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**‘Territoriality, parochial development, and
the place of ‘community’ in later medieval
Cornwall’**

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Abstract

This paper explores the emerging territorial framework of west Cornwall in relation to community expression and power. It examines such issues as increasing administrative competence, territorial order and communal action. However, although such notions as emerging territoriality, secular political development and local communal cohesion are often associated with studies of modernisation and the emergence of distinctly *modern* systems and relations, this paper focuses on a peripheral region during the later medieval period (c. 1350-1550) and identifies such transitions as inherent within this pre-modern society.

Evolving local ecclesiastical patterns in Cornwall during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries saw numerous small chapels and sub-parochial foundations struggling for status and recognition amid an increasingly well-delineated territorial framework of parishes. By relating accounts of incidents and episodes of local ecclesiastical politics and discord to the territorial expressions of community

organisation, combinations of local people are identified that were operating to control and order their local affairs. As well as questioning the implicit assumptions that some geographers and other scholars have about a medieval society that was supposedly dominated by a collage of lordly manorial and high ecclesiastical power, this paper also makes space for theories of territoriality and organisational complexity as a way of examining the developments of a period for which the written record is both sparse and partial.

Keywords;

Medieval community; Territoriality; Pre-modernity/modernity debate; Parish development; Cornwall.

Introduction: Modern assumptions about pre-modern society

Although the traditional view of medieval Britain being the scene of an oppressive feudal society that was dominated by ubiquitous lordly control has been largely revised in academic circles,¹ the popular conception of a medieval ‘dark period’ of superstitious backwardness and straight-jacketed serfdom has continued.² More importantly for this essay however, is the implicit support for some of these ‘old style’ views that is almost unconsciously supplied through a few more recent geographical discourses; particularly those of a theoretical nature that explore the conception of (post)modernity. Often, these views appear to be almost unwarranted ‘side effects’ of the way in which modernity, to use Bauman’s expression, is portrayed as a “quest for order”.³ The implicit assumption of this is that medieval society was either somehow ‘ruleless’, or that it was ‘naturally ordered’ and supposedly not influenced or controlled by human activity.⁴ This idea of an apparently non-civic and non-political (dis)ordering is related to the most common theme for how pre-modern societies are implicitly described; that of a society that was uniformly and completely dominated by the twin powers of real feudal control through overlordship, and metaphysical dominance through the spiritual ‘stewardship’ of the Church. In fact, ‘feudalism’ seems to have become a general catch-all term denoting almost

anything in the pre-modern period; it is as though all societal relationships, economies and politics of the medieval period can be defined simply by this legal term that describes the action of lords collecting a surplus through a sort of military protection racket.⁵

The implication of some geographical writing is of a very one dimensional view of the feudal system, and of the medieval period in general. This view does not appear to allow much space for ‘non-conformity’ within this supposedly over-arching and uniform system. Crang for instance, implies that there was no “horizontal identification [or] sharing of identity among (formal) equals” in the pre-modern period, while Taylor and Flint go as far as claiming that “medieval Europe under feudalism was a hierarchical system of power and authority, *not* a territorial one” (emphasis added).⁶ The very verticality of these relationships that are implied here has long been criticised by anthropologists such as Llobera, Halbwachs and Tilley, and indeed, has been acknowledged by several geographers, notably Jones.⁷

Despite an increasing profile for more nuanced understandings of pre-modernity within geographical literature however, medieval

arrangements and relationships are still too often pictured simply according to their supposed relationship to the ‘modern’.⁸ In this sense, it seems that the medieval has become the ‘other’ to modernity’s Enlightenment and rational order. For instance, as part of a much wider debate about the supposed rise of what can be termed ‘modern arrangements and patterns’, Harvey sees the emergence of modernity being at the *expense* of an identity based upon ‘dynastic loyalty’, and as being marked by a *move away* from ‘time honoured routine’ and ‘superstition’.⁹ Harvey also stresses an isolation inherent within the feudal system in which concepts of external space were apparently only weakly grasped.¹⁰

Medieval historians, however, do not have a problem in recognising the existence of horizontal relationships in the medieval period (which, crucially, operated *within* the feudal system).¹¹ While supporting this contention, this paper augments this established work by adding a previously unrecognised territorial dimension. While I would not deny that religiously-based views of the world acted as a medium through which pre-modern society came to know the world around them, or that the system normally referred to as ‘feudal relations’ had an indelible impact on many peoples’ lives, the

implication that such a society was so wholly dominated by such spiritual or feudal threat needs to be problematised.

As we shall see below, the evidence from west Cornwall (an area often considered isolated even today) paints a more complex picture; one with space for a communal identity that was to some extent independent from dynastic loyalty or spiritual superstition, and one with not just a vague conception, but a direct diplomatic relationship with an external world on an 'international' scale. It is not the idea of a series of long-term transitions in society and notions of spatial order that this paper seeks to overturn. Rather, it is the idea that this transition was marked by some kind of 'leap over a ditch' (as it were) of simple and intrinsic dualities, such as disordered as *opposed* to ordered, sensuous as *opposed* to rational, rigidly feudal as *opposed* to uniformly and freely capitalist, dynastic fealty as *opposed* to individual citizenship, or spiritually driven as *opposed* to secular in outlook.

The present paper, therefore, should be seen as part of recent attempts by geographers to explore the complexity involved in the transition from the pre-modern to the modern.¹² However, rather than dealing

with the 'global shift' to modernity that authors such as Blaut and Dodgshon have tackled previously, this paper deals with some of the micro-processes of pre-modernity which, by implication, affects how such 'global shifts' are drawn.¹³ One geographer who is certainly sensitive to these shifts is Ogborne, who reviews this debate over the emergence of modernity with skill, questioning why, in such an anti-totalising academic climate, that a concept of modernity (and, by implication, pre-modernity) is the one totalisation that is still allowed.¹⁴ Much of the debate seems to revolve around the dating of modernity's inception; a debate which, by definition, implies the existence of a particular juncture at which a supposed 'leap of faith' from the pre-modern world of tradition took place. However, as Ogborne notes, we need to check the assumption that 'tradition' and 'modernity' can be simply identified.¹⁵ This essay is no place to review the debate about the rise of modernity in detail (Ogborne does this extremely well already). Rather, it needs to be re-iterated that the medieval period should not be viewed simply from the closet of (post)modernity as 'Other'; the one simply being defined *in opposition* to the other. In the same way that Latour has portrayed modernity not as a realisable entity, but as a project - or projection, then a notion of pre-modernity should, on the face of it, be seen as a

projection of certain values and a specific agenda, always described simply, and in opposition to whatever is considered to be *modern*.¹⁶

Such a project that seeks to re-establish the vitality and ‘ability’ of the medieval period is not new,¹⁷ but in the face of the present debate about the rise of modernity, I feel that this essay should be seen as a warning against viewing the pre-modern in the simple, one dimensional light that this debate sometimes implies. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the relationship between expressions of local popular allegiance and alterations in the emerging territorial framework of parishes in west Cornwall. A particular focus upon the role of semi-autonomous community organisation is made as a means of understanding the micro-processes of parochial definition. Through reviewing the many stories of sub-parochial and chapel politics in west Cornwall over the later medieval period, a pattern becomes clear of certain ‘types’ of foundation managing to achieve further status and certain ‘types’ failing. It is argued that the key factor in the definition and legitimisation of certain (sub-)parochial units was the strength and independence of local community groups which, in Cornwall, had a territorial expression that was sometimes separate from manorial or ecclesiastical consideration. While

certainly not seeking to establish the existence of a uniform and general ‘law’ of ‘local community’ that existed across the entire medieval countryside, this paper tries to make space for the existence, in some localities, of a capacity for non-lordly people to combine within a social strata and influence the organisation of their lives through territorial control. Therefore, this paper adds to the complexity with which we view medieval space and, importantly, recognises that not only was the vertical and seemingly uniform social hierarchy of the pre-modern era not as ubiquitous and one dimensional as is sometimes implied,¹⁸ but that a sense of territoriality was well enough developed for communities to identify themselves with a location and act in a concerted manner.

Popular politics and the medieval period

Despite the common popular conception of the medieval period that is echoed in the discourse that outlines the modern as artificially ordered (and by implication, the pre-modern as naturally, or traditionally (dis)ordered), there has been no dearth in historical studies that show the dynamism and strength of popular politics in the medieval period. Within the specific realm of research into village communities (as opposed to ecclesiastical, agrarian, urban or

manorial studies), the ground-breaking work of Cam has had a secure legacy, perhaps most recently best articulated by Chris Dyer, when he stressed that “reports of the death of the village in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have been shown to be much exaggerated”.¹⁹ As well as recovering a history of people who have hitherto been largely ignored, Dyer’s emphasis on the capacity for ordinary communities to organise their affairs and partake in wider economic developments has also helped to revise the simplistic way in which medieval society is often portrayed. Rather than being homogenous and orchestrated through lordly power, later medieval society is portrayed as dynamic, complex and certainly not as a startled rabbit caught in the headlights of advancing capitalism and Enlightenment thinking.

These ideas of uncovering the significance of a community of ordinary people, whose efforts are often hidden in many documentary sources, are echoed by recent work in ecclesiastical history.²⁰ Katherine French for instance, investigated assertions of collective action within parish communities struggling for self-expression in Somerset. The significance of lay activism is invoked, and the later medieval parish emerges as “a meaningful unit of agency around

which community identities could be constructed”²¹ Therefore, the idea of medieval society being static is dismissed by this work, which instead emphasises complex patterns of negotiation and sometimes conflict, as local communities organised themselves and attempted to define their status.

The cohesion and energy of village communities during the later medieval period (*c.* 1350-1550) is portrayed for us in the material evidence of the many churches which were rebuilt and decorated as never before, not generally through the patronage of wealthy lords, but mainly as a result of collective fund raising among the whole body of parishioners by church wardens.²² It was through the institution of the parish, therefore, that the community of the village found expression. In Dunster, for instance, French showed that determination and long term planning by the lay community was demonstrated through the acquisition of church bells and a new tower in which to hang them.²³ However, notwithstanding these few crucial studies into local community expression, that have been conducted by Dyer and others, the documentary record for the period is still (and unavoidably) dominated by the ‘official’ and semi-official manorial records. With the discovery of a gigantic set of first-hand

written material from the supposedly 'lower echelons' of later medieval society a rather unlikely event, more ingenious studies are required in order to investigate the form and nature of these groups without recourse to the often one-sided accounts of the higher feudal and ecclesiastical power brokers. It is the premise of this paper that a geographical approach that investigates local activism through the examination of developing expressions of secular territoriality can both expose the roles of these often ignored sections of society, while also demonstrating that the nature of pre-modern society was more complex than some discussions have allowed.

In the later medieval period, the Catholic Church operated a vast trans-national territorial system for the purposes of exploitation and control.²⁴ The institution of the territorial parish had become ever-more well delineated, symbolising a developing sense of territoriality, defined here as "the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence or control people, phenomena and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographical area".²⁵ The physical origins of the territorial units that made up the parochial framework, together with their regional variations and anomalies have been much discussed elsewhere. The issue that this paper deals

with is the problem of why some recognisably ancient establishments in Cornwall with fairly well delineated ‘territories’ achieved wider status in the later medieval period, and others did not. The territorial pattern of parishes that emerged reflected the continuing use of pre-existing patterns that were reinterpreted within the context of contemporary political machinations, often at a local level. It is the contention of this paper that some of these ‘contemporary political machinations’ reflect the existence, operation and determination of local communal organisation. A picture is drawn of successful (and unsuccessful) struggles for self expression that were undertaken by people operating outside of the interests of manorial power; struggles that reflect the capacities to organise horizontally and independently, raise funds, pursue litigation, and even commence diplomacy on an ‘international’ scale.

Emerging territorial frameworks in Cornwall

In many areas of Britain, the often assumed territorial association between the institutions of the parish, the manor and the vill appear to mask more complex negotiations between these bodies at a local level.²⁶ In Cornwall, the quasi-official unit of the lowest order, elsewhere termed the ‘vill’, is expressed through the institution of the

territorial *tithing*.²⁷ The actual territorial pattern of Cornish tithings has been related to the vestiges of a very early system of landscape organisation based upon local agrarian units, which later medieval administration re-interpreted for their own purposes of judicial control and local tax assessment.²⁸ It is due to these income generating and judicial functions of this framework, however, that systematic assessment and delineation was made, allowing a fairly accurate reconstruction of this territorial framework (see figure 1).²⁹

Earlier investigations have demonstrated that the tithing framework had a real territorial expression that was recognised at a local level, and that this expression was not necessarily coterminous with elements of manorial or higher ecclesiastical patterns.³⁰ The process of tithe assessment meant that every acre of every field needed to be reckoned as being within a particular parish, and with respect to coastal zones, the need to be able to ‘place’ each and every ship wreck within a specific tithing led to a similarly tight delineation of tithing boundaries in coastal areas.³¹ Away from the coast however, these territories may not have had such rigid boundaries on the ground, but nevertheless, they were recognised as having a territorial form, demonstrated especially well in court cases in which each and

every misdemeanour had to be placed in a particular tithing territory.³²

Turning to the institution of the parish, the territorial pattern that emerges at the end of the medieval period in west Cornwall (shown in figure 2) reflects negotiations over landscape organisation and status over a considerable period of time. Many of the territories were recognised in some form at a very early period and reflected the status of particular ecclesiastical foundations. Other units, however, acquired (or lost) their territorial status at a relatively late period, reflecting successes and failures of negotiation between interested parties. This paper explores these micro-processes of parochial development with particular reference to the role of communal activity at a local level.

The universal parish framework that existed by the end of the medieval period reflects a complex negotiation between emerging forces of government, the Church and the local agrarian community. The ubiquitous system of ‘a church in every parish’, therefore, should be seen within the context of developing notions of communal identity at a local level, as groups of ordinary people demonstrated cohesion and sought legitimisation and identity through territorial

expression. Far from reflecting some sort of ‘natural’ form of spatial organisation, the pre-modern period had a distinct regime of spatial regulation.³³ This essay seeks to re-establish the role of local communal negotiation as part of this wider package of ‘feudal’ spatial regulation.

Parochial status and community expression in west Cornwall

Although Pool asserts that the pattern of territorial tithings was not related to that of the parochial pattern, a more detailed investigation highlights many important associations between the two territorial frameworks.³⁴ Indeed, even Pool’s earlier work on the tithings of Penwith show that the vast majority of parish boundaries coincided with many of the boundaries (of whatever sort) that existed between territorial tithing units.³⁵ Although a superficial territorial correspondence has been identified, the processes of mediation that represent an ‘active’ relationship between local ecclesiastical and communal groups need to be explored. In this respect, it is the recognition and maintenance, and converse ‘non-recognition’ and even active suppression of small ecclesiastical foundations that display important aspects of the relationship between communal expression and ecclesiastical organisation.

In trying to uncover the nature of the negotiation between the various interested parties in west Cornwall, it is the recognition of chapelries as distinct territories with a certain level of status that draws particular attention; especially in comparison to a number of foundations of apparently similar size and importance in an earlier period, which never came to be recognised as distinct chapelries within the emergent parochial framework. The *Nonarum Inquisitiones* of 1341, for instance, includes a mention of the chapel of St. Euny within the parish of Wendron, even though chapelry status never came to be granted to this establishment.³⁶ On the other hand, this same mid-fourteenth century document does not mention the establishments of Sennen or Towednack which *did* later achieve semi-independent chapel status, even though these foundations had almost certainly been in existence at this time for some centuries.³⁷ Processes of ecclesiastical network formation were still occurring at this time and it is the contention of this paper that the often ‘hidden’ factors of communal cohesion and self-organisation played a crucial role in these processes.

At the 'parishioner's convenience'?

A phrase that appears several times in relation to literature on parish politics is that chapels were established and supported *for the convenience of parishioners*.³⁸ The altruistic overtones of such a phrase, conveying a sense of moral duty and sympathetic care on the part of ecclesiastical authorities and local aristocracy, does not appear to accord very well with the realities of often bitter rivalry that went hand in hand with parochial recognition and the jealous guarding of tithe rights. On the contrary, these simple labels and comments conceal a much more complex picture of negotiation for status in which ordinary people played a much larger role than is often acknowledged. In west Cornwall, tantalising glimpses of this struggle comes to the surface in the stories of how certain chapels won wider status and recognition at the expense of their 'mother' foundations. The protraction of some disputes over many years (and even centuries), together with the financial costs involved, tends to show a degree of activity, commitment and long term planning on the part of local people, who found it to be in their best interests to combine together and organise themselves on a territorial basis.

Depending on the tithe settlement, the existence of a chapelry within the sphere of an established ‘mother’ church would certainly have compromised the power and wealth of that church.³⁹ The maintenance of such an establishment, therefore, required strong support, and the extension of rights of such chapels would have required concerted action in the face of the ‘mother’ church’s vested interests. In west Cornwall, a strong link between the success of chapels in achieving higher status and the existence of a cohesive local community that was recognised through territorial definition can be demonstrated. As will be discussed, almost every successful chapelry in west Cornwall is strongly associated with a territorial tithing community that was sufficiently independent of any interests of the ‘mother’ establishment, suggesting that the independent expression of these chapels rested upon a territorial association with a tithing community.

Far from being drawn up ‘from above’, or literally surveyed by a centralised ecclesiastical bureaucracy, the parish framework can be seen to be the product of a lengthy process of negotiation, akin to what Jones notes for the emergence of the territorial state as a “gradual, tentative and discontinuous process of territorialisation”.⁴⁰

These protracted negotiations came to define a universal framework of territorial parishes that by the Reformation was, at once, both the backbone of local ecclesiastical organisation and also the basic unit of community identity. In west Cornwall, these processes of territorialisation are shown to be contingent upon particular constellations and trajectories of local political arrangements, thereby reflecting developments that can be viewed as *internal* to the dynamics of later medieval society. The following discussion is based upon a review of each chapel in west Cornwall that managed to obtain further semi-independent status from their ‘mother’ foundation during the later medieval period (see figure 3).

The chapel of St. Piran, in the east of Stithians parish, has some Norman remains in the church fabric, showing that this chapel, dedicated to an important Cornish saint, was an establishment that had existed for several centuries before communal pressure forced some independent recognition at the expense of Stithians. A document dated 10th May 1388, which emanated from no less a figure than the Archbishop of Canterbury, records that some sort of delegation of parishioners of *St. Pieranus in Arwothal* had been active in seeking support for this establishment.⁴¹ From this account,

it appears that the tithing community of Arworthal not only formed an important focus for the said ‘delegation of parishioners’ (who are revealingly described as being ‘of Arworthal’ rather than ‘of Stithians’), but also found it possible to form and utilise a very important external diplomatic relationship (with the Archbishop).

A similar, yet more animated, account of how local activism succeeded in securing the rights of a lesser establishment involves the chapel of St. Martins, which won burial rights from the church of St. Mawgan in Meneage.⁴² Far from demonstrating any narrow and inward-looking sense of existence, in 1380 the parishioners petitioned Pope Urban VI, noting how the sea-shore was too narrow for two men walking abreast to carry the bier at a funeral. The Pope acceded, and the Bishop of Exeter commissioned his suffragan to consecrate the new cemetery in 1385. It is not known whether the ‘narrow sea shore’ excuse was a reality, or simply a device to use as a lever, but either way, the status of St. Martins appears to have been enhanced at the expense of the mother church, and without any evidence of manorial consideration. Rather, these examples highlight the importance of the territorial tithing expressing a communal

identity and legitimate focus around which such endeavours took place.

The interesting (and certainly long-running) dispute over the status of the chapels of St. Ives and Towednack, described at length by Henderson, provides some very good evidence for the nature of such communal struggle to obtain independent religious expression from a 'mother' church; in this case, that of Lelant.⁴³ These cases show an ability of the local inhabitants to organise themselves over a considerable length of time and raise funds to support the great expense of lengthy litigation. St. Ives had held a series of temporary licenses to celebrate Divine service at the cost of 3 shillings a year since at least 1331. Further complaints and petitioning of grievances however continued, arguing that the roads to Lelant "were mountainous and rocky and liable in winter to sudden inundations so that they could not safely attend Divine service, nor send their children to be baptised, their wives to be purified, nor their dead to be buried". As with St. Martins, whether this really was the case, or whether it was used as a rhetorical device, matters less than the fact that it appears to come directly from ordinary people. Two chapels

had already been built, along with two cemeteries enclosed (despite the lack of any right to burial), and provision made for two priests.

Following an Episcopal enquiry in 1409, the parishioners went to the great expense of procuring Papal Bulls from two successive Pontiffs, which were presented in 1411. Aware of the value of the tithes of these two chapelries, the Rectory of Lelant (held by the Abbot of Tavistock) put up strong resistance, but civil action continued throughout the fifteenth century. In 1513, the Rectory of Lelant sued several parishioners in the consistory court for non-payment of mortuaries, suggesting that the chapel burial grounds were in use by this time.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, a petition from Towednack in 1532 cites the possibility of “sudden invasion by pirates” as a reason for granting baptismal and burial rights, but it was not until 1576 that some sort of final agreement was met which extended partial independence to both St. Ives and Towednack.

In this long-running dispute, the financial costs to the local community must have been substantial, but we see how concerted action was organised by two neighbouring communities whose actions appear to be driven by a genuine concern for local provision

of religious facilities and a wish for the tithes to be spent locally.⁴⁵ Although this certainly does not imply the activity of an equal and democratic group of ‘community-minded citizens’, it does show that elements of the local community appeared to be able to combine and act of their own accord. Even if this reflected a situation of bitter local political in-fighting in reality, it is a realm of local politics that is often hidden in many first hand accounts and records, and suggests a more complex situation than is sometimes implied for the pre-modern period. Significantly, the territorial tithings in St. Ives and Towednack which would have formed a natural communal focus were independent from interests in Lelant. Perhaps most revealingly, the tithing unit of Corva (in St. Ives) in 1461 paid a stipend of 40d. to its tithingman (or ‘chief pledge’), which was actually double the annual tax for this area that was paid to the hundredal authorities.⁴⁶ By this time, with Justices of the Peace, and constables in place, the actual judicial function of the old tithing system would have been superseded, and it seems odd that such a large amount of money was made available to such a low status figure, unless this tithingman had exceptional expenses. The date of this payment coincides with the middle of the protracted struggle for recognition of St. Ives chapel, and supports a notion of a close relationship with communal

organisation through the tithing institution.

The suppression of 'lost' parishes

As well as lesser foundations succeeding in their bids for greater recognition, west Cornwall has many such establishments that never manage to obtain parish status. A review of these foundations reveals that, as a rule, they appear to have no independent tithing community, and/or have been victims of particular local political actions. Being situated within the same territorial tithing as their 'mother' establishment may well have been a crucial factor as to why the once important chapels of St. Euny (Merther Uny in Wendron parish) and St. Augustine's of Binnerton failed to maintain their status. Merther Uny was even recognised independently in the Lay Taxation of 1334, and may have been confident of increased ecclesiastical status and autonomy.⁴⁷ It was certainly much closer to independent recognition than either Towednack or St. Ives at this time, and yet it came to be suppressed and taken within the larger parish of Wendron, which was dominated by the large and powerful Duchy manor of Helston.⁴⁸ Even though both of these chapels were once acknowledged to have had a territorial dimension akin to that of a proto-parish, there is no evidence of any organised communal activity such as petitioning or

the procurement of Papal Bulls. In the case of Merther Uny and St. Augustine's, their location within the tithings of Helston and Binnerton, within which their mother establishments were also located, seems to have been a significant factor.

In other potential parishes however, active suppression can be seen. In 1270 for instance, Bishop Bronescombe directed that the whole hay tithing of the chapel of St. Elvan should pass to the 'mother' establishment of Sithney; both establishments being situated within the single territorial tithing of Methleigh.⁴⁹ Perhaps a more revealing example of how an important semi-independent foundation was suppressed involves the chapel of St. Day, in the parish of Gwennap. Even though St. Day was within a separate territorial tithing to Gwennap, recognised almost as a separate parish (and was certainly an important centre of pilgrimage) its fate was sealed through negotiations at a higher level, as Henderson describes thus.⁵⁰ In 1225, the local lord, William Briewerr granted the parish of Gwennap to the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral. In 1269 however, a strong hint of nepotism appears when the Bishop of Exeter (William Briewerr's nephew) decides that the whole altalage and considerable perquisites of the chapel of St. Day be granted to the church of Gwennap.⁵¹ Here, we see a case of where communal considerations

were eventually out-weighed by higher ecclesiastical politics. Even where chapelries were associated with an independent tithing, it does not mean that these tithings were either always effective, nor always had the inclination to support their chapel's status. Crucially however, we should not see the parochial framework simply as the product either of central planning, or some sort of 'natural' expression of local identities, but to see it as being formed through negotiation and mediation between a variety of interested groups.

Territoriality and the place of community

The west Cornish cases demonstrate that the existence of a local community with a territorial expression may have played an important role in the negotiation of parish status and definition. In particular, these territorial communities were able to organise, have external relationships, and define their world in a sophisticated way. Accurate boundaries are difficult to pick up away from the coast, although every household would have known within which tithing it was located.⁵² Tithings were not accurately surveyed territories 'drawn up from above', nor were they 'naturally ordered' through traditional notions of 'superstition', but were communities that came to have a territorial expression. Therefore, these processes of

territorialisation operated internally to the 'feudal system' to produce a distinct form of regulated space.⁵³ Thus, such territorial organisation was negotiated through the complex relationships that existed between ecclesiastical, manorial and community interests, all of which were operating *within* existing conceptions of space and identities of place. Thus, far from taking a back seat in these mediations, communities of local people are seen to have had the organisational ability and determination to have played quite a major role; even to the extent of obtaining Papal Bulls and petitioning the Archbishop of Canterbury. Authors such as French and Kumin have demonstrated the considerable fund-raising ability of such groups.⁵⁴ In these examples from Cornwall, we see how this acknowledged potential was realised, as local communities demonstrated their ability to organise effectively in the pursuit of common goals.

Far from mirroring Taylor and Flint's views of medieval society not having a territorial basis, the negotiations over chapel status took on an increasingly spatial focus that reflected Dodgshon's notion of developing territoriality.⁵⁵ These mediations over ecclesiastical status, therefore, both mirrored this increased importance of control over territory, and were reflected by increasing complexity and

competence of territorial organisation. Fund-raising operations were conducted through this more advanced form of territorial organisation, while activism at a local level found cohesion through expressing a territorial form. Significantly, rather than communities of kin, or tenants and clients, perceived entirely through feudal relations, these groups of ordinary people recognised an allegiance to locality and place. This was not an evenly spread phenomena, nor was it necessarily the result of action by some sort of free and equal lay community. The communities that rallied around these sites were in no way revolutionary, nor even were they attempting to overturn the authority of the Church as it existed. In other words, they should not be seen as somehow 'outside' of the context of later medieval society and institutions.

The development of the parochial framework, which increasingly took on civil administrative expressions, can be seen to be tied up in a relationship between public and private elements of society. On the one hand, there are individual Bishops, who are keen on pressing through with certain administrative plans, and on the other hand there are the local communities, sometimes of a quasi-statutory nature, who are striving for status and independent expression. The later

medieval parish in this sense, should be recognised as a ‘lived in’ and overtly territorial institution, rather than simply as a unit of administration and taxation by ‘higher’ authorities. The development and definition of such a framework, therefore, must make space for expressions of communal allegiance that recognised a territorial nature to their common identity.

This paper has demonstrated the value of trying to understand medieval life at a deeper level. We must get beyond the teleological and simplistic labels that are synonymous with popular notions of the medieval world. Although the availability and survival of existing medieval records tend to push us towards investigating only the wealthy and powerful, we should be spurred on to seek novel and alternative methods to understand the nature of medieval society. Rather than portraying the medieval simply as a fore-runner (and, by definition, in opposition to) the modern period, we should seek to uncover an environment that was populated by real people who had real concerns, and who took part in real negotiations over their identity and position.

In the later medieval period, semi-independent communal expression came to be represented by more centrally controlled institutions such as that of Justice of the Peace.⁵⁶ The territorial expression of these developments was undoubtedly the parish, which increasingly formed the basic organisational framework for administrative, religious and judicial life in Britain. However, this emerging system should also be recognised as an expression of the decisions and determination of local people as they negotiated their placed identity and common interests on their own terms.

Conclusions

Perhaps the oft-invoked statement that such lesser chapels and shrines were established and maintained *for the convenience of parishioners* is, in fact, a very apt phrase to use. Despite the connotations of a wholly sympathetic and considerate ecclesiastical hierarchy that just does not square with reality, it does indicate the simple idea that these foundations were established partly in the interests of the local population. Although it underplays the role of the activism that was at the heart of such struggles, the phrase acknowledges the existence of a community of people, with an identity based upon a particular locality and territory, with real

religious needs that would be partly satisfied with the provision of a small chapel.

The Cornish evidence supports an idea of negotiation between interested parties at a local level. Although communal organisation seems to have often played an important part, other factors were also significant. The unevenness of this action accentuates the complexity of these mediatory processes and exposes the great need to investigate local contexts as part of an explanation for the developing parochial framework. The vested interests of both State and Church were always important factors, while the example of St. Day shows that even the personality and principles of certain 'key actors' also often played a major role.

This paper has attached a realistic importance to developing notions of territoriality and a spatial allegiance to location rather than depending upon *modern* territorial schemes 'drawn up from above'. In addition, the role of a horizontal community of individuals has been stressed which challenges traditional notions that see the medieval world simply as a vertical construction and device of lordship relations. As Dyer cogently argues, we should not assume or

over-estimate the role of the gentry in defining the landscape, but should instead look at ordinary people.⁵⁷ Direct sources are not straightforward, but this analysis of territorial relationships has demonstrated the relevance of communal organisation. The emergent parochial framework, that formed the basis of local administration, taxation and judicial organisation for several centuries, was not drawn up by elite groups, but were at least partly expressions of community allegiance, the roots of which can be found in agrarian organisation and village life in the medieval period.

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Endnotes

- ¹ See J.A. Raftis, *Peasant Economic Development Within the English Manorial System* (Stroud, Gloucestershire 1997); C. Dyer, *Everyday Life in Medieval England* (London 1994); S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900-1300* (Oxford 1984) for instance.
- ² The stereotyped popular view of the medieval period is well articulated in films such as *Robin Hood*; *Prince of Thieves*, or *Excalibur*, while even comedies such as the first *Blackadder* series help to add substance to this picture.
- ³ Z. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge 1991), 4.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-5. For the implication of ‘rulelessness’ see the short discussion in J. Agnew and S. Corbridge, *Mastering Space; Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy* (London 1995), 18-9.
- ⁵ For instance, see P.J. Taylor and C. Flint, *Political Geography* (4th Edition) (Harlow 2000), 8, 371; M. Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London 1998), 163-4; E.W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies. The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London 1989), 128.
- ⁶ Crang, *op. cit.*, 164; Taylor and Flint, *op. cit.*, 156.
- ⁷ J.R. Llobera, *The God of Modernity. Development of Nationalism in Western Europe* (Oxford 1994); M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago 1992); C. Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape. Places, Paths and Myths*, (Oxford 1994); R.A. Jones Foundation legends, *origins gentium*, and senses of ethnic identity: legitimising ideologies in medieval Celtic Britain, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, **17.6** (1999) 691-703. The work of Smith on *ethnies* has also been influential in some geographical arenas. A.D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford 1986).
- ⁸ Recent forays into the medieval period that reflect a more complex understanding of the pre-modern world include work by Jones, Lilley, Dodgshon, Harvey and Philo. For example, see R.A. Jones, Problems with medieval Welsh local administration – the case of the *maenor* and the *maenol*, *Journal of Historical Geography* **24.2** (1998) 135-146; K.D. Lilley, ‘Non urbe, non vico, non castris’: territorial control and the colonization and urbanization of Wales and Ireland under Anglo-Norman lordship *Journal of Historical Geography* **26.4** (2000) 517-531; R.A. Dodgshon, *The European Past*, (Cambridge 1986); D.C. Harvey, Continuity, authority and the place of heritage in the medieval world; a study of identity in west Cornwall, *Journal of Historical Geography* **26.1** (2000) 47-59; C. Philo, The ‘chaotic spaces’ of medieval madness: thoughts on the English and Welsh experience in M. Teich, R. Porter and B. Gustafsson (Eds) *Nature and Society in Historical Context* (Cambridge 1997) 51-90.
- ⁹ Emphases added. D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford 1989), 228, 241. Also Lash and Urry for instance, spend some time discussing the transition to modernity as a *move away* from a world of ‘gods and demons’; S. Lash and J. Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London 1994) 15-16.
- ¹⁰ D. Harvey, *op. cit.*, 240-241.

- ¹¹ For instance, Dyer, *Everyday Life*; or Reynolds, *op. cit.*.
- ¹² In particular, see the special issue of *Political Geography*, **11.4** (1992) 355-412.
- ¹³ J.M. Blaut, Fourteen ninety-two, *Political Geography*, **11.4**, (1992) 355-385; R.A. Dodgshon, The role of Europe in the early modern world-system: parasitic or generative?, *Political Geography*, **11.4** (1992) 396-400.
- ¹⁴ M. Ogborne, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780* (London 1998) 1-38, 3.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ¹⁶ B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Hemel Hempstead 1993).
- ¹⁷ For instance, Helen Cam first postulated the previously under-estimated importance of the vill as an institution of secular community expression in medieval society, and Umberto Eco famously listed a range of supposedly *modern* accoutrements that were 'invented' in the medieval period - from cheques, banks and the prime rate, - to trades unions, horseshoes, spectacles, computing and double entry book-keeping. H.M. Cam, *Liberties and Communities in Medieval England* (Cambridge 1944); U. Eco, *Travels in Hyper-Reality*, (London 1986) 64.
- ¹⁸ Crang, *op. cit.*, 164.
- ¹⁹ Dyer, *Everyday Life*, 10.
- ²⁰ For instance, see K.L. French, Competing for space: Medieval religious conflict in the monastic-parochial church at Dunster, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, **27.2** (1997) 215-44; B.A. Kumin, *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish, c. 1400-1560* (Aldershot 1996).
- ²¹ French, Competing for space, 220.
- ²² C. Dyer, Peasants and farmers: Rural settlements in an age of transition, in D. Gaimster and P. Stamper (Eds), *The Age of Transition; The Archaeology of English Culture 1400-1600* (Oxford 1997) 61-76, 74.
- ²³ French, Competing for space, 224.
- ²⁴ For an account of the origins and drawn out development of the parish as a territorial unit of ecclesiastical administration, see J. Blair, The making of the English parish, *Medieval History* **2.2** (1992) 13-19. For specific studies of parochial development in England and the south west, see for instance, papers in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Eds), *Pastoral Care Before The Parish* (Leicester 1992); C. Holdsworth, From 1050 to 1307, in N. Orme (Ed.), *Unity and Variety; a History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall* (Exeter 1991) 23-52. For Cornwall, see D.C. Harvey, The evolution of territoriality and societal transitions, *Landscape History* **19** (1998) 13-23.
- ²⁵ R.D. Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge 1986), 19.
- ²⁶ This 'ideal' of territorial symmetry is actually much less common than is often thought.

- ²⁷ P.A.S. Pool, The tithings of Cornwall, *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, (new series) **8** (1981) 275-337. Elsewhere in the country, the tithing reflected a group of people (in theory of ten men) who were bound together for judicial purposes through a sort of enforced collective responsibility. In Cornwall however, the tithing became territorialized, so that incidents of crime, wrecks and straying animals were located within a territorial tithing unit, while judicial payments and assessments were similarly placed on a territorial footing. See Pool, The tithings of Cornwall; T.A. Critchley *A History of Police in England and Wales, (900-1966)* (London 1967).
- ²⁸ D.C. Harvey, The tithing framework of west Cornwall; a proposed pattern and an interpretation of territorial origins, *Cornish Studies* **5** (1997) 30-51.
- ²⁹ For details of figure 1's production, see D.C. Harvey *Territoriality and the Territorialisation of West Cornwall* (unpublished PhD thesis; University of Exeter 1997).
- ³⁰ See P.A.S. Pool (Ed.), The Penheleg Manuscript, *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, (new series) **3.3** (1959) 163-228; Pool, The tithings of Cornwall; G.D.G. Hall, *Three Courts of the Hundred of Penwith* (HMSO, London 1978); Harvey, The evolution of territoriality and societal transitions.
- ³¹ Pool, The Penheleg manuscript.
- ³² See Hall *Op. Cit.*
- ³³ R.A. Dodgshon, *Op. Cit.*, 166-92.
- ³⁴ Pool, The tithings of Cornwall, 276.
- ³⁵ Pool, The Penheleg manuscript.
- ³⁶ *Nonarum Inquisitiones in Curia Scaccarii; Tempus Regis Edwardi III*, (London 1807) folio 348.
- ³⁷ A. Preston-Jones, Decoding Cornish churchyards, in N. Edwards and A. Lane (Eds), *The Early Church in Wales and the West* (Oxford 1992) 104-24.
- ³⁸ For instance, see C. Henderson, Topography of the parish of St. Keverne, *Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society*, (new series) **8** (1931) parts 7 and 8, 49-75 and 185-92, 56.
- ³⁹ It was obviously in the interests of the 'mother' church's owners to guard against losing any rights to tithe; a form of ecclesiastical 'tax', which, in theory at least, amounted to 10 percent of all production.
- ⁴⁰ Rh.A. Jones, Mann and men in a medieval state: the geographies of power in the Middle Ages, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, (new series) **24.1** (1999) 65-78, 66-7.
- ⁴¹ C. Henderson, *The 109 Ancient Parishes of the Four Western Hundreds of Cornwall, (Penwith, Kirrier, Powder and Pydar)* (Truro 1924), reprinted in the *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall* **2.3-3.3** (1955-1960) 1-497, 328.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 329-30.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 334-5.

- ⁴⁴ Mortuaries are fees paid to the church, which are due on any burial. Obviously the cemeteries at Towednack and St. Ives were being used 'illegally'.
- ⁴⁵ Echoing Dyer's thoughts on the expense of church building and decoration at this time, both of these chapels (and burial grounds) had to be built and equipped without any apparent relief from normal tithe payment. In addition, the cost of petitions and (particularly) the Papal Bulls must have been considerable. See Dyer, *Peasants and farmers*, 74.
- ⁴⁶ Pool, *The tithings of Cornwall*, 291.
- ⁴⁷ N.J.G. Pounds, Taxation and wealth in late medieval Cornwall, *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall* **6.2** (1970) 154-67.
- ⁴⁸ See P.L. Hull (Ed.), *The Caption of Seisin of the Duchy of Cornwall, 1337* (Exeter 1971); N.J.G. Pounds (Ed.), *Parliamentary Survey of the Duchy of Cornwall, 1650* (Exeter 1982).
- ⁴⁹ Henderson, *The 109 Ancient Parishes*, 439-40.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.
- ⁵¹ *Altalage* and *perquisites* are forms of ecclesiastical income, generated through profit from such schemes as selling blessings (etc.) at pilgrimage centres, of which St. Day was one of the most important in the whole south west.
- ⁵² Pool, *The Penheleg manuscript*; Hall, *Op. Cit.*.
- ⁵³ Dodgshon, *Op. Cit.*, 185-92. For a comparative discussion of such territorial development, see Rh.A. Jones, Early state formation in native medieval Wales, *Political Geography* **17.6** (1998) 667-82.
- ⁵⁴ K.L. French, Parochial fund-raising in late medieval Somerset, in K.L. French, G.G. Gibbs and B.A. Kumin (Eds), *The Parish in English Life, 1400-1600* (Manchester 1997) 115-32; Kumin, *The shaping of a community*.
- ⁵⁵ Taylor and Flint, *Op. Cit.*, 156; Dodgshon, *Op. Cit.*.
- ⁵⁶ Cam, *Op. Cit.*; F. Pollock and F.W. Maitland, *History of English Law Before Edward I* (Cambridge 1968).
- ⁵⁷ Dyer, *Peasants and farmers*, 61.