

## RESEARCH IN PROGRESS INTO THE ANGLO-SAXON LANDSCAPES OF THE WEST MIDLANDS\*

The sources for a study of early landscapes include archaeological data and field evidence, contemporary literature and later documents, parish boundary patterns, place-names and pre-Conquest charters. The latter often contain a wealth of local topographical information which may be examined in conjunction with other evidence to reveal the fine details of the landscape over wide areas of countryside.

Many charters include clauses which contain detailed descriptions of the landmarks along the boundaries of the estates but the problems of using these are not confined to the solution of the clauses in the field and their relationship to surviving boundaries. The terminology of the landmarks, like that of place-names, remains incompletely understood. However, unlike placenames, the clauses, in describing features which can be relatively accurately located, offer possibilities of examining individual features in the field and in conjunction with other evidence, thus allowing a more precise interpretation of the term. It is hoped to publish the results of this enquiry in forthcoming Journals of the English Place-Name Society.

In areas which are well-covered by charters with boundary clauses, such as Worcestershire, the distribution of individual features may be mapped and seen to be representative of different kinds of landscape. Many of the landmarks describe vegetation type or man-made features and the varying regional patterns may indicate different responses to man's natural environment and differing stages in the development apparent over the area. The study concentrates upon the counties of Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire, including virtually all of the Kingdom of the Hwicce. Within this area the charters and place-names, in particular, reveal regions of relatively dense woodland, areas with active colonisation of woodland and areas of intensive agriculture.

Given this information the territorial evidence for the area takes on a fuller meaning. It becomes possible by means of charter and place-name evidence to examine the degree and nature of landscape development in conjunction with known tenurial and ecclesiastical relationships, and estates may be set within their geographical framework, shedding additional light upon the problems of continuity and change. Once this has been established it becomes possible to examine in greater detail the territorial organisation of the area.

Related publications:

'The Reconstruction of Ancient Routeways', *The Local Historian*, vol. 12, No.5, 1977, 212-220. Examines the use of the terms *straet* and *weg* in West Midland charters with special reference to the areas around Worcester and Stratford upon Avon.

'Anglo-Saxon Landscapes of the West Midlands', *Journal of the English Place-Name Society* forthcoming. Illustrates how the information in charter boundary clauses suggests regional patterns of landscape development.

'Llanaber: a Study in Landscape Development', *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society*, vol. VII, part 3, 1975, 221-228. Uses place-names and archaeological data to examine agrarian change in West Merioneth, Wales.

## Notes

- \* A report following a paper read to the tenth Conference of the Council for Name Studies on April 15th, 1978.

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