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**Bradbourne – closing the gaps
in the history of a Peakland landscape**

The growth of interest in long-term landscape histories has been one of the most productive and promising of recent developments in British and European archaeology. However, even a cursory inspection of many long-term histories reveals common problems. Most contain lacunae, gaps in the sequence which are frequently taken as a manifestation of a real absence in the past. They are seen as the product of the collapse of the structures that bound society together in earlier times, and are almost always explained in terms of demographic collapse and abandonment. Today I would like to present an argument, based on 2 (complementary) projects carried out by the University of Sheffield in the Peak District of Derbyshire, that these gaps can be more apparent than real, and that if we shift our focus slightly (and change our methods), some of them actually disappear. This should result in more, nuanced, and 'realistic' local and regional histories.

As you know, the Peak District lies between Sheffield and Manchester. It is centred on an area of limestone upland with a topography of rolling ridges, steep sided dales and broader shale rich valleys. The limestone plateau is surrounded on its eastern, western and northern sides by the edges and higher reaches of the gritstone moors. To the south lie the Trent Valley and the 'champion' country of the English Midlands.



Roystone Grange landscape

Roystone Grange is situated in what is, in many ways, a valley typical of the White Peak — the limestone heartland of the Peak District National Park. It became the focus of the research activities of the Department of Archaeology in March 1978, and we have been continuously involved with the archaeology of the Peak District ever since – most recently in our project at nearby **Bradbourne**.

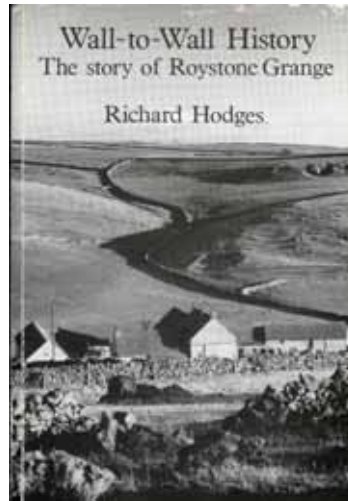


Bradbourne from Haven Hill

These two projects are intimately related – they are only 4kms apart; Mark Edmonds and I (co-directors of the Bradbourne Project) both took part as students in the work at Roystone; Mark (and his students) have subsequently analysed and re-worked many of the conclusions drawn on the basis of the

Roystone material; and the Bradbourne project was established explicitly to complement **and** to challenge the regional history written for Roystone.

Landscape history at Roystone



Towards the beginning of his *Wall-to-Wall History*, Richard Hodges sums up the argument underlying his interpretation of the archaeology and history of Roystone Grange -

The history of the uplands ... tells us much about the so-called champion landscapes of central and southern England. This is because the rhythms of Peakland history are effectively accentuated versions of the champion lands. In some ways it might be said that the Peakland contains the high water marks of those ages of expansion, which were clearly imprinted on the landscape whenever the growth in the economy receded (12).

In his mind, this tidal metaphor is nowhere more appropriate than in the first half of the 1st millennium AD. Roman civilisation's need for lead to roof its monuments and sheep to feed and clothe its people led to the exploration and ultimate colonisation of Peak District valleys like Roystone. According to Hodges, the demand of the Roman core for lead and agricultural resources meant that the valley could sustain an 'artificially high' population.



'Roman Roystone'

By the 4th century, however, things had changed dramatically. Without the demand for lead and wool that were a product of empire, 'the landscape emptied of people almost as swiftly as it had been colonised'. The valley, he says, reverted to 'aboriginal circumstances'. It was the epitome of the Dark Ages. The tide of civilisation had retreated to the lowlands (and beyond) and, despite some charter evidence from the second half of the 10th century, really only returned in the late 12th century when Garendon Abbey in Leicestershire acquired an estate at *Revestones* – which, like the Romans, they probably exploited for sheep and lead.

This scenario is part of a more general long-term regional landscape history in which the rise and demise of population and society is mirrored rather literally in the archaeological record. It is one in which absence of evidence is evidence of absence. However, it is possible that such 'gaps', read as catastrophes, are a product of the fact that we do not have a well-developed understanding of the relevant ceramic sequences. This possibility is reinforced if we turn to other sources of evidence. A 6th-century penannular brooch from Pikehall, and a fragment of a 6th century square-headed brooch and a 7th

enamelled escutcheon found in the excavations of the later monastic grange at Roystone are testimony to a human presence in this apparently abandoned landscape.



Escutcheon from Roystone

It may have been the owners of these objects, or their descendants who, in the 7th century, chose to appropriate time and tradition by burying their dead in Bronze Age mounds above Roystone and in the nearby barrow at Wigber Low. Further, and despite the obvious change in the belief system expressed by the two monuments, it may have been their descendants who commissioned and venerated the monumental late 8th/9th century cross that now stands in Bradbourne church yard.



I am not trying to say that **nothing** changed at the end of the Roman empire; that abandonment, depopulation, and forest regeneration **never** happened, anywhere. What I am arguing is that images of landscape abandonment may be more a product of ignorance, method and expectation than historical reality. They result in a 'history without people', when it is clear that people were making history - living, worshipping and dying - in this landscape in the early middle ages. We need to devise methodologies to locate these missing histories. It was with these thoughts in mind, these lessons from Roystone learned, that we began our work at Bradbourne.

Why Bradbourne?

In the context of an attempt to fill in the Dark Age gap in the long-term history of the Peak District, Bradbourne was an obvious place to begin. In 1086 it is recorded as having a church and priest

Bradeburne

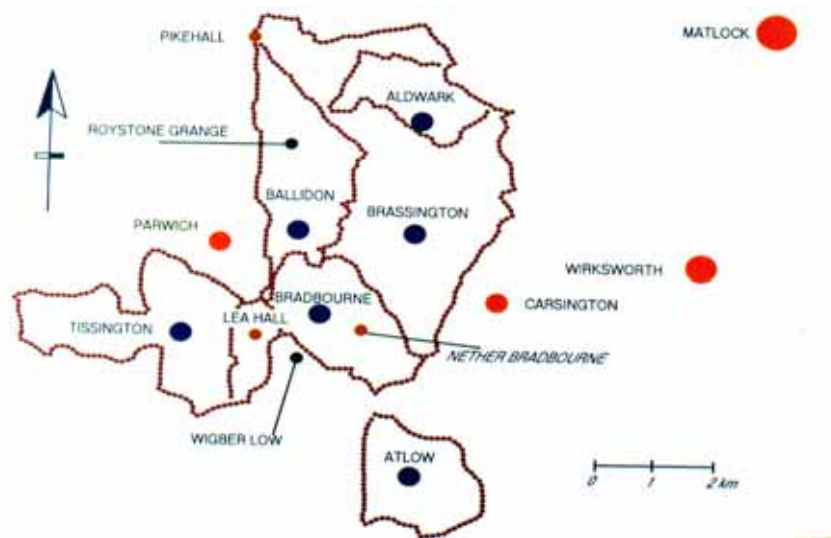
Aelfric had 4c. of land taxable. Land for 4 ploughs. Now in lordship 2 ploughs

12 villagers and 4 smallholders have 4 ploughs

A priest and a church; meadow, 12 acres; underwood 3 furlongs long and 2 wide.

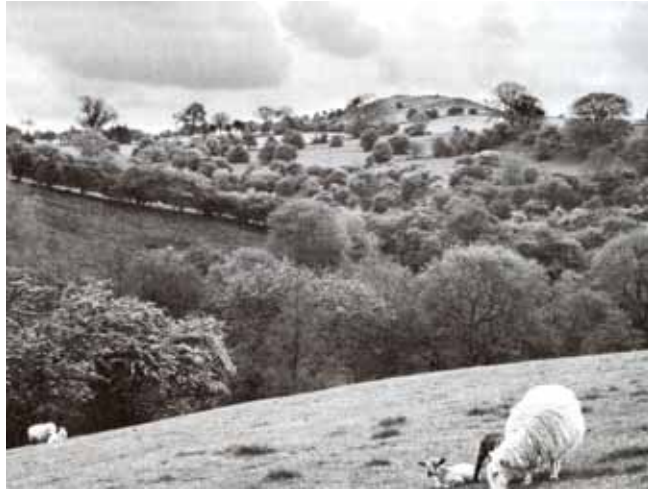
Value before 1066 £4 now 30s [Morgan, 1978: 6/6]

and throughout the middle ages it lay at the heart of an usually large parish.



Bradbourne parish (map by Tim Allen)

The presence of the late 8th century monumental cross led us to believe that it may have been a place of some ecclesiastical (and perhaps secular) significance in the early middle ages. The close proximity of Wigger Low was another factor in our decision to pursue the Dark Ages here. The people buried there, and presumably those who buried them, were clearly of some regional significance – might they have lived in or around Bradbourne? Or is the shift in focus from Wigger to Bradbourne an example of the kind of settlement shift that we know characterises the late 7th–early 8th century in many parts of England?



Wigber Low

At the other end of the chronological spectrum, there is good evidence for Roman occupation into the 4th century at nearby Rainster Rocks. Some Roman pottery has been found in Bradbourne itself. Hayman Rooke, an 18th century antiquarian, believed that Bradbourne was ‘an expropratory camp of the Romans’ and that ‘the church was probably placed on the site of the Prætorium’. He was wrong, but we cannot discount Roman occupation.



Rainster Rocks



Rooke's sketch of Bradbourne church

Before describing the results of the project, 2 other points should be made -

- although our focus was on the ‘Dark Age gap’, we intended to situate this study within a more general regional, landscape history of the

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village and parish. Just as our work at Bradbourne ranged from
extensive landscape survey to very intensive test-pitting, so our 'parish
history' would run from prehistory to the present but with a particular
focus on the middle ages and early modern period

- working on the assumption that any early medieval settlement would lie close to the medieval and later medieval core, we tried to situate excavations close to the church and manor house – though as you will see, and in line with our more general desire to chart the history of the medieval parish, we did not restrict ourselves to those locations.

Investigating Bradbourne

Our first attempts to locate Bradbourne's Dark Age settlement took place in field just to the west of the church - a prominent position looking out over the valley towards Parwich and Roystone Grange.



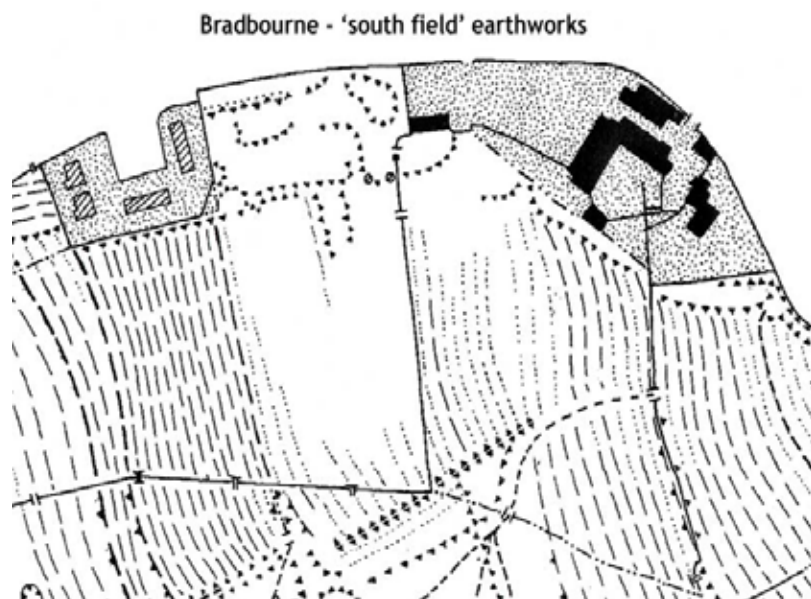
From Bradbourne church towards Parwich



West field earthworks

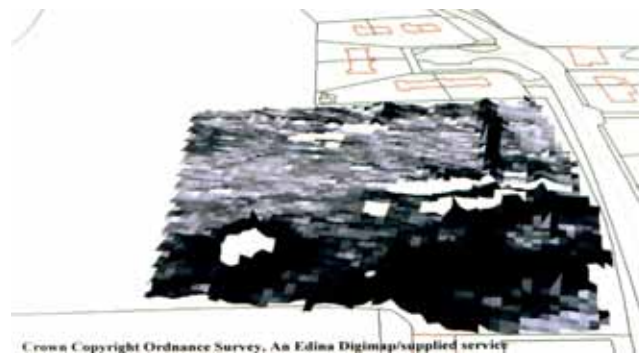
The humps and bumps in the field were mapped as part of a programme of topographical survey designed to record the extant landscape archaeology of the parish, before two trenches were excavated – one in the middle of the

earthworks, the other at the break of slope where (the now ephemeral) ridge and furrow of the surrounding fields began. Trench 1 revealed that, in the post-medieval period, collapsed building material had been re-arranged to form ephemeral structures (to what end we do not know). What is clear is that this material had originally been part of a substantial stone building (or buildings). The associated pottery can be dated to the 13th and 14th centuries. We had hoped that earlier medieval post-built structures might underlie this building – but this proved not to be the case (or at least not in the small area examined). We cannot be sure of the function or status of the buildings we did uncover – and we may never know as a local farmer deep-ploughed the whole area shortly after we had finished. However, one could argue from what we did find that Bradbourne is another example of a shrunken village – and that the shrinkage started in the 14th century. I will consider the results of the excavations in Trench 2 in a moment, but the issue of how much shrinkage has actually taken place was raised in our next intervention – and elsewhere in the village.

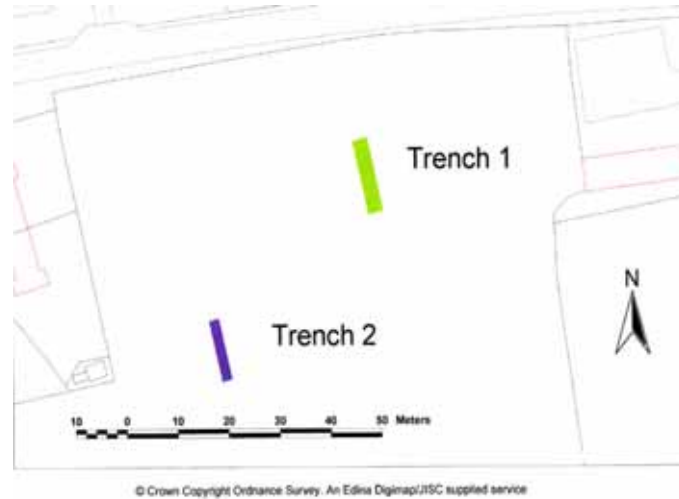


The 'south field' lies, surprisingly enough, to the south of the entrance to the church. Like the 'west field', the 'south field' satisfied our criteria for intensive exploration as it was an open area close to the hall/church core. The humps and bumps in the field suggested that here we would find medieval structures similar to that excavated in the 'west field' and we expected that exploration of these would add to our ability to write the medieval history of the village and parish. Again, however, our real hope was that we would find structures built by those who had witnessed the erection of the cross or even those who had buried their dead at Wigber Low – the burial mound is clearly visible from this part of the village.

The earthworks had already been mapped as part of the ongoing landscape survey, and we supplemented this with a programme of geophysics.

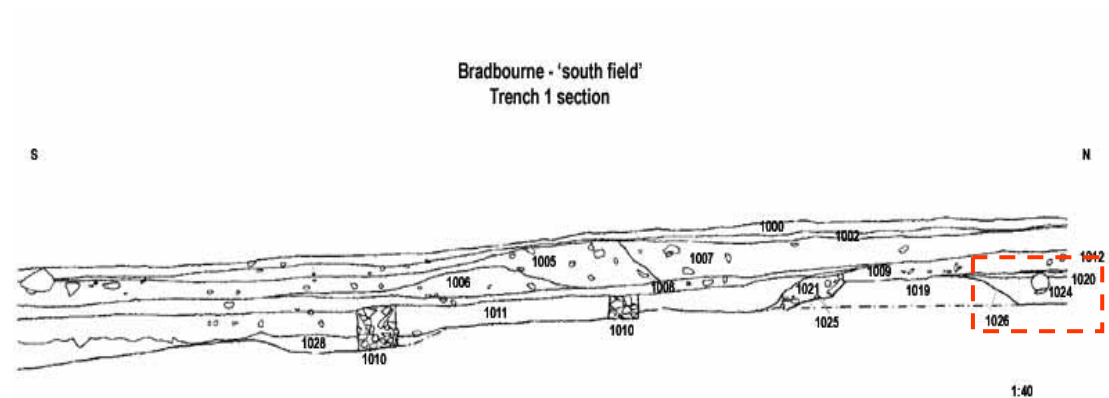


We excavated two trenches – Trench 1 (3x12m) ran across the southern half of what looked like a building platform, while Trench 2 (2x10m) cut across a linear feature that separated the 'humps and bumps' from the ridge and furrow to the south. We did not find quite what we expected – but what we did find threw tantalising light on the morphology of the medieval village – as well as on some rather unusual later activity that I will discuss later.



South field - trench locations

The base of the archaeological sequence in Trench 1 would seem to have been a pond – which, to judge from the ceramic sequence - was in-filled or dried out by the 13th or 14th centuries.

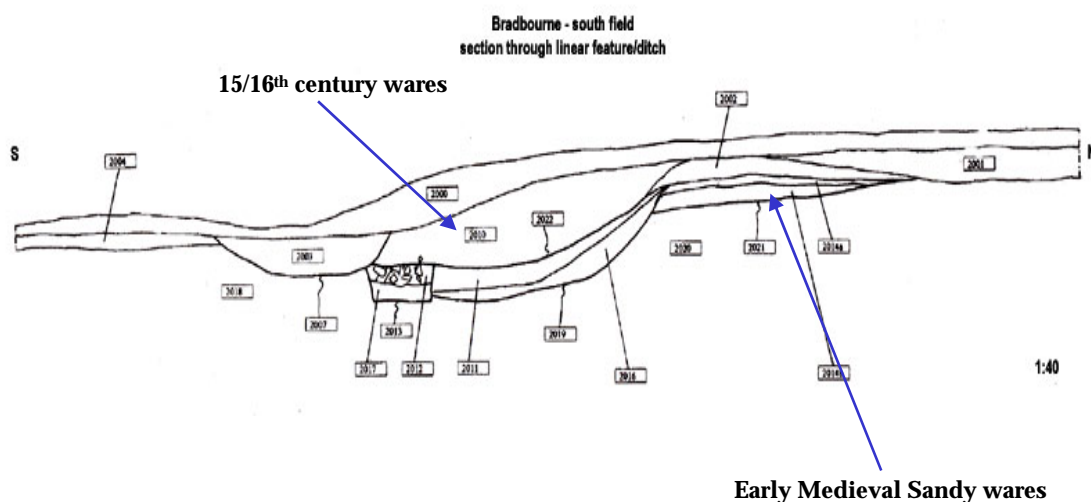


The significant thing about this sequence is that it contains what our pottery specialist, Dr Chris Cumberpatch, calls a 'significant group of Early Medieval Sandy wares' as well as Shell Tempered and other early medieval wares. The dating of these wares has still to be refined (and we should not be misled by the title; 'early medieval' here has a different meaning from the one I would normally ascribe to it!) but they seem to date to the 11th –12th centuries - the Late Saxon/early Norman period. Other early contexts associated with the

infilling of this pond contained Shell Tempered ware, one sherd of which 'has on overhang rim of a type that is usually confined to ... vessels of the late 9th to mid tenth century'.

A stone linear feature running NW/SE was constructed over the filled-in pond, and it is clear from the geophysics that this was part of a substantial structure running west and roughly parallel to the modern road. We have yet to investigate this further, but it may represent a boundary between the field and an earlier road line.

Trench 2 also produced some glimpses of earlier medieval activity in this part of the village.



The earliest material is again our 11th-12th century Early Medieval Sandy ware. It derives from a series of deposits (which may themselves be fills of an earlier ditch) cut through - almost certainly in the 13th-14th centuries - to create the present linear feature. The fills of this later ditch contain sherds of the 15th

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to 16th centuries – and they were themselves cut through (probably in the 18th
century) when a drain was inserted in the bottom of the ditch.



South field - trench 2 excavations

So where does all this leave us? We are certainly a step forward. We are not yet in the world of Wigger Low – but we may be getting to a point where the cross was till a relatively recent monument and in places we are contemporary with the construction of the earliest upstanding phases of the church – including the tower and parts of the north wall.



Bradbourne church north wall

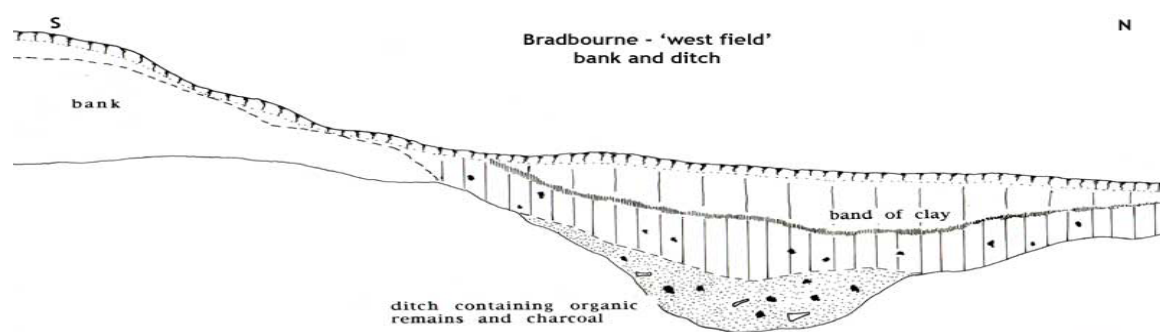


Bradbourne church - tower

The problem, however, is that we have no buildings to go with these sherds.

The pottery from Trench 1 is in fact re-deposited in the fills of the pond and of a small ditch cut into the pond-fill – probably in the 13th/14th century. While it is unlikely that the people who used these wares lived far from the point at which they were re-deposited, later developments (to which I will return) in the northern part of the ‘south field’ have made it very difficult for us to establish whether they lived in this part of the village.

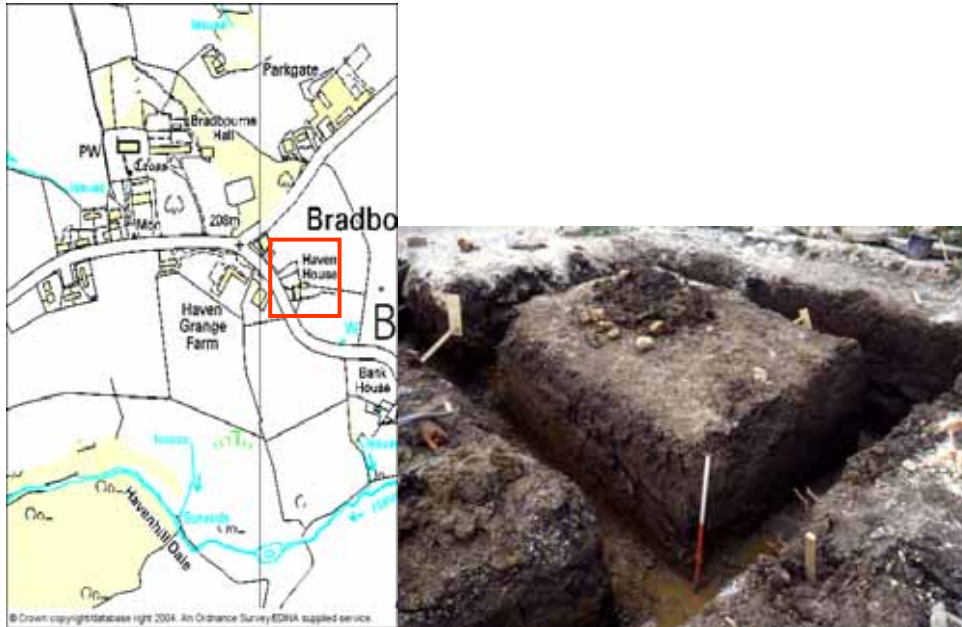
In some ways the evidence from Trench 2 is more interesting. If the deposits containing the 11th-12th century Early Medieval Sandy Wares are really the fills of an earlier ditch, and if the ridge and furrow really respects this line (and not that of the 13th/14th century ditch) – and these are clearly ‘ifs’ that require further detailed investigation – then it would seem to parallel the situation brought to light in Trench 2 in the ‘west field’. This trench was also located close to where the ridge and furrow ends, and here too we found evidence for a bank and ditch. The ditch was cut into the natural subsoil and, although some residual Roman pottery was found, the pottery associated with the ditch dates to the 11th/12th century.



In the late 18th century Hayman Rooke recorded a 'ditch and vallum' to the north, west and east of the church — 'this inclosure – he says - takes in a hill, near the summit of which the church was built'. As I have already noted, Rooke thought this was a Roman camp, but it now seems more likely that he was looking at an early medieval earthwork running round (at least part of) the village.

The results of these excavations, and of Rooke's observations, raise the possibility that, whatever form the earlier medieval settlement took, in the late Saxon/early Norman period it was defined and separated from the surrounding landscape by the construction of these earthworks. It is not always advisable to link archaeological phenomena with historical events, but we might be forgiven for linking this restructuring of the village with its acquisition by 1086 by Henry de Ferrers, a major Norman landholder in the region.

As I have already mentioned, in our desire to locate settlements of the Dark Ages and early middle ages, we preferred to excavate in the core of the village. However, this was not our only agenda and an application by the owners of Haven House to build a garage provided us with an opportunity to investigate the margins of the present village.



Haven House – location and garage foundations

A watching brief, carried out as the foundations for the garage were being dug, recorded 2 large pits which contained medieval pottery, animal bones and iron smithing waste (including hammer scale). In addition the cutting of a driveway up to the house had created a section through significant medieval deposits. In the course of summer seasons in 2001 and 2002, therefore, we excavated a strip bounded by Haven House to the north, the road to the west, and the ridge and furrow to the east.



The earliest structural phase on site is post built with associated rubble-filled drainage slots. Some small hearths may be associated with this phase but as yet the whole is insufficiently understood to support a plan. While we cannot be sure of the dating, we can say that it (obviously) predates the subsequent 13th/14th century phase and that Early Medieval Sandy wares suggest activity in the 11th/12th centuries.

The medieval longhouse that occupied this site seems to have begun as a small north-south oriented building (5.5m NS x 2.75 metres EW) with a roughly central doorway opening on the western side towards the road. Subsequently the northern part of this building was demolished and a much larger extension constructed overlapping the earlier plan. The retained southern part of the earlier building now projected around 3 metres from the southern end of the longhouse, which itself measured approximately 11m NS x 5.5m EW. The early door was replaced by one towards the southern end of the new build – but again opening towards the road.



Rather like the roughly contemporary grange at nearby Roystone, this would have been a wooden building set on stone footings and there is nothing to suggest that the floor was anything other than beaten earth/clay. Close dating of the ceramic sequence from the building remains to be resolved but, as with that discovered in the 'west field' excavations, a phased sequence ending in the mid-fourteenth century can be proposed.

As we all know, the exploration of the margins can provide us with significant insights into the overall structure – and this is certainly true of our discoveries at Haven House. Firstly, we have the evidence of iron smithing. This introduces us to the world of production and consumption within the village, though we cannot yet be sure when this begins. Secondly, we have the fact that this is one of the most completely excavated medieval longhouses in the Peak District. Thirdly, we have the 11th/12th century pottery. The discovery of evidence for occupation of this date here, on the margins of the village, when combined with that from the 'south' and 'west' fields, could imply that the earlier medieval village covered an area roughly similar its later medieval successor. We have, as yet, no way of comparing the relative

densities of occupation within this area but it remains an interesting observation none-the-less.

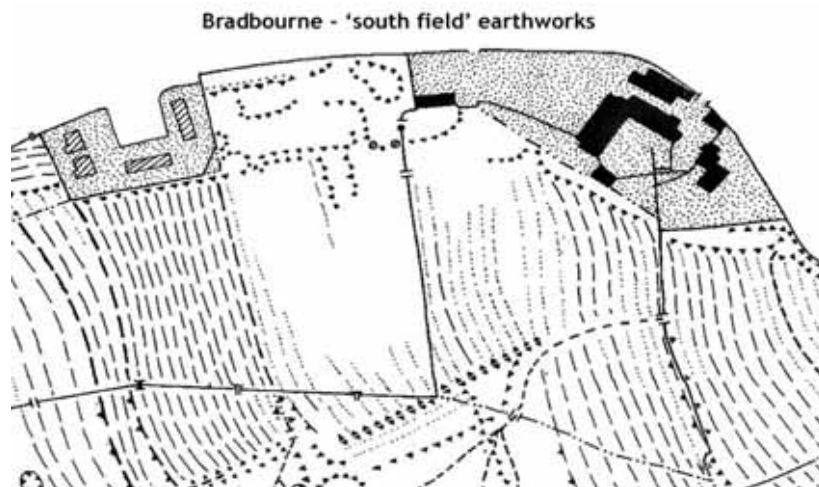


Bradbourne – trench locations

Finally, and connected to the last point, we have the fact that the ceramic sequence from Haven House suggests that the site was not occupied between the end of the 14th and the 17th century. This adds to the impression gained from the ‘west field’ excavations that, after the 14th century, Bradbourne contracted. However, we should also note that the landscape survey makes it clear that the modern village covers roughly the same area as its medieval counterpart and that, in most places, the medieval ridge and furrow runs up to the edge of the present occupation.



Earthworks up to and east of Haven House



It is also significant that the Haven House plot seems to have been re-occupied in the 17th century. So, while Bradbourne did contract in the later middle ages, it did not shrink much from the area of occupation established in the 11th/12th centuries. In the same way, expansion from the 17th century onwards seems to have taken place within the same bounds. The nature and density of that settlement will, of course, have altered but it did so within a structure of some antiquity.

Before concluding I would like to refer to some other work we have done on the medieval and later history of the village. The church and cross has been the focus of some detailed research that I cannot really describe here. Suffice it

to say that we have some detailed understanding of the changing place of these monuments in the community from the middle ages through the cataclysmic events of the Reformation and Civil War.



Bradbourne Church – Ecclesiastes V.1

Apart from some sherds at Haven House and in Trench 2 in the ‘south field’, we do not have much archaeology to provide a settlement context for these momentous events – much of that will be concealed beneath/within the structures of the present village. A phase of quarrying in the ‘south field’ in the later 17th/18th centuries may have resulted in the destruction of some of the medieval structures there.

More positively, we have excavated parts of a late 17th to early 18th century farm in Nether Bradbourne (c.1.5km to the south-east). The buildings and yards of this complex were set within a series of old stream and ditch channels, some of which were walled perhaps suggesting the harnessing of water-power. The site seems to have been abandoned in the 18th century – when Park Farm was built 100 metres to the east. It seems that the inhabitants of Park Farm used the old farm as a rubbish dump – since the upper layers there comprise a large assemblage of 18th century pottery. We expect that

analysis of this will provide us with a powerful insight into patterns of consumption and world view of Bradbourne's middling sort.



Nether Bradbourne – excavations and finds

Further evidence for 18th century activity comes in the form of the land-drains encountered in many of our excavations. As we have already seen, it was at this time that a drain was inserted into the fills of our medieval ditch in Trench 2 in the south field. It may also have been at this time that a series of rubble filled drains were cut into the backfill of the quarry excavated in Trench 1.



Quarrying debris and field drains, South Field, trench 1

A programme of test-pitting in the ridge and furrow to the east of Haven House revealed a stone lined drain in every other furrow, while Richard Hodges' excavations at nearby Ballidon uncovered 'the junction of two fine land-drains laid across the deserted medieval village'. He, rather reasonably, links this discovery to late eighteenth century programmes of land improvement. Perhaps our drains and the disposal of the 18th assemblage from Park Farm can be linked as aspects of a similar ethos of improvement in and around Bradbourne.

Finally, oral histories are one means of taking our understanding of Bradbourne and its inhabitants up to the modern world, and it may be that in the 'south field' our excavations have made a direct connection with the lives and memories of the village's older inhabitants. The geophysical survey showed areas of very high resistance in the eastern corner of the field; the upper layers of Trench 1 consisted of tips of building rubble, wall plaster and 19th century tile. However, these layers also included significant quantities of very gaudy carnival glass and a white metal trophy – perhaps an archaeological marker of the Wakes (fairs) that used to be held in this field in

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the early 20th century one of the high points of which, we are told, was
catching the greasy pig!

Conclusion



We are now a long way from those who buried their dead at Wigber Low or who erected the Bradbourne cross. But, as I have tried to emphasise, our search for them is not the only driving force behind our work at Bradbourne. We know something of their sacred landscape, but we have not yet managed to find where they lived. We are certainly closer than we were when we started – the Shell-Tempered wares and Early Medieval Sandy wares of the late 9th to 12th centuries narrow the ceramic gap and provide us with the chronological markers required to understand the form of the early medieval village - and this, I think, provides us with the key as to how to proceed. More excavations are certainly needed, not only at Bradbourne but also at Rainster Rocks, Wigber and other key points in the landscape. But I think these have to go hand-in-hand with the construction of a reliable, well-dated ceramic types series for the region. This work, funded by English Heritage and undertaken by Dr Chris Cumberpatch, is already underway for South Yorkshire and

North Derbyshire. The excavations at Bradbourne have already added several types (including the Early Medieval Sandy Wares) to this series. Other excavations, here and elsewhere, will enhance the sequence and, if we are blessed with more than a little good luck, we might soon be in a position to close one of the chronological gaps in the long-term history of the Peak District.

