THE OPEN FIELDS OF CHESHIRE

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CHESHIRE has long lain in the no man's land of early cultivation systems. In a borderland zone, and with the assembled information as to open arable lands limited to a few examples, it has been widely believed that common arable fields had little place in the development of Cheshire agronomy. H. L. Gray came nearest to the truth when he wrote in 1915 in *English Field Systems* that the vestiges of open common field mentioned in Tudor surveys suggested that earlier most hamlets in the county had had a certain amount of open arable land. Yet he only named twelve places in which it occurred. This opinion received little support from English historians and in 1938, the late Dr. C. S. Orwin's view was summed up in these words: "In Cumberland, Westmorland and Cheshire only a few scattered instances (i.e. of open field) have been found, those in Cheshire being mostly in the neighbourhood of Chester."(1) Nor was Orwin alone in assuming that it was correct to leave Cheshire almost a blank on the distribution map of open field in England.

In the late 1940s a number of Manchester geographers began work on rural Cheshire from various angles and not by any means with the open-field question as their main concern. In particular, Mrs. Vera Chapman made a study of the Dee and Gowy valleys in Cheshire from which originated the paper *Open Fields in West Cheshire*, published in *Transactions* Volume 104. Some time before this Leonard Wharfe had revealed the extent to which this type of land system was formerly prevalent in Wirral.(2) Miss Pauline Kenworthy (now Mrs. D. M. Brookes) produced some useful data for north-eastern Cheshire, noting a number of examples but showing the lesser importance of open arable in that part of the county.(3) Mrs. Stella Davies in 1949 and 1953(4) described further cases

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in eastern Cheshire, notably Macclesfield and Stockport, and drew attention to the 1721 map of Witton on which its Town Fields were marked. Meanwhile, the writer's work indicating, *inter alia*, evidence of former open fields in several parts of Cheshire\(^5\) was extended and became part of a wider scheme of study of the rural landscape of the Welsh Borderland,\(^6\) and it became increasingly evident that the Cheshire data were not only of key interest but were also highly individual. With the evidence now collected, a card index has been formed, and from the information so far carded it has been possible to map the distribution of open arable lands for the county (fig. 3). The map shows over 250 examples, and in addition to these there are over 40 "suspects" and several unidentified places for which some indications of open field have been noted.

The best known of the British systems is the two- and three-field open arable system, which Gray distinguished as the Midland type. He advanced evidence to prove that in the early Middle Ages, and in some cases before that, it began as a two-field system, with cropping and fallowing alternating on each of the two small arable fields until, in suitable areas, a third field was added, and fallowing resorted to in only one year in three. He traced a relationship between a persistent two-field system and land of poorer quality; and between a three-, four-, and even multi-field system and areas of more advanced agriculture. Sufficient to say that in extreme cases, such as that of Oakley Reynes in Bedfordshire,\(^7\) the arable fields absorbed the greater part of the land. Nevertheless, the stubble and the fallow land provided only limited grazing and in most townships a proportion of the area had to be reserved for hay and for pasture. If alluvial valley land was to be found, water meadows were typically held in common, pegged out in strips at hay harvest so that every man took a share from his own *dole*, then thrown open so that each could put in a prescribed number of cattle to feed on the aftermath. These too were a form of open common field, and there was not always a hard line drawn between the two types. The poorest land of all was normally "waste" or open common pasture, heath, mountain land, or simply the land which had not been colonized. As the population increased, this rough pasture was reduced by assarting and it was either added to the common

\(^{\text{(5)}}\) "Rural Settlement in Cheshire", *Transactions* (1949).

\(^{\text{(6)}}\) Volume now in preparation.

field area or enclosed in severalty holdings. Thus, numerous factors were at work causing the land-holding and land-use patterns to alter and, as time went on, the open-field system became more complex, more irregular, or suffered attrition. Gray maintains that the multiplication of fields in the Midland system was the result of trying to reconcile it with advancing agricultural practice.

Certain elements in a system of co-aration are likely to be found elsewhere, but regional differences develop increasingly with relative isolation, especially where there are distinctive cultures and traditions. Hence, although various features of the Midland system can be identified outside the great diagonal belt which stretches from south-central England to south-east Durham, details of the pattern and the associated tenurial arrangements have long been recognized as differing appreciably in other parts of Britain. Gray himself drew attention to variations in form and practice which distinguished the open fields of Northumberland, Cumberland, Lancashire, Cheshire, Devon and Cornwall as well as Wales, Scotland and Ireland. He also described differences in south-eastern England, separating East Anglia and Kent from the Midland area in which the two- and three-field system was characteristic, and these broad regional differences have long been accepted.

In the Celtic areas where there are large acreages of barren upland, the amount of land suitable for the plough is generally restricted and the area of rough pasture almost equally unrestricted. But the Celtic people, who practised cultivation from an early period of their occupation of Britain, have long had some form of co-operation in tillage, and there are many indications that a primitive strip system was operated at the latest by Early Iron Age C. In Wales, rules for co-aration were formulated in the Laws of Hywel Dda which, although recorded in the Middle Ages, were probably in operation at a much earlier date. There is, indeed, no reason why the Celts of the lowland zone should not have taken the practice of co-aration with them when they moved into the hills and maintained a strip system varying in character according, in part, to the permissive or prohibitive character of their land. The Anglo-Saxon settlement was, on the whole, in regions where potential ploughland was abundant. Thus, by the Middle Ages, the Celtic areas were largely areas of difficult economy where pastoralism prevailed but a form of common cultivation persisted, and the English lowlands, by contrast, saw the increase and spread of cultivation the greater part of which was carried out in common fields which grew in size as the population grew.
It is generally assumed that the Anglo-Saxons brought with them traditional cultivation systems and Gray was at pains to trace the English open field system back to charters of the tenth and eleventh centuries.\(^8\) Although the history of the Expansion Phase is far from elucidated, it is clear that the settlement of Cheshire was both late\(^9\) and scanty. Little is known of the character of this occupation, except in so far as place-name evidence and certain surviving cultural and settlement features throw light on it. But it is clear that relatively small groups of English settlers established themselves among the transhumant or semi-nomadic Celtic tribesmen of the Cheshire lowlands and dominated them sufficiently to replace the greater part of the old Celtic place-names with English forms. Comparatively soon afterwards, Irish-Norse settled in north Wirral and some Danish groups penetrated north along the hill-foot zone of the Cheshire Pennines. Each left their quota of place-names. The Norman influence on place-names was less in this county than the importance of their administration might seem to warrant, but there is no doubt as to their far-reaching effects on forms of land tenure and on the extended colonization of the woodlands and heaths. Hence, by the time of the earliest documentary references to open arable fields, numerous peoples had mingled here and the settlement picture is correspondingly complex.

I. CHESHIRE EVIDENCE FOR OPEN ARABLE LANDS

Cheshire open field evidence is not easily reconstructed, yet in total it is modestly abundant. So many Cheshire townships had fields which failed to conform to any accepted pattern, that it is difficult to suppose that a true three-field system was worked in the county. One-field, two-field and multi-field cases are the commonest, but information as to their working is scanty indeed. It is therefore essential to cast aside preconceptions and be prepared to find peculiarities and irregularities. The evidence is, however, overwhelming that the custom of division into strips and of intermixed holdings was widely practised, not only in the arable fields but in meadows and on the peat mosses. Unfortunately, the evidence for

\(^8\) Op. cit., pp. 57–62. These principally concern places in the old kingdom of Wessex, but three are in Gloucestershire and three in Worcestershire.
\(^9\) Professor Kenneth Jackson in Language and History in Early Britain (1953), pp. 210–11, discusses the date of the Cheshire settlement and suggests that it may well have been some considerable time after the Battle of Chester.
certain townships is inadequate and confirmation from maps of pre-enclosure date is rare. Hence, in mapping the distribution of open fields for the county, certain “grades” have been resorted to. The map key is arranged accordingly, and the symbols so designed that they can be revised as and if new evidence becomes available. For example, there is acceptable evidence of former co-aration in a considerable number of cases for which, as yet, information as to the existence of fields named as such, is wanting. Should this be forthcoming, the symbol can be altered. But in a Welsh Border area one must be prepared to find that co-aration was not necessarily associated with strip groups in compact fields, for Welsh ploughing strips were liable to be scattered. In other instances, the evidence is so thin as to label the place in question no more than a “suspect”. These places have not been shown on the map, but, on detective principles, the information is filed and may, later, be sufficiently substantiated to justify their inclusion.

Admissible evidence is of several kinds. The early use of the word field (or campus) was applicable only to land cultivated or mowed in common in the Middle Ages. In Flintshire, it can generally be assumed to apply to open fields until the latter half of the eighteenth century, but in Cheshire its use was extended to closes at the latest by the seventeenth century. Characteristic names indicating open strips in Cheshire were shoot or shutt (e.g. Cockshutt headland in Townstead, Iddins-hall; Long Shoot, Cuddington), butt (innumerable examples, for instance at Butley, Coddington, and Clefford), land, lawnd, loon, loont, loom and other variants (e.g. at Chester, Claverton, Moreton, Greasby, Elton and Brinnington, headland (Great Caldy), rigg (Chester), dale (chiefly in Wirral townships), dole (generally in meadow, but at Macclesfield in an arable field), flatt, sometimes platt (very numerous, e.g. at Acton near Nantwich, Adlington and Astbury), selion (the usual term in Latin deeds and of very frequent occurrence), pingle (unusual but it occurs at Great Caldy), sproth (also unusual but occurs at Little Over), cultura (Appleton and

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(12) Tithe Apportionment.

(13) There were, for example, 37 recorded at Newton in the thirteenth century. Wm. Beamont, The Arley Charters, 1866, no. 1/53 (1292).
Walgherton), and acre (never accepted without supporting evidence because of its common use as a measurement and consequent later application to closes). The term territory is frequently used in mediaeval deeds in Cheshire and elsewhere to indicate the whole arable field area of a township, e.g. "the field called Rudifeld in the territory of Balderton."(14) This usage is so often and so specifically associated with common arable that there seems no doubt as to its meaning. Sometimes the term common field is employed,(15) but this is comparatively rare, and the field of . . . is the ordinary description, and where there was only one field it generally had no other name.(16) Where there were two or more fields they bore individual names, and many Cheshire fields were so small that furlongs might be named.(17) Even strips bore individual names sometimes.(18)

The earliest documentary evidence concerning Cheshire's common arable fields dates back to the early Middle Ages. Abundant reference is made to them in the Chester Chartulary and in the collection of deeds and documents in the so-called Middlewich Chartulary, published by the Chetham Society in 1941 and 1944. References to some Cheshire examples are also made in the Great Register of Lichfield Cathedral, published by the William Salt Archaeological Society in 1926, and the Chartulary of Dieulacres Abbey. There are one or two relevant examples in the Book of the Abbot of Combermere, Volume XXXI of the publications of the Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society. Several collections of estate documents contain important material, and many have the further advantage that they continue the story into the post-Reformation period.

II. EARLY OPEN FIELD TOWNSHIPS

Church Lawton may serve as the first example of the type of information conveyed by these early mediaeval deeds. It is

(15) As, for example, "the common field of Manley", Chester Chart., II, no. 710 (c. 1265–91).
(16) The name "common field" was also applied in and after the eighteenth century to fields which had been enclosed from the common pasture or waste. It is not therefore admissible evidence to assume that the late occurrence of this name indicates former open arable field.
(17) E.g. at Manley and Saighton in the thirteenth century, Chester Chart., Vol. II.
situated at Lawton Gate where an important route enters Cheshire from across the Midland Gap. Here the abbot of Chester gathered tolls. Now a dispersed township with a parish church, a hall and park, it was held for centuries wholly or in part by the Lawtons. In the Middle Ages, Chester Abbey held a moiety of the manor. Hence the group of deeds in the Chester Chartulary which concern the open fields of Lawton in the thirteenth century. A number of quitclaims each of some unspecified date between 1265 and 1291 refer to “an oxgang which Richard the smith rented from William de Lawton . . . and one half-selion lying in the field called Barwehedys,” [Chester Chartulary, No. 790], “two half-lands in the territory of Lawton”, and land in the fields called Quethull, Liveres-leghnese, and Parva We(r)sthannel(e) [No. 791], to “two selions in the territory of Lawton of which one lies in the field called Siwardeleg sive Brodelond and the other in le Ferfeld abutting on Brodeleg”, [No. 792], to “all his land in the field of Barwedes to the lake near Church Ridding, except the assart which the wife of T.L. held of him, and half a selion above the Midifarlong and two half-selions below the Church . . .” [No. 793b]. A grant to the abbot was made at about the same time of “three acres and the fourth part of an acre of land in an assart called le Dices, and half an acre above Threlowenhett and half a selion with a house on it next to the road in front of the door of the Lawton parson” [No. 805]. Another grant was made at this time of “part of the moor near Lawton Church containing 45 perches, to enclose and ditch” [No. 823]. Several assarts are mentioned in these thirteenth century deeds, most of them characteristically named riddings, e.g. Stanweyruding, Everardisrudyng and Hawardisrudyng [Nos. 825, 796, 826]. Other open fields figured in these deeds and it is clear that Lawton at this period operated a considerable number of fields, but whether as an integrated system or not is obscure. Assarts were being made to extend the open fields, and in the case of le Dices, assarting was clearly the means of creating either a new field or a new furlong attached to an old field.

Palmer and Owen cited Mobberley as an example of a parish with a town field, basing their evidence on an early seventeenth-century map and the nineteenth-century tithe map. (19) The history of open arable in Mobberley can in fact

Fig. 1. PART OF THE TOWNSHIP OF WYBUNBURY, 1845
be taken back to the fourteenth century through two documents among the Legh of Booths Charters. The later of these documents, No. 200, dated 1334, lists “two selions of land on le Nethercroftlondes; a moiety of a selion on le Mulnerudyng between two butts which formerly belonged to William de Modburleigh; . . . a selion called Gangkemonisacre in le Birchenfeld; a selion in le Birchenfeld between (the land of two); the moiety of a selion called le Stubbehallond in le Birchenfeld; a selion in le Holdefeld between (the land of two); moiety of two selions in Tattonstye; . . . moiety of Blakehurthe lying at the end of le Dichelondes next to the land of E.; a selion in le Holdencliff . . .; reversion of a selion on le Nethercroftlondes; piece of a medue pleck in le Mulne Rudyngk,” etc. Here too a multiple field system was worked together with common meadow land and common turbary [No. 200] divided into “moss rooms” [Nos. 207 (1605) and 210 (1608)]. In the fourteenth century, Mobberley’s customary tenants also had rights in the woods [No. 196 (late Edward I)]. A hedge bounded the field of Holdencliff, and the name Dichelondes suggests that that field was surrounded by a ditch which, as was so frequently the case in the Middle Ages, served a double purpose. By the seventeenth century, enclosure had not quite eliminated the open fields for there is a reference to “the closes and lands in the vill and fields of Mobberley” in an Inquisition post mortem. By the nineteenth century there was only a single town field.

The rather similar nineteenth-century field arrangements of Wybunbury were described by the writer in TRANSACTIONS, Volume 101. There too, a glimpse of earlier conditions is afforded, in this case by thirteenth-century documents (numbers 539, 547 and 531) in the Great Register of Lichfield Cathedral. In 1240, Pope Gregory authorized the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, in whose see Wybunbury then lay, to retain the church of Wybunbury for his own use because he had alleged “that around Stafford and Chester there are woody tracts infested by ‘sons of perdition’ who without the fear of God molest travellers” and that, as the bishop had to pass that way in the performance of his duties, he should therefore use it as a safe resting place. As a result the bishop acquired land there, becoming lord of the manor about this time (1240/1) when was assigned to him “the whole lordship of the vill of

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Wibbenbury, given to him by Robert de Praers, lord of Baddiley (via Richard of Wybunbury) . . . also two oxgangs of land in the same vill . . . he also grants him three londes of land (londas terre) in the same vill . . .” Among the few other documents in these muniments, two others, both dated 1240/1, are of interest in relation to open field. The first of these refers ostensibly to the Hough, a neighbouring township lying to the east of Wybunbury and within its parish. In one of these deeds, Sir Adam de Praers sells to the bishop “the whole of his meadow in the vill of Houth lying between Houth and Wybunbury, either to close it throughout the year or to make messuages thereon or for any other purpose: also his pool and fishpond . . . also the stream and a site for building a mill wherever he chooses within the vendor’s fief . . . and from his wood and haye at Houth for the purposes of the meadow, pool and mill; with free access to pool and mill and meadow; also a piece of land in the field of Olenwrthug below the church fence with all the commonage, liberties and easements of the vill of Houth, for an annual rent of one penny . . .” It is clear from this deed that there was some sort of common meadow in the Hough over which, however, the lord of the manor could evidently exercise arbitrary rights—a fact suggestive of its comparatively recent institution. The common field seems, by contrast, to have been associated with all the rights of ancient custom. The difficulty about this passage is that there was no church in Hough, and if the field of Olenwrthug lay “below the church fence” then it seems impossible that it could have been in that township. Further, the only area in Hough which, from the tithe map evidence, is likely to have been former open arable is near the hamlet and some distance from Wybunbury. The field of Olenwrthug can only have been in or near the small valley which forms the boundary between Wybunbury and the Hough townships. On the Hough side this is the only likely site for the common meadow, hence there is a fairly strong probability that Olenwrthug field lay in Wybunbury itself, and that the men of Hough held strips there “with all commonage, liberties and easements” which had been accorded to them. There is nothing in these thirteenth-century documents to suggest that Wybunbury had more than one arable field and perhaps a common meadow, and it is therefore classed as a one-field township. But the tithe map, in addition to the town field, shows a number of fields called riddings, and it is possible that these represent assarts which constituted or extended a second field.
Documentary evidence of this type is abundant in the mediaeval records. For some townships it gives a reasonably clear account of the open fields, naming them and giving at least indicative information as to their character and mode of division. For others it is tantalisingly incomplete, and for some meagre in the extreme. The whole body of information, however, leaves no doubt as to the wide distribution of common arable lands in Cheshire or that new assarts were being actively added to their acreage. This extension of the cultivated area was part of the mediaeval colonization of woodland and waste, rendered necessary by increasing pressure of population. It was facilitated by the Carta Communis Cestrisirie, the ‘Magna Carta of Cheshire’, in which Earl Ranulf III granted certain liberties to his Cheshire barons in 1215/6 in response to their petitions. Among these liberties was “the right to assart their lands within the arable area of the forest and to grow crops on lands formerly cultivated and free from wood without payment.” (22) As a result the arable area was rapidly extended in the thirteenth century and the early fourteenth century by the greater landowners including the religious houses. Among these last, the abbey of St. Werburgh was particularly active, promoting the clearing and cultivation of new lands in their numerous manors in Wirral, around Chester and in scattered manors in other parts of the county as has, for example, been described in the case of Church Lawton (see above pp. 6–7). Several other religious houses owned land in Cheshire, but in no other case were their possessions so extensive as those of St. Werburgh. Next in importance as a landowner was the abbey of Vale Royal. After its foundation in the latter part of the thirteenth century, Vale Royal Abbey became the owner and administrator of considerable estates, and extended the cultivated area in the manors of Over, Darnhall and Weaverham which had formerly belonged to the earldom of Chester. (23) Several other religious houses held Cheshire properties, (24) for example the abbey of Dieulacres held land in the Dee valley at Aldford, Pulford, Balderton, Eccleston, Churton,
and in occasional other manors in several parts of the county.

Among the lay estates, the manor of Frodsham remained in the earldom of Chester throughout the Middle Ages, and its town field was finally enclosed by act of Parliament in 1784. The manor of Macclesfield which was in the earldom at Domesday, passed via Queen Isabella to the Black Prince and then to his widow all in the course of the fourteenth century. The Lacies held estates which became part eventually of the Duchy of Lancaster. These included Halton, Runcorn, Moore, Whitley, Congleton and Kelsall. Of the baronies of the early Norman period, several were broken up or in the process of break-up by that time—Nantwich, Malpas, Dunham Massey, Shipbrook and Kinderton. But in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries some at least of these were actively associated with the extension of cultivation, for example Kinderton in the Middlewich area where there were numerous open-field townships.\(^{25}\) In addition many small mediaeval estates consisted of only one or two or a handful of manors. Many of these grew and later outstripped the original baronies in importance, and in a number of cases their records have been preserved and throw important light on the distribution and character of early arable fields, for example those of Arley, Tabley and the Leghs.\(^{26}\)

The effect of the Black Death on the growing but still small population of the county must be largely conjectural, but there is considerable evidence that it caused many deaths, many vacant tenancies and many economic changes.\(^{27}\) The Black Death can hardly be invoked as the chief cause in the decline of the open arable system in Cheshire, where so many factors must have been contributory, but its incidence seems to coincide with a sharp decrease in the deeds concerning open field holdings, and it certainly hastened if it did not initiate the break-up of community cultivation. In the Vale Royal manors the system reached its height in the fourteenth century. In other parts of the county, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries provide the most abundant references, which is not to suggest that an earlier period had not also witnessed the spread and practice of the system here. Decline seems to have set in earliest in the smaller communities, but the larger villages

\(^{25}\) Middlewich Chart.

\(^{26}\) The Arley Charters, 1866; Tabley House Coll.; Legh of Booths Charters.

\(^{27}\) Ed. R. Stewart-Brown, Accounts of the Chamberlains and other officers of the County of Chester, 1301–60, Record Soc. of Lancs. and Cheshire, Vol. LIX (1910), nos. 16, 17, 19 and 23. In Drakelowe alone 57 tenancies were vacant by death in 1350–1. See also Hewitt, op. cit., pp. 148–9.
and several of the towns such as Knutsford, Stockport and Chester, which were true “country towns” until the industrial period and which often had the largest open fields, retained their fields and, despite enclosure within them and consequent shrinkage, maintained at least one of them as such until dates varying up to the eighteenth century. A further differentiating factor was the degree and character of manorial control.

Knutsford was a case in point. Here, near to the park and hall of Norbury Booths, and in the adjacent township of Knutsford Booths or Over Knutsford, the existence of open field can be traced from the thirteenth century (28) until the nineteenth. In the fourteenth century, Nether Knutsford had open fields called Oldefeld, Quitebruche (or Whitebruche), and Walleclif; those of Over Knutsford were called Leprossefeld and le Botheslade. (29) One of the difficulties of following open field history is that field names change from one period to another. Hence identity is rendered uncertain. Eventually, but at varying dates, most Cheshire open arable fields came to be known as Town Fields. (30) Knutsford provides a particularly early example of the use of this name. Excerpts from a deed of 1430 (31) illustrate these and other points:

“a parcel of land in le Tounfyld (between the lands of two others); which parcel is enclosed by a new ditch and stretches in breadth towards the east and lengthwise to a road leading from the said vill (Knutsford) to the manor of le Bothes (Norbury Booths); . . .” two selions in le leperosfyld, whereof one lies in the southern portion of the said field and has one headland stretching as far as Ponstonesmere in the east and the other as far as John de Oulegreave’s field in the west and lies in breadth between the lands of William de Are and Robert de Cornell’ on the one side and le Rowlowfyld on the other, and the other lies in the northern portion of le leperosfyld, namely in length as far as William de Are’s croft in the west and the heath towards Ollerton in the east and in breadth towards le Cleypittes on the heath in the north and as far as the land of the said John . . . in the south”.

The rent for these parcels was six shillings per annum together with all secular services “excepting suit of the said John’s court of Knottesford, to his watermills and common there, and autumn work such as the other burgesses are bound to do, namely for each burgage one day in autumn”. In other fifteenth-century deeds, further open field names are mentioned

(28) Tabley House Collection.
(29) Legh of Booths Charters, nos. 44 (1373), 45 (1382), 48 (1392).
(30) See the discussion of this point on p. 32.
(31) Legh of Booths Charters, no. 63 (1430).
Fig. 2. NETHER KNUTSFORD—PART OF TITHE MAP, 1847
for Nether Knutsford: le Overmast Domfyld, Slaynemensfyld, and perhaps le Kyrkefeld for Nether Knutsford: le Overmast Domfyld, Slaynemensfyld, and perhaps le Kyrkefeld were in this township.

The Tabley Collection includes an indenture of 1450, which refers to “a grant of a selion and garden ... and an acre lying between the common field of Knottesford and John Legh’s field called le Soutfyld and a large selion lying in le Botheslade and extending to the field called Appultreflatte.” The implied difference between the common field of Knutsford and le Soutfyld, in the Legh demesne presumably, is an interesting indication of varying status and possibly of tenure. It seems possible that the common field was the town field of the 1430 deed. Le Botheslade, Leprossefield, the Crossefield, Overtounfeld and probably others survived as open fields until 1512, but after that date references to the open fields are few. In the seventeenth century, a number of closes bore names which, formerly, would have been appellatives only for open fields: three Mylnefields (divided into six closes), Sanfield and Lillycock hey. Presumably enclosure went on piecemeal for several centuries in townships such as these, but by the time of the tithe commission the process had still not been completed for a few quillets survived among the strip-shaped closes which continued to bear witness to the former area of the open fields (fig. 2).

There was certainly no single period in which enclosure took place throughout the county. It seems, rather, that fields in the smaller places were replaced at the Black Death or quite soon afterwards by severalty holdings. Many demesne fields may have undergone this change. But elsewhere there was no purpose served by enclosure, for a common plough team was essential and boon work, a small rental, and perhaps certain renders in kind were the only means the peasant could offer in exchange for the use of oxen to plough his lands and ensure his eventual share of the harvest. It is important to remind ourselves at this stage that Cheshire, unlike the greater number of English counties to the south and east, was neither a wool nor a wheat producing area to any degree, but gained her wealth rather from cattle, swine, timber and salt. The damp, cool, northerly climate made wheat always a difficult crop, and, in poor seasons, a hazardous one. Yet a minimum amount had to be grown to feed the population in the self-sufficient communities of the pre-industrial period. In these conditions it is not to be expected that the arable land would

\[\text{Ibid., nos. 66 (1434), 84 (1472).}\]
\[\text{Ibid., no. 133 (1570).}\]
be the major concern and, apart from the phase of expansion fostered by the monasteries and the mediaeval barons, there seems to have been little enthusiasm for extending common ploughlands. Individualism seems always to have been a characteristic both of the county and its inhabitants and should probably not be neglected as yet another factor in the growth of severalty holding here. Just how early this became a significant feature it is difficult indeed to say, and could we assess the increase in severalty holdings at certain periods or in certain parts of the region, we should have part at least of the answer as to the relative importance of common and severalty cultivation in the Middle Ages.

The three volumes of the *Cheshire Inquisitions Post Mortem* form one of the most useful sources of information about agricultural holdings in the first half of the seventeenth century. One finds them, however, very imprecise as a guide to common fields. Many names suggest either that such fields were still in existence, or that they had only recently been enclosed, for the term *field* was now liberally applied to closes. Nevertheless, covering as they do landowners all over the county, they reveal information as to the survival of open field and common meadow in many townships and even provide the earliest indication of their existence so far known to the writer for others. One example is Haslington, near Crewe (Vol. II, p. 31), for which mention is made of ten acres of land called Leysur, parcel of Winchurch Fields “to their use for ever.” Another is Wettenhall (Vol. I, p. 63), for which three parcels of land in the town fields were mentioned—town fields which are still so named on the Two-and-a-half Inch Ordnance Survey map.

Two exceptionally interesting Cheshire field plans have been deposited in the Shropshire Record Office by Lord Brownlow and are preserved in the Bridgwater Collection. One is a map of Worleston of 1639, the other of Marbury cum Quoisley of 1651. Although the *Chester Chartulary* includes several deeds which concern Worleston, they make no mention of common fields. Yet in 1639 on a coloured map on parchment entitled *The Plot of Worleston Towne fields surveyed by John Reeve of Dudington in the County of Chester, free Mason, Anno 1639*, are depicted open strip fields called “Annesey feilds” and “Annesey Meadow”. The name Annesey is not preserved on the modern Ordnance Survey maps and the parchment plan is inaccurately drawn. By comparison with scale maps, however, it would appear that Annesey meadow lay probably at Beam Bridge, near to Reaseheath. If so, this ties up with a
reference in *Inquisitions Post Mortem* (Vol. I, p. 86) to “a portion of meadow in the Beame Bridge Meadow to the use of Roger Wright and his heirs” in 1622. Annessey Field lies adjacent to this and both are divided into open strips. Areas of open strips are shown also in other parts of the township, but there are considerable numbers of closes, evidently held in severalty. The 1651 map of Great Marbury Heyes is by William Fowler, but is torn and unfortunately the lower part is missing. It shows an area of one-time open field evidently largely enclosed and one presumes that the map was made about the time of enclosure as a record of that process. There is an accompanying schedule of field names and among the significant names are Ry Feild, Long Feild, and Great and Little Marbury Hay.

Open field enclosure acts for Cheshire are rare indeed, and one is forced to assume that the common fields disappeared piecemeal or were enclosed by private agreements which in many cases were not even recorded. For example, Bunbury township showed, at the time of the tithe commission a number of open quillets still remaining in the area of the old open fields.\(^{(35)}\) Barnston in Great Budworth shows the old pattern very strikingly on the tithe map, and a 1781 map of Witton in the Brunner Library, Northwich, depicts large portions of the old town fields still open at that date. But by the time of the General Enclosure Acts, Cheshire was one of the counties for which the lowest amounts of remaining open field were reported and it is probably because of this that later writers have been of the opinion that it was never an open field area of any note.

**IV. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMON ARABLE LANDS**

From whatever angle one approaches the study of Cheshire open fields their peculiarities are evident. There are only a few examples of what may have been three-field townships to be found in the county:—Aldford, Iddinshall, Handbridge, Manley, Nether Peover, and Horton by Tilston, but none of these can be confirmed as having in fact worked a three-field system. It is difficult to introduce statistics into a study of this type without seeming to be more precise than it is in fact possible to be. But for what it is worth a count has been made on the basis of information so far filed, including unidentified places and suspects:

\(^{(35)}\) Dorothy Sylvester, *Transactions*, Vol. CI, pp. 24 and 26, and fig. VII.
Fig. 3. DISTRIBUTION OF COMMON ARABLE AND MEADOW LAND IN CHESHIRE
It is clearly possible that examples in all but the first class may be moved up to a higher category if more evidence is found, hence the totals must be regarded as very liquid. Nevertheless certain facts stand out, and taking into account these and other reservations it is clear

(a) that a one- or two-field system was the most typical
(b) that a multi-field system developed in a striking number of cases
(c) that Cheshire is not a three-field county.

It is possible that the number of townships in the three-field group may be added to. It is also possible that it may be reduced in number. One- and two-field townships have been put together, because it is not at this stage possible to assume that, even where one field may have been a persistent feature, it was worked as such. Indeed, fallowing was so essential a part of the open field system, that no land could be in continuous cultivation, and there are at least three possible solutions to this problem. First, there may have been an outfield which was movable and for which part of the waste was ploughed as and when it was required, and it seems possible that some of the numerous riddings may have served this purpose, for the term outfield has never been encountered in connection with Cheshire examples. Some of the fields called Heathfield may also have originated in this way. Secondly, pairs of townships with neither good land in abundance nor many men to do the work, may have combined forces and worked their two single fields on a two-field principle although a manorial or township boundary lay between. Certainly, as shown below on pages 21–4, inter-aration was practised in the large, multi-field manors belonging to Vale Royal Abbey.
Thirdly—and here the matter is rather less hypothetical—Cheshire fields were often divided into named furlongs, and the deeds constantly refer to selions as lying in a specified furlong, *e.g.* “four selions in Aspone-furlong in the territory of Manley of which one is called Aleynes Haddelond . . . another in the same field.” (36) It would be very simple to leave one or more furlongs fallow in alternate years.

The second point which emerges from the count is the numerical strength of the multi-field townships. Gray paid considerable attention to this type and drew the conclusion that they originated in numbers in the West Midlands. The Cheshire examples are strikingly associated with Vale Royal Abbey and with lands of some large lay owners in areas of extensive assarting. They seem to have become multi-field manors during the Middle Ages and to have lost their multi-field character just as quickly as they acquired it. The Vale Royal manors offer a particularly illuminating illustration of the complexity of Cheshire ploughing arrangements in the fourteenth century. The data are derived from a long and intricate rental in the *Ledger Book,* which lists the holdings in the arable fields in each manor, in or about 1334. The difficulties of the rental are considerable, not least among them the doubt left as to whether every arable holding is in fact in a field or whether some may not be separate or in odd patches or small crofts. Certainly many of the names appear to be place names not field names. Mediaeval spelling leaves doubt as to the identity or otherwise of certain pairs with very similar spelling. But the major problem is to elucidate the complex working of the system which applied in these closely inter-related manors. Scores of field names are used in the rental referring to the eight manors principally concerned. Some of these fields appear only once or twice or under only one manor. But many appear under several of the manors and the greater number of these have been tabulated in the accompanying guide plan, on which numbers refer to the number of holdings in the field in question under the various manors.

It immediately becomes clear from the table that Churchtown (in Over) and Blakeden were the two manors which came nearest to having a small number of fields of appreciable size by mediaeval Cheshire standards. In Churchtown, le Heye and Littlemor seem to be confined entirely to the men of that manor, while the same applies to Oldredenfeld with the exception that two Littleover men have holdings there. But Churchtown men also have shares in eleven more of these fields or

(36) *Chester Chart.*, no. 712 (c. 1265–91).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIELDS (?)</th>
<th>Little Over</th>
<th>Ways Green</th>
<th>Much Over</th>
<th>MANORS</th>
<th>Church-town</th>
<th>Blake-den</th>
<th>“Heth”</th>
<th>Little-croft</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Bradenal</td>
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in twelve if le Bruch and Bruchland are separate, and the total list of "fields" (?) in which Churchtown men ploughed was twenty-seven, in addition to one or two "localities". The situation was most nearly similar in Blakeden, whose men held the major number of shares in Heppedenefeld and Blakedenefeld; more than was held by any other manor in Burifeld; as large a number as Churchtown held in Stonfeld; but only had holdings in a total of seventeen "fields" or places. Of the fields shown in the table, which include the largest, it will be noticed that in two only are there more than twenty customary tenants, in another ten between ten and twenty, and in eleven fewer than ten. From the unlisted "fields", many more could be added to the under-ten group. We can therefore assume first, that there was a high degree of irregularity both in the size of the fields and in any "system" by which they were worked; secondly, that there had been a wave of unprecedented expansion since the foundation of the abbey, a conclusion borne out by the many references to assarts in the fields; thirdly, that most of the fields were inter-arated between a number of manors, the largest especially; and fourthly, from the number of "places" mentioned once only or at most two or three times, that either severalty holding was growing up side by side with common cultivation or the seeds of such a form of tenure were already planted in this district. The active colonization of the waste is shown by numerous references to assarts and, in the Weaverham portion of the rental to numerous holdings in the waste, e.g. "John Child and Henry his brother hold in the waste of Weverham 22 acres for the term of 40 years, by deed; rent £1-2s."(37) It would seem that the fight against the wild was not without its setbacks, for several entries (see p. 112) speak of "one acre of 'Cursed Oxgang'." Waste, meadow and ploughland were clearly in a state of confusion in 1334 in these manors, and in view of this remarkable expansion phase, a memorandum of 1475 concerning Over has enhanced interest. Crofts and meadows predominate in this later record which suggests that they were less concerned with customary holdings than severalty tenure, but such entries in the Ledger Book as the following have significance in relation to the open field question:—

"a close callytt Tewfeld in holding of Ric. Bower, departyd in two."

"a croft in holding of Edm. Derlynton callytt Clerkes feld."

(37) Vale Royal Ledger Book, p. 151.
THE OPEN FIELDS OF CHESHIRE

"2 felds negh Blakeden lone in holding of Tho. Ewode."
"Blakden heth that is to say three felde in the holding of Jo. Bower."
"3 feldes callyt Churnokfeldes in the holding of Tho. Gregory."
"all the holding of Maykin-Cokeson, that is to wete, X croftes and 2 medowes."

Of fifty-three items in this document only eight refer unmistakably to open fields, and the following are samples:

"2 buttes lying by the yate within the Galefeld."
"4 buttes within the said Galefeld extending upon the Rye crofte."
"one londe and a halfe lying upon the Rye Crofte."
"one londe and a halfe shotynge unto the Cokshote."
"in the secund Ryefeeld from the house . . . 6 buttes on the west part and 6 on the est part, shotyng north and sowth."

Clearly, the open fields were still being worked in Over in the mid-fifteenth century but the exchange, transfer and sale of strips which were recorded in the 1334 Rental had evidently been the indications of pending change. Of the fields named in 1334 and 1475, only Blakefeld was found in both documents. In 1475 new names appear such as Tewfeld, Rye Croft, and Galefeld and we are left guessing as to whether they were in fact new fields or old ones re-named. But the retraction of the fourteenth-century open fields seems indubitable. No later evidence has been found by the writer, but town fields are named on the modern Two-and-a-half Inch Ordnance Survey map near to Over.

As regards the third feature of the count a three-field system of the Midland type is indeed difficult to prove for any Cheshire township. In each case, there is contradictory evidence, obscurity, or a lack of evidence which would clinch the matter. In Aldford, there may have been more than three fields. At Handbridge there were three fields named in the seventeenth century—Town Field, Weetraynes and Ley Hey—but a close called Stubble Hey also contained four "lands" referred to in an Inquisition post mortem, another selion was referred to as in the Grey Ditch, and another outside it. Hence, the evidence is not definitive. Similarly, at Nether Peover, one can name Church Field, Bradefeld and Brocfield as open fields in the

thirteenth century, but references to selions by no means indicate that there were not other places too where there were ploughing strips.\(^{(40)}\) At Manley at the same period there appear to have been three fields and it seems that Asponefurlong was in one of these.\(^{(41)}\) No later references have as yet been noted. Iddinshall also seems a possible mediaeval three-field township, but it was a one-farm township showing no trace of these in the nineteenth century.\(^{(42)}\) Horton near Tilston is as strong a candidate as any of the six, mainly on the strength of the tithe map which shows “three well-separated fields with open strips”, but early references do not distinguish three fields.\(^{(43)}\) There is the further possibility that evidence not yet noticed may bring other places into the group of possible three-field townships, but it must be admitted that out of a very considerable body of evidence already carefully sifted and filed, there is nothing which can bring convincing proof that Cheshire had, at most, more than a few cases of possible three-field townships worked as such.

The mediaeval evidence reveals, in fact, anything but a picture of a long settled area with a firmly established and mature field system, such as seems to have existed in many parts of England at that time. At Domesday, large areas remained unsettled, others had suffered wide devastation as the result of the raids of the Conqueror’s armies in 1069–70. Hence when the Norman settlement was under weigh in Cheshire, it became associated with a vast programme of extending cultivation, building up flocks and herds, and bringing the waste and wild land into the manorial orbit. In Wirral, on Rudheath, in the areas fringing the great wooded tracts of Delamere, Mondrem and Macclesfield Forests, assarting went on apace and the plough was actively concerned in the extension of field land, especially in the twelfth, thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Not infrequently, enthusiasm overran the limit of economic maintenance, and recession followed.\(^{(44)}\) The abundant evidence of the creation of new

\(^{(40)}\) *Tabley Collection*, various deeds of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.
\(^{(44)}\) A particularly good later example of this is provided by a document in the *Tabley Collection*, dated 1563. It refers to “the waste in Ou' Tabley and Sudlow called Northc Crofte *alias* Hynge Feld and Sudlow Feld” which was divided. All the ground in Over Tabley called the Intack was to become common once more. Cases of recession following the Black Death have already been cited.
fields in the thirteenth centuries, makes clear the difficulty of
trying to classify Cheshire townships as two- or three-
field townships as is possible in the Midland system. The
number of fields fluctuated. Their mode of organization was
such that the function of field and furlong was not necessarily
distinct, and inter-aration further blurred the issue as to
whether a one- or two-field system was worked. (45)

The mediaeval records are full of references to assarts, rid-
dings and new cultivation. The heaths were ploughed up as at
Netherpool where "the monks reserved the right of cultivating
any part of the heath broken up before the date of the con-
cord". (46) The same happened at Saughall, Woodchurch and
in other Wirral vills. (47) The assarting of Rudheath was par-
ticularly extensive as is clear from the thirteenth-century deeds
in the Chester Chartulary, numbers 731 and 747, referring to
places such as Hulse (super Rudheath) and Cranage in which
latter place 270 acres of pasture were to be put into cultivation
according to a single quitclaim. Other areas of vigorous
advance were in the forest and woodland belts as has been
exemplified in the case of the Vale Royal manors on the eastern
side of Delamere (see above, pp. 21-4). The confused situation
as to the number and sharing of the common fields which
prevailed in the Overs was doubtless typical of other Cheshire
townships in which the extension of population and new
ploughlands had evidently been too rapid for adjustment to
keep pace. It seems that ploughing strips were to be found in
all kinds of places: fields, furlongs, crofts and riddings as well,
perhaps, as bundles of two or three acres in sundry places.
In addition there were many common meadows in the rich
alluvial valleys of the rolling Cheshire lowland; particularly
valuable to a people whose concern was increasingly with
cattle raising and, as time went on, less and less with corn.
It seems probable that, as in the case of the arable fields, some
of these were in demesne and worked by the lord of the manor
and his copyhold tenants; others worked by the free tenants
and presumably of more ancient origin or in townships where
the manorial yoke was light and the charterers numerous. (48)

(45) For example "the leaseholders and natives of Woodchurch" had land
in the territory of Landican, Chester Chart., Vol. II, no. 661 (1289-91), and a
Mainwaring Charter of 1271-74, quoted Chester Chart., no. 570, tracing the
bounds of Chelford and Snelson between the fields of the two vills makes it
an attractive possibility that at one time these two were one community, and
that when they were divided they may have continued to share their fields.
(46) Chester Chart., no. 694 (1245-9).
(47) Ibid., nos. 685 (1265-81) and 663 (do.).
(48) As in the cases of the Hough, vide supra, p. 10, and Knutsford, vide
supra, p. 15.
As part of the demesne the *Chamberlain’s Accounts* show that they were exceptionally lucrative. In many cases, they seem to have been convertible, being ploughed or left for hay according to the season or the convenience of the commoners or the lord of the manor, and similar cases occur in other parts of the Border as in Montgomeryshire.\(^{(49)}\)

Despite the fact that the mediaeval fields were still in process of formation, the sale and exchange of holdings was going on actively in many manors. A further sign of confusion was the complexity and uncertainty of land measures and modes of estimation and division. The subject is too involved for full discussion here, but certain points have relevance. The bovate or oxgang was the unit most commonly cited in the Cheshire deeds, apart from the selions themselves. The larger unit of the carucate is mentioned more rarely, as is the measure, normally a villein’s holding, of the yardland or virgate. Although a yoking was still spoken of in Cheshire at the end of last century as the land which could be ploughed in a day, no early references to it have been found. The bovate was defined in the case of Shotwick as three Cheshire acres,\(^{(50)}\) the carucate at Weston (near Runcorn) as four bovates in demesne and four *in terra rusticanea*\(^{(51)}\) and at Darnhall as 30 bovates.\(^{(52)}\)

A knight’s fee was 30 bovates at Great Budworth\(^{(53)}\) and Nether Tabley,\(^{(54)}\) and 29 at Calveley.\(^{(55)}\) Cheshire measures of land seem rarely or never to have been equivalent to English measure but, significantly, are more nearly related to those of north-east Wales. Seebohm equates the Cheshire acre with the Powys acre, and its commonest measure was 10,240 square yards.\(^{(56)}\) The rood in North Flintshire which was the equivalent of a *cyfar* or quarter-acre was 2,560 acres,\(^{(57)}\) and although the question of regional variations in measurements was so much more complex and obscure than these selected instances


\(^{(50)}\) R. Stewart-Brown, “The Royal Manor and Park of Shotwick”, *Transactions*, Vol. LXIV, p. 95. Here there were 28 bovates, the bondsmen holding one or two each (p. 141).

\(^{(51)}\) *Arley Charters*, no. 1-47 (c. 1170).

\(^{(52)}\) *Ledger Book V.R.A.*, fo. 32. Darnhall had 6 carucates of land in demesne, each carucate containing 30 acres. Over had one carucate in demesne (30 acres), and 19 in villeinage.

\(^{(53)}\) *Arley Charters*, no. 1-89 (c. 1170).

\(^{(54)}\) *Tabley House Collection* (N.D., probably mediaeval).

\(^{(55)}\) *Cheshire Ing. P.M.*


might suggest, the Welsh relationships of the Cheshire acre are undeniable. As compared with standard English measure, the linear rod of Cheshire is 8 yards to the English 5½ yards, the square rod 64 square yards as compared with 30½ square yards, and the Cheshire acre is 10,240 square yards as compared with the statute acre of 4,840 square yards. The bovate was the peasant’s holding in the common field in Cheshire as in Welsh custom, consisting of a variable number of selions (also variable in size), and it was the standard unit for which the contribution of one ox was made to the plough team, or its equivalent given in labour, plough irons etc. But inheritance, sale, exchange, irregularities in the land surface or the shape of field or furlong, combined to produce as many exceptions as exemplifications of these theoretical measurements and long before Tudor times the position was infinitely complicated by practice.

V. GEOGRAPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Finally, in this brief survey of open arable lands in Cheshire, comes the matter of their geographical distribution. If we ignore the difficult question of classification and look at the distribution as a whole, areas of moderate density, areas of comparative sparsity, and blank areas can be distinguished. Wirral (except for a small area east of Burton), the Dee and Gowy valleys, and, rather more brokenly, the Weaver and Dane valleys, and the areas east of Northwich and Nantwich all show a striking density of open arable lands. Sparser distributions appear in north Cheshire between the lower Weaver and the lower Bollin, and along the Bollin itself. Beyond the Bollin, examples are very rare, and Cheshire roughly to the east of a line through Stockport and Macclesfield is all but a blank area. Except for Lawton, known cases are few in a wedge-shaped stretch between Alsager, Sandbach, Middlewich and Congleton. There are two further blanks: central Delamere and the former Mondrem Forest in south Cheshire between the Dee and Weaver.

It is essential to make clear that this distribution is based on evidence of all dates between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries, and the justification for this is on the one hand the need for as complete a distribution as it is at present possible to map, and on the other the assumption of continuity of existence apart from occasional possible exceptions. Historically, therefore, it represents a projection of information from
numerous periods on to a single map. In many cases there is evidence of the continuity presumed. Only in comparatively few cases is the evidence from one period or source, and where there is any doubt as to its implications this is shown on the map by the choice of symbol. It is not only possible but probable that other places will have to be added to the map. Nevertheless, the writer is of the opinion that, except in occasional areas, the distribution as a whole gives a correct impression (see below, page 30).

The first and most important fact which emerges is the width of the distribution, especially if we exclude the Cheshire Pennines in which only occasional scraps of land are physically suitable for ploughing. Far from being a virtual blank on the open field map of England, Cheshire emerges as a county in which co-oration was all but universally practised, and the reasons for this can only be sought in the joint realm of geography and history.

There is, unfortunately, no soil map yet available for Cheshire, and it is self-evident that soil, slope and climate together provide the joint conditions which favour or deter arable farming. The nearest approach we can make to ascertaining soil conditions is through the One-Inch Geological Survey drift maps all of which are available except for the Nantwich sheet. The ideal soil for corn growing is a clay or a moderately heavy loam. Boulder clays of differing quality occur over large parts of the Cheshire lowlands, covered in considerable spreads by light glacial sands and by peats, while alluvium fills the flatter portions of the lowland valley floors. Some of the clays are very heavy to till and must have offered considerable difficulties to the comparatively light, ox-drawn plough of the Middle Ages. Where they were liable to be water-logged, their use for this purpose was ruled out. The light sands of north Cheshire and Delamere were, however, almost equally unusable, for they provide no hold for corn which requires a firm soil to support the mature plants. The ideal soils are therefore the lighter and medium clays where drainage is good, and the loams which are characteristic of the boundary zone between sand and clay. These prove, in fact to have been the areas most closely associated with the development and persistence of open arable practice. In most of Wirral, boulder clays and loams predominate except where the Triassic sandstones emerge above the drift, and a similar range of soils prevails in the Chester area. In nearly every case the open field sites seem to have been on boulder clay or on the margin of clay with sands or sandstone, and this siting
pattern can be paralleled time and time again in the western and eastern lowlands. In north-central Cheshire, sands and gravels prevail and there is a corresponding sparsity of open field records, but a line of places which practised co-oration in this broad region is associated with patches of peat, sands and gravels from Bowden to Warburton, the mediaeval communities presumably choosing the firmest soils available in the absence of a stiff clay. The great stretch of deltaic sands and gravels in Delamere Forest constitutes a largely blank area on the open field map, but new assarts were creeping over its southern and eastern margins in the early middle ages as has been described. The drift map cover does not extend to Mondrem. Uplands are generally devoid of ploughed land in Cheshire, whether they be the Pennine slopes or the low Triassic hills of the west and centre.

The physical correlation is therefore clear, but we remind ourselves again that the map is a historical projection, and that the full correlation can only be seen correctly if it be made with period maps. The information carded is hardly full enough to justify this for the later centuries, but there is, of course, one invaluable source of information for an earlier period in Domesday Book. It has some demerits: notably that it is a record of carucates and not of open fields as such, and that there were some probable omissions. These last, however, can be presumed to have been few and, even added to unidentified manors, they hardly mar the overall picture for the county. The total distribution is almost certainly more complete than that shown on the common arable map. Setting aside these provisos, the comparison of the two distributions becomes an informative exercise, and at the first glance it becomes apparent that the two are so remarkably similar that this is no accidental correspondence. The uplands and the light sands are blank in both cases. Wirral, the Dee-Gowy lowlands and the Weaver valley are areas of density in both. The similarity is, in fact, so striking that, with the evidence of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as support, there is a strong case for presuming that the Domesday carucates were worked by co-oration and, in many cases, in open fields.

But there are also interesting differences between the two distributions. Where the open field map shows advances they are fair evidence of the advancing front of cultivation in the post-Domesday period. These are notable in two districts. The first is on the fringes of Delamere, due particularly to the efforts of Vale Royal Abbey, St. Werburgh’s and some lay landowners. The second is in the area between Great Budworth and the Bollin,
an area now notable for the number of large estates, the Leghs, Tabley, Arley, Mere, etc. A further correlation must now be made with the distribution of woodland at Domesday, which provided a deterrent to breaking up new land in many parts of the county, especially in the Delamere-Mondrem and Macclesfield Forest areas, but was also abundant in many parts of the Knutsford district. Any further colonization in Cheshire involved an advance into woodland, heath or other poor land. That it was carried on actively on the margins of Delamere, Rudheath and in parts of the eastern woodland zone has already been evidenced, and a comparison of the map of Domesday Ploughland and that of Common Arable land in Cheshire, gives a cartographical measure of these advancing fronts, from mediaeval times onwards. The records also show that there was a compensating recession from time to time in the use of common fields and, as the economic history of Cheshire bears out, in tillage, which tended to decline in favour of pasture from the later Middle Ages. By the nineteenth century, townships had frequently lost all trace of their former open field boundaries, as witness Iddinshall, and this occurred both in the lowlands which supported the richest swards and which turned profitably to cattle raising, and in the poorer lands like Rudheath where soils were too hungry to make either good cornfields or good grassland.

The instances already cited are proof of the non-correlation of open field with any particular forms of settlement. Villages, hamlets and wholly dispersed settlements appear to have had open fields at some time. But in the history of the retreat of co-aration, the size and social structure of the community probably had some part to play. In the smaller groups, open field structure can, at best, have been simple and restricted, and the field or fields small. Where the community failed to grow, it lost the basic conditions for co-operative farming and in many such townships, a large estate or an ambitious and rising farmer would absorb the old community lands. This might be achieved as late as the eighteenth century or as early

A map of Domesday Woodland in Cheshire was part of a paper prepared by the present writer for the British Association, Section E, 1939. It has since been published in The Cheshire Historian, no. 7 (1957), p. 8. A composite map of Domesday Woodland and Waste will be published in the Historical Atlas of Cheshire, being compiled by the Cheshire Community Council. The higher portions of Macclesfield Forest were moorland, the Pennine slopes below about 1,000 ft. O.D. and the plain beyond were long wooded.

The Mondrem blank referred to on this page is puzzling. It may represent a recession of cultivation immediately after the Conquest, but it seems more probable that, despite the considerable body of evidence filed, data for this area may still come to hand.
as Tudor times. By contrast many hamlets and scattered communities such as Rope, Hunsterson, Walgherton and Hough in Wybunbury parish, retained some portion of their town field until the Tithe Survey. It also seems probable that few nucleated villages, and those mainly of the “estate” type, originated in Cheshire after the Anglo-Saxon settlement until a distinctive set of economic factors began to operate in the eighteenth century. The characteristic mediaeval assart was associated with scattered settlement forms and as the tide of colonization slackened, these were the most easily convertible to severalty holding. But in the villages and the market towns, the custom of community ploughing seems to have been sufficiently deeply entrenched to have survived, albeit often in a decreasing area and in a smaller number of fields, until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and numerous places including Bunbury, Lymm and Nether Knutsford had open quillets still surviving in their town fields at the Tithe Survey.

There are two further points which must be made here. One is that there is some ground for assuming that in Cheshire in the Middle Ages and afterwards, an open field might be a community field in which the freeholders had their shares and which they managed and owned in common, or a demesne field in which tenants held land by copyhold and which could therefore the more easily be closed or converted to severalty. The former is characteristic of the older Anglo-Saxon communities and of lordless Welsh groups. The latter is typical of the manorial settlement or of land taken over by the Normans. The former holdings were associated with ancient privilege and custom and might be difficult indeed to convert to other uses, and then only by common agreement. The latter were quickly established and, by reason of demesne ownership, would be easier to convert especially in a shrinking community. The second point is implicit, though for the moment it is hypothetical: it is that the basic pattern of open arable in Cheshire is threefold. The two older settlement types in Cheshire i.e. the dispersed and semi-dispersed British or Welsh communities and the Anglo-Saxon villages and hamlets, can be assumed to have operated their own common fields on differing plans and with differing usage, and these presumably, would account for the majority of the carucates recorded in the Cheshire portion of Domesday Book. The Norman administration resulted in the addition of a third element bringing new fields and the extension of some old fields, with the new ones being worked as demesne fields. The evidence does not always make the distinction clear, but the matter would bear
further investigation. Thus, as the Middle Ages advanced, Cheshire had a widening range of settlement types associated with a variety of open field arrangements. Welsh communities practising co-eration normally worked only one or two fields or may simply have taken the plough to small open crofts or scattered ploughing strips. The Anglo-Saxon village has been widely correlated with a two- and, later, a three-field system in the Midland belt as defined by Gray. The manorial system as introduced into many Welsh Border counties was also linked in many cases with a two- or three-field system in the Englishries, that is in those areas in the Marcher lordships in which English custom was followed and Welsh settlement limited. But in Cheshire, it seems rather to have lacked system, to have taken new assarts as and where they could be ploughed up, and to have operated eventually in a multi-field group on no definable plan. Since the manor was so often grafted on to older townships and associated with active colonization in Cheshire, the reason for the meaninglessness of "number" in relation to fields becomes explicable. Hence the question of the English type of two- and three-field townships having existed in Cheshire has at least one more possible answer: it may have been submerged within a multi-field township due to mediaeval additions, just as easily as it may later have shrunk to what, by the nineteenth century appeared as a one- or two-field township. In some cases, cartographical and field evidence can provide the answers, especially in townships of limited area and still more information is required from all types of sources, before many of these questions can be solved.

The final facet of the problem which may claim mention here is the relationship of Cheshire to neighbouring areas. Lying just to the north and west of Gray's boundary of the Midland system, its suggested association is with north-western England and with Wales rather than with the English Plain to the south and east. There is nothing in this further study which is irreconcilable with Gray's findings. The need to investigate Lancashire open field is clear. A recent study of upland Derbyshire has shown a mingling of types in the hills to the east of Cheshire. The writer hopes soon to publish her findings on the group of Welsh and English counties which lie on either side of the political boundary between England and Wales, and until the map of open field for the entire Welsh Borderland is completed it is, perhaps, wise to defer the attempt to elucidate further the external relationships or the origins of the Cheshire system.
