Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1311, the clerk of the Lakenheath manorial court enrolled a charter detailing a lease between the prior of Ely and Richard, son of Richard in the Lane for all the demesne fisheries of Lakenheath for a ten-year period in return for annual rent of £13 10s. In the agreement, the prior retained his right to half the bitterns and all the pike of a certain size, as was his prerogative as lord of the manor. For his part, Lane acquired access to the appurtenant weirs and fens, alongside the rights to eighteen courses for fishing boats on the water of *wendilse*, and the custody of the lord's swans. During this period, Lakenheath fisheries were interchangeably described as fens, and almost fifty are detailed in the manorial records. The demesne fisheries would have comprised a small proportion of this number, but, nevertheless, the grant clearly gave Lane rights over a significant acreage of demesne resources.[1] Three years later, an inquisition *post mortem* valued Lakenheath's Clare fee fisheries at £1.[2] It is possible to draw from this that in 1311 Richard in the Lane had access to a greater and more valuable expanse of one of Lakenheath's key seigneurial assets than did Gilbert de Clare, earl of Gloucester and one of England's leading magnates. However, in stark contrast to de Clare, Richard in the Lane was a servile peasant, legally bound to the prior's manor of Lakenheath.

Within this one brief example it is possible to find – in concentrated form – all of the elements that form the principal lines of enquiry followed within this volume. Leasing demesne resources to peasants was not, of course, unprecedented, and in some respects this agreement is unremarkable. Given, however, that certain seigneurial assets, including fisheries, parks, gardens, dovecotes and warrens, were strongly associated with lordship – in actuality and within contemporary literature and illuminations – it reveals a dichotomy between the way lords perceived their rural resources and the practical realities of managing the rural environment, as outlined in chapter two.[3] Despite images showing peasants occupying their rightful place in lords' fields, as they do in the *Luttrell Psalter*, while absent from strictly seigneurial spaces, Richard in the Lane junior's lease of the Lakenheath fisheries dispenses with the myth perpetuated by elites that the local environment was characterised by clear divisions between lordly and peasant space. At the same time, Lane cannot be considered an archetypal peasant in this respect: not all Lakenheath peasants had authorised access

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1   CUL EDC/7/16/2/1/4/3.

2   TNA C 134/42; the value had been decreasing since 1261: TNA C 132/27/5; TNA C 133/129/1.

3   Literary and artistic representations of the deliberate separation of lordly resources from the lower orders were not mere constructs of the seigneurial mind. In 1381 resources of this nature were specifically targeted by peasants because of their overt association with lords; R. Liddiard, *Castles in context: power, symbolism and landscape, 1066–1500* (Macclesfield, 2005), p. 118.

to demesne resources. Nevertheless, as chapter three shows, authorisation was not always sought by peasants traversing their local landscape. Considering the size and value of the fisheries he leased, Lane's status is noteworthy, complementing the analysis of rural social hierarchies that forms the focus of chapter four. The fishery named in the lease – *wendilse* – reminds us that the rural landscape of medieval England was a patchwork of named places, and that these names had been devised by those who knew it best – the resident peasants. The great importance of the named environment to peasant culture is considered in chapter five. As a servile individual, Lane would have been aware that the details relating to his lease would have been documented by the clerk of the manorial court, creating a permanent record of the transaction. Although they were increasingly drawn to written court records in the later medieval period as an aide-mémoire, the written word was generally untypical of the means through which peasants remembered important events, as outlined in chapter six. The Lakenheath fisheries were clearly an important aspect of Lane's economic wellbeing, and the peasant economy forms the focus for chapter seven. Finally, the lease provides an insight into the ways in which both landscape and resources were managed in the rural environment, and this forms the key consideration for chapter eight.

The study of the medieval rural environment and its inhabitants is at an exciting crossroads. In recent years, landscape archaeologists and historical geographers have begun to turn their attention away from a focus on the physical environment in which debates concerning form and function have dominated the scholarly discourse. Similarly, social and economic historians, formerly preoccupied with comparisons between medieval and modern productivity, have started thinking about rural England and its inhabitants from new perspectives. Today, a growing number of scholars from all these disciplines are concentrating on uncovering the experiences of those living in rural settlements, as Sally Smith outlines: 'focus[ing] on the *people* who occupied the landscape … explor[ing] the complex webs of social relationships in which they operated, and … try[ing] to … enquire into the practices of living in the medieval settlement and the meanings thus invoked and revoked'.[4] Increasingly, scholars following this line of enquiry take an interdisciplinary approach to the challenge of revealing the lived experiences of late medieval rural dwellers. As Matthew Johnson has suggested, in order to approach the rural landscape in this way it is necessary to introduce a range of contextual information allowing us to respond to the complexities of elucidating the human experience of past societies.[5] This requires us not only to draw upon a vast array of sources, including documents, material culture, place-names and the landscape itself, but to explore the approaches adopted by a wide

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4   S.V. Smith, 'Towards a social archaeology of the late medieval English peasantry: power and resistance at Wharram Percy', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 9/3 (2009), p. 392. Our European colleagues, perhaps benefiting from more profitable source material, have been ahead of us in this endeavour. See, for example: E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French village, 1294–1324*, trans. B. Bray (1978; London, 1990); J.-C. Schmitt, *The holy greyhound: Guinefort, healer of children since the thirteenth century*, trans. M. Thom (Cambridge, 1983).

5   M. Johnson, 'Phenomenological approaches in landscape archaeology', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41 (2012), p. 279.

variety of academic disciplines, including onomastics, anthropology, ethnography, landscape archaeology, history and historical geography. It was in this spirit that the Medieval Settlement Research Group recently convened a series of workshops resulting in the report 'Perceptions of Medieval Landscape and Settlement'.[6] Other academic networks subsequently established have followed broadly the same intellectual path; particularly noteworthy in this context was the 2009 collaboration between the universities of Leicester, Nottingham and Durham in assembling a group of interdisciplinary scholars to investigate the sense of place in Anglo-Saxon England.[7]

This open approach adopted by many scholars of the rural environment has been marked by a growing body of interdisciplinary work in which the emphasis has shifted away from a narrow focus on the physical environment to a more anthropic view that places human experience at the centre of the equation – in a sense, 'repopulating' the rural landscape. Archaeologists are now concerned to move beyond the materiality of rural settlements to consider the experiences of those residing there. This ranges from how the built environment and its environs were perceived by those encountering it to a more anthropological focus on the human experience of dwelling and working in rural settlements.[8] In many instances, this new focus extends beyond the residential core and out into the surrounding fields and the wider landscape.[9]

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6   C. Dyer, 'Perceptions of medieval landscape and settlement', *Medieval Settlement Research Group Annual Report*, 22 (2007), pp. 6–31.

7   R. Jones and S. Semple (eds), *Sense of place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donington, 2012).

8   For the former, see, for example, J. Campbell, 'A house is not just a home. Means of display in English medieval gentry buildings', in M.S. Kristiansen and K. Giles (eds), *Dwellings, identities and homes. European housing culture from the Viking Age to the Renaissance* (Hojbjerg, 2014), p. 183; O. Creighton and T. Barry, 'Seigneurial and elite sites in the medieval landscape', in N. Christie and P. Stamper (eds), *Medieval rural settlement. Britain and Ireland, AD 800–1600* (Oxford, 2012), p. 63; M. Gardiner and S. Kilby, 'Perceptions of medieval settlement', in C.M. Gerrard and A. Gutiérrez (eds), *The Oxford handbook of later medieval archaeology in Britain* (Oxford, 2018), p. 212; and for the latter, see K. Altenberg, *Experiencing landscapes: a study of space and identity in three marginal areas of medieval Britain and Scandinavia* (Stockholm, 2003), p. 154; K. Giles, 'Seeing and believing: visuality and space in pre-modern England', *World Archaeology*, 39/1 (2007), p. 108; S.V. Smith, 'Materializing resistant identities among the medieval peasantry: an examination of dress accessories from English rural settlement sites', *Journal of Material Culture*, 14/3 (2009), p. 327; M.H. Johnson, *English houses 1300–1800: vernacular architecture, social life* (Harlow, 2010), p. 73; K.A. Catlin, 'Re-examining medieval settlement in the Dartmoor landscape', *Medieval Settlement Research*, 31 (2016), pp. 36–7.

9   N. Whyte, *Inhabiting the landscape. Place, custom and memory, 1500–1800* (Oxford, 2009), p. 3; B. Morris, 'Old English place-names – new approaches', in R. Jones and S. Semple (eds), *Sense of place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donington, 2011), pp. 47–60; R. Gilchrist, *Medieval life: archaeology and the life course* (Woodbridge, 2012); R. Jones, 'Responding to modern flooding: Old English place-names as a repository of traditional ecological knowledge', *Journal of Ecological Anthropology*, 18/1 (2016); L. ten Harkel, T. Franconi and C. Gosden, 'Fields, ritual and religion: holistic approaches to the rural landscape in the long-term perspective (*c.* 1500BC – AD1086)', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 36/4 (2017), pp. 413–37.