

Four Oxfordshire Anglo-Saxon Charter Boundaries

By JANET COOPER

SUMMARY

A re-examination of the boundary clauses of four Anglo-Saxon charters, for Whitehill, Shipton-on-Cherwell, Water Eaton and Cutteslowe, shows that the boundaries of three of the estates changed during the Middle Ages. Only the changes in the Cutteslowe boundary can be dated, and the others presumably took place in the 11th or 12th century, before parish boundaries were firmly established.

Descriptions of the boundaries of four estates on the west bank of the Cherwell just north of Oxford survive in 10th- and 11th-century charters: Water Eaton (904), Whitehill (1004), Cutteslowe (1004), and Shipton-on-Cherwell (1005).¹ The bounds were discussed by Grundy in 1933,² but his conclusions need revision. For the charters of 1004 and 1005 he used the inferior texts printed in Kemble's *Codex Diplomaticus* rather than those edited in the Oxford Historical Society's editions of the St. Frideswide's and Eynsham cartularies, and he attempted to apply the bounds of Water Eaton to Wood Eaton on the east bank of the Cherwell. Moreover, later medieval and early modern evidence, not known to Grundy, throws light on some of the boundary marks and makes it clear that the boundaries of three of the four estates altered between the later Anglo-Saxon period and the 18th century, when maps and other evidence for parish boundaries become available. The four boundaries are also interesting because they are for two sets of neighbouring estates: Whitehill and Shipton shared a boundary, as did Water Eaton and Cutteslowe, but despite the common boundaries there are few common boundary marks.

Three of the estates under discussion did not become independent parishes. Whitehill was part of Tackley parish in the Middle Ages, and probably also in the Anglo-Saxon period when Tackley had a large church which may have been a minster.³ The village was deserted in the 16th century, so that Whitehill did not become a civil parish in the 19th century, and its boundaries are therefore not shown on the early Ordnance Survey maps. They are, however, known from an estate map of 1605.⁴ Water Eaton was a hamlet of Kidlington until it became a civil parish in the mid 19th century;⁵ its boundaries have been drastically altered in the present century by the growth of Oxford and the consequent reorganisation of its neighbouring parishes. Cutteslowe was part of St. Edward's parish in Oxford in 1341 and had probably earlier been in St. Frideswide's parish, Oxford.⁶ After the closure of St. Edward's church in the later 14th century Cutteslowe became an extra-parochial area and remained one, although closely associated with Wolvercote,⁷ until it

¹ *Place-Names of Oxfordshire* (E.P.N.S.), ii, 485-7, 489.

² G. B. Grundy, *Saxon Oxon.* (Oxon. Rec. Soc. xii), 24-6, 55-8, 61-3, 85-91.

³ *V.C.H. Oxon.* xi, 194, 296; Blair and McKay, below pp.25-45.

⁴ *Corpus Christi Coll. Mun.*, Langdon Maps I. 5: published in *Sixteen Old Maps of Oxon. Properties*, ed. J. L. G. Mowat (1888).

⁵ *Census* 1801-1901.

⁶ *Nonarum Inquisitiones* (Rec. Com.), 142; *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 381.

⁷ E.g. *Oxon. Rec. Office*, MS. Wills Oxon. 181, f. 56; *ibid.* land tax assess.; *Oxf. Jnl.* 12 Aug. 1769.

became a civil parish in the mid 19th century; it was absorbed into the new civil parish of Gosford and Water Eaton in 1932.⁸ No map of Cuttesslowe or Water Eaton survives before the first edition of the large-scale Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1876.⁹ The fourth estate, Shipton-on-Cherwell, was a separate parish until it was joined with Thrupp, its southern neighbour, in 1955.¹⁰ The earliest surviving map is one which, although it was printed with a sale catalogue in 1803, was made between 1768 and 1785.¹¹

The Anglo-Saxon boundaries, and the evidence for later alterations, will be discussed estate by estate.

WHITEHILL, 1004

of ealdon hensing' lade – 'from the old 'hensing' way or water-way'. The first element of 'hensing' is the same as the 'en' or 'hen' in Enslow bridge, which was called Eneslade bridge in 1512.¹² The 'hensing' way was presumably the rather straight section of the Cherwell at the south-east corner of the later township, shown on the map of 1605. Possibly there was in the 11th century another branch of the Cherwell to the east of 'hensing lade', but no trace of it survives, or survived in 1605.

ofer þe clyf on þam stennithanwege – 'over the cliff to the stony way'. The cliff is marked in the south-east corner of the township on the map of 1605.¹³ The way must be the old road from Woodstock to Bicester, which ran along the eastern part of the southern boundary before turning north to join the road on the line of the modern Chipping Norton to Bicester road and cross the Cherwell at Enslow bridge.¹⁴

of þan wege on langan hlaewe – 'from the way to the long barrow'. The barrow, still just visible as a crop mark on aerial photographs, was just west of the Banbury road; it was marked as 'long bank' on the map of 1605. This section of the boundary thus crossed the Banbury road, although the road itself is not mentioned.

of þam hlaewe on þa porte strete – 'from the barrow to the port street'. Grundy identified 'port street' with the Banbury road, an obvious interpretation as the Banbury road is called 'port street' in the Cuttesslowe charter, but, as has been pointed out above, the boundary had already crossed the Banbury road to reach the barrow, and it makes better sense here to identify the 'port street' with Akeman Street, which formed the northern boundary of the township. This interpretation assumes that the western boundary did not actually follow the Banbury road but ran just to the west of it, and the map of 1605 does indeed show a narrow Banbury road just inside the township. 'Port street' would have to be translated 'public road', rather than 'road to a market'.

of þare strete on cere willam stream – 'from the road to the Cherwell'. In fact the line of Akeman Street runs to the Cherwell, but by 1605 the eastern end of the road had disappeared. If the identification of the 'port street' with Akeman Street suggested above is correct (and if it is not, we must assume that the charter ignores Akeman Street while following its line), this clause implies that its eastern end was already disused in 1005.

swa æfter streame þæt hit scylt eft into hensing lade – 'so along the stream that it runs back into hensing lade'. The Cherwell forms the eastern boundary of the parish; 'hensing lade' brings the boundary back to its first mark.

⁸ Census 1931.

⁹ O. S. Maps 1/2,500, Oxon. XXVII. 15; XXXIII. 2, 3, 6, 7 (1881 edn.).

¹⁰ Census 1961.

¹¹ Bodl. G. A. fol. A 266 (41); Oxon. Rec. Office, CH XI/1.

¹² Corpus Christi Coll. Oxf. MS. 320, f. 25.

¹³ *Sixteen Old Maps*.

¹⁴ Bodl. G. A. fol. A 266 (41).

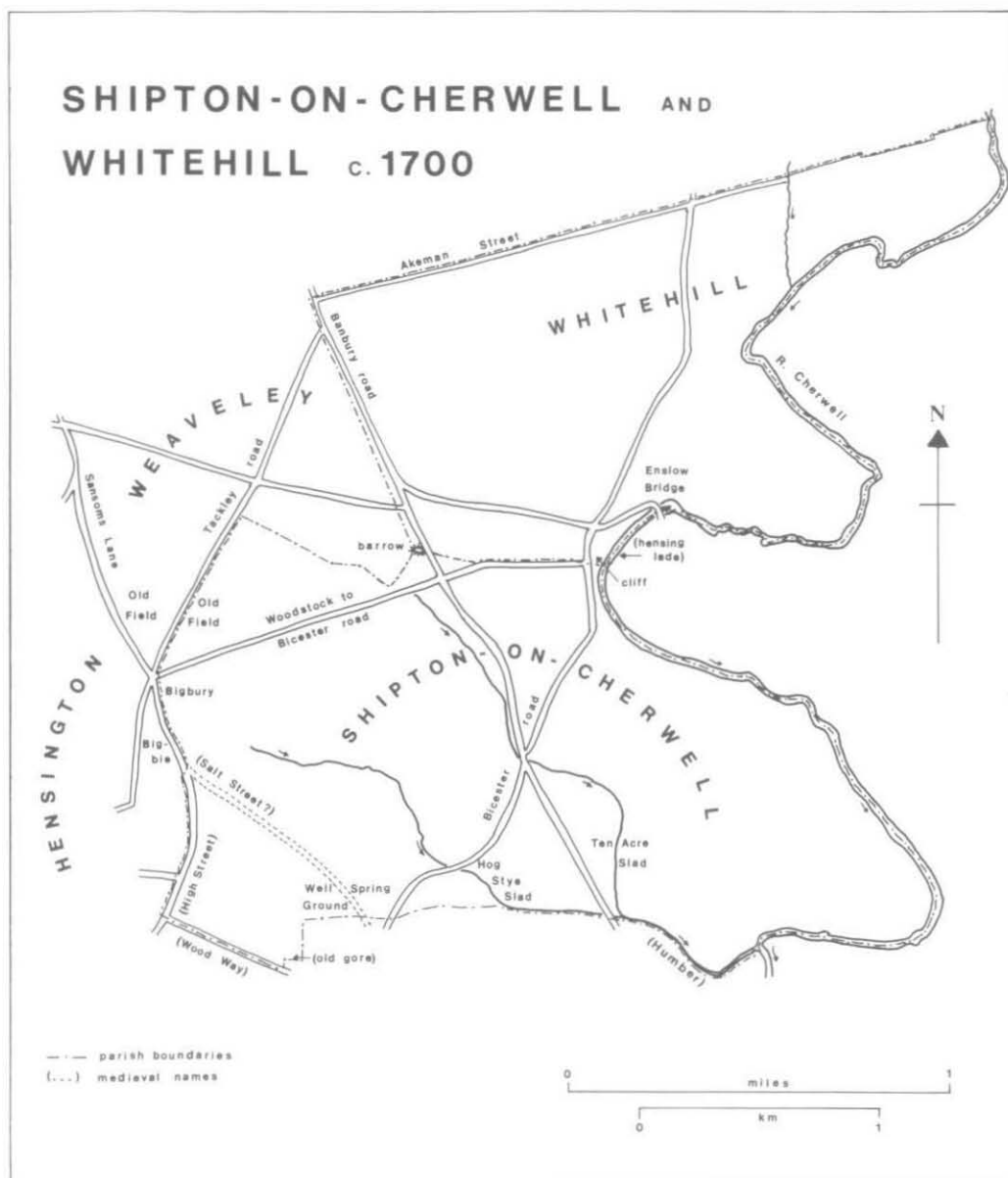


Fig. 1. Shipton-on-Cherwell, Whitehill, and part of Hensington c. 1700, from maps of Whitehill in 1605 (*Sixteen Old Maps of Oxon. Properties*, ed. J. L. G. Mowat), Hensington in 1750 (Bodl. MS. Rolls Oxon. 103), and Shipton-on-Cherwell in the later 18th century (Bodl. G. A. fol. A 266).

SHIPTON-ON-CHERWELL, 1005

of Cearwylle on Humbran – ‘from the Cherwell to the Humber’. The boundary, like the Whitehill one, starts in the south-east corner of the parish where it leaves the Cherwell and follows a small tributary stream, which must have been called the Humber in the 11th century.

andlang Humbran on þæt slæd – ‘along the Humber to the valley’. The stream formed the southern boundary of the later parish until a point midway between the modern Banbury and Bicester roads. There the stream and its valley, which was called Hog Sty Slad in the 18th century¹⁵ and gave its name to the modern Shipton Slade Farm, turn north. The most likely interpretation of this clause is that the valley is the point at which the boundary leaves the stream. There is, however, another valley, just east of the Banbury road, which was called Ten Acre Slad in the 18th century¹⁶ and which Grundy identified as the ‘slæd’ of the charter boundary.

þanon on þa stræt – ‘from there to the street’. Grundy identified the street with the Banbury road, but if the identification of the valley with Hog Sty or Shipton Slade is correct, the boundary has already crossed the Banbury road. In the Middle Ages, two other main roads crossed the southern boundary of Shipton: the surviving Bicester road which runs from south-west to north-east across the parish, and the lost Salt Street which appears, from the evidence of medieval and 16th-century field names in Shipton-on-Cherwell and Thrupp, to have run from south-east to north-west;¹⁷ the two roads must have crossed each other near the boundary. Either road would fit the topography, but the fact that the Salt Street was called ‘street’ in the Middle Ages while the Bicester road was called the Ridgeway¹⁸ perhaps makes the Salt Street the more likely identification. In either case, the boundary mark was about two-thirds of the way along the southern boundary of the parish.

of þære stræte on Bradewyllon – ‘from the street to the broad streams.’ The broad streams were presumably in the field west of the Bicester road called in the 18th century Well Spring Ground, although its 16th- and 17th-century name seems to have been ‘the furlong that the path goes over to Hensington Cross’.¹⁹ At this point the boundary turns south.

on þone ealdan garan – ‘to the old gore’. A gore is a wedge-shaped field, here, as Grundy said, the point at which the boundary turns east again, near the modern Perdiswell (a name not recorded before the 20th century).

of þam ealdan garan andlang þæs wudu weges – ‘from the old gore along the wood way’. The wood way must, as Grundy thought, have been the lane which runs along the western end of the southern boundary.

on þa heh stræte – ‘to the high street’. The high street was presumably the road, now a green lane, which runs up the southern part of the western boundary of the modern parish; in 1688 it was part of the highway from Shipston-on-Stour to Oxford.²⁰ Again Grundy’s identification is correct, but he was not correct in assuming that the boundary ran north along the road. The following marks, notably ‘bican byrig’, make it clear that the high street merely marked the point at which the boundary left the wood way. Somewhere about the south-west corner of the parish the boundary has changed, moving to the east.

of þære stræte on þone weg þe scylt to Bladene – ‘from the street to the way which leads to Bladon’. This section of the boundary presumably ran across country. Bladon could be either the

¹⁵ Ibid.; Oxon. Rec. Office, CH XI/1.

¹⁶ Bodl. G. A. fol. A 266 (41); Oxon. Rec. Office, CH XI/1.

¹⁷ Magd. Coll. Mun., Shipton-on-Cherwell 7^b, 6^a, 14^b, 24, 26; Oxon. Rec. Office, MS. Oxf. Dioc. d 16, f.43.

¹⁸ Magd. Coll. Mun., Shipton-on-Cherwell 7^b, 21, 31; New Coll. Arch., 12653.

¹⁹ New Coll. Arch., 487, 495.

²⁰ Oxon. Rec. Office, Cal. Quarter Sessions Rec. viii, p. 512.

village or the River Evenlode, then called the Bladon.²¹ In either case the road must have run north-south and may well have been an extension of the modern road from Hensington to Sturdy's Castle in Tackley parish.

þonne andlang weges to þam hagan – 'then along the way to the inclosure'. There seems to be no reason to translate 'hagan' as 'game inclosure' as Grundy did; it is much more likely to have been a close or yard associated with Bicanbyrig, the next boundary mark. Its site cannot now be identified.

of þam hagan to Bicanbyrig – 'from the inclosure to Bica's farmstead or fortified house'. The name was recorded as Bikbury in the 13th century²² and survived as Bigbury or Bigbie on later 18th-century maps of Shipton-on-Cherwell and Hensington.²³ These make it quite clear that it lay near the crossroads half-way up the western boundary of Shipton.

of Bicanbyrig on þa ealdan dic – 'from Bica's farmstead or house to the old ditch'. The old ditch cannot be identified, but its presence among the boundary marks suggests that the boundary had still not returned to the roads which it followed in the 18th century.

of þære dic on þone weg – 'from the ditch to the way'. In the Middle Ages, and later, three roads led northwards from Bigbury: Sansoms Lane, the road to Tackley followed by the modern parish boundary, and the old road to Bicester. Of these the last is unlikely to have formed the boundary here, as it formed the boundary further north-east. If the way was on the line of the modern road to Tackley it would have been an extension of the 'way which leads to Bladon' further south on the western boundary. Identifying the way with this road would have the advantage of making the 11th-century boundary follow the same line as the modern one. On the other hand, if the boundary followed Sansoms Lane, running west of the later boundary, it would make more sense of the next clause.

andlang weges to wiðigleas gemæro – 'along the way to the Weaveley boundary'. Weaveley was a hamlet of Tackley parish. If the 'way' of the last clause was the modern Tackley road, Shipton bordered Weaveley on part of the west as well as on the north, as it did in the 18th century; the Weaveley boundary of this clause would then mean that part of the Weaveley boundary which leaves the road and runs across the fields. If, however, Sansoms Lane formed the north-western boundary in the 11th century, Shipton would have bordered Hensington on the north-west. 'The Weaveley boundary' would then mean the point at which the Shipton boundary turned east, bordering Weaveley. Such a boundary would remove into Shipton the triangle of Weaveley which in the 18th century lay between Shipton and Hensington and which, like the neighbouring field in Shipton, was called Old Field.²⁴ This identification would, however, imply a drastic reorganisation of parish boundaries involving land in Shipton, Hensington and Weaveley.

andlang mores on langan hlæw – 'along the moor to the long barrow'. It seems reasonable to emend 'mores' to 'mæres' and to translate 'along the boundary to the long barrow', particularly as there is nothing on the western part of the northern boundary which might reasonably be called a moor. The long barrow was presumably the barrow just west of the Banbury road which appears in the Whitehill bounds.

of langan hlæwe andlang weges to þam ealdan Cristelmæle – 'from the long barrow along the way to the old cross'. The way must be the old road from Woodstock to Bicester, the 'stennitthan wege' of the Whitehill charter, which is shown on the 18th-century map of Shipton.²⁵ The old cross must have stood at the point at which the road turns north, leaving the boundary.

²¹ *Place-Names of Oxon.* i, 7.

²² Magd. Coll. Mun., 10^b, 15^b, 17, 24.

²³ Bodl. MS. Rolls Oxon. 103; G. A. fol. A 266(41).

²⁴ P.R.O. C 3/426, no. 9; Oxon. Rec. Office, CH XI/1; Bodl. G. A. fol. A 266(41).

²⁵ Bodl. G. A. fol. A266(41).

of þam Cristelmæle on Cyrwyll – ‘from the cross to the Cherwell’. This must be the stretch of boundary described in the Whitehill charter as ‘over the cliff’. It is interesting that in the Shipton charter the river is called the Cherwell and there is no suggestion of a separate stream called *hensing lade*.

andlang Cyrwyll eft on Humbran – ‘along the Cherwell back to the Humber.’ This completes the bounds; the Cherwell forms the eastern boundary of the parish.

It is clear from this discussion that at some point after 1005 the western boundary of the Shipton estate was altered, probably quite drastically. Although Shipton is comparatively well documented from the 13th century onwards, there is no documentary evidence of this alteration, which is likely therefore to have taken place in the later 11th century or the 12th.

WATER EATON, 904

Ærest from wifes lase – ‘first from Wifel’s stream’. The personal name Wifel has survived in Wilsey, a meadow in Marston parish near the south-west corner of Water Eaton.²⁶ The boundary must therefore start in the south-west corner of the township, Wifel’s stream being the stream on the north or east of Wilsey.

þæt swa up andlang riðiges þæt hit cymð to fagan floran – ‘and so up along the streamlet until it comes to the tessellated pavement’. The streamlet was presumably the one which still marks the boundary between Water Eaton and Cutteslowe; the tessellated pavement has not been certainly located, but presumably lay at the point at which the boundary turns west, at the north-east corner of Cutteslowe.

and þonne swa andlang slædes be þam twam lytlan beorgan – ‘And then along the valley by the two little barrows’. There is a slight suggestion of a valley by the present north-east corner of Cutteslowe, and that may have been more pronounced in the 10th century. Two little barrows survive near the modern boundary just east of the Banbury road, but to assume that the charter refers to two other barrows, further east than the surviving ones, makes better sense of the following boundary mark. Medieval field names and modern aerial photographs demonstrate that numerous barrows survived along the Banbury road into the Middle Ages.

þæt hit cymð to wulfunes treow stealle will – ‘that it comes to Wulfwun’s plantation (or grove) spring’. Neither the grove nor the spring can now be identified. There was a grove immediately north of the Cutteslowe farmhouse (now St. Frideswide Farm) in the 17th century,²⁷ but groves and plantations can move over the years. If the spring was the same as the ‘trill’ spring of the Cutteslowe charter, it was east of the Banbury road, and must indeed have been some distance east of it, as there are no springs near the road. The medieval village of Cutteslowe lay almost immediately north of St Frideswide Farm, where a hollow way is still just visible on air photographs and large quantities of pottery can be picked up from the plough-soil. The Water Eaton boundary might be expected to turn north before reaching the village.

an suna þæt sea þwyres ofer þæt furlang – ‘and immediately from there diagonally across the furlong’. The boundary has probably turned north or north-east.

þæt on þa þyrnan westewarde þær se mycla þorn stod – ‘Then to the westerly thorn or brambles, where the great thorn stood.’ An unidentifiable boundary mark.

þæt swa on fugelmere – ‘so then to the bird lake or pool’. This was probably near the

²⁶ *Place-Names of Oxon.* i, 181–2; O.S. Map 6" Oxon. XXXIII (1st edn.).

²⁷ Deed of 1588 in possession of Mr. R. Sawyer, Water Eaton Manor, Oxford.

south-east corner of Gosford where a pool is marked on 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps, and where the ground is still very marshy.

þæt þonne a ondlang dices oð þæt hit cymeð to horwyllan – ‘thence always along the ditch until it comes to the muddy stream or spring’. The old boundary between Water Eaton and Gosford is still marked by a good deal of wet and muddy ground; the bounds are presumably going along that boundary.

þæt swa ondlang riðies þæt hit cymeð to cearwyllan – ‘that so along the streamlet till it comes to the Cherwell’. This streamlet has disappeared, but it seems reasonable to assume that it ran on or near the line of the northern boundary of the 19th-century township.

þonne mæreð hit cerwelle seoððan – ‘thereafter the Cherwell bounds it.’ The Cherwell forms the eastern boundary.

Despite the problems caused by the four marks after the tessellated pavement being unidentifiable, it is clear that the 10th-century bounds describe an estate different from the 19th-century parish. The later history of Water Eaton shows that the medieval estate was created by Oseney abbey from the original 5-hide estate recorded in 904 and a 3-hide estate in Cutteslowe which Roger d’Irvi, its Domesday overlord, or his successors gave to the collegiate church of St. George’s in the Castle, Oxford, from which it passed to Oseney abbey in 1149.²⁸ On grounds of size alone it seems reasonable to assume that the original Water Eaton estate did not extend much further west than the Banbury road, and the charter bounds seem to fit an estate consisting only of the eastern part of the later township.

CUTTESLOWE, 1004

Erest of þere portestrete on trilwille – ‘first from the port street to the ‘trill’ spring’. The port street here must be the Banbury road, which formed the western boundary of the later estate. The bounds thus start at the north-west corner of the parish. The ‘trill’ spring is not now identifiable, but it may have been the same as the Wulfwun’s grove spring of the Water Eaton charter. It must have been east of the Banbury road.

of ðere wille on þet ripig – ‘from the spring to the streamlet’. The streamlet presumably formed the eastern part of the northern boundary, an area still full of drainage ditches. It might, however, be the same as the streamlet of the Water Eaton boundary clause, and if so formed the eastern boundary of Cutteslowe.

of þam riðie to þes biscopes gemeron – ‘from the streamlet to the bishop’s boundary’. Water Eaton had belonged to the bishop of Worcester in the late 9th century,²⁹ so the bishop’s boundary is presumably the Water Eaton boundary. If it means a common boundary it must refer to the eastern boundary of Cutteslowe, marked by the streamlet in the Water Eaton bounds, but it is possible that it refers to the point at which the two boundaries diverge, at the south-east corner of Cutteslowe.

of þem gemarun in to wifeshille – ‘from the boundary to Wifel’s stream’. Wifel’s stream, which appears in the Water Eaton boundary, is one of the streams round Wilsey, immediately south of the Cutteslowe estate.

on þed flad (presumably an error for *slad*) – ‘to the valley’. The Ordnance Survey map³⁰ marks a slight valley running north-west from about the north-west corner of Wilsey, but the landscaping of the modern Cutteslowe Park has destroyed any evidence on the ground.

of þam slade on wyfeleshille – ‘from the valley to Wifel’s hill’. The land rises from the Cherwell towards the Banbury road, and this was presumably Wifel’s hill.

²⁸ Oseney Cart. iv (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xcvi), pp. 36, 38.

²⁹ M. Gelling, *Early Charters of the Thames Valley*, pp. 126–8.

³⁰ O. S. Map 1/10,000 SP 51 SW (1981 edn.).

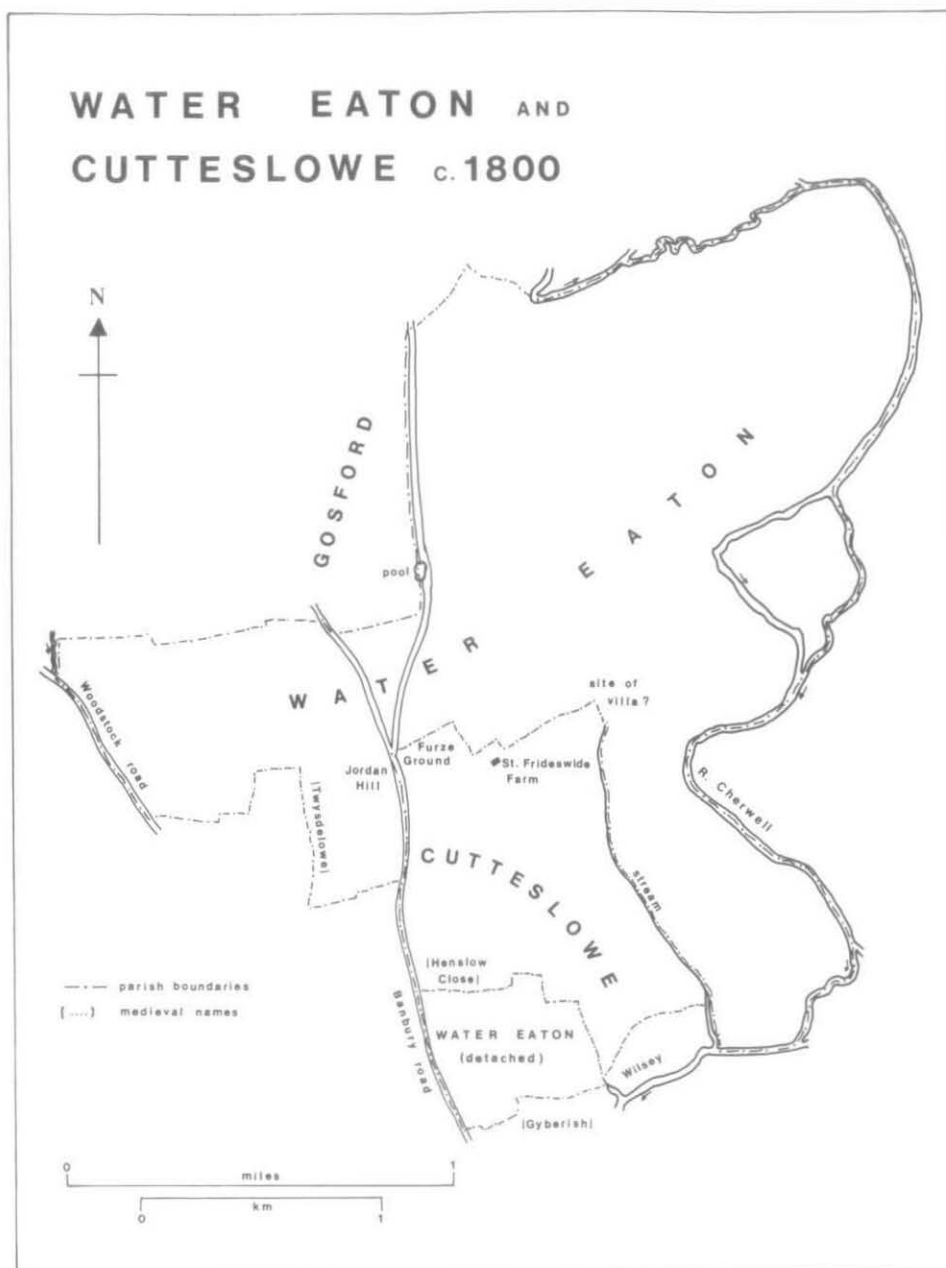


Fig. 2. Water Eaton and Cutteslowe c. 1800, from T. Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767), O. S. Maps 1/2,500, Oxon. XXVII. 15; XXXIII. 2, 3, 6, 7 (1881 edn.), and documentary evidence.

of þare hille on hyne – 'from the hill to?' The last boundary mark is unintelligible as it stands. It is possible, perhaps, that it is a corrupt form of the element 'hen' which occurs in the 16th-century Henslow or Henslade close in the detached part of Water Eaton, just south of Cutteslowe and just east of the Banbury road.³¹ A boundary mark in that position would bring the boundary nearly back to the Banbury road.

The interpretation of the Cutteslowe and Water Eaton charters suggested here implies straighter boundaries on the north and south of Cutteslowe than existed in the 19th century. The alterations in the boundaries were probably the result of exchanges of land between Oseney abbey, St. Frideswide's priory and Godstow abbey in the Middle Ages, and between the lords of Cutteslowe and Water Eaton in the 16th century. In 1359 Oseney granted St. Frideswide's 17 ac. of arable land next to the prior's manor in Cutteslowe;³² this could well have been all or most of the field in the north-west of Cutteslowe, later called Furze Ground. In exchange St. Frideswide's granted Oseney land in the north of Water Eaton and 8 ac. called Gyberichs in Cutteslowe field. If Gyberichs was in the extra-parochial area of Cutteslowe this grant would have further altered the boundary; but it seems to have been in Cutteslowe field in the detached part of Water Eaton, for there was a Gyberish furlong in the north of St. Giles's parish.³³ In 1358 Godstow gave St. Frideswide's land in Wolvercote field called Twysdelowe,³⁴ a grant which seems to have made Twysdelowe, west of Jordan Hill, into a detached part of Cutteslowe. In 1588, however, William Lenthall of Cutteslowe sold Twysdelowe to William Frere of Water Eaton, and thereafter the area, estimated at 40 ac., was considered to be in Water Eaton. At the same time Frere sold Lenthall Henslow or Henslade Close (6 ac.) in Water Eaton, and that close was part of Cutteslowe in 1636.³⁵

The four estates discussed here may be atypical in the extent to which their boundaries changed after the 10th or 11th century, and certainly the fact that both Water Eaton and Cutteslowe were held in demesne by religious houses made the changes in their boundaries easier, as they paid no tithe to a parish church. Nevertheless, the discussion does demonstrate the importance of using later medieval and even early modern evidence, as well as topographical evidence, to elucidate charter boundaries, and it serves as a warning that it must not be too easily assumed that an Anglo-Saxon boundary will follow the line of a 19th-century one.

³¹ Deed of 1588 in possession of Mr. R. Sawyer.

³² *Oseney Cart.* iv, pp. 102–3.

³³ *Early Hist. St. John's Coll.* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. new ser. i), 518.

³⁴ *Godstow Eng. Reg.* i (E.E.T.S. orig. ser. 142), pp. 379–80.

³⁵ Deed of 1588 in possession of Mr. R. Sawyer.