

THE DISSOLUTION SURVEY OF SNAPE PRIORY

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INTRODUCTION

THE PRIORY OF St Mary at Snape was founded on land granted in 1155 to the Abbey of St John's, Colchester by William Martel, Albreda his wife and Geoffrey their son. In 1400, a Papal Bull was secured in an attempt to free Snape on the grounds that St John's Abbey was not maintaining enough monks there. It seems not to have succeeded.¹ In 1499 Snape was given by Henry VII to Butley Priory. This implies that the monastery was already in a state of decay, but in 1509 Butley surrendered all claim to Snape. The reason for this action, dealt with in a now lost section of the register of Butley Priory, is unknown.² In 1520 the Bishop of Norwich on his visitation found the priory to be in a satisfactory state, given the number of monks and the financial situation.³ However the prior was ordered to find another monk and to provide an inventory of his house's state. In 1524 Wolsey chose Snape as one of the small houses to be dissolved to provide endowments for Cardinal College, his foundation at Oxford. On 1 February 1525 Snape was officially dissolved and the prior and two monks expelled by Dr John Allen.⁴ In 1528 labourers were being paid to take down the houses and clear the stone.⁵ In 1530, following Wolsey's attainder, the manor of Snape (including a water-mill and a rabbit warren) and the manor of Aldeburgh, both possessions of the former priory, were given by the King to Thomas Russhe, serjeant-at-arms and Thomas Alverd, gentleman usher of the chamber.

THE SURVEY

The survey survives in the Public Record Office (P.R.O. E36 163) as part of a collection of Wolsey's papers called 'The Cardinal's bundle'. It is bound in a volume which contains surveys of several of the other religious houses suppressed by Wolsey. The Snape survey is divided into three sections and is written in two hands. The first section is a general introduction which gives the names of the three surveyors (including Thomas Cromwell) and sets out the aim — a full recording of all the late monastery's assets. There then follows a section headed 'The site of the manor of Snape with the lord demesnes there', and this contains a description of the lands directly farmed by the priory. The final section, written by the second hand, far less neatly, lists the lands let out to the inhabitants of Snape. The first two sections are reprinted by Dugdale.⁶ Not all the entries have been completed and the surviving manuscript is probably a fair copy of the original notes. The survey must have been carried out at some time between the dissolution of the priory in February 1525 and the transfer of the manor from Oxford to Ipswich in May 1528.

The method of description is the same throughout. First the type of land is given. This could be a close, a meadow, a fen, a piece of land, a tenement, a croft, a pigtle or a building. Sometimes the name is given. Where relevant this is followed by the name of the tenant. Then comes a list of abuttals on each side. For the lord's demesne each abuttal is described by name, otherwise the owner is given. Finally the area is given in acres, roods and perches. A typical entry from the third section runs thus: 'Item a piece of ground called Brick Elmes in the tenure of Thomas Oakley lying between the land of Thomas Oakley on the south and the land of Robert Haring and Snape Green on the north, abuts upon Snape Green towards the east and the land of John Aldeth towards the west, containing ½ acre'.

No mention is made of the value or rent of any piece nor are any more specific descriptions of use given other than the divisions into 'piece of land', 'close' etc. Generally the description of the lord's demesne is much fuller than that of the tenanted land. On the lord's demesne only three fields out of nineteen are without names, compared with twenty-two out of forty-one tenanted

fields. That more care was taken over the demesne section is reflected in the much neater handwriting used in its recording. Furthermore, several of the entries in the tenanted section have been duplicated.

The survey does not provide a total picture of agriculture in Snape nor of the priory economy. From the third section of the survey especially it is clear that there was land in Snape which did not belong to Snape manor. Several people are mentioned as having land which abuts on priory land (the abbot of Myssenden for example) but which is not otherwise recorded in the survey. Furthermore, although the priory site itself, the priory mill and several tenements are mentioned, no details are given and there were clearly other buildings which are not recorded. The most curious omission is perhaps the barn, now part of Abbey Farm, the frame of which⁷ dates to the 14th century. No crops or livestock are mentioned but it is possible that everything had been taken away when the priory was dissolved. This is certainly what the register of Butley Priory infers. Nor does the survey include all of Snape Priory's property. It is known from Henry VII's charter transferring Snape to Butley (printed in Dugdale⁸) that the priory also controlled the manors of Shotts, Tastards (two manors within Snape parish), Bursawes (?), Bedingfield and Aldeburgh, the churches of Friston, Snape and Bedingfield, as well as miscellaneous rents in Snape, Friston, Buxlow, Peasenhall, Sternfield, Bedingfield, Aldeburgh, Hazlewood and Orford. The Snape survey is followed by similar surveys of Friston, Aldeburgh, Bursawes and Bedingfield but, in this volume at least, there are no more details. The overall value of Snape is given as £99 but, as yet, it is not known how this was made up.⁹

Having assessed the limitations of the survey, it is possible to see what we can infer from it about the agriculture of early 16th century Snape. Although not nearly as detailed as, for example, the two Elizabethan surveys of Walsham,¹⁰ a great deal of information can be gleaned about the organization of the manor. Appendix I shows the distribution of the different types of land.

The Tenanted Land

The land let out to tenants totals 119.09 acres, 29.5 per cent of the total area of the manor as recorded in the survey. There was some enclosure, and seven closes, with an average size of 5.4 acres, are mentioned, as well as two small crofts. Crofts and closes, together making up some 36 per cent of the tenanted land, are divided between five men. The bulk of the remaining land, 42.03 acres, 35 per cent of the total, is divided into forty-eight separate holdings described simply as 'pieces of land'. These are unenclosed strips, many mentioned as lying in the common fields called Snape Field, Thirtyfield, Sarsecroft and, picturesquely, 'Gyblets, now called Abell'. Many of the smallest of these pieces are only 1 rood (0.25 of an acre) in area. On the other hand there are clear traces of consolidation, often an important forerunner to enclosure. A lady called Agnes Crane (one of the priory's most important tenants, though she had no closes) had a 'piece of land' of 6½ acres 11 perches and another of 3½ acres 34 perches. The size of her pieces, concentrated mainly in eastern Snape, was exceptional, but areas ranging from ½ to 1½ acres were not uncommon.

There is little clue to the use made of the land. In contrast to the lord's demesne there is very little meadow or fen. This does not preclude the grassing of either closes or pieces of land and it is possible that in the survey the word 'meadow' is used in a technical sense to describe land drained, banked and ditched and suitable for mowing and 'fen' to describe land outside the river walls, used for simple grazing. Most of the tenanted land lay on higher ground and did not require draining.

The fact that enclosure had barely begun among the tenants in Snape at the time of the survey makes it impossible to attempt any detailed reconstruction of the landscape. Only a couple of the field names survive on the 1848 tithe apportionment map. Aerial photographs have produced some possible traces of ridge and furrow and one common field, the Fieldings, survived until

1848, but generally the enclosed landscape of the 1848 tithe map would seem to be totally different from that, predominantly open, recorded *c.* 1526. The best that can be achieved is a rough estimate of the sort of area under cultivation. It is noticeable that the western side of Snape (known then as Caldwell Green, in later maps as Cordial Green and today occasionally as Cundle Green, but otherwise Gromford) seems to have been more advanced than the rest. Five out of the seven closes are to be found in this area. Three people, John Balman with 19.5 acres, John Aldeth with 22.75 acres and Agnes Crane (already mentioned) with 16.25 acres, stand out as the priory's principal tenants and the two former have their land concentrated around Caldwell Green. The size of their tenements cannot be taken to indicate the total size of their holdings, as all three are mentioned as having land which abuts on priory land.

The Lord's Demesne

The demesne land totals 286.75 acres, 70.5 per cent of the whole area of the manor. This high percentage (demesne farming was out of fashion at this time¹¹) is explained by the fact that, so far as can be judged, this was the only land in all its estates which the priory did not let out. The demesne seems to have been concentrated in Snape. If the Butley Transfer charter is correct and Snape Priory owned, in all, 1,150 acres, then the demesne at Snape made up some 25 per cent of the whole.

The structure of the lord's demesne makes an interesting contrast to the tenanted land and serves to underline the fact that it was the landlords (Latimer's 'cormorants and greedy gulls') who were making the agricultural advances. The land is divided between pasture or fen (30 per cent), meadow (7 per cent), close (21 per cent) and wood (21 per cent). The nature of the remaining 21 per cent is unspecified. On the demesne the average size of a close is 11.85 acres compared with 5.4 acres on the tenants' holdings.

The predominance of pasture and meadow is presumably a reflection of the general popularity and profitability of sheep at the turn of the 16th century. On the other hand the field names include 'Horse Pasture' and 'Cow Pasture' but no reference to sheep; one cannot therefore be certain. The register of Butley Priory says that, on Snape's dissolution, all moveable goods were either removed or destroyed, and this perhaps explains the lack of mention of any crops or livestock.

One remarkable fact, and one which helps to explain the preponderance of pasture, is that about 37 per cent of the priory's land was liable to flooding by the river. Land reclamation was much undertaken by religious houses and, further down the Alde, Butley Priory was making spectacular gains. It is clear that Snape too had been reclaiming. It appears from the survey that drained land is called 'meadow' or 'pasture' while unreclaimed areas, not necessarily unusable, are called 'fen'. Thus Lytteborowe is a 'rushy fen'. Of the 99.1 acres of marshland within the lord's demesne 28.1 acres (28.3 per cent) seem to have been drained. There is evidence that reclamation was still in progress in 1500;¹² when it had begun, however, is an interesting (and unresolved) question. One might expect either the period of the 13th and earlier 14th centuries, until the Black Death put an end to the demand for more land, or the later 15th century when the population began once more to rise and the need for more land to return.

Unlike the tenanted land, which seems to bear little resemblance to the modern landscape, it has proved possible, to a remarkable degree, to reconstruct the positions of most of the demesne's fields and fit them on to the modern map. For this there are two reasons. First of all the far greater detail, and especially the high number of field names, in this section of the survey makes it much easier to work out the relative positions of the fields. Secondly, the more advanced state of demesne farming makes it much more similar to the landscape of today. Once a ditch was dug or a hedge planted, it tended to stay in the same place, at least until recently. It is interesting, though, how few of the field names survive on the 1848 tithe map.

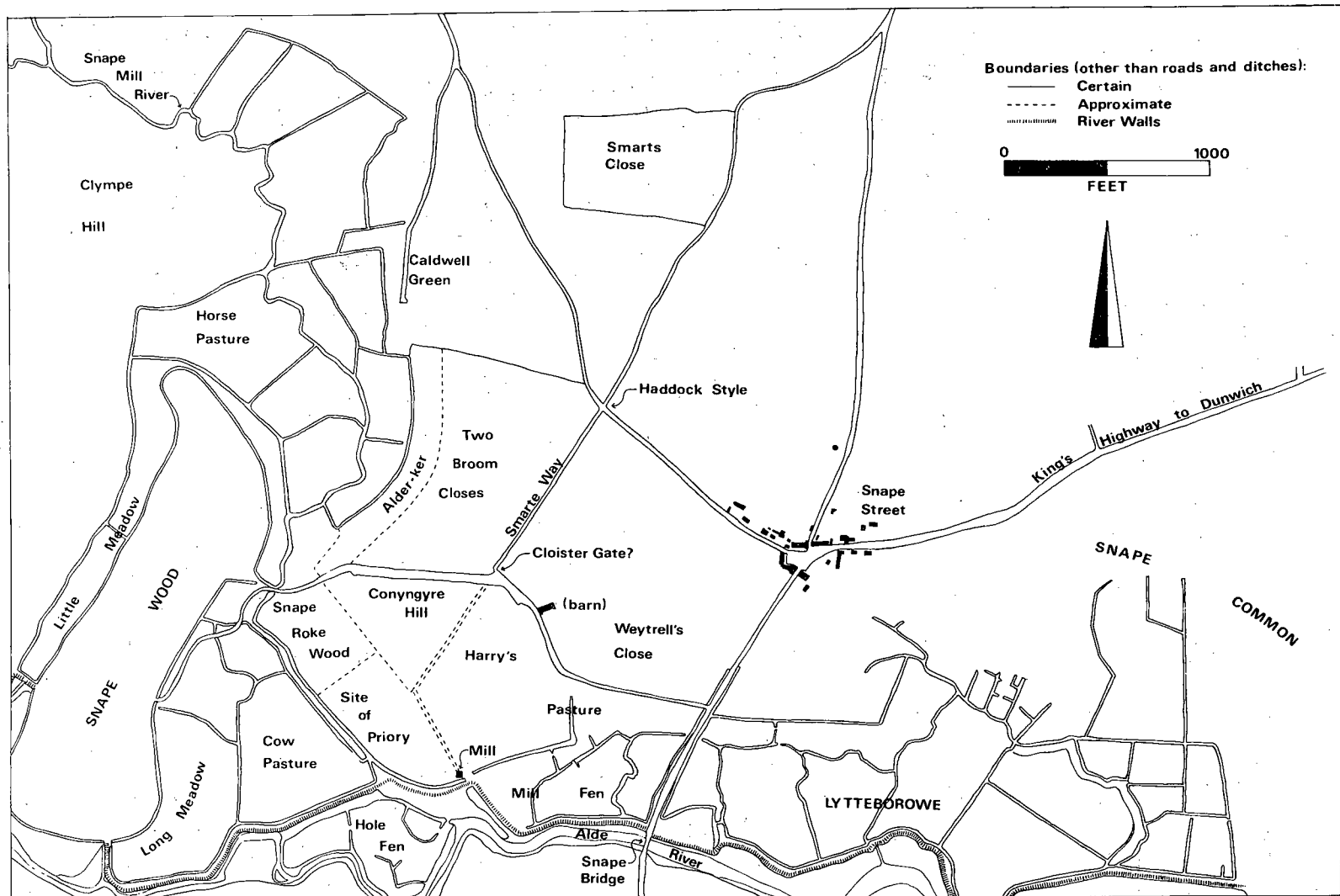


FIG. 46 — The suggested reconstruction of the lord's demesne of Snape Priory as recorded in the Dissolution Survey. The pattern of ditches, hedges and river walls is based on the 1848 Tithe Map.

The following extract is that part of the survey which deals with the lord's demesne. For convenience the spelling of all but the field names has been modernised and each separate entry has been numbered. The notes which follow (in square brackets) attempt to explain the references in each entry and the resulting reconstruction of the demesne is shown on the map (Fig. 46). With one or two exceptions (e.g. nos 4 and 5) the entries relating to the position of fields are clear and do not contradict each other. Where it has been possible to make direct comparisons of area between the survey and the modern landscape the error varies between 0.46 and 13.6 per cent. The average error is 7.12 per cent and in each case the survey area seems an underestimate (see Appendix II).

THE SITE OF THE MANOR OF SNAPE WITH THE LORD DEMESNES THERE

1. First the site and circuit, with the church of the late monastery of Snape, lying within the moat ditched, containing east, west, north and south. . . 5½ acres.
[The position of the priory is known from field survey: It was positioned on the site of the pre-Conquest manor, and the find of a sherd of Ipswich ware indicates an early beginning of occupation of the site.]
2. Item two Broom closes lying on the north side of the cloister way leading to the gate called Cloister Gate east, and from the said gate along the way called Smarte Way to Haddock's Style north, and from Haddock's Style to Caldwell Green north-west, and butteth on an alder karre west, joining to the Conyngyre hill south, containing. . . 16½ acres.
[In the 1848 tithe award the field just north of the Broom Closes' limit on my map is called Upper Broom Field. The Cloister Way appears to be an eastward extension of the way to Snape Wood, which is still a track. Smarte Way was probably the modern right of way linking Snape church to Abbey Farm, passing Smart's Close. Caldwell Green is now Gromford.]
3. Item at the west end of the said two broom closes, a close called Alder-ker, with a reedy fen adjoining to a river called Snape river, lying on the west, butting on a way leading to Snape Wood on the south, and Caldwell Green on the north, and the said broom closes on the east, containing. . . 4 acres.
['Ker' must be the same as the modern word 'carr', defined as 'a type of woody vegetation consisting of trees like hazel, alder and willow which develops on very peaty soils, generally in low-lying situations'.¹³ Alder-ker must have been long and thin since, although less than a quarter of Broom Closes' area, it extends the same distance north - south.]
4. Item a close called Harryes Pasture, lying on the south part of the Cloister Way leading to Cloister Gate on east, and butts on a way leading to Snape Mill towards the west, and betwixt the Conyngyre and the said close joining to the fen called Mille Fen south, and a close called Weytrell's on the north, containing. . . 8½ acres.
[No obvious equivalent and the entry is not totally clear. 'Betwixt the Conyngyre and said close. . . Mill Fen south' is probably describing the course of Mill Way rather than the location of Harryes Pasture. Weytrell's close is described in the third section of the survey as belonging to John and Elizabeth Redberd.]
5. Item a hill with a pigtle called Conyngyre Hill on east of the same hill, leading from the way called Snape Mill Way east, up and down by the monastery on the south, butting on a watering which joins to Snape Roke Wood towards the west, leading to the gate called the North Gate of the Bromye Close north, and from thence to the corner of the Bromye Close east, containing. . . 7 acres.
[The name Conyngyre indicates that this may well be the rabbit warren mentioned in Henry VIII's gift of Snape in 1530. Bromye Close must be Broom Close, but the position of the North Gate remains obscure. Roughly the same area as the 1848 Cart Shed Hill.]
6. Item a pasture called Cow Pasture, lying betwixt a river going to Snape Mill on east, and a meadow going to the wood there on the west, butting on Hole Fen on the south, joining on the meadow toward the north, containing. . . 7½ acres 2 perches.
[Cow Pasture is the 1848 Sluice Marsh.]
7. Item a close called Palesbury Close, lying betwixt the King's Highway leading to Dunwich on the north, and a marsh on the south and butts on Waley's tenement holden of my Lady of Lincoln toward the west and on a meadow in the tenure of Thomas Oakley and Alewell Fenne toward the east, containing. . . 23 acres.

8. Item a piece of land called Claypit Land and butting on the King's Highway leading to [blank] towards the south and Bromys Heythe toward the north, joining on the tenements of my Lady of Lincoln on the west, and the lands of the abbot of Myssendon on the east, containing... 45 acres, 3 roods, 6 perches.
9. Item another piece of land called Bylande, lying betwixt the tenement of Waleys on the east, and my Lady of Lincoln on the west, butting on the King's Highway aforesaid on the north and a fenne of the same John Waleys toward the south, containing... 9 acres, 1½ roods.
[Palesbury Close, Claypit and Bylande seem to have lain in the same general area. It is clear from Kirby's *Suffolk Traveller*¹⁴ that the old main road does not follow the route of the modern road through Snape, but cuts across Snape Warren, being today little more than a farm track for much of its length. In the same passage Kirby mentions a Polsborough Gate, which seems to lie near the main gate to Blackheath on the modern Snape – Aldeburgh road. It is possible that these three substantial pieces of land (70 acres in all) lay in this area, although it today falls within Friston parish. Missenden Abbey was an Augustinian house in south Buckinghamshire.]
10. Item a long meadow lying betwixt Snape Great Wood on west and the Cow Pasture on the east, butting on the said Great Wood partly on the north, and the river lying betwixt the manor of Dungworth and the same meadow on the south, containing... 10½ acres, ½ rood.
[Dungworth is Dunningworth.]
11. Item a long meadow lying along under the west side of Snape Wood with a fen at the south end of the wood, butting on a pasture called the Horse Pasture toward the north, and on a meadow in the tenure of John Wolsey on the west, and on Doingworth river on the south, containing... 9 acres.
[In the following entry this meadow is called 'little' and this name has been adopted on the map to prevent confusion with 10. Doingworth river is the Alde. In the survey all river names are of a very local character.]
12. Item a wood called Snape Wood, joining to a long meadow on the east, butting on Horse Pasture on the north, joining to a little meadow there on the west, butting on a fen belonging to the said manor on the south, containing... 46 acres.
[In 1848 this area comprised two fields, 'Further Wood Marsh' and 'First Wood Field', and two small pieces of wood were left. It is possible that the wood extended further north since the area of these two fields alone is considerably smaller than that given in the survey (as is that given for the Little Meadow, 11). On the other hand the strip of field immediately north of First Wood Field is called Segures Skirts which implies that at some moment it formed the edge of the wood.]
13. Item a little grove of wood with two pightles and an orchard called Roke Wood, lying between the Conyngyre on the east and a river going to Snape Mill on the west, and butteth on a way from the wood on the north, joining on the monastery there on the south, containing... 5½ acres.
14. Item a fen called Horse Pasture with a marsh at the east end, butting on the river going to Snape Mill toward the east, lying under Clympe Hill on the north, butting on a meadow in the tenure of John Aldeth toward the west, joining to Snape Wood on the south, containing... 16 acres.
[The exact position of Horse Pasture is uncertain as it depends on the northerly extent of Snape Wood, but it is probably roughly equivalent to the 1848 'Clympe Hill Marsh', with Clympe Hill itself a little to the N.W. on higher ground. John Aldeth was one of the Priory's principal tenants.]
15. Item a fen called Mill Fen, lying along by the Mill river on the south, and butteth on a way leading from Snape Bridge to the Street toward the east, lying under the Conyngyre on the north, and butts on the river going from the mill on the west, containing... 10 acres.
[Roughly the area of the 1848 'Mill Marsh'.]
16. Item a fen called Hoole Fen, lying within the river between Domgworth on the south and the mill dam on the north, containing... 5 acres.
[Almost an island, formed by the confluence of the main and mill rivers. Outside the river wall even today.]
17. Item a rushy fen called Lytteborowe, lying along by the way going south and south-east, butting on the common on the east, lying along by the common on the north, and butts on a way leading from Snape Bridge to the Street on the west, containing... 45 acres.
18. Item a water mill there, containing in length 68 feet and in breadth 19 feet, lying on the south side of the monastery, standing east and west, and a little pightle lying between the mill north and watergate south-east, containing... 3 roods.
[The site of the mill is roughly known from finds of mill-stone fragments. A mill mentioned in Domesday as belonging to Robert Malet was probably on the same spot.]

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19. Item a little pightle adjoining to the watergate at the west end of the said mill, contains... 1 rood'.
20. Item a close called Smart's Close, lying betwixt [blank] 7 acres 1 rood.
[In 1848 this field was still called 'Smarts' and still belonged to Abbey Farm.]
21. Item a piece of land called Folycroft, lying betwixt the [blank] 4 acres ½ rood 12 perches.
[No clue. The scribe seems to have been getting bored!]

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: DISTRIBUTION OF THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF LAND IN THE MANOR OF SNAPE

Land type		no.	Total acreage	Average acreage	Percentage of demesne	Percentage of tenanted	Percentage of total	
Lord demesne	Tenanted							
Close		5	59.25	11.85	21	32	14.5	
	Close	7	37.84	5.4			9.5	
Meadow/Fen		7	103.14	15	36	5	25.5	
	Meadow/Fen	4	5.84	1.5			1.5	
Wood and Pightle		4	58.75	14.7	20		14.5	
	Piece of land	48	42.03	0.88			35	10.5
Monastery and Mill		2	6.25	—	2		1.5	
	Tenement/ House	8	12.3	1.5			10	3
	Croft	2	4.83	2.4			4	1
Unspecified		3	59.36	19.78	21	14	14.5	
	Uncertain	1	16.25	—			4	
Totals		91	405.87	8.1				

APPENDIX II: THE INDIVIDUAL PARTS OF THE LORD'S DEMESNE

Name	Survey no.	Land type	Survey acreage	Suggested acreage*	Percentage difference
Lytteborowe	17	rushy fen	45	45.8	1.8
Hole Fen	16	fen	5	5.6	12.4
Cow Pasture	6	pasture	7.5	8	6
Long Meadow	10	meadow	10.6	12	13.6
Snape Wood	12	wood	46		
Little Meadow	11	meadow	9		
Horse Pasture	14	fen	16		
Mill Fen	15	fen	10		
Harry's Pasture	4	close	8.5		
Conyngyre Hill	5	hill with pightle	7		
Snape Roke Wood	13	grove with pightle	5.5	38.2	.5
Monastery	1		5.5		
Mill and Pightle	18/19	pightle	1		
Alder-ker	3	close	4		
Two Broom Closes	2	close	16.5	22.25	8.5
Palesbury Close	7	close	23		
Claypit Land	8	?	45.8		
Bylande	9	?	9.4		
Smart's Close	20	close	7.25		
Folycrofte	21	?	4.2		
			Total 286.75		

*The 'suggested acreage' column gives the area of the modern fields directly comparable to survey land.

NOTES

¹ *V.C.H., Suffolk*, II 79.

² Dickens 1951, *passim*.

³ Jessop 1888, 177.

⁴ Brewer 1862 - 1932, IV (i), 1137; Dickens 1951 gives 19 January as the date of the expulsion of the monks.

⁵ Brewer 1862 - 1932, IV (i), 4623, 5353, 6803.

⁶ Dugdale 1817 - 30, IV, 559 - 61.

⁷ In the opinion of Philip Aitkens.

⁸ Dugdale 1817 - 30, VI, 379 - 82.

⁹ Knowles 1961, 470.

¹⁰ Dymond 1974, 195 - 211.

¹¹ Postan 1978, 116.

¹² Arnott 1961, 12.

¹³ Evans 1978, 135.

¹⁴ Kirby 1764, 279 and map.

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