

# **WARDON ABBEY THE MONASTIC WOODLANDS**

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## Abbreviations

AN	Anglo-Norman
BARS	Bedfordshire Archives
Beds	County of Bedfordshire
<i>BHRS</i>	Bedfordshire Historical Record Society publication
Bucks	County of Buckinghamshire
<i>Cal. Chart. R.</i>	<i>Calendar of the Charter Rolls</i>
<i>Cal. Close R.</i>	<i>Calendar of the Close Rolls</i>
<i>Cal. Inquis. p.m.</i>	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem</i>
<i>Cal. Pat. R.</i>	<i>Calendar of the Patent Rolls</i>
Cambs	County of Cambridgeshire
Herts	County of Hertfordshire
Hunts	Huntingdonshire (Historic county of England)
LAO	Lincolnshire Archives
Lincs	County of Lincolnshire
<i>LP</i>	<i>Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VII</i>
<i>LRS</i>	Lincoln Record Society publication
ME	Middle English
<i>Mon.</i>	<i>Monasticon Anglicanum</i>
Northants	County of Northamptonshire
N. Yorks	County of North Yorkshire
OE	Old English
TNA	The National Archives
<i>VCH Beds</i>	<i>Victoria County History: A History of the County of Bedford</i>
<i>VCH Cambs</i>	<i>Victoria County History: A History of the County of Cambridge</i>
<i>VCH Hunts</i>	<i>Victoria County History: A History of the County of Huntingdon</i>
<i>VE</i>	<i>Valor Ecclesiasticus, temp. Henry VIII</i>
Warwicks	County of Warwickshire



# WARDON ABBEY – THE MONASTIC WOODLANDS

## Introduction

Contrary to general assumptions that the English countryside was shaped during or after the Middle Ages, botanist Oliver Rackham took the view that 'By AD 1200 much of the modern landscape was already recognizable. Nearly all our villages and most hamlets existed then; the proportions of farmland, woodland and moorland were not enormously different from what they are now.'<sup>1</sup> According to Forestry Commission data, woodland covered about ten per cent of England in medieval times and thanks to replanting, a similar level occurs today.<sup>2</sup> The Woodland Trust however, reported that 'The UK's woodland cover has more than doubled in the last 100 years, but much of this is non-native trees. Existing native woodlands are isolated, in poor ecological condition and there has been a decline in woodland wildlife.'<sup>3</sup>

A familiar sight in medieval England was the wooded common, a simple form of wood-pasture where local inhabitants had common rights, mostly to graze their livestock or gather wood.<sup>4</sup> The introduction of parks can be credited largely to the Norman nobility for whom keeping deer had become fashionable. Enclosed by oak palings, hedging or stone walls to contain the animals, they consisted not only of wood-pasture but also launds (open, grassy areas where the deer would congregate to feed)<sup>5</sup> and sometimes arable or heath. Rather than being hunting grounds established for the pleasure of the rich, these were carefully managed, utilitarian ventures where deer might graze alongside domestic animals and the woodland served as a source of timber, wood (anything less than two feet in girth), and other valuable resources.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the name, Royal Forests of the Middle Ages were concerned with preserving game not trees. Large tracts of demarcated land were subject to Forest Law by which the king exercised certain legal rights, namely the keeping and slaughtering of deer, the appointment of Forest officials, holding Forest courts and taking the fees or penalties levied. Most Forests included *some* woodland, but ordinary farmland, private woodland, villages and towns also lay within their metes (bounds).<sup>7</sup> Rackham observed that 'The extent of the land under Forest Law fluctuated throughout the Middle Ages but, at its greatest extent in the late twelfth century, it may have covered up to one-third of the whole of England.'<sup>8</sup>

The monks of Wardon would have been accustomed to a range of native tree species, typically oak, ash, elm, some types of poplar, whitethorn (hawthorn), field maple, alder and hazel, birch, small-leaved lime and willow. At ground level, glades supported a diverse habitat where plants such as wood anemones, wild garlic, bluebells, wood sorrel and primroses thrived. Wood-pastures were generally less variable; grazing combined with shade from the tree canopy had a detrimental impact on the woodland flora and a heavily used wood-pasture might consist of little more than grassland plus two or three species of tree.

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<sup>1</sup> O. Rackham, *Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2020), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bridge, 'Woodland back to 'medieval levels'', *The Times* (4 January 2020).

<sup>3</sup> C. Reid *et al*, 'State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2021'. *Woodland Trust* (2021), <<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/state-of-uk-woods-and-trees/>>.

<sup>4</sup> *Trees and Woodland*, pp. 4, 18, 143, 150; D. Niemann, *A Tale of Trees. The Battle to Save Britain's Ancient Woodland* (Short Books, 2016), pp. 16-17, 277; 'Wood pasture'. *Ancient Tree Forum*, <<http://www.ancienttreeforum.co.uk/ancient-trees/british-treescapescapes/wood-pastures/>>.

<sup>5</sup> *land, lande; laund, launde* (AN): woodland; glade, open space within a wood; plain, area of level ground, piece of open (and uncultivated) land, pasture.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion on deer management, see J. Birrell, 'Deer and Deer Farming in Medieval England', *Agricultural History Review*, 40 (1992), 112-126. The definition of 'wood' is proposed in *Trees and Woodland*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Trees and Woodland*, pp. 164-72.

<sup>8</sup> J. Bond, *Monastic Landscapes* (Tempus, 2004), p. 92.

### Management of woods and wood-pasture

Woods were managed intensively as renewable resources where trees were **coppiced** (cut down and allowed to grow again from the stools) every five to twenty years to yield underwood (poles and rods for light construction or firewood). The areas were protected with hedging and ditching, not only to exclude any animals tempted to nibble the slender new stems or poles but also as a clear mark of ownership. Scattered among the underwood were oaks which were allowed to stand for twenty-five to one hundred years before being felled for the timber (*meremium*) used in planks and beams.<sup>9</sup>

Grazing in wood-pasture by sheep, cattle or deer called for a different style of management known as **pollarding** or **lopping**. Here the tops of the trees were cut off leaving up to five short branches on the trunk beyond reach of browsing livestock. These sprouted to yield crops of poles in the same way as a coppice stool, but while the risk of harm from animals was alleviated, the practical hazard of perching up a ladder wielding an axe made harvesting a precarious operation. A variant of pollarding was **shredding**, when the side branches of a wood-producing tree were repeatedly cut off, leaving a tuft at the top. This yielded crops of poles or of leafy boughs on which to feed animals ('tree hay') and a trunk that might eventually be usable as timber.<sup>10</sup>

In the mid-thirteenth century the Cistercian abbey of Beaulieu employed Guy the forester who received a stipend of 60s per annum, while the 1363/64 bursar's records at Sibton Abbey, second daughter house of Wardon, show annual pay of 20s for woodcutter William Nouchyld and a stipend of 6s 8d plus a 16d gratuity from the abbot to Richard Underwood.<sup>11</sup> There are no surviving details of payments made to their counterparts at Wardon nor to John Raynold, Crown custodian of the late abbey of Wardon's woods at Southill in 1538.

### From floorboards to vine stakes

Many household necessities, fixtures and fittings were made from wood – stools, benches and tables, candlesticks, barrels, bowls and platters, book covers, and even the clapper used by the prior to call the monks to the parlour. Wooden doors provided security, window shutters kept out the worst of the weather, and floorboards were laid in two-storey buildings, including in the east and west ranges of the claustral complex. Shingles (rectangular, wooden tiles) gave protection from the elements, while the development of clay roof tiles called for pegs to hold them in place. In 1363/64 the bursar of Sibton paid '10s to 2 sawyers working and sawing boards and other necessities in the Abbey for 30 days each for 2d per day'. Renovation work on the abbot's chamber saw 3s 4d paid to 'N. Qhwyte, J. Doraunt and Hugh Threshere for breaking and removing old partitions' and 'working on wall carpentry', followed by nine days of 'carpentry work on the new room of the Abbot' that earned William Stiward and his workmen 2s 3d.<sup>12</sup>

A ready supply of wood was indispensable around the farms for constructing and maintaining fences, hurdles, pens, stables and sties, as well as for supporting vines and hops, firing the forge, and in the manufacture and repair of tools, agricultural implements, carts and wagons. Timber piles were sunk to divert water courses and shore up earth banks during the construction of dams and fishponds, and timber was integral to both wind and watermills. In

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<sup>9</sup> D. Dymond and E. Martin (eds.), *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk* (Suffolk County Council, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1999), p. 64. In medieval Latin documents timber obtained from standing trees is called *meremium*. The word *boscus* is used for wood or woodland.

<sup>10</sup> *Trees and Woodland*, pp. 8-9; 'Pollarding'. *RHS*, <[www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)>.

<sup>11</sup> *The Account-Book of Beaulieu Abbey* [1269-1270], ed. S.F. Hockey, Camden Fourth Series vol. 16 (Royal Historical Society, 1975), pp. 200-201; J. Ridgard and R. Norton, *Food & Ale, Farming & Worship. Daily life at Sibton Abbey* (Leiston Press, 2011), pp. 16, 19, 29.

<sup>12</sup> *Food & Ale*, pp.13-14.

1363/64 master John carpenter of Norwich received 40s and a two-shilling gratuity for 'making a new mill within the Abbey' at Sibton.<sup>13</sup>

Major works demanded scaffolding and planks. Stone vaults and arches were formed over wooden frames, and huge beams supported the church roof. There is no surviving evidence of how many trees were used in the construction or extension of Wardon's abbey church but as a guide, the abbey of Thame needed thirty oaks for rebuilding its presbytery in 1236.<sup>14</sup> The excellent quality of carpentry in Cistercian abbey churches is represented by the carved fifteenth-century rood screen formerly at Jervaulx (N. Yorks), now preserved in St Andrew's Church, Aysgarth.

Firewood was the only source of heat in the warming room, infirmaries, abbot's lodging, and guest accommodation, while faggots (bundles of dried twigs) were used to stoke the ovens in the kitchens, brewhouse and bakehouse. Assuming that ten faggots were needed to bake one hundred loaves of standard wheaten bread,<sup>15</sup> the bakehouse at Wardon would have burned on average sixty-five faggots daily (23,725 annually) in the late twelfth century to produce 646 loaves. Based on 4,000 faggots per acre of coppice, six acres of woodland would have been harvested annually to fuel the bread ovens alone. In a sustainable cycle of management, where every acre might only be cut once every twenty years, the monks of Wardon would have required 120 productive acres if the community was to be fed.<sup>16</sup>

Trees also powered industrial facilities like the forge. The monks of Beaulieu demonstrated that where the lie of the land proved difficult for manoeuvring carts, wood might be reserved for conversion into charcoal. There, logs were cut into lengths of one foot in preparation for stacking in the kiln and probably burned in the forest itself.<sup>17</sup> At Wardon poles were burned to create charcoal for the kilns in which tiles and pottery were fired during the fourteenth century and the tile-makers used small planks to scrape excess clay out of the moulds to level them before firing. Access to oak woods was necessary for the tanning process, which required raw hides to be steeped for up to two years in a liquor containing oak bark.<sup>18</sup> A connection might therefore be assumed between Barkers Close adjacent to Warden Great Wood (part of the monastic Abbey Wood) and tanning for monastic rather than commercial use.

### **The rights of herbage and pannage**

Herbage was the right to collect fees from persons pasturing livestock other than swine on lands belonging to the lord of the manor and originally referred to the fees or payments themselves. Pannage was the right to allow swine to feed in the woodland or to charge others for the privilege.<sup>19</sup> Pigs were traditionally released from late July onwards and it is estimated each animal needed about 1½ acres to fatten up on acorns and beech mast before being slaughtered and salted down.<sup>20</sup> In an exceptional year, 1296/97 being an example, supplies of beech mast were such that swine belonging to Dunstable Priory in Bedfordshire survived in the woods right up until the following Easter.<sup>21</sup> The pannage system provided not only a cheap source of food but also played a natural role in woodland sustainability, whereby rootling pigs turned over the soil releasing nutrients that supported plant growth.

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<sup>13</sup> *Food & Ale*, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Monastic Landscapes*, p. 93.

<sup>15</sup> D.J. Stone, 'The Consumption of Field Crops in Late Medieval England', in *Food in Medieval England*, ed. C.M. Woolgar, D. Serjeantson and T. Waldron (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 11-26 (p. 14).

<sup>16</sup> *Account-Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, pp. 35, 200-201.

<sup>17</sup> *Account-Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> *Monastic Landscapes*, pp. 352-53.

<sup>19</sup> The terms herbage and pannage derive from the Old French *erbage* and *pasnage*.

<sup>20</sup> For discussion on using swine as the basis for calculating an area of land, see G.H. Fowler, 'Bedfordshire in 1086', *Quarto Memoirs of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society* 1 (1922), 62-63 §66 and A. Wright, *Domesday Book Beyond the Censors* (Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2017), p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> *The Annals of Dunstable Priory*, trans. D. Preest, ed. H. R. Webster (Boydell Press, 2018), p. 276.

### The right of free warren

Granted by the Crown, the legal right of free warren was a valuable privilege which permitted the holder to take not only rabbits but also other small game including pheasant, partridge, badgers, foxes, and hares from a specified area. Henry III seized the opportunity to generate revenue by issuing numerous charters and on 25 April 1252 the abbot of Warden agreed to pay 200 marks (£133 6s 8d) for a charter of liberties granting right 'of free warren in all their demesne lands without the metes of the [Royal] forest and in the woods belonging to the granges of Rowney, Park, Putnoe, Millbrook, Renhold, Limbersey, Meppershall, Milton [Ernest], Caldecote, Holme, Henlow, Meadow [Grange at Dunton], and Risinghoe (Beds), West Wardon (Northants), Burden, Ravenesholte, and Odsey (Cambs), Livermere (Suffolk), and Bradfield (Herts).<sup>22</sup> Four instalments of fifty marks were due in the octaves of St John the Baptist (24 June 1252), in the octaves of Michaelmas (29 September 1252), on 2 February 1253 at the Purification of the Blessed Mary, and in the octaves of St John the Baptist 1253.<sup>23</sup>

In 1330 the abbot made good his claims to right of free warren on the granges of Rowney, Putnoe, Millbrook, Renhold, Limbersey, Meppershall, Milton [Ernest], Caldecote, Holme, Henlow, and Risinghoe. He also claimed for the manor of Wardon which included Park Grange and the manor of Southill, but not for West Wardon, Burden, Ravenesholte, Odsey, Meadow, Livermere, and Bradfield which had been leased to secular tenants.<sup>24</sup> In 1369 the monks acquired the manor of Gastlings in Southill, which included the right of free warren worth 6s 8d (½ mark) annually.<sup>25</sup>

### Woodland produce as a cash crop

The accounts of the Cistercian abbey at Beaulieu for 1269/70 show that one acre of coppice cut every twenty years was expected to yield 4,800 bundles of firewood, 500 bushels of vine-stakes or fencing-rods, and 4,000 oven faggots. With any remaining wood going for charcoal, this brought the total to two tons of wood per acre per year. Sales from the coppices produced a regular annual income of a little over 2s per acre.<sup>26</sup>

In 1363/64 Sibton Abbey generated £25 6s 4d from a range of produce at rates ranging from 12d for 100 sticks of firewood and 2s 6d per 100 faggots, to 6s 8d for 2,000 laths, 12d for 600 small poles, and 7s per acre of underwood. Old wood was recycled, with 4s received for 'old timber from the mill sold at Wenhaston by the cellarer' and '26s 8d for old timber from a house called Fychshous in Dunwich sold to Watkyns'.<sup>27</sup>

In 1535 the declared income from wood and underwood belonging to Wardon Abbey was £23 4s 0d.<sup>28</sup> The 1537/38 Court of Augmentations accounts document income of 18s 5½d derived from 'sale of wood' at the late monastery's lands in Southill confirmed on the oath of John Raynold, but sales dropped by nearly a shilling to 17s 6d in the first financial year after the suppression.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The charter dated 25 April 1252 in *Cal. Chart. R., Henry III*, vol. 1, p. 385 was reconfirmed by Edward I and recited in '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), 291-94 (p. 293), (344f).

<sup>23</sup> 'Henry III Fine Rolls Project No. 36/482'. *The National Archives and King's College, London*, <[https://finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/calendar/roll\\_049.html#it482\\_014](https://finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/calendar/roll_049.html#it482_014)>.

<sup>24</sup> *Placita de quo warranto temporibus Edward I, II & III in Curia Receptæ Scaccarij Westm. Asservata*, ed. W. Illingworth (London, 1818), pp. 31, 64.

<sup>25</sup> *Cal. Inq. p.m. 43 Edw. III*, pt. ii (2nd nos.), no. 16.

<sup>26</sup> *Account-Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, pp. 35, 200-201; *Monastic Landscapes*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>27</sup> *Food & Ale*, pp. 4-6.

<sup>28</sup> W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinel, 6 vols. in 8 (London, 1817-49), vol. 5, p. 373 cited as *Mon.*

<sup>29</sup> 'Court of Augmentations Accounts for Bedfordshire – I', ed. Y. Nicholls, *BHRS*, 63 (1984), 89 (120).

### The lethal cost of woodland rights

Such was the value of woodland that in 1217 the consequences of a dispute between Abbot Roger of Wardon and Falkes de Bréauté, sheriff of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, proved deadly. Quarrelling had arisen over a small piece of wood (the record does not say where), prompting the sheriff's squires to attack the abbey, killing one of the monks, wounding others and having about thirty others 'unceremoniously dragged through the mud' to Bedford Castle. The matter was later resolved at a meeting in the abbey's chapter house where de Bréauté acknowledged the monks' rights to the wood and did penance.<sup>30</sup>

### The founder's grant

When Walter Espec founded Wardon Abbey in 1135 he endowed the monks with the assarts and woodlands of Wardon and Southill, the boundaries of which were set out in his charter (now lost). He granted them the rights to take timber and wood for their own use, pannage, herbage, and a share in the common pasture.<sup>31</sup> Over 200 years later the abbey was still said to be in 'a desolate and wooded place'.<sup>32</sup> Such areas being magnets for criminals, a royal statute of 1284 had decreed that all trees and bushes (except ashes and 'great Trees') were to be cleared to a distance of 200 feet on both sides of the highways leading from one market town to another. Parks adjoining the highways had to be set back 200 feet or a wall, earth bank or hedge made to stop offenders going back and forth between parkland and highway.<sup>33</sup> Common sense suggests that the monks of Wardon would have introduced similar security measures wherever the highway ran alongside or through their woodlands to remove hiding places for potential robbers. By the sixteenth century they had employed a parker to manage their local woods and game, his presence (hopefully) acting as a deterrent to poachers.<sup>34</sup> The Court of Augmentations accounts for 1537/38 and 1541/42 record copyholder William Parker (Perker) paying 8s rent for the messuage, two closes, and acre of [arable] land [in the fields of Old Warden] previously held by John Parker.<sup>35</sup>

### The Abbot's Garden Grange

The Abbot's Garden Grange (the home farm adjacent to the abbey buildings and renamed Farm of Demesne Lands after the dissolution) seems to have contained minimal woodland, although hedges would have supplemented the boundary ditches to serve as windbreaks and offer additional protection against intruders both human and animal. In 1538 pastures called the Grove (six acres) and Bushy Close (eight acres) were documented from which it is inferred that they contained nothing more than a few trees and some scrubby growth.<sup>36</sup> Under the terms of a 21-year lease dated 24 January 1539 the new tenant was granted rights on the farm and site of the late abbey to fyrebote (gather sticks and fallen timber for cooking and winter warmth), hedgebote (wood for repairing hedges or fences), ploughbote (make or repair a plough), and cartebote (make and mend carts).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *The Annals of Dunstable Priory*, p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> The confirmation charter issued by King Stephen is transcribed in *BHRS*, 13, pp. 286-87 (344a). The confirmation charter of Henry II recited in *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol. 2, p. 614 documents '*Omina eciam aisiamenta in omnibus boscis et pasturis de Ward' det de Sugivla, scilicet, materiem et ligna et pasnogiū et herbagium et pascua cum omnibus communis et omnibus aliis rebus, sicut carta ejus testator.*'

<sup>32</sup> Entry dated to 1 November 1356 recited in the *Cal. Close R., Edward III*, vol. 10, pp. 282-83.

<sup>33</sup> *The statutes of the realm*, ed. A. Luders *et al.*, 11 vols. in 12 (London, 1810-28), vol. 1, p. 97.

<sup>34</sup> 'Parker' is derived from the Old French *parchier*, *parquier*, *parker*.

<sup>35</sup> *BHRS*, 63, 79 (105); 'Court of Augmentations Accounts for Bedfordshire – II', ed. Y. Nicholls, *BHRS*, 64 (1985), 147 (426).

<sup>36</sup> *BHRS*, 63, 149 (197).

<sup>37</sup> *BHRS*, 64, 150-51 (430).

## Hay Wood

In 1240 the abbey reached an agreement over several issues affecting the baron of Bedford, William de Beauchamp. One contentious matter concerned the 'ditch which encloses the Abbey's Hay Wood' which the monks agreed was 'to remain intact, and not be widened towards Cardington Wood to the damage of William and his heirs'.<sup>38</sup> This rare contemporary reference is taken to mean the north-east corner of the abbey's wood which abutted the boundary with Cardington parish on top of the Greensand Ridge. The entry also provides evidence of the manner in which ditching was used by the monastic community to define and physically protect their prized assets, while the name 'Hay' points towards an area formerly used for deer hunting.<sup>39</sup>

Most of the land clearance between the eastern edge of the woodland and the lane beside the western boundary of the abbey precinct can probably attributed to monastic efforts. Substantial quantities of building materials were called for during the twelfth century and by sourcing trees from their own woods close to the building site, the community would have minimised the trouble and expense of carting heavy loads long distances. Numbers at the abbey grew rapidly in the early years and wherever possible the freshly grubbed up areas would have been converted to pasture. Poorly drained areas fit for nothing but meadow were incorporated into the crofts settled by secular abbey servants centuries later, and both the cleared land and lane remain susceptible to flooding due to the heavy clay soil and numerous springs.



Figure 1 View west over Warden Great Wood (left) and Warden Little Wood (right) (formerly Hay Wood / Abbey Wood) (August 2018).

It has not been established whether 'Abbey Wood' was a monastic designation or applied after the dissolution. The earliest known reference dates to the second half of the sixteenth century when, following the death of Edward Peke, Richard Wistowe [Westowe] acquired a 21-year lease for Warden Warren on 21 February 1564. Terms included 'a close called Inlonde' next to Rowney Warren in Southill parish and the 'herbage and pasture of woods called Abbey Woode and Parkewoode, pannage of pigs there and the keeping of the same woods'. Purchase of the Crown lease cost Wistowe £27 13s 4d with a further 25s payable annually for the woodland.<sup>40</sup> A sale document dated 4 July 1629 gave the area of Abbey Wood as 331 acres,<sup>41</sup> and while a lease of 1636 confirmed 'Abbey Wood or Warden Wood' as 330 acres,<sup>42</sup> it is likely to have been somewhat larger under monastic ownership.

<sup>38</sup> *BHRS*, 63, 184-88 (p. 185) **(240 (7))**.

<sup>39</sup> *haiae* (Latin) / *haga* (OE): hunting enclosure translated as 'hay'.

<sup>40</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Elizabeth I*, vol. 3, p. 186 **(938)**.

<sup>41</sup> Bargain and Sale document dated 4 July 1629 'wood called Parkewood (137 acres) & Abbey Wood alias Wardon Wood (331 acres) lately of Warden Abbey now dissolved, now occupied by John Puckering, knight, lately keeper of the great seal, & Lady Jane, wife, & Thomas Puckering, son - worth £44 per annum' [BARS, W2223].

<sup>42</sup> Assignment of lease: "good causes" dated 20 May 1636 '(ii) William Palmer of Hill in Warden, esquire -- wood called Abbey or Warden Wood, (330 acres) late belonging to Warden Abbey Fish family expect



There is no indication as to why Warden Wood was split into two (Figs. 1 and 2). We only know that the change occurred between 1629 and 1733, and that by 1765 the wood lines and adjoining field margins had been straightened except where they coincided with the parish boundary.<sup>43</sup> The Old Warden Enclosure Map (1794) shows the space between the woods divided into two fields, the western end appearing as Upper Long Field (12 acres). Middle Long Field (11 acres) lay to the east with Lower Long Close (16 acres) extending eastwards beyond the woodland margin to the stream.<sup>44</sup> Today Warden Little Wood (97 acres) [TL 1043], Warden Great Wood (208 acres) [TL 1042] and the 23-acre field between them cover a total of 328 acres, a clear indication that the footprint has not changed for at least 250 years.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 2 View west between Warden Great Wood and Warden Little Wood (September 2023).

### Park Wood

The early Norman heritage of the parish and surrounding area is undocumented, but it is reasonable to suppose that the conquering forces established the ringwork castle and adjoining park on top of the Greensand Ridge shortly after 1066. William Spec, lord of the manor of Wardon at the time of the Domesday survey (1086), was succeeded by Walter Espec who is thought to have been his son.<sup>46</sup> Walter opted to retain the park rather than granting it to the monks of Wardon Abbey and following his death in 1155, the asset passed to his nephew William de Bussei.<sup>47</sup>

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to acquire Sir Thomas Puckering's whole estate & interest within year - to convey to William Palmer & pay him £12. 4s. 6d per annum for Parke wood & Dansy Bowre (pightle)' [BARS, W2245].

<sup>43</sup> Map of Bedfordshire by Thomas Jefferys, 1765 - facsimile reprint [BARS, X 354/5/2].

<sup>44</sup> Old Warden Enclosure map 1794 [Central Beds HER, CRO W2/6/1-2].

<sup>45</sup> According to Natural England, nine acres of Warden Great Wood are categorised as 'Ancient & Semi-Natural Woodland' meaning that although the land has been under continuous tree cover since 1600, it has been shaped by humans through extensive harvesting. *Natural England*, <<https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/>> ['Ancient Woodland (England) Data'].

<sup>46</sup> '[Old] Warden'. Powell-Smith, A, 'Open Domesday'. *TNA and University of Hull*, <<https://opendomesday.org/place/TL1343/old-warden/>>.

<sup>47</sup> Arrangements for dividing Walter Espec's assets were made in 1158. *Pipe R., Hen. II*, 140, 146 and *R. Chart.*, 32b cited by W. Farrer, 'The Honour of Old Wardon', *BHRS*, 11 (1927), 1-46 (p. 6).

It was three years before arrangements for the division of Walter's estate were formalised and William de Bussei donated the park to the monastery between 1158 and 1160. In part his gift may have been offered for the salvation of Walter's soul, however less altruistic considerations almost certainly influenced his decision. Despite the park having evolved over the ninety-two years since the Norman Conquest, its challenging nature (exposed location, proliferation of springs and poor drainage) would have been exacerbated by high maintenance costs. These factors combine to suggest that the gift served not only a spiritual purpose, but also offloaded a hefty financial commitment. Henry II confirmed c. 1161 that the abbey held the park which consisted of *incrementum* (presumably wood-pasture) and laund.<sup>48</sup> The monks converted the area into a grange and extended the local road network to improve access (Fig. 3).

Despite the grange being a home farm whose produce was intended primarily for consumption by the monastic community, the abbey declared taxable receipts of £12 2s 6d from land, meadows, rents, courts, and pannage in 1291.<sup>49</sup> Income from pannage is an indicator that the abbey had kept a proportion of the original woodland, partly for in-house use and partly to generate income by renting the right to pasture swine there to a third party.



Figure 3 Park Grange (now Park Farm). View north-east over former pasture and meadow, farmyard and Park Wood (now Palmers Wood) (August 2018).

The full extent of Park Wood [TL 1244] cannot be gleaned from medieval records and its size (137 acres) was only revealed in 1629.<sup>50</sup> A marriage settlement dated May 1695 documented 'Park wood, Old Warden (141 acres)' and while the increase of four acres might be explained by the vagaries of the measuring systems or new planting during the intervening sixty-six years, it is of little consequence when considering the acreage during the monks' tenure.<sup>51</sup> The same document also noted '40 acres pasture, late part of Park wood, lately grubbed up, 2 messuages, lately built thereon'. It is therefore concluded that Park Wood covered in excess of 180 acres before the early seventeenth century and based on the requirement for 1½ acres to support each pig, pannage for at least 120 swine would have been available to the abbey.

<sup>48</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol. 2, p. 614.

<sup>49</sup> *Mon.*, vol. 5, p. 369.

<sup>50</sup> Bargain & Sale enrolled 4 July 1629 [BARS, W2223].

<sup>51</sup> Marriage Settlement dated 16, 17 May 1695 [BARS, HY525-6].



By the late nineteenth century, Park Wood had been reduced to 110 acres south of Bowell Lane and today retains a mixture of deciduous trees with relatively young timber oaks and evidence of coppicing.<sup>52</sup> A deep ditch and earth bank combination marks the western boundary, a feature for which the monks may have been responsible (Fig. 4). Similar features survive within the woodland and although not as deep as the perimeter, suggest an element of compartmentation during bygone cycles of woodland management.



Figure 4 Boundary ditch between lands belonging to the former Park Grange and the western edge of the old Park Wood (August 2021).

### **Orchard Grange**

Orchard Grange probably had its roots in glebe land, its purpose being to support the parish priest rather than the monks. When secular tenant George Barnardiston acquired the lease from Abbot Augustine London on 19 July 1521, he undertook to repair the buildings and outbuildings belonging to the farm. Barnardiston was to supply straw for roofing, while the abbot paid for the 'Roddes' (straight rods), 'Splentes' (stakes used in wattle-and-daub construction), 'Tyle' (tiles), 'Lathes' (thin, flat strips of wood used in wattle-and-daub structures, especially strips nailed to rafters to support shingles, tiles, or slates) and 'Lathnale' (wooden nails used for fastening lathes), which were to be transported at the tenant's expense. Barnardiston could take wood blown down by wind, 'le Shredes' (side branches from trees managed by shredding) and 'Thornes' (uprooted thorn bushes used as fuel), and had rights of ploughbote, cartbote, and hyrdelbote (to take wood such as hazel or willow for making and mending hurdles).<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Bowell Lane (after John de Boeles who was granted a market and fair in Wardon by Edward II in 1308) occurs on the 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].

<sup>53</sup> *BHRS*, 64, 150 (429).

## Parish of Southill

The 1160/61 charter of Henry II reconfirms the founder's grant of woodland in **Southill** with rights appertaining but there is no hint as to the amount of tree cover by that time. It is fair to suppose, however, that some clearance had been undertaken paving the way for Rowney Grange, which first occurs in a charter of Richard I (1198). The document also confirms receipt of a wood in Southill from Roger, son of Ansketil. Entries in the cartulary showing Ansketil of Southill and his son John witnessing several charters relating to the abbey between 1171/76 and 1180/1200 point towards a close relationship with the abbey. The editor of the cartulary goes so far as to suggest that the individuals held some office at the abbey and were on hand to serve as witnesses whenever required. The 1160/61 royal charter also documents monastic ownership of '*totam terram de Keteleshai in bosco et plano per divisas suas cum omnibus pertinenciis suis*', a reference to roughly seventy acres of fields and woodlands in Southill.<sup>54</sup> Ketel (Ketellus / Ketelus / Chetel) may be another member of the abovementioned family and *hai* indicative of former hunting grounds.<sup>55</sup>

Although grants of land were less common after the end of the twelfth century, four acres of wood in Stanford and Southill were included in a package of assets given to the abbey on 14 June 1360.<sup>56</sup> Large gaps remain in the documentary evidence until 1538 when a thirty-acre close of arable called Kettelsey [*Keteleshai*] occurs,<sup>57</sup> and in 1587 the woodland formerly belonging to the monks in Southill extended to eighty-one fiscal acres, comprising **Kettlesey Wood** (forty acres), **Broomeclose Wood** (thirty-six acres) and **Beale's Grove** (five acres).<sup>58</sup> The grove survives as Beal's Wood (six acres) in the parish of Shefford on the south side of the boundary with Southill [TL 1340].

By the sixteenth century the monks of Wardon were leasing surplus woodland to secular tenants. In 1537/38 freeholder Joan Strynger paid 9d for a little grove called **Lowes Wood** at Stanford (possibly that granted to the abbey in 1360),<sup>59</sup> while Edward Peke was permitted to take not only rabbits, but also the 'loppes' (the produce from pollarding), 'bushes' (small, low-value branches trimmed from trees up to about head height), broom, and underwood from the close called '**Inlond**' (now the hamlet of Ireland) beside Rowney Warren.<sup>60</sup>

## Along the Greensand Ridge

By 1161 Gilbert le Munne [Moine] had sold the monks some woodland and assarts at Priestley, nine miles south-west of the abbey in the parish of **Flitwick**<sup>61</sup> and from the twelfth century onwards the monastery acquired holdings at the foot of the northern slope of the ridge in **Millbrook** where they operated a grange and mill. An indication of scale appears in 1343 when Edward III granted a licence for the monks to accept land in Wardon in exchange for just over

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<sup>54</sup> Charter of Henry II, reconfirmed by Henry III and recited in *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol. 2, pp. 614-15; *BHRS*, 13, 5, 289-91 (344e).

<sup>55</sup> 'Ansketil' refers to an ecclesiastical elder, including an elder in a monastic order (AN). See 'Great Barford'. <<http://opendomesday.org/place/TL1352/great-barford/>> and *BHRS*, 13, 5. The name *Ketil* (AN), meaning money or wealth, occurs in 1086 as lord of the manor in Carlton, eight miles north-west of Bedford, and at nearby Lavendon where a Ketil had been tenant-in-chief of a minor holding in 1066.

<sup>56</sup> William Burle, John Baldewyne, Adam Baldewyne, and Nicholas Geton also granted a messuage, 110 acres of land, two acres of meadow, four acres of pasture, a two-shilling cash rent, and a rent to be paid in the form of a pair of gilt spurs to the value of 51s 8d. *Cal. Pat. R., Edward III*, vol. 11, p. 373.

<sup>57</sup> *BHRS*, 63, 84 (112); lease dated 9 February 1569 [BARS, X95/133].

<sup>58</sup> Bargain & Sale dated 14 October 1587 [BARS, W2001].

<sup>59</sup> *BHRS*, 63, 87 (116).

<sup>60</sup> *BHRS*, 63, 81 (108).

<sup>61</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 242-43 (324). The confirmation charter concerning Beeston Wood refers to Hugh de Beauchamp, in this instance the first baron of Eaton [Socon] (Hunts), who is likely to have been in his early twenties in 1160; *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol. 2, p. 614.

320 acres in Millbrook including ninety-four acres ten perches of wood.<sup>62</sup> Situated on top of the ridge three miles east of Millbrook was the abbey's grange of Limbersey in the parish of **Maulden**. The grange had been divided and leased to secular tenants by the sixteenth century and on 18 January 1523 John Samwell began renting 'Lymbotsey or Lymersey' pasture from Abbot Augustine London. Samwell planted a three-acre moated grove in 1529/30 but the trees were too immature for harvesting when the Court of Augmentations prepared the accounts for 1537/38 and since no profit had been generated, the Crown failed to levy a charge on the underwood.<sup>63</sup>

In 1160/61 Henry II confirmed that the monks held **Coles Wood** from Hereward as confirmed by charter of Roger de Port.<sup>64</sup> An entry in the cartulary confirms the grant of the six-acre Coles Wood at Ickwell in the parish of **Northill** by Richard and Gilbert, sons of Herewarde between 1195 and 1205.<sup>65</sup> There is nothing to say when or from whom the monks acquired **Drewelles Wood** in Northill (Fig. 5), suffice to say it was leased to the Master and Society of Northill College on 2 June 1526 for a fixed term of forty years at 10s per annum (1s 3d the acre) with the college allowed to keep any profits.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 5 Drewelles Wood, Northill (July 2016).

The elongated parishes of Cardington and Cople extend northwards from the top of the ridge to the River Great Ouse. By 1161 thirty acres of woodland in **Cardington** had been received from an unnamed benefactor and according to a charter witnessed by eighteen men in 1160/80, the monks paid fifteen marks to purchase woodland between '*Ailricheseye et Moxewurthe*' from Simon de Beauchamp, great-grandson and heir of Hugh, the first baron of

<sup>62</sup> Other assets in the agreement dated 3 December 1343 were 148 acres of land, fifteen acres of meadow, thirty-three acres three roods of pasture, and thirty acres of heath valued together at 100s yearly. *Cal. Pat. R., Edward III*, vol. 6, p. 147.

<sup>63</sup> *BHRS*, 63, 105 (140).

<sup>64</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol. 2, p. 616 (9).

<sup>65</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 214 (274).

<sup>66</sup> *BHRS*, 63, 100 (131).



Bedford.<sup>67</sup> The woodland formerly belonged to Nicholas, son of Ascelina, and we might surmise that their new acquisition (possibly 200 acres at 1s each) lay adjacent to Park Grange on the north-facing slopes of the ridge in the parish of **Cople**.<sup>68</sup> An entry dated to roughly 1225 in the cartulary shows the monks renting **Trocleie Wood** at Cople from Robert de Airel for 5s per annum, and in 1257 William de Beauchamp of Bedford claimed service from Wardon Abbey on a total of 335¾ acres in Cople, although it is not stated how much had been assarted.<sup>69</sup>

### North of the Greensand Ridge

Situated 4¼ miles west of Bedford, Burdelys manor in **Stagsden** was held by the Beauchamp family and the abbot of Wardon in the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>70</sup> At the time of his death in 1283 John de Burdelys was renting arable, meadow, pasture, and fifteen acres of wood in Stagsden from the abbot, of which he was permitted to sell three acres of underwood to the tune of 4s each year.<sup>71</sup>

In 1086 Hugh de Beauchamp held Puttenhoe [Putnoe] (in the ancient parish of **Goldington**), which was assessed at four hides (480 fiscal acres). Putnoe was granted to Wardon Abbey after 1161, almost certainly by Hugh's great-grandson Simon, and a charter of Richard I confirmed that in 1198 the monks owned Putnoe Grange with land in Milton [Ernest].<sup>72</sup> In 1224 the monks sustained significant losses from **Putnoe Wood** when forces of Henry III commandeered timber in preparation for the siege of Bedford Castle two miles to the south-west. A writ of liberate was issued to the treasurer and chamberlains of the exchequer ordering payment of twenty marks annually to the abbot of Wardon for damages, recompense that was to continue until such time as the king provided the abbot with land to the value of £10 a year; it took more than a century for the matter to be concluded.<sup>73</sup> Lying on the north side of Bedford [TL 0652], Putnoe Wood covers little more than twenty-five acres today (Fig. 6).

In 1409 four acres of wood were included in a gift of assets in Goldington, but nothing further is known.<sup>74</sup> More than 100 years later a lease of 4 March 1516 shows the warden of the Minor Friars in Bedford renting the underwood in **Oxlease, Putnoe** (within 'the manor or grange of Putnoe') from 24 June 1516 for a 46-year term at 13s 4d per annum. The Minor Friars were permitted to cut down '6 parts' each year if they so wished, leaving the other trees, woodland, plants, crab-apple trees and maples untouched, which suggests a judicious cycle of woodland

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<sup>67</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol. 2, p. 614; *BHRS*, 13, 295 (346). The editor of the cartulary translated *Ailricheseye* as Arlesey, although any connection with the parish, manors or town seems tenuous. Alternatively, this may mean the *hése* (OE) (woodland country, land with bushes and brushwood) or former hunting grounds belonging to Ailric. *Moxewurthe* / *Moxewrthe* is linked to 'mox' (a shortened form of 'monk') and *wyrpe-land* (OE) meaning land that has lain fallow, land ploughed for the first time, or a cultivated field. Note also *Monkefeld* adjacent to the north-west side of Park Grange which is documented in the Court of Augmentations accounts of 1538 in *BHRS*, 63, 150 (199). The same field is called *Moxfield* in a lease dated 1 September 1610 [BARS, W2297] leaving Moxhill Farm at the top of the Greensand Ridge in the parish of Cople [TL 1216 4629] to perpetuate the name.

<sup>68</sup> F. Madden, *et al* (eds.), *Collectanea topographica et genealogica*, 8 vols. (J.B. Nichols and Son, 1840), vol. 6, p. 207 (xij).

<sup>69</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 68 (92), 249 (335); *Troclé* (AN): wound up, twisted.

<sup>70</sup> *VCH Beds*, vol. 3, p. 97 (fn 51) cites *Hund. R.* (Rec. Com.), ii, 326.

<sup>71</sup> J. Steele Elliott, 'Stagsden and its Manors', *BHRS*, 8 (1924), 1-14 (p. 8); *Cal. Inquis. p.m.*, vol. 2, p. 277 (465).

<sup>72</sup> 'Putnoe'. <<https://opendomesday.org/place/TL0651/putnoe/>>; *BHRS*, 13, 289-91 (289) (344e).

<sup>73</sup> *Cal. Pat R., Henry III* (1906), pp. 39, 74; *BHRS*, 63, 101-102 (133); *Cal. Pat R., Edward III*, vol. 4, p. 520.

<sup>74</sup> In addition to the woodland, Chaplain John Clardon of Elstow, Thomas Biddenham of Goldington and John Hayward of Wardon granted two messuages, two tofts, forty-five acres of land, two acres of meadow, and 2s rent in Goldington. *Cal. Pat R., Henry IV*, vol. 4, pp. 59-60.

management.<sup>75</sup> Nothing else can be said of the late medieval period except that 140 acres of wood formed part of a 1539 transaction concerning the 'Manor & Grange of Putnoe'.<sup>76</sup>



Figure 6 Putnoe Wood (May 2016).



Figure 7 Tilwick Wood (April 2016).

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<sup>75</sup> *BHRS*, 63, 101-102 (133).

<sup>76</sup> Final concord dated September 1539 between John Gostwick and wife Joan and Oliver Leder and wife Frances concerning the 'Manor & Grange of Putnoe with 3 messuages, 1,000 acres of land, 200 acres of meadow, 2,000 acres of pasture, 140 acres of wood, and 40/- of rent with appurtenances in Putnoe, Goldington and Clapham' [BARS, R6/22/1/1].

On 6 October 1276 the abbey accepted an acre of wood in **Wilden** (4½ miles north-east of the centre of Bedford) from Bartholomew le Neweman and his wife Cecilia and in 1262 William de Beauchamp of Bedford quitclaimed his right in one virgate (thirty fiscal acres) at **Tilwick** in the north of **Ravensden** parish.<sup>77</sup> In 1522 lands called Tilwick were leased to Robert Bulkeley by Abbot Augustine of Wardon for a forty-year term commencing Michaelmas 1527 at 28s 4d plus three capons or 9d, which suggests an area of thirty-four acres at an average of 10d apiece.<sup>78</sup> The 1538 accounts documented 'Shepecotegrove' and '1 parcel pasture and wood called Tulwyke' [Tilwick] within the 'Manor or Grange of Ravensden'.<sup>79</sup> The area is not given and the earliest evidence occurs on the map of 1900 when Tilwick Wood (Fig. 7) adjacent to Tilwick Farm [TL 0756] covered eleven acres much as it does today.<sup>80</sup>

### South of the Greensand Ridge

The manor of Woodhall in the parish of **Meppershall** lay between the Ivel and Flit river valleys, almost four miles south-east of Wardon Abbey. It probably originated in a grant by Gilbert de Meppershall comprising 100 acres of land and twenty-two acres of wood, a transaction confirmed by Gilbert's son John in 1200. The monks converted the land into a grange and purchased the right of free warren from Henry II in 1252.<sup>81</sup> It is possible that any standing woodland was retained in demesne or cleared in favour of arable as no taxable income was declared from woodland products in 1291. When the 'farm of grange of Woodhall' was leased to a secular tenant in 1527 his rent included all of the tenements, arable land, meadow, pasture and herbage belonging to the farm - but no woodland.<sup>82</sup>

### The Ivel Valley

**Beeston Wood**, arable land, and Caldecote mill (Northill parish) were granted to Wardon Abbey by Roger Burnard with the consent of his wife Roeise before 1160/61 and a cartulary entry shows Roeise, by then a widow, confirming his gifts between 1154 and 1172.<sup>83</sup> The location of Beeston Wood is unclear and while the area on top of the ridge east of Sheerhatch Wood, known in the nineteenth century as Beeston Leys, cannot be ruled out, the monks' woodland is more likely to have been about four miles north-east of the abbey close to the west bank of the River Ivel in the parish of **Sandy**.

Bishop Alexander of Lincoln was one of many witnesses to the 1136 charter by which King Stephen confirmed the foundation of Wardon Abbey. To mark the occasion the bishop granted land to the abbey from his fee in Chicksands and although the exact date is unknown, he had also given the monks '... *sed et boscum de Hermel*' (arable and woodland at Holme) in the parish of **Biggleswade** by 1148.<sup>84</sup>

The medieval Barony of Odell (Wahull) sprang from Walter of Flanders' manor recorded in Domesday when he held fifty and a half hides in Bedfordshire spread across Odell, Astwick, Biggleswade, Henlow, Langford, Milton Ernest, Podington, Southill, Thurleigh, Totternhoe, Turvey and Wymington.<sup>85</sup> The charter of Henry II shows that Walter de Wahulle (probably the

<sup>77</sup> 'A Calendar of the Feet of Fines: Part III. For the reign of Edward I with some earlier fines', ed. G.H. Fowler, *BHRS*, 12 (1928), 3-82 (p. 10); *BHRS*, 13, pp. 69-70 (**93**).

<sup>78</sup> *LP*, vol. 13, pt. 1, p. 240 (grant no. **646(2)**).

<sup>79</sup> *BHRS*, 63, 109 (**149**).

<sup>80</sup> OS Six-inch England and Wales, Bedfordshire VIII.SW (revised 1900; published 1902).

<sup>81</sup> 'A Calendar for the Feet of Fines for Bedfordshire for the reigns of Richard I, King John and Henry III 1192-1272', ed. G.H. Fowler, *BHRS*, 6 (1919), 20 (**67**); *BHRS*, 13, 293, (**344f**).

<sup>82</sup> *Mon.*, p. 370; *BHRS*, 63, 104 (**136**).

<sup>83</sup> *Cal. Pat. R.*, *Henry VII*, vol. 2, p. 615; *BHRS*, 13, 242 (**324**);

<sup>84</sup> The confirmation charter issued by King Stephen is transcribed in *BHRS*, 13, 286-87, (**344, 344a**). *Cal. Pat. R.*, *Henry VII, 1485-1509*, vol. 2, p. 617 (**11**) confirms that in 1160/61 the monks held two hides in Chicksands - details of the donors are listed on p. 615 (**9**). *Sēd* (ME): seed.

<sup>85</sup> 'Walter of Flanders'. <<https://opendomesday.org/name/walter-of-flanders/>>; 'The barony of Odell'. <<https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityHistories/Odell/TheBaronyOfOdell.aspx>>.



great-grandson of Walter of Flanders) had granted woods in the parish of **Langford** to the monks of Wardon by 1160/61.<sup>86</sup> Nothing remains to pinpoint the location.

### Cambridgeshire

By 1160/61 the abbey's Burden Grange in the parish of **Burrough Green** comprised 105 acres of heath, thirty acres of arable scattered throughout the common fields, and rights to common of pasture; the royal charter makes no mention of the grantor who was probably connected with the honour of Richmond (N. Yorks).<sup>87</sup> The same document confirms Philip de Baunville (Banville in Normandy) having granted fifty acres of woodland in **Ravenesholt** which lay near the eastern end of the long, narrow parish of Burrough Green, while Alan, son of Froger, had added a *lei* (a piece of open land, glade, or clearing).<sup>88</sup> Ravenesholte is first documented as a grange in 1252 when right of free warren was granted by Henry II.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, unlike the granges surrounding the abbey itself, supporting infrastructure may have comprised little more than a farmstead manned initially by lay brothers and later by secular employees whose primary task was woodland management.



Figure 8 Junction of Sparrows Grove and Out Wood near Ravens' Hall (August 2016).

On 3 April 1282 Edward I issued a writ to the 'sheriff of Cambridge to enquire what fees pertain to the honour of Richemund'. At the inquisition (undated) it was established that lands in *Burgo* (Burrough) were shared as follows: '1 fee held by Thomas de Burgo; 2 hides and 50a land [290 fiscal acres] held by the abbot of Wardon in alms; and 1 hide similarly held by the prior of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem'.<sup>90</sup> Despite their close proximity, the abbey accounted for Burrough Green, Ravenesholt, and Burden under separate line entries, declaring taxable income of £7 0s 6d, £6 1s 0d and £1 0s 10d respectively in 1291.<sup>91</sup> Circa 1368 the monks' tithe-free land in Burrough Green comprised sixty acres attached to Burden Grange, 100 acres attached to Ravenesholt [*sic*], and woodland belonging to both.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>86</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol. 2, p. 614.

<sup>87</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol. 2, p. 616; *BHRS*, 13, 299 (N/5).

<sup>88</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol. 2, p. 616.

<sup>89</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 291-94 (p. 293) (344f).

<sup>90</sup> *Cal. Inquis. p.m.*, vol. 2, pp. 210-28 (p. 219) (381).

<sup>91</sup> *Mon.*, vol. 5, p. 370.

<sup>92</sup> *VCH Cambs*, vol. 6, pp. 141-47 fn. 49 cites B.L. Harl. MS. 4765, ff. 14.

The monks relinquished all of their holdings in south Cambridgeshire as part of a fourteenth-century rationalisation programme. On 10 October 1386 William Bateman and Nicholas Westerdale paid £10 for a royal licence to exchange their manor of Beeston (Beds) 'for the granges of Ravenesholt and Burdon, co. Cambridge'. Escheator Thomas More of Balsham valued the granges at '20 marks 6s 8d a year' (£13 13s 4d), while Bedfordshire escheator Alan de Kirketon assessed the manor of Beeston to be worth £8 annually. A charter dated 8 February 1390 shows John atte Wode as tenant of Ravenesholte with Robert Knechebole and John Kent of Thaxsted jointly holding Burden Grange and Burrough Green.<sup>93</sup>

On 22 September 1392 Bateman and Westerdale alienated to the Augustinian priory of Barnwell (Cambs) 'a messuage, 200 acres of land, 3 acres of meadow, 40 acres of wood and 2s of rent in Burgh' (parish of Burrough Green).<sup>94</sup> Following the death of John, Duke of Norfolk on 19 October 1432 the inquisition held at Caxton (Cambs) on 26 January 1433 mentions '2½ fees which the abbot of Warden [had] held' at Burdon with a value of £12 10s'.<sup>95</sup>

Bounded to the north by a low plateau boasting a generous covering of deciduous woodland, the site of the former Ravens' Hall farm buildings between Great Bradley (Suffolk) and the hamlet of Burrough Green [TL 6561 5440] is said to derive its name from Old English words *hræfn* meaning raven and *holt*, a wood or copse (Fig. 8).<sup>96</sup> A spring 55m due north of the old hall fed a 440m<sup>2</sup> fishpond north-east of the farm buildings in 1885, inviting speculation that the assets belonged to the abbey's holdings in Burrough Green, possibly Ravenesholt Grange itself.<sup>97</sup>

### Huntingdonshire

Granted to the monks of Wardon by King Stephen in 1139/53, **Raveneshoe Wood** in the little parish of **Midloe** had belonged to the royal manor of Godmanchester, an ancient demesne of the Crown.<sup>98</sup> The royal connection suggests that Raveneshoe Wood had been part of a Norman deer park, but when Henry II confirmed his predecessor's gift c. 1161, the wood had been assarted in favour of arable for Wardon Abbey's newly established Midloe Grange.<sup>99</sup> In 1160/79 Nigel de Luuetoþ [Lovelot] quitclaimed (relinquished his rights in) the monks' ditch and dike between Midloe and Raveneshoe, possibly the southern boundary of the royal grant. In 1198 Richard I reconfirmed that the monks held Midloe Grange together with 100 [fiscal] acres granted by the Crown at Raveneshoe.<sup>100</sup>

The editor of the cartulary places the wood in the north-west of the parish between Grafham and Diddington [TL 1666], which seems reasonable.<sup>101</sup> It appears to have covered 123 acres on the ground and, at almost 1km at its widest point, extended for 720m from south to north. All bar the twenty-five acres abutting Diddington Wood on the east side were lost when the area was dammed and flooded in 1965 to create a reservoir - Grafham Water (Fig. 9).

<sup>93</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Richard II*, vol. 3, p. 220; *Cal. Close R., Richard II*, vol. 4, p. 157.

<sup>94</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Richard II*, vol. 5, p. 163.

<sup>95</sup> 'E-CIPM 24-104: JOHN, DUKE OF NORFOLK'. *Mapping the Medieval Countryside*, <<https://inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/24-092/104>>.

<sup>96</sup> 'Survey of English Place-Names'. <<http://epns.nottingham.ac.uk/>>.

<sup>97</sup> OS Six-inch England and Wales, Cambridgeshire XLIX.SW (survey 1885, published 1885).

<sup>98</sup> Midloe is derived from *midd* (OE) meaning in the middle of a place + *lôh* (OE): a place, stead. Unlike the neighbouring parish of Southoe, Midloe does not occur in Domesday, from which it is inferred that the land granted to the monks was literally in the middle of nowhere; *BHRS*, 13, 287 (344b).

<sup>99</sup> Raveneshoe combines the Old English words *hræfn*, meaning raven, and *hoe*, a strip of land, spur, or ridge. In this instance, it refers to a strip of land in the parish, which projected northwards; *BHRS*, 13, 143 (205d) and *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol 2, p. 615. The cartulary provides more detail than the confirmation charter, the latter having been produced 300 years after the original grant.

<sup>100</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 146 (205q), 289 (344e).

<sup>101</sup> *BHRS*, 13, Map 1.



Aside from assarting Raveneshoe Wood, the monks also grubbed up part of **Tredeley Wood** in the neighbouring parish of **Diddington**. There is no record of when, or indeed whether the woodland had been given to them officially before felling began and it was not until after c. 1161 that Robert Grimbald formally granted them the land that they had already cleared. The terms of his charter mention the monks assarting the wood 'in augmentation' of the royal gift of Raveneshoe, which suggests that Tredeley Wood lay beside the parish boundary within the footprint of the present-day *Diddington Wood*. Another undated charter shows Geoffrey de sancto Mauro granting the abbey that his share of Tredeley Wood, but there is no evidence to suggest the total acreage acquired by the monks there.<sup>102</sup>



Figure 9 View south-west from the dam at Grafham Water towards the site of Raveneshoe Wood (May 2016).

There is also no record of when William de Perry gave the abbey part of his wood and meadow in the parish of **Perry**, a gift confirmed by his son Ralf.<sup>103</sup> The bounds set out in Ralf's charter mention Ravenscroft hedge and the brook that flowed between the monks' land and the parish of Grafham, implying that the wood and meadow abutted the north-west corner of Raveneshoe Wood. In 1206/07 King John granted permission for the monks to assart **Perry Wood** and enclose it with a ditch and hedge. The licence, which also granted the privileges discussed below relating to Midloe Wood, cost the abbey 60 marks (£40).<sup>104</sup>

King Stephen confirmed that Walter, abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Ramsey (Hunts) had given **Midloe Wood** to the abbot of Wardon for use as a grange. The wood was granted free of all exactions and secular services,<sup>105</sup> and the cartulary of Wardon includes a memorandum dated 1135/54, showing that *Myddelhoo* was held from the abbot and convent of Ramsey in return for 24lb of wax payable annually on Palm Sunday.<sup>106</sup> The wax was presumably earmarked for the good quality candles that would be lit in the Benedictines' church over Easter. Assarting progressed to the point where, c. 1161, Henry II was able to

<sup>102</sup> BHRS, 13, 144 (205g-h).

<sup>103</sup> BHRS, 13, 144-45 (205i-j).

<sup>104</sup> BHRS, 13, 143-44 (205e). 'Parishes: Midloe', in *VCH Hunts*, vol. 2, pp. 318-19 cites *Pipe R. 9 John*, m. 10d.

<sup>105</sup> BHRS, 13, 287 (344b).

<sup>106</sup> BHRS, 13, 143, 146 (205a).

confirm that Wardon Abbey held Midloe Grange with all appurtenances from the abbot of Ramsey.<sup>107</sup>



Figure 10 View west towards Midloe Grange cottage with the surviving fragment of Midloe Wood on the skyline (right-hand side) (May 2016).<sup>108</sup>

King John confirmed the grant of *Middehou* in 1206/07, listing a range of privileges that saw the monks of Wardon freed from the usual scrutiny and obligations associated with the royal Forest.<sup>109</sup> Details are provided in a charter issued by Henry III in 1252 when he reconfirmed his predecessors' permission for the monks to 'enclose, assart or till' the land or to create a park. They were allowed to dispose of the wood and hays as they so wished and were granted free right of way to 'carry from the said wood and hays what they will', permission that extended not only to the monks themselves, but anyone to whom they might subsequently give or sell any part thereof. The wood and grange of Midloe were no longer subject to the jurisdiction of the foresters (responsible for animal husbandry and policing), verderers (judicial officials of a royal forest), regards (officers responsible for the supervision and regular inspection of a forest) and forest bailiffs. The abbot was excused from paying suit of court (attendance at an overlord's regular court), swanimote (court held three times each year before the forest verderers), and the expeditation of dogs (practice of cutting off the pads or claws of an animal, especially a dog, to inhibit deer chasing).<sup>110</sup>

The Hundred Rolls of 1279 confirmed payment to Ramsey by the abbot of Wardon of three 'petras' of wax (42 pounds) for the manor of Midloe which, at that point, retained a wood with a one-league perimeter.<sup>111</sup> Equating to three miles, this suggests that despite extensive assarting, tree cover of about 326 acres remained in the second half of the thirteenth century. Sales of *silvis ceduis* (wood) from Midloe were declared in Warden's 1291 tax return, although the exact amount was rolled up in the total income of £5 5s 2d.<sup>112</sup> By 1535 the payment of wax had been commuted to 13s 4d payable to the sacristan and declared as a share of income derived from Mulsoo pasture.<sup>113</sup> Today the 34-acre Midloe Wood lies 365m north-west of Midloe Grange, giving a nod to its monastic heritage (Fig. 10).

<sup>107</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol. 2, p. 615.

<sup>108</sup> The site of Midloe Grange is obscured by the cottage.

<sup>109</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 143-44 (205e); *BHRS*, 13, 295-96 (347) [Carte antique, G. 24]; *Pipe R. 9 John*, m. 10d.

<sup>110</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 291-94 (344f).

<sup>111</sup> 'Parishes: Midloe', in *VCH Hunts*, vol. 2., pp. 318-19.

<sup>112</sup> *Mon.*, vol. 5, p. 370.

<sup>113</sup> *Mon.*, vol. 5, p. 374. Mulsoo appears to be derived from *múl* (OE) meaning mule + *hoe* (OE), strip of land.

A memorandum in the cartulary notes that 'the abbey has the whole of Stert and the meadow thereto belonging by the gift of Norioth (Nariot de Wylebi / Wilby).<sup>114</sup> King Malcolm IV of Scotland (eldest son of Henry, earl of Huntingdon) confirmed the gift in 1157/65 and in 1174/84 Simon III, earl of Huntingdon, confirmed the grant of his father Simon II de Senlis, earl of Northampton and Huntingdon (died 1153) in **Stert Wood**.<sup>115</sup> The records imply therefore, that Norioth granted Stert with the permission of the earl, his overlord, and that these and subsequent confirmation documents relate to the same piece of land. Simon III also granted the road which ran through the middle of Stirt Wood linking Midloe Grange with Haile (parish of Hail Weston). This may have been confirmation of an earlier grant as the road was already in monastic hands when Simon III captured Huntingdon Castle in 1173/74.<sup>116</sup> A further memorandum dated c. 1190/1200 shows Henry and Robert, sons of Norioth, confirming their father's gift.<sup>117</sup>

In 1231 Roger de Quincy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Winchester, had licence from Henry III to enclose his wood of Stert with a dike and hedge so that 'beasts of the chace may have entry and egress, and that he may essart and cultivate the same'<sup>118</sup> and in 1235/36 the earl received a total of three of the king's bucks and twenty-six does from Weybridge Forest for stocking his park at Southoe.<sup>119</sup> It was probably around the same time that the earl gave the abbey a road of thirty feet in width from Midloe Field to [its land at] Stirt. However, in all likelihood this was the road mentioned previously. The earl also gave a meadow next to his Southoe meadow, reserving a path of six feet in width which appears to be the meadow granted by Norioth prior to 1165.<sup>120</sup> In 1286/93 Walter, son of Robert, gave a road through his wood of Stert to Midloe Grange, again reconfirming a right held by the abbey for at least 120 years.<sup>121</sup>

The editor of the cartulary observed that any connection with the hamlet of Stirtloe, 2½ miles north-east of Midloe Grange in the parish of Buckden could be ruled out and placed the 30-acre Stert in the south-west corner of the parish of Midloe [TL 1564] where it once abutted the south fringe of Midloe Wood. Stert was confined to the south by a 262m stretch of the River Haile (now known as the River Kym) marking the boundary between the parishes of Midloe and Hail Weston, where low-lying land beside the river remains liable to flooding and was always best suited to meadow. The parish boundaries with Great Staughton and Hail Weston ran along the west and east sides respectively. A wood line 250m in length lay to the north and a straight, 181m-long ditch protected the north-east edge between Hail and Scratenhoo. The Middle English word *scratten* means to scratch (with thorns or briars) offering a sense that this was a poor-quality site.<sup>122</sup> The road probably ran for just over a mile in an east-west direction between the brook dividing Midloe from Southoe [TL 17037 64577] and the north-east corner of Stert [TL 15506 64387].

## Hertfordshire

With the consent of his brother William, Theobald son of Fulk granted to the abbey thirty acres in Broadfield [Bradefeld; Bradfeld] free of all secular obligations. Theobald also granted the whole manor of Bradfield comprising woods, arable land, meadow, and pasture. No secular services were called for according to the agreement, which took effect on the feast of St

<sup>114</sup> *Stirc / stert* (OE): a stirk, calf, young bullock or heifer + *lôh* (OE), a place or stead.

<sup>115</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 147 (207a-c); In 1147 Simon II de Senlis, 4<sup>th</sup> earl of Northampton and Huntingdon, founded Sawtry Abbey, the first daughter house of Wardon.

<sup>116</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 147-48 (207e-f).

<sup>117</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 147 (207b).

<sup>118</sup> Roger de Quincy was the great great-nephew of Simon de Senlis II; *Cal. Chart. R. 1226-57*, p. 140.

<sup>119</sup> *Cal. Close R., Henry III*, vol. 3, pp. 52, 231, 325.

<sup>120</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 145 (205l-m).

<sup>121</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 145 (205k).

<sup>122</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 147-48 (207e) indicates that the monks owned a section of Stert Wood, which they had enclosed on the east side with a ditch: '... *intra clausum eorum cum ipso fossato ab Scratenhoo usque ad Hayle versus occidentem*'.



Michael in the eleventh year of the episcopate of Robert de Chesney, bishop of Lincoln (29 September 1160); Theobald's overlord, Henry de Scales, served as one of five witnesses.<sup>123</sup>



Figure 11 View south along Friars Lane towards Friars Wood, formerly Fildene Wood (July 2016).

By 1160/61 Sybil, wife of Robert son of Hamosis, had granted all of her demesne in the parish of *Mord'* (Gulden Morden/Steeple Morden in Cambs), rights in the common pasture, and **Fildenewd** (over six miles south of Steeple Morden) in the parish of **Rushden** (Herts). As the name suggests, this was probably dense, poor quality stock of little financial value. The monks established Bradfield Grange which despite the name, was actually in Rushden and may have served as a hub from which to manage the local assets.<sup>124</sup> In 1198 Richard I confirmed that the abbey held Bradfield Grange with Fildenewood and in 1291 taxable income from land and underwood at Rushden came to £1 19s 8¼d.<sup>125</sup> It is unclear when the assets were leased to a secular tenant, only that they were no longer in demesne when rights of free warren were renewed in 1330. The 62-acre *Friars Wood* in the north-east of the parish of Rushden retains moats on the western margin near Friars Grange [TL 3178 3285] and at Wood Farm on the south-east corner [TL 3237 3254].

### Woodland in Old Warden after the dissolution

There is no surviving evidence to show who acquired the abbey's woodland immediately after the suppression on 4 December 1537, however it is fair to assume that the local bailiff soon installed a tenant to manage the assets and generate income for the Crown. Twenty-six years later, on 19 December 1563, the patent roll of Elizabeth I records Peter Graye, steward of the royal manor of 'Ouldwardon' renting the site of the monastic guest house and a close of pasture to John Wynche and it is conceivable that Wynche acquired Park Wood and Abbey Wood for 25s per annum at around the same time.<sup>126</sup> A minor gentleman who owned about 100 acres in Cardington as well as property at Northill and Everton (Beds), Wynche was

<sup>123</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 60-61 (79). Bishop Robert de Chesney was elected on 13 December 1148 and consecrated on 19 December.

<sup>124</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII*, vol. 2, p. 615. The name derives from *fil(e)* (ME) meaning something of inferior quality or worthless + *dēne* (ME), a thickly wooded valley. *BHRS*, 63, 106 (142).

<sup>125</sup> *BHRS*, 13, 289-91 (p. 289) (344e); *Mon.*, vol. 5, p. 370.

<sup>126</sup> *Cal. Pat. R., Elizabeth I*, vol. 6 [1572-1575], p. 518 (3098).

succeeded in 1582 by Humphrey, his second son, but there is nothing to say whether or not the latter inherited rights in the former monastic woodlands.<sup>127</sup>

The complex nature of landholding in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is clearly reflected at Old Warden. Many men and their legal representatives had a hand in arrangements and the plethora of existing agreements, often reciting earlier charters involving long dead individuals, hampers efforts to establish a full picture. Nevertheless, the financial value of the woodlands is never in doubt.

The Puckering family became involved late in the reign of Elizabeth I (died 1603) when the woods were granted to lawyer John Puckering, Lady Jane his wife (died 1611) and son Thomas (1592-1637). John Puckering, who was knighted by the queen and appointed Lord Keeper of the Great Seal in 1592, died of apoplexy on 30 April 1596. Created baronet on 25 November 1611, his only son Thomas was knighted by James I on 3 June 1612.<sup>128</sup> On 10 July 1625, less than four months into the reign of Charles I, a warrant was issued to 'the Exchequer and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to accept a surrender from James Levingston of an estate for two lives, in reversion after Sir Thomas Puckering [of the Priory in Warwick, knight, Baronet], of the woods of Warden, co. Bedford, and to give order for preparation of a grant of lands in lieu thereof'.<sup>129</sup>

James I had granted a 99-year lease for the manor of Warden to Sir Francis Bacon (attorney general) and others on 10 January 1617, but this was revoked eleven years later and assigned on 10 June 1628 to trustees for the City of London. At this time assets included Abbey Wood and Park Wood,<sup>130</sup> and when Robert Palmer of Hill (Beds) and his son William (1605-83) acquired the manor on 4 July 1629, John Winowe was paying 25s in annual rent for the two woods, given as 331 acres and 137 acres respectively. The lease issued in 1629 appears to recite a much earlier document, which gave the value of the woodland occupied by the Puckering family as £44 per annum.<sup>131</sup> When Robert Palmer died in August 1630, the manor passed entirely to son William, who was by then a lawyer.

On 16 February 1634 Sir Thomas Puckering agreed to lease the woodlands to brothers Humphrey Fish of Ickwell (Northill), esquire (1585-1647), Oliver Fish of Biggleswade, gentleman, Thomas Fish of Southill, gentleman (1588-1646), and Henry Fish of Steppingley, gentleman (1590-1657). The term specified was 60 years 'If Thomas Puckering so long live' and rent set at £144 per annum for the first six years, £164 in the seventh year, and £184 per annum thereafter.<sup>132</sup>

Arrangements were made more complicated two years later when, on 20 May 1636, Humphrey Fish granted a moiety of the parsonage of Southill to William Palmer, Sir Oliver Luke of Haynes (Beds), John Bramston (son and heir of John Bramston, the Lord Chief Justice), and John Porter of London. That same day, the four Fish brothers agreed to assign the lease of Abbey or Warden Wood (330 acres) to William Palmer, expressing the expectation

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<sup>127</sup> Will of John Wynche of Northill made 13 July 1582 and proved on 31 October 1582 [BARS, ABP/W1580-84/64]; 'WINCH, Humphrey (1554/5-1625), of Everton, Beds. and Lincoln's Inn, London; later of Serjeants' Inn, Chancery Lane, London'. <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/>>.

<sup>128</sup> 'Sir John Puckering'. *Westminster Abbey*, <<https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/sir-john-puckering>>.

<sup>129</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Domestic Series of the reign of Charles I*, ed. J. Bruce, 23 vols. (London, 1859), vol. 1, p. 543.

<sup>130</sup> *Documents concerning Old Warden and Southill transcribed by F. Emmison for Mrs Shuttleworth*, pp.146-48 [BARS, CRT100/5].

<sup>131</sup> Bargain & Sale [manor of Warden] enrolled: 20/-, £2350: £66..12s per annum dated 4 July 1629 [BARS, W2223].

<sup>132</sup> Agreement recited in the Assignment of lease: "good causes", rent £33..3s dated 20 May 1636 [BARS, W2245].

that the Fish family would acquire Sir Thomas Puckering's 'whole estate and interest' in Warden Wood within the year. Moreover, the brothers were 'to convey to William Palmer & pay him £12..4s..6d per annum for Parke wood & Dansy Bowre (pightle)', which appears to be contingent upon Sir Oliver Luke, John Bramston, and John Porter surrendering their claim to their share in the rectory of Southill. If that interest was not acquired, the alternative was 'to grant lease of Parke wood to Oliver Luke, John Bramston & John Porter'.<sup>133</sup>

### **Park Wood from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards**

Sir Thomas Puckering died on 20 March 1637 aged 45 years and as it transpired, Park Wood remained in Fish family hands for more than 200 years. A draft lease dated 20 August 1669 shows Humphrey Fish of Northill, esquire (son of the abovementioned Thomas Fish of Southill), leasing to widow Ann Wilson of Old Warden 'a mansion called Parkewood House built by the said Ann and 2 tenements also built by her, situated in Warden Park wood; 5 closes of 42 acres adjacent the enclosed grounds of Sir Ralph Boovies [Bovey] called Bartons North; Dansibowers close, 2 acres, in Old Warden and now in the tenure of Ann Wilson'.<sup>134</sup> Ann Wilson was the wife of Charles Wilson, gentleman, who had been buried at Old Warden on 30 March 1653. The couple had three sons, Charles (baptised 1646), John (1648) and Thomas (1650). Judith, their only daughter, was baptised on 28 April 1653, less than one month after the death of her father.<sup>135</sup>

Humphrey Fish (I), son of Thomas Fish of Southill, married Catherine Constable with whom he had three children. The Northill parish register records the baptism of Humphrey, son of Mr Humphrey Fish, on 27 April 1660 [Humphrey Fish (II)]. Named for his grandfather, Thomas Fish was baptised at Northill on 27 September 1661 and since the first record of their sister Catherine is her marriage to clergyman John Dell of Woodford (Northants) on 24 April 1700, it is assumed that she was born c. 1680. The same parish register also documents the burial on 9 November 1677 of Henry, son of Humphrey Fysh, esquire, possibly a third son who died young.<sup>136</sup>

Humphrey Fish (II) was admitted to Gray's Inn on 4 March 1689 and in anticipation of his forthcoming marriage, father and son jointly appointed trustees on 16 May 1695. The bride was Anne Stillingfleet, born in 1679, daughter of Edward, bishop of Worcester.<sup>137</sup> Assets included Parke Wood (141 acres) and a close of pasture (40 acres) which had until recently been part of the wood. Also noted were two messuages erected on the cleared land and an adjoining pightle of pasture called Dansyboures [*sic*].<sup>138</sup> Concluded the following day, the marriage settlement mentions Park Wood, the 40 acres of woodland grubbed up and turned over to pasture, '2 messuages, lately built thereon, and pightle of pasture called Dansybowers in the occupation of William Gilman'.<sup>139</sup> Humphrey Fish (II) and his new wife were to take profits from the wood and after their deaths, it would pass to their sons.<sup>140</sup> Over the following twelve years Anne gave birth to Humphrey Fish (III), Henry (1705), Anne, and Catherine. However, the four children were left motherless when Anne died in 1707 and her body returned for burial near her parents in Worcester Cathedral on 23 August. Their grandmother, Catherine [Constable], was buried at Northill on 15 September 1709 and Humphrey Fish (I), grandfather of Humphrey (III) and Henry, on 13 April 1720.

<sup>133</sup> Assignment of lease: "good causes", rent £33..3s dated 20 May 1636 [BARS, W2245].

<sup>134</sup> Draft lease (not executed) dated 20 August 1669. [BARS, X116/12]. Coldharbour Farm now occupies the site of Parkewood House.

<sup>135</sup> *Bedfordshire Parish Registers*, ed. F.G. Emmison (Bedford, 1935), vol. 10, pp. A1-A53 [Old Warden].

<sup>136</sup> *Bedfordshire Parish Registers*, ed. F.G. Emmison (Bedford, 1936), vol. 13, pp. A1-A97 [Northill].

<sup>137</sup> Edward Stillingfleet was rector of Sutton (Beds) 1658-1665. He was granted a number of preferments, serving as bishop of Worcester from 1689 until his death in 1699. CCED Person ID: 103422.

<sup>138</sup> Conveyance (lease of lease and release) dated 16 May 1695 [BARS, M15/18].

<sup>139</sup> Marriage Settlement: copy Lease and Release. £2,000, 17 May 1695 [BARS, HY525-6].

<sup>140</sup> Lease and release dated 2 & 3 June 1735 [BARS, SL1/51].

Legal arrangements were made in 1724 to ensure that widower Humphrey Fish (II) would receive £100 of rent annually from the 141-acre Park Wood during his lifetime.<sup>141</sup> In accordance with accepted practice, Humphrey (III) as the elder son expected to inherit the Northill estate while his sibling would have been less fortunate. However, when Henry was no more seven years old, provisions were made for him by his father's cousin, Charles Palmer MD and when Charles died without an heir in 1712 the seven-year old boy inherited East Court Manor, Finchampstead (Berkshire) on condition that he adopted the surname of Palmer in addition to that of Fish.<sup>142</sup>

In the event, Humphrey Fish (III) predeceased his father and was buried at Northill on 13 December 1728. In 1735 the 'wood in Old Warden known as Parkewood (141 acres)' was placed into the hands of trustees and directions given to ensure that after the death of Humphrey (I), it would pass Henry Fyshe Palmer and his heirs.<sup>143</sup> A further legal document dated July 1735 mentions forty acres of pasture formerly 'parcell of a wood called Parke Wood lately grubbed up and turned into pasture and 2 messuages lately built there and Dansibowers pightle in parish of Warden occupied by Wm. Gilman'.<sup>144</sup> Humphrey Fish (II) survived his elder son by more than ten years and was buried on 21 September 1739 aged 79 years.

Henry Fish Palmer married Elizabeth Ingram in 1728 and of their eight children (seven boys and one girl), Charles Fyshe-Palmer succeeded to the estate in 1786. It is reasonable to suppose that Park Wood became known locally as Palmer's Wood in or after the third quarter of the eighteenth century. However, it retained the name 'Park Wood' on the Land Use Survey map (surveyed 1931 to 1933, revised 1936 to 1937 and printed in 1937), finally appearing as Palmers Wood (no apostrophe) on the one-inch Ordnance Survey map (surveyed 1951 to 1957 and published in 1959).

Charles Fyshe-Palmer died in 1807 and was succeeded by his son Charles (1768-1843). The younger man was characterised by a skeletal frame and great height prompting Mary Russell Mitford to observe that 'three or four yards of brown thread would be as like him as anything, if one could contrive to make it stand upright'.<sup>145</sup> The 'Swing Riots' in Bedfordshire were violent outbursts of protest against problems such as harsh poor law administration, low wages, and to a lesser extent tithes and taxes.<sup>146</sup> Notable incidents included poaching and on 15 December 1826 Thomas Harrington of Cardington, gamekeeper informed William Woodcraft, the Southill Park gamekeeper, that there was shooting in Palmer's Wood. On attending the scene, Harrington, Woodcraft and other assistants were confronted by an armed gang. One man emerged from the wood and levelled his gun at Woodcraft while the other poachers cried out 'shoot him, shoot him'. In the ensuing fight Woodcraft was hit twice on the temple with a bludgeon, but the poachers were eventually overpowered and five loaded guns, six pheasants, and a bag of powder and shot seized. The keepers took the offenders to a public house in Warden, where they could be held securely overnight. Local JP, the Rev FH Neve (vicar of Old Warden and Southill), clearly thought there was a case to answer and committed the men to Bedford gaol pending the next quarter sessions. Labourers 26-year old James Darnell of Old Warden, William Darnell (20), James Fisher (20) and William Shelton (26) from Sandy together with William Ward (24) of Northill appeared at the Epiphany session and

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<sup>141</sup> Bargain and sale to make tenants to the praecipe to suffer a recovery dated 10 November 1724 [BARS, SL1/48].

<sup>142</sup> W. Lyon, *Chronicles of Finchampstead* (London, 1895), p. 128.

<sup>143</sup> Lease and release dated 2 & 3 June 1735 [BARS, SL1/51].

<sup>144</sup> Conveyance (Copy) (Lease & Release dated 3 & 4 July 1735 [BARS, AD2901-02].

<sup>145</sup> 'PALMER, Charles Fyshe (?1771-1843), of Luckley House, Wokingham; East Court, Finchampstead, Berks. and Ickwell Old House, nr. Biggleswade, Beds.'. <<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/palmer-charles-1771-1843>>.

<sup>146</sup> A. Cirket, 'The 1830 riots in Bedfordshire, background and events', *BHRS*, 57 (1978), 75-112 (p. 110).

despite pleading *Not Guilty*, the jurors found the evidence overwhelming. Each poacher was sentenced to be transported for 7 years and late in January 1827 they were delivered aboard the prison hulk “*Justitia*”, which was moored at Woolwich. After perhaps two or three month's incarceration, a convict would usually be loaded along with fellow prisoners onto a ship destined for New South Wales, but none of the five poachers appears in the convict records leaving their fate unclear.<sup>147</sup>

The last of his line, Charles died on 24 January 1843 and by his will of 4 October 1832, left all of his property to his wife, Lady Madelina Fyshe Palmer of East Court (Berks) who he appointed sole executrix.<sup>148</sup> In February 1844 Frederick Henley Ongley of Old Warden acquired Park Wood (109 acres 2 roods), ‘the farmhouse etc. (73 acres 3 roods 14 perches) formerly part of said wood’ and ‘two cottages etc. in Old Warden’.<sup>149</sup> However, the following month financial woes saw him taking out a loan of £1,430 at 4½% interest using the assets as security. He died unmarried and intestate on 26 August 1846.<sup>150</sup>

Frederick was survived by his eldest brother Robert Henley Ongley, Lord Ongley, who ensured that the woodland paid its way. Buyers convening for the auction on 3 August 1860 were instructed to ‘meet in Bowers Lane, Park Wood’ for a 10am start, where ‘150 oak timber trees & spires, 20 large larch and spruce fir timber trees, 200 capital ash spires or poles, about 150 larch and spruce firs’ would be offered for sale alongside ‘elm, beech, cherry, and other timber trees, a quantity of fire and other wood’. For the hunting fraternity, the wood was renowned for good fox coverts; indeed Lord Ongley reportedly ‘preserved well at Old Warden, and the Hon. George Ongley always had a litter of [fox] cubs at Palmer’s Wood’.<sup>151</sup>

On 27 September 1872 Lord Ongley sold out to Joseph Shuttleworth of Hartsholme Hall, Lincolnshire, esquire, for £15,000. Assets included the manor and lordship of Southill and Stanford; the manor and lordship of Hill in Old Warden; the mansion house in Old Warden where Ongley had lived; the warren or wood ground in Old Warden and a small part in Southill known as the Warren (123 acres but formerly said to contain 300 acres) and the summer house; spinneys etc. (30 acres 3 roods 21 perches) in Old Warden and Northill; spinneys, etc. in Southill (23 acres 2 roods); farmhouses, cottages, arable, meadow and pasture in the parishes of Southill and Old Warden, the Hare and Hounds public house in Old Warden; rectorial and vicarial tithes previously payable to Ongley from the area of Old Warden parish known as Hill; ‘Parkwood (109 acres 2 roods) - farmhouse and old enclosures (73 acres 3 roods 14 perches) formerly part of said wood and which old enclosures and wood are in Old Warden and were formerly in occupation of Charles Fyshe Palmer, deceased, and now in occupation of Jesse Masters, or assigns’.<sup>152</sup> Regular auctions continued, with ‘1296 poles of capital rangewood’ offered for sale on Monday 10 February 1879, the meeting point for Lot 1 being ‘Palmer’s Wood, near Bowers Lane’.

<sup>147</sup> Examinations and depositions. Information of William Woodcraft, of Southill, gamekeeper [BARS, QSR1826/358]; Bedfordshire Gaol Register, <<https://apps.bedford.gov.uk/grd/>>; Notice of convictions and sentences at the Epiphany Sessions, 9 January 1827 [BARS,1827/102]; Quarter Session Minute Book, 1824 (Easter) - 1827 (Michaelmas) [BARS, QSM28, p. 402]; *BHRS*, 57, 81; Convict records, <<https://convictrecords.com.au/>>.

<sup>148</sup> ‘PALMER, Charles Fyshe’, <<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/palmer-charles-1771-1843>>.

<sup>149</sup> Release and assignment to attend the inheritance dated 7 February 1844 [BARS, SL1/56]; Application to register the granary of Mr Masters at in the parish of Potton as a place for Calvinist preaching dated 6 January 1838 [BARS, ABN2/321].

<sup>150</sup> Appointment and demise dated 18 March 1844 [BARS, SL1/59].

<sup>151</sup> ‘Country Quarters: Cambridgeshire’, *Baily's Magazine of Sports and Pastimes*, 28 (1876), 140-48 (p. 147).

<sup>152</sup> Conveyance dated 27 September 1872 [BARS, SL1/75a].



In 1890 Major Shuttleworth instructed Conder and Son to sell by auction on Thursday 17 April 'about 350 large larch and scotch fir poles, a quantity of fir thinnings & hurdle poles, 24 oak trees, and 1,200 fir and hardwood fagots, as felled and lotted near the Park Farm, on the Warren, and in Palmer's Wood'. Bidders were to meet at 'Lot 1, Back Spinney, Park Farm'. The advertisement emphasises the improved railway connectivity, noting that the 'Old Warden Estate, Bedfordshire' lay 'Two miles from Southill Station, on the Bedford and Hitchin branch of the Midland Railway...', which opened on 7 May 1857.<sup>153</sup>

Palmer's Wood now belongs to the Shuttleworth Trust. Public access is restricted to a footpath which begins 560m west of the parish church and runs for 560m north-westwards through the trees. Skirting the northern fringe of the wood, the track formerly known as Bowell Lane (1750) and Bowers Lane (1860 and 1879) provides access from Old Warden village to Sweetbrier Farm.

### **Abbey Wood from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards**

According to the settlement of 13 June 1663 made by Sir William Palmer of Ladbroke (Warwicks) on the marriage of William Palmer, Esq., his eldest son, to widow Elizabeth Clerke of London, part of Warden Wood (formerly Abbey Wood) had been subdivided into smaller parcels:

Several pieces of wood & wood ground (137 acres) in Warden at South end of "a greate wood there called Warden Wood & being part thereof" & now divided in 6 divisions of 22 acres from it by a quick hedge; one division abutting Austins close, East, & upon "The master lyne which parteth the whole wood", West; one on last, South, The "master lyne", West; one on Shefford to Bedford way, South, "master lyne", East; one on last, South, Muss close, West, "master lyne", East; one on last, South, Greene Lane, West, "master lyne", East; one on last, North, "master lyne", East (sic).<sup>154</sup>

The marriage settlement for Charles Palmer and Mary Newdigate dated 5 October 1733 referenced the manor of Warden, including 300 acres of woods and 'wood grounds', which suggests that between 1629 and 1733 a gap had been created leaving Warden Little Wood (97 acres) and Warden Great Wood (208 acres) as separate entities, just as they appear today. After the death of Charles Palmer in 1764, his elder son and heir William Palmer (1735-1772) decided to sell his assets in Old Warden and on 22 June 1768 details of the property were listed as follows:

3 messuages, 6 gardens, 60 acres land, 40 acres meadow, 120 acres pasture, 350 acres wood, 50 acres furze & heath, 20 acres marsh, 2 acres land covered with water, £18 16s rents, common of pasture, court leet, court Baron, View of Frankpledge, Perquisites & Profits of Courts, goods & chattels of felons & fugitives in Warden, Southill, Hill & Broome & tithes,  $\frac{1}{3}$  annual rent £119 7s 8d for manor.<sup>155</sup>

The advertisement placed before the end of March 1770 reads:

To be sold. The Manor of Old Warden with Court Leet, Court Baron, Chief rents, Royalties and Privileges thereto belonging. Also the Capital messuage, a farmhouse and several inclosed grounds of arable, meadow and pasture containing 180 acres now in the occupation of Joseph Taylor, together with two

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<sup>153</sup> 'English Timber Sale' [advertisement], *Timber and Wood-working Machinery*, 11 (1890), 143.

<sup>154</sup> Supplementary marriage settlement dated 13 June 1663 [BARS, W2230].

<sup>155</sup> Conveyance to make a tenant to the praecipe. (Lease & Release), 21, 22 April 1768 [BARS, W2232]; Exemplification of Recovery, 22 June 1768 [BARS, W2234].

large woods of 310 acres adjoining, the whole being a freehold estate, pays no tithes and lying within 5 miles of Bedford and 6 miles of Biggleswade.<sup>156</sup>

Another paper in the Ladbroke Deeds (undated) calculated the latest rental income from the 'Estate at Old Warden belonging to William Palmer Esq.' as £14,140 7s 9d, including 'Fines, alienations etc, privilege of planting upon an extensive waste, manor house etc' of £1,000; 'Two large spring woods in hand' (310 acres) at £240; and 'Two farms now in one tythe free' (179 acres) for £144 18s 0d.<sup>157</sup>

When William Palmer died unmarried in 1772, his brother Charles (1738-1806) inherited the Old Warden property. Protracted negotiations to offload the land continued, but on 18 March 1773 Mr Francis Murcott of Funivall's Inn finally wrote to Charles, 'After a multiplicity of attendances I have at last put a finishing stroke to the long depending sale of your Bedfordshire estate.' A purchase price of £11,250 had been agreed with a further £150 allowed for 'the proportionable part of the next year's fall of underwood and poles', so that Charles would receive £11,400 from the buyer, brewer Samuel Whitbread of Cardington (1720-96), who would 'enter upon the estate' on 10 October 1773.<sup>158</sup> Warden Great Wood and Warden Little Wood remain in family hands as part of the Southill Estate.

### Out of the woods

The importance of woodland cannot be overstated and without it, the abbey and its granges could not have survived. Far from being a place of enjoyment, woods were valuable resources which called for professional husbandry to maximise yields. Outgoings included the construction and maintenance of physical boundaries to prevent incursions (both human and animal), the allocation of manpower to cultivate and harvest the crops, and the cost of acquiring legal documents. Attacks on Warden Abbey, the monks and its woodland took a toll during the early thirteenth century, both in financial terms and life lost.

Good quality evidence of monastic woodland management emerges from accounts compiled at the Cistercian abbey of Beaulieu (1269-70) and from Warden's daughter house at Sibton (1363-64). Unfortunately, details of Warden's woodland are confined to a small number of entries in the cartulary, the 1291 tax return, and various charters by which the fate of the late abbey's lands can be traced after its closure. It is likely, however, that the monks held significantly more than can be identified from these limited sources.

In addition to gifts made by the founder, the abbey accepted many acres of woodland during the early years. Prominent benefactors included King Stephen who granted a wood within the Royal Forest (1139/53), Alexander, bishop of Lincoln (c. 1135/36), Walter, abbot of Ramsey (1135/54), and Simon II de Senlis, 4<sup>th</sup> earl of Northampton and Huntingdon (before 1153). Following the founder's death, his heir granted the park at Warden, and the baron of Bedford sold the abbey an estimated 200 acres of wood adjacent to the newly established Park Grange (1160/80).

By and large, the woodlands occupied marginal positions close to parish boundaries. These are exemplified by Ravenesholte (Burrough Green), Ravenshoe Wood, Midloe Wood and Stert Wood (Midloe), Tredeley Wood (Diddington), Putnoe Wood (Goldington), and Tilwick

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<sup>156</sup> S.H.A. Hervey, *Ladbroke and its owners* (Bury St Edmunds, 1914), pp. 160-61. The parish register shows Joseph Taylor buried at Old Warden on 28 March 1770.

<sup>157</sup> *Ladbroke*, p. 160.

<sup>158</sup> *Ladbroke*, pp. 160-61; Conveyance. (Lease & Release), 4,5 October 1773 [BARS, W2235-2236]. See also [BARS, W2288]; M.M. Drummond, 'WHITBREAD, Samuel (1720-96), of Cardington, Beds.'. *The History of Parliament*, <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/>>; For portraits of Samuel Whitbread, see <<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp60146/samuel-whitbread-the-elder>>.

Wood (Ravensden). The dubious quality is occasionally revealed in a name, for example Fildenewode in the north-east of Rushden and Scratenhoo, part of Midloe Wood.

King Stephen had granted permission for the monks to assart Ravenshoe Wood or keep it as a park, but despite assarting to create Midloe Grange, they retained at least 326 acres of woodland in the parish by 1279. There is nothing to indicate how much woodland had already been assarted in Wardon and Southill when the abbey was founded, nor has the size of the Norman parkland been established. All that can be said is that the monks held over 590 acres of demesne woodland in the sixteenth century.

Purchasing the right of free warren at nineteen granges was a clear demonstration of the abbey's status and affluence in 1252. Reconfirmation at far fewer properties seventy-eight years later is a useful barometer marking the shift from demesne farming to leasing, a trend that continued into the sixteenth century. Similarly, other woods and woodland produce, namely Drewelles Wood (Northill), Lowes Wood (Southill), and the close called Inlond beside Rowney Warren (Southill) had also been leased to seculars by that time and in 1537/38 only the Abbot's Garden, Rowney, and Park granges remained in demesne allowing some scope for woodland produce to generate an income.

There is little evidence of the monastic woodlands today. The Southill demesne woods have been lost (or defy identification) and despite some 415 acres surviving in the parish of Old Warden, public access is limited to one path through Park Wood and to the route formerly known as Howell Lane along the northern fringe. Elsewhere, the Three Shires Way runs close to Midloe Grange and across land formerly occupied by Midloe Wood and Stert Wood. Friars Lane leads through the former Fildene Wood in the parish of Rushden and a path running from the village of Burrough Green cuts across land north of Ravens' Hall (Ravenesholte). Small though it is, Putnoe Wood in Bedford can be enjoyed by everyone.

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