

RURAL SETTLEMENT IN ENGLAND: AN ENGLISH HERITAGE MAPPING PROJECT

Brian K. ROBERTS – Stuart WRATHMELL – David STOCKER

Introduction

English Heritage, the organisation charged with the preservation and conservation of nationally important archaeological sites and monuments in England, set up, in the 1980's the Monuments Protection Programme (MPP). It is designed to accelerate the process of giving statutory protection to the most important archaeological remains. As part of this programme English Heritage have funded a series of projects involving the mapping of rural settlement diversity. This was undertaken as part of a new approach to the concept of 'national importance' in medieval settlement remains.

The first phase of the work resulted in new Monument Class descriptions (MCDs) for such remains: these emphasised the regional diversity of both settlement patterns and forms, and established that such regional diversity was itself a matter of national importance. The MCDs incorporated maps showing the broadest of England's settlement regions, three 'provinces' defined by the presence/absence and density of nucleated settlements. A second phase of the project has looked in much more depth at settlement diversity, taking into account not only the distribution of nucleated settlement but also variations in the dispersion of non-nucleated settlement. A parallel activity has involved both the detailed mapping of terrains and other aspects of settlement and landscape, and the result has been the definition and characterisation of sub-provincial and local regions within the overall framework of the provinces, and the use of these regions in selecting settlement sites for which scheduling proposals will be prepared. A third phase of the work will involve the preparation of maps for wider dissemination.

For English Heritage, concerned with the protection, management and presentation of archaeological and historical sites, this is a severely pragmatic exercise. All archaeological sites need placing within their broader settings, their contexts, both physical and cultural. Nevertheless, there is little scholarly agreement about how this should be done. Indeed there may be a directly inverse relationship between the quantity of available information and the sophistication of the analysis of the landscape settings - thus prehistorians such as Bradley and Tilley, in the face of a total absence of documentary evidence, have used anthropological models to postulate 'landscapes of the mind', fragile concepts touching the settings of individual sites.

Amid an increasing quantity of surviving artifacts, indeed an increasing complexity of superimposition of many layers accreted from widely separated periods of development found in medieval and post-medieval periods, such landscapes of the mind tend to be swamped by pragmatic viewpoints, functionalist approaches, laying emphasis on evaluation of economic factors and social structures and their roles in generating contexts within which the artifacts were created. Nevertheless, to generalise about the medieval landscape, to move away from the study of particular sites, however far-reaching, it is necessary synthesise and begin the difficult process of identifying broad synoptic patterns. How can this be done? What specific 'elements' or 'indicators' associated with the broader medieval scene must be taken into account?

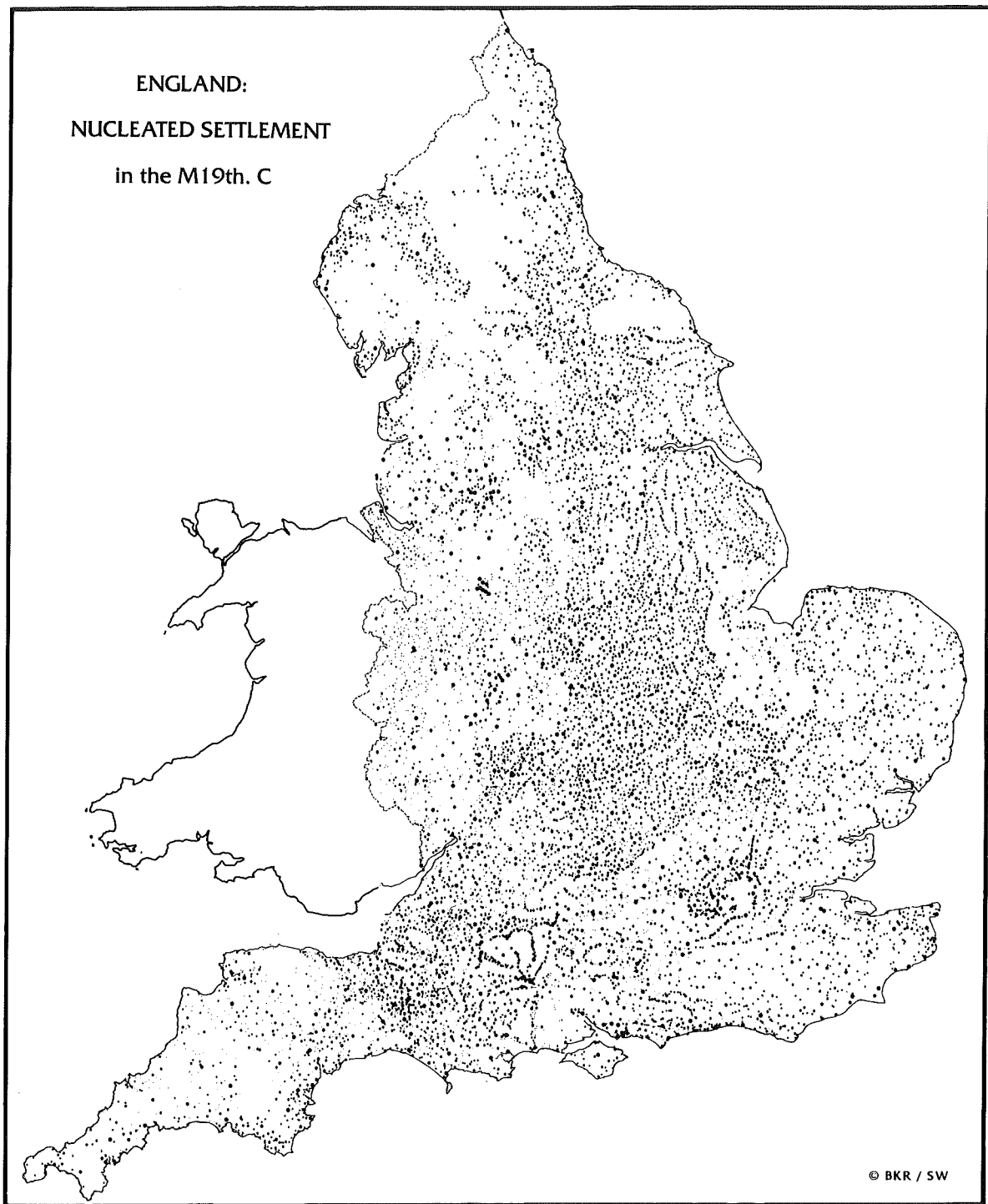


Fig. 1. England: Nucleated Settlement in the M 19th. C.

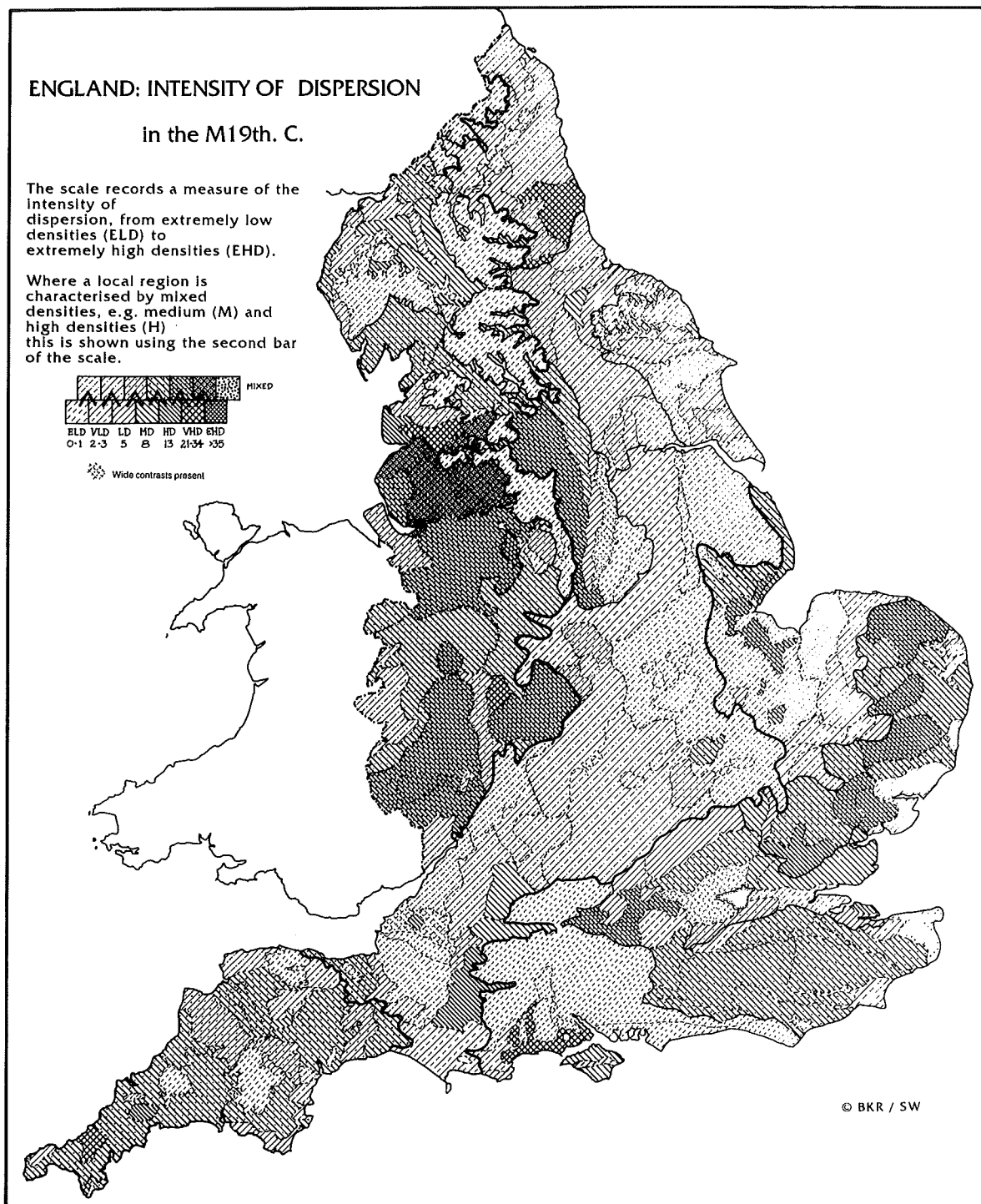


Fig. 2. England: Intensity of Dispersion in the M 19th. C.
 The scale records a measure of the intensity of dispersion, from extremely low densities (ELD) to extremely high densities (EHD).
 Where a local region is characterised by mixed densities, e.g. medium (M) and high (H) densities, this is shown using two bars of the scale.

Past landscapes were constructed - in whatever sense - by the communities which lived within them and used them, and what eventually emerges is 'not something delivered complete from the hand of nature' but a quality which unfolded in the course of time as a result of the interaction between these communities and their physical, economic and social environments (Kinvig, citing Vidal de la Blache in *Wise 1950*, 113). For post-medieval periods Thirsk has shown the diversity of local regions - local landscapes - likely to have been present (*Thirsk 1987*; see also *Homans 1969*) and while uncritical retrospective projection of these must be avoided, many are without doubt sometimes inherited and sometimes transformed from medieval antecedents. The Elizabethan traveller William Harrison, cited by Homans, noted that

*it is so that our soile being diuided into champaine
grounde and woodland, the houses of the first lie
uniformlie builded in euerie towne together, with
streets and lanes (i.e. in nucleations); whereas in the
woodland countries (except here and there in great
market townes) they stand scattered abroad, each one
dwelling in the midst of his own occupieng (i.e. as dispersion) (Homans 1960, 21).*

To this fundamental contrast, between an arable countryside, with market towns, villages and hamlets, and woodland landscapes, with more common grazing lands and enclosures and dispersed settlements intercalated between some nucleations, Thirsk has added two other elements: first, those zones comprising normally marsh and fen, hill country and uplands, where open unenclosed common pastures dominated the landscapes, and second those areas where farming intermingled with coal mining, lead mining, quarrying, textile working and the like, generating distinctive local countrysides. Each economic variation added a contribution to a mosaic of distinctive landscape assemblages, characteristic local regions. Some aspects of these have been mapped by *Thirsk (1987)*.

The MPP Maps

Harrison's description hints that the on-ground settlement characteristics may represent a useful and practical surrogate through which distinctive local regions may be identified, local regions which may have deeper, older, implications and meanings derived from the antecedent landscapes from which they have evolved. In order to explore this question, two fundamental maps, one of nucleations and the other of dispersion, have been constructed, based upon the nineteenth century Old Series, one inch to one mile maps. These represent the earliest reasonably uniform and detailed national source (*Margery 1975-1981*). Data from these were then used to define the boundaries of provinces, sub-provinces and local regions. The nucleations were plotted by the simple expedient of representing each by a subjectively scaled dot symbol (*Fig. 1*). This is a replicable exercise, limited only by the scale of the maps and their variations in quality. Dispersion was recorded by a sampling procedure, making counts of the number of dispersed elements - cottages, single-farmsteads, other houses, industrial and agricultural structures present within a 2 x 2 km square (not 4 x 4 as incorrectly stated in earlier reports) - and then approximating this count to a point on the scale 0, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21 and 34 (*Fig. 2*). Designed to magnify the presence of variations at the lower thresholds, this sequence is based on the Golden Mean or Fibbonaci ratio. The curious double scale used in the map key shows both those areas with 'pure' dispersion scores, e.g. medium density or exceptionally high density, and those local regions with mixtures of scores, for instance medium and high densities (*Roberts - Wrathmell 1995*), with the coarsest stipple - not yet used - being reserved for indicating those limited areas with scores well above 34 units per 2 x 2 square kilometres.

At the present time, these maps exist only as working drafts at a scale of a quarter inch to the mile, from which provisional photographic reductions have been prepared at a scale of 1:1 million, reduced to A4 prints

for easy use. More sophisticated versions of both the settlement maps and the terrain maps are to be prepared in a graphics computer, maps which will allow careful tuning to reveal more subtle elements concealed within the national distribution. Future refinements will, for example, sift out zones with large numbers of the very smallest hamlets, the more visible of which were recorded as the smallest category of nucleation, but with the more ambiguous 'smallest of all' hamlets being incorporated within the counting system used to note the intensity of dispersion. Bringing these two together will be an informative and stimulating exercise.

Analysis

Inherent in the nature of these fundamentally simple maps are two characteristics: first, they reflect great on-ground complexity, and second, they compress into simple plane surfaces a very great 'time-depth' - that 'deep well of the past' to use Thomas Mann's words. Both confirm the presence of the three provinces, (1) north and west, (2) central and (3) south-east, seen most clearly on the map of dispersion (*Fig. 2*). Preliminary studies involving careful comparison with other distributions provide convergent evidence for the threefold division, which was indeed noted by Rackham who identified a central band of 'planned landscapes' separating two outer zones of 'ancient landscapes', terms which beg many questions (*Rackham 1986, 3*). In fact known deserted villages tend - as might be expected - to concentrate in the central province, as of course do regular two and three field systems and townfield enclosures (see Donkin in *Darby 1973, Fig. 23*). Once, before enclosure, this was a zone of champion landscapes (*Darby in Darby 1973, Fig. 69*), with nucleations supported by and set within a vast sea of open, subdivided arable townfields. In contrast, moated sites and settlements with place-names incorporating the element 'green', as Aberg and Shirley's maps show, appear amid the 'ancient' more enclosed landscapes of the north and west and south-east (*Aberg 1978, Fig. 1; Shirley 1994, 33a*). Both of these have undisputable origins in the medieval period, the former attested by the evidence of excavations (*Aberg 1978*), the latter by documentation (*Warner 1987; Dyer 1991*).

It can hardly be disputed that many nucleations have medieval roots (*Beresford - St. Joseph 1958, repr. 1979; Beresford - Hurst 1971; Taylor 1983; Roberts 1987; Aston - Austin - Dyer 1989*), but it is in practice surprisingly difficult to *prove* precisely what settlement form or pattern existed in a particular decade or even century for the many thousands of named and documented places known from medieval taxation records and Domesday Book of 1086 (*Glasscock 1975; Darby - Versey 1975*). Still less is this possible for the thousands of localities attested by place-names whose linguistic origin - Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian or Anglo-Scandinavian - suggests their presence long before they are first documented in Domesday Book or even in Anglo-Saxon charters (*Sawyer 1976, 1-7; Hooke 1988*). The scale of the problem can be appreciated by noting that Roberts has estimated that of the order of 7500 nucleations were present in England by the mid-nineteenth century: if a deduction of any post-medieval additions is ignored because this gross figure is almost certainly an underestimate based on a preliminary mapping, then to this figure must be added approximately 2500 deserted settlements. All in all - for the figures are as yet only rough measures - this suggests a gross total of 10,000 localities where nucleations once existed. Domesday Book lists some 13,278 places in England, demonstrably an underestimate (*Darby 1977, 15-26*), although, with appropriate caution, he attempts no estimate of the ratio of those recorded to those not recorded. Figures given by Sawyer for Kent are startling: 347 places are named in Domesday Book, to which must be added a further 139 places which had baptisimal churches at the time but which do *not* appear in the Domesday record (*Sawyer 1976, 2*). This would give a ratio of 2.5 recorded settlements for each one not recorded, and adding a gross figure of 5000 to 13000 gives a 'guestimate' (between a 'guess' and an 'estimate'!) of 18,000 'settlements' actually present in 1086. When set against the figure of 10,000 localities noted above - to describe these as 'putative potential nucleations' offers sufficient criticism of this step - then the importance of regions lacking nucleation is clear, for the named localities of 1086 appear in all but the most difficult of upland environments in a country that was already fully settled and vigorously exploited. These crude figures in no way nullify the importance of thinking about such gross totals, and that fact that a calculation based upon the 1334 national Lay Subsidy data for 1334 (*Glasscock 1975*) suggests a total of some 15,000 'vills' or adminis-

trative units - essentially townships - indicates that the order of magnitude implied by the calculations may be broadly correct.

It must be emphasised that correlations between the three provinces and other distributions are currently being explored; thus while moated sites and 'green settlements' (these not to be confused with true 'green villages', i.e. nucleations, organised, probably planned, around a central integral green or open space) tend to be absent from the central province, the central province accords very closely with national maps recording the enclosure of communally organised open field systems ('townfields' to use a more neutral term), maps which were compiled by scholars working at the turn of this century (Darby in *Darby 1973*, Fig. 69). It is tempting to see such broad brush correlations as 'obvious', but in fact apart from a bold generalisation by Thorpe in 1964, no general view of national settlement had been created before the present versions (in *Watson - Sissons 1964*, Fig. 47) and it is the *convergence* of this evidence which is particularly important. In this context H. L. Gray's map of field systems published in 1915 (*Gray 1915*, repr. 1959) - is now seen to be singularly misleading. Much remains to be explored, defined, often redefined and integrated into work at a local scale.

The use and analysis of these maps points towards three interlocking themes which see settlement (1) as part of MPP management procedures, (2) as an icon linked to the perception of landscapes, and (3) as a source material for academic enquiry into the genesis and transformations of whole landscapes.

Management Questions

A search through the sites and monuments records of all English counties by Stuart Wrathmell has shown that there are marked spatial variations in the numbers of sites recommended for protection. This arises from several factors, not least variations in on-ground recording and listing procedures, but more fundamentally because there are underlying variations in the distribution of the specific types of site being considered. Clearly, the value of a particular site, a deserted village for example, must be assessed within a framework which considers not only the quality of that site relative to all others of its type, but also in the context of the quantity or scarcity within each local region. While a simple grid framework, perhaps based upon 25 x 25 km squares, could be used to ensure an evenly spread national sample of sites, some measure of the real underlying pattern offers the possibility of more sophisticated sampling procedures. There is the further prospect of using the maps as a means of asking questions about gaps in distributions, perhaps with one type of site being replaced by another type in a different area.

Moreover, the sub-provinces and local regions can be described in terms of the settlement characteristics from which they are identified, leading to the next logical step, describing not only definitive features associated with settlement, but also summarising associated features, characteristic terrains, field systems, land usages, types of road nets, possible antecedent features and other elements, bringing the work close to a national appraisal of types of cultural landscape. This will parallel the national terrain map.

The management of tracts of countryside as cultural relicts poses profound questions, and well-known designations such as 'areas of outstanding natural beauty' can only invoke only mirth amongst those concerned with understanding landscapes. In fact, natural landscapes have been influenced by human actions for longer and more thoroughly than most of us can imagine, bringing changes which affect not only surface vegetation, fauna and land-cover but soils, drainage and even slopes and climate. Cultural pressures have, time and time again, effected fundamental transformations whose lineaments we can often only discern with difficulty for earlier periods but which are amply attested by documents. The maps require much further study and refinement, but the continuous mosaic of local regions - in no small measure reflecting historical forces as well as elements which are the gift of nature - provide a useful yet adaptable synoptic view of the whole land surface.

Countrysides of the present contain complex mixtures of elements, some of which are natural, some of which are artifacts, bequeathed by former generations, elements which are now often - perhaps even normally - divorced from their original setting, a setting which at any point in time itself comprised mixtures of elements bequeathed from even earlier antecedents. Processes of creation, decay, adaptation, renewal, sometimes in the context of dramatic transformations over long or short periods of time generate what the historian Maitland termed 'that complex palimpsest' (Maitland 1897, repr. 1960, 38), bearing comparison with a document overwritten not once but many times. This generates tensions, for the landscape is both a resource, from which contemporary society must, in part, obtain a living by using it, and also a source for all concerned with the past, for an inherited cultural landscape is, in M. R. G. Conzen's words, the 'geographical record of its own evolution' (Conzen in Isaac - Allan 1949, 76). Nowhere is this tension more evident than in landscape seen as 'heritage', in which relict features are perceived to have 'value' because of their antiquity.

Although most ideas have many roots, the concept of the cultural landscape was for English readers closely defined in a classic paper by Carl Sauer entitled 'The Morphology of Landscape'. Originally published in 1938 it was reprinted in 1963 by John Leighley (Leighley 1963) in a collection of Sauer's papers, thus making it available to a wider public. The same collection also included a paper originally published in 1941 in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* and titled 'Forward to Historical Geography'. Both bear re-reading. In 'The Morphology of Landscape' Sauer reviews what had been and (in 1938) was the object of geographical study, showing that the German roots of the term imply the study of the content of areas, both of the entities present and the connections between these: he continues to argue that culture acting upon both unaltered and altered nature generates cultural landscapes, areas, whose distinctive and unique associations of elements (by definition location is always unique) are worthy of study, analysis, comparison and explanation. In this, the time dimension can never be excluded, although the duration taken into account may vary from a few decades to several thousand years.

That the word *landscape* was originally introduced into English, from the Netherlands, as a painters' term, with all that this implies in terms of perceptions, judgements and values, is not in question - indeed Sauer comments on this link (Leighley 1963, 322). In philological terms the two elements - *land* and *scape* - combines two Old English words which draw together two ideas, the first implying quite literally 'a tract of land', the second meaning 'create, ordain' or 'appoint', seen in *craftsmanship* and *workmanship*, where individuals are involved, but also extending to the collective as in township - the territory of a *-tun*, or local farming community. Common usage such as that seen in *The Making of the English Landscape* (originally published in 1955, but revised in 1976, see Taylor 1988) - a classic work by the local historian W. G. Hoskins - supports the general use of the term to designate the components of the artifactual scene which, in close combination with wholly natural elements, give distinctive character to tracts of countryside, in opposition to townscape, the urban scene. This definition in no way excludes artistic or perceptual approaches within the scope of the same term. No narrow limits need be sought or accepted (*Landscape Research* 1994). E. Estyn Evans touches a vital point when in 1973 he noted that Sauer's use of the term 'geographical personality' embraces "the whole dynamic relation of life and land" (Evans 1973, repr. 1992, 68).

Academic Enquiry

Boundaries are a crucial part of this synoptic view of rural settlement. There is no doubt that they vary in date and significance: some may be quite ephemeral features, while others are of ancient foundation and long duration, indeed the lineaments of the two provincial boundaries can be discerned in the national map of woodland in 1086 (Darby 1977, repr. 1986, Fig. 64). This is not the place for a discourse on such questions, but many of these derive from the processes of comparing and contrasting the various other sources described earlier. In fact, the maps are more than a mere summary of a static situation visible on the mid-nineteenth century: they are a record of centuries of dynamic transformations which have generated the visible patterns. While the three provinces are seen to be present in other distributions created from wholly different sources by varied scholars since the beginning of the twentieth century - a process of convergence - it is a remarkable fact that they are still not satisfactorily explained. In this there remains a fundamental academic challenge.

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