

DESERTED VILLAGES REVISITED



edited by Christopher Dyer and Richard Jones

Explorations in Local and Regional History

Centre for Regional and Local History, University of Hertfordshire

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The starting point of this book was a meeting in 1948 in Leicestershire when historians and archaeologists visited newly identified sites of deserted villages. The excitement of these discoveries changed approaches to the medieval countryside. Sixty years later a new group of scholars went back to the same sites and debated their significance in the light of many advances in knowledge.

Thousands of villages and smaller settlements were deserted in England and Wales during all periods, though many of them were abandoned between 1340 and 1750. Why were they deserted? Why did some villages survive while others were abandoned? Who was responsible for their desertion? What can we learn about life in the countryside from a study of the deserted sites?

Since the 1970s these questions have been set aside while interest has shifted to the origin and planning of villages, and the regional differences which led to a 'village England' developing across the middle of the country, while everywhere else people lived in hamlets and individual farms. Now seems the right moment to return to the subject and with fresh eyes reopen the important questions which were not fully answered in the early days.

Table of Contents

- 1 The origins and development of deserted village studies *Christopher Taylor*
- 2 Contrasting patterns of village and hamlet desertion in England *Richard Jones*
- 3 Villages in crisis: social dislocation and desertion, 1370-1520 *Christopher Dyer*
- 4 Dr Hoskins I presume! Field visits in the footsteps of a pioneer *Paul Everson and Graham Brown*
- 5 Houses and communities: archaeological evidence for variation in medieval peasant experience *Sally V. Smith*
- 6 Deserted medieval villages and the objects from them *David A. Hinton*
- 7 The desertion of Wharram Percy village and its wider context *Stuart Wrathmell*
- 8 Understanding village desertion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries *John Broad*
- 9 Abandoning the uplands: depopulation among dispersed settlements in western Britain *Robert Silvester*
- 10 'At Pleasure's Lordly Call': the archaeology of emarked settlements *Tom Williamson*

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