Early Castles and Rural Settlement Patterns: Insights from Yorkshire and the East Midlands

by Oliver H Creighton

Introduction

Traditional castellology, with its emphasis on architectural and military analysis, has often led to the study of castles in isolation from their landscape contexts. In particular, many synthetic studies of medieval castles have consistently failed to acknowledge the status of fortified sites as working manorial centres which contributed to the development of contemporary landscapes. Recent studies of the usage and manipulation of social space within castle planning, while welcome, have likewise failed to provide a broader context for the interpretation of castles. Conversely, landscape archaeologists and settlement historians have often tended to overlook the rôles of castles as forms of settlement. This is demonstrated amply by the merger in 1986 of the Medieval Village Research Group and Moated Sites Research Group to form the MSRG, while castles, as high-status forms of settlement, have lain beyond the remit of the merged body and remain the focus of the Castle Studies Group.

This paper emphasises that castles can and must be viewed as integral components within medieval settlement patterns; either as elements within the fabric of villages and hamlets or as dispersed forms of settlement in their own right. Case study material drawn from the author's research in Yorkshire and the East Midlands (Creighton 1997; 1998; 1999) is used to draw attention to some important interrelationships between castles and rural settlement patterns, and to explore some potential avenues for future research.

Figure 13 illustrates one important aspect of the interrelationship between early castle sites (i.e. those with likely occupation in the period c. 1066-1216) and rural settlement forms. What is immediately obvious is that castles, in terms of their settings, appear to mirror wider regional trends in medieval rural settlement development, reflected in the marked clustering of isolated castles, and those associated with hamlets and both regular and irregular villages. For instance, castles of the Holderness peninsula are predominantly associated with irregular villages; the Vale of York is characterised by castles in close association with regular villages; and the Lincolnshire fen-edge castles are primarily isolated sites. While it remains essential not to overlook the diversity of settlement forms within a given area, this observation does emphasise the status of castles as core elements within the distinctive medieval manorial economies of different regions and sub-regions.

Castles as Settlement

We may define two essential ways in which castles functioned as dispersed forms of medieval settlement. First, a proportion of fortified sites were constructed to act as specialised centres for the administration of medieval hunting resources. Second, other castles can be understood as isolated high-status settlements within landscapes that were also characterised, wholly or partially, by other forms of dispersed settlement. Castles which fall into the second category were thus manorial centres and perhaps working farms as well as fortified sites.

The ringwork or motte and bailey provided medieval lords with a flexible physical template readily adapted to a variety of social and physical geographical circumstances and landscapes; the control of royal forests was one specialised rôle which early castles sometimes fulfilled. We must recognise, however, the essential social and legal differences between castle sites associated with the management of royal forests as opposed to private seigneurial chases and parks. Castles associated with forests acted as centres for the administration of an area under the jurisdiction of forest law through the strategic settlement of an appointed official. These sites also

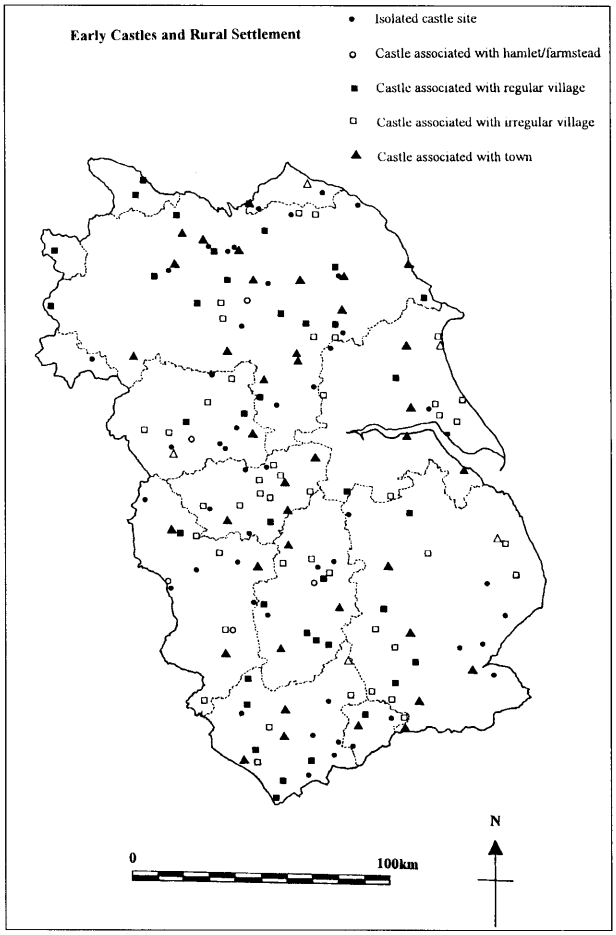

Figure 13: Key relationships between early castles and rural settlement in Yorkshire and the East Midlands.

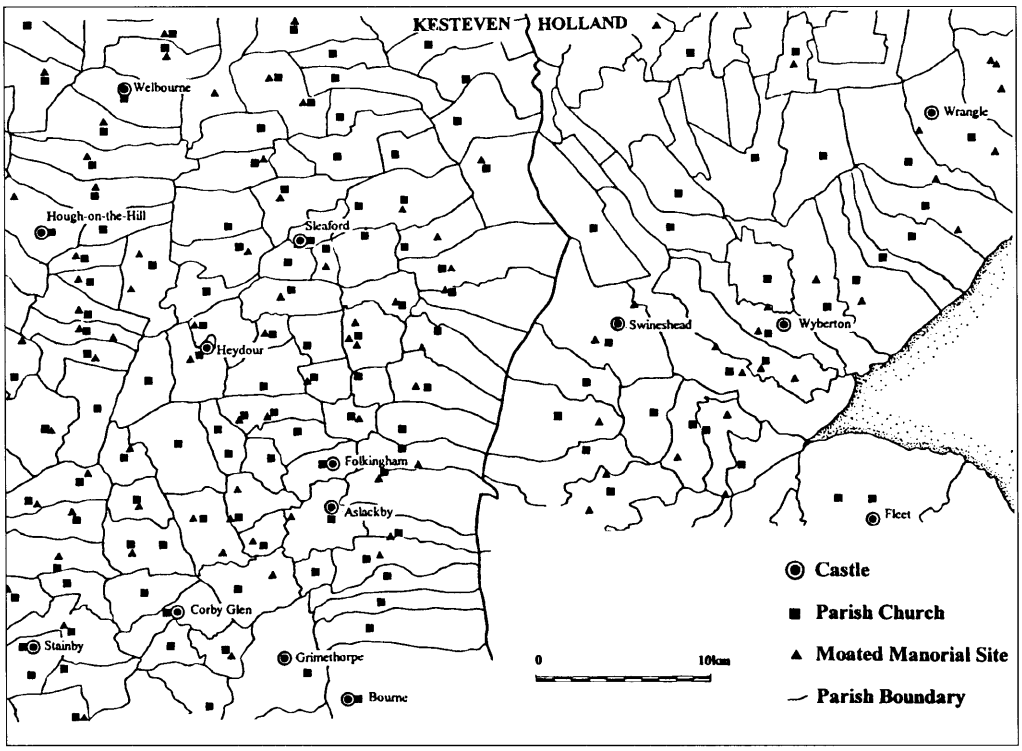

Figure 14: Castles, churches and moated sites in south Lincolnshire (adapted from Healey 1977, Figure 15).

provided occasional accommodation for hunting parties and are invariably found in isolated positions, while those associated with private deer parks were more often closely associated with villages or hamlets.

Typical of these isolated 'forest' castles are Sauvey Castle, Leics. (SK 787053) and Beaumont Chase, Rutland (SK 849004); both the seats of appointed royal foresters associated respectively with the forests of Leafield and Rutland (Creighton 1997, 3233; 1999, 22-23). Three isolated castles on the fringes of Sherwood Forest can be interpreted in a similar light: Annesley (SK 509518) and Kingshaugh, Notts. (SK 765736), and South Normanton, Derbys. (SK 459568) (Crook 1990, 94-95; Speight 1994).

The status of other early castles as isolated forms of settlement in non-nucleated landscapes is exemplified by a series of sites in south-east Lincolnshire. In particular, we may note the landscape context of four early castles in South Holland and Boston (Figure 14): Fleet (TF 385231); Swineshead (TF 243410); Wrangle (TF 413531); and Wyberton (TF 335410). With the exception of Wyberton, all these sites are low wetland mottes which represent, in morphological terms, an intermediate form between the motte and bailey and moated manor. Significantly, the manner in which all four sites are isolated from loosely agglomerated settlements or are isolated forms of settlement in their own right, mirrors exactly the landscape context of moated manorial sites in the surrounding district. The early castles of South Holland were thus integral components of a regional economy dominated by split manors and a relatively free social structure (Healey 1977, 28); here castles clearly follow an extant settlement pattern and economy where church, settlement and manor were not necessarily conjoined. This pattern contrasts sharply with the greater integration of sites of lordship (both castles and moats) in Kesteven to the west. For instance, the castle sites at Aslackby (TF 085305), Corby Glen (SK 000251), Heydour (TF 007397), Hough-on-the Hill (SK 924464), Stainby (SK 909226) and Welbourne (SK 968542) are all fully integrated within village plans, and indicate the position of castles within a fundamentally different manorial and social structure.

Other regional studies confirm that in certain landscapes the distribution of castle sites can be viewed as part and parcel of a characteristically dispersed medieval settlement pattern, as in Devon (Higham 1982, 106). Yet it is equally possible that dispersed settlement could originate through schemes of seigneurially-led planning. That castles could form fortified elements within these schemes has been demonstrated in the Vale of Montgomery (King and Spurgeon 1965), and it is possible that the castle at Kilton, Cleveland (NZ 703175) may well have been planned in conjunction with a series of farmsteads in its immediate hinterland (Daniels 1990, 46-47). The fact that these patterns lack the conventional hallmark of settlement planning - regularity -should not detract from the fact that they were deliberate creations by powerful secular lords. It is certain that parallel schemes remain to be identified elsewhere and may well be characteristic of border regions in the highland zone.

Castles and Deserted Settlement

The study of interrelationships between castles and deserted settlements can make two important contributions to our understanding of the rôles of castles in the development of rural landscapes. First, morphological plan analysis may amplify our understanding of the physical *pattern of* castle-settlement relationships, in the absence of the post-medieval alterations to village plans that blur the picture elsewhere. Second, it remains to be identified whether deserted

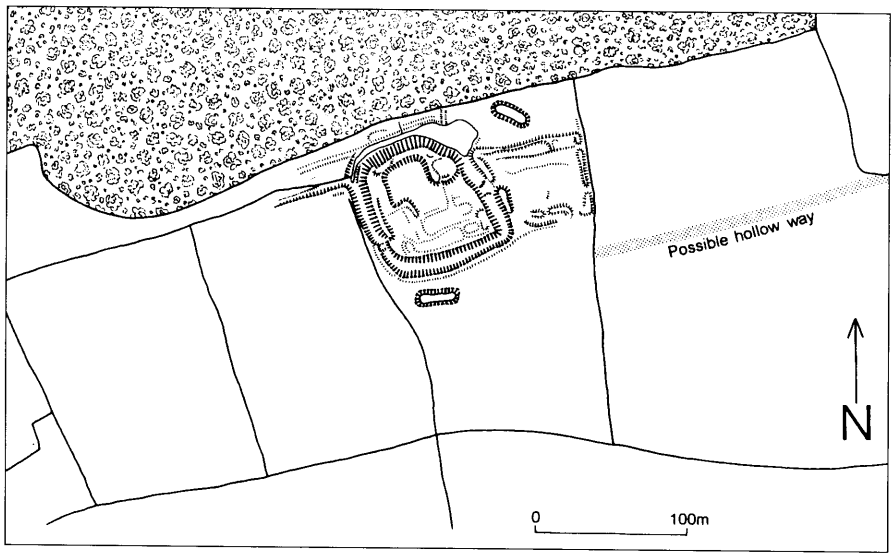

Figure 15: Woodhead, Rutland (adapted from Northants. CRO Map No. 4134/2).

settlements associated with castles were atypical in any way and, in particular, whether the abandonment of the castle was a causal, contributory or independent factor in the *process* of settlement decline.

The medieval fortified site of Woodhead, Rutland (SK 997116) occupies a prominent ridge-top position, c. 1.7km north-east of the York-Stamford Roman road (Figure 3). Despite its present isolation as a landscape feature, the castle appears to have spawned a dependent hamlet or settlement, although its population is subsumed within that of Great Casterton in medieval taxation returns, thus rendering estimation of its size problematic. The manor of Woodhead is absent from Domesday; however, in 1286-87 a toft and croft at Woodhead are specified in the endowment of a chapel here (Irons 1917, 50-51; VCH Rutland 11 1935, 235), and in 1684 the antiquarian Wright mentions " ....Woodhead, formerly a village and chapelry, now only one house, and that in ruins" (1684, 36). The precise location and plan of this settlement remains obscure, yet a 1798 estate plan of Bridge Casterton by J. Baxter depicts four squarish enclosures in line to the south of the castle earthworks which are associated with the field-name *Woodhead Closes* (Figure 15). These features may well indicate a series of amalgamated peasant crofts, subsequently overlain by ridge and furrow cultivation, whilst a superficial depression leading east from the castle may indicate a former hollow way. Although the desertion of the settlement can be dated no earlier than Wright's late-seventeenth-century reference, the castle was certainly ruinous by 1543, when it is positively documented for the first time (VCH Rutland 11 1935, 232).

The castle earthworks presently abut a zone of woodland to the north, and given that the place-name *Wod(e)heved* ('headland or eminence with a wood') is recorded as early as 1263 (Cox 1994, 131), this topographical relationship is clearly of some antiquity. The present field monument comprises a sub-rectangular ringwork with vestiges of an appending enclosure to the east, and surface collection in the immediate area has yielded a substantial volume of tile and a fragment of Collyweston slate, in addition to medieval pottery (Rutland County Museum Acquisition Nos 1975.22 and 1977.55). The entire complex was formerly encompassed by a spring-fed moat, and evidence of fishponds to the north and south may indicate a secondary phase of manorial expansion.

The example of Woodhead serves to indicate that small foci of settlement associated with apparently isolated castles remain to be identified. A complex range of other relationships exist between castles and deserted/shifted/shrunken settlements. For instance, the close association of early castles with parish churches and small zones of settlement earthworks at Gilmorton (SP 570879) and Shawell, Leics. (SP 541796) may indicate early settlement foci which have been deserted in favour of other village sites (Creighton 1997, 25-27, 30-31). Elsewhere, the scrutiny of relationships between castles and deserted village earthworks has much to tell us; for instance at Burley, Rutland (SK 894120) and Kingerby, Lincs. (TF 056928), Norman castle building clearly infringed upon and displaced portion of existing settlements (Creighton 1999, 26-28; Everson *et al.* 1991, 147-49).

Castles and Village Planning

Where a castle is associated with a settlement containing clearly planned elements, it is tempting to single out the castle seigneury as the likely agent of settlement change. The foundation of a castle could be a critical moment in a settlement's development, when powerful secular lords were apt to indulge themselves in settlement planning, driven by social, economic and even aesthetic motives. These questions must, however, be related to the wider debate within medieval settlement studies concerning the coercive powers of lords in settlement planning relative to the collective power of peasant communities (Dyer 1985; Harvey 1989; Lewis *et al.* 1997, 204-10). In addition, archaeological research is demonstrating increasingly that many rural castle sites perpetuated extant seats of secular authority (Higham and Barker 1992, 38-61), making it difficult to correlate episodes of settlement planning with Norman as opposed to pre-Conquest lordship.

It becomes possible to draw a firmer link between castle building and settlement planning where documentary

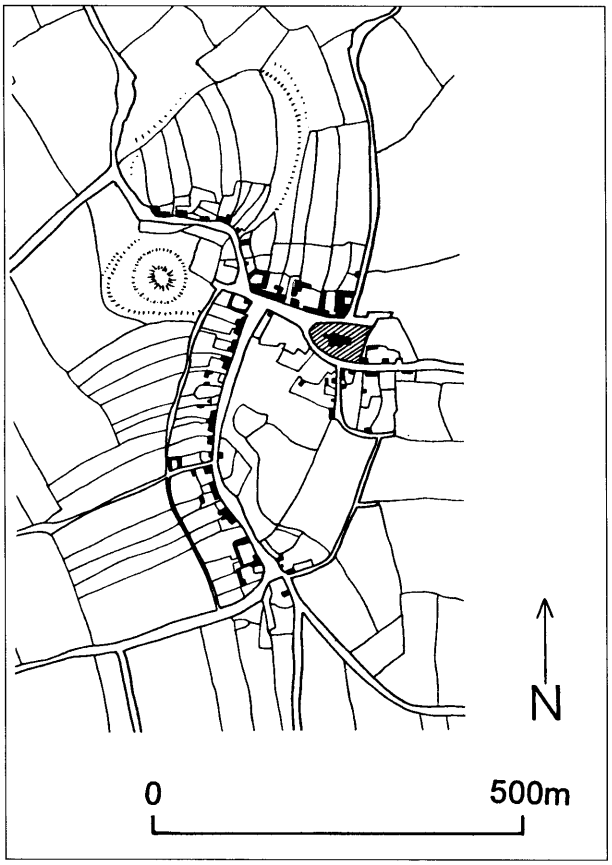

Figure 16: Barwick-in-Elmet, W. Yorks. (adapted from OS First Edition).

evidence makes it clear that the construction of a fortified site resulted in a demonstrable increase in a settlement's status and economic fortunes. This appears to be true of Barwick-in-Elmet, Yorks. (SE 194275). The village plan exhibits three distinct plan-units (Figure 16): an irregular nucleus of tenements clustering around All Saints' church (which contains fragments of Anglo-Saxon work: Collingwood 1914-18, 135-39); a univallate iron age hillfort remodelled as a motte and bailey; and a regular row of tenements characterised by long toft plots, which appends to the south of the hillfort. This regular unit of village topography is seemingly a planned expansion over open field agriculture, as indicated by the curvilinear profile of the plots. The junction between the three plan units is indicated by a marked widening of Main Street where stands the vestiges of a market cross. What is significant is that documentary analysis reveals Barwick to have (re)emerged as a centre of regional administration in the mid twelfth century; before, the township was a berwick of Kippax and of little apparent significance.

The motte and bailey at Barwick was not a castle of the immediate post-Conquest period. Instead, it was raised during the uncertain political geography of the Anarchy, at a time of intense political threat to the de Lacy position (Wightman 1966, 244). The hillfort was doubtless re-occupied due to its geographical position at the junction of the east-west route through the Pennines and the Aire Gap, and the north-south axis of communication on the western fringe of the Ouse-Trent basin. Hamlets in the immediate hinterland of Barwick at Hillum, Barnbow and Seacroft was incorporated within the township by the de Lacy lords from c. 1144 in order to create a complementary demesne estate around the hub of Barwick, which by the thirteenth century had replaced Kippax as the gravitational centre of the north part of the Honour of Pontefract (Fault and Moorhouse 1981, 257, 735). These circumstances make it likely that the planned extension may well correlate with Barwick's rapid rise to prominence within the Honour of Pontefract. Similar sequences - of settlements rising to administrative prominence, commensurate with castle building and settlement planning - have been recognised elsewhere; for instance at Kirkby Malzeard, N. Yorks. and Laxton, Notts. (Cameron 1980, 220-25; Challis 1995; Roberts 1990, 120-21).

Conclusions

This paper has served to draw attention, through a series of contrasting case-studies, to certain aspects of the interrelationship between medieval castles and rural settlement. From one perspective it is important that future archaeological reports relating to the excavation or survey of castle sites give full recognition to the context of a fortified site within its settlement landscape, in addition the more standard analysis of its physical setting and ownership history. Yet equally, however, medieval settlement studies must recognise that castles are as much a part of the settlement pattern as moated manors or isolated homesteads.

These remarks are particularly pertinent with regard to the period between 1066 and 1250, when many earth and timber fortifications were raised under the orders of minor lords, tenants and sub-tenants to function as manorial centres as much as military strongpoints. The interrelationships between these rural mottes and ringworks and their associated manorial economies are yet to be examined adequately, although interesting patterns of regional variation can be anticipated. The full range of relationships, both chronological and morphological, between castle and settlement is clearly complex, yet key themes can be identified: in many cases castles and churches form a magnate core within a settlement (Morris 1989, 248-255); elsewhere castle siting meant the disruption and displacement of antecedent settlement; in other landscapes castles functioned as forms of dispersed settlement. The underlying conclusion is that castles can and must be understood as part and parcel of wider settlement landscapes; to deny this is undoubtedly to the detriment of rural settlement studies and castellology.

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Early Medieval Assembly Places

by Aliki Pantos

As part of ongoing doctoral research, fieldwork was carried out to visit the locations of thirty possible early medieval assembly-places in the counties of Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and the former county of Rutland. Sites included both hundred/wapentake meeting-places and a number of previously uninvestigated sites identified from field-names. The purpose of this fieldwork was to identify on the ground any features not previously noted from maps and other sources, and to collect information which cannot be ascertained from cartographic evidence alone. Specific attention was paid to how sheltered/exposed a site was and the extent of its viewshed. Both written and photographic records of each site were made. Sites included in this fieldwork are given below listed by parish and National Grid Reference. In some cases the location of a meeting-place can only be identified in general terms. The NGR given for such sites is marked 'approximate'.

Leicestershire:

1. Syston parish (SK648108)
2. Cosby parish (SP526962 approximate)
3. Shangton parish (SP716972)
4. Melton Mowbray parish (SK750222 approximate)
5. Cossington parish (SK626136)
6. Peckleton parish (SK468028)
7. Diseworth parish (SK465256)
8. Whitwick parish (SK445173)
9. Gumley parish (SP679897)

Leicestershire formerly Rutland:

1. Burley parish (SK894120)
2. Martinsthorpe parish (SK866046)
3. Barleythorpe parish (SK838100 approximate)
4. Edith Weston parish (SK957053)

Lincolnshire:

1. Fleet parish (TF393260-410266 very approximate)
2. Broughton parish (SE940086 approximate)
3. Honington parish (SK923440)
4. Edlington parish (TF214707)
5. Langton by Partney parish (TF401722)
6. Gayton le Wold parish (TF258869 very approximate)

Nottinghamshire:

1. Bilborough parish (SK533428 approximate)
2. West Burton/South Wheatley parishes (SK764845-SK779856 approximate)
3. Oxton parish (SK635532)
4. Cropwell Butler parish (SK683390)
5. Gotham parish (SK533288)
6. Perlethorpe cum Budby parish (SK599683)
7. Aslockton parish (SK753413)
8. Radcliffe on Trent (SK665400)
9. West Leake parish (SK520269)
10. Staythorpe parish (SK758543)
11. East Markham parish (SK726734)

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