

The Anglo-Saxon Estate of *Readanora* and the Manor of Pyrton, Oxfordshire

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SUMMARY

This study of Pyrton (OS 688956) covers the period from 887 to the late 10th century. There are three main topics: the evidence that the Anglo-Saxon estate of Readanora and the manor of Pyrton were two separate entities, the one preceding the other; the meaning of the place-name Readanora; and the implications of the place-name Pyrton. The study considers the charter evidence for the estate of Readanora; its connection with the ecclesiastical community of Worcester; the charter boundaries of the manor of Pyrton; identification of four ora place-names within the estate; and the influence of soil types on place-name formation.

THE ANGLO-SAXON ESTATE OF READANORA

There has been much recent work on Anglo-Saxon complex estates, and how they broke down with manorialisation. This case-study shows this process in fine detail, especially in tracing the transition from a 'natural landscape' landscape of land-units to an 'estate-management' one.

Travelling through south-east Oxfordshire today, one can drive through Pyrton (11 miles south-east of Oxford) in seconds, and scarcely notice the village. The origins of this place-name, and why it was changed from *Readanora* to Pyrton sometime after the end of the 9th century, have been obscure: this work seeks to shed light on this problem. In the past, it has been assumed that these two names related to the same place and that there was a name-change, for some reason, by the late 10th century. This article will argue that the place-name *Readanora* referred to a large estate in the mid Anglo-Saxon period, whereas the place-name Pyrton evolved when the older estate system was superseded by manorialisation. At the time when Oxfordshire formally came into existence,¹ Pyrton was the name given to one of its hundreds, possibly because the place-name *Readanora* had fallen into disuse.

The estate of *Readanora* began at present-day Standhill in the north (see Fig. 2). It continued past Golder and Clare, then descended down to and across the valley floor, up the scarp slope of the hill to Christmas Common, then down the dipslope to Stonor and Assendon. In the Chiltern hills and other similar areas, in Surrey for example, the practice was to allocate the land in long, narrow strips in order to make best use and fairest distribution of pasture, meadow, arable land, differing soil types and woodland. This strongly defined pattern is clearly visible on the Chilterns, where the land-units are at right-angles to the hills. The estate of *Readanora* was particularly fortunate in its rich diversity of soils and different types of woodland.

Three maps have been included in this section: Fig. 1 shows the location of Pyrton village and its parish church of St. Mary's today, for familiarisation and comparative purposes. Fig. 2 is a conjectural map of the mid Anglo-Saxon estate of *Readanora*, from the evidence currently available. Fig. 3 gives a more detailed interpretation of the late 10th-century charter bounds manor of Pyrton, as the charter evidence is more specific. The evidence on

¹ J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (1994), 102.

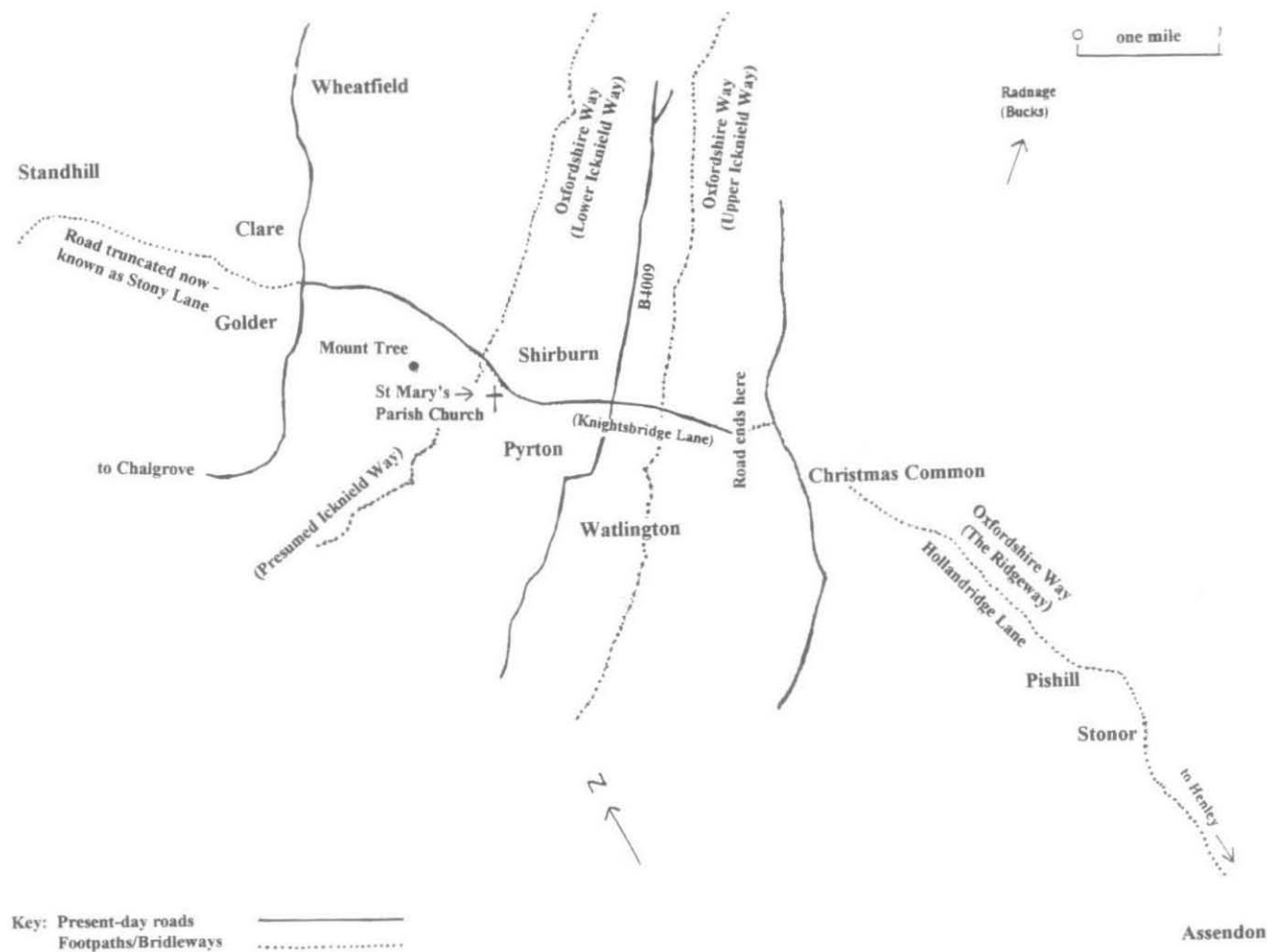


Fig. 1. Present-day Pyrton.

which Figs. 1–3 are based has been collated from charters,² a map of Pyrton hundred,³ two perambulations,⁴ topographical, geological and place-name evidence, fieldwork and a current Ordnance Survey map of the area.⁵ There are four charters (S.104, S.107, S.217, S.1354), of which two (S.104 and S.217) have vernacular boundary clauses; there is also an unattached set of bounds (S.1568).

As a first step, it is necessary to look briefly at some background information, against which the charter evidence can be placed. An important feature of the landscape in this region is the Thames and there is much evidence to suggest that it was used for travel and transport of goods from an early date. Grave goods in the area from the period 580–630, for example, have produced jewellery and elaborate glassware from Kent, copper alloy cauldrons from Francia and metal bowls from the eastern Mediterranean.⁶ There is no doubt that the upper Thames region grew steadily in importance throughout the Anglo-Saxon period as an economic and cultural corridor.

Throughout years of political upheaval and change, two centres juxtaposed in the area remained constant: Benson and Dorchester. Benson was an important royal complex and a central place for purposes of law, administration and tax gathering;⁷ the estate of *Readanora* was probably administered from here. Land belonging to Benson stretched as far as Henley-on-Thames,⁸ and in 1086 it was still the most valuable royal manor in Oxfordshire. Nearby Dorchester had been a Roman town, which had fallen into disuse, but re-emerged significantly in the 630s as an episcopal seat, after the conversion to Christianity.⁹ At the time of the 887 charter (discussed below), Benson and Dorchester were part of the kingdom of Mercia.

Henley-on-Thames was the port used for the transportation of goods to and from London; it was also an off-loading point for goods to be taken overland to destinations inland and further north. The most direct overland route to Benson from Henley (approximately 11.5 miles away) was via Nettlebed, although there is a steep hill to negotiate at Bix. Another major route for transportation of goods started from Henley, came up through *Assendene* (Assendon) and *Ruggeway* (later Hollandridge Lane) to *Readanora* (Christmas Common), and along *cnihta bryge* (Knightsbridge Lane) to *Stan(ge)delf* (Standhill), at the northern end of the estate (see Fig. 2). From here the road linked into other interconnecting routes to Islip and Oxford, among other places, and eventually it led to Worcester.

As can be seen on Fig. 2, there were two important trackways which passed through the estate, both of which were pre-Saxon roads.¹⁰ The first, discussed above, began in Henley and went to *Stan(ge)delf*. The second of these routes was the Icknield Way, which led from the Wash in the prosperous area of East Anglia to Salisbury Plain.¹¹ There were two sections of the Icknield Way, the upper and lower. The lower Icknield Way, which came from the Chinnor area, ran through the centre of the estate and carried on towards Benson and Dorchester. The upper Icknield Way went further south to Goring and Benson and then on

² The Anglo-Saxon charters cited here for *Readanora*/Pyrton are listed by their 'S-number' in P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography* (1968).

³ *V.C.H. Oxon.* viii, 128.

⁴ Perambulations of 1790 and 1847 in Bodl. MS. Ducat a.1.

⁵ OS Chiltern Hills South (West Sheet).

⁶ Blair, *op. cit.* note 1, p. 29.

⁷ *Ibid.* 49.

⁸ F. Emery, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape* (1974), 65.

⁹ Blair, *op. cit.* note 1, p. 39.

¹⁰ Emery, *op. cit.* note 8, p. 64.

¹¹ The Viatores, *Roads in the South-East Midlands* (1964), 49.

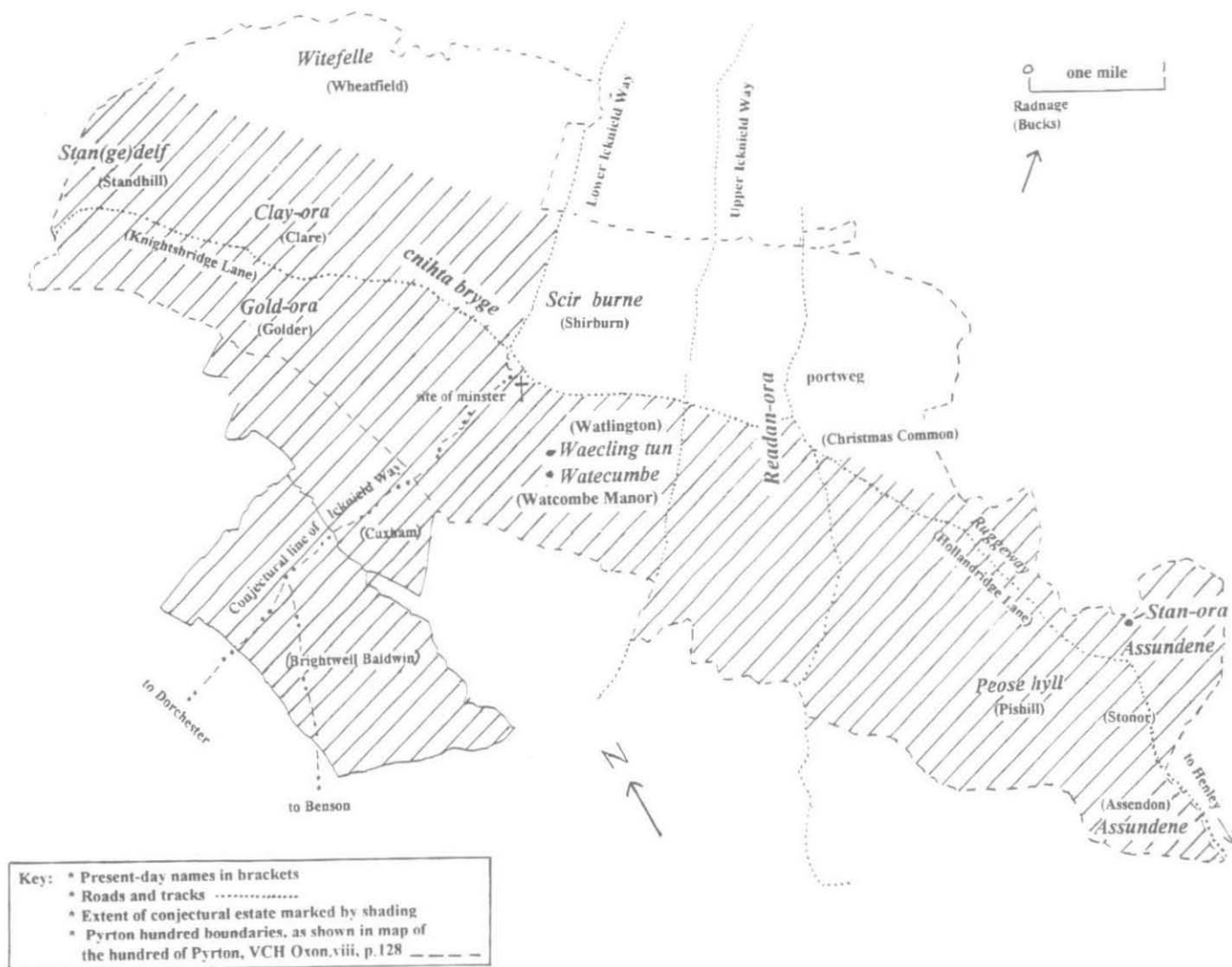


Fig. 2. Conjectural map of the mid Anglo-Saxon estate of *Readanora*, from charter evidence.

to the west country. The minster church of St. Mary at *Readanora*, held by the bishopric of Worcester in mid Anglo-Saxon times, stood adjacent to the crossroads of these two trackways. The distance from this church to Benson is approximately 6 miles and to Dorchester 9.5 miles.

Fig. 2 is a conjectural map of *Readanora* based on the charter evidence of 887 (S.217),¹² a grant to the bishopric of Worcester, and its wording confirms that the minster church of St. Mary's had already been in existence for some time at *Readanora*. In the charter, Aethelred ealdorman of the Mercians acknowledged that the land at Brightwell Baldwin and Watlington formed part of the *Readanora* estate and that an additional six men (slaves) were also being given, to belong to the church.¹³ It is difficult to establish the precise reason for this charter: it may have been returning land to Worcester after it had been usurped; it could have been to settle a dispute. Fig. 2 presents a fragmentary picture of the estate of *Readanora* from which pieces, inevitably, are missing.¹⁴ The full extent of the estate may never be known but perhaps more evidence can be added at a later date.

It is not possible to establish exactly when the estate began to be broken up, but two main factors can be suggested which probably contributed to its demise. First, it is evident from the development of bookland¹⁵ in the 10th century that rapid inroads were being made, on a wide scale, into these earlier large estates. Large tracts of land were being sub-divided into smaller estates and acquired by the rising thegnly class, or sometimes given to servants for faithful service.¹⁶ A second factor is that the bishopric of Worcester, which held *Readanora* in 887, was experiencing widespread landholding problems in the late 10th century. Oswald, bishop of Worcester 961–92, increasingly leased land to high ranking laymen for three lives, intending that it should revert to Worcester after that period. This arrangement was open to abuse and affected landholding badly: just under half the land Worcester had leased in the 10th century remained in laymen's possession in the late 11th century.¹⁷

Oswald was bishop of Worcester for 31 years, and also archbishop of York between the years 972 to 992. Emma Mason states that revenues from Worcester were used to boost York's finances.¹⁸ This only served to make land tenure more complex and weakened Worcester's control. The first reference to the manor of Pyrton, in a charter datable to 987 (S.1354), is an example of this. In it, Oswald leases land at Golder in Pyrton to his man Aethelmund for two lives. A church-scot of an acre's crop and an acre's hay is said to be payable to the church at Pyrton. This charter not only provides evidence of ancient minster status but also reflects the plurality of Worcester and York at this time, since it was awarded by Oswald in his capacity as archbishop of York. Holding land in plurality effectively diluted

¹² Fig. 3 was created from charter evidence of S.217 with the English bounds of Brightwell Baldwin (contiguous with the present parish boundary), the 10th-century charter bounds of the manor of Pyrton in S.1568 and the place-name evidence of *Readanora*.

¹³ A comparable augmentation of the lands of Bampton minster by King Eadwig (955–9) is recorded in a charter of 1069. Text printed by J.B. Davidson, 'On Some Anglo-Saxon Charters at Exeter', *Jnl. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.* xxxix (1883), 298–301; original reproduced in *Facsimiles of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts* (pt. 2) (Ordnance Survey, 1881), no. XVI.

¹⁴ Cuxham is included in the estate of *Readanora*, since it is evident from charter S.1379 that it was held by Dorchester. Cuxham is the piece of land between Brightwell Baldwin and Golder (both held by *Readanora*), and it would seem reasonable to assume that this island of land was also a part of the estate.

¹⁵ Sir F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (repr. 1989), 307.

¹⁶ There are two charters recording servants being given land in the 10th century. The first (S.1354) is datable to 987, granting land at Golder in Pyrton from Oswald to his man, Aethelmund. The second (S.1379) is at Cuxham, where the bishop of Dorchester gave a grant of land to Aelfstan, his man, in 995.

¹⁷ E. Mason, 'Change and Continuity in Eleventh Century Mercia', in R.A. Brown (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies VIII: Proc. of the Battle Conference* (1985).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Worcester's control and it was part of the reason the bishopric lost so much of its land. The 887 charter uses the name *Readanora*, whereas that of 987 calls the estate Pyrton, so it seems reasonable to conclude that the name changed between those dates.

It appears, from the charter evidence and from Domesday, that Worcester lost control of Pyrton between 987 and 1066. By 1086 the 40-hide manor had become the property of Archbishop Stigand of Canterbury. There is no way of establishing what happened in the intervening years, or how it was lost. One possibility is that the land may have been grabbed by one of the Danish magnates at the time of King Cnut. Whatever transpired, however, the problems Worcester had been encountering in the 10th century would not have helped to ease the situation.

Two charters relating to *Readanora*, allegedly 8th-century, have been identified as forgeries (S.104 and S.107) and may have been attempts either to prevent land from being usurped, or to regain Worcester's title to the land. Charter S.104 purports to be from King Offa to the church of St. Peter, Worcester, in 774, but its composition has been dated to the late 10th century.¹⁹ There is also a set of boundaries attaching to this charter, purporting to be those of the estate of *Readanora*. If the charter had been genuine, the bounds probably should have been those of a larger estate, yet the boundaries given are known to be those of the *feld* and woodland sections of the manor of Pyrton (the 40-hide estate mentioned at Domesday).²⁰ Clearly, therefore, this charter was written some time after the estate of *Readanora* had been sub-divided by manorialisation and the boundaries of the manor of Pyrton had been established. Yet although the charter (S.104) is spurious, the boundaries of the manor of Pyrton in the late 10th century are almost certainly authentic. As noted above, there is also another set of bounds for the manor of Pyrton without an accompanying charter (S.1568), and these have been used to create Fig. 3, since they are easier to follow and are also considered to be the most authoritative.²¹

THE LATE 10TH-CENTURY CHARTER BOUNDARIES OF THE MANOR OF PYRTON

Over the years there have been various attempts to piece together the Pyrton boundaries. Grundy,²² for instance, thought they included Watlington and Shirburn, but clearly they do not. Work completed more recently by A.H.J. Baines²³ has provided very useful comments on the Assendon part. As can be seen from Fig. 3, the bounds are in two halves: the manor of Pyrton including Standhill (*Stan(ge)delf*), Golder (*Gold-ora*), Clare (*Clay-ora*), and the detached woodland section which belonged to the estate. These boundaries also encompass virtually the whole route from *Stan(ge)delf* to *assundene*,²⁴ perhaps an indication that this was an important through-road.

The start of the valley of *englunga dene*²⁵ (OS 717933) is in the gap between the two sections of the charter boundary. The actual woodland boundary starts at OS 717931 (this is also the point at which the clockwise circuit of the boundary ends). The first part of the charter boundary to *catedenes heafdan* (the head of cat valley), can be followed by map, as well as on foot quite easily. One agrees largely with Baines's interpretation of the charter

¹⁹ *Place-Names of Oxfordshire* (hereafter *PNO*), 86-7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² G. Grundy, *Saxon Oxfordshire, Charters and Ancient Highways* (1933).

²³ A.H.J. Baines, 'Turville, Radenore and the Chiltern Feld', *Records of Bucks.* (1981).

²⁴ There is a short stretch of the boundary where *Cnihtabyrge* is marked which runs parallel but close to the road.

²⁵ *Englunga dene* translates as 'valley of Engel's people' but the precise meaning is not known.

bounds as far as *catedenes*, although exact translations are not always possible. This section begins: *And lang englunga dene* (along the valley to *englunga dene*) *swa waeter wile yrnian* (as the water naturally runs), *in haethena byregels* (to the heathen burials) OS 721927, *a be wyrtwalan* (ever by the *wyrtwala*, possibly a woodbank with vegetation on it), *in barfodslaed* (into *barfodslaed*, or barefootslade) in the area of OS 723923, *and swa on timber slaed* (and so to timber slade), *in staepacnolles scydd* (into steep knoll shed) in the area of OS 727918, *on hanslaedes heafdan* (to the head of the high slade), *innan grenan weg* (and so on to the green way) OS 735916, *innan healde maeres hlinc* (and thence along the sloping boundary bank) OS 738898, *in stanora lege* (to the wood on the stony slope) OS 740898, *in stanmeres hlinc* (and then to the stony boundary bank), *on catedenes heafdan* (to the head of cat valley), *in holemeres hlinc* (thence to the hollow boundary bank). Baines suggests *stanbeorh* (stone barrow) is at OS 746885 but this appears to place it in the middle of a field. Perhaps a more suitable site for *stanbeorh* is OS 749891, which is the mid-point of the stony bank.

The section of the boundary which historians have found most problematical to interpret is the area between *stanbeorh* and *hremhryc* (raven ridge) where the charter gives six references for a relatively large area: *smalen aesc* (small ash), *mapoltre* (maple tree), *edles pyt* (edles pit), *dragmaeres hlinc*, *rugawic*, *deopan hamsteal* (the possible meanings of these last three references are discussed below).

From *stanbeorh*, the terrain is much easier to identify by actually walking the boundary. The stretch of road to Henley (marked on Fig. 3 as B480) is also a part of the county boundary. If this is walked as far as OS 736867, one arrives at a wide trackway on the right known as Warmcombe Lane, edged with a continuous boundary bank and leading in a north-westerly direction. This may conceivably be the point where *mapoltre* (maple tree) was sited as a marker. Warmcombe Lane leads steadily upwards; this would explain why no further references to landmarks were necessary in the bounds, since one simply had to follow the trackway.

About two-thirds of the way along this lane, there is a very large ditch at OS 724876 alongside the trackway, which may be *edles pyt* (edles pit) referred to in the charter. The trackway continues and passes Lodge Farm at OS 724883. At OS 722885 the track divides into two: the modern parish boundary forks to the left in a north-westerly direction and the other path goes north, keeping Maidensgrove on the right. The most likely route to *hremhryc* is offered by the evidence in the 1790 perambulation of the manor of Pyrton²⁶ although it is difficult to follow. The names mentioned in the perambulation are Parkwood, Stonor Park and also Picked End: all these names occur on the path which leads to the right at OS 722888. This well-worn track can be followed until it meets the edge of Pishillbury Wood, where it turns in a north-easterly direction and exits at OS 727892. The trackway leads to Pishill, passing the church as it does so. Continuing along the B480 in a north-westerly direction, one reaches a boundary hedge OS 720902 that ultimately leads to *hremhryc* (raven ridge) at OS 721904. The modern parish boundary which starts at OS 722885 also eventually leads to *hremhryc* but is a far more circuitous route and none of the places on it are mentioned in the perambulation.

There are three points in the charter boundary (after OS 722888 but before reaching Pishill) which remain difficult to identify: *dragmaeres hlinc*, *rugawic* and *deopan hamsteal*. The meaning of *dragmaeres hlinc*, Baines suggests, might be where timber was drawn down a hill, and a possible site may be OS 727896 where the land descends towards Stonor. The references to *rugawic* (farm buildings on rough grazing)²⁷ and *deopan hamsteal* (deep homestead) are difficult to specify. The remaining portion of the boundary in the woodland

²⁶ Perambulations of 1790 and 1847, op. cit. note 4, p. 1.

²⁷ Baines, op. cit. note 22, p. 21.

section from *hremhryc* to *lufan mere* is satisfactorily described by Baines. He places *fulan slo* (foul slough) with the solitary apple tree at OS 725903. *Sigor dene* (victory valley) is in the area of OS 719925 and *Badan dene* (Bada's valley), Baines says, can be taken to run from OS 723909 up to OS 715921. *Clacces wadland* (Clacc's wodeland) is to the north of this and west of Queens Wood and *lufan mere* (a tiny pond) is at OS 716927. The boundary turns right at OS 714927 and goes by the righthand side of the road, along the top of the Chiltern ridge, turning right at OS 714930 which leads to OS 717931, thus completing the woodland section.

Turning to the *feld* section, beginning at Christmas Common, there are few reference points to cover a large area. Whereas the topographical evidence in the woodland section has probably remained relatively unchanged, continuous farming activity in the *feld* section may have obliterated some of the salient marker points. The latter part of the *feld* section of the bounds was badly copied.²⁸

One starts at *claenan dune* (clean hill) which is probably in the area of OS 714936. The next point, *grottes graf* (Grotte's grove) may possibly be located on the scarp slope of Pyrton hill at OS 708939 (in a similar position to nearby Kingston Grove which is between Aston Hill and Kingston Hill at OS 745975). The next reference is *ceorla pytte* (ceorls' pit). A survey in 1606 of copyhold land belonging to William Woodhouse refers to a furlong (in the area of OS 691950) known as 'Charlepitt', but on a later map of 1738 the name 'Chalkpits' occurs. According to Barbara Tearle we can assume that they were the same field because the Woodhouse virgate contained the same number of lands in Charlepitts and Chalkpits at both dates and there is no other furlong name in 1738 which is a likely candidate to be the 1606 Charlepitt.²⁹ This area is now a playing field with no evidence of chalk on the surface, but a geological map shows a belt of underlying lower chalk.³⁰ It may be that by the 18th century the word '*ceorl*' meaning 'peasant' had fallen out of use, but if pits were still being dug in this area the chalk would have been visible. Possibly, therefore, the pits acquired a new name with a contemporary meaning.

The next reference is to *fleotan*, which is the small stream between the boundaries of Pyrton and Watlington.³¹ The following point on the boundary is 'to the *crawan thorn*' (crow's thorn); this is not very specific and is difficult to locate.³² The next reference is *thone haeth* (the heath). The main section of Pyrton Heath is in the region of OS 672962 and the lower heath, which is still scrubland today, can be identified at OS 668965.³³

Hweol rithig (the wheel stream) can be identified in the area around OS 666965; this is the stream on which Cutt Mill (a water mill) stands. The area beyond *hweol rithig* to *hroppan broc* (the boundary stream known as Haseley Brook), which is marked on Fig. 3 by a broken line, indicates the enigmatic part of the boundary. In this section there are two references: *morpyt* (mor is a marsh, or wasteland) and *senthylle* (a place cleared by burning). These points in the charter boundary would have been recognised by contemporaries but after centuries

²⁸ PNO, 87.

²⁹ Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. c 207, f. 94 (survey of copyholds, Pyrton 1606); Bodl. (R) MS. c 17:49 (181) (estate map of Pyrton, 1738); B. Tearle, 'Customary Landholding in the Principal Manor of Pyrton, Oxfordshire from the 15th to the 18th centuries' (Oxford Univ. Dept. for Continuing Education unpubl. M.St. dissertation, 1995), 60.

³⁰ Brit. Geol. Survey Map, Sheet 254, Henley-on-Thames, Solid and Drift edition.

³¹ PNO, 87.

³² Although not on the boundary, from *fleotan* one can see Mount Tree at OS 677962, a large round earthwork on top of a hill (see Fig. 3). The name could be a corruption of 'Mound Tree'. More research needs to be undertaken; Mount Tree may possibly be a contender for the hundred meeting place.

³³ From information on the estate map of Pyrton surveyed in 1792 by George Richardson in the Bodleian Library and the tithe map of the township of Pyrton in Oxfordshire Archives.

of farming they can no longer be identified in the landscape today. At *hroppan broc* the boundary goes 'along the brook to the old ditch' (*ealdan dic*).³⁴ If one walks along *hroppan broc*, at the intersection where the boundary leads to *crypsan hylle* there is a large, wide ditch at OS 660010.³⁵

The boundary then heads in a south-easterly direction to *crypsan hylle* (Crips Hill, Clare).³⁶ This name is not used on the present-day map but the area is marked by a 70 m. contour on Pathfinder map 1117, in the area of OS 664008. The boundary turns south at OS 664010 and as it gradually goes downhill the soil becomes heavy clay as it approaches *scyttan mere* (Scytta's pool). To the immediate right of the boundary at OS 665005, there is evidence of a deep hollow in the ground. Although the hollow is dry,³⁷ reeds and rushes still grow there. This may be the site of *scyttan mere*; the fields now have good drainage, but without it the soil in this area would be waterlogged and muddy.

Scyttan dune (Scytta's hill) is the next boundary point; this is probably part of Poppett's Hill near the summit on the 100 m. contour at OS 671996.³⁸ From there the boundary goes on to *smalan broc* (small brook), at OS 675990; this is the stream which rises in Stoke Talmage and joins Haseley Brook just north of Standhill Farm.

The next reference in the boundary is *cnihtabryge*. It has been argued³⁹ that Knightsbridge was the bridge over Weston Brook which derived its name from a group of men called *cnihtas*, and that descendants of theirs settled by the bridge and were responsible for its upkeep.⁴⁰ There are two main factors which make this explanation doubtful. Firstly, this is a very shallow stream, with a small modern bridge constructed for present-day traffic – a horse could walk through or jump over the stream, and there would have been no need for a bridge in Anglo-Saxon times. Secondly, there are several meanings of the word *cniht*. It can, for example, refer to a boy, youth, servant or retainer of a local lord. It was only at the very end of the Anglo-Saxon period that the word *cniht* began to refer to a knight, after this charter boundary had been recorded. Elsewhere in Oxfordshire it has been suggested that *cnihtas* should be understood as 'robbers'.⁴¹

Knightsbridge Lane crosses two streams. The upper stream starts in South Weston and flows under the tiny bridge at OS 679975: the area on the west side of the bridge is very muddy, where cattle wade through. The lower stream starts from Shirburn and currently flows in a pipe under the road at OS 685965. There is still a marshy area to the west side of the Shirburn stream marked on the present map at OS 684966. Another meaning for the second syllable *bryge*, (*brycg*)⁴² is a raised track through marshy ground, and this may be the case in Pyrton. The trackway (see Fig. 3) near each of the two streams would be liable to flood or become extremely muddy if it were not well drained, although the water is not deep. In Anglo-Saxon times this was a through-road⁴³ and the route needed to be kept passable. The areas in the vicinity of the two streams might have been laid with brushwood or faggots, to form a causeway in the absence of proper drainage. It is possible a small toll

³⁴ For this section of the boundary, information on two older Ordnance Survey maps was used: OS SP60 2.5 inches to a mile, dated 1960, and OS SU69, 2.5 inches to a mile, dated 1959. The present-day maps are Pathfinder 1117 (SP60/70) and Pathfinder 1137 (SU69/79).

³⁵ OS map SP60.

³⁶ *V.C.H. Oxon.* viii, 163. This is the area marked as Great Cripshill and Little Cripshill.

³⁷ The boundary was walked in September 1996 after a very dry summer.

³⁸ OS map SU69, dated 1959.

³⁹ *V.C.H. Oxon.* viii, 157.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 178.

⁴¹ 'Where the *cnihtas* lie' (1044): Blair, *op. cit.* note 1, pp. 17, 131.

⁴² A.H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, ii (E.P.N.S. xxvi, 1956), 54.

⁴³ The route through the estate is discussed below.

might have been exacted from those who used this road for its upkeep and this could have been collected by a lad, or servant. In West Oxfordshire, a *stan bricge* or stone bridge mentioned in a Ducklington charter of 958 was found to refer to a paved causeway across a stream.⁴⁴ Archaeological excavation of this structure identified it as a stream-crossing which was in use in the mid 10th century.

Winecalea (Wineca's leah or clearing), the next point on the boundary, is not specific and difficult to locate. The boundary point which follows is *haethena byregels* (heathen burials); these were often sited where a boundary makes a sudden turn. A possible place for this point in the charter bounds may be situated at OS 689959 (see Fig. 2), where there is a definite sharp turn in the boundary to the left, facing the scarp slope.

The last boundary point is *colnoran* meaning Cola's slope, or *ora*,⁴⁵ and a likely site would be about halfway up the scarp slope, perhaps at approximately OS 712944. *Colnoran* would then be sited in a similar position to *Ceonna's ora* (which is present-day Chinnor). This last boundary point of the *fild* section would thus be near to *englunga dene*, where the woodland section starts.

This evidence collated from charter, topographical, fieldwork and other sources strongly suggests that the mid Anglo-Saxon estate of *Readanora* and the later manor of Pyrton were two separate entities and that Pyrton was one of the manors which emerged from the old estate. Careful land allocation is evident in Fig. 2, where one can see that not only does the manor of Pyrton include a wide range of agricultural resources (arable, wood, pasture, etc.) but it also encompasses the entire through-route from *Stan(ge)delf* to *Assendene*.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLACE-NAMES IN THE ANGLO-SAXON ESTATE OF READANORA

As can be seen in Fig. 4, there are four *ora* names within this estate: *Gold-ora*, *Clay-ora*, *Stan-ora* and *Readan-ora*. The first three place-names and their location have continued in existence from Anglo-Saxon times and are known today as Golder, Clare and Stonor, but the place-name of *Readan-ora* and its location have disappeared.

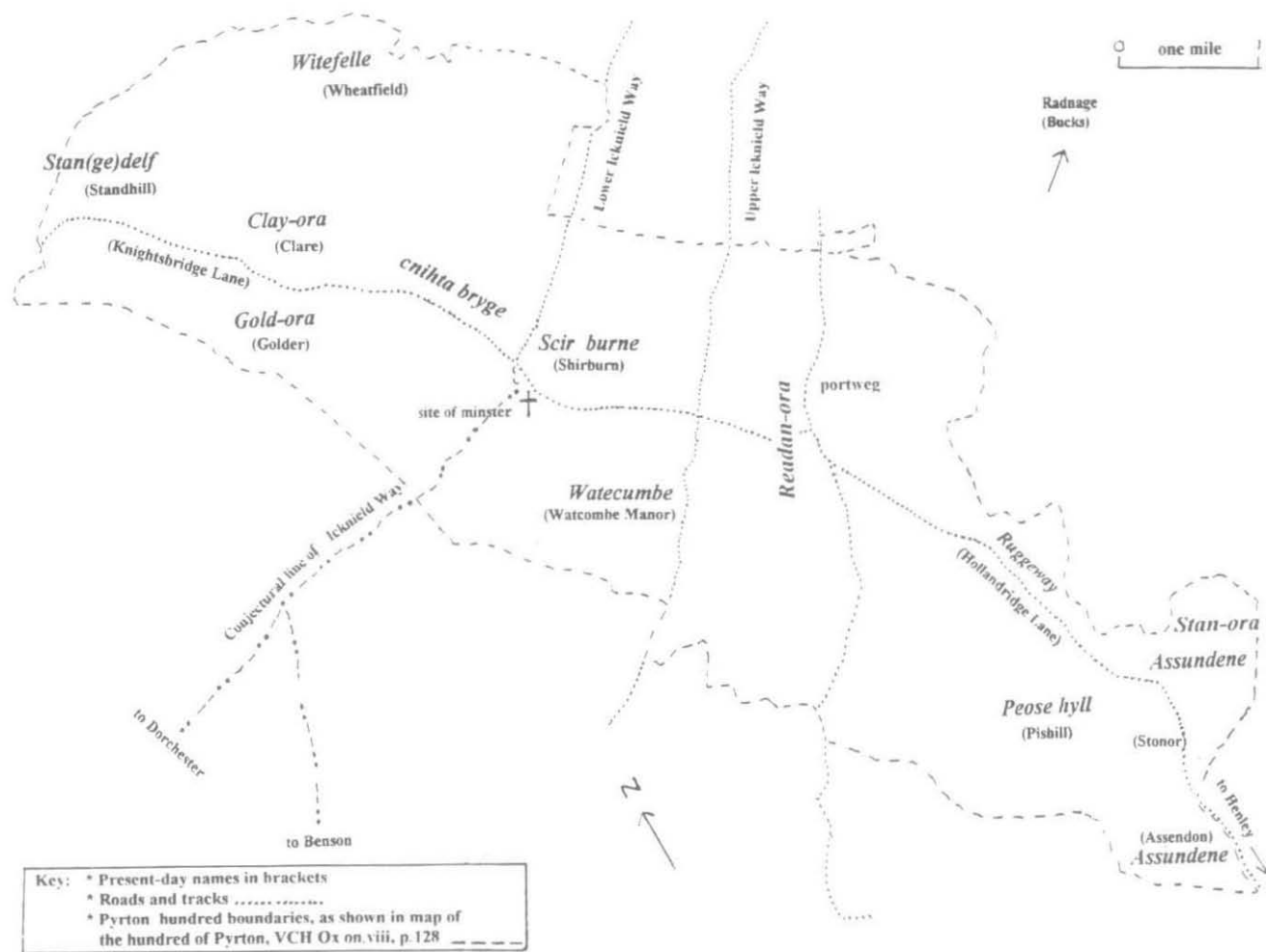
What does the word *ora* mean? In present-day English we have one general word to describe a hill; at the time of the Anglo-Saxons very specific names were used consistently across England for different shapes of hill, for example, *beorg* (hill, mound, tumuli), *dun* (a flat-topped hill suitable for village sites), *hoh* (heel: this hill is shaped like a human heel).⁴⁶ An *ora* is also a specific Anglo-Saxon name for a particular type of hill. Margaret Gelling describes the shape of an *ora* as a hill with a convex end, rather like an upturned canoe,⁴⁷ overlooking a settlement. In researching the meaning of the place-name *ora*, Ann Cole has found that the word was significant since these names very frequently appear by important routes, at boundary junctions or at harbour entrances. An *ora* name can refer either to a single hill, or to two hills which face each other (examples of these are discussed below). A coastal *ora*, for example *Bognor*, could be seen from the sea, thereby providing a

⁴⁴ J. Blair and A. Millard, 'An Anglo-Saxon Landmark Rediscovered: the *Stan ford* / *Stan bricge* of the Ducklington and Witney Charters', *Oxoniensia*, lviii (1992), 342-8.

⁴⁵ *Oras* are discussed below.

⁴⁶ M. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (1984) (hereafter *PNIL*), 127, 148, 167.

⁴⁷ BBC2 Television programme 'Tracks: What's in a Name?' (Margaret Gelling in conversation with Nick Fisher and Ann Cole, broadcast on 17.7.1997).

Fig. 4. Four *ora* place-names: *Gold-ora*, *Clay-ora*, *Readan-ora* and *Stan-ora*.

navigational aid.⁴⁸ Ann Cole also suggests that the whole route from Standhill to Henley was an important one, and highlights the place where the Oxfordshire Way crosses Knightsbridge Lane, in the centre of present-day Pyrton, as being especially significant.

The place-name *Readanora*, sometimes written as *Radnor*, has been the subject of different interpretations. Margaret Gelling defines *Radnor* as 'red slope'⁴⁹ and comments that this is the old name for Pyrton. One school of thought has been that *Readan-ora*, quite simply, was where the centre of Pyrton is today, but this does not account for the 'red-slope' element, since Pyrton lies on the valley floor. It has also been suggested that the name of *Readanora* has a similar origin to that of Reading. 'Reading' presumably commemorates a leader named *Reada*, with the suffix *ingas*, 'followers of',⁵⁰ but this definition seems unlikely to explain the origin of *Readanora* too. There are a considerable number of place-names with *read* or 'red' as the first element, and there are probably too many of them to all refer to people named *Reada*. If these place-names had evolved from leaders with the name *Reada*, clearly they would not be 'red-related'!

Another explanation offered for *Readanora* is that the name originated from the colour of beech leaves on the scarp slope in the autumn:⁵¹ but this is unsatisfactory on several counts. In this non-literate and non-map society, the names of places were not only extremely important for local use, but also as 'signposts' whilst travelling.⁵² Generally, very specific names were used, of non-movable objects that are visible the year round, whereas leaves only wear their autumnal colours for a few weeks at most. This theory appears to be based on the assumption that the beech trees, so prolific along the scarp slope today from Chinnor to Pyrton, were there in Anglo-Saxon times. Even if this were so, a traveller would be quite unable to distinguish one particular place from miles of identical beech trees. The theory is also inconsistent with the term used in the charter bounds⁵³ for the scarp slope, *claenan dune* (clean hill), indicating a hill with no trees; woodland or different types of tree are generally mentioned specifically. As late as 1792, an estate map of Pyrton defines the scarp slope of the hill as 'sheep common',⁵⁴ and the first edition Ordnance Survey map for the area shows closes for animals on this hill reaching to Christmas Common. Domesday defines Pyrton as a manor with mill, pasture, meadow and smallholdings: the woodland is identified as a separate area on the dipslope beyond Christmas Common, not visible from the vicinity of the village in the valley.⁵⁵ One concludes from this evidence that the profusion of beech trees on the scarp slope are a comparatively modern feature of the landscape.

Features that are constant the year round are earth and water, and there is no doubt that, being dependent on it for their survival, the Anglo-Saxons would have been acutely aware of the specific qualities of soil and its crop-producing potential. They knew where the soil was rich or poor and the places where sufficient water existed: their careful land allocation bears witness to this. This expertise is reflected in the earliest place-names which bear specific soil-related or topographical names. It was therefore decided to investigate the 'red' element of *Readanora* in relation to the soil types.

⁴⁸ A. Cole, 'The Meaning of the Old English Place-name Element *ora*', *Jnl. of Eng. Place-Name Soc.* xxi (1989), 15-22; A. Cole, 'The Origin, Distribution and Use of the Place-name Element *ora* and its Relationship to the Element *ofer*', *Jnl. of Eng. Place-Name Soc.* xxii (1990), 26-41.

⁴⁹ Gelling, *PNIL*, 180.

⁵⁰ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England* (1978), 106.

⁵¹ *V.C.H. Oxon.* viii, 157.

⁵² Gelling, *PNIL*.

⁵³ W. de Gray Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ii (1887), 547.

⁵⁴ Estate map of Pyrton surveyed in 1792 by George Richardson, in Bodleian Library.

⁵⁵ J. Morris, *Domesday Book, a Survey of the Counties of England* (1978).

There are no names containing a 'red' element within the *Readanora* estate on the north-west side from the valley floor up to the top of the scarp slope: they are all beyond Christmas Common on the Assendon side. In Oxfordshire there is Red Lane (B481) which runs from Howe Hill, Watlington through Cookley Green to Nettlebed;⁵⁶ nearby is Redpits Manor (OS 702892) and further along, the large woodland section of the *Readanora* estate. In nearby Buckinghamshire, Radnage too has *rad*, a corruption of red, in the first syllable of its place-name. Fieldwork was carried out in these places to see if any elements common to all of them could be established. In each of the places, the soil visible to the eye was unremarkable, a grey/blackish colour, but in Priors Wood (OS 697889) near Redpits Manor, vivid red sub-soil was discovered clinging to the exposed roots of an upturned tree. Further research near Radnage Common (OS 795961) again revealed red soil in a pit dug for drainage pipes. This place-name Margaret Gelling translates as 'red oak tree':⁵⁷ she argues that names with a final element of *ac* or *aec*, for example Fairoak in Somerset or Broadoak in Gloucestershire, usually describe the appearance or condition of the tree. There is certainly an oak tree that has red leaves – *quercus robur* – but its leaves would only be red for, at most, a few weeks in the autumn. Perhaps this needs to be studied again; the name may have originally referred to an oak tree which was rooted in red soil.

Similar fieldwork carried out on the woodland section of *Readanora* uncovered the same sort of evidence. Although the top soil is grey/black, soil samples taken from Queens Wood (OS 715930) and Priors Grove (OS 717928) from the roots of upturned trees are red clay. Further along, in Hollandridge Lane (OS 719925), the trackway has been widened for access and red soil is very noticeable in the banks at the side of the road.

In today's largely urbanised society, it is easy to forget that until fairly recently people's lives were still governed by a close relationship with the land, and even though it has been coloured by different agrarian systems this symbiosis has been unbroken since Anglo-Saxon times. William Ellis (*c.* 1690-1758) demonstrated his knowledge of agriculture and soil types;⁵⁸ he wrote several books on husbandry and specifically mentioned the 'red clays' or clay-with-flints of the Chiltern Hills in *Chiltern and Vale Farming Explained* (1733). Although most of the land is now used for grazing, it has been used for arable in past centuries and normal farming activity would have exposed the sub-soil. The clay was used to make bricks at various times; for example, Richard White of Watlington was a brickmaker in 1665 with a kiln near Christmas Common,⁵⁹ and a brick kiln was shown on the enclosure map in 1815.⁶⁰ Fig. 5, based on the British Geological Survey Map,⁶¹ illustrates part of the belt of clay-with-flints: it is the sub-soil just below the surface that is red, probably because it contains oxidized iron. As illustrated in Fig. 5, this belt runs along the top of the Chilterns. Shirburn Castle was built of bricks in 1377 which may have been made from clay transported from the top of the hill. In more recent times, a brick-kiln owned by the Russells, a family of brickmakers, is mentioned in a Stonor rent account of 1695.⁶² The brick-works of the Russells, who later gave their name to the area known as Russell's Water, was on the hundredal boundary near Red Pits Manor.

⁵⁶ Red Lane is probably a corruption of *Redland* which in several early references was said to be in Sydenham. Possibly the people of Sydenham had common land up on the Chilterns, where Red Lane is (PNO, 108).

⁵⁷ Gelling, *PNIL*, 219.

⁵⁸ L. Hepple and A. Doggett, *The Chilterns* (1994), 143.

⁵⁹ Mentioned in the will of his father John White, brickmaker and farmer: J. Bond, S. Gosling, J. Rhodes, *Oxfordshire Brickmakers* (Oxon Museum Service Publ. no. 14), 13.

⁶⁰ Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record, Watlington MPC 898.

⁶¹ *Brit. Geol. Survey Map Sheet 254, Henley-on-Thames*, Solid and Drift edition.

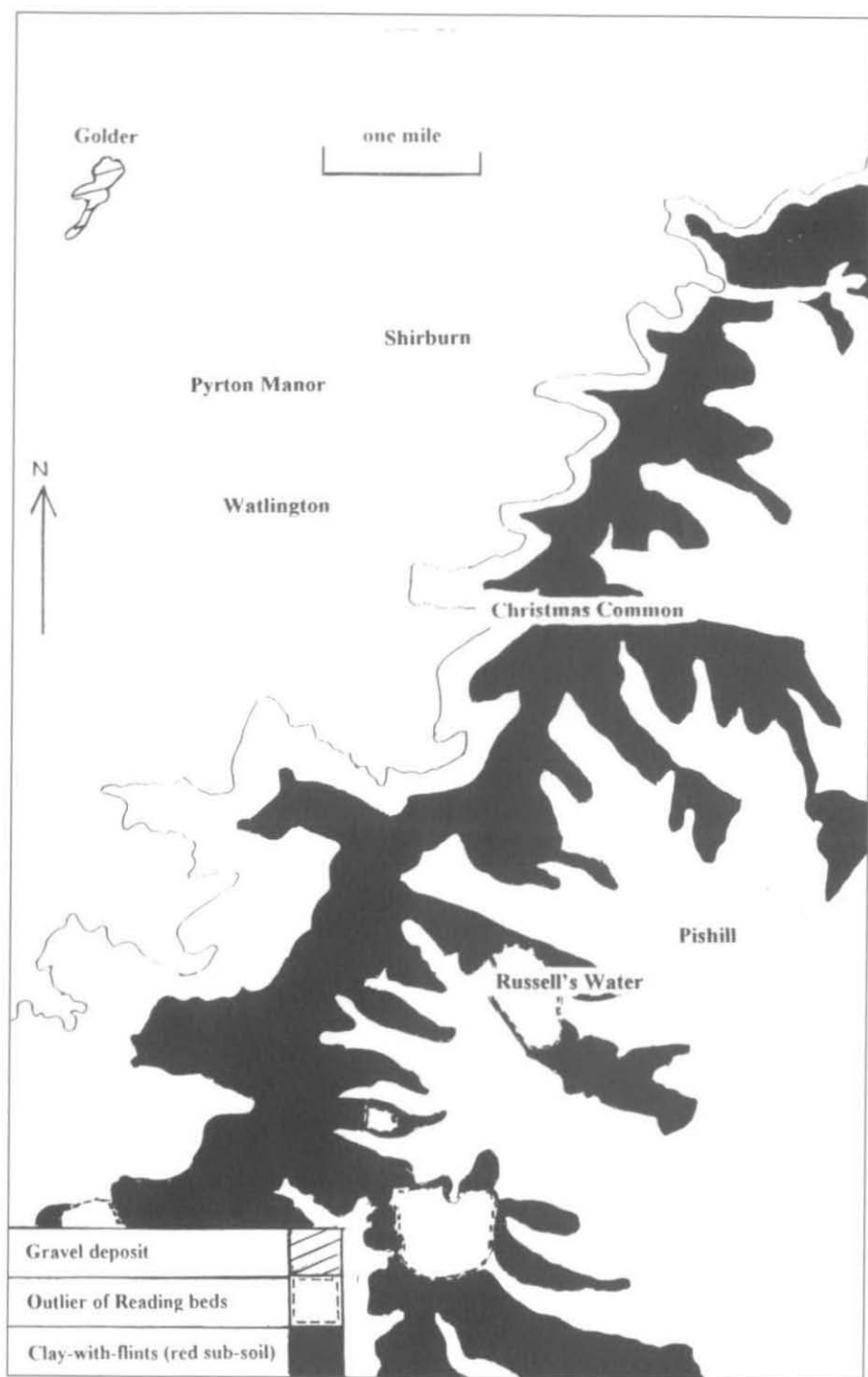


Fig. 5. Geology and soils, based on British Geological Survey Map, Sheet 254, Henley-on-Thames.

Fig. 3 illustrates the late 10th-century charter boundaries of the manor of Pyrton as two pieces of land, separated by a short distance. The woodland section (with red soil) led from the top of the Chiltern hill, down the dipslope to Assendon, thus making its land mass much larger than other nearby estates. For example, the neighbouring estates of *Leofeca's ora* and *Ceonna's ora* (present-day Lewknor and Chinnor) have boundaries which end at the scarp slope on the top of the Chilterns; they have no woodland section. Cumulatively, this evidence suggests that *Readan-ora* derived the first syllable of its name from the red soil in the woodland section. The beginning of the downward slope of the *ora*, overlooking the present-day village of Pyrton) can be seen whilst walking the charter boundary, on the Chiltern scarp slope at OS 713938.

If the place-name *Readan-ora* originates from the *ora* with red soil on top of the Chilterns, then clearly it cannot be on the floor of the valley where Pyrton is today. The charter of 887 (S.217) is a grant to the church of St. Mary's which had already been in existence for some time, and Aethelred acknowledged that the land at Brightwell Baldwin and Watlington formed part of the *Readanora* estate. As can be seen in Fig. 2, the site of St. Mary's minster church is adjacent to the crossroads in the middle of the valley, about 2.25 miles away from *Readan-ora*. Together with other corroborative evidence, this strongly suggests that *Readanora* was the 'red-slope', which gave its name to a large estate in the mid Anglo-Saxon period and that the place-name Pyrton evolved some time later.

In the light of this hypothesis, fieldwork was carried out on some of the other *ora* place-names within the estate: Golder (*Gold-ora*), Clare (*Clay-ora*) and Stonor (*Stan-ora*). *Gold-ora* has been interpreted as 'the slope where the golden flowers grow'.⁶² However, since flowers bloom at a specific time of the year and have a short life-span, whatever the species, their value as a permanent place-name indicator seems dubious. The only exception to this is, perhaps, where the plant has exceptional qualities or is remarkable in some other way, for example at Croydon where the crocus was grown for saffron. Fieldwork revealed no indigenous gold or yellow flowers but there were gold and some white stones (measuring on average about 2 inches diameter) spread regularly across the fields at Golder.⁶⁴ Reverting again to the geological map, it becomes clear that Golder is situated just west of a gravel outcrop; younger Coombe deposits produce this type of gold and white stone, which would be visible all year round. There are other places with these deposits in the area near Cuxham with Easington but these settlements have later names, perhaps replacing earlier ones. The soil in nearby Clare, as the name *Clay-ora* suggests, is clay. The charter boundary goes between *Gold-ora* and *Clay-ora* (OS 673979) and from across the road, one can see the village of Pyrton on the valley floor, and the two *oras* can be seen leading down towards it. The last *ora* name on the charter boundary is *Stan-ora* at OS 740898 and, in a similar way to *Gold-ora*, *Clay-ora* and *Readan-ora*, the top of this *ora* (with stony soil) overlooks the present-day village of Stonor.

These *ora* names, like most topographical names, preserve the terminology of the people who lived on the spot and exploited the landscape. Equally, the two elements of each *ora* name could also be useful pointers to travellers. The second element *ora* can sometimes be coupled with a person's name, for example Bognor,⁶⁵ Lewknor, and Chinnor. However, it is clear that in the case of *Gold-ora*, *Clay-ora*, *Readan-ora* and *Stan-ora* these first elements are

⁶² Hepple and Doggett, *The Chilterns*, 196.

⁶³ *PNO*, 89.

⁶⁴ Samples were taken at the road leading to Golder Manor (OS 674978) and in Stoney Lane (OS 673979).

very apt descriptions of the soil type or a soil-related aspect, whilst *ora* indicates the distinctive shape of the hill.

Some *oras* face each other and an example of this is *Gold-ora* and *Clay-ora* (which are adjacent on the north side of the valley) and *Readanora*, on the opposite southern Chiltern scarp slope. The system still works well today, even on a dull or wet day; these are vantage points from which one can see across to the other side from either direction. On this route *Stan-ora* stands in isolation and cannot be seen whilst standing at *Readan-ora*, but it can be identified easily from the stony soil and shape of the *ora*.

Other Anglo-Saxon place-names in this locality are descriptive of soil types, for example Watcombe, Pishill, Wheatfield, Standhill and Shirburn. Watcombe near Watlington (*Watecumbe* in Domesday) means 'wheat valley', and Pishill (*Peose hyll*) where peas grew.⁶⁶ Both these names relate to the sorts of crops the soil was best suited for. *Watcumbe* indicates land of a suitable quality to grow wheat, whereas *Pesehull* points to soil of a poorer quality. Watcombe Manor today still has fertile land which grows wheat and cereals: at Pishill, even with modern agrarian techniques, the soil is extremely stony and some fields are so unproductive that they are left as scrubland. It has been suggested that the place-name Wheatfield originated since good crops were produced there.⁶⁷ The land may be productive, but this does not take into account the type of soil, which is actually full of chalk. An early spelling of Wheatfield is *witefelle* (white field),⁶⁸ and this presumably became corrupted over time. On newly-ploughed land, the visual effect – even on a dull day – is of a white mist over the field: when the sun shines directly on the soil it is glaringly white. Standhill was originally *stan(ge)delf*⁶⁹ meaning stone quarry: there is still stone, and disused pits, in the vicinity. Fig. 1 illustrates the truncated road from Standhill to Golder/Clare, which is now called Stony Lane. Shirburn (*Scireburne*) means 'bright stream',⁷⁰ and this clear shallow water still bubbles along as part of the Pyrton boundary to this day.

The land was a crucial element in the lives of people who derived their existence from the soil, or products from it. Those who lived locally or who were travelling through the area would certainly be able to read the landscape and identify the soil-related place-name elements of red soil, gold stones, white chalky soil and clear, running streams.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE MANOR OF PYRTON – POSSIBLE FACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ITS PLACE-NAME

It has been argued that the place-name of *Readanora* evolved as the name of a large mid Anglo-Saxon estate. The reason for the change of name to Pyrton almost certainly occurred through agrarian re-organisation to smaller land units. By the 10th century, large tracts of land were being sub-divided into smaller estates, which evolved names and identities of their own. The name 'Pyrton' is first recorded in a charter of 987 (S.1354) which, clearly, was written after sub-division had taken place and the boundaries of the manor of Pyrton had been established. Place-names, as we have seen, can relate to features that were

⁶⁵ 'Buce's coast': Gelling, *PNIL*, 17.

⁶⁶ *PNO*, 84, 94.

⁶⁷ *V.C.H. Oxon.* viii, 268.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 100.

⁶⁹ *PNO*, 90.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 91.

significant to the people of the area. The name Pyrton means 'pear orchard',⁷¹ which may suggest that pear-growing had become a specialization within part of the large multiple estate of *Readanora*.

The first element of Pyrton is *pyrige* meaning pear: this will be discussed later. The second element, *tun*, is likely to have acquired widespread application relatively late in the Anglo-Saxon period. Margaret Gelling comments that only six *tun* names are recorded in written sources up to 731,⁷² yet the name later became so common as to be almost uncountable. The word *tun* originally meant 'enclosure' but later on, in some cases, it evolved to mean 'estate'. The place-name of Pyrton may have evolved in this way, to become 'the estate that grows pears'. In a similar example before the Conquest, the bishopric of Worcester held the manor of Perry, Worcestershire, which was recorded as *Pirian*, *Pirie* in the 6th century and *Purie*, *Perye* in the 9th century.⁷³ This evidence not only reflects the evolving place-name of 'Perry' through the centuries, but it also confirms that pears were grown as a speciality from an early date. Similarly, before the Conquest, nearby Pershore Abbey owned land in the manor of Pirton, Worcestershire⁷⁴ and the tithing of Purton in Lydney, Gloucestershire.⁷⁵ Pirton in Herefordshire had become the property of Archbishop Stigand of Canterbury by 1086,⁷⁶ but may have belonged originally to the bishopric of Worcester or Pershore Abbey. Although much more research is needed, it therefore seems possible that the agrarian expertise to produce pears in Pyrton, Oxfordshire, may have been introduced via ecclesiastical links with Worcester, in other words, before the estate was lost.

Pyrton has *pyrige* as its first element but there are other variations of this. *Per* and *pur* are also pear-related, and these form the first element of many other place-names. There are three Purtons in Gloucestershire, Staffordshire and Wiltshire, Puriton in Somerset, Perivale now in Greater London, Perry Barr in Birmingham, and besides these there are other variations.⁷⁷ *Appletun* names occur at this period too, in Berkshire, Cheshire, Cumberland, Kent, Lancashire, Norfolk and Yorkshire (North and West Ridings). In a similar way, these names may have evolved because they were clearly identifiable places that grew either apples or pears. Since so many apple- or pear-related place-names evolved at this period, it would seem that growing these fruits had become a distinctive feature associated with the name of a settlement or township. This hypothesis poses many questions and problems, but in general terms it may well indicate fruit-growing for wider markets. Fruit is generally a valuable and marketable commodity, but it could also be that the production specifically of apple or pears indicates the making of cider and/or perry.

Perry had been made since Roman times, then called *castomoniale*,⁷⁸ but may not have become widespread until much later. The county of Worcester was, and still is, noted for its prolific cultivation of apples and pears, from which cider and perry are made. The perry produced then was not the same as the product we know today, which is a pleasant light pear-wine. The juice of the pears was blended with crab apples in the production of cider, and coarse perry was often called cider, which it closely resembled.⁷⁹ The *Victoria County*

⁷¹ M. Gelling, *PNIL*, 219.

⁷² M. Gelling, 'Towards a Chronology for English Place-Names', in D. Hooke (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (1988), 70.

⁷³ *V.C.H. Worcs.* iii, 512.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* iv, 181.

⁷⁵ *V.C.H. Glos.* v, 60.

⁷⁶ *V.C.H. Herts.* iii, 44.

⁷⁷ Gelling, *PNIL*, 219.

⁷⁸ Unless footnoted separately, the information relating to pears was given by Mr. J. Edgeley, Senior Fruit Lecturer, Pershore College of Horticulture, Pershore, Worcs.

⁷⁹ *V.C.H. Worcs.* ii, 252-3.

History of Worcester explains that perry in the 13th century was made from a particular variety of pear, which was uneatable but nevertheless made a very pleasant drink: these were grown in hedgerows not orchards.⁸⁰ This species, *pyrus communis*, is still grown for perry to this day. In Gloucestershire, the place-name Hartpury which means 'hard pear tree'⁸¹ is perhaps a reference to hard pears being grown for this purpose. Robert Plot accurately describes this variety of pear, which was growing at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in 1677. He refers to its two main qualities as hardness and a capacity to last well. The fruit were often called 'wooden pears' and could be kept, often for years, without rotting. These pears, he says, grew in abundance in Worcestershire, 'where ... they are called Long-lasters'.⁸²

Fieldwork in Pyrton in early September established that small apples (*malus*) grow in profusion along the hedgerows, but no pears were found. If this variety of pear was grown but has disappeared from Pyrton, there is no way of knowing precisely why: it may have been allowed to die out with the introduction of new varieties, or succumbed to present-day pollution. In the 10th century not only were honey bees kept, but there would also have been a profusion of beneficial insects such as hover flies and ladybirds to aid pollination. The custom of growing hard pears in hedgerows continued in Worcester until the 19th century, even though sweet pears were also used by then for eating and perry making. If the hard pears in Pyrton were as prolific as the crab-apples in the hedgerows today, there is no doubt that they would have been visible to travellers and local people. A soldier in the Civil War wrote: 'Worcestershire...abounds in corn, woods, pastures, hills and valleys, every hedge and highway beset with fruit, but especially pears, whereof they make that pleasant drink called perry which they sell for a penny a quart...'⁸³ Much more work needs to be done on this interesting hypothesis, for instance analysis of all the apple- and pear-related names that evolved at the same time as Pyrton. Places bearing these names may have supplied local towns or markets; perhaps an allocation of cider was given to workers as a part of their wages.

A final question which needs to be addressed is why the place-name of Pyrton gradually began to replace *Readanora*. The evidence strongly suggests that the change is linked with Pyrton becoming one of the hundredal manors of Oxfordshire. We know that Oxfordshire was in existence a little before the first reference to it in 1010-11, and that the place-name 'Pyrton' had already been recorded by then. When Pyrton became the name of a hundred, it is very likely that that name would have come into general usage by word of mouth, whilst the older name of *Readanora* gradually faded away.

The minster church sited in the estate of *Readanora* did not have the commercial success of the minster at nearby Thame, with a community of traders growing within its precinct. It was probably not one of the earliest minsters⁸⁴ and may not have had time to spawn commercial growth before the tide of change occurred. Nearby Watlington eventually became a small market town whereas Pyrton remained largely agricultural, and is still a village to this day.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 313.

⁸¹ E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (1960), 223.

⁸² R. Plot, *The Natural History of Oxfordshire* (1677), 173.

⁸³ *V.C.H. Wores*, ii, 313.

⁸⁴ Blair, *op. cit.* note 1, p. 57.

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented in this article supports the evolution of the place-name *Readanora* from both the characteristics of the natural landscape and the *ora* topography, which can still be identified today. As the large estate was sub-divided into smaller units, older names gradually began to be superseded by new. Manors were to play a central role in a period of sustained economic growth which brought innovative ideas and agrarian reorganisation. Somewhere between 887 and 987 the place-name 'Pyrton' began to replace *Readanora*. Once Pyrton became the hundredal name, it is likely that the older place-name eventually fell into disuse. The original names did not vanish altogether: some, such as *Gold-ora* (Golder), *Clay-ora* (Clare) and *Stan-ora* (Stonor), remained in existence. The point that emerges from cumulative evidence is that the place-names *Readanora* and Pyrton evolved at different times to describe separate land units.

The minster church at the crossroads of the estate of *Readanora* declined and became the parish church of Pyrton, with two daughter chapels at Easington and Standhill. Today the small parish church of St. Mary's, which dates from the 12th century, stands in a large churchyard. The route that passed through the estate, from *Stan(ge)delf* (Standhill) to *Assundene* (Assendon), began to be less used but it is difficult to know why. In the late 20th century, our transport system has evolved around major motorway routes and as a consequence, some roads which were formerly congested with traffic have now become quiet backwaters. In a much more gradual way, perhaps the route through Pyrton suffered a similar fate, becoming less important through the centuries. It is clear that by 1767,⁸⁵ the Knightsbridge Lane route had been demoted to a very minor road.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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⁸⁵ T. Jeffery, map of the County of Oxford (1767), Bodleian Library.