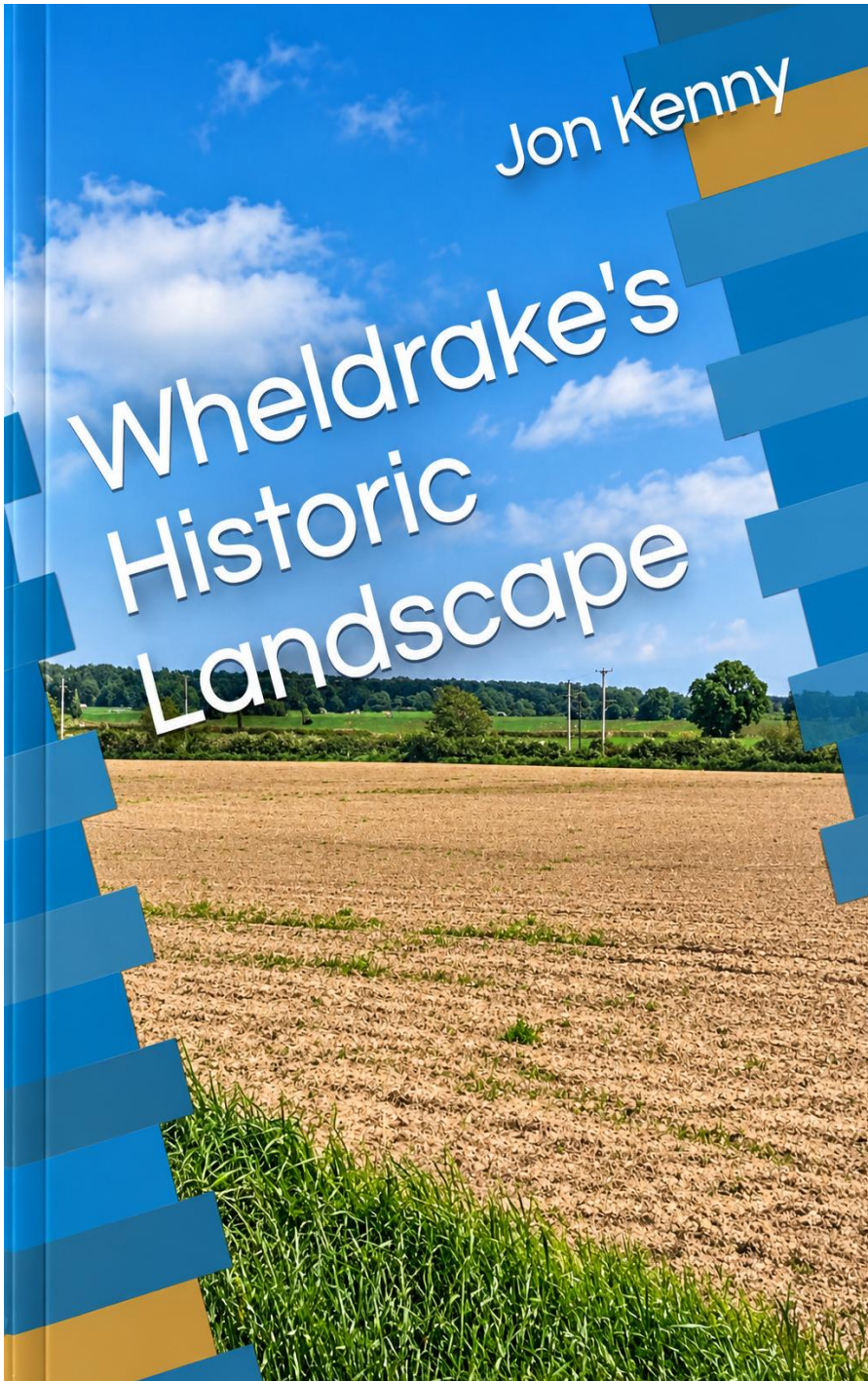


Jon Kenny

Wheldrake's Historic Landscape



Wheldrake's Historic Landscape

Dr Jon Kenny

As an archaeologist, thought of the history of the landscape around me is never far from my mind. In this blog, I wanted to write about the historical landscape in which I live. For the last 20 years, I have lived with my family in a semi-detached farm labourers' cottage on the boundary between Wheldrake and Deighton parishes, set back from what is now a busy modern road, Wheldrake Lane. I wrote about Wheldrake because my children went to school there and I had friends in the village. It is also the location of a village pub, shop, and post office, all of which we use. The fields surrounding us are busy with arable farming. Many fields have been enlarged by tearing down enclosure hedgerows (dating from the late 1700s) to allow modern farming machinery. Dotted amongst the arable fields, are a few pasture closes used to feed sheep, cattle, or horses. All, to us at least, a 21st-century rural idyll, right on the edge of the City of York. That rural idyll somehow seems unchanging, but of course, it is not. It has always been rural, but the way that it has been farmed and settled has changed through time since the end of the last Ice Age some 12,000 years ago.

I have written this blog as a timeline from the Ice Age to the modern era. Much of what I have said about the Medieval and early current period, from about 1066 AD to about 1900 A.D., leans heavily on the work of June Sheppard (1966), in which she models the medieval landscape of Wheldrake as a local study to throw light on a bigger picture of changing village life. I have also leaned on the Victoria County History (published online as British History Online) and the Historic Environment Record of the City of York Council in describing the historic landscape and the components that go together to make a medieval village.

What do I Mean by Wheldrake?

What I mean by Wheldrake should be obvious! It is a village about 10 miles south and west of York. That, of course, is true, but the landscape we live in has not always been called Wheldrake. The landscape around Wheldrake is ringed by an ecclesiastic administrative area called a parish that conveniently defines a territory around the village. For the medieval peoples who lived in Wheldrake, the region where they lived was a township that equates in this case (but not always) to the parish (See Figure 1). So, the township and parish of Wheldrake make a very convenient plot of land to think about. One that people would have thought of as home during the medieval period. Today we tend to think more of the village as home unless we farm the land in the township. Back in the medieval period, almost everyone worked some part of the fields or had some rights to the common, so the township is, for me, nicely thought of as the village and its surrounding lands.

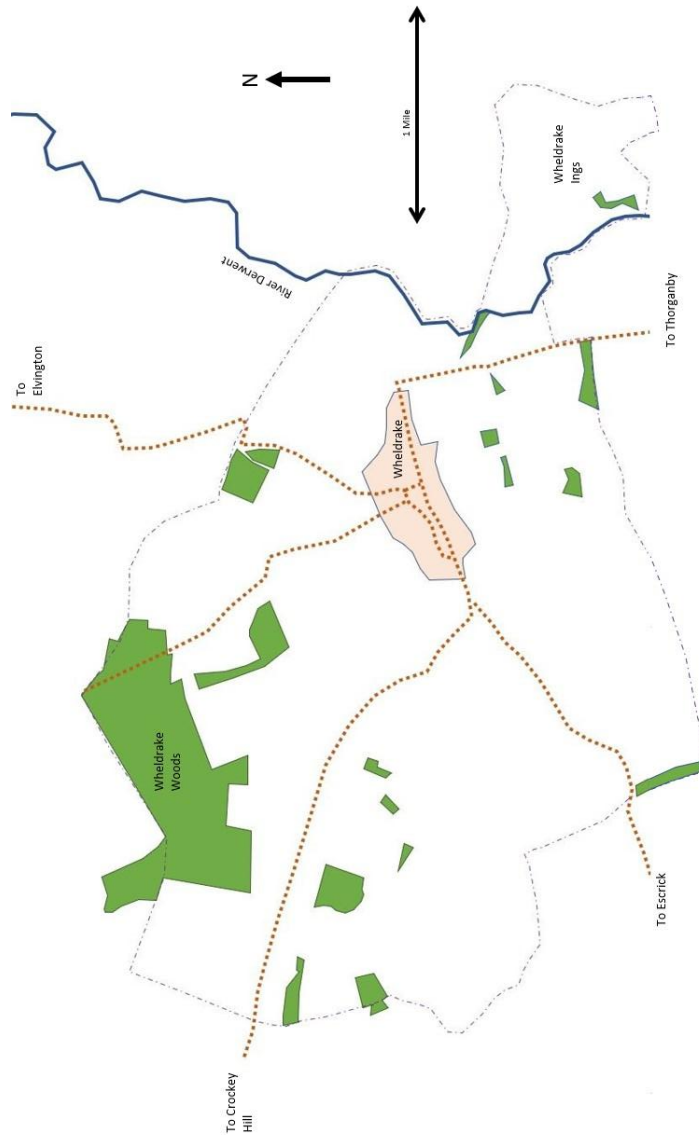


Figure 1: Wheldrake Township.

The Ice Recedes

The end of the last Ice Age about 12,000 years ago was the last fundamental landscape forming process, leaving great mounds (moraines) of material pushed and washed along by the Ice and a broad valley flanked by Limestone uplands to the west and chalks to the east. The melting Ice gave rise to great rivers rushing through the valley. Some blockages caused by the moraines caused lakes to form behind them, which eventually broke through the moraines. After the moraines were breached, the waters rushed down towards what we call the Humber today. Here they were met by another, far more impenetrable barrier.

The North Sea was still Icebound, and the back up of water formed a vast lake called by Geologists and Geographers (and, of course, Archaeologists) Lake Humber. Eventually, the Ice in the North Sea melted, and Lake Humber too drained away. Leaving behind a landscape for nature to grow (it had begun this process before the lakes drained, of course), it was a landscape of moraines, sand banks that soon blew into dunes and clay patches that were added too later by peat bogs. Now, binding all the sands and clays into a subsoil came plants followed by animals and after their arrival, came humans.

The first humans after the Ice Age to walk back into our part of what we call Yorkshire today arrived during the Mesolithic period, which runs from about 9,000 BC until about 4,300 BC (that is about 11,000 years ago until about 6,300 years ago). The previously arctic landscape had become dominated by Pine Birch and Alder trees, and the new peoples survived as Hunter-Gatherers catching Elk, Red and Roe Deer, Wild Boar, Fish and Wild Cattle (Aurochs). Good evidence for these peoples has been found by archaeologists at Star Carr, just west of Scarborough. A site that shows that the Mesolithic peoples were able to settle in huts and remain on the move and that they may have settled in areas where food supplies were best.

What kind of landscape did they settle (if they came at all) around what we call Wheldrake? Today, the village sits on one of two moraines that stretch across the Vale of York, cut through by the rivers Ouse and Derwent. Wheldrake sits on the more southerly moraine (the Escrick moraine) at the point that it is cut through by the River Derwent (See Figure 2).

The low ground to the north and the south of the moraine is made up of various clays and clay loams (that drain poorly and may have been marshy in the distant past) and sandy subsoils that would drain well (see Figure 3). In the shallow river valley to the East of the township, there are alluvium flood deposits built up over the years, filling in much of the valley. This lowland landscape with a variety of subsoils and drainage makes for an excellent place to settle. If we do not have any evidence for Mesolithic settlement, we do have suggestions of Neolithic activity.

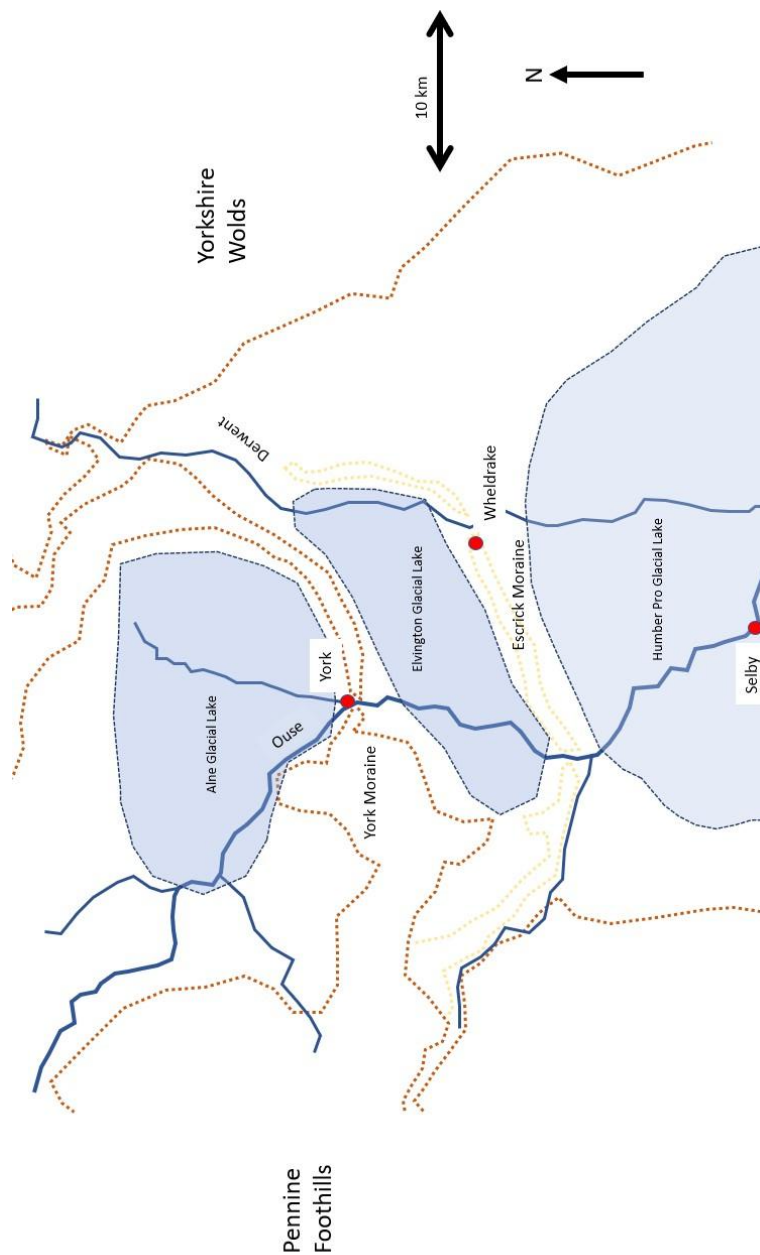


Figure 2: Vale of York: Showing Wheldrake sitting on the Eskrick Moraine.

Neolithic Wheldrake, Anything Going on?

The Neolithic period started about 4,300 BC and ran until about 2,000 B.C. It is a time when DNA studies suggest more migrants were arriving, bringing with them ideas of agriculture and animal husbandry. Other DNA studies indicate that substantially more people come during the Late Neolithic period (known as the Beaker period to archaeologists), making this quite a dramatic time. The Neolithic peoples frustratingly do not leave much settlement evidence, but they built very grand ceremonial sites from Orkney right down to Stonehenge. They created plenty of ceremonial henges in Yorkshire. Many (Kexby just up the Derwent, or down the Derwent and back up the Ouse and its tributaries to Newton Kyme, Boroughbridge and Thornton) can all be accessed by river from Wheldrake (see Figure 3).

A look at the City of York Historic Environment Register shows that four polished hand axes have been found in the area. Indeed, one was found in the fields outside our house in Crockey Hill! These hand axes survive well because they are made of tough, polished stone, often sourced from Langdale in Cumbria.

After using hammer stones to knap a nodule and produce a rough shape, the axes were ground or polished to create a sharp edge, and the smooth form is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Neolithic Polished Stone Axe, from the Langdale region of Cumbria.

The axes could be mounted onto wooden handles and could be used for chopping and cutting. They were also impressive objects that might have been important for the status of people in the past. So, if we have found four in the fields around Wheldrake, there must be some settlement, and we know that the nearest henge is only about five and a half miles away, north up the Derwent (see Figure 3).

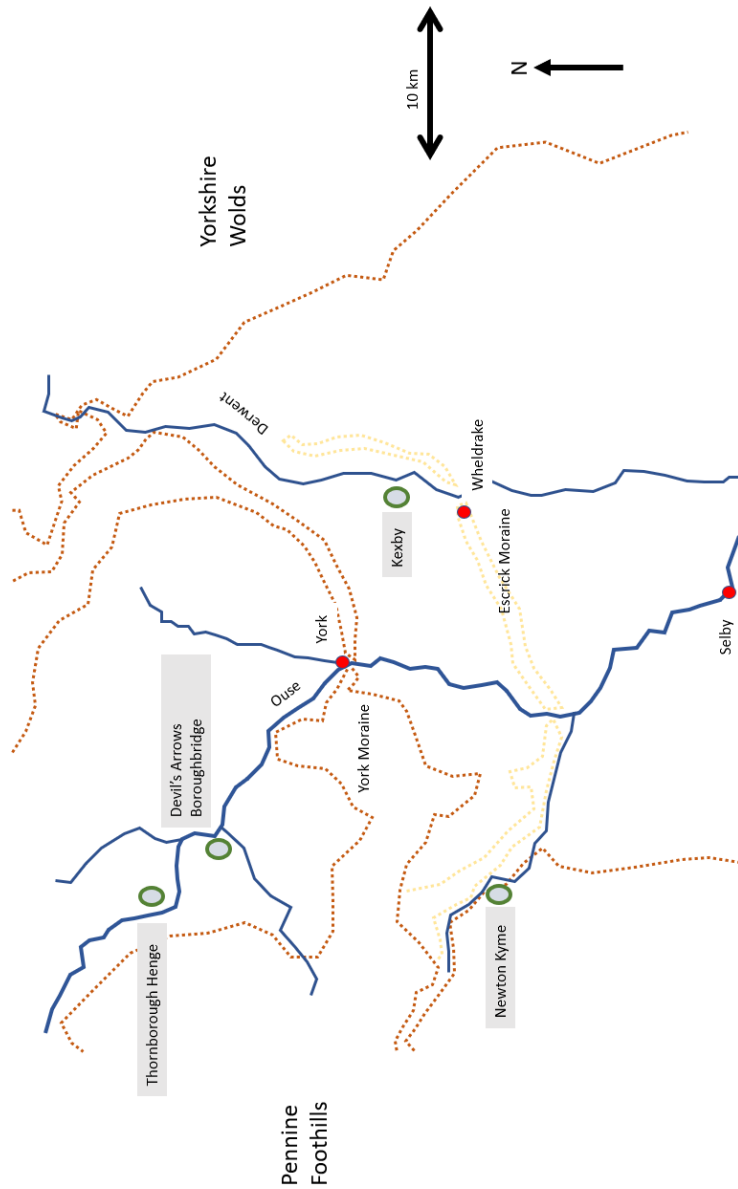


Figure 3: Vale of York: Showing river links from Wheldrake to Kexby, Newton Kyme, Boroughbridge and the Thornborough Henges.

The Bronze Age and Iron Age in the Wheldrake Landscape.

The Bronze Age stretches from about 2,000 B.C. in Britain until about 740 B.C. The north-western part of Wheldrake township, mostly Wheldrake woods or large arable fields today, shows many prehistoric field boundaries in the form of crop marks indicating filled in ditches beneath the present-day plough soil. Most of these crop marks are taken to suggest later Iron Age or Roman (Romano British, so that we do not imagine lots of Italians farming the land) fields and enclosures containing roundhouses. No crop marks in Wheldrake have been proven to be Bronze Age. Some, however, have been suggested as dating from that period. Not so far away from Wheldrake, on Skipwith Common, there are more definite Bronze Age burial mounds and a triple bank running across the common, possibly territorial boundary or cattle drove way.

Many more of the field boundary ditches in the north-west of Wheldrake township are believed to be Iron Age in date. These represent a more intensified occupation of the landscape, an occupation that had started in the Neolithic and continued in the Bronze Age. The Iron Age in Britain runs from 750 BC until 43 A.D. (when the Romans invaded for good).

People had been clearing the woodland and farming in Wheldrake township since the Neolithic period. By the Iron Age, our landscape would have been divided into fields with patches of marshland on some of the more challenging farm subsoil and patches of woodland (preserved as essential sources of firewood, charcoal and building material). The people who lived here in the Iron Age were probably tribal, living in family or clan groups but showing allegiance to larger tribal groupings. In Wheldrake, people might have looked to Yorkshire to the North, West and South as a sizeable tribal group known to the Romans as the Brigantes. Or people might have looked to the East to the people named the Parisi by the Romans. The Parisi lived on the Wolds and came down into the eastern part of the Vale of York. Several archaeologists have researched them, like John Stead and Peter Halkon, and we know lots about their burial

practices, building square barrows and burying important members of society in chariots. There are square barrows on Skipwith Common, and maybe one or two in the crop marks near Wheldrake woods. But the burial practices are slightly different, with the Skipwith burials seeming to be cremations rather than burials in the earth. So maybe the Ouse and Derwent area had its clan traditions, and we do not know whether the people living here showed allegiance to the Brigantes or Parisi.

The Romans are Coming!

In 43 A.D., the Roman Empire set about adding Britain to its provinces. They did this through a combination of military conquest and political persuasion. Some of the tribes fought back, and others became puppet governments. The Brigantes, under their famous queen Cartamandua, became a vassal tribe and were only genuinely brought into the Roman Empire in the 70s A.D. The Parisi, too, were engulfed by the Empire. The same must have been the case of the clans of the Ouse and Derwent area. Elsewhere the Romans brought a new way of doing things, the might of the Empire seeking natural resources, slaves, and glory, built Forts and Roads to keep the rebellious Britons in line. The Roman system also created towns, either around forts (like the massive legionary fortress at Eboracum, Roman York) or as local centres for trade and exploitation. These towns, such as Isurium Brigantium (Roman Aldborough), were places where Roman and local merchants and tribal leaders could mingle and live the 'civilised' life that the Romans offered. But what happened in Roman Wheldrake?

The Iron Age clans had already started to live in more complex settlements, and it is tantalising that the trackways through the fields in the North West of Wheldrake all seem to head towards a centre. The trees of Wheldrake Woods, of course, obscure that. What was going on at the centre? There are also lingering questions about this largely unexcavated landscape:

- Was the landscape a combination of Iron Age and Romano British tracks, fields, enclosures, and houses? How much did the pattern of change alter through time?
- Did the pattern of settlement extend beyond what we can see from aerial photographs? Do crop marks only form appropriately on the lighter soils, or were the clays too difficult and or boggy to farm and enclose?

The arrival of the Roman army and town nearby does not seem to have brought an enormous change in the landscape, but some farmsteads become more complex. Archaeological investigations on a pipeline crossing the moraine at Millfield Farm (see Figure 5) showed a Romano British farmstead.

The farmstead at Millfield Farm sat right next to a trackway that was heading north south, across the moraine. The houses at the farmstead were traditional British roundhouses to start with but contained Romano British pottery. Several slots were dug later, suggesting a change of building style to rectangular houses, but none of them forms a nice, neat rectangle. There were also three Romano British burials found here.

Excavations undertaken by a volunteer team (including people from Wheldrake) led by Brian Elsey from Archaeology North Duffield (supported by archaeologists Paul Durdin and myself) excavated a farmstead near Hardmoor Farm on Broadhighway.

Hardmoor Farm's excavations revealed a Romano British farm enclosure containing roundhouses replaced through time by other roundhouses. We did not find evidence for rebuilding in rectangular forms of a house at all on this site.

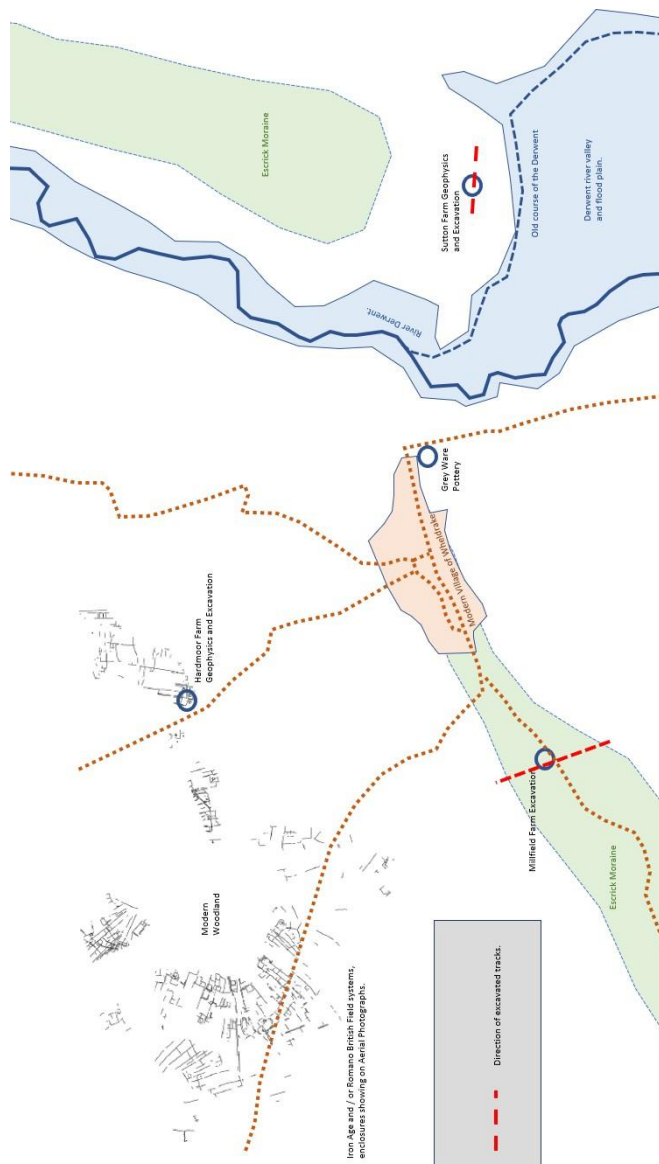


Figure 5: Wheldrake Landscape showing possible Iron Age and or Romano British activity and excavated sites.

On the east side of the river Derwent (in Sutton on Derwent township), a much larger settlement was partly excavated by a Hull University team (Van de Noort). The team carried out a geophysical survey that showed a track running east-west running along a section of the old river Derwent before the river headed north (see Figure 5). They saw a set of small enclosures along that track that looked like they might represent a settlement. After excavation, the team led by Van de Noort described it as:

“An important Romano British settlement of some size and importance. Although only 1% of the site’s estimated area was excavated, it provided evidence for large scale archaeological features a huge variety of Roman pottery tiles and glass vessels and a gold earring” (Van de Noort 1999, 187-188).

Van de Noort suggested a river crossing between his site and Wheldrake, which would have facilitated passage east-west along the Escrick moraine. Although the section of track on the moraine discovered at Millfield farm runs north to south, and an east to west track along the moraine may also be nearby. The actual crossing is still to be located (if it existed). Still, it is interesting that when I had an allotment to the East of Whedrake, I discovered several sherds of Roman grey ware pottery suggesting further settlement on the west side of the Derwent too.

One of the significant features of a Romano British landscape would be the Villa. These were large houses surrounded by a farmstead that acted as the centre for large agricultural estates. Yet strangely, despite (or perhaps because of) being close to the Roman Legionary fortress at Eboracum (York), we only have one suggested in the whole area encompassed by the rivers Ouse and Derwent. That is just off Kings Rudding Lane and has not been excavated. However, the Elvington to Riccall aqueduct project that discovered the Millfield Farm site very nearly hit it in 2003.

During the time that Britain was part of the Roman Empire, things gradually changed. The building of new civic places slowed and stopped, and the

peoples began to look to defend themselves against raiders from the north and the east. Leadership from the centre varied between squabbling aspirants to be the Emperor and strong leadership from Emperors such as Severus and Constantine. Severus even led the whole Empire from York in 208 A.D. By the time the Roman Empire withdrew its military and administrative support in 411 A.D., the landscape had changed, and we do not know how much of the farmsteads and settlements described in or near Wheldrake still survived. It is not even clear how much occupation there was in York itself. This period of history became known as the dark ages, which is something of a misnomer. We do not know so much about it. Leaders who had remained seem to try to impose order locally. Sometimes clinging to the laws, they had lived under previously and supported by the church. Many of the Britons had converted to Christianity, but they did not build churches and other large buildings as they did later. The population may have fallen due to disease, either during or after the Roman Empire gave up on Britain. After about a hundred years, people from the northern parts of what we call Germany began to arrive, and by occupying the land and defeating the locals, they began to build Anglo Saxon England. Most of the Britons were forced back to the west and north, and the last British kingdom in the east, the Kingdom of Elmet, fell in the early 600s A.D.

[Into the Medieval Period: The Village we Know Grows.](#)

The Anglo Saxons fought with their near neighbours the Danes (Vikings) for control in England, and overlordship in northern England flipped from English to Danish for some years. During this time (the Early Medieval period), we see land and lordship develop a little as the Romans had with large estates being held by lords. During this period (the 800s until the 1000s A.D.), there is much conjecture about when villages such as Wheldrake formed. Archaeological evidence is absent for any occupation during the period. Only the name suggests an Anglo Scandinavian and Anglo Saxon meaning but is relatively obscure, and the name changes through time. The meaning is a strip of land (ric) with Wellsprings on it, possibly the moraine (Victoria County History, British History Online). This reference suggests that Wheldrake came into being before the Norman invasion (1066 AD). It was described as Coldrid in the Domesday Book of 1086. So, it is possible that there was little or no settlement in the township of Wheldrake for some hundreds of years, but during that early medieval period, a large farmstead or village formed to bring the land back into cultivation. Over those hundreds of years, the field divisions would have flattened out but may have remained as traces, trees would have recolonised large tracts, and there may well have been a sense of starting afresh.

In 1966 June Sheppard from Queen Mary's College at the University of London published a project that had sought to map the development of Wheldrake into the village we see today. Sheppard used maps drawn up in the 1700s and 1800s, including the Enclosure survey of 1769. Which I am not sure has been seen by contemporary local historians! She added to this a host of documents giving field names etc. and built up a fascinating picture of the growth of Wheldrake.

Sheppard began her study by seeking to understand the landscape that Wheldrake was built. She notes the positioning on the moraine and the proximity of the river. She also consulted the geological survey to establish

where the better and more deficient draining soils were located. I have adapted her map, highlighting the more deficient soils and areas where bog iron is found (an essential resource to the earlier Iron Age and Romano British dwellers) (see Figure 6).

The map in figure 6 shows that the soils closer to Wheldrake village and the moraine are better drained and having sandier subsoils more accessible to plough. Sheppard's first mapping of the village and its fields shows us the growth of a planned settlement with an unusual bank built around it and its most immediate fields. The villagers had assarted (cleared, or as they might call it in South America slashed and burned the areas immediately beyond the bank to create fields (see Figure 7).

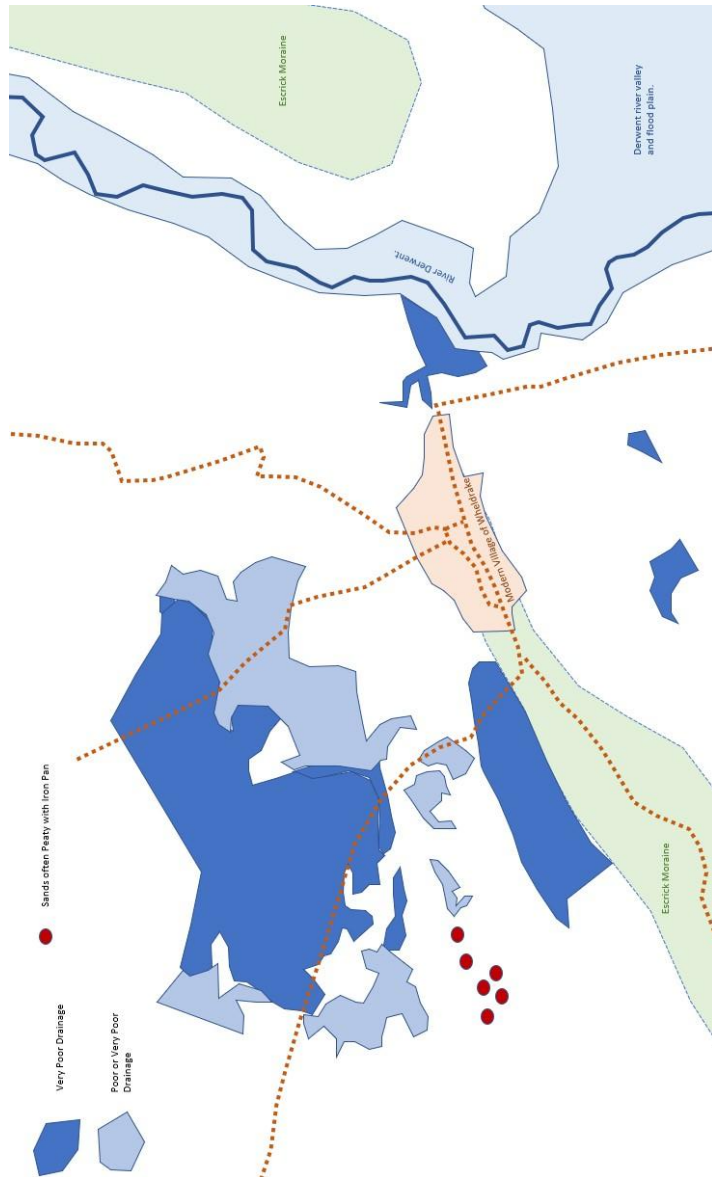


Figure 6: Wheldrake showing the poorer draining soils and bog iron deposits.

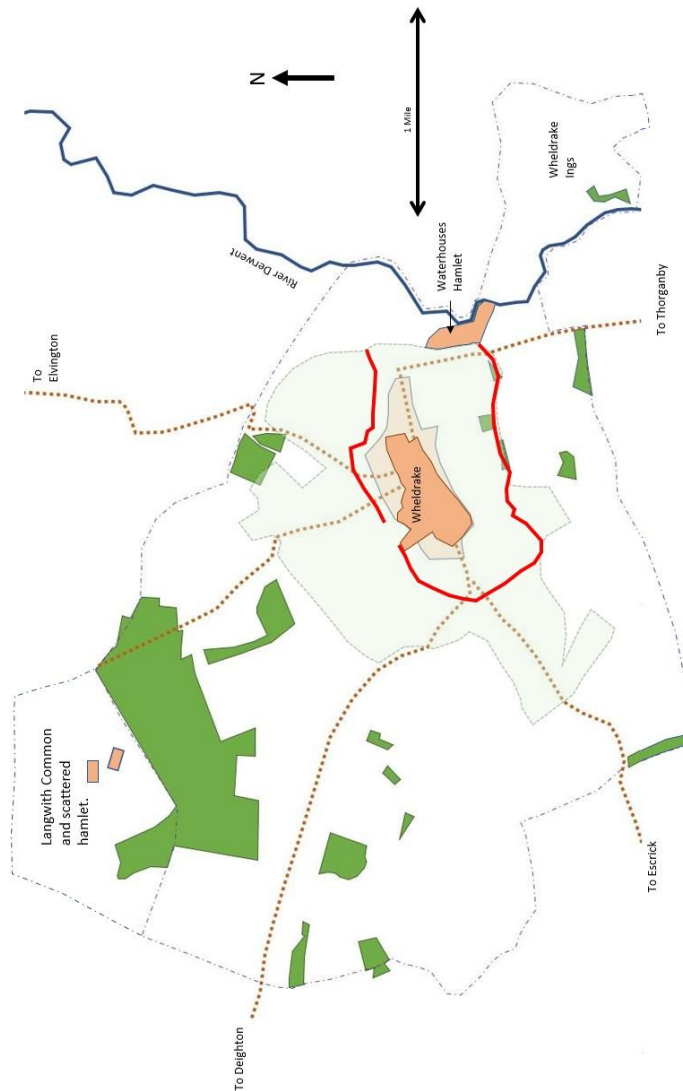


Figure 7: The early village of Wheldrake after about 1235 (after Sheppard 1966). The bank enclosing the village and its closest fields is in red. The field system first cleared by assarting is shown in light green. The Township and Parish boundary has already been established and has probably changed little since.

The Township and Parish boundary is much larger than the fields opened for production. This discrepancy probably reflects the small population of Wheldrake at the time. The outlying parts would have consisted of open clearings and heathland and stands of woodland. Villagers used these areas for common grazing (shared with surrounding townships) and fuel and building materials.

When we look more closely at the field names in Sheppard's circa 1235 map, we see many examples of words suggesting that they have been assarted (see Figure 8). These words include Rudding - old English for area rid of overgrowth, Brand – an area cleared by burning, or Brec – land that was broken up for clearing.

The central village had been added to by two separate hamlets:

- Langwith, which was nothing more than a scattered hamlet sitting on Langwith Common.
- Waterhouses, which was a separate riverside hamlet that presumably specialised in fishing in the Derwent.

Sheppard based the field and furlong names on eighteenth-century field plans and the first edition O.S. 1: 10,560 maps (1854). The land encompassed by the turf dyke and the boundary ditch of Wilgesic formed the original nucleus of improved land. The plots outside this boundary were probably assarted between about 1140 and 1235.

Sheppard assumed the area contained within the dyke was created before the Normans took control in the years after 1066. The area within the bank she calculated to be about 425 acres. She believed that 75 acres were taken up by the tofts where the villagers lived and the roads, leaving 350 acres for farming. If each tenant villager held about thirteen to twenty acres, the 350 acres available would suit about 15 to 20 villagers plus the

actual manor farm belonging directly to that manor's Lord and occupied by his steward.

The Domesday Book reveals that in 1086 when William Coleville held the manor of Wheldrake as sub-tenant of William Percy, there were six tenant households. At this date, therefore, it is unlikely all land within the dyke was cultivated, let alone any assarts outside (Sheppard 1966, 70). Sheppard felt that the village's steady growth, as the Lord of the manor attracted more villagers to Wheldrake, took until the mid-1100s before it could farm all the lands inside the dyke and assarting started to kick in. Leading to the situation suggested by about 1235. This steady growth of the village and its fields took place through some politically difficult times nationally and with a growing population background.

Sheppard suggests that before the Norman invasion and the 'harrying of the north,' the village was large enough to cultivate the enclosed area (say 20 households). Following the reduction from about 20 households down to 6 the village had to regrow. This regrowth was achieved, until about 1150, by the villagers, presumably with the Lord's encouragement on the manor. The villagers divided the landscape into closes rather than the traditional feudal open field system that came later in the story.

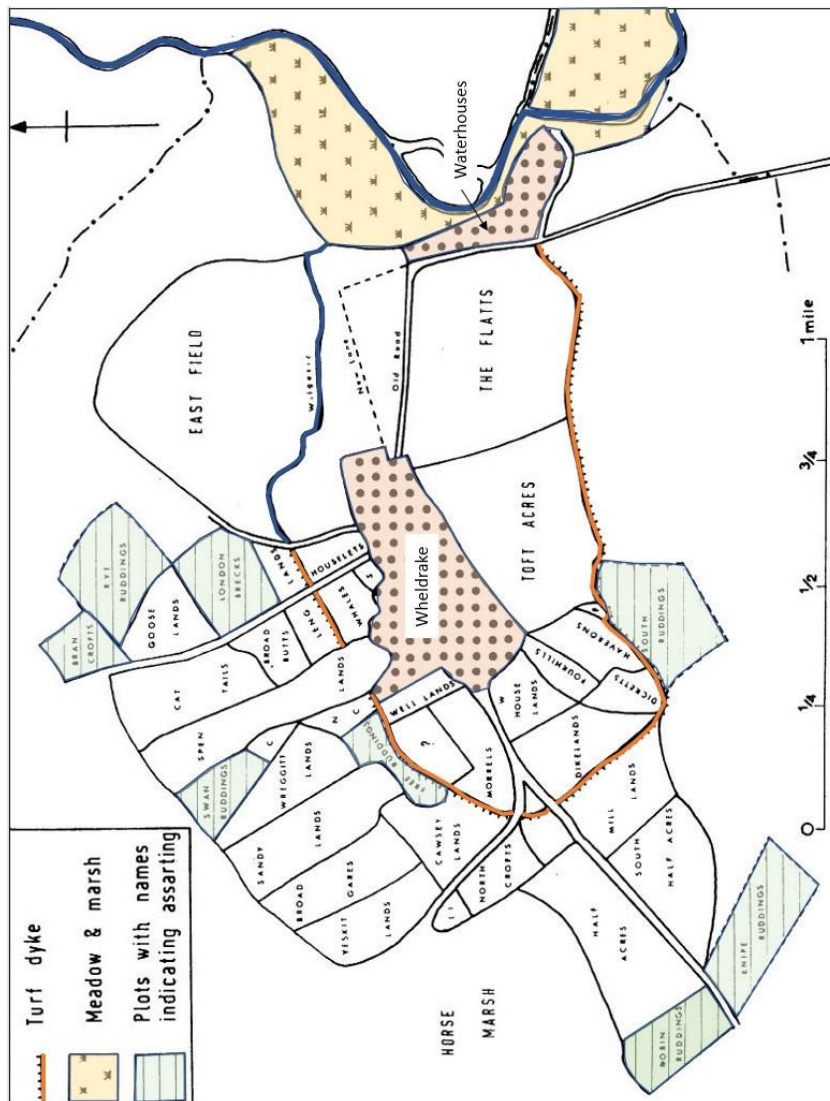


Figure 8: Plan by Sheppard (1966) showing pre-1235 field names suggesting that many had been assarted to create lands for growing crops around Wheldrake and the hamlet of Waterhouses.

C. = Cowscotts; N.C. = Nichol Crofts; L.I. - Little Ing; F. = Fouse Butts; S. - Stockhill Butts.

What Evidence do we have for the Enclosing Bank (Dike)?

Sheppard also suggests that the bank around the village was constructed to keep animals out. The Lord of the manor may have had the bank or dike created with the village under Anglo Saxon rule (probably in the 900s or earlier). Alternatively, the bank was built later in the 1100s when the township was surrounded by the Ouse and Derwent's Royal Forest. Living in a Royal Forest did not mean that the village was surrounded by impenetrable woodland; it was more like living in a modern-day National Park. The Lord of the Manor and his villagers had some restrictions, but life could generally go on. I agree with Sheppard that we do not have enough evidence to say whether the bank was constructed before or after the Norman conquest.

Several pieces of evidence suggest that a wall, bank, or ditch once followed the line set out in in Figures 7 and 8:

- Three furlongs adjoining the boundary on its inner side have names that suggest this, i.e., Dikelands, Dicketts and Whales.
- An early charter refers to the "west Surdwall" (sodwall?), though without any indication of its location.
- The first edition 1: 10,560 map has "old walls" written along the boundary where it passes south of Toft Acres.

Therefore, it seems likely that a turf dyke, continued in the northeast by an artificially deepened stream known as Wilge-sic, once surrounded a core of arable land. Outside this boundary, the ground was subsequently assarted to form the village fields (Sheppard 1966, 69-70).

The Layout of the Village.

The growth of an enclosing bank and fields around Wheldrake until about 1150 has been discussed. How was the village itself laid out? The Lord of the manor often planned a medieval village to attract villagers as tenants.

They would have a toft of land running off a communal road. On that toft, there would be a croft with a cottage built on it. The toft could be used for growing fruit or vegetables and maybe running a pig or two. Wheldrake grew from a set of 18 tofts, a Lord's hall (occupied sometimes by the Lord themselves or by a Steward who oversaw the Lord's interests in the village) and a church and rectory (see Figure 9).

It is not clear whether the tofts and crofts survived the 'harrying of the north' intact, but at least six households remained in 1086. Figure 9 probably represents the village layout after the new Norman Lord has set about making the village a profitable concern once more. As the population grew, particularly after 1150, housing and new tenants' demand would lead to the dividing up of tofts and rebuilding crofts to develop the village. The result of dividing the tofts through 800 years is shown in Figure 9, with the subdivisions marked as dotted lines. Some of the original toft boundaries are marked today by rights of way running to the back lanes from the main street.



Figure 9: Plan of Wheldrake tofts taken from 1850 1:10,560 O.S. map (Sheppard (1966)) showing post-conquest boundaries and subsequent subdivisions to allow for the growing population.

The hall's location, the administrative centre for the Lord of the manor and sometimes his home, appears on the map in Figure 9, as does the church and rectory, built on a toft donated by the Lord of the manor to show his great piety! Detail of the plot where the hall once stood appears on the First Edition 6-inch O.S. map in Figure 10.



Figure 10: Extract from 1853 O.S. first edition map highlighting in green the old hall site.

The Lord's hall and a possible Castle in Wheldrake.

The Victoria County History (British History Online) also notes that a castle may have stood in Wheldrake because permission was granted to the people of York to tear one down in 1149! It is suggested that the castle might have been on a spur of land overlooking the Derwent, much as the motte and bailey castle did about five and a half miles south in Aughton. However, there is no sign of a motte at Wheldrake, but the same can be said for the castle six and a half miles south at North Duffield.

In 1066 the manor of Wheldrake was held by a William Coleville. It soon passed to the Percy family (a rich and influential Medieval Yorkshire family) who then handed it onto the Earl of Warwick. In 1086 the Percy family were relatively modest, but did not live at Wheldrake, they had an under tenant who would have acted as Lord of the manor the Darel family. Between 1180 and 1200 the Earl of Warwick then handed the service of the Darel's and the estate at Wheldrake to Richard Malbis, Malbis took more interest in Wheldrake than the Percy's had.

In 1200, Lord of the manor, Richard Malbis, was licensed to fortify a castle that he was building (he was granted a licence to crenelate), but again the citizens of York prevented this. Richard Malbis' manor was probably the hall located in Figure 10, and it is perfectly possible that the licence to crenelate referred to this site.

The Victoria County History also speculates that a second, smaller manor-house stood at the dismantled castle site after 1200, and it may have belonged to the Darel's. They were undertenants of Fountains Abbey in 1361 (see Figure 11). It is also possible that the Darel's family took the Lord's seat in the village back after Richard Malbis sold his Lordship of Wheldrake to Fountains Abbey at some time between 1200 and his death in 1209 thus making the Abbot of Fountains Abbey the Lord of the manor. Victoria County History (British History Online) states that Fountains had a

grange in Wheldrake before 1200, so they may have kept on the grange farm as the village's centre for operations.



Figure 11: O.S. 6-inch map from 1853 showing the location of the Lord of the manor's hall and the place on a spur overlooking the Derwent valley, the possible site of a pre-1146 castle.

The village grows under the Lordship of Fountains Abbey 1200 – 1539

We cannot say whether the planned setting out of the Tofts and Crofts along main street was the action of the Malbis family or the Bishops of Fountains Abbey taking over. But during the 1100s and 1200s Wheldrake, like England itself experienced considerable population growth. This seems to lead to the division of the original planned tofts and crofts allowing more people to occupy the village. This period also saw the continued growth of Wheldrake's two hamlets: Waterhouses next to the river Derwent and Langwith, on the common (probably beneath the airfield today). The hamlets did not grow to the same compact density that Wheldrake did itself, but still formed important parts of the village.

It is interesting that despite the probable population decline in the village during the mid-1300s due to famine and the plague the village continues to be expanded by the landlords (Fountains Abbey). The map in Figure 12, taken from Sheppard's article (1966), shows the final extent of the closes and fields of the village. The closes beyond the communal fields remain as pastures, so this suggests that the village population does not expand after the mid-1300s, but the village extent extends right out to its parish boundaries. Creating the map drawn by Sheppard (Fig 12) that shows the assarting and creation of closes given over to pasture. Pasture would suit the running of sheep in particular, an important part of the income generation of Fountains Abbey and of interest to the villagers who could generate income with much less work than the tilling of their fields.

The picture painted by the map in Fig 12, after the dissolution of the monastic landlords at Fountains Abbey in 1539 and the enclosure of Wheldrake's fields in 1773, shows a successful medieval village that balanced arable farming and pasture. It was already starting to see the growth of farms separate from the village that would grow in number after enclosure.

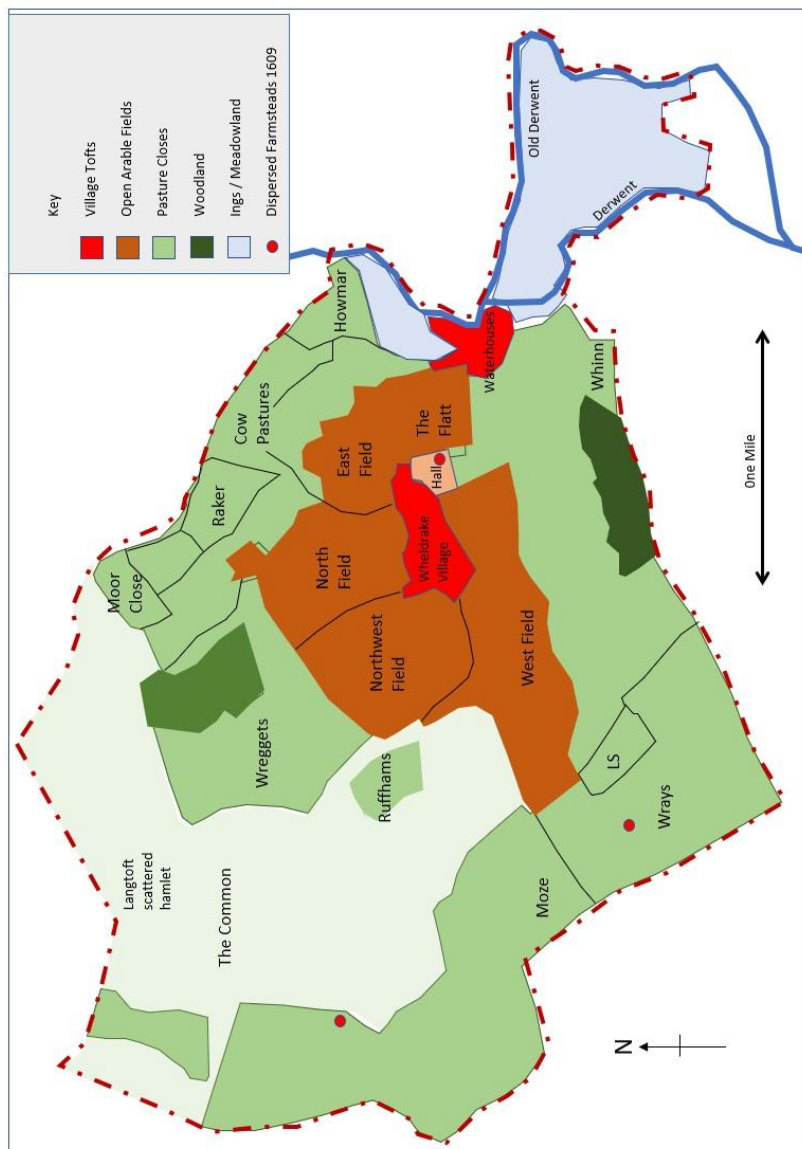


Figure 12: Map drawn from Sheppard (1966) showing the extent of land use around Wheldrake during the 1500s and 1600s.

After the Dissolution 1539

Documents give us glimpses of the life for the better off in Wheldrake and the everyday folk. These are listed in the Victoria County History (available online at [British History Online](#)).

The Common remained an important asset during the 1500s and 1600s and common grazing rights for cattle and pigs remained for the villagers until 1773 and enclosure. Enclosure benefitted the better off villagers and landowners but created real problems for the poorer villagers who relied on small portions of the common fields, the common itself and the tofts around their houses where they had them. Wheldrake practiced intercommoning with villages to the north, Elvington, Kexby and Heslington.

Farmers after enclosure were important, taking over from, and probably being the same villagers. By the 12800s there were between 30 and 40 farmers of whom about 10 were bigger farms of over 150 acres. There were only about 2 to 3 farmers in Langwith during the 1800s. In more recent times there were only 20 farms in 1971 at an average size of 157 acres.

The village also provided wood for the Abbey whilst they were landlords and continued to supply oak to the King after the dissolution. The small woodlands shown in Fig 12 may have been larger during the 1300s and 1400s.

The fisheries at Waterhouses were always an important aspect of the village economy, mostly producing eels. They even created a special eel pond on the Ings. In attempts to encourage other fish the villagers at Waterhouses built weirs, but these caused problems for river traffic. Which is why they are recorded in court rolls.

Other activities in the village are hinted at in the documents. In 1609 there were several weavers, that probably reflects the continued importance of

sheep to the village economy. The village housing was essentially rebuilt (as was much of Yorkshire) during the 1700s. The houses were rebuilt in brick with clay roof tiles, and it is unsurprising that there were Brickmakers in the village by 1782.

Milling of the grain produced in the open fields during the medieval period, and then through the 1500s and 1600s needed milling. There are documentary records of a water mill in the 1200s which may have been near a spot called Mill Hill today (see Fig 11 above), as a stream flows towards the Derwent. There was a windmill in West Field by 1609 (resulting in the West Field becoming known as Mill Field) there is also record of a horse driven mill in Wheldrake, but I cannot identify a typical circular wheelhouse today.

The more recent history of Wheldrake, after the enclosures, becomes more accessible and numerous so I should really leave the telling of the village history to others who have studied Wheldrake since the 1700s. This attempt at outlining the history of the landscape around Wheldrake has really been an opportunity for me to learn about the next-door village. A village where my children attended primary school and where many of their friends live today. I have had fun making Sheppard's maps colourful on PowerPoint and all in all it has been great fun.

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