

# Rural Settlement Contraction in the East Riding of Yorkshire between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth Centuries

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## Abstract

Evidence of settlement contraction in the form of earthworks marking abandoned house sites is to be found throughout England, yet the timing and causes of village shrinkage have received only limited attention from historians. This article explores the extent of settlement contraction in the East Riding of Yorkshire between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries. Nationally this was a period when population stagnation coincided with urban expansion suggesting widespread rural depopulation. Using detailed documentary material relating to individual settlements, the possible causes of contraction are explored, and a link between landownership patterns and contraction is established.

**I**N the Introduction to *Deserted Medieval Villages*, first published in 1971, Beresford and Hurst drew attention to another type of settlement, the shrunken village. They wrote:

The 'shrunken' village is a phenomenon full of historical and archaeological interest. Its living portion resembles any normal English village, while its grass-covered houses and streets resemble the deserted sites. Its mysteries are open to the archaeologist without trespassing into cottage gardens and under cottage floors. *For the historian the variety of causes and periods which could produce a shrunken village present a major challenge to the intelligent use of documentary evidence.*<sup>1</sup>

Historians and archaeologists alike have been slow to accept this challenge. Housing developments are gradually eroding many shrunken village earthworks, yet the shrunken village continues to be one of the most common features of the English landscape. Indeed, as Christopher Taylor has commented 'It is probably safe to say that there is hardly a village in England which does not have at least one or two empty plots where houses once stood'.<sup>2</sup> In *Village and Farmstead*, Taylor provides examples of shrinkage at many different

periods but stresses that 'a lack of detailed documentation from medieval times ... usually prevents the accurate identification of many presumed examples of shrinkage of that period'.<sup>3</sup> This cannot be said of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, yet little research has focused on the shrunken village during this later period. One of the few exceptions is the work of Stuart Wrathmell, an archaeologist, on post-medieval depopulation in Northumberland, which demonstrated that the dating of certain deserted or shrunken village earthworks should be reconsidered.<sup>4</sup> Other studies, for example Mary Dobson's examination of south-east England, have drawn attention to general population decline in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but not to its impact on the physical size of individual settlements.<sup>5</sup>

In response to the challenge posed by Beresford and Hurst some twenty years ago, a study was made of post-medieval settlement contraction in the East Riding

<sup>1</sup> M W Beresford and J G Hurst, eds, *Deserted Medieval Villages*, 1971, p xviii (emphasis added).

<sup>2</sup> C Taylor, *Village and Farmstead*, 1983, paperback edn 1984, p 165.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, *Village and Farmstead*, p 166.

<sup>4</sup> S Wrathmell, 'Village Depopulation in the 17th and 18th Centuries: Examples from Northumberland', *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, 14, 1980, pp 113-26.

<sup>5</sup> M J Dobson, 'The last hiccup of the old regime: population stagnation and decline in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century south-east England', *Continuity and Change*, 4, 3, 1989, pp 395-428.

of Yorkshire.<sup>6</sup> This is an area where considerable work has been carried out by Beresford and others on medieval depopulation, and where documentary and cartographic evidence suggested that the century after the Restoration was likely to be a key period in the history of the shrunken village.

## I

Two sources provided the basis for a study of settlement contraction in the rural East Riding between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, a set of hearth tax returns for 1672, and returns made in response to an archiepiscopal visitation questionnaire of 1743.<sup>7</sup>

The hearth tax, levied between 1662 and 1689, was paid according to the number of hearths per household. Those who were already exempt from paying church and poor rates, and others who could obtain a certificate confirming that they lived in a house worth £1 or less a year, did not occupy land worth more than £1 a year, and did not possess goods, chattels, lands or tenements in excess of £10 in value, were also exempt. The tax was levied at two shillings per hearth, payable in half-yearly instalments. Under the original act, collection was to be made by the constables of each township, but in 1664 this responsibility was transferred to specifically appointed officials. From 1666-9, and again from 1674-84, the collection of the tax was farmed out, and from 1684 until its termination in 1689 it was collected through a special commission. Since assessments were only returned to the Exchequer during the periods when the tax was not farmed out or dealt with by the special commission, few

records survive except for these limited periods.<sup>8</sup>

For the East Riding, the earliest surviving assessment is for Michaelmas 1670, but the document is in poor condition. Of those East Riding assessments which are more or less complete, 1672 was chosen for this study as it appears to give the fullest and most legible lists of both tax payers and exempt householders.<sup>9</sup> Other hearth tax assessments from the early 1670s were substituted where necessary.

Although often used to estimate total population, the hearth tax is most reliable as a source for assessing the number of households in a settlement, since no multiplier is required. If anything, it is likely that the hearth tax under-represents the number of households, since the lists of those exempt from payment are sometimes incomplete.

The archiepiscopal visitation returns of 1743, available for the diocese of York, provide information on, amongst other things, the number of families in each parish.<sup>10</sup> Returns survive for most East Riding parishes. For a handful of larger parishes, the number of families is obviously an estimate, but in the majority of cases a precise figure is given. There were sufficient single-township parishes within the East Riding to enable comparison with the hearth tax figures to be made for individual settlements. In parishes which comprised two or more townships, changes in the number of households/families in the parish, rather than in each of the constituent townships had to be examined.

In order to use the above sources to examine physical changes in settlement size, it is necessary to consider whether

<sup>6</sup> See the author's unpublished PhD thesis 'Rural Settlement Contraction in the East Riding of Yorkshire c 1660-1760', Univ of Hull, 1990, on which this article is based.

<sup>7</sup> PRO, 179/205/504; S L Ollard and P C Walker, eds, *Archbishop Herring's Visitation Returns 1743*, i-v, Yorks Archaeol Soc Record Series (hereafter YASRS), 71, 72, 75, 77, 79, 1927-37.

<sup>8</sup> For further information on the hearth tax see C D Chandaman, *The English Public Revenue 1660-1688*, Oxford, 1975, pp 77-109; J D Purdy, *Yorkshire Hearth Tax Returns*, Centre for Regional and Local History, University of Hull, 1991, pp 1-18.

<sup>9</sup> PRO, E179/205/504.

<sup>10</sup> Ollard & Walker, *Herring's Visit*, i-v. The original returns are at the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York (hereafter BIHR), BpV.1743/Ret.

'household' and 'family' represent what Laslett has termed 'houseful', that is, 'all persons inhabiting the same set of premises'.<sup>11</sup>

A number of historians studying rural areas have assumed that each head of household mentioned in the hearth tax lists occupied a separate dwelling, in other words, a tax-payer assessed for one hearth lived in a one-hearthed cottage. Spufford, for example, in *Contrasting Communities*, maps the distribution of one-and two-hearthed houses in Cambridgeshire from the hearth tax returns.<sup>12</sup> In the East Riding other sources, for example rentals taken by 'house row', indicate that it was uncommon for more than one household to occupy a property. Where a property was in joint occupation, this was made clear in the hearth tax returns by bracketing the names of the householders.

The comments of the clergy in their responses to the visitation questionnaire in 1743 suggest that 'family' was generally interpreted to mean a person or group of people living under one roof. The incumbent at Cottingham near Hull noted that 'There are about 277 families in this parish, reckoning in every house inhabited a family; although in 20 of these houses there is but one inhabitant'.<sup>13</sup> Similarly at Burythorpe in Buckrose deanery the incumbent reckoned a family to every house inhabited although again he was careful to point out that some of these 'families' comprised only one or two people.<sup>14</sup>

This suggests that in the rural East Riding the visitation returns are a fairly reliable indicator of the number of occupied houses in a settlement. If, however, several families did share accommodation, the estimated number of houses in 1743

will be falsely inflated. The hearth tax returns probably give an under-estimate of number of households; thus where there is a decrease between 1672 and 1743 this may be even greater than the figures indicate. It can therefore be argued that 'household' as used in the hearth tax returns and 'family' as used in the visitation returns are comparable units and provide an acceptable basis on which to study settlement contraction. The validity of this argument can be tested by examining a settlement where cartographic evidence of shrinkage is also available.

## II

The East Riding village of Watton lies some eight miles north of Beverley, in the valley of the river Hull. The settlement is split into two sections by the Beverley-Driffield road. To the west of this road is the core of the modern village, comprising a single street built up with houses on both sides. On the eastern side of the main road, and some distance from it, stand the remnants of a Gilbertine priory (Watton Abbey, now a private house), the village church, and a handful of cottages. It is clear, especially when viewed from the air, that Watton was once a much larger village, for running north-south alongside the road to Driffield lie a series of house platforms – a classic example of a shrunken medieval village. Or is it? The documentary evidence tells a different story.

Three early maps of Watton survive: one dating from the mid-seventeenth century; a second drawn in 1707 but based on an earlier survey; and another dated 1761 (see Figure 1).<sup>15</sup>

The two earlier maps show cottages where the empty platforms now stand. By 1761 only one building remained in this

<sup>11</sup> P Laslett and R Wall, eds, *Household and Family in Past Time*, Cambridge, 1972, p 36.

<sup>12</sup> M Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, Cambridge, 1974, pp 39-45.

<sup>13</sup> Ollard & Walker, *Herring's Visit*, i, p 150.

<sup>14</sup> Ollard & Walker, *Herring's Visit*, i, p 106.

<sup>15</sup> The mid-seventeenth century map is in Humberside County Archive Office (hereafter HCAO), DDX/128/3. Both eighteenth-century maps are in private hands. The Beverley-Driffield road has been straightened in the present century.



TABLE I  
 Change in number of households/families in the rural East Riding between 1672 and 1743\*  
 (by wapentake)

Wapentake**	1672 (Households)	1743 (Families)	Change 1672/1743	% Decrease
Howdenshire	729	528	-201	27.57
Buckrose	1313	961	-352	26.81
Holderness - South	1004	757	-247	24.60
Holderness - Middle	1238	950	-288	23.26
Harthill - Bainton Beacon	838	655	-183	21.84
Harthill - Holme Beacon	1005	790	-215	21.39
Dickering	2058	1691	-367	17.83
Hullshire***	275	226	-49	17.82
Holderness - North	1099	920	-179	16.29
Ouse and Derwent	1066	905	-161	15.10
Harthill - Wilton Beacon	943	852	-91	9.65
Harthill - Hunsley Beacon	1360	1251	-109	8.01
All wapentakes	12,928	10,486	-2442	18.89

\* excluding the principal towns of Hull and Beverley. A handful of rural settlements, where 1743 figures were not available, were also excluded.

\*\* the wapentakes of Holderness and Harthill are subdivided into several divisions.

\*\*\* the townships surrounding Hull which (together with the town of Hull), formed the county of Hull or 'Hullshire' have been treated as a wapentake.

Sources: see note 7.

area, and the number of houses lining the main street had almost halved. Population figures for the village support the map evidence; in 1673 [sic] there were 71 households at Watton, but by 1743 only 34 families lived there.<sup>16</sup> The empty house sites in this particular settlement clearly represent a post-medieval shrinkage.

Using the hearth tax returns and visitation returns, an analysis of settlement contraction for the whole of the rural East Riding, subdivided by wapentake, was made. The results are given in Table I.

A more specific list was drawn up of those East Riding townships where the 1672 and 1743 figures were unambiguous - primarily where a parish comprised a single township, or where the visitation figures were subdivided into townships. Eighty-four townships met these criteria. The selection was made irrespective of

whether the 1743 figures were lower or higher than those for 1672. The total decrease in number of households/families between 1672 and 1743 for these 84 townships was 19.26 per cent, comparing favourably with the figure of 18.89 per cent for the whole riding. From this list individual settlements where contraction was particularly marked could be identified and more detailed case studies made.

For the study to be valid it was, of course, necessary to compare and contrast settlements which shrank with those which remained more or less stable in size. For this purpose one particular area of the East Riding, the Bainton Beacon division of Harthill wapentake, was examined. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the division comprised fourteen ecclesiastical parishes, containing twenty-five townships: Bainton (including the townships of Bainton and Neswick), North Dalton, Great Driffield (Great Driffield, Little Driffield and Elmswell), Holme on the Wolds, Hutton Cranswick (Hutton Cranswick, Rotsea and Sunderlandwick),

<sup>16</sup> PRO, E179/205/523; Ollard & Walker, *Herring's Visit*, iii, p 213.

The 1673 hearth tax figure was used since it gave a marginally higher number of householders than the 1672 list. In addition to the contraction of the village centre, there had been a reduction in the number of outlying farms in the township by the mid-eighteenth century.



FIGURE 2  
East Riding wapentakes

Kilwick (Kilwick, Beswick and Bracken), Kirkburn (Kirkburn, Eastburn, Southburn and Tibthorpe), Lockington (Lockington and Aike), Lund, Middleton on the Wolds, Scarborough, Skerne, Warter, and Watton. The Bainton Beacon division was partly chosen because of its situation at the heart of the East Riding, ensuring that influences upon its settlements were largely confined to that identifiable region (see Figure 2). Topographically the landscape is varied, ranging from low-lying settlements in the valley of the Hull river, for example Watton (see above) to Wolds settlements such as Warter, where the land rises above 600 feet. The demographic experience of the division, and incidence of settlement contraction there, mirrored

the pattern of the riding as a whole, thus making it an ideal unit for detailed examination.

### III

The preliminary part of the study focused on analysis of population levels in the Bainton Beacon division. Population estimates for *c* 1672 and 1743 were obtained from the hearth tax and visitation return figures, using a multiplier ( $\times 4.5$ ), and from an analysis of material from parish registers.<sup>17</sup> The results obtained by both

<sup>17</sup>Hearth tax returns for 1670, 1672 and 1673 (PRO, E179/205/504,514,523) were examined, and the highest figure for each township used. Parish registers for the Bainton Beacon division are all at HCAO, with the exception of the Warter registers, which are at BIHR. Bishops' transcripts (BIHR) were used to fill gaps in the registers wherever possible.

methods suggested a decrease in actual population of around 20 per cent in the Bainton Beacon division. A more detailed analysis of burial and baptism figures showed that, although the division experienced several periods of crisis mortality (notably 1679–81 and 1728–9, both periods of national crisis mortality), these did not have a long-term impact on population levels. Overall, during the seven decades from 1671–1740, 8581 baptisms were recorded, but only 7964 burials, indicating a natural growth in population. The decline in size of many settlements in the division was not a result of a natural population decline.

Having established that other causes of settlement contraction must be sought, a study of the landownership structure of the settlements within the Bainton Beacon division was then undertaken. The East Riding is fortunate in that it is one of only four areas where a Registry of Deeds was established in the early eighteenth century (in the case of the East Riding, the Registry commenced in 1708).<sup>18</sup> The first two volumes of the township index of the Registry (covering the period 1708–1756) were searched and the number of land transactions in each township in the Bainton Beacon division recorded, on the assumption that townships where a high level of activity was recorded had a number of freeholders, whereas those where few or no land transactions took place would probably be under the control of one or a small number of landowners. The material drawn from the Registry of Deeds was used in conjunction with a list of freeholders who voted in an election in 1742, and, in the absence of an earlier reliable source, with the land tax returns of the 1780s.<sup>19</sup> The townships were ranked according to

the number of transactions recorded in the Registry of Deeds.

When the material on landownership structure was presented alongside the percentage decline in size of individual settlements, a link between number of landowners and vulnerability to contraction was apparent (see Table 2). The majority of the settlements under the control of only one or a small number of landowners experienced substantial contraction, and in some cases had been reduced to one or two farms by the mid-eighteenth century. This suggested that settlement contraction could be a direct result of changes in land use or agricultural practice, such as emparking, enclosure, or an increase in size of farms, initiated by major landowners. A selection of East Riding case studies which demonstrate this point are given below.

#### IV

The creation of landscape parks is seen as one the principal causes of depopulation in the eighteenth century. In the East Riding emparking was a contributory factor in the shrinkage of several settlements and occasionally led to the destruction of a village. This was the case at Easthorpe, a small settlement which lay in Londesborough parish.

The site of Easthorpe lies south-east of Londesborough village, its eastern township boundary adjoining the Bainton Beacon division. The settlement, which comprised twelve households in 1672, and ten cottages and four farms in the early-eighteenth century, was depopulated when the park associated with Londesborough Hall was extended.<sup>20</sup>

There may have been a small deer park at Londesborough in the Middle Ages, but it was not until the mid-seventeenth cen-

<sup>18</sup> The Registry of Deeds, located at Beverley and now incorporated in HCAO, was concerned primarily with freehold land, although mortgages, wills and leases exceeding a term of twenty-one years could also be registered. Copyhold land was not dealt with by the Registry.

<sup>19</sup> *Yorks Poll Book*, 1742; HCAO QDE/1 (land tax returns).

<sup>20</sup> PRO, E179/205/504; D Neave, *Londesborough: History of an East Yorkshire Estate Village*, Londesborough, 1977, p. 6.

TABLE 2  
Landownership in the Bainton Beacon division linked with settlement contraction

Deeds Registry: number of transactions registered 1708-56	Township	Number of freeholders voting in 1742	Percentage land tax paid by 3 largest owners†	Reduction in number of households/ families between 1670-3 and 1743
300+	Great/Little Driffield	33	54.1	n/a (other sources indicate none)
101-300	Hutton Cranswick	15	57.8	4.5 (incl. Rotsea/Sunderlandwick)
	North Dalton	15	60.1	17.2% n/a#
	Lockington	8	77.3	see Kirkburn
	Tibthorpe	10	63.0	9.1%
	Holme on the Wolds	—*	69.4	10.7%
	Lund	13	69.7	see Kirkburn
	Southburn	0	75.0	n/a#
	Aike	2	84.5	25% 8.7%+
	Middleton	—*	85.1	25.6%
	Bainton	4	94.5	36.6% (incl. Southburn, Tibthorpe, and Eastburn)
21-100	Skerne	0	95.6	n/a#
	Kirkburn	3	96.7	n/a (deserted in 19th century)
	Kilnwick	2	99.8	settlement depopulated
	Elmswell	0	100	52.6%
	Rotsea	0	91.3	37.1%
	Scorborough	0	99.2	settlement depopulated
	Beswick	1	100	settlement depopulated
	Bracken	0	100	settlement depopulated
	Eastburn	0	100	68%+
	Neswick	1	100	settlement depopulated
1-20	Sunderlandwick	1	100	31.8%
	Warter	0	100	52.1%
	Watton	0	100	

\* confusion with other Yorkshire townships.

† in 1782 or 1787.

# for an explanation of the difficulties encountered with the parishes of Lockington (comprising Lockington and Aike) and Kilnwick see Neave 'Settlement Contraction' pp 54-57.

+ between 1672 and 1764.

Sources: HCAO Registry of Deeds; *Yorks Poll*, 1742; HCAO QDE/1 (land tax returns); PRO E.179/205/504, 514, 523; Ollard & Walker *Herring's Visit* i-iii.



tury, when the estate was in the hands of Richard Boyle, 1st Earl of Burlington, that work on the present park commenced. Extensions to this park were made throughout the second half of the seventeenth century and by 1704 it had encroached upon agricultural land belonging to Easthorpe township. Eventually the settlement of Easthorpe was destroyed. Additions said to have been made to Londesborough park in the year 1738 include Easthorpe Green and several houses and garths. A rental dated 1739 mentions two ruinous cottages and a further five cottages 'all pulled down' at Easthorpe.<sup>21</sup> Earthworks of the former village can still be seen within the park.

In the north-west corner of the riding the settlement of Scampston was partially destroyed in the early-eighteenth century when the grounds of Scampston Hall were laid out. A map of c 1730 suggests that some houses in the eastern half of the village had recently been cleared for this purpose, and by 1766 more cottages had gone in order to create the kitchen gardens of the hall.<sup>22</sup> Forty-nine households were recorded at Scampston in 1672, but by 1743 only around two dozen families lived there.<sup>23</sup>

Similar examples of villages having been swept away or reduced in size for emparking are to be found throughout England. Emparking was commonly associated with agrarian reorganization, and provided landowners with an opportunity to reduce the number of cottages to the minimum required to house key estate workers. Whilst many tenants benefited from the improved quality of housing provided in new estate villages, others for whom no such provision was made found themselves

forced to seek work and accommodation elsewhere.

In the medieval period enclosure of open-field land, and the subsequent conversion of the land to pasture, has been shown to be one of the major causes of village depopulation.<sup>24</sup> The importance of enclosure before c 1760 has been highlighted by Wordie who has estimated that some 75 per cent of land in England had been enclosed (in the legal sense) by this date. Furthermore, he estimates that 28 per cent of land was enclosed between 1600 and 1760.<sup>25</sup> One therefore needs to consider what effect enclosure had on settlement size between these dates. Several studies have been made of enclosure in the early-modern period, for example by Butlin, who has written on England as a whole, and Hodgson, whose work deals primarily with the county of Durham.<sup>26</sup> In these and similar studies the emphasis has, however, been on the chronology of enclosure and its impact on the *landscape*, rather than on the size of individual settlements. In some instances this is due to the lack of reliable source material. Reed, for example, found it difficult to assess the impact of enclosure upon the demography of individual townships in North Buckinghamshire in the period 1500-1750 owing to the lack of satisfactory population sources for the county before 1801.<sup>27</sup> As has been shown, this is not the case in the East Riding, where it can be demonstrated that a number of settlements whose open fields were enclosed between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries

<sup>21</sup> Chatsworth House Archives, Bolton Abbey MSS 293, 321 and bundle entitled 'Old Indentures, Distresses, Valuations and Agreements'.

<sup>22</sup> Hull University Library (hereafter HUL), DDSQ(3)/31/2,5.

<sup>23</sup> PRO, E179/205/504; Ollard & Walker, *Herring's Visit*, iii, p 122.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, M Beresford, *The Lost Villages of England*, 1954, especially chapter 6.

<sup>25</sup> J R Wordie 'The Chronology of English Enclosure 1500-1914', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser 36, 4, 1983, pp 488, 495.

<sup>26</sup> R A Butlin, 'The enclosure of open fields and extinction of common rights in England c.1600-1750: a review', in H S A Fox and R A Butlin, eds, *Change in the Countryside: Essays on Rural England 1500-1900*, 1979, pp 65-82; R I Hodgson, 'The progress of enclosure in County Durham, 1550-1870', in Fox & Butlin, *Change in the Countryside*, pp 83-102.

<sup>27</sup> M Reed, 'Enclosure in North Buckinghamshire, 1500-1750', *Ag Hist Rev*, 32, 2, 1984, p 143.

experienced a decline in both population and size.

At Birdsall, an estate village some five miles south-east of Malton, the number of households recorded in 1672 was seventy. The open fields of the township were enclosed by agreement in 1691-2. There are no population figures available for the first half of the eighteenth century, but by 1764 only thirty-seven families lived in Birdsall.<sup>28</sup> At Burnby, near Pocklington, twenty-nine households were recorded in 1672. A map and survey made in 1725 suggest the township comprised thirty-two farmhouses and cottages at this date. Six years later, in 1731, the open fields of Burnby were enclosed by private agreement. By 1743 only seventeen families lived in the township.<sup>29</sup> Both settlements were dominated by one landowner, and in the absence of firm evidence, it must be assumed that enclosure was part of a process in which their estates were reorganized so that they could be worked on a more profitable basis with larger farms and fewer tenants.

In the Bainton Beacon division of the East Riding, nine of the twenty-five townships were subject to non-Parliamentary enclosure before the mid-eighteenth century. In at least two cases this enclosure took place after the Restoration, and in both cases depopulation resulted.

At Eastburn, a now-deserted settlement within Kirkburn parish, the circumstances surrounding enclosure were perhaps more typical of the Middle Ages than of the seventeenth century, with a deliberate clearance of the village by a new landowner who considered it more profitable to graze sheep. The whole of Eastburn was acquired by John Heron of Beverley between 1664 and 1666, and soon after he converted the township to pasture. This eventually led to

a dispute concerning tithes of hay; it is from the evidence presented before the church courts in 1682 in connection with this dispute that the association between the depopulation of the township and the conversion of its lands to pasture is known.

According to one witness, the town or village of Eastburn '... did anciently consist of a great many messuages, cottages and dwelling houses ... the said messuages and other dwelling houses were about twelve years ago totally demolished and the town of Eastburn aforesaid quite depopulated by John Heron late of Beverley'. In a perhaps more realistic account, another witness described Eastburn as having anciently consisted of 'several messuages and cottages'. He, along with other witnesses, confirmed that Heron had pulled down most of the houses and converted the township to pasture.<sup>30</sup> Eastburn was not enclosed in the physical sense; following depopulation the township was initially used as a sheep walk 'not divided by fences or ditches', and later a rabbit warren was planted there.<sup>31</sup>

At Neswick, in Bainton parish, enclosure of the open fields was a more gradual process which took place during the first half of the eighteenth century. The principal estate at Neswick was acquired by Thomas Eyres in 1714, and evidence from the Registry of Deeds shows how he and his successor, Robert Grimston, bought out the other freeholders in the township. Associated with these purchases was the enclosure, in stages, of the open fields, and progressive clearance of the settlement.<sup>32</sup> In 1672 twenty-five households were recorded at Neswick. By 1764 there were only eight resident families; fifteen years later the township comprised only Neswick Hall and two farms.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> BIHR, CPH 5705.

<sup>29</sup> A Harris 'The Lost Village and the Landscape of the Yorkshire Wolds', *Ag Hist Rev*, 6, 2, 1958, p 98.

<sup>30</sup> Registry of Deeds, Q/312/792, R/38/88, R/135/320, R/142/335; HCAO, DDWR/1/54.

<sup>31</sup> PRO, E179/205/504; BIHR, BpV.1764/Ret.; HUL, DDCV/116/1.

<sup>28</sup> PRO, E179/205/504; B English *Yorkshire Enclosure Awards*, Hull, 1985, p 19; BIHR, BpV.1764/Ret.

<sup>29</sup> PRO, E179/205/504; HCAO, DDAN/239; Ollard & Walker, *Herring's Visit*, i, p 87.

Some eighteenth-century landowners apparently chose to amalgamate farm holdings into larger units irrespective of whether or not enclosure had taken place. An estate with few tenants required less management than one with many small tenants. Some initial outlay on improved farm buildings might be necessary when larger farms were created, but fewer tenants generally meant less expenditure on property repairs. The amalgamation of farms provided an opportunity to increase rents, if the economic conditions were favourable, and a larger tenant was more likely to be able to pay his rent during periods of agricultural depression. In 1749 an East Riding farmer complained in a letter to the *York Courant* that:

The gentlemen of estates, to prevent the trifling expense of repairing their cottage-houses, have suffered them in all a manner to drop down over the heads of the poor cottagers, throwing the little ground which belonged to them to the larger farms, at the old or perhaps an advanced rent, tho' there is now no house to maintain ...<sup>34</sup>

On the Dean and Chapter of York's estate at Cottam, near Driffild, the cost of property repairs was clearly a factor in the demolition of cottages. In 1706, when there were nine houses and cottages at Cottam, it was noted that the tenants were poor, and that their houses were costly to repair owing to the shortage of local timber. In 1719, when the lease of the estate came up for renewal, the Dean and Chapter authorized the lessee to demolish all but four of the houses. By 1743 only one family lived at Cottam.<sup>35</sup>

Engrossment of farm holdings commonly followed the purchase of smaller freeholds within a township by the principal owner. Instead of letting the farm to a new tenant, the landowner would add it to another holding, or split the land between a number of existing tenants. In

either case any property associated with the freehold became surplus. This occurred at Warter, in the Bainton Beacon division, where the Penningtons of Warter Hall gradually bought out other freeholders in the township in the first half of the eighteenth century. In 1725, for example, Sir Joseph Pennington purchased a farm belonging to a freeholder named Hurdsman. Instead of finding a tenant for the farm, Pennington divided the land amongst sixteen of his existing tenants and increased their rents accordingly.<sup>36</sup>

Warter provides a classic example of a settlement where estate records give some indication of the timing of contraction and the physical effect which this had on the village. In 1673 there were eighty-five households at Warter, but by 1743 only fifty-eight families lived in the township.<sup>37</sup> Records suggest that contraction was of a piecemeal nature, with cottages demolished when they fell into a poor state of repair, or when a tenant died or moved away. Rentals taken by 'house row' show how the empty plots were usually rented by the tenant of the adjoining house. In 1715, for example, Robert Turner's house and garth adjoined that of Richard Parkins, which in turn adjoined that of John Sherwood. By 1736 William Turner had succeeded Robert Turner as tenant. Parkins and Sherwood no longer appeared in the rental, and their cottages were no longer listed, but 'Sherwoods and Parkins garths' had been acquired by Turner.<sup>38</sup>

A similar policy of gradually reducing the number of houses available to tenants was pursued by Sir Marmaduke Constable on his estate at Everingham, twelve miles south-east of York, again in the first half of the eighteenth century. In 1730 Sir Marmaduke instructed his steward 'I would rather have my cottages diminished, than increased, though I am now in Everingham

<sup>34</sup> *York Courant*, 21 Feb 1749.

<sup>35</sup> K J Allison, ed, *Victoria County History Yorks E Riding*, vol 2, 1974, p 267; Ollard & Walker, *Herring's Visit*, i, p 161.

<sup>36</sup> Registry of Deeds, M/111/169; HUL, DDWA/6/23.

<sup>37</sup> PRO, E179/205/523; Ollard & Walker, *Herring's Visit*, iii, p 212.

<sup>38</sup> HUL, DDWA/14/4,9.

at or about the number of houses I would be at', and some ten years later he noted that 'Few houses and good is what I propose in Everingham'.<sup>39</sup> Everingham comprised fifty-seven households in 1672, but by 1743 there were only twenty-seven families in the parish.<sup>40</sup>

At both Warter and Everingham, contraction took place over several decades; many of the farmhouses and cottages were demolished only after a tenant had left or died. In other cases, for example following the demolition of cottages at Eastburn when the township was converted to pasture, tenants were clearly forced to leave. Where did these people, and the younger people for whom cottages were no longer available in many rural settlements, go? Limited evidence which exists suggests that some people moved into larger, more open settlements, and that many others went to work in the rapidly expanding towns.<sup>41</sup> On this point, the population figures speak for themselves. Recent research suggests that England experienced a prolonged phase of population stagnation commencing around the middle of the seventeenth century and lasting well into the eighteenth century.<sup>42</sup> This period of stagnation coincided with a time of significant urban growth. The population of London alone increased from around 400,000 in 1650 to 675,000 in 1750, an expansion which took place in spite of high levels of urban mortality.<sup>43</sup> In the cramped and insanitary living conditions of the poor, which were to be found in most of the larger towns, epidemics had a more widespread and severe effect than in the countryside. The consequence was that if population levels

were to be maintained, let alone increased, substantial migration into the towns from rural areas was essential. The extent to which this migration was forced upon the rural work force is difficult to assess, but in the case of the rural East Riding evidence suggests that movement was not always through choice.

## V

In the East Riding of Yorkshire, documentary evidence demonstrates that many settlements decreased in size between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, and that a number of 'shrunk village' earthworks date from this period of contraction. Although the population of many townships increased again in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, this was largely due to the establishment of post-enclosure farmsteads away from the village centres, with their large households of farm servants living-in, rather than the physical growth of nucleated settlements. In some cases the timing and causes of post-medieval settlement contraction are well-documented; in others the reasons for depopulation remain less clear. Ironically, at Watton, where good cartographic evidence is available, the causes of depopulation can only be surmised. But, as in the case of so many other contracting settlements, the core of the village was in the hands of a single landowner, emphasizing the apparent link between settlement contraction and the nature of landholding.

Comparative work on two east Midlands counties shows for this region a pattern similar to that found in the East Riding, with many settlements supporting fewer households in the mid-eighteenth century than in the mid-seventeenth century. Using hearth tax returns (1665) and visitation returns (1723) for four south Lincolnshire wapentakes (62 parishes), an overall drop of households/families of 16 per cent between these dates was found. It

<sup>39</sup> P Roebuck, ed, *Constable of Everingham Estate Correspondence 1726-43*, YASRS, 136, 1976, pp 28, 128.

<sup>40</sup> PRO E179/205/504; Ollard & Walker, *Herring's Visit*, i, p 189.

<sup>41</sup> See Neave 'Settlement Contraction', chapter 11.

<sup>42</sup> E A Wrigley and R S Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction*, paperback edn with new introduction, Cambridge, 1989, esp. pp 208-9.

<sup>43</sup> E A Wrigley 'A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy 1650-1750', *Past & Pres*, 37, 1967, p 44.

is possible the decrease would have been higher had figures closer to the mid-eighteenth century been available.<sup>44</sup> A similar exercise was carried out using figures available for ninety-five Nottinghamshire parishes. Here the decrease between households in 1664 (hearth tax) and families in 1743 (visitation returns) was 18.6 per cent, a result remarkably close to that obtained for the East Riding.<sup>45</sup> This is particularly surprising in the light of the contradictory figures presented by Chambers in *The Vale of Trent 1670-1800*.<sup>46</sup>

Demographic material from elsewhere suggests that settlement contraction between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries was not confined to the eastern counties of England. Figures available for Gloucestershire, for example, show that 45 per cent of villages supported fewer households in 1712 than in 1650.<sup>47</sup> Of twenty-seven rural Bedfordshire parishes studied by Tranter seventeen (63 per cent) experienced a fall in population between 1671 and 1720.<sup>48</sup> And in a study of eight rural parishes in West Yorkshire, the total number of households decreased by 14 per cent between 1664 and 1743.<sup>49</sup> Similar studies to the one outlined above, especially in areas which contrast with the East Riding, would help evaluate the importance of the post-Restoration period in the history of the shrunken settlement.

<sup>44</sup> PRO, E/179/140/791 (typescript copy in Lincolnshire Archives Office), R E G Cole, ed, *Speculum Dioeceseos Lincolnienensis* pt 1, Lincs Record Soc, 4, 1913.

<sup>45</sup> W F Webster, ed, *Nottinghamshire Hearth Tax 1664:1674*, Thoroton Soc Record Ser, 37, 1988, pp xvi-xvii; Ollard & Walker *Herring's Visit*, iv.

<sup>46</sup> Using 1674 hearth tax returns and 1743 visitation returns for sixty-two Nottinghamshire 'agricultural' villages Chambers recorded a 12.7 per cent increase in population, and for forty 'industrialized villages' a 47.8 per cent increase in population. The discrepancy between Chambers's figures and those given here can partly be explained by the inadequacy of the 1674 Nottinghamshire hearth tax which is not consistent in recording exempt households. If the incomplete 1674 returns are substituted for the 1664 returns for the ninety-five parishes studied here, a modest rise of 1.5 per cent in population by 1743 is recorded, but this goes little way towards accounting for Chambers's substantial rises. Unfortunately it is

impossible to determine precisely which villages Chambers studied, but it would appear that his 102 settlements included most of the ninety-five used here.

<sup>47</sup> A Percival, 'Gloucestershire Village Populations', *Local Population Studies*, 8, 1972, Appendix.

<sup>48</sup> N L Tranter, 'Demographic Change in Bedfordshire from 1670-1800', unpublished PhD thesis, Univ of Nottingham, 1966, pp 105-6.

<sup>49</sup> M F Pickles, 'Agrarian Society and Wealth in Mid-Wharfedale 1664-1743', *Yorks Arch Jnl*, 53, 1981, pp 72-3.