

28. Cf. Peter Foote and David Wilson, The Viking Achievement (London, 1970), 148.
29. Cf. the article referred to in n.21, 320-21.
30. Cf. Anne-Berit Ø. Borchgrevink, 'The "Seter"-Areas of Rural Norway, - a Traditional Multipurpose Resource', Northern Studies 9 (1977), 3-24.

GILLIAN FELLOWS JENSEN
University of Copenhagen

MIDDLE ENGLISH 'LETEWORTHI':
AN UNNOTICED TENEMENT-DESCRIPTOR

A year or two ago, Dr. Wilson drew attention to the occurrence of the puzzling name 'Lydworthy', found in certain eighteenth-century Sidmouth, Devonshire, deeds.¹ Further enquiry reveals the existence of a hitherto unnoticed term employed to identify a particular type of land-holding in the south-west, probably of purely regional significance and perhaps confined to a small part of south-east Devonshire. While the earliest references are found only in the fifteenth century, the form is relatively well documented thereafter.²

A 1425 rental of Walter Chenale, town reeve of Sidmouth, lists leteworthies (pl.) together with, albeit distinct in some way from, Botelond, and i leteworthi vocatur Cothey These entries were repeated with slight modifications the following year in the 1426 rental of Chenale's successor, John Tanner: lyte-worthies (pl.) as distinct from Botelondys . . . unique ledeworthi vocatur Cotehay, and (twice) i ledeworthi rented to others.

A century and a half later the term was already apparently unusual, perhaps a local technicality, as suggested by the use of the vernacular in 1581 court records of a dispute concerning rights over a tenement vocatur A lidworthie et unique cotagii Thereafter it seems to have become recognised as having a precise usage, albeit only tantalizingly described. The first manorial court held by Christopher Maynwarynge, temp. James I, attempting to establish something of a manorial custom, began with the following entry:

by ther custome of the manner of Sydmouth there may be att one tyme sixe names upon anye tenement lydworthey or other tenure wherof three by copie in possession and three in revercion . . .

going on to describe how such tenancies may be transferred, bequeathed, etc. Its application seems quite specific, for:

To the fyfte artyckell they saye that the newe bildinges are not called lydwortheys nether do they knowe anye other name or natwre opertyninge to them . . .

Subsequently the term occurs in this form in Sidmouth manorial deeds repeatedly throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Among the more detailed, a 1670 lease by Sir Peter Prideaux to Nicholas Wood of Sidmouth, mariner, makes it clear that the term may embrace more than one parcel of land simultaneously - perhaps referring merely to a conglomerate of holdings:

Tenement called or commonly known by the name of A lidworthy. Containing 2½ acres. i.e. dwelling house and garden, one yeard of ground, one close or parcel of land called Brasses Mead, est. 1 ac., one piece of land lying near the pound in Blackmoore field, est. three yeards of ground, one piece or parcel more in the said field est. ½ ac., and parcel or piece more called the Lodge, est. 1 yard of ground.

Almost invariably the term is applied to a relatively small holding of between one and three acres. It may lie in town, e.g.:

A Lydworthy called Rowes, being a good Dwelling house . . . consisting of kitchen, 3 parlours, pantry, stable, cellar, courtelage with walled garden in town and 2 acres of land,

or in the open countryside, possibly even without a dwelling-house, cf.:

A Lydworthy called Lardys (late Mr Follet's) 2½ acres arable land in the fields with a barn and mowbarton to the same belonging;

and may include stretches of woodland and water. As intimated in the custumal, it may be further divided, e.g.:

A Lydworthy in Western Town late Channon's, now consisting of 3 small tenements and gardens 3½ acres, being Orchard 1 acre, Arable 3 acres.

Occasionally they bear specific names, e.g. Cothay, or some form like Pine's Lydworthy, Page's Lydworthy etc., apparently referring to former rather than current lessees. In one 1735 document the indefinite article is omitted and then interlined when first cited, as though the clerk thought it a proper name. It is certainly so used in a conveyance of 1822, although this is the last recorded use known to me, and the term is now apparently no longer current.

The sense of the second element, OE worthig, is clear enough. Although quite common in Devonshire as a whole, it is very little used south and east of the Exe,³ perhaps allowing the development of a highly localized modification in this area. But in view of the late date of its documentation, the sense of its modifying prefix is much less certain. Of conventional name-elements we might normally have looked to - and which are not ruled out on phonological grounds - lith (MED n.2)⁴ 'slope', seems inapplicable topographically since at least some of the identifiable holdings cannot in any sense be regarded as sloping; and the same applies to lete (MED n.1), 'mill-stream/conduit', although the term ledum certainly occurs thus locally. Given the tenorial context in which the name is employed, however, a variety of possible interpretations remain. Of these, lith (MED n.3a), 'an estate, landed property, household, habitation', is insufficiently precise. Similarly lete(n) (MED v.2), 'rented', seems too general a usage, since it is apparently distinguishable from other holdings which are no less rented in their terms of reference. It seems patently not to utilize lete(n) (MED v.5-6), 'neglected, abandoned', since the holdings are clearly in continuous occupancy, sometimes attested over several generations. And an average of 2½ acres or less would scarcely represent lede (MED n.3), 'a landholding on a fairly grand scale'. There is no good reason to suppose a compound noun deriving from the well-attested collocation lete(n) iworthen (MED v.18q), indicating that the tenant might do much as he pleased with the property, since they are sometimes hedged around with restrictions of all kinds. It is just possible that it refers to lete(n) (MED v.1b), 'bequeath', although the transferability of a tenancy to widow, heirs and such seems almost the rule in the south-west at this time.⁵ In the absence of any reasonable

alternative, there seems a strong likelihood that the term incorporates lete (MED n.2), 'the manorial court', indicating land held under the direct jurisdiction of the court-leet, or requiring service at its meetings.⁶ Jury-service requirements for copy-holders were nationally established during the course of the fifteenth century.⁷ Some such service is certainly required in one Sidmouth lease as late as 1755,⁸ although there is no means of telling whether this requirement is definitive or merely contingent.

Data from other areas, should it exist, would clearly be welcome.

NOTES

1. R.E. Wilson, 'Lydworthy', Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries, XXXII (1973), 218-9.
2. Devon County Record Office MSS 1334 M Add/2; 1855A. Certain other documents survive only in nineteenth-century transcripts: West Country Studies Library, Exeter, MS. SB/SID/0001/HUT.
3. J.E.B. Gover et al., The Place-Names of Devon, English Place-Name Society, VIII-IX, Cambridge, 1932, part 2, pp. 675-6; A.H. Smith, English Place-Name Elements, English Place-Name Society XXV-VI, Cambridge, 1956, part 2, map 3. This observation, based mainly on early major names, may require modification however.
4. Middle English Dictionary, ed. H. Kurath and S.M. Kuhn, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1954, in progress.
5. Cf. W. Marshall, The Rural Economy of the West of England, London, 1796, part 1, p.43 et passim; C. Vancouver, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Devon, London, 1808, p.81ff.
6. See generally: Sir Edward Coke, The Complete Copy-holder; being a learned discourse of the antiquity and nature of manors and copy-holds, with all things thereto incident, London, 1673, and F.J.C. Hearnshaw, Leet Jurisdiction in England, Southampton, 1908, espec. p.83 ff.
7. Cf. Stat. 1 Ric. III, cap.4; Statutes at Large, London, 1763, vol. II, p.55.
8. Devon County Record Office MS. 1334 M Add/2 L213.

M. J. SWANTON

University of Exeter