

The medieval origins of south Pennine farms: the case of Westmondhalgh Bierlow*

by David Hey

Abstract

The scattered farmsteads of the Pennine foothills of south-west Yorkshire rarely offer visual clues to the antiquity of their sites. Most of their names are first recorded in the early modern period, yet if we examine the surnames that are associated with them we find that many were founded well before the Black Death. This is a much older settled landscape than at first appears. The importance of the hamlet as the basic unit of farming systems is emphasized, and evidence is provided for small arable townfields, divided into doles, and extensive moorland commons whose boundaries are marked by deep ditches that have wrongly been interpreted as linear defences from the Romano-British or Anglian period.

Modern studies have provided us with a general understanding of how farms were created on the edges of moorland in different parts of England during the period of population growth between the twelfth and early fourteenth centuries. The pioneering work of Margaret Faull and Stephen Moorhouse on West Yorkshire, of John McDonnell on the North York Moors, of Angus Winchester on the Lake District, the northern Pennines and the Scottish Borders, and of Harold Fox on Dartmoor is well known.¹ In recent years the late Richard Britnell and Brian Roberts have led a team in an ESRC-funded project on settlement and waste in the Palatinate of Durham, including the western High Pennines, where the extent of waste by the early fourteenth century differed little from today.² Yet there is still much scope for local studies of the predominantly pastoral and weakly manorialized territories that characterized the gritstone moorlands and which differed considerably from, say, 'the islands of cultivated land in a sea of waste' on the magnesian limestone district of south-east County Durham.

In 2001 George Redmonds and I wrote an account of how the present landscape of a Pennine moorland township in the parish of Huddersfield was largely created in the first half

* I am grateful to two anonymous referees for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of the text.

¹ M. L. Faull and S. A. Moorhouse (eds), *West Yorkshire: an archaeological survey to AD 1500* (4 vols, 1981); J. McDonnell, 'Medieval assarting hamlets in Bilsdale, north-east Yorkshire', *Northern Hist.* 22 (1986), pp. 269–79; A. Winchester, *The harvest of the hills: Rural life in northern England and the Scottish Borders, 1400–1700* (2000); H. Fox, *Dartmoor's alluring uplands:*

Transhumance and pastoral management in the middle ages (2012).

² H. M. Dunsford and S. J. Harris, 'Colonization of the wasteland in county Durham', *EcHR* 56 (2003), pp. 34–56; R. H. Britnell, 'Fields, farms and subdivision in a moorland region, 1100–1400', *AgHR* 52 (2004), pp. 20–37.

of the fourteenth century.³ The place-name evidence implied that little settlement had taken place before the Elizabethan period and the earliest surviving vernacular architecture was seventeenth-century in style. However, onomastic evidence, mainly in the form of surnames taken from the Wakefield manor court rolls, showed that the basic structure of the township had been created before the Black Death and had survived that disaster. A similar approach has been adopted here.

I

On the Pennine foothills to the north-west of Sheffield a young couple rear ostriches and alpaca, as well as geese and horses. Inscribed on a slate by the farm entrance is the name Snell House. The outward appearance of this farm is that of a typical nineteenth-century smallholding at the highest point of cultivation on a steep hillside, some 850 feet above sea level. Yet the documentary evidence tells us that this land has been farmed for over six-and-a-half centuries. The book of customary fines of the lordship of Hallamshire, otherwise known as the manor of Sheffield, records that in 1342 Elias Snel 'gave 6*d.* for licence to hold one plot of land in Westmondhalgh by the gift of Hugh de Whitley'.⁴ Westmondhalgh was the ancient name of one of the four townships or bierlows in the soke of Bradfield within the manor of Sheffield, and White Lee Farm (formerly Whitley) lies a quarter-of-a-mile to the west of Snell House, so there is no doubting the identification (Figure 1). In the Bradfield poll tax returns of 1379, a William Snell paid at the basic rate of 4*d.*⁵ After that, the family disappeared from local records. Snell House is not mentioned in the relevant English Place-Name Society volume, but the surname of these medieval peasants – one that was derived from an old personal name or nickname – provides a strong clue to the origin of their small farm in the years of rising population before the calamity of the Black Death.⁶

Further down the steep hillside that rises from the Ewden Valley, at about 650 feet above sea level, Raynor House takes its name from another medieval surname, in this case one that arose from a personal name that had been brought to England by the Normans. In a late thirteenth-century confirmation deed that can be dated to before 1270 Thomas de Furnival, lord of Hallamshire, granted Thomas, the son of William Reyner 'of the new mill' (*newmyln*) in the valley bottom, properties that included 'a messuage with the appurtenances called Rayner House in Westmondhalgh'.⁷ A William Reyner paid the basic rate of poll tax in 1379 and he, or his namesake, was recorded as a witness to local deeds in 1383 and 1402.⁸ A Thomas Rayner was

³ G. Redmonds and D. Hey, 'The opening-up of Scammonden, a Pennine moorland valley', *Landscapes* 2 (2001), pp. 56–73.

⁴ Sir A. S. Scott-Gatty (ed.), 'Records of the court baron of the manor of Sheffield', *Trans. Hunter Archaeological Soc. (hereafter THAS)*, 1 (1918), pp. 257–329.

⁵ Carolyn C. Fenwick (ed.), *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381*; III, *Wiltshire – Yorkshire* (British Academy Records of Social and Economic History, 37, 2005), pp. 317–19.

⁶ A. H. Smith, *The place-names of the West Riding of*

Yorkshire (8 vols, 1961–3), I, pp. 221–44. The naming of farmsteads after the surnames of their earliest occupiers was first discussed by George Redmonds. See, for example, his *Names and history: People, places and things* (2004), pp. 72–3, which considers some farm names in the Holmfirth district a few miles further north.

⁷ T. W. Hall (ed.), *A descriptive catalogue (3rd volume) of Sheffield manorial records ...* (1934), p. 137.

⁸ T. W. Hall (ed.), *A descriptive catalogue of miscellaneous charters and other documents relating to the*



FIGURE 1. Detail of Thomas Jefferys' map of Yorkshire, showing the farms mentioned in the text

Source: Thomas Jefferys, *The county of York survey'd ...* (1772) is available in major public libraries and as a CD (Digital Archives Association, 3 Cedarways, Appleton, Warrington WA4 5EW, UK, 2008).

still there in 1440,⁹ but the surname disappeared from local records in the following century and, in later times, the farm was sometimes recorded as Reynard House in the mistaken impression that it had taken its name from the fox. It survives as a working farm today.

Linking the medieval documentary evidence to existing farms is not always as straightforward as this. The same pre-1270 grant to William Reyner included the nearby Case House, a farmstead that has either been demolished or which has taken a new name after its last appearance in the records in 1570.¹⁰ John Case paid poll tax in 1379 and in 1424 a John Case surrendered 'a rood of cultivated land near le new Milne'.¹¹ The surname is an occupational one for a maker of boxes, etc., but here again the local family either failed in the male line or migrated, for they were not recorded in the Bradfield parish register which begins in 1559. A similar nearby example of a farmstead that cannot now be identified is Gillott House, whose name was derived from a surname that developed from the Middle English personal name, Gille. The manorial book of customary fines recorded Thomas Gillott in 1416 and noted that in 1439 Richard Gellott surrendered 'one messuage and one bovate of cultivated land in Wigtwisle [the neighbouring hamlet to the west] to the use of John Gellott his son'.¹² Gillott House was named in a manorial survey in 1637¹³ and a Thomas Gilliott was taxed in the township on

Note 8 continued

districts of Sheffield and Rotherham (1926), p. 40; id., *Descriptive catalogue of charters, copy court rolls and deeds forming part of the Wheat Collection* (1920), p. 20.

⁹ T. W. Hall (ed.), *A descriptive catalogue of Sheffield manorial records from the 8th year of Richard II to the Restoration* (1926), p. 14.

¹⁰ Sheffield Archives (hereafter SA), Crewe

Muniments, 658. A likely candidate is Jack House, which is in the right place and is unrecorded before the first edition of the six-inch Ordnance Survey map in 1855.

¹¹ Scott-Gatty, 'Records', p. 283.

¹² Ibid., pp. 279, 291.

¹³ J. G. Ronsley (ed.), *An exact and perfect survey and view of the manor of Sheffield with other land by John Harrison, 1637* (1908, repr. 2009).

two hearths in 1672,¹⁴ but the farm name has disappeared and it is unrecorded by the English Place-Name Society. Here again, the surname provides essential evidence of the early history of the farm.

Other farm names in the same small neighbourhood were topographical in origin, but the surnames that were derived from them suggest continuity of occupation from the medieval period to modern times. Fairhurst Farm is sited by 'the fair wood on the hill', close to Raynor House. John del Fayrhirst paid the lay subsidy in 1297 and was recorded as 'John de la Fayrhurst of Hallumschir ... in Westonhallge' in an undated, thirteenth-century deed.¹⁵ A William del Fairhirst witnessed a local deed in 1323 and obtained 'a license to hold a wood and a bovat of land in Wigtwisle' in 1335, and John de Fairehurst inherited land there in 1402.¹⁶ By the time of the 1637 survey of the manor of Sheffield, however, the farm had been subdivided and had passed into other hands. The surname survived as Fairest, but the Arthur Fearest who paid hearth tax in a neighbouring township in 1672 was the only householder with this surname in the West Riding returns.¹⁷ In the 1881 national census returns all but eight of the 103 people named Fairest lived in south-west Yorkshire, within walking distance of the original farm.¹⁸

In 1303 Henry son of Walter of Wygetwezil granted John de Fayrhirst 'all that plot of land in Dueridene called Newlands'.¹⁹ Dwarriden was a farmstead that was replaced in the twentieth century by a plantation on the southern bank of a reservoir about a mile to the west of Fairhurst. The name means 'dwarf valley' because of the echoes that reverberate from shouts.²⁰ In 1404 John Morton held a messuage in Dwarriden that had once belonged to Henry Dwarriden.²¹ His surname did not survive but Dwarriden House was recorded in the 1637 survey of the manor.

Further down the lane to the east of Fairhurst we come to two other ancient farms with topographical names, Carr House and Thorn House, but the evidence from their names is not as clear cut. Carr is derived from an Old Norse word that passed into local speech for a marshy area, overgrown with brushwood, in this case the land descending to Ewden Beck now preserved by a wildlife trust. Roger and Richard del Kerre were listed amongst the poll tax payers in 1379 and the manorial book of customary fines has fifteenth-century references to Old and New Carrs, but these may have been other marshy areas further up the valley. The first definite reference to Carr House is in the 1637 manorial survey. The same problem occurs with Thorn House. William and Henry de Spina (the Latin word for thorn) witnessed local thirteenth-century deeds²² and William del Thorne paid the lay subsidy in 1297, but other medieval references to Thornfield and Thornland are too imprecise for us to locate them with certainty. Again, the first definite reference to Thorn House is in the 1637 manorial survey.

¹⁴ D. Hey *et al.* (eds), *Yorkshire West Riding Hearth Tax assessment, Lady Day 1672* (2007), p. 392.

¹⁵ W. Brown (ed.), *Yorkshire Lay Subsidy, being a ninth collected in 25 Edward I (1297)* (Yorkshire Archaeological Soc., Rec. Ser., 16, 1894), pp. 72–6; SA, Wilson of Broomhead deeds, 90.

¹⁶ Hall, *Descriptive catalogue ... Wheat collection*, p. 10; Scott-Gatty, 'Records', pp. 260, 271.

¹⁷ Hey *et al.* (eds), *Hearth Tax*, p. 392.

¹⁸ S. Archer, *The British nineteenth-century surname atlas* (Archer Software CD, ver. 1.10, 2011).

¹⁹ SA, Wilson of Broomhead deeds, 89.

²⁰ Smith, *West Riding*, I, p. 223; A. Gatty, *A life at one living* (1884), p. 205.

²¹ Scott-Gatty, 'Records', p. 272.

²² Hall (ed.), *Descriptive catalogue (3rd volume)*, pp. 137–8; Hall, *Descriptive catalogue ... Wheat Collection*, pp. 4–5.

We are on more certain ground with White Lee Farm, high above the valley at almost 1000 feet above sea level. The style of the nineteenth-century farmhouse and its outbuildings, together with the large, rectangular fields that surround it, suggest a post-enclosure creation, yet the documentary evidence shows that this 'bright clearance' amongst the woods at the edge of the moors has been farmed since the middle ages. In an undated thirteenth-century deed Thomas son of Ralph de Witteley held 'five acres one rood of land ... enclosed between Witteyleymoor towards the east and the wood of Dweridene towards the west' and the land of Robert le Walker on the south, which retains the name of Walker Edge Farm to this day. The manorial book of customary fines notes that in 1283 Hugh de Whitley gave 20*d.* for admission to one rood of new land in Westmondhalgh and that in 1342 William de Stabulo paid 2*s.* for a licence to hold 'half a bovate of land in Whitley'. In 1433 William de Morton held 'one Messuage and six Acres of cultivated land in Whitley' and in the following year Thomas Smalfeild farmed 'two bovates of land in Westmonhalgh at Whitley'. By 1557 the property was thought of as 'a messuage and two oxgangs in Westmondhalgh at Whitelegh'.²³

II

These farm names show that the scattered pattern of settlement along the southern side of the deep Ewden Valley that survives to this day is medieval in origin, if not even earlier. The present limit of cultivation up to the moorland edge had been reached by the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, though new land in the carrs and woods below continued to be cleared until the mid-fourteenth century. Old Booth Farm, at the very limit, takes its name from the Old Norse word for a manorial cattle-rearing farm or vaccary. The lords of Hallamshire had two such farms on the edge of the Pennine moors, here and at Fulwood Booth, further south in the parish of Sheffield, which they re-stocked with 40 cows, four bulls and eight oxen in 1184.²⁴ John de Bothe paid poll tax in the chapelry of Bradfield in 1379 and John Bothe the younger and Joan de Bothe were recorded there in 1440.²⁵ Manorial vaccaries were abandoned in the later middle ages, and in later times the farmers at Old Booth concentrated on rearing sheep until Broomhead Moor was fully converted to grouse moor in the late nineteenth century.

Old Booth Farm is sited at the north-western edge of a remarkable natural landscape, known as Canyard Hills, which consists of a series of huge conical mounds and depressions that have been formed by a massive landslide (Figure 2). The name is not recorded before 1592, when John Morton of Canyas was one of the jurors for the soke of Bradfield within the manor of Sheffield. In 1617 Nicholas Morton of Canions fulfilled the same role and in 1643 he was described as a yeoman 'of Cannis'. John Harrison's survey of the manor of Sheffield in 1637 noted Canier House, the farm that stands on a ledge or shelf just below the landslip and which is now known as Canyards (though the local pronunciation is Kenyers). The name was still written as

²³ Hall (ed.), *Descriptive catalogue* (3rd volume), pp.137–8; Scott-Gatty, 'Records', pp. 258, 261, 287, 288; Hall (ed.), *Sheffield Manorial Records ... also ... Lindsay Collection*, p. 78.

the reign of King Henry II, A.D. 1183–1184 (Pipe Roll Soc., 33, 1912), p. 100.

²⁵ Hall (ed.), *Descriptive catalogue of miscellaneous charters*, p. 8.

²⁴ *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the thirtieth year of*



FIGURE 2. Aerial view of the natural landslip once known as Moldiclipf but now named Canyards Hills, with Canyards bottom right and Old Booth farm top right

Source: Photo reproduced by courtesy of Meridian Airmaps Ltd

Canniers in 1782.²⁶ Its etymology is uncertain, but *canne*, an Old English word for a cup or a can, was used topographically for depressions and deep hollows.²⁷

²⁶ T. W. Hall, *Sheffield Manorial Records*, p. 131: Ronsley (ed.), *Exact and perfect survey*, p. 13; Borthwick Institute, York, will of George Helliwell, Canniers,

Bradfield, Doncaster Deanery (proved Mar. 1782).

²⁷ M. Gelling and A. Cole, *The landscape of place-names* (2000), p. 100.

In earlier centuries this landslip area was known as Moldicliff, meaning the earth-covered cliff.²⁸ The nineteenth-century antiquarian, Joseph Hunter, noted that in 1388 Thomas de Moldiclif of Westmonhalgh gave lands to William de Morton, who lived at Dwarriden, just below Moldicliff. The Mortons farmed here for nearly three centuries and Hunter mentioned the will in 1651 of 'Nicholas Morton of Muldicliffe, which was then called Caniers'. For a time, the two place-names overlapped; in 1594, for instance, Nicholas and John Morton were said to be 'of Moodyclyf', but the old place-name gradually disappeared.²⁹ However, the surname that was derived from the farm name survives to the present day, albeit far away from its source. The Bradfield poll tax returns for 1379 listed John de Moldclyf, Adam de Moldcliffe and Thomas Moldeclif, and in 1441 Thomas de Moldeclyff was one of the jurors of the manor court.³⁰ The name died out locally before the Bradfield parish register began in 1559, but John Mouldcliffe was taxed on one hearth a few miles further north in Holmfirth in 1672. At the time of the 1881 national census all 15 people named Moodycliff(e) were living in the Huddersfield district. Today the name is found only in Dumfries to where a Huddersfield Moodycliff migrated two generations ago.³¹

A mile or so down the old bridleway that was converted into a moorland turnpike road in the 1770s and which still separates the medieval farms from the moors is the ruined site of Broomhead Hall, with Broomhead Farm just beyond, on the headland that was once covered with broom or gorse. Once more, our earliest dating evidence comes from surnames. Henry de Bromeheude witnessed a local deed that dates from before 1290.³² His descendants have made Broomhead into a familiar Sheffield district surname to this day. A William Bromed paid 4*d.* poll tax in 1379 but, by then, the family had moved two or three miles south to Bradfield and John Weleson paid his 4*d.* at Broomhead. In 1398 this John Wilson de Bromhead was referred to as John, the son of William, the son of John de Waldershelf, so he was the first to bear the hereditary surname. The Wilsons were small farmers there on the same scale as most of their neighbours until the sixteenth century, when their fortunes began to improve, first by a profitable marriage and then by service in the households of the Earl of Shrewsbury at Sheffield and Sir Thomas Wentworth at Wentworth Woodhouse. In 1640 Christopher Wilson built a substantial stone hall at Broomhead, which was demolished and rebuilt as a large Tudor Gothic mansion in 1831 by James Rimington, a barrister who had succeeded Henry Wilson in 1819 as his nephew and heir and whose descendants changed their name to Rimington-Wilson.³³ In the years leading up to the First World War their grouse moor beyond the turnpike road was the most celebrated in England.

Other scattered farms in the eastern part of the bierlow or township were created in the thirteenth or early fourteenth century beyond the Domesday Book hamlets of Onesacre and Worrall. Spout House, which stands about 1000 feet above sea level, bears a name that was derived from a water outlet. An undated, thirteenth-century deed mentions Le Sputesyke as a

²⁸ Smith, *West Riding*, I, p. 243.

²⁹ J. Hunter, ed. J. W. Clay, *Familiae Minorum Gentium* (4 vols, Harleian Soc., 37–40, 1894–6), II, pp. 807–10.

³⁰ Hall (ed.), *Descriptive catalogue of miscellaneous charters*, p. 35.

³¹ Information from George Redmonds.

³² Hall (ed.), *Descriptive catalogue* (3rd volume), pp. 137–38.

³³ D. Hey, *Historic Hallamshire* (2002), pp. 58–9.

boundary here, and another deed of 1316 records 'all that messuage, with the outbuildings land and tenements at le Spouthous ... in the territory of Onesacre in Bradfield'.³⁴

Some farms in this group are evidenced by surnames long before they were recorded as place-names. Swinnock Hall, which was first mentioned by name in 1582, referred either to a burnt oak or one that was somehow associated with swine, but the surname is recorded much earlier.³⁵ Thomas de Swynok appeared as a witness to five local deeds between 1309 and 1332³⁶ and John Swynok paid 6d. as a tailor in the Bradfield poll tax returns for 1379. Adam and John de Scwynok were recorded in 1403, John Swinnock in 1416, Thomas de Swinock in 1439, and John Swynok in 1441, long before the first reference to the farmhouse, which survives as a modest nineteenth-century, mock-Jacobean, gabled structure.³⁷ By then it had passed to another family and the Swinnock surname had disappeared.

Another example of the use of surnames in establishing the early history of Pennine farms is Coumes, to the south of the valley formed by the Coumes Brook as it flows towards the Don. Margaret Gelling defined *cumb* as a 'short, broad valley, usually bowl- or trough-shaped with three steeply rising sides',³⁸ a description that fits this south Yorkshire valley perfectly. The manorial book of customary fines notes a Peter de Combes in 1277 and a John del Coumb who surrendered two acres of land in le Coumbes in 1339.³⁹ Forty years later, John de Combe paid 4d. poll tax. John Harrison's survey of 1637 noted other properties close by with the names Tagglands, Taggland Ing, Taggland Wood and the Taggstons. The relevant English Place-Name Society volume has no reference to these names before the seventeenth century and its editor suggested that their source was teg, a young sheep in its second year. Yet the manorial book of customary fines records a Thomas Tegg who was admitted to half a rood of land in this neighbourhood in 1284.⁴⁰ Succeeding generations of this family (whose surname may have started as a nickname from a sheep) appear regularly in the records centuries before the first references to the minor place-names. A John Tagge witnessed a deed at Bradfield in 1341 and Richard Tagge of Worrall held land in that hamlet in 1350. Richard Tagge and Magota Tagge paid their poll tax in 1379, Richard Tagg witnessed a deed in Westmondhalgh in 1403, and John Tag and Elizabeth Tag appeared before the manorial court in 1440–1.⁴¹ The Taggs were farming at Hawkesworth Head, further south in the chapelry of Bradfield in the sixteenth century,⁴² but they had disappeared from this neighbourhood by the time that the hearth tax was levied in 1672.

³⁴ J. Hunter, revised A. Gatty, *Hallamshire* (1869), p. 470; Hall (ed.), *Descriptive catalogue ... Wheat Collection*, pp. 9–10.

³⁵ Smith, *West Riding*, I, p. 239.

³⁶ Hall (ed.), *Descriptive catalogue ... Wheat Collection*, pp. 9–13.

³⁷ T. W. Hall, *A descriptive catalogue of land-charters and court rolls from the Bosville and the Lindsay Collections* (1930), pp. 120; Hunter, *Hallamshire*, p. 471; Scott-Gatty, 'Records', p. 290; Hall (ed.), *Descriptive catalogue of Sheffield manorial records*, p. 26.

³⁸ Gelling and Cole, *Landscape of place-names*,

pp. 103–9.

³⁹ Scott-Gatty, 'Records', pp. 257, 261.

⁴⁰ Ronksley (ed.), *Exact and perfect survey*, pp. 322–3; Smith, *West Riding*, I, p. 242; Scott-Gatty, 'Records', p. 258.

⁴¹ Hall (ed.), *Descriptive catalogue ... Wheat collection*, p. 14; id., *Sheffield manorial records*, p. 198; id., *Descriptive catalogue of miscellaneous charters*, pp. 7, 33; id., *Descriptive catalogue of land-charters and court rolls*, p. 120.

⁴² Hall (ed.), *Descriptive catalogue (3rd volume)* p. 17.

III

In researching the landscape and the social and economic history of a locality, one of the historian's first tasks is to identify the administrative and tenurial arrangements. Westmondhalgh bierlow was defined by the River Don in the east, the deep Ewden Valley to the north, and by moorland to the west and south. Unlike the neighbouring Waldershelf bierlow to the north, it contained no sub-manors; the whole of its territory lay within the manor of Sheffield. Bierlow was an Old Norse term for a township that was also used in other parts of the West Riding and Westmond seems to have been derived from an Old Norse personal name.⁴³ A *halgh* was a nook of land and the term was sometimes used in an administrative sense to denote a territory that was detached from the main unit.⁴⁴

The huge manor of Sheffield was divided into four sokes, including that of Bradfield, in which Westmondhalgh lay. The lord held no demesne or forestland in this bierlow, nor were any granges established by abbeys or priories. Instead, the land was farmed by small freeholders and copyholders with security of tenure. Our earliest evidence of settlement comes both from deeds and the manorial book of customary fines. It was common practice for farmers to hold some of their land by freehold and the rest by copyhold. Copyholders could bequeath their property to their heirs upon payment of an entry fine, a transaction that was entered into the manor court rolls, and by the late middle ages the entry fines were fixed 'by ancient custom'. Copyholders had the right to fell and use any wood that grew on their own lands, to dig and sell any coal, slate or stone that lay under their lands, and to get stone, turf, clods, earth and clay from the commons.⁴⁵

The tenures of the copyholders were sometimes recorded as either 'hastler' or 'mattock' land. Thus, in 1398 Thomas Locksley held a 'plot of Mattockland called Gilson land' in Dwarriden and in 1500 Thomas Morehouse surrendered a tenement and a bovat of hastler land in Westmondhalgh. The tenants of hastler land – a term probably derived from the Latin word for a spear – were the ones from whom the various officers such as the constable were chosen. They were the occupiers of the ancient farms. By contrast, mattock land took its name from the tool used for grubbing up small assarts or intakes.⁴⁶

The typical Hallamshire farmer was a smallholder with generous common rights on the local moors and often a second occupation to improve his standard of living. Of the 253 married couples or single persons who paid the 1379 poll tax in the soke of Bradfield 236 paid the basic rate of 4*d.*, thirteen paid 6*d.* and four paid 12*d.*⁴⁷ Likewise, the lay subsidy returns of 1545–6 show that the district had a high proportion of householders who were taxed on small amounts of land.⁴⁸ The moorland farms in this part of the south Pennines were very different from those in County Durham, where farm sizes varied considerably and some were many hundreds of acres in extent, and different again from the southern two-thirds of Bilsdale on the North York Moors, where Rievaulx Abbey established a chain of granges.⁴⁹

⁴³ Smith, *West Riding*, I, p. 229.

⁴⁴ Gelling and Cole, *Landscape of place-names*, pp. 123–33.

⁴⁵ D. Hey, *The fiery blades of Hallamshire: Sheffield and its neighbourhood, 1660–1740* (1991), pp. 49–53.

⁴⁶ Scott-Gatty, 'Records', pp. 268, 301; for a discussion

of hastler land see Hey, *Historic Hallamshire*, pp. 20–1.

⁴⁷ Fenwick (ed.), *Poll Taxes*, III, pp. 317–19.

⁴⁸ R. B. Smith, *Land and Politics in the England of Henry VIII* (1970), pp. 120–22.

⁴⁹ Dunsford and Harris, 'Colonization' pp. 34–56; McDonnell, 'Medieval assarting hamlets', pp. 269–73.

Neither the soke nor the bierlow were the units where decisions about farming arrangements were made. In this type of countryside on the edge of the Pennines, where settlements were scattered, as in wood-pasture districts elsewhere, the hamlet was the unit that mattered. The popular meaning of hamlet is a small group of farmsteads and cottages, but the term was also used in a more technical sense to describe a small, compact area with its own communal fields and common. These hamlets do not feature much in surviving records, though occasionally their inhabitants brought their agreed rules and regulations about farming practices to the manor court for ratification. The memory of some of these hamlets survived well into Victorian times, for the first editions of the six-inch Ordnance Survey map often mark their boundaries, long after their townfields and commons had gone. Hamlets were ancient institutions. The Yorkshire folios of Domesday Book are not very informative but within the soke of Bradfield they name small estates at Onesacre, Worrall, Holdworth and Ughill, all of which were regarded as hamlets in later centuries. Onesacre and Worrall lay in the south-eastern part of Westmondhalgh bierlow and it is reasonable to think that the other two hamlets to the northwest – Brightholmlee and Wigtwizzle – were amongst the 16 berewicks of Hallamshire that were noted, but not named, in Domesday Book.

Each of the hamlets in the Pennine foothills of south-west Yorkshire had one or two communal townfields, where oats, and occasionally other cereals, were grown in selions, or strips. From the sixteenth century onwards, local farmers began to agree on piecemeal enclosure schemes, which replaced the old arrangements. Just to the north of Westmondhalgh bierlow, for instance, in 1674 the townfield at Midhope was enclosed by the agreement of the six farmers who held land within it.⁵⁰ We usually have to rely on occasional references in scattered records, such as ‘a messuage in Worall and an oxgang in the fields of Worall’ in 1350,⁵¹ ‘a dole lying in Onesacre towne field, 1a. 1r. 1p.’ in 1637,⁵² or ‘an acre of land lying in two selions in the Field of Brightholme Lee’ in 1568.⁵³ Further information about the Brightholmlee townfield, which lay immediately west of the group of farmsteads at the centre of the hamlet, is provided by Harrison’s survey of the manor of Sheffield in 1637. Martin Smilter was the tenant of a 20-acre farm, which included: ‘the well acre lying in Bright holme lee Towne’s field 1a. 1r. 4p., a dole under Lee Knowle in the Towne field 3r. 36 $\frac{2}{5}$ p., a dole lying in Leewood 3r. 36p., a dole in the Lee wood head 24 $\frac{2}{5}$ p., dead man’s halfe acre lying in Townefield 3r. 2p., a rood land in Townefield (arable) 2r., another rood land in the Townfield 1r. 37 $\frac{1}{5}$ p., a dole in Towne field (arable) 3r. 20p., a nooke of wood ground lying in Lee wood in Townefield 1r. 8p.,’ a total of 6 acres and 38 perches. His neighbour, Dioneý Gillett, tenanted a smallholding of 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ acres, including 3a. 1r and 27p. in: ‘a Dole in the Little field (arable) ... 1a. or. 20 $\frac{3}{10}$ p., another Dole in the little field (arable) 2r. 19 $\frac{2}{5}$ p., a Dole lying in Bright holme Lee Towne field 3r. 10 $\frac{3}{10}$ p., another Dole in the Townfield 3r. 17p.’⁵⁴

The most detailed information about the workings of these small arable townfields comes from Wigtwizzle, the westerly hamlet in the bierlow. In a topographical survey of the Bradfield

⁵⁰ East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, DDBM/14/8, 9.

⁵¹ T. W. Hall (ed.), *A descriptive catalogue of early charters relating to lands in and near Sheffield* (1938), p. 17.

⁵² Ronksley (ed.), *Exact and perfect survey*, p. 323.

⁵³ Hall (ed.), *Sheffield manorial records*, p. 128.

⁵⁴ Ronksley (ed.), *Exact and perfect survey*, pp. 324–28.

district of 1741, John Wilson, the antiquarian and owner of Broomhead Hall, recorded 'The doles which belong to my farm at Wigtwisle situate in the Byer Dole in Townfields of Wigtwisle'.⁵⁵ The Wilsons had owned property there since at least 1422 and in 1623 had inherited Wigtwizzle Hall through marriage. John Wilson had 39 doles, each of which had different neighbours on either side. He noted:

N.B. That the said fields are in five parts, out of which I have two ... Every dole that lyeth lengthways in the said fields, the North or North West Reyn or Bank belongeth to it, and every dole that lyeth crossways in the said fields the West Reyn belongeth to it.

These reins or banks acted as the headlands. He continued:

Two parts of the wast land or mean [i.e. common, not demesne] ground in the aforesaid Townfields belongeth to me. By having two parts in the said fields we put into the same or such of them as are pastured, twice as many beasts or sheep. ... the times for putting joyst [agist] or other beasts into the same being on May Day and for taking the same out again on Michaelmas Day; the sheep to be put into the same on Michaelmas Day and to be taken out again at Lady day.

He then explained how the fields were cultivated on a rotation basis:

In the said Fields in Twelve takings up of plowable Land; one of which is every year new broke or riven up with the plow; so that it is twelve years in going about before the same part comes to be plowed again. And one of these parts so taken up is to be plowed four years and then laid down again; by which means it happens that they always have four parts of the twelve corn every year and the other eight pasture.⁵⁶

IV

It seems likely that the townfields were associated with the older settlements and that individual farms were created within the hamlet territories in the years leading up to the disasters of the early fourteenth century.⁵⁷ Wigtwizzle was 'Wicga's river fork', a place-name derived from an Old English personal name attached to the confluence of two streams flowing down to the Ewden Beck.⁵⁸ A William Wigtwesulle was a juror for the soke of Bradfield in 1441, but this is the last reference that we have to the surname.⁵⁹ Only the small cluster of households, described by John Wilson in 1741 as four messuages and a cottage, had doles in the townfields, but the other farms that were scattered within the hamlet shared with them the extensive

⁵⁵ The meaning of 'Byer Dole' is unclear: it may be a reference to the doles that belonged to the bierlow, i.e. the communal doles of the township.

⁵⁶ SA, Ronksley Collection, 11924 *et seq.*, transcribed in C. F. Innocent, 'The field system of Wigtwizzle', *THAS* 2 (1924), pp. 276–8. The Wigtwizzle townfields are now completely covered by a conifer plantation and some older deciduous trees.

⁵⁷ An inquisition *post mortem* of Thomas Lord

Furnival in 1332 referred to the decay of population and an inability to find tenants in his lordship of Hallamshire; E. Curtis, 'Sheffield in the fourteenth century: two Furnival inquisitions', *THAS* 1, pt i (1914), pp. 31–53.

⁵⁸ Smith, *West Riding*, I, p. 229

⁵⁹ Hall (ed.), *Descriptive catalogue of miscellaneous charters*, p. 33.



FIGURE 4. Bar Dike, the south-eastern boundary of Wigtwizzle hamlet.

Photo: author.

ditch. Bar Dike has always been interpreted as a Romano-British or early Anglian earthwork, comparable with the Roman Rig in South Yorkshire or the Grey Ditch in north Derbyshire, but it has no obvious connection to either of these or to any other linear earthwork and it does not fit into a wider system of defences. No dating evidence has been found from the limited archaeological surveys that have been made. In 1741 John Wilson noted that the ‘large ditch called Bardike’ was then a boundary between Wigtwizzle and Smallfield commons and that ‘the horseway from Broomhead to Sheffield and Nether Bradfield lies through it.’⁶¹ This ancient bridleway was the one that was turnpiked as ‘Mortimer’s Road’ in the 1770s and which still separates the cultivated land from the moors.

Harrison’s survey of the manor in 1637 also makes it clear that Bar Dike separated the moorland commons of Wigtwizzle and Cowell (which formed part of the hamlet of Smallfield),⁶² so the question arises as to whether this was an ancient ditch that was re-used as a boundary or whether the dike was constructed in the medieval period for this purpose. The name Bar Dike has been taken to mean a defensive structure, but Kenneth Cameron notes that in the

⁶¹ SA, Ronksley Collection, 1541.

⁶² G. Scurfield, ‘Seventeenth-century Sheffield and its environs’, *Yorkshire Archaeological J.* 58 (1986),

pp. 147–71, which reconstructs the lost map that accompanied Harrison’s survey.



FIGURE 5. The earthwork that formed the north-western boundary of Wigtwizzle hamlet

Photo: author.

Derbyshire part of the Peak District (which borders on the soke of Bradfield), the Celtic word *barr*, meaning 'top, crest', referred to steep ridges and that the eighteenth-century antiquarian, Samuel Pegge of Beauchief Hall, had observed that that it was used in the local dialect to mean a horseway up a steep hill. Pegge stated that: 'In the Peak of Derbyshire all those steep and precipitous roads which run down from the cliffs to the valleys, where the villages are generally plac'd, they call Bars, whence Bakewell Bar, Beely Bar, Baslow Bar, Rowsley Bar, etc.'⁶³ This description fits Bar Dike exactly: it is at the highest point on an ancient bridleway.

The other ditch further north has attracted less attention, perhaps because it does not have a name attached to it, but it is similar in style to Bar Dike and is much longer, stretching for three-quarters of a mile or so above the Ewden Beck valley (Figure 5). In 1741 John Wilson wrote, 'I take the ditch on the adverse or north side of this Common of Wightwisle, lying by a close belonging to the Duke of Norfolk called the Lea, to have been thrown up as the encampment for the army from the North or the Northumberland army'.⁶⁴ But the ditch stops at the western side of the route that Wilson supposed it defended, and why would a commander split his troops into two groups a mile apart? The military explanation does not seem credible.

⁶³ K. Cameron, *The place-names of Derbyshire* (3 vols, 1959), I, pp. 40–1.

⁶⁴ SA, Ronksley Collection, 1543.

We are left with the question of why Wigtwizzle Common did not extend northwards beyond this earthwork, down the slope to the natural boundary created by Ewden Beck. The answer is provided by the final note in John Harrison's manorial survey in 1637, which seems to have been added as an afterthought, for it bears no relation to what he had written before in his account. It reads:

There is a close lying in the soke and parish of Bradfeild called the side taken out of Wiggtwisell Common and is my Lord Marshalls as belonging to the mannor of Sheffield, but is now occupied to Uden, that is part of Boulster stone lordshipp: This peice lyeth betweene Uden water and Boulsterstone Lordshipp North & Wiggtwisell Common South East & West: And cont[ains] 131a. or. 22p.⁶⁵

This matches the size of Moor Side, the name now given to the slope between the earthwork and the Ewden Beck. Bolsterstone lordship was a medieval sub-manor that lay within the adjoining bierlow of Waldershelf in the soke of Bradfield; its early lords were knights who failed to establish dynasties. It seems that when Thomas de Furnival confirmed grants to the inhabitants of the outlying parts of Hallamshire some special arrangement was made to include the southern bank of the Ewden Beck within Bolsterstone lordship and that this considerable ditch was dug to mark the otherwise vague boundary. Bar Dike could have been dug to mark the division between the Wigtwizzle and Smallfield commons about the same time.

In the west Wigtwizzle Common extended more than three miles over the moors to the natural escarpment known as Howden Edge, high above the Derwent Valley, which still separates Yorkshire from Derbyshire. Another ditch (which now marks part of the boundary of The National Trust's High Peak estate) had to be dug to separate the lord of Hallamshire's sheep pastures from the commons of Wigtwizzle and Agden. Harrison's 1637 survey noted:

Holden ffarme ... an outpasture for sheep being moorish Ground called the Dayne lying betweene a parte of little Holden in the use of Robert Barber in parte and Wiggtwisell Common in parte and Boulsterstone Lordship in part east and Boulsterstone Lordship.⁶⁶

This ditch is not as deep as the other two but it remains a prominent feature.

To answer the question posed earlier, it appears then that the medieval inhabitants of Wigtwizzle dug deep ditches to mark the northern, south-eastern and western boundaries of their extensive common. No ditch was needed in the east because the cultivated lands between Broomhead and Old Booth lay next to the common, immediately beyond the ancient bridleway. The other hamlets in Westmondhalgh bierlow – Brightholmlee, Onesacre and Worrall – also had large commons, but they were not as extensive as Wigtwizzle's.

⁶⁵ Ronksley (ed.), *Exact and perfect survey*, p. 382.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 299. Similar linear earthworks include the medieval boundary of the manor of Glossop within the Forest of the Peak across Bleaklow, which now forms

part of the Pennine Way, and the head-dike on Alston Moor, illustrated in Winchester, *Harvest of the Hills*, p. 54.

V

John Harrison's manorial survey of 1637 mentions eight other small farms by name in the central part of Westmondhalgh bierlow: Bitholmes, Coldwell, Foldrings, Hill House, Hob Lane House, The Poggs, Rocher, and Wharncliffe Side. Four of these have no earlier documentary references, but an Adam de Bithemes witnessed a deed in the bierlow in 1330,⁶⁷ Hill House was recorded in 1492, Rocher in 1566, and the Poggs was described in an earlier survey of 1611 as 'One house three baies, two parlars, one chamber, one barne, three baies in decay, one hay house, one bay in decay and another house fallen downe', so it must have been already old.⁶⁸ Poggs Farm covered nearly 57 acres in 1637 and was the largest of this group but it is now lost under the Broomhead reservoir. This group lies close to several farms that were documented in the middle ages but as no surnames were derived from them – Bitholmes has no other references – we cannot say how old they are.

During the seventeenth century the timber-framed buildings within the bierlow were replaced by stone halls, farmhouses, cottages and outbuildings. Wigtwizzle Hall, which was demolished in 1935, was the earliest. It consisted of a hall, western wing and three-storeyed porch bearing a 1610 datestone, but the timber-framed eastern wing, which provided the kitchen and service rooms, was not encased in stone until later. In the middle decades of the seventeenth century Nicholas Stead and his son, Thomas, built the similarly gabled Onesacre Hall in two stages and used some of the old cruck timbers in the roof.⁶⁹ The Hallamshire cruck buildings date from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth century and several survive in cottages and barns in Westmondhalgh bierlow; that at Raynor Farm has been dated by dendrochronology to 1593.⁷⁰ When hearths were taxed in 1672, Broomhead Hall had eight, Onesacre Hall and Wigtwizzle Hall six each, three other houses had four hearths, and another four had three, so it was possible to earn a good living on the margins of cultivation.⁷¹ Other surviving seventeenth-century houses include Rocher, Old Booth, and a range at another farm in Wigtwizzle. The house that Thomas Hawkesworth, yeoman, built at Dwarriden in 1693 has been demolished but a photograph shows it as a L-shaped building whose rooms matched those that were recorded in his inventory in 1728: kitchen, house, parlour, little parlour, dining room and three chambers above.⁷² Like his neighbours, Hawkesworth concentrated on rearing livestock, but some of the farmers had an extra source of income. Nicholas Downing of Raynor House (died 1699) was described as a yeoman but he also had a blacksmith's 'bellows, iron, tongs, stithie [anvil], etc.';⁷³ George Thompson of Brightholmlee (died 1729) was a fellmonger;⁷⁴ and Daniel Roberts of Brightholmlee (died 1699) was not only a farmer but a cloth maker with looms, shears, a

⁶⁷ Hall, *Descriptive catalogue ... Wheat collection*, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Smith, *West Riding*, I, p. 235, 226; SA, Ronsley Collection, 158.

⁶⁹ S. Jones, 'Stone houses in the vernacular tradition in south Yorkshire, 1600–1700', *Archaeological J.*, 137 (1980), pp. 386–87.

⁷⁰ Hey, *Historic Hallamshire*, pp. 92–4.

⁷¹ Hey *et al.* (eds), *West Riding Hearth Tax*, pp. 392–3.

⁷² B. Duffield *et al.*, *The archive photographs series: Around Stocksbridge, the second selection* (1998), p. 34; Borthwick Institute, will and inventory, Doncaster Deanery (proved Feb. 1727/8).

⁷³ Borthwick Institute, will and inventory, Doncaster Deanery (proved May 1699).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, will and inventory, Doncaster Deanery (proved June 1729).

dying lead, etc. and woollen and linen cloth in two of his chambers or on his tenters outside to rival the yeomen-clothiers in the heart of the West Riding woollen district further north.⁷⁵

The expansion of the cutlery industry had not started when Thomas Jefferys published his county map of Yorkshire in 1772, the earliest map to show the farmsteads of Westmondhalgh bierlow (Figure 1). The settlement pattern hardly differed from that described in Harrison's survey of 1637 and it was basically that which had been established before the Black Death. A few new farms were built on the former commons after the enclosure award of 1826, but the limits of cultivation in the west had already been reached. In 1819, Joseph Hunter, a regular visitor to Broomhead Hall, wrote,

All without the [ancient] enclosures was barren, or produced only a scant feeding of grass to the sheep which ranged at large upon these hills. Here and there a few stunted trees were to be found; but the fern and the heath and the foxglove seemed to be the plants to which the soil was most congenial, mixed indeed with the slender wires of the bilberry, the cow-berry, or the more highly valued cranberry ... The district is now passing into the state of general cultivation; such parts, I mean, as are capable of being made productive ... The inhabitants are as rugged as their soil.⁷⁶

The huge moor that had served as Wigtwizzle Common to the west of the turnpike road remains intact. It was converted into a grouse moor and has long been carefully managed for that purpose.⁷⁷ Most of the successors to the medieval farmsteads survive on the hillsides, stretching up from the river valleys; some are still working farms, others have been converted into modern residences, and a few were demolished when the Broomhead and More Hall Reservoirs were constructed along the Ewden Valley in the 1920s and '30s. When the Rev. Alfred Gatty visited Dwarriden in 1884 he found that the Rimington-Wilsons had already planted some larches, Scots firs and pines,⁷⁸ but this small plantation was extended all along the banks of the reservoirs once they were completed in 1933. The narrow, winding lanes retain a strong sense of the medieval holloways that linked the farms and they make a sharp contrast to the straight roads that were created across the former commons by the parliamentary enclosure commissioners. This is an ancient landscape that is easy to read once the documentary evidence has been thoroughly analysed and the ancient administrative arrangements understood.

⁷⁵ Ibid., will and inventory, Doncaster Deanery (proved May 1699).

⁷⁶ Hunter, *Hallamshire*, p. 459.

⁷⁷ D. Hey, 'The grouse moors of the Peak District', in

P. S. Barnwell and M. Palmer (eds), *Landscape history after Hoskins*, III, *Post-medieval landscape* (2007), pp. 68–79.

⁷⁸ Gatty, *A life at one living*, p. 205.