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COLKIRK SETTLEMENT PATTERN: A REAPPRAISAL AND A QUESTION

by Paul Rutledge

In 1990 I wrote in *Norfolk Archaeology*¹: 'Colkirk lies along a boulder clay ridge ... The site was comparatively inhospitable ... It is therefore not surprising that the settlement is a comparatively late one. The place-name is Scandinavian and Christian... No pre-Conquest archaeological finds are reported from Colkirk.' The revolution in field archaeology brought about by fieldwalking and controlled metal detection has since reached the parish. Metal detecting has, in Andrew Rogerson's words, 'in one field close to the present village revealed, as well as an Icenian gold stater, a substantial concentration of Roman finds near to a group of four pieces of sixth-century metalwork, along with Middle and Late Saxon material'.² This field (SMR 30867) lies north and north-west of the church and north of a suggested Roman road called Toft Way³, on which the church lies, which runs eastwards through the parish from the neighbourhood of the Roman crossroads settlement at Toftrees about 1km to the west. It includes the open-field furlong Drake North ('dragon hoard'), recorded on the parish map of 1592/1617, which alone previously hinted at archaeological largess here.⁴ Even more recently prehistoric, probably Iron Age, pottery has been collected by Dr Rogerson in the churchyard (SMR 7126) and he has located a concentration of Iron Age potsherds in the north-eastern sector of the parish (SMR 34298). Smaller areas (SMR 10863 and 30016) examined just north and west of the village nucleus and the enclosed central green have produced mainly Late Saxon and later material, though another just north-east of it has yielded a sceat of 710–15 and a Pagan Saxon pendant (SMR 30823). Occupation, even if shifting and intermittent, may be assumed at least on the interflaves between the small streams that run north out of the parish from the pre-Roman period onwards, though the church and nearby green became the main focus of settlement in the Late Saxon period.

These discoveries prompt another look at the place-name. For Colkirk, Ekwall gives the derivation Cola's or Koli's church and comments that the first element may be Old English Cola or Scandinavian Koli — personal names — and that the second element varies in early records between Old English *cirice* and Old Scandinavian *kirkiá*, both meaning church.⁵ The assumption made in 1990 was that the place-name and the settlement were late pre-Conquest, post-dating the conversion of the Danes to Christianity, and that the Old English variant was a borrowing by Danish speakers. In the light of these recent discoveries it now seems possible that the name was established in the Anglo-Saxon period and later adapted to Danish usage. Tom Williamson opens up further possibilities by referring to the name in the context of the possible Christianisation of a pagan shrine.⁶

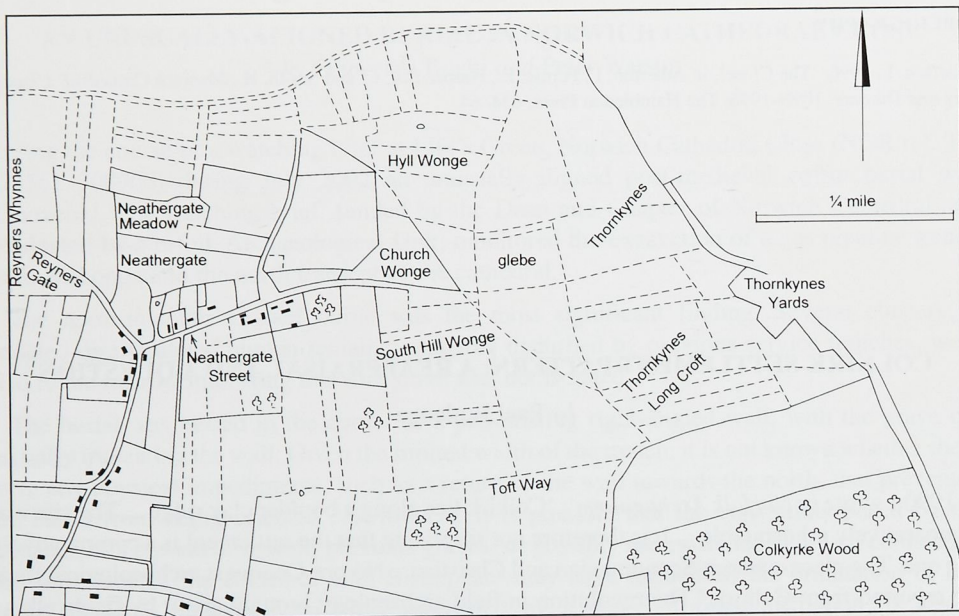


Fig. 1 The north-east sector of Colkirk parish, based on the map of 1592/1617

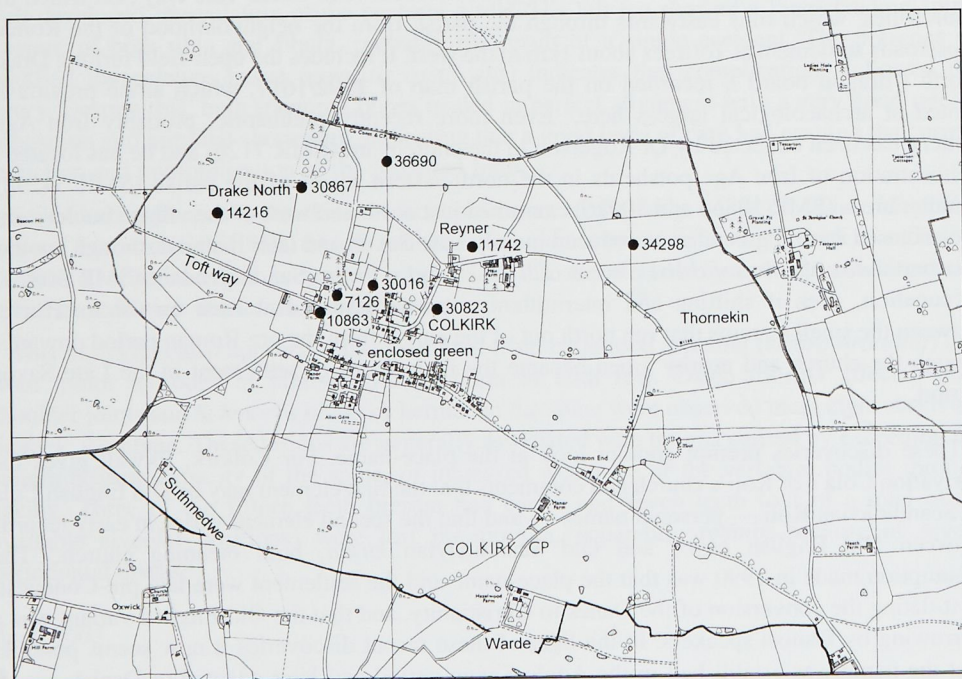


Fig. 2 Colkirk parish showing relevant SMR numbers and secondary settlements (Thornekin, Warde, Suthmedwe and Reyner)

Fieldwork undertaken so far indicates that early settlement and cultivation were concentrated on the lighter and better-drained soils of the hilltop and north-facing slopes of the northern part of the parish. This impression is reinforced by the distribution of the glebe lands of the parish church, by far the oldest identifiable holding. As befits a church which gave its name to the vill its endowment was quite large, forty acres at the time of Domesday, and it varied little thereafter.⁷ The parish map of 1592/1617 shows that of 21 pieces all but four lay north and west of the village centre, in and near the main area of known pre-Conquest activity.

A cluster of church-related field names near one of these four pieces — an open-field strip of glebe land in the north-eastern sector of the parish — raises a further question. This cluster occurs on a north-facing spur of land somewhat isolated from the rest of the parish to the west by marsh and meadow surrounding a small but vigorous northward-flowing stream which now feeds a reservoir. It was formerly bounded to the south by old woodland called Colkirk Wood. Gillian Beckett tells me that hedge-counting in 1970 identified sixteen species, including maple, holly, dogwood and buckthorn, in the eastern hedge of the road beside this wood, and the mangled remains of the western hedge seemed as rich. One suggestion relating to this sector must first regretfully be abandoned, however. This was made some years ago by the late O.K. Schram⁸ who found the word *Heccles* in a Colkirk context and marked it as a third, lost, Norfolk Eccles and the indicator of a very early church site. The word occurs in an undated but 13th-century grant by one Ralf de Thornekin of twelve pence rent at Colkirk to Walsingham Priory.⁹ The Thornekin family's parish-edge holding is easily located. Its centre is marked as *Thornkynes Yards* on the 1592/1617 map and is confirmed by a cluster of medieval potsherds, none later than the mid-15th century, and a fragment of larva quernstone at this spot (SMR 34298). The Walsingham cartulary also mentions Relf's *cultura* or ploughed land, probably the *Thornkynfeld* recorded in 1562.¹⁰ After granting the twelve pence rent the document continues (in Latin):

moreover, for this gift the said prior and convent have remitted to William son of Gilbert de Colekirke and his heirs twelve pence annual rent that Roger son of Alan de Heccles and his heirs were accustomed to pay to the said prior and convent from the tenement that they held of the said William son of Gilbert in Heccles to acquit the said twelve pence.

Now, 'in' (Latin *in*) rather than 'at' (Latin *ad* or *apud*) implies in the vill or manor of Eccles, rather than at a minor place in a parish elsewhere. Eccles-by-the-Sea is in fact adjacent to Hempstead-by-Eccles where the de Colkirk family held the manor, as well as that of Colkirk, in the previous century.¹¹ They still held a fee in Hempstead and a marsh in Eccles in 1229–30.¹² What seems to be happening, in fact, is that the priory is exchanging a distant rent, at Eccles, for one nearer at hand at Colkirk. Presumably William son of Gilbert in turn compensated Ralf de Thornekin but there was no reason to record this in the cartulary.

The cluster of church-related field-names in this sector include *Holly Wonge* (1528), glossed in the 17th century as *Holy Wonge*, recorded in a note in the 1577 field book as a variant of *Hyll Wonge* which is the name of an open-field furlong to the north-west of Thornkynes Yards. It is said to lie near *Chappellond*. Also, in 1577 a furlong called *Church Wonge* lay south of Hyll Wonge and abutted the strip of isolated glebe land already referred to.¹³ Fieldwalking kindly undertaken by Dr Rogerson produced no medieval pottery or other artefacts in the area covered by these names, however. A small, aceramic chapel site on a pilgrimage route to Walsingham is possible, but the probability is that a single strip of isolated glebe land and nearby land rent charged to Walsingham priory, and therefore described as chapel land, gave rise to these names. Herein, as with Heccles, lies a warning that place-name evidence should be seen in context with other data.

The *wong* element, at Colkirk found only here, seems to mark a stage in the expansion of cultivation away from the already-settled north-western core of the parish. The word derives from Old English *wang*, open field, or its Danish variant *vangr*¹⁴, and must imply pre- or early post-Conquest assarting, extended probably by the Thornekin family in the early medieval period right up to the parish boundary. A little more evidence is now available for two of the other parish-edge assarts that represent the high-water mark of the early medieval expansion of cultivation and settlement into the heavier, and more heavily wooded, eastern and southern parts of the parish (and which, like all the secondary settlements mentioned in this paper, lay beside small streams flowing out of the parish or at the edge of common or meadow land, or both). That at Southmeadow, documented in 1296 and later, gives its name to Bartholomew de Suthmedwe who appears in an undated but mid/late 13th-century Oxwick deed.¹⁵ That near Southwell Moor, previously only suspected because it showed up as a freehold house site in an area of copyhold tenure in 1577, is evidenced by John Warde of Southwelle whose land abutted Colkirk common in a deed of 1336. He is listed in the lay subsidy of 1327.¹⁶

Attention was drawn in 1990 to a small, presumably secondary, settlement along Nethergate Street. It lay on a low terrace below the steep northern slope of the hill on which the main settlement stands and just above the marsh and meadow mentioned above, which in 1577 included Nethergate Meadow and an alder-carr.¹⁷ The house-sites are now marked by their platforms (SMR 11742). In 1990 no part of this settlement could be traced before 1443, but now there is indirect evidence to take one house further back in date. This is the westernmost of the sites north of Nethergate Street, which still carried a house in 1592/1617. It stood on a large irregularly-shaped toft and it was described in 1568–9 as long since in the tenure of Thomas Reyner.¹⁸ The family gave their name to an adjacent lane, Reyners gate, and a nearby open-field furlong called Reyners Whynnes, both recorded in the 1577 field book. The ‘-gate’ element (meaning road or way) which is Middle English at latest, in conjunction with the Old French personal name Reyner, must take the holding back to the early medieval period.¹⁹ John and Hugh Reyner’s names appear in the 1327 subsidy list and four Reyners paid poll tax in 1379.²⁰ As late as 1577 five of this name, living at Little Massingham and Harpley, are listed as bondmen by blood and villeins regardant to the manor of Colkirk, a condition which made them liable to payment for permission to live outside the manor and which also takes the family well back into the feudal past at Colkirk.²¹ It is interesting to note that one son of this peasant family became a priest. John Reyner of Colkirk was presented to a third part of the benefice of Itteringham in 1346.²² The Thornekins, too, produced a cleric: William Thornekin of Colkirk was vicar of Ilketshall St Margaret, Suffolk, in 1327–33.²³

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THE NATIONAL MAPPING PROGRAMME IN NORFOLK, 2001–3

by Sarah Massey, Mark Brennand and Henrietta Clare

Introduction

(Fig. 1)

The National Mapping Programme is an English Heritage initiative aiming to map, record and collate all archaeological sites visible on aerial photographs (Bewley 2001). In 2001, with the mapping of areas such as Essex, north and west Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire nearing completion, Norfolk became the 23rd region in England to begin its mapping programme. The 32 projects currently under way have at present mapped *c.* 30% of the country. The Norfolk NMP Project is being undertaken at the Norfolk Air Photo Library at Gressenhall by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology staff. The project will consult photographs within collections at the