Aspects of THE MEDIÆVAL LANDSCAPE *of* SOMERSET *&* *Contributions to the landscape history of the county*

Edited by MICHAEL ASTON

Chapter 2

THE LATE SAXON LANDSCAPE

The evidence from charters and placenames

Michael Costen

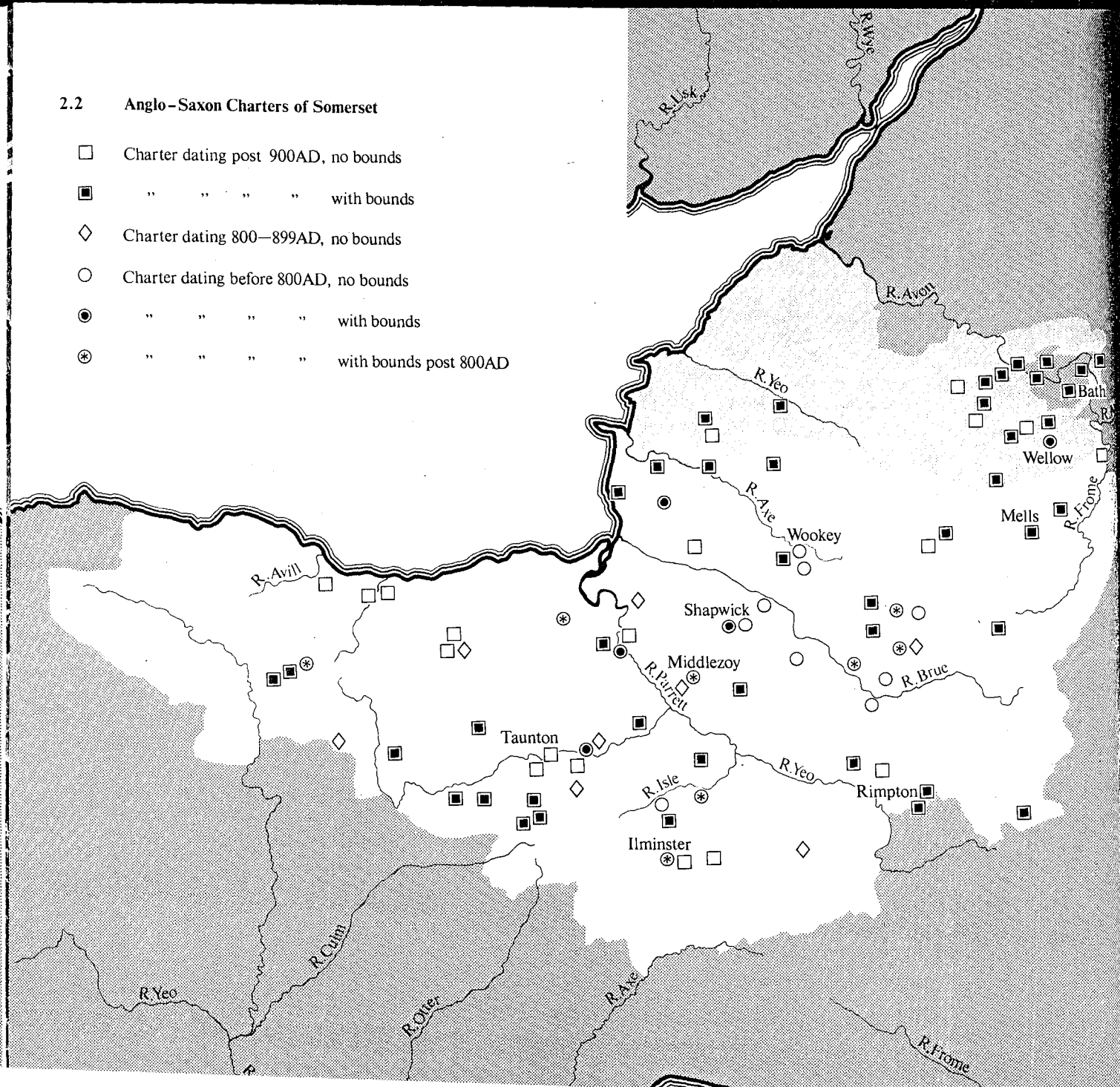
The written evidence which survives from the pre-Conquest period and which is reliable is inevitably very limited in quantity and in variety. The comparative rarity of documents which carry landscape information, combined with the chance nature of survival, leaves us dependent upon sources which are often in grave need of critical examination before they can be accepted for the evidence they contain. However the charters and place-names are so fruitful as a source of information that they must be used despite their dangers. Other potential sources of evidence such as archaeological and topographical material will not be considered in detail here.

The major source of information available is in the charters of the pre-Conquest period. These are records of grants of land, often made by kings, usually to churches and monasteries, but also, towards the end of this period, to secular individuals. The total number with a text surviving amounts to about ninety-five for the old county of Somerset *(Finberg 1964)*. Seventy-seven *(Note 1)* sets of boundary descriptions occur in these charters and 65 discrete areas are covered, some more than once. An example of a perambulation, with details of the landscape, is given at the end of the chapter. Unfortunately, the survival of a charter in its original form is almost unknown in Somerset. Of all the charters for the county only three exist as single sheet charters penned before the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. These are the charters for Pennard, S236, East Pennard, S563, and Withiel, S697 *(Note 2)*. All other charters survive as copies in the cartularies of monastic houses compiled later in the Middle-Ages *(Note 3)*.

The problem of the authenticity of the charters is immediate, since some appear to be contemporary with the date they carry, while others purport to date from the seventh and eighth centuries. The two genuine pre-Conquest survivals in the Longleat archives both covering Pennard, (Longleat 10564 (S236) and 10565 (S563)) are extremely valuable, helping us to assess the worth of other charters in the Glastonbury cartulary. It is apparent immediately that 10564 cannot be contemporary with its nominal date of 681 and neither can it be a copy of an original of that period. The handwriting alone shows that it is of the tenth century, while the form of the bounds in Old-English suggests that they too were written in the tenth century, and should be taken as such. Longleat 10565, on the other hand probably is more or less contemporary with the date it contains, 955. The charter for Withiel (S697) is almost certainly also contemporary with its tenth century date.

Even where they survive only in the form of later copies, some charters show authentic early features suggesting that they do contain some evidence of the period to which they claim to belong. The charter for Brent (S238) probably does have late seventh century boundaries, while the two Muchelney charters for 'Ile' *(Bates 1899, p 46 and p 47)* are also probably of eighth century date *(Whitelock 1955, p 498)*. Other charters for 'Poelt' (S253), Baltonsborough (S1410), Hamp *(Bates 1899 p 144)*, and Wellow (S262), may all be considered as having bounds of the dates claimed for them in the seventh and eighth centuries.

The landscape to the south of Wellington and north of the Blackdown Hills escarpment. Area of small, irregular fields probably cleared from woodland and waste in late Saxon and early medieval times



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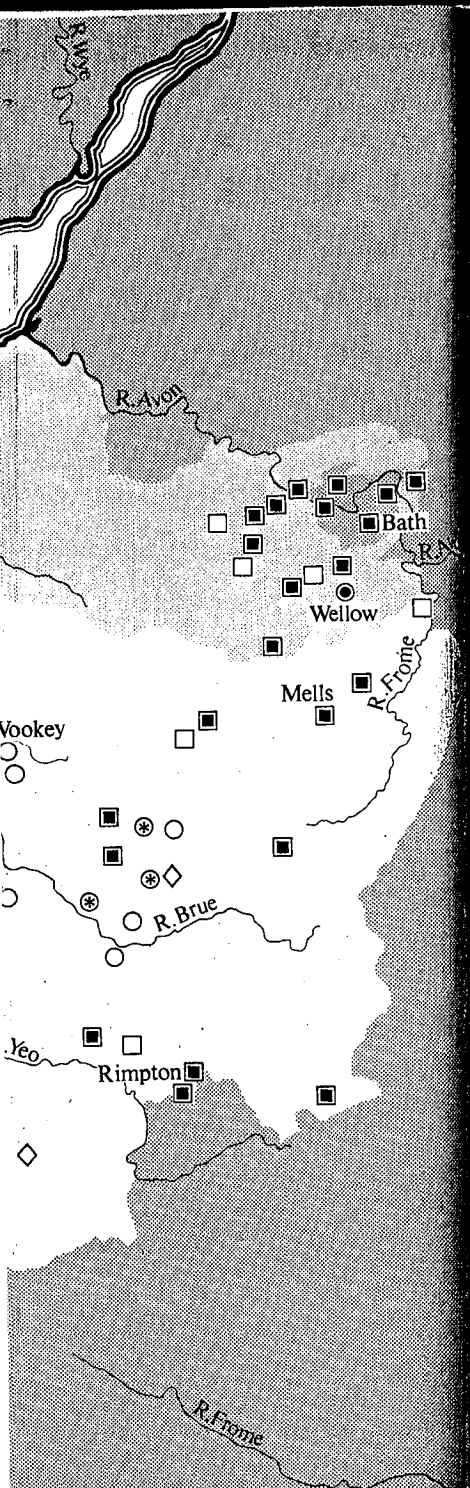


However the charter for Ham was condemned by Stevenson *(Bates 1899 p 95, note 4)* and must be dismissed as probably much later than its claimed date.

Another whole group of charters would be most easily accepted as containing tenth century surveys to which spurious dates have been attached. This group includes S236, for Pennard, S247 for Pilton, S270a for Butleigh, S249 for Ilminster, S254 for Withiel Florey, S251 for Middlezoy and S265 for North Stoke. Here all the charters show well-developed Old-English boundary clauses and yet all date from before any known originals with Old-English bounds (S37 of 846) and are contemporary with authenticated Latin bounds (S89 of 736).

The rest of the examples of charter bounds date from the tenth century with a very few exceptions of the ninth century. What information can be gleaned must therefore be regarded as essentially tenth century with occasional material of the late seventh and early eighth centuries (Fig. 2.2).

Other charters which have no boundary clauses, and also those charters which are known to have existed but are now lost, provide valuable information about the existence of estates in the Anglo-Saxon period, as well as providing early place-name material. Sources such as the Chronicle of John of Glastonbury also preserve information of pre-Conquest date although incorporated in a post-Conquest source *(Carley 1978)*.

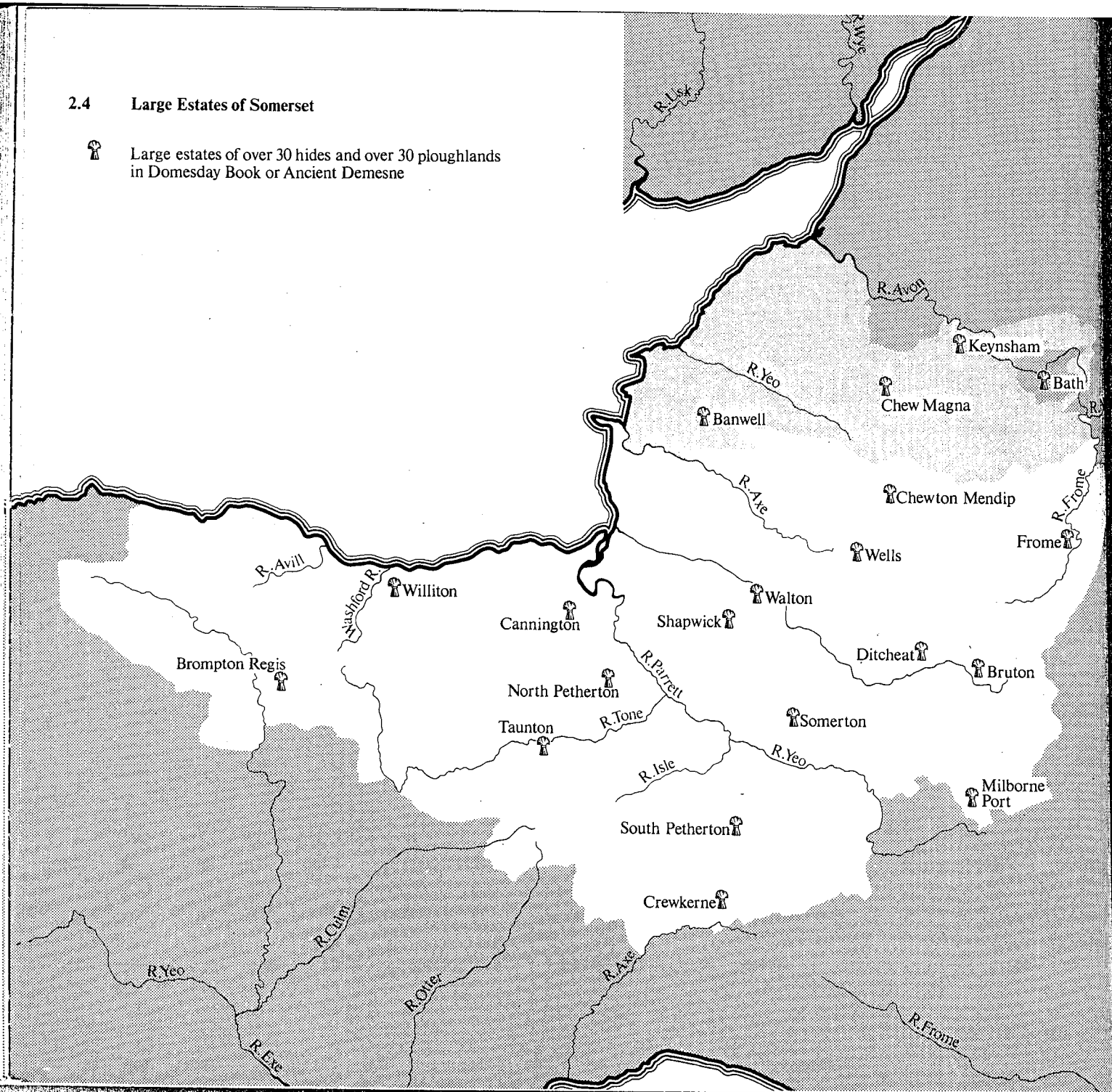
The Domesday Book provides the most valuable source for the end of the Anglo-Saxon period and it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this document *(Thorn and Thorn 1980)*.

Finally the field names of the county provide a vast reservoir of information on many aspects of Anglo-Saxon landscape history which has scarcely been touched.

PLACE-NAMES AND CENTRALISED ESTATES

In the past it has been customary to deal with the place-names of an area as if the landscape in which they are found did not differ significantly in its social and political organisation from the period of the Domesday Book. This view of the local organisation of an area suggests an underlying pattern of ownership and of social organisation which was based upon the direct relationship between a landowner and the individual estate. This view no longer seems tenable *(Jones 1979)*. The social and political organisation of the very first Anglo-Saxon estates in Somerset was probably based upon large centralised estates, in which a central authority was served by a variety of smaller sub-units, each of which might be recognised as a hamlet or farmstead in its own right, but which was economically and socially subservient to the central authority. In 1979 Professor Sawyer argued that the fragmentation of the large estate was the main development in the settlement of Anglo-Saxon England. Such sub-units would have been integrated into the economy of the whole in such a way that they may not have been self-supporting in everything, but needed to exchange specialist goods within the estate. Such an estate has been demonstrated for Sherborne (Dorset) and its district *(Barker 1984)*. In Somerset it seems likely that the great royal estates were organised on just such lines and that the outline of those units persisted throughout the Anglo-Saxon period because they stayed in the hands of rather conservative landowners, such as the Anglo-Saxon kings and the bishops.

2.3 *Anglo-Saxon boundary bank and hedge at Rimpton*



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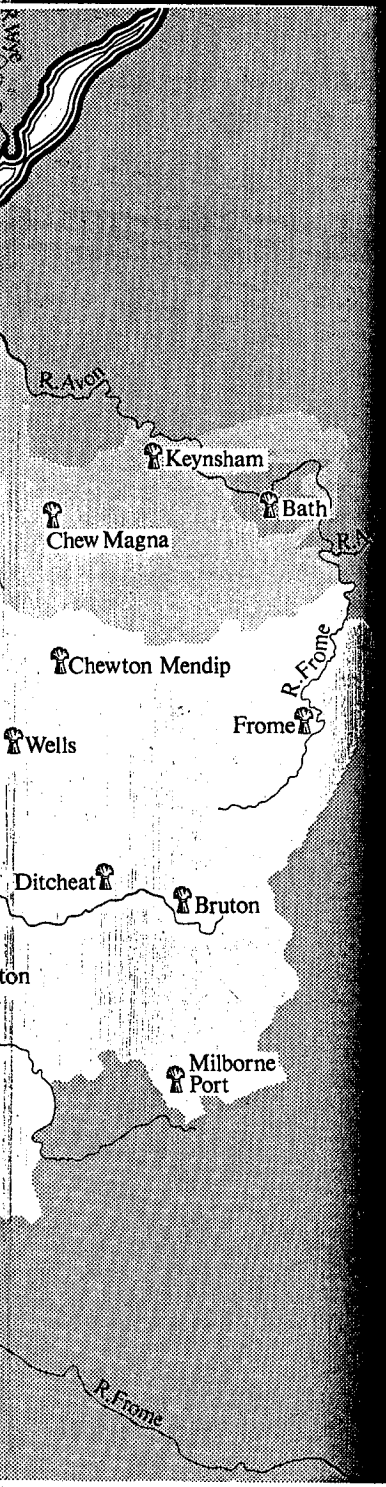


Crewkerne, Cannington, Williton, Bruton, Somerton, North Petherton, Frome and Milborne Port stand out as possible examples of centralised estates under Royal control. All these places were marked by being very large, even in 1066 (Fig. 2.4). Crewkerne had forty ploughlands. Cannington was linked to Williton and Carhampton to form three units with 100 ploughlands between them. Frome had fifty ploughlands, as had Bruton, Somerton and Milborne Port, while North Petherton had 30 ploughlands *(Thorn and Thorn 1980)*. Because these places had always been royal estates, probably since the time when the kings of Wessex first exercised authority in the region, they had never been hidated. This was the method of assessment which made it possible for the Anglo-Saxon kings to impose a uniform land tax on all estates. Since the kings took all the income from their own estates there was clearly no need for such an exercise. Many of these early royal estates also share common features in the way in which they are named. Typically they have been named by taking the name of a prominent local topographical feature and adding to it the Anglo-Saxon *'tun'*. Thus Taunton, the two Pethertons (North and South) and Bruton, Chewton (Mendip), and Williton all fit this type, being the 'tun' on the rivers Tone, Parret, Brue, Chew and Willet respectively. Others add the 'tun' to a topographical feature such as a range of hills. Brompton is *'brigan'+'tun'*, the first element being the Old Welsh name from which the Brendon Hills take their name. Cannington also contains a somewhat similar element, though here it is possible that both hills and settlement take their names from an Old Welsh element which describes an estate here rather than the hills. (The element *'cant'* from which comes the later Quantock, which has the 'uc' suffix is very like the names of other known estates with Old Welsh estate names, i.e., Fideok, Sydeock (Dorset)).

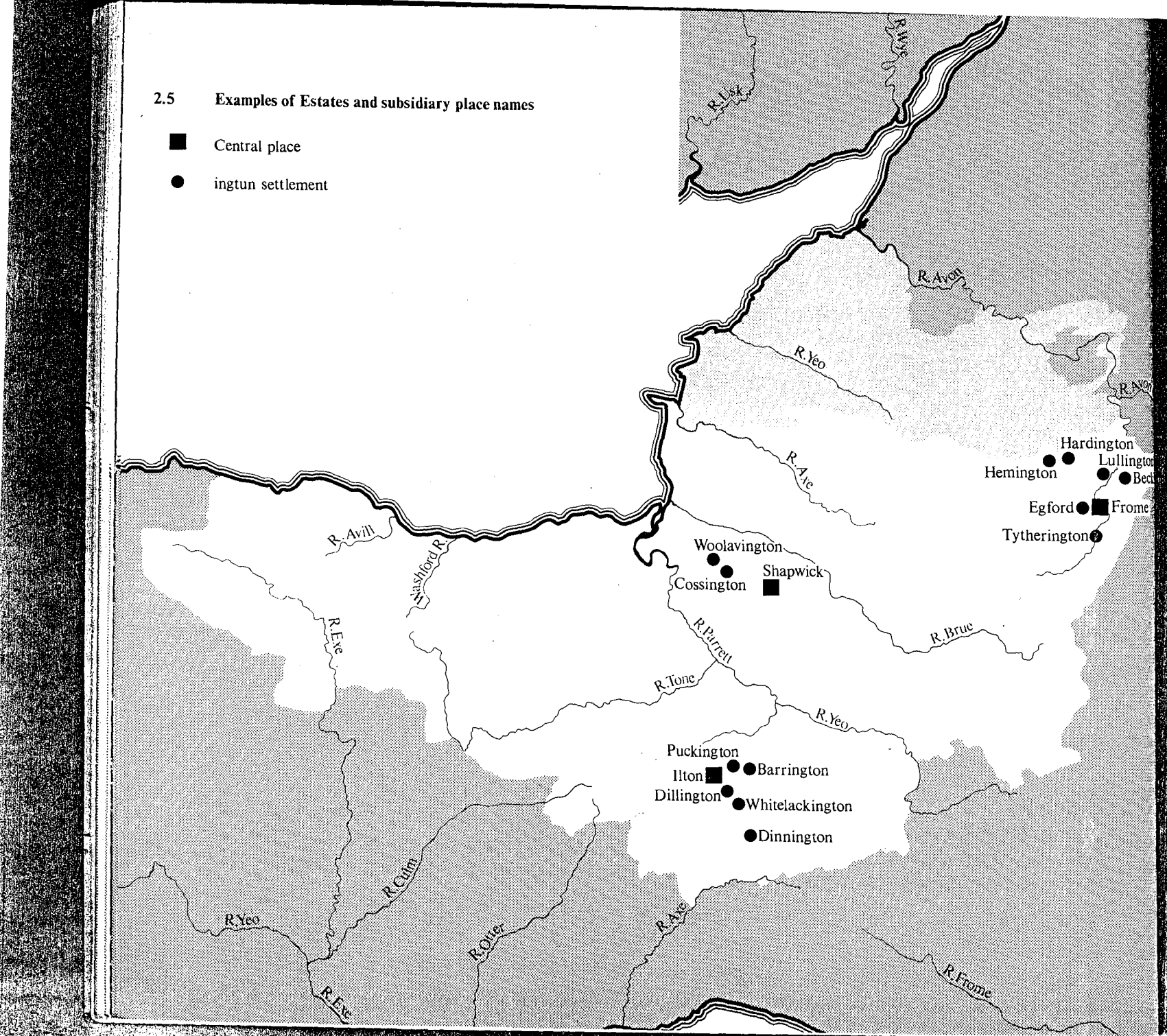
Other names in this same group of estates, such as Frome, simply take the Old Welsh river names upon which the estates stand. The same criterion, extended to other large estates outside the King's ancient desmesne, points to Chew (Magna), Bath and Wells as being estates of the same type. They were all very large in 1086, and their possession by the Church over long periods helps to explain how they survived as single units for so long. Inside the multiple estate units many place-names probably indicate the uses to which the individual units were put. Thus the many Sheptons in Somerset probably represent specialist sheep keeping units. Shepton Montague may have performed such a function for the estate at Milborne Port, while Honeywick, a settlement near Bruton, probably supplied the central estate with its sweetening agent. This same explanation may also serve for some of the settlements with woodland names, such as 'Barrow', near Bruton, which is probably Old English *'bearu'*, a wood or *'baer'*, a wood-pasture, normally used for grazing pigs *(Note 5)*. The more specialist and unusual name, Hornblotton, meaning *"the tun of the horn blower" (Ekwall 1960)* may refer to the use of the estate as the benefice of a man who performed an important honorific service for the lord of the estate, once more perhaps the estate at Bruton. Raddington near Wiveliscombe, may be an estate with a similar history, since the name means "councillors' tun".

LAND HOLDINGS

The major division in the late Anglo-Saxon countryside in the control of property was between the lands in the control of the "State apparatus": the royal family, the major church institutions such as the bishop and the monasteries, plus the holdings of the great earls where they were in alliance with the king; and, on the other hand, the rest of the aristocracy, however rich or important they may have been. The lands of the Church need to be included with the king's holding because the bishop and the abbots were all royal appointees and had little freedom of manoeuvre on their own account. The evidence of the Domesday Book is very clear on this point since it records the ownership of land as it was at the moment of collapse in 1066.

The differences between the two types of holding are quite clear in 1066. The King's estates averaged just over 72 ploughlands each in size, while the average for the whole of the "state apparatus" was 23.36 ploughlands. Seventy-four per cent of all the ploughlands in the hands of this group were in estates of twenty ploughlands and over. Among the rest of the landowning class the situation was almost exactly reversed. The average number of ploughlands in each estate was only 3.36 while 73 per cent of all estates were of five ploughlands or under. Estates with this assessment and smaller formed 48 per cent of all the land-holding of this class, while no less than 159 estates were of one ploughland or smaller. Another significant feature of these estates was that 20 of less than one ploughland were in multiple ownership.

Within the landowning class there were clearly wide disparities of ownership which have nothing to do with



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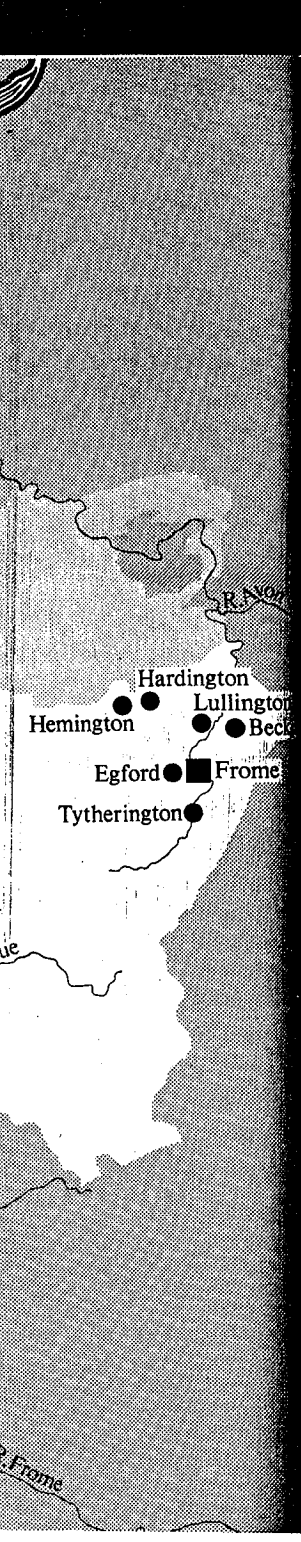


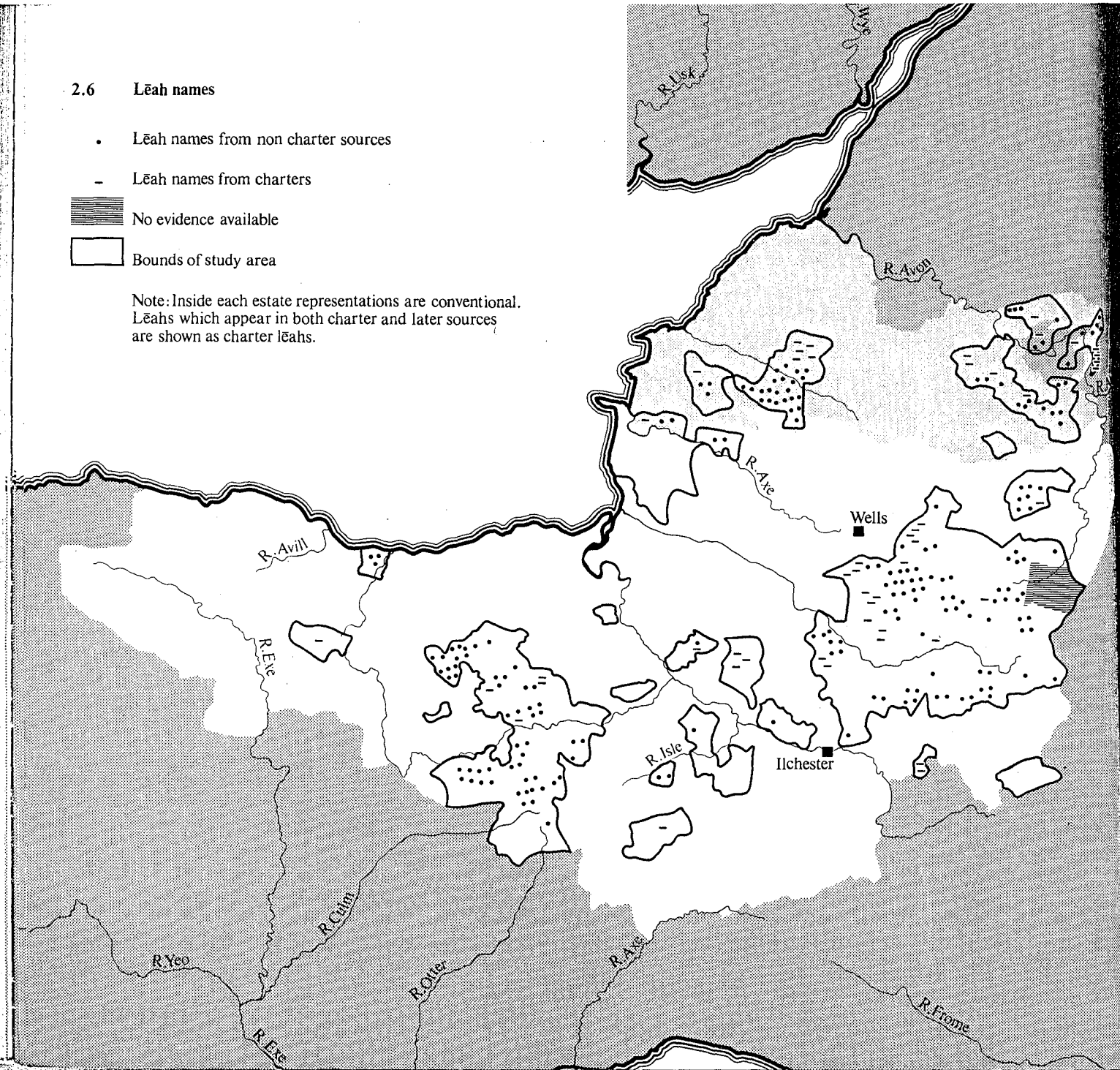
Somerset. What is important in assessing the effect of land ownership upon the landscape is the existence of this pattern of large estates, mostly in the hands of the "state apparatus" on the one hand, and the much smaller estates of those outside this small group. It seems likely that the reason for the existence of so many small units has to do with the inheritance customs of the Anglo-Saxon nobility which included the habit of leaving land by will and division among heirs. However, the beginnings of this state of affairs must be sought in the period when land was first alienated from the "state apparatus" to outside family groups on a permanent basis. This period was marked by a growth of a distinction between **bookland,** that land which was really owned and might be let, sold, or left in a will, and **folkland** which had remained in the king's hand and could be let by him for life, but not permanently alienated. At first in the mid to late seventh century the device of bookland was used only to grant land to the new church institutions which were appearing, but quite soon the device became a way of transferring land outside royal control on a permanent basis *(John 1966).* It seems likely that we should regard the numerous examples of small estates with names formed from a **personal name+tun** as examples of this process. Groups of names of the form **personal name+ingtun** *(Note 6)* occur from time to time suggesting that sometimes whole blocks of land were granted away into smaller private estates at the same time. One such group lies close to Ilminster (Fig. 2.5), where Barrington, Puckington, Whitelackington, Dillington and Donnington are all within a distance of six kilometres of one another. A somewhat similar group occurs on the Polden Hills where Woolavington and Cossington lie close to one another, on the northern side of the hill. They may have formed part of the earlier estate of "Poelt" (S948 of 705), which later became the Glastonbury estate of Shapwick, and which at the time of the Domesday Book included within its bounds Catcott, Ashcott, Chilton and Shapwick itself *(Watkin 1947–56).* Another group of a similar kind is to be found in the Frome area, where Beckington, Hardington, Hemington, Lullington, Tytherington and Egford (Egferdingtun) all cluster around the royal manor.

With estates in the hands of the nobility and with the development of both a market in land and division by inheritance the tendency would be for estates to become smaller over the centuries. The greatest number of these small units occurs in the far west of the county. The extension of more intensive cultivation into this area in the latter part of the Anglo-Saxon period, when estates were already becoming smaller, combined with the local geography, would go some way to explain the particular pattern found there.

WOODLAND

In any landscape the presence or absence of woodland is the most important factor in deciding the general appearance of the land and it is an important indicator of the type of farming being practised. By 1086 Somerset had only about 11 per cent of its area wooded *(Rackham 1980).* However Rackham makes the very important point that some 70 per cent of all Somerset manors actually had some recorded woodland in the Domesday survey and that the median size of this woodland was about thirty-five acres. This is an extremely important finding, since it shows that if there had been a time when woodland was more extensive, then it must have been widely dispersed throughout the county and not just concentrated in great blocks of woodland with much open land between. Though as a cautionary note, possession of woodland by a Domesday vill does not necessarily mean that it was physically located there—in many other parts of the country woodland recorded under the name of the vill to which it belonged was actually located in a heavily wooded district 15–20 miles away.

It seems reasonable to assume that part of the pattern of development of the county landscape was a gradual reduction in the amount of woodland and in its distribution as the Anglo-Saxon period progressed. Some major place-names are useful indicators of the early distribution of woodland. *Leah* names associated with woodland clearing, place-name elements such as *bearu, wudu, graf, holt,* and *hangra,* wood-names as well as *bær,* a woodland pasture and *feld,* an open space in woodland all point to areas of active colonisation of woodland in the early part of the Anglo-Saxon period *(Note 2).* The distribution of such names taken from the Domesday Book (Fig. 2.6) shows that the most important concentration is in the area between the River Parret and the edge of the Brendon Hills. However, it is as well to remember that this is an area which was particularly rich in small Domesday manors, many of which have "woodland" names. It may be, therefore, that names of this type are disproportionately represented and the activity exaggerated. Nevertheless, the evidence does seem to point to this district as especially well wooded in the early Anglo-Saxon period.



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A more extensive survey of *leah* names helps to fill out the picture. All the surviving *leah* names in a block of land covering about 65,000 acres (26,300 hectares) were collected (Fig. 2.6). Seventy-four examples survived in an area with a wide variety of woodland cover in the Domesday Survey. West Lydford for example had 1108 acres of woodland in its 1900 acres, a woodland cover of 58 per cent. Milton Clevedon had 770 acres out 1243 acres wooded, some 61 per cent. On the other hand, North Cadbury, with an area of 2810 acres had only 53 acres of woodland—a cover of about 2 per cent. The spread of *leah* names does not correspond directly with the pattern of Domesday woodland. Instead it presents a distribution of names in a regular pattern which suggests that Selwood once spread nearly to Wells while further south the area around Ilchester was wood-free. The *leah* names can only be explained by assuming that an initially extensive area of woodland was cleared after *leah* names became fixed in the landscape. However, inevitably, different estates would have had different internal histories leading to a diversity of woodland cover by the mid-eleventh century. On that basis, we might imagine that by the tenth century, at the latest, woodland clearance had been extensive and that the considerable disparities in woodland cover already apparent in Domesday Book had been long established.

Information for the rest of the county is not so readily available, but similar patterns to the Selwood area exist on estates where charters detail the bounds. Some estates with charters had no woodland in 1086 and had no *leah* in charters, or in modern material. On others, *leah* names appear even where woodland cover was sparse in 1086. In general the existence of *leah* names in charters is a guide to their survival at a later date, and the distribution of these names is not different as between "charter estates" and "non-charter estates". The concentration of surviving *leah* names in the modern landscape, even when no early material survives, can be linked to early woodland cover. Consequently it is no surprise to find a concentration of *leah* names around the Quantocks and the Brendon Hills and along the south-western boundary of the county (Fig. 2.6). The survival of a large number of such names in the north-west of the county (the modern Woodspring District of North Avon), which is now open country, suggests that there was once extensive woodland.

So far the pattern conforms with the distribution of settlement names connected with woodland. The direct evidence of woodland as it occurs in the charters of Somerset estates confirms this view and also supports the thesis that by the late Anglo-Saxon period the extent of woodland had sharply declined and the remaining woodland was being conserved. Woodlands occur in charters of the tenth century for Weston, near Bath (S508, S661), Marksbury (S431), East Pennard (S563), Batcombe (S462), Compton Bishop *(Liber Albus 2—no S number)*, Taunton (S311), Pitminster (S475), Curry Rivel (S455), Rimpton (S441), Wellington (S380) and Lyng (S432). In each case the boundary clauses suggest that the woods concerned were not large. In some cases, as at Adber and Weathergrove, both mentioned in the Rimpton charters *(Costen 1985)*, it is likely that the references were to settlements with woodland names rather than to woodland areas, since both these places were settlements in 1086.

Only around the edges of the county were there large tracts of continuous or near-continuous, woodland. The forest of Neroche has an English name meaning *"the nearer place of the hunting dogs" (Ekwall 1960)*. This suggests one of the prime uses of the forest area and the Domesday evidence shows that this forest had already been apportioned for the use of surrounding estates in the mid-eleventh century and it is likely that communal use of Neroche goes back to the earliest period in settlement history.

Selwood was mentioned obliquely in 709 when Bishop Aldhelm died and was described as having been *"bishop west of the wood" (Garmonsway 1953)*. It was again mentioned by Asser in his Life of Alfred *(Keynes and Lapidge 1983)*, when he gave the then current Old Welsh version of the name *'Coit Maur'*, 'the great wood', probably using the name which had been in use among the British speakers of the area since Roman times at least. By the end of the Anglo-Saxon period the manor of Bruton was credited with some 9000 acres of woodland in Selwood *(Thorn and Thorn 1980)*. It has been suggested above that the forest once extended as far as Wells in the west, and the collection of woodland settlement names around Frome is probably the result of extending settlement on the Frome estate, which encroached into the forest round about. At an early date in the Anglo-Saxon period there also existed a forest on the Quantock Hills called *'Cantucuudu'* in 682 (S237). To what extent this forest still existed as a coherent unit in the tenth century it is impossible to say but it is noticeable that many of the surviving *hyrst* and *leah* names cluster around the slopes of the Quantocks.

2.7 *Man cutting cereals, from document c.1280*

FARMING PRACTICE

The question of how the Anglo-Saxon landscape was farmed in the eighth to tenth century is clearly of great importance in any attempt to reconstruct the landscape. The first question must be to what extent this was a landscape of open-field farming. Writing in 1972 Finberg expressed much hesitation about the existence of an open-field system in Wessex in the eighth century *(Finberg 1972)*. More recently, Della Hooke has shown that in the west midlands in the tenth century there are many references in charters to systems of farming involving not only common wood, pasture and meadow but also arable land, which look like an emerging form of open-field cultivation *(Hooke 1981)*. Some other references in charters point to the existence of infield–outfield systems in Gloucestershire *(Finberg 1972 and Hooke 1981a)*. Hall has demonstrated the antiquity of open-field systems in the East Midland counties, placing the origins in that area at a time before 1160 *(Hall 1981)*. However the evidence in Somerset, though inconclusive tends to suggest that open-field agriculture was not well established in the tenth century. Charter evidence at Weston (S508), Corston (S593), Batcombe (S462), Cheddar *(Liber Albus 2 fo. 246—no S number)*, Taunton (S311), Pitminster (S1006), Bishops Lydeard (S380), Ile Abbots (S740), and Rimpton (S571) shows that the word *feld*, 'a field' or 'an open space', occurs often enough for us to know that the word was in regular and common use in the tenth century. However the names in the Somerset sample are not good candidates for open field systems. At Weston, near Bath, the field was *clænan feld*, that is the 'bare' or 'clean field'. This suggests a contrast with open ground which was covered with scrub rather than ploughland. A similar usage occurs in the tenth century charter for Manworthy in Milverton (S709) where there is a reference to *clænan mor*, the 'bare moor', now Clean Moor in Milverton. At Batcombe the *feld* lay next to a wood and a part of the estate not later associated with the open fields. At Cheddar the *feld* was on top of the Mendips, close to the edge of Cheddar Gorge, and in an area which was then part of the hunting grounds of the Anglo-Saxon kings and which was later a part of the royal Forest of Mendip. At Pitminster the *feld* was called *Oxenafeld*, 'the field of the oxen' and lay on the broken slopes of the Blackdown Hills in the south of the estate. The *feld* in Fideok cannot now be identified, but the *fasingafeld* in Bishops Lydeard lay on the slope of the Quantocks while at Ile Abbots, *theodenesfeld*, 'the lord's field' was on low ground close to a river. Generally, these fields look as if they were open pasture areas and grazing grounds rather than land for arable cultivation. Only the field at Corston, near Bath, lies where a later open field lay and may have been arable in the tenth century.

References to 'acres' seem generally to refer to isolated plots of land rather than giving much information about their state of cultivation. The charter for Weston (S508) uses acres as boundary points, in one case *oden aecar*, 'the threshing acre', in another case a 'single acre in the wood', which looks like an assart. At High Ham where the 'king's thirty acres' can still be identified as an isolated piece of ground in Wearne, now part of Huish Episcopi parish, the land in question is detached from the rest of the estate by a river, and although it was probably arable at the time of the charter, it could not fit into a larger area of open field. It must always have been isolated as it is now.

Only one reference to furlongs survives in all the Somerset charters and this is in the charter for Marksbury (S431). There the 'east end of the east long furlong' and 'the east end of the furlong' both occur in areas associated with the later open field cultivation. However there are grounds for thinking that the bounds of this charter are not of the tenth century, but are probably

an updated twelfth century description *(Cos*

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demonstrated the existence of planned medi
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ground, as at South Brent and Yatton. They

an updated twelfth century description *(Costen 1983)*.

It is possible that some open field cultivation was being organised in Somerset in the later tenth century. Ann Ellison *(1983)* and Nicholas Corcos *(1983)* have demonstrated the existence of planned medieval villages in Somerset at Long Load, Ilton and Shapwick. Corcos, following Harold Fox *(Fox 1981)*, has argued that this reorganisation of the settlement pattern accompanied a reorganisation of the farming system and connects this change with the break-up of multiple estates. We should perhaps look to the reformed monasteries of the tenth century, with their acquisition of estates and resumption of the lands lost to their control in the eighth and ninth centuries, as the sources of this reorganisation of the landscape in Somerset. Perhaps this occurred in the search for more effective exploitation of demesne lands at a period when the status of the peasant farmer was declining while markets were growing in which large sums of cash might be made from the efficient production and sale of surpluses.

If the open-field landscape of Somerset was just developing, it is also possible to distinguish elements in the late tenth century landscape which had survived from an earlier age and only slowly disappeared. The *hiwisc* *(Costen 1988)* was a unit which has left its mark on the landscape in the place-names of Somerset at places such as Huish Episcopi and Huish Champflower. It is a name which ultimately derives from the Old English word for a family, so that a *'hiwisc'* is the landholding necessary to support a family. There is evidence that some of these units may have functioned independently as farmsteads in the late Anglo-Saxon period. A very few are mentioned as *hiwisces* in the tenth century charters of the county. This is the case for Burnham-on-Sea *(Liber Albus 2 fo. 246—no. S number)*, and Rimpton (S441). Others appear as independent manorial units in the Domesday survey, for instance Beggearn Huish and Huish Barton, now in Nettlecombe. Others can now only be distinguished by the survival of field names, as at Somerton and Yeovil. There is evidence that the hiwisces which once existed at West Hatch and at Somerton lay in what later became two separate estates. Thus the West Hatch example had lands both in the present West Hatch and in Thornfalcon, while the Somerton example extended into Kingsdon. This points to the existence of the *hiwisces* before the division of the estates which created the later units we see fossilized in parishes. Some *hiwisces* lay on low lying marshy ground, as at South Brent and Yatton. They may have been pioneering units. Other estates are found spread across the county in the relatively rich lands of the south-east, at Rimpton and Lovington and on the higher ground of the Mendips, at Shepton Mallet and Radstock, on royal estates, at Crewkerne, and on the high ground of the far south-west, at Nettlecombe and at Rodhuish. Thus there is nothing to suggest that they were tied to a particular kind of landscape. On the contrary they were found everywhere, suggesting that they were part of a common social and agricultural organisation. There were probably many more that the 18 examples currently recognised. The size of these units varies considerably. Those at Lovington and Rimpton were of about 200 acres each, while the Nettlecombe examples were each of about 400 acres in extent. Rodhuish near Carhampton, although only rating one virgate for the geld in the Domesday Book, covered an area of 1450 acres as is shown in the Tithe Award 1842. These differences probably show that the *hiwisc* was a unit which really did vary in size according to the quality of the land, as indeed it would need to, in order to support the family unit in different terrains.

In west Somerset small settlements with 'worthy' or 'worth' names are quite numerous. Examples are at Woodworthy Farm in Chipstable, Clatworthy—a parish name, Elworthy—another parish name, Lexworthy in Enmore, and Almsworthy in Exford. Settlements with this type of name are much rarer in eastern and northern Somerset, but the field name 'worth', common everywhere in the county, together with a few parish names, Closworth and Badgworth, and a few minor settlement names—'Baneworth', a lost settlement in Wellow, Ebbor, a deserted settlement in St Cuthbert Without parish, suggests that settlements and farmsteads with this type of name may have been common all over Somerset in the late Anglo-Saxon period. This points to an agricultural pattern which included many small farm units rather than a landscape uniformly farmed in open-fields. It seems possible that the Somerset landscape was much less differentiated as between upland and lowland than it later became. The farming pattern of the far west is perhaps a survivor of a pattern which existed everywhere once.

THE BOUNDARIES OF ESTATES

The charters of the tenth century show that the estates of that period, for which we have evidence, were clearly defined by well established boundaries, even in places like the wetlands. But that does not always mean that the boundaries were physical objects. Some were and still are

impressive features. Thus the various charters for Pitminster (S440 and S475) mention a hedge which ran from the modern Woodbrook Farm (ST202184) to Dipford (ST205219) a distance of about two kilometres. The hedge still exists and is easily the longest and largest hedge mentioned in charters and still surviving. In many other places hedges described in charters do not survive. The *gemaere hagan* of the same Pitminster charters, which was probably close to Hayne in Corfe cannot be identified. The *maer hagan* at Bathampton (S627), the 'mere hawan' at Marksbury (S431), the *hagan* at Lottisham (S292) and the *maer hagen* at Rimpton (S571) can all be identified, but do not all survive as hedges. That at Bathampton is now a wall; at Marksbury the hedge has vanished. However at Lottisham it survives and at Rimpton the hedge which is described as a *scaga* in the charter S441 is still in use as a stout hedge for part of its length, Fig. 2.3. Here the whole hedge existed until recent years and has only lately been bulldozed. These *'hagan'* are usually very large dense hedges and they are associated with woodland or areas which were once wooded. They were probably formed by leaving a thick line of trees and bushes along the line of the boundary when the woodland was cleared. Such hedges were probably a common feature of wooded estates and it is likely that detailed fieldwork would reveal further examples which are not recorded in charters.

The less impressive *heges* of the charters occur almost everywhere and were probably planted as boundaries. More important were *dices,* sometimes *gemaer dices* (boundary ditches). In the surviving charters for Somerset there are thirty-two separate estates which have *dices* as boundaries, but nowhere was an entire estate surrounded by them. But what was a *dic*? Despite the obvious answer of 'a ditch', investigation shows that the same word was used to describe two different features. Usually a 'dic' was a bank of earth with a ditch formed when the bank was constructed. However in lowlying areas, out in the marshes, the word was used to denote a water filled furrow.

Some of the banks were described as being *micel,* that is 'big'. At Mells the *muchil dich* (S481 of 942) is the rampart of the Iron Age Tedbury Camp, while at East Pennard the *miclan dic* (S563 of 955) is the bank which separates Pennard from Ditcheat and gives Ditcheat its name. This bank is in fact a roadway of late Roman origin running from the Fosse Way to the temple on Lamyatt Beacon *(Leech 1986),* but was clearly not recognised as such, either in the tenth century or in the seventh or early eighth centuries when Ditcheat was named. At Otterford the Taunton Charter (S311) has a *widan dic,* which is in fact the county boundary and is a large bank reinforced with stone facing.

More common than big dykes are old dykes. They occur at Weston, Charlcombe, Stanton Prior, Priston, East Pennard, Batcombe, Bleadon, High Ham, Taunton, Pitminster, Henstridge and Wellington. The concentration indicated in charters was heaviest in the Bath area, around Pilton and around Taunton. In many cases the banks and ditches are still discernible. The name 'old dyke' seems to suggest that the boundary followed a feature which was so old that it was thought to predate the estate boundaries themselves. Usually these banks are a formal feature rather than a major obstacle and their frequent occurrence in charters suggests that they were a feature of almost all estates and that consequently large numbers must survive unrecognised today. Furthermore, if such features were frequently thought to predate late Anglo-Saxon arrangements it could be that they actually marked internal divisions in older and perhaps much larger units. It has been noted *(Costen 1983)* that in the northern part of the county (around Marksbury) Wansdyke is not a local boundary. This suggests that the estates in that area pre-date the dyke. On the other hand the dyke does form the boundary in the Clifton–South Stoke district, pointing to these two estates being laid out after the construction of the dyke. Old dykes of other types may have been used also as bounds in making new divisions. Both estates created in the ninth or the tenth centuries and those which were ancient subunits of earlier multiple estates, existed side by side.

ROADS

Towns appeared in this landscape rather late in the Anglo-Saxon period. Hodges has pointed to their creation in the ninth century as part of the process by which the forces of the newly emerging state retained power over a developing economy and tapped part of the proceeds of that growth *(Hodges 1982).* Towns grew at points which were in most cases already centres of royal or official power, hence the Domesday Boroughs or earlier mints at Taunton, Bruton, Ilchester, Milborne Port, Crewkerne, Milverton and Axbridge *(Hill 1981).*

Important in shaping the relationships between the nascent towns were the long distance routes. Ilchester, with 107 burgesses in 1086, was the most important market centre in late Anglo-Saxon Somerset, apart from

Bath, and it held that position because of the existence of the Fosse Way.

There is some evidence from the charters of the district that roads ran from Ilchester into Wiltshire, heading towards the south-coast ports and towards Winchester. Rimpton, in south-east Somerset, was for long the staging post of the Bishops of Winchester on their journeys to Taunton, and an examination of its charters shows that it was on a major road *(Costen 1985)*. The same area has a large number of 'ford' names, implying that the routeways in the area were both early and very important. Thus Alford, Ansford, Blackford, Bayford, Lattiford, Mudford, Sandford Orcas and Sparkford are all in this south east area. Blackford, Bayford and Lattiford are on a route leading from Ilchester into Wiltshire, via Mere. Mudford and Sandford Orcas are on part of a route which runs further south, while it is also likely that there was a road which ran through Sherborne, northwards to Frome and so on into northern Wiltshire. References to roads and tracks are extremely common in the charters. No less than forty-nine of the estates for which charters survive use roads, tracks and paths as boundaries. So common are they that we must assume that everywhere roads were used as boundaries as a matter of course. There are of course numerous other routes, not referred to in the charters, such that nowhere in Somerset could anyone have been far from a highway, and often one which would take him on long journeys.

CONCLUSION

Late Anglo-Saxon Somerset was full of people. A well developed road system; estates whose boundaries were clearly marked or at the least well-known; woodland which was relatively small in area and well protected; woodland whose exploitation was regulated; all these are features which point to a landscape where land-use needed to be carefully regulated and apportioned. The contrast between large and small estates was the most conspicuous feature of land ownership and such large estates were to be found all over the county, where the administrative centre of a king or a monastery provided a focus. Agricultural methods were probably also markedly different as between large and small estates and contrasts were developing between the highland and lowland districts. Above all it was a rich landscape in which the population was increasing and where the country dwellers of the late Anglo-Saxon era were reaping the benefits of the expansion of economic activity.

Note 1 *This differs from Oliver Rackham's figure of 74 (p 19) but the total depends on whether several versions of the same charter are counted separately and whether estates within estates are individually distinguished.*

Note 2 *S in S236, S563 etc. refers to the serial numbers given to Anglo-Saxon Charters in Sawyer 1968. There is no S number for the charters for Banwell etc. (see below).*

Note 3 *The sources for the charters consulted here are very varied. The charters for Bath Abbey are in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (ms 111) and are published by the Somerset Record Society (Hunt 1893). Glastonbury Abbey's cartulary (ms Longleat 39) kept at Longleat House, Wiltshire has also been published by the Somerset Record Society (Watkin 1947–56) as have those of Athelney Abbey and Muchelney Abbey (Bates 1899). The charters relating to the estates of the Old Minster at Winchester, later the property of the Bishop of Winchester, have not been printed, except in Birch and Kemble (Birch 1885–93, Kemble 1839–48); they are in the Codex Wintoniensis, British Library Additional ms 15350. The charters of Banwell and Compton Bishop, Wellington and West Buckland, and Wellow are in the Liber Albus in the Library of Wells Cathedral; and the British Library contains the charter (ms Harley 61) for Hentridge S570.*

Note 4 *See Smith 1970 for the Old English place-name elements and their meanings.*

Note 5 *OE is used for Old English throughout.*

Note 6 *It is likely that the element 'ing' which occurs quite commonly in names such as 'Lullington' is of the type described by A H Smith (1970) as -ing-4. This is a connective particle denoting the association of a place with a particular person whose name forms the first element in the name i.e. 'Lullington'—'the tun associated with Lulla'. The 'ing' has a genitival function but does not necessarily denote ownership.*

DITCHEAT AND ITS CHARTER

The Longleat Chartulary of Glastonbury Abbey includes a charter (S292 of 842) for the Abbey's estate at Ditcheat. The grant is for an area which later appears as the ecclesiastical parish of Ditcheat. Two separate units, Ditcheat and Lottisham, were granted and Lottisham continued as part of the estate and part of the ecclesiastical parish, although completely detached on the western side of the Fosse Way, until modern times. Here only Ditcheat is considered. Both parts of the estate were surveyed and provided with a boundary clause in the charter, but the Lottisham part has not yet been solved. Although the Ditcheat clause is not certain at every point enough can be elucidated to make it a worthwhile example.

Ditcheat was an important estate in the Abbey's lands and it is clear that its origins are tied up with an estate of the late Roman period. Within its bounds there is a Roman villa site *(Haverfield 1906 p 320).* The existence of an extensive area of the parish with the modern name *Old Floors*, probably denotes an otherwise unknown site of Roman origin (see 'A', Fig. 2.8), while at Sutton there is a site of an extensive Romano–British village (see 'B', Fig. 2.8).

In addition it is possible that a Dark Age *wicham* site also existed (see *'8'* below). However, the bounds of the estate, as we see them, are not entirely of Roman origin, since the northern boundary is a late Roman landscape feature, so that the boundary must be post fourth century in origin. It is also noteworthy that the late Romano–British temple on Lamyatt Beacon is less than two kilometres away in the next parish. Lamyatt itself was often appended to Ditcheat in the early middle-ages and in 1086 Lamyatt and Hornblotton were both included in the Ditcheat entry in Domesday Book, as was the estate inside Ditcheat at Alhampton *(Thorn and Thorn 1980).*

The Bounds

1—First to the ford at the dyke . . .

At a point on the northern boundary there is a stream which cuts the boundary and runs through the parish to meet the river Alham. This stream separates the outlying parts of East Pennard from Evercreech. The ford is therefore a meeting point for several boundaries and the obvious place at which to start a perambulation. The ditch or dyke referred to probably gives Ditcheat its name (*dic+geat*), referring to the gap in the dyke through which the stream passes. This dyke is a large ditch and bank, which is probably a road linked to the nearby Lamyatt temple towards which it runs *(Leech 1986).*

2—Along the course of the Alham to the thorntree at the boundary ford . . .

The boundary runs along the river Alham. At the point at which it leaves the river and turns in a generally southerly direction the field is called **millfords** (T661). There is no evidence for a mill here and it seems likely that this is actually a corruption of the Old-English *gemaereford.*

3—Thence south to a farm . . .

This point cannot be traced, but may be near the point at which the present parish boundary crosses the road.

4—To the road . . .

The boundary runs along Holwell lane.

5—Along the road to a post. . . .

Fields (T906 and 907) *(Note 7)* here are called Stable Acre. This is clearly the Old-English *stapel,* a post and enables this point to be fixed.

6—To the birdswood . . .

It is clear that, since the next point is close this one must lie near T912.

7—Thence to the clearing where garlic grows . . . (Note 8)

Field T913 is **ramsley**.

8—South to the boundary ditch . . .

The boundary turns south and joins a stream deeply cut into the land which runs south to the river Brue. This is still the parish boundary. The names of the fields close to this boundary, T924–931 **castle** and T934 **wickham ash**, point to this as an area of early settlement. **Wickham Ash** is very close to the medieval *wykhamstyle (Note 9).* This might be a *wicham* site.

9—Along the ditch to the River Brue . . .

10—Along the stream to the confluence with the river Alham . . .

The river passes the Roman villa site at **laverns** as well as a Romano–British village at Sutton.

11—Up the Alham to Bula's tree . . .

It is likely that the name Bula's tree is preserved in the name of Bolter's Bridge (bolamtre—bolter). The modern boundary goes on a little way beyond the bridge before turning, but this is probably what the original boundary did and it is the name which has migrated a few yards. Several fields around this area carry the name **bolters** (T1338 and T1339).

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Fosse Wa

13—Along the road . . .
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"gate".

14—Along the
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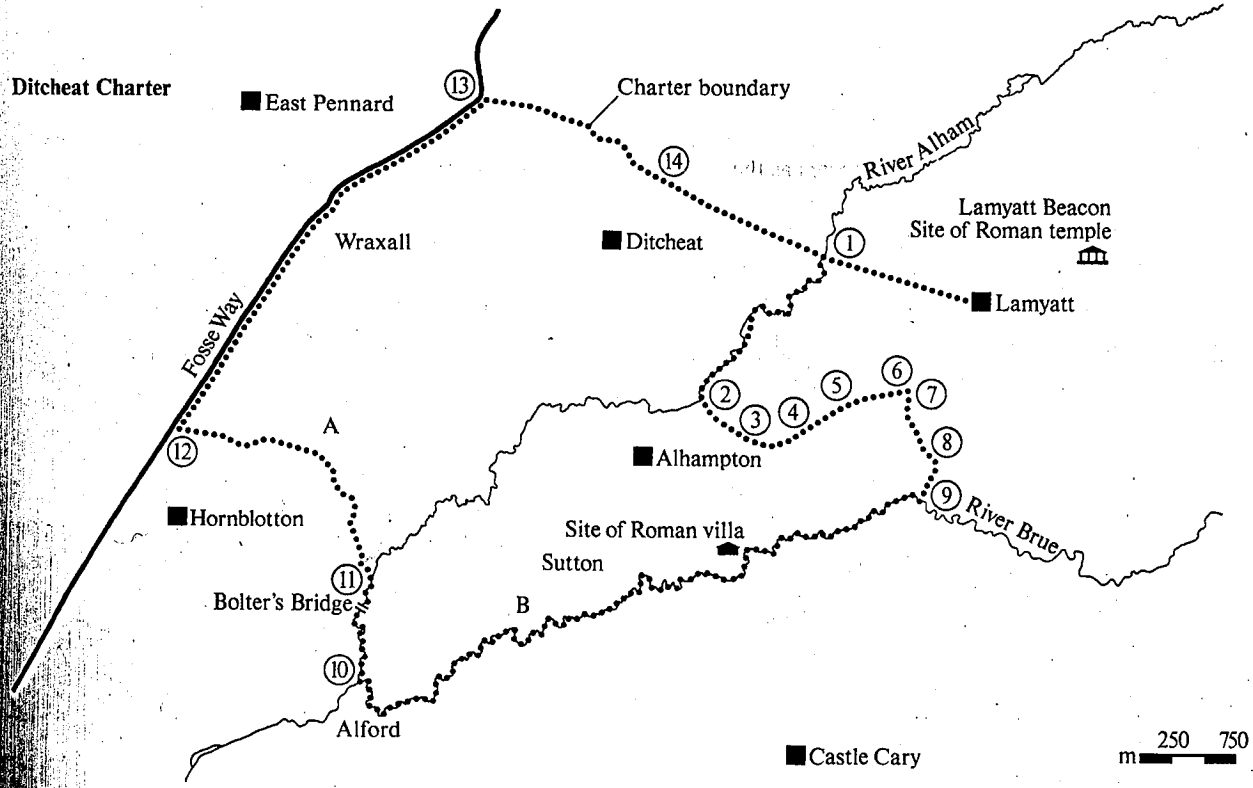
2.8 **Ditcheat Charter**



2—Along the ditch to the Roman road . . .
The modern boundary follows a small ditch which divides Ditcheat from Hornblotton and runs to the Fosse Way.

3—Along the Roman road to the gap on the Roman road . . .
The boundary runs to the point where the Fosse reaches an escarpment and plunges down to the plain. The dip through which the road runs is probably the "gate".

4—Along the dyke once more to the ford at the ditch . . .
This takes the boundary along the dyke until it reaches the starting point of the charter. The charter boundary and the modern parish boundary may diverge slightly for part of this stretch, but the divergence, if any, is very small.
The modern parish boundary and the charter boundary seem to correspond for the whole of this estate. Glastonbury had little reason to alter the bound of its estates once they were fixed, and the stability of the monastic ownership probably explains why there were no changes in this boundary from the ninth century until the establishment of parochial boundaries in the early middle ages.

Note 7 *Tithe map and award for Ditcheat 1840 in the County Record Office, Taunton.*

Note 8 *The transcription of this charter is late and many of the spellings are actually Middle-English rather than Old-English. It is therefore impossible to distinguish between 'hramsa', OE 'garlic', which is often spelt* hraemes *in place-names and 'rammes' the genitive singular of OE 'ramm,' a 'ram'. In view of the very common association between wild garlic and woodland, and the unlikelihood of sheep in this context it seems best to treat this as another example of* wild garlic.

Note 9 *British Library Manuscript Egerton 3321. A Survey of the lands of Glastonbury Abbey of 1308–10.*

Chapter 3

THE CHURCH *in the* LANDSCAPE

Part 1 The Anglo-Saxon period

Michael Costen

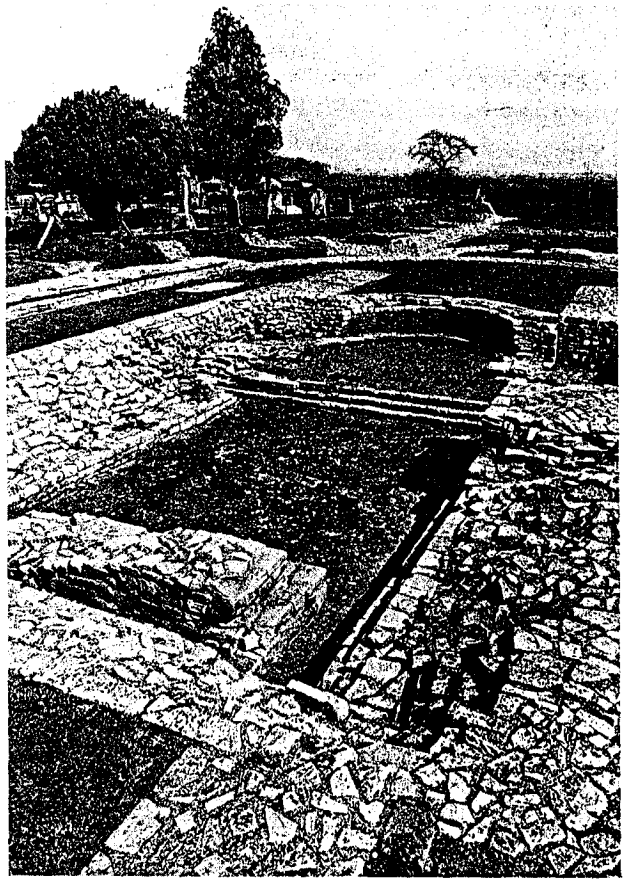
It is important to recognise that religious belief and practice was an integral part of Anglo-Saxon society and that the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period in Somerset coincided with the growth of the alliance between the Anglo-Saxon kings and the newly trained native English hierarchy and clergy. This was a quite natural event, since the pagan Anglo-Saxon rulers seem to have been the leaders of religious cults for their subjects. This relationship inside the new church is clearly demonstrated in the work of Bede.

The West-Saxon King Cynegils was converted in about 635 *(Bede)* and although his successor, his second son, was not a Christian at first, he was converted while in exile in Essex. However, Cynegils had set up an episcopal centre at Dorchester on Thames and this institution survived, moving to Winchester in 662. Bede makes it clear that a bishop was normally established as the result of the request of the king and his people; he was not imposed by clerical authority from outside. The bishop exercised his authority inside the territory of a king and was clearly felt to be the bishop of a people, not of a territory. In those circumstances the conversion of the king and of his household was clearly the first priority for any missionary.

The arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in Somerset took place soon after their conversion, and it would be a mistake to imagine that paganism did not exist among them. There are some signs of paganism, which survive even into the late Anglo-Saxon period. At Taunton the bounds of the charter S311 *(Note 1)* preserve a remark about an ash tree, *"which the ignorant call 'holy'"*. In addition the parish of Staplegrove, near Taunton, probably preserves a remnant of a fertility cult in its name. It is significant that a field name in the middle of the parish preserves the name 'halgrove'. It seems possible that this was a site of phallic worship.

The building of churches was the responsibility of the king and in the face of continuing paganism his example was of the greatest importance. The existence of churches among the Anglo-Saxons from an early date is well attested *(Morris 1983)* and the foundation of both conventual monasteries and minsters in Somerset probably took place in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. However the actual dating of such institutions is very difficult and caution is necessary. The earliest church known in the county was the monastery at Bath founded about 676 (S51), but that was probably in the territory of the Hwicce and so should be regarded as Mercian rather than West Saxon. The only other churches which have foundation (or refoundation) dates in the seventh century seem to be Glastonbury, about 688 *(Garmonsway 1953)* and Muchelney about 693 (S240). The early foundation of minster churches must be inferred. At least on royal sites minsters were probably in existence by the early eighth century. Recent work has drawn attention to the difficulty of drawing a clear distinction between the monasteries, properly called, and the secular minster churches *(Blair 1985)*. However this does not mean that all the minsters founded to provide religious services to the secular community were founded as monastic communities in the strict sense, but that they all share the characteristic that both minsters and monasteries held land for their support.

3.1 *The central crossing under the tower at Milborne Port church. The Romanesque arches date from just before the Norman Conquest*



3.2 *Saxon crypt, Muchelney Abbey*

MONASTERIES

It would be unwise to assume that the early foundations at Glastonbury and at Muchelney had enormous lands at their disposal in their early years. The picture drawn in the Domesday Book is many centuries later and long after the refoundations of the tenth century. Consequently despite their political and social importance their predominance as landowners was probably far from established in the eighth century.

The situation of Glastonbury Abbey has often been remarked upon as suitable for a "Celtic" monastery, built in the marshes as it was. Whether of not it was a religious site of significance prior to the late seventh century is still an open question, but it is indisputable that the site is also very convenient for the chief early royal 'tun' of Somerset at Somerton, while Muchelney, also deep in the marsh lands, is also within easy reach of Somerton as well as another royal estate at South Petherton.

Nothing is known about the way in which monasteries exploited their early estates and we must assume that they merely fitted into the existing pattern of large centralised units which has been suggested for the secular world. However, the monastic revival of the mid-tenth century, affecting Glastonbury first among all English monastic institutions, produced a profound change in the relationship between the monasteries and their estates. It is clear that, as on the continent, the ninth century had seen a dispersal of the lands of monasteries among secular landowners. This alone would explain the moves to have Dunstan exiled from the court of King Edmund in 939, since a revival of English monasticism would have involved considerable financial loss for the local nobility *(Knowles 1963)*. As it was, the monastic resurgence from 940 onwards led to an enormous expansion of monastic property and turned Glastonbury into the largest landowner in the shire after the royal household.

The administration of monastic estates took place in the context of the new, individualistic landscape of the tenth century. In most cases the monastery was simply administering what it had been granted but there are some grounds for thinking that, where the monastery held large "multiple estates", it may have reorganised them to meet the new social conditions of the age. Work on Shapwick *(Corcos 1983)* suggests internal reorganisation of the estate in the tenth century, which provided for a nucleated village settlement and newly laid out fields. But Shapwick itself was only a part of a much larger unit and it may well be that the laying out of new estates along the top of the Poldens marks another part of the same enterprise.

MINSTERS

The siting of minster churches, often close to Roman villa sites as at Cheddar, Banwell and Keynsham *(Pearce 1982)*, or near Roman cemeteries as at Ilchester *(Dunning 1975)*, or late Roman mausolea as at Wells *(Rodwell 1982)*, suggests that kings were often constrained by relationships and religious forces which predate the period of foundation in the early eighth century. Other sites may also betray the need to take account of existing sacred sites. The minster on the royal estate of Williton, St

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3.3 *East Pennard Church, list*

Decumans, is not close to the royal 'tun' which gives the estate its name, but out in the country, near to the sacred spring of St Decuman, itself probably a pagan site connected with celtic severed head and spring cults.

Despite its relatively late foundation (909) as the head minster the choice of the site at Wells is clearly constrained by the presence of a major cult there, which may have been powerful enough to have commanded the whole of the 60 hides which was credited to the cathedral in Domesday Book *(Thorn and Thorn 1980)*, even before it was the head minster.

Where such constraints did not operate the king was free to found churches at places convenient to the major royal secular sites, reflecting their use by the community of high ranking people and the need for those of a lower social status to turn towards the social centre of their community to meet their religious needs.

In Somerset we have regrettably little information about the extent or pattern of church building during later Anglo-Saxon times. The well known ordinances of King Edgar concerning tithes, issued between 959 and 963, give valuable information about the relationships between churches and show that by the mid-tenth century a hierarchy of status, probabaly related ultimately to date of foundation and the prestige of the founder, was clearly defined:

> *"And all payment of tithe is to be made to the old minster to which the parish belongs and it is to be rendered both from the thegns, demesne lands and from the land of his tenants according as it is brought under the plough.*
>
> *If however there is any thegn who has on his own bookland a church with which there is a graveyard, he is to pay the third part of his own tithe into his church.*
>
> *If anyone has a church with which there is no graveyard he is then to pay to his priest from the nine parts what he chooses. And all church scot is to go to the old minster from every free hearth."*
> *(Whitlock 1955 p 395).*

33 *East Pennard Church, listed as Pennarminster in The Domesday Book, although none of the Saxon fabric remains*