

WEST YORKSHIRE JOINT SERVICES

WEST YORKSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY ADVISORY SERVICE

RESEARCH AGENDA

Medieval Rural Settlement in West Yorkshire

by Stuart Wrathmell

This document is one of a series designed to enable our stakeholders and all those affected by our advice and recommendations to understand the basis on which we have taken a particular view in specific cases. It is also a means by which others can check that our recommendations are justifiable in terms of the current understanding of West Yorkshire's Historic Environment, and are being consistently applied.

As the document is based upon current information, it is anticipated that future discoveries and reassessments will lead to modifications. If any readers wish to comment on the content, the Advisory Service will be glad to take their views into account when developing further versions. Please contact:

The West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service
Nepshaw Lane South
Morley
Leeds
LS27 7JQ

tel.: 0113 393 9959
e-mail: wyher@wyjs.org.uk

Issue 1, January 2018

© West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service and Stuart Wrathmell

The Archaeology of Medieval Rural Settlement in West Yorkshire

1. The broad pattern of medieval rural settlement

1.1 Medieval rural settlement in West Yorkshire displays all the forms and variations that can be found across England as a whole. The easternmost part of the sub-region, east of Leeds and Wakefield, is an area dominated by compact villages, so-called 'nucleated' settlements that formed or were planned (in stages or as a single event) mainly between the 8th and 12th centuries AD. To the west of this line, the far greater part of West Yorkshire was dominated by 'dispersed' settlements, usually small clusters of farms rather than single homesteads, scattered throughout the countryside. Many of these, too, were in place by the 12th century, though their numbers probably increased thereafter, just as the sizes of many villages increased until the 14th century.

1.2 There were, of course, some compact village settlements in the western part of the sub-region, just as there were some dispersed settlements in the east: the distinction is in the preponderance of one form of settlement rather than the other; their distributions are not exclusive. For example, the 'nucleated' areas east of Leeds included Methley, where there were several dispersed settlements in the Middle Ages (PRN 14625), whilst in the 'dispersed' area further west could be found the nucleated village of Clifton, near Brighouse, with its extensive open fields (Crump 1925).

1.3 Nevertheless, the broad distinctions remain valid. They cannot be explained in the context of West Yorkshire alone, using for example upland/lowland contrasts (cf Faull and Moorhouse 1981, 585), because they are simply one small part of a pattern extending the length and breadth of England. Nucleated settlements predominate in a central swathe of England (the 'Central Province' of settlement) stretching from Dorset in the south-west to Northumberland in the north-east (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, ch.1). To the north and west of the Central Province, and to its south-east, dispersed settlements predominate. Part of the western boundary of the Central Province, a boundary represented by a transitional zone perhaps 5-10km across, runs from north to south across West Yorkshire, on a line extending through the conurbations of Leeds and Wakefield (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, fig. 1.3).

1.4 The national patterning of nucleated and dispersed settlements has been established on the basis of early 19th-century mapping, and it could be (and has been) argued that these patterns do not reflect the forms of settlement in earlier centuries: that the medieval pattern of settlement could not have survived the huge economic and social changes that affected England over subsequent centuries, particularly during the period of industrialisation. There were certainly some radical shifts in settlement forms and sizes during these centuries, affecting

West Yorkshire as well as other areas; but it is clear from a number of associated datasets that the basic characteristics of nucleated and dispersed settlement patterns persisted in this sub-region until the late 19th century.

1.5 Some of these associated datasets relate to place-names; others to methods of farming and the balance of arable, open pasture and wood pasture resources available to local communities. Broadly speaking, nucleated settlements are usually to be found in areas where the territories associated with them – their ‘vills’ or townships – were largely given over to open-field cultivation, in which all the farmers had shares of the arable in the form of intermixed strips of land. The amount of permanent pasture available within these townships was limited. In dispersed settlement areas, in contrast, the communities had relatively small areas of arable land made up of intermixed strips, and a much greater proportion of lands – both arable and pasture – in the form of enclosed fields.

1.6 As for the settlement sites themselves, the primary focus of medieval rural settlement studies in England has, for the past sixty years, been the nucleated settlements of the Central Province. Over two thousand medieval villages have been largely or entirely depopulated since the Middle Ages (see Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, fig.1.5), and a significant number of them have now been surveyed and investigated by excavation. Investigations have usually, however, been confined to the heartland of the Central Province, in counties such as the East Riding of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, rather than in the more marginal parts of the Province, like West Yorkshire.

1.7 In comparison with nucleated villages, dispersed settlements have traditionally attracted far less attention from archaeologists, except in upland areas such as Dartmoor and the Pennines (see Wrathmell 2012a, 263-5). Since the early 1980s there has, however, been a growing awareness of the extent of dispersed settlement nationally, a shift which has been summarised elsewhere (Roberts and Wrathmell 1998, 110-11). Yorkshire’s early contribution to this realignment of research interest came from the West Yorkshire Archaeological Survey, which identified that ‘minor settlements, including hamlets and single farmsteads... form the principal types of settlement in the western uplands of the county’ (Faull and Moorhouse 1981, 585). In the township of Northowram, for example, nearly forty separate settlements are recorded in medieval documentation (Faull and Moorhouse 1981, 603-06).

1.8 Dispersed settlements take many forms. Some are single farmsteads standing in their own grounds, though these are most frequently either manor houses or monastic granges, or the homes of freehold farmers. Many others are small groups of homesteads, what would now be called hamlets, frequently strung out along the edges of commons and greens and at the intersections of roads and tracks. A clear example is the township of Liversedge, which contained no village of that name, but a series of dispersed settlements, including Liversedge Robert, Little Liversedge and Long Liversedge (Faull and

Moorhouse 1981, 436). During the 18th and 19th centuries, however, with the growth of industry and associated housing, these expanded into village-like settlements.

1.9 Common edge settlements are widely known in other regions of dispersed settlement, notably in Norfolk and Suffolk (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, 104-7), but in West Yorkshire their medieval development has yet to be explored. This is partly because of their subsequent settlement history: as with the Liversedge hamlets, they were mainly subsumed into larger settlement agglomerations in post-medieval times, during the rise of the textile industry; but it is also true that there has been little attempt to carry out detailed settlement analysis which might identify medieval cores. One of the few so far attempted is an analysis of Haworth, where early estate maps and the locations of the earliest standing buildings have been used to define two cores: an isolated hall at Hall Green and a small tenant settlement at Town End (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, 91-3).

2. Nucleated settlement: characterising the resource

2.1 West Yorkshire has few fully deserted large medieval villages, and those that exist are frequently invisible, lacking the prominent earthworks found in other counties. Lotherton, for example (PRN 3990), probably contained a sizeable medieval village, but its location has been lost in the parkland of Lotherton Hall. Two of the villages that have seen some excavation, Gawthorpe near Harewood (PRN 688) and Colton near Temple Newsam (Grassam 2010a), were also casualties of emparking and estate management.

2.2 The few deserted villages that are marked by earthwork remains seem to have been relatively small settlements, not much different from the hamlets discussed in the section below on dispersed settlements. There is across England as a whole a tendency for the fully deserted villages to represent outliers of estate centre villages, rather than being the estate centre settlements themselves, which have usually survived; but even these outlying settlements often reached considerable sizes.

2.3 In West Yorkshire, the small size of many nucleations also probably reflects the sub-region's geographical position in relation to the Central Province: its eastern half occupies a transitional zone of settlement forms, and the western half is firmly within the dispersed area. A typical small earthwork village is Towhouses (PRN 2564), lying between Harewood and Adel. Limited excavation has taken place, and some of the settlement enclosures were thought by the excavators to represent systematic planning.

2.4 The evidence for village planning is one of the key themes of research: the extent to which overall planning of settlements – or planned elements within

those settlements – can be detected in their extant or excavated morphology. Villages were often formed of rows of farmsteads (tofts and crofts), these ‘row villages’ being established in stages or at a single time. In some instances, perhaps far more than we currently recognise, the planned village, or its planned elements, may have been laid out on a template created by earlier open-field strips and furlongs. For example, a recently published study of two villages with *ceorla-tūn* place-names – Carleton near Pontefract and Carlton near Rothwell – has argued that each of them was laid out, probably before the end of the 10th century, over parts of the open fields which had previously been cultivated as part of neighbouring estate centres (Wrathmell 2017, 7-12).

3. Nucleated settlement: investigating the resource

3.1 Traditionally, the archaeological investigation of deserted medieval village sites has involved large, open-area excavations. This methodology is the only one which can fully address issues such as village planning and village origins. Even with large, long-term excavation projects, however, much can remain uncertain simply because of the nature of the evidence and the impact of later modifications during the life of the village. It is, on the other hand, sometimes possible to narrow down the range of likely scenarios, and at least explore when the village was created, whether the settlement was established all at one time or in stages, and what it replaced (see for example Wrathmell 2012b, 111-12, 203-15).

3.2 The only open-area excavations of medieval villages in West Yorkshire have been at Colton near Temple Newsam, and at Hillam near Parlington (Grassam 2010a; Grassam 2010b). Even with the excavation of relatively large open areas, neither site offered much clarity in terms of settlement origins and planning. Hillam was a small outlying settlement of Parlington, with occupation dating broadly from the 12th to the 14th centuries. The use of the site in the 15th century for quarrying roofing materials and burning lime perhaps related to the refurbishment of the nearby manorial water mill. The mill itself has not been explored, and there is more widely a lack of information on medieval mills – mainly because their sites were usually reused during post-medieval industrial development. The excavations at Colton, a village that probably moved or shrank in response to the expansion of Temple Newsam park, produced structures and occupation material of broadly similar date. The date range of material at Hillam is consistent with a late-founded outlier, but Colton, judging by its *tūn* place-name and its Domesday entry, should have middle or late Saxon occupation somewhere in the vicinity.

3.3 Both excavations were more successful in providing evidence for the overall layout and construction of peasant buildings and farmsteads, which are otherwise still largely unrecorded in West Yorkshire. On both sites there was

evidence of the commonly recorded transition from post-hole construction to buildings with stone foundations, though at neither was it possible to say much about the forms and functions of the buildings. It is particularly unfortunate that there are, as yet, no excavated peasant houses of the 13th and 14th centuries that can be compared in detail with surviving farmhouses and barns of the 15th and 16th centuries.

3.4 Large, open-area excavation is not the only means of exploring village origins and development. Nationally, a new research methodology has been developed over the past two decades: the archaeological investigation of surviving villages, often termed 'currently occupied rural settlements' (CORS: see e.g. Lewis 2014). There are both advantages and disadvantages in CORS research. The problems are that excavations will be very limited in extent – often amounting to sampling by means of pits or small trenches – and that the location of the sample pits will be constrained by present buildings and hard surfacing, and by the willingness of owners to allow gardens or other accessible areas to be investigated. The advantages are that CORS research can target the large 'estate centre' villages, likely to have been established at an early date, which continue to be occupied down to the present day.

3.5 In West Yorkshire, to take one example, a number of relatively small-scale excavations in a currently occupied rural settlement have taken place at Thorner, a parochial centre which attained a weekly market and fair in the 14th century (PRN 1292, 4674, 7469). Multiple small-scale interventions in a single village are likely to offer the only practical way of exploring the early history of West Yorkshire's most important nucleated settlements. This could be by the CORS methodology, or by the use of watching briefs and small-scale trenching during the development process. This latter method could be used where development plots had been identified by map analysis as lying within areas of planned medieval settlement, or in the proximity of key settlement foci such as medieval churches, castles, or greens.

4. Recommendations for nucleated settlement research

4.1 It seems unlikely that any fully or largely deserted settlement site will become available for excavation in the near future, but any infrastructure projects which are likely to lead to the wholesale destruction of significant areas of deserted villages or hamlets will offer a significant opportunity to make major advances in understanding the origins and plan development of West Yorkshire's medieval villages.

4.2 As with dispersed settlements (7.1 below) documentary research relating not only to the settlement site but also to its wider territory of fields, pastures and other resources should be an integral part of such a project, to enable the results of excavation to be set in their social and economic context.

4.3 Small-scale interventions in currently occupied rural settlements are important as probably the only means of exploring some of the most important and early-established nucleated settlements. An individual intervention may not yield obviously important data, but the cumulative value of such interventions is likely to have far greater significance than their individual outcomes.

4.4 A currently occupied rural settlement also offers opportunities to compare the excavated remains of medieval buildings with the earliest elements of village buildings which are still standing. Such comparisons are important for understanding the changes in housing which took place between the late medieval and post-medieval periods.

4.6. Further research themes which should be explored through these methodologies include the comparison of settlement sites associated with castles (e.g. Kippax, Barwick, Bardsey, Rothwell, Almondbury and Mirfield) with those that lacked castles or fortified manor houses.

4.7 The association of settlements with churches and ecclesiastical spaces is equally worthy of investigation. It may be that some of these settlements, particularly ones next to potentially early oval churchyards (e.g. Bramham, Hemsworth and Otley) have different histories from those settlements that have much later ecclesiastical elements, or none at all.

4.8 In addition, investigations should include the development of rural settlements that achieved the status of market centres (e.g. Nostell by 1119, Harewood by 1208, Bingley by 1212, Otley by 1227, Wetherby by 1240, Aberford by 1251, Emley by 1253, Almondbury by 1294, Keighley by 1305, Thorner by 1311, Thornhill and Elland by 1317, Rothwell by 1407). It is important to determine whether settlements that became market centres had in earlier times developed differently from others, and to explore whether their development after the granting of a market charter took a different trajectory.

5. Dispersed settlement: characterising the resource

5.1 As noted above, dispersed settlements, when contrasted with nucleated villages, often had a much greater proportion of lands – both arable and pasture – in the form of enclosed fields occupied by individual families. Many of these fields had been taken out of open land, enclosed either from moorland or from tracts of wood pasture. Fields taken from wood pastures are often signified (mainly in the West Riding and Lancashire) by the term *royd*, meaning ‘a clearing in a wood’ (Smith 1956, 86, *sub *rod*¹). As a suffix, *royd* is also found in medieval dispersed settlement place-names such as Howroyd in Barkisland, recorded in the 14th century (PRN 2518).

5.2 There were still, at the end of the 11th century, extensive wood pastures; they were recorded in the Yorkshire entries of Domesday Book as *silva pastilis*, and the settlements associated with them were often, in the Anglo-Saxon period, identified by place-names with the suffix *lēah* meaning 'a clearing in a wood', or perhaps 'a woodland glade' (Smith 1956, 18-22). Della Hooke (pers. comm.) believes the suffix to be closely linked with 'wood pasture' management, in which open rather than closed-canopy woodlands were used for pasturing animals. In West Yorkshire, it would be worth exploring whether wood pasture settlements were denoted mainly by *lēah* names before the 12th century and ones subsequently established, by *royd* names.

5.3 Most of the hamlets and farms of this kind were presumably occupied by small-scale farming families; but there were other dispersed settlements which performed specialist functions as appendages of larger estates managed on behalf of manorial lords and monastic houses. These included manorial residences, frequently moated, set apart from the homes of the tenant farmers and often sited in or adjacent to hunting parks, as well as the specialist husbandry farms, vaccaries and bercaries, belonging to their estates; and they included the many agricultural and industrial establishments, usually called granges, which were created by monastic authorities to exploit the lands and resources that had been granted to them.

6. Dispersed settlement: investigating the resource

6.1 In West Yorkshire, there have been several investigations of both 'dispersed' manorial homesteads and 'dispersed' monastic granges, and these studies have emphasised the value of combining evidence from surviving structures with historical documentation, place-name evidence and archaeological survey and excavation. An example of such a combined approach was the investigation of Elland Old Hall (PRN 2585), the home of the Eland family from the 13th century, set in a hunting park. The detailed survey of the Old Hall's standing buildings was complemented by archaeological excavation, and this resulted in the recognition of a series of halls based on both excavation evidence and the analysis of extant structures. The earliest hall, dating to the 13th century, was represented by timbers with traces of typically 13th-century jointing which had been reused in the (then) surviving 16th-century timber-framed hall.

6.2 Elland Old Hall stood at a distance from Elland village, on the opposite side of the river Calder, and other manorial homesteads in parks are also likely to have resulted from the local lord removing his residence (or one of them) from the main settlement area. Thornhill Hall (PRN 55), in the rectory manor park, was established by 1300, though the excavated hall dated to the mid-15th century. New Hall, Beeston was established in a park which had probably been created by the early 14th century, though the surviving timber aisled barn (Stank Hall

Barn: PRN 1971) was built in the second half of the 15th century. The remains of the adjacent timber-framed hall are currently undated.

6.3 Some dispersed manorial homesteads were established before the 13th century, or were created on the sites of more modest farmsteads of the 12th century and earlier. The remains of at least one building excavated near the 16th-century Oakwell Hall (PRN 97) may date back to the 12th century. At Howley, in Batley, reused timbers in farm outbuildings date to the early and mid-15th centuries, derived from the buildings which preceded the Saviles' 16th-century Hall (PRN 3793); but Howley's *lēah* place-name, though not documented until the 13th century (Smith 1961, 182), hints at a much earlier and probably lower status settlement here in Anglo-Saxon times.

6.4 Monastic granges and similar 'institutional' settlements were perhaps more frequently established on new sites, though this should not be assumed to be the case. The Knights Templar preceptory at Temple Thorpe, near Leeds (PRN 7454), was established in the mid-12th century, but its excavation uncovered, as well as a magnificent aisled barn, brewhouse and other buildings of the 12th and 13th centuries, some evidence of earlier occupation. Similarly Fountains Abbey's grange at Bradley, near Huddersfield (PRN 2730) was probably created on the site of a *lēah* settlement established before the late 11th century (Smith 1961, 296).

6.5 Bradley is one of the grange estates for which there is both documentary and archaeological evidence of industrial activity. The excavated medieval pottery kilns at Upper Heaton (PRN 2717) were within its territory, as were the iron-working sites at Cockley Hill (PRN 3186) and Bradley Wood (PRN 3381), evidenced by both documentary sources and archaeological remains. Such linkages can add value to investigations at any one location within a monastic estate, but more fragmentary and indirect evidence for manorial homesteads and granges can still provide vital information. For example, the 13th-century timbers reused at Ling Bob Farm, near Horsforth (PRN 12695) had undoubtedly been removed from a building over half a mile away, at Kirkstall Abbey's Dean Grange, an establishment about which little else is known (Barnes 1984, 19, 40-42).

6.6 Much less still is known about dispersed settlements which were occupied by farming families of lower status. This is, perhaps, because they are often still in use, the earliest phases of occupation obscured and perhaps obliterated by subsequent occupation. Even the hamlet of Hodroyd (PRN 1549), in South Hiendley township, seems to have expanded and acquired a church and manor house before it was largely deserted.

6.7 As with higher status settlements, one of the most effective ways of learning more about them is through tree-ring analysis of suspected medieval timbers. At Whitwood Farm, Clifton (PRN 10602), an originally timber-framed aisled barn, subsequently encased in stone, was dated to 1445; and at Bullace Tree Farm,

Liversedge (PRN 13291) another timber-framed aisled barn on a dispersed farmstead produced tree-ring dates in the early to mid-15th century. There may be others to be found on other farmstead sites. In addition, there is the well-recognised group of aisled timber-framed houses in the western parts of West Yorkshire, erected in the 15th and 16th centuries by yeomen who had prospered from the early development of textile manufacture (Giles 1986, 32-7).

6.8 Where there is a clear indication, on the basis of surviving medieval documents, that a proposed development site may have had a medieval origin, small-scale archaeological investigations can provide significant evidence of the period and character of occupation, especially when accompanied by visually inspecting upstanding buildings on the site (including those of the 18th & 19th centuries) for re-used timbers. If these buildings are to be demolished, dendrochronology may be justified where evidence for earlier jointing survives in re-used timbers (see below).

7. Recommendations for dispersed settlement research

7.1 Whatever the type of dispersed settlement – whether an ordinary farm, or a grange or a seigneurial enterprise – its significance can best be understood in its relation to the wider landscape, the lands and other resources its occupants exploited. Therefore, documentary research is essential to place them in their social and economic setting.

7.2 Though a few manorial sites have been investigated in West Yorkshire, they form a resource which is still poorly understood, especially in terms of their origins and early development. Archaeological evidence of monastic granges is almost non-existent, and any opportunity should be taken to rectify this. But the greatest gap is in our understanding of the lives of the ordinary medieval farmers in what is now West Yorkshire: the forms, construction and functions of their buildings, and their general level of material culture. It is particularly important to be able to relate such evidence to that of their successors in the 16th and 17th centuries.

7.3 Over the last twenty years, dendrochronology has played an increasing and increasingly valuable role in characterising the medieval buildings associated with dispersed settlements of all types. As will be seen in the examples cited here, these are not confined to the analysis of extant medieval buildings; valuable information can also be derived from timbers reused in post-medieval buildings, even in undistinguished outbuildings of otherwise 18th or 19th-century date. And such reused timbers, which can be initially identified by evidence for early, redundant jointing, are not necessarily confined to the sites where the buildings of which they were originally a part were sited. Reclaimed timbers might be moved several miles for reuse at a later date.

7.4 Tree ring analysis is not only valuable for dating the structures in which the timbers were used; it can also provide data on the character of local woodland, through the evidence the rings provide for the tree's growing conditions. Such data can ultimately be combined with environmental and documentary information to provide a better picture of early wood pastures and parks, and their subsequent development.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barnes G.D. 1984 *Kirkstall Abbey 1147-1539: An Historical Study*, Publications of the Thoresby Society, vol. 58 (Leeds)

Crump, W.B. 1925 'Clifton and its common fields', *Trans Halifax Antiq Soc* 1925, 105-35

Faull, M.L. and Moorhouse, S.A. 1981 *West Yorkshire: an Archaeological Survey to AD 1500* (Wakefield)

Giles, C. 1986 *Rural Houses of West Yorkshire, 1400-1830*, Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (London)

Grassam 2010a 'A report on the excavations undertaken in 1980 at Colton, West Yorkshire', Archaeological Services WYAS report 2099, unpublished (available in the West Yorkshire Historic Environment Record)

Grassam 2010b 'A report on the excavations undertaken in 1980-81 at Hillam Burchard, Parlington, West Yorkshire', Archaeological Services WYAS report 2028, unpublished (available in the West Yorkshire Historic Environment Record)

Lewis, C. 2014 'Test pit excavation within currently occupied rural settlements' *Medieval Settlement Research* 29, 66-81

Roberts, B.K. and Wrathmell, S. 1998, 'Dispersed settlement in England: a national view' in P. Everson and T. Williamson (eds), *The Archaeology of Landscape* (Manchester), 95-116

Roberts, B.K. and Wrathmell, S. 2002 *Region and Place: a Study of English Rural Settlement* (English Heritage)

Smith, A.H. 1956 *English Place-Name Elements* (Cambridge)

Smith, A.H. 1961 *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Part 2* (Cambridge)

Wrathmell, S. 2012a 'Northern England: exploring the character of medieval rural settlements', in N. Christie, and P. Stamper (eds), *Medieval Rural Settlement* (Oxford), 249-69

Wrathmell, S. (ed.) 2012b *Wharram: A Study of Settlement on the Yorkshire Wolds, 13. A History of Wharram Percy and its Neighbours*, York University Archaeological Publications (York)

Wrathmell, S. 2017 'Open fields and village planning during the late Saxon period: a Carleton and a Carlton in West Yorkshire', *Medieval Settlement Research* 32, 7-12