

WARDON ABBEY: ASSETS IN THE SETTLEMENTS OF ICKWELL AND NORTHILL

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COLESWOOD

Grant by Hereward of Ickwell (before 1161)

A charter issued by Henry II in 1160/61 documents the assets which had been granted to Wardon Abbey on its foundation (1135) and in the 25 years thereafter.¹ The benefactors' names are given, and, where appropriate, details of the overlord. The list includes '... *Coleswde cum pertinenciis suis que Herwardus secum intulit sicut carta Rogeri de Port confirmavit ...*', referring to Coleswood and the rights attached to it, which Herward (usually transcribed as Hereward) held from Roger de Port.² The name of the woodland is telling, insofar as *cōl* is the Middle English word for charcoal.

The cartulary of Wardon Abbey (the book containing copies of important documents and charters) includes an undated charter which was probably issued when Coleswood was first granted to God and the church of St Mary of the Assarts (the name by which the monastery was commonly known in the mid-twelfth century).³ Witnessed by Adam, Roger de Port's eldest son and heir, and by Adam's brothers, Henry and Hugh, it shows Roger confirming the gifts of Hereward and his sons at *Ikewelle*,⁴ although Gilbert, Hereward's elder son and heir, is the only one mentioned by name.

Some medieval charters specify the location of a gift, albeit in relation to long-lost features in the landscape, but there is no hint in contemporary documents as to the whereabouts of Coleswood. The possibility remains that it was assarted (the practice of converting woodland into arable) during the thirteenth century leaving no visible traces on the ground.

Taxatio Ecclesiastica (1291)

The monks of Wardon declared taxable income from each of their manors and granges rather than from individual settlements in 1291, and for that reason, assets in Ickwell and Northill were reported as part of Caldecote manor, which had a taxable value of £7 0s 5d.⁵ Of this, arable crops, rents, meadows, and manor courts were deemed to be worth £3 12s 7d, while young livestock added £2 17s 10d. Ten shillings were declared 'In Caldecote *de redd. ad pitanc*', a turn of phrase that usually referred to pittances (pious bequests to a religious house to provide extra food and wine at particular festivals). Nevertheless, it may, in this instance, pertain to flour rendered in lieu of cash by the tenant of Caldecote Mill.⁶

¹ 'Wardon' is the correct medieval spelling, although various forms were used before the 18th century when 'Warden' became the norm. The charter of Henry II (reigned 1154-1189) was reconfirmed by Henry III (reigned 1216-1272) and by Henry VII on 14 December 1508. It was published in full in *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII, 1485-1509*, 2 vols. (London, 1914), vol. 2, pp. 614-617 (p. 616) (9).

² Roger de Port had died by 1166 according to 'A Calendar of the Pipe Rolls of the Reign of Richard I for Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire 1189-1199', ed. G.H. Fowler and M.W. Hughes, *BHRS*, 7 (1923), 169 (Note/v15 (de Port)).

³ 'The Cartulary of the Cistercian abbey of Old Wardon, Bedfordshire: from the manuscript (Latin 223) (transcribed and edited, with introduction, abstracts and appendices in English)', ed. G.H. Fowler, *BHRS*, 13 (1930), 215 (276).

⁴ 'Ickwell' was rendered in sundry ways, including *Ikewelle*, *Gikewell*, *Jekewelle*, and *Gykwelle*.

⁵ *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae Et Walliae Auctoritate P. Nicholai IV, Circa A.D. 1291*, ed. T. Astle, S. Ayscough and J. Caley (London, 1802), p. 50; W. Dugdale, 'Wardon Abbey, in Bedfordshire', in *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinel, 8 vols. (London, 1846), vol. 5, pt. 052, pp. 369-70.

⁶ The arcane nature of the calculations is discussed in M. Roberts, *Wardon Abbey. The Lost Plot* (FWAV, 2025), pp. 24-25.

Although underwood, woodland products, and pannage (payment by tenants for the right to pasture their pigs in the lord's woodland) were generally listed on the same line as arable crops, rents, meadows, courts, mills, and dovecotes, there was no such entry for Caldecote. This further supports the view that Coleswood had been assarted and the land leased to a secular tenant, however, the possibility that it had been sold to, or exchanged with, the preceptory of Melchbourne near Yelden (Beds) cannot be discounted entirely.

The preceptory of Melchbourne and the manor of Ickwell

Founded during the reign of Henry II (1154-89) as a religious house of the Knights Hospitaller (also known as the Knights of St John of Jerusalem),⁷ the preceptory appears to have been the dominant entity in *Jekewelle* by the fourteenth century, with the prior holding half a knight's fee there in 1346.⁸

According to the *Victoria County History (VCH)*, the preceptory was functioning in 1527 when one William Browne received a grant of board and lodging. Leases were issued for its manors and rectories between 1533 and spring 1539, but whether arrangements were made by the prior of Melchbourne, the grand prior of Clerkenwell (the Order's headquarters England), and/or the Crown depends on when the preceptory closed, a fact that eludes us to this day. George Barnardiston, gentleman, who had held Orchard Grange (otherwise the rectory of Wardon) from Wardon Abbey since 29 July 1521, added to his holdings on 27 June 1533 by renting the 'Manor of Ickwell or Ickwelbury [*sic*]' from the hospitallers, except for 'woods & underwoods'.⁹

When Henry VIII ordered the assets of the Church to be valued in 1535, the preceptory of Melchbourne failed to merit a mention in the written record (*Valor Ecclesiasticus*), which suggests that either it had already closed or its temporalities (revenues from secular possessions) were not assessed for tax purposes.¹⁰ Accounts compiled for the Court of Augmentations covering the financial year from Michaelmas (29 September) 1539 to Michaelmas 1540 show lay rector of Langford, Robert Burgoyne,¹¹ being granted 'sufficient timber of & in woods of manor of Ickwellbury' under the terms of a lease issued on 24 April 1539.¹² This seems to perpetuate an earlier arrangement, but in the absence of detail, any possible links to Coleswood would be pure conjecture.

⁷ The hospitallers had an international structure based on priories. With the loss of the Holy Land in 1291, their headquarters relocated from Acre to Cyprus, and as the organisation was not liable for tax under the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae Et Walliae* (1291), details of their thirteenth-century assets in Ickwell are unavailable.

⁸ *Feudal Aids 1284-1431*, ed. H.C. Maxwell Lyte, 6 vols. (London, 1899), vol. 1, p. 27.

⁹ 'House of Knights Hospitallers: The preceptory of Melchbourne', in *VCH Beds* (London, 1904), vol. 1, p. 394; Leases were issued for the manor & rectory of Eaton (Northants) on 30 May 1536, and for the rectory of Riseley (Beds) on 24 April 1539. The rectory of Langford (Beds) was leased that same day. *BHRS*, 63, 165-66 (220) and 179-80 (239). Clerkenwell Priory was dissolved by Henry VIII on 7 May 1540.

¹⁰ The religious houses in the diocese of Lincoln are listed in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Henry VIII*, ed. J. Caley, 6 vols. (London, 1821), vol. 4, p. 463.

¹¹ On 24 April 1536 Robert Burgoyne was one of ten auditors appointed by the Court of Augmentations, the others being William Berners, Thomas Combez, John Wiseman, William Tumour, Hugh Fuller, William Cavendish, Thomas Myldemaye, James Rokesby, and Edward Gostewyke (brother of Robert). See *LP*, vol. 13, pt. 1, p. 573.

¹² 'House of Knights Hospitallers: The preceptory of Melchbourne', in *VCH Beds* (London, 1904), vol. 1, p. 394; 'Melchburn Preceptory, in Bedfordshire', *Monasticon*, vol. 6, pt. 2, p. 803; 'Court of Augmentations Accounts for Bedfordshire - I', ed. Y. Nicholls, *BHRS*, 63 (1984), 160-80 (p. 164) (219) and 179-80 (p. 180) (239).

Colmerum (1584)

Based on name alone, it is conceivable that Coleswood lay in the vicinity of the present-day Colemoreham Spinney, which was mapped astride the Northill-Old Warden parish boundary in 1881-82.¹³ The earliest known reference to Colemoreham, or ‘*Colmerum*’, dates to 1584, when a jury in the Old Warden manor court heard a case against John Marbury. Of the many allegations, it was said that Marbury had denied inhabitants their right of common of pasture by enclosing the commons, including ground at [the hamlet of] Aston. Also under dispute was ‘the broade’, where he had fenced off Common Close and two pightles, and likewise the close at Plummes Corner. Moreover, Marbury had allegedly interfered with a close called the ‘Reed Ponde & *Colmerum*’, where he withheld an acre of ground, which, according to a lease of Elizabeth I, rightfully belonged to copyholder ‘Smyth’ along with his tenement.¹⁴

Coles Leys, Ickwell (18th century)

Documentary evidence suggests an alternative, but less persuasive, argument placing Coleswood between Ickwell and Northill. The word ‘ley’ generally referred to an area ploughed for several years and then put under grass before the cycle was repeated. A survey of 1781 included a field called Coles Leys in Ickwell (5 acres – 34 perches) owned by John Harvey, Esq.,¹⁵ for which [?] Inskip paid £5 9s 5d annually. Enquiries in 1935/36 placed the field, by then called Colts Leys (24 acres), south-east of Home Wood [OS Grid Reference: TL 1465 4613], where it was bounded to the east by Ickwell Road, and to the south by a stream.¹⁶ LiDAR shows the area having been subdivided down the centuries, making it impossible to draw conclusions.

CONFIRMATION OF GIFTS TO WARDON ABBEY c. 1180-1210

A general confirmation was issued c. 1180/90 by William son of Aldelin, the king’s steward, concerning the gifts of Hereward and his sons at *Gikewell*.¹⁷ It was probably in the period 1190/1210, that William, son of Jordan Inchevale, confirmed an acre of arable at Ickwell, which had been given to the monks by his brother Walter with the consent of their brother Geoffrey. The land lay in the area once held by Gilbert, son of Hereward of Ickwell.¹⁸

An entry in the cartulary dated to c. 1195/1205 shows Peter of Baldock and his wife Eva confirming to God, St Mary, and the monks of Wardon, the gift made by Richard and Gilbert, sons of Hereward of Ickwell.¹⁹ This consisted of the abovementioned Coleswood; 2½ acres of arable up to *Langeheg* (long hedge); an area of open land (*brāde*)²⁰ [formerly] belonging to Hereward, which the monks held of Peter de Baldock’s fee between ‘*Gikewell et Smalbroc*’; 2½ acres of meadow in *Rademersc*;²¹ and 1 acre of arable up to *Langeheg*, which William, son of Richard, had given to the monks. Peter de Baldock also remitted his claim to the land of *Keteleshej* (probably in the parish of Southill).²² In the absence of further references, neither *Langeheg* nor *Rademersc* has been identified.

¹³ 1st edition OS map Bedfordshire XVII.SE (surveyed 1881 to 1882, published 1885).

¹⁴ *Documents concerning Old Warden and Southill transcribed by F. Emmison for Mrs Shuttleworth*, BARS, CRT/100/5, pp. 46-47 (14).

¹⁵ *A Survey of Northill* dated 1781, BARS, A 2/3; *Parish Field Names Listings M-W*, BARS, CRT 120/125.

¹⁶ [Map] *The Parish of Northill*, BARS, X 1/67.

¹⁷ *BHRS*, 13, 215 (275).

¹⁸ *BHRS*, 13, 226-27 (296).

¹⁹ *BHRS*, 13, 214-15 (274).

²⁰ Old English (OE) *brāde* meaning open land.

²¹ Middle English (ME) *rēdmersh* meaning reed bed or reedy place; OE *mersc* meaning marsh or meadow.

²² Unless there is another of that name, *Keteleshej* belonged to Rowney Grange, Southill by 1538.

ARABLE AND MEADOW IN ICKWELL

Ickwell brook / the great brook

The watercourse documented as 'Ickwell brook' in 1704 and as 'the great brook' in 1736, is thought to be one and the same.²³ Rising west of the A600 near Haynes, it flows in a north-easterly direction through Warden Great Wood (part of the monastic Hay or Abbey Wood) to the lowest point on Rowney Lane, where it enters the former Warden Abbey precinct via a culvert [TL 11974 43357].²⁴ It was canalised by the monks, probably during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and almost certainly powered their mill until the 1230s/40s, when they curtailed the flow by installing a dam.

On leaving the precinct, the stream makes its way through Gastlings and the parish of Southill, before returning to the parish of Old Warden in Lowsiebush Covert [TL 15300 43780]. Evidence of its natural course has been lost in many places from that point onwards, but it seems to have passed through the hamlet of Aston (vicinity of TL 156 447 and now lost beneath Old Warden Aerodrome) before crossing into the parish of Northill [TL 15453 44865]. From here, it would have been significant historically as a boundary feature and as means of irrigating adjoining meadows. However, the channel has been excavated over the centuries, and with the earth piled up on the west bank to prevent overtopping, it appears as a deep cutting in the landscape.

The small brook

A spring-fed brook flowing along the shallow valley, just over 350m from the wooden, hilltop castle at Warden, probably powered the mill held by lord of the manor, William Spec, in 1086.²⁵ The source, in the present-day Old Warden Park, nestles in a copse within the designed landscape, and today the water is quickly captured in a reservoir before being released into a series of elongated, manmade lakes that roughly mirror the brook's natural course. Nothing remains of its original path from the point at which canalisation begins within the park [TL 14885 44789], some 33m south of the parish boundary with Northill.

The small brook originally crossed into Northill about 130m east of where the canalised stream heads beneath the early nineteenth-century road from Old Warden to Biggleswade. It meandered in a north-easterly direction to meet the great brook at Ickwell, with the junction thought to coincide with the east end of a 223m-long ditch [TL 15370 45163]. The ditch was probably dug as part of a wider drainage programme in or around the mid-seventeenth century, whereas the small brook was infilled and ploughed out after 1765, leaving no trace on LiDAR or satellite imagery.²⁶

The non-natural character of the stream today is evidenced on LiDAR, which shows earth banked up along the east side in Old Warden Park. Having crossed into Northill [TL 14910 44865], the watercourse continues in a north-north-easterly direction for almost 250m, again with earth piled up along its east bank, before taking a series of turns corresponding with modern field boundaries. Having flowed beneath the public footpath that leads southwards from Ickwell towards Old Warden Aerodrome [TL 15199 45318], it discharges into a complex of moats, south of *The Old House* near Ickwell Green.

²³ Mortgage, George Barnardiston to John Mordaunt, dated 1 November 1704, BARS, HY190-1; Exchange dated 8 September 1736, BARS, HY627.

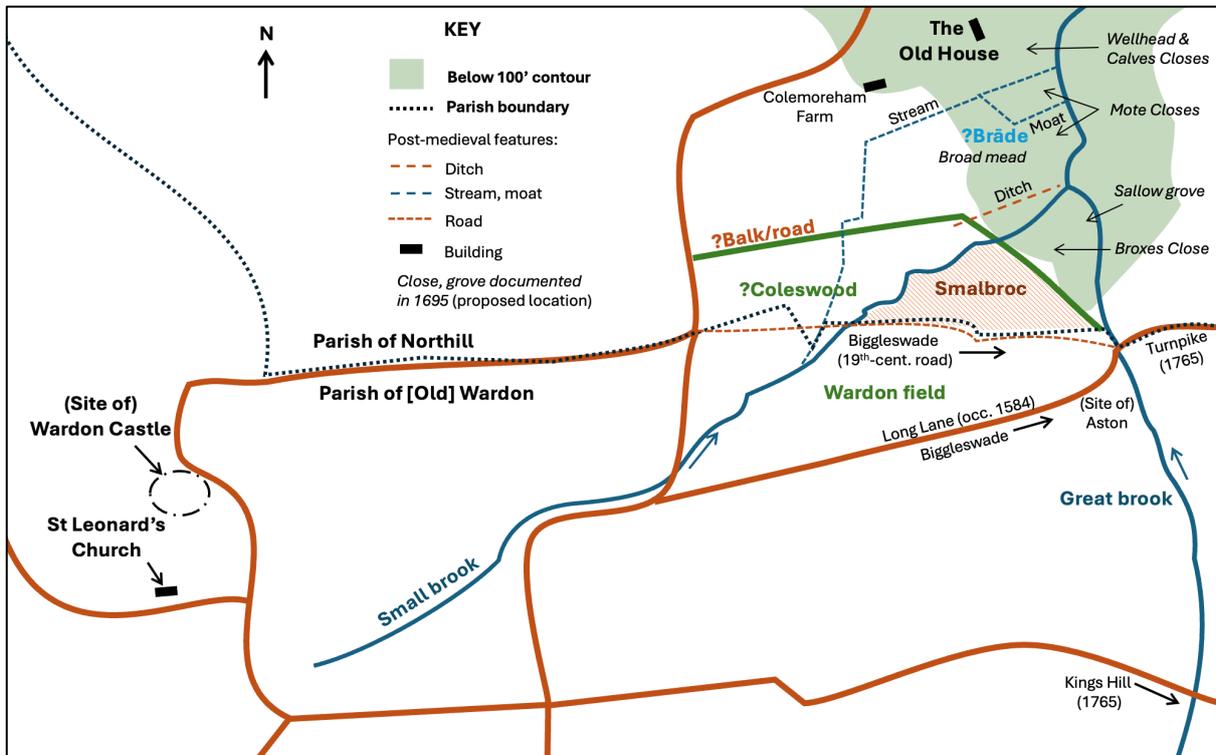
²⁴ The medieval monastery always documented as Warden Abbey in primary sources, but spelling conventions evolved over time. For further details, see *Warden Abbey. The Lost Plot*, p. 1.

²⁵ A. Powell-Smith, '[Old Warden]'. *Open Domesday* (TNA and University of Hull), <https://opendomesday.org/place/TL1343/old-warden/>.

²⁶ Map of Bedfordshire by Thomas Jefferys, 1765 - facsimile reprint, BARS, X 354/5/2.



Source of the small brook in Old Warden Park (centre) (December 2025)



Road network based on the map of Bedfordshire by Thomas Jefferys (1765) with annotations

Medieval arable fields

The medieval unit of cultivation was a strip, called a *land*. More often than not, these were ploughed anticlockwise, which caused them to be ridged up to about 0.3m high in the centre, leaving the two sides sloping down into a furrow. Groups of lands with the furrows orientated in the same direction were called *furlongs*, each of which was named for easy identification. Furlongs were often grouped together into large blocks called *fields* and typically there were two or three open fields in a parish to support a two or three year system of crop rotation.²⁷ Individual tenant holdings were distributed throughout the fields to ensure fairness.

A *balk* (*baulk*) was an unploughed piece of land in a common arable field, with various uses: as an access path by which a tenant could reach his lands; a boundary between strips and/or other units of arable, or merely places unsuitable for cultivation.²⁸ A late seventeenth-century marriage settlement references a 'cottage with barn, garden and orchard, close of pasture (4 acres), and a common baulk adjoining in Ickwell', while an early eighteenth-century mortgage mentions not only 'the great common baulk' (probably one and the same), but also baulks in Northill, including 'a baulk in Northill backside, by Barnardiston's field close; a baulk next Thomas Carter's close east and highway west, south James Tompion's close end, and several willow trees belonging, being near Ickwell'.²⁹

Common arable fields in Ickwell

Late twelfth and early thirteenth-century documents relating to Wardon Abbey mention two fields in Ickwell, namely Ickwell field and the South field.³⁰ The southern edge of the South field appears to have been defined by the Northill-[Old] Wardon parish boundary, with Wardon field abutting it to the south. Details of the full extent and number of furlongs in the South field, however, are open to question.

With field names having changed down the centuries, Ickwell field remains an enigma, although it appears to have been east of the great brook in the early thirteenth century. A legal document of 1924 reciting earlier contracts mentions '11ac 3r 16p arable in Ickwell Field, mostly in Northill but a small portion on S or SW in Warden...', which places it on the parish boundary.³¹ Based on names provided in 1935/36 by farmers, market gardeners, smallholders and other landowners, a 17-acre plot called Ickwell Field [TL 5160 2456] lay on the south side of Caldecote Road, between Spinney Field and Larkins Field, but it is impossible to say how far it coincides with the medieval field of that name, if at all.³²

Smalbroc

Derived from the Old English *bróc* (Middle English *brōk*) meaning a small stream or brook, *Smalbroc* was a named furlong in Ickwell's South field during the late medieval period.³³ LiDAR indicates that a balk or road of about 13.66m (45 feet) in width (including an earth bank/ditch on each side) once ran directly for 492m east-north-eastwards from the present-day farm entrance on Warden Road [TL 14664 44990]. The structure, which does not occur on the 1765 map, then

²⁷ D. Hall, *Medieval Fields* (Shire Archaeology, 1982), pp. 5-9, 17.

²⁸ R.A. Butlin, 'Some Terms Used in Agrarian History. A Glossary', *Agricultural History Review* 9.2 (1961), 98-104.

²⁹ Settlement on the marriage between Humphrey Fish junior and Anne Stillingfleet dated 16, 17 May 1695, BARS, HY525-6; Mortgage, with Bond dated 1 November 1704, BARS, HY190-1.

³⁰ *BHRS*, 13, 219-20 (284), 220 (285).

³¹ Abstract of Title of Capt. John Edmund Audley Harvey 1924, BARS, X713/17/1.

³² [Map], BARS, MV 12/7.

³³ *BHRS*, 13, 220 (285).

curved south-east, but has been cut just south of the bend by the west end of the abovementioned ditch [TL 15148 45085], thereby confirming the ditch as a later feature.

Crop marks on satellite imagery suggest that the balk/road then took a diagonal path in a south-east direction for about 340m, and it is assumed that a ford would have been established through the small brook. The balk/road finished at the parish boundary, close to the great brook,³⁴ where it appears to have joined the way from [Old] Wardon (documented as Long Lane in 1584), and travellers would have crossed the larger watercourse by ford or bridge before continuing east on the highway towards Biggleswade (annotated 'Turnpike' in 1765).



View north-west over *Smalbroc* as seen from the Old Warden-Northill parish boundary (September 2025)

A mortgage of 1 November 1704 mentions 'Upper Furlong, in Smallbrook abutting the Little brook [to the] north and Warden field [to the] south',³⁵ a contemporary turn of phrase describing the location of Smallbrook, not the Upper Furlong (a reference to a ploughed strip of land within Smallbrook). It is therefore proposed that the arable land of *Smalbroc* was originally defined by the parish boundary to the south, the small brook to the north-west, and by the balk/road to the north-east, an area of about 8 acres.

The balk/road had been ploughed out and the meadows drained to increase the amount of arable available by the mid-1730s. This is borne out in an exchange of property between John Harvey of Ickwell Bury, Esq. and Henry Fish Palmer of Ickwell, Esq. dated 8 September 1736, which included a strip of arable land (1 rood) in 'Smallbrook furlong', then part of Stonehills field. The strip was bounded to the east by the great brook, by the headland belonging to Henry Fish Palmer on the west, and by Fish Palmer's arable to the north and south.³⁶ A conveyance of assets by Henry Fish Palmer, Esq. of Ickwell to his sons, Charles and Jeremy, in 1773 excluded 3½ acres in Smallbrook (then described as within Ickwell field) adjoining his 4-acre piece of Ickwell Farm.³⁷

³⁴ Barely discernible on LiDAR Digital Terrain Model (DTM) 50cm-1m, the balk is lost from larger scale models and from the Digital Surface Model (DSM).

³⁵ Mortgage, George Barnardiston to John Mordaunt, dated 1 November 1704, BARS, HY190-1.

³⁶ Exchange dated 8 September 1736, BARS, HY627.

³⁷ Conveyance dated 2 & 3 April 1773, BARS, AD2913-14.

‘Broxes’ [Brooks] close (1695)

At less than 100 feet above sea-level, the flat ground between the balk/road and the great brook would have been susceptible to flooding, fit for nothing but meadow or grazing. The ditches alongside it would have mitigated the risk of flooding in the adjoining arable land, and had the route been slightly raised, it would have doubled as a bund, an arrangement used in the precinct at Wardon Abbey, where causeways were an early feature of the sodden landscape.

An ancient deed of 8 January 1657 which describes Elizabeth Fyshe, widow of Henry Fyshe, leasing rents and various other assets to Humfrey Fyshe for 60 years, mentions ‘all that piece of ley or pasture ground next Smalebrooke [*sic*]’.³⁸ It is possible that this is the 6-acre close of pasture documented as ‘Broxes’ [Brooks] close in 1695, and which is thought to have occupied the triangular area between the two brooks. A spinney on the west bank of the great brook [TL 1542 4506] may have its roots in the seventeenth-century Sallow grove (a collection of willows, especially those of the low-growing or shrubby kind), which lay ‘at the end of Broxes close’.³⁹

The *brāde*

The close of pasture called Broad mead in 1695, and Broad Meadow in 1735, is thought to have taken its name from the medieval *brāde* between ‘*Gikewell et Smalbroc*’ and, based on the 1695 document which lists ‘2 closes of pasture called Mote closes (5 acres)’ immediately before ‘1 close of pasture called Broad mead (5 acres)’, it appears that the three were contiguous. As a distinctive feature south of *The Old House* near Ickwell Green [TL 15187 45448], it is easy to pinpoint Mote closes (documented elsewhere as Home close or Little Moat Close (2 acres-3 roods-4 perches) and Great Moat Close (4-1-36)), and it is therefore suggested that the *brāde* occupied about 10 acres of wet, low-lying ground on the west bank of the great brook [TL 152 452].⁴⁰

The Tiville family

Circa 1190/1200 Ralf de Tiville granted the monks of Wardon 3 acres in the South field,⁴¹ which is described as all of his arable ‘*que abutat ad Smalbroc*’. Based on the Middle English word *abōute(n)* (from the Old English *ābūtan*) meaning ‘to be encircled by’, the gift probably consisted of arable strips scattered throughout *Smalbroc*.

Further grants made by Tiville family members around 1220,⁴² included 40½ acres and ½ rood in Marhei Furlong (Ickwell Field) from Ralf de Tiville.⁴³ It is unlikely to be the same Ralf who occurred c. 1190/1200, but as the eldest son in each generation was given the same name, and without further details, an element of uncertainty remains. Ralf gave permission for the monks to make a ditch or boundary on their land, if they so pleased, which suggests that some, if not all, of the strips were contiguous and, given the acreage, they are likely to have been found between the great brook and Caldecote.

³⁸ ‘Ancient Bedfordshire Deeds: No. 3, Northill, Southill, Old Warden etc’, ed. F.A. Page-Turner, *BHRS*, 8 (1934), 17-86 (pp. 73-74).

³⁹ Marriage settlement, BARS, HY525-6.

⁴⁰ Marriage settlement, BARS, HY525-6; Conveyance dated 3 & 4 July 1735, BARS, AD2901-02; *BHRS*, 13, 214-15 (274).

⁴¹ *BHRS*, 13, 220 (285).

⁴² *BHRS*, 13, 219-20 (284).

⁴³ OE *mere*, *mære* meaning a lake, pond or pool, also ME *mēre* meaning a boundary, and ME *hei* meaning hay, or *hei(e)*, a hedge or fence, an enclosed plot of land, field, or yard.

At about the same time, Ralf de Tiville also confirmed the 9 roods of arable in the fields of *Gikewell* and 1½ acres of meadow, which the abbey had at Ickwell thanks to Henry de Tiville.⁴⁴ These are described as 5 roods of arable [1.25 acres] in *Rivenhull* next to the land of Richard the forester; one acre of arable at the head of Robert Basset'scroft; and 1½ acres of meadow in *Rademeris* [see *Rademersc* above confirmed by Peter de Baldock], which the monks had exchanged with Henry de Tiville. The location of *Rivenhull* has not been identified.⁴⁵

A further charter shows Henry de Tiville and wife Emma granting a virgate [30 fiscal acres] to the abbey from his fee in Beeston. Also confirmed were 7 roods of meadow in Ickwell [1.75 acres], 5 roods of which were in *Rademers* between the meadow of persons from Northill and the meadow of Ralf, son of Godfrey, and abutting *Derneford*; and ½ acre [2 roods] in *Heidiche* next to the meadow of John, son of Thorold.⁴⁶

The Broc family of Ickwell (late 13th century)

The cartulary contains a copy of a charter issued in 1288/89, showing that Richard, son of Geoffrey de la Broc, held from the abbot at 'Gykwelle' in the parish of Northill, 'a messuage [a dwelling with outbuildings and land assigned to its use] and a virgate of arable land'. In return he was to perform services and customs, as others in the settlement were accustomed to do. Annual rent of 5s was payable, together with 10d for customary works according to the will of the abbot, and one ox, worth 10 shillings, as heriot (payment on the death of a tenant).⁴⁷ The second part of the charter is translated as:

After his [Richard's] death, his son John claimed the aforesaid messuage and a virgate of land as his freehold. He offered the abbot half a mark [6s 8d] as a relief [one-off payment to inherit and take possession of the land] and refused to do the services his father had done for the aforesaid tenement.

Therefore, the abbot gave that tenement to Cristiane, Richard's widow, to be held by services pertaining to the aforesaid tenement. By that time, [?], the daughter of the aforesaid Richard and Cristiane, was married and gave 2 shillings and 2 capons for the licence to be held.

A year later, John came again and asked for a change of status, and the abbot made him a charter by which he holds the aforesaid tenement free to himself and his heirs, paying 10 shillings rent and scutage [cash in lieu of military service] per year when he comes to pay suit of court, but the charter makes no mention of freedom or redemption of his own blood or body, and he gives 40 shillings for the charter.

Lay subsidies (1309 and 1332)

Of the thirty-three taxpayers in 'Northyvele' (including Ickwell and Caldecote), the highest levies in 1309 were placed on Walter Launcelyn (21s 3¾d) and Eleanor de Trailly (13s 3¾d), while the poorest, Richard le Chesman [cheese man] and Roger Cras (*crās*, Middle English word meaning fat or gross) paid 6d apiece. The amount was calculated based on one twenty fifth of any rental income and the value of their moveable assets, such as cattle and crops. John atte Broke was required to pay 18¼d, the equivalent of 7 days' wages for a skilled tradesman. The great famine (1315-17) decimated the population before another subsidy was imposed in 1332. For those living in the countryside, this amounted to one fifteenth, and of the twenty-seven taxpayers in the 'Villata de Norhtgivel [*sic*]', demands for payment ranged from 16s 8d from Walter Launcelyn to

⁴⁴ *BHRS*, 13, 221 (286).

⁴⁵ Derived from the Anglo-Norman (AN) *rive* meaning shore, bank or edge, and *hul* meaning hill.

⁴⁶ *BHRS*, 13, 221-22 (287); ME *dërne* (adj.) meaning a secluded or solitary place.

⁴⁷ *BHRS*, 13, 254-55 (336s).

10d from Robert Tipelyn. Whether the same man or his heir, the name John atte Broke appears once again, this time against a bill of 22½d, representing 4 days' pay for a skilled tradesman.⁴⁸

View of frankpledge in Caldecote manor (1511-1512)

At the view of frankpledge in Caldecote manor held in the third year of the reign of Henry VIII, Abbot Augustine London of Wardon leased unspecified lands in *Ickewell* to Robert Boteler, a brother of Northill College, who was acting on behalf of the master of the college, John Underhill.⁴⁹

Wardon Abbey and the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (1535)

The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* documents Wardon Abbey receiving gross (taxable) income of £25 from Beeston, Caldecote, Sandy, Blunham, Tempsford, Moggerhanger, and Gamlingay, plus £2 13s 4d from Caldecote mills. There was nothing, however, from the settlements of Thorncote, Northill, or Ickwell, from which it is inferred that the commissioners accounted for Thorncote under Beeston manor (acquired by Wardon Abbey in 1386), and for Northill and Ickwell as part of Caldecote manor.⁵⁰

Allowable expenses included 19s paid to the [grand] prior of St John of Jerusalem in England, comprising 10s in lieu of tithes on an acre of land at Park Grange and 9s shillings from Caldecote mills.⁵¹ The abbey continued an annual payment of 6s to Northill College, as agreed on 1 October 1486, which represented a portion of the tithes from 'Trayleystockyng or Trayley Fld'⁵² and from New Close alias 'Swetebryer close', two pastures on Park Grange lying within Northill parish.⁵³

Holdings of the late Wardon Abbey (1537 onwards)

The Crown commissioners' visit to Wardon Abbey in October 1535 provided the catalyst for a restructuring programme, and before closing its doors on 4 December 1537, the monastery had relinquished its assets in Blunham, Moggerhanger, and Gamlingay. A more detailed picture emerges in the Court of Augmentations accounts (1537/38), which list not only income from Beeston, Caldecote, Sandy, and Tempsford, but also rents from Thorncote, Northill, and Ickwell.

Settlement of Northill

It is calculated that the abbey had owned assets in the vicinity of Northill totalling 18s 1d. The most valuable was Drewelles Wood [TL 1430 4704], which Abbot Augustine London had leased to the 'Master & Society of College of Northill' on 2 June 1526 for a fixed term of 40 years at 10s per annum, with the college allowed to keep any profits. Curiously, the woodland was not mentioned in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (1535), although it is conceivable that the abbey had acquired the temporary reversion of the lease before spring 1535 and was holding the woodland

⁴⁸ *Two Bedfordshire Subsidy Lists. 1309 and 1332*, ed. S.A.H. Hervey, Suffolk Green Books. No. XVIII (Paul & Mathew, 1925), pp. 51, 138-39 (p. 138). For currency conversion, see the 'Currency convertor', TNA, <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/>>.

⁴⁹ Caldecote manor, view of frankpledge held by Augustine London abbot of Wardon in the year 22 April 1511 – 21 April 1512 [TNA, C 146/10316].

⁵⁰ For Beeston manor, see *Cal. Pat. R., Rich. II*, vol. 3, p. 220; The abbot derived income from manor courts at Caldecote in 1291. See *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. 5, pt. 052, p. 369.

⁵¹ The demesne lands of Park Grange straddled the boundary between the parishes of Wardon and Northill.

⁵² According to O. Rackham, *Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape* (Dent, 1976; W&N, 1990), p. 48, 'Names referring to the destruction of woodland may include ... Stocking'. 'Stocking' is a place which, perhaps hundreds of years earlier, contained 'stocks', that is tree-stumps.'

⁵³ *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. 5, pt. 052, pp. 373-74; *BHRS*, 63, 149 (198); Map of the Estate of Miss Katherine Davis Bovey situate in the Parishes of Old Warden and Northill in the County of Bedford c. 1750, BARS, Z1125/1.

in demesne at the time of the survey. A rental of Northhill College Manor (1545/47) records ‘Drewes Wood, lately belonging to Warden Monastery, held by the College of the King, on a lease of 40 years at a rent of 10s. with power to take what they wish of wood: 8 acres [15d per acre]’, which indicates clearly that the abbey, not the college, had been the owner prior to the dissolution. A 1634 map illustrates the bounds of Druell’s Wood with an area of 14 acres and 27 perches.⁵⁴

In 1535 the Master and Society of Northhill College paid 17d to the abbot, which appears to have had some particular significance, as the sum was allowed to the college as an expense for tax purposes.⁵⁵ According to the Court of Augmentations accounts (1537/38), the college had held, as a free tenant of the abbot, ‘cert. land lying in Northhill’ of the same value. No further details are given, however we might surmise that these are the lands leased to the college in 1511/12 by Abbot Augustine London.

Wardon Abbey’s only other asset in Northhill was rented to tenant at will, William Clerke [Clarke]. Its whereabouts are unknown, but the most promising location is on the east side of the road leading from Northhill to Ickwell, just south of the former Northhill College precinct. Unfortunately, Clerke had fallen into arrears by September 1538, having failed to pay 6s 8d to the Crown for his close and an acre of pasture.⁵⁶

Settlement of Ickwell

No such complications arose in 1538 over William Clerke’s messuage and arable in Ickwell for which he paid 10s yearly, and Clerke, who had also held a tenement in Beeston from the abbot for 1d, would become a key landholder in Ickwell over the coming years.⁵⁷

Other Ickwell assets belonging to Wardon Abbey included a small hemp land (a plot for the cultivation of hemp according to a statute of 1533, and by extension any very small plot or pightle, especially one attached to a house), which the abbot had let out to Northhill College for 8d yearly (date unknown).⁵⁸ Richard Fleecher [Fletcher] rented a close and 2 acres of arable for 4s, together with another close and 2 acres of arable for 3s 4d. We might surmise that Richard was related to William Fleccher, bailiff of Northhill College, who held from the abbot of Wardon 3 acres of meadow in Heydyche for 5s 6d.⁵⁹ Richard Tychemersshe held a parcel of meadow in Heydyche for 4s 4d, while Reginald Tychemersshe had a piece of meadow there for 4s.⁶⁰ Tychemersshe [Tittesmersh(e), Titchmersh, Tichermerche] family members were named as trustees for St Anne’s chantry in 1494 and 1528,⁶¹ and likewise William Gylman [Erlmynn, Gilmyn], who leased 12 acres of arable in Heydyche from the abbot of Wardon for 5s. The most valuable asset in Ickwell was a messuage called *Brokes*, which was rented to Robert Gostwick in 1536 for 31s 5d,⁶² bringing the annual value of former monastic assets in the settlement to £3 8s 3d.

⁵⁴ Northhill College Manor. Rental, with other manors, 1546-47, TNA, SP 5/1/87; ‘Records of Northhill College No. II’, trans. C. Gore Chambers, *BHRS*, 2 (1914), 111-125 (p. 114); Northhill College and Manor of Northhill (1634), BARS, X 1/39.

⁵⁵ *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, vol. 4, p. 196; *BHRS*, 63, 98-99 (p. 99) (130).

⁵⁶ *BHRS*, 63, 98 (129), 100-101 (p. 101) (132).

⁵⁷ *BHRS*, 63, 98-99 (p. 99) (130), 98 (129).

⁵⁸ *BHRS*, 63, 98-99 (p. 99) (130).

⁵⁹ *BHRS*, 63, 98-99 (p. 99) (130); *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, vol. 4, p. 196; *Heidyche*, Ickwell, occurs in connection with the Tiville family c. 1220.

⁶⁰ *BHRS*, 63, 98-99 (p. 99) (130).

⁶¹ *BHRS*, 2, 123-24.

⁶² *BHRS*, 63, 98-99 (p. 99) (130) and 99-100 (p. 100) (131).

THE MESSAGE CALLED *BROKES* OR *SALTWELLES*

Robert Gostwick (d. 1561)

Robert Gostwick, who was serving as the abbot's bailiff in Southill in 1535, had been engaged to manage the abbey's properties in Bedford with Goldington and Biddenham by 1538, although it is unclear whether he was appointed by the abbot or the Crown. He continued his role in Bedford until 1541-42, and submitted accounts for Southill etc until at least 1544-45.⁶³ On 24 January 1539 Sir Francis Bryan acquired a 21-year lease for the site and demesne land of the late abbey⁶⁴ and although there is no surviving evidence to suggest when he sublet the property, it had passed into the hands of Robert Gostwick by Michaelmas 1542.⁶⁵ Robert and his wife Agnes [Anne] acquired the title of the lease for 41 years on 16 July 1545.⁶⁶ On 4 December 1548 Edward VI granted a pardon to 'Robert Gostwyk of Wyllington, Wardon Strete and Wardon Abbey, Beds, gentleman', a clear indication that he had severed his connections with Ickwell by that time.⁶⁷

On 27 September 1536 Abbot Henry Emery rented *Brokes* and associated rights to Robert Gostwick 'at farm' (on a fixed term lease) for 30 years. According to the contract, the messuage was once [called] *Saltwelles* and included all of the associated arable land, meadow, pasture, and herbage (permission to graze animals on another person's land).⁶⁸ The date suggests that, following the royal commissioners' visit to the monastery in October 1535, this was one of those properties let out as part of the abbot's restructuring programme and, in common with other religious houses, Wardon was taking steps to benefit its lay officials as the monasteries' prospects became increasingly uncertain. For the same reason, Gostwick probably acquired Little Hell (close of pasture) and Ox Close (arable) in Southill for 53s 4d around that time, assets of equivalent value being let by the abbot to Richard Cumberland, his bailiff in the parish of Wardon.⁶⁹

The Clarke family

It has not been established whether Robert Gostwick ever lived at *Brokes* or undertook any improvements to the dwelling house. Moreover, there is no record of when he relinquished the lease, other than to say that William Clarke had taken possession before making his will on 14 December 1546 (proved 8 January 1547).

Again, there is evidence of the property being known by its alternative name, with 'William Clarke of Ickwell' leaving 'To son Henry his house called Saltwelles with all that belongs to it saving 4

⁶³ *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. 5, pt. 052, p. 374; *BHRS*, 63, 92 (123); *Receivers' accounts for lordship or late monastery of Wardon in Bedfordshire cum membris*, as in S.C.6 Henry VIII 22, BARS, FAC1/SC6/HenryVIII/25 and BARS, FAC1/SC6/Henry VIII/28.

⁶⁴ *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, vol. 14, pt. 1, p. 608 (32b); Ancient Deeds, Series B for the year 22 April 1538-21 April 1539, TNA, E 326/11772; *LP*, 20 pt 2, p. 680 (101).

⁶⁵ 'Court of Augmentations Accounts for Bedfordshire – II', ed. Y. Nicholls, *BHRS*, 64 (1985), 151 (430).

⁶⁶ H.P.R. Finberg, 'The Gostwicks of Willington, Bedfordshire', *BHRS*, 36 (1956), 85; *LP*, vol. 20, pt. 1, p. 680 (101).

⁶⁷ Pardon Rolls of 1 and 2 Edward VI set out the general terms of the pardon in an entry dated 8 March 1547, 'General pardon to "AB" for offences before 28 Jan. 1 Edward VI set out at full length... Provided always that the persons wishing to avail themselves of this pardon sue for it in writing under the Great Seal dated before 28 January 1548. An entry on 26 March 1547 began a list of hundreds of individuals and organisations affected, including both Robert and his brother Edward Gostwick. See *Cal. Pat. R., Edward VI*, vol. 2, pp. 138-168 (p. 168).

⁶⁸ ME *salt-welle* and OE *sealt-wille*, *salt-wylle*, *-wælle* referring to a salt-water well or spring, a well or pit from which salt was obtained, and found in surnames and place names; *BHRS*, 63, 100 (131).

⁶⁹ *BHRS*, 63, 88 (117). Little Hell is thought to have been part of Rowney Grange, which included Great Hell Close in 1538.

acres of land bequeathed to testator's son Thomas.' To son Thomas, William left 'a house called Mathews with all that goes with it.' It is reasonable to suppose that his elder son received the better of the two dwellings and that the message bequeathed to Thomas was the one held by his father for 10s per annum in 1538.⁷⁰ The parish register documents the baptism on 11 July 1564 of William, son of Henry Clarke, the burial on 17 June 1582 of Margery, wife of Henry Clarke, and on 15 January 1591, the burial of 'Father Henry Clark'. Thereafter the trail goes cold as several leaves have been torn out of the Baptisms section of the parish register and no records survive for the period from 1578 to 1595.⁷¹

Manor of Caldecote (1537-64)

At the time of the dissolution, former monastic properties were granted to local men of good standing who would ensure that they generated maximum income for the Crown. It is unclear who took over Wardon Abbey's manor of Caldecote, suffice to say that continuity was provided by John Bromsall, who had been the abbot's bailiff for Beeston, Caldecote, and Sandy in 1535 on a salary of £1 6s 8d. Following reorganisation, probably after the abbey closed, Bromsall's pay rose to 30s per annum for managing Beeston, Thorcote, Ickwell, Caldecote, and Tempsford, and he remained a Crown servant until at least 1544/45.⁷²

On 1 July 1564 Elizabeth I granted numerous assets for a period of 21 years to her favourite, Robert Dudley KG, Master of Horse. These included the 'Manor of Caldecote' and 'Holme Myll Graunge', both formerly belonging to Wardon Abbey.⁷³ Having been created Baron of Denbigh (28 September 1564) and Earl of Leicester (29 September 1564), Dudley granted the manor of Caldecote and other Bedfordshire premises to George Fish of Southill, gentleman, who was then in his service.⁷⁴ Fish is documented as 'her majesties Surveyor of the Countie of Bedford' in 1584 and, having lived for another 20 years, was buried at Southill on 21 June 1604, aged 70.⁷⁵

One message, two names

Questions remain over the significance of two names for the premises sometimes called *Brokes*, and at others, *Saltwelles*. Accepting that the abbey held few resources in Ickwell, and the general inclination to retain assets over long periods of time, it is conceivable that *Brokes* was on the site of the dwelling that was rented by the abbot of Wardon to Geoffrey de la Broc, his son and heir Richard, Richard's widow Cristianne, and their son John in the late thirteenth century. As the name suggests, the family was associated with a watercourse. There is, however, no evidence to confirm whether this was the great brook, the small brook, or both, yet the extensive nature of the holding suggests that they were affluent tenants.

Saltwelles may have had a literal meaning, and although no evidence of salt production has been documented in Ickwell, variations of the name occurred at Little Staughton in the north of Bedfordshire as early as the thirteenth century.⁷⁶ The oldest exposed rocks in Bedfordshire are those of the Upper Lias, comprising a series of silty muds and muddy limestones that were laid

⁷⁰ Will of William Clarke dated 14 December 1546, proved 8 January 1547, BARS, ABP/R11/263.

⁷¹ *Bedfordshire Parish Registers*, ed. F.G. Emmison, vol. 13 (CRO, 1936).

⁷² *Mon.*, vol. 5, p. 374; *BHRS*, 63, 100 (132); BARS, FAC1/SC6/Henry VIII/nos 14-29.

⁷³ *Cal. Pat. R., Eliz. I*, vol. 3, pp. 95-96 (p. 96) (414) (v).

⁷⁴ Manor of Pilling in Marston Mortaine purchased by John Earl of Upper Ossory in 1758, BARS, RO14.

⁷⁵ CRT/100/5, p. 44; *Beds Parish Registers*, vol. 12 (CRO, 1936), p. 89.

⁷⁶ Beds Archives references to Saltwell in Little Staughton (c. 13th century), Z423/8 and grant dated to 1275-1300, PR30; Saltwellemede (1309), PR43; Saltwell furlong with meadow adjoining (1322), PR54; and Saltwelle furlong (in Cherchefeld) (1322), PR172.

down in the sea around 190 million years ago.⁷⁷ Parallels can therefore be drawn with the geology of Droitwich in Worcestershire, famed for its salt beds, leaving us to ponder whether salt was produced in Bedfordshire during the medieval and Tudor periods.⁷⁸

Ickwell did not occur in Domesday (1086) and discussion of the message prompts questions over its origins.⁷⁹ It has previously been proposed that Ickwell referred to Gicca's stream or spring, thought to be the spring in the grounds of the present-day Ickwell Bury. However, Gicca is not among the many personal Saxon names listed by *Regia Anglorum*, thereby casting doubt over the theory.⁸⁰ Based on the etymology and the inevitable disparate spellings in late medieval documents, it is more plausible that Ickwell is derived from the Middle English noun *ēke* (Old English *ēaca*) meaning an increase, addition, or enhancement, and that this was simply the place where an additional well, perhaps the *salt-welle*, was to be found.

Location of Brokes / Saltwelles

Known today as *The Old House (Ickwell House)* on the OS map revised in 1900, the property was described in 1695 as the 'capital message or mansion house in Ickwell in the occupation of Humphrey Fish senior; 2 closes of pasture called Wellhead and Calves closes (3 acres)', with a grove or spinney adjoining the capital message. Once again, the name may provide a clue, with Wellhead close thought to lie near to the dwelling. The name survived in 1735, albeit in altered form, when Humphrey Fyshe occupied the 'Mansion House in Ickwell' with 'barns, stables, gardens, dovecote & ponds etc., Willhead [sic] & Calves Closes, Middle Closes [Mote Closes], Broad Meadow, Broxes Close in Ickwell, Grove adjoining mansion and Sallow Grove abutting Broxes Close'.⁸¹

Is this sufficient evidence to confirm that *The Old House*, now divided into two properties, is the dwelling belonging to the message called *Brokes/ Saltwelles*? The proposal certainly has merit. Said to have medieval origins, the house was reworked in the sixteenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and although originally of timber framed construction, parts have been re-cased, rebuilt and added to in brick. The original open hall block (in No. 2, *The Old House*) runs north-south, retaining a hipped roof to the south, and is two-storeyed, the floor having been inserted in the sixteenth century. It has three two-storeyed gables of varying proportions; the left hand one is sixteenth-century, apparently originally jettied, but built out in the nineteenth century and a two-storey, canted bay added.⁸²

Tudor property developers

Robert Gostwick and his brother, Edward, had acquired the site of the late Warden Abbey's guest house by Michaelmas 1538 and are likely to have been responsible for constructing a manor house on the site now occupied by Warden Manor Farm.⁸³ Edward was buried at Southill on 9

⁷⁷ *Rocks in Bedfordshire*. Bedfordshire Geology Group, <<https://www.bedfordshiregeologygroup.org.uk/>> , accessed 6 September 2025; *The History of Salt*, Salt Association, <<https://saltassociation.co.uk/education/salt-history/>>, accessed 6 September 2025.

⁷⁸ K. Hughes and J. Payne, *Sources of Salt in Worcestershire* (May 2021).

<<https://earthheritagetrust.org/sources-of-salt-in-worcestershire/>>, accessed 6 September 2025.

⁷⁹ *Open Domesday*, <<https://opendomesday.org/place/TL1446/northill/>>.

⁸⁰ 'Authentic Names'. *Regia Anglorum*, <<https://regia.org/members/names.php#SFG>>.

⁸¹ Marriage settlement, BARS, HY525-6; Conveyance dated 3 & 4 July 1735, BARS, AD2901-02.

⁸² Historic England, <<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1221781>>, accessed 6 September 2025.

⁸³ 'Court of Augmentations Accounts for Bedfordshire – II', ed. Y. Nicholls, *BHRS*, 64 (1985), 148 (426); Bargain & Sale enrolled, 4 July 1629, BARS, W2223. For further details, see M. Roberts, *Warden Manor Farm* (12 February 2024; revised 15 July 2024), <<https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityHistories/OldWarden/WardenManorFarm.aspx>>.

August 1558, while Robert occupied a newly built Tudor farmhouse on the site of the monks infirmary cloister by 20 November that same year.⁸⁴ As a keen property developer, the possibility that Robert was in some way responsible for work on *Brokes/ Saltwelles* in the sixteenth century cannot be ruled out, and although the question of whether any direction connection with *The Old House* is presently unconfirmed, it would be nice to think that his legacy lives on somewhere in Ickwell.

⁸⁴ *BHRS*, 36, 76-87 (pp. 82-83); F.A. Blaydes (ed.), 'Gostwicke Wills', *Bedfordshire Notes and Queries*, vol. 2, pt. 18 (June 1888), 182-91 (pp. 187-88).