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Deserted Medieval Villages: Determining  
whether landscape was a significant  
factor in the depopulation and desertion  
of medieval villages within the East  
Riding of Yorkshire

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## Definitions

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Berewick(s):	A detached or separate section of farmland which belonged to a medieval manor and was reserved exclusively for the lord's personal use (Merriam Webster, 2019)
Croft(s):	A holding of land (Muir, 2004, 258).
Earthwork(s):	Archaeological remains, typically beneath the grounds surface. These are typically identified via marks, changes in colour or changes in the topography of the grounds surface. Studying earthworks is an integral part of non-invasive archaeology and their study can lead to a better understanding of village and building layout and structure. Earthworks tend to be mapped when they are studied (Muir, 2004, 79).
Messuage(s):	A house - typically with outbuildings and land.
Moraine(s):	A mass of rocks and/or sediment deposited by a glacier.
Population/Village Shift:	The movement of people from once village site to another. This is not limited to displaced villiens joining pre-existing villages. Displaced populations may move location and relocate their settlement elsewhere. This usually happens for economic hardship but can occur for a number of reasons.



Ridge and Furrow: A corduroy-like texture on the grounds surface which can be found in fields. This is most easily seen when the sun is low in the sky or when snows and subsequently melts. These undulations are the remains of an archaic ploughing system which allowed for more drainage around the planted crops. Ridge and Furrow farming is very common at the village sites. It appears to have been the most popular form of ploughing arable land in the medieval period.

Toft(s): In most medieval villages houses were arranged along a main road through the village. A toft was a narrow strip of land that ran behind the houses, typically at a right angle to the main road. These strips were often the same approximate length and ended at a bank lane when ran parallel to the main road. Each house was a free-standing structure and not terraced and as such stood upon its own toft. A toft would often be used for farming small animals such as poultry or for the farming of vegetable and herbs.

Turbary: The ancient legal right to cut peat or turf for fuel. Alternatively, the act of cutting peat or turf for fuel.

Villien(s): A villager. Someone who resides in a village.

Wapentake: A subdivision of certain northern and midland counties in England.

## ~ Chapter One: Introduction ~

### 1.1 Aims and outcomes

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine whether landscape was a significant factor in the depopulation and desertion of medieval villages within the East Riding of Yorkshire.

In a previous study on the subject, the author determined that the majority of desertions within the East Riding of Yorkshire were due to the enclosure of common land (Coulson, 2019). This study aims to view deserted medieval villages from a landscape-oriented perspective. This paper will analyse how significant the landscape was in the depopulation of the villages of the East Riding and will compare and contrast different theories and factors which led to the desertion of these once bustling villages.

### 1.2 What is a deserted medieval village?

This study defines a Deserted Medieval Village as such: A Deserted Medieval Village, or DMV, is a settlement that was conceived during the medieval period and eventually succumbed to significant depopulation. Despite the name of the phenomenon, '*Deserted*' Medieval Villages do not need to be entirely 'deserted' in order to be classified as such.

A settlement need only have a significant depopulation for it to be classified as a DMV. For example, say a settlement has upwards of 50 residents living in a planned village at its peak and over time the state of this settlement devolves into a small of residents living in scattered farms across the site. This settlement would qualify as a DMV as the settlement no longer resembles a nucleated village as it once had done. For further discussion on the definition and characteristics of deserted villages see Jones 2010.

### 1.3 Further information about DMVs

Though the structure of most DMVs was heavily dependent on the landscape in which they were based, many of them feature crofts which were surrounded by an enveloped boundary bank. Most villages were surrounded and embraced by these boundary banks which helped indicate the boundaries of the settlement. Remains of ridge and furrow farming can also be found in fields surrounding many of these villages. These structural features are present in most of the DMVs across England and their presence in earthwork remains has aided academics in identifying lost villages.

The villages of lowland Yorkshire, much like the villages of the Midlands, had been created in the act of settlement and subsequent acts of clearing forests and fields. This was primarily done for the purpose of growing corn. Even in areas which provided the resources for other forms of production, such as basket making, salt making or charcoal burning, corn was still grown in large quantities. There are many reasons for corn to have been grown in such large quantities. Firstly, corn was a staple of the villager's diet and secondly, corn was an economic necessity for any village wanting to thrive. The trading of corn acted as a financial failsafe should other trade avenues fail (Beresford, 1951, 474-475).

Most of the population of Yorkshire in the Middle Ages was concentrated in its villages. Between the years of 1100 and 1350 the number of villages was stable. If one compares the figures for existing villages in the Exchequer Clerks list in 1086 with the Exchequer Notes of the fourteenth century, we see little change and deviation between the two. Of course, there are some exceptions to this observation; notably around the Ouse marshes some forest hamlets appeared, beyond this however, the years between 1100 and 1350 spawned few new settlements (Beresford, 1951, 475).

In contrast, the fifteenth century saw villages that were present during Domesday begin to disappear entirely. Gradually, farms established since the Dark Ages were abandoned and turned back to grass. The churches lost their congregations and fell into disuse and disrepair. Villeins would leave their cottages, nature would reclaim the streets and roads as sheep began to graze amongst the ruins of the once thriving village. These

fields would become, and remain, as pasture. This process was one of gradual and slow decline (Beresford, 1951, 475).

The dominant cause of desertion in the East Riding of Yorkshire was due to the sheep enclosures of 1450/1550, though the effects of the enclosures could take centuries to be fully realised. For more information on settlement contraction and depopulation see Neave, 1990. Though there were other causes for desertion in the region, such examples are rare in comparison to the sheep enclosure related depopulations (Beresford, 1951, 476). The '*Harrying of the North*' seems to have been responsible for the disappearance of some villages. This is evidenced by notes on the Yorkshire Domesday which show that some villages were unidentifiable to the editors (Beresford, 1951, 476).

The villages that had already lost their open field systems by the reign of Elizabeth can be broadly divided into two classes:

1. The enclosure was a result of an agreement between the property holders of the village, who decided to change from farming scattered strips of land to farming compact hedged fields. This change may have occurred as people began to use this new technique of land management as it resulted in greater productivity and profit.
2. Animal husbandry. This caused a substantial reduction in the labour force of the farm. The need for many husbandry men had long passed. Due to this, enclosures, and the changes to farming they were responsible for, contributed significantly to the depopulation of villages.

The church was also responsible for a small number of village desertions. As the Cistercians acquired land through gifts, they created large single land holdings called '*granges*'. This process was done with no consideration of any other laymen. The previous tenants were removed, sometimes their buildings demolished, and the church would claim the land and use it as they saw fit. In some respect, a Cistercian grange was not '*deserted*' as it was still operated and farmed by the conversi, however, it did mean that these granges now ceased to be the villages they once were (Beresford, 1951, 476).

#### 1.4 Past studies of DMVs

The academic study and recognition of DMVs, although now over 70 years old, is a relatively young area of academic interest when compared to other areas of historical study. The genesis of the modern study of DMVs was met with much scepticism and debate as to its importance, historical relevance, credibility and even the existence of DMVs as a phenomenon. Eminent and successful academics at the time criticised and questioned the growing interest and study into the phenomenon of DMVs.

Influential academic, Tawney, stated in 1912, that while he recognised the existence of DMVs and that depopulation occurred in the late medieval period, he believed that there was no phenomenon of desertion and that all the settlements considered to be DMVs were just isolated incidents which bore little to no historical significance (Tawney, 1912, 261).

Though it is true that the academic significance of DMVs was questioned in the twentieth century, interest in DMVs reaches further back into the past. In 1770, Oliver Goldsmith created his famous poem '*The Deserted Village*'. This poem recounts the demise of a once bustling settlement. The poem details that the village met its end at the hands of greedy landlords who saw it more fortuitous and profitable to turn their land to pasture for the grazing of sheep, rather than to allow the residents to continue to live and farm the land. A stanza of the poem reads:

*“The man of wealth and pride,  
Takes up space that poor supplied;  
Space for his lake, his parks extended bounds,  
Space for his horses, equipage and hounds”*

- Goldsmith (1770, 275-278).

The first published excavation of a DMV site was of Woodperry in Oxfordshire. This resulted in the recovery of a quantity of Roman remains. This excavation was published in 1847 and records the excavation of the

church, church yard and a number of smaller structures on the site (Wilson, 1847).

The existence of DMVs was known to contemporaries in their own time; but only in the late 1940s and early 1950s had the subject gained any sort of legitimacy or academic interest (Allison, 1970, 7). A common misconception around DMVs is that the plague was responsible for the desertion of many of the villages, however, when put under scrutiny this does not hold up. Sir John Clapham wrote in 1949: *“one might have expected the Great Pestilence [...] to have led to much abandonment of village sites. Abandonments following bad times, or a shrinking population is met with fairly often on the continent; but there is little evidence of it in Britain”* (Clapham, 1949, 197).

Professor Maurice Beresford was a key individual who helped the study of DMVs gain legitimacy. As the key academic figure in the field of studying DMVs, he published his work *‘The Lost Villages of England’* in 1954. This publication was an immediate success and helped to facilitate the popularisation of the subject area. Other notable academics in the field of DMVs are Professor William Hoskins, Professor Barbara English, and Dr Susan Neave.

Hoskins can be credited as being the catalyst for the modern interest in the study of DMVs. Hoskins was, in many ways, a pioneer. He was involved in the study of DMVs since 1938 (Chartres, 2006). Hoskins contributed much to our understanding of DMVs. He released his ground-breaking regional work on DMVs in 1946 called *‘The Deserted Villages of Leicestershire’*. This release detailed a number of villages that Hoskins had personally identified as DMVs and perhaps represents the first substantial published academic work on the study of DMVs (Hoskins, 1946).

Hoskins was older than Beresford and worked on the subject of DMVs around the same time. In 1948 they would work together and upon Hoskin’s death Beresford would largely be the one to carry the torch of academic advancement in the field.

Another notable academic on the topic is Professor Barbara English. English’s bibliography of written works spans many topics and over many years. Her sound understanding of each subject she writes on, and her

eloquent manner of writing has made much of her work essential reading for many would-be historians over the years. English has also contributed to our understanding of DMVs and has worked closely with other academics to create significant works which better our understanding of medieval village life and their inevitable desertions (for example see English, 1985, 1991, 1996 and English & Miller 1991).

Dr Susan Neave's doctoral thesis was a ground-breaking piece of academic literature analysing population decline within the late medieval period (Neave, 1990). Neave has also spent much time working with archaic ordnance survey maps in order to gain a better understanding of the landscape in which our medieval ancestors lived.

While the incredible work of academics in this field should be celebrated, it is also important to recognise that Maurice Beresford is likely the most significant contributor to our understanding of DMVs, and some of his earliest work focuses on the villages of Yorkshire (Beresford, 1952) Beresford is responsible for identifying and mapping the majority of all the DMVs in England and has also contributed many in-depth studies on the features and remains of DMVs.

Beresford's work relied heavily on the tax returns of the medieval period as it was one of the easiest and most reliable ways of identifying the general location, name, and existence of a DMV. Beresford combined his information and interpretations with contemporary documentary evidence and field work in order to facilitate the identification of a DMVs all across England.

Since the genesis of the study of DMVs in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the technology, which is available to us has advanced rapidly, rendering it far easier to analyse these sites. Today we benefit from technological innovations such as: satellite imaging, LIDAR imagery, 3D modelling, geophysical survey, radiographic surveys, and aerial photography to name a few. These luxuries were, predictably, not available to Beresford in the late 1950s, save for aerial photography, which was in its infancy.

Beresford utilised aerial photographs taken by the Royal Air Force during World War Two, as well as the early work of the Cambridge Aerial Photography Unit. The method of using aerial photographs to identify

earthworks and features on the ground is still used today, with access to cameras with superior quality and resolution, access to LIDAR imaging, capturing different wave-lengths of light. Moreover, the invention and public adoption of drones has made it easier for people to take to the skies and look downwards to identify what lies on the grounds surface.

Beresford formed a partnership with Kenneth St Joseph of the Cambridge Aerial Photography Unit, with lists of potential sites provided and flown. This became the backbone of the Deserted Village Research Group Archive, with a selection of the aerial images of key DMV sites accompanied by explanations and analyses published together in '*Medieval England: an aerial survey*' (Beresford & St Joseph, 1958).

The goal of Beresford and St Joseph's work together was to identify areas with DMV significance via aerial photography. Beresford's most well-known contribution to the field is perhaps his work with John Hurst at Wharram Percy, which saw excavations over a 40-year period (Hurst, 1971). At the time, this sparked mass interest in the existence of DMVs. The months and years following the publicisation of this excavation saw an influx of interest, both academic and general in nature.

The establishment of the Deserted Village Research Group (DVRG) sparked a new wave of interest in deserted medieval villages. This group would later be known as the Medieval Village Research Group (MVRG) from 1970-1986 and then as the Medieval Settlement Research Group (MSRG) when it combined with the Moated Sites Research Group in 1987 (Beresford's *Lost Villages*, 2019).

The goal of studying DMVs has changed over time. When the subject area was first established there an overwhelming focus on the reasons for desertion and depopulation. As time has progressed and the discipline has evolved, academic focus has turned to examining village life and how residents lived in these long-lost settlements (Atkin & Tompkins, 1988).

### 1.5 The significance of this study

This study, as previously mentioned in *section 1.1*, will determine whether landscape was a significant factor in the depopulation and desertion of



medieval villages within the East Riding of Yorkshire. This study will focus on the East Riding of Yorkshire which had a desertion rate of 13.4% since 1334. The number of villages recorded in 1334 was 336, 49 of which would become deserted post-1334 (Beresford, 1952, 55).

The actual figures relating to the desertions of the East Riding of Yorkshire can be viewed in figure one. Figure two is a map of the Wapentakes of the East Riding of Yorkshire which will give added geographical context to the information presented in figure one (This figure uses historical boundaries).

<b><u>Villages deserted since 1334</u></b>			
<u>Wapentake</u>	<u>Number of Depopulations (1334)</u>	<u>Total Villages in Wapentake (1334)</u>	<u>Percentage lost (to one decimal place)</u>
Holderness	5	81	6.2%
Harthill	14	98	14.3%
Howden	8	55	14.5%
Buckrose	11	50	22%
Dickering	8	50	16%
Others	3	32	9.4%
<b>Total</b>	49	366	13.4%

Figure one: A table displaying the number of villages deserted after 1334 in the different Wapentakes of the East Riding of Yorkshire. Data taken from Beresford (1952, 54). Percentages calculated independently.



Figure two: A basic map of the Wapentakes of the East Riding of Yorkshire (Coulson, 2019, 7).

Analysing desertion using a landscape centric approach is significant as we may be able to spot certain patterns in desertion on certain landscapes. ‘*Landscape*’ in the context of DMVs refers to the location of the DMVs settlement and is ultimately also a measure of the resources available within the vicinity of the village.

The study area of the East Riding of Yorkshire has been divided into four regions, Holderness, Hull Valley, the Yorkshire Wolds and the Vale of York. These divisions were drawn to illustrate different landscape types. There are around 34 DMVs in Holderness, around 15 in the Hull Valley, approximately 60 in the Yorkshire Wolds and around 17 in the Vale of York.

Holderness is a low lying plain. The fields of this region are typically bounded by drainage ditches, not hedges. Holderness is a wide region which bares very few remarkable landscape features. The region has the highest rate of coastal erosion, losing nearly 2 meters annually to the sea, this

is primarily due to the soft grounds of the region. The soil here is relatively infertile too, making it difficult to grow an abundance of crops.

The Hull Valley, like Holderness, has a close relationship with water as the whole region is characterised by the River Hull. In order to live here residents have had to maintain a policy of drainage and land reclamation. The historical land of the Hull Valley was one of marshes, meres and carrland. This area was more capable of growing crops than Holderness, save for the risk of flood damage to the crops. The Hull Valley was used for salt production due to the saline waters of the region. The remote nature of the valley led to the establishment of religious houses who were responsible for early drainage efforts in the area.

The Yorkshire Wolds was known for having two types of landscape. The first was its high-lands. These were vast rolling areas on the Wolds Tops suitable for arable farming. The second type of landscape in the region were the dry valleys that intersected the rolling High-Wolds landscape. Some of these valleys featured damp, marshy areas within them. Overall, the Wolds is viable for both arable farming and animal husbandry due to its two distinct character types.

The Vale of York features ancient glacial deposits of sand and gravel. The area is quite marshy with most settlements being situated on high or marginal land away from wetland environments. This area is capable of crop growth and has reliable floodplains as opposed to seemingly random flood locations like the Hull Valley.

## ~ Chapter Two: Methodology ~

### 2.1 Introduction to methodology

Before proceeding further into the analysis of whether landscape was a significant factor in the depopulation and desertion of medieval villages within the East Riding of Yorkshire; it is necessary to outline the methodology of this piece. This chapter will outline the sources utilised within the dissertation and will define how they are relevant to the study.

### 2.2 Primary sources

A primary source is most easily defined as: material created during the period in question. Primary evidence gives us an invaluable glimpse into the past and into the minds of our contemporaries. Not all primary sources are exclusively written, though nearly all are documentary. Primary sources are also often illustrations, plans and maps.

Many different classifications of primary sources have been used in this dissertation in order to investigate the case studies presented. These sources include, but are not limited to, deeds, taxation records, maps, quarter sessions and poetry. These have been indispensable in painting a picture of the past and determining whether landscape was a significant factor in the depopulation and desertion of medieval villages within the East Riding of Yorkshire. Deeds have been one of the most useful primary sources for this piece as they not only list the owners of the villages and properties, but they also mention the size of the land holding.

Additionally, a variety of different taxation records feature heavily in this piece. They enable us to view the amount of tax paying residents on a site which enables us to have some idea of the population of a village at different points in time. Muster rolls and military lists can also aid in this analysis and can be used in conjunction with taxation records to paint a clearer picture of residency and population levels of the villages

that are assessed. This dissertation relies primarily on published translations of contemporary documents and tax records.

### 2.3 Secondary sources

Secondary sources are created after the event they record took place.

This dissertation uses numerous examples of secondary literature. Maurice Beresford's works have been cited many times in this paper, particularly his first major publication about the lost villages of England (1952), his work with St Joseph which provides an aerial survey of the DMVs of England (1958, 1977) and Beresford's analysis of historical maps which can be found in his 1957 publication. Susan Neave's work on settlement contraction in the medieval period (1990) has been very useful when formulating this dissertation as it explores the potential causes of Medieval desertion. Specific excavation reports and academic papers on DMVs feature in this paper. Hayfield & Brewster's work on Cowlam (1988), was indispensable when formulating ideas on the villages desertion and English & Miller's work on Eske (1991) was also extremely valuable as it gave an in-depth analysis of the DMV within a landscape context.

### 2.4 Maps

Maps allow historians to better understand how the landscape of the past was structured and how it was used. Though historical maps of DMVs exist, academics often create their own maps in order to clarify a point they are trying to make. When writing about landscapes maps are indispensable. This paper features maps both created independently by the author and taken from other academic works. Some site maps have been taken from excavation reports (Cocroft, Et. Al, 1989), others have been taken from secondary historical studies such as Ostler, 1990. Finally, some maps within this paper have been created by the author using data from secondary sources, such as Siddle, 1967.

## 2.5 Aerial photography

As outlined above, aerial photography was a key tool at the start of the study of DMVs, often done in an attempt to see the earthworks of a village from above. Viewing earthworks in this way allows for them to be seen and understood more clearly. From the skies it is much easier to discern crop markings, earthworks, and discolouration of the earth surface. Much of our knowledge of medieval village structure, besides contemporary documentary evidence, comes from aerial photography (Historic England, 2019a). '*Aerial photography*' is a generalised term which also encompasses LIDAR imaging and other forms of aerial photography which use different wave lengths of light.

LIDAR stand for '*Light Detection and Ranging*'. LIDAR was created in the 1960s with a military application in mind, detecting enemy submarines from the air (Historic England, 2019b). LIDAR is still used today and is still primarily used from the air. However, it is now primarily used to study the surface of the earth in greater detail. LIDAR is frequently used by the Environment Agency Geomatics Group to generate models and maps of the terrain in order to detect flood risk.

In order to participate in LIDAR imaging, the aircraft or UAV equipped with a LIDAR instrument, usually comprised of a laser emitter, a scanner, and a specialised GPS (*Global Positioning System*) receiver; will fly above the target location they intend to scan. The craft will then emit a focused beam of light as a pulsing laser in order to measure the range and topography of the land below (National Ocean Service, 2018). As the pulses of light impact the surface below, a digital model of the topology is generated. This model is highly accurate and comprises of fully rendered three-dimensional data.

There are two different types of LIDAR: topographic and bathymetric. Topographic LIDAR data uses light near the infrared spectrum to analyse the floor below it. This wave-length of light can not penetrate through water but does penetrate through foliage allowing for more accurate renderings of the ground surface (Historic England, 2019b). Figure three is an example of topographic LIDAR imaging. Bathymetric LIDAR data uses a

green wavelength of light to penetrate water and is often used to measure the sea floor and riverbeds (National Ocean Service, 2018).



Figure three: An example of a topographical LIDAR image. This example clearly shows subtle marks in the earth's surface. This allows archaeologists to determine whether a place is archaeologically significant - grid reference SP3571662340 (Houseprices.io lab, 2019)

This paper will use examples of aerial photography, both standard and LIDAR, when assessing DMVs. These photographs give a better idea of the village structure and the landscape in which they are set. Cropmarks, discolouration, and earthworks are easier to see from high altitude so using aerial photography is essential in order for this dissertation to make claims and judgements about the structure of DMVs. This study will use topographic LIDAR due to its ability to penetrate through foliage. This enables us to analyse the landscape of the villages without being obstructed by wooded canopies.

## 2.6 Excavation reports

An excavation report is a document that is created after the completion of an excavation. This report contains all important details about the particular site and what was found there. These reports can also include scientific data such as soil analysis. Excavation reports are not only used to record and preserve the findings of a dig, but they are also used to communicate results of an excavation to the wider public as well as other academics.

This paper uses excavation reports to get a better understanding of DMV remains. This is most noticeable within the discussion of Rotsea. Cocroft, 1989 features excavation report data and maps. These have been used within the paper to further the discussion of village structure and the landscape it is based upon. Hayfield, 1989, has also been cited frequently as it provides in-depth excavation data and useful illustrations and maps.

## 2.7 GIS

GIS stand for '*Geographic Information System*' and is a type of program that generates, manages, and analyses different kinds of data. GIS systems are used to create maps, both two and three dimensional, and incorporate location data so that they can also be georeferenced. GIS software is the industry standard when it comes to mapping and analysis in many fields. GIS is often used as a way for the operator to better understand patterns in the data set they are using. GIS software improves the efficiency of map creation and diagrammatic data presentation (ESRI, 2022)

This piece will use GIS to display the landscape and topology of the villages analysed. In order to create maps with a GIS, a spreadsheet was created which included the data of all the villages within the East Riding of Yorkshire. This spread sheet contained all of the geographical data for these villages, this data was then plotted on a map, creating a map with all the villages of the East Riding of Yorkshire. The study area and sub-boundaries were then drawn on the map and topographical data was layered over the top; this enables us to view the topology of the DMV landscapes.



## 2.8 Dissertation structure

This dissertation will seek to reach its conclusion through splitting the study area into four sections: Holderness, the Hull Valley, the Yorkshire Wolds, and the Vale of York. Each division will have a village which acts as a case study for the region. These will be: Rotsea, Eske, Cowlam and Cotness respectively. These regions were chosen as a way to neatly divide the East Riding into four sections. These boundaries were drawn with multiple considerations in mind. The landscape differences and modern and historical administrative divisions were all considered when these boundaries were drawn. These case studies will then be compared and contrasted, and a conclusion drawn at the end of the piece.

The four regions of Holderness, the Hull Valley, the Yorkshire Wolds and the Vale of York were selected primarily due to the variations, in their respective landscapes and geographical situation. Administrative boundaries were also considered when dissecting the study area into four parts as it made boundaries far easier to draw and to assess. Below is a map which shows the divisionally boundaries of the areas within the East Riding of Yorkshire.

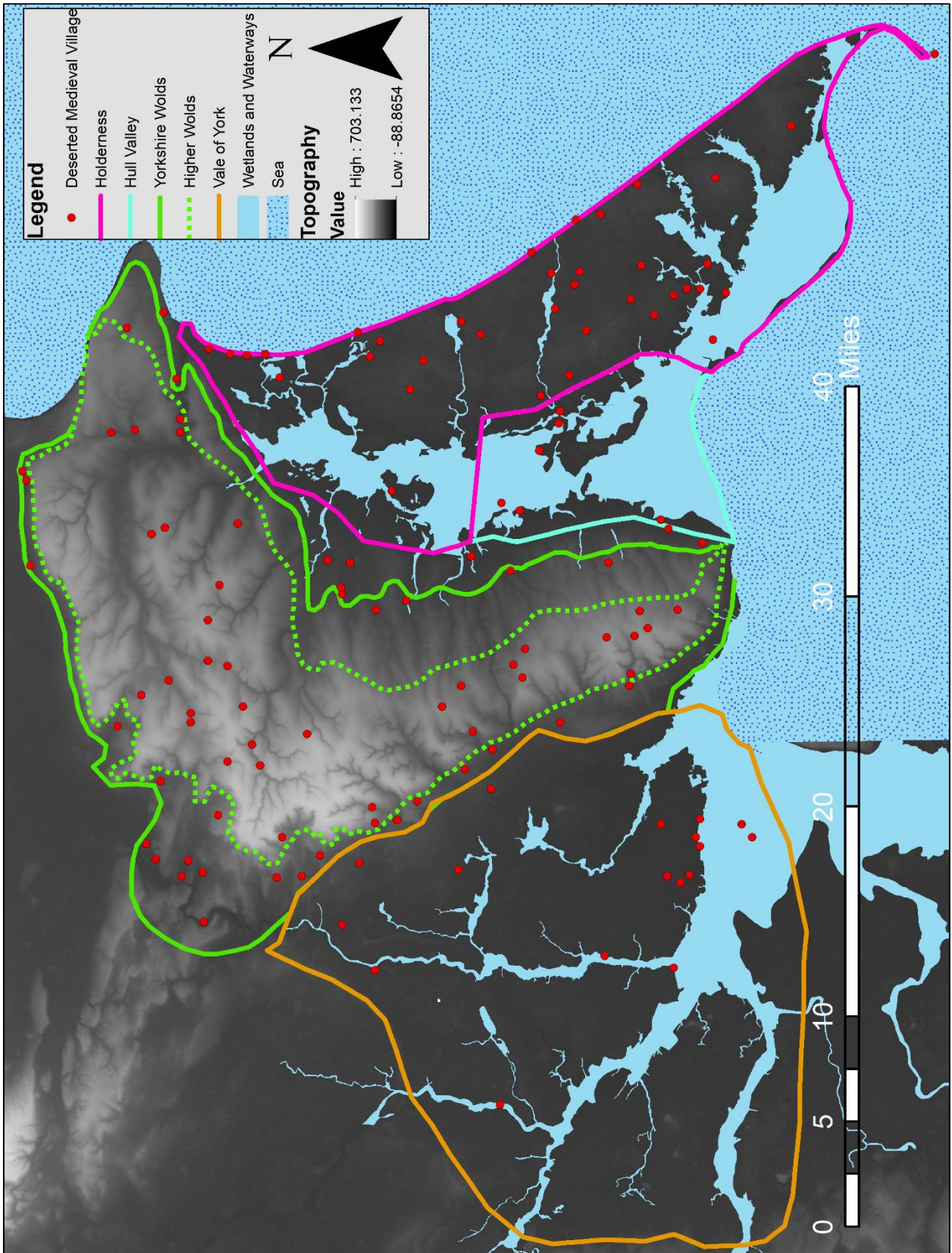


Figure four: A GIS generated map of the East Riding of Yorkshire and the subdivisions within it. The geographical topography of the region is also displayed.

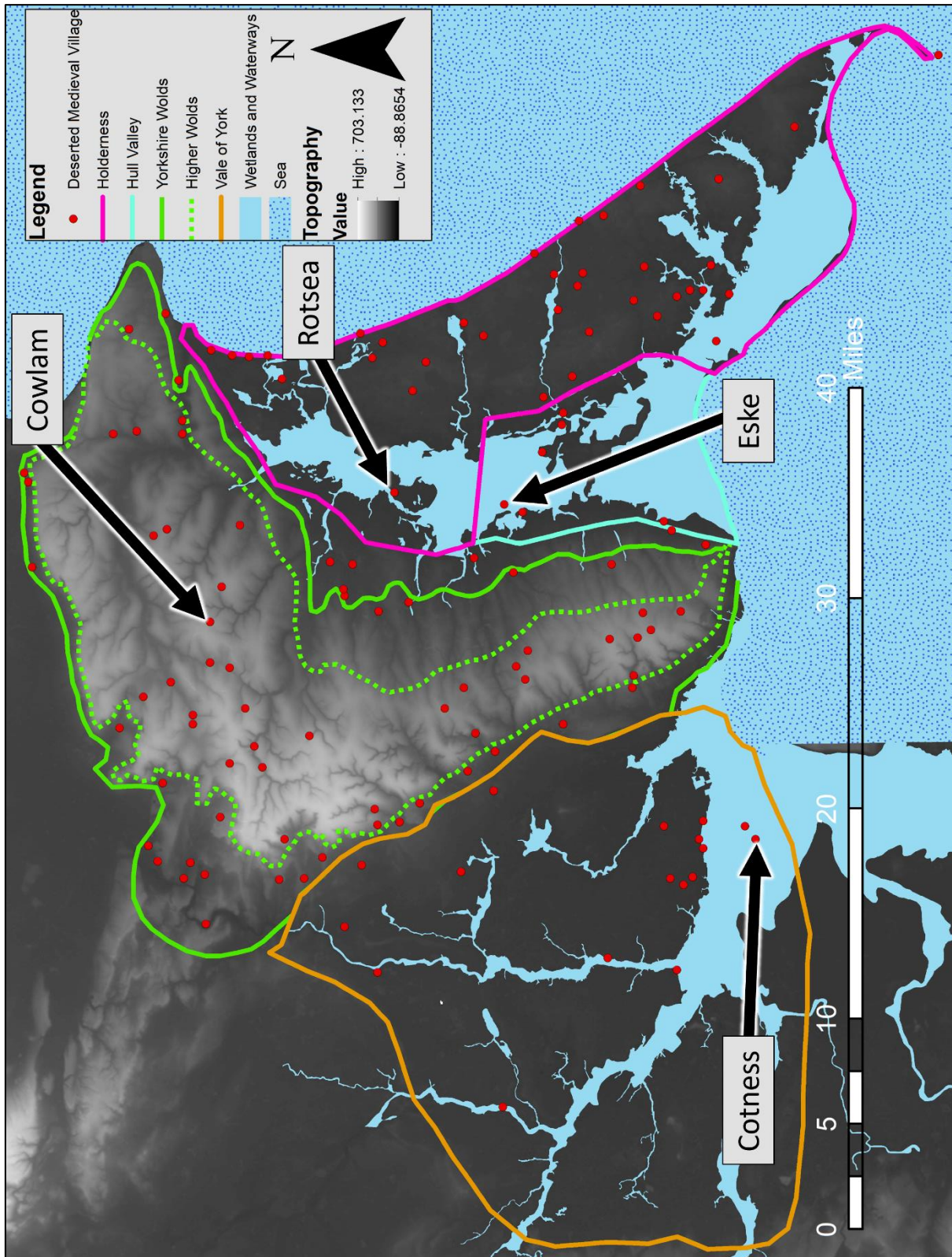


Figure five: A GIS generated map of the East Riding of Yorkshire and the subdivisions within it. The geographical topography of the region is also displayed. The villages this thesis uses as case-studies are labelled.

## ~ Chapter three: A tale of landscape desertion ~

### 3.1 An introduction to landscape desertion

Before addressing the villages in my chosen four districts, it is important to first demonstrate the importance of landscape in medieval desertion. The most extreme case of this is undoubtedly the case of Ravenser/Ravenserod. This chapter will use Ravenserod as an introduction to the concept of landscape-based village desertion.

### 3.2 Ravenserod

Ravenserod was established around c.1230 on a small island near Spurn Point. It has been suggested that this Ravenserod replaced the older settlement of Ravenser, though this is fiercely debated. Unfortunately, it is not known exactly where the island was located and there are conflicting theories; the island no longer exists due to coastal erosion. There are two primary theories: some believe that the island was located east of Spurn Point (Sheppard, 1912) while others suggest that it was located to the west of Spurn Point (Boyle, 1884). Current work using echosounding equipment is hoping to locate its location (BBC News, 2022).

There has been suggestion that Ravenserod, while an island, was actually connected to mainland and was only impassable at high tide (De Boer, 1964), this theory is supported by an excerpt from the Chronicle of Meaux Abbey which claims states:

*"For that town of Ravenser Odd [...] At the extreme limits of Holderness, situated between the waters of the sea and the Humber, lay about a mile or more distant from the mainland. Access to it from early times from Old Ravenser was by means of a sandy road strewn with rounded yellow pebbles [...] scarcely a bows shot in width and marvellously withstanding the floodwaters of the sea on its eastern side and the tides of the Humber on its western side. This road can still [c.1394-1400] be seen by travellers on foot and horseback; but at its further end, it was washed into the Humber for the space of half a mile by the floodwaters of the sea. Of the site, therefore of Ravenser Odd, scarcely a trace is to be found [...]* This

town, was situated about four miles distant from Easington" (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 8). Though this gives us some idea of what the settlement was like in its day, it does not help us to locate the village today due to the shifting sands of Spurn and the ever changing and moving landscape of the area.

The earliest reference to a settlement in the vicinity of Spurn comes from the seventh century. This reference is found in Alcuin's *Life of St. Willibrord*; when Willis, father of the apostle to the Frisians, is said to have resided there as a hermit. This place was known as Ravenser, perhaps etymologically derived from '*Hrafn's Eyr*' which roughly translates to 'Hrafn's Sandbank' (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 5).

Icelandic references to Ravenser seem to imply that the settlement was based on or near Spurn Point as some documentary evidence suggests that it was used as landing point for the Norwegian Army after their defeat at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066 (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 5). Despite this, some scholars, notably Boyle, have some other ideas. While it is widely accepted that Ravenserod's name has Nordic roots, Boyle (1884) believes that Ravenserod was originally a Danish settlement and gained its name from the standard of the Danish army which landed in 827AD, the Raven, which was the animal associated with Odin; as opposed to it being a bastardisation of '*Hrafn's Eyr*'.

The Orkney and Icelandic Sagas tell of how Olaf, son of Harold Sigurdson, sailed to Ravenser after their defeat at Stamford Bridge (Ostler, 1990, 7). This theory is based off of this poem: "*King the swift ships with flood set out with autumn approaching. And sailed from the port, Hrafnereyri*". Boyle believed that this poem was significant in shaping the name of Ravenserod (Boyle, 1884, 9).

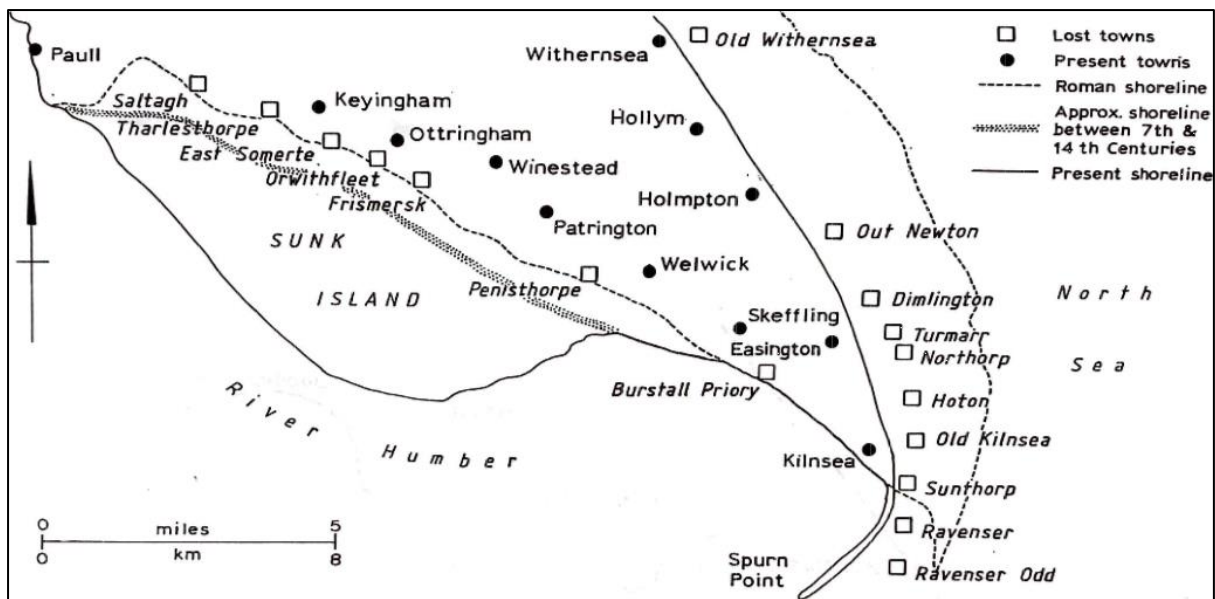


Figure six: A map illustrating possible locations of Ravenser and Ravenserod as well as the historical shorelines (Ostler, 1990, 27).

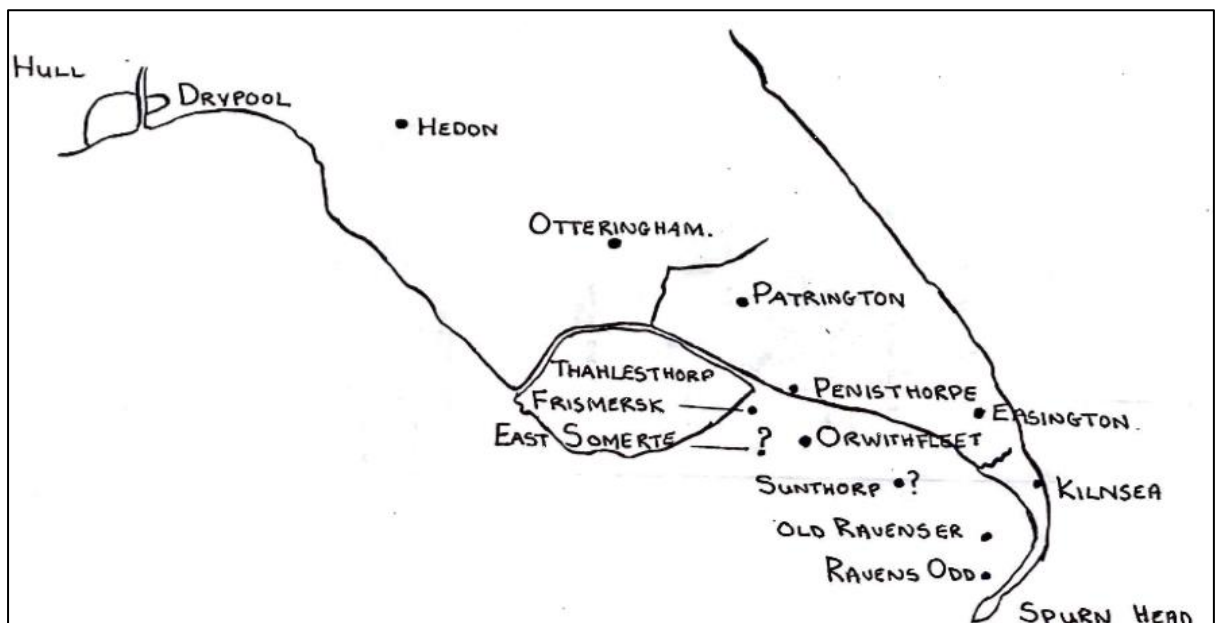


Figure seven: A map illustrating alternative positionings of Ravenser and Ravenserod (Ostler, 1990, 29).

The earliest post-conquest reference to the settlement can be found in the Pipe Rolls of 1230. These mention two individuals named Odo de Ravenser and Matthias de Ravenser (Ostler, 1990, 8). The Chronicle of Meaux 1235-49, records the building of the houses and the fisheries. It also makes a clear distinction between Ravenser and Ravenserod. It seems that

Ravenserod was conceived when a shipwrecked upon the spit. A man known as Peter Atte-see, took the grounded vessel seeing an opportunity to make profit. He held his stores in the remains of the ship and would sell to passing seamen. Atte-see was the first merchant of many at Ravenserod (Ostler, 1990, 8).

William de Fortibus, Lord of Holderness, and Earl of Aumale, saw the potential of the area and sent a bailiff and some villeins to establish a village in the area. William would die whilst on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, so it was his son, also named William, who was granted the Royal Charter by Henry III (Ostler, 1990, 8). The establishment of Ravenserod was significant event for its neighbours. So much so that in 1256 Henry III assured that no ports would be established between Scarborough and Ravenserod (Ostler, 1990, 8). This event is captured in a statement of the jury from 1276:

*"forty years and more ago, the casting up of the sea caused stones and sand to accumulate, and on them the Earl of Aumale began to build a certain town which is called Ravenserod: and it is an island: the sea surrounds it"* (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 6).

There have been many theories about the landscape and location of Ravenserod as well as its origins. Ostler's theory on the difference between Ravenser and Ravenserod is an interesting one. He suggests that Ravenser and Ravenserod were located on the spit of 1235-1360. He claims that the first Ravenser became known as Old Ravenser. Old Ravenser seems to have silted up making its port obsolete until it eventually fell under the shadow of its new neighbour Ravenser, which would also be known as Ravenserod. Ostler's theory is supported by the Tax Returns of 1297 which indicate that Old Ravenser had five taxpayers while Ravenserod had 36 (Ostler, 1990, 7).

The diagram below demonstrates how the landscape has changed around the village of Ravenserod. In 1990 the spit was around 2 miles further west than it was in 1060 (Ostler, 1990, 7). As the location is heavily debated and lost to the sea, it is clear that landscape played a key role in the settlement.

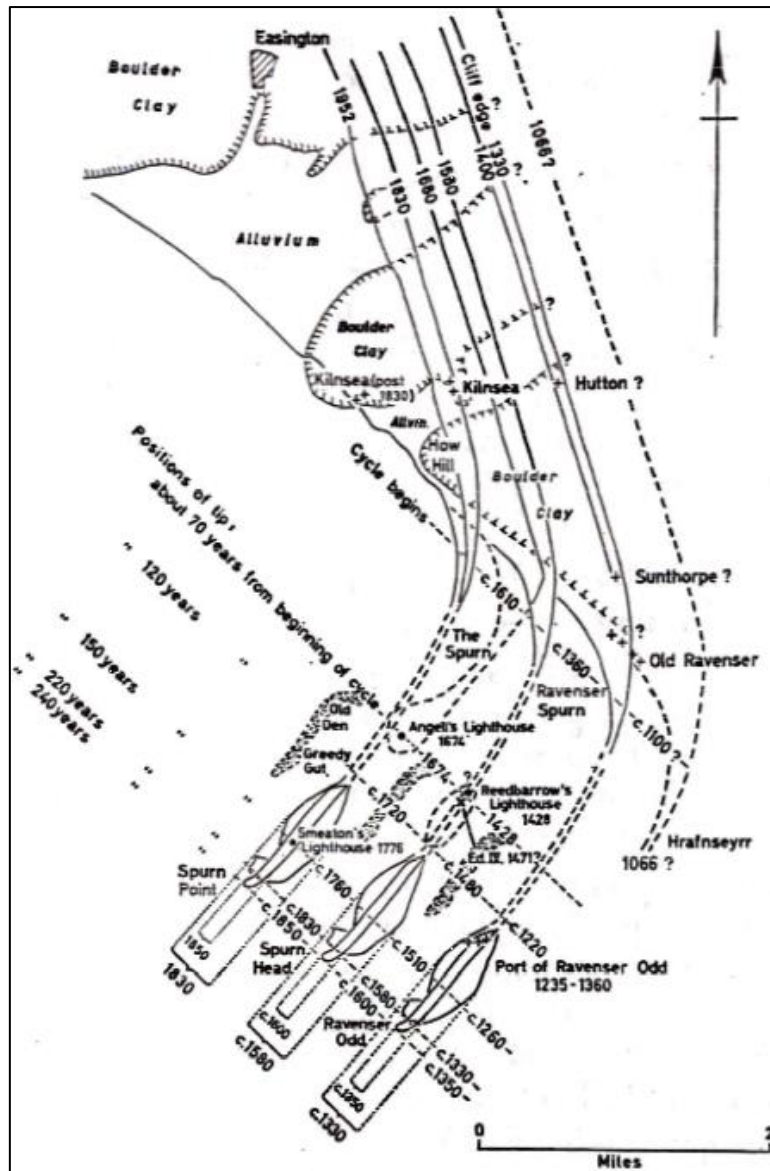


Figure eight: A diagram to show the movement of Spurn point over time (Ostler, 1990, 21).

### 3.2.1 Village overview

Ravensrod was once considered a town, but by 1241 it has expanded and was to be considered a borough until 1249 (Allison, 1984). Early occupation of the site is recounted by another jury in 1290:

*"who say on their oath that in the time of King Henry by the casting up of the sea, a certain small island was born, which is called Ravenserodd [...] and at first, fishermen dried their nets there, and a few men began to dwell and remain there, and afterwards ships [...] began to discharge and*



*sell their merchandise there [...] A certain ship was cast away on Ravenserodd, where there was no house then built, which ship a certain person appropriated to himself, and from it made a cabin which he inhabited for some time and there he received ships and merchants and sold them meat and drink, and afterwards others began to dwell there" (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 7).*

William de Fortibus (II) would die at Amiens in 1260. He left 100 marks to the monks of Meaux Abbey as well as half of Ravenserod's chapel. The other half of the chapel was left to the monks of Thornton Abbey. He also requested that his heart be buried with his daughter in the presbytery of the church, to which the monks obliged. He was survived by his widow, Isabella, who was to retain possession of the land (Ostler, 1990, 8).

The men of Holderness, and Ravenserod, complained that Isabella Fortibus, countess of Aumale, was holding courts, rebuilding the port, and also charging for the use of the land. The fishermen were especially irritated about being charged as they had grown accustomed to drying their nets in the area free of charge. The fisherman wanted to know what right she had to do this (Ostler, 1990, 8). This is recorded in article nine of the Yorkshire Hundred Rolls:

*"They say that Isabella countess of Aumale takes toll at [Ravenser] Odd through Robert Hildyard her bailiff, this is 4d from [each] net of every ship coming into land to dry them. The men of [Ravenser] Odd distain for their debts as in a borough. The countess makes a port there and caused it to be built from new there, by which the king's ports of Grimsby, Scarborough and Hedon are much harmed, and there she holds pleas as in borough: they do not know by what warrant" (English, 1996, 37).*

Ravenserod was originally within the fief of Counts of Aumale but was passed to Edward I in 1293 after the death of Countess Isabella (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 8-9).

In 1286 the merchants of Ravenserod were given rights to sell bread and beer in the town (Ostler, 1990, 8) and in 'Ravenser' was granted quayage in 1296-7. Interestingly, from 1297-1330 we see a grant of quayage for 'Ravenser' but from 1335 to 1347 we see grants of quayage for 'Ravenserod' (Ostler, 1990, 8). In 1298, the merchants of Ravenserod petitioned King

Edward I whilst he was staying at Cottingham and asked for the town to be made a free borough.

This petition was made at the same time as the merchants of Hull made theirs (Ostler, 1990, 8). The charter was granted to them in 1299 and they had to pay £300 (Ostler, 1990, 9), around £360,000 today (Bank of England, 2022). The Pipe Rolls record that in 1299-1300, Ravenserod paid off £36 of the £300 owed. The rest would not be paid off until 1302 (Ostler, 1990, 9). Ravenserod saw some notable changes as a product of the terms of the Royal Charter. The settlement now had a warden and a coroner appointed and a king's prison and gallows were erected. Additionally, the borough would now have two weekly markets on Tuesday and Sunday (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 9).

It has been theorised that Ravenserod was perhaps wealthier than Hull at this time. This is suggested as Hull only paid back £66 13s 4d of the money owed to the king. However, it is also possible that Hull was not poor and that it was instead more favoured by the King and allowed to pay less than what was owed (Ostler, 1990, 9).

Ravenserod was a significant settlement, it regularly supplied the crown with ships for military actions, usually against the Scots. Ravenserod is said to have received dues from over 100 merchant vessels. The town had its own market and annual fair held on the Nativity of Mary (8<sup>th</sup> September) each year. Ravenserod also had its own mayor and customs officers who would judicate the many cargo ships and fishing boats that used the quay. Ravenserod also boasted a well-developed infrastructure with its own wharves, customs sheds, warehouses, windmills, tan house, court, prison, and chapel (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 6).

Ravenserod found its success due to its position at the mouth of the Humber, as such it could benefit from both the fishing industry and maritime commerce (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 8). Ravenserod's success came at the cost of their relationship with their neighbours. The citizens of Ravenserod capitalised on their position at the mouth of the Humber by taking part in a habit of forestalling ships who entered the river with the intent of trading with other ports, most notably Grimsby and Hull.

This caused tensions between Ravenserod and their neighbours leading to the merchants of Grimsby submitting a complaint to King Edward I. The complaint detailed that they were losing £100 a year due to Ravenserod's interference (Ostler, 1990, 7), that is over £140,000 by today's standards (Bank of England, 2022). The inquisition ruled in Ravenserod's favour as the king determined that the residents were men of enterprise (Ostler, 1990, 7).

The coastline of the island began to erode away around c.1300, despite this, Ravenserod would receive another Grant of Quayage in 1310 (Allison, 1984). Ravenserod was a large settlement at its peak. Documentary evidence from 1347/8 indicates the presence of around 300 buildings on the island at this time (English, 1991).

### 3.2.2 Downfall and desertion

Ravenserod was geographically flawed and was a victim to the tides. Coastal erosion and flooding were frequent maladies that residents would have to endure. Boyle claims that in 1346 two thirds of the settlement was destroyed in a particularly bad incident of erosion and subsequent flooding.

Ravenserod's demise would inevitably be due to its geographical situation. As the settlement fell victim to frequent and aggressive coastal erosion, social issues began to develop amongst the residents of the island. As the land eroded, alcoves would develop. These geological features became the perfect residence for criminals and dissidents who did not wish to be found. Documentary evidence of this issue survives in the form of a parliamentary appeal in 1347-1348 from a merchant named William de Lithenay.

De Lithenay appears to have had some items stolen from him by the newly arrived criminals who stationed themselves on the island. De Lithenay's appeal primarily constitutes of a request for a commission to be held. He asked that this commission should be held in order to help him reclaim the value of the goods that were stolen from him. The value of these items was estimated to be £186 13s 4d (Boyle, 1884).

By 1340 the town became uninhabitable for the population due to coastal erosion. Hugh of Leven accounts 1339/49: *"At that time the chapel of Ravenser [...] and the majority of the buildings of the whole town of Ravenser, by the inundations of the sea and the Humber increasing more than usual, were almost completely destroyed"* (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 10).

In 1346 a Royal Inquisition found that two thirds of the town were destroyed claiming that a mere third of the population were able to *"pay or support the tithes, tolls and other burdens hitherto assessed upon the said town"* (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 10).

From 1349-60 the sea would completely envelop the town of Ravenserod. A monk at Meaux Abbey records how the church was washed away and the remains of those buried beneath it were revealed:

*"The inundations of the sea and the Humber had destroyed to its foundations the chapel of Ravenser Odd, built-in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, so that the bodies and bones of the dead were horribly apparent"* (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 10).

The deterioration of Ravenserod, both geographically and socially, would continue until its complete destruction around c.1370. The island would completely collapse into the sea around this time, though the population left before that could occur. The residents of Ravenserod moved elsewhere, many of them to Hull (English, 1991).

The chronicle of Meaux Abbey recounts the chaotic scenes as the island was deserted. People took to looting and panicking while fleeing the island.

*"The town of Ravenser Odd [...] lay open to devastation [...] (with the floods and inundations of the sea [...] surrounding it from every side like a wall, thus threatening its imminent annihilation. And so, with the terrible vision of waters seen on every side, the besieged persons [...] preserved themselves at that time from destruction flocking together and tearfully imploring grace"*.

*"While those same inundations daily threatened the destruction of the town, some sacrilegious persons carried off and took possessions of certain ornaments of their chapel without our consent [...] excepted were a*

*few ornaments, images, books and a bell which we sold to the mother church at Easington [...] that town of Ravenser Odd [...] was an extremely famous borough, devoted to merchandise with many fisheries and the most abundantly provided with ships and burgesses of all the boroughs of that coast. But yet by all its wicked deeds, and especially wrongdoing on the sea, and by its evil actions and predations, it provoked the vengeance of God upon itself beyond measure" (Crowther & Crowther, 2007, 11).*

The monks of Meaux determined in their chronicle that Ravenserod had been lost to the sea due to the evil acts of the residents. Surviving documentary evidence establishes that acts of piracy were committed by residents of Ravenserod. The reality of the village's destruction is far less divine. Ravenserod was doomed due to its location in the Spurn peninsular. This area has 250-year cycle in which sediment and other washed-up material is deposited at the mouth of the Humber. Ravenserod was likely built upon one of these large deposits. However, when this deposit gets too large for the mouth of the Humber the water pressure becomes increasingly more powerful, eroding the waste away (Ostler, 1990, 6-7).

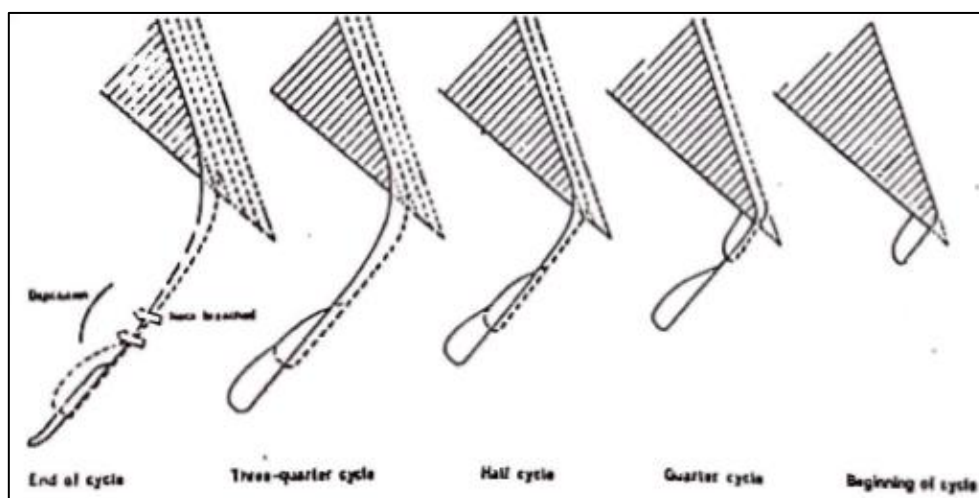


Figure nine: A diagram detailing the cycle of sediment accumulating and washing away at the mouth of the Humber (Ostler, 1990, 21).

There is no reference to any commercial activity at Ravenserod after 1358, but reference to the village appears in 1399 when Henry of Lancaster (Henry IV) landed at Ravenserod. By this time the village was lost to the sea and no longer existed. The occupants of the town had fled elsewhere, save one individual, a hermit named Matthew Danthorpe. Upon Henry's

arrival Danthorpe was in the process of building his own chapel without royal consent. However, when Henry became King, he pardoned Danthorpe and even granted him the right to create his chapel. Additionally, he granted Danthorpe the right to claim the wrecks of the sea for two leagues around. From this he could claim profit and goods from the wrecks. This right was also inherited by his successors. A cross was erected at the site of Ravenserod to commemorate the landing of Henry IV. It is believed that this was created by Matthew Danthorpe himself (Ostler, 1990, 10). Danthorpe's first successor, Richard Reedbarrow, was the individual who built the first of many light beacons/light houses in the Spurn area (Ostler, 1990, 11).

### 3.2.3 Excavation history

The war office gave up Spurn Head in 1959. The Deserted Medieval Village Research Group was asked if they wanted to conduct rescue excavations on the site of Ravenserod before the coastline changed with the abandonment of the sea defences. The DMVRG decided that this would not be necessary as the exact location of the village remained unknown (The Deserted Medieval Village Research Group, 1959, 6). Although people have searched in the past for the location of the settlement nothing has been located, however ongoing sonar work is trying to pinpoint its position.

### 3.2.4 Conclusion

Ravenser and Ravenserod represent the most extreme case of a landscape-based desertion in the whole of the East Riding of Yorkshire. The relationship between the desertion itself and the landscape in which the settlement was situated are closely intertwined. Even the origins of Ravenserod were linked to its landscape when its predecessor, Ravenser, had its port silted up and was rendered useless.

Ravenserod's landscape was both its greatest strength and its fatal flaw. Being positioned just off of the Spurn peninsular, Ravenserod was able to reap the rewards of trade and the fishing industry. At its peak it had around 300 structures consisting of, but not limited to, a market, a fair,

a quay, multiple wharves, customs sheds, warehouses, windmills, tan houses, a court, a prison, and a chapel.

This thriving town was deserted and destroyed by aggressive coastal erosion, spurred on by Spurns 250-year cycle of sediment movement. The alcoves formed by the relentless waves made way for undesirables to wreak havoc upon the population. As social undress grew, the island grew smaller and smaller until it collapsed into the sea entirely. Ravenserod's position in the landscape, once its greatest strength, was the primary reason for its destruction.

## ~ Chapter Four: Holderness ~

### 4.1 Introduction

Holderness is a quasi-triangular peninsular at the south-eastern extremity of Yorkshire (Siddle, 1967, 40). It lies next to the North Sea and runs as far as Spurn Point (Halstead, 2003, 30). To the west and the north, the region is surrounded by the dip slopes of the Yorkshire Wolds. To the south and the east, the region is bordered by the Humber Estuary and the North Sea respectively (Siddle, 1967, 40). There are around 34 DMVs in Holderness, including Arram, Dowthorpe, Newton in Paul and Rotsea.

Holderness sees its origins during the Ice Age. Glaciers formed in the Wolds chalk, carving deep valleys, and carrying tons of eroded rock and sediment into the frozen sea. As the ice melted, the transported earth settled forming large landmasses of soft sedimentary rock. This region of land would become known as Holderness (Kenny, 2017, 103).

Geographically, Holderness is a low-lying plain, stretching from Flamborough Head to Spurn Head. Holderness contains very little woodland save for a few knolls and small hills with wooded features. Most of the fields in Holderness are bounded by drainage ditches as opposed to hedges. The region is, overall, wide, and somewhat featureless (Kenny, 2017, 203).

To define Holderness as a '*plain*' is somewhat misleading. Holderness has a very varied topography. Eastern Holderness features a series of curved moraines which extend from the north-east to the south-east of the region. These moraines rise to around twenty-five feet and rarely exceed 50 feet. There is little to no continuity to these areas as they are frequently dissected by post-glacial stream erosion. The '*plain*' of Holderness also features irregular kettle holes, depressions, outwash fans and gravel/sand deposits (Siddle, 1967, 40).

During the medieval period it is likely that a larger portion of the region was either permanently or seasonally flooded. Though this is not a common feature of Holderness today, the region is still threatened by floods more than other regions in England (Siddle, 1967, 40).

A consequence of soft lands of Holderness is that its coastline has the highest rate of erosion in all of Europe. The erosion of the coast is



exacerbated by both the shape of the coastline and the frequency of storms at sea. Around two metres of land are lost to the sea each year and many roads on the Holderness coast now lead to cliffs edge as their original destination has been devoured by the sea (See figure ten).

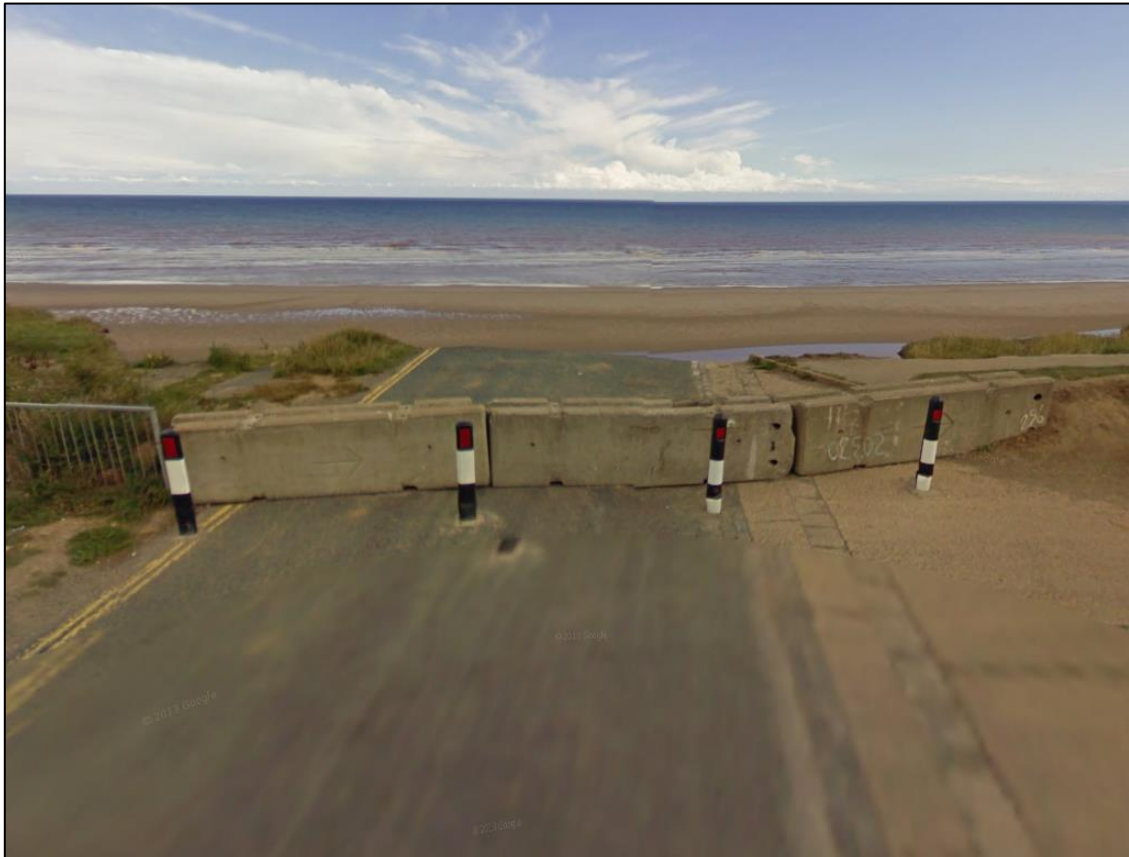


Figure ten: An example of a road at Aldbrough (Seaside Road) which now leads to nowhere as its original destination has been washed away (Google, 2010).



Figure 11: A photograph taken in 2009 of the coastal erosion at Aldbrough (JThomas, 2009).

There are conflicting reports regarding the state of Holderness in the Medieval Period. A chronicler of the Cistercian monastery of Meaux recorded the state of the lands that the new Earl of Holderness had inherited as such: *“which was exceeding barren and infertile at this time, so that it produced nothing but oats”* (Bond, 1890, 90).

In contrast to the testimony of the Cistercian chronicler, Maxwell summarised the Holderness returns of the Medieval Period as such: *“in spite of its marshy nature, Holderness was the most prosperous part of the East Riding in the eleventh century”* (Maxwell & Darby, 1962, 203). Figure 12 displays the value of the different areas within Holderness and a small area of the Hull Valley in the Domesday Book.

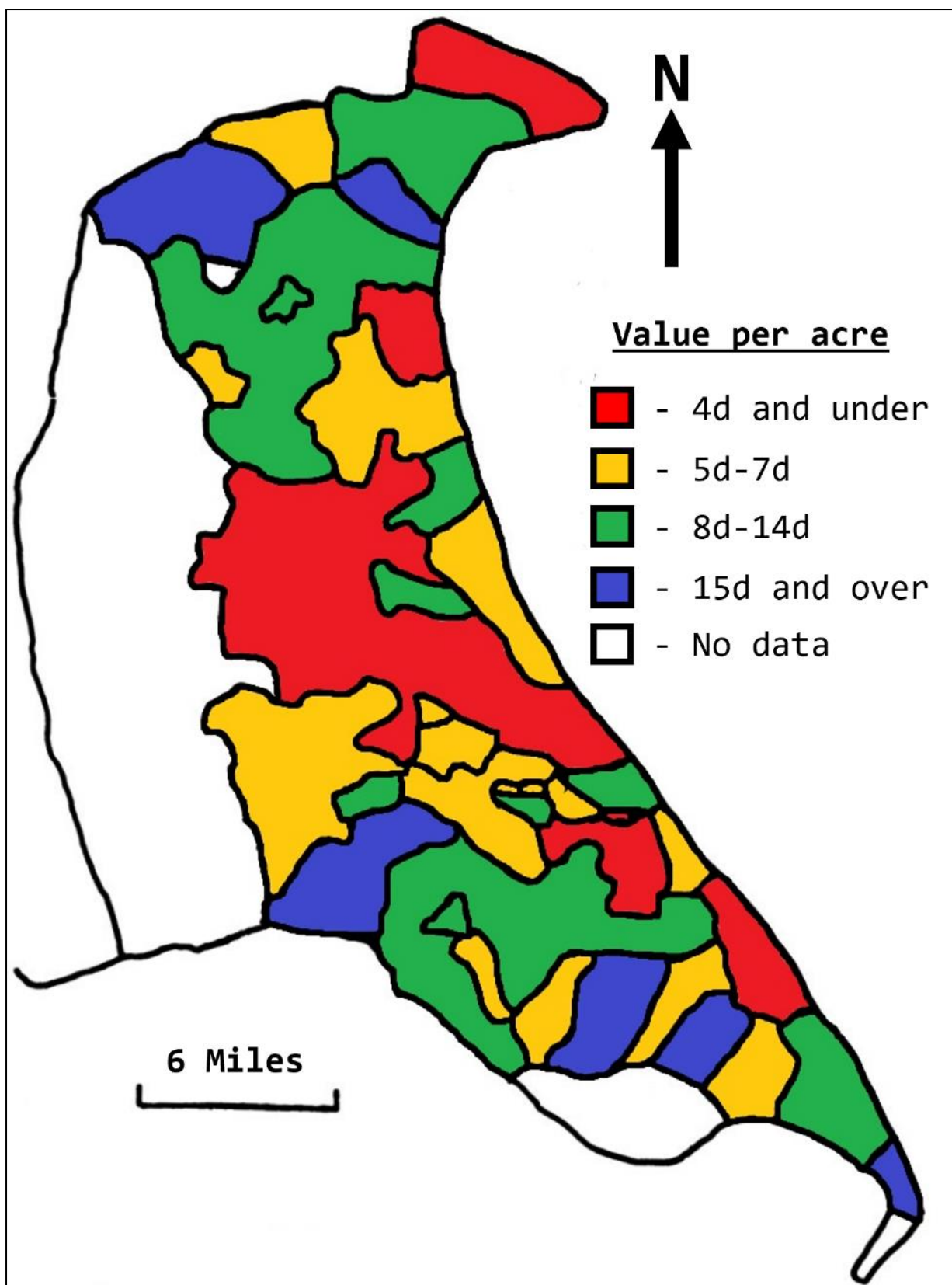


Figure 12: A map of Holderness and a section of the Hull Valley which displays the distribution of different land values in the Medieval Period (Domesday). Data taken from (Siddle, 1967, 41)

It is difficult to reach a final verdict on the prosperity of Holderness within the Medieval period as both of these sources have limitations. The Meaux Chronicle was compiled over 200 years after the Norman conquest, potentially damaging its reliability. Maxwell's summary also has some issues however as summarising a vast work such as the Cambridge series on Domesday documents will give a result that is tentative at best (Siddle, 1967, 40)

There are around 34 DMVs in the Holderness regions. Rotsea is not based on the coast, as such, other landscape analysis will not be overshadowed by the treat of coastal erosion. Should a village be threatened by coastal erosion it is almost inevitable that it will eventually be swallowed by the sea, while this is certainly a notable cause of desertion in the Holderness region, this paper aims to fully analyse the effect of a regions landscape on village desertion. Coastal erosion may be too much of an overwhelming force when it comes to assessing the smaller landscape factors that led to desertion.

This paper will attempt to determine whether landscape was a significant factor in the depopulation and desertion of medieval villages within the East Riding of Yorkshire through a case study on Rotsea.

#### 4.2 Rotsea

Located around two miles east of Cranswick and five miles south-east of Driffield, Rotsea is a small township of around 805 acres in size. Situated near Great Driffield, Rotsea is a scheduled ancient monument. Rotsea, recorded as '*Rotese*', in the Domesday Book consisted of two carucates of land for geld (East Riding Archives, c.1980, 22).

Etymologically, '*Rotsea*' has several possible origins. It is possible that either the old English '*hrot*', or the Middle English '*rot*': both meaning '*decayed matter*' were taken and used in conjunction with the Old English word '*see*' meaning lake. Essentially naming the settlement '*Lake containing decayed matter or refuse*' (East Riding Archives, c.1980, 22).

This is in reference to the drainage efforts in the area and the programme of land reclamation being conducted at the time. The lowlands of the Hull

Valley were chiefly used for grazing purposes but were also a source of hay, peat, reeds, fish and windfowl. The land at Rotsea is said to have been *'so rotten and boggy that the carriages could not go upon it'* (East Riding Archives, c.1980, 22).

A branch of the affluent Thwenge family once owned lands and lived in Rotsea. There was a small Wesleyan Chapel on the site built around the 19<sup>th</sup> century by T & R Holtby (T Bulmer and Co, 1892, 217). The DMV of Rotsea is a small, scattered site south-east of the two remaining farms. The village was a rental of Guisborough, and 41 tofts were recorded in 1300 (Beresford, 1952, 67).

In 1989 English Heritage submitted a request for the remains of Rotsea to be recorded. In the May of that year the RCHME planned the earthworks of the DMV. The village is notable for its high-quality earthwork remains and surviving documentary evidence. Rotsea is an example of a village that developed as a successful nucleated medieval settlement that was then ultimately reduced to a collection of dispersed farms (Cocroft et al., 1989, 14).

#### 4.2.1 Landscape

Rotsea occupies the east end of the east to west linear parish of Hutton Cranswick. The settlements of Hutton and Cranswick are some five kilometres west of Rotsea. These ridge-top settlements are now linked by the A164 road (Cocroft et al., 1989, 14).

Rotsea was the site of much land reclamation in the area. Successful drainage and reclamation of the carr lands along the river allowed for eighteenth and nineteenth century canal and drainage schemes. Both of which are located to the east and south of the settlement (Sheppard, 1958). The village of Rotsea sits around four meters above ordnance datum and lies upon boulder clay. The village is located to the west side of the north end of the River Hull (Cocroft et al., 1989, 14).

The earthworks at Rotsea lie some 500 meters southeast of Rotsea Manor. Traces of the village's former boundaries survive as soil marks to the north and south. The earthworks at Rotsea have a confusing appearance.

Comprising of numerous extant and abandoned beast ponds, recutting of features, drainage features and bomb craters from World War Two. The whole site of Rotsea DMV is subdivided by a denser pattern of ditches and field boundaries (Cocroft et al., 1989, 15).

The earthworks are spread in an irregular pattern across the site as well as having variable sizes, presentation, and numbers (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16). These are represented as points: 'a', 'b', 'c' and 'd' on figure 13. Point 'e' is a well-marked and clearly cut hollow-way that runs eastwards (Cocroft et al., 1989, 15). The layout seen in figure 13 correlates well with the Guisborough accounts of c.1300 which states that the properties on the site were based "*on the north side*". Twelve of the aforementioned properties are mentioned in detail, with only one property vaguely being described as being "*on the south side*" (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).

Several properties on the site were distinguished by their name or size, but more commonly, properties at Rotsea appear as tofts and/or crofts of half an acre with one bovat of land. This may be the standard set up of property at Rotsea. There is some evidence of a sub-division of properties on the site and also evidence of engrossment of properties and evidence of several properties in the same hands (Cocroft et al., 1989, 15).

The north-eastern side of Rotsea is easier to analyse and to ascertain the settlements development. In the documentary evidence from c.1300 six properties are listed to the east of a common way running north. East of this hollow way, 'e' on the plan, is dominated by a single large property. A collection of building platforms is grouped around a large crew-yard or hollow in a courtyard arrangement with a subsidiary yard to the west (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).



Figure 13: A detailed plan of the Rotsea DMV with letters marking points of interest (Cocroft et al., 1989, 20)

Around point 'g' lies the foundation remains of a stone building. This is noted as the 'old foundation' on the 1854 Ordnance Survey map. The presence of these foundations, combined with the form of the farmstead on the site suggests some late phase activity at Rotsea (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).

More subtle earthworks denote the presence of two long and narrow properties on the site. These are evidence of the earlier medieval pattern of the settlements and are located between point 'e' and point 'g'. These have a regular planned appearance and abut on a straight section of a hollow way to the south. These earthworks also lie over arable land on the site. The remains also seem to correlate with the regular-sized tofts mentioned in c.1300 (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).

Another example of early phase evidence is located at point 'f'. This is another foundation of a stone structure. On the 1854 Ordnance Survey map this structure is also marked as 'old foundation'. This was likely the house of a farmstead and had ditched closes to the south and east of the structure which undoubtedly belonged to it. To the west of 'f' the primary hollow way curves south-westwards and opens up into a broad area shaped like two triangles. It is possible that this was once a green (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).

Some of the remains of Rotsea DMV are confusing and a fraction of these unintelligible. This is the case west of 'b'. The main hollow way has two routes. The first, is a straight run from point 'b' to 'd'. The second arcs southward from 'b' via 'c' towards 'd'. The most likely village properties in this vicinity are located between these routes, north of the straight street that runs from 'b' to 'd'. The less likely and more unclear properties are located along the southern side of the curving routeway (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).

At certain points on the site there are large open areas which open out from the hollow ways. These may perhaps mark the sites of crew-yards at Rotsea. However, it must be noted that due to the improved pasture on the site, these crew yards can be difficult to distinguish and identify and can be confused with ponds from later activity. To the north side of 'b' and 'd' there is a reasonably clear row of plots. These may be interpreted



as separate properties or as a single late property comprising of a farmstead with attached closes (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).

To the south of the curving hollow way, ridging is structured in blocks within ditched close boundaries. These are especially prominent to the north-west and south-west of the village site. To the south-east, there is a close which features two different phases of ridging which intersect. North of this feature is a rectangular platform which has been overlain by a block of ridges. This platform would perhaps once have been suitable for building upon (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).

There are multiple interpretations of the hollow-ways that litter the site. These ways may be contemporary; in which case the early settlement would have had a complex structure which was not accurately reflected in the Guisborough accounts of c.1300. Alternatively, the original village streets may have been a continually curving feature that ran through the village following the southern line from 'b' to 'c' and ending at 'd'. In this case, the straight-way was possibly a replacement for this route running from 'b' to 'd' directly. This is supported by the sheer straightness of the route, as well as the unevenness of the track. In-fact it is so uneven that the way is almost blocked on its east end by the terrain (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).

More supporting evidence for the theory that the straight-way was a later feature, is the manner in which the north-south linear features present on the site line up on either side of the track; almost as if this way was cut through an existing pattern of earthworks and structure. If the alternative theory is to be believed then it would also stand to reason that early settlement remains on the south side of Rotsea have been obscured by later cultivation efforts (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).



Figure 14: A satellite image of Rotsea DMV (National Library of Scotland, 2022).



Figure 15: A LIDAR image of Rotsea DMV (National Library of Scotland, 2022).

#### 4.2.2 Development and downfall

In documentary terms, Rotsea is first recorded in 1086 in a summary of the Domesday Book. No population figures are recorded for the village. Rotsea was originally held by the Count of Mortain and was later passed to the de Brus family in 1119 (Cocroft et al., 1989, 14). Peter de Brus was to leave: *“all he had in Rottessee in eels, lands and services of his men in that vill, save the meadow that he had before given to Marmaduke of Twinge”* this was confirmed by his son, Peter, in 1239 (Parker, 1925).

In 1285 the Prior of Guisborough held thirteen bovates of the two carucates of land held by the de Bruce family in Rotsea (Cocroft et al., 1989, 14). The Priory's rent roll from around c.1300 had 31 plots in Rotsea described as either *‘toft and croft’* or *‘toft and garden’* or similar words to that effect (Surtees Society, 1894, 441-444).

There was a chapel at Rotsea. This chapel was dedicated to St Andrew but did not receive a separate parochial status. The chapel was built around 1328 (Cocroft et al., 1989, 15). The Thwing family had long had interests at Rotsea as they were subtenants of the de Brus family (Parker, 1925). The Thwing family were responsible for Octonholme to the east of the Hull Valley. In the fourteenth century they would be responsible for the ancient ferry which crossed the River Hull. Rotsea was situated on an east to west through-way which linked the Wolds and Holderness (Flower, 1923).

In 1509, Marmaduke Thwing made bequests in his will to the chapel at Rotsea. This evidence assures us that the chapel was still in operation at this time (Surtees Society, 1884). The will of Marmaduke Thwing implies that there was a substantial residence in Rotsea at the time. It is possible that this residence was related to the site's depopulation and the reorganisation (Cocroft et al., 1989, 15).

In 1538, only four men are listed in the East Riding Musters for Rotsea. This is an incredibly small figure, especially when compared to its neighbours. The nearby township of Hutton Cranswick had 50 men on their muster roll and there were five in Sunderlandwick (also to become deserted). Rotsea's low population would decline even more in the coming

years as in 1584 Rotsea was only able to produce two fighting men. This figure is the lowest total in the Bainton Beacon area of the Harthill Wapentake. This is most noticeable when, again, compared to Hutton Cranswick and Sunderlandwick the same year who produced 57 and seven respectively (Cocroft, 1989, 15).

Evidence pertaining to the later cycle of the settlement is limited. But what we can ascertain is that there was a considerable reduction in the site's population in the later medieval period or in the sixteenth century. This is likely related to enclosure and the conversion of arable land to pasture (Cocroft et al., 1989, 15).

Population levels persist throughout the seventeenth century. Documentary evidence from disputes in 1616 refers to only three messuages and four cottages at Rotsea (Brigg, 1917). The Hearth Tax returns of 1672 and 1675 list 11 heaths and six dwellings at Rotsea. Two of the six dwellings were more substantial and had three hearths each. Comparing this information with the returns from 1663 and 1667 shows a loss of two similar three-hearthed buildings from that earlier period (Cocroft et al., 1989, 15).

The exact date of Rotsea's abandonment is not known and Rotsea still appears on all principal county maps as a place name but not a settlement from 1784 (Neave, 1990, 384). The first census was in 1801 and records 13 people residing within the Rotsea township. Rotsea Manor Farm existed in 1801, so it is likely that the village earthworks were deserted by this point. The village was certainly abandoned in 1848 as is noted on maps from the time. Rotsea Farm and Rotsea Carr Farm were both in operation by 1848 (Cocroft et al., 1989, 15).

The picture presented to us of Rotsea is one of settlement shrinkage as the population steadily declined. This was likely due to an economic shift towards cattle pasture and the subsequent change of settlement plan. It is reasonable to infer those later properties on the site, namely later farm structures with groups of attached closes, are what primarily make up Rotsea's distinctive earthworks. Desertion at Rotsea was likely then an extended and drawn-out affair and was not necessarily a one-way process (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).

There is suitable evidence to suggest that the village may have continued in some way into the eighteenth century. Ultimately, Rotsea would not be completely deserted; but instead saw a massive rate in depopulation until the site no longer resembled a village and instead resembled a scattered collection of farms, all of which farming the site from different locations (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16). The Thwing family were still regarded as residents of Rotsea in the nineteenth century, however the settlement had no substantial population by this time (Cocroft et al., 1989, 15). This is not a remarkable ending to the village of Rotsea and is typical of low-lying settlements of Holderness (Cocroft et al., 1989, 16).

#### 4.2.3 Conclusion

While evidence of Rotsea's later phases is admittedly limited, it is safe to determine that the depopulation of the site was due to the conversion of arable land to pastoral land. Rotsea's population shrank as a result of the economic shift of the site towards animal husbandry. The tale of Rotsea's desertion is one that was a common occurrence amongst many DMVs in Holderness and represents a larger trend and tells us much about the symbiotic relationship between the Holderness landscape and the villages of the medieval period.

The heavy clays of Holderness scarcely gave remarkable yields to the residents in the region. The clay and chalk peninsular suffered greatly from terrible drainage conditions which made efficient farming near impossible. It is likely that the lands of Holderness were perhaps only capable of producing oats in mass (Siddle, 1967, 42).

Infertile soils required more regular fallowing and were better suited to a two-field fallowing system rather than a three-field fallowing system (Gray, 1915, 73). Of the 44 parishes of Holderness which have surviving records, 36 used a two-field system as opposed to a three-field system. This implies that the land was indeed difficult to use for crop cultivation. Moreover, on the Yorkshire Wolds, which was free draining, over half of all its parishes used the three-field fallowing system due to its superior soils (Harris, 1961, 5).

Given the cold clays of the region and the frequent flooding experienced by the residents of Holderness. It would seem that the region did not depend on its arable wealth. Holderness's scarcity of woodland is likely due to attempts to create more cropland in the region. Large amounts of accessible woodland were cleared to make way for more cropland in the Middle Ages (Maxwell & Darby, 1962, 230).

The marshes and lakes likely provided the basis for the Holderness economy, through acts like fishing and fowling. Lakes more specifically also allowed locals to participate in maritime trade. The Holderness economy would have also benefitted greatly from turbarry as a major source of income (Siddle, 1967, 43). The act of peat cutting is mentioned in numerous medieval documents and it was common for as many as six acres of marshland to be set aside for turbarry (Siddle, 1967, 44).

Holderness's frequently flooded land gave the region many carrs. These lands were regularly, but temporarily, flooded and made for perfect summer pastureland for sheep and cattle. The value of this land increased during the period which reflects the value of this use (Siddle, 1967, 45).

Medieval Holderness was largely incompatible with the aspirations and needs of an arable farming economy. The area was a watery waste land, based upon infertile boulder clay which frequently yielded few crops besides that of oats. It makes sense then, that the area depended heavily on the products drawn from its marshes and meres. The prosperity of Holderness was made '*because of*' and not '*in spite of*' these features.

The enclosure of land and the shift from arable farming to pastoral animal husbandry is a logical shift for the residents and lords of the region. It would seem that, while desertions in Holderness were primarily due to the enclosure of arable land and its conversion to pasture; it was an inevitable and sensible shift of economic priority. The landscape of Holderness was better suited to reaping the rewards of its marshes and rearing livestock than growing crops as a way to sustain its economic prosperity. The relationship between desertion and landscape in Holderness was symbiotic and cannot be separated. The landscape dictated the economy and lifestyles of those who resided there and was ultimately responsible

for shift in economic priorities and hence the desertion of the nucleated village structure.



## ~ Chapter Five: Hull Valley ~

### 5.1 Introduction

Hull Valley is bounded by the gravel terraces of Holderness to the east and the dip slopes of the Yorkshire Wolds to the West and is a broad area. Its ground rises gradually to a relatively low height at its boundaries which lie on a ten-meter contour line (Wastling & George, 2018, 97). There are around 15 DMVs in the Hull Valley region, including Storkhill, Meaux, Newton in Cottingham and Eske. The Hull Valley is characterised by the River Hull. The source of the River Hull is located in the Yorkshire Wolds, close to the town of Drifffield. From this point it flows 20 miles south where it joins the Humber Estuary at Kingston upon Hull (Wastling & George, 2018, 97).

The historical landscape of the Hull Valley was very different to what it is today. Today we see the region being used for intensive agricultural activities, this was not always the case. Much of the Hull Valley's landscape history is concerned with the gradual drainage and reclamation of land to form the modern landscape. The River Hull was birthed as a late glacial drainage channel, left over from the Ice Age. This valley eventually became alluviated and peat formation began, despite this, there are still some areas of glacial till present in the region (Wastling & George, 2018, 97).

The historic landscape of the Hull Valley was that of marshes, meres and carr lands. Reed-swamps and oak and alder carr were commonplace in the landscape. The region was often waterlogged or flooded with the River Hull being the primary means of drainage (de Noort, 2004). The River Hull was not naturally efficient as a drainage system for the land. The gentle gradient of the valley and the geological consistency of the region led to the poor drainage by the river. This maintained the wetland environment of the area. Parts of the Hull Valley were seasonally flooded and inaccessible, while other areas were perhaps permanently underwater (Wastling & George, 2018, 97).

Despite the environmental struggles, there were numerous Iron Age and Roman settlements in the area. These settlements seemed to take advantage of this environment, settling on the dryer areas of ground, and using the

River Hull for trade and as a communication channel (Didsbury 1990a & 1990b). The wetland environment changed little until the early medieval period. At this time, the lower areas of the region, south of Beverley, were subjected to intensive flooding. Place name evidence suggests the presence of salt-marshland around this time as well as peat-marshland (Wastling & George, 2018, 97).

Certain post-Roman settlements were established on '*islands*' of glacial drift, these include: Wawne, Routh, Weel and Sutton. Other settlements were established on the edges of the valley, such as: Beverley, Leconfield, Leven and Wansford. These settlements were established deliberately to take advantage of the numerous resources available in the vicinity, such as: peat, fertile soils, fish, and wildfowl. From the earliest periods of human occupation in the Hull Valley there was likely also an exploitation of the saline waters of the area. These waters can be used for salt production (Wastling & George, 2018, 98).

The distribution of medieval settlements in the region is mainly focused on the valley margins, this is likely due to the periodic flooding of the region before drainage efforts were effectively implemented. Villages on the western side of the River Hull follow a line where glacial till meets alluvium. In contrast to this, eastern settlements lie on the raised gravel terraced and glacial till. The settlements which lie between the east and west consist of sparsely-dispersed farmsteads and scattered villages situated on '*islands*' of glacial till (Wastling & George, 2018, 100).

Many of the villages in the Hull Valley conform to a linear plan, this is also a very common form of village structure in Holderness. A notable exception to this trend is Cranswick which is instead centred around a village green (Wastling & George, 2018, 98). Some settlements of the medieval period have shrunk or become entirely deserted, such as Eske, which this paper will use as a case study for the region.

The remote nature of the Hull Valley resulted in the establishment of three religious houses in the area around 1150. These were Meaux Abbey, the Cistercian foundation at Swine and Watton Priory (Kent, 2002). Much of the initial drainage work in the region is down to these religious houses.

Cistercians (Meaux and Swine) were particularly known for modifying their surroundings via manual labour, using both monastic and lay brothers (Wastling & George, 2018, 99). Many of the first drains of the Hull Valley were dug by the brethren of Meaux. The drains cut by religious houses include: Eschedike [1160-82], Forthdike [1221-35], Monkdike [1210-20] and Skerndike [1210-20] (Sheppard, 1958).

Twenty monastic granges would be established across the Hull Valley. This had a positive effect on the local small-scale drainage. This can be seen at Bridlington Priory for example, when the priory was undertaking drainage on its lands within the region with the purpose to create granges. The monastic dykes would change little until the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, following the publication of William Dugdale's *'History of Imbanking and Drayning'* in 1662. Subsequent to this, drainage efforts at his estate at Wawne were conducted by Joseph Ashe in 1675 (Wastling & George, 2018, 99).

Ashe reorganised the existing drains in the region, and he was also responsible for cutting Engine Drain. Engine Drain utilised two windmills to lift water into the River Hull. He also had banks constructed around Wawne Village (Sheppard, 1958). Other landowners in the region followed suit and soon drainage would also improve around Routh and Swine. The use of windmills to drain the water marked the beginning of mechanised drainage systems in the area. Steam pumps were added to the drainage system in the late nineteenth century at Hempholme, Arram, and Dunswell (Middleton, 2000). Mechanised drainage systems, while modern, are still used to keep the valley dry today.

The upper valley carrland proved more difficult to drain. This was primarily due to the springs rising at the eastern dip-slope of the Wolds (Wastling & George, 2018, 99). The large-scale drainage works commenced in the early medieval period, eventually enabled the valley to be developed into usable arable land, though some areas remained as wet pasture. Enclosure of the Hull Valley occurred gradually. Some parishes were enclosed by an Act of Parliament, primarily after 1780. This effected the upper valley car lands disproportionately. From the eighteenth century the River Hull largely been prevented from flooding the Hull Valley region.

This was mostly achieved through the construction of flood-banks (Wastling & George, 2018, 100).

As mentioned previously, Eske will be used as a case study in order to determine whether landscape was a significant factor in the depopulation and desertion of medieval villages in the Hull Valley region.

## 5.2 Eske

Eske is located to the east of Beverley on the eastern side of the River Hull. The village of Eske is completely depopulated except for Eske Manor Farm. Eske has been extensively studied through field surveys, written sources, aerial photography and fieldwalking, with to date no excavations having been carried out (English & Miller, 1991, 5).

There are multiple theories for where the village got its name of Eske. One common theory is that Eske is derived from 'aesc' which is Scandinavian for 'ash tree'. (English & Miller, 1991, 8). This is supported by Eske being named 'Asch' in the Domesday Book which is a word derived from ash trees (East Riding Archives, c.1900, YE/ESK, zLS5321). Alternatively, it has been suggested that, due to its riverside location, Eske may have derived from the British name for water 'asche' (English & Miller, 1991, 8). The etymology of the name of the village is made even more enigmatic when it also appears as both, 'Esc', which is Old English, and as 'Eske' which is Danish (East Riding Archives, c.1900, YE/ESK, zLS5321).

The township of Eske is made up of around 1100 acres but only contains two farms, named Eske Manor and High Eske (English & Miller, 1991, 5). Beresford first recorded the DMV of Eske in 1952. Since the 1950s the earthworks of Eske have been a Scheduled Ancient Monument and have never been excavated (Beresford, 1952, 61).

### 5.2.1 Landscape

The landscape surrounding Eske is primarily low-lying, flat and either just above or at sea level. There is a rise towards the centre, near High

Eske, at this point two areas of boulder clay reach between seven-12 meters above sea level. Unfortunately, no in-depth geological survey has been conducted at the site of Eske. Despite this, it has been concluded that the soil in Eske is alluvium which was likely deposited by frequent flooding of the nearby River Hull onto the substrata clay, sand, and chalk (English & Miller, 1991, 5-6).

Towards the southern side of Eske, underlying sand and gravel break through the ground surface. To the north, lays a multitude of peat deposits including long-buried trees known as bog-oaks. These bog-oaks have been dragged to the surface due to ploughing (Poulson, 1840/1841, 482). The remaining earthworks of Eske DMV are located in two fields of pasture near the River Hull.



Figure 16: A satellite image of the DMV site (National Library of Scotland, 2022)

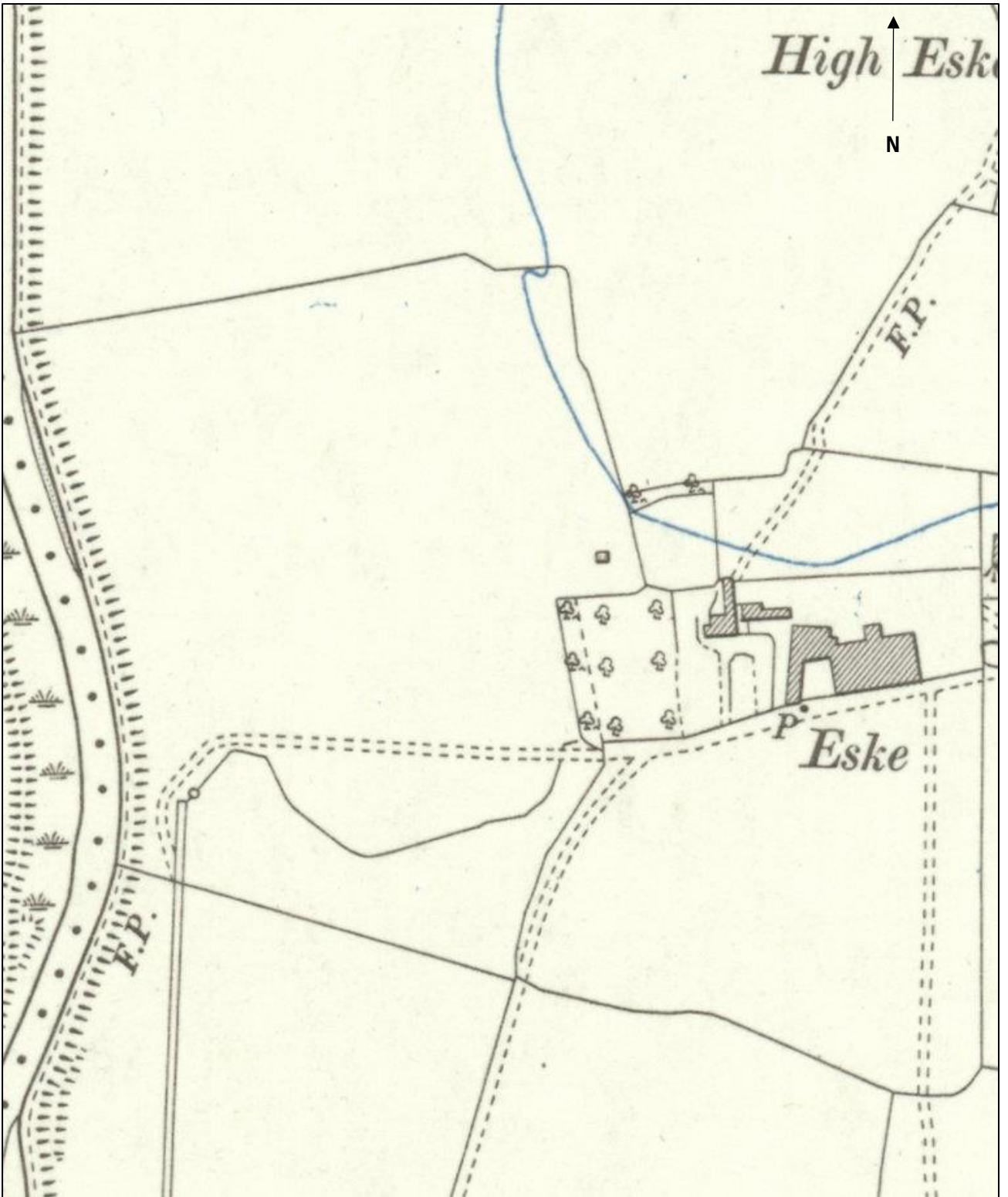


Figure 17: An Ordnance Survey map from 1888-1913 of Eske and its surrounding area (National Library of Scotland, 2022).



Figure 18: A LIDAR map showing the earthworks and topology of Eske DMV (National Library of Scotland, 2022).





Figure 19: A combination of a LIDAR map showing the earthworks and topology of Eske DMV and the Ordnance Survey map from 1888-1913 of Eske and its surrounding area (National Library of Scotland, 2022).

### 5.2.2 Village overview

During the Middle Ages, Eske was within the Wapentake of Holderness for administrative purposes. Despite this, Eske was occasionally considered within the administrative liberties of Beverley. This association was likely formed due to Eske's connection with Beverley Minster as both during and after the Middle Ages, Eske remained a part of the ecclesiastical parish of Beverley Minster (English & Miller, 1991, 5).

Aerial photography of Eske helped reveal a former village street, house plots and an arable system alongside a planned extension (English & Miller, 1991, 7). This extension contained crew yards and building platforms. Other features of this extension include a 'long strip' arable field system, boundary features, drainage works, carrlands meadows, turbaries and pastures (English & Miller, 1991, 5).

Prior to the extension the village was a much more rudimentary site by the river, a stark contrast to the planned and orderly site it became. The later planned site of Eske was located to the north of the original village plots and appeared before 1300 (English & Miller, 1991, 7). Today, Eske is identifiable by its distinctive ridge and furrow corrugations around the village site. Not all instances of ridge and furrow in England are significantly old, however, Eske's ridges and furrows predate its extension and as such are most definitely medieval. This conclusion was reached when it was discovered that the integral strips that form the field pattern lied beneath the earthworks of the newer part of the settlement (English & Miller, 1991, 7).

### 5.2.3 Development and downfall

There is evidence to suggest that there was a Roman presence at the village site which predates the DMV we know today. In 1984, an early third-century coin of Septimius Severus was found in the area. This was the first archaeological find which indicated the possibility of Roman activity. Subsequent field walking was carried out which revealed clear evidence of the presence of a Romano-British occupation of High Eske Farm, around 400 meters away from the DMV site. The lack of Roman material

dating from before the fourth century does not necessarily indicate the absence of a settlement in the area. It is possible that there may be earlier levels and deposits on the site which remain undisturbed. Alternatively, it is plausible that a Roman settlement may have been established in an area which was flooded in the later Roman period. From a purely conceptual perspective, it is possible that there may have been some early Saxon occupation of Eske, though we have yet to find archaeological evidence to support this theory (English & Miller, 1991, 8).

The village of Eske was established possibly between the ninth and eleventh centuries with its origins in Saxon and Danish hegemony. The village site is topographically lower than that of the Romano-British site which was located on the high ground (English & Miller, 1991, 27-28). The site existed prior to 1086 and was of a reasonable size in the late fourteenth century. By 1457 Eske had been substantially depopulated (English & Miller, 1991, 5). The Domesday Book reports Eske as being:

*“Land of the Archbishop of York. Berewick. In Asch (Eske) two carucates of Land for geld. Land for one plough. Six villeins and one bordar have two ploughs there [...]. These berewicks are St John’s, and are in Holderness”* (East Riding Archives, YE/ESK, zLS5321).

The open fields were laid out around the first medieval settlement, and subsequently their alignment was not altered. The open fields were in long rectangular strips with no obvious furlong boundaries (English & Miller, 1991, 28). There is no documentary evidence of Eske prior to 1086. Evidence of the village’s earliest periods survives purely through archaeological remains (English & Miller, 1991, 7).

From Eske’s Domesday entry one can determine that it was not a large settlement. Eske was taxed as two carucates (one carucate is equivalent to eight bovates). Perhaps unusually, there was only land for one plough team at Eske, despite the peasants having two plough teams. It has been suggested that this occurred due to the state of East Yorkshire in 1086. At this time, the region had experienced a series of several military campaigns by both the Normans and the Danes which will have no doubt decreased the local population and certainly left many areas as ‘waste’

according to the Domesday Book. It is likely that Eske would have been disproportionately affected by the numerous invasions due to its riverside location (English & Miller, 1991, 10).

Little is known of Eske post-Domesday, until 1240, when William of York granted Eske Manor to his brother Nicholas. William of York was the Royal Judge, Provost of Beverley, Chief Ecclesiastic of Beverley Minster, head of the Chapter and the equivalent of a dean elsewhere and later became Bishop of Salisbury. The act of gifting Eske to his brother was most certainly improper. Eske was Minster land and granting it to his brother, William had moved the land away from the Church. There is some evidence that suggests that the gift was not actually recognised by the church. In 1246 it is recorded that officers of the Archbishop and Provost had been imprisoned for taking some metal bowls and pots from the area, which should have belonged to the Crown (English & Miller, 1991, 8).

The document of William of York's gift to his brother still survives and states:

*"To all faithful in Christ seeing or hearing this writing William de Ebor Provost of Beverley, greeting in the Eternal Lord. Know that I have given and conceded and by this present writing confirmed to Sir Nicholas my brother, the knight, my manor of Esck (Eske) in Holderness with all its appurtenances both in demesne and in villeinage and in the service of free men and all my lands and tenements with all their appurtenances in the vill of Norton next Malton [...] to hold and have by Nicholas my brother and his heirs [...] paying for these yearly 1 rose at the feast of St John the Baptist in hymn for all earthly service exaction or demand"* (East Riding Archives, YE/ESK, zLS5321/1).

Documentary evidence from the Easter of 1249 indicates that a man and his wife leased *"a toft with a croft with all the appurtenances belonging to the croft of one cottar"*. The terminology used seems to exclude any land in common fields and probably a lease to a freeman (English & Miller, 1991, 13). It is important to note that not every toft at Eske had an accompanying croft. This is evidenced by a charter dating back to around 1250. The charter lists five bondmen with tofts and crofts and an additional six bondmen with just tofts (Poulson, 1840-1, 479-480). The

presence of tofts without crofts is further confirmed by the charters of 1286, 1328, 1329 and 1346 (Hebditch, 1948, 34). The earliest form of documentary evidence that suggests some residents did not have full holdings can be found in the Domesday Book. Despite this, these documents do not allow us to count the tofts and croft at Eske (English & Miller, 1991, 13).

In the mid-thirteenth century a grant of six bovates included the services of five freemen and the tofts of other six villiens. These figures suggest that the population of Eske increased significantly since 1086 (English & Miller, 1991, 10). 1268 saw Eske change hands from Patrick de Caldebeck to William, son of Nicholas of Ebor, the transaction is listed as such:

*"This is the final concord made in the court of the Lord King at York...before these justices [...] between Patrick de Caldebeck petitioner and William son of Nicholas de Ebor tenant, about a messuage and 6 bovates of Land with appurtenances except 4 acres in Hesk (Eske) in Holderness. Patrick gives up all rights to William and for this William gave him 10 marks of silver"* (East Riding Archives, YE/ESK, zLS5321/1).

A survey of Eske in 1278 details that there were sixteen bovates, each bovate consisting of arable, meadow and pasture (Poulson 1840-1, 480-1). During the latter half of the thirteenth century, Eske was extended northwards towards higher ground. It is likely that this planned extension was due to changes in the area's water table. The extension was developed with regularly planned tofts and was situated on what was formerly arable land. The arrangement of the extension was such that the tofts were aligned on either side of a straight street. The western side of the street featured both tofts and crofts, whereas the eastern side of the street featured only tofts (English & Miller, 1991, 28). It is possible that the extension came together with a reorganisation of the village's landholdings, and perhaps the introduction of arable strip holdings. Dykes protected the fields and the surrounding open carrs, meadows and pastureland were defined by drains or a boundary bank. Some documentary sources suggest that farming was not the only occupation available to those living in Eske, some appear to have thrived by working peat, fishing, or other trades such as smithing (English & Miller, 1991, 28).

There is documentary evidence that suggests the existence of a church at Eske in 1309/10 (Leach, 1898, 244-246). Despite this, the earthworks on the site fail to indicate the presence of a church within the village. Furthermore, there is no reference to a church at Eske in the diocesan archives at York. As such, it is possible that that the '*church*' in question was the manorial chapel of Eske Manor (English & Miller, 1991, 13). The lay subsidy of Eske in 1332 was 22s and in 1343 it was 26s 8d. Though this shows an increase, it was still less than the typical modal range of other Holderness villages at the time which was around 30s-40s (Beresford, 1952). A capital messuage with an enclosure is mentioned in 1346 and 1459, but there is no evidence as to its exact location (English & Miller, 1991, 9). In 1346 Eske is recorded as having 16 bovates. At this time the village had four landholders, in the same year, one of the four divided their lands: three bovates were to be held by two men, together with 15 tofts and three half tofts which were to be held by 17 men and women, who were not the same individuals who held the bovates (English & Miller, 1991, 10). In 1377 Eske had 63 recorded taxpayers, which gives us some idea of the population at the time. In 1459 the actual size of a croft at Eske was recorded and was described to be "*half an acre*" (Poulson, 1840-1, 481-1). Post-1377, Eske's population begins to decline; by 1457, the phenomenon of village depopulation was taking hold and by 1539 Eske was smaller than any of its neighbouring settlements (English & Miller, 1991, 28).

Eske Manor changed hands repeatedly until John Portington passed it onto Anthony Jackson of Killinggraves in 1451. The estate would remain in his family until 1624 when his grandson sold it to Thomas Lewins of Rushome in 1624 (East Riding Archives, YE/ESK, zLS5321). There is sufficient evidence to conclude that a significant depopulation occurred between 1371 and 1457. Depopulation would continue for decades after 1457, only more gradually. During the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century a small number of farmers resided there, though even their numbers became fewer and fewer until in 1788 when there were only two farms left (English & Miller, 1991, 11). There is a lack of evidence to suggest that the landowners of Eske lived on the site after 1459. In fact, the little evidence we do have suggests that the Grimstons, Jackson and earlier members of the Lewins family resided elsewhere in England until after the

English Civil War (English & Miller, 1991, 10). As mentioned previously, around 1346 Eske was described as of the archbishop's fee, by 1502 it was held by the Duke of Buckingham and in 1572 it would change hands again to Sir John Constable (English & Miller, 1991, 8).

A surviving muster roll from 1539, which details the men applicable for military service, sheds some light on the population at the time. The muster found only seven men in Eske. This is the smallest amount in any Holderness community at the time and is also the only number in single figures (English, 1985, 49). In 1607 there were only nine tenants in Eske. The fines of 1610, 1618 and 1625 recorded seven cottages and four messuages (Brigg, 1917, 252-3). Wills dating to 1610 and 1628, belonging to two landowners, detail bequeathed annual rents at Eske totalling £116 and £100 respectively. The wills also contain additional rents in the residue, but these are unvalued (English & Miller, 1991, 11).

A plan of the village dating to 1668 shows the village of Eske with six houses of varying size, this plan is corroborated by the 1671 hearth tax which recorded six dwellings of different sizes, the largest having eight hearths (Eske Manor) (English & Miller, 1991, 11). By 1710 there were only four messuages and 44 acres of arable land at Eske. The rest of the land now consisted of meadow, pasture and carr (English & Miller, 1991, 11). Come 1788 the once bustling village of Eske had been reduced to only two farms: Eske Manor and High Eske (English & Miller, 1991, 28).

#### 5.2.4 Conclusion

Eske saw a substantial depopulation in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For many years, it was theorised that the plague was responsible for Eske's desertion. There exists a story amongst locals that the plague entered the settlement on a bundle of rags. However, there is no evidence to support this claim. What is known, is that the land was converted to pasture. It is uncertain whether the land was converted forcibly by the landlord or whether a decline in the number of peasants led to a natural change to a pastoral economy (English & Miller, 1991, 12).

An alternative theory, and one which this paper finds more plausible, is that the change towards pastoral farming may have occurred due to environmental factors in the area. England's climate from 1150 to 1250 was comparatively mild and dry and the relative sea-levels were falling; the combination of falling sea-levels and dry climate encouraged the people of East Yorkshire to reclaim land from the marshlands (English & Miller, 1991, 13). After c.1250 England's weather began to cool down and get wetter with increased north and north-easterly winds. This caused more storms to occur in the mid thirteenth century. This weather pattern would remain until the mid-fifteenth century (Parry, 1978, 97-9, Lamb, 1982, 67-190, Lamb, 1998, 28-69).

The mid-thirteenth century also saw a rise in the Humber tide levels, likely caused by the storm surges. This had a serious impact on the low-lying areas of the Humber Estuary and the Hull Valley (English & Miller, 1991, 13). This combined with the deteriorating climate had serious implications for local residents, particularly those living on reclaimed land. There was widespread flooding and loss of land, occurring multiple times during the medieval period, the first example being the Great Flood of 1253 (Bond, 1866-8, pp. xxi, 91, 286). The flooding in this period was frequent and severe. In 1265 it is said that the waters reached as far as Cottingham, some 10 km south of Eske (Allison, 1976, 76). Flooding was such an issue, that in 1285 commissioners were appointed to survey drains, sea defences and riverbanks, to ensure that reclaimed areas were maintained and not lost to flooding (Shepherd, 1958, 2-4).

In 1357 it is recorded that the King was informed that "*the tides in the river Humber and Hull did then rise higher by 4 feet than they were wont [want] to do*" (Sheppard, 1956, 101). Due to the River Hull having a very low gradient, even the smallest change in level could have serious consequences, both impeding drainage of the area and making low-lying land less viable. An inquisition held in 1367 recorded that the sluices at Eske needed attention, these sluices were the two main drains that served the lowest carrlands north of the village, Oxmerdyke and Eske Moor drain (Poulson, 1840-1, 119). The drainage of the Hull Valley would continue to worsen throughout the medieval and post-medieval period. Drainage works of a substantial nature would not take place until the eighteenth century and



drainage in the Hull Valley remains an issue today (English & Miller, 1991, 13).

It is possible that the Eske's extension was built on higher ground due to the flooding and increased wetness in the climate. This theory is supported by the change to pastoral farming due to climate becoming wetter than before. This change would also see the adoption of crew yards for over-wintering cattle. It seems that Eske successfully adapted to the immediate issue of England's changing climate as through the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries Eske maintained and perhaps increased its population. Despite this, the ever-evolving climate and poor drainage infrastructure severely reduced the long-term viability of the settlement. This made Eske the perfect candidate for pastoral conversion and, as such, a gradual reduction in households and occupancy on the site (English & Miller, 1991, 13).

Eske would survive sheep and cattle murrain, the black death, recurring pestilences, and the aforementioned climatic changes of the thirteenth century without significant damage and had 63 recorded taxpayers in 1377. The population would begin to decline sometime after 1377, with the phenomenon of depopulation being significant by 1457. By 1539, Eske was smaller than any of its neighbours, as the combination of factors led to decreasing depopulation.

From the above analysis of Eske, it seems that the landscape was a determining factor for a village's survival within the Hull Valley. The importance of landscape can be seen when the residents of Eske extended onto higher ground in order to avoid flooding. Population decline was long and drawn out in the case of Eske, and was undoubtedly due to many factors, particularly enclosure. Enclosure for animal husbandry in the Hull Valley, like in Holderness, was possibly adopted so readily due to the wetland environment of the Valley being largely incompatible with an agrarian lifestyle. While it is true that drainage in the region made it possible to grow crops and have more arable land, the effects of the drainage were felt too late into Eske's decline for it to save the village from desertion.

## ~ Chapter Six: Yorkshire Wolds ~

### 6.1 Introduction

The Yorkshire Wolds are an area of low hills, situated in the East Riding of Yorkshire and crossing over to North Yorkshire at its extremities. To the west of the Wolds is the Vale of York and to the east lies Holderness. South-east of the Wolds, the Hull Valley is situated. There are around 60 DMVs in the Yorkshire Wolds region including Easthorpe, Holm Archiepiscope, Wharram Percy and Cowlam. The largest settlement in the Wolds region is Drifffield, but other notable settlements include Thixendale, Kilham and Pocklington.

During the Neolithic period, the Wolds was progressively cleared off woodland. This clearing represents the movement away from the hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the Mesolithic towards a farming-based economy. This new lifestyle would focus on livestock grazing and arable farming. The clearing of the woodland left behind a rolling grass upland, intersected by steep and sinuous, dry valleys. This landscape was later subdivided into smaller units by a system of bank and ditch earthworks named 'dykes' (Wastling & George, 2018, 60).

These 'dykes' were linked by a series of tracks and droveways. These formed a focus for burial mounds and other ritual monuments in the area (Wastling & George, 2018, 75). Visual evidence of this past landscape is limited due to extensive ploughing. Examples of surviving earthworks include, but are not limited to: Huggate Dykes, Dane's Dyke and Argam Dykes. There are also two possible dykes that survive beneath Cowlam and Pockthorpe (Wastling & George, 2018, 60, 75).

The Wolds is a combination of two landscape types. The intensely farmed arable fields of the Wold tops and the dry valleys that cut across them. The higher areas of the Wolds are an open rolling landscape, with impressive and vast views. The arable fields of the area largely date from the parliamentary enclosures of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The uplands of the Wolds are cut by flat-bottomed, dry valleys known as 'dales' or 'slacks' (Wastling & George, 2018, 60).

The spring line in the valley bottoms produces small area of damp marshy grassland known as '*flushes*'. These flushes are rich in plant life and given the right circumstances can develop into larger spring-fed ponds. Similar ponds can be found at Millington Pastures. As a whole, woodland is rather scarce in the Wolds, around 1.1% (Wastling & George, 2018, 62).

In the Iron Age and Romano-British periods land use was conducted much the same as before. Due to population increases in this period it is safe to assume that arable farming efforts increased in this period, though the area would largely have remained pastoral. (Wastling & George, 2018, 75). The establishment of Roman villas in the Wolds during the third century led to a reorganisation of land management in the area, which also would have led to the increase in arable farming (Fenton-Thomas, 2005).

During the early medieval period, villages were established at the heads of, or in, the sheltered valleys and hollows. These were often positioned close to the spring line, where there was an abundance of fresh water. These villages were usually surrounded by an arable open field system, with open pasture being located on the Wold tops or on the township boundaries (Wastling & George, 2018, 60).

In the twelfth century, two religious houses were established in the sheltered valleys of the Western Wolds: Warter Priory and the Benedictine Nunnery at Nunburnhome. Both of these communities farmed the floor and slopes of the Wolds valleys and grazed sheep on the upper Wolds. Both houses would meet their end in the 1530s at the hands Henry VIII with the enactment of the Dissolution of the Monasteries (Wastling & George, 2018, 60).

The open Wolds landscape would remain largely unchanged until the Parliamentary planned enclosure of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This preliminary act saw the conversion of the warrens and sheepwalks of the open Wolds into large rectangular enclosures. These enclosures were bounded by hedges which were flanked by wide verges. Due to the adoption of enclosures, isolated farmsteads were established away from the villages in the middle of the newly enclosed fields (Wastling & George, 2018, 75).

The enclosure of the Wolds led to a general decline in the number of villages in the area. At Sledmere Hall, the landowner used the Enclosure Act of 1775 to partially demolish and relocate the village whilst extending his parks bounds at the same time. (Wastling & George, 2018, 61). Despite the interesting story of Sledmere's desertion, Cowlam is the DMV which will be used as a case study for this region.

This paper will use Cowlam as the case study for this region's desertion. Wharram Percy, arguably the most famous DMV is also situated in the Yorkshire Wolds, however this was not chosen to be the case study for this paper. Wharram Percy is perhaps the most well-preserved DMV in England. As such, Wharram Percy is a bit of an exceptional case as a DMV. Wharram Percy was deserted primarily due to its land being enclosure for sheep grazing. The effects of enclosure can be and will be discussed in the section pertaining to Cowlam, as such Wharram Percy does not add anything specific to the analysis that Cowlam cannot add itself. Cowlam represents a much more typical DMV, as it has minimal physical remains, as such it is a better candidate for an area case study.

## 6.2 Cowlam

Cowlam and the neighbouring DMV of Cottam are located on the high Yorkshire Wolds; in between Drifffield and Malton. Around 20km from the North Sea coast, the once separate townships are now joined in one civil parish named Cottam. This was created in 1935 (Richards, et al, 2013, 201). Cowlam was one of the first villages visited by Beresford when he was creating his early accounts of the DMVs of the Yorkshire Wolds (Beresford 1954, 330). Rescue excavations were conducted at the site in the 1970s, one of the conclusions drawn from the excavations was that the site had been occupied into the seventeenth century (Hayfield, 1988, 23).

Cowlam is mentioned in both the Domesday Book and in the 1801 census, though usually under a number of name variations (Heritage Gateway, 2012, 64666). In the Domesday Book the village is mentioned four times as: 'Colmun', 'Coletun. Smith' and 'Gelling'. It was originally theorised that the name "Cowlam" may have originated from the Old Scandinavian word 'Kollum' and its plural 'kollur' which means 'at the hilltops'. Though

this is disputed by the presence of the alternative Domesday naming (Richards et al., 2013, 204).

The English Place Name Society first found the name “*Cowlam*” used in 1285 (Smith, 1937, 126). The Domesday entries of the site record that pre-conquest Cowlam was part of the estates of Thorbandr. Cowlam along with, Uncleby, Croom and East Heselton were part of the sokeland of the manors of Weaverthorpe and Buckton (Richards et al., 2013, 204). Today, Cowlam is a township typical of the High Wolds, a sparsely inhabited area with a large expanse of arable land. A large majority of the land which is farmed is done from Church Farm, located adjacent to the deserted medieval village.

Still standing is the church of St Mary. The origins of this church are recorded in the Domesday Book, though what stands today was constructed in the nineteenth century by the Sykes family (Hayfield, 1988, 21). Only the Norman front of the original church survives. In 1713 the church was almost entirely gone and in the same year the ruined steeple was finally pulled down. This was claimed to be because the area was “*depopulated with not any inhabitants save two shepherds*” (Beresford & St Joseph, 1977, 124).

The DMV of Cowlam itself is located at the head of a V-shaped glacial dry valley or slack (Richardset al., 2013, 230). The area surrounding Cowlam is primarily chalk (Hayfield, 1988, 21) and has a variable depth of bedrock ranging from 0.2 to over 1 meter below the ground surface (Richards, 2011). The remains of Cowlam are enclosed to the north-west, north, and east by a stony bank covered in turf. Also present at Cowlam are the remains of two sunken roads. These cross from east to west and from north to south (Heritage Gateway, 2012, 64666).

In the north-western area of the village a few building stones can be found as well as some regular enclosures. These can be seen as amorphous and non-descript hollows divided by walls and lynchets. The southern area of the DMV has been completely destroyed due to extensive ploughing. Evidence of ridge and furrow can be found outside the DMV site (Heritage Gateway, 2012, 64666).

The majority of Cowlam's boundaries are believed to be ancient; laying at both ends of the valley bottoms. Cowlam is dissected by two principal roadways, High Street and Driffield Road. The modern placement of High Street is an Enclosure Road which follows the line of a far earlier roadway constructed by the Romans. The Roman track connected Sledmere with Rudston and Bridlington Bay (Hayfield, 1988, 24).

Cowlam is a three-row 'T-shaped' village. The regular and structured alignment of the croft boundaries suggests that Cowlam was a planned site. There were at least 12 crofts in the row to the north, at least 12 in the eastern row and at least ten in the row to the south. It is also believed that these crofts would have been subdivided into individual plots (Hayfield, 1988, 33). Over years of investigation there is ever increasing evidence that a number of medieval villages on the Wolds were planned (Harvey, 1982).

The most common type of planned village on the Wolds is the 'two row' village plan, some examples of this are: Wharram Le Street, Leavening and Kirby Grindalythe. 'T-shaped' plans are also common, such as Wharram Percy, Argam and Swaythorpe (Hayfield, 1988, 33). It has been suggested that these villages were created in the twelfth century (Sheppard, 1966, 74-75), however, some have suggested otherwise stating that a reorganisation in the twelfth century would have left behind some documentary evidence of the restructure, however, no such evidence has been found (Hayfield, 1988, 33).



Figure 20: Aerial photograph of the site post-ploughing (Hayfield, 1988, 32).

Another theory about the planning of Cowlam is that the restructure took place after the Harrying of the North in 1068. The widespread destruction in the North of England presented an opportunity to start again and replan villages which were destroyed during the devastation (Kapelle, 1979). Academically, there was a movement to link the planning of villages with the evidence for planned Open Field systems. It is likely that both originated in the Scandinavian period of the ninth and tenth centuries (Harvey, 1981, 1982, 1983).

Aerial photographs taken before and after Cowlam was ploughed show that the croft boundaries were prominent earthwork features, making them easily identifiable on the ground (Hayfield, 35). Despite the general depopulation of the village of Cowlam, improvements have been made to the area over the years. As mentioned previously [see 6.2] the Sykes family constructed a red brick church at Cowlam in 1852.

In 1783 Cowlam Manor had around 2000 acres of land in total. All but a quarter of this land was used for rabbit warrens and a mere 22 acres was arable land. This changed over the years however, in 1801 the amount allocated to arable land was doubled. It has been suggested that this may

be due to the Napoleonic Wars. By 1844 all the rabbit warrens were destroyed, and 1564 acres were now turned into arable land (Beresford and St Joseph, 1977, 125). The warren was first recorded in 1743 and by 1783 included 1,600 acres of the total 2,000 acres of land that made up the township (Hayfield, 1988, 22-23).

Cowlam's neighbours of Cottam, Croom, Pockthorpe, Towthorpe and Swaythorpe (all also to become deserted) were managed in a similar way. They all had wind-break plantations either upon or adjacent to large grass fields which contained the remains of the former village (Beresford & St Joseph, 1977, 125). The earthworks of Cowlam seem to suggest the presence of two types of buildings. The first type was long and narrow peasant houses, also present at Wharram Percy, and groups of buildings surrounding a courtyard. It is quite typical to find both types of buildings at a DMV site. They can also be located at Towthorpe and Duggleby (Beresford & St Joseph, 1977, 126).

### 6.2.1 Development and downfall

#### 6.2.1.1 Cowlam manor

Cowlam's first Norman Lord was Berenger de Toeuy when he was granted extensive estates in Yorkshire. After de Toeuy's death, the land was passed to Robert de L'Isle and then again to Hugh Bigod (Hayfield, 1988, 26). Berenger de Toeuy, Robert de L'Isle and Hugh Bigod all have one thing in common, they were all tenants in chief of the land. For them Cowlam was likely no more than an entry in a ledger. It is possible that these tenants in chief never actually visited Cowlam at all. A series of sub-tenants would have been the effective lords of the village (Hayfield, 1988, 27).

In 1269 the land in Croom and Cowlam was alienated by Thomas de Elm and John de Etton to Geoffrey, Prior of Bridlington (Hayfield, 1988, 27). The manor was confirmed to have been in the possession of John Falas of Drax and his heirs in 1409. 1511 saw the death of Alexander Drax and the confirmation of the lands of Croom and Cowlam to his son, also named Alexander, to be held of the king by service unknown. Nothing more is



known of the manor for the remainder of the sixteenth century (Hayfield, 1988, 27). An Exemplification of Common Recovery in 1606 details how the manor was passed from Edward Force and Merzell Ryvers to Thomas Heblethwaytes. This changed in 1674 when James Heblethwaite quitclaimed to Sir George Marwood. It seems that shortly after this the village of Cowlam became depopulated (Hayfield, 1988, 27).

The manor was included in a will from 1732 belonging to an individual named Henry Barnard. The will also evidences that he acquired the manor during his lifetime from Sir William Strickland in 1718 (Hayfield, 1988, 27). Barnard's successor would be William Foord of Foxholes who placed Thomas Taylor as tenant. The manor stayed in the possession of the Foord family for some time. It is next mentioned in 1755 in the will of Timothy Foord of West Heslerton where he bequeaths the manor to his son, Barnard. Additionally, the manor is mentioned in 1789 in the correspondence of Sir Christopher Sykes when he mentions that he purchased an estate at Cowlam (Hayfield, 1988, 28). According to the Tithe Award of 1848, Sir Tatton Sykes held 56 acres of land at Cowlam. The rest of the land, excluding Glebe land, belonged to the Reverend Timothy Fysh Foord (Hayfield, 1988, 28).

#### 6.2.1.2 Cowlam village

The precise date of depopulation is unknown. However, it has been suggested that Cowlam is one of the only Wolds villages to be abandoned in the post-Medieval period by Hayfield (1988, 21), although as will be shown below this is not the case, many of other settlements are deserted in this period. Cowlam shares some similarities with other sites on the Yorkshire Wolds, one key similarity is that there is a clear discontinuity of permanent occupation in Cowlam and the Wolds during the fifth and sixth centuries before the villages appear (Richards et al., 2013, 253).

There were 54 people taxed in Cowlam in 1377, it is likely that there were more residents than this at an earlier date, prior to the plague as Cowlam received a remission of half its taxes in the years of 1352, 1353 and 1354 (Beresford & St Joseph, 1977, 124). The Domesday book does not give a clear indication of population prior to 1377 as it the area was classed as

sokeland. These tax records indicate a slow decline in population, this was likely initiated by the plague then further exacerbated by other factors.

Information on Cowlam increases from the fifteenth century onwards (Hayfield, 1988, 26). Thirty-three wills were recorded by the Yorkshire Record Societies, Calendars of Yorkshire Wills, at Cowlam between 1438 and 1663. These wills contained agricultural implements, land, livestock, and tenancies (Hayfield, 1988, 28). Thirteen of the 33 wills were examined in detail. Eight wills made gifts of harvested corn or corn growing on the ground. Eight left sheep or lambs, six bequeathed cattle and four contain mention of horses. The wills that wrote of corn had specific examples given, such as barley, wheat, and oats; barley being the most common (Hayfield, 1988, 28).

It seems that the Cowlam had a mixed farming community, with tenants keeping livestock and growing corn. Sheep were likely the most important and numerous animals on these farms. The wills at Cowlam provide surprisingly little evidence about what titles residents held in the area. This suggests that most residents were likely just tenants. This theory is supported by the will of one 'Margaret Robinson' bequeathed "*all the rights to my family the tenancy of the lease*" (Hayfield, 1988, 28). Moreover, a resident named Robert Megson wrote of the "*lease of my farmland*" in his will and another named William Milner stated in his will that his "*whole interest and title which I have in and to my fermhold in Collom*" in this case, '*fermhold*' likely means leasehold (Hayfield, 1988, 30).

The wills from the sixteenth century indicate that some tenants had larger holdings than others. Both William Milner in 1579 and Thomas Symson in 1603 described themselves as '*yeomen*'. Milner's '*fermhold*' consisted of 16 oxgangs. The total number of oxgangs at Cowlam is unknown but given the acreage of the area it is safe to estimate that Cowlam may have had more than 40 oxgangs at any one time. Milner would have most certainly had a substantial amount of oxgangs for one holding. It has been suggested that consolidated holdings may have been a leading factor that led to Cowlam's depopulation.

Evidence of holdings being consolidated can be found in the will of Thomas Milner's brother, Henry. Henry left Thomas "*all of my purchased Land with all appurtenances within Collom*" (Hayfield, 1988, 32). This shows Henry leaving the entire contents of his tenancy to his brother, giving Thomas the equivalent of two tenancies. The more holdings that became consolidated with time the smaller the population would get. Furthermore, a Mr William Barnard as a house holder appears frequently in the Cowlam Hearth Tax entries along with Henry Barnard who became owner of Cowlam manor in the early eighteenth century. The suggestion is that more of the land became owned by less of the population and as such residents moved out of Cowlam (Hayfield, 1988, 32).

Many historical sources in relation to Cowlam have yet to be thoroughly researched. Despite this, there is a healthy amount of information on the decline of the manor including the date and manner of desertion and the state of agriculture in Cowlam during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Hayfield, 1988, 26). John Milner's will, dated 1657, was the last will from Cowlam (Hayfield, 1988, 28). Tax Returns indicate that there were 13 households present at Cowlam in 1671 and 14 households in 1672 and 1673. The 1674 Hearth Tax shows that there were still at least 14 houses in the village at that time (Harris, 1961). Comparing names across the Hearth Tax Records leads us to assume that Cowlam was primarily inhabited by well-established families who had been residing there for generations (Hayfield, 1988, 28).

Cowlam seems to have been a small and stable community with the majority of housekeepers having only one hearth. Hearth Tax records of Cowlam village as well as pottery remains found while excavating the farmstead indicate that the desertion of the village postdates 1674. When attempting to learn more about the decline of a DMV, original Parish Registers can be a vital source of information. Unfortunately, the original Parish Registers for Cowlam have been lost, the Bishop's Transcripts of these registers survive, which illustrates the final years of the village (Hayfield, 1988, pp.30-31).

The Bishops' Transcripts show that the last baptism to take place in Cowlam was in 1678. There is no other reliant information until another baptism in 1776 by which time only one farm remained on the site. This is

likely representative of the farmers and workers who remained. The actual date of Cowlam's desertion was likely after 1674 and either before or around 1680. Within a decade the 14 households had disappeared. Due to this rapid decline, it may be safe to assume that the landlord of Cowlam was primarily to blame for the village's depopulation. This is supported by other Wolds villages which saw more prosperous tenants take over the tenancies and holdings of their neighbors, culminating in areas becoming one single holding (Hayfield, 1988, 31).

Beresford originally grouped Cowlam with the villages that had been deserted at the end of the medieval period as a result of the expansion of the wool trade and as such, sheep farming. This was later disproven by Alan Harris in 1961 who was able to use documentary evidence to demonstrate that Cowlam was not deserted until after the post-medieval period. By 1783, Church Farm was the only remaining dwelling within Cowlam and most of the township consisted of rabbit warren.

It is possible that Cowlam was depopulated as its lands were enclosed. This was a phenomenon that swept the Yorkshire Wolds and was responsible for the depopulation of many of its villages. Archbishop Sharpe in around 1700 claimed that *"the town they tell me has now no inhabitants but the parson and 2 shepherds...the tithe barn is fallen down..."*. It seems that, in this period, Cowlam and the surrounding landscape was an empty place (Beresford & St Joseph, 1977, 125).

It seems that Cowlam was depopulated around the same time as other villages in the Wolds were being deserted due to sheep enclosures. As mentioned before, much of Cowlam in 1783 consisted of rabbit warrens. But by 1844, all the warrens were destroyed and much of the land at Cowlam was used for arable farming (Heritage Gateway, 2012, 64666). The census of 1841 accounts for 44 inhabitants in the Great Farm. These were likely the farmers family and a force of labourers. Most of these labourers would have been unmarried and below the age of 18 (Beresford & St Joseph, 1977, 125). Around this time the site finally became depopulated and ceased to resemble a village at all. Now Cowlam was a disparate collection of farmers and arable land.

### 6.2.2 Excavation

The decision was made in the 1970s for Cowlam to be ploughed level (Hurst 1971, 104-112). The Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Department of the Environment commissioned Tony Brewster, the Director of the East Riding Archaeological Research Committee (Hayfield, 1988, 21), to conduct rescue excavations throughout 1971 and 1972 (Heritage Gateway, 2012, 64666). At the genesis of the excavations, it was decided by Brewster that they would focus their efforts on a northern row of earthworks which suggested the presence of buildings on the site, this became known as '*courtyard farm*' (Beresford and Hurst 1971, 104-112). Brewster excavated the sites of 4 structures within '*courtyard farm*' (Hayfield, 1988, 21) and these revealed that it was a combination of two earlier croft units. It is believed that these crofts originated from some time near the end of the medieval period (Hayfield, 1988, 21). Around three quarters of the excavated buildings seemed to be typical longhouses as indicated by their ground plans (Hayfield, 1988, 21).

During the rescue excavations, several trenches were excavated. These were organised into five independent areas. Four of these areas were focused on the buildings of the '*courtyard farm*' while the fifth and final area was dedicated to investigating a building belonging to a second farmstead (Hayfield, 1988, 23). The first trenches dug at the excavation were located over the earthworks of a rectilinear building that ran through the center of the village. In 1972, Brewster chose to examine the crofts to the east (Hayfield, 1988, 35); from this, one issue arises: Brewster made no plans or records of the site prior to his excavations. Hence, we have no knowledge of his preliminary judgement of the site or if he regarded the rows as one single courtyard farm complex or as two independent crofts (Hayfield, 1988, 35-36).

Brewster's methodology was based upon a hybrid system of 'area' excavation and a grid system. Each area was organised into a ten-foot grid, each square had a letter code, and each vertical axis of squares was given a trench number [See figures 22 and 23].

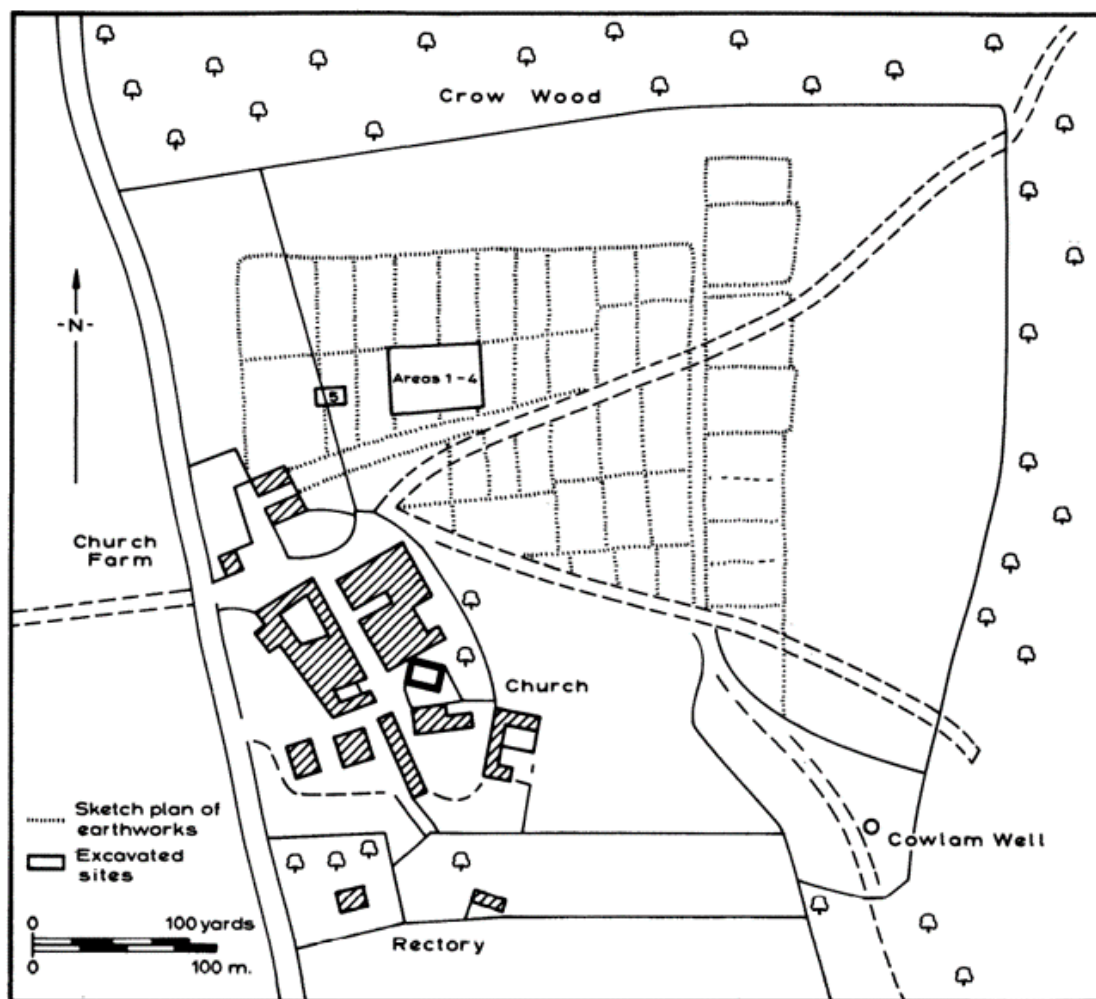


Figure 21: Plan of Cowlam village detailing the location of the excavation (Hayfield, 1988, 35).

Towards the end of the excavation, Brewster opened another trench in a croft unit to the west of area one. This led to the discovery of another building set back from the trackway (Hayfield, 1988, 36). Brewster's final interpretation of the site was that all the buildings he uncovered were part of a single post-medieval farming complex. He described one building as a house, another as a 'Great Barn', a third as a stack yard and a fourth building as a byre. He also determined that all buildings, with the possible exception of the byre, were still in use during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There have been no objections to Brewster's 'single farmstead' theory and interpretations thus far (Hayfield, 1988, 84).

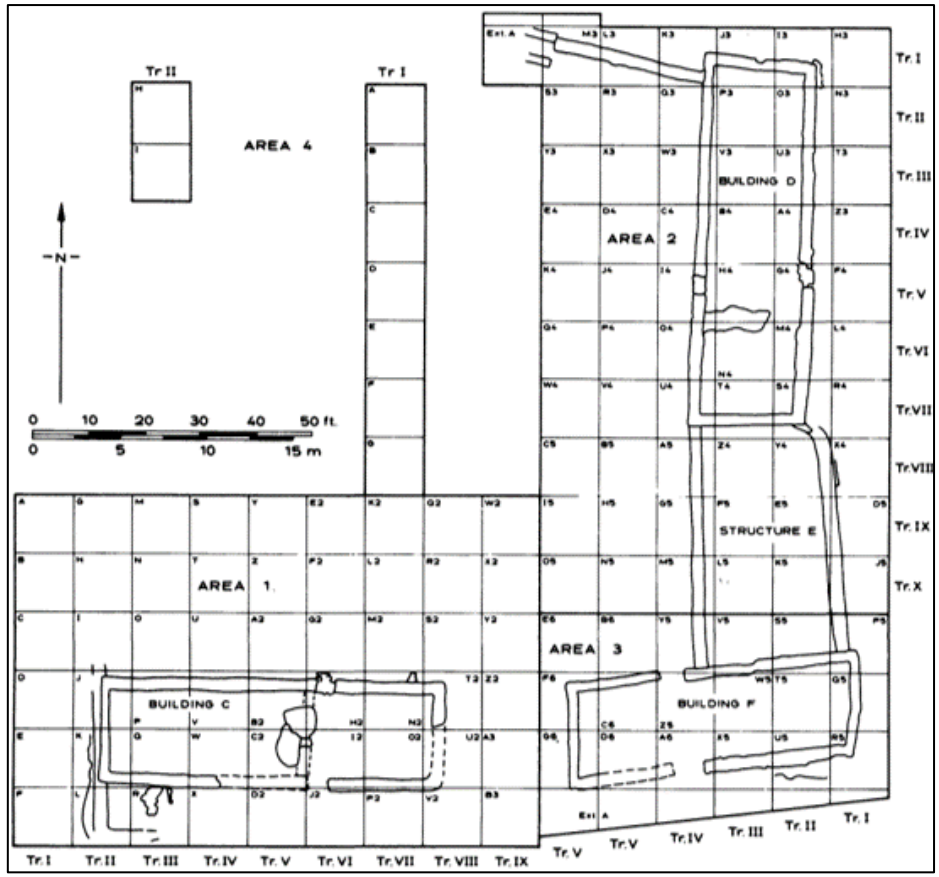


Figure 22: Trench plan of areas one to four (Hayfield, 1988, 37).

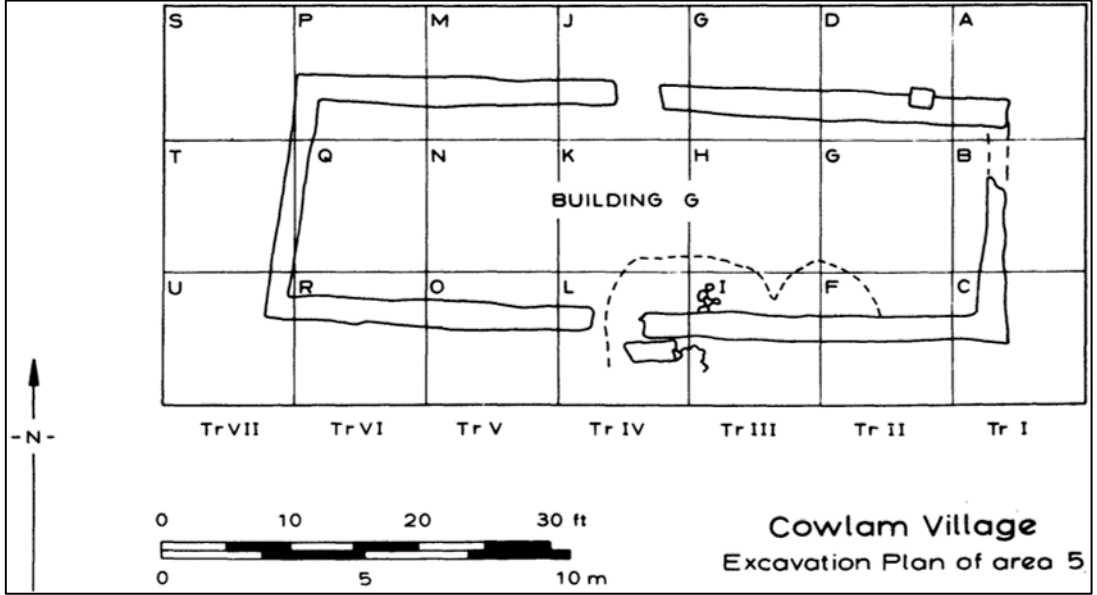


Figure 23: Trench plan of area five (Hayfield, 1988, 38).

Despite the lack of evidence available to disprove Brewster's theory, there is also no evidence to prove it either and it must be stated that a lack of evidence is not evidence in and of itself. Therefore, Brewster's

conclusions must remain as interpretations (Hayfield, 1988, 84). In 1984, Brewster passed away. After his death, English Heritage commissioned Colin Hayfield to finish Brewster's work on Cowlam and bring it to publication. Hayfield's work primarily focused on the desertion of Cowlam (Richards et al., 2013, 207). More recently, in 2003, postgraduate students from the University of York conducted a gradiometer survey of Cowlam using a FM 36 Fluxgate Gradiometer. The results from this survey were a clear indication of buried features including enclosures, ditches, gullies and possible Anglo-Saxon features and medieval plough furrows (Richards et al., 2013, 233).

### 6.2.3 Conclusion

As with Holderness and the Hull Valley, Cowlam's fate was ultimately determined by the landscape characteristics of the Yorkshire Wolds. While many other factors played into the downfall of the village, such as economic issues and political policies, the landscape of the Yorkshire Wolds would be the major determining factor in the fate of the settlement. Cowlam's lands were enclosed, this was primarily due to a parliamentary act. The characteristic rolling grassland was ideal for enclosure and for the implementation of both large-scale sheep and arable farming, but also in certain periods for raising rabbits. This led to a reduction in population as fewer hands were needed to tend for this land and for the sheep. The adoption of enclosure by the lords of the Wolds was likely spurred on by the lucrative nature of the Wolds landscape.

Cowlam is not alone in its desertion. Other Wolds villages were deserted around the same time due to the enclosures, such as the famous Wharram Percy. The village and many of the rabbit warrens that once sustained it were completely destroyed by 1844 and the bulk of the surrounding land on the High Wolds was now to be used for arable farming and sheep rearing.



## ~ Chapter Seven: Vale of York ~

### 7.1 Introduction

The Vale of York is bounded by the North Yorkshire County boundary to the north. This begins at Derwent and runs eastwards to meet the Wolds near Garrowby. To the east it is bounded by the western Wolds dry valley and limestone escarpment, which runs from around Garrowby Estate to North Cave. West of the region are the River Derwent and the Humberhead Levels, between Barmby-on-the-Marsh and Buttercrambe. The southern boundary of the region reaches as far as Walling Fen. There are around 17 DMVs in the Vale of York including, Belby, Cavil, Metham and Cotness. The large and notable settlements of the Vale of York include Holme-on-Spalding-Moore, Gilberdyke, Howden, Pocklington, Market Weighton and Stamford Bridge (Wastling & George, 2018, 20-21, 29-30).

A notable landscape feature of the Vale of York is the Escrick Moraine. This is a glacial deposit of sand and gravel which runs along the western part of the Vale of York. This deposit roughly runs parallel to the River Derwent. This stretches from Sutton-upon-Derwent in the south, towards High Catton in the north and then eastwards to Stamford Bridge (Wastling & George, 2018, 21).

In the prehistoric period the Vale of York was covered by low lying carr and marshland. This area was intersected by slow flowing creeks. Walling Fen was a marshy but navigable inlet of the River Humber. The inlet extended deep into the region. This inlet is today marked by the River Foulness. The marshy environment was utilised by the hunter-gatherer residents of the Mesolithic and Neolithic period. The area was abundant with wildfowl and fish which the residents would exploit. During the Neolithic Period and Bronze Age, the residents turned away from the hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the past and moved towards farming. These communities would settle along the Wolds margins on raised sandy dry promontories (Wastling & George, 2018, 30).

During the Iron Age, use of resources was more concentrated around Walling Fen. The low-lying areas of carr became the focus of large-scale iron production due to its supply of bog iron and woodland for fuel. The settlements in the region and especially in the Fen, were focused on the

higher, drier, fringes of the land. During the Roman period, the Fen was used primarily for pottery, iron, and salt production while farming was also intensified in the area (Wastling & George, 2018, 30). The primary routes of travel in the region are the A1079 and the A166, these are surviving Roman roads which lead from the Roman town of Petuaria (Brough) to the town of Eboracum (York) (Wastling & George, 2018, 21).

During the medieval period, a number of villages were established on the higher ground of the region or on the fringes of the marshland areas. Settlements would also be established above the floodplains of adjacent rivers. Some examples of villages which followed this trend are Howden, which is first mentioned in 959, Cavil and Portington which were founded around the mid tenth and late eleventh centuries respectively (McDonagh, 2007). A motte and bailey castle was established soon after the Norman Conquest in the Derwent Valley at Aughton and survives as a series of earthworks (Wastling & George, 2018, 30).

It appears that the settlements in the Vale of York during the medieval period were quite scattered due to their tendency to settle on high and marginal land. The Domesday Book indicates that much of Walling Fen and Bishopsoil remained as large areas of unsettled and undrained land. The marshes were used by nearby villages for pasture and turf cutting, however they also provided a source of wildfowl and fish. There were large areas of common land located within the medieval period at Holme Moor, Market Weighton, Hotham and Cliffe (Wastling & George, 2018, 30).

Much of the Vale of York belonged to the Bishop of Durham in the eleventh century. As lord of Howdenshire, the Bishop was primarily responsible for the settlement and reclamation of the lower part of the Vale of York. The twelfth century saw drainage ditches and road networks established to enable the development of settlements such as Gilberdyke, Gowthorpe, Greenoak and Sandholme, all of which were recorded for the first time in the thirteenth century. Also, during the thirteenth century, an expansion of small, dispersed settlements occurred. These villages expanded into areas of waste and common land. These became hamlets, examples of these hamlets include West Linton and Balkholme (Wastling & George, 2018, 30).

The most dispersed form of settlement were moated homesteads. These were often established beside newly improved areas of wasteland. Examples of these thirteenth century moated sites can be found along the margins of the Derwent floodplain, more specifically at Aughton and Storwood (Wastling & George, 2018, 31). Other moated sites can also be found on the margins of High Belthorpe and on the floodplains of Sutton Wood and St. Louis Farm (Wastling & George, 2018, 21). Moated sites are relatively common and are more prevalent in the southern part of the Vale of York (Wastling & George, 2018, 31). The thirteenth century also saw the establishment of the Gilbertine Priory in the Derwent Valley at Ellerton, the earthworks of which can still be seen (McDonagh, 2007).

Despite the thirteenth century trend of village expansion, much of the common and waste land in the Vale of York remained unsettled until the parliamentary planned enclosure acts of between 1760 and 1850 (Kain et al., 2004). Some townships within the Vale had already enclosed their fields prior to the parliamentary enclosure policies of the eighteenth century. Cavil had enclosed its fields from 1501, Burland Field in Eastrington was enclosed by 1630 and Portington had been enclosed by 1754 (McDonagh, 2007). The medieval deer parks of Wressle, Holme-on-Spalding-Moor and Harswell had been enclosed privately during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as they had fallen into disuse (Wastling & George, 2018, 31).

1782 saw the opening of Market Weighton's Canal. This construction runs south to join the River Ouse at Weighton Lock. The purpose of the canal was to transport agricultural produce and to assist with the drainage of the surrounding marshland. The village of Newport was developed in the late sixteenth century as a direct result of the canal's establishment. Newport was a centre for brick and tile making. Newport and Goole are the only two significant settlements in the Vale of York to be established in the post-medieval period (Wastling & George, 2018, 31). The Pocklington Canal would open nearly 40 years later in 1818. This runs south and joins the River Derwent near East Cottingwith. The purpose of this canal was also to transport agricultural produce (Wastling & George, 2018, 22).

During the Second World War, airbases were established in the Vale. These airbases include RAF Melbourne, RAF Holme-on-Spalding-Moor, RAF Brighton,

RAF Pocklington, and RAF Full Sutton (Cocroft & Thomas, 2003). Since the closure of these airbases, the land they are based upon has gradually been returned to agricultural land. This was then used for areas of agricultural storage or was developed into industrial estates (Wastling & George, 2018, 31). Despite this, there are a few number of airbases that still maintain a functional runway and operate as a civil airstrip, such as RAF Pocklington and RAF Full Sutton. A portion of the RAF Full Sutton site now lies below HMP Full Sutton, a maximum-security prison (Pevsner & Neave, 1995).

Post-World War Two there has been an extended process of consolidating smaller fields into larger blocks of land in order to facilitate modern farming techniques and equipment. The consolidation has resulted in a loss of dykes and hedgerows that once marked field boundaries (Wastling & George, 2018, 32). There has been little in the way of large-scale development in villages and settlements of the region. Some developments have been seen in those settlements closest to the transport network of the area, such as Howden, Gilberdyke, Newport, Holme-on-Spalding-Moore, Wilberfoss, Pocklington, Stamford Bridge and Market Weighton. These places have seen developments in the form of modern housing estates, factory units, small business parks and industrial estates all on the outskirts of the villages (Wastling & George, 2018, 22, 32).

ADD OVERVIEW OF DMVS – how many and where

In order to analyse the connection between landscape and desertion in the Vale of York, this paper will use Cotness as a case study for the region.

## 7.2 Cotness

Cotness is located to the east of Saltmarshe and is approximately five miles from Howden. It is exceptional for the complexity of its landholding for such a small township, assessed at only 633 acres. The early settlement was based upon a raised alluvial bank. There is evidence to suggest that the village experienced an inland shift in the mid thirteenth century, due to a general campaign of increased drainage and land reclamation.

Some of the landholding complexities present at Cotness arose from its attractiveness to influential and notable gentry. Cotness's allure was a product of its proximity to Saltmarsh and Metham, which attracted notable and influential families from the gentry (Crouch, 2019, 108). Cotness was home to some notable residents such as the Baldbody family; an infamous 14th Century criminal family; who occupied the courts with speculative suits and were involved in frequent activities of extortion and violence (The National Archives, c.1325 & 1348). Other residents include Gideon Wells, a Quaker physician and Evelyn Pierrepont (second Duke of Kingston-Upon-Hull), whose mistress, Thérèse de Fontaine de la Touche, retired to Wells' residence in Cotness after the end of her relationship with the Duke in 1750. This gave the town of Cotness an air of notoriety which remained into the Victorian era (Crouch, 2019, 108).

### 7.2.1 Landscape

Cotness's western boundary is one of the older drains in the district. It is known as Laxton Goit or Cotness Fleet. The eastern boundaries of Cotness are also old, evidence exists from before 1195, when Bishop Hugh du Puiset granted Metham to John the clerk. The document refers John's new land as being between "*Cotnesse*" and Yorkefleet, but also mentions Metham's western boundary. Metham's western boundary was the eastern boundary of Cotness. The eastern boundary ditch is known as Celery Bank, nowadays only intact as far as Metham Lane (Crouch, 2019, 108).

The northern boundary of Cotness was only partially defined by Metham Lane as, in the 1630s, the Ings, a collection of pastures, was located north of the lane, but was within the Cotness township. A conveyance of freehold lands dated 1751 from Gideon Wells to Amaziah Empson, details the southern border of Cotness as "*the middle stream of the River Ouse*". The Bishopsoil Enclosure Award of 1777 allotted a total of 64.5 acres to Cotness proprietors. The Wallingfen enclosure in 1781 created another small exclave of Cotness of 23 acres. Both enclosures were absorbed into the new civil parish of Bishopsoil and Wallingfen in 1880 (Crouch, 2019, 108).

By today's standards, Cotness is rather remote. However, in centuries gone this was not the case. This is primarily due to the contemporary

importance of river transport and travel. The River Ouse was an essential factor in the survival of Cotness. There was a sandbank called *Contenessfal* which lay just off the township. This was mentioned as one of the Ouse's hazards in 1192. The River Ouse was also a local danger (Crouch, 2019, 108). It was not uncommon for the river to throw corpses onto the sandbank, an unknown individual was found dead on the Cotness sand bank by Thomas Oty in 1376 (De Potto, 1376-1378). Ferry Lane and Cotness Lane would remain an important inland route towards Howden in the nineteenth century and ran from the landing point of the ancient Whitgift Ferry in Metham. The course of the lane was changed in 1750 due to enclosure (Crouch, 2019, 108). Ferry Lane connected to Cotness Lane at Cotness Hall, forming a town street known as '*Le Cawsie*'. It ran northwards past the town crofts on the east and Cotness Manor on the west and met Metham Lane and Chapel Lane at its north end (East Riding Archives, 1625, DDSA/171 & 1761, DDSA/185). Swine Lane, one of Howdenshire's Broad Lanes or Greenways for the annual drifts of stock on to Bishopsoil Common started at the north-west corner of the township (Crouch, 2019, 108).



Figure 24: Ordnance Survey Map from 1885-1900 showing the locality of Cotness [SE 800 240] (National Library of Scotland, 2022).

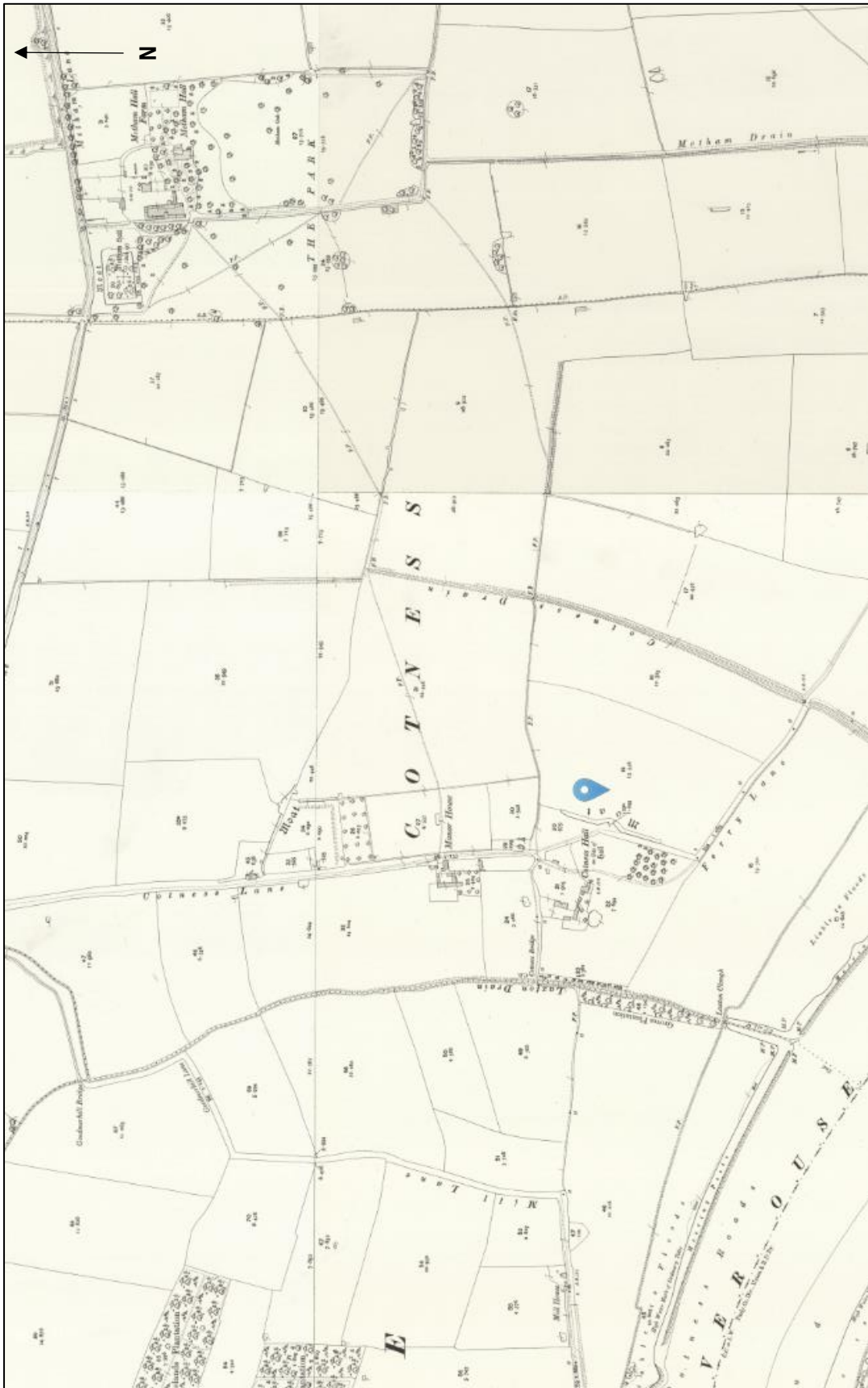


Figure 25: Ordnance Survey Map from 1892-1914 showing the locality of Cotness [SE 800 240] (National Library of Scotland, 2022).





Figure 26: A LIDAR map of the locality of Cotness, showing the topography of the area [SE 800 240] (National Library of Scotland, 2022).

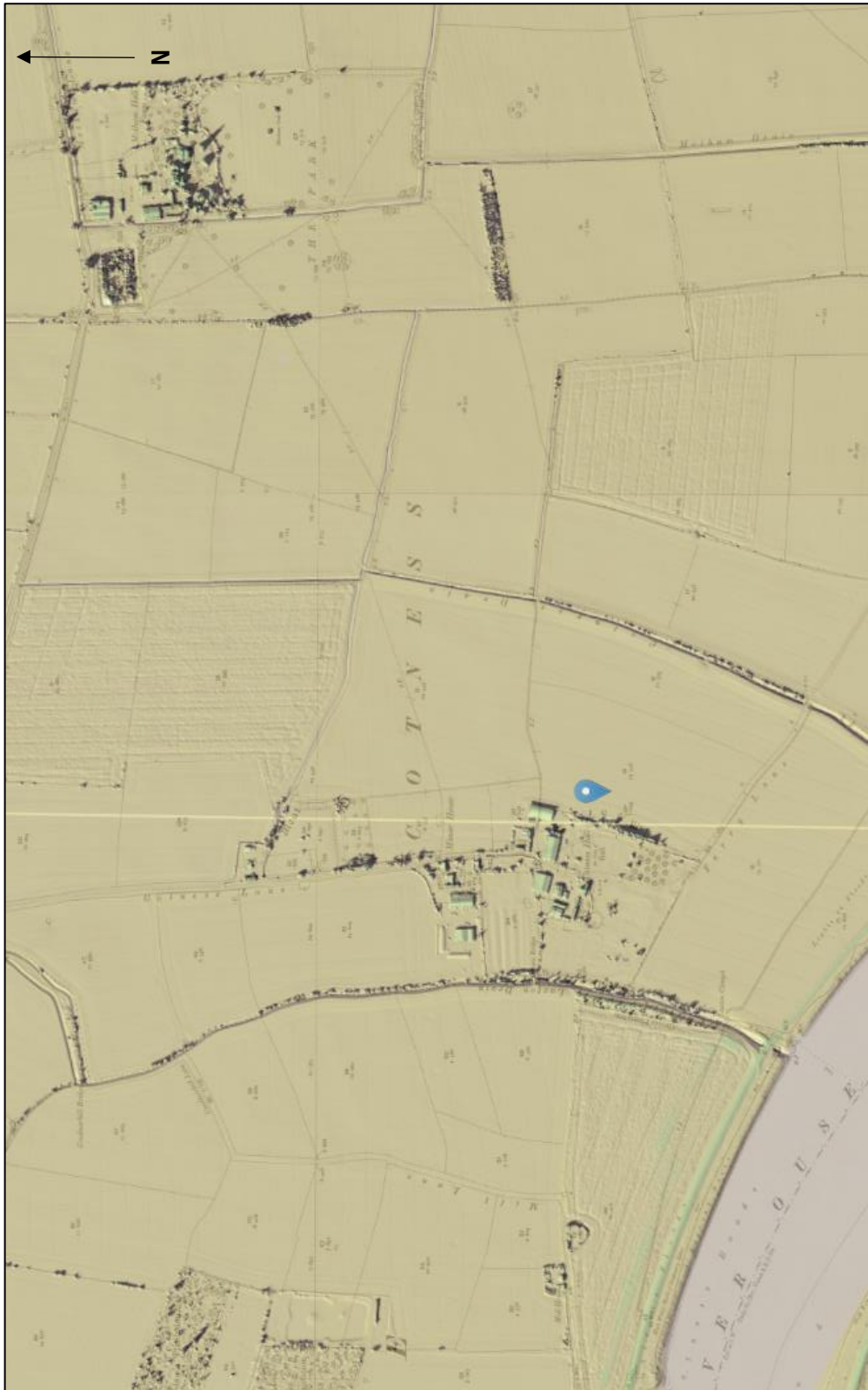


Figure 27: A combination of the LIDAR map of the locality of Cotness, showing the topography of the area, and Ordnance Survey Map from 1892-1914 showing the locality of Cotness [SE 800 240] (National Library of Scotland, 2022).

### 7.2.2 Development and downfall

Among the members of the lordship of Howden in 959, Cotness is not listed. Cotness first appears in documentary evidence in 1086 in the Domesday Book but is recorded as Cotes. Cotness at this time was a Berewick of Howden manor and consisted of a half-carucate (Crouch, 2019, 109). The name "Cotnesse" appears well before 1195 (The National Archives, 1246/1247), "Cotnesse" is derived from the Old English 'cote' and 'naess' which means '*headland with cottages*'. This is likely in reference to Whitgift Ness on which the earlier settlement was situated (Smith, 1937). The arable land in Cotness in 1086 would have likely run along the alluvial levee alongside the river. It is possible that the houses on the site were clustered to the south of the present day Cotness Hall (Crouch, 2019, 109).

A half-carucate of land at Cotness, mentioned in the Domesday Book, would remain in the possession of the Bishop of Durham after 1086. This would remain so until 1139 and 1152 when it was granted to the Augustinian canons of Thornton in Lincolnshire (Crouch, 2019, 109). This land was to later change hands again when the bishop's successor, Hugh du Puiset, returned to reclaim the parcel of land. He offered the canons an alternative half-carucate of land at Faxfleet in exchange for the land in Cotness (Snape, 2002). This trade was ratified by Bishop Philip in 1199, when Cotness was apparently in the hands of the bishop of himself (The National Archives, 1246/1247, JUST1/1045).

The settlement was rated as a half-carucate in 1258. In 1285 the land was rated far larger at one and a half carucates, three times its original size. This expansion is likely due to the campaign on land reclamation and drainage in the thirteenth century (Public Record Office, 1899-1921). William Clervaux was an influential and controlling interest within the village and was an enthusiastic advocate of the drainage campaign it would make sense it his influence was what led the settlement to grow before 1268. It is likely that the village was physically relocated north between 1260 and 1280 to the new site at Cotness Lane (Crouch, 2019, 109). 1279 saw one of Walter Wychard's coheirs being punished for allegedly forcibly

demolishing William Hakun and Alice's houses in Cotness, it is also said that she then carried off the timber (The National Archives, 1279 KB27/49, The National Archives, 1293-4, JUST1/1084).

The creation of the manor of Cotness at the onset of the thirteenth century gave birth to two entities. The division of Walter Wychard's inheritance between his two daughters led to the creation of the Clervaux manor and the Villers manor from the tenement of Muriel, his daughter. The two farmsteads that dominate Cotness's present day landholding originated from the Clervaux manor. The Clervaux manor itself originating from the Wells tenement which created Manor Farm and the Mawson tenement which created Cotness Hall. These two holding have been under single ownership since World War Two (Crouch, 2019, 109).

Fourteenth century lay taxation records indicate that Cotness was once a larger settlement. This even allowed some form of settlement dispersal. There were 69 people taxed at Cotness in 1377; while the poll tax of 1379 recorded a substantial population of 27 men and 32 women. Most of whom played agricultural roles (Fenwick, 2005).

Cotness was taxed separately throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the settlement was sometimes grouped up with Metham and Saltmarshe. In the mid-fifteenth century, Cotness received a small amount of taxation relief, equalling six percent (Beresford, 1952, 59).

Evidence of the shape of the village would only become clear in seventeenth century sources. It was located at the southern end of the lane (East Riding Archives, 1761, DDSA/185). The town crofts were to the east side of the lane and are visible today as long and rough stretches of pasture. Opposite the houses, across the lane, is a nine acre close which was once a manorial enclosure; Manor House Farm, to the south, is the successor to this enclosure (Crouch, 2019, 109).

The older of the two manor houses also lay within a moated enclosure. Still surviving is the eastern ditch of the old Cotness Hall, as well as the northern length of a moat. This same moat is mentioned in the property bounds. New building occurred on the site in 1618 when Marmaduke Machell constructed a residence fit to represent his new wealth. Documentary

evidence from 1761 mentions the old hall, more specifically "*the moat of the Old Hall grounds*", it states that the area was an extension to a property on the western side of Cotness Lane (Crouch, 2019, 109).

In the early seventeenth century Cotness had a functioning common field system. 1633 saw Robert Rainforth owning 17 acres of land at Cotness. "*three towne fields of Cotness*" are mentioned in documentary evidence from 1646/7 (East Riding Archives, 1633, DDSA/168, 1646, DDSA/148 & 1647, DDSA/174). The "*three towne fields*" referenced are North Field, Middle Field and Bank Field. Bank Field being named as such due to the raised alluvial bank along the River Ouse named '*Goate*' or Goit Bank in 1647 (East Riding Archives, 1647, DDSA/174).

The Lords of Metham were dominant in Cotness as it formed a bailiwick within their estate in the sixteenth century; this lasted until 1649. The Machells and Wells, two local yeomen families, became wealthy due to their place in the Metham estate administration. The way was opened for the newly aspiring Wells family as the Metham family had reserves in the Civil War and sold off their assets in Cotness. The Wells family were Quakers and had purchased the Metham Manor of Cotness. This initiated the enclosure of the common fields in the locality and was completed by the 1680s (Crouch, 2019, 109).

Several common fields at Cotness were enclosed by 1682, this happened as a result of Yeomen consolidating their holdings (East Riding Archives, 1682, DDSA/176). Documentary evidence from 1720 explicitly references the ending of stinted pasture and mentions the enclosure of common land at Cotness. The land it mentions enclosed used to be called '*Twelve Cow Gates*'. Furthermore, there is no reference after this date of selion strips being present at Cotness (Crouch, 2019, 115).

It seems likely that communal farming met its demise due to a mutual agreement between the several prominent land holders in the area. This process was multifaceted, multi-staged and meticulous. Evidence of this can be seen in 1750 when Gideon Wells, member of the prominent Wells family at Cotness, petitioned the Crown to change the course of Ferry Lane as Wells reorganised his enclosures and partitions in what was once Bank Field (Crouch, 2019, 115). Mention of Wells' closes survives from 1757:

*"closes called the Bankfield Closes, now being in one close"* (East Riding Archives, 1747-1759, QSV/1/4, 106)

The village had become depopulated in 1769. Several of the crofts to the east were now vacant (Crouch, 2019, 109). The Land Tax Assessment of 1769 shows that Cotness was split between ten landowners, only two of which appear to be residents of the township (East Riding Archives, 1769, DDSA/195). The shape of Cotness has hardly changed since the eighteenth century. Cotness Hall and Manor Farm are the two surviving houses on the site, were constructed in the late eighteenth century. These structures are large and grand and represent a trend of ambitious rebuilding of earlier houses on the site. These structures reflect the success and wealth of the yeoman families of Cotness (Crouch, 2019, 109).

An enclosure plan from this period survives though it relates only to the Bishop Soil allotments (Nottinghamshire Archives, 1772, DD/439/31). Early enclosure efforts in the seventeenth century meant that landowners and tenants in the eighteenth century had *carte blanche* to farm how they wanted (Crouch, 2019, 115).

Population on the site during the 19th century was notably smaller than centuries prior. It could now only sustain two working farmsteads and was well below the viable population of a township or village (Crouch, 2019, 109). The agricultural return of 1867 finds that in excess of 252 of the 624.25 acres of the land at Cotness were being used to cultivate cereal and root and spring crops. There was also a large percentage of potatoes and turnips, but besides that, Cotness was much the same as its neighbours (Crouch, 2019, 115).

By the early 1900s the arable farming at Cotness had been reduced to a mere 60 acres, with the rest of the land being under grass as animal husbandry and cattle farming increased. After the first world war the land was used to farm relatively small amounts of flax and sugar beet (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, 1867, 1907 & 1927). Since the 1970s Cotness defaulted to growing wheat, oil seed and rape seed like its neighbours (Crouch, 2019, 115).

Field investigation in 1962 suggested that the moat at Cotness was likely for ornamental purposes as opposed to defensive (Heritage Gateway, 2012,

59384). Before the 1970s it was possible to see the moated site of a large yeoman residence towards the northern end of the site. However, this has since been ploughed level (Crouch, 2019, 109). In 2016 Cotness was occupied by 5 houses (Crouch, 2019, 109), there is no physical evidence of the village itself.

### 7.2.3 Conclusion

In the Vale of York villages were established on higher ground and on the fringes of wet areas. The structure and establishment of the villages within this region was determined by the landscape. The production means and economies of the villages was also heavily determined and effected by the landscape in which the villages were based. The villages of the Vale of York prioritised their economic output around the fisheries, salt production, and turf cutting. Arable farming was also an option for those living in the region. The landscape determined how the village would function and what resources they would have access too.

Cotness ceased to become a village, ultimately, because the local landlords decided to consolidate their holdings. Cotness was slowly depopulated over centuries leading the prominent figures and land holders to instead enclose their holdings and use their land purely for farming. This was a far more profitable use of their property and was a very common cause of village desertion. Although in an area of volatile landscape, this did not play such a crucial role in the desertion of the settlement.

## ~ Chapter Eight: Conclusion ~

To conclude this thesis, the landscape was a significant factor in the depopulation and desertion of medieval villages within the East Riding of Yorkshire. However, in order to justify this conclusion this chapter will go into greater detail as to how this was determined. This paper has assessed large areas, primarily through case studies. The case studies selected for this piece were selected as they are representative of other villages in their respective region. Though it is true that no two villages are the same, these villages represent what was common for a set area. The ability to compare and contrast patterns between different regions is what is primarily being assessed within this paper and this method of analysis allows this to happen.

Rotsea's reduction in population is indicative of the parliamentary enclosures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, this was likely just the final the factor which further exacerbated an already present problem. The landscape of Holderness was one of marshes and harsh clay surfaces. The land there struggled to produce a substantial amount of grown produce which meant that the residents of the area were competing in a difficult agricultural market.

It is likely that the residents of Rotsea, and by extension the residents of settlements of Holderness, were able to cultivate enough produce to support themselves, but were unable to produce excess amounts which could have been sold and traded. Instead, villages within the Holderness region relied on their fisheries, maritime trade, pastoral farming, and peat cutting to make a sustainable living.

It is then safe to claim that the landscape was a significant factor in the lifecycle of the village and by the same merit, in the demise of said village. Holderness as a region the highest rate of erosion in all of Europe and relied on intensive drainage schemes to make certain areas of land viable for living. One such area was that around Rotsea. It seems likely that Rotsea was a victim of population shift.

It seems probable that the harsh, infertile clays and boggy nature of the area drove the population to move and resettle in larger more successful settlements within the Holderness Region. This was only exacerbated by the



parliamentary enclosures. Due to the move towards a shepherding lifestyle, less farmhands were needed and as such, less population. The shift towards a pastoral lifestyle suited the area more favourably as it was difficult to grow crops in the area from the beginning.

Those who left to seek out more prosperous settlements did so, driven by long existing issues in the area's landscape (floods and infertile soils) and by the enclosures which changed how the landscape was used. Ultimately then, it is clear to see that landscape was a significant factor in the depopulation and desertion of medieval villages within the Holderness. Other DMVs which shared a similar form of desertion to Rotsea in this region are Etherdwick and Newsome Mowthorne.

The Hull Valley is characterised by the River Hull. During the medieval period the river was a vital part of life to the residents who lived there. The river was a source of food, communication, trade, and drainage before proper drainage systems were implemented in the region. Eske was used as a case study for the region as it represents a fine example of a desertion within the Hull Valley.

The history in the area is one of land reclamation and constant drainage. Vast areas of the valley were either seasonally or permanently flooded. This led to a number of issues, one of the largest of which was that it made arable farming difficult. This was an issue that was also faced by Holderness, but the Hull Valley saw much more of its region waterlogged than that of Holderness.

The landscape was a determining factor for how and where villages were to be constructed in the region. Many of the settlements in the region were established on '*islands*' of glacial drift or on the edges of the valley. This was likely a way to avoid the settlement flooding. The residents did not overly rely on an arable farming economy due to the challenges of their landscape. Instead, they exploited windfowl, fish, peat, and salt as a way to sustain themselves and their economic health.

Eske, like many other villages in the East Riding of Yorkshire, was enclosed during the parliamentary enclosures. This usually led to a sharp decline in residents. However, this decline had already occurred in Eske prior to the parliamentary enclosures. During the medieval period there

were a number of changes in the environment, as detailed in Chapter Five. These changes were more heavily felt in the Hull Valley than surrounding areas and it is probable that the depopulation of Eske was directly tied to the changes that occurred to the climate and landscape during this period.

The adoption of a pastoral farming economy, which was encouraged by parliamentary enclosures in most other villages, was likely already underway due to the massive depopulation Eske had already seen in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, predating the threat of enclosure. Environmental factors led to the depopulation and eventual desertion of Eske. Other villages in the Hull Valley region which shared a similar decline and desertion to Eske are Storkhill and East Benningholme. The climate and landscape changes within the Hull Valley show that landscape was a significant factor in village desertion within the East Riding of Yorkshire.

In the Yorkshire Wolds, enclosures were also a dominant force in the changing use of land and the subsequent depopulation and desertion of villages. Cowlam faced many issues during its life cycle, from economic to political hardships, the Wolds landscape was a constant factor that was to determine what would happen to the village.

The swift adoption of the parliamentary enclosures in the area was likely indicative of the Wolds landscape itself. The rolling grasslands of the Yorkshire Wolds fit well with the structured division of the enclosures. Unlike both Holderness and the Hull Valley, the Yorkshire Wolds had no issue when producing crops and as such always had a good mixture of arable and pastoral farming distribution in the region.

The adoption of enclosures then, served to intensify the amount of pastoral and arable farming occurring in the region, taking up space which could have once served to expand a village. Other villages in this region that suffered a similar fate as Cowlam are Wharram Percy, Hunsley and Arras. The focus in the Wolds was now that of scattered farmsteads, not of nucleated villages. This new change was the perfect fit for the Wolds landscape; once again confirming that the lucrative nature of the Wolds

landscape was one of, if not the, most significant factor in depopulation in the area as it only intensified the effects of the enclosure acts.

The villages of the Vale of York were deliberately settled on higher ground and on the fringes of wet areas. The landscape of the area dictated where the village was erected. Unlike Holderness and the Hull Valley, which had very specific qualities, the Vale of York is a much more balanced landscape which allowed its residents to take advantage of a multitude of resources such as fish, salt production, turf cutting, pastoral and arable farming.

Residents living in the Vale had the means to compete in many different economies, this was based entirely on the landscape. The Hull Valley, Holderness and Yorkshire Wolds all had much more specific landscapes which had set resources that were far more accessible than others, this was more balanced in the Vale; the landscape then, in many ways determined the prosperity of its villages.

The village of Cotness was ultimately hamstrung by the local landlords of the area. These lords decided to consolidate their holdings. This resulted in Cotness no longer resembling a nucleated village. Similarly, to the Yorkshire Wolds, the adoption of enclosures into the Vale of York was likely inevitable as the landscape of the Vale suited the structure of enclosures and proved to be more lucrative to the landholders in the area. Other Vale of York villages which suffered a similar fate as Cotness include Metham, Belby and Cavil.

Holderness, the Hull Valley, The Yorkshire Wolds, and the Vale of York are all microcosms of the much larger East Riding of Yorkshire. Each region has its own unique characteristics and yet all four areas share similarities with one and other. The landscape of the East Riding has been a constant factor throughout history to those who have resided within it. The landscape of a village determines the location, the economy, the environmental risks, the priorities of the residents and many more aspects of the settlement's lifecycle and development.

Successful settlements of the Middle Ages which survive into the modern era often do so for a number of reasons. Though one common factor between them is an ideal landscape. A settlement that is situated in an area which

can provide a variety of resources and also a landscape which is easily defensible from both human and natural threats, will thrive. The villages deserted in the medieval period were often hindered by their landscape for one of more reasons. These reasons are often site specific and pertain almost entirely to their environmental situation. In an extreme example of this phenomenon, Ravenserod fell victim to its landscape and as a result was destroyed unlike its competitors, Grimsby and Hull, which still survive as a town and a city respectively.

This paper has assessed how landscapes can both limit and improve a village's production and growth. It has also shown how the landscape influences the inhabitants to adopt new measures such as enclosures. The landscape in which medieval villages were situated is intrinsically linked to the health of the village. In the Hull Valley and Holderness, residents attempted to improve the landscape through land reclamation and drainage, in the Yorkshire Wolds the same sentiment can be seen, but woodland was cleared instead of land drained. In many ways, the relationship between the landscape and the villages which exist within it is symbiotic.

Ultimately then, this thesis determines that landscape was a significant factor in the depopulation and desertion of medieval villages within the East Riding of Yorkshire.

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