THE MEDIEVAL PARKS OF BEAUMANOR, LOUGHBOROUGH AND BURLEY: NEW ARCHAEOLOGY AND A REASSESSMENT OF THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

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This paper advances a reconsideration of the relationship between the adjacent medieval parks of Beaumanor, Loughborough and Burley, on the western edge of Loughborough. They were all tenanted by the Despenser family soon after the Norman Conquest until the early fourteenth century. The accepted view that these parks were separate entities within the local landscape is questioned and new archaeological evidence is presented which suggests that, until at least 1350, rather than being three separate parks, they were actually one large unit managed for a number of different ends. This was probably not an area given over solely to recreational hunting. A review of the historical evidence, which suggests the use to which this area was put, is presented.

INTRODUCTION

Cantor (1970/71 and 1976/77) was one of the first to consider the medieval parks of Leicestershire, which included the parks of Beaumanor, Loughborough and Burley. This was followed by the earliest substantial work on the medieval parks of England (Cantor 1983; and with Hatherley 1979). At that time the general concern was with park identification. A major work by Squires and Humphrey (1986) on the medieval parks of Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire, followed, and this included a valuable historical review and interpretation. At that time very little archaeological information was available.

Map 1 shows the three parks, as identified by Squires and Humphrey, and their relationship to Loughborough. The western boundary of Loughborough Park is shown with the newly identified boundary which continues the line of Burley and Beaumanor Parks. This addition gives the composite area a rounded shape, characteristic of a medieval park. The course of the boundary to the north of both Burley Wood and Burley Park is conjectural, as are exact details of the boundaries which are now built on.

Map 2 shows a close-up of the western boundary of Loughborough Park. Humphrey’s boundary (1986) is based on historical records and it hinders the total area of the three parks being seen as composite. The boundary identified by
Fig. 1. Burley, Loughborough and Beaumanor Parks. The newly identified park pale of Loughborough Park is shown.
Fig. 2. Ditch 1, the newly identified pale for Loughborough Park, running from Burley Park towards Beaumanor Park. Also showing the line of the pale as earlier proposed by Humphrey (1986, Fig. 9.29).
the author is also shown, and this links Burley and Beaumanor Parks in a continuous line, suggesting that all three parks were one. Deer are recorded as being introduced into Loughborough Park between 1229 and 1232 (Humphrey 1986, 27). At Beaumanor Park Hugh le Despenser, the tenant, hunted in 1277/78, and other, illegal, hunting took place in 1282 and 1289 (Humphrey 1986, 52). Deer were kept in Burley Park in 1428 and possibly earlier (Humphrey 1986, 41).

Problems with the historical accounts of the three Loughborough Parks

The initial impression that the parks could have been one is suggested by the fact they could possibly have been one large Anglo-Saxon hunting enclosure (Humphrey 1986, 64); they are adjacent; they were under the same ownership and tenancy shortly after the Norman Conquest until the fourteenth century; that in 1326 the Crown granted them all to the Beaumont family (Squires and Humphrey 1986), after which evidence in the form of some of the financial accounts survives (Hastings MSS). These financial accounts detail the areas separately. It is possible that this administrative arrangement is partly why the parks have been considered to be separate areas in the recent literature (Humphrey 1986; Squires and Jeeves 1994; Cantor and Squires 1997; Squires 2004).

Archaeological and cartographical evidence

Initially, Ditch 1 (Maps 1 and 2) in Loughborough Park and linking with the pale (boundary) of Burley Park was recognised through aerial photography. This ditch can be projected south-easterly to touch parts of the Outwoods and it goes on to meet the boundary of Beaumanor Park. Earl’s Ditch (not shown on Maps 1 and 2) is significant as it was used by the Earls of Chester and Leicester as a boundary between their territories in the closing years (leading up to 1154) of King Stephen’s reign (Pounds 1994, 8–9). Hartley’s map (1989, 39) illustrates this ditch as running north of, and parallel to, Nanpantan Road and meeting Burley Wood at close to a right angle. Squires and Humphrey (1986, 15) suggest that Earls’ Ditch could be pre-Conquest in date. It is possible, therefore, that Ditch 1 and Burley Park boundary could be even earlier. There is confusion over the naming and punctuation of Earls’ Ditch. Hartley (1989, 39) refers to it as Earl’s Ditch but Squires and Humphrey (1986, 15) call it Earl’s Dyke. Potter (1842, 177) and Pounds (1994, 8–9) define it as a boundary between the Earls of Leicester and Chester. Therefore, it should be Earls’ Ditch or Dyke. For consistency here this is referred to as Earls’ Ditch. Map 3 is from 1754 and, although not accurate, does show that the boundaries between Burley and Loughborough Parks as probably continuous. Burley Wood is shown enclosed within that park. Similarly, Map 4, from 1842, shows the same line and its extension linking onto the edge of Beaumanor Park.

Map 5 is an RAF aerial photograph of 27 August 1945 (ROLLRc) and it reveals Burley Wood and a field boundary from this going, across Nanpantan
Fig. 3. Boundaries of Loughborough and Burley Parks showing that their boundaries could have been a continuous line. The boundary of Loughborough Park is on a very different line to that proposed by Humphrey (1986). After Nicholls (1800, 130).
Fig. 4. Map of 1842 showing a continuous line linking Burley and Loughborough Parks along the line of Ditch 1. Also showing Beaumanor Park. After Potter (1842, 1)
Fig. 5. RAF photograph of 27 August 1945 showing the extension of the line of Burley Park pale into Loughborough Park (after ROLLRe).
Road and joining a projection of the Outwoods. Ditch 1 joins the southern point of this projection and travels south. I consider the field boundary to be on the line of Ditch 1. These maps do show that the boundary was present until recent times.

The evidence so far suggests that the three Loughborough parks were initially one and that Ditch 1 was the western boundary. Significantly, Ditch 1 crosses the medieval road from Loughborough to Charnwood Forest, presently called Nanpantan Road, at an area now called Forest Gate.

Pre-Norman parks are now being recognised as widely spread across areas of England. Certainly there have been cases of such enclosures identified in Cambridgeshire, Shropshire, Essex, Cornwall, Suffolk and at Dyrham House (Rowley 1983, 151–2; Stacy 1993, 42; Way 1997; Hoppitt 2000; 2007, 157–8; Herring 2003). These studies materially advance our ideas on the three parks under discussion.

A helpful comparison can be made by examining Way’s work (1997). She has identified a large number of adjacent parks in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire (now part of Cambridgeshire). They are adjacent, yet have features which have led to the view that they had separate identities. However, a review of their features could equally lead to the view that they were one park initially, which later had separate identities. The following table compares those parks with the three parks near Loughborough.

Way’s study has revealed that adjacent parks may have common features of roads passing through them, they may share continuous boundaries and they may have differing dates when first recorded. The three parks near Loughborough also have these features.

Agricultural Land Classification

Cantor (1983, 3) has argued that for economic reasons medieval parks were established on land of poorer quality. However, Way (1997, 32–3) has argued that this may not be the case and is supported by Herring (2003, 37), who examined the parks in Cornwall. Both argue that parks were a valuable resource for the population. Herring also noted that 20–30 per cent of the areas he examined were taken by steep sided valleys or woodlands. Way is unlikely to have found steep-sided valleys in Cambridgeshire, but did, however, note that woodland did cover a significant area. The agricultural value of land is further supported by Liddiard (2007, 14) and Vera (2007). This developing understanding is partly due to the early emphasis on documentary records and recent work has adjusted this perspective.

The Defra Agricultural Land Classification for the area of the three Loughborough parks is generally 3a and 3b (Holloway 2008a). This is land presently capable of producing moderate to high yields of cereals, grass for grazing or harvesting, moderate yields of oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet and less demanding horticultural crops (Holloway 2008b). Thus, the area occupied by the three Loughborough parks has more potential for arable use than was earlier thought. However, the presence of a large number of large stones in the ground
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cambridgeshire Park No.</th>
<th>Earliest recorded date and location</th>
<th>Significant features</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Similar features in the three parks near Loughborough</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Parks 150, 151 & 152. West Wickham. Earliest date is 1393. | 1. Road follows southern boundary  
2. Roman road travels through and separates the parks.  
2. Road in use in medieval times (Nanpantan Road) travels between two parks.  
3. Pocket Gate Lane (Park Lane) travels though Loughborough Park.  
4. Earliest recorded date is 1229. |
| Parks 20 & 27. Glutton parish and Homewood Hall Park. Earliest date is 1242. | 1. Common parish boundary follows northern edge of the parks  
2. Road follows southern continuous edge of the parks. | Way 1997, 247 and 249; fig. 22.15, p. 296 | 1. Common western boundary |
| Parks 94 & 136. Stitchworth. Probably they date from 1367 and 1563. | 1. Common parish boundary shared by both parks.  
2. The parish boundary also is shared by park 136 and by part of the woodland. | Way 1997, 266 and 276; fig. 22.69, p. 350 | 1. Common western boundary  
2. Adjacent woodland  
3. Differing dates first recorded. |
| Park 118/119 & park 120 (in total two parks). Kibling. Earliest recorded dates are 1086, 1319 and 1611. | A road runs through both areas, appearing to separate them. | Way 1997, 272; fig. 22.81, p. 362 | 1. Nanpantan Road separates Burley and Loughborough Parks.  
2. Pocket Gate Lane (Park Lane) passes through Loughborough Park.  
3. Differing dates first recorded. |
| Parks 138 & 139. Stow cum Quy. Possibly date from the Middle Ages. First recorded in 1726. | 1. Both parks are adjacent in a north-south alignment.  
2. A road follows their common eastern boundaries.  
2. All three parks are adjacent.  
3. Mixed use also (see below).  
4. Differing dates first recorded. |

Table 1. A comparison between some Cambridgeshire parks and the three Loughborough parks.
near the Outwoods would have made non-mechanised ploughing more difficult than it is today (Holloway 2008c).

The historical records indicate that deer were transferred from Sherwood Forest to Loughborough Park in the thirteenth century. Farnham (1912, 137) recorded that in 1427 Beaumanor Park was used by the villagers for the common grazing of their beasts and cattle. Garendon Abbey, nearby, had 536 acres of grazing for sheep in the medieval period (Squires 1981, 68). Thus, the Agricultural Land Classification and historical evidence both indicate the land suitability for grazing and arable uses.

**The historical accounts of Beaumanor, Loughborough and Burley Parks**

The three adjacent medieval parks have different earliest recorded dates. These indicate that at those dates the parks were up and running, and they have contributed to the idea that they were separate areas rather than parts of a larger whole.

Humphrey (1986, 64), although presenting no supporting evidence, has suggested that the area may have been used for Anglo-Saxon hunting. Additionally, he indicates (1986, 52) that the area in which Beaumanor Park stands was held by the Earl of Winchester at the time of the Domesday Book. However, Squires (2004, 146) has suggested that all the parks in Leicestershire were post-conquest in origin, as none were mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Thus the date of the formation of Beaumanor Park is uncertain, but the first definite mention was in 1232 and then under Hugh le Despenser’s control (Skillington 1944/5, 268). The park was under the same owners as Loughborough Park until 1559 (Humphrey 1986, 52).

Loughborough Park is first mentioned in 1229 when Hugh le Despenser received, through the King, 10 does and two bucks from Sherwood Forest for an annual gift of one pair of gloves (Hastings MSS, vol. 1, p. 330). Further gifts over three years increased the total number received to 43 does and 11 bucks. Clearly these numbers are only additions to any present stock and take no account of losses through hunting, providing food for the table, natural causes or increases through breeding (Cal. Close R. 1230, 341; 1231, 555; 1232, 110). Birrell (1991) has calculated that up to 10 per cent of the deer stock in a medieval park could be taken each year by hunting. In this case that would amount to very few deer. Perhaps further animals were gathered from other sources. Clearly if hunting took place in the Anglo-Saxon period there would possibly have been a stock already present which Despenser was adding to. Furthermore, the large area of the three parks had water supplies, which were essential for deer-keeping. Hunting did take place in Beaumanor Park. Farnham (1930, 26) indicates that this happened illegally in 1282 and 1289. Despenser then established a private enclosure for his own hunting.

It can be stated with confidence that the adjacent Beaumanor and Loughborough Parks had deer within them, they were under the ownership of Hugh le Despenser from at least c. 1229 and remained together, later under a different ownership (Humphrey 1986, 52), until 1559.
Burley Park is not mentioned until 1330 (MCI 1130–37) and in the context of the manors of Loughborough and Beaumanoir. So it is possible that Burley Park was linked to Beaumanoir and Loughborough Parks.

In 1398/99 and at other undated times, Lord Beaumont hunted within the three parks (Humphrey 1986, 54–5). In 1398/99, Lord Beaumont’s costs for hunting for twelve days over the three parks were £9/10/10½d (ROLLRb). They were all owned by the Beaumont family until the death of Frances, Duchess of Suffolk, until 1559 (Hastings MSS).

It seems clear that the three areas were certainly under one ownership after 1326 and probably before.

The Beaumanoir accounts for 1277/78 (ROLLRa) indicate that Hugh le Despenser’s two sons stayed there in a hall or lodge for two nights. This building contained a hall, great chamber, garderobe and additional room. Nearby was a porter’s house for the attendants. A servant and groom were in attendance. The site of this Beaumanoir Hall or lodge has been assumed by Humphrey (1986, 65–66) to be near the present Hall, but there has not been an archaeological investigation.

**Moat House, the Park Keeper’s Lodge**

To turn now to an examination of some other aspects of the landscape and their relevance to the present study.

Map 1 shows the location of Moat House and marked as ‘Lodge’. Humphrey (1986, 40) has identified a further road, perhaps pre-Conquest, passing through Loughborough Park, from Loughborough into Charnwood Forest. This road, Pocket Gate Lane (also known as Park Lane), runs through the present agricultural land to Pocket Gate Farm. This road extended eastwards towards Loughborough and today Beacon Road follows its course (Humphrey 1986, 38). Moat House has been identified as the medieval park keepers lodge and came into use as the park developed (Humphrey 1986, 40). There is a moat around two sides of the house however, Humphrey (1986, 38, 40) has speculated this was a later ornamental addition.

The position of a lodge by a water course, as in this case, is not uncommon. In nearby Quorn Park, two lodges can be seen. The earlier site, containing fishponds, is now located under the Victorian Swithland Reservoir (Squires 1986, 15 (plate 14)). The earliest record of the park assumes that it and the lodge were possibly in existence by 1100 (Squires 1986, 17 (fig. 2), 43 (plate 14)). The later lodge, to the north, survives as an earthwork (Hartley 1989, 11, 25 (fig. 25)). Other Leicestershire park keeper’s lodges close to water courses have been found at Bradgate Park, at Old Hays Farm in Groby Park, at Donington Park, and probably at Bardon Park, Whitwick (Liddle 1977/78, 8–29; Squires 1986, 99 (plate 44); Squires 1986, 109 (plate 50); Miller and Squires 2009, 142).

The location within the landscape of Moat House as the lodge of a medieval park keeper is unusual in that it is not in an elevated position as are many identified by Way (1997), even in relatively flat Cambridgeshire. It does not overlook all sections of the park, yet is in a central position. Usually a lodge would
have a central location in a park or have a commanding height for supervision purposes. From an elevated, if peripheral, position at the Outwoods, the significance and central location of the lodge would be self evident. In medieval times it would have made an authoritative statement as travellers approached from Charnwood Forest. Way (1997, 87) also noted that park creation demonstrated power and appropriation over the landscape. Certainly this would have been made clear by the view from the Outwoods to the lodge, and across Burley, Loughborough and Beaumanor Parks. Unfortunately, Moat House and its vicinity have not been archaeologically examined.

The medieval function of Beaumanor, Loughborough and Burley Parks to c. 1350

The accounting details of the three parks do vary in detail across the period of interest, but the evidence available suggests that the three areas had various uses. Beaumanor Park catered for mainly grazing and some woodland products; the adjacent Loughborough Park had a balance between grazing and woodland income; and Burley Park produced essentially woodland products and was used for grazing. Deer were present in all three areas. We know they were introduced into Loughborough Park; they were hunted at Beaumanor Park and later probably grazed at Burley Park (Crocker 1981, 48; Humphrey 1986, 27–8, 41, 39 (fig. 7), 52; Squires and Jeeves 1994, 7, 101, 109.

The results can be summarised as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Woodland</th>
<th>Grazing</th>
<th>Deer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beaumanor Park</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Main use</td>
<td>Hunted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loughborough Park</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Grazed/Hunted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burley Park</td>
<td>Main use</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Grazed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total area of the three parks was about 1,552 acres and this division of use agrees with Herring (2003, 37), who noted that parks exceeding 465 acres could be divided into several areas for different functions. The suitability for grazing use is supported by the evidence, above, from the Agricultural Land Classification interpretation.

It is suggested above that deer were accommodated in all three parks and there are water courses which would supply the animals’ needs. There was a stream which supplied fishponds in Beaumanor Park (Humphrey 1986, 58). The site of the fishponds can still be seen near to the present hall.

There is uncertainty over the northern boundary of Burley Park. However by 1428 a stream near to Holywell Hall was included within this boundary (Humphrey 1986, 33 (fig 6), 41). Sharman and Mackie (1991, 30) have speculated that the fishpond there was dug during medieval times. The most significant water course is the Woodbrook which flows through Loughborough Park, and part of it flows close to a length of the boundary between Burley and Loughborough Parks.
Conclusion: the significance within Leicestershire and elsewhere

Ditch 1 forms a western boundary passing along the edge of all three parks. This probably predates Earl’s ditch of 1148–52. As noted, Humphrey (1986, 64) suggests that hunting took place in Anglo-Saxon times within an early park. There is a convincing body of work to indicate that many parks had Anglo-Saxon origins (Stacy 1993; Bond 1994; Liddiard 2003; Vera 2007). The documentary evidence indicates that deer were present by 1229, at the latest.

With the presence of Ditch 1, it becomes possible to interpret the post-conquest landscape differently to that proposed by Squires and Humphrey (1986). It is proposed that the three parks were one, and following the conquest passed through the hands of the Earl of Winchester, Hugh le Despenser, in 1326 to the Beaumont family, and were one area until at least 1559. It is clear that the total area was about 1,552 acres (Humphrey 1986, 17, 40, 48). Cantor and Squires (1997, 15) indicated that Bardon Park, near Coalville, was the largest park in Leicestershire, covering 1,260 acres. Clearly the total area of the three parks near Loughborough significantly exceeds this.

Liddiard (2003, 4) has indicated that Anglo-Saxon parks had a significant recreational role and that during the Norman period their economic function developed. The evidence indicates that this was the case with the three Loughborough parks. Way (1997) has considered a number of adjacent parks which have boundaries extending from one to the other, and have roads running through them. She has concluded that these were not always separating features. There are parallels between those parks and the three Loughborough parks.

This study offers, at the local level, an opportunity to reconsider the relationship between the three Loughborough parks and their medieval roles. There is a growing body of research on the relationship and roles of medieval parks across England, and it is now possible to include the three Loughborough parks within this national picture.

It is proposed, therefore, that Beaumanor, Loughborough and Burley Parks were one large park in the medieval period, and possibly even earlier.

This paper is based on the research carried out as part of an MA degree in Archaeology, awarded by the University of Nottingham in December 2008.

ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cal. Close R</td>
<td>Calendar of Close Rolls (Public Record Office).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastings MSS</td>
<td>Hastings Manuscripts in The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCI</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Chancery Inquisitions (1130–37). The National Archive.</td>
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<td>ROLLRa</td>
<td>Document reference DG9/1954. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROLLRb</td>
<td>Document reference 5D33/118. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROLLRc</td>
<td>RAF aerial photograph No. 4138, 27 August 1945. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, Leicester.</td>
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