

Some Documentary Sidelights on the Deserted Oxfordshire Village of Brookend

By T. H. LLOYD

ALTHOUGH the archaeologist will almost certainly write the final chapter in the history of the deserted medieval villages of England, documentary sources nevertheless make an important contribution to the evidence. The written record may give the date of desertion, a thing which in the present state of knowledge the archaeologist can do only within broad limits; and again, documents, intelligently used, may reveal the causes of desertion, whereas without them the archaeologist all too often can only guess.

Documents have been known to lie, however, and should not always be taken at their face value. This can be shown in the case of the Abbot of Eynsham's manor of Woodeaton, supposedly ravaged by the Black Death to the point of near desertion. In an extent of 1366 it is said that at the time of the great mortality of 1349 'hardly two tenants remained' and that these wished to withdraw.¹ It is likely that the scribe is guilty of exaggeration, if nothing more. A comparison with earlier documents shows that considerably more than two tenants, or at least members of their families, must have survived the plague. The lay subsidy roll of 1316 records the names of 18 contributors to the subsidy at Woodeaton.² Twelve of these taxpayers have distinctive surnames, such as Rodeploute, le Dosier and Maynard, the other six have common occupational or topographical surnames. Turning to the 1366 extent we find that despite the span of half a century and the appearance of an epidemic no less than eight of the surnames in the first group are still borne by the abbot's tenants, one of them occurring twice. Three of the surnames in the second group also reappear, but they are too common for any weight to be given to this fact. These eight families are not necessarily the sole survivors of the plague. We do not know the names of the non-taxpayers of 1316, but it is quite possible that some of them might have been found among the 28 tenants of the abbot in 1366.

The above example is not a general indictment of the value of documentary sources in studying depopulation movements; it merely urges caution.

¹ *Cartulary of the Abbey of Eynsham*, ed. H. E. Salter, II (O.H.S. LI), 19.

² E 179/161/8.

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The records of Eynsham Abbey contain instances of depopulation which are much better substantiated than this. One of these is the desertion of the hamlet of Brookend in Chastleton parish. This was no dramatic desertion caused by the Black Death, although in the case of its hamlet of Tilgarsley Eynsham Abbey can furnish a genuine example of this rare phenomenon. In contrast Brookend would appear at a first glance of the 1363 rental to have been unscathed by the pestilence.³ The contrary will in fact be shown; but first a word must be said about the location of the hamlet and about its fortunes previous to the Black Death.

The parish of Chastleton is a finger of Oxfordshire territory pointing towards the north-west. The higher ground in the parish is in the south-east on the limestone scarp, while the lower part lies in the lias vale of the river Evenlode. Chastleton village lies at the foot of the scarp between the 500-ft. and 600-ft. contour lines. Above the village the slope rises fairly steeply to a maximum height of about 780 ft. The lower part of the parish, which must have contained most of the medieval arable land, lies between the 500-ft. and the 400-ft. contour lines and is for the most part level ground. The site of the hamlet of Brookend lay in the lower part of the parish, rather less than a mile distant from Chastleton, but connected with it by the only road which runs through the parish. Most of the visible remains of the hamlet are by the farther bank of the brook which gave it its name.

The hamlet of Brookend was probably not in existence at the time of the Domesday Survey. In fact, it is likely that it was not founded until the second half of the 12th century. When Eynsham Abbey received the four hides, which were to form its Brookend estate, from Henry d'Oilly about 1152-54, they were described as in Chastleton (*apud Cestreitone villam*).⁴ Two of the hides were already under cultivation, but the other two were as yet uncleared (*in brueria*). It is possible that an increase of population at Chastleton in the later 12th century, which must have given impetus to the clearing of the two hides of waste, resulted also in the setting up of a subsidiary settlement at Brookend. There is little reason to credit the monks of Eynsham with this piece of colonization. Aside from the fact that the actual clearing of the waste would have been done by the new tenants themselves, it is possible that Eynsham had disposed of the land to another lord. In 1241 the abbey received a grant of land in Chastleton from Walter Beiemere, who had until then held the land as their tenant; in return they were to pay him five marks a year for the term of his life.⁵ This can only have been the Brookend land.

³ *Eynsham Cartulary*, II. 62.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I (O.H.S. XLIX), 74.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

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The earliest surviving description of the settlement of Brookend appears to be in the Hundred Rolls.⁶ At that date Eynsham had 12 villein tenants, each holding a virgate, and another holding a $\frac{1}{2}$ -virgate. In addition there were a free tenant holding 2 virgates and two free tenants jointly holding $1\frac{1}{2}$ virgates. It is possible that the freehold land was land formerly held in demesne by Walter de Beiemere. It is equally possible that it was part of the two hides which was cleared by tenants getting more favourable conditions than the other settlers obtained. Later events suggest that the two virgates were made up of the best land in Brookend. The whole estate was held by the abbot as a $\frac{1}{4}$ -knight's fee of the manor or barony of Hook Norton.

At this date, 1279, Brookend may have approached, or even exceeded, the parent village in size. Chastleton was a manor in the hands of a junior branch of the d'Oilly family. Here there was a demesne of 2 carucates, 8 villein tenants holding virgates and 5 free tenants holding a total of 5 virgates and a croft. In neither settlement is the number of tenants an indication of the total population. There may have been sub-tenants or landless peasants in either place.

To complete the picture given by the Hundred Rolls, mention must be made of two others who held land in the parish; Henry de Twemlad, who held one hide, and the Abbey of Oseney, which, as rector of the church, held a glebe of 3 virgates in demesne. There is no mention that either of these had tenants, although in the 14th century Oseney had two or three small-holding tenants, one of them at Brookend.

Since the surviving court rolls and accounts of Brookend all date from after the Black Death⁷ it is necessary to draw upon other sources to show something of the economy of the parish before the pestilence. These do not distinguish between Chastleton and Brookend, but it is not conceivable that conditions can have differed markedly in village and hamlet. The chief of these sources is the accounts of Oseney Abbey's demesne land.⁸ A detailed analysis of this estate is not relevant to our subject, but it may be mentioned that during the first half of the 14th century there was a decline in its viability as an economic unit. It had never been a source of much profit to the abbey, for the demesne was small and without labour services the expense of cultivating it was high. In many years this cultivation resulted in an actual loss, which was disguised only by the fact that the tithes which Oseney received as rector passed through the same accounting machine. This meant that the accounts showed a favourable, but deceptive, balance.

⁶ *Rot. Hund.* (Rec. Com.), II. 729.

⁷ B.M. Harl. Rolls A 43; B 1-14; P.R.O. SC 2/197/14.

⁸ Bodl. Christ Church Oseney Rolls, 2, 4-14, 19.

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The rectorial tithes are of more moment than the problems which confronted Oseney in the management of their demesne. These tithes represent the combined payments of the villagers of Chastleton and Brookend and of the lay lord of Chastleton. It is not possible to break them down further. It is more unfortunate that in most years the accounts do not distinguish between the tithe income and the fruits of the Oseney demesne. In fact, in only two years do we have separate figures for the tithes. In 1345 tithes yielded 11 quarters 3 bushels of wheat, 20 quarters 2 bushels of rye, 15 quarters 1 bushel of drage, 12 quarters 4 bushels of oats, total 59 quarters 2 bushels, plus some peas, which were not distinguished from the demesne peas. In 1347 the amounts were 5 quarters 4 bushels of wheat, 16 quarters 5 bushels of rye, 21 quarters of drage, 8 quarters 7 bushels of oats, 7 quarters 2 bushels of peas, total 59 quarters 2 bushels. The proportions of the different types of grain must have been roughly similar in years when the tithe is not separately enumerated. Even if most of the wheat did not come from the demesne of the lord of Chastleton it is clear that the villagers relied mainly on rye for their bread crop. Drage was preferred to barley for the beer crop. Although the accounts have survived for thirteen years they contain no reference to barley, either from tithes or from the Oseney demesne.

If we assume that the rector received a literal tenth of the grain of the parishioners and we make an estimate for the tithe peas in the earlier year we find that in 1345 the amount of grain tithed was about 800 quarters and in 1347 about 600 quarters. By adding to this the issue of the Oseney demesne we may arrive at rough figures for the total grain produced in the parish. The figures are 890 to 900 quarters in 1345 and 655 quarters in 1347. The earlier harvest was better than average, the latter rather below average.

In 1851 the area of Chastleton parish was 1,769 acres; the figure can have changed little since the 13th century. At no date can the entire area of the parish have been given over to grain cultivation; the higher parts have probably never been touched by the plough. In 1279 there was a total of 44 virgates of arable land. Although the Oseney virgates may have each contained 45 acres this is too high a figure to have applied to all the virgates. We may therefore take the Brookend virgate of 32 acres as being the standard size.⁹ This gives us a total arable area of 1,408 acres, although this is to be regarded as a minimum figure. By 1279 the upper limits of arable cultivation in the parish of Chastleton must have been reached. There can have been no room for further expansion.

In the 14th century on the Oseney demesne a two-course rotation was being operated. This was the normal practice in the Oxfordshire Cotswolds,

⁹ Size of the Brookend virgate in 1363 rental.

so we may assume that all the land in Chastleton parish was worked in the same way. If there had been no reduction in the area of arable land between 1279 and the mid-14th century about 700 acres would have been sown each year. From this 700 acres came, as we have seen, about 890 quarters of various grains in the good year 1345 and about 655 quarters in the poor year 1347. These are gross yields; from these figures would have to be deducted the seed corn to give us the net yields. Unfortunately the evidence is not sufficiently complete to allow the working out of more precise yields per acre or return on seed sown.

The parish did not rely entirely upon arable farming for its livelihood. The Oseney accounts record the receipt of tithe wool and lambs. Receipts are recorded in nine years prior to the Black Death. The lowest number of fleeces received was 45 in 1314 and the highest 97 in 1332. These may represent a sheep population of from 500 to 600 and over 1,000 in the respective years. Tithe lambs ranged from seven in 1340 to 32 in 1328. The wool tithes include the tithe of any sheep belonging to the lay lord of Chastleton manor, but this was a small estate and unless the lord was concentrating heavily on sheep farming on the down he is unlikely to have had more than about 200 or 300 sheep. This still admits the possibility that at various dates between 400 and 700 sheep or more were in the hands of peasant farmers. There is no way of telling how these were distributed. In 1279, however, there had been 29 tenants, nearly all holding a virgate. So the average number of sheep per tenant may have been as high as a dozen. For a Cotswold parish these figures are not high. Wool sales would have added something, but not much, to the income of the parish. But even a flock of 1,000 sheep would not have sufficed to supply an adequate amount of manure for the total arable area of the parish.

The lay subsidy returns of 1316 and 1327 shed a little light on the economic state of the parish, although again it is not possible to distinguish between Chastleton and Brookend.¹⁰ It is well known that the numerous exemptions from payment of subsidy make this a difficult source to use. However, since the returns exist mention may be made of them. In 1316 twenty-one persons paid subsidy on taxable goods assessed at a total of £55 10s. 8d. In 1327 nineteen persons paid subsidy on a total assessment of £77 13s. 4d. The average assessment in 1316 was £2 10s. 6d. compared with £2 6s. 11d. for the hundred as a whole, and in 1327 £4 1s. 9d. compared with £2 13s. 4d.¹¹ In 1316 twelve villis in the hundred had a higher average assessment than

¹⁰ E 179/161/8, 9.

¹¹ These averages exclude the detached portion of the hundred.

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Chastleton, compared with only three in 1327. This change in the position of Chastleton does not result merely from an illusory increase in the average payment which might have been caused by an increase in the assessment of the richest taxpayer. On the contrary the improvement results from increased assessment at the middle levels. This can be seen by excluding the richest taxpayers, taking as an arbitrary limit those assessed at £8 or above on each occasion: for those remaining the average payment in 1316 was £1 19s. 11d. compared with £2 1s. 4d. for the hundred as a whole, and in 1327 £3 2s. 1d. compared with £2 4s. In 1316 nineteen vills had a higher average, but in 1327 only two vills. In 1316, apart from the lord of Chastleton, assessed at £13 12s., only one person was assessed at more than £3 and that was only £3 9s. 4d. In 1327 the lord of Chastleton was assessed at £16 13s. 4d., one other at £9, four at £5 or above, four at £3 or above, one at £2 3s. 4d. and eight at less than £2.

By comparing the names of the tenants of 1279 with those of the 14th-century taxpayers it appears that there is a strong possibility, though no proof, that the richer taxpayers tended to live at Brookend rather than Chastleton. As a final comment upon the subsidy returns it must be confessed that the apparent prosperity of the parish in 1327 is not easy to reconcile with the not too bright picture which we have drawn of the same scene two decades later. In vindication of the latter we can only repeat that during the intervening years the small Oseney estate was certainly going downhill. In the year prior to the Black Death the state of affairs had reached such a pitch that, in an effort to cut costs, the abbey entered into an unprecedented agreement with the vicar, whereby in return for certain revenues he was to shoulder personal responsibility for some of the expenses of running the estate.

For a picture of the immediate effects of the Black Death on Chastleton parish we must once more turn to the Oseney accounts. These show that the plague must have caused severe dislocation in the economic life of the village. In 1351-52 the Oseney demesne arable was completely uncultivated. The villagers' grain production was probably also down. The tithes were less than half those received in the years prior to the plague, although it must be borne in mind that the harvest of 1351 was very poor. Even as late as 1355-56 the total seed sown on the Oseney demesne was only half that sown in 1347-48.

Oseney took advantage of the decline in arable cultivation during these years to bring sheep into the parish. Prior to the Black Death it had been their custom to winter a small flock of hogasters at Chastleton, feeding them on the manor's hay and grain. In 1355 a large mixed flock spent most of the year there and the shearing was done there. Sheep may have played a relatively

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increased role in the economy of the parish as a whole. The tithe of fleeces in 1355 and 1356 show that, apart from the Oseney flock, there must have been over 1,000 sheep in the parish in these years, a figure higher than that given by most of the pre-plague accounts.

The first picture of Brookend after the Black Death is provided by the extent or rental of 1363. A first glance at this suggests that the hamlet had been little affected by the plague. All the abbey's lands were provided with tenants. Compare this with the near-by manor of Rollright where two of the four fields had gone out of cultivation and many holdings were in the lord's hand. The plague had not passed Brookend by, however. The explanation can only be that the low rents of holdings had attracted new tenants to take the place of those who had died. The change of surnames is suggestive, though not proof, of this. Not all had perished; four surnames borne by taxpayers in 1327 were still borne by tenants, and one of these dates back to 1279.

The most noticeable change that had taken place since the survey of 1279 is that Eynsham had acquired the two tenements which at that date had been held of them by free tenure. These come to be regarded as identical tenurially with the villein lands.

The average holding in 1363 is hardly different from that of 1279. Nine tenants had a virgate each, two had $\frac{1}{2}$ -virgates, one had $\frac{3}{4}$ -virgate, one had $1\frac{1}{2}$ virgates and one a total of $2\frac{1}{4}$ virgates. There was a 2-virgate holding with no tenant named, but later evidence suggests that it was in fact occupied. The number of tenants was thus one less than in 1279. Rents had increased slightly. In 1279 the standard rent for a virgate had been 7s. 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. In 1363 there was some slight variation in the rents of the old villein lands, but the highest rate was only 8s. 6d. for a virgate. A holding of $\frac{3}{4}$ -virgate charged at 13s. 4d. and another of the same size charged at 6s. were almost certainly made from the old free holding of a virgate and a half. Having regard to the changes in the value of money the rents must have borne much more lightly on the tenants of 1363 than on those of 1279.

The court rolls which provide most of the evidence for the depopulation of Brookend begin in the year 1381. Although they continue until the end of the 15th century they do not provide a complete picture of the changing social conditions. In the 15th century courts were held at Brookend very irregularly, often years apart. Much of the business of acceptance and surrender of holdings is not recorded in the court rolls, so that the record of tenancy changes is incomplete. Furthermore, even when a formal acceptance or surrender of land was made in court the actual exchange had often been made long before. Thus the date of any acceptance or surrender of land mentioned in a court roll can only be taken as the latest date at which the

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change in tenancy can have taken place. However, with the aid of a few surviving rent-collectors' accounts the general trend in the depopulation of Brookend can easily be described.

Already in 1381 the abbey was losing tenants in Brookend. In the court held on 30 October of that year three persons were reported to be fugitives from the lordship. The father of one of these was ordered to ensure his return on pain of paying a penalty of 40s. It is unlikely either that he secured his son's return or that he paid the penalty. Such entries are common in succeeding court rolls. A resident of the lordship is reported to have fled; a relative or the homage as a whole is ordered to bring him back, on payment of a penalty if they fail; but no action is ever taken and no penalty ever paid. This happens even when it is known where the fugitive is living and when his changes of residence are regularly reported in the court. In 1386 the whole of the Rogers family was reported to have fled and to be living at Aston. In 1404 John, one of the sons, was living at Adlestrop, in 1424 he was at Radford, by 1433 he was at Honying Aston, where he still lived in 1437, when he was said to be sixty years old.

Some of the fugitives from Brookend were the sons of tenants, others daughters, whose 'crime' was that of marrying men from other lordships. Others consisted of whole families for whom flight was the easiest way out after a series of prosecutions in the court for neglecting to cultivate their land or for allowing their buildings to fall into disrepair. Most fugitives probably did not move far. Those whose whereabouts is reported are usually said to have been living in neighbouring Cotswold villages. Most of them probably led lives which differed very little from those they had left behind them.

One interesting point, however, is that no less than three or four sons of peasants from this single hamlet deserted the soil to take Holy Orders. In 1405 William Hancock was granted permission to take Orders, but under the condition that he was to return to the lordship if he had not reached the priesthood within thirteen years. He may have failed to achieve this for he was probably the William Hancock who was ordered to return to Brookend in 1443. In the same court of 1405 Walter Jacks was amerced 6s. 8d. for having his son tonsured without the lord's licence. In 1427 Thomas Watts, Vicar of Enstone, was claimed to be a villein of the abbey, as was John Watts, priest, in 1443. In 1446 the latter was a chaplain at Oxford.

The difficulty about securing the return of fugitives was that no one was prepared to take the initiative in the matter even if coercive power were available, which is unlikely. Moreover the abbey's claims against the fugitives were flimsy. Presumption of villeinage seems to have sprung from residence or land-holding in the village. Many of the fugitives were the sons of

immigrants, or were even themselves relative newcomers who fled after a short period of residence. It is likely that the abbot would have found it difficult to prove his charges of villeinage in a court of law if he had been tempted to try it. If these men were villeins other lords must have had prior claims on many of them.

Not all those who left Brookend did so by stealth. Some left without opposition from the authorities. What the latter were attempting to prevent was not movement as such, but unregulated movement. Tenants who fled usually paid no heriot and often left the lord to bear the cost of repairing their buildings. If a tenant formally surrendered his holding, paid a heriot for doing so and paid a fine to cover costs of repairs, no bar was placed in the way of his leaving the lordship. Many left in this way.

Although there was large movement of population away from Brookend in the closing years of the 14th century and the early years of the 15th century, others came to take their place, and the lord lost no revenue because of vacant holdings. In 1363 the rents due from 14 virgates amount to £6 2s. 1d., while the rent of the other two virgates is later seen to be £1 6s. 8d. This accords almost exactly with the £7 9s. 9d. for which the rent collector was responsible in 1379-80. There were no decays of rent at this date.

The first reduction in rent did not occur until 1390-91 when a tenement came into the lord's hand and was re-let at 6s. instead of 8s. This was the only rent reduction before the 15th century. By 1412-13 a second tenement had had its rent reduced by 2s. and by 1418-19 a third was also reduced by 2s. Thus in 1420-21 the nominal rent of £7 9s. 9d. was offset by a decay of 6s.

The abbey did not receive its rents punctually from the rent collector, who was always a tenant and usually served for a long term. Most collectors fell into arrears. This was probably because they were converting part of the money to their own uses rather than because they could not get the rents from the other tenants. This is proved by the fact that they usually paid off most of the arrears, even though it often took them a long time to do so, for on the Eynsham estates rent collectors were not personally responsible for rent which they had not been able to collect.

As late as 1420 the movement away from Brookend had not resulted in any serious loss of revenue to the abbey. However, there is evidence to show that before this date the depopulation of the hamlet had begun and that this factor was responsible for the few rent reductions already made. In the 14th century vacant holdings had been taken up by new-comers and no land remained in the lord's hand. From the beginning of the 15th century tenants from outside the lordship cannot have been easy to find. To prevent land lying idle it became necessary to persuade those already holding land to

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take on more, and if necessary to offer them inducements in the shape of rent reductions.

From the beginning of the 15th century we find a new force at work in Brookend—the movement towards the consolidation of hitherto separate holdings in the hands of the same tenant. In 1399 a virgate and a half virgate were united in this way; in 1402 two virgates; the same year two three-quarter virgates were consolidated with a third holding of a virgate and a half. In 1415 there was a further union of two virgates, to which a third virgate was added in 1434. In 1423 a virgate was united with a half virgate, and in 1438 another virgate was added.

It has already been mentioned that as late as 1420 the rents of the abbey had not seriously been affected by the movement of population away from Brookend. A very different story is to be told in the year 1441-42. The critical years in the history of Brookend fell between 1422 and 1441, although it is not possible to pinpoint them. In 1441-42 only three holdings, two of 3 virgates and one of $2\frac{1}{2}$ virgates, were held by permanent tenants. Five holdings, totalling $7\frac{1}{2}$ virgates, were technically in the hands of the lord.

The rents of the untenanted land were not completely lost to the abbey. Some of the land was let on annual leases. The $7\frac{1}{2}$ virgates should have yielded £3 13s. $\frac{1}{2}$ d.; in 1441-42 £2 9s. 11d. was received from short leasing. It is not recorded who paid these rents. It is likely that the best of the land was taken on an annual basis by the permanent tenants of Brookend or Chastleton.

The loss of rents was not the most important consequence of the inability to find men who would take land in Brookend on a permanent basis. Far more serious was the fact that the loss of tenants meant that the village was beginning to fall into ruins. This danger was present even when two or three holdings were engrossed by one tenant. Even if a tenant trebled his holding of land he did not need to treble his living and storage space, especially since much of the additional land was probably allowed to revert to pasture. Therefore the temptation was to allow the surplus buildings to fall down, rather than to incur unnecessary expense by keeping them in good repair. The pace of the decay of the village was increased when untenanted land was held on short leases, for the lessee took only the land and no one was responsible for the state of the buildings.

At first the abbey fought hard against the decay of the village in this manner. When a tenant engrossed several holdings the lord tried to insist that he keep all the buildings in good repair. This was very unpopular with the tenants. Many of those who left Brookend did so because they were harassed by the lord to carry out repairs. The lord was fighting a losing battle. He first attempted to compromise by allowing the tenant to put a sub-tenant in the

extra farm house. When this policy failed he was driven to accepting a fine in return for permission to convert the house to other uses or to allow it to fall down altogether.

There is no need to emphasize how the interests of the abbey were damaged by this collapse of the village. Rent reductions need have been only a temporary expedient; during more prosperous times they might have been increased. But when the buildings attached to a piece of land had been destroyed that land lost much of its attractiveness to a prospective tenant. A new tenant would not undertake to replace them, while the capital cost of rebuilding most of the village would have been too heavy a burden for the abbey's finances. When its buildings had been destroyed there was little chance of a holding ever again existing as an independent economic unit. The engrossing of holdings was irreversible.

The population of Brookend, which in 1363 had numbered at least fifteen families, had been reduced by 1441 to probably no more than three families. This decline in population is to be regarded as in part the visible symptom of and in part the cause of the general impoverishment of the parish during this period. What we have witnessed is not merely a change over from a community of small peasant farmers to one of a smaller number of prosperous yeomen farmers. The parish as a whole was becoming poorer.

This can be seen quite clearly from an action of Oseney Abbey in 1459.¹² This is one of the rare examples in English history of a monastery voluntarily surrendering rectorial tithes. In this year the rectory and the vicarage of Chastleton were consolidated. This was a common enough procedure in the 15th century, but the object of the exercise was usually to appropriate the vicarage to the monastery, leaving the parish to be served by a stipendiary chaplain. However, Chastleton parish was so poor that even this would have brought the abbey no profit. Already the abbey, as rector, had a greater expense than it was receiving in tithes. Therefore the vicar was granted all the income of the rectory, but was also obliged to shoulder the charges of the rector. The only link which remained between the church of Chastleton and Oseney was the right of patronage and the payment of a 40s. pension to the abbey. Oseney retained the demesne of three virgates, but surrendered to the vicar the rectory farm buildings, the tithe barn and a smallholding at Brookend.

The charter which records the consolidation of the rectory and the vicarage speaks of the scarcity of parishioners, the sterility of the soil and the abandonment of cultivation. This is to some extent stylization on the part of the episcopal chancery. The action itself is more eloquent than the form of the charter.

¹² *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, ed. H. E. Salter, iv (O.H.S. xcvi), 330.

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This action by Oseney was a belated attempt to cut its losses, for the rot had set in at least twenty years earlier. Nor can there have been any improvement in conditions during the remainder of the 15th century. In 1469, although there was now no land remaining in the hands of the lord, there were still only four tenants. One of these held 3 virgates, one $2\frac{1}{2}$ virgates, one 2 virgates and one $8\frac{1}{2}$ virgates. These groupings were the same in 1499. Brookend had ceased to exist as a hamlet, it was now merely a group of farms.

The depopulation of Brookend is probably to be explained by the impoverishment of the soil. It is noticeable that the best piece of land, and that having the highest rent, was the easiest to let. This was the 2 virgates which in 1279 had been held freely by Henry le Knith. When the abbey obtained the freehold the land was let for 26s. 8d. Three-quarters of a virgate of the remainder of the freehold land had a rent of 13s. 4d. in 1363. The opinion has already been ventured that this free land was the vestige of a former demesne. Some confirmation for this view is found in the entry in the court roll of 1446 which describes the tenement attached to the two virgates as 'the site of the manor'. The superior quality of these two virgates is proved by the fact that they were never long in the hand of the lord and that it was never necessary for their tenant to amalgamate them with other holdings to make ends meet. By contrast the large farm of $8\frac{1}{2}$ virgates which had emerged by 1469 was made up of the land which nobody wanted; quantity had to compensate for quality.

It is likely that early in the decline of Brookend there was a movement from arable farming to pastoral activities. In May 1441 when Richard Faulkner surrendered the 2 virgates which we have identified as being the best land in Brookend, his chattels were impounded to meet the cost of building repairs. He had only 12 acres under crops, although the whole holding totalled at least 64 acres. But even as a pastoralist he was not rich; the livestock seized from him comprised 3 cows, 2 calves, 16 ewes, 14 lambs, 2 horses and 2 foals. Sheep-houses are frequently among the buildings described in the court rolls as being in need of repair. The decline of arable cultivation is well-evidenced by the end of the century, when it was impossible to stop outsiders from grazing their sheep within the lordship. Richard Palmer of Moreton in Marsh was amerced for trespassing with his sheep in 1486, 1488 and 1490; in the last year he had 240 sheep within the lordship illegally.

Whether the conversion of arable to pasture was accompanied by the enclosure of the land it is not possible to say. The court rolls contain a number of references to the breaking down of hedges, but this is not proof of any large-scale enclosure movement. The editor of the *Domesday of Enclosures* is mistaken in his identification of the Grove, which is there mentioned as

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being a scene of enclosure.¹³ This is not Grove in Brookend, but Grove in the parish of Sandford St. Martin.

This paper has described something of the short, and probably uneventful, history of the village or hamlet of Brookend. Its intention has been to show that the end of the village was not brought about spectacularly or in a manner of which the moralist may disapprove. It did not disappear overnight as a consequence of the ravages of the Black Death; within a decade of that event hardly a trace of the damage was still visible. It was not pulled down during the 15th century by hard-hearted monks to make way for sheep; the opposite is true; the monks long sought to prevent the pulling down of houses or their conversion into sheep-houses.

The end of the village was brought about by a reversal of the processes which had given birth to it. This land had been the last land in the parish to be cleared during the 12th century. It was probably marginal land which was only then taken up because of the growing size of the population. Three centuries later the wheel had turned the full circle. The soil was tired after being long exploited with little put back in return. The population of England was at what was probably its lowest ebb in the Middle Ages. Opportunities elsewhere were greater than the prosperity which faced the husbandman fighting the poor soil of Brookend. He went elsewhere. Brookend had outlived its usefulness.¹⁴

¹³ *Domesday of Enclosures*, ed. I. S. Leadam (London 1897), 329.

¹⁴ The University of Wales has generously contributed to the cost of publication of this article.