

The Pattern of Settlement on the Welsh Border

By G. R. J. JONES

IN the zone which incorporates the western border counties of England and the adjoining marcher lordships of Wales the existence of an important cultural frontier has long been recognized, although like all such boundaries it cannot everywhere be defined precisely in topographic terms. To Seebohm, in his study of the English Village Community, it was clear "that in the eleventh century, as it had done previously for 400 years, the river Wye separated by a sharp line the Saxon land, on which the manorial land system prevailed, from the Welsh land on which the Welsh tribal land system prevailed."¹ Likewise Gray, in his analysis of English Field Systems, attempted to demonstrate that the boundary between the Celtic System and the Midland System passed through this zone.² The purpose of this paper is to reveal some of the major factors which underlie the arrangement of farmsteads within the zone. As the references to Seebohm and Gray imply, however, such an analysis must be based not simply on the patterns of farmsteads as they exist today, important though these are both as starting-points and as links in the chain of evidence, but also on the social and economic aspirations of the communities which created these patterns and modified them through past ages.

For the student of settlement this border zone, where the tides of struggle between English and Welsh ebbed and flowed over centuries, presents an embarrassment of problems, but adequate answers have hitherto been all too few. Why, for example, should the isolated farmstead, often set in the midst of its own fields, abound on the Welsh side of the border and yet co-exist there alongside small nucleated hamlets? How was it that both these forms of settlement were associated until recently with unequivocal traces of open field? Were the Welsh hamlets simply a product of late and sporadic diffusion from the counties on the English side of the border where in Domesday times the hamlet of one or two ploughlands was by far the most frequent unit of settlement, or were these hamlets of an earlier origin? Similarly on the English side, for example, can the contrasts between the three-field system formerly associated with the hamlets of Herefordshire and the irregular

¹ F. Seebohm, *The English Village Community*, 1905, p. 208.

² H. L. Gray, *English Field Systems*, 1915, pp. 83-271.

open-field system of 'forest' areas be explained away simply as an expression of early, as opposed to late, colonization?

The attempt made in this paper to answer these questions will be based almost entirely on Welsh evidence. The English evidence, examined and re-examined since the late nineteenth century, is already sufficiently familiar to members of the British Agricultural History Society. To English eyes, on the other hand, the Welsh evidence is still obscured in something akin to a Celtic twilight. The Welsh countryside is still too readily interpreted as a pastoral reserve where Welsh Abrahams with their tribes roamed at will until the late Middle Ages, and the scattered farms of modern Wales are interpreted as a direct expression of these arrangements. This is in part due to the oversimplified equation of pastoralism with the accidented relief and moist climate of Wales, an equation all too easily made, given the predominance of animal husbandry in modern Wales. A moment's reflection on the need for grain in a self-sufficing economy during the Middle Ages should have been sufficient to cast doubts on this interpretation, but in the nineteenth century, when studies of rural settlement were initiated, the theory of unilinear social evolution held sway. Since this theory emphasized, in Darwinian terms, that pastoralism inevitably preceded cultivation, no such doubts arose. Nor were these earlier views unpalatable to Welshmen, for, well versed in Biblical lore, they were not unwilling to link their oldest traditions with those of the Hebrews of old. Welshmen readily imagined their forbears as free tribesmen, practising an almost exclusively pastoral economy, with some no doubt looking down in contempt upon the settled servile cultivators of the English plain. Englishmen on the other hand found solace in the belief that their Saxon forbears were at a more advanced stage of social and economic evolution than the tribal Welsh. For these reasons, and perhaps also because of prejudices against the "primitive communism" envisaged by Morgan and Engels,¹ earlier investigators have consistently underestimated the importance of the evidence for social stratification in early Celtic society, and in particular for the existence of a settled servile population. Closer examination of the Welsh evidence within recent years has revealed that there was not simply one Celtic system, as Gray would have it, but, in the centuries following 1100 A.D., two fairly distinctive Celtic systems. On the one hand there were communities of bondmen who normally resided in small nucleated hamlets; on the other hand there were corporate groups of freemen, which can be described technically as agnatic 'clans', whose members frequently resided in more widely dispersed homesteads.

¹ Cf. E. E. Evans, 'The Ecology of Peasant Life in Western Europe', in W. L. Thomas (ed.), *Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth*, 1956, p. 231.

I

Pride of place in this account can be given to the second of these systems, since this is probably the least familiar to students of agrarian history. Each clan occupied a resting place, otherwise known in Latin as a *lectus* and in Welsh as a *gwely*. This resting place was a permanent stake of arable land which entitled the clan members to grazing rights over extensive common pastures. Sometimes one resting place was confined within the limits of a single township or vill, but often one resting place would embrace land within a number of widely scattered townships.¹ Frequently, as a result, any one member of a clan might hold his stake of arable land in a number of townships often several miles apart; but even within any one township the arable 'lands' (*selions*) of any one clansman were usually scattered through a number of small patches of open-field arable, known as sharelands.

The average endowment of the typical member of a free clan at the close of the thirteenth century was less than ten acres of arable land, a figure which implies that even the most widely scattered 'lands' could not be neglected because of their remoteness or difficulty of access. Sometimes distant 'lands' were held and cultivated by undertenants, but usually these problems of distance were overcome by means of co-operation. Individuals would frequently undertake to plough 'lands' for each other so as to obviate frequent journeys to and from distant sharelands. The other major aspects of agrarian co-operation concerned the grazing of animals. The prevalence of spring cereals, mostly oats, meant that the arable sharelands were available as common fallow pastures in winter. Similarly the common pastures within each township were preserved for use in winter, a practice made possible by the grazing in summer of large upland wastes which, like the shire-moors of Northumbria or the wealds of Kent, were common to a large number of townships.

Each resting place had originated when the eponymous ancestor of the clan, or his immediate predecessor, was permitted to appropriate arable land in a place often referred to as the Old Settlement (*Hendref*). This arable land, subject to equal division *per stirpes* among male heirs, soon became an open-field shareland (*rhandir*). Partible inheritance, by reducing the share of any one heir in the first area occupied, made necessary a territorial expansion away from the Old Settlement on to sites commonly less favourable from a physical standpoint within the territories over which the nascent clan exer-

¹ T. Jones Pierce, 'The Gafael in Bangor Manuscript 1939', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1942, pp. 162-88; G. R. J. Jones, 'Some Medieval Rural Settlements in North Wales', *Transactions and Papers 1953, Institute of British Geographers*, 1954, pp. 51-64; 'Medieval Open Fields and Associated Settlement Patterns in North-West Wales', in X. de Planhol (ed.), *Géographie et Histoire Agraires*, 1959, pp. 314-22.

cised rights of pasture. With most heirs links of sentiment, reinforced by a shrewd awareness of the superior quality of the Old Settlement lands, led to an early fragmentation of the typical Old Settlement. As a result, the largest shares of most heirs came to lie in the newer sharelands and it became convenient for many an heir, on first inheriting, to establish his homestead away from the Old Settlement. To economize on arable land, which has always been the scarce factor of agricultural production in Wales, the homesteads of many heirs were frequently built on the outer edges of the newer sharelands. Since the average shareland rarely contained more than 100 acres, there frequently developed what may be described as girdle patterns of dispersed dwellings, the shape of each girdle flexibly adapted to that of the contour and its dimensions dependent on those of the nuclear shareland.¹

Few of these girdles have survived, for the resting place contained within itself the seeds of a fairly rapid decline. Partible inheritance appears to have encouraged a high rate of population growth, and thus the perpetuation of the *gwely* system was dependent upon the opportunities for territorial expansion. There were obvious geographical and technical limits to this process, and as soon as this stage was reached the continued operation of *gavelkind* reduced the arable stakes of some heirs below the economic minimum. At this stage, some individuals with greater resources could buy up the holdings of any one heir, and as a result adjoining 'lands' were gradually consolidated into compact blocks.² In most areas this consolidation had already taken place by the opening of the sixteenth century and many of the consolidated blocks had been enclosed with hedges or banks. Similarly, if not simultaneously, enclosed pastures were carved out of the hitherto undivided common pastures within the townships. Estate consolidation transformed many sharelands, and notably the oldest sharelands on the best soils, into large, consolidated, and thus isolated farms often of 250 acres or more, with, for Wales, correspondingly large enclosed fields. To this day, however, remnants of sharelands and girdle-patterns, fossilized at the partial stage of consolidation, are still to be found, especially in that northern portion of the border zone which lies west of the present national frontier.

II

Hamlets inhabited by small groups of bondmen were the characteristic units of settlement under the first Celtic system, which as we shall see was

¹ G. R. J. Jones, *op. cit.*, 1959, pp. 316-17: 'The Distribution of Medieval Settlement in Anglesey', *Anglesey Antiquarian Society Transactions*, 1955, pp. 27-33, 68-73, 77-9.

² *Ibid.*; T. Jones Pierce, 'Agrarian Aspects of the Tribal System in Medieval Wales', in X. de Planhol, *op. cit.*, pp. 329-37.

certainly the older of the two systems. Although it would be rash to claim that every bond settlement was invariably a hamlet, Welsh law makes it clear that the ideal bond settlement of the Middle Ages was a unit containing nine houses closely grouped together. The complement of this ideal hamlet was one plough, one kiln for the drying of corn, one churn, one cat, one cock, one bull, and one herdsman who cared for the common herd. Each hamlet was encompassed or adjoined by an open-field shareland, beyond which lay the common pasture, parts of which were 'mountain land' (*terra montana*) periodically subject to temporary cultivation.¹ Thus constituted, the hamlet was the local unit of both pastoral and agricultural co-operation, but in addition every hamlet was part of a wider group known as a *maenor*, which for agrarian purposes was subject to the control of a land mayor (*prepositus*). In return for their labour services and rents, which were heavy as compared with those of the freemen but light by English manorial standards, bondmen of these hamlets were allowed by the lord of each commote or administrative neighbourhood to exercise rights of occupation over their small areas of arable land and permitted to graze their livestock on the lord's wastes. These rights were shared equally *per capita* among the adult males of each hamlet community; thus the arable land was subject to re-division and re-allocation with any change in the size of the adult male population of the hamlet. The lowly status of these bondmen was emphasized by the control to which they were subject even for the most mundane farming activities. The land mayor was responsible not only for allocating lands to the bondmen but also for deciding which crops were to be grown and which plots were to be cultivated. The actual cultivation was conducted by all tenants in common but the mayor was responsible for allocating to each a rôle in the common tillage, and until this was done no cultivation could be commenced. Each bondman garnered the produce of his own plots, but thereafter all plots became common once more and served as pasture until the next tillage.

Within each commote there were a number of bond hamlets, but by far the most important was the hamlet where the mayor resided and which was known therefore as the mayor's settlement (*maerdref*). Within a short distance of each mayor's settlement was the court (*llys*) of the lord of the commote; accordingly the lands of each mayor's settlement embraced fairly large areas of demesne land or board land (*tir bwrdd*) used for the sustenance of the court. Such land, normally the most suitable for cultivation within the commote, was worked on behalf of the lord by the bondmen of the *maerdref* and the outlying hamlets of the commote working under the supervision of the land mayor.

¹ G. R. J. Jones, *op. cit.*, 1959, pp. 320, 327-8.

Few of the bond hamlets of Wales have survived, for reasons which are closely bound up with the conditions of bond-land tenure. The rents and services imposed on each hamlet were a communal obligation, so that if but one tenant survived he was to have the whole hamlet in return for all the rents and services imposed on the hamlet. A decrease in the bond population such as occurred during the Great Plague meant a corresponding increase in the burdens of the survivors. Not unnaturally many bondmen took advantage of the turmoil of the later Middle Ages to escape their obligations by flight, so that many bond lands and demesnes, now held by the English Crown or by Lords Marcher, fell into decay.¹ As a result these lands provided a favourable field for the activities of estate-consolidators who by means of legitimate leases, or even illegitimate encroachments from adjoining *gwely* land, gradually converted bond land, or intermingled bond and demesne land, into compact farms. Consequently most of the bond hamlets in medieval Wales have disappeared. Nucleated settlements survived only where there were favourable local conditions to promote such a survival. The two extremes of survival and disappearance are best illustrated by reference to the northern borderland.

The mayor's settlement of Meliden, home manor of the bishop of St Asaph, provides clear evidence of the survival until relatively recently of medieval and even older arrangements (Fig. I). In 1357 there were no less than 358 acres of arable in demesne, the greater part being on those soils rich in lime and having a favourable crumb structure which are known today to the soil scientist as brown earths of high base status. Some two-thirds of this arable, which was divided between the bishop and the Chapter, lay intermingled in the open fields with the selions of the tenants, but 134 acres of arable, 12 acres of meadow, and an orchard were held in severalty by the bishop. This land in severalty presumably lay in the vicinity of the Old Court (Hens Llys) about a quarter of a mile north of the hamlet; for here by 1839 a large and fairly well consolidated farm of the same name had emerged, although field names like *Maes-y-dre* (the Township open field) and *Talard hirion* (*sic*) (Long headland) make it clear that this land too had once lain in open field.² As late as the eighteenth century the court rolls reveal that the community of the hamlet still exercised certain communal responsibilities, for in 1734 the township was fined for not having a pinfold and stocks. Appropriately enough, in the same year one inhabitant of the hamlet was fined

¹ T. Jones Pierce, 'Some Tendencies in the Agrarian History of Caernarvonshire during the Later Middle Ages', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, I, 1938, pp. 1-27.

² P.R.O., Ministers' Accounts, 1143/23; Tithe Redemption Commission, Apportionment and Map, Meliden Parish, 1839.

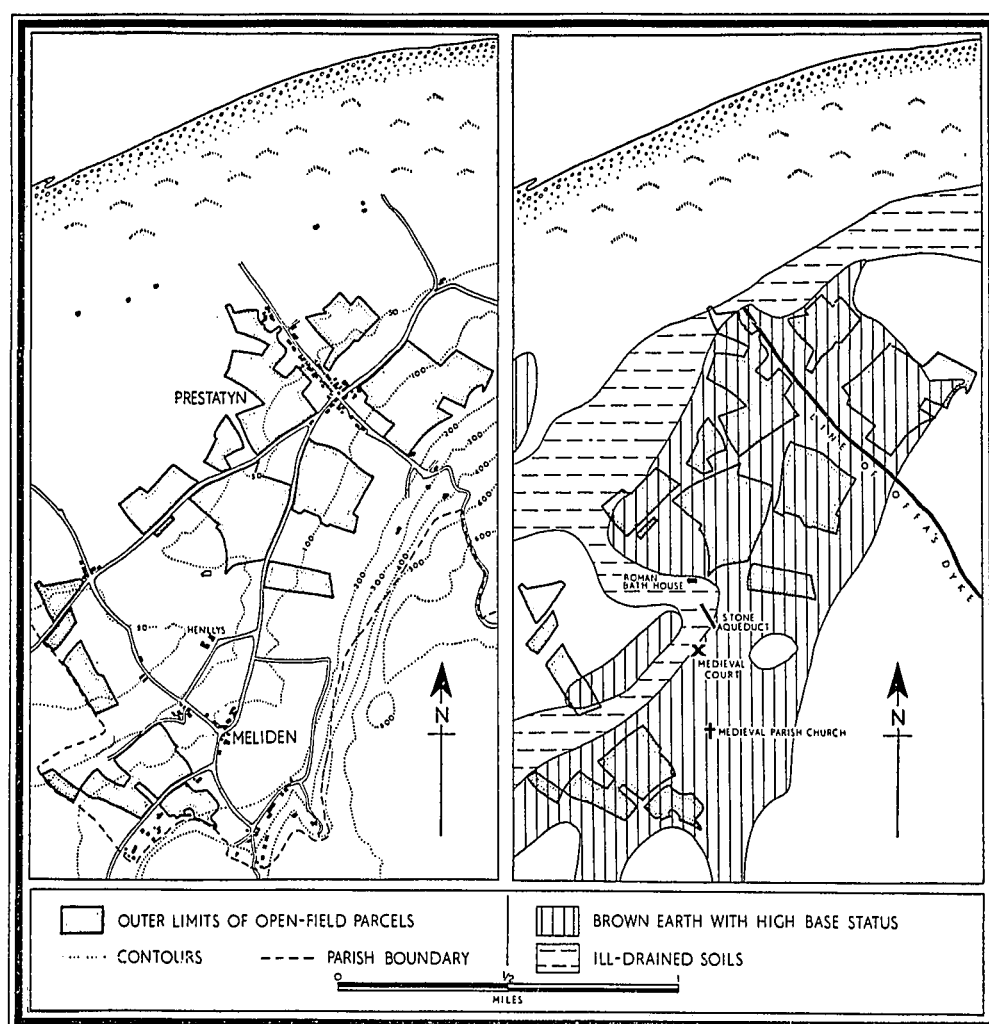


FIG. I

for not laying open three enclosures.¹ Enclosures were however permitted on payment of fines, and by 1839 open-field arable was confined to the southern part of the township. The hamlet of Meliden, which in 1699 had contained twelve houses "by the church,"² survived despite these changes, though by 1839 it was being increasingly overshadowed by the squatters' cottages erected on the common upland pasture to the east and the dispersed farmsteads which had been established in the west as a result of the consolidation and enclosure of the open fields. At Meliden, as in the neighbouring secular mayor's

¹ National Library of Wales: E.C.E. MSS., 215790; N.L.W., MSS., 4353, 14542 F; Plymouth MSS., 158.

² R. H. Morris (ed.), *Parochialia*, 1909, pp. 55-6.

settlement of Prestatyn (which provides an even more striking instance of late surviving open field), the persistence of a community of smallholders in the initial nucleus of settlement was closely bound up with opportunities to combine agriculture with other activities. Not only were conditions here favourable for the production of corn, but in addition the smallholders were not entirely dependent on the produce of their scattered 'lands', for the copper mine in the south of Meliden was an important source of supplementary income.¹

By way of contrast, at Dinorben, seven miles to the south-west, conditions were less favourable for the development of supplementary activities, for the mayor's settlement occupied an interior site on the southern flank of a low limestone ridge (Fig. II). As a result the arable lands of the hamlet community which in 1334 had lain intermingled with some 50 acres of demesne, were already at an advanced stage of consolidation by the sixteenth century. By the eighteenth century these lands had been incorporated into a single farm known appropriately as Fardre (a mutated form of the name *Maerdref*). Where formerly had stood a small hamlet, adjoined by a church and corn-drying kiln, there now stand but the substantial buildings of a single large farm.²

III

Strictly speaking, the sharp distinction between free clans and bond communities, drawn for the sake of clear exposition in earlier sections of this paper, was not true of medieval Wales. Earlier investigators assumed that resting places resulted from the settlement of one or more freemen on lands which somehow or other had escaped settlement or even permanent cultivation until a late date, variously interpreted as ranging between 900 and 1400 A.D. Even Jones Pierce, who was the first to demonstrate that the resting place was an institution which developed only after 1100 A.D., adhered to this virgin-land theory.³ Closer examination of the evidence, however, has shown that resting places frequently developed on land formerly occupied by bondmen, who were often granted along with the lands they tilled to the free founders of clans. Significantly enough, the oldest resting place of which we

¹ Tithe Redemption Commission, Tithe File 14338; P.R.O., Home Office, Enumerators' Returns, Meliden Parish, 1841.

² P. Vinogradoff and F. W. Morgan (eds.), *Survey of the Honour of Denbigh*, 1914, pp. 230-3; P.R.O., Miscellaneous Books Land Revenue, 235, ff. 21-6; T.R.C., Tithe Apportionment and Map, St George Parish, 1840.

³ T. P. Ellis, *Welsh Tribal Law and Custom in the Middle Ages*, I, 1926, p. 147; T. Jones Pierce, 'Medieval Settlement in Anglesey', *Anglesey Antiquarian Society Transactions*, 1951, pp. 7-9.

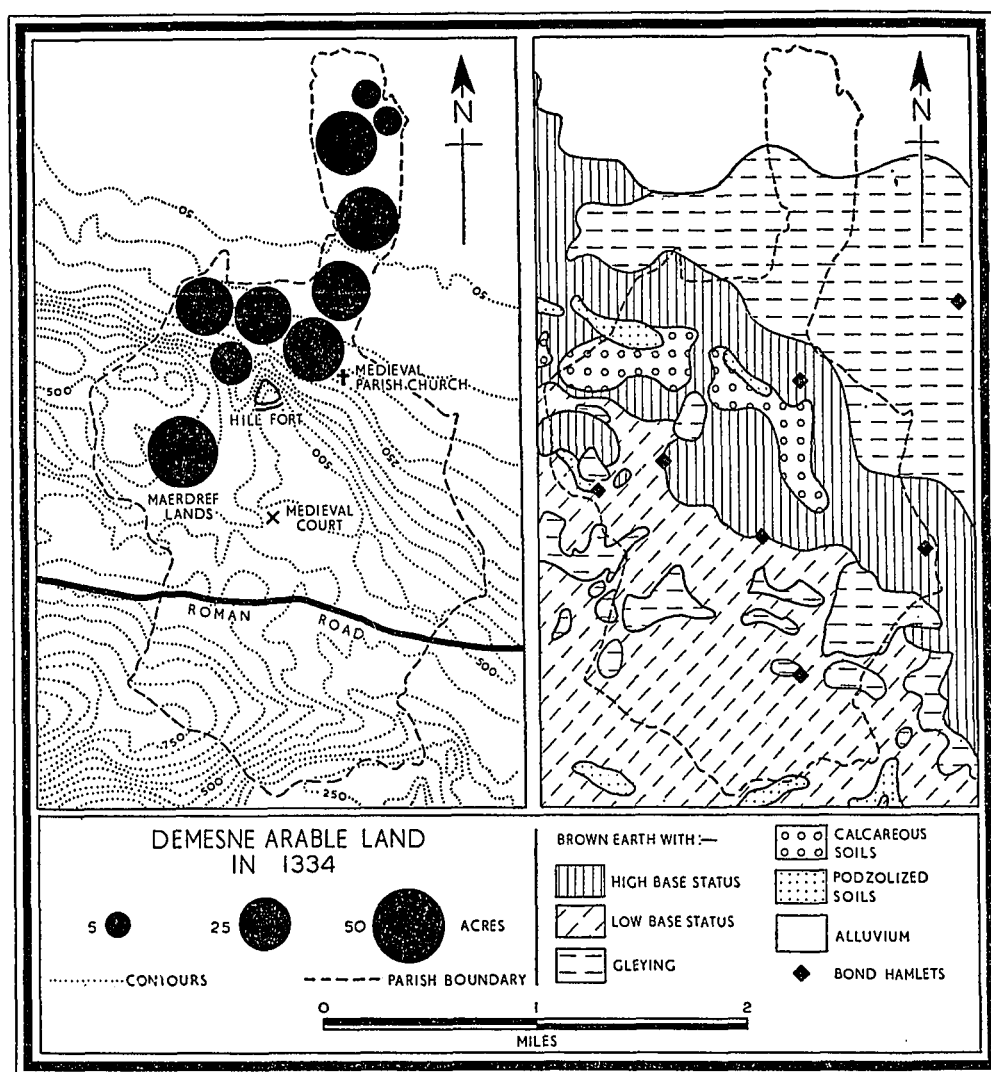


FIG. II

have record is that which developed after Elidyr, son of the prominent free-man Rhÿs who held Erbistock in 1066, was allowed to appropriate land on the border of the mayor's settlement of Llandegla in the years following the first Norman impact on the northern border of Wales. From this *pied à terre* west of the Clwydian Hills his descendants looked eastwards for lands to settle, and by 1315 the 97 adult males of this clan held land in no less than ten other settlements in an area often exposed to the ravages of war and formerly tributary to the mayor's settlement of Wrexham.¹

¹ Illustrated in G. R. J. Jones, 'Rural Settlement: Wales', *Advancement of Science*, xv, 1959, pp. 338-42.

The emergence of such resting places caused the disappearance of many bond hamlets. A parallel process whereby some bond communities were enfranchised and permitted to hold land by resting-place tenure had a similar result. It follows therefore that before 1100 A.D. bondmen were probably more numerous and freemen were certainly less numerous than is indicated in late medieval records. Domesday Book provides ample testimony to this effect for the area of the border. Each of the Welshmen described as living by Welsh law at Caerleon had one plough team,¹ and should be regarded as 'notables' (*uchelwyr*), or prominent freemen, rather than as humble freemen characteristic of later centuries when large clans had emerged and landed resources had been subdivided. The same is probably true of the individual Welshmen recorded for the border as paying substantial rents and frequently owning whole plough teams. Suggestion hardens into certainty in Gwent (Monmouthshire) where Berddig, a Welshman and the king's minstrel, held in 1086 three villas containing five plough teams on the same easy terms as had been imposed by the Welsh king Gruffydd. These and seven other villas had formerly been part of a *maenor* of fourteen bond hamlets which had been broken up in order to endow prominent freemen.² But that such freemen were but a small minority is indicated by the existence alike in Gwent, Archenfield, and Moldsdale of *maenors* embracing 7, 13, or 14 bond hamlets, some of which were still under the control of Welsh land mayors left undisturbed in office.³

Although Domesday Book provides concrete evidence for the existence of groups of bond hamlets, and even records a unit named Maenor (Mainaure) in Archenfield, this alone is unlikely to satisfy those who adhere to the belief that the vast majority of Welshmen were free tribesmen and in economy semi-nomadic pastoralists. Fortunately therefore it can be demonstrated that the two mayor's settlements of Meliden and Dinorben considered above are of some antiquity.

The hamlet of Meliden was the oldest settlement in the parish of Prestatyn, for here was located the parish church recorded in Domesday Book. In 1086 Meliden was linked to Prestatyn and both were small bond settlements, but their earlier history was quite distinct. According to an account recorded in the medieval records of St Asaph, Meliden was granted to St Kentigern by the Welsh ruler Maelgwn Gwynedd in the sixth century A.D.⁴ Although it is

¹ *Domesday Book*, I, p. 185b. ² *Ibid.*, p. 162a.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 162a, 181a, 267b; J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, II, 1948, pp. 357-99.

⁴ National Library of Wales: Peniarth MS. 231.B., *Liber Ruber Asaphensis*, 200-2; St Asaph MS. B/22, *Alter Liber Pergamenus*, f.1 verso.

difficult to substantiate this claim, Meliden does appear to have been old-established. Its name, like that of all other settlements in this area west of Offa's Dyke, is of Welsh origin, whereas neighbouring Prestatyn was originally known by the English name Preston.¹ Nor is it unlikely that this Preston was named after the pre-existing priest's *tun* immediately to the south-west. For defensive reasons the Preston which became Prestatyn was a long narrow settlement built along the line of Offa's Dyke, the frontier work constructed in the late eighth century,² which still underlies the High Street. It follows therefore that Meliden was certainly in existence before this date. But a still greater antiquity is implied for Meliden by the discovery, to the north of the Old Court, of traces of a Roman bath-house and other structures which have been interpreted as the remains of a villa associated with the fortress at Chester.³ The Old Court, ascribed here by local tradition to Maelgwn Gwynedd, occupied a site so close to that of the villa that one is tempted to equate the court with the villa and ponder the question whether the social stratification between the Welsh lord and his bondmen did not already exist on Welsh soil in Roman times.

A conclusive answer to this question would undoubtedly be regarded as premature on the basis simply of the Welsh evidence, yet the evidence already available for Dinorben indicates that the answer should be in the affirmative. As the prefix *din* indicates, Dinorben, like a significant number of other bond settlements in Wales, was named after the immediately adjoining hill-fort. Dinorben, which had been a centre of importance in the Dark Ages,⁴ appears in 1334 as a manor and *caput* of the commote of Rhos Isdulas. All the freemen of this commote were responsible for the upkeep of the buildings of the court, but the actual construction of these buildings was a duty borne by the bondmen of five hamlets appendant to Dinorben.⁵ The medieval court was sited to the south of the hill-fort, then known as Pendinas, but in earlier centuries was probably within the ramparts, where the spade of the archaeologist has revealed a succession of substantial huts.⁶ One was a circular structure (of Little Woodbury type) dated to the third and fourth centuries A.D., when it was inhabited, or so numerous coins would suggest, by an affluent

¹ B. G. Charles, *Non-Celtic Place-Names in Wales*, 1938, pp. 230-1.

² C. Fox, *Offa's Dyke*, 1955, pp. 5-28.

³ R. Newstead, 'The Roman Station, Prestatyn', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, xcii, 1937, pp. 208-32; *Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain*, 1956, and Introduction, p. 33.

⁴ J. G. Evans (ed.), *The Black Book of Carmarthen*, 1906, p. 69.

⁵ *Survey of the Honour of Denbigh*, pp. 215-16, 220, 222-3, 225-8, 239, 268-9.

⁶ H. N. Savory, 'Excavations at Dinorben Hill Fort, Abergele (Denbs.)', 1956-7, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, xvii, 1958, pp. 296-309.

household.¹ In later layers, possibly of the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., there is evidence to suggest a large rectangular hall of the kind described in the Welsh laws and medieval extents as characteristic of a lord's court. The medieval court on the outskirts of each mayor's settlement in Wales was sometimes encompassed by a protective wall;² we can therefore envisage that the ramparts of a hill-fort served a similar purpose at an earlier stage of Celtic social development. Dinorben provides a clear answer to that question which for so long has puzzled archaeologists:³ what kind of social organization in the Early Iron Age made possible the construction of such large structures as this hill-fort, which embraced within multiple ramparts an area of no less than five acres? An undertaking such as this would have required control over the resources of an area far larger than the lands of one hamlet. The rents and labour services levied by the lord of Dinorben on the tenants of the appendant hamlets of his *maenor* provide testimony as to how the requisite control over the resources of a wide area was effected.

The evidence for Dinorben, moreover, gives some pointers as to the siting of these appendant hamlets in the sub-Roman period. For the manor as a whole detailed post-medieval records make it possible to locate with precision the arable demesne lands described in the survey of 1334. At that date there were some 300 acres of demesne arable which lay in three distinct types of physical setting. In the north the arable was located on brown earths subject to gleying, or in other words imperfectly drained; this imperfection of drainage was probably caused by the adverse effects on soil-water circulation of woodland clearance undertaken after 1311,⁴ for the area of arable demesne recorded in that year was less than half the figure for 1334. In the south the

¹ The site at Little Woodbury (Wiltshire) was interpreted as a lone steading of the type now commonly accepted as the unit of that dispersed settlement which many archaeologists regard as characteristic of the Early Iron Age in Britain. Analogy with Dinorben suggests, however, that Little Woodbury could equally well be interpreted as the *llys* of the local lord who ruled—probably among others—the adjacent lowland hamlet of Britford (the ford of the Britons).

² G. R. J. Jones, 'The site of Llys Aberffraw', *Anglesey Antiquarian Society Transactions*, 1957, pp. 5-7.

³ S. Applebaum, 'The Agriculture of the British Early Iron Age as exemplified at Figheldean Down, Wiltshire', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, xx, 1954, p. 14.

⁴ A. Muir, 'The Post-Congress Excursion Round Britain', *Transactions of the Third International Congress of Soil Science*, III, 1936, p. 266. I am indebted to Dr Muir, of the Soil Survey of England and Wales, not only for this observation concerning the effects of forest clearance on soil drainage, but also for permission to incorporate in my illustrations some hitherto unpublished results of the Soil Survey. Mr E. Roberts, formerly of Bangor, was kind enough to permit access to the unpublished maps of the Soil Survey.

Maerdref lands were sited on a slope at an elevation of about 450 ft, but some at least of these lands were favoured for grain cultivation alike by their south-facing aspect and their inherent quality as brown earths of high base status. Thus the state of affairs described in the survey of 1334, when the 52 acres of arable demesne at *Maerdref* were valued at only 6d. per acre (as compared with 1s. and 1s. 3d. per acre for the arable north of the ridge), and because of their exhaustion were used only as sheep pasture, is best attributed to long-continued cultivation. Cultivation of the *Maerdref* lands was probably initiated in fact when the site on which the hill-fort stands was first occupied in the fifth century B.C. For the remaining intermediate zone under demesne cultivation, evidence of a different kind suggests that lowland cultivation had an early beginning at Dinorben. The recent excavations of the hill-fort revealed an asymmetrical winged ploughshare in a layer containing numerous objects of late Roman and sub-Roman character. As Payne has demonstrated, such winged ploughshares were devised for the cultivation of heavy lowland soils.¹ This example at Dinorben was probably used for the cultivation, at the very latest by the sub-Roman period, of the band of lime-rich brown earths which extends along the northern foot of the limestone scarp. Taken in conjunction with that for Meliden, this evidence for the cultivation of the northern scarpfoot at Dinorben makes it clear that some of the appendant hamlets, like Cegidiog (St George) where the parish church was sited, could well have been established by the early centuries A.D. on those same fertile lowland sites they occupied in the Middle Ages.

IV

One question of critical importance for the student of settlement is whether this *maenor* organization, whereby a court was maintained by a network of appendant hamlets, existed on the English side of the border as well as in Wales. Seebohm envisaged a sharp division between English and Welsh social organization in this borderland and deliberately chose the manor of Tidenham, which was east of the Wye and in his opinion had probably been English since the battle of Deorham in 577 A.D., as a singularly useful example of the Saxon manorial system. Yet the feature which obtrudes from the evidence which he quoted for Tidenham is the similarity between this manor and the Welsh *maenor*. The rents and services demanded of the *geburs* or servile tenants of Tidenham were akin to those of Welsh bondmen; they were far lighter than the burdens imposed on the *geburs* of the pre-Con-

¹ F. G. Payne, 'The British Plough: Some Stages in its Development', *Agricultural History Review*, v, 1957, pp. 74-84.

quest *Rectitudines* of England or the burdens imposed on the villagers of the English Midlands in the Middle Ages.¹ Moreover, like the Welsh *maenor*, Tidenham was a discrete estate containing more than one significant settlement; interestingly enough one of the outlying hamlets of Tidenham was sited on and named after a Roman road, and a second bore the name Lancut which indicates that it was a Welsh church hamlet.

Elsewhere along the border the similarity between social arrangements and settlement patterns on both sides of the border was equally pronounced as late as 1086. Maesbury in north-west Shropshire was described in Domesday Book as a manor of 7 hides for geld with 5 berewicks where 10 Welshmen and a priest had 8 ploughs, and where 6 ploughs more could have been at work.² Later records make it clear that this Domesday description merely conceals a *maenor* at a late stage of development, where small free clans were about to emerge over and above the bond substructure. By the thirteenth century this lordship, now known as Oswestry, was composed of a large number of appendant villis inhabited by resting-place clans, and a small number of bond hamlets held by conditions reminiscent of Welsh bond tenure but modified by the superimposition of heavy labour services.³ The hill-fort of Old Oswestry enhances the parallel with Dinorben; as with Dinorben, its construction was probably made possible by that discrete organization (represented here in 1086 by the 5 berewicks of Maesbury and perhaps also the 8½ berewicks of the larger royal manor of Whittington) which enabled the resources of a wide area to be mobilized.

A little way to the south a "district of Wales" (probably Ceri and Cydwain) belonged in 1086 to the castellany of Montgomery, as also did 52½ hides for geld in 22 appendant hamlets.⁴ No less than 5 of these hamlets were still inhabited by bond communities holding land by Welsh bond tenure as late as 1540.⁵ Among them was Thornbury, named no doubt after the scrubby vegetation on the remains of the Roman fort built to protect the ancient Severn ford known as Rhyd Chwima. That this small settlement adjoining a strategic Roman fort should still house a Welsh bond community in 1540 is strong presumptive evidence that the network of hamlets focused on the new castle of Montgomery in 1086 was in being, at least in embryo, when the hill-

¹ F. Seebohm, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-59; see also W. Rees, *South Wales and the March*, 1924, pp. 165-73; A. J. Robertson (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 1939, p. 204; R. Lennard, *Rural England, 1086-1135*, 1959, pp. 364-8.

² *Domesday Book*, I, p. 253b.

³ W. J. Slack (ed.), *The Lordship of Oswestry, 1393-1607*, 1951, pp. 21-37, 142-171.

⁴ *Domesday Book*, I, pp. 253b, 254a.

⁵ J. R. W. Whitfield (ed.), 'The Lordship of Cause (1540-41)', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, LIV, 1953, pp. 63-8.

fort of Ffridd Faldwyn, which towers above Montgomery Castle, was constructed during the Early Iron Age.

Similarly Domesday evidence can be advanced for many of the Iron Age forts of Shropshire, alike in the southern uplands and the northern lowlands. Of some twenty major forts,¹ not less than thirteen were adjoined by important lowland settlements which were either the heads of territorial hundreds or the centres of discrete estates with outlying members or berewicks; sometimes they combined both these attributes. Alberbury, below the Breiddin, was the head of a hundred whereas Wrockwardine, below the Wrekin hill-fort, was the head of a hundred and also the focus of $7\frac{1}{2}$ berewicks. Doubtless Wrockwardine was responsible for that organization of wide territorial resources which the construction of Wrekin hill-fort demanded. That Wrockwardine was overshadowed in 1086 by Shrewsbury, head of its own hundred and the focus of no less than 57 berewicks scattered in various parts of the county, is perhaps merely the result of those rearrangements which followed the supersession of the Wrekin and Wroxeter by another centre in the lowlands west of Haughmond hill-fort yet well protected by a pronounced meander of the Severn.²

Throughout the borderland a similar relationship between the Iron-Age hill-fort and the administrative arrangements which existed in 1086 can be discerned, but nowhere perhaps is this more striking than at the hill-fort of Abington near Leominster in Herefordshire. The great royal estate of Leominster, a *manerium* with 16 members of which some were up to six miles distant, was worked in 1086 by 29 ploughs on the demesne and no fewer than 201 ploughs of the tenants.³ Almost everywhere along the border a striking continuity in the administrative arrangement of settlements can be demonstrated between the prehistoric and medieval periods. This continuity appears to be more closely associated with the Iron-Age hill-fort, and to a lesser extent with Roman military installations, than with the relatively few Roman villas to be found along the border.

¹ L. F. Chitty, 'How did the Hill-Fort Builders reach the Breiddin?', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, XCII, 1937, pp. 129-50.

² I am indebted to Dr Finberg for allowing me a preview of his forthcoming paper on 'The Political Background of Settlement in the Welsh Border'. This accords far more readily with the new thesis on the history of settlement advanced in this paper than any previous interpretation. The supersession of Wroxeter and Wrockwardine by Shrewsbury was probably not direct. Miss Chitty has recently suggested that Pengwern, the traditional early capital of Powys, was not at Shrewsbury as hitherto accepted by some authorities, but at the fort known as the Berth on an island site near Baschurch.—'Introduction to Shropshire Archaeology', *Archaeological Journal*, CXIII, 1956, p. 182. Baschurch, however, no less than Wrockwardine and Shrewsbury, was the head of a hundred in 1086.

³ *Domesday Book*, I, pp. 180a-181a.

The discrete estate or federal manor of England, though known to have been old-established, has always been ascribed to the outward expansion of settlement from villages first established by Anglo-Saxon pioneers.¹ Seebohm and all subsequent workers have assumed that the patterns of settlement in England and Wales were distinct *ab initio*, but the evidence presented in this paper shows that the patterns of settlement on the English and Welsh sides of the border had a common origin which dates back at least to the Iron Age. On both sides of the border the fundamental unit of settlement was the hamlet surrounded by its small patch of open field. In some areas favoured in their physical setting, for example parts of Shropshire, these hamlets developed into larger villages encompassed by more extensive open fields and were worked by an increasingly complicated field system until enclosure supervened. In Herefordshire on the other hand the three-field system emerged in association with the small nucleated hamlet. In forest areas like Morfe in eastern Shropshire clear traces of Celtic hamlet arrangements survived as late as the sixteenth century, though increasingly blurred by assarting and the creation of severalties.² On the Welsh side of the border hamlets survived far less frequently, as the large isolated farmstead on the site of Thornbury suggests. Sometimes this was a direct result of the consolidation of bond land which followed the flight of bond communities, but frequently the conversion of bond hamlets into the resting places of groups of kinsmen was an intermediate stage in this process alike in North and South Wales. But in the Welshries of the marcher lordships of South Wales large free clans did not emerge and the girdle of dispersed farmsteads rarely developed. The large clans with which earlier investigators were wont to people the whole of Wales emerged only along the more exposed frontiers of the late surviving independent principality of Gwynedd. That these large clans should have emerged here, rather than elsewhere in Wales, serves as a reminder that the geographical factors which condition the development of patterns of settlement are invariably very complex. In a border zone such as the one with which we have been concerned in this paper they include not only such factors as relief, soils, climate, and vegetation, which condition the various means of wresting a living from the soil, but also those space relations and lines of movement of importance to warring groups of men.

¹ For a recent example see T. H. Aston, 'The Origins of the Manor in England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Ser., VIII, 1958, p. 75.

² H. L. Gray, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-9, 93-7, 108, 139-56.