

An Archaeological Resource Assessment of Post-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 considering a period so complex and so rich in data, both historical and archaeological as the post medieval, even excluding aspects of industrial archaeology, it is inevitable that a selective approach has to be taken. This contribution is selective both in terms of subject areas covered and geographically, as much more has been written about the north of the county than the south, and this is inevitably reflected in what I will say today.

In a paper published in 1991, David Crossley set out a series of priorities for post medieval archaeology in North Derbyshire. In this paper he noted that far more attention had been devoted to the prehistoric archaeology of this area than to later periods and to the post medieval in particular (Crossley:1991). Yet the potential for the study of post medieval archaeology in northern Derbyshire is considerable, as this was an area of complex economic relationships reflected in the standing buildings and relict landscape features and specific sites. Crossley points out that the development of the economy in north Derbyshire between the demographic upturn at the end of the middle ages and the acceleration in industrial growth from the end of the 18th century

‘depended on the interrelationships between geological zones, between agriculture and industry, and between town and countryside’.

The cattle produced by the pastoral farmers on the Limestone plateau were sent eastwards into the long distance droving trade, lead ore for much of the 16th to end of the 18th century was sent from the ore fields in the Peak District to be smelted in the wooded valleys east of the Derwent, where there was a ready supply of wood and charcoal, and lime was sent to the farmers on the coal measures, whose grain returned westwards. Later in the period with the increasing use of coal in the production of lime and lead, the return trades between east and west developed and influenced the development of the road system across the gritstone moors. Chesterfield and Sheffield were important centres for this trade in north Derbyshire.

Unfortunately no similar review has been produced for the south of the county. This area was much more agriculturally based and did not have the range of extractive and manufacturing industries which characterised the earlier post medieval period further north. However, retains extensive areas of important landscape features, including the best examples of deserted settlements and open fields as well as large country houses and their parklands.

The Resource

The SMR currently contains almost 2000 entries recorded as being post medieval and this will rise, with the addition of information from the RCHME survey of the National Forest area in the south of the county, which drew heavily on evidence from the 1st edition OS maps. The record for this period is dominated by records relating to industry, including buildings. There are for example 91 lead mining sites listed and 98 lime kilns in the limestone plateau; and the record for Erewash District is dominated by textile industry records, particularly mills, as a result of the inclusion of data from a gazetteer of industrial sites in the District, prepared by the Derbyshire Archaeological Society. The record will become even more industrially oriented once the IRIS forms relating to the county are included. Reference to buildings of all types are also numerous even though not all of the listed buildings in the county are included on the record. Thesaurus terms relating to agriculture and subsistence barely feature, probably as a result of ambiguities in the records and the assumption that all deserted settlements are medieval. Transport is another neglected area on the SMR despite work on the

road systems by Radley and Hey and objects of post medieval date are poorly represented throughout the county. The SMR evidence for towns is equally poor as archaeological work in Derbyshire towns has been limited generally and what has been carried out has been focussed on earlier periods. However there are important historical studies of some towns, including a multi-volume history of Chesterfield and works on Derby, and Ashbourne in particular. The extended urban survey for Derbyshire currently being carried out will hopefully alleviate the lack of readily available information on the SMR and provide a foundation for identifying priorities in the small towns of the county.

It goes without saying that the extent of the surviving documentary evidence in public and private archives for the period is at the same time a vital but daunting resource in studying the period. Derbyshire had a number of substantial estates particularly those of the Devonshire family, whose archives are now at Chatsworth and the Dukes of Rutland, whose archives are lodged at Belvoir Castle. Smaller families such as the Gells and the Eyres have also left substantial archives. The Duchy of Lancaster also has important records for the north of the county. For the 18th and 19th centuries an important source of evidence for the north of the county in particular, is the Fairbanks archive, now in Sheffield City Archives. The Fairbanks were a family of land surveyors who operated in north Derbyshire and South Yorkshire in particular and their extensive archive of maps, plans and notebooks is a vital but hitherto underused source of information for the period. The diocese of Lichfield also contains an extensive collection of Probate inventories recently the subject of a publication by Kay Battye (1999).

With the exception of industrial sites, evidence from excavation for the period is actually sparse. This is due to the overwhelming concentration on the prehistoric and roman periods in the county and the dearth of excavation even on medieval sites. There may be relevant information from the NDAT excavations in Chesterfield, but the relevant sections of these reports remain unpublished.

The Rural Landscape

One of the major aspects of the post medieval period is, of course, the consolidation and enclosure of the medieval open field system. Derbyshire was an area of open field cultivation which extended over much of the county even into the limestone plateau of the Peak and enclosure and consolidation of the

open firelds took place from the late medieval period to the parliamentary enclosures in the late 18th – 19th centuries. David Crossley has drawn attention to the need to establish the incidence of open field systems in the north of the county to confirm and complement the earlier studies by Wightman and Carr and to distinguish land enclosed from the open fields from the closes created from commons, particularly in the east of the county. Thereafter it should be possible to address the problem of how much land was consolidated and enclosed by piecemeal agreement before the parliamentary enclosures (Crossley 1991:123-4).

Much physical evidence for this process survives in the rural areas of the county both in the uplands and in the claylands and Trent Valley in the south of the county. This takes the form of extant and relict field boundaries, deserted settlements and the characteristic curving boundaries of consolidated medieval strips. These are all well known types of archaeological evidence which need no further description.

Dating the change from open field farming is of course more of a challenge although the archival evidence in the form of documents and maps is a major resource in addressing this problem and providing a context for the physical remains. Other techniques may be valuable in particular areas. For example the potential for dating boundary walls has been demonstrated at Roystone Grange and more extensive application of these techniques may be of value in the uplands (Hodges 1991).

It is the evidence provided by historic maps which can provide a major door to understanding and dating this process. The Chatsworth archives have a series of surveys by William Senior dating to the early 17th century. The Parliamentary Enclosure maps are also of great value where they show old enclosures pre dating parliamentary enclosure acts. The Fairbanks archive is of particular interest as it does contain pre-enclosure maps and plans of certain areas detailing the existing situation.

As well as consolidation and enclosure of the open fields there was the enclosure of the wastes and commons. These too could have been enclosed as a result of agreement in the 17th century as well as parliamentary enclosure later. It is clear that in the upland in Edale there are farms of medieval origin but it is unclear what closes or fields they would have been associated with. It is possible that there was a late medieval retreat followed by a later recolonisation. Environmental analysis has indicated the

overgrazing and abandonment of lands around Kinder in the 17th century, which suggests the instability of these upland areas. (Crossley 1991:124; Shimwell 1974 and Somerville 1977).

The evidence from the range of existing historic maps from the county is being used in the preparation of the historic landscape assessment project currently being undertaken by the Peak National Park and funded by English Heritage. The methodology being adopted builds on that developed in the Cornwall project, but uses it to create a series of time slices based on the existing historic map evidence. The technique was originally developed to look at the lead mining areas in the Peak District to try to identify the development of the landscape in an area where dual economy of small scale agriculture and lead mining was prevalent. The project was then extended to encompass the whole of the area of the National Park and again to encompass the whole of the county.

A series of time slices at 50 year intervals were created for the National Park and a slightly different series of overlays were created for the area in the east of the county. The earlier periods are obviously incomplete but are nonetheless extremely valuable in presenting the known map based evidence of the landscape through time. Professional judgement can be exercised to suggest how the gaps might be filled and present a working model of the landscape through time, which can be tested and refined by other sources of evidence.

The value of the written archives for adding detail to this picture are obvious and demonstrated by the article by Doe (1973) which details the process of consolidation and enclosure by agreement during the 17th century, of the common fields of the parish at Beeley, part of the Chatsworth estate.

A further important and growing resource for the study of the development of the landscape in the Peak National Park are the farm surveys being carried out by the Archaeology Service. These provide a sketch plan at 1:--- scale and a description /catalogue of the individual features present in the area concerned. Well over 100 of these have now been carried out as well as larger blocks of land such as the Chatsworth Estate and the National Trust and Yorkshire Water properties in the Upper Derwent Valley. These provide an overview of the current landscape and record features such as small quarries, lime kilns, packhorse tracks and earthworks many of which have not previously been recorded. This

is an important and growing resource and the challenge at present is to try to incorporate these surveys into the SMR system in such a way as to make this information useable and searchable.

Along with the enclosure and reorganisation of the fields and commons went the rebuilding of and establishment of new farms closer to their consolidated fields. Again David Crossely has identified as a priority the need for a comprehensive review of buildings at the yeoman-farmer level, not just in the traditional way of looking at building styles and materials, but in relation to the landscape evidence for the improvement of farming. Work on the vernacular buildings of northeast Derbyshire was begun by Bob Hawkins and led to a publication of the analysis of a number of buildings in the Moss Valley by the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Sheffield. Hawkins work demonstrated a change from timber framing to the use of stone over the 16th century and an improvement in the standards of masonry through the 17th into the 18th centuries. This is an area where there are numerous probate inventories recently published by Battye (1999) which indicate an area of dual economy where farmers were also engaged in metalworking, mining and woodland occupations.

In addition to this Derbyshire County Council the Peak National Park and the RCHME funded a dendrochronology project for a number of years until financial constraints brought it to an end. This focussed on cruck buildings, particularly farm buildings and demonstrated a preponderance of dates in the 15th and 16th centuries with only a few showing felling dates post 1600. A number of these buildings have now been recorded and analysed by a group from the Dept of Continuing Education at Sheffield.

Babara Hutton and colleagues have also been recording timber framed buildings, largely in the south of the county, and several hundred have now been reported on. Cumulatively these various initiatives represent an important resource for studying buildings in the county. There is still an urgent need for similar studies in the west of the county. The impression here is that the improvement of farmhouses took place in the 17th and 18th centuries rather than earlier. There is a need to test the possible links between early enclosure and the improvement of housing and how periods of expansion in the lead

industry and other industries in the 17th century and later influenced investment in housing in villages as well as farms (Crossley 1991:125-6).

Industrial archaeology is the subject of a separate seminar but as is clear already the development of industries in the north of the county were of fundamental importance in the development of the economy. Dual economy was a fact in both the lead mining areas of the Peak and the coal measures in the north east. The need to transport livestock and lead ore, lime, millstones and grain and later coal, had an important influence on the development of the transport network of packhorse routes, carriage roads and later turnpikes (Radley 1963).

The extractive industries left an obvious and visible impact on the land scape. The lead mining remains have been the subject of much recording and analysis by the Peak District Mines Historical Society and more recently the Peak National Park and English Heritage. The Iron and coal mining industries in the east of the county have featured less in archaeological recording and analysis, although a current project at the County Council, funded by English Heritage is intended to record the evidence of early mining from AP's, to try to establish areas of early mining remains still surviving and the degree of loss in the last 50years.

As well as these direct impacts on the landscape, the demand for constant supplies of both charcoal and white coal for the iron and lead smelting industries respectively, necessitated large areas of coppiced woodland. This was an important aspect of the economy of the wooded valleys along the edge of the gritstone moors and the western edge of the coal measures but has received little attention in Derbyshire. The late Richard Doncaster recorded examples of Q pits or white coal kilns in a number of woods but most work on woodlands has been carried out by Mel Jones and others in the Sheffield woodlands. The analysis of the lead ore hearths of the 16th century by David Kiernan has illustrated the dense distribution of these features in the valleys draining the gritstones to the east of the Derwent an area where adequate supplies of timber presumably existed.

The output of the industry in the late 17th century has been estimated at some 10000 tons of lead which would have required some 18000 acres of coppiced woodland. There would also have been competing demands for charcoal and other products, making necessary the efficient use and management of these woodland resources. Survey of existing woodlands, even if the coppice trees have long gone, can reveal surviving earthworks relating to management practices, such as the division of woods into compartments for rotational coppice.

As I stated earlier this discussion has been inevitable selective and has focussed on the potential resource in the county for studying this period. I have not for example mentioned the great houses and their parks. North Derbyshire again is blessed with a number of 16th and early 17th century houses which have been studied in relation to their architects and builders but consideration of how their main periods of building and rebuilding relates to the fortunes of their estates and the industries they controlled. Industrial development throughout the period and particularly in the later 18th and 19th centuries had a massive impact on the landscape of both urban and rural areas and a number of towns developed on the back of particular industries and were in effect created by individual industrialists. At Cromford Sir Richard Arkwright built rows of terraced cottages for the workers he needed in his new mills and similar developments were common in many of the towns of the in the area. The great urbanisation in the coalfield went hand and glove with the expansion of the coal and iron industries.

The value of archaeological evidence in the post medieval period is a subject of some debate and David Crossley in his introduction to *Post-Medieval Archaeology* (1990: 1-7) has summarised the value and use of archaeological evidence both in conjunction with the written record and often as the only source of evidence for a major section of the population in the 16th to early 18th centuries.

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