

# **An Archaeological Resource Assessment of Medieval Derbyshire**

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Note: For copyright reasons the figures are currently omitted from the web version of this paper. It is hoped to include them in future versions.

## **Introduction**

In 1988 the Derbyshire Archaeological Advisory Committee published a document entitled 'Archaeology in Derbyshire: Research Potential'. In the final chapter, which covered medieval and post medieval settlement, Richard Hodges noted the poverty of the database in Derbyshire compared with other counties, but also drew attention to the enormous potential in the archaeological record in Derbyshire for '...a vigorous attack on at least five major issues in British archaeology' (DAAC 1988). By database in this context it is assumed that Hodges was referring more the extent of information derived from excavation and survey, rather than simply that recorded on the SMR. I will consider the SMR as a resource a little later. The potential of the archaeological record in Derbyshire remains just as important today but the poverty of the database, in Hodges use of the term, for the medieval period has improved little.

The reasons of topography and geology, which are fundamental to the development and landscape of the county are no less important in the medieval period as in the earlier periods which we have already discussed. The county extends from the classic arable landscapes of the lowlands to the gritstone uplands of the southern Pennines, with its dispersed settlements and pastoral economy. The varying geology offers a range of landscapes from the Trent Valley to the high gritstone moorlands, and a variety of natural resources like lead, iron and coal, which have inevitably shaped the development of the area, both economic and social, since the middle ages.

## ***The Medieval Economy***

The first of Hodges' targets for vigorous attack with the evidence from Derbyshire was the medieval economy. Under this heading he addressed the development of towns in the county and whether the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries saw an 'urban revolution' as happened elsewhere and the concomitant developments in the rural areas.

## **Towns**

The markets and fairs of medieval Derbyshire have been well documented particularly by Coates (1965) who identified 28 markets by the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century. Not all of these were in what we would consider urban centres of course. With the exception of Chesterfield and Derby however, archaeological evidence for the development of Derbyshire towns is minimal. Excavations in Chesterfield in the 1970's and early 80's by NDAT were quite extensive and revealed evidence of medieval and Roman occupation. While a report on the Roman period has been published in the DAJ ( Ellis 1989), the findings relating to the medieval period remain unpublished and there appear no plans to remedy this in the foreseeable future. Chesterfield is relatively well documented and was the subject of a multi-volume history in the 1970's and 1980's (Bestall 1974) and the lack of the archaeological evidence to complement this is unfortunate. In the last 18 months there have been further excavations in the town, again focussed particularly on the Roman period, but further evidence relating to the medieval period has come from excavations at South Street and Lordsmill street, on the fringes of the known medieval town. Chesterfield was the major market centre in north east Derbyshire and may have been the site of a major pre-conquest minster set within the Roman fort, although this is not universally agreed. Around AD1200 an extensive new market place was laid out to the west of the original core of the town around the church. Excavations at South Street have shown the possibilities of extensive survival of archaeological remains below existing 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> buildings, when a medieval malting kiln was revealed, as well as foundations of earlier structures on the site.

Derby is of course the major town in the county but it has fared poorly when it comes to excavations in the medieval core of the city. Only one major excavation has been carried out in the medieval town, again most of the excavations have been concentrated on the Roman areas of Derby, which appear to be distinct from the area occupied during the middle ages. The excavation at Full Street in 1972 by Richard Hall (1972) revealed a series of pits with a collection of pottery ranging in date from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards but no evidence of buildings or other structures was found. A more recent evaluation in the area of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Court House has revealed some evidence of medieval occupation (T+PAT 199?)

Derby and Chesterfield certainly had origins in the pre-conquest period but Castleton and Bolsover appear to be planned towns outside major castles founded at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Hart 1984). Soon after 1066, castles were established at Castleton and Bolsover, which developed into major defensive structures and in both cases planned towns were laid out next to them. These had a grid pattern of streets and were both defended by ramparts

and controlled important routeways. In the case of Castleton it would also have had a role in controlling the lead fields in the northern part of the Peak. There have been no excavations in Castleton and excavations in Bolsover have mainly been on the fringe of the town, which again revealed evidence of Roman settlement rather than Medieval. Otherwise there have been no excavations of any note in any other town.

The extended urban surveys, which are currently under way for Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, funded by English Heritage, will hopefully provide a base and starting point for identifying research questions and opportunities relating to these urban centres.

### **The countryside**

Towns cannot exist in isolation and Hodges also drew attention to the quality of the evidence for medieval rural landscapes and the potential for documenting the changes in the nature of the rural settlement and agriculture during the period. Turning to the data base as represented by the SMR there are a total of c60 deserted medieval villages and 22 shrunken medieval settlements recorded on the SMR. Within the Peak District there have been no substantial excavations of any medieval village settlement. The survey work carried out by John Barnatt and colleagues at the National Park has produced a growing record of surveys of landscape and villages, farms and field systems. In addition the historic landscape character assessment, which has been carried out for the National Park and is currently underway for the rest of the county, will undoubtedly help inform studies of the medieval period, even though the evidence is derived from historic maps of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and later. Valuable as the survey information being generated by the National Park is, our understanding of the ebb and flow of upland settlement is going to be constrained until detailed surveys and excavation of some of these sites is carried out to address specific issues and questions.

One of the five major issues Hodges identified in relation to rural settlement was indeed the advance and retreat of upland settlement and he pointed out that upland Derbyshire offers a ‘..fine case study of this process and of its relationship to changes in population levels and market opportunities.’ (1988:14). The evidence in the White Peak for medieval and later agriculture is extensive in the form of deserted and shrunken settlements and surviving ridge and furrow and lynchets, which are widespread up to heights close to 1000 feet above sea level suggesting an intensive agricultural exploitation of the area prior to the 14th century (Wightman 1961; Jackson 1961; Hart

1981:131-2; Barnatt and Smith 1997:60-76). Particularly good examples of DMVs occur at Ballidon, Conkesbury and Snitterton amongst others.

There are examples of other monument classes such as moats and particularly monastic granges. While the Peak District was particularly devoid of religious houses as such, a number of monasteries held estates in the Peak and farmed them by way of granges, most notably that at Royston Grange near Parwich, which was excavated by Sheffield University as part of the Royston Grange Project. These were probably mainly concerned with sheep farming but at Needham Grange near Hartington fossilised open field strips survive associated with the grange. Hart, in the North Derbyshire Survey (1981:154-6), lists 41 possible monastic granges, owned by at least 20 different monastic houses, mostly Cistercian and Augustinian.

The only substantial excavation of a medieval site in the Peak District is that carried out by Hodges and the University of Sheffield at Royston Grange. Excavations and survey have revealed the grange buildings and identified the boundaries of the estate. The buildings were of some pretension but continued flooding of the site resulted in their abandonment at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century in favour of a drier site, the buildings then being used for stock. Hodges points out (1989:119) that ‘..Medieval Roystone, like Cronkstone grange, bears the hallmark of a colonised landscape, selected for the purpose of exploiting it for cash crops’, in this case almost certainly wool and probably lead.

Surviving evidence of deserted settlements in the north and west of the county, where the settlement pattern was more dispersed, is largely absent, but recent identification of a possible medieval site at Arnfield in Longdendale (J. Walker pers comm) and the settlement of Butteralls near Bubnell (Barnatt and Smith 1997:61) offer hope of further examples being recognised. In addition the surveys being carried out by the Peak District National Park in the Upper Derwent Valley, for example, are identifying evidence for medieval settlement and also evidence of charcoal burning. The whole chronology and nature of upland settlement in the county and its links with the lowlands and the areas to the north and west is an subject worthy of further research.

The eastern side of the county, particularly the area of the Coal Measures, remained wooded for a much longer period and the eventual clearance is reflected in place name and documentary evidence. In the parish of Dronfield,

for example, Hart has identified a number of place names which indicate woodland clearance, Birchett, Woodhouse, Summerley, Cowley,. Stubley etc. and documentary evidence from the Beauchief Abbey archives also indicates clearance in the area (Hart 1981:132; see also Cameron 1959:xxli). On the Magnesian limestone there are further, if smaller, examples of deserted or shrunken settlements such as those at Whitwell and Elmlton.

There is extensive earthwork evidence of settlements and field systems to the south of the limestone plateau and in the Trent Valley. The area between the carboniferous limestone and the Trent and Dove valleys is particularly rich in earthwork remains with closely spaced examples of deserted and shrunken settlements. Place name evidence for this area also indicates that it was heavily wooded and it was also largely within the Royal Forest of Duffield Frith (Cameron 1959:xlii). In contrast the Trent valley is almost completely devoid of 'wood' names suggesting extensive clearance at an early date.

As with the limestone plateau systematic work on medieval sites is equally rare in the rest of the county. The only large scale excavation of a village site was that carried out by Guy Beresford at Barton Blount in the South Derbyshire and published as part of a Society for Medieval Archaeology monograph (Beresford 1975). These excavations provided a sequence of buildings and crewyards originating in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and extending to the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, when abandonment occurred. A decline in the quality of the material culture represented at the site is apparent in the climatically less favourable periods in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the mid-14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries there seems to be a specialisation in pastoral farming which may have resulted in an up turn in economic prosperity.

More recently a small scale excavation at the shrunken village of Thurstaston, a few miles from Barton Blount has revealed a similar sequence. Here the plan of a probable domestic building with hearth dating probably from the 13<sup>th</sup> century was in turn sealed by a cobbled surface, which may have been a crewyard of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This sequence of occupation seems to have been abandoned in the later 15<sup>th</sup> century and was sealed by ridge and furrow (Challis 1999) perhaps suggests late expansion of the arable fields.

There are no comparable excavations of village sites in any of the other geological zones in the county with which to compare this sequence suggested by the excavations at Barton Blount and Thurstaston. Unlike the National Park there are few surveys of village sites and landscapes, the only detailed survey

of a deserted medieval village is that for Hungry Bentley, another village in the south of the county. There has been no systematic attempt to document the extent of ridge and furrow across the county, although the county council has funded two SMR enhancement projects essentially to identify earthwork evidence not then included on the SMR. While being of much value and increasing the numbers of recorded earthworks, these surveys were not exhaustive (T+PAT 199??).

Turning to other monument classes for the period, there are some 55 moats recorded on the SMR although a number of these are almost certainly spurious entries. Moats occur throughout the county but are less common in the north east on the magnesian limestone and on the carboniferous limestone. They occur as isolated features and are also associated with village earthworks, as at Thurstaston or Callow Hall near Wirksworth and occasionally with fishponds. With the exception of some small generally unpublished trenches (eg Monk 1951) there are no substantial excavations of moated sites in the county.

#### **Castles and fortified sites.**

Only 7 castles in Derbyshire developed into substantial stone built structures; Peveril Castle at Castleton, Bolsover, Codnor, Duffield, Horsley, Melbourne and Mackworth. The most important of these, as already noted, were Castleton, Bolsover and Duffield, which were established just after the Conquest and developed into major defensive structures. There appear to be no references to excavations at Peveril Castle, but it appears to have effectively become redundant by the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Bolsover Castle was rebuilt in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and little is known of the original structure, although recent excavations by T+PAU ahead of the construction of a new visitor centre have revealed evidence of an aisled hall amongst other things. Duffield was a major castle situated at the confluence of the Ecclesbourne and Derwent rivers, controlling routes to the north and up the Ecclesbourne valley to the Peak District. Excavations in 1900 revealed evidence of the foundations of the keep as well as an Anglian period burial and considerable amounts of Roman material (Manby 1957). Melbourne Castle was a late development, a licence to crenellate being granted in 1311, and little now remains (Fane, W D ). The surviving stonework at Codnor is largely of 14/15<sup>th</sup> century date, Horsley Castle is largely quarried away and Mackworth survives only as a late 15<sup>th</sup> century gatehouse and was probably always a house rather than castle (Bailey...).

In addition to these stone castles, if indeed all of them deserve the name, there are also a number of motte and baileys and ring works, presumably of late 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century. Hart records 10 such sites in the North Derbyshire Survey (1981; 143-7) and this is bulk of the known sites in the county. These include the ring work at Hathersage, subject of excavations by Hodges (1980), and motte and baileys at Pilsbury, Hope, Tapton and Holmesfield amongst others. In the southern half of the county examples are rare with Castle Gresley near Swadlincote being the best of them.

### **The church**

There are c.150 medieval churches in Derbyshire but none have been the subject of modern archaeological investigation. The exception is arguably Repton, but the excavations there were aimed at understanding the middle Saxon monastery and associated structures, rather than the post conquest development of the church. It is impossible to untangle the development of churches pre-and post conquest and probably undesirable to try to do so. Many medieval churches in Derbyshire were rebuilt in the 13th and 14th centuries and reflect the economic well being of the county at that time. The individual history of a particular church can reflect the history and development of its associated village or settlement but little systematic study of churches on a county basis has been undertaken (Leonard 1993).

Derbyshire possessed only four abbeys, Darley, Dale, Calke and Beauchief, although the latter is now in the suburbs of Sheffield. The Premonstratensian Dale abbey is the best surviving, although even this is little compared to better known monastic sites elsewhere. Excavations from the 19<sup>th</sup> century have revealed much of the plan of the abbey and extensive documentary evidence survives (Cox, Colvin, Drage, Hope, Saltman). Opportunities for further work and analysis at Dale still exist but continual piecemeal encroachment on the site by new dwellings and extensions in the village which now surrounds the Abbey remains, will inevitably have a long term detrimental effect. Little remains of the Augustinian house at Darley Abbey now in the suburbs of Derby. Calke Abbey, actually a priory, which eventually was moved to Repton and which became Repton School after the dissolution, lies under the present 18th century house but excavations by the National Trust in the 1980's revealed a number of burials.

Other smaller religious houses existed in Derby where there was a nunnery, friary and a Benedictine Priory, none of which have been the focus of any excavations. Preceptories of the Templars and later the

Hospitallers were located at Stydd and Temple Normanton and there was the Augustinian priory at Repton.

At Locko there was a preceptory of the Knights of St Lazarus which cared for leprosy sufferers (Marcombe 1991) as did the hospital at Chesterfield and further hospitals are known from Castleton, Barlborough, Bolsover and Staveley (Hart 1981:143)

Another of Hodges five themes to be attacked was standing buildings and the rural landscape. He touches on the importance of church building and the post medieval rural buildings but says little of non religious medieval buildings. Again the range of evidence from the county is not extensive but should not be ignored. The most imposing medieval house is of course Haddon Hall. Much of what survives is of 14th century date but permission for a house surrounded by a 12 ft wall was granted in 1195 (Hart 1981:154). Padley Hall near Hathersage also dates from the 14th century and consisted of a hall built around a square courtyard. Only one building survives, originally a gate house this was later converted into a chapel. The footings of the rest of the complex were exposed in 1933 although no archaeological record was made (Hart 1981:154). In the moated site at Callow Hall Farm, the 19th century farm building, which now stands within the moat, contains a 13/14th century stone vaulted undercroft and fine fireplace of the medieval manor house. Again it is sites like this which will reflect the changing economic rhythms of the rural economy and understanding their development and decline will only help in understanding the wider developments within the county during the medieval period.

## **Industry and Crafts**

Derbyshire is rich in mineral wealth which has been long exploited

### **Lead**

The mining of lead was a significant industry in Derbyshire in the Roman period. Although the level of activity would have declined in the post-Roman period it almost certainly never ceased entirely. In AD714 for example the abbe of Repton gave a lead coffin for the body of St Guthlac and in the 9th century a rent of 300 shilling worth of lead was paid to Christ Church Canterbury. In Domesday Book 'lead works', possibly smelters or mines, were recorded in all of the royal manors in the Peak. A complex set of customs regulating mining and payments to the owners of the mineral rights had developed and these were formalised into a set of laws in the mid 13th century, which were administered by a steward and the Barmoot court (Ford and Rieuwerts 1975; Barnatt and Smith 1997:99).



Archaeological remains of this early period of mining are difficult to identify as areas of early mining have often been reworked and the earlier evidence has been destroyed or masked by later activity. Similarly, underground workings are extremely difficult to date.

### Iron

Ironstone occurs in Derbyshire in the lower coal measures, generally as nodules in the bands of clay. These would initially have been won by surface workings and then by shallow bell pits (Nixon 1969:49). From the 13th century onwards there are frequent references to forges in the Belper and Duffield areas and also from the north of the area around Chesterfield, Brampton, Barlow and Eckington. Until recently archaeological evidence of medieval, as opposed to post-medieval, smelting sites was absent. In 1998 excavations ahead of open cast coal extraction by T+PAU at Stanley Grange, revealed evidence of an extensive smelting site dating to the 13th century. The remains of eight furnaces were recovered, associated with the preparation of iron ore, extraction of clay for furnace building and slag disposal (Challis 1998). Further such sites undoubtedly exist in the county, but the extent of open cast coal mining in the last 50 years in the areas where early iron ore mining and smelting was concentrated, will have removed much evidence already.

### Coal

The use of coal for industrial use by smiths nailers, brewers and limeburners was well established by the mid 13th century and records of mining at Morley in Derbyshire date from 1285 and from Denby in 1291 and in the following century references increase in numbers (Nixon 1969:70). There are references to a number of mining fatalities in the early 14th century and the digging of a sough for drainage at Cossall, just over the border in Nottingham from 1316, perhaps suggesting more extensive underground workings than would be achieved by bell pitting. Again the early mining will have been along the exposed coalfield and just as with the early iron mining the evidence for early coal mining will have been greatly affected by open cast coal mining. The work at the open cast site at Lounge in Leicester which revealed evidence of pillar and stall working dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> century shows the potential in open cast sites for the recovery of evidence of early mining and the identification and recording of such workings should be a priority.

### Pottery

Pottery production in Derbyshire is poorly known due to a lack of excavation of kiln sites and a lack of excavation of medieval sites in general and the resulting lack of comparable assemblages. Kiln sites are known from Burley Hill and Brackenfield, neither of which are yet published (check). The area around Ticknall was important in pottery production but little evidence or information is contained in the SMR at the present time (though excavations at the Heath End site have recently been undertaken, 1998-9, by Deirdre O'Sullivan of Leicester University, School of Archaeological Studies). Assemblages of pottery have been excavated from Derby (Hall 1972) and Chesterfield, although the latter is yet to be published. Rural sites at Roystone Grange, Thurstaston and Barton Blount and recently Bradbourne, have also produced useful collections (refs). The recently announced EH project to produce a ceramic type sequence for North Derbyshire and South Yorkshire will go a long way to alleviate this gap in knowledge.

#### Royal Forests

In the 12-13<sup>th</sup> centuries much of the county was subject to the forest laws. The Forest of the High Peak, an area covering some 40 square miles in the northwest of the county, is the best known but there was also an important forest to the west of Duffield, Duffield Frith. In addition between c.1150 and 1225 the whole area between the rivers Erewash and Derwent was also subject to the Forest Laws until it was disforested by Edward I (Cox 1905; Crook 1990). Within these royal forests were a number of enclosed parks, this was particularly true of Duffield Frith, where at least seven parks are recorded. The area of Duffield Frith is one within which, as noted above, there is good surviving evidence of medieval settlements and field systems. There are extensive documentary records for the forest and opportunity exists for research into the development of these settlements and the economy within a royal forest.

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