

An Archaeological Resource Assessment of Medieval Leicestershire and Rutland

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Note: For copyright reasons the figures are currently omitted from the web version of this paper. It is hoped to include them in future versions.

INTRODUCTION

Unlike many of the earlier periods a lack of evidence is not a problem. The archaeological resource is itself huge and beyond this is a vast amount of documentary evidence that allows us to study many aspects of society that archaeology can not easily reach (e.g. tenurial relations, administrative structures etc).

WORK COMPLETED

I will begin by looking at the major studies already produced:

R.F. Hartley's Medieval Earthworks series is a major resource – publishing earthwork evidence as well as ridge and furrow transcribed from vertical aerial photographs.

Fieldwalking surveys: which occasionally produce settlement evidence away from the 'known' villages/hamlets but more often produce manuring scatters.

Surveys of particular types of site:

- Castles (Oliver Creighton)
- Abbeys and Priors (PL)
- Granges (Paul Courtney)
- Woodland, Parks, Forest (Tony Squires)

Excavations and watching briefs: City (abbey, castle, Austin Friars, and urban sites); South Croxton; Mountsorrel (small town); Oakham Castle; Long Whatton Moat; Hemington (water mill, bridges, wish weirs); Coleorton (coal mines); Nether Hambleton; Huncote.

Documentary sources: VCH: three volumes of general volumes for Leicestershire published and city and Gartree Hundred. Also general Rutland volume and detailed parish volume.

Nichols (eight volumes published 1795-1815)

Individual village studies (Wigston, Kibworth Harcourt, Anstey).

A SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY

We can be fairly confident in working out the medieval settlement hierarchy. From the top it is:
The Country Town (for Leicestershire – Oakham is less differentiated in Rutland): Leicester – several (specialist) market places – large castle – important as administrative centre – several parish churches and religious houses (abbey and four friaries, major college and several hospitals). Mint (at early period from several documents and coins themselves), industry (cloth in early period – not much archaeology), communal/administrative buildings (shire hall, guildhalls – one still standing), inns, town houses (Guildhall Lane undercroft, Wigston's House etc). Growth/ decline – or at least shifts in population distribution.

Market Towns

- Ashby de la Zouch
- Loughborough
- Melton Mowbray
- Castle Donington
- Market Harborough
- Hallaton

Lutterworth
Hinckley
Market Bosworth
Rutland
Oakham
Uppingham

- all have large market places, several have castles (Ashby, Donington, Hallaton, Oakham and Hinckley); several have minor religious houses (Melton, Donington, Lutterworth and Loughborough – all hospitals; Hinckley: alien cell); inns; large churches (but singular).

Villages – some with market charters and/or identifiable market places/crosses – may be considered sub group.

Parish churches (or chapels)

Often manorial complexes – manor houses – many more being found as standing buildings –

moats – fishponds – dovecotes – gardens (dendro dating important showing many more 13th century survivals)

Mills – water (Hemington) and wind

Associated with open field systems – (can be understood by documentary in association with surveys of ridge and furrow plus dating of expansions by fieldwalking through manuring scatters e.g Medbourne).

Village buildings of non-manorial type: some late medieval examples now identified (e.g.

Quienborough).

Hamlets – often chapels rather than churches

often no manorial sites

mostly have own open field systems – may sometimes be simpler than ‘standard’ three field system

THEMES

VILLAGES

Origin of villages and field systems – in mid to late saxon period: work on village in-fill sites beginning to produce evidence e.g. Cottesmore, Barrowden.

Growth and decline of villages – work has already concentrated on DMV’s – useful data being produced by fieldworking programmes of ploughed sites.

Village planning – little done.

INDUSTRY AND TRADE

Markets – need more work on market towns

Pottery: study of Potters Marston Ware – but kiln site not really surveyed properly – interesting example of rural industry

: import of pottery from surrounding counties reasonably well known (may be a marker for wider trade links): small amount from further away e.g. Saintonge

Cloth and Wool: little archaeological evidence but important in documents.

Coal Mining: very important work by Fred Hartley at Coleorton producing medieval deep mines of surprising sophistication from modern open cast. Also, surveys of shaft tops and bell pits.

Building materials: stone, slate, brick, tile. Some sources identified for stone and slate but as no medieval quarries known. Early brick kilns/ clamps identified at Bradgate etc.

ADMINISTRATION

Shire/ hundred and equivalent deaneries can be identified in documents. Moot sites can be identified on ground – but little systematic work done. Documentary evidence can also identify hundredal manors, and for large landowners e.g. Duchy of Lancaster major administrative centres (e.g. Leicester Castle) and then a hierarchy of demesne manors (e.g. Hinckley), bailiwicks grouping the other land of the Honour of Leicester – these may show up in the archaeological record in some way. Similarly we can see how the abbey/ Priory estates articulate and how central policy affects particular sites (e.g. Leicester Abbey and Ingarsby, Stoughton and Stanton Bardon where the landscape was reorganised in the late medieval period).

CHURCH

- Most work on standing buildings.
- Only small amount of excavation.

- Major work on abbeys and priories – less work on smaller religious houses.
- Major resource of graveyards for evidence of demographics, illness etc.
- Work on parsonage houses.

BATTLES

Bosworth and Losecoat Field: work on Bosworth under way – metal detecting, flight by NERC aircraft being followed up by magnetometry.

STANDING BUILDINGS

Dendro dating very important in giving objective dates – PPG15 leading to much more work and producing good evidence.

LANDSCAPE

Field systems, pasture, woodland – three forests (or chases/ wastes).