

The Monastic Granges of Leicestershire

by Paul Courtney

The classic monastic grange was an isolated and consolidated demesne farm and the best known group are the Cistercian granges of Yorkshire.¹ However, in Yorkshire some granges did specialise in fishing, salt manufacture or iron mining. Therefore perhaps the best definition is that of T.A.M. Bishop who saw the grange as a 'purely economic formation external to the administration and social life of the district'.² In studying the Leicestershire granges one is immediately faced by problems of definition. The isolated compact demesne farmed by lay brothers or hired labourers lies at one extreme from the demesne dispersed in the open fields and worked by a varying mixture of hired and customary labour. However, many estates lay in between these two types and many demesnes were only consolidated slowly. One is also confronted by lack of information on the workings of most granges and the medieval usage of the term 'grange' may be loose.

The most important possessor of granges in Leicestershire was the Cistercian Garendon Abbey whose economy was largely based on its sheep flocks. A twelfth century letter from Pope Alexander III (1159-81) gives a list of Leicestershire granges including Stanton under Bardon, Welby, Goadby, Ringlethorp, Alton and Dishley.³ Another list is given in a late fifteenth century rental by which time all Garendon's granges had been leased out, a common phenomenon. This adds Burton on the Wolds, Swannington and Swinfen to the earlier list. Sysonby and Eastwell granges are also mentioned but these may represent splitting of Welby and Goadby estates respectively.⁴ Unlike Sysonby Grange, Eastwell has no earlier documentation and may only come into existence when leased. Another grange is that documented at Ibstock where a *bercaria* or sheepcote is mentioned.⁵ Two partly overlapping cartularies survive for Garendon but are unfortunately unedited. Nichols transcribes chunks containing much detail on grants of land to its granges.⁶ It is possible that detailed work on the original cartularies, and comparison with other documents, would enable reconstruction of some grange estates but this would be a formidable task.⁷

Unfortunately most of the other Leicestershire granges are much more poorly documented. Few other manuscripts survive from the county and these mostly have little or no relevance to the study of granges. Many of the granges have been identified by incidental references. An example is Skeffington, a grange of the Premonstratensian canons at Croxton Kerrial. A commission of oyer and terminer, dated to 1281, gives a list of names including Croxton's abbot and two grange officials. The latter pair are 'Simon the Graungerssejaunt' and 'William le Graunger'. 'Richard Freroberscrave' and two brothers are also mentioned and may be associated with the grange. In 1539, however, the estate was described as a 'manor'.⁸

A very doubtful grange is documented at South Croxton where the Gilbertine Priory of Malton in Yorkshire bought 3½ carucates of land in 1203. The priory built a 'tenement or grange' for John de Leck, Malton's chaplain in South Croxton who was renting their property in 1212. They also constituted him as their agent for transacting all their lay business in the parish.⁹ This property hardly corresponds to the usual modern definitions of a grange and it is

not even certain that the priory had any demesne in South Croxton. It is possible, however, that it belonged to the class of tithe granges. A more certain example of which is Wymondham in Leicestershire belonging to Tutbury Priory in Staffordshire.¹⁰ These granges present a number of problems but apparently existed to collect and store the tithe produce of distant advowsons. However, was the term grange used merely to mean a barn or to describe a more elaborate set-up incorporating a permanent residence?

There are two cases of grange properties having possibly changed hands between monastic foundations. At Diseworth the Augustinian Canons of Breedon are recorded as having built a grange.¹¹ In the nineteenth century an extra parochial area of 130 acres called Whartoft Grange existed.¹² Nichols states that some of the original grange walls could be seen by the modern Whartoft Grange (SK454245). He, however, believed that the grange belonged to Norton Priory in Cheshire. This Augustinian house was apparently assessed for one-eighth of a knight's fee in Whartoft in 1346.¹³ In 1535 Norton's rectory in Donington was assessed at £16 per year.¹⁴ There was no mention of Diseworth in the *Valor*. Castle Donington lies immediately to the north of Diseworth. It is possible, therefore, that there were two separate granges in Diseworth, or else a single grange may have changed hands. There is also a possibility that Nichols wrongly ascribed the grange to Norton on the evidence of their having nearby lands. It is also not certain that the present Whartoft Grange is the one mentioned by Nichols. A change of hands might also explain the origin of another Augustinian property, Charley Grange. At the Dissolution this had belonged to Ulverscroft and was granted to the Standish family.¹⁵ In 1465 the small priory of Charley about one mile to the north was united with Ulverscroft.¹⁶ It is possible that this grange had been the home demesne of Charley Priory previous to 1465.

Each grange can only be assessed on its individual merits. The problem is to some extent linguistic and it might be argued that it is preferable to study granges only as part of the entire range of estate belonging to an individual monastery. Certainly this makes sense from the point of view of an economic historian. However, the main aim of this work was to assess the impact of granges on the landscape of the county. The evidence of earthworks is also a useful way of helping to identify granges. At Thrussington there is only a Dissolution reference to a grange there, belonging to Sempringham Priory in Lincolnshire.¹⁷ However, aerial photography subsequently identified in 1978 an enclosure complex by the modern Thrussington Grange.¹⁸

One source of confusion with granges are the Augustinian demesnes. The economy of the Augustinian abbeys of St. Mary de Pratis, Leicester and Owston have been analysed by Professor Hilton.¹⁹ Their demesnes were mostly based on the glebes of churches which were subsequently enlarged by grants, purchases and exchanges. The demesne lands were considered as appurtenances to the rectory and most of them were unconsolidated lying scattered amongst the strips of the open fields. Some attempt at consolidation was made at a few estates notably Ingarsby and Stoughton. Three of Leicester's demesnes were described as granges in medieval or Dissolution records. These were Horsepool Grange, Pinslade Grange and Stoughton. Horsepool is the only grange to be so called in Leicester Abbey's own records. Its arable was scattered in the common fields of Stanton under Bardon but it also had an important sheep flock, almost certainly grazed on the waste of Charnwood.²⁰ Stoughton was Leicester's second largest demesne and the only one unleased at the Dissolution.²¹ Little is known of Pinslade's economy or estate.²² A fourth demesne at Ingarsby was never described as a grange but certainly deserves the title. It was a late creation and involved the removal of the Ingarsby inhabitants in 1469 and the enclosure of the open fields for sheep and cattle.²³ Earthwork remains again complement the documentary evidence. Three of these 'granges' are associated with isolated earthwork complexes. Stoughton leaves no archaeological trace today but any medieval remains are probably located beneath the modern grange building.

Owston was a small Augustinian house and only one of its demesnes had associated

earthworks. Knossington has an isolated moated site and associated enclosure earthworks, lying about three-quarters of a mile east of the abbey and about the same west of the village. The tithe apportionment of 1847 exempted 25 acres of land near the moated site being 'ancient abbey lands'.²⁴ It seems likely that Knossington was making some effort to consolidate its demesne. One should note that no other demesne of Leicester or Owston abbeys have associated earthworks. Presumably any manor houses associated with their rectorial demesnes lie under modern villages.

In Yorkshire C. Platt has managed to reconstruct a number of Cistercian grange estates from tithe exempt lands, as has D.H. Williams in Wales.²⁵ Tithe exemption, however, was normally restricted to Cistercian lands acquired before 1215. Although we have seen above some tithe exemption associated with the Augustinian house of Owston. In Leicestershire it has proved difficult to use tithe exemption as many of the granges acquired their estates more slowly than in areas of abundant waste like Wales. Also much tithe exemption in Leicestershire is associated

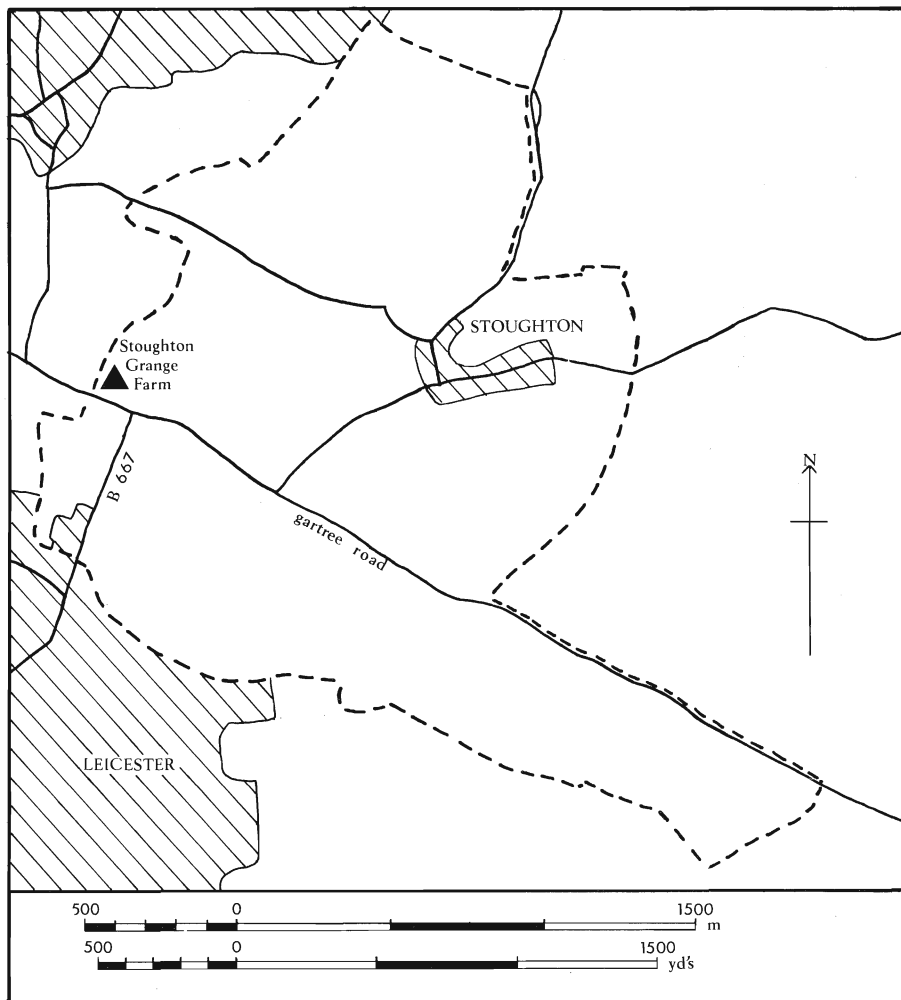


Fig. 1 Stoughton Grange: Tithe Exempt Lands of 1845

with pre-nineteenth century enclosure. Only the Stoughton Grange estate of just over 230 acres can be reconstructed with confidence at present as the reason for tithe exemption is clearly stated on the 1845 tithe map (Fig. 1).²⁶ The Cistercian house of Merevale just over the Warwickshire border has four Leicestershire granges. Three of these, Morebarn, Pinwall and Newhouse, occupied the western part of Sheepy Magna parish and the eastern boundary of this block can be determined from the 1820 enclosure map.²⁷ Merevale was still farming most of its granges directly at the Dissolution. Although sheep were the dominant aspect of their economy.²⁸ Dissolution records show that Newhouse at least had some arable. Barley was the main crop stored in its barn but there was also wheat, rye and peas. Grace Dieu's Merrill Grange also had barley as its largest individual crop as well as peas, oats and hay in a similar record.

A grant of 1550 has detailed descriptions of Newhouse and Pinwall Granges which comprised 240½ and 295 acres respectively. Newhouse had 94 acres of pasture in five closes (6, 12, 14, 20

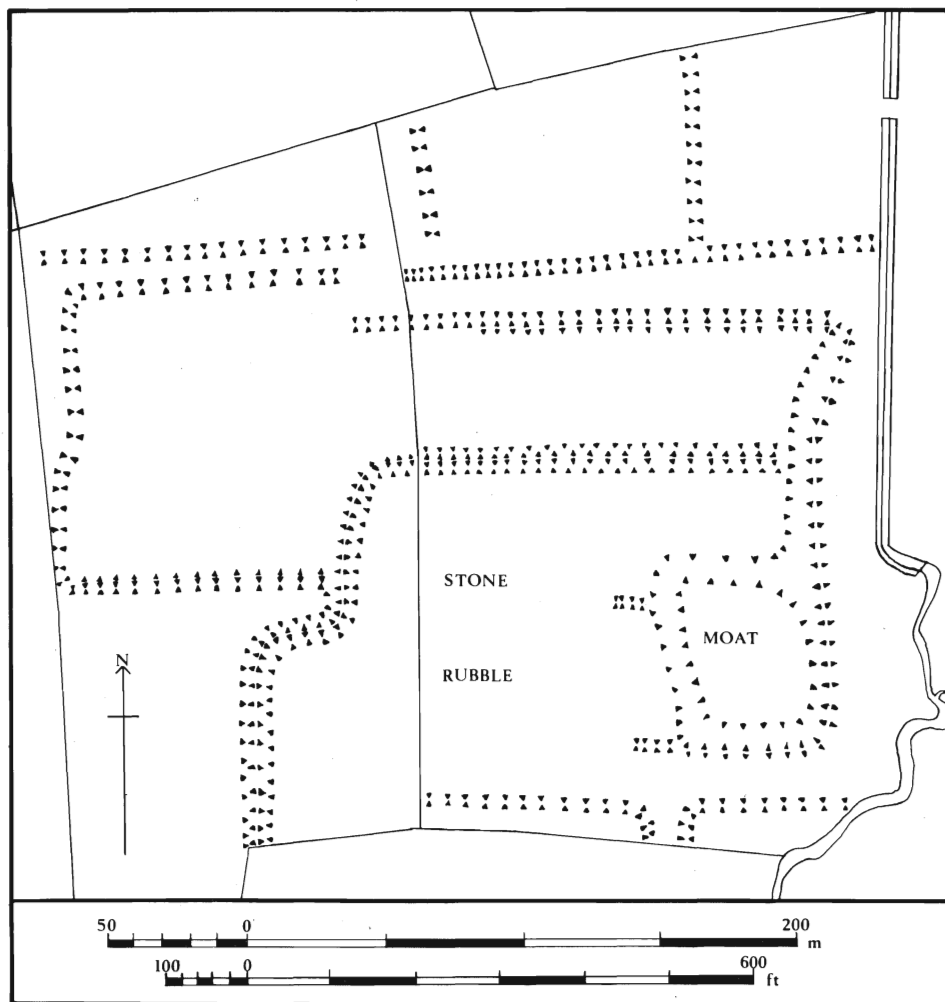


Fig. 2 Burton Lazars Grange: after OS 25" map and R.A.F. vertical air photographs L.C.R.O. 1066/UK/744/4315-6

and 30 acres) with 12 acres in 'Weston Felde'. It also had three closes of meadow (8, 12 and 28 acres) and 4½ acres in 'Weston Feldes' adding up to 52½ acres. There were 54 acres of arable in 'Weston Feldes' and another 40 acres in 'Tawny Feldes'. Pinwall Grange had 155 acres of pasture in eight closes (6, 8, 15, 18, 20, 26, 26 and 36 acres). Its 43 acres of meadow lay in three closes (4, 11 and 28 acres) and there was 97 acres of arable in four closes (71 [2 closes], 6 and 20 acres). There was also a tile kiln near the grange which might be located by geomagnetic prospecting.²⁹ How much change had occurred since the Dissolution it is impossible to estimate. Certainly it is a good example of early enclosure whether, as is most likely, by the monks or by the new capitalist farmers. Possibly the modern field system would make an interesting study for hedgerow dating. It is possible more could be learnt of other grange estates by combining documentary studies of tithe exemption, enclosure history and manorial bounds with field morphology and hedgerow dating.

The impetus for this study was to examine the archaeological impact of Leicestershire's

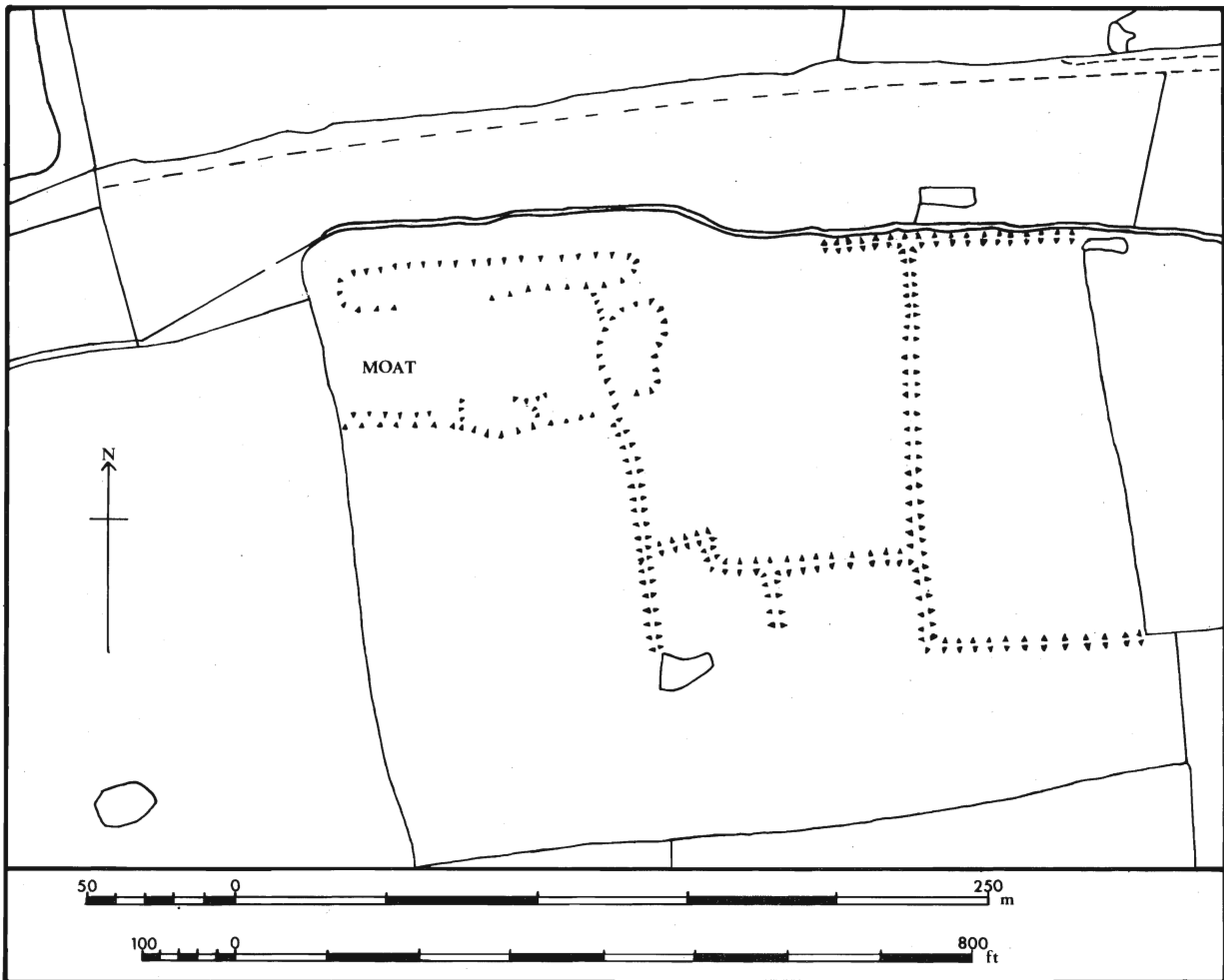


Fig. 3 Burton on the Wolds Grange: after O.S. 25" map and R.A.F. vertical air photograph L.C.R.O. CPE/UK/1932/4159

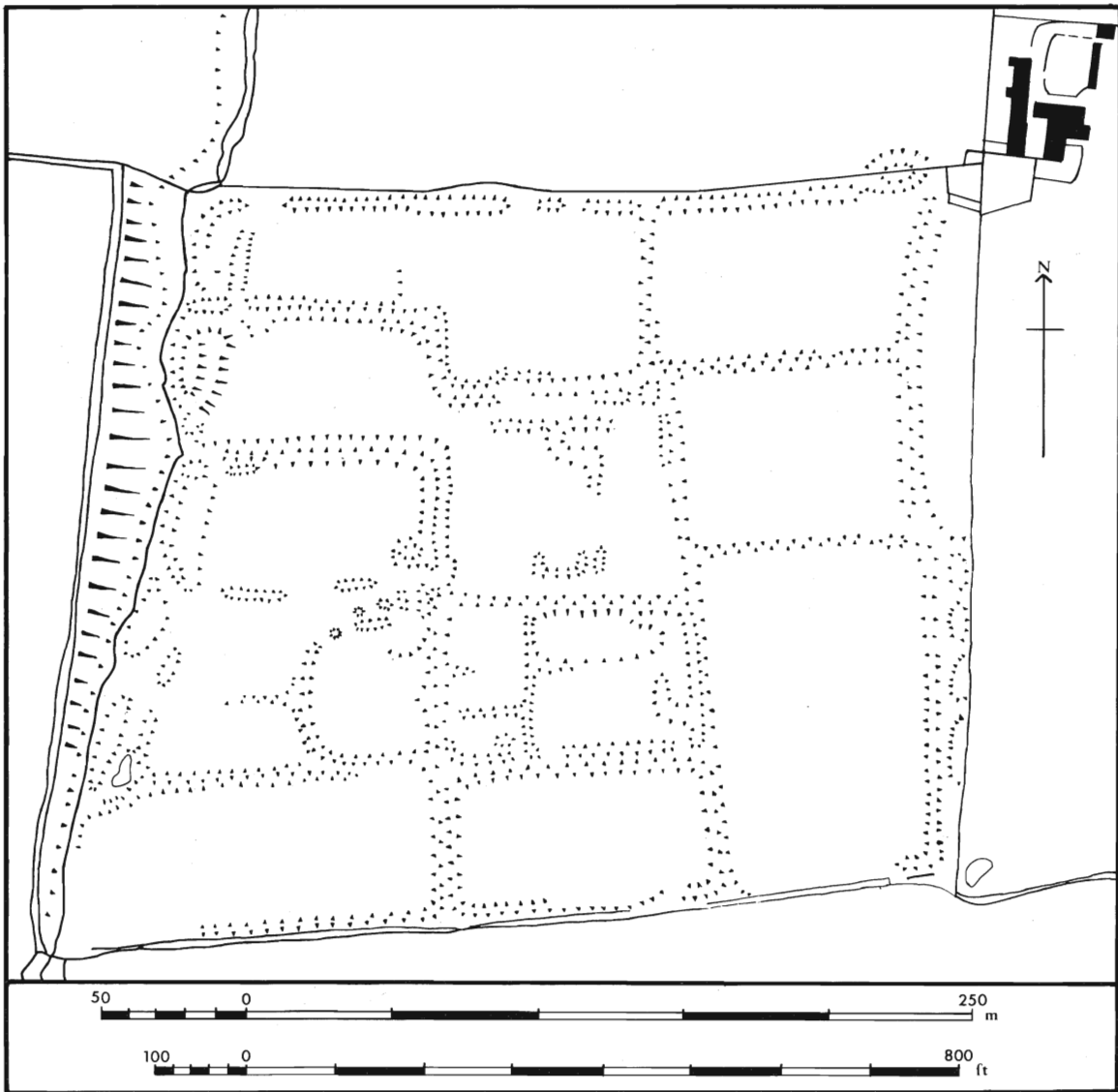


Fig. 4 Sysonby Grange: after original drawing by Leicestershire Archaeological Excavation Group (courtesy of T. Pearce)

granges. A difficulty in discussing the earthwork remains of granges is that one cannot know how differential preservation has been. At Ingarsby a classic grange layout of moat and associated enclosures can be seen, adjusted to a deserted village site. However, only a moat is visible on the site of Pinwall Grange but it is possible other earthworks associated with the moat have been destroyed. Against this suggestion is the absence of any enclosure complexes at the other Merevale granges of Lea and Newhouse. At the Vaudey grange of Burton Lazars the enclosures alongside the moat have been ploughed out in recent years. A scatter of stone rubble adjacent to the moat suggests the presence of stone buildings probably stock houses or

accommodation for the *famuli* (hired labourers). The other enclosures were probably *bercariae* or sheepcotes (Fig. 2). Of the 40 or so documented grange sites I have collected evidence for only 13 — 15 can be currently associated with likely earthworks. In many cases continuity of occupation may have destroyed earthworks. Continuity is demonstratable for example, at Newhouse Grange and Ingarsby where modern building complexes incorporate medieval remains inside moated enclosures. Moats on the sites of farms might easily be filled in and totally obscured and it is notable how little of Newhouse Grange's moat survives today. Modern ploughing of long established pasture is endangering other earthworks. At Burton on the Wolds Grange both the moat and the enclosures have been ploughed out (Fig. 3). One should not necessarily assume that granges had moats. Sysonby is an example of a well preserved complex of enclosures around an inner court possessing no moat (Fig.4).

Another problem is concerned with the function of these earthworks. Many of the enclosures were undoubtedly for sheep. *Bercariae* are documented at Sysonby and Ibstock.³⁰ However, the Burton Lazars evidence shows buildings were not confined to the moat or inner court. Geomagnetic survey might usefully be applied to tracing the distribution of at least stone buildings in these courts. Recently the defensive interpretation of moats has been gaining ground at least in some quarters.³¹ C.C. Taylor, however, has stressed their function as a status symbol. He notes that in Cambridgeshire, at least, there is a contrast between large moats in villages and small isolated moats. Taylor argues that the greatest need for defence would accrue to the isolated sites and that this is incompatible with their small scale. However, he fails to take account of the expense of moat building. The isolated moats were in the main almost certainly associated with colonising villeins or freeholders of lesser resources than the manorial lords in the villages. Taylor also emphasises the existence of two or three sided moats.³² However, without excavation or geophysical survey it is impossible to know how many of these were not originally four sided. For instance at Newbold Verdon in Leicestershire an apparently three sided moat turned out to have a fourth side upon excavation.³³ Even aerial photography can fail to indicate large ditches on apparently ideal subsoils and crop cover let alone on pasture.³⁴

Status cannot be entirely discounted but surely the widespread theft and violence of medieval society was the main reason for their construction.³⁵ Even a small moat especially when combined with a fence could obstruct intruders while the occupants were warned by a guard dog or geese. Certainly isolated granges must have had good reason to fear theft or physical attack from those bearing grudges. Although some moated granges may have owed their moats to later farmers Merevale's granges, for instance, were never leased. Sysonby is interesting in that it ever had a moat despite a suitable geology, *i.e.* alluvium. Possibly this reflects emphasis on the protection of a larger area by banked palisades rather than on concentration on the central buildings. The use of masonry walls around the central area is also a possibility, but excavation would be necessary to answer these questions. However, perhaps moats ought to be seen more as only the most obviously preserved of a number of 'defensive' or 'protective' alternatives.

The most notable feature of the overall grange distribution pattern is their virtual absence in the central area of the county (Fig. 5). The reason for this lack of granges was probably the dominance of Leicester Abbey in this area. Leicester Abbey was the country's richest monastic house and its demesnes were mostly in the form of rectorial manors (Fig. 6). There does not seem to be any obvious relationship between the distribution of granges and soil type or land described as waste in Domesday. Of the 32 villes described as wholly or partly waste in Domesday only Dishley and Ravenstone, later had granges.³⁶ The majority of granges were located in the immediate area of the monastery which owned them. Monasteries would be more likely to be given lands in their vicinity and also administration of nearby estates would be easier.

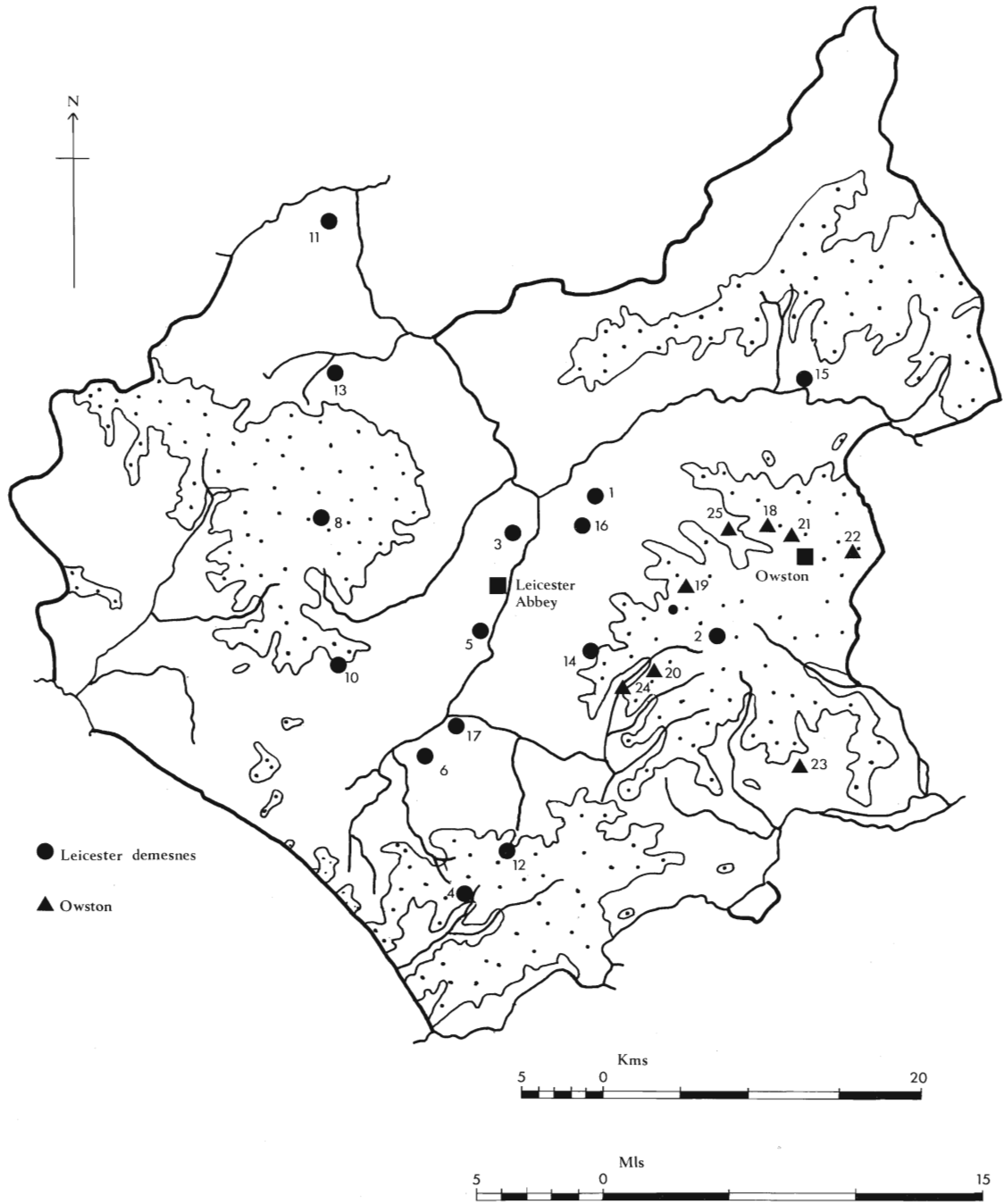


Fig. 5 Augustinian Demesnes: after Hilton

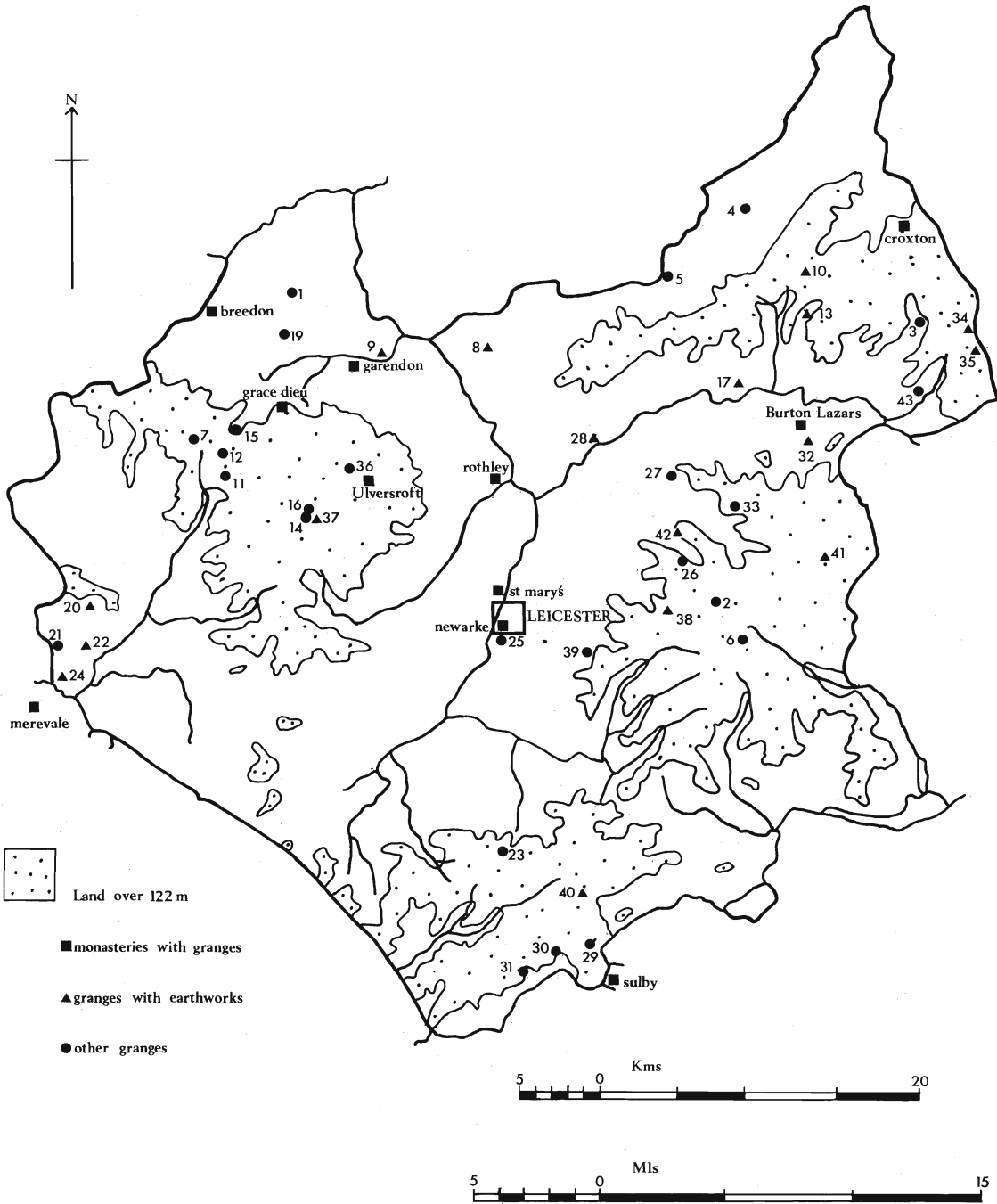


Fig. 6 Leicestershire Granges

Only four of Leicestershire's 63 deserted villages seem to have resulted from grange formation. The four villages deserted as a result of grange formation are Alton, Dishley, Ringlethorp and Weston. It is possible that shrinkages associated with granges were more widespread but would be difficult to demonstrate. Two medieval standing buildings are related to grange sites in the county. A late fifteenth century stone-built range survives at Ingarsby within the moat.³⁷ At Newhouse Grange the timber framed tithe barn has been dated as probably early sixteenth century by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments.³⁸ It seems likely therefore that it is the same barn documented at the Dissolution. At Welby Leicestershire Museums have recently recorded re-used masonry in the present barn of Welby Grange (SK730212). The masonry included window fragments and a fireplace provisionally dated to the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively.³⁹ It is possible these fragments came from a grange building at either Welby or Sysonby. One might note Nichol's reference to stone foundations, a rock-cut well and lead piping at Saltby Grange where earthworks still survive.⁴⁰

There is only one excavated grange in Leicestershire and although the excavator noted a tradition of the site being monastic he failed to find documentary evidence at the time. This is Sewstern Grange belonging to Vaudey Abbey in Lincolnshire and documented in 1222. A number of stone structures within an enclosure system were excavated but the limited area makes the interpretation difficult.⁴¹ This site has since been destroyed by gravel extraction. The earliest pottery from the site is Stamford Ware which suggests an earlier pre-grange settlement on the site. Sewstern Grange was leased in 1323 for 80 years to the chapel of St. Peter, Kirby Bellars and the pottery evidence would accord with the site being abandoned at this time.⁴²

Appendix 1: Augustinian Demesnes Leicestershire (after Hilton, 1949)

Leicester Abbey	Owston Abbey
1. Barkby	18. Burrough
2. Billesdon	19. Hungarton
3. Birstall	20. Kings Norton
4. Bitteswell	21. Newbold
5. Braunston Gate	22. Knossington
6. Cosby	23. Slawston
7. Eaton	24. Stretton Parva
8. Horsepool	25. Twyford
9. Ingarsby	
10. Kirkby Mallory	
11. Lockington	
12. Pynselade	
13. Shepshed	
14. Stoughton	
15. Thorpe Arnold	
16. Quenborough	
17. Whetstone	

Monastic Granges

M. Medieval Reference D. Dissolution Reference only

a. moat b. moat and enclosures c. enclosures d. other earthwork complex

Breedon/Norton (Cheshire) — Augustinian

1. Diseworth, M.

Burton Lazars — Augustinian Hospital

2. Cold Newton, D, d, SK736055

Croxton Kerrial — Premonstratensian

3. Coston, M.

4. Hose, D, d, SK740298

5. Nether Broughton, D.

6. Skeffington, M.

Garendon — Cistercian

7. Alton, M.

8. Burton on the Wolds, M, b.

9. Dishley, M, a, SK769265

10. Goadby Marwood, M, d, SK769265

11. Ibstock, M.

12. Ravenstone, M.

13. Ringlethorp, M, a, SK776235

14. Stanton under Bardon, M.

15. Swannington, M.

16. Swinfen, M.

17. Sysonby, M, c, SK725210

18. Welby, M.

Grace Dieu — Austin Nuns

19. Merrill, M.

Merevale (Warwickshire) — Cistercian

20. Lea, M, a, SK322055

21. Morebarne, M.

22. Newhouse, M, a, SK319024

23. Peatling Parva, M.

24. Pinwall, M, a, SK308000

Newarke — Chantry College

25. The Grange, D (Grange Lane, Leicester)

Rothley — Knights Templar

26. Baggrave, M.

27. Gaddesby, M.

Sempringham (Lincolnshire) — Gilbertine

28. Thrussington, D, c, SK643184

Sulby (Northamptonshire) — Premonstratensian

29. Bosworth, D.

30. North Kilworth, D.

31. South Kilworth, D, a, SP605814 (D, possibly secular)

Vaudey (Lincolnshire) — Cistercian

32. Burton Lazars, M, b, SK765169

33. Colley (Thorpe Satchville), M.

34. Saltby, M, d, SK874261

35. Sewstern, M, c, SK882220

- Ulverscroft — Augustinian
 36. Charley, D.
 Leicester Abbey — Augustinian
 37. Horsepool, M, a, SK470101
 38. Ingarsby, M, b, SK685054
 39. Stoughton, M.
 40. Pinslade, M, b, SP635871
 Owston Abbey — Augustinian
 41. Knossington, M, b, SK788082
 Malton (Yorkshire) — Gilbertine
 42. South Croxton 'Grange' M.
 Tutbury (Staffordshire) — Benedictine
 43. Wymondham, M.

Notes

I am grateful for the assistance of Mr. T. Pearce and Mr P. Liddle of Leicestershire Museums and for the comments of D.H.S.A. Fox of Leicester University.

- 1 See C. Platt, *The Monastic Grange in Medieval England* (Macmillan, 1969) for a full bibliography up to 1969
- 2 T.A.M. Bishop, 'Monastic Granges in Yorkshire', *English Historical Review*, II (1963), 193-214
- 3 J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (1975 reprint), 3, 813-14
- 4 *Leicester County Record Office (L.C.R.O.)*, Reference De 40/26
- 5 Nichols, *op. cit.*, 2 (Appendix 17), 133-8 and 3, 823; W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinell (1846), 5, 332
- 6 Nichols, *op. cit.*, 2 (Appendix 17), 133-8 and 3, 805-41; G.R.C. Davies, *The Medieval Cartularies of Great Britain*, (Longmans, Green and Co., 1958) 49
- 7 See S. Jack, 'Monastic Lands in Leicestershire and their Administration on the Eve of the Dissolution', *T.L.A.H.S.*, XV (1965-6), 9-10 for a list of monastic documents but does not include the Garendon cartularies
- 8 *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1272-82*, 467; *Letters and Papers, foreign and domestic of the reign of Henry VIII*, XIV, 257
- 9 I am grateful for this information from Miss E. Linford and Mr T. Pearce in advance of the publication of the South Croxton moated site excavation
- 10 Nichols, *op. cit.*, 2, 339 and 418. (I am grateful to P. Liddle for this reference); *Victoria County History (V.C.H.)*, *Staffordshire*, 2, (1978), 3, 331 and 338
- 11 Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 3, 697
- 12 J. Curtis, *A Topographical History of Leicester*, (1831), 181
- 13 Nichols, *Leicestershire*, 3, 783
- 14 J. Caley and J. Hunter (eds.), *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Henrici VIII, Auctoritate Regia Institus* (Record Commission, 1810-34), 5, 210
- 15 S. Jack, *op. cit.*, 22
- 16 *V.C.H. Leicestershire*, 2 (1954), 23
- 17 *Lists of Lands of Dissolved Religious Houses*, Public Record Office Lists and Indexes (1964), 2, 123
- 18 Information from T. Pearce
- 19 R.H. Hilton, *The Economic Development of some Leicestershire Estates in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1947)
- 20 *Ibid.*, 40-1, 60, 62, 81 and 92
- 21 *Ibid.*, 30 and 54-6
- 22 *Ibid.*, 35; *V.C.H. Leicestershire*, 5, (1964), 30
- 23 C. Platt, *op. cit.*, 112-14, 126 and 211-12
- 24 *Ibid.*, 214-15; D.J. Bott, 'Oliver Cromwell's Castle', *T.L.A.H.S.*, XXVI (1950), 113-9

- 25 C. Platt, *op. cit.*; D.H. Williams, *White Monks in South Wales and the Border* (Griffin, 1976)
- 26 *L.C.R.O.*, Ti/312/1
- 27 *L.C.R.O.*, En/Ma/286/1
- 28 S. Jack, *op. cit.*, 18
- 29 Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 5, 481; Nichols, *op. cit.*, 3, 656; *Cal. Patent Rolls*, 1549-51, 432-3
- 30 Nichols, *op. cit.*, 2 (Appendix), 137; Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 5, 332
- 31 C. Platt, *Medieval England* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 111-14
- 32 C.C. Taylor, 'Medieval Moats in Cambridgeshire in P.J. Fowler (ed.), *Archaeology and the Landscape* (Baker, 1972), 237-49
- 33 Information from Mr R.G. Mitchell
- 34 For instance an Iron Age farmstead surrounded by substantial ditches on gravel was excavated in 1970 by A.E. Johnson in Earls Barton, Northamptonshire. It was not identified from the many aerial photographs of the surrounding cropmark complexes but was only recognised by geomagnetic survey
- 35 See R.H. Hilton, *A Medieval Society* (Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1966), 248-59 and 'Peasant Movements in England before 1381' in E.M. Carus Wilson, (ed.), *Essays in Economic History*, II (Arnold, 1962), 73-90; D. Williams 'Fortified Manor Houses' *T.L.A.H.S.*, L, (1974-5), 1-16; J. Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in the Late Middle Ages* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973)
- 36 *V.C.H. Leicestershire*, 1, (1907), 275-338
- 37 See S.T. Winckley, 'Excursions to Houghton on the Hill', *T.L.A.H.S.*, X, (1909-10), 254-6 for elevations and plan)
- 38 T.H. Fosbrooke, 'Newhouse Grange, Sheepy, Leicestershire', *T.L.A.H.S.*, XI (1913-14), 85-6; E. Mercer, *English Vernacular Houses* (HMSO, 1975), 186
- 39 Information from Mr P. Liddle
- 40 Nichols, *Leicestershire*, 2, 303
- 41 D.H. Rudkin, 'The Excavation of an early Medieval site in Buckminster, Leicester', *T.L.A.H.S.*, XLVII (1971-2), 1-20; *Cal. Charter Rolls*, 1, 3
- 42 *Cal. Patent Rolls*, 1321-24, 356.