CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR

Christopher Charles Taylor

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elected Fellow of the British Academy 1995

by

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Fellow of the Academy

Christopher Taylor spent his working life in the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England, of which he became Head of Archaeological Survey in 1980. His academic achievement was to record and interpret the earthwork remains of medieval sites. He was a thoughtful surveyor, who integrated the results with information from other sources, and became a leading figure in the study of past landscapes. He contributed to a sequence of inventories published by the RCHME, but also published many articles in journals, chapters in edited volumes, and books aimed in part at the general reader. His achievements were widely recognised, notably in the award of the British Academy's Landscape Archaeology Medal in 2013.

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Christopher C Taylor

I

Christopher Taylor was an innovator and leader in the field of landscape history (also called landscape archaeology), who had strong connections with universities, but was throughout his career a civil servant, employed by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England. The Commission, as it was widely known among archaeologists, was established in 1908 to compile inventories of 'monuments', to provide the means of selecting those worthy of preservation. The commissioners were a distinguished group, including leading scholars, and the grand name suggested a prestigious organisation, but it was not generously funded. The investigations of the staff developed in a predictable way: as they progressed from county to county the range of 'monuments' to be listed expanded from the original emphasis on standing buildings to include sites mainly below the ground. An ever wider range of techniques were applied to the recording of sites, including, for example, aerial photography. The descriptions became more elaborate and time consuming. The first county, Hertfordshire, was completed in two years (1908–10). One of the volumes of the multi-volume survey of Dorset published in the 1970s had taken twenty years. A culture of confidence, combined perhaps with some complacency, developed among a mainly male staff. They put an emphasis on accurate and complete coverage of sites, without a realistic goal of completing the inventory. They prided themselves on their professionalism, but did not always offer new staff thorough training and a 'job description'. The Commission ceased to compile county inventories towards the end of the 20th century, embarking on a series of specific projects, and in 1999 the Commission was absorbed into English Heritage. Within the organisation Taylor worked purposefully and effectively. He set himself challenging deadlines, and by dint of hard work and a systematic approach kept to schedule while maintaining a very high standard of recording. He contributed substantially to a dozen inventory volumes, of which some were produced single handed or with one assistant. At the same time he was teaching in various capacities, and maintained a flow of articles and books which gave him a strong academic reputation. It was appropriate that he should be elected to the British Academy, where he was one of small but significant group of Fellows who were not on the staff of a university.

II

Like many scholars of his generation Taylor came from lower middle class parents who had no previous experience of higher education.[1] His father repaired and maintained agricultural machinery in the countryside around the family's home in Lichfield in Staffordshire. He made occasional comments about the rural landscape which his son later remembered as his first contact with the subject. Taylor's enterprising mother opened a shop in the centre of Lichfield, called 'Nurseryland', selling goods for infants and small children. In 1935 when he was born the family lived in a terraced house outside the town centre, but subsequently they moved to more spacious accommodation above the shop. Taylor's mother was especially ambitious for her son, and he gained a place at the small local grammar school, King Edward VI at Lichfield. After unpromising results at the age of 16 she encouraged him to enter the sixth form, where both history and geography engaged his interest. He was attracted to the local university, the University College of North Staffordshire, later Keele University, because he was reluctant to specialise in a single subject. The degree course extended over four years (1954–8 for Taylor) to accommodate a Foundation Year. This introduction to the full range of subjects taught in the College was welcomed by Taylor, who threw himself into a formidable programme of reading, as well as enjoying the whole university experience. He went on to take a degree in history and geography, with a history syllabus covering a long chronology of mainly political British history, and a geography programme which tended to be deterministic in line with then current thinking.

He encountered very little archaeology at Keele, and developed an interest in the subject on his own initiative. During the summer vacations of 1956 and 1957 he worked for Staffordshire County Council on the early stage of a Sites and Monuments Record (though it was not given that name). He copied out information from the card index of archaeological sites compiled by the Ordnance Survey, and then used this information to begin a recording system in Stafford. Though this was in some ways a routine administrative exercise, he noticed the distribution patterns revealed in the record cards. For example, why did so many Bronze Age finds come from the heavy clay soils and extensive woodlands of the county, which according to deterministic thinking were inhospitable environments for early settlers? Also during the summer vacations, Taylor responded to an offer of summer placements for students advertised by the Commission. He spent time with the Commission's team at Salisbury, and was hooked by the

[1] For his early life an especially useful source has been C. Taylor, 'A Driving Lack of Ambition: the Making of a Landscape Historian', an unpublished memoir, kindly made available to me by Stephanie Taylor.

introduction they provided to the planning of earthworks. He obviously made an impression on them, which helped when a post later became available. Meanwhile, he felt the lack of a formal qualification in archaeology, and signed up for a two-year diploma course in West European Prehistory at the Institute of Archaeology in the University of London. This was also a useful alternative to National Service, which he was anxious to avoid. The London course followed a rather traditional syllabus, but he encountered some new developments, such as environmental archaeology in the form of the analysis of animal bones. He passed the diploma exams, but also acquired an antipathy for excavation, confirming a view gained from visits to sites in Staffordshire. This persisted, so he was committed to archaeology, but preferred to practise it above the ground.

III

Taylor was appointed to a post in the Commission in 1960, and immediately was immersed in a year of intense recording of sites in west Cambridgeshire. He used his experience with the Commission as a student, and was working alongside a more senior colleague, but he was also training himself in methods of survey. He embarked on the project with completion in view, as he intended at the end of the year to marry, and move to Salisbury where he was to be employed in the long term. Surveying sites, and writing up the results for inventory volumes was to be Taylor's main activity for the next three decades, but for him it was not a tedious routine, as he found surveying earthworks in the field intensely enjoyable and rewarding, and that pleasure remained throughout his life.

After the initial year in Cambridgeshire, Taylor was pursuing two parallel careers. His official job and main source of income was working on the inventory volumes, but that task did not satisfy his curiosity and ambition to interpret the evidence fully. The Commission was publishing high quality works of reference, based on painstaking research, which carried a great deal of authority. The organisation expected its investigators to interpret the monuments and sites they recorded, but without too much expression of opinion. The preference for factual and objective approaches was shared with other bodies dealing with the past, such as the Ordnance Survey and the Victoria County History. The survey of each site was expected to provide a date, identify its function, and trace any visible changes. A consideration of the wider significance of the evidence risked controversy, and required comparison and perhaps even speculation, which took up valuable space in the publication.

The published inventories did not name a particular author or authors on the title page, though the commissioners' report thanked those responsible. Staff were free to

advance discussion of their work in journals and books under their own names, written in their own time, and Taylor took full advantage of this. An example was the village of Culworth, which features in the fourth volume of the inventory of Northamptonshire. This showed that the modern village plan is formed from two streets, different in character, which meet at a triangular green. It was suggested that the green had once been rectangular, and might have been the original village site, before the streets developed, or it could have been a market place, as the lord of Culworth was granted a royal charter for a market in 1264. This was written by Taylor in about 1979, and appeared in the inventory volume in 1982. Also in 1982 Taylor published an article in the journal *Landscape History* under the title. 'Medieval Market Grants and Village Morphology', in which Culworth was cited as one of a number of examples of villages known to have held markets in which space for these occasions was embedded in the village plan, and survived long after the market ceased to be held.[2]

To focus on his Commission work, Taylor's contribution was remarkably productive and worthy of note if it had been his sole activity. The Commission operated from various regional bases. Taylor began with a year at Cambridge, then moved to Salisbury, and after seven years returned to Cambridge. In his first period at Cambridge he contributed substantially to the volume on West Cambridgeshire.[3] He then spent much of the 1960s researching Dorset with the team he had encountered as a student, contributing to four volumes.[4] He went back to Cambridge for a special project on Peterborough, which had been designated as a New Town, with imminent threats to its historic landscape from the expansion of its housing. This survey was completed in 1966–7, and was followed by North-East Cambridgeshire and a section of a volume on Stamford.[5] In the 1970s the Commission decided, with some persuasion from Taylor, to embark on Northamptonshire, its first venture into a midland county. This was Taylor's project, and he produced the first volume entirely on his own, though subsequent volumes benefited from the help of a research assistant, Fran Crowther. Even for two workers the county posed formidable problems, as it was large, with numerous parishes, and many sites of all periods were already known or were to be discovered. Its remote western corners

[2] Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England (henceforth RCHME), *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northampton*, 4, *Archaeological Sites in South-West Northamptonshire* (henceforth *South-West Northamptonshire*, or the appropriate county) (London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office [henceforth HMSO], 1982), pp. 39–40; C.C. Taylor, 'Medieval Market Grants and Village Morphology', *Landscape History*, 4 (1982), 21–8.

[3] RCHME, *West Cambridgeshire* (London, HMSO, 1968).

[4] RCHME, *South-East Dorset* (London, HMSO, 1970); *Central Dorset* (1970); *North Dorset* (1972); *East Dorset* (1975).

[5] RCHME, *Peterborough New Town* (London, HMSO, 1969); *North-East Cambridgeshire* (1972); *The Town of Stamford* (1977).

took a great deal of travelling time from Cambridge. He set himself a target of completing a parish in a week. He was helped to deal with more complex sites by enlisting the help of students who attended training courses at Knuston College, taught jointly with the local Extra-Mural organiser, Tony Brown of Leicester University. These volunteers still came at a price, in terms of the time and energy expended in teaching them surveying techniques. In spite of the problems, and the slow pace of production by the publishers (the Stationery Office), the four volumes of Northamptonshire appeared within a few years of the research.[6]

IV

The inventories that were produced for Cambridgeshire, Dorset and Northamptonshire dealt with all periods, and Taylor was responsible for publishing in them numerous prehistoric and Roman sites, some visible as earthworks, especially in the Dorset chalk country, but many known from crop marks photographed from the air, or revealed by scatters of pottery and flints on the surface of ploughed fields. He was however best known for recording and interpreting the earthwork remains of rural settlements and landscapes of the medieval period, mostly occupied between the 12th and 16th centuries. It is worth setting his thinking in the context of the general growth of understanding of these sites in the second half of the 20th century. When Taylor joined the Commission in 1960 many features of the rural landscapes of the prehistoric and Roman periods were well known and had been studied for decades. Knowledge was not confined to religious sites and burial mounds, but 'Celtic' field systems and linear earthworks were familiar features, the excavated enclosure and building of Little Woodbury (Wiltshire) served as the type site for iron age farms, and hill forts and many Roman villas had been excavated. However, in many ways medieval archaeology was a new subject, which had not been part of the syllabus for archaeology students, and had only just begun to develop an institutional base. The Society for Medieval Archaeology had been founded in 1956, soon after the formation of the Vernacular Architecture Group, and the Deserted Medieval Village Research Group (both in 1952).[7] The most generally recognised rural settlement site, the deserted village, had been discovered by W.G. Hoskins and M.W. Beresford just before and just after the world war, and their distribution over the whole country was established by Beresford's

[6] RCHME, *North-East Northamptonshire* (London, HMSO, 1975); *Central Northamptonshire* (1979); *North-West Northamptonshire* (1981); *South-West Northamptonshire* (1982).

[7] C. Gerrard, *Medieval Archaeology. Understanding Traditions and Contemporary Approaches* (London, Routledge, 2003), pp. 122–5.

book of 1954.[8] Hoskins and Beresford could both see that the irregular mounds, terraces, banks, ditches and holloways represented the remains of a village, especially when the site was surrounded by the ridge and furrow of a medieval field system. However, although air photographs from the inter-war period and some skilful early surveys were revealing coherent village plans, further survey work and selective excavation were needed before these sites could be fully understood. In 1956 Hoskins published plans of seven Leicestershire deserted villages prepared by the Ordnance Survey. His commentary was mainly historical, but he gave brief descriptions of the earthworks, recognising a main street and 'side lanes' (which showed in the plans as holloways), associated with banks and ditches defining property divisions – the tofts and crofts. He seemed unsure of identifying the sites of buildings, though stone foundations were visible on some sites. In five of the Leicestershire examples a moated site, probably in each case representing a manor house, lay within or next to the village earthworks.[9]

The Commission's team working on the inventory of Dorset, who were joined by Taylor in 1961, had to deal with a large number of medieval settlement sites. The deserted villages were outnumbered by the areas of earthworks adjacent to existing settlements, often called shrunken villages. Researchers were gaining confidence in interpreting the different features within the tofts and crofts. Buildings on clay land sites (like the Leicestershire villages described by Hoskins) were visible as house platforms, but in the districts where building stone was available, such as parts of Dorset, the outline of foundations could be planned, including such details as doorways and inner partition walls. The village plan could include boundary banks on the edge of the surrounding fields, and other contemporary features lying near to deserted villages were fish ponds and occasionally mill sites.

In the early stage of archaeological research into medieval rural settlements their importance was thought to lie, not in their origin or development, but in their abandonment. Here had been well-established villages, some of them quite large, and subsequently they had lost all of their inhabitants, or at least the settlement had been greatly reduced in size. To some extent the material evidence was being used to support an historical agenda. The documents showed that the rural population had grown between the 11th and the 13th centuries, and numbers had diminished in the following period in the aftermath of epidemics and a general decline in agriculture. Historians also linked the deserted villages to the known phase of deliberate depopulation of the 15th and 16th centuries, when peasants were removed to make way for sheep pastures.

[8] M.W. Beresford, *The Lost Villages of England* (London, Lutterworth, 1954).

[9] W.G. Hoskins, 'Seven Deserted Village Sites in Leicestershire', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 32 (1956), 36–51.

As settlements were surveyed aspects of their past became apparent which did not connect so easily with the historical evidence. Some villages had been laid out with regular plans, most commonly with rows of rectangular tofts of equal size along a straight main street. Alternatively the houses fronted on to a rectangular green, or formed a square, or a grid. Analysis of existing villages also revealed their planned origin. We are left with the dilemma of explaining when the plans were made, and who was responsible. Taylor was inclined to suggest a late chronology, with plans being imposed in the 12th century, and to assume that the idea came from the lords of the manor, but recently opinion has moved away from this position. Taylor was insistent on the complexity and variety of settlement, and saw evidence for changes in shape and the mobility of the inhabitants. Some villages showed little evidence for regular planning, for which one explanation might be that an original farmstead expanded with additional houses as heirs settled nearby and developed their holdings of land. In certain regions villages in the sense of large and compact settlements are rare or absent. Taylor found this in Dorset in Blackmoor, a former royal forest, with a number of isolated farmsteads which had developed as land was cleared for agriculture. Much later he examined a settlement pattern consisting of a string of farmsteads at Thurleigh in Bedfordshire. In areas of dispersed settlement there was limited evidence for settlement planning, but still some indications of abandonment, at Thurleigh though not at Blackmoor. [10]

Changes in settlement plan could be revealed by survey, most notably at Bardolfeston, in Dorset, where the street and clearly identifiable houses of the late medieval village were laid across a series of enclosures and boundaries with a different alignment.[11] A decision had evidently been made at some unknown date to redesign the village, but the evidence is entirely archaeological, as no document records such a drastic transformation. That villages were replanned is confirmed by excavations, where boundary ditches and buildings can be found on different alignments in successive periods. Taylor accepted that some village plans could be quite conservative, and he used the street plans and property boundaries of existing settlements as a guide to the layout in the 12th century.

The archaeological evidence, from pottery scatters on ploughed sites, for example, suggested that the desertion of settlements did not occur suddenly, after the Black Death or at the behest of an enclosing lord. People moved away from declining settlements over the 14th and 15th centuries, or indeed the final abandonment stretched into modern times. One explanation for their deterioration was small size and relative poverty which made a village vulnerable.[12] It was sometimes alleged by determinists that marginal land

[10] C.C. Taylor, 'The Pattern of Medieval Settlement in the Forest of Blackmoor', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society*, 87 (1965), 251–4.; A.E. Brown & C.C. Taylor, 'The Origins of Dispersed Settlement; Some Results of Fieldwork in Bedfordshire', *Landscape History*, 11 (1989), 61–81.
[11] RCHME, *Central Dorset*, pp. 222, 229, plate 183.
[12] C.C. Taylor, *Dorset* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), pp. 111–21.

(on high ground or in woodland) was most likely to become uninhabited, but a weak village, even with potentially fertile land, was more 'marginal' (in the sense of being liable to collapse) in this period than settlements on heaths or in royal forests.

Surveying the Dorset countryside for the Commission gave Taylor insights into the wider landscape as well as the details of the settlements. He recognised the importance of the advance of cultivation and habitation in the medieval period, especially in the 12th and 13th centuries. One contribution he made to understanding the extent of the area under the plough was to date 'strip lynchets', a feature of chalk country (and elsewhere), which consisted of long terraces cutting into the hill slopes and especially along the side of valleys. These had once been dated to the Bronze Age, but Taylor argued convincingly that they were of medieval origin, forming extensions of the system of plough ridges in the open fields.[13] Constructing them must have been arduous and time consuming, and they indicate the lengths to which medieval cultivators went to maximise the area under crops. At the same time he was critical of the assumption that very large areas of woodland were cleared by the process of 'assarting' in the high middle ages. He argued that the written evidence for the foundation of new settlements was interpreted sometimes with naivety, with the assumption that the first reference to a place dated its origins. The sudden growth in the number of named settlements was the result of the advent of abundant record keeping, and archaeology could sometimes show that the place named for the first time in *c.*1200 had existed for centuries.

There was however a high tide of expanding farmland in the Middle Ages, and Dorset provided an opportunity to observe the consequences for the archaeological record. As a student Taylor had encountered the distinction between the highland and lowland zone that had been advanced by Cyril Fox, believing that early man had settled on high ground and avoided the inhospitable damp oak forests of the lowlands. In Dorset, as Fox knew, the prehistoric hill forts, burial mounds, and linear dykes could be seen mainly on the chalk downs. However, Taylor pointed out that prehistoric sites in the lowlands were invisible because they had been destroyed by the advance of arable farming in the medieval and modern periods. The countryside could be divided between a zone of destruction in the river valleys and the royal forests, and a zone of survival on the chalk uplands. It was beginning to be appreciated in the 1960s that there had been prehistoric settlements in the valleys, for which the evidence has subsequently greatly increased.

When Taylor came to focus his attention on Northamptonshire, he was presented once more with a large quantity of both abandoned and still inhabited medieval settlements. He was well-practised in his observation of earthwork evidence, and was providing interpretations with confidence. He also benefited from the growing research

[13] C.C. Taylor, 'Strip Lynchets', *Antiquity*, 40 (1966), 277–84.

community in Northamptonshire, who were developing new ideas about rural settlement from field-walking, excavation, and the exploration of local topography. True to the tradition of the Commission, most of his writing in the four volumes of the inventory was factual and avoided controversy, but in the introduction to the second volume he did allow himself space to make a series of general statements about rural settlement.[14]

He addressed the then much debated issue of the continuity between the Roman and medieval periods. There was little direct coincidence between sites of the two periods which might suggest that occupation was continuous, or that places had similar functions. However he had indicated the significance of some Roman rural sites which spread over a large area and could have served as exchange centres: 'large non-urban Roman settlements'. One of these lay near Kettering, later to be a medieval small town, and this was the site of a large early Anglo-Saxon cemetery. Less cautious authors might have argued that some of the people buried in the cemetery were the descendants of the inhabitants of the Roman 'non-urban' settlement, and Taylor hinted at this.

He was more certain of the lack of continuity within the pre-Conquest period. The location of settlements that he called 'early Saxon', that is dated by pottery to the period 450–650, were unrelated to the nucleated villages of the 11th century onwards. It appeared that most villages had formed by *c.*1100, but there was no dating evidence earlier than the 10th century. He doubted the value of the concept of 'daughter' villages, used to explain the existence in some parishes of two nucleated villages, based on the assumption that the smaller village had spun off from the larger when it expanded. He believed that the 'daughters' had formed at the same time as the larger settlements, and both were the products of the same nucleation process in the late pre-Conquest period.

In examining the nucleated villages he emphasised how they were liable to change. He had noticed in Cambridgeshire and elsewhere that some villages consisted of a group of distinct clusters, sometimes called 'ends', and he found further examples in Northamptonshire. He gathered examples together and published them under the title 'polyfocal settlements'. It suggested that large villages could be formed from the merger of a number of hamlets.[15] Stronger evidence for growth in the size of settlements, which he had noticed in his work on Cambridgeshire, was the decision to find new space for housing in an expanding village on arable fields, which he described as 'the movement of villages over their own fields', which might result in the long plots of land on which houses stood retaining the curved shape of the former ploughed strips. Otherwise it was quite difficult to find evidence for expansion – it was easier to establish decline in the form of abandoned streets and house sites adjoining the modern village. Even this apparently direct evidence could be questioned, as it could be the result of a village's inhabitants occupying a new site nearby. Settlement was shifting and mobile.

[14] RCHME, *Central Northamptonshire*, pp. xlvii-liii.
[15] C.C. Taylor, 'Polyfocal Settlement and the English Village', *Medieval Archaeology*, 21 (1977), 189–93.

Finally, ideas which developed from the Northamptonshire work related to the later use of the former village site. As the decay of the village could be slow and piecemeal, an abandoned part of the village might have been cultivated by the cultivators who continued to live there, leaving tell-tale traces of ridge and furrow running across the tofts and house platforms. A striking feature of Northamptonshire villages was that a number were overlain by the earthworks of gardens attached to large country houses. Aristocrats who profited from desertion were likely to have the ambition and means to create gardens on or near to the village site. This tendency had confused some surveyors of village earthworks, who imagined that the terraced walkways and flower beds had been roads and boundaries belonging to the medieval village.

V

By 1980 Taylor had completed programmes of fieldwork in Cambridgeshire, Dorset and Northamptonshire, and the last Northamptonshire volumes were going through the press. He was appointed Head of Archaeological Survey for the Commission, and became responsible for the Cambridge office. His heavier involvement in administrative work increased to a considerable burden when the post of Secretary (the head of the whole organisation) became vacant in 1985 with the departure of Peter Fowler to a university post, and Taylor took charge temporarily.

Soon after he was appointed as Secretary Fowler had proposed that the Commission should concentrate on 'projects'. Taylor became involved in a very successful venture in Lincolnshire, where the Commission had not previously been much engaged. The county had been slow to set up a systematic recording of 'Sites and Monuments', later to be known as the Heritage Environment Record. Work on Lincolnshire was being managed by a single member of staff, Paul Everson. To begin a more systematic approach a section of countryside running across the county to the north of Lincoln was selected, and Everson worked with Taylor and Chris Dunn to examine rural sites. Some of the settlements were exceptionally well-preserved and from them complete village plans could be recovered, but the survey also revealed a shocking amount of damage, mainly from modern agriculture. [16]

Also in the 1980s Taylor was developing his interest in historic gardens, which had been given a strong stimulus from the discovery in Northamptonshire of examples of the 16th to the 18th centuries. More medieval garden designs were being recognised, and the most influential of these was at Bodiam in Sussex. Taylor visited the site by accident,

[16] P.L. Everson, C.C. Taylor & C.J. Dunn, *Change and Continuity. Rural Settlement in North-West Lincolnshire* (London, HMSO, 1991).

outside the area with which he was most familiar. The castle itself, built in the 1380s to a perfectly square plan with round corner towers, was regarded as characteristic of the late phase of medieval fortifications. It was designed to be both impressive and pleasing, but until Taylor and Commission staff analysed the surroundings it had not been realised that the building was set in an elaborately designed landscape. Visitors in the Middle Ages approached on routes which gave them impressive views and even created the sensation of the castle rising out of the ground.[17] The published results had an impact on castle studies which were turning away from military analyses of these buildings. Castles were being perceived as attractive residences, with gardens and adjacent parks, providing a pleasurable environment in which women participated. Bodiam became a shining example for those seeking to compose a revisionist social and cultural history of castles.

Taylor was partly responsible for changing perceptions of moated sites which were much more plentiful than castles. They were houses, many of them manor houses and other high status buildings, surrounded by a wide, water-filled ditch. They were conventionally regarded as defensive, with a purpose of protecting the house and its inhabitants from thieves or raiding parties. When he first encountered them in number while surveying west Cambridgeshire, Taylor decided that their purpose must have been to display the status of the owners. He later elaborated the idea and gave it a cultural dimension by arguing that the water in the moats could have had a decorative function, and might sometimes have formed part of a garden layout.

VI

While Taylor from 1960 onwards was researching and writing for the Commission's inventory volumes, he was also engaged in a self-generated academic programme. This was often closely related to his official duties, but not a requirement. He did not fit this work into periods of relative calm in compiling the inventories: his most productive academic years, between 1973 and 1979, coincided with the demanding period of the Northamptonshire inventories. To some extent the Commission volumes fed his academic work, as his contributions to the inventories stimulated ideas, and he was also able to exchange views with colleagues, to their mutual benefit, as would have been the case in a university environment among academic colleagues. Later in life he recalled lively discussions with Collin Bowen, Desmond Bonney, Paul Everson and others. Taylor's publications were clearly regarded favourably by the Commission,

[17] C.C. Taylor, P. Everson & R. Wilson-North, 'Bodiam Castle, Sussex', *Medieval Archaeology*, 34 (1990), 155–7.

which allowed him access to materials awaiting publication, and it also gave permission for illustrations from Commission volumes to be reproduced. It was presumably recognised that books with a wide circulation by a member of the Commission staff would be good for the organisation's reputation.

Although Taylor's own publications contain many references to sites and settlements in Cambridgeshire, Dorset and Northamptonshire, he familiarised himself with other parts of the country, by travelling widely, reading, especially the periodical literature, attending conferences, and speaking to researchers of all kinds. His curiosity began at home, by investigating the history and archaeology of the villages in which he lived. On his marriage in 1961 he was located near Salisbury at Whiteparish, in the wooded southern tip of Wiltshire, not far from the New Forest. The theme of the article that resulted from his research was the expansion of a dispersed settlement pattern in a woodland environment, much of it in the 12th and 13th centuries. This coincided with similar findings by historical geographers in other English regions.[18] He later came to believe in general that the importance of forest clearance (assarting) in that period had been exaggerated, leading him to suspect a longer chronology for much dispersed settlement.

He moved in 1967 to Whittlesford in the valley of the Cam in Cambridgeshire. As he accumulated evidence about the village, and as thinking about rural settlement was revised over the decades, he was able to formulate hypotheses and then discard them. He wrote a paper for a *festschrift* in honour of Maurice Beresford and John Hurst, tracing the accumulation of evidence and changes of view, as a lesson in the need to adapt interpretations in the light of new knowledge and thinking. He used maps and documents, carried out field walking, and recovered pottery from building sites. He found evidence for a planned market place and a phase of polyfocal growth, ideas which had originated in other village studies. But after a series of reconstructions of Whittlesford's evolution, all of which had to be revised, he was left in a state of uncertainty.[19] Although the results were inconclusive, the process was satisfying for him, and interested his readers. The long timescale of the Whittlesford investigation contrasted with the need when preparing an inventory volume to research and reach conclusions on each village in a week.

A further spur to his 'parallel career' came from his teaching of adult education classes. In his early years in the south-west he was employed by the Extra-Mural Department of Southampton University to conduct evening classes in a succession of

[18] C.C. Taylor, 'Whiteparish: A Study of the Development of a Forest-Edge Parish', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 62 (1967), 79–102.

[19] C.C. Taylor, 'Whittlesford: the Study of a River-Edge Village', in M. Aston, D. Austin & C. Dyer (eds), *The Rural Settlements of Medieval England* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1989), pp. 207–27

Dorset villages, and he also contributed to day schools where he encountered other specialists in the archaeology of the region. He formed a congenial relationship with Tony Brown of Leicester University's Extra-Mural department, and over the years he became a regular tutor of day schools and training courses at Knuston Hall in Northamptonshire. He taught because he thought that it was important to inform the public about research, but also because it was enjoyable. Teaching connects especially closely with research when adult students are involved. They are confident enough to ask challenging questions which require thoughtful answers, and they bring to the classes specialist knowledge and personal experience so that learning becomes a process of mutual exchange. Encountering adult students showed Taylor that the relatively new subject of landscape history lacked the reading matter that adult students would appreciate. Books on landscape would also be useful for teaching undergraduate students, and for interested members of the public who did not attend formal classes. He began in 1970 with a general account of the landscape of Dorset, which belonged in a series inspired by Hoskins. It followed a template for the series, with a first chapter on the prehistoric and Roman periods, followed by three chapters on the countryside in the Middle Ages, and then through the modern period, with a last chapter on towns. These were popular illustrated books of 200 pages, which gave little scope for detail or elaboration of argument, but Taylor's experience with the Commission shone through and gave the book depth and authority. It was soon followed by another in the same series on Cambridgeshire.[20] He followed these broad surveys of specific counties with thematic books addressing the interests of landscape historians in general and adult students in particular, with an eye to helping amateur researchers. *Fieldwork in Medieval Archaeology* was explicitly aimed at the 'part-time archaeologist', but it must have had a wider readership. It showed how to plan earthworks without sophisticated equipment, gave advice on interpretation, with appropriate examples, and demonstrated the use of supplementary information, such as documents, especially maps.[21] 'The general reader with an enquiring mind' was intended to take an interest in *Fields in the English Landscape*, and it clearly had a general appeal as it was reprinted three times. It provided a clear and systematic overview, using mainly map and earthwork evidence, of fields from prehistory into modern times, with chapters on both enclosed and open fields of the medieval period.[22] Similar qualities are found in his *Roads and Tracks of Britain*, which treated them as elements in the landscape rather than just as long distance channels of communication. He made the simple but important point that an open field system needed a close network of access routes so that cultivators could reach their strips.[23]

[20] Taylor, *Dorset*; C.C. Taylor, *The Cambridgeshire Landscape* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1973).
[21] C.C. Taylor, *Fieldwork in Medieval Archaeology* (London, Batsford, 1974).
[22] C.C, Taylor, *Fields in the English Landscape* (London, Dent, 1975).
[23] C.C. Taylor, *Roads and Tracks of Britain* (London, Dent, 1979).

His most important and influential book, appreciated by academics and students as well as the 'general reader' was *Village and Farmstead*.[24] Like the fields and roads books it covered a long time span, and devoted a good deal of attention to the late prehistoric and Roman settlement patterns, delivering the strong message that large areas were being settled and farmed, even in regions which had previously been regarded as under exploited because of environmental constraints, such as heavy soils. He thought that a population of 5 million was possible at the peak of the Roman province's development, a figure that was comparable with the numbers in the 13th or 16th centuries. He was also aware of the likely organisation of the Roman countryside into estates, which echoed cautiously the theory of continuity of boundaries and units of land management between the pre-medieval and medieval periods.

In his chapters on the Middle Ages he reiterated and strengthened arguments that he had been making in earlier writings, both for the Commission and in his own publications. He warned against too strong an emphasis on nucleated villages, which were not the predominant settlement form of the period. Large villages had grown at quite a late date within the medieval period, with most villages being associated with pottery dated after 1000. A large midland village which had been extensively excavated at Faxton in Northamptonshire seems to have formed in the 12th century. He identified the various processes that led to nucleation, such as agglomeration by which the family occupying a single farmstead settled its offspring nearby, leading over the generations to a cluster of peasant farms. Polyfocal settlements reflected expansion in stages, by which hamlets established within a short distance filled the gaps with new settlers and could then appear as a single settlement with a complicated plan. The pottery scatters indicating small settlements from before the 9th century found in the fields around nucleated villages suggested a 'balling' of settlement by which people moved from hamlets and farmsteads to congregate in the central village. Taylor's new statement on nucleation put much evidence on planning. He was insistent that planned villages were more numerous than we had appreciated, because the original core, often a street with rows of houses, was buried in a settlement that had grown into a loose cluster. He assumed the importance of the lords of manors as agents of settlement change. His work on polyfocal villages found that the original foci of settlement belonged to different lords, again suggesting links between settlement forms and lordship.

In examining the subsequent development of villages he was anxious to emphasise their tendency to change, as in his previous writings. These included expansion over former fields, encroachment of houses on the village green, and the addition of new streets. Market places and greens might be added, and most radical of all developments,

[24] C.C. Taylor, *Village and Farmstead. A History of Rural Settlement in England* (London, George Philip, 1983).

part of a village might be abandoned because the inhabitants were relocating to an adjacent site, along a road that was increasing in importance, for example. He reiterated the view that the loss of population in the later medieval and early modern periods was often gradual, and that small villages were most likely to be deserted.

In the same year as *Village and Farmstead*, 1983, Taylor's *The Archaeology of Gardens* was published,[25] followed by much more on gardens in the succeeding thirty years. This was a new subject, in the sense that archaeologists discovered gardens in the 1970s, and Taylor had led the way. Earthworks which had been thought to mark the site of buildings, roads for carts and livestock, fishponds, or even Civil War fortifications were now seen to have been walkways, terraces, flower beds and water features. This was not just the result of greater skill in earthwork interpretation, but also a shift from assuming that earthworks should be explained in functional, practical and economic terms, to the idea that they reflected a culture and society that valued beauty, leisure and pleasure. Especially influential was Taylor's reconstruction of the garden, a pleasure ground, attached to the residence of the bishops of Ely at Somersham in Cambridgeshire.[26] Gardens changed with the aesthetic preferences of successive period. Medieval gardens tended to be enclosed, and often included water-filled features, such as ponds and moats. The more elaborate Renaissance designs of the 16th and 17th centuries had a more formal and geometric layout, with such features as prospect mounds. In the late 18th century the new taste favoured extensive grassland and many trees in landscape parks, and the earlier symmetrical flower beds and terraces were abandoned.

Taylor's numerous shorter pieces of writing, ranging from comments on individual sites to wide overviews, interconnected with his books and his contributions to the inventories. Reference has already been made to significant articles on strip lynchets, polyfocal settlements, village market places, dispersed settlements in Blackmoor and Bedfordshire, Bodiam Castle and designed landscapes. His papers on Whiteparish and Whittlesford have also been mentioned. He wrote nine other articles generalising about the relationship between Romano-British and medieval settlements, and the nucleation of villages, both subjects debated generally from the 1960s onwards. There were 15 articles about gardens, five on moats, four discussing deserted villages, and three about fields.

Some articles dealt with subjects which did not feature prominently in his other writings. For example in 2004 he demonstrated field evidence for a deer course associated

[25] C.C. Taylor, *The Archaeology of Gardens* (Princes Risborough, Shire, 1983)

[26] C.C. Taylor, 'Somersham Palace, Cambridgeshire : a Medieval Landscape for Pleasure?', in M. Bowden, D. Mackay and P. Topping (eds), *From Cornwall to Caithness* (Oxford, British Archaeological Reports, 209, 1989), pp. 211–24.

with a Derbyshire park.[27] This was a sport rarely mentioned in documents, in which deer were pursued along a designated course. Taylor also became involved in urban archaeology, in a place where he had lived, his home town of Lichfield. He argued that its territory had originally been focused on a Roman town at Wall, and that the medieval town owed its existence to the regular plan of streets next to the cathedral which had been devised by a bishop in the 12th century.[28]

The fenland, a very special landscape which offered a contrast with the chalk uplands of Dorset had a profound impact on Taylor when he worked on north-east Cambridgeshire, and in later years he returned to write more about fenland villages. His article on Reach discussed its role as an inland port, accessible by the network of waterways across the fens. He traced the process by which Burwell fen was drained in modern times, which included the use of a pumping station, a technology which clearly fascinated him.[29] When Joan Thirsk edited a general book on the English landscape Taylor was persuaded to contribute a chapter on fenlands which enhanced the whole volume.[30] To demonstrate his versatility, he was impressed at a conference by a presentation by Catherine Clark on the literary concept, very relevant for landscape historians, of the *locus amoenus* (ideal place). She quoted from a 12th-century poem written in praise of Downham in the Isle of Ely, a village well-known to Taylor, who was inspired to write an article connecting Downham's medieval landscape with the poem.[31]

A feature of Taylor's method was that he was conscious that new data or fresh thinking might reveal the fallibility of previous conclusions. His Whittlesford paper showed how hypotheses were rendered obsolete by new evidence. A number of his papers included second thoughts on previous writings, and one on Somersham and Pampisford was entirely devoted to the revision of previous publications.[32] He would disarm those attending his lectures with self-deprecating comments, which were not displays of modesty, but a demonstration of the scientific method, by which hypotheses were tested against the evidence. Perhaps he was revealing a mischievous streak,

[27] C.C. Taylor, 'Ravensdale Park, Derbyshire, and Medieval Deer Coursing', *Landscape History,* 26 (2004), 37–57.

[28] C.C. Taylor, 'The Origins of Lichfield, Staffordshire', *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 10 (1968), 43–52

[29] C.C. Taylor, 'Reach, Cambridgeshire: a Medieval Port and Market', in A. Longcroft & R. Joby (eds), *East Anglian Studies. Essays Presented to J.C. Barringer* (Norwich, Marwood, 1995), pp. 267–75; C.C. Taylor, 'The Drainage of Burwell Fen, 1840–1950', in R.T. Rowley (ed.), *The Evolution of Marshland Landscapes* (Oxford, Oxford University Department for External Studies, 1981), pp. 158–77.

[30] C.C. Taylor, 'Fenlands', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The English Rural Landscape* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 167–87.

[31] C.C. Taylor, '"A place there is in which liquid honey drops like dew". The Landscape of Little Downham, Cambridgeshire, in the Twelfth Century', *Landscape History*, 31 (2010), 5–23.

[32] C.C. Taylor, 'New Work on Old Sites: Somersham and Pampisford Revisited', *Proceedings of the Cambridgeshire Antiquarian Society*, 97 (2008), 121–36.

suggesting that some of his fellow scholars took themselves and their pronouncements rather too seriously.

Taylor was very conscious of the origin and development of the subject that he practised, and the debt that we all owed to the 'founders'. He revered in particular the mentor who helped him in his early days in Dorset, Collin Bowen, and he later wrote in his honour. He encountered Hoskins in his early days, and grew to know him better later in life. He paid his respects to the great man by providing material for a second edition of *Fieldwork in Local History*, and devoted considerable care to preparing a sumptuous new edition of the *Making of the English Landscape* in 1988. This was published with comments by Taylor which modified, corrected or supplemented Hoskins's original text.[33] It resembled medieval manuscripts for which a commentary on the main text was provided in glosses in the margins. Taylor enjoyed working with others, both in the field and in the study. Most of the inventories to which he contributed were team efforts, or with at least two investigators working together. The collaborative nature of his work is clear from the number of his academic publications which were jointly authored. His first wife, Angela, taught geography in schools and at degree level, and in the years before her premature death in 1983 she researched a doctoral thesis on the effects of the Ice Age on the landscape. Taylor joined her in the search for local pingos. Stephanie, who became his wife in 1985, edited publications in the Cambridge office of the Commission, and worked with him on his later publications.

VII

Taylor earned the respect of those who read his works or heard him speak. In addition to the adult education students who he had taught since the 1960s, and the recruits to the Commission who were trained by him, the archaeologists at Cambridge welcomed him as a teacher of undergraduates and a supervisor of doctoral students. Some of those students who were influenced by him went on to become well-known authorities, who were very ready to acknowledge their debt to him.

In his later years former trainees, students, colleagues, and admirers of his contribution honoured him with written tributes. Few academics are presented with three *festschriften*, yet these came in succession in the late 1990s.[34] One was compiled by the staff of the Commission, and the others reflected the admiration for him in the wide research

[33] W.G. Hoskins, *Fieldwork in Local History*, 2nd edn (London, Faber and Faber, 1982); *The Making of the English Landscape*, new edn (London, Guild Publishing, 1988).

[34] K. Barker & T. Darvill (eds), *Making English Landscapes* (Oxford, Oxbow, 1997); P. Everson and T. Williamson (eds), *The Archaeology of Landscape* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998); P. Pattison, D. Field & S. Ainsworth (eds), *Patterns of the Past* (Oxford, Oxbow, 1999).

community both in universities, and in the various branches of the public archaeology service. He received an honorary doctorate from the University of Keele, and as well as electing him a Fellow, the British Academy awarded him in 2013 the John Coles Landscape Archaeology medal.

He did not relish serving on committees, but a succession of organisations were anxious to enlist his advice as a wise councillor or as a prominent scholar to represent them as President. He was connected in various capacities with the Society for Landscape Studies, the Moated Sites Research Group, the Medieval Settlement Research Group, the Nene Valley Research Committee, and Institute of Field Archaeologists. Societies and others organising conferences would often invite him to speak, and he was very ready to do so, which meant that a wide circle of those interested in landscape or settlements, both professionals and others, were familiar with his very effective presentations.

What was the importance of his contribution to the study of past landscapes? The subject had made a slow start, because although the seminal work of Hoskins, *Making of the English Landscape*, was published in 1955, the great surge of interest came in the 1970s, and Taylor played a major part along with a cohort of archaeologists and geographers, with some historians and place-name scholars. The new urgency reflected concerns for understanding the environment, and the need to protect what remained of the English countryside. The scope of research needed to be broadened, and some scholars were willing to embrace kindred disciplines. There was also a widespread enthusiasm among the non-academic public for a subject that showed that their everyday surroundings could be treated as historical evidence. When the Society for Landscape Studies was founded in 1979 by a group of researchers based in Yorkshire some doubted the wisdom of such inexperienced enthusiasts taking on the management of a Society promoting an important discipline. The new Society's success was aided by his support, as Taylor was already widely respected as a leading advocate of the subject.

Taylor had new ways of seeing the landscape, and was capable of conveying the excitement of his vision to the scholarly community and a wider audience. He could visit a field in Northamptonshire and appreciate that the uneven surface had been a planned garden of the 16th century. He could then go on to connect the garden to a particular aristocrat, and understand how the design of the garden belonged to a general cultural movement. The garden was abandoned when formal designs went out of favour, and perhaps the elite family declined or moved its residence, and the space reverted to agricultural use. Detailed survey might then reveal that before the garden was designed the land had formed part of a medieval settlement.

He advocated an ideal of studying 'total landscapes', meaning that instead of focusing on individual features or periods, the whole landscape should be taken into account, from prehistory until the present day. In order to unlock the sequence of events that made

up landscape change, researchers should attempt to embrace as many disciplines as possible, including geology, geography, history, and place-name studies. The landscape should be set in the widest possible context, which could bring to bear the political and cultural background as well as the usual economic, agrarian and environmental circumstances. The landscape should not be analysed in static terms, with too much emphasis on enduring features, but as dynamic and in constant development. This was an ambitious ideal which required a wider range of knowledge and skills than most individuals possess. Many would want to add to Taylor's checklist a wider social dimension than he normally deployed. He was very ready to attribute change in the medieval period to the lords of manors, without strong evidence, but devoted much less attention to the country people who lived in villages and farmed the fields. His approach would also have gained from a comparative European dimension.

He was anxious to find ways of explaining change. He was wary of giving authority too much respect, and repeating established perspectives without critical examination. He believed in advancing hypotheses, testing them, and if they did not work abandoning them. He reserved a special scepticism for the pervasive determinism that he encountered in his youth. He showed constantly that geology, soils and climate did not control human behaviour. We cannot divide the land into favourable and unfavourable zones, and expect to find that people lived and farmed according to these variables. He pointed out that distribution maps were often used to justify these ideas, but they were flawed – they showed where the evidence survived, in the case of those that demonstrated that prehistoric people lived on chalk hills but not on the clay soils of the lowlands. Or they reflected where archaeologists had searched. He set out a view of a flexible past that was in constant movement, that was not easily explained, especially by single causes. He was content sometimes to accept that we do not know the answers.

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Note on the author: Christopher Dyer is Emeritus Professor of History in the University of Leicester, who has published works on the social and economic history, the landscape history and the archaeology of medieval England. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1995.

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