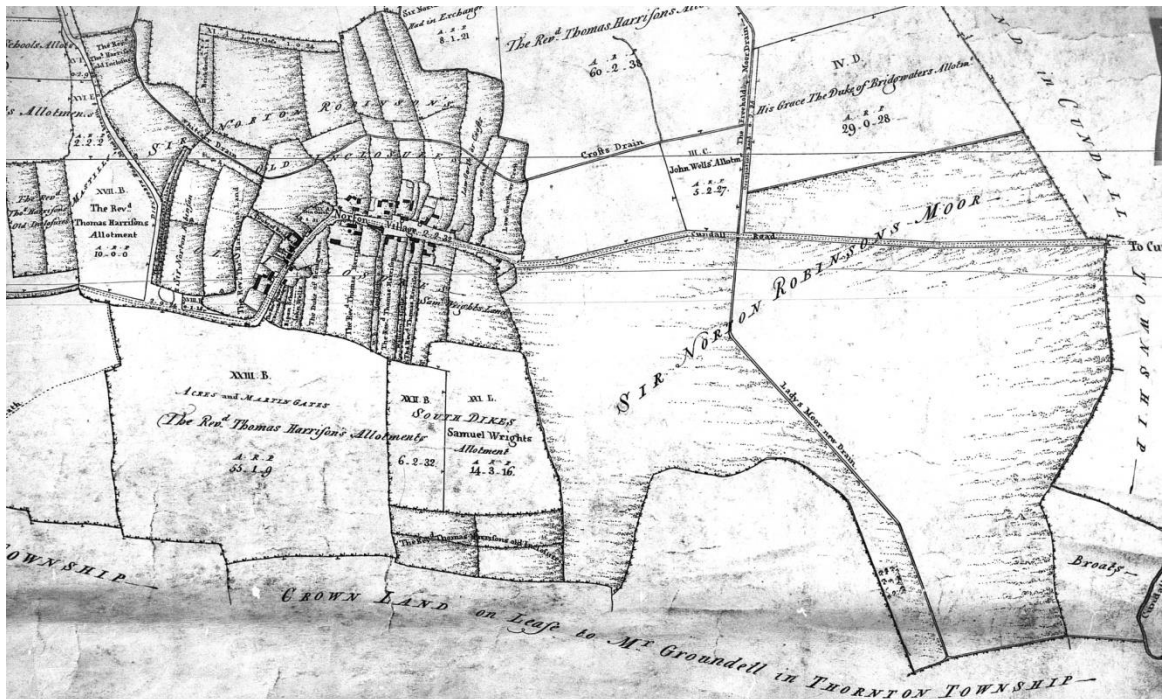


# Meadows, moors, mires, meres and meanders

Notes on the historic habitats of  
the Swale & Ure Washlands



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# Introduction

This study focuses on the lower Swale and Ure valleys of central North Yorkshire, an area referred to as the Swale and Ure Washlands because its physical geography was shaped by fluvial processes in the early post-glacial period<sup>1</sup>. The study area was defined originally to provide a landscape context for the restoration of its numerous aggregate quarries<sup>2</sup>. The present work excludes the western Parishes of Azerley and Grewelthorpe as these extend more into the upland fringes of the Yorkshire Dales, along with Knaresborough which sits mainly in the Nidd valley. Some reference is made to Parishes on the eastern margin of the Washlands between Thirsk and Northallerton as these shared contiguous meadows and commons historically.

Understanding the evolution of the Washlands landscape is important to any effort to conserve and restore biodiversity because many threatened habitats have ancient origins and have been shaped by centuries of use by local communities. The prehistory of these landscapes has been well-documented<sup>3</sup> but less is known of the long period between the beginnings of feudalism and the enclosures of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This period, spanning the best part of a thousand years, is the subject of the present study. It focuses on wetlands and grasslands because these are particular priorities for nature conservation in the central lowlands of North Yorkshire; woodlands, parklands and arable farmland have equally interesting histories but must await further research.

During the medieval and early modern periods, each township contained three main types of land managed in common: large arable fields, divided into numerous strips allotted to individual households but farmed under collective arrangements and usually open to common-right grazing of the stubbles and fallows; the meadows or Ings, reserved for production of hay under a similar system and usually located on a floodplain; and one or more moors, used primarily for common-right grazing but often also providing peat or turf (for domestic fuel), whins (gorse, for fuelling ovens) and bracken (for bedding and fertiliser). Fens, known as carrs or mires, also seem to have served as grazing commons though evidence of historic land use is surprisingly scant. In several places, these wetlands included meres with at least seasonal standing water, representing the remnants of post-glacial lake basins. Rights to exploit specific resources also applied to other parts of the landscape, e.g. pannage (grazing pigs on acorns) and rights of *bote* (harvesting different types of timber) in woodland, but these were defined by local custom and practice.

Some land was always privately managed, especially the *demesne* ('home farm') of the lord of the manor, enclosed parkland and monastic granges. Enclosed fields (closes) held directly

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<sup>1</sup> Swale & Ure Washlands Project (2005); Bridgland *et al* (2011)

<sup>2</sup> Swale & Ure Washlands Project (2005)

<sup>3</sup> Bridgland *et al* (2011)

by individual tenants or freeholders formed part of the landscape throughout the medieval period and became increasingly prevalent as village land was privatised piecemeal from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Nonetheless, it is the meadows, moors, mires and meres which constituted the most distinctive elements of the historic Washlands landscape.

## Study methods

This is an initial, work-in-progress report. Much remains to be done to test, expand and refine its findings. Work to date has comprised:

- A search of modern and historic maps for place-name evidence referring to common land (e.g. moor, common, green, specific types of pasture), wetland (carr, mire/myer) and meadow (e.g. named Ings).
- A search of historic documents which provide evidence of land use such as audits and surveys of landed estates, monastic cartularies, Quarter Sessions and other legal records (e.g. Star Chamber proceedings), land transactions (deeds, indentures, charters, conveyances), manorial rolls, enclosure maps and local history studies. For the most part, this information has been sourced from published transcripts or studies e.g. from publications of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society, North Riding Records Society and Surtees Society. This has been supplemented by a limited amount of research using primary sources at North Yorkshire County Records Office (NYCRO). One important document, the Ripon Perambulation of 1481, has been translated from the original Latin.
- Reviewing previous research into the rich archive of botanical records for the study area<sup>4</sup>.

A dataset has been compiled consisting of records of historic common land, meadows and wetlands. This currently stands at 661 entries and could be used to generate distribution maps of historic habitats. The boundaries of around 45 historic commons and Ings meadows have been plotted, based mainly on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosure award maps held by North Yorkshire County Records Office; maps held by West Yorkshire Records Office, Yorkshire Archaeological Society and the National Archives have not yet been examined.

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<sup>4</sup> Hammond (2004).

# Meadows

An interesting finding of this project has been that floodplain hay meadows were historically much more widespread in the Washlands than previously recognised. This is perhaps unsurprising given the crucial importance of hay to the pre-industrial economy<sup>5</sup>. However, the lack of surviving examples is striking and contrasts with the Ouse and Lower Derwent valleys in the Vale of York, where traditionally-managed Ings remain important nature conservation and landscape assets.

Nearly 100 named Ings have been identified in the Washlands: given the limited examination of manorial records, this is sufficient to demonstrate the widespread use of floodplains for hay production. Evidence or suggestions of floodplain meadows exists for Ainderby Quernhow, Aldborough, Aldwark, Asenby, Bishop Monkton, Brafferton, Carthorpe, Catton, the Cowtons, Crakehall, Cundall, Dalton, Dishforth, the Dunsforths, Eldmire, Ellenthorpe, Givendale, Helperby, Holme, Humberton, Hutton Conyers, Kirby Wiske, Lazenby (Danby Wiske), Maunby, Minskip, Moulton, Myton-on-Swale, Norton Conyers, Northallerton, Nunwick, the Ouseburns, Pickhill, Rainton, Ripon, Roecliffe, Sharow, Skelton-on-Ure, Skipton-on-Swale, Sleningford, Snape, Sowerby, Thirsk, Thorpe Underwoods, Thorton-le-Beans, Thornton-on-Swale, Thrintoft, Topcliffe, Well and Yarnwick.

A rough tally of known Ings for which acreages are known or can be estimated comes to 1,007 hectares but this excludes several sites along the River Ure and elsewhere which are known from documents but with little surviving indication of boundaries. A rough extrapolation suggests a total of >1,300 hectares. This exceeds the entire surviving resource of Great Burnet meadow (the grassland plant community characteristic of traditionally-managed Ings) in England and Wales, and equates to about 44% of the current resource of agriculturally-unimproved floodplain meadow in the entire UK<sup>6</sup>.

Ings, divided into numerous strips or 'doles'<sup>7</sup> but open to common-right grazing after the hay was harvested, were thus a widespread element of Washlands landscape in medieval and early modern times. Enclosed meadows also formed part of most private farms or estates. Figure 1 (below) shows historic records of meadows from the Swale and Ure Washlands.

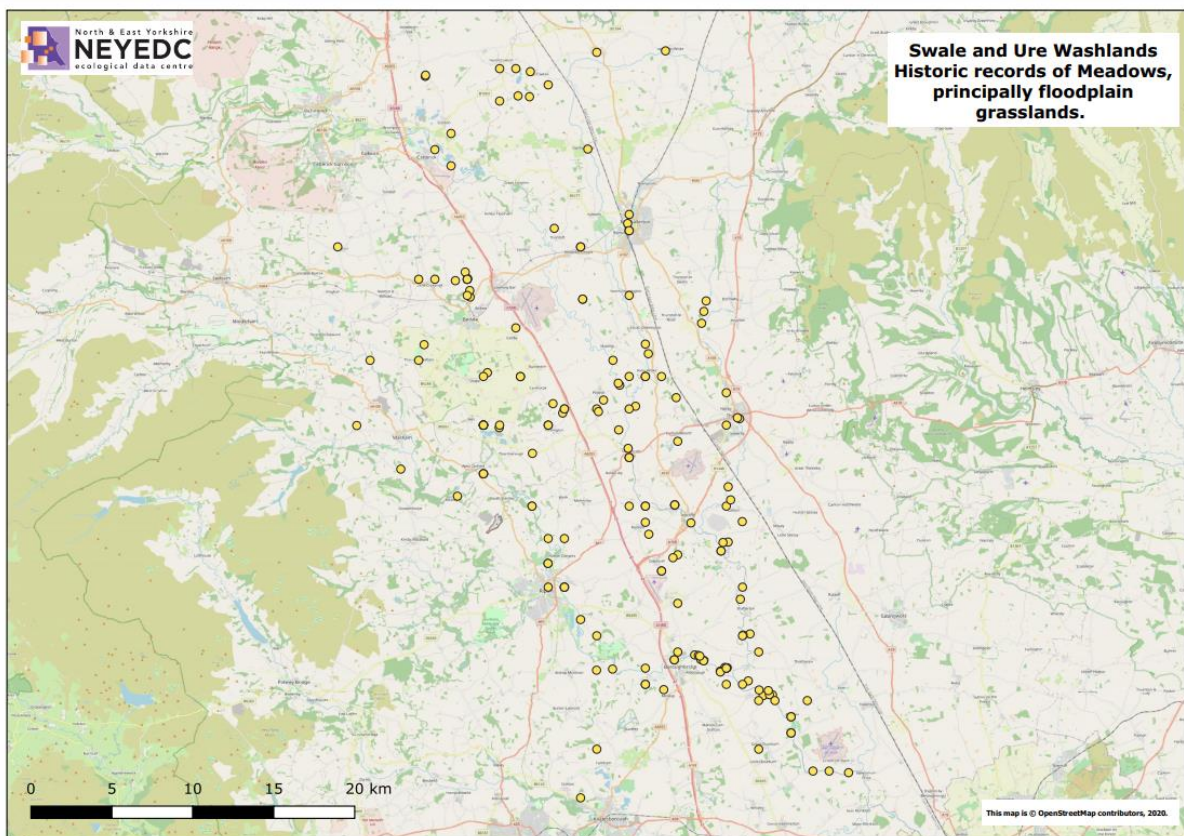
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<sup>5</sup> Hammond (2017)

<sup>6</sup> The current estimate is that 1,171 ha of Great Burnet meadow, coded as MG4 in the National Vegetation Classification, survive in the UK: <http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/about-meadow/conservation>; the total area of agriculturally unimproved floodplain meadow has been estimated to be 2,980 ha (Rothero *et al*, 2016)

<sup>7</sup> Often *dailes* or *dales* in contemporary records





**Figure 1: historic records of meadows in the Swale & Ure Washlands**

Hay meadows were already a feature of many Washlands manors when the Domesday Book was collated in 1085-86. At that time, the Archbishop of York's large estate around Ripon included 85 acres of meadow; this encompassed a dozen manors including *inter alia* Bishop Monkton, Littlethorpe, Ripon and Westwick. Scorton had 12 acres of meadow. Hutton Conyers, a manor of the Bishop of Durham, had ten. At Thirsk, the manor belonging to Hugh son of Baldric had eight acres with the same area at Great Fencote, Kirby Fleetham and Crakehall. Bedale had six acres of meadow as did Brompton-on-Swale, Ellerton-on-Swale and Danby Wiske. Newsham, Well, Langthorne and Little Ouseburn all had four acres while Thrintoft had three. The Archbishop of York's estate at North Stainley also had two acres of meadow. Count Alan's manor of Gilling, which took in the northernmost part of the Vale of Mowbray, contained 12 acres of meadow though some would have been outwith the Washlands.

Hay was an essential resource in the pre-industrial economy, providing the staple fodder for overwintered livestock and for stabled horses throughout the year. The Lay Subsidy rolls of 1297 show that there were 1,044 oxen (and 144 young oxen) belonging to taxable owners in the West Riding compared to 681 horses<sup>8</sup>; each ox would require two tonnes or more of hay

<sup>8</sup> Brown (1894). *Yorkshire Lay Subsidies*. In 1297 only better-off households were levied, so the actual number of oxen and horses would have been much higher but these figures give an idea of how numerous plough oxen would have been.

per winter. More specialised demands for hay included fodder for stud animals and winter feed for park deer. The 1415 inventory of Lord Scrope of Masham, executed for treason, illustrates the importance of meadows in the late medieval period: it itemises the demesne (in-hand) land of his manor, including 102 messuages (dwellings), 24 cottages, 12 tofts, 50 acres of arable, 133 of meadow, 1,000 of pasture and 140 of woodland<sup>9</sup>.

The most sustainable source of hay would always have been river floodplains, where the annual replenishment of silt and minerals allowed regular cropping without exhausting the soil. Consequently, many riverside manors would have had floodable Ings dedicated to the production of hay. This is illustrated well by the Perambulation of the boundaries of the Lordship of Ripon in 1481<sup>10</sup>: as the route crossed back and forth across the River Ure, it passed by or through the Ings<sup>11</sup> of several townships, all located alongside the river. Thus, at Roecliffe, the Perambulation passed "*inter prata de territorio de Roecliffe*" (among the meadows of Roecliffe), at Sharow "*ad pratum in campo de Sharowe vulgaliter vocatum le Sunning*" (by a meadow in the fields of Sharow commonly called the Sunning) and at Sleningford "*inter pratum de Sleningforth vocatum Sleningforth Ings*" (through the meadow of Sleningford called Sleningford Ings). A Sparre-stone Ing and a Coniers Ings near Norton Conyers and a Nunwick Longing are also named. In the Archbishop of Durham's Lordship of Northallerton, which encompassed several modern Parishes, a vast tract of Ings covered hundreds of acres of the Cod Beck valley. Not all common meadows were beside main rivers: at Well, they lay alongside the Ings Goit; at Snape they formed part of the extensive, seasonally flooded Snape Mires landscape; at Langthorne, the Ings adjoined Wassick Beck; at Thrintoft, the Ings lay beside North Beck; at Dishforth, Sopwath meadow probably adjoined Soppa Gutter.

### Value of meadows

Medieval Inquisitions (audits) enumerated the extent and value of resources belonging to recently deceased lords of the manor<sup>12</sup>. In Table 1, information has been collated from 20 Inquisitions from manors in or adjoining the Washlands<sup>13</sup>. This shows that meadows were worth from one-third to over nine times more per acre as arable land; on average, meadows were worth four times as much as arable.

It should be noted that meadows could vary in value within the same manor. At Thirsk in 1298, land held in wardship for John de Mowbray included ten acres of meadow valued at 3 s. per acre, 14 acres at 2s., 6d. and 20 acres worth 18d. each<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Public Record Office (2003), item 95.

<sup>10</sup> Appendix in Fowler (1875).

<sup>11</sup> The name Ing(s) (often *yngs/enges* in contemporary documents) is of Old Norse derivation and presumably pre-dates the Norman Conquest. It was certainly in use in North Yorkshire by the 12<sup>th</sup> century: in 1176, for example, Robert de Mowbray gave to Fountains Abbey 20 cart loads of hay from *Wacaldaseing* at Kirkby Malzeard (Mowbray Charters: Greenway, 1972, item 118).

<sup>12</sup> *Inquisitiones Post Mortem* (IPMs) of major land holders were required for taxation and inheritance purposes.

<sup>13</sup> Transcripts in Brown (1892, 1898, 1902 & 1906)

<sup>14</sup> In Brown (1902), item LXXIX.

Later, the demesne rent roll for the Manor of Aldborough in 1512 showed that pasture had an average rental value half that of meadow. In the early 1600s, meadow in the Manor of Wensleydale was worth about three times as much as pasture per acre<sup>15</sup>.

| Township          | date | acres of meadow | meadow value         | arable value | source                                 |
|-------------------|------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------|--|
| Carthorpe         | 1246 | 23              | 2s, 6d <sup>16</sup> | 9d.          | IPM of Thomas de Auno                  |
| Walkingham Hill   | 1250 | 3               | 8d for 'poor' meadow | 6d.          | IPM of John de Walkingham              |
| Aldfield          | 1272 | 13              | 2s., 6d.             | 6d.          | IPM of Alan de Aldefelde               |
| Thornton-on-Swale | 1275 | 30½             | 2s., 6d.             | 6d.          | debts of John de Eyvill                |
| Humberton         | 1276 | 9               | 3s.                  | 10d.         | IPM of William de Arderne              |
| Moor Monkton      | 1280 | 5½              | 4s.                  | 5d.          | IPM of William de Chauncy              |
| Moulton           | 1280 | 13              | 6s.                  | 15d.         | IPM of Peter de Savoy                  |
| Aldborough        | 1280 | 16              | 5s.                  | 18d.         | IPM of Peter de Savoy                  |
| Raskelf           | 1282 | 40              | 12d.                 | 8d.          | IPM of Robert de Neville               |
| Nidd              | 1290 |                 | 2s.,3d.              | 8d.          | IPM of Avelina, Countess of Albermarle |
| Well              | 1298 | 43              | 2s.                  | 6d.          | IPM of Robert de Tateshale             |
| Crakehall         | 1298 | 24              | 2s.                  | 8d.          | IPM of Robert de Tateshale             |
| Thirsk            | 1298 | 42              | 2s., 6d.             | 5d.          | IPM of Roger de Moubray                |
| Islebeck          | 1299 | 5½              | 3s.                  | 8d.          | IPM of Gilbert de Iselbek              |
| Aldborough        | 1300 | 37              | 2s.                  | 6d.          | IPM of Edmund, Earl of Cornwall        |
| Roecliffe         | 1300 | 18              | 3s.                  | 6d.          | IPM of Edmund, Earl of Cornwall        |
| Northallerton     | 1303 | 6               | 20d.                 | 4d.          | IPM of Roger de Burton                 |
| Thirkleby         | 1303 |                 | 20d.                 | 6d.          | IPM of Roger de Burton                 |
| Eldmire           | 1304 | 8               | 12d.                 | 6d.          | IPM of Alice de Lunde                  |
| Kirk Hammerton    | 1306 | 10              | 4s.                  | 8d.          | IPM of Robert de Pontefract            |

**Table 1: area and value of meadow in 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> century Inquisitions Post Mortem**

### Meadow tenure

The evidence for the Swale and Ure Washlands is more limited than for the Ouse floodplain downstream<sup>17</sup> but it is apparent that most lngs were managed as common meadows. Under such arrangements, large meadows were divided into numerous strips or *doles* allocated to individual tenants but following the removal of the hay crop, the aftermath was open to common-right grazing. Although many demesne meadows and meadow closes existed, it is assumed that references to “the meadows” of a given township denote common meadow.

There are numerous records demonstrating the division of meadows in the Washlands into small parcels allocated to different tenants with common-right grazing of the aftermath. Just outside the study area at Hudswell in lower Swaledale, for example, the abbot and convent

<sup>15</sup> Willan & Crossley (1941).

<sup>16</sup> A shilling (s) was 12 pence (d); a pound was 20 shillings

<sup>17</sup> Hammond (2017)

of St Agatha reached an agreement with Roald son of Alan in 1251 that “all the herbage...of the meadow after the cutting of the hay should remain common to either party in respect of his portion, and also to the freemen of Hudeswelle as much as they ought to have common”<sup>18</sup>. In 1277, the Dean and Chapter of York Minster held 19 acres of arable land a rood of meadow at Hornby<sup>19</sup>: a rood was approximately a quarter of an acre so must have been a strip within a larger meadow. A conveyance of 1279 refers to 3½ acres of meadow at “Langlythorp, Myldedel and Ethelynthorp”<sup>20</sup>, implying multiple small parcels; in a separate transaction in the same year, a parcel of three roods of meadow was granted at Ellenthorpe<sup>21</sup>. In 1294, two separate conveyances document third-parts of an eight-acre meadow at *Disceford* (Dishforth)<sup>22</sup>.

In 1318, the wonderfully-named John de Eyvill, lord of the manor of Thornton on Swale, granted Edelina de Ufford six acres “in the meadows of Thornton on Swale” for a yearly payment of a root of ginger on Christmas Day, a form of peppercorn rent<sup>23</sup>. In this case the lord had discretion in allocating parcels as Edelina’s lot was specified as “to be taken in the better part”. In his will of December 1321, Richard de Bosco left to his son and daughter “eight acres of meadow *in the great meadow of Useburne*”<sup>24</sup>. Three 14<sup>th</sup> century deeds mention plots of meadow at Humberton; one from 1382 specifies the location of three acres of meadow “in the common field”, showing that the Ings were common meadow at that time<sup>25</sup>.

In 1602-1603, around 20 tenants held parcels in Crakehall Ings of between one rood and five acres with one holding 16 acres<sup>26</sup>; there was also a Westings in which four tenants of Coverham Abbey held parcels totalling 17¾ acres<sup>27</sup>. A 1778 estate map (Figure 2) shows that the Ings still included numerous narrow strips, along with larger parcels where tenure must have become consolidated.<sup>28</sup> Crakehall Ings, to the north-east of the hamlet of Kirkbridge, was eventually enclosed in 1833.

At Lower Dunsforth, the Ings remained common meadow until the Enclosure Award of 1809. An indenture of February 1755 listed “divers Parcels of Meadow-ground or Ings-Meadow, situate, lying and being in the Common Meadow called Dike-Brickleys-Flat, Leys-Flat, Dales-

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<sup>18</sup> *Yorkshire Deeds*, Volume VII, item 408 (Travis Clay, 1932)

<sup>19</sup> *Feet of Fines* (Atkinson, 1956: item 36)

<sup>20</sup> *Feet of Fines* (Atkinson, 1956: item 35); a subsequent deed of 1296 itemises several parcels of again at Ellenthorpe including half-acres at Swaledaleheudes, Myldedale and Thoftmar (*Yorkshire Deeds*, volume I, Part 2, item 534). The term *dale* here refers not to a valley but to a *dole*, an allotment of hay within the larger Ings.

<sup>21</sup> *Feet of Fines* (Atkinson, 1956: item 43)

<sup>22</sup> *Feet of Fines* (Atkinson, 1956: item 17)

<sup>23</sup> *Yorkshire Deeds*, Volume I, Part 2, item 584.

<sup>24</sup> *Yorkshire Deeds*, Volume I; my emphasis

<sup>25</sup> *Yorkshire Deeds*, Volume I, Part 2, item 544

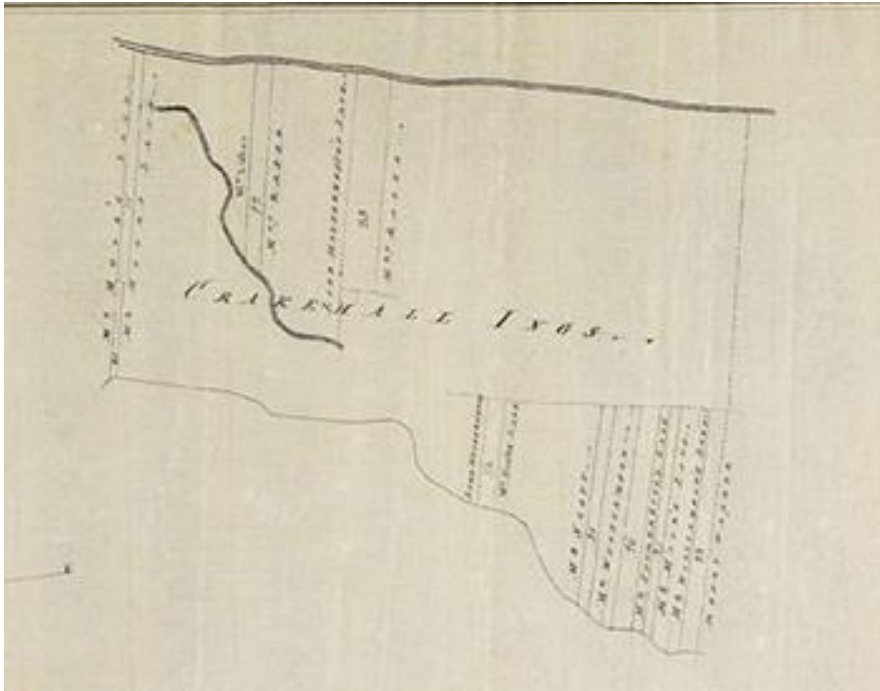
<sup>26</sup> <http://www.glenlodge.me.uk/archives/1602survey.html>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.glenlodge.me.uk/archives/coverham.html>

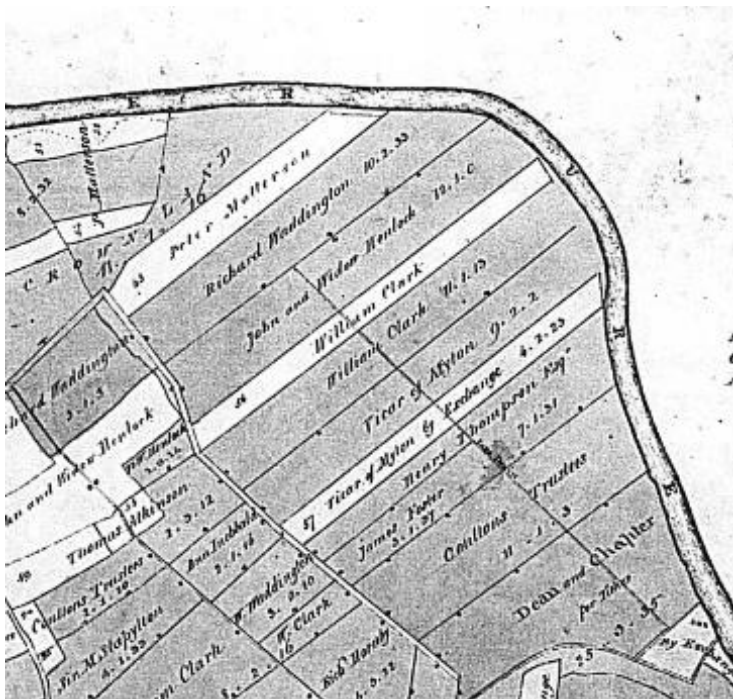
<sup>28</sup> *Plan of William Withers esq.'s estate of Crakehall* (1778), NYCRO ZAW243A4C



Flat and Moor-Ing Flat in Lower Dunsforth”<sup>29</sup>. In total these parcels made up 8 acres, 1 rood and 34 perches. The excerpt below from the Enclosure map for the township shows the Ings after land holdings had been consolidated but clearly reflects to a pre-enclosure pattern of narrow strips (Figure 3):



**Figure 2:** 1778 estate map showing Crakehall Ings. Extract from *Plan of William Withers esq.’s estate of Crakehall*, NYCRO ZAW243A4C courtesy of the North Yorkshire County Records Office.



**Figure 3:** excerpt from Lower Dunsforth enclosure map, reflecting historic land holdings on the Ings. Courtesy of the North Yorkshire County Records Office.

<sup>29</sup> Stapylton archive, NYCRO ZLQ

As late as 1847, similar evidence of historic tenure can be seen at Ellenthorpe Ings (the scene of the famous 'White Battle' of 1319)<sup>30</sup> (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Ellenthorpe Ings at the junction of the Swale and Ure in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Extract from *Plan of the Township of Ellenthorpe in the Parish of Aldborough, North Riding of Yorkshire* (1847), NYCRO [T]PR-ALB6-6A4, courtesy of the North Yorkshire County Records Office.

Larger demesne holdings would also include meadows. The Knights Templars' grange at Temple Cowton, for instance, employed a specialist hay maker or messor in the 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>31</sup>. Even after leys (temporary grasslands sown as part of the arable rotation) were introduced in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, hay meadows remained important: a 1717 marriage settlement itemised an estate at Rasmire, South Cowton containing 60 acres of arable, 40 of meadow, 60 of pasture and 90 of moor. The same document lists 80 acres of arable, 40 of meadow, 40 of pasture and 80 of moor at Bolton-on-Swale<sup>32</sup>. A tithe account of 1758 recorded 223 acres of hay within the closes of the parish of Great Crakehall compared to 143½ acres of corn<sup>33</sup>; this did not include the Ings.

#### Management of common meadows

As with common pastures, use of the Ings was carefully regulated by the manorial Court Leet. In 1704, for example, the Myton-on-Swale court specified that laden hay wains must leave the Ings via higher ground, presumably to avoid compaction or rutting of lower, damper areas. In October 1706, the same court directed "...that everyone that hath meadow in Myton Ings that they grip it well" (maintain ditches) between set dates<sup>34</sup>. In 1696 edicts were issued

<sup>30</sup> *Plan of the Township of Ellenthorpe in the Parish of Aldborough, North Riding of Yorkshire* (1847), NYCRO [T]PR-ALB6-6A4

<sup>31</sup> Donajgrodzki (1990)

<sup>32</sup> NYCRO ZBL I/1/1/252

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.glenlodge.me.uk/archives/1758tithes.html>

<sup>34</sup> Myton manor court papers, 1688-1811, NYCRO ZLQ

concerning the timing of hay making on the Ings and in 1713, St James's Day (25<sup>th</sup> July) was the last date to complete mowing, with a fine of 1s,6d "*for every aker unmown after*".

Aftermath grazing on the Ings was also tightly regulated, both in terms of numbers and type of livestock. At Crakehall in 1760, for example, the manorial court agreed that,

"John Horner, Bailiff of this manor, shall attend the Ings... from Bartholomew Day<sup>35</sup> (the usual day of breaking the same) for three weeks after from 5 o'clock in the morning to 7 in the evening and drive the same and impound all horses, goods, cattles and sheep whatsoever belonging to any person or persons that have no right to turn any cattle therein. And for such attendance it is agreed that he shall be allowed ten pence a day to be paid by the constable of Crakehalls for the time being; and it is also agreed that he shall at all other times in the year drive the said Ings and impound any horses etc. It is also agreed that the said John Horner shall impound all stallion Galloways and asses that shall be found unlawfully trespassing in any of the lands or commons belonging to this manor"<sup>36</sup>.

At Crakehall in 1813, grazing on the commons was restricted to the hours of 6 AM to sunset. Pigs, bulls, stallions and asses were excluded, not only from the grazing commons but also from the Ings when it was opened as "the common winter pasture". The pinder was charged with impounding animals grazed in breach, charging 4d for the release of horses, cattles, asses and pigs or 1d for sheep<sup>37</sup>.

As with moor land and the wider public realm of each township, maintenance of common infrastructure was a particular concern of the manorial administrations. On the Ings, well-functioning drains were especially important to protect the quality of the hay crop by removing surface water once floods receded: while flooding provided essential replenishment of nutrients, good surface drainage is essential to produce a lush and nutritious hay crop. Thus, at Crakehall in 1719 there were many presentments for not clearing the Ings Stell while in 1763 the court decreed a pain of 6d a rood on tenants of the Ings "if they do not clean the main stell before September 24<sup>th</sup>" and "The like if they do not ditch and scour the High End of the Ings before 25<sup>th</sup> March"<sup>38</sup>.

In some manors, meadows continued to be referred to as Ings long after enclosure. In such cases it is difficult to discern whether such grasslands were closes within the boundaries of former common meadows or whether the name simply denoted current use. Thus, at Dalton in 1754, there was a New Close Ing adjoining Cod Beck of nearly nine acres, an Ings adjoining Willow Beck of 3½ acres and by Old Beck, a Cundith Ings divided into three closes and totalling

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<sup>35</sup> St Bartholemew's Day, 24<sup>th</sup> August

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.glenlodge.me.uk/archives/courtrolls/courtsall.html>; Galloways were hill ponies.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.glenlodge.me.uk/archives/courtrolls/courtsall.html>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.glenlodge.me.uk/archives/courtrolls/courtsall.html>

around 20 acres<sup>39</sup>. In the same year, the *Survey of Elmire and Crakehill Lordship* recorded a close of 9½ acres called Great Pitch Ing<sup>40</sup>.

### Church land holdings

Ecclesiastical institutions were major owners of meadow land on the Ouse floodplain<sup>41</sup> and the same appears to have been the case on the lower Ure and Swale. In the late 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, numerous parcels of meadow were gifted to Fountains Abbey, with the *Monasticon Eboracense*<sup>42</sup> recording such donations from Ainderby Steeple, Aldwark, Atlow Cowton, Carthorpe, Catton, Dunsforth, Ellenthorpe, Exelby, Givendale, Holme, Maunby, Newsham, Pickhill, Rainton, Skipton-on-Swale, Sleningford and Upsland. Sometimes there were multiple gifts from the same township, such as seven from Kirkby Wiske and numerous lots in Dishforth. The fact that many donations were of small parcels suggests that the practice of the great landlords was copied by those of more modest means.

Bridlington Priory was gifted meadows at East Cowton in 1261 while the Priory of Holy Trinity at York received meadowland at Lower Dunsforth in the 1180s; the Priory of Allerton Malverer also received eight acres there in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1357 it was recorded that meadow and pasture at Edelyngthorpe (Ellenthorpe) was given “long ago to St Mary’s”<sup>43</sup> (St Mary’s Abbey in York). Across the Swale at Myton, Nicholas de Myton granted the same abbey 45 acres of meadow while Richard Molendarius (‘the Miller’) donated a single acre<sup>44</sup>. These gifts would have been on considerable value to the monasteries, and by default to the immortal souls of the donors.

At the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1535), the Prebend of Skelton-on-Ure and Givendale received an annual rental income of 30 s. from meadowland<sup>45</sup>.

An audit of 1650 recorded that the Canons of Ripon held parcels of meadow on Bondgate, at Halsey Ings and at Ingerthorpe<sup>46</sup>. Church ownership of parts of Myton Ings continued after the Dissolution. An indenture of September 1739 dealing with the transfer of land between the Archbishop of York and the Stapylton estate listed inter alia “*five acres of meadow in Myton Meadow...abutted upon the New Dyke*”<sup>47</sup>.

For the most part, clerical institutions benefitted from the rental income and tithes generated by gifts of meadow, while the strips continued to form part of the common meadow of the

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<sup>39</sup> *Survey of the Lordship of Dalton, 1754*. NYCRO ZDS IV I/I/I

<sup>40</sup> NYCRO ZDS

<sup>41</sup> Hammond (2017)

<sup>42</sup> Burton (1758)

<sup>43</sup> i.e. St Mary’s Abbey at York: Patent Rolls Edward III (Part 1)

<sup>44</sup> Drake *Eboracum*

<sup>45</sup> Accounts in Fowler (1888); Prebends were cathedral estates largely dependent on agricultural incomes.

<sup>46</sup> Gowland (1936)

<sup>47</sup> Stapylton archive, NYCRO ZLQ

township. Sometimes, however, holdings were farmed directly, either as demense or as an outlying grange. At Moulton in 1280, for instance, 13 acres of arable and three roods of meadow were enfeoffed to the Monks of Richmond<sup>48</sup> while the monastic grange at Cowton employed a specialist hay maker.

Later, parcels of hay meadow generated a reliable rental income and were often bequeathed in trust to fund early-modern social welfare arrangements. In 1657, for example, a Henry Croe of Thirsk left four wands of land in the North Ings for the benefit of the poor of the township and in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century this was producing an annual income of 16 shillings<sup>49</sup>. In 1718, a field called Ings Close at Kirklington was bequeathed to the poor. An undated list of benefactors in St Andrew's Church, Aldborough mentions the gift of two half-acres in the Long Ings left by a Peter Simpson, the money raised to be distributed to the poor of the Parish each Good Friday<sup>50</sup>.

### Botanical composition

From an ecological point of view, the significance of common meadows is the consistency of management over very long periods imposed by manorial regulation. We have very little information as to the botanical composition of historic meadows in the Washlands but it is very likely that floodplain Ings supported *Alopecurus pratensis* – *Sanguisorba officinalis* grassland, coded MG4 in the National Vegetation Classification<sup>51</sup>. Some evidence of this is provided by the fact that around 1800 local botanist William Brunton described Great Burnet, the most diagnostic plant of this community, as “common in meadows at Ripon” while Rev James Dalton noted it was “very frequent” at Copgrove (Turner & Dillwyn, 1805). MG4 is the characteristic plant community of lowland hay meadows on winter-flooded but freely-draining, base-rich soils, especially those with a long history of consistent management. It is possible that some elements of upland hay meadow flora (NVC MG3) would have occurred in the lower Swale valley, as they do in remaining examples of unimproved grassland on the banks of the Swale around Richmond town.

MG4 grassland is an internationally-threatened plant community, listed in Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive.

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<sup>48</sup> Yorkshire Inquisitions, I (item CXXX)

<sup>49</sup> *Reports of the Commissioners for Charities and Education of the Poor in England and Wales - York, North Riding*. Vol XXXIX. (1839)

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/YKS/WRY/Aldborough/AldboroughStAndrewBenefactions\\_3Photo](https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/YKS/WRY/Aldborough/AldboroughStAndrewBenefactions_3Photo)

<sup>51</sup> Rodwell (1992)





**Unimproved meadow on the floodplain of the River Ouse at Clifton Ings, York: it is likely that the extensive Ings of the lower Swale and Ure valleys would have been similar to this.**

# Moors

Grazing commons were variously referred to as moors, commons, pastures or greens, the latter usually applying to smaller areas within the settlement and along adjoining lanes. Moor/common names seem to have been interchangeable and referred to larger tracts of unenclosed land beyond the arable fields of the township. Village pastures (e.g. Myton Pasture, Burton Pasture, Topcliffe Great Pasture) were typically large fields closer to the settlement where grazing was probably more strictly regulated; these are sometimes referred to as stinted pastures, as distinct from moors, in enclosure awards. Latterly these were often named Ox-pastures or Ox-closes, suggesting better grassland reserved for plough oxen<sup>52</sup>. Such pastures were found at Aldborough, Allerton Malverer, the Crakehalls, Fawdington, Littlethorpe, Northallerton, Rand, Sharow, Sowerby, Thorpe Underwoods and Whixley.

To date around 180 named moors or commons have been traced within the study area (Figure 5). Some of these are readily identified from 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century enclosure maps or Jeffries's 1772 *Map of Yorkshire*; others are more vaguely identifiable from place names, with no precise record as to their boundaries; others still are referred to in historic documents but have left no further trace.

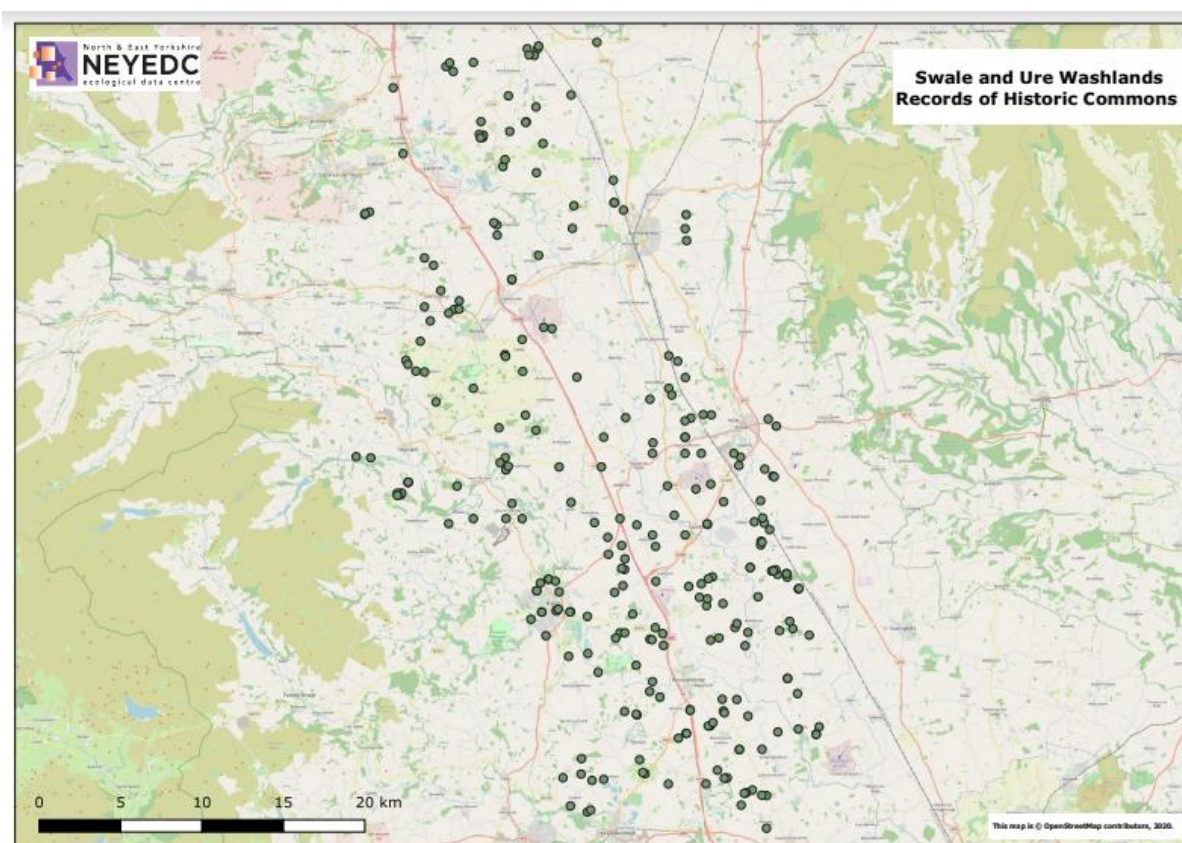


Figure 5: records of historic commons in the Swale & Ure Washlands

<sup>52</sup> e.g. Aldborough, Eldmire, Marton-cum-Grafton, Myton-on-Swale, Littlethorpe, Sharow, Sowerby



Moors were often accessed via named lanes or drove routes: maps of the Washlands feature numerous Moor Lanes. By the time of the Parliamentary enclosures, once-extensive grazing commons had sometimes been reduced to linear parcels along roads such as Boroughbridge Common on either side of the old A1. Sowerby South Moor formed a wedge extending for 2 km along South Moor Lane.

An individual township might include more than one moor: for example, Roecliffe had a Moor, Common and Horse Pasture; Marton-le-Moor had a High Common and a Low Moor; Thirsk had a West Moor and an East Moor, both large. If place names are reliable, Staveley had The Moor, High Moor and Lazenby Moor. Aldwark had Haddock's Moor, Hall Moor and Aldwark Moor as well as the Town's Pasture. The city of Ripon contained large areas of common including High and Low Common, Kitling (or Ketley) Moor, Quarry Moor, Bondgate Green, Borish Green and Ellers, Skell Crooks, Fisher Green, Little Green and North Bridge Green. Northallerton had Bulla Moor, Hailstone Moor, Low Wiske Moor and North Moor.

Where moors spanned township boundaries, this gave rise to large tracts of open grazing common such as the contiguous Thirsk East Moor, Balk Moor and Bagby Moor or the great expanse of moor which encompassed the commons of Hutton Conyers, Melmerby, Dishforth, Rainton, Marton-le-Moor and Copt Hewick. Frequently, contiguous moors of adjacent settlements would be 'intercommoned'. Great Crakehall shared a common called the Scroggs with Cowling, for example, while Hollow Moor belonged jointly to Little Crakehall and Hackforth. Nearby, No Man's Moor was shared by Newton-le-Willows, Thornton Watlass, Cowling and the Crakehalls<sup>53</sup>.

The history of common lands in the Washlands remains poorly documented. Some moors likely pre-date the Norman Conquest: in the Vale of York, part of the Archbishop of York's estate was described in Old English around 1030 as *mid folc-rihte* ('with folk-right')<sup>54</sup>, implying that commoners already enjoyed recognised rights to exploit certain resources. The word *mor* is used repeatedly in a 958 grant of land in Nottinghamshire by King Eadwig to the Bishop of York<sup>55</sup>. According to John of Hexham, the site of the Battle of the Standard (1138) was known at the time as *Baggamoore*<sup>56</sup> and in 1145, Pope Eugenius III granted to Fountains Abbey privileges and lands including "*grangiam de Cootonemore*" (the grange of Cowton Moor)<sup>57</sup>.

In 1257, there was arbitration between Ralph son of Ranulph and Avice Marmion "about common of pasture in Welle, Tanefielde, Nosterfield, Karethorp and Fagherwall". Contrary to popular belief, residents of a township would not necessarily be tenants of a single Lord of the Manor but were often divided between two or more landlords, hence the need to clarify which tenants enjoyed rights over the various resources managed in common, e.g. pasturage,

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.glenlodge.me.uk/crakehall/contents/anland.html#farms>

<sup>54</sup> Farrer (1914)

<sup>55</sup> Item 2 in Farrer (1914)

<sup>56</sup> Langdale (1791). *History of North-Allerton*.

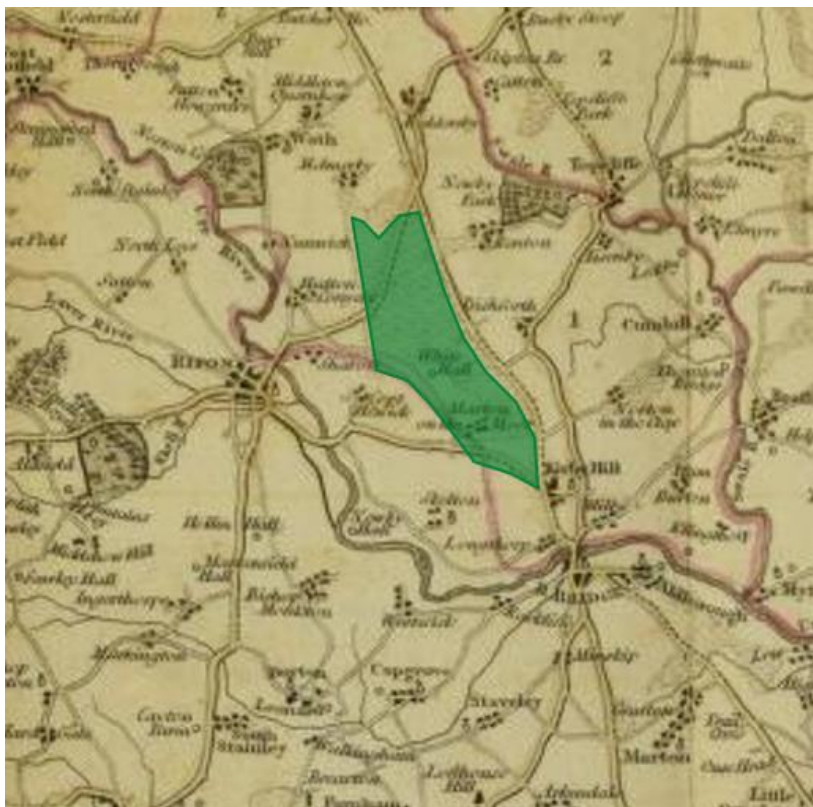
<sup>57</sup> Farrer (1914), item 79

meadow, aftermath grazing in the arable fields, turbarry, wood-gathering and pannage. Thus, it was determined that the householders of Nosterfield should “have common in the moors and meadows of Nosterfield” but not in Well or Tanfield. They would also “have their estovers [rights to collect wood] from the peat ground on the south side of Hilum up to Lysjordewath, free of charge”. This suggests that specific areas were reserved for peat cutting, distinct from the grazing commons.

The boundaries of moors probably changed over time. During periods of population growth, moor land could be brought temporarily into cultivation: at East Cowton parts of the common which became known as Breches were ‘broken’ in the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>58</sup>. The great tract of Hutton Moor appears to have shrunk somewhat between the bounds described in the Feet of Fines of 1202 and the enclosure of 1815, its original boundary extending from Canna henge to Halikeld spring near Melmerby.

However, it is noticeable that boundaries of common land tend to persist in the landscape, in the form of place and road names, irregular field boundaries, kinks in roads, parish boundaries and public rights-of-way. An 1800 map of Ripon shows a shoal (shingle island) on the right (southern) bank of the Ure as part of Sharow Ox-pasture, implying that this was once attached to the left bank before an episode of river migration; such migratory ‘Batts’ are a feature of the Ure corridor and this suggests the Ox-pasture boundaries were very old.

### Hutton Moor



**Figure 6:** Hutton Moor based on Christopher Greenwood’s 1828 map of Yorkshire.

The contiguous moors of Hutton Conyers, Marton-le-Moor, Rainton-with-Newby, Melmerby, Kirby Hill (once known as Kirby Moor) and Littlethorpe would have been one of the largest expanses of common in the Washlands. More work is needed to investigate the landscape history of this area, especially given the presence of several ancient monuments including the

<sup>58</sup> Donajrodzki (1990)

Canna henge; this could make for an illuminating multi-period study. Mostly overlying sand and gravel but also including wetland 'dykes' (presumably kettle holes or sink holes) and at least one valley mire (Marton-le-Moor Carr), this must have been a diverse tract of heath, warren, grassland, fen and bog, perhaps at one time supporting birds like Stone Curlew and Crane. As late as 1863, J.G. Baker noted that "Hutton Moor was once a tract of low sandy heatherland but it is now cut through by the railway and almost entirely enclosed".

A small remnant known still known as Great Raygill Dyke survives amongst the arable by the A1, supporting poor-fen vegetation including Marsh Cinquefoil *Comarum palustre* and a tiny amount of Slender Sedge *Carex lasiocarpa*. H.H. Slater's Flora of Ripon (1883) mentions Whitemere, habitat for a number of bog plants suggesting acidic mire. At the same time, there must have been base-rich flushes as Grass-of-Parnassus *Parnassia palustris* and Bird's-eye Primrose *Primula farinosa* were also present. In 1945, the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union visited Marton-le-Moor Carr (Lowmoor Carr) and described what sounds like a raised mire, dominated by Hare's-tail Cotton-grass *Eriophorum vaginatum*.

Edmund Bogg (1906) recounted how the commoners of Hutton Conyers, Baldersby, Rainton, Dishforth and Copt Hewick had grazing rights for sheep on Hutton Moor. Each township had its own shepherd and on the first day of the year, the shepherds would present the manorial court with a large apple pie and a two-penny sweet cake.

### Management of the commons

Information on the management of the Washlands commons is fragmentary and much more could be gleaned from further examination of original manorial documents. Few of these have been transcribed; records up to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century are usually in medieval Latin shorthand in copperplate script while later English records are not always easy to decipher.

Manorial courts would regularly issue (lay) byelaws (*pains*) to prevent abuse of common resources; *penalties* were the fines liable for offences heard by the court (*presentments*) and *estreats* were inventories of fines to be collected by officers after judgement. The available records demonstrate that exploitation of common resources was carefully regulated, both in the interests what we would now call sustainable use and to ensure that commoners kept within the terms of their tenure. Commoners did not enjoy equal shares but were entitled to a specified amount of pasturage, quantified as *beastgates* (or simply *gates*<sup>59</sup>), as part of their tenancy.

Gifts recorded in the monastic cartularies of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century suggest that in most of the Vale of Mowbray manors, grazing rights and apportionment of meadow in the common Ings were proportionate to the amount of arable land held by each tenant; in some cases, this

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<sup>59</sup> Often spelt *gaits* in manorial records



applied also to rights of turbarry. Likewise, an ordinance of the Allertonshire manorial court in 1472 allotted grazing rights according to the size of tenants' holdings: "for every oxgang [of arable] held, the tenant should pasture no more than one horse, two outlay cattle and five sheep, upon pain of 3s,4d.<sup>60</sup>" Over time and within the labyrinthine rules of feudal tenancy, rights and allotments were inherited, exchanged, sublet, bought and sold, all such transactions being subject to the approval of the manorial bureaucracy.

There are many examples of common-right grazing being rationed as beastgates, and although there may have been unstinted moors, the system was probably more or less ubiquitous. For example, in 1605 each of the 30 tenants of the Lordship of Middleham in Crakehall held between 1½ and 17½ pasture gates, the total number of such gates being 198½<sup>61</sup>. An estate survey of 1712 itemised grazing rights including "a right of depasturing two head of cattle [in Sharow Pasture] during the summer, and two horse-gates and two cattle-gates in Langwith Pasture, in the parish of Well"<sup>62</sup>. In 1722, Will Dinmore of Sowerby held several closes (enclosed fields farmed privately) but also four gates in the Ox-pasture<sup>63</sup>.

While a beastgate was similar to a Livestock Unit in modern parlance, it is unclear whether there was ever a standardised definition and there were probably differing interpretations according to local customs. At Crakehall in 1813, a gate equalled a single cow or horse or either four ewes with lambs or five geld sheep. Sometimes adjustments were made for the quality of pasturage: in the time of Charles I, several stinted pastures in the Manor of Aldborough were described as "very subject to whins, having in them whins so rank that commonly towards three acres go to a Gate"<sup>64</sup>.

### Regulation of grazing commons

Surviving records of the Allertonshire court from 1491 and 1499-1500 include numerous presentments regarding overgrazing on common land<sup>65</sup>. In 1513, the Michelmas session of the Northallerton Borough court heard complaints that a local vicar had grazed too many sheep on the Northmore<sup>66</sup>. The Aldborough manorial court of October 1563 fined four villagers from Minskip for over-grazing the common pasture; at the same session, Joan Adam, a widow, was fined because she had "*made a hole in the common pasture of Mynskippe*". For unknown reasons the court also decreed that the inhabitants of Great Ouseburn must employ between them one common shepherd and not hire shepherds individually, suggesting that most grazing was still being carried out in common.

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<sup>60</sup> Newman (1999)

<sup>61</sup> Johnson & Rathborne (1605)

<sup>62</sup> Horsfall, 1912

<sup>63</sup> Quarter Sessions (Atkinson, 1890)

<sup>64</sup> In Lawson-Tancred (1937)

<sup>65</sup> Newman (1999)

<sup>66</sup> Henderson (2018)

Sometimes the court's edicts would be broad: for example, in 1761 the court of Well laid a Pain "that none oppress the Common", with a penalty of 10s<sup>67</sup>; similar byelaws were laid repeatedly by the Crakehall courts of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. More often, byelaws addressed specific problems such as the pasturing of animals with infectious diseases. Thus in 1692 the Myton-on-Swale Court Leet decreed that,

*"...all ye inhabitants of Miton that putoth any horses that is scabbed or suspected to be scab'd from this Court day forwardly on Miton moor.  
Upon pain of any default: 10 s.<sup>68</sup>"*

One villager was fined at a subsequent session for not observing this Pain. The prohibition of 'scabbed' horses is regular among manorial byelaws, e.g. at Well in 1761.

Maintenance of shared infrastructure was also a frequent concern. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, failure to maintain 'causeys' (flagstone paths) in the common pastures of Carthorpe was penalised due to the low-lying, marshy nature of the grassland<sup>69</sup>. The inhabitants of Leeming were presented to the Quarter Sessions at Thirsk in 1613 for not maintaining a bridge onto Aiskew Moor<sup>70</sup>.

#### Ox-closes and other special types of common pasture

In many townships, dedicated areas of common were established for livestock other than sheep and store cattle. Most frequently this took the form of an Ox-close or Ox Pasture, a large field separate from the moor where plough oxen could be depastured under a system of stinted grazing. In 1602-1603, 19 tenants held between one and ten beastgates in Great Crakehall Oxpasture; 78 gates were available in total. Ox-closes have been identified at Aldborough, Allerton Malverer, Great and Little Crakehall, Fawdington, Littlethorpe, Myton, Northallerton, Rand, Sharow, Sowerby, Thorpe Underwood and Whixley. It is likely that these were better grasslands than the open moor.

At Myton-on-Swale, Oxclose Pasture appears to have been stinted common with seasonal limitations on grazing. Thus in 1800, the Court Leet warned "*That no person or persons within the Township*" must graze more stock than their entitlement "*betwixt Mayday and Martinmas*" [11 November] on pain of 5s. per head of cattle. In 1798, the court had fined Frances Peacock 5 s. "*for over-stocking the Oxclose*"<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> Horsfall (1912)

<sup>68</sup> Myton manor court papers, 1688-1811, NYCRO ZLQ

<sup>69</sup> Severs (1994)

<sup>70</sup> In Atkinson (1884b)

<sup>71</sup> Myton manorial court records, NYCRO ZLQ

A 1634 map of Rand manor<sup>72</sup> shows a number of closes which were presumably farmed privately and a large South Pasture and North Pasture which were commons. However, there was not only an Ox-close but also a Horse Close, a Mare Close, a Cow Hill and a Great Calfe Close. It's possible these too were private fields but more likely that they were designated areas for particular livestock. Roecliffe also had a Horse Carr.

In 1513, the Vicar of Northallerton was presented to the Borough court for not providing a common bull for the town; he was ordered to provide one by next Martinmas<sup>73</sup>. This presumably relates to an obligation to provide breeding animals but the basis is unclear. A detached part of Sharow Ox-close is referred to specifically as 'the Bull Close' on one pre-enclosure map.

### Harvesting of whins, bracken and willows

Whins (gorse) were valued as fuel for bread ovens. In 1636, the commoners of Aldborough had rights to harvest whins on the High Moor<sup>74</sup>. Thomas Hird described helping cart whins from No Man's Moor (a common shared by several villages) and Aiskew Moor in the late 1700s. Access to this important resource was lost when common land was enclosed, adding to the grievances of commoners; this presumably explains a case heard at Thirsk Quarter Sessions in April 1610 against Robert and Jane Bell "for entering a certain close at Sowerby, called Sowerby West Moore, and stealing whinnes thence". A year later the same court heard the following indictment:

*"George Firbank of Sutton Howgrave, yeoman, and Elizabeth, his wife, Jack Wilkinson and John Smyth of the same, husbandmen, George Richardson also known as Dyker and William Atkinson of Well, labourers, and Thomas Wilkinson of Sutton Howgrave, labourer, for illegally and riotously assembling, trespassing in a close of one Thomas Jackson's called Sutton Wood and, with two horses and four oxen yoked in a wain, taking away two loads of whins and two of thorns, the property of the said Jackson".*

A number of 'whin' or 'broom' place-names in the Washlands may refer to areas designated for the harvesting of gorse.

Bracken was cropped for cattle bedding and fertiliser; it is likely that soiled bedding was used to fertilise the arable fields but bracken may also have been burned to produce potash-rich ash. Estovers (rights of harvest) of bracken are mentioned in a 1202 agreement concerning Hutton Moor. At least in some instances, collection of bracken was regulated by the manorial court. The Great Crakehall court rolls for 1450 document the cutting of bracken on the Scroggs, a common pasture, and on one occasion it was recorded that three men from Little

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<sup>72</sup> A survey of Rand Grange Lordship for John Pierse esq by John Raper, 1634; redrawn at <http://www.glenlodge.me.uk/crakehall/randmap1634.jpg>

<sup>73</sup> Henderson (2018)

<sup>74</sup> In Lawson-Tancred (1937)

Crakehall and Brompton “had cut ferns from the moor of this manor without permission”; in the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was recorded that “every tenant did know his several parts of braks [on the Scroggs], and every said part was marked by merks or dowles”<sup>75</sup>. The court at Aldborough in October 1563<sup>76</sup> heard that John Matherson and Ralph Inchebolde each “cut and mowed two cart loads of ferns called brakans growing on Aldburgh Moor in a place there called Thustehyll.” Each was fined 20 d. The commoners of Aldborough held rights to bracken on the High Moor in 1628<sup>77</sup>. A deposition of the same year recorded “That some of the Tenants of Aldburgh have had manure out of the Tyne Carr to their land in the Field of Aldburgh”, presumably another reference to bracken.

Willows were managed in at least a few locations. The Manor Court of Scruton in 1542 prohibited the inhabitants of Great Leeming from harvesting willows<sup>78</sup>. In 1628, the Quarter Sessions at Boroughbridge heard that Edward Gibsone of Staveley and Joan Thomson of Minskip had each cut and taken away two cartloads of withies (willow stems) from Minskip Common “against the bye laws and old pains”.

### Warrening

Some rabbit farming may have taken place within moor land boundaries: the Archbishop of Fountains had been granted Free Warren on Hutton Moor in the reign of Edward III (1312-1377)<sup>79</sup> and the Moor was still described as open moor and rabbit warren in the Enclosure Award of 1815. However, most named warrens in the Washlands appear to have been associated with emparked land rather than moor.

### Enclosure

Even if we were able to map each historic common accurately, we could not give a figure for the maximum extent of ‘moor’ in the Washlands. This is because enclosure was a much more extended process than often imagined, so that much common was divided into private fields long before the Parliamentary Enclosure period of c.1750-1850.

Although moors were sometimes described as having been subject to common rights for time immemorial, this was not always the case. As well as the reduction in common pasture through enclosure, there was probably occasional conversion of formerly enclosed land to common; thus, areas known as Thacker and Micklecarr at Topcliffe were demesne meadows in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and later became part of Topcliffe Park but were common pasture in the

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<sup>75</sup> <http://www.glenlodge.me.uk/crakehall/contents/anland.html#farms>

<sup>76</sup> Aldburgh with Boroughbridge, 6 Elizabeth. Transcript in YAS (1929)

<sup>77</sup> In Lawson-Tancred (1937)

<sup>78</sup> *Yorkshire Deeds II*

<sup>79</sup> “...abbati de Fontibus, quod ipse et successors sui imperpetuum habeant liberam warrenam in omnibus dominicis terriis suis de Baldersby, Marton-super-Moram” in Walbran (1876)

17<sup>th</sup> century (Fisher, 1954). On the eastern edge of the study area, the dissolution of the former Royal Forest of Galtres resulted in some areas becoming common such as Raskelf Lawn or Lund<sup>80</sup>: a lawn in Forest law being an open area maintained for grazing deer<sup>81</sup>.

An early example of enclosure is the bringing into cultivation of 60 acres of Moulton Moor in 1160 by Cowton Grange, a farming business of Fountains Abbey.<sup>82</sup> In 1254, the Abbot of Byland was licensed to enclose 20 acres of “the moor called Pylemore” at Brafferton<sup>83</sup>. By the Tudor period, the Vale of Mowbray contained much productive arable land but large tracts of moor remained. Thus, John Leland’s *Itinerary* (1535-43) described “*a meately fertile valley bytwixt Blakemore hills by east, and Richmondshire hills by weste*” but although “*there is good corne in Northalverton, yet a great peace of the ground that I saw at hand bytwixt Northalverton and Smithon [Smeaton] bridge is low pasture and mores...*” The 1570 Humberston survey of former monastic lands recorded that the tenants of Topcliffe manor “*have great commons for the sommer tyme for stoore cattle upon the moores*”<sup>84</sup>. In East Cowton, enclosure of the open field arable was carried out in the 1620s to 1660s but the moor remained; in the 1680s, the township still had 700 acres of common<sup>85</sup>.

Nonetheless, enclosure accelerated in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. At Northallerton, Wiske Moor (also known as Raker Moor) was being leased by the Archbishop of Durham to a single tenant by 1501, by which time common rights had presumably been extinguished<sup>86</sup>. In 1517, William Conyers was arraigned by Cardinal Wolsey’s Commission of Enquiry into Enclosures for emparking Hornby<sup>87</sup>. Although the Yorkshire records are fragmentary, this Commission recorded 30 cases on enclosure in the North Riding as a whole covering 2,628 acres; East Tanfield, South Cowton and Carthorpe were amongst the settlements depopulated as a result, with local courts also hearing evidence concerning Thornton-le-Street (1607), Maunby (ca. 1591) and North Kilvington<sup>88</sup>. Wolsey’s inquiry heard that there had been 32 evictions and eight houses destroyed at East Tanfield as a result of the enclosure process in 1513-17; 20 people were evicted and four houses destroyed at South Cowton<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Atkinson (1890)

<sup>81</sup> In Galtres, new commons were established in 1630 in lieu of the various Forest rights enjoyed by the townships. However, by then Myton-on-Swale, Aldwark, Helperby and Brafferton had been outwith the Forest for some time.

<sup>82</sup> Donajgrodzki (1990)

<sup>83</sup> Feet of Fines, Henry III (item 33)

<sup>84</sup> Cited by Graham (2000)

<sup>85</sup> Donajgrodzki (1990)

<sup>86</sup> Newman (1999)

<sup>87</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1420079>

<sup>88</sup> Beresford (1955a)

<sup>89</sup> Beresford (1955b)



At Great Smeaton, the process of enclosure had begun by the 1540s<sup>90</sup>. At Romanby, common land was partly enclosed in 1596, a consequence of the break-up of the Bishop of Durham's estates following the Dissolution<sup>91</sup>. The Cowpasture, Oxpasture, Horsepasture and Common of Asenby and Dalton were enclosed in 1613, totalling 416 acres (168 hectares) (Fisher, 1954). At Aldborough, the first wave of large-scale enclosure began in 1628 with an agreement to divide three of the open arable fields, though the common remained<sup>92</sup>. At Thorton-le-Moor, on the eastern boundary of the study area, moor land north-west of the village had been enclosed and brought into cultivation by 1652<sup>93</sup>. At Carlton Miniott in 1667, an indenture refers to closes formerly part of West Moor, though the East Moor was still an unenclosed common<sup>94</sup>. At Dalton, the open arable fields were enclosed by agreement in 1673 and the Ings and Common had been enclosed before 1754, apparently leaving no common land in the township. Nearby, an agreement was made in 1668 to enclose "*the commons, waists, or moores commonly called or knowne by the several names of Thirkleby and Islebeck Moore, Sowerby South Moore and Bagby West Moore*"<sup>95</sup>.

Nonetheless, large areas of common meadow and moor remained by the time of the Parliamentary Enclosures of ca. 1750 to 1850. An exact figure for the Washlands is not available but around 12,000 acres (4,856 ha) of Common and Ings were enclosed by Parliament during this period along with the remaining Open Field arable<sup>96</sup>. The townships for which records are at hand are summarised in Table 2<sup>97</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> Lart & Mann (2000)

<sup>91</sup> Riordon (2002)

<sup>92</sup> Lawson-Tancred (1937)

<sup>93</sup> Thornton le Moor Millennium History Project (undated)

<sup>94</sup> Inrolement of indentures, Quarter Sessions in Atkinson (1886)

<sup>95</sup> Inrolement of Indentures, transcript in Atkinson (1886)

<sup>96</sup> The very large Masham enclosure of 1793 mainly concerned commons outside the study area; only those clearly identifiable as lying within have been included in the figures.

<sup>97</sup> Figures are sourced from Slater (1907), English (1985) and NYCRO (2005) with some extrapolation from maps where separate areas were not specified for arable and grassland.

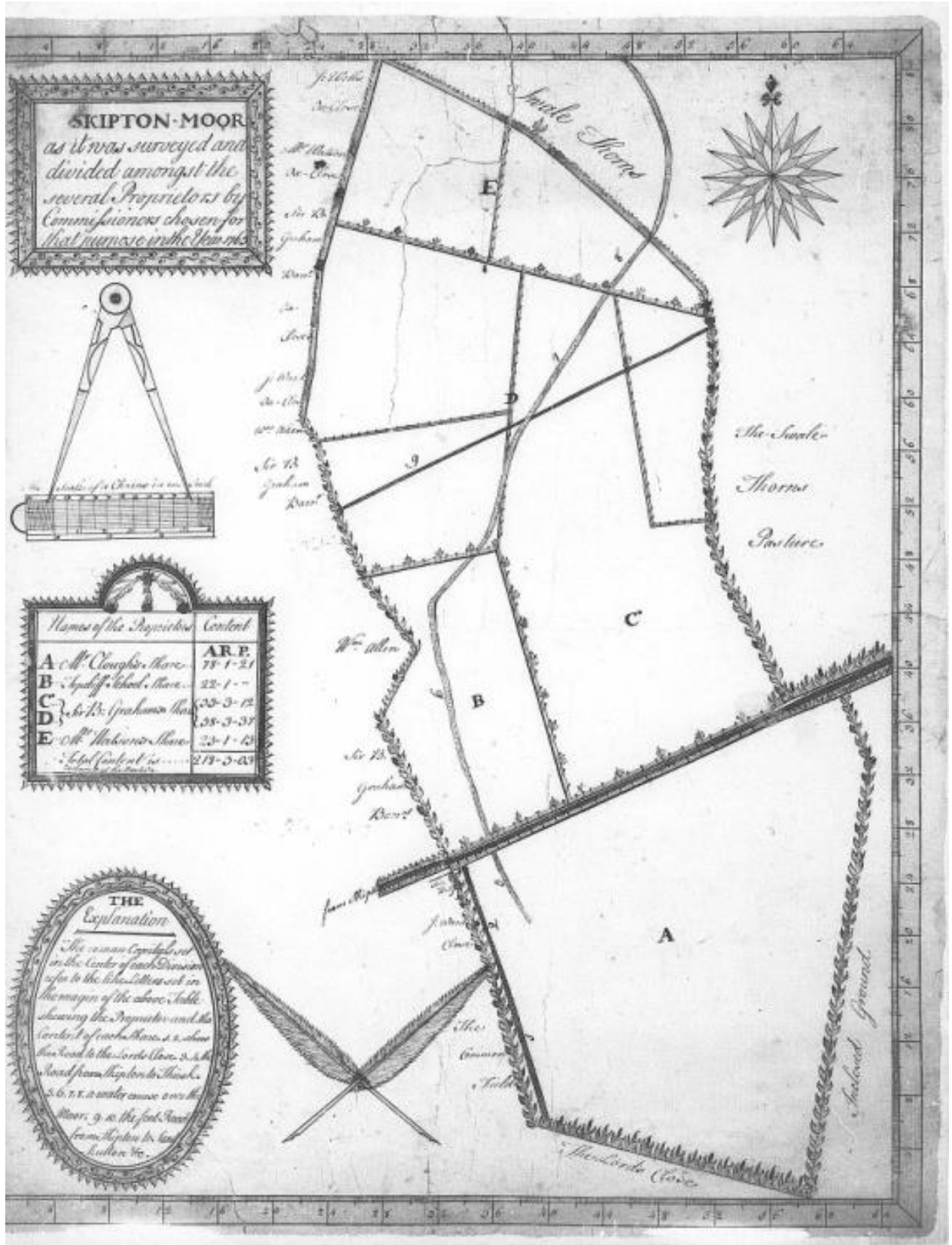


Figure 7: Skipton-on-Swale enclosure award map, 1763. NYCRO ZTF 2/1. Courtesy of the North Yorkshire County Records Office.

**Table 2:** Enclosures by Parliamentary Award in the Swale and Ure Washlands

| Township                                 | Year | Ac.  | Ha.   | Description  |
|--|------|------|-------|--|
| Aiskew                                   | 1807 | 194  | 78.5  | Aiskew Moor & small pieces of waste  |
| Aldborough                               | 1809 | 396  | 160.3 | meadow and pasture, per Slater (1907)  |
| Aldwark (part of Alne)                   | 1807 | ?    | ?     | Alne enclosure covered 680 acres of open fields, Ings & wastes; area in Aldwark parish uncertain               |
| Arkendale                                | 1773 | 250  | 101   | common pasture, per Slater (1907)  |
| Bishop Monkton                           | 1807 | 450  | 182   | 150 acres meadow, 300 acres common pasture per Slater (1907)   |
| Boroughbridge                            | 1857 | 27   | 10.9  | Boroughbridge Common (stinted)   |
| Brafferton                               | 1821 | 200  | 80.9  | Fawdington Common, part of Brafferton Common   |
| Brearton                                 | 1773 | 650  | 263   | Rigg Moor & Brearton Moor  |
| Carlton Miniott                          | 1803 | 304  | 123   | Carlton Common   |
| Catton                                   | 1812 | 253  | 102.4 | Catton Moor & Common   |
| Clareton, Coneythorpe, Allerton          | 1772 | 250  | 101   | Clareton Moor and Shortsill Moor totalled 250 acres; mentions 6 ancient enclosures                             |
| Crakehall                                | 1833 | 143  | 58    | open fields + Ings = 176 acres; estimate is for Ings only, from OS & 1788 estate map                           |
| Copt Hewick                              | 1772 | 190  | 76.9  | stinted pasture & common   |
| Farnham                                  | 1814 | 16   | 6.5   | stinted pasture at Cliff Carr  |
| Farnham & Knaresborough                  | 1828 | 466  | 188.6 | common pasture per Slater (1907)   |
| Ferrensby                                | 1807 | 50   | 20.2  | Ferrensby Moor   |
| Grafton                                  | 1803 | 141  | 57    | moor and common land   |
| Great Ouseburn                           | 1770 | 390  | 157.8 | common pasture, per Slater (1907)  |
| Helperby                                 | 1772 | 394  | 159.4 | Helperby Moor enclosure  |
| Helperby                                 | 1809 | ?    | ?     | total of 1,284 acres open field, Ings & waste  |
| Hutton Conyers, Rainton, Newby, Melmerby | 1815 | 1067 | 432   | 1,610 acres including 4 open arable fields; area of common measured off map reconstructed from enclosure award |
| Kirby Hill                               | 1812 | 186  | 75.3  | common and wastes  |
| Langthorpe                               | 1812 | 135  | 54.5  | open fields, common and wastes = 318 acres   |
| Little Ouseburn                          | 1806 | 113  | 45.7  | Ings, common, stinted pasture, commonable waste (29 acres of meadows)  |

|                                 |                   |        |         |  |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------|---------|--|
| Littlethorpe                    | 1742              | 220    | 89      | Littlethorpe Moor  |
| Lower Dunsforth                 | 1809              | 91.5   | 37      | open field, meadow & common pasture = 664 acres. 37 ha Ings based on Award map.                                      |
| Masham                          | 1793              | 138    | 55.8    | 4,657 acres of moor and common - most outside study area;<br>Fearby Low Moor & Swinton Moor = 55.8 ha                |
| Melmerby Green                  | 1815              | 60.5   | 24.5    | measurement based on enclosure map   |
| Minksip                         | 1839              | 54     | 21.9    | stinted pasture called The Carr  |
| Norton-le-Clay                  | 1791              | 205    | 83      | common and open fields = 770 ac (common masured from Jeffries's Map of Yorkshire)                                    |
| Ripon                           | 1744<br>&<br>1800 | 556.5  | 225.2   | complicated series of enclosures, area derived from contemporary maps  |
| Sandhutton                      | 1799              | 212    | 85.8    | Sandhutton Common  |
| Scriven                         | 1830              | 268    | 108.5   | Scriven Moor, Scotton High Moor, Scotton Low Moor  |
| Skelton-on-Ure                  | 1798              | 199    | 80.5    | High & Low Commons; also Ings, acreage not specified   |
| Skipton-on-Swale                | 1763              | 260    | 105.2   | Skipton Moor   |
| Sowerby                         | 1803              | 381    | 169     | Oxclose, South Moor  |
| Staveley                        | 1806              | 321    | 130     | open fields, ings, carrs, commons = 398 acres  |
| Thirsk                          | 1797              | 743    | 300.7   | East Moor & West Moor  |
| Thornton Watlass                | 1754              | 388    | 157     | Watlass Moor including parts in Snape & Well   |
| Tunstall                        | 1813              | 150    | 60.7    | Tunstall Moor & waste, Catterick Green   |
| Upper Dunsforth & Branton Green | 1770              | 100    | 40.5    | 100 acres common pasture per Slater (1907); there were also 4 meadows<br>so this is under-estimate. No map at NYCRO. |
| West Tanfield                   | 1793              | 500    | 202     | per Slater (1907), includes Thornborough Moor  |
| Whixley                         | 1806              | 216    | 87.4    | Bank Common & Skaite Moor Common   |
| Yafforth                        | 1790              | 417    | 168.8   | Yafforth Moor includes land in Thrintoft, Little Langton and Danby Wiske   |
|                                 |                   | 11,745 | 4,767.4 |  |

## Habitats of the pre-enclosure commons

We have little indication of the vegetation of the pre-enclosure commons of the Washlands, most of which had been greatly diminished by the time botanical recording began. In a few cases such as Lingy Moor at Moulton or Ling Pasture at Topcliffe, the common was presumably lowland heath and this may have been extensive on the sands and gravels. On the eastern border of the Washlands, the former Forest of Galtres townships also seem to have contained extensive tracts of heathy common. In 1856, Raskelf was described as “having formerly been surrounded by moors and waste commons - Hagmoor on one side, Pilmoor on another, and the Lund moor on a third - on which very little was found but whins and ling”. Elsewhere we can assume a mosaic of wet and dry, calcareous, neutral or acidic conditions depending on soil type and topography.

The few brief descriptions available to us give a general impression of poorly-drained land with abundant sedges and rushes, often dotted with gorse in the drier areas. In the period 1535-1543, Leland wrote of “low Medowes and Morisch Ground ful of Carres” in the Forest of Galtres north of York, a description which probably applied to the western fringes of the Forest on the eastern border of the Washlands, of which Pilmoor Site of Special Scientific Interest is the last remainder. Bogg (1894) described “a large common” between Masham and Grewelthorpe - presumably Roomer Common - as “covered with furze and sedgy pools”, noting that Leland had described the same vicinity as “boggy and moorish”. In his *Annals of Bedale*, Robert Hird recorded his boyhood memories of Aiskew Moor in the 1770s/1780s<sup>98</sup>:

*Oft here I rambled when a boy,  
And my schoolfellows too,  
In search of nests, was our employ,  
Went whins and rushes through.*

*Plovers and linnits, Chatts and Snipes,  
All were alike 'tis true!  
We often were as wet as tripes,  
In stocking and in shoe!!!*

Hird also recorded that many inhabitants of Bedale fled to the Lord's Moor in 1745 when the Jacobite army approached, “where they hid themselves amongst the reeds, sedges and rushes, with which that land was covered until about the year 1775, when John Braithwait of Ashbank, John Fenwick of Aiskew and John Mumforth of Bromaking Grange entered upon it by lease. They divided it into fields and built the farmhouse...” He also described Watlass Moor as having once been a bleak and exposed place to cross in winter with no hedges or trees to provide shelter - though it was enclosed before he was born.

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<sup>98</sup> Lewis (1975)



# Mires

Carrs were typically low-lying hollows in the undulating glacial till landscape of the Washlands, difficult to convert to more productive farmland before the advent of pumped drainage. In a few instances these were extensive peatlands, as at Snape Mires and Ainderby Mires; in other cases, they appear to have been small, discrete basins, some of which have since been replaced by plantations or amenity ponds. Some may also have been kettle-holes, depressions left by embedded ice-blocks in the late glacial, such features being more recognisable a little further up the Ure valley in lower Wensleydale. There is no indication that *carr* implied wet woodland, and such habitat tends to be recorded separately on old maps and in historic documents. The Old English *kjarr* is a generic term for wetland.

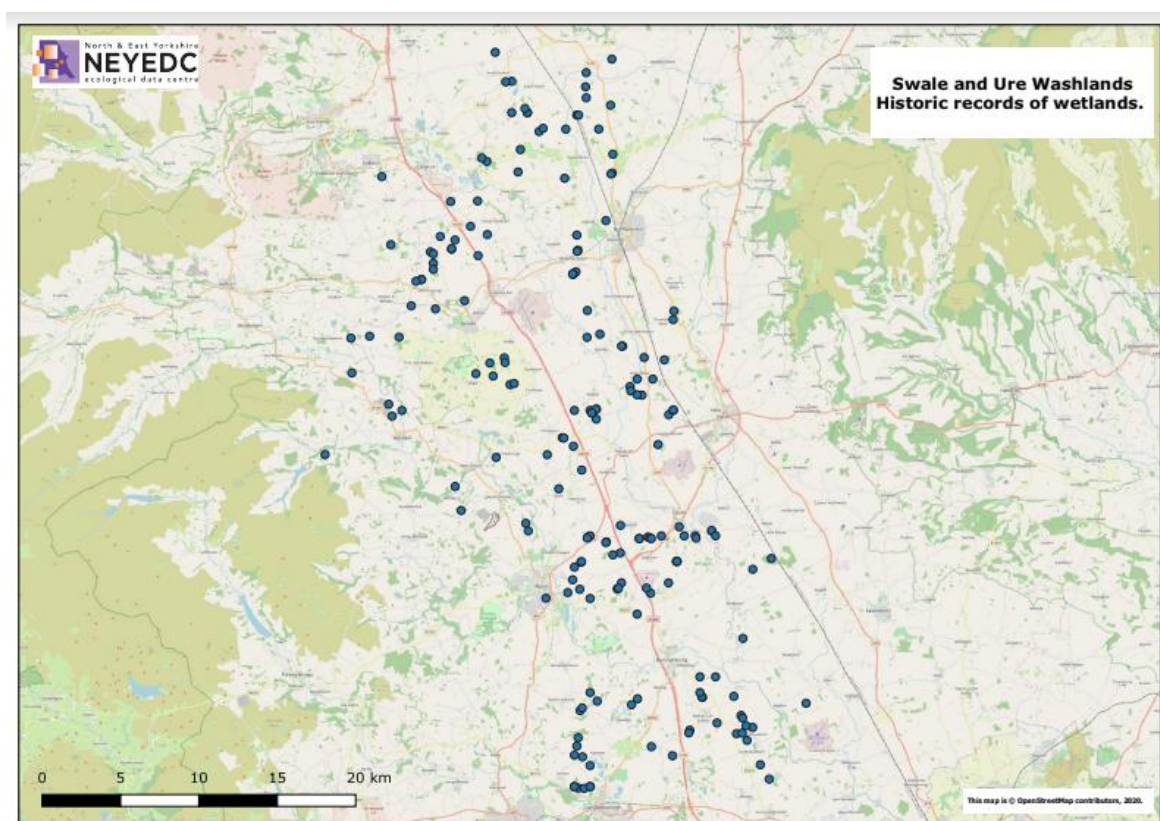


Figure 8: historic wetland sites in the Swale & Ure Washlands

Wetlands are recognisable more through carr/car, mire/mier/myer, marr place names than documentary sources. However, some caution is needed as mire and carr seem sometimes to have been less specific terms, perhaps denoting poorly-drained land in general rather than wetland habitat per se. Thus, at Aldborough in the time of Charles I, Nepo Carr was “a parcel of ground that lies unfenced in the middle of one of the Town Fields” and appears to have been farmed as part of the arable rotation. Ellecar, Lusmires, Yarn Mires and Gormires also appear to have been names for parts of the open arable fields rather than wet commons<sup>99</sup>.

<sup>99</sup> Lawson-Tancred (1937)

Certainly, wetland features were well recognised in the historic landscape of the Washlands. At South Cowton, Fountains Abbey received land at Wynneholme next to a “white marsh” and “beside a hanging well or spring”<sup>100</sup>. An arbitration of 1257 gave Avice Marmion right to a road “through the middle of the swamp on the south side of the wood of Langwith” near Nosterfield, showing that wetlands existed on the higher ground as well as in the low-lying river floodplains. In this case, the ‘swamp’ was presumably part of a complex of groundwater-fed peatlands overlying the magnesian limestone. The transfer of an acre of land on *Gerneganmere* at Fencote is mentioned in a deed of ca. 1290<sup>101</sup>. The Perambulation of the Boundaries of the Liberty and Lordship of Ripon in 1481 listed numerous ‘wet’ features including a Turff-carr Rein between Sharow and Copt Hewick, a Brankcarr near Hutton Conyers, a Cock Carr at Marton-le-Moor and a Dampkarr Hill at Kirkby Hill.

Over 150 wetland place names or documented sites have been identified within the Washlands (Figure 8, above). These include 82 carr names, 47 mire/mier/myer names, eight or nine mar or marsh names, five bogs, five bottoms and five reed/red names. A number of *keld* (= spring) place names occur also, though these have not been collated; the name *Hallikeld* (‘holy spring’) occurs occasionally, e.g. north-east of Northallerton and near Melmerby.

Often the carr or mire would have formed part of the medieval common resources of the township but use of these wetlands seems to be rather poorly documented. The Aldborough manorial court of October 1563 fined four villagers of Minskip for putting dairy cattle “*on a certain place called the Carre against the form of the bye law*”. It is unclear whether those presented for this offence held no right to graze there, or whether there was a specific prohibition on dairy cows. Also at Aldborough, 14 grazing gates were let on Lily Car in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century at an annual rental of 20 s per gate<sup>102</sup>. An inventory of Richard Cook’s estate at Hutton Conyers in 1570 listed “*cattel gaits and dailes in Huton town myers*”, showing that both stinted grazing and hay making took place within the Myers<sup>103</sup>. At Minskip, the Carr was described as stinted pasture of 54 acres in the 1839 Enclosure Award.

An indenture of 1615 itemises a land holding at Myton-on-Swale including “*half of one part of the meadow lying in Green Karre*”, suggesting a hay meadow divided into numerous lots<sup>104</sup>. At Myton, the Carr was a sizeable area north of the village, alongside the River Swale. It is mentioned only occasionally in court records but access to it caused some consternation: both the wetness of the land and the need to cross arable fields seem to have presented problems. Around 1692 a pain was laid “*that none go to ye car over ye long lands*” and a penalty of 1s,6d was threatened for “*not making a Car bridge and...way over ye Carr*”. In

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<sup>100</sup> Donajgrodzki (1990)

<sup>101</sup> *Yorkshire Deeds*, vol 3, item 90

<sup>102</sup> Lawson-Tancred (1937)

<sup>103</sup> In Raine (1853). *Daile* usually refers to a dole, a strip or small parcel within a large hay meadow.

<sup>104</sup> Transcript in Atkinson (1886)

1715, it was referred to as “*ye poor folks carr*” with an indication that rights of pasture were rationed as gates, as on other grazing commons<sup>105</sup>.

At Leckby Carr and Marton-le-Moor Carr, botanical records demonstrate the localised development of raised mires, with peat accumulating above the influence of groundwater to form rainwater-fed, *Sphagnum*-dominated bogs. At Leckby, cranberries were harvested for sale at local markets (Foggitt, 1909). Citing local naturalist William Brunton, Turner & Dillwyn (1805) wrote that cranberries grew so abundantly in bogs near Ripon, “that the berries are brought to market in large quantities”.

It is likely that wildfowling was widespread in the Vale of Mowbay wetlands. In 1616, Marmaduke Grant of Northallerton was fined for shooting ducks on Long Cowton’s Westmyre in breach of laws restricting the use of firearms for hunting<sup>106</sup>. Writing of his childhood in the 1770s, Thomas Hird of Bedale recalled how his brother would “go to all the neighbouring Carrs and Ings Stells” to hunt duck with a terrier and spear.

Hird also described how his school master was “one of the many ague doctors”, suggesting that malaria was still endemic. “At that time” he added “it was a prevalent and a most inveterate disorder amongst people, young and old, which was brought on through the great quantity of stagnant water on the marshy lands and numerous carrs, which are now all drained”: a reminder that wetlands were not necessarily a welcome feature of the landscape to those who dwelt among them.

### Peat and turf cutting

A number of references to turbary (the right to cut peat or turf for domestic fuel) indicate that some wetlands were exploited specifically for this purpose. Records span the period 1253 to 1481, perhaps suggesting that peat was becoming less important as domestic fuel by the late medieval period. However, only a fraction of manorial records have been examined and this practice may have been much more extensive, at least in those areas where low-lying, permanently wet, peat-forming basins formed part of the landscape. Most records refer to rights of turbary gifted to the monasteries.

Thirteenth century records are from East Cowton, Dishforth (two locations), Farnham, Newsham, Sutton Howgrave (two locations) and Well. Rights to cut turf existed on part of Aldborough Moor in 1338<sup>107</sup> and a turf-ground between Sharow and Copt Hewick is mentioned in the Ripon Perambulation of 1481. Interestingly, the first edition Ordnance Survey 6” map shows a peculiar maze-like pattern on White Mere on Hutton Moor which may denote peat cuttings separated by balks.

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<sup>105</sup> Myton court papers, NYCRO ZLQ

<sup>106</sup> Donajgrodzki (1990)

<sup>107</sup> Extracts from the court rolls of the manor of Aldborough, 12-13 Edward III (YAS, 1929)

# Meres

Jefferys's 1772 *Map of Yorkshire* shows a large mere (shallow lake) of around 200 hectares on Snape Mires and four smaller lakes to the north around the headwaters of the River Wiske. These water bodies, perhaps only seasonal, would have been the last remains of the numerous lakes formed in the early post-glacial Washlands.



Figure 9: extract from Jefferys' 1772 *Map of Yorkshire* showing four meres in the northern Vale of Mowbray

John Leland's *Itinerary* (1535-1543) mentions that "In the parkes by Snape be pools" and Horsfall (1912) refers to "old" records mentioning Snape Water. An early 14<sup>th</sup> century indenture (transfer of rights) mentioned "the Marshes of Burniston and Snape" (Horsfall, *ibid*). However, there is surprisingly little evidence as to how the mere was exploited, which it surely would have been. Waterfowl, fish, leeches, reeds and peat would almost certainly have been harvested.

Drainage plans were produced in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and Snape Mires was drained by a system of stells in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>108</sup>. Further improvements in drainage were accomplished in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Snape Local History Group, 1999). While the detail of its extent and history remain obscure, Snape Mires must have been one of North Yorkshire's

<sup>108</sup> Horsfall (1912)

great wetlands up to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century: if Jefferys' map is reliable, it would have been a similar size to Hornsea Mere, Yorkshire's largest lake. The location of the Georgian Leech House at nearby Bedale cannot be coincidental and must imply the presence of local habitats with abundant Medicinal Leeches.

So far, historic documents offer little information about the four meres shown on Jefferys' map around the headwaters of the River Wiske at Birkby, Hutton Bonville and the Cowtons. The map names one as Birkby Carr and another as Cowton Stells; these were presumably locally-recognised names at the time, although Stell usually implies a small watercourse rather than a lake. The mere south of East Cowton was re-wetted in 1999 to preserve the deep lake-bed sediments, which contain a wealth of biological remains valuable to understanding environmental change. This is now known as Pepper Arden Bottoms. Land drainage in the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the disappearance of the other meres.

Donajgrodzki (1990) suggests that reed from the Red or Reed Mire would have been used to thatch medieval houses in the Cowtons but this seems to be only an inference.



# Meanders

The Washlands landscape has been formed by rivers, all of which have been modified to varying degrees by activities such as embankment, straightening, channel stabilisation or installation of weirs. The River Wiske is a particularly striking example: this satellite image shows the canalised channel north of Yafforth along with traces of its former, meandering course.



**Figure 10:** Evidence of former meanders removed by straightening of the River Wiske north of Northallerton [Google Earth Pro]

This straightening has not only changed river morphology but allowed the removal of oxbows, backwaters and other wetland features associated with natural rivers.

Michael Drayton's topographical poem *Poly-Olbion*, published in two parts in 1612 and 1622, set out to describe "all the Tracts, Rivers, Mountaines and Forrests" of England and Wales. His account of the Swale tributaries in the Vale of Mowbray refers to the "labyrinth-like turns and mad meand' red trace" of the Wiske<sup>109</sup>, and it's likely that this was typical of many smaller watercourses:

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<sup>109</sup> Drayton (1622); northern England was covered in the second volume of *Poly-Olbion*

Next takes into her traine, cleere *Wiske*, a wanton Gyre,  
As though her watry path were pau'd with Orient Pearle,  
So wondrous sweet she seemes, in many a winding Gyre,  
As though shee Gambolds made, or as she did desire,  
Her Labyrinth-like turnes, and mad Meandred trace,  
With maruell should amaze, and comming doth imbrace  
*\*North-Alerton*, by whom her honour is increast,  
VVhose Liberties include a County at the least,

In towns, small becks have often been culverted. In his *History of North-Alerton* (1791), Thomas Langley noted that "A small brook, running from east to west, called Sunbeck, crosses the street about the middle of the town, over which there are two stone bridges for foot passengers and horses"; the stream is now mostly confined to a pipe.

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