

The Lost Village and the Landscape of the Yorkshire Wolds

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THE enquiries of the historian and the archaeologist have shown that the deserted village site is a feature of many English countrysides. It is now possible to assign a date to the final disappearance of many of these places, and to say why they disappeared. Little attention has been paid, however, to the later history of the village lands. In particular, their physical character during the eighteenth century, when widespread changes were effected by enclosure in many areas, has been virtually ignored. Yet the evidence from the chalklands of the East Riding of Yorkshire suggests that important changes in the landscape occurred in a number of deserted villages at this time, the initial depopulating enclosure having modified but not destroyed the old open landscape at some earlier period.

The wolds remained largely unenclosed until well into the eighteenth century. During the years of Parliamentary enclosure (1730-1850) approximately two acres in every three were enclosed, a higher proportion than in any other part of the Riding. The events of these years changed the face of the district. In 1850 large, hedged fields, windbreaks, and isolated farmsteads occupied what had once been portions of unenclosed arable fields, pas-

tures, and rabbit warrens. A number of depopulated townships shared in these changes.

The sites of between forty and fifty lost villages with some wold land attached can be traced from Mr M. W. Beresford's lists.¹ It is difficult to assign an exact acreage to these, for their boundaries are in some cases obscure. Twenty-nine of them lay within parishes or townships with an aggregate area of about 30,000 acres. A total area of some 45,000 acres may not be far wrong for these villages. But the significant fact for the present argument is that at least 12,000 acres of land in these places lay open and unenclosed, in the physical sense of the term, until the age of Parliamentary enclosure.² In all probability, the area lying in this state was considerably greater than 12,000 acres, for a number of places known to have been in possession of open land early in the eighteenth century have been omitted from the calculation because of the imperfect nature of the data. Altogether, some twenty deserted townships are known to have been affected by late enclosure. They lay in all parts of the wolds.

Events in Eastburn and Cottam, it is suggested, may be regarded as typical of what had occurred in a number of places by the eighteenth century. In the 1660's there was a

¹ *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, xxxviii, 1952.

² Octon, 1770, at least 900 acres (Thwing enclosure award, Registry of Deeds, Beverley); Pockthorpe, 1773, 680 acres (Nafferton enclosure award, R.D.B.); Croom, 1775, about 1,000 acres (*House of Commons Journals*, 1774-6, xxv, 1803, p. 136); Tranby, 1796, 400 acres (Hessle, Anlaby, and Tranby enclosure award, R.D.B.); Wauldby, 1796, about 900 acres (Elloughton, Brough, and Wauldby enclosure award, R.D.B.); Riplingham, 1801, 1,400 acres (Little Weighton and Riplingham enclosure award, R.D.B.); Holme field in Wetwang, 1806, 430 acres (Wetwang enclosure award, R.D.B.); Arras, 1770-1820, about 800 acres (*infra*, p. 98, n. 9); Eastburn and Battleburn, after 1720, about 1,200 acres (Book K, 1726, pp. 49-50, R.D.B.); Southburn, Eastburn, and Kirkburn tithe papers, 1843-4, Department of Geography, University of Hull); Little Givendale, after 1750, 370 acres (Castle Howard Estate Survey, 1743-7, Castle Howard, Yorks); Cowlam, after 1780, 1,900 acres (W. Marshall, *Rural Economy of Yorkshire*, II, 1788, pp. 249, 261); Cottam, open 1706, partially enclosed by 1843-4, enclosure award 1851, about 2,000 acres (*infra*, p. 98, n. 8), P.R.O., K.R. Misc. Bks., 38, ff. 244-5, lists 200 acres of closes in 1569. There were extensive tillage lands with intermingled properties here early in the seventeenth century (P.R.O., C2 Jas. I, B22: 13).

small cluster of dwellings in Eastburn.¹ The village or hamlet consisted of four husbandmen's houses and three cottages. At some time between 1667 and 1671 at least three of the houses and possibly one of the cottages were pulled down by a John Heron and "all grounds belonging the townshipp converted into Meadow and pasture."² But this did not lead to a physical enclosure. In 1698 the grounds of Eastburn and its neighbour Battleburn were lying "open for Sheepe Walks . . . & . . . not devided by Fences or ditches."³ By 1715 a rabbit warren had been planted in Eastburn.⁴ The final destruction of this, and its replacement by ploughed, hedged fields did not take place until the middle of the following century.⁵

In Cottam, too, an 'improvement', in the course of which houses were pulled down and changes made in the pattern of land use, did not lead to the disappearance of the unenclosed landscape. In 1698 the Dean and Chapter of York leased their estate of Cottam (83 oxgangs of 27 acres each) to Mary Mountaign, of York.⁶ Nine messuages and cottages were leased with the land. Eight years later Cottam was still a small village lying amidst its open lands: "The Township of Cottam hath within it but 92 Oxgangs of Land . . . of these 9 are Freehold . . . The Messuages and crofts with small peices of Inclosure about the Town are all included in the [rent of] 10 sh.p.Ox[gang]." But changes were in prospect in 1719. In that year the

lease came up for renewal. The Dean and Chapter decided to authorize the demolition of all but four of the houses, the task to be carried out "as soon as conveniently may be."⁷ A warren was planted shortly afterwards, and survived as a great tract of open ground until the nineteenth century.⁸ The economy of these wold warrens would repay investigation.

It is not always easy to trace the progress of enclosure in the depopulated townships, for much of it took place without leaving any record in the form of an enrolled award or deed. Occasionally, however, some chance reference, or the survival of a plan, throws light on the matter. This is so in Arras and Cowlam.

In the 1840's Arras was owned by William Constable Maxwell, and farmed by William Stephenson.⁹ In Stephenson's youth most of the 800 acres on the farm had been devoted to rabbits. There were no hedges, but a sod wall defined the outer boundary of the farm where it adjoined other warrens. Arras was described by Stephenson as being then "open to Sancton, Market Weighton and Gardham . . . there was no close or garden or subdivision fence . . . rabbits came up to the windows." This was the state of Arras until the late eighteenth century, when members of the Stephenson family began to plough, subdivide, and hedge the farm. This they achieved between about 1770 and 1820. In the 1840's almost all the estate was under the plough.¹⁰

¹ RAS 21B: 7, 1682-3, RAS 21B: 14, 1682-3, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York. There is evidence in these papers for demolitions in Eastburn at an earlier period than the one discussed here. The events of the late seventeenth century appear to have affected what was already a shrunken settlement.

² *Ibid.* ³ RAS 43: 4, 1698, B.I.H.R. ⁴ DDHO 39: 2, 1719, East Riding Record Office, Beverley.

⁵ *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, series 2, v, 1869, p. 403.

⁶ S 1(1) A and C, Dean and Chapter library, York.

⁷ The lease book records, in 1706, that the tenants were poor and the houses difficult and costly to maintain in repair because of the shortage of timber.

⁸ Tithe map and apportionment, 1843-4 (Tithe Redemption Commission, London); enclosure award, 1851 (County Hall, Beverley). Large areas outside the warren were enclosed by 1843-4. The award of 1851 appears to have confirmed existing enclosures, extinguished rights of stray, and facilitated further enclosures.

⁹ Arras and Market Weighton tithe papers, 1838-44, Department of Geography, University of Hull. Stephenson was aged seventy-two in 1842, and had lived at Arras all his life.

¹⁰ The Tithe Apportionment gives the acreage of Arras as 874 acres, of which 825 acres were arable land.

A similar sequence of events occurred in Cowlam. In 1783 Cowlam farm contained about 1,900 acres of land, of which 1,500 or 1,600 acres were rabbit warren, about 200 acres arable land, and the remainder sheep walks.¹ The subdivision and hedging of the farm took place between 1783 and 1844, by which year a pattern of hedged fields covered the township, the warren had gone, and most of the land was under the plough.²

The character of the depopulated townships mentioned so far has been fairly clear: they were unenclosed, at least in large part, until the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, and they possessed considerable tracts of warren and pasture. There existed also a number of other depopulated places about which much less is known at this period, but which were certainly unenclosed.

The grounds belonging to the hamlet of Pockthorpe were awarded to Robert Macfarland in one block of nearly 700 acres, under the terms of the Nafferton enclosure award of 1773.³ Macfarland was to ring-fence where necessary, to separate his land from that of others. The Reverend Robert Rousby enclosed his Croom estate with the aid of an act of Parliament in 1775. Holme Field in Wetwang, which lay about the site of the village of Holme Archiepiscopi, was enclosed with the open fields of Wetwang in 1806.⁴ The open arable field of Tranby was enclosed at the same time as the open fields of the surviving settlements of Hessle and Anlaby in 1796. There is evidence that open land ex-

isted in other places, but no record of the date of enclosure is known.⁵

A decision to enclose in one township affected interests in an adjacent one in several of the places mentioned. Thus Macfarland held land in Nafferton fields next to Pockthorpe, and the arable field of Tranby was farmed by Hessle men.⁶ Circumstances such as these may explain why enclosure affected places at the same time. But the subject requires more attention than can be given it here.

The presence of unenclosed depopulated townships at this time is at first sight surprising, for there are numerous examples of the making of closes in such places, and at much earlier dates.⁷ But when considered in the light of the physical character and land-use history of the wolds, the existence of open lands becomes explicable.

There is evidence for depopulation and conversion of arable land into pasture in a number of wold villages before the eighteenth century, but little to suggest that those responsible for these events thought it worth their while to embark upon a physical enclosure of the property. There were good reasons for their reluctance.

If, as seems likely, depopulation was frequently followed by conversion of tillage to sheep pasture and rabbit warren, a full enclosure was unnecessary. Farming of this type could be successfully pursued without subdividing the land. In the case of sheep farming a ring-fence would reduce the labour

¹ Marshall, *op. cit.*, II, p. 262.

² Acreage 2,013, of which 1,564 acres arable (Tithe Apportionment). No record of the enclosure exists in Beverley.

³ For references in this paragraph see above, p. 97, n.2, unless otherwise stated.

⁴ The acreage awarded was 450 acres. That this included much, if not all, of the lands once belonging to the village of Holme is suggested by Torre, *Peculiars*, fo. 1073 (Dean and Chapter library, York), which gives the area of Holme as 32 oxgangs. The acreage of the oxgang in the parish of Wetwang varied, but its average size was 15 or 16 acres. I owe the Torre reference to Mr H. Dunton.

⁵ Easthorpe, 1690 (Inventory, Simon Newbald, May 1690, York Probate Registry); Raisthorpe, 1712 (Book E, pp. 51-2, R.D.B.); Neswick, 1714 (Book E, pp. 181-2, R.D.B.); Towthorpe, 1744 (Book R, p. 280, R.D.B.); Drewton, 1723 (Book H, pp. 585-6, R.D.B.); Cleaving, circa 1816 (Londesborough, enclosure plan, R.D.B.). But see Book F, 1717, pp. 62-3, *ibid.*, for enclosures here by a much earlier date.

⁶ DDHB 30: 25 and 26, undated, E.R.R.O. (for Pockthorpe); DDHB 1: 30, *ibid.*, and P.R.O., L.R. 229, ff. 49-63, 1608 (for Tranby).

⁷ M. W. Beresford, *Lost Villages of England*, 1954, *passim*.

bill for shepherding, but it was not essential. Furthermore, the attitude towards enclosure was strongly influenced by the knowledge that the wolds presented the would-be encloser with considerable problems. The local chalkstone does not make satisfactory field walls, and quickset hedges were required.¹ As the landowners of the eighteenth century found to their cost, these were not easily established on the higher parts of the district.² Timber for posts, rails, and gates had also to be imported into the area, for until the plantations of the later improvers began to yield there was very little available locally. The problem of fencing was fully appreciated in the age of Parliamentary enclosure, and there were attempts to find some substitute for full enclosure. The village bylaws were modified to allow seeds and turnips to be sown within the open arable fields, or the process of consolidating the scattered lands was hastened.³ It is perhaps significant that when an en- clo-

sure was made, it was sometimes many years before the ring-fenced allotments were subdivided into smaller closes.⁴ In sum, the depopulating squire of an earlier age could usually achieve his immediate end without going to the trouble and expense of a full enclosure. When changed circumstances provided an incentive, his descendant did in the depopulated township what others were doing, in spite of difficulties, elsewhere. The new landscape was created in populated and depopulated township alike.

The object of this paper has been to draw attention to the existence of lost villages on the wolds unenclosed until the age of Parliamentary enclosure, and to suggest, in general terms, reasons for their presence. Only a detailed study of individual villages will reveal the extent to which the pattern of land use was influenced by circumstances peculiar to each.⁵ It is hoped that this brief article will provide some basis for such detailed studies.⁶

¹ A good contemporary account of the problem in the eighteenth century is contained in *Trans. East Riding Antiq. Soc.*, II, 1894, pp. 69 ff.

² Isaac Leatham, *General View of the Agriculture of the East Riding of Yorkshire*, 1794, pp. 45-7.

³ The crops of the new husbandry were grown in the open fields of South Cave, Helporthorpe, Weaverthorpe, West Lutton, and Hunmanby during the eighteenth century.

⁴ Forty years after the execution of the award (1773), there were large tracts of land in Kilham awaiting subdivision.

⁵ Riplingham, for example, had a full set of open arable fields and pastures until 1801. The hamlet appears to be an example of shrinkage. There were ten dwellings standing in 1801, but foundations are known to exist near by. The pattern of dwellings in Riplingham in 1801 was essentially that of the present day. See enclosure award (R.D.B.); note-book of the commissioners for enclosure (Department of Geography, University of Hull); DDHB 35: 62, 1786, and DDHB 35: 64, 1802 (E.R.R.O.).

⁶ A preliminary investigation of some of the Holderness material suggests that the unenclosed lost village was relatively uncommon there (as would be expected if the argument advanced above is approximately correct), but was not unknown. See Book I, 1725, pp. 217-18, R.D.B. (open land in Hilderthorpe); agreement to enclose, 1758, Department of Geography, University of Hull, and act for the enclosure of Hornsea, 1801, R.D.B. (open fields in Southorpe in Hornsea); Book N, 1735, pp. 436-45, R.D.B. (open fields in Danthorpe). Both Southorpe and Danthorpe had a full and orthodox set of open fields until the enclosures. But in Southorpe the lands were farmed by persons who lived elsewhere.