area. Sometimes the enclosures themselves seem to have been relatively short but on other occasions *haga* features extended for many kilometres, sometimes appearing to enclose almost entire estates. The word came down into later times as 'hay' (now obsolete), used as a verb 'to enclose or

fence in by a hedge';⁶⁸ and as 'haw' 'a hedge or encompassing fence: hence, a piece of ground enclosed or fenced in'.⁶⁹

In German, the term developed from a meaning of 'hawthorn, thorn hedge', to a more specialized meaning of (a) 'defensive enclosure'; (b) 'the enclosure of a wood containing wild animals'; eventually becoming attached to (c) 'an enclosed settlement' or 'an enclosed wood'.⁷⁰ Although the term *haga* both here and on the continent was, therefore, chiefly associated with the enclosure of land, primarily woodland, it was also used in England to refer to defended settlements: to enclosures within the newly fortified burhs of Wessex and Mercia.⁷¹ Only later were the subdivided properties within these divisions also referred to by the same term. In Germany, *haga* place-names are similarly associated with fortified settlements established along province frontiers. There is also, however, a strong association with royal land rights, whether over fortified settlements or forests.⁷² The connection cannot always be proved, but of the Worcestershire woodland *hagan*, half occurred along the boundaries of royal estates or of estates bordering upon royal land, and the English burhs were, of course, also established under royal direction.

A similar Middle English term, 'hay', appears to be related. This was used for a net spread across a gap in a fence to capture game animals, usually, in later times, rabbits. Anglo-Saxon sources, already quoted, also refer to the capture of deer in nets spread across gaps in a fence and of dogs driving the deer towards the nets. 'Hay'

⁶⁸ OED, p 134.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p 129.

⁷⁰ M Heyne (ed), J and W Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*. Vierten Bandes zweite Abteilung, Leipzig, 1877.

⁷¹ D Hooke, 'The hinterland and routeways of late Saxon Worcester: the charter evidence', in M O H Carver (ed), *Medieval Worcester, an Archaeological Framework*, *Trans Worcs Arch Soc*, 3rd ser, 7, 1980, pp 39-43.

⁷² Metz, *op cit*.

⁶⁷ Rackham, 1986, *op cit*, p 185.

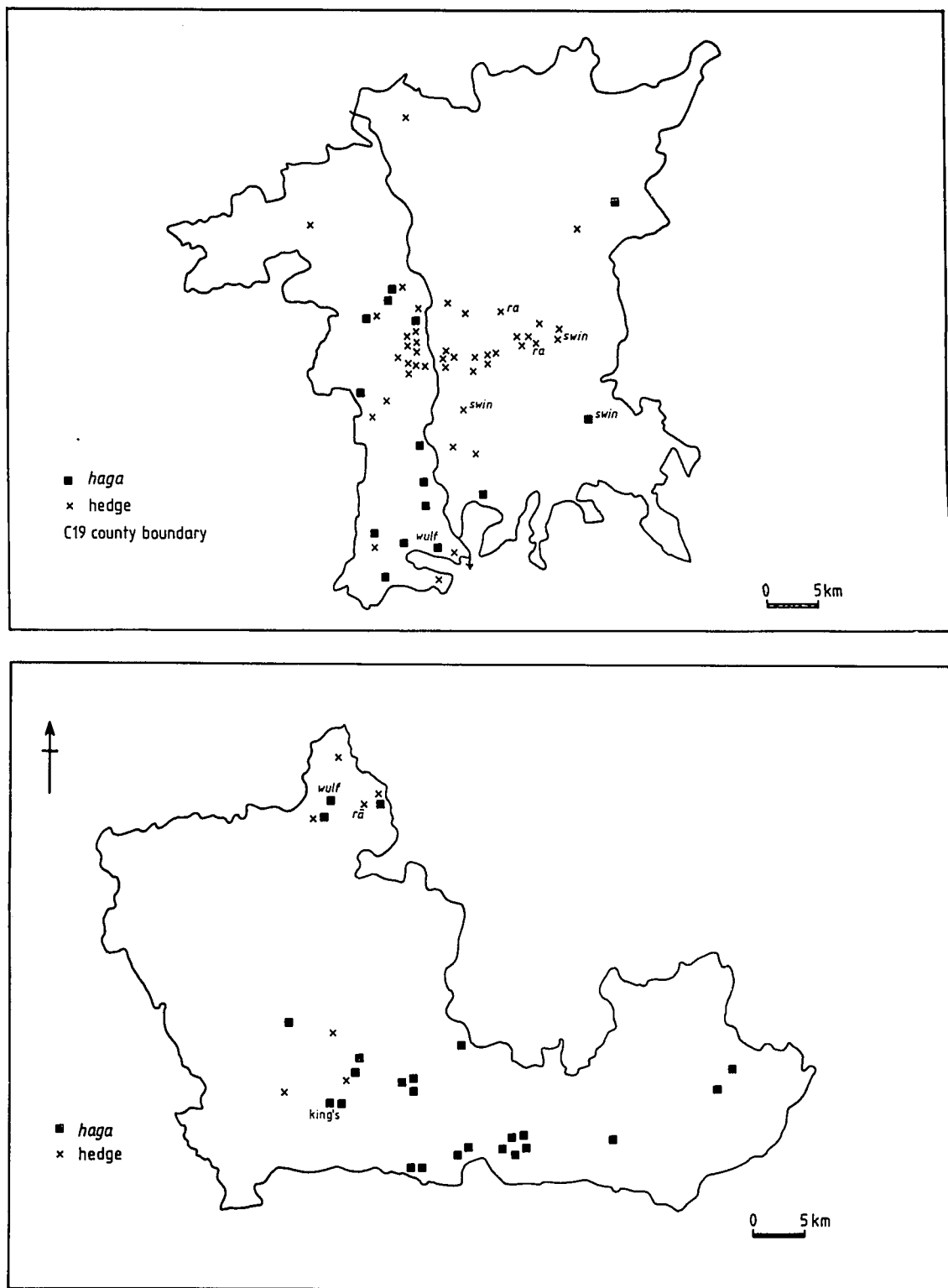


FIGURE 5
The distribution of the *haga* and *hegge* terms in (a) Worcestershire and (b) Berkshire

was, however, also used to describe the fence itself, and became 'an enclosure fenced off for hunting',⁷³ while a 'hayes' was 'a small hunting park, usually in a woodland area, enclosed for the retention of deer'.⁷⁴ These meanings, most of them associated with enclosed woodland, need to be borne in mind.

Under Roman law game had been regarded as *res nullius*, belonging to whoever killed it, regardless of where or on whose land it was killed.⁷⁵ By the seventh century, however, royal hunting reserves had been established within the Frankish empire, restricting the right to take particular types of game, notably deer. It is not clear when the concept of royal hunting preserves was introduced to this country, or whether any such limitations upon the taking of game came into effect before the Norman Conquest, but certainly hunting was a notable pastime of the Anglo-Saxon nobility and the king maintained huntsmen, falconers and dog-handlers, with certain estates duty-bound to offer hospitality to such officers. Three Mercian charters freed estates from such services, one of them a grant of 844 by King Berhtwulf to Æthelwulf, *dux*, freeing an estate at Pangbourne, Berkshire, *a pastu principum 7 a difficultate illa quot nos Saxonice dicimus festigmen nec homines illuc mittant qui osceptros uel falcones portant aut canes aut cabellos ducunt*, 'from the entertainment of ealdormen and from that burden which we call in Saxon *fæstingmen*; neither are to be sent there men who bear hawks or falcons, or lead dogs or horses'.⁷⁶ A more questionable charter of King Berhtwulf,⁷⁷ allegedly of

845, grants similar privileges to the monastery of *Ufera Stretford*, at Stratford in Warwickshire, and a further authentic charter issued by Burgred, King of Mercia, in 855, exempted the minster at Blockley, Glos., from dues which included '*pastu. et ab refectiōne omnium ancipitrum et falconum in terra Mercensium et omnium uenatorum regis uel principis nisi ipsorum tantum qui in prouincia Hwiccorum sunt*', 'the feeding and maintenance of all hawks and falcons in the land of the Mercians, and of all huntsmen of the king or ealdorman except only those who are in the province of the Hwicce'.⁷⁸

The maintenance of the deer-fence, the *deorhege*, was a recognized part of a landholder's duties at the king's residence.⁷⁹ As suggested, this was probably rather more than a mere hedge around cropped ground, rather, a substantial fence or hedge (not necessarily living) marking off the hunting land and possibly playing a part in the actual steering of the game during the hunt (*supra*).

The reservation of vast areas as forest land was undoubtedly an important feature of kingship under Norman rule. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* claims in 1086 [1087] that William 'constituted much protection for game (*deofriþ*) and he laid down laws therewith',⁸⁰ instituting penalties for killing the hart or the hind, but one may suspect that it was not such an innovation as has always been suspected. Metz shows how two *hagan* boundaries on lands of Fulda monastery, recorded in 801, coincided with the boundaries of the royal forests of Bramforst and Zunderhart (980), querying: *sollten sich hinter den 'hagon' der Urkunde von 801 gar die beiden Königsforsten selbst im Sinne des 'gehagi' verbergen?* 'does the name "hagon" in the document include the two king's forests themselves in the sense of "gehagi"?' (implying that the *hagan* may

⁷³ I H Adams, *Agrarian Landscape Terms: a Glossary for Historical Geography*, 1976, p 107.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p 108.

⁷⁵ J M Gilbert, *Hunting and Hunting Reserves in Medieval Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1979, p 5.

⁷⁶ S 1271, B 443; D Whitelock (ed), *English Historical Documents*, i, c 500-1042, 1955, p 481.

⁷⁷ S 198, B 450.

⁷⁸ S 207, B 489.

⁷⁹ Liebermann I, pp 444-55.

⁸⁰ J Earle (ed), *Two of the Saxon Chronicles parallel with supplementary extracts from the others*, Oxford 1865, p 222.

already have been hunting reserves) and concluding *Fest steht dagegen die Beziehung zwischen Königsforst und Hagen in irgendeiner Art*, 'The connection between king's forests and "Hagen", however, is in some way proved'.⁸¹

The area of Worcestershire in which *haga* enclosures are most notably concentrated, west of the River Severn and south of the River Teme (Fig 5), was all to become part of the royal forest of Malvern and entries in the Domesday folios show that much of it had been designated as such by 1086. It was a remote and underdeveloped region, still described by William of Malmesbury in the twelfth century as *vastissimo illo saltu quod Malvernum vocatur*, 'that vast/unoccupied wood which is called Malvern'.⁸² Much of this border area near the western margins of the Hwiccan kingdom was to be granted by the king to the major abbeys and churches of Pershore, Worcester and Deerhurst, but royal rights were re-established over most of the region, as forests were designated after the Conquest. Pre-Conquest charters show that there were *haga* features along the boundaries of Upton-on-Severn, Longdon and Bushley, and Deerhurst, gates in such features on the boundaries of Leigh and Powick, and other related features in Eldersfield, Hasfield and Tirley, the latter region later to form the separate forest of Corse (Fig 6).

By 1086, Domesday Book records specific enclosures known as *haia*, in which game were confined and captured. A *haia* in Kington, Worcestershire, was a place *in qua capiebant fera*, 'in which wild animals used to be captured', and at Lingen, now in Herefordshire, there were *iii haia capreolis capiendis*, '3 hays for taking roe-deer'.⁸³ The abbey of Gloucester claimed rights

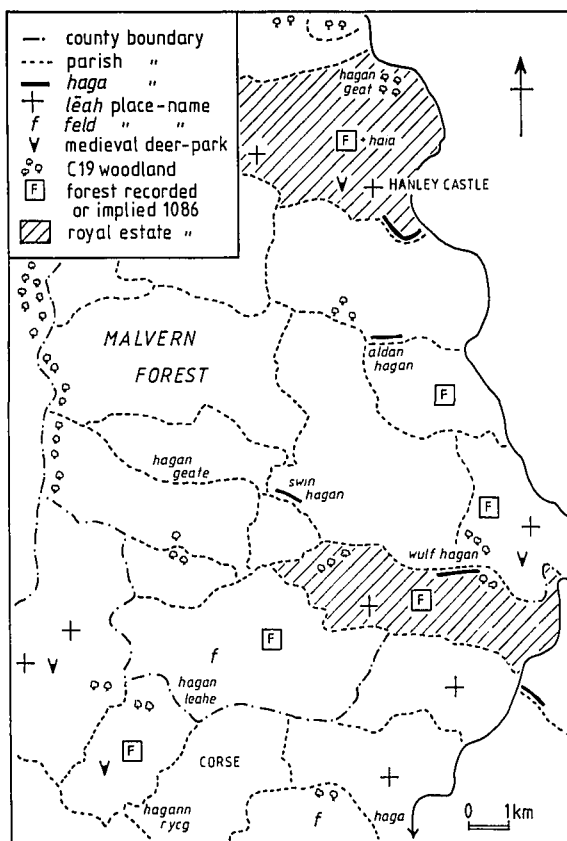


FIGURE 6

The Malvern region of Worcestershire: features associated with hunting and woodland

to hunting in the *haia* of Churcham and Morton in Gloucestershire.⁸⁴ Within the area shown in Fig 6, one *haia* lay within Hanley Castle, the estate centre of Malvern Forest.⁸⁵ In 1315 the main deer-park of Hanley Castle lay in the south-eastern sector of the parish, its boundary coinciding with the *haga* which followed the Upton boundary in 962. There is insufficient evidence to claim that the Anglo-Saxon *haga* was necessarily a fully-fledged deer-park, although the park made by the king at Ongar in Essex in the eleventh century was certainly termed a *derhage*.⁸⁶ It does

⁸¹ Metz, *op cit*, pp 41-2.

⁸² N E S A Hamilton (ed), William of Malmesbury, *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi. De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, Rolls Series, 52, 1830, pp 285-6.

⁸³ F and C Thorn (eds), *Domesday Book*, 25, Shropshire, Chichester 1986, 6.14, fo 260b.

⁸⁴ J S Moore (ed), *Domesday Book*, 15, Gloucestershire, Chichester 1982, 10.11, fo 165c.

⁸⁵ Thorn (ed), *Domesday Book*, 16, Worcestershire, Chichester 1982, EG 1, fo 163c.

⁸⁶ B Thorpe, *Diplomatarium Angliam Aevi Saxonici*, 1865, p 574.

seem, however, to have been an enclosure directly linked with the reservation of land for the preservation and hunting of game. Such features occur frequently in regions which were to be taken into royal forest after the Conquest and often lords were later officially allowed to enclose deer-parks in the same regions, sometimes actually on the site of an Anglo-Saxon *haga*, as at Hanley. Woods often survived on or near the sites of Anglo-Saxon *hagan* until the present day.

The same connection is evident wherever the term appears in charters but one further example must suffice. In northern Hampshire, a block of territory centred upon the royal vill of Hurstbourne Tarrant lay to the north-east of the royal estate of Andover. The southernmost estates of this territory, Whitchurch and Hurstbourne Priors, were alienated to the church of Winchester in the late eighth and ninth centuries, and for a time in the early ninth and later tenth centuries ownership of the Hurstbourne Tarrant estate also passed to Abingdon Abbey, but was retrieved by the crown by the end of that century. Like Malvern, this seems to have been regarded as a marginal zone to be granted into ecclesiastical hands, rather than prime royal property, although the estate of Faccombe remained a royal estate and was the morning-gift of Wynflæd, the grandmother of the kings Edwy and Edgar. There were numerous *haga* features in this area, many of them running for several kilometres. One ran around parts of the western boundary of St Mary Bourne (recorded when the latter was granted to the church of Winchester) separating the then royal estates of Andover and Hurstbourne; another followed the northern boundary of St Mary Bourne between that estate and the adjacent estates of Crux Easton and Woodcott and Litchfield, while others ran along the boundaries of the royal estate of Faccombe and around East Woodhay to the north. Another *haga* followed the

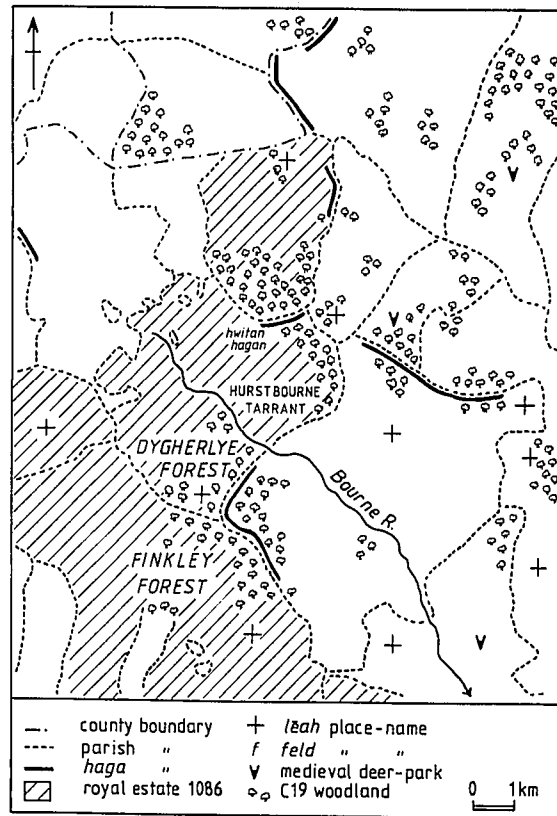


FIGURE 7
North Hampshire: features associated with hunting and woodland

boundary of Vernhams Dean to the west (Fig 7).⁸⁷ In most cases, there is a direct or indirect connection with royal ownership.

The majority of *haga* enclosures can also be shown to have been related to actual woodland: often this lay on both sides of the boundary in medieval times and was earlier indicated by *leah* place-names. Moreover, two of the *haga* fences ran along boundaries which were later those of the medieval forests of Finkley and Dygherlye in Andover parish. Another ran along the boundary of Crux Easton parish which was held by a huntsman in 1086. Surprisingly, perhaps, woodland is not strongly represented in the assessments of the Domesday manors, but Hampshire is one

⁸⁷ The main charters are S 689, B 1080; S 359, B 594; S 378, B 624.

of the south-eastern counties in which woodland was entered only according to its pig-rent and, as Welldon-Finn pointed out: 'This may imply that the . . . villagers had no right to feed their swine in their lord's wood',⁸⁸ the manors of Crux Easton, Combe, Linkenholt and Upton in Hurstbourne Tarrant only recording 'wood for fencing'. Welldon-Finn thought that the lord may perhaps have been retaining the woodland as cattle pasture but it may be that the woodland was reserved even then as 'forest' (not fully recorded in the Domesday folios for Hampshire), Crux Easton certainly being in the hands of a huntsman. In the medieval period the woods of this region were officially reckoned as part of the Forest of Chute, the bulk of which lay in Wiltshire, and little wood was entered for the manors there, although the wood received one incidental mention, merely as *siluæ quæ uocat cetum*, 'the wood which is called Chute'.⁸⁹ Finkley formed the eastern walk of Chute Forest in the mid-thirteenth century⁹⁰ and a boundary perambulation of 1298⁹¹ runs 'along the *hayam*' exactly where the charter boundary of St Mary Bourne⁹² followed the *hagan*, perhaps suggesting some sort of functional or even administrative continuity. In this area, much of the woodland seems to have regenerated in post-Roman times, for the woods are full of field evidence of field lynchets and enclosures dated by pottery scatter.

In this area, too, there is a little more evidence for the nature of the *haga* boundaries, for at several of the locations there survive clearly defined banks and ditches, the former often several metres in width.

While these differ little from later deer-park boundaries and cannot be dated, they are frequently very abraded and restricted to the stretches of *haga* boundary referred to in the charters. On the boundary of Finkley and Dygherlye Forests between Andover and St Mary Bourne, the ditch lay on the Andover side, as if to restrict the passage of animals out of the forest into St Mary Bourne. The bank is still some 4.5 metres across and the ditch about 2 metres across. On the Faccombe estate, animals similarly seem to have been retained by the boundary feature within Faccombe itself, but between St Mary Bourne and Crux Easton the short remaining stretch of *haga* boundary displays a ditch on the southern side, although the adjacent part of Crux Easton had undoubtedly been part of a deer-park recorded there by 1292. It is possible that ditch survival along the last boundary may have been influenced by the slope of the land, which here drops steeply southwards. The 'white *haga* of Faccombe', recorded in 961,⁹³ is represented by a particularly fine earthwork, the nomenclature explained by the presence of flints in the surface soil. Equally fine woodland banks, in association with ditches, have been identified at several *haga* locations in southern Berkshire and it seems likely that the Anglo-Saxon woodland *haga* boundary consisted of a wide bank and ditch, probably carrying a timber palisade on the bank, like the boundary bank of a medieval deer-park. The connection of the *haga* word with the haw of the hawthorn may suggest, alternatively, that the bank was surmounted by a thorn hedge, either dead or living, but in any case, it was something more than the ordinary field hedge.

One last point in this context may be worth consideration. The archaeological excavations at *Hamwic* (Anglo-Saxon

⁸⁸ R Welldon-Finn, 'Hampshire', in H C Darby and E M J Campbell (eds), *The Domesday Geography of South-East England*, Cambridge, 1971, pp 320-1.

⁸⁹ Thorn (ed), *Domesday Book*, 6, Wiltshire, Chichester 1979, 1, 19; *Domesday Book*, fo 65b.

⁹⁰ T W Shore, 'Ancient Hampshire forests', *Hampshire Field Club and Arch Soc*, 1, 1888, pp 40-60.

⁹¹ *Proc Hampshire Field Club and Arch Soc*, 9, 1921-5, pp 262-3.

⁹² S 359, B 594.

⁹³ S 689, B 1080.

Southampton) have produced vast quantities of red deer antler. The excavators have been surprised that so many antlers could be collected at just the right stage of growth.⁹⁴ However, if the hunting of red deer was officially organized in Hampshire, or the animals deliberately encouraged within actual game reserves, this could be partially explained: the hunting of such game may have been rather more than just 'the sport of kings'. Certainly the numbers of fallow deer hunted

increased dramatically under the Norman kings, as excavations at Faccombe have shown,⁹⁵ but the conception of woodland reserved for the hunting of game may not necessarily have been an introduction of the Normans. It was a type of land use familiar in the Frankish kingdoms from the seventh century⁹⁶ and there is little reason to think that this country was slow to follow continental practices.

⁹⁴ J Bourdillon, personal communication.

⁹⁵ J R Fairbrother, 'Faccombe Netherton', *Archaeological and Historical Research*, 1, City of London Archaeological Society, 1984.

⁹⁶ Gilbert, *op cit*, 1.