

A FANFARE FOR THE NOBLE MAN?

The rise of Wharram's manorial elite

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This paper was, in its essentials, one of those given at the conference at York in March 2012 to launch the publication of *Wharram XIII* (Wrathmell 2012). As long-term supportive (and opinionated) outsiders, we had personal reasons to be pleased to contribute to the final volume. We were especially keen, however, because the volume was conceived, not as a re-statement of known facts, but rather as an exploration of what those facts might actually mean within the context of contemporary settlement studies. So, for all that the volume presents itself as a traditional chronological summary, we were unapologetic that our sections in Chapters 11, 13, 15 and 16 crackle with debate about the meaning of the Wharram results, and indeed about the validity of the chronology itself.

The conference brief for the paper was to outline our reflections on the development of the nucleated settlement itself. What had proved in the book to be the underpinning theme of our thinking on that topic, however, was the vital importance of the presence or absence of a resident lord in the scale, nature and dynamic of those developments, and in the resulting archaeological record. We therefore took this as our paper's focus. The seldom-emphasised corollary underlying this theme is that the documentation of manorial tenure at any given settlement does not necessarily imply lordly residence or the physical presence of a manorial complex as understood by archaeologists. A medieval manor was a legal but not necessarily a physical entity. This basic, critical, fact – one that is clearly understood as a bread-and-butter matter by historians – can sometimes be less surely handled by archaeologists. It is as an example of the importance of this distinction between the historian's concept of the manor as a legal entity and the archaeologist's expectation of the manor's physical correlate on the ground that publication of this paper is perhaps most justified. In itself, however, the present discussion is merely a summary of ideas already published in *Wharram XIII*, where fuller detail, argument and referencing is given (Wrathmell 2012).

Regardless of the character of settlement that came previously (as debated in Wrathmell 2012, 163–180), the evidence from both survey and excavation has convinced most commentators that, at one particular moment, a nucleated medieval settlement was laid out in the unpromising Wharram topography (cf. Lewis *et al* 2001, 191–205). This is not to suggest that such a 'village moment' happened everywhere or at the same moment. Even within the 'Central Province of Settlement' (Roberts and Wrathmell 2000), the incidence of nucleation was clearly regional; and, even locally to Wharram, Dominic Powlesland's work at

West Heslerton demonstrates nucleation implemented through a complete re-planning of the landscape but – as *Wharram XIII* envisages – occurring somewhat earlier than the equivalent on the high Wolds lands (Wrathmell 2012, 215–220; see the relative chronology implied by Fig. 36). When we took up the Wharram challenge, we had just published our work on plan-form morphologies of different village types in Lincolnshire; and it was clear to us, long before we had finished that study, that Wharram was an example of one of the main categories of village we had identified there (Stocker and Everson 2006, 58–70). Accounts of that approach have been published several times, and the fact that both our methodologies and results have been taken up subsequently by other scholars indicates at least a degree of acceptance of the methods we developed, even if details are sometimes less easily agreed.

If it had been in Lincolnshire, Wharram would have been categorised as an example of the so-called 'church-on-the-green' type of settlement, a type accounting for somewhat more than 30% of the total we studied in our sample. It is, then, not a particularly rare form of village morphology (Fig. 1). As Oswald reiterates in the new Wharram volume, the nucleated settlement at Wharram is a layout of two rows of crofts against an elongated triangular green, which was subsequently in-filled at its northern end by later dwelling plots. Characteristically also, the green has water, in this case in the form of a river along its eastern side. Also typical of such settlements in Lincolnshire is the provision of a priest's house on the green (at certain phases anyway), a feature comprehensively explored by Wrathmell (Harding, Marlow-Mann and Wrathmell 2010). In Lincolnshire villages of this type, other items of communal infrastructure are also present on such greens: a common pound; a common dunghill; on one occasion even a common alehouse. But our Lincolnshire work was focused on church location, and as with so many examples there, St Martin's parochial church dominates common open space at Wharram's centre.

Our Lincolnshire work grew out of studies of other aspects of these church sites, of course. Specifically, we had also been interested in the distributions of funerary sculpture of 10th- and 11th-century date as evidence for the process of parochialisation and its association with settlement nucleation (Everson and Stocker 1999). We have sought to link our work on the morphology of settlements with our hard-won understandings of the foundations of parochial graveyards through their burial culture, and have proposed that many of these churches 'on-the-green' in Lincolnshire were probably established in the second half of the 10th century. In *Wharram XI*

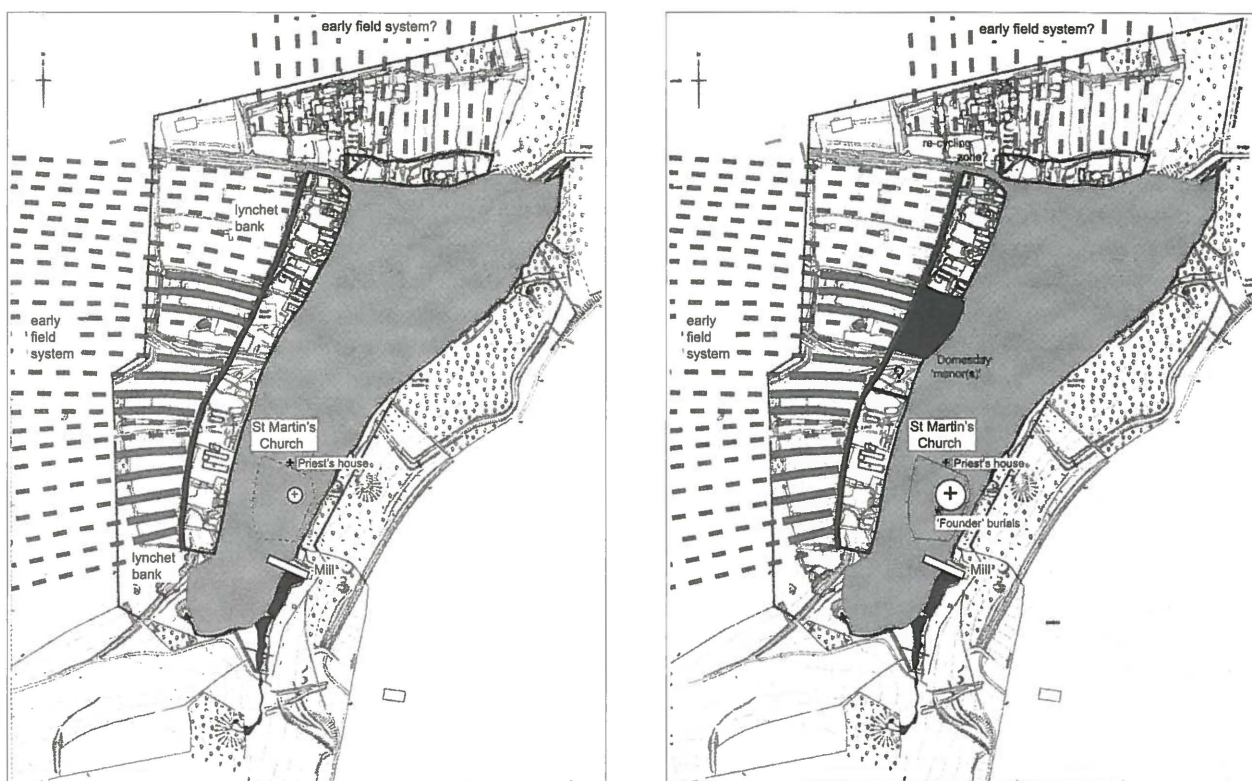


Figure 1 Wharram as a pre-Conquest settlement of the 'church-on-the-green' type (Wrathmell 2012, Fig. 81).

(Mays, Harding and Heighway 2007), a similar date was also confirmed for the establishment of the parochial churchyard on the green at Wharram.

In both Lincolnshire and at Wharram we have been very interested in using both village morphology and the development of the church within the settlement as a way of understanding something of the social mechanisms involved in the development of settlements. Aided by the relatively very full information from the Lincolnshire Domesday, we were able to show that many of the villages with Wharram's 'church-on-the-green' morphology also had large numbers of sokemen at Domesday. Our understanding of this interesting category of free peasant has benefited enormously over the years from advice and discussion with David Roffe, who has also made his own authoritative contribution to Wharram, of course (Stamper and Croft 2000, 1–16). Under Roffe's tutelage, we have learnt not that the sokemen are without lords – that would be quite a-historical – but that they were a superior kind of tenant, clinging tenaciously to their antiquated legal freedoms. In many cases, especially in those villages where the lord was not resident, they would have been substantial farmers, almost petty lords themselves. In Lincolnshire, we were able to suggest that, even though such figures owed soke to various lords – often non-resident lords – the leading sokemen were quite capable of taking local initiatives such as the planning of settlements and the foundation of churches. Amongst the sokeman class, some no doubt aspired to a position of social pre-eminence which would have made them indistinguishable from minor lords. Indeed David Roffe identifies them as the equivalent of *drengs* elsewhere in northern England.

Furthermore, we noticed that it is in the 11th century also that monumental sculpture becomes relatively common in the graveyard (Fig. 2). One view of such sculpture in such settlements dominated by sokemen, we suggest, is that it was erected by these *primus inter pares* figures, precisely in order emphasise the fact that they are local leaders. It seems likely that the earliest elite burials at Wharram represent a social statement of precisely this type. Here, following the dating of the various generations of burial in the Wharram graveyard in *Wharram XI*, we suggest we can see the initial foundation of the graveyard (and presumably therefore of the nucleated settlement as well) in the third quarter of the 10th century, and the accumulation of a couple of generations of burial before one or two of the families burying here aim to distinguish themselves with more elaborate grave furniture. They were making a claim to social pre-eminence within the community, as represented by the graveyard itself.

In fact, *Wharram XI* went further and suggested that these memorials might have been erected by the families of Lagman or Karli, who both had holdings at Wharram at Domesday (Mays, Harding and Heighway 2007, 271–287). Although they were described as 'manors' in Domesday, David Roffe long ago identified them as precisely akin to sokeland holdings in the Lincolnshire sense (Stamper and Croft 2000, 6–10).

We have yet to confirm where these putative lordlings of 11th-century Wharram lived but, again following our Lincolnshire researches, we have no reason to expect them to occupy exceptional enclosures compared with those of their fellow villagers: certainly no reason to think of them holding court in a hall – they simply did not have that legal status. In *Wharram XIII*, based

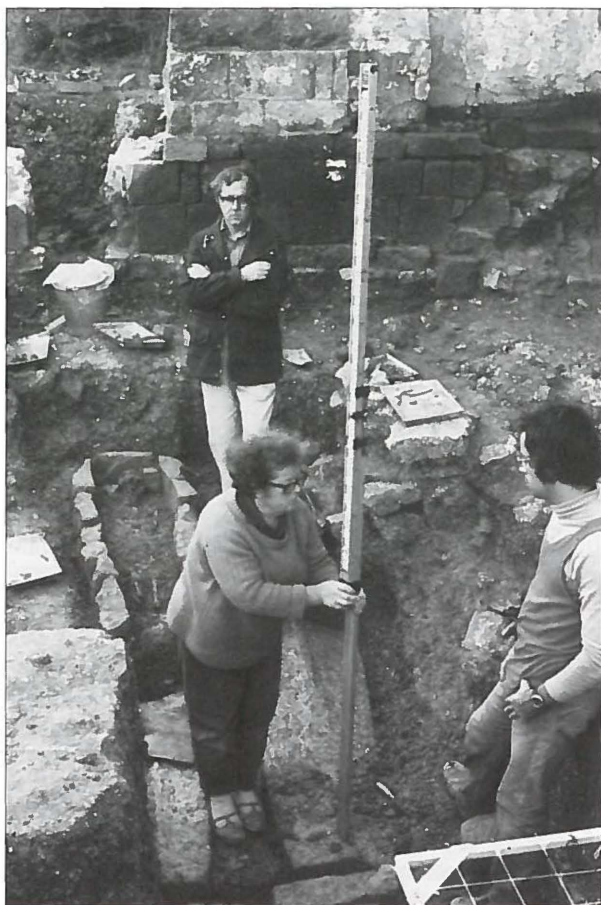


Figure 2 Recording of elite burials in the south aisle of St Martin's church, including 11th-century grave-covers, during excavations in 1973. The view looks west with the foundations of the church porch in the background; Betty Ewins holds the levelling staff and in the foreground Jim Thorn draws (colour slide, reference WPF22-17, from the Wharram Percy archive).

largely on the earthwork stratigraphy, we have suggested that they might have occupied two plots in the west row, which were subsequently amalgamated to form the south manor: but that remains to be demonstrated (Fig. 1).

We have also attempted to understand the field system that went with this first phase of nucleated settlement. Using detail in Oswald's new earthwork survey, we wonder if the layout of the field system between the 10th and 12th centuries was not, in fact, quite different from what came subsequently (as reconstructed and analysed by David Hall: Wrathmell 2012, 278–288). It perhaps resembled the so-called 'foundation fields' that Brian Roberts has identified and described as the basis of other upland, marginal, peasant communities (Roberts 2008). In the 11th century, indeed, we propose that the villagers at Wharram lived in tofts or house plots without the benefit of attached garden crofts. In this early agricultural landscape, the mill was an important asset, but it was small and of primitive horizontal form; crucially, its location on the green associates it with the other communal assets, such as the church and graveyard, and not with any particular dwelling (Wrathmell 2012, 206–207).

The families adopting elite burial fashions in the churchyard in the mid 11th century were undoubtedly resident, and, we suggest, would have been in a position to influence the layout and development of the settlement and its buildings. We have seen no signs, however, that their feudal lord was resident at this date. Indeed Wrathmell suggests in *Wharram XIII* that prior to the Conquest this lord was Ormr son of Gamal, whose nearest residence was probably at Langton, 8 km (5 miles) away (Wrathmell 2012, 180–188). Our Lincolnshire work concluded, too, that such non-resident overlords had relatively little influence on matters such as settlement layout and the foundation of the church (Stocker and Everson 2006, 70–76). Instead we argued that such settlements were led by the most prosperous of the 'sokeman' families. Wrathmell now suggests that the 'in-between' status of the lordlings of 11th-century Wharram may be reflected in the type of monument with which they were commemorated in the village graveyard. Their simple grave-covers contrast with the fine cross-shafts favoured by the petty lords of Folkton or Kirby Grindalythe somewhat earlier, and their subservient status is even more clearly symbolised, Wrathmell suggests, by the fact that the stones for the funerary monuments of Wharram's leading 'sokemen' came as *spolia* from the Roman villa at Langton (Wrathmell 2012, 188–193, 212–23). This would have been a clear visual demonstration that, for all that these families had a pre-eminence in the Wharram graveyard, they nevertheless remained the 'men' of Ormr, whose local base was at Langton.

So, we have offered an outline of the character of lordship in 11th- and early 12th-century Wharram: the newly nucleated village, we suggest, was established without a resident lord, and its layout reflects a strong sense of community action, of which the establishment of the church 'on-the-green', rather than within or attached to any particular toft, is the most potent symbol. But that community contained its own social hierarchy, which, by the mid 11th century, had resulted in one of the leading families aspiring to an elite status, for all that such sokemen were losing, rather than gaining, legal prominence at this date. The sokemen's loss of social position, of course, was part of a social revolution already well underway, and in the middle of the 12th century, these families were replaced as social leaders at Wharram by an entirely different and recognisably feudal lord.

Contrary to previous understandings, we have proposed that this wider social revolution arrived at Wharram when a branch of the Percy family – a family of true Norman aristocrats – took up residence here shortly after 1166. The Percys had, of course, held a lesser and non-residential lordship in Wharram for many years, but the critical step, we suggest, was their taking up the mesne tenancy of the vill at this date. We propose that it was their residence here, rather than the legal distinctions between different levels of lordship in which they participated, that was the motor for Wharram's subsequent development. We believe that the Percys took up residence in the South Manor, which was completely rebuilt at precisely this moment in the 1160s or 1170s (Fig. 3): we would say for this purpose. With Wrathmell's help, *Wharram XIII* suggests ways in which the archaeology reported by Jim

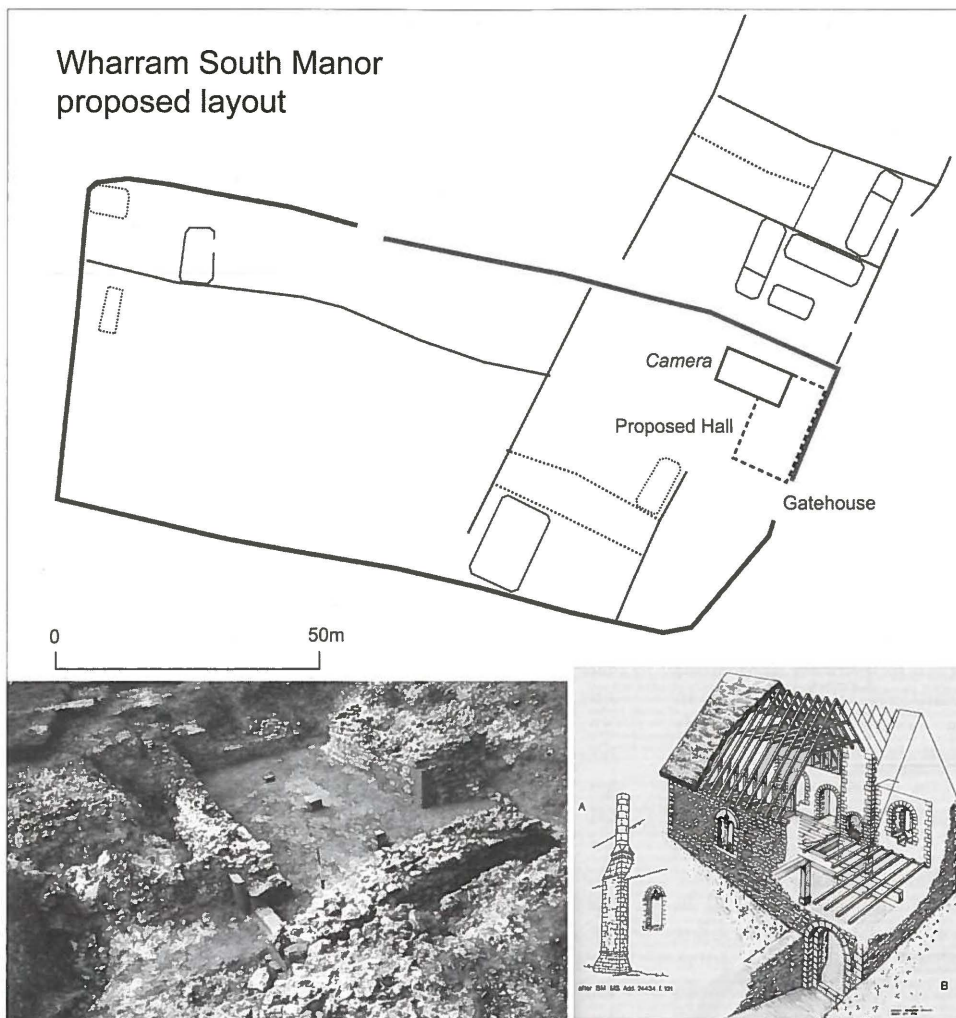


Figure 3 Collage illustrating the proposed layout of the camera and hall in the South Manor enclosure (Andrews and Milne 1979, Fig. 19; Wrathmell 2012, Plate 20, Fig. 96)

Thorn in *Wharram I* (Andrews and Milne 1979, 55–66) might be re-interpreted as the creation here, for the first time, of a large manorial curia, with its great hall of judgement and its residential block to accommodate the Percy household. These new stone buildings marked the arrival of a great family in residence in the village landscape for the first time. But it was equally important for the newly resident lord to demonstrate his new position as leader of the community by embarking on a rebuilding of the church.

As our work progressed, it became increasingly clear that the account of the church fabric offered in *Wharram III* (Bell and Beresford 1987) was not adequate for the type of analysis that we wished to undertake. A thoroughgoing new fabric analysis of the church found us rejecting the complicated phase structure of *Wharram III* and replacing it with one based on the stratigraphy visible in the fabric. The excavation results within the church were also re-examined and afford substantial support for the proposed re-phasing. Chapter 15 of *Wharram XIII* therefore also offers a new understanding of the archaeological sequence at St Martin's church (Fig. 4).

What we can now do is use this revised building history as evidence for the activity and aspirations of the elite in Wharram society up to the 16th century. We can start by taking a step backwards and saying something about the third, early 12th-century phase of the church,

before the arrival of resident lordship when the Percys came (Fig. 4). A surprising amount of the fabric of this building still survives, and it is enough to show how similar it was to the church at nearby Weaverthorpe. Like well-dated Weaverthorpe, this phase must date from the second or third decade of the 12th century. But, whereas at Weaverthorpe the chancel extends into the manorial enclosure, at Wharram – where there was no resident lord and no manorial enclosure at this date – we believe that the chancel of this period remained the dingy rectangular box left over from the mid 11th-century church. It is not known how strictly responsibility for the chancel, as opposed to the nave, was defined in the early 12th century, but it is likely to have been the responsibility of the priest and not of the parish. Thus, we are inclined to see this revised church plan as further evidence for the strength of the village community at this period, led by the descendants of the leading 11th-century sokemen, who put their efforts into the fine, new early 12th-century nave to provide the most ambitious building the community could afford. This contrasted, we would suggest, with the lack of updating of the chancel: perhaps because the rector, if still an independent priest, did not have the funds, or alternatively because his non-resident lord was simply uninterested.

Shortly after 1166, major changes to the church fabric reflect the arrival of a resident lord. The chancel

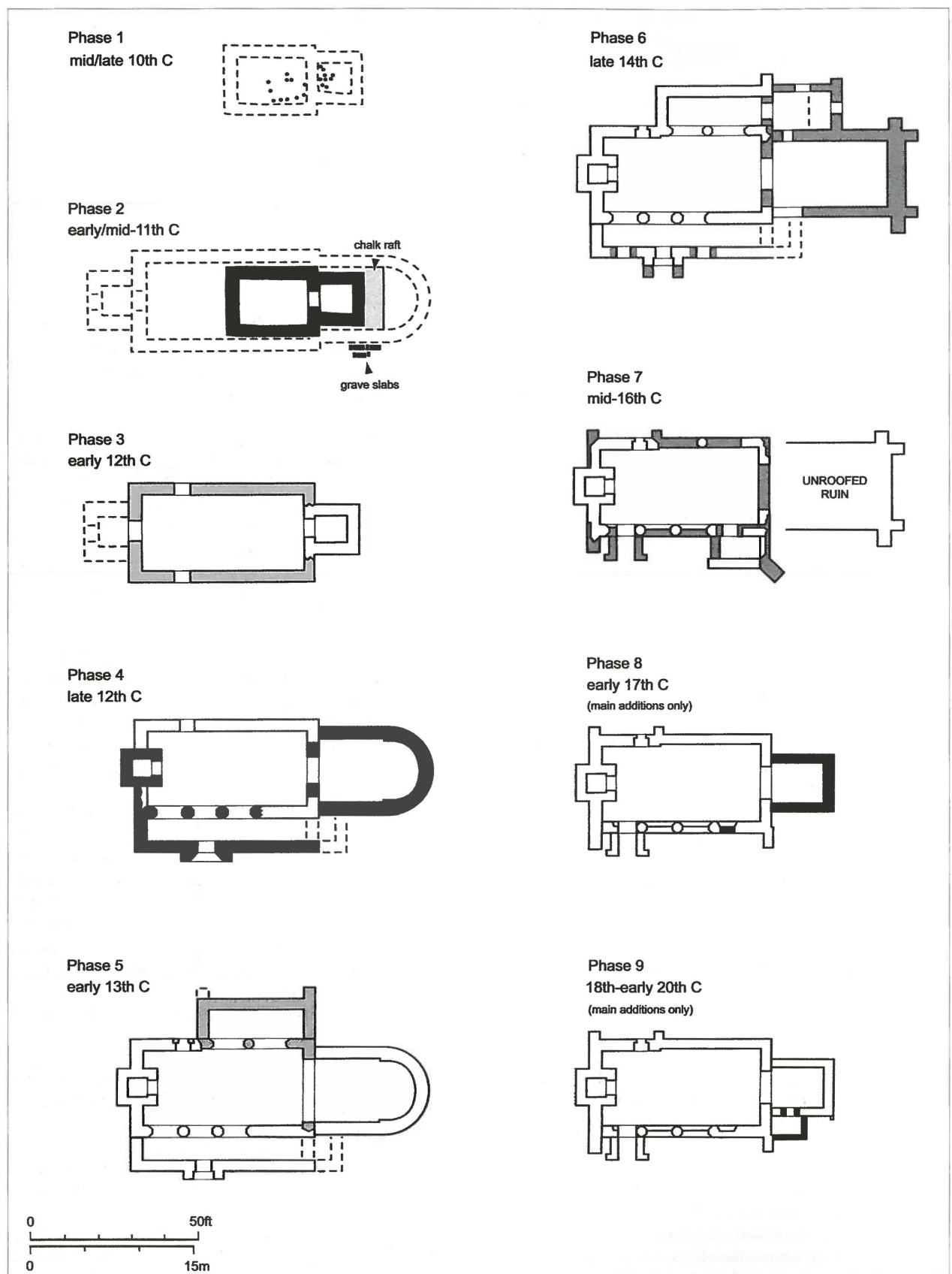


Figure 4 The revised phasing of St Martin's church (Wrathmell 2012, Fig. 87)

– the symbol of church lordship as opposed to the local community – was only brought up to standard at this point. But reconstruction of the chancel was not undertaken in isolation by the newly resident Percys. It was part of a comprehensive reconstruction and enlargement of the building, which included a wholly new south aisle, a diminutive tower and a new font. It is unlikely that the nave *needed* up-grading in this spectacular fashion only some 50 years after it had originally been constructed, and it is perhaps unlikely that it needed a new font either; but the old church had been without prestigious internal burial accommodation for the resident lord and his family. This, we suggest, lay behind the erection of the south aisle, with its spectacular arcade, and the intricately detailed south doorway (here reconstructed for the first time as *Wharram XIII*, Fig. 93). Although a tower had been part of the plan for the early 12th-century building, the excavations showed that it was not built, and it seems clear that today's tower also owes its origins to the Percys' work in this phase.

The Percys, then, made dramatic architectural gestures on their arrival in the village. They built themselves a top-quality residence overlooking the green and the church, and they rebuilt the church itself from end to end. Fortunately we can date both sets of work precisely to the 1170s and 80s. We have also suggested that Oswald's new earthwork survey provides good evidence that the Percys re-organised the communal field system of the vill at this date, too. The earthwork stratigraphy arguably shows that the pattern of fields so masterfully recorded by David Hall does not date from the 10th century, but from the late 12th (Wrathmell 2012, 266–267; this is a development that Hall disagrees with here: *ibid.*, 278). Martin Watts has offered support for this proposition through his study of Wharram's mill, which exhibits a major technical up-grading at this same juncture. The 'horizontal' type of mill – typical of marginal peasant economies, as he puts it – was up-graded to a vertical wheel with much greater capacity (Wrathmell 2012, 206–207). At this date, then, the millers were accommodating greatly increased arable production, resulting from investment in a more developed field system.

The church acquired a north aisle in the early 13th century, but it was not until the middle years of that century that a further major restructuring of the village and its facilities, modifying that undertaken 80 years earlier, was carried out – again by the resident lordly family (Fig. 5). Beresford and Hurst's longstanding suggestion that the next phase in village development arose from the Percys' final acquisition of the tenancy-in-chief – an event celebrated in 1254 – seems very sound. In previous models of village development, however, the assumption has been that both manor sites had been in existence from the 10th or 11th century, and that they were only amalgamated on the site of one of them – the North Manor – after 1254. We looked long and hard for any evidence either that there had ever been two lordly residences at Wharram, or that the North Manor site had been occupied earlier than the mid 13th century. We found none. As far as we can see, the demolition of the South Manor, and its replacement with a mixture of quarries and other structures, is approximately contemporary with the few signs we have for the start

of elite occupation on the North Manor site. Therefore, we suggest, it is not that the Percys acquired an existing residence on the North Manor site for the first time in 1254, and relocated themselves there, but that, on their acquiring the tenancy-in-chief, they embarked on a second, and more thoroughgoing, re-layout of the village, which was now both feasible and appropriate to their enhanced status as they were in complete legal control. In name, too, Wharram became Wharram Percy.

Oswald's resurvey of the earthworks not only tells a story of rationalisation of tofts and crofts, but also of the clearing of an area along the north side of the village to create a landscaped setting for the new hall complex. What might previously have been domestic plots in the north row, for example, might have become closes associated with the newly established manor and its new parkland behind, perhaps with associated gardens. Such a transformation of the village's northern end in the period following 1254 would fit well with Chris Dyer's suggestion that the East Row was newly established at this time, as cottage holdings, designed to support the re-located manor (Wrathmell 2012, 318, 324). A prominent location at the entrance to the settlement and at its high point, structures such as the dovecote within the new manor complex, as well as the establishment of managed woodland to the east, can be seen as part of the same re-organisation and dressing-up of the residence with amenities appropriate to the Percys' additionally elevated lordship.

The Percys also acquired the advowson of St Martin's at this juncture. The fabric history of the church, too, reflects the enhanced aspirations on the part of the Percys at this time, though it has to be unpicked from the dynastic chaos caused by the failure of the male line in the early 14th century (Fig. 4, Phase 6). We suggest that St Martin's large medieval chancel replaced the Romanesque one in the years leading up to the donation of the rectory to the newly founded priory at Haltemprice in 1327. It seems very likely that the chancel's reconstruction was part of the establishment here of the substantial Percy family chantry, which was masterminded by Henry Percy, who was the last Percy to hold the rectory and who died around 1322. To substantiate this proposal one can draw parallels with the rebuilding of some Lincolnshire chancels, like the contemporary (though much larger) example at Heckington (Wilson 1980). In these cases the 'founder' of the chantry and the newly rebuilt chancel is often accorded the honorific position north of the high altar. At Wharram the excavators found an elite burial with a chalice and patten in this position. Was this Henry himself?

The north-east chapel probably comes a little later in the development sequence, in the second half of the 14th century, though there is no structural evidence to separate it in date from the chancel.

The decline in Percy interest in the vill that seems to be indicated through the late 14th century culminated with the sale of the entire manor to the Hilton family in around 1403. There is no evidence, as yet, that the Hiltons actually resided here. On their arrival as lords, however, they indicated their commitment to the vill, in stone, just as the Percys had done 250 years earlier. Jim Thorn showed that they were responsible for rebuilding the upper stories of the tower, which can be seen from

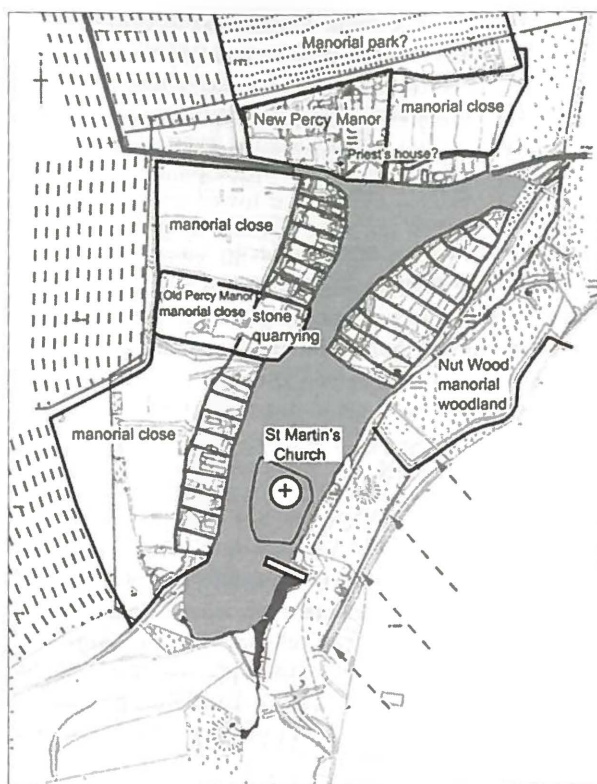
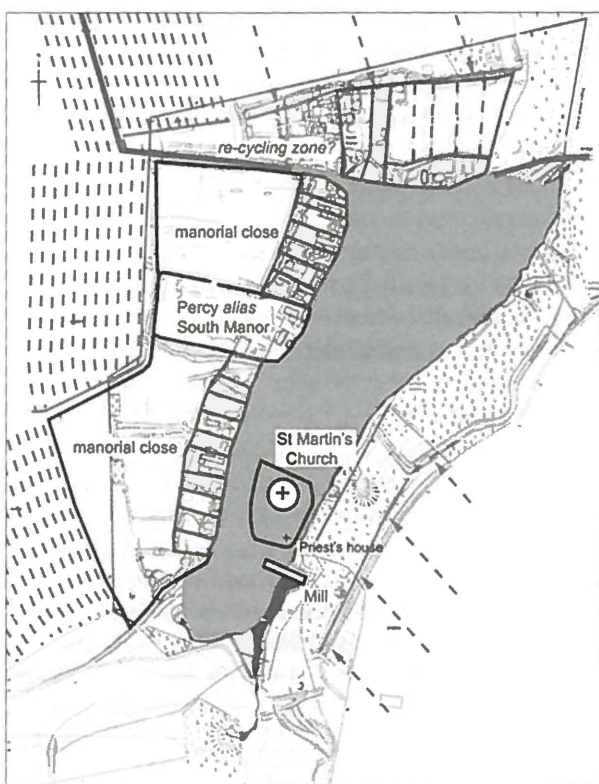


Figure 5 The South Manor and the late 12th-century village (left); (right) the North Manor and the mid 13th-century village (Wrathmell 2012, Fig. 97)

the North Manor. It seems that the Hiltons also sponsored new windows in the south aisle, and their attention to this specific area is worth a moment's reflection. By this date, no one lived to the south of the church at all: indeed the church was quite isolated at the southern end of the village. But its main entrance remained through the south wall. Part of the explanation for this continued attention to the south aisle might have been the presence there of the Percy monuments, illustrating the tradition of lordship in this place. Furthermore, as was explained in *Wharram XI*, when they constructed the south aisle two hundred years earlier, the Percys had aligned *themselves* with the village elite of the 11th and early 12th century (Mays, Harding and Heighway 2007, 284–287; Fig. 2). Sanctioned by this weight of tradition, then, it is perhaps not surprising that the new Hilton lords concentrated their patronage on this southern part of the church. With our attention to the role of resident lords, we might suggest that their sponsorship of building implies that the Hiltons had intended living here, even if their intention remained unfulfilled.

Reassessment of the church fabric identified a more extensive reconstruction in the 16th century than any that had occurred since the Percys arrived in the vill 400 years earlier (Fig. 4, Phase 7). In this phase, the building was reduced to a rectangular box, with a peculiar adjunct on the south side created out of the eastern bay of the south aisle. Whilst it is clear that this box once existed, and that there was a period when the church had no chancel, dating this phase is not precise. There is little dating evidence to bring to bear. A late 16th- or early 17th-century burial was made within the space once occupied by the chancel, but at a time

when that space had been thrown into the churchyard, and we can also make a rough estimate based on the likely regularity of internal re-decoration. Liturgically, however, it seems extremely likely that this sort of re-arrangement should post-date the Reformation. But even this reconstruction, which looks so much like an emergency measure and therefore lacks the sort of political and symbolic associations we have been considering in previous phases, can still be linked to the predilections of a new lord at Wharram. After 1536 the advowson was in the hands of the Crown, and it was most unlikely to be behind the reconstruction of the church, but the manor was sold in 1575 to the dean (and subsequent archbishop) of York, Matthew Hutton. Hutton did not acquire the Wharram estate for religious reasons: it was a business investment. But he was a committed Protestant, who whitewashed York Minster and equipped it with Geneva Bibles. Indeed, he was too low-church for many of his colleagues, and both the archdeacon and the then archbishop, Edwin Sandys, hounded him over the ruinous state of Wharram's church, though he probably did not rectify the defects until shortly after 1586. When he did so, however, his reconstructed building reflected his own views about the proper layout of a place of worship, with the communion table amongst the people, no structural chancel, and only the most discrete of rooms for the parish or the vestry. So even in these altered times, the lord of Wharram was still imposing his own agenda on the church fabric. By this time, Wharram had few permanent residents anyway, although more parishioners were scattered in surrounding vills, and there is no reason to think that Hutton was present at all frequently.

So, this review of the later medieval settlement indicates that it was not so much the figures described by documents as having legal authority who influenced the development of the vill and its buildings. Rather, we would say, it was usually the resident leaders of the community who were the most influential. In the late 10th and 11th century, it was not the tenants-in-chief who were responsible for the village layout and for the organisation of the churchyard, but the resident leaders of the vill. In Wharram's case, we are fortunate in being able to identify by them by name and perhaps to see their memorials and those of their successors in the churchyard. At this early stage the village morphology reflects the strength of the community here in the absence of a resident lord. A big change came with the arrival of the Percy family, shortly after 1166. Their impact on the church fabric, the South Manor, and the entire agricultural layout and economy of the vill was rapid and profound. But, we would argue, it was the fact that they lived, died and were buried at Wharram that was most significant, and not that they held a particular title of lordship. Indeed, it was not until 1254 that the Percys acquired the tenancy-in-chief; and, although this moment was probably marked by the recreation of the village around a new manor site, this does not seem to be matched by any dramatic developments in the church fabric. More significant for the church was their acquisition of the advowson at the same time, which eventually led to impressive gestures of lordly patronage, reflected in the church fabric – but not for several generations, and then only as a result of the disintegration of the Percy line. When the lordship was sold to the Hiltons at the start of the 15th century, we see the new lordly family also investing in the church fabric, just as the Percys had done. Did this betoken their intention of taking up residence, even if that never came to pass? After this initial enthusiasm shortly after 1400 there is a long period without investment in the church fabric, coinciding with a period when the lordly family was no longer resident. After the Reformation, when the manor had been reduced to a single tenanted farmhouse, we see another non-resident lord being at first reluctant to spend any money at all on the church, and subsequently undertaking a drastic and highly economical reconstruction. Yet, even so, Matthew Hutton very likely also saw his massive intervention in the church fabric as a gesture of instruction and leadership for the greatly diminished population of his new estate, just as his predecessors had done.

In initiating work at Wharram, Maurice Beresford and John Hurst set out principally to investigate the lives of the medieval peasantry. That theme is indeed further illuminated and elegantly enhanced in *Wharram XIII*, notably in the late medieval chapters 19–21 by Dyer and Wrathmell (Wrathmell 2012, 312–356). By contrast, our engagement in this final Wharram publication turns the focus back on the lords. In doing so, we have an important point to make about the relationship of documents to archaeology. We should like to claim

that this input represents a successful case of marrying the two, without one following the other slavishly. Ironically, too, the point we make serves to emphasise precisely the marginal, upland and peasant character of the village as initially founded in the late pre-Conquest period, and the profound difference between this early community and its mature 12th- to 14th-century form; a point which emphasises yet again that the remains we encounter at Wharram today did not spring fully formed at the outset, either in layout, spiritual provision or economic basis.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the organisers, notably Stuart Wrathmell and Professor Julian Richards, for the invitation to contribute to the celebratory conference marking the launch of *Wharram XIII*. The comments of two academic readers have sharpened our text in important ways, and our reproduction of one of the colour slides from the somewhat neglected Wharram Percy archive collection was prompted and enabled by Paul Stamper, whom we thank for his supportive enthusiasm. Many conversations with our friend, David Roffe, have spurred us to grapple with, and here to highlight, the relationship between historical documentation and archaeological features.

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