A STUDY OF ‘COMMON-EDGE DRIFT’ IN NORFOLK

Imogen Christina Wegman, B.A., LL.B.

School of History, University of East Anglia
M.A. in Landscape History

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ABBREVIATIONS

N.R.O. – Norfolk Record Office

N.H.E.R. – Norfolk Heritage Environment Record
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Dedicated to Granny, who always encouraged me to follow my passions, even to the other side of the world.
INTRODUCTION

The Norfolk landscape has continuously changed and developed over the centuries as farms have grown and amalgamated, towns expanded, and coastlines eroded. Despite this, it retains the shadows of former eras including prehistoric burial mounds, Roman roads, and medieval field patterns. Although post-medieval alterations and additions have influenced the county’s landscape, the settlement patterns were created earlier, in the medieval period. One characteristic feature of this time is the ‘isolated’ parish church. Now standing surrounded by wheat or cows, it is a familiar icon of East Anglia, but one rarely seen elsewhere. Nearly every Norfolk local will have a story of a relative who lives in a small village lying separate from the parish church, and theories about its origins. Rumours of Viking raids, the Plague and over-zealous enclosure abound.

Archaeological evidence shows that all of these now-‘isolated’ churches were originally built within a settlement—rarely was a church intended to be separated from the houses. At some point, however, the settlement moved away from this site and towards the edges of the common. This process is known as ‘common-edge drift’, and it was occurring throughout Norfolk, although, as will be seen, the settlement patterns resulting from this phenomenon vary greatly. In some areas the church came to stand completely isolated; in others it was at the end of a village stretching away; elsewhere the relationship will be different again.

Even the most isolated churches usually continued to be used for worship as an integral but distant part of the parish. As will be seen, the movement of settlements away from the church was a slow process, a gradual drift rather than a sudden exodus, but something was luring or pushing them to new ground. Although ‘isolated’ churches are a particularly East Anglian phenomenon, they are not exclusive to the region; nor are the patterns of settlement drift. The discoveries of this study are therefore applicable to a larger area than just Norfolk, as the settlement patterns reveal factors influencing the formation and shaping of settlements as they exist today.

The evidence suggests this process was first seen in the Late Saxon period, but continued through the Medieval. What is significant is that the now-‘isolated’ church was almost invariably built before the common edge was settled, whether in the Late Saxon or Medieval. While local surveys often demonstrate the existence of
settlements that have moved away from their parish church building, very few attempts have been made to find a general explanation for why this occurred, and there has not been any systematic categorisation of the variation in settlement forms. Advances in Geographic Information Systems technology now make it possible to closely examine the relationship between church and settlement, see county-wide patterns, and seek an explanation for them. Using Norfolk as a case study, this dissertation will examine the patterns of common-edge drift and associated settlement patterns. It will particularly rely on William Faden’s 1797 map of Norfolk, as well as field walking surveys, soil maps, archaeological detail, and early estate and tithe maps.

Initially this study will give definitions of the key terms, and look at the context of this study in the UK and in Norfolk specifically, before briefly discussing the theories that have been offered by historians. An analysis of the different sources used will also be offered. Chapter Four will examine the most significant categories individually, and then draw all the sources together to build a more complete picture of the situation. Finally, this essay will conclude that settlement drift towards the commons was occurring across Norfolk due to increased agriculture encroaching onto previously common land, pushing the locals to new land to feed their sheep and their fires.
CHAPTER ONE: DEFINITIONS

This chapter will set the background information required to understand my interpretation of the common-edge drift phenomenon. It will first define the specialist phrases used, and then outline the categories that have been created for this study and applied to all the churches. This will include discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the process of categorisation.

DEFINITIONS

The phrase ‘common-edge drift’ is often used as a general phrase to cover the existence of an ‘isolated’ church, without any explanation of what defines the phenomenon or why it is even worth any comment. It is therefore necessary to define what exactly is meant by this and several other words and terms that are central to the discussion.

Common-edge drift: Broadly this term may apply to any settlements that have migrated to a common edge. For the purposes of this study, however, an ‘isolated’ or ‘peripheral’ church provides a partially-dateable marker of the original settlement and the term will apply only to movement from around the church to the edges of the common.

Drift period: The main period of focus in this study will be approximately 850–1100 AD, as this is when this particular phenomenon is known to have established itself. This period covers what is often called the Middle Saxon to Medieval in archaeological reports, and for brevity will be called the ‘Drift Period’. Common-edge drift was not exclusive to this period, and later examples will be used, but this phrase will denote these early years of pattern development.

Common: Sara Birtles notes adequate grazing land and a source of wood were important factors in determining the location of a settlement. A common is a large space that provides for these needs—space to graze livestock and supply fuel for the inhabitants of settlements, particularly the indentured and free workers of the land and their families. By the twelfth century all commons were owned by the lord of the

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manor, but access for the tenants was retained as a common right. This recognition of ownership gave the lord the power to enclose and reduce the available common, and led to some statutory obligations to provide for the tenants’ needs.³

Although the majority of settlements appear to be based around commons, there are some at the edges of ‘heaths’ or ‘greens’, as labelled by Faden. It is acknowledged that there are differences between these three spaces, in terms of soils, topography and uses, but also that names and physical features change over the years and it is not always possible to know the classification of a space in the Drift Period.⁴ All commons, heaths and greens will therefore be known as ‘common’ for the purposes of this study, under the principle that provided common access to fuel and fodder.

*Settlement categories:* Throughout this study several terms will be used to differentiate between a variety of settlement patterns. They are ‘embedded’, ‘marginal’, ‘peripheral’, ‘common-edge peripheral’, ‘isolated’, ‘scattered’ and ‘no settlement’. The definitions follow.

*Wastes:* Occasionally there will be mention of ‘wastes’, which are lands with an uncertain use or status during the Drift Period—they may have been used as common land, or may not have been in any use until later years. The term ‘waste’ allows for this uncertainty, and does not assume that these spaces were commons when the settlements moved to them.

**CATEGORISATION**

Categorising every church shown on Faden is a fickle task, subject to the whims of the researcher. Each settlement is unique in its layout, and to apply one of only seven labels to it is to generalise and remove the particular subtleties that give it an identity. Faden’s map fossilises the Norfolk landscape at a time significantly later than the Drift Period, and must therefore contain misleading information—common-edge settlements that have lost all trace of their common or the inclusion of modern churches, to name but two. Most of the key problems can be mitigated through the use of other sources—other maps, or archaeological reports for example. Any attempt to

categorise the churches across Norfolk is, however, better than nothing—the big picture is crucial to understanding the patterns of church and settlement relationships.

Despite the difficulties, accuracy and consistency were sought, to produce the map at Figure 1. Some settlements fit into several categories, but in each case a judgement was made with reference to other settlements, and always seeking to answer the question ‘how does this church relate to the settlement?’ Figure 2 shows a typical example of each category. A church with several settlement cores may have been classified as ‘isolated’ if all those clusters were more than 500 metres from the church, or ‘marginal’ if one section was closer and appeared to be separated by a park—a settlement may have been broken by post-medieval emparkment.

Using ArcMap I examined each church and its relationship to the settlement, making some rough measurements of distances between the church and the main settlement and finding the most applicable category. Measurements were rough and regularly rounded to the nearest 10m to allow for the inherent weaknesses in Faden’s map, and there was a certain element of subjective judgement—what the settlement looked like, which gaps might be recent, the interaction with surrounding commons and settlements.

After creating and testing a set of categories, the following were found to be the most applicable to the highest number of churches in Norfolk. In other counties the definitions may require some adjustments or additions, but there were only two or three parishes in Norfolk that required significantly creative interpretation, not enough to disturb the overall patterns. Figure 1 shows all the categorised churches on one map, while Figure 3–Figure 9 break each down with their specific soils. These individual maps help show the concentrations of particular categories, but they also belie the statistics—failing to show that there are significantly more churches in the north east and fewer in the west, for example. Figure 10 shows this breakdown as statistics, to provide a clean picture of the balance within each section.

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**Figure 1: Soil map with categorised churches from Faden**

‘Embedded’: The church is surrounded by buildings, although it does not have to be in the exact centre or densely surrounded. The most important factor is that the church is not distant from the buildings—they start within approximately 100 metres of the church.

‘Peripheral’: The settlement extends away from the church, starting within approximately 100m. Fewer than 10% of the buildings lie behind the church. Three of the four sides are essentially clear of marked structures. The church may be on the side of the settlement, rather than the end, but there would always be the appearance of a settlement spreading away from it. In many locations enclosure, emparkment and other land changes have removed clear signs of what the settlement was stretching towards, but there is evidence to suggest the target was a common.

‘Common-edge peripheral’: The church abuts onto or is immediately adjacent to a common or heath and the village spreads out from it around the edge of the common. The buildings may start a little further from the church than for ‘peripheral’, allowing for changes in the common shape or removal of buildings.

‘Marginal’: The church lies approximately 100–500 metres away from the main cluster of buildings. This category is designed to cover settlement shrinkage, buildings not shown, or large and longstanding glebe lands around the church.

‘Isolated’: The nearest cluster of buildings is more than 500 metres away. A small number of isolated buildings may be closer, but are not indicative of the settlement-hub. 500 metres was chosen as the minimum distance as approximately six minutes walking in a straight line, but closer to ten on a bending and poorly maintained medieval road. Such a distance is significant for a building that initially formed the central point of both spiritual and secular life in the settlement.

‘Scattered’: There may be multiple small clusters of buildings, or an even scatter ranging from 50–1500 metres from the church, but with no obvious hub of settlement. Often the church will lie in the approximate centre of this scatter.

‘No settlement’: The map does not show any buildings that clearly belong with that church. This may be a deserted or over-scattered settlement, or a peculiarity of Faden’s surveying.
Figure 2: Examples of categorisation

Figure 3: ‘Embedded’ churches with specific soil types
Figure 4: ‘Peripheral’ churches with specific soil types

Figure 5: ‘Common-edge peripheral’ churches with specific soil types
Figure 6: ‘Marginal’ churches with specific soil types

Figure 7: ‘Isolated’ churches with specific soils types
Figure 8: ‘Scattered’ churches with specific soil types

Figure 9: ‘No settlement’ churches with specific soil types
Figure 10: Breakdown of categories by region
CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTEXT AND SOURCES

This chapter will provide a brief historiography, covering the main points that have been discussed in the context of both England and Norfolk. This will be followed by an examination of the archaeological sources available, using them to establish the time period, and demonstrate the variable and constant factors.

ENGLAND

It must be noted that the ‘isolated’ church is not peculiar to eastern England, although it is an icon of Norfolk. The broad themes and questions of settlement development have been examined by a series of historians, from a variety of perspectives. Although few have considered settlement drift, their discussion supplies the general principles of settlement formation and change. While exploring dispersed and nucleated settlement in Landscapes of Settlement, Brian K. Roberts considers the ranking of different influences. He summarises the list with three ideas:

‘first the extent to which physical factors determine the nucleation/Dispersion balance; second, the important contrast between site and situation; and third, the underlying social and economic forces which encourage nucleation.’

His discussion of the physical environment is broad and non-committal but it does accept that water availability and agricultural conditions do play a significant part. He also notes that particular conditions of the site might only become apparent after years of habitation, that wind, wetness or other ‘physical hazards’ may only have manifested as a result of work and living on the land. The consistency with which settlement drifted in Norfolk does not allow for a widespread and ongoing dissatisfaction with original sites of settlement. Rather, it would seem that the original settlements became inadequate for the changing needs of the population. Nevertheless, Roberts does highlight the issue of human influence on changing the landscape and reminds the reader that the land seen today is not necessarily that which was settled twelve hundred years ago.

In The Making of the English Village Roberts offers two explanations for settlement drift—the appeal of cultivating ‘manured soils of previous sites’, or later

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6 Landscapes of Settlement: Prehistory to the present (Abingdon: 1996), pp. 31-2
7 (1996) p. 33
medieval planning related to population growth. The former does not, however, explain why there would be more movement on already fertile soils and less on those that are harder to work—the opposite would make more sense. As will be discussed, there is a body of evidence showing shifts occurring in the Late Saxon period, long before Roberts’ proposed late medieval manorial reorganisation.

Common-edge drift has not gone entirely unnoticed in the rest of the country, however. In Champion Tom Williamson and others discuss the existence of common-edge drift in areas other than East Anglia, particularly Northamptonshire. Example villages such as Lilbourne demonstrate that similar forces were at play in traditional ‘champion’ areas, with an isolated church, rectory and castle indicating where the original settlement was, more than a kilometre from the current centre. Despite their assertion that settlements were attracted to the common edges, however, the authors attempt very little explanation of events beyond agricultural expansion. It is important to highlight that drifting settlements are not confined to Norfolk—the potential causes apply across England, not just the east.

NORFOLK

Norfolk is purported to have the highest concentration in the world, many of which are isolated. Despite this, there has been very little research into the causes of common-edge drift. Instead it is taken for granted, and given as a coverall excuse for any distance between a settlement and its church without any further explanation demanded. By looking at the outcome but ignoring the causes an important influence on the creation of Norfolk has been deemed insignificant.

The issue, however, has not gone unnoticed. Historians are aware of common-edge drift, but have not discussed it in depth. The most detailed analysis comes in David Dymond’s book The Norfolk Landscape in which he speculates on the causes, but does not come to any final conclusions. He does note that the most influential factor is probably related to the use of commons for grazing, providing sustenance for the

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8 (Harlow: 1987), p. 92
11 Above footnote 1
tenants’ livestock.\(^\text{12}\) Williamson has also considered the phenomenon several times, in *The Origins of Norfolk* and *Shaping Medieval Landscapes* for example, but also comes to no final explanation, other than reiterating the importance of grazing land.\(^\text{13}\) In *Environment, Society and Landscape in Early Medieval England* Williamson does suggest there was a vacuum effect as agriculture expanded into the uplands, taking the settlements with it, away from the churches.\(^\text{14}\) He writes about a broader context, but as will be seen this idea of critical mass attracting the population to a new site has relevance in the Norfolk landscape. Nevertheless he does not explain the entire phenomenon and fails to account for the differences between an ‘isolated’ and a ‘peripheral’ church.

The literature on this topic emphasises the importance of the common to those living in the settlements. But it does not explain the clear image seen in the primary sources: a settlement is established on suitable ground, one that provides convenient water and fuel sources, and grazing land. A church is built. The settlement moves away from this site to another, leaving behind the church, but gathering around a new patch of grazing land. There is a step missing that has not yet been explained—why did the initial settlement become inadequate for inhabitation?

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE**

The majority of discussion about common-edge drift can be found in field walking and archaeological reports, as researchers seek to explain the patterns they find a wealth of evidence available in situ. Field walking on a number of sites across Norfolk has revealed information about the settlement patterns throughout the ages on each particular site. The reports speculate on the causes of this drift, but none find a conclusive answer. The theories relate largely to environmental factors, but no one theory can apply to all the discovered sites of drift. Several field walking reports cite David Dymond’s theories on ‘isolated’ churches in Suffolk:

- The site was abandoned in favour of a new location;
- The church is built at the centre of a dispersed parish;

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\(^\text{12}\) (1989), p. 100  
\(^\text{13}\) (Manchester: 1993), pp. 167-71; (Cheshire: 2003), pp. 160-3  
\(^\text{14}\) (Woodbridge: 2013), p. 155
- The site has pre-existing pagan significance and was adopted by the builders of the church; or
- It relates to the position of the original manor hall.\textsuperscript{15}

What follows is a summary of the evidence and analysis of three archaeological reports from different areas of Norfolk—the west, south and north east. This dissertation does refer to other reports, but these three examples demonstrate the county-wide nature of common-edge drift, while also giving particularly useful information about the patterns and dates seen in different areas. Figure 11 and Figure 12 show the locations of all the settlements discussed in detail, on both Faden and soil maps.

\textsuperscript{15} David Dymond, “The Suffolk Landscape,” in \textit{East Anglian Studies}, 17-47 (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 28-9, in Davison Peter Wade-Martins, \textit{Fieldwork and Excavation on Village Sites in Launditch Hundred, Norfolk}, EAA 10 (Norfolk Archaeology Unit, 1980); Alan Davison, \textit{The Evolution of Settlement in Three Parishes in South-East Norfolk}, EAA 49 (Norfolk Archaeology Unit, 1990), p. 71
Figure 11: Main settlements discussed, on Faden’s map

Figure 12: Main settlements discussed, with associated soils
Launditch Hundred

The Launditch Hundred is located in the central west of Norfolk, primarily on clayey Beccles 1 and loamy clayey Burlingham 3 soils, with a chalk bedrock. Categorisation reveals a mixture of ‘peripheral’ and ‘marginal’ churches in the close area.

Peter Wade-Martins states that that settlement drift was a product of the post-Conquest period with only exceptional cases occurring earlier.\(^\text{16}\) His Launditch survey concludes that the earlier a settlement is known to have been established the ‘less the settlement can be related to modern features’—he argues that there were no village greens (as defined today) before the twelfth century, but villages did follow roads still existing today.\(^\text{17}\)

The individual field walking reports in his study show evidence of Drift Period movement in some settlements. Not all end up isolated, but common-edge settlement drift only requires that the settlement has been pulled towards a common, away from the church. At Beetley, for example, Ipswich and Thetford ware was found by the church, but by the Medieval period the settlement had spread down the hill. The effect of this is seen on Faden’s map, as Beetley is a ‘peripheral’ settlement spreading away from the church. This pattern was established during the Drift Period. The settlement of Mileham also appears to have drifted away from the church during the Late Saxon period, becoming established along a road by the eleventh century. This continues to the time of Faden and has been categorised as ‘peripheral’. Stanfield provides another example—it is ‘well removed from the pre-Conquest village site’ having moved from the church site to the common edge during the Medieval period.\(^\text{18}\) By the time of Faden’s map Stanfield has become a ‘peripheral’ church, but some of the space between the common and the church may have been filled with buildings post-drift.

Horningtoft shows a different form of settlement drift, as the settlement extended away from the church while remaining connected to it. Throughout the Drift Period the settlement was focussed on the church, but was stretching towards the green in the later Medieval period. This pattern still exists in Faden’s day, with the church being

\(^{16}\) (1980), p. 87-8
\(^{17}\) (1980), p. 85-6
\(^{18}\) Wade-Martins (1980), pp.17-18; 40-8; 49-52
categorised as ‘peripheral’. A similar effect is seen in Wellingham (also ‘peripheral’), although it was not until the twelfth century that it truly reached the common edge.\textsuperscript{19}

Wade-Martins’ report covers other settlements, but these examples give the most clear evidence of an established pattern of settlements originating by the church then moving away to the common edge, primarily by stretching out, but with some instances of possible relocation. This was occurring from the Late Saxon period onwards, continued throughout the Drift Period and into Late Medieval times.

**Hales, Heckingham and Loddon**

The area of Hales, Heckingham and Loddon in south-east Norfolk is covered by a variety of soils, from the chalky boulder clays to the clayey Burlingham.\textsuperscript{20} ‘Isolated’ churches are the most common, but do not dominate—almost every category has a proportionately high representation.

Alan Davison’s report looks at a number of individual sites throughout this area. By the Early Saxon period there is evidence of only three settlements in the area, with sites 14 and 42 in Loddon the most significant. These sites show continuous inhabitation from the Iron Age through to Early Saxon period, after which they were then abandoned as the settlement moved to the north and east. Sites 99 and 10, on the east of Hales Green, show settlement evidence from the Early Medieval. There is no indication of where these settlements originated, but they appeared on the common edge during the Drift Period, demonstrating the appeal of this location at this time.\textsuperscript{21} Further, both Hales Green and Stubbs Green show indications that the settlement was exclusively common-edge based—pottery finds fall dramatically further away from these areas.\textsuperscript{22} The finds do not provide a simple picture of movement across the area, but show clear evidence of sites being inhabited and abandoned throughout the Drift Period. Hales church has been classified as ‘isolated’, and architectural and

\textsuperscript{19} Wade-Martins (1980), pp. 24-8; 71-5
\textsuperscript{20} TM 38122 97310; TM 38577 98711; TM 36214 98715
\textsuperscript{21} (1990) pp. 15-29
\textsuperscript{22} (1990), p. 33
documentary evidence suggests it may have Saxon origins, while Loddon church is ‘embedded’, and may sit on a pre-Conquest church site.23

Sites 153, 154 and 157 between Loddon and Heckingham show some indication of a westwards drift during the Drift Period, while a series of sites to the west developed simultaneously. When these sites are combined the surviving boundaries have some resemblance to common edges, with curves and field boundaries merging into roads.24 The survey of this region was broken up by field boundaries and it is unlikely that these boundaries reflect the management of the land when the settlement was moving. Analysing finds according to them is to impose a modern understanding of the landscape and obscure the Drift Period situation.

Together, these sites might suggest a settlement spread along the edge of a lost common, as the sites further out on the eastern side were abandoned in favour of closer common-edge lands. In a final example from this report, there is uncertainty about the story of Heckingham church which shows evidence of being the centre of the community during the Drift Period, with a ‘small northward shift’ in the later years.25 The Heckingham church is now categorised as ‘scattered’, indicating there is no clear nucleus of settlement to which it relates.

Not all of these examples show the movement from a church site to a common edge, but they do demonstrate the mobility of settlements in the Drift Period. Although map evidence hints at former common edges, it is impossible to know the location of all the active commons of this time and therefore impossible to know with certainty what a settlement was attracted by in each individual case. These examples only add to the picture of a county-wide practice of settling common edges.

Davison discusses a variety of explanations for the abandonment of sites 14 and 42, but does not find all credible. Some are drawn from other historians and theories, but all have possible (albeit sometimes doubtful) application in the three parishes:

- an increase in pastoral farming, encouraged by the return of fresh water to the Broads with falling sea levels;

24 (1990) p. 38
25 (1990) pp. 39-41
• growing importance of waterways in trade and travel;
• increasing political security, reducing the danger of inhabiting vulnerable river-side sites;
• other political or social change; or
• creation and movement to a specialist site, such as a kiln or mill.26

All these are the result primarily of social and political change, but not entirely isolated from other influences. Davison considers various environmental factors, including:

• adapting to environmental conditions not immediately apparent to the initial settlers—harsh northerly/easterly winds for example;
• the difficulties of farming chalky boulder clay before the 11th century, and the apparent relationship between ‘limited intrusion’ onto this land and population growth;
• the low sea levels of 700AD that then rose to peak in 1300AD, forcing abandonment of low-lying settlements;27

After long consideration, Davison eventually settles on the protection of common grazing land by peasant farmers.28 This was more prominent in regions where the open field systems were less regulated and common land was threatened by population growth and agricultural expansion.29 That Loddon and Heckingham appear to have had alternative sources of green pasture, while Hales did not, contributed to the drift seen in each parish as they sought to feed their animals.30 While this describes the purpose of moving, it does not explain what has happened to the previous grazing ground to force this move.

26 (1990), pp. 66, 71
27 (1990), p. 65-7
28 (1990), p. 67
30 (1990), p. 67
Witton

Witton sits in the north east of Norfolk, on the fertile loams of Wick 2 Association, in an area dominated by ‘isolated’ churches.\(^{31}\)

Andrew J. Lawson’s report is the result of a long term archaeological and historical study of the parish. It reveals a long history of use, with finds dating back to the Neolithic. The evidence suggests there was a growing Saxon settlement on the site beside the church, with agriculture expanding into the surrounding fields over the same period. In the Medieval period the settlement spread out, but Lawson suggests the church retained its central position within a scattered community.\(^{32}\)

Faden’s map of 1797 shows Witton church as ‘isolated’, with the buildings based along the common edge in the east, and a large park adjacent to the west. Lawson’s report does not record movement to this common edge, but does notice an expansion out to the north and east. He sees this as a response to growing agricultural requirements, and applies a three stage process to the developments. It begins with random distribution of sites in favourable locations, and then outward growth to form clusters, which then even out to allow for access to maximum resources in a competitive environment.\(^{33}\)

This suggests that the church was still at the centre of its parish, but that the settlement was spread out rather than tight around it. This would go some way to explaining how the church came to be isolated—if parts of this ‘scattered’ settlement disappeared, leaving only the common edge properties, it would then appear as an ‘isolated’ church rather than one in the middle of a ‘scattered’ parish. There is an unfortunate dearth of archaeological reports in north-east Norfolk. Witton may represent the norm, a ‘scattered’ settlement turned ‘isolated’, but the statistics on categories in this area do not support this as the prevailing cause. The presence of Witton Park has probably had some influence on this area. It was taken from wasteland and some fields, and therefore may have obscured the patterns of common-edge drift.\(^{34}\) The Inclosure Map of 1812 reveals some small scraps of woodland at the

\(^{31}\) TG 34024 31248
\(^{32}\) Andrew J. Lawson, *The Archaeology of Witton, near North Walsham*, EAA 18 (Norfolk Archaeological Unit, 1983).
\(^{34}\) (1983), p. 89
north of the settlement not shown on Faden, suggesting there may have been a common in that area.\textsuperscript{35}

Although Witton does not help define the dates of common-edge drift, it does demonstrate its existence in the north eastern parts of Norfolk. The archaeology suggests that expanding agriculture pushed the settlement across the lands, away from the church, an idea that will be discussed more later in this study.

FADEN

The base map for this study is Andrew Macnair’s geo-rectified version of William Faden’s 1797 Norfolk map. This map provides the most complete and accurate image of Norfolk before enclosure of common land in the early nineteenth century significantly altered the landscape. It is unfortunate that 1797 is the earliest available snapshot of Norfolk as a whole, but as Macnair and Williamson note the first wave of parliamentary enclosure, peaking in the 1770s and 80s, had very little effect on Norfolk and commons still followed medieval patterns when Faden’s surveyors mapped the county.\textsuperscript{36}

There are inherent problems with this map of both technological and human origin. While the surveyors Donald and Milne used superior technology it was not perfect, and even their expertise could not mitigate the flaws and create an exact map. One issue affecting this particular study is spatial distortion caused by the combining of six separate sheets. Macnair notes that these errors were corrected to some extent in the digital redrawing, but errors still remain.\textsuperscript{37} This is a problem because this study is based on spatial data—the distances between church and settlement, the appearance of a whole settlement. The distances must be taken with some flexibility, and this study will use them as guides only.

For this study the other main issue is the location of churches and buildings. Despite general patterns remaining stable since the Middle Ages there had been some developments, including new churches and villages, all recorded by Faden’s team, and shown in Figure 13. Macnair also lists a number of churches that were either

\textsuperscript{35} NRO, C/Sca 2/338 (Award: Witton near North Walsham)

\textsuperscript{36} Andrew Macnair and Tom Williamson, \textit{William Faden and Norfolk’s 18th Century Landscape} (Oxford: 2010), p. 28

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{William Faden}, (2010), pp. 79-83
mislocated or entirely absent from the original map. While the number of drawn buildings may not always reflect the actual number of buildings in existence at the time of surveying, they are nonetheless observed to be an accurate depiction of general patterns. This is particularly true for smaller villages and hamlets and around the edges of commons—two conditions relevant to this study. It is also important to know that Faden’s representation of commons and wastes is considered to be reliable, when compared with other pre-enclosure maps.\footnote{William Faden, (2010), pp. 85-90}

These issues have been addressed in several ways. Other map sources have been used for sample villages—enclosure, tithe or estate maps have been preferred, with the first edition Ordnance Survey to provide geo-referencing points, more accurate spatial data, and verification of church positions. Field walking reports also map out the layout of a village, including the position of the church and discovered sites of habitation. Finally \textit{Domesday Book} and architectural dating evidence was used to establish the presence of those churches coming under close scrutiny during this study. Unfortunately there was not the capacity to apply such tests to all 717 churches shown by Faden, but they have been employed whenever possible.
Figure 13: Faden’s Map (1797) with all the churches marked
CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS

This chapter will assess first the maps created or adjusted for this report, analysing what they can offer, but also discussing their inherent problems. This will be followed by an in-depth examination of each of the three main categories seen in Norfolk—‘embedded’, ‘peripheral’ and ‘isolated’ churches. The chapter will conclude by bringing the key factors together to illustrate the range of influences acting on Norfolk during the Drift Period.

BROAD ANALYSIS

Domesday Populations

Figure 14 shows Williamson and Skipper’s map of Late Saxon population densities according to calculations taken from *Domesday Book*, overlain with the churches from Faden and a 1500 metre buffer. Although the population map contains many unavoidable flaws, outlined by the authors in *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, it serves to show that the distribution of churches in 1797 follows twelfth century population patterns.\(^\text{39}\) It also demonstrates the medieval population differences across the county: concentrated in the east, low in the west, with large centres in the south.

Ancient Commons

Figure 15 shows all the churches marked out on Faden’s map, with a buffer of 1500 metres. The original map is dominated by the commons, by virtue of their colour, so this map has been made greyscale and inverted to give a new perspective. Figure 13 shows all the churches of Faden’s time, but the relationship between churches, settlements and the wider landscape is not so clear. The 1500 metre buffer is not intended to be an accurate representation of the area covered by every settlement, but instead shows the possible concentration of settlement and cultivation at about the time the church was established.

What is immediately apparent are the differences between regions within the county—the north-east is crowded with churches, with many overlapping buffered ‘territories’, and few large open spaces. The whole of the west shows the reverse, it is dominated by large open spaces, with the churches scattered across. They are not, however, scattered randomly. There are lines of churches along the edges of large areas devoid of any churches, or perhaps just one in the very centre. The crowded north-east provides an explanation.
Figure 15: Faden’s map inverted, churches marked with a 1500 metre buffer showing large open areas
Most of the few larger open areas in the north-east are based around an area occupied by a common by Faden’s day, such as Mousehold Heath or Hevingham Common (a pattern also seen in the south west at Kilverstone and Brettenham).\textsuperscript{40} Where there are fewer ‘open’ areas devoid of churches, Faden’s map still shows gaps between buffers, with smaller areas of common land in the centre, such as at Roughton. This suggests the encroachment of the surrounding settlement onto former common in the distant past.\textsuperscript{41} Common land was a necessary unbuilt resource; those spaces without churches must have been common or waste land during significant periods of population growth, when pressure on land was highest.

What Figure 15 shows is that churches were based around commons, and therefore spaces without churches are probably areas of former wasteland that have since been enclosed. This pattern can also be applied to the west, on a larger scale. The vast expanses seen there were large tracts of waste, edged by churches and settlements. Faden’s map has fossilised an entire network of former common and waste land that was fragmented by the expansion of cultivated land during medieval population and settlement growth.

Some of these lost tracts of common do have a church within their boundaries, but the majority are either not listed in Domesday Book, for example Amner in the north-west; or belong to a settlement that is large by 1086, such as Wymondham in the south.\textsuperscript{42} As with any presumptions reliant on Domesday, however, it is always necessary to confirm dates with archaeological data for any individual case. It can be said that these settlements are probably either established after the Drift Period, after moving into the vast space, or are an old settlement, established after some old incursion on to the waste land. The large pre-Domesday towns of Wymondham and Swaffham show a visible pattern of the common being removed from the settlement outwards, with a straggled semi-circle forming an outer circumference.\textsuperscript{43} This study, however, is focussed on the patterns of smaller settlements than these, as their size obfuscates evidence of their development.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{40} TG 24296 10355; TG 20321 21161; TL 89294 84249  
\textsuperscript{41} TG 21976 36949  
\textsuperscript{42} TF 74084 29540; TG 11267 01494; Alecto Historical Editions, Domesday Book: A complete translation (London: 2002), pp. 1072, 1074, 1092, 1181  
\textsuperscript{43} TF 82077 08535}
The remaining evidence that churches have preserved the outer edges of long lost tracts of waste comes with the interlaced strips along roads and small scraps of common at the centre of the enormous areas, such as Rudham Common south-east of Houghton. These are the only traces left, and resemble the small patches seen in the north-east, but in a less crowded context.

The pattern of churches hugging the edges of commons is clearer in the south and east, where more commons survive. By applying the pattern to the open spaces in the west, ancient commons long since enclosed but not entirely removed are revealed—the spiderwebs of commons following the roads and the patches nibbled evenly to form a small central common attest to their former existence. What then becomes apparent is that western Norfolk was once characterised by large areas of waste, with settlements (and churches) forming a border, while the east was from an early date tightly packed with small commons that survived through to Faden. This demonstrates that the entire county required access to commons, but this manifested differently across the region.

**Soil maps**

The soil map used for this report has been surveyed by the Soil Survey of England and Wales, for use by those interested in or reliant on the conditions and types of soils in particular areas. Although designed for use by modern farmers and agronomists, the information contained can shed some light on the agrarian circumstances of earlier centuries. It divides the information into *series* and associations—the series describes the broad make-up of the soil, ‘sandy over fine loamy’ or ‘clayey over peaty’ for example, while each association describes a set of series that will often be found together to make up all the levels of a piece of land, down to the bedrock.

The soil map used for this report is fairly broad, giving the overall analysis of soil types, but not the specific details of every valley and field. Given the inaccuracies of Faden’s map, and the subjective nature of categorising each church, this is not a problem—this soil map shows the themes of each area, allowing for analysis of the overall patterns without confusing the matter with too many spatially-reliant variables.

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44 TF 81616 28025
Figure 1 shows where, for example, the large areas of Beccles 1 soil lie, and Figure 16 shows the relationship of the churches with each soil type, while Figure 17 shows the combination of superficial and bedrock geology, to demonstrate the significant geology of the region.
Figure 16: Soil types and dominant categories

Figure 17: Superficial and bedrock geology with categorised churches

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The soils statistics present a complex package of information. For all seven categories Burlingham 1 and Wick 2 are in the top three most predominant soil types. To some extent this comes as no surprise, as these represent some of the most common soil types across the county, particularly in the most populous areas, and they are known today for being well-drained and reasonably fertile. Importantly they are also easier to work without modern machinery, crucial for the period discussed here. Although soils do change over time and with use, the consistency with which churches are on Burlingham 1 and Wick 2 soils suggests they were as suitable in the Drift Period as today for cultivation.

Figure 16 shows the breakdown of soil types and associated categories of churches, and what is immediately apparent is that all the categories occur with similar frequencies on each soil type. The dominant patterns is that soils are either popular with almost all the categories, or with very few at all. Some of this comes down to the availability of the soil—an ideal graph would be proportionate to the acreage of each soil type as well, but this will suffice for demonstrative purposes.

Despite this general pattern, there are some patterns to be seen. ‘Embedded’ and ‘common-edge peripheral’ churches favour Beccles 1 soil as their third most popular, while ‘peripheral’ and ‘marginal’ favour Isleham 2, and ‘isolated’ Wick 3. Analysis of these trends will be given for each category in turn.

**CATEGORIES – BREAKDOWN**

Although all the categories are important, some reveal more than others about the circumstances that have encouraged common-edge drift. The primary categories for this study are ‘embedded’, ‘peripheral’ and ‘isolated’. ‘Common-edge peripheral’ and ‘marginal’ do also contribute, but in conjunction with these main categories and there is neither the time to examine the differences between pre- and post-drift common-edge churches, nor to clarify the ambiguities of ‘marginal’ settlements. ‘Scattered’ settlements and churches with ‘no settlement’ are in the minority, and do not help see patterns in the overall picture. Each of the primary categories will be discussed in turn, followed by an analysis of the overarching patterns they reveal.
‘Embedded’

An ‘embedded’ church is located within its settlement, surrounded by buildings. The distribution of ‘embedded’ churches remains fairly even across the county, as shown in Figure 10, and examples are scattered across a range of soils. 19% are found on Wick 2 Association soil, largely in the fertile north eastern region famed for its undulating fields of cereals and vegetables. 15% sit on Beccles 1 soil, a clayey and often waterlogged soil found largely in the south of the county. 12% of ‘embedded’ churches are on Burlingham 1 Association, a soil which may be clayey or loamy, and waterlogged or droughty depending on location and treatment. The largest areas of Burlingham 1 are found in the west of the county. 47

When considering ‘embedded’ churches it should be remembered that field walking evidence indicates that all the churches marked on Faden’s map were once contained within a settlement—they were not originally intended to be ‘isolated’ or ‘peripheral’. But the ‘embedded’ churches are deceptive because they give the impression that their associated settlement has never moved. Closer inspection reveals two different explanations for the existence of ‘embedded’ churches: they are original settlements that provided everything necessary so there was no need for the settlement to move, or they are the result of a settlement drifting to a new site and starting from scratch, including building a new church within the settlement. Each of these will be discussed in turn, as they are diametrically opposed.

The ‘common-edge peripheral’ church has been built on the edge of a common, and the settlement has grown out from it, also along the edge of the common. Figure 3 and Figure 5 show that ‘common-edge peripheral’ churches are found in the same places as ‘embedded’ churches, suggesting they are minor variations of the same broad patterns of development. Therefore it may be helpful to combine the two categories to reveal a new pattern: combined, ‘common-edge peripheral’ and ‘embedded’ churches have an even spread across the county, coming between 19% and 29% in every region. This means they were not the result of one particular set of circumstances, such as soil type or population density, but occurred despite the factors that influenced the differences between ‘isolated’ and ‘peripheral’ churches.

Original Settlement

Barton Bendish, in west Norfolk, has another example of an ‘embedded’ church, but this appears to have been built on a site of long occupation. Sited on the very edge of an area of Newmarket 1 Association soils, it appears almost to straddle this and Isleham 2 soils, providing a combination of workable land for many different crops, plus grassland on the lower ground. The field walking evidence shows scattered finds from the Iron Age onwards, waning in the Early Saxon period and reappearing in inconclusive amounts in the Middle Saxon. The suggestion is that although population size has varied, the western end of Barton Bendish has been occupied for several millennia, with substantial finds available from the Late Saxon. The western end also holds the three parish churches, all thought to be Middle to Late Saxon constructions.

It is likely that Barton Bendish has never experienced any settlement drift beyond natural expansion. To the south is an open area that Faden has called ‘Barton Fen’, but there are no other signs of a common. The scattered nature of the finds suggests the arable land was adjacent to the settlement. It is most likely that the settlement largely relied on strip commons that have since become roads, and whatever rough meadow the Isleham 2 fen soils provided. This suggests that whatever occurred to make other settlements drift was not an issue here.

Starting from scratch

The three primary soil types listed above have characteristics that suggest churches are on ground that has been settled after drift for two different reasons. While Wick 2 soils provide excellent arable land, they are also usually found on higher ground, with other soils leading down to the rivers. Although Figure 1 does not show the detailed differences between Wick 2 and Wickmere Associations, it does show that the majority of ‘embedded’ churches are located away from the river land. Like Wick 2, Burlingham 1 is ‘typically’ found on higher ground, even on the crests of spurs.

48 TF 71184 04408
50 Alan Davison, David Pritchard, Robert Silvester and Andrew Rogerson, Barton Bendish and Caldecote: fieldwork in south-west Norfolk, EAA 80 (Norfolk Archaeology Unit, 1997).
52 Barton Bendish, (1997), p. 21
53 Barton Bendish, (1997), p. 4
Meanwhile Beccles 1 is notoriously difficult to farm, with *The Soil Survey* listing few good working days, droughtiness, and waterlogging as problems for different crops.\(^{54}\)

There is no clear explanation for why settlements drifted onto Burlingham 1 or Wick 2 when both provided excellent soils for medieval arable use, and might be expected to be inhabited from an early period. Many ‘embedded’ churches on these soils may belong to settlements like Barton Bendish that are long-term users of the site, but the dearth of settlement-specific archaeological surveys makes it currently impossible to distinguish patterns between these ‘original’ settlements, and those that have drifted there from another site, like Loddon. A detailed analysis of both the church and soils may help to resolve questions, but for now it must retain some mystery.

The reasons for interpreting Beccles 1 ‘embedded’ churches lies in the quality of the soil rather than the location, and are more certain. The difficulty of farming Beccles 1, with heavy soils, raises the probability that it was settled later when farming developments and population growth opened the land up. Just as settlements spread uphill with necessity, so they also spread onto more difficult soils. South Norfolk features large ‘forgotten’ commons—those shown in Figure 15, and many are on Beccles 1 soils. Moreover the majority of ‘embedded’ churches on Beccles 1 are sited on the very edges of this soil. These ‘embedded’ settlements were probably established on the edge of a common that has now been destroyed by expansion. ‘Common-edge peripheral’ churches fall into the same category, but with less destruction of the common so the origins are more obvious today. The only difference between these and ‘isolated’ churches is the construction of a new church, creating the illusion of an ‘embedded’ settlement. Figure 16 shows that ‘embedded’ and ‘common-edge peripheral’ are the only churches that populate Beccles 1 with any regularity—15% of ‘common-edge peripheral’ down to 7% of ‘isolated’. Sara Birtles notes that there was a significant growth in population during the Drift period, particularly in south east Norfolk, corroborated by Williamson and Skipper’s map of Late Saxon population density at Figure 14.\(^{55}\) This map shows high numbers in this area, with a strip of maximum population around Fritton and no population immediately to the

\(^{54}\) Burton, (1984), pp. 117-9, 132-5, 346

\(^{55}\) (2003), p. 31; (2005), p. 39
south, suggestive of an uninhabited common. Both sets of data here are somewhat problematic, but this pattern is repeated elsewhere, giving it credibility. Demonstrable high population, a clear soil-category relationship and visible common shapes show that south eastern ‘embedded’ and ‘common-edge peripheral’ churches are a result of incursions onto the commons during the Drift Period.

Loddon provides one example of an ‘embedded’ church built after the establishment of the settlement. It sits on Burlingham in the Chet Valley, and Davison’s field walking suggests there has been some migration from the south end of Loddon northwards and downhill to the River Chet in the early Drift Period. These southern sites were abandoned at the end of the Early Saxon period, a pattern observed on several Anglo-Saxon sites across Norfolk. What this reveals is a settlement moving to the green river edge pastures, where livestock can be fed, as on a common. There are finds that indicate some continuous use of the river-edge land, but their extent is hidden under the town. It is not known when the first church was built here, but the early dating of this drift makes it more likely that construction post-dated the shift.

A key piece of information is missing here, however, due to the inaccessibility of the town for field walking. The finds maps show a settlement disappearing from the southern site and reappearing in the north, but without any indication of whether this was a stretch or a jump, or whether there was another church that has been lost to plain sight. It is clear that the settlement was reaching for the pastures, but ambiguous about whether it gradually moved there or if it was pushed across arable lands to a new site. Both of these methods of drift are seen in Norfolk and the differences are embodied in ‘peripheral’ and ‘isolated’ churches.

These two settlements demonstrate the nature of an ‘embedded’ church—it has either survived throughout the centuries, on the resources available, or it has been built up after early incursions onto the common, developing from a common-edge settlement and building a new church in the process. Barton Bendish shows that some sites were adequate for serving the community for thousands of years. Loddon demonstrates that, despite appearances, an ‘embedded’ church may have been affected by drift, having been built after the population has drifted to the new location beside

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56 TM 22530 92689
57 Davison, (1990), pp. 17-20; Birtles, (UEA, 2003), p. 15
greener pastures. Both appear to have been influenced by the availability of pasture, although the significance of that becomes a little clearer when looking at ‘peripheral’ and ‘isolated’ churches.

**‘Peripheral’**

A ‘peripheral’ church is still connected to the settlement, but stands at one end or side, as if the settlement has grown away from the church. These churches are dominant in the west and central north of the county, on soil profiles that bear significant similarities to those of ‘embedded’ churches. As with ‘embedded’ churches Burlingham 1 and Wick 2 are popular soils (16% and 10% respectively), with Isleham 2 at 12%. The characteristics have all been discussed already in the context of ‘embedded’ churches, as has the River and Wold upland drift theory and the issue of its broad application.

One difference between ‘embedded’ and ‘peripheral’ churches is their proximity to water sources. Accurate water source information is particularly hard to find, and does not reliably describe the situation in the Middle Ages, but the prevalence of low-lying or marshy soils, such as Isleham 2, Wallasea 1, Agney, Wisbech, Blackwood and Hanworth (totalling 19%) describes a set of river edge settlements. In comparison, only 13% of ‘embedded’ churches lie on these soils. This does not explain the popularity of Burlingham 1 and Wick 2 for all categories, it does demonstrate the higher likelihood that ‘peripheral’ churches are on lower ground near water sources. These two soils are often found on hillsides, perhaps ‘peripheral’ churches are simply lower on the slope than ‘embedded’.

Figure 10 shows that the most common area for ‘peripheral’ churches is in the west and central north of Norfolk, where they constitute 35–38% of all churches. The population of this area was demonstrably lower during the Drift Period, and Figure 15 shows it has the largest concentration of invisible commons. This map shows that along with the invisible commons, the churches are also widely spread across the landscape, often in a row between two large open areas. The significance of this again comes from visualising the Drift Period as a series of large blocks of common land from which farmland was gradually taken—these enormous spaces have been slowly
enclosed, but were once common land accessible to all the settlements scattered around them.

Western Norfolk has been compared to the Midland champion countryside for many years, as early as 1611.\(^{58}\) Williamson suggests it was an area of specialised grazing in the Middle Saxon Period, explaining the need for large areas of land.\(^{59}\) Any number of other reasons may have caused the west to have a lower population than the east, but for the moment it suffices to observe that where there is a lower population there is also the greatest number of ‘peripheral’ churches.

Two churches in Wade-Martins’ Launditch study demonstrate the causes and effects of ‘peripheral’ drift. Mileham is located on Beccles 1 and is found at the eastern end of a settlement that stretches along a road.\(^{60}\) Finds indicate that the church was established within a settlement just south of this road that then moved north to the road in the ninth century. Faden shows a common at the west end of this street that he credits to Mileham, and it certainly appears that the settlement is stretching towards this area. The Saxon settlement, however, did not reach as far as Faden’s common edge, it was only after the construction of a motte and bailey castle in the twelfth century that it continued westwards.\(^{61}\) It is likely, however, that a part of the common was taken into the castle land, and traces have not survived.

The puzzle here is why the settlement moved north from the church. If it was heading for the common, there is no obvious reason why it could not spread out from the Middle Saxon site. Instead the settlement moves north by 100 metres and re-establishes itself there. Wade-Martins states ‘except for the church itself, there is nothing in the present village plan which can have been influenced by the site of the early village.’\(^{62}\) Roads and commons, however, were considered one and the same until relatively recently—Birtles notes that in 1660 some green lanes in Pulham St Mary Magdalen were called ‘The Common Pasture of Pulham’.\(^{63}\) But routes have always been necessary for travel, droving and trading, and the only logical explanation for moving to this stretch is that there was a pre-existing thoroughfare

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\(^{59}\) Williamson, (Manchester: 1993), p. 120  
\(^{60}\) TF 91321 19280  
\(^{61}\) (1980), pp. 4-8  
\(^{62}\) (1980), p. 41  
\(^{63}\) (2003), p. 177
passing the north end of the church. The relationship between the early settlement and this northern route cannot be known.

Pottery finds from the Middle Saxon period onwards increase in size and occurrence, suggesting this was a time of population growth. It is well accepted that from this time onwards there was increased pressure on the land to provide for growing numbers, and that this involved taking in common and waste land for ploughing. In such circumstances, where widespread common land is being lost, it would be logical to move closer to the established stretch that serves both as pasture and road. As more surrounding common is converted, the settlement gradually becomes elongated along the boundaries of the protected strip, but also reaches out to the larger areas at the western end to provide more resources. While only a hypothesis, it is only one that fits the evidence. Faden shows Mileham Wood to the north of the road, and a wide junction that may once have formed a common boundary west of the castle mound. By remembering that all land was once unploughed and open, it is easier to see a pattern of commons shrinking away from settlements, leaving the residents reaching out for their supplies.

Tittleshall is sited north west of Mileham, also on Beccles 1 soils. It is now a large parish, having amalgamated with three other surrounding parishes in the post Medieval period. North west of the village is Tittleshall Common, with one strip leading down to a road into the settlement and regular field boundaries surrounding it suggesting more recent enclosure of the area. A 1596 map records an area called Peakhall Green to the north of the church, contained within the same roads as Tittleshall Common, the two were probably once part of a large area of wasteland. There is no evidence of settlement along the southern side (to the north west of the church), the conversion from open to arable was probably early, giving no reason to settle there, or the road was a secondary feature, built over the fields.

The church stands at one end of the main street, and Wade-Martins’ 1596 map shows a village stretched down the length of this one street towards a crossroads. Tithe maps show this to be a wide and uneven intersection (Figure 18). The southbound road meets a Roman road at another open intersection, this one with a

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65 TF 89200 21176
67 (1980), p. 55
small water feature. By the mid-nineteenth century this junction has been partially enclosed.\(^{68}\) Both of these point towards the existence of a larger area of common in this direction. Wade-Martins describes the area as ‘scattered’ with commons in 1596, and attributes survival of them into the late 18\(^{th}\) century to low population density and an accompanied lack of pressure to enclose all the wasteland for arable use. The majority of commons, however, are found on the edge of this parish, on higher ground.\(^{69}\)

\[\text{Figure 18: Tittleshall Tithe Map showing wide intersections to the west and south}\(^{70}\)\]

The field walking reports show that this was a common-focussed settlement, and gravitated towards particular areas, even with the abundance of open land available.\(^{71}\) The earliest known date for the church site is thought to be pre-Domesday.\(^{72}\) It is possible that it bears no relation to a Saxon Period structure, but its position within a multi-period site that shifts from one side to the other makes is likely that there is a

\(^{68}\) NRO, DN/TA 159 (Tittleshall with Godwick Map, 1839) from http://historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk/mapexplorer/ (accessed 19/08/2013)
\(^{69}\) (1980), p. 53
long significance to it. The first detectable settlement was a Middle Saxon one that reaches north from the church towards Peakhall Green, reaching it in the Medieval Period. At a similar time, a settlement grows along the road heading west from the church towards the cross roads.\(^73\) What this shows is a settlement that has accessible common, but requires a little more, perhaps in a larger contained area.

Mileham and Tittleshall are only two from many examples of settlements that stretch out along roads, away from their churches but towards commons or former commons. The comparatively low population allows areas to retain strips of common, but larger areas are still required for intense wood gathering or grazing—it must not be forgotten how hard commons were worked by the local populations. The ‘green lanes’ may also have been wider on these clayey soils, Birtles notes their tendency to turn to ‘quagmires’ when overused and under-maintained.\(^74\) A wider road would ease the load somewhat and reduce the wear—it would be in the best interests of all to commit more land to this. Together these separate factors create one explanation for the dominance of ‘peripheral’ churches in western Norfolk.

With a lower population density and the associated lower pressure on the land, came the ability to be more discerning about land use—there was not the push to use every square metre that will be seen in relation to ‘isolated’ churches. This allowed the local populations to retain land close by for larger areas of common. Leading to these larger spaces, however, were roads made of common land—green strips that could provide some grazing, making it unnecessary to rely entirely on the large space but possible to find some resources nearby. The settlements followed these strips to the common at the end, gradually spreading along them away from the church, but never needing to move away entirely. It is likely that the common was shrinking somewhat—there was still agricultural expansion in these areas, but the settlement was able to follow it along the street.

**‘Isolated’**

The ‘isolated’ church stands at least 500 metres away from the nearest cluster of buildings. There is a wide perception that they are ubiquitous feature of the Norfolk

\(^{74}\) (2003), p. 177
landscape found everywhere. Figure 10, however, shows their dominance to be in the east and central south of Norfolk, with 37% of churches in north-east Norfolk categorised as ‘isolated’, compared to 10% in the south-west. This indicates that something significantly different was influencing settlement development across the county, particularly in the north-east. The evidence suggests that two processes were occurring, similar but not identical. In the more populous east, settlements were forced away from their churches by land pressures and enclosure, while the western ‘isolated’ settlements bear more resemblance to ‘embedded’ settlements, lacking only the church. Two examples, Witton in the east and Loddon in the west, will elaborate on the subtle difference between these two patterns.

The soil profile is very similar to that of ‘embedded’ and ‘peripheral’ churches—the most common soils are Burlingham 1 and Wick 2, as well as Wick 3, a soil found almost exclusively in the north-east of Norfolk. The most significant difference is on Beccles 1—where 15% of ‘embedded’ churches are on this soil, only 7% of ‘isolated’ churches are located here. The low and marshy soils that differentiate ‘peripheral’ from ‘embedded’ hold 11% of the ‘isolated’ churches, the fourth most common type. The pattern seen here then is one of fertile and well-drained soils—farmland suited to pre-mechanised agriculture. Despite the dominance of Beccles 1 in the south, the majority of ‘isolated’ churches in this area are found on the more workable Burlingham 1 soils but are still the most common type in that area. Figure 4 shows them sitting very close to the boundaries of Burlingham 1 and Beccles 1, just as those of ‘embedded’ churches will often be on the Beccles 1 border.

Figure 14 shows that this area was also the most populous in the Late Saxon Period, while Figure 15 shows that there are parts of the eastern region that have a church every kilometre or two, that this is an area fighting for space. This map also shows that there are far fewer large spaces devoid of churches than in the west—Mousehold Heath and the Hevingham common are clear, as are gaps by Plumstead Common and Loddon, but there are few others. While the west retains the traces of large and continuous tracts of Saxon-era wastes and common grazing, the east shows a tight web of settlements with very little open space.

\[75\text{ TG 24296 10355; TG 20321 21161; TG 13143 34903; TM 36214 98715; TG 11267 01494}\]
Instead, Faden’s map shows many small commons dotted through the area; most settlements appear to have some common land attributed to them, even if it is only a small amount. Tithe maps build on this image by showing how this common fits into the layout of the settlement. Figure 19 demonstrates the typical location, right on the parish boundary with enclosed land cutting in. It is almost impossible to know how far the commons had receded in each settlement by Faden’s day, but the image is one of the common being enclosed from the inside outwards.  

Along with high population came high competition for land. Land ownership in east Norfolk was the most fragmented in the country, so the parcels of land here were also the smallest. Owners enclosed large areas of wasteland to increase their yields, with arable land being prioritised over commons. The peasants still had obligations to their lords, owing food and other duties, all requiring large areas of arable land. This did not lessen their need for commons however, so there was a constant struggle to keep a balance between the different land types.

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77 Tunstead Tithe Map
78 Birtles, (2003), pp. 30-32, 42
Commons in east Norfolk tended to straddle parish boundaries, such as Coltishall joining Belaugh or Westwick with Worstead.\(^{79}\) Considering their integral role in the survival of a settlement, it is surprising that they would be found at the furthest points of a parish. But in the light of the competition for land it is perhaps more understandable that the common was pushed to the edges by land that would keep the lord satisfied, just as today people prioritise their rent over food in household budgets. While the west has large settlements, with leeway to build wider green lanes and less pressure to economise land use, the east has small settlements that must be worked efficiently to perform adequately.\(^{80}\) That is not to say they were planned, but that their efficiency developed organically, ploughing the most accessible land and relying on green lanes as commons. As populations grew, however, the strips of common became inadequate. With more people came higher traffic, a tighter land squeeze to enlarge fields and reduce lane width, and overuse of the resource. The outlying areas had not yet been enclosed, their use as commons increased, and gradually people started to move to these common edges to both use them and protect them from enclosure. Eventually it would reach a critical mass and become self-sustaining, pulling in the old settlement, which fades from use and leaves only the church.

This can be seen at Witton where, as discussed in Chapter Three, the settlement has been pushed out from the church to the commons at the periphery.\(^{81}\) The density of finds expands out, condensed by the church in the Middle Saxon, and strongest at the northern boundary by the Medieval Period. The Inclosure Map at Figure 20 shows the northern boundary as slightly wooded, with a ‘Public Road’ and ‘Ancient Driftway’ running through the centre.\(^{82}\) This also forms the parish boundary. This must have originally formed a larger area of common that had been eradicated over time—a small remnant patch can be seen a few metres south of this boundary. That this is an area of Wick 2 soils, productive agricultural land, adds credence to this picture of agricultural growth controlling the settlement patterns.

\(^{79}\) TG 28312 19098; TG 29211 26620; Campbell, (1983), p. 10
\(^{80}\) Birtles, (2003), p. 42
\(^{81}\) Lawson, (1983), pp. 50, 70, 73, 78
\(^{82}\) NRO, C/Sca 2/338 (Award: Witton near North Walsham, 1812) from http://historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk/mapexplorer/ (accessed 19/08/2013)
Not only do the soils indicate high production, but the scale of the isolation also shows the size of the farming land. From the church to both north and east boundaries is 800–500 metres as the crow flies, a fifteen minute walk on a track in bad conditions. There would be certain advantages to living closer to the common than to the church: protection of grazing stock; ready access to fuel and building supplies; keeping guard against encroachment by neighbouring parishes, to name a few. If it were possible to compare the tenancy of common-edge fields and the common-edge houses of this period, there would no doubt be a correlation as people chose to live closer to their work.

Longham, examined by Wade-Martins as part of his Launditch report, also features an ‘isolated’ church, this time in the west on the boundary of Burlingham 1 and Beccles 1 soils. The settlement is focussed around two commons—Kirtling Common and South Hall Green, which are connected by a thin strip along what is now a road. This settlement moved later than some of the others discussed here, and lies towards the west of Norfolk, but still displays the signs of having been pulled from one site to another by the combined growth of population and agriculture. The Middle Saxon settlement is smaller than some of the others in the area, but grows to

83 NRO, C/Sca 2/338
84 TF 94151 16196
85 (1980), fig. 15
accommodate forty-five tofts by the Medieval Period (although the actual number remains unknown).  

Longham is in an area dominated by ‘peripheral’ churches, but it demonstrates that similar factors are at play across the county. In central-northern and western Norfolk ‘isolated’ churches dominate the areas bordering Beccles 1 soils. This bears a similarity to the ‘common-edge peripheral’ churches discussed earlier, and suggests that ‘isolated’ settlements are sometimes only distinguished from their ‘common-edge peripheral’ or ‘embedded’ Beccles 1 counterparts by their lack of a church. The church in Longham stands completely ‘isolated’ to the north west of the commons, with ploughed land between it and the settlement. It is on well drained soil with observed reliable water sources, on the highest ground of the settlement. The commons are on the lower ground to the south, in an area shown by Figure 7 to be Beccles 1. The shift from church-side to common-edge occurred in the Late Medieval period, after growing to its maximum size, but with some evidence of Early Medieval expansion to areas of South Hall Green.

Longham gives an idea of a broad timeline—the settlement and church grow together during the Middle Saxon, expanding out a little in the Late Saxon. By the Early Medieval the accessible common comprises green lanes, with areas of common at the ends, but the population is growing and the tracts of common become attractive for habitation. The agricultural expansion continues, moving outwards from the settlement and church, expanding over the outlying common, taking out new strips, the traces of which can still be seen in the boundaries. It becomes easier to live on the other side of the settlement, near these furthest fields, where there is more common and less travel to the land. One or two families move out, and the rest of the settlement stays around the church. Well into the Medieval period more families have followed, the population is still growing, and then the scales tip and there are more people living by the commons. From then it becomes the main settlement, and the area around the church is first abandoned and then ploughed, after all it is good land.

Witton shows a similar pattern, albeit several centuries earlier, on better farming land in a more populous area that began to feel the pressure earlier than the west of the county. The difference between the east and west may be simplified to say that in

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87 (1980), pp. 33-9
the east settlements were pushed to the outer edges, forced to ‘leap-frog’ the ploughed land to reach the small commons, while the western settlements drifted to the edges of large tracts of common, pulling the remaining residents in by force of numbers but not building a new church. This is a subtle difference, but it explains why there are isolated churches in less populous parts of the county where access to common may be less of a factor than simple attraction.

**OVERALL EXPLANATIONS**

The preceding section has looked at different categories of churches individually, with little consideration of how they all form a large picture of Drift Period Norfolk. Each category results from different factors—soils are important for ‘embedded’ churches, but only secondary to ‘peripheral’. Population growth affects both ‘peripheral’ and ‘isolated’, but the impact is directly related to the amount of land available. Access to common was essential for all residents of Norfolk at this time, but the accessibility varied across the county and created regional differences in settlement layout. As observed, however, the responses were not uniform to a particular region—there is the north east with 37% ‘isolated’, while the central-south has a nearly equal proportion of ‘peripheral’ (25%) and ‘isolated’ (30%) churches. Every settlement is unique, and has been formed from a different combination of the same influences.

This examination of ‘embedded’, ‘peripheral’ and ‘isolated’ churches and their settlements has revealed the main influences in operation across the county.

- **Sufficient resources**

  The settlement did not experience significant population growth, or the original settlement may been in the best location in the near surroundings to provide for their needs. Therefore it had no need to move.

- **Population growth**

  Throughout Norfolk there was population growth in the Drift Period, and associated settlement expansion. This increased the area of ploughed land, reduced the amount of common land closest to the settlement, and made the outlying commons more valuable. Settlements moved to reach the commons, to provide food, fodder and fuel.
- Land pressure

In some areas there was enough land to allow for flexibility in the location of commons, while others struggled to fulfil all the requirements for both the settlement and lord. Where there was more choice the green lanes could be wider, allowing for more grazing and leading to large open areas for more demanding use. Where the land was highly populated the roads were busier and the strips left by earlier generations were no longer sufficient, settlements jumped over the surrounding arable to the border areas of common that could support them.

- Soils

Soils do not by themselves define the category of church that will be present, but they influence the other factors. Highly productive soils such as the Wick series tend to have higher populations and smaller estates, increasing the land pressure. More variable soils, such as Burlingham 1 are likely to have larger estates with less pressure to plough every inch of land. Very clayey soils, such as Beccles 1, will usually have been opened in the later years of the period and host newer settlements and churches. Valley floor and marsh soils will have more settlements that travel towards upland soils, probably as population forces expansion. There may also be a relationship between ‘quagmire’ soils and wider roads, but this has not been broadly investigated.

- Critical mass

A separate common-edge settlement will only dominate after reaching a critical mass, after which it pulls in the remnants from the original settlement. Otherwise it will remain as a few individual buildings on the common edge. This effect is easiest seen with ‘isolated’ churches, but may also influence some ‘peripheral’ settlements, pulling the houses down the street in a continuous line rather than hopping over the arable land.

- Status

An ‘isolated’ settlement may build a new church if it had the wealth or motives, and it would then become categorised as ‘embedded’. The territory may have been divided after the drift occurred, and any early church absorbed into a new neighbouring parish. Traces may still exist in place names, on maps, or with archaeological evidence. Alternatively there may never have been a church in the
early settlement, or it may have completely disappeared in the thousand years since abandonment.

These factors had different importance across Norfolk—in the east it is apparent that population growth and land pressure caused the dominance of the arable-hopping ‘isolated’ settlement. The west was influenced by the same, but at the opposite end of the scale and without the critical mass of the east. In the south-east and west there was the mixture of soils and population growth, with expansion onto poorer soils creating various combinations of ‘embedded’, ‘marginal’ and common-edge settlements. The overwhelming fact remains, however, that across the region settlements were shifting and migrating to ensure they could provide for all their requirements and obligations.
CONCLUSION

I was lead into this question by curiosity about churches standing in the middle of a field, surrounded by cows. While the ‘embedded’ church can be ambiguous, the ‘isolated’ church is an incontrovertible signal that a settlement has moved from a church-based site to a common edge some distance away. Between these extremes is a scale that depended on different factors to create the settlement shape. Population and land availability were important catalysts for settlement movement, but the only factor influencing every settlement across Norfolk was that of access to common land, for it was this that supplied the resources that ensured the survival of the community. Despite this it is impossible to examine only one category of church without referring to the others; the difference between ‘isolated’ settlements being ‘pushed’ versus ‘pulled’ towards the common is only seen when compared to ‘common-edge peripheral’.

The results of this quest to provide sufficient fodder and fuel can be seen in the diversity across the county. While all categories of churches can be found in all sections, there are particular explicable patterns. The importance of common in the Saxon and Medieval periods cannot be overstated, as it was access to this resource that drove settlements towards it, in whatever manner was necessary. In the west there was space for settlements to expand towards areas of common grazing, while still remaining attached to the church. In the east, land was under more pressure and settlements were forced to jump over the arable to the nearest large blocks of common. The evidence of this movement remains today.

The relationship of parish church to settlement is therefore both revealing and corroborative. Whether it is ‘peripheral’ or ‘isolated’, it helps tells the individual story of a settlement, the pressures, responses, conditions of the site in Late Saxon and Medieval times. But it also substantiates theories about population growth and the county-wide patterns of this period. Where previously the ‘isolated’ church has been seen as an East Anglian curiosity, interesting but not valuable, this study has shown that it is a signpost to settlement growth, influence and movement throughout a tumultuous period of history.
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