CHAPTER I

That Norfolk is over-churched is a commonplace. Within the county there are, in various states of completeness, over one thousand mediæval church foundations, although some may have been replaced by later buildings as at Gunton (Georgian) and Booton (Victorian). Within the walls of the city of Norwich there were no fewer than sixty-three parish churches and parochial chapels, some serving an area of no more than a few hundred square feet. While it is generally accepted that a feature of the growth of towns within a period roughly coterminous with the eleventh century is a proliferation of parishes with the civic area, it is not expected outside large towns. Indeed, it is not always to be expect in large towns: in Norfolk, only Thetford rivalled Norwich in parochial provision, having twenty-two parish churches – of which three survive. King's Lynn (or Bishop's Lynn as it should be called in the period under review) only ever had one parish, St Margaret, with a chapel-of-ease of St Nicholas; Yarmouth had merely St Nicholas' parish church until St George's chapel-of-ease was founded in 1715.[1]

What we do expect, however, is that this pattern of dividing a settlement between two or more parishes should be carried on in the countryside. In parts of the north-west of England, it is common for several townships to comprise one parish, with one parish church in what we may take to be the mother settlement, but elsewhere the rule is one parish to a settlement. In Norfolk this is not so – nor indeed, as we shall see, in other eastern counties – and the division of settlements between parishes is common. But while would should expect to find some sort of physical differentiation between the parishes, , in many cases we do not do so, and in no fewer than twelve of those cases in Norfolk the physical contiguity is such that the churches share the same churchyard. Strictly, of course, they churches do *not* 'share' a churchyard: they are placed in separate churchyards which have a common boundary, and which in all cases has disappeared – if indeed it was ever more than notional in the first place.[2]

The legend which has grown up around this phenomenon has given the title of this study: two sisters, who appear to have been joint manorial lords, had an argument, and as a result each built her own church. At Antingham the legend is given added point by the fact that one church is St Mary, and the other St Margaret, the supposed names of the sisters. It is told at South Walsham, and at Reepham there were of course three sisters (occasionally nuns): they appear on the town

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[1] There was a pre-Conquest church of St Benedict in Yarmouth, recorded by Domesday Book, but it was replaced by St Nicholas by de Losinga. (*cf* Batcock 1991, p 47, n10.)
[2] See entry on Antingham, p xx

sign erected in 1992, albeit in a tongue-in-cheek manner![3] Exactly how much truth lies behind this legend will, I hope, become apparent later.
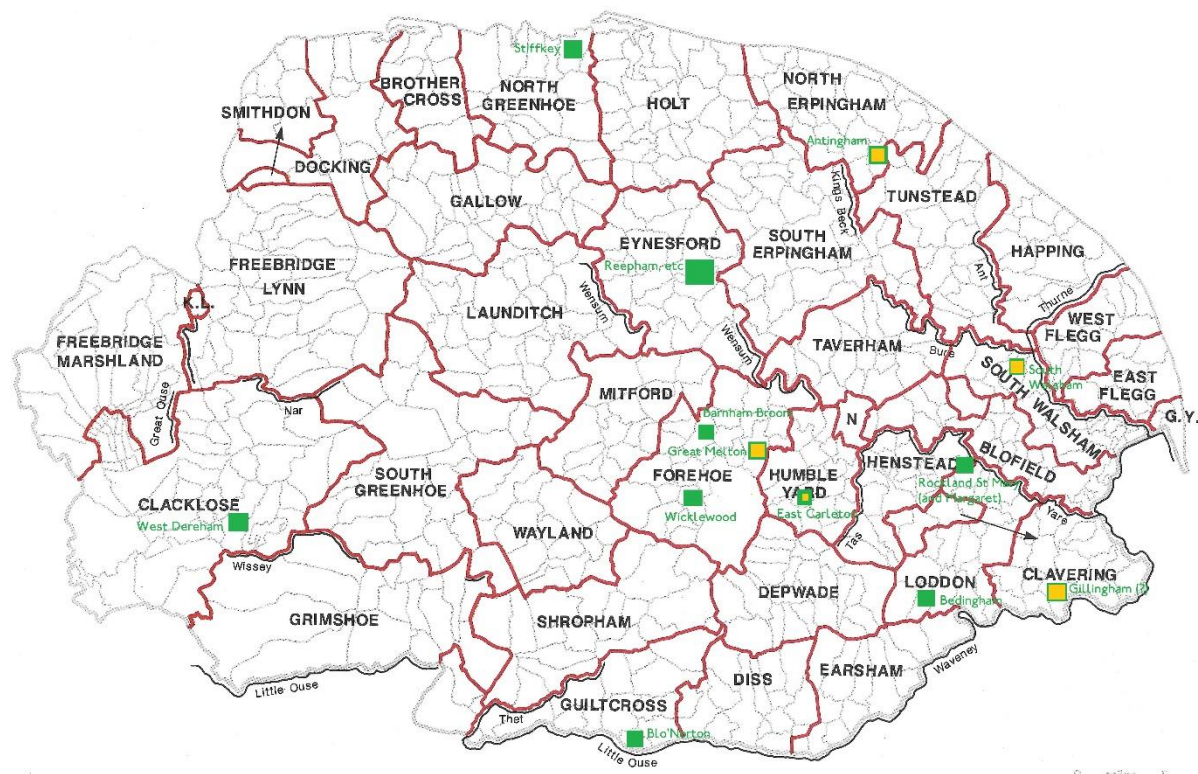
Fig 1.1: The thirteen shared churchyards and their hundreds.
(A square with a yellow centre indicates the second church still stands)

Warner, in his article 'Shared churchyards, freemen church builders and the development of parishes in eleventh-century East Anglia'[4] has a very impressive list of thirty-eight instances of shared churchyards in Norfolk. On closer examination, however, this list can be whittled down to the number twelve mentioned above. (See Chapter II for the reasons), although there is a possibility that Gillingham (Hundred of Clavering) may be a further example.

The list of thirteen settlements with shared yards is as follows. (Where one of the churches is ruinous, it is marked with a single asterisk; where it is completely vanished or the ruins are exiguous, it is marked with a double asterisk).

Table 1.1 List of all thirteen shared churchyards

Antingham		St Mary	St Margaret*
Barnham Broom		Sts Peter & Paul	St Michael**
Bedingham		St Andrew	St Mary**
Blo'Norton		St Andrew	St Margaret**
East Carleton		St Mary	St Peter**

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[3] *cf* article in *Eastern Daily Press*, 16 July 1992.
[4] in *Landscape History*, vol 8, 1986, pp 39-52.

West Dereham		St Andrew	St Peter**
Great Melton†		All Saints	St Mary*
Rockland‡		St Mary	St Margaret**
Stiffkey¶		St Mary	St John Baptist
Wicklewood		All Saints	St Andrew**
Gillingham		St Mary	All Saints*
Reepham		St Mary	
Whitwell	§	St Michael	
Hackford		All Saints**	

† All Saints was dilapidated in 1715, but rebuilt in 1885, and St Mary was allowed to dilapidate.

‡Rockland St Mary is also known as Rockland Major, and St Margaret as Rockland Minor.

¶There is some doubt as to which church was which. Wills after 1552 do not mention St John's. The living is listed today as 'Sts John and Mary'. One stands, and one has vanished.[5]

§These three shared a yard, although they have separate village names.

This is clearly something confined to the east of England, but it is not a phenomenon peculiar to Norfolk. Suffolk can provide four examples: Stowmarket, Trimley, Middleton/Fordley, and Bungay;[6] Cambridgeshire can provide a further three: Swaffham Prior, Fulbourn, and Histon; Essex (Willingale Spain and Willingale Doe) and Lincolnshire (Alvingham and North Cockerington) one each. Suffolk can take things one step further: at Pakefield, what appears to be a nave with either a north or a south aisle of identical dimensions, is in fact two parish churches in one building. The arcade was blocked up until the mid-nineteenth century. Other examples of this sharing of one building may remain to be discovered.[7] It should e noted that blocking the arcade was a standard way of dividing churches shared by communities of nuns with parishes.[8]

In the course of this study, it is proposed to look first at the twenty-seven churches in the list above (or the remains thereof). and examine their setting with relation to each other and to their parishes (where the boundaries can still be reconstructed), and also their relative architectural development, where this is possible. It will also be necessary to examine the shape of the villages: can we find a second nucleus of settlement, and how does it related to the churches? A third topic will concern the decline of one church: why do some villages (*e.g.*, Barnham Broom lose the second church very early (*c*1345), while Reepham and Whitwell were not ecclesiastically united until 1935?

With regard to the reason for the fragmentation of parishes and villages in this manner, we shall need briefly to look at the growth of the parochial system in England, and especially in Norfolk, and also the ownership of churches.

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[5] See Batcock 1991, fiche cards, 9/D2.
[6] Bungay appears now to have two separate yards, but see T Reeve, *The Day Bungay Burned*, Morrow Books, 1988.
[7] Little Dunham is a further possible example.
[8] For example, St Helen Bishopsgate, London; Easebourne, Sussex; Minster-in-Sheppey, Kent.

We have referred above to the large, multi-settlement parishes of the north-west of England, and this can be explained in terms of the minster system which was found throughout the land in the Anglo-Saxon period. This system involved a mother-church (or 'head-minster') which had all the rights of baptism, burial, and tithes over its daughter foundations in other settlements within its *parochia*. Even after these daughters had been raised to full parochial status themselves, we can still trace, to a greater of lesser extent, the workings of the old minster *parochial* in the way tithes were paid to the former mother-church, or it may perhaps shave retained the burial rights until very late in the mediæval period. A minster often retained an unusually high level of staffing, reflecting the need to send priests out to the daughter churches.

In East Anglia, it is almost impossible to trace the minsters at all. This is frequently ascribed to the totality of the Viking invasions in the eleventh century, which, if they did not extinguish the Church in East Anglia, at least severely curtailed its administrative processes. It was, therefore, easier to form new, smaller, parishes once the iron grip of the minsters had been broken. Exactly where the origins of these smaller parishes lie is still comparatively obscure, but it would appear that, as the large tenth-century manors were being subdivided in the period immediately preceding Domesday Book, so the parochial system which paralleled them was being subdivided. In other words, what we are seeing in East Anglia is the rise of manorial churches, not founded as outliers to a minster, but founded by the manorial lord for the benefit of his tenants.[9] This is not to say that *all* churches founded in this period were the result of seigneurial foundation: there were doubtless 'devolutions' from former minsters, and also examples of churches being built as a result of 'corporate initiative' by groups of freemen. The topic of freemen is an important one, to which we shall be returning in due course; attention is drawn to it here.

A topic already raised it that of manorial tenure. Campbell has pointed out that East Anglia, 'for whatever reason, was an area of generally complex lordship … A high proportion of tenants within the region were free or semi-free status and there was little coincidence between manor and township'.[10] His map of the hundreds, ranked in order of complexity of lordship in 1316, based on the *Nomina Villarum* and the 1334 Lay Subsidy, although dealing with a period many hundred years later than the foundation of the churches under discussion, may nonetheless be usefully compared with the locations of the churches (see Fig 4.1). He places the hundreds into one of seven ranks, from 'small, low-value, numerous' (my Group 1) to 'large high-value, few' (my Group 7). It is significant that five of the twelve settlements fall into the first group, one into the second,

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[9] Blair, *Minster and Parish Churches*, Introduction, p 7-8.
[10] Campbell, *Norfolk Atlas*, §21, p 52.

two into the third, three the fourth, and only on in the fifth. Of all villages with more than one parish church (in one or more churchyards), the highest number falls in Groups three and four, with thirteen each, or about 25% of the total of fifty-one settlements, while the second highest total, ten, is about 19%. (Appendix I gives the manorial lords for all twelve shared-yard villages.)

Table 1.2: distribution of multi-church settlements in relation to hundreds.

	Shared yard	2+ churches	Totals	≈ % of total
Group 1	5	5	10	19
Group 2	1	3	4	8
Group 3	2	11	13	25
Group 4	3	10	13	25
Group 5	1	6	7	14
Group 6	0	3	3	6
Group 7	0	1	1	2
Totals	**12**	**39**	**51**	**100**

The original intent of this study was to examine merely the twelve settlements whose churches share a churchyard, but as will be apparent from the above remarks, it is necessary to look, however cursorily, at other settlements containing more than one church. Even this presents problems of definition, as there are examples where the churches are all but in the same yard, but with a well-defined highway passing between them; examples with churches in separate parts of the village, being as close as a hundred yards and as far apart as a mile; and at the far end of the scale are what appear now to be two or three distinct villages, but which start out as one with several churches. The most extreme example of this in Norfolk is the Burnham group, but others of a more 'orthodox' nature are the Ormesbys and the Shoteshams. What these two village groups provide is a settlement which, for whatever reason acquires multiple churches (four each at Ormesby and Shotesham) and which now form two distinct villages – Great and Little Ormesby; Upper and Lower Shotesham.[11] A further complication is the fission of a dependent settlement from its parent, with the consequent raising of its chapel-of-ease to parochial status, although the mother church may retain some rights over it. Examples here are Salhouse, which is split form Wroxham, and Themelthorpe, split from Foulsham.

We may, perhaps, postulate a scale of church siting types as follows:

Table 1.3: church siting types.

a	1 village	1 parish	1 church	1 yard	1 incumbent
b	1 village	1 parish	1 church	1 yard	2 incumbents*
c	1 village	2 parishes	1 church	1 yard	2 incumbents

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[11] In each case, two of the churches have gone.

d	1 village	2 parishes	2 churches	1 yard	2 incumbents
e	1 village	2 parishes	2 churches	2 yards	2 incumbents
f	2 villages†	2 parishes	2 churches	2 yards	2 incumbents

*holding medieties: this may apply to any of the other categories.

†originally one settlement.

This last category, with distinct villages, has probably the least bearing on the topic, although it may well be important when we come to look in more detail at the Reepham/Whitwell/Hackford group in Chapter III. It represents the state to which all the other are aspiring: full, separate parochial status, and may be the result of the original settlement being polyfocal. All those which fall in the levels b to e may well represent a fossilization of the process, which we may suggest came about in the eleventh century, when the formation of parishes was becoming more difficult. It would be possible to add a seventh level to this table, with two villages, one parish, one church (with or without a chapel-of ease for the second village) and one incumbent, but the only exmaples that come to mind in Norfolk are those where a deserted village has been united with its neighbour (as for example Leziate and Ashwicken) or very late developments such as Silfield and Spooner Row in the parish of Wymondham.

This is a necessarily very brief introduction to the topic, but it serves to outline the main issues in the background against which the rest of this study must be seen.