

The Parracombe Survey - Terry Green

(Newsletter Summer 2001)

THE PARRACOMBE SURVEY: More than any of our plans, the field-boundary survey at Parracombe has been brought to a halt by the Foot & Mouth crisis. When things are back to normal it will go ahead. Meanwhile, examining and recording field-boundaries is only part of a developing Parracombe project, an important element of which will be a survey of the vernacular buildings (an accurate measured survey can enable us to sort out the phases of development of a building and to determine its earliest form). At the same time we plan to conduct test-pitting in the vicinity of the houses. This will involve digging out a number of small (1metre x 1metre) pits and extracting any artifacts which may provide dating. This all requires the permission of the owners, of course, especially when we want to dig holes in their gardens!

There are 30+ buildings to be surveyed, so assistance is required. We plan to begin the survey this September.

We hope to get a small number of students from Exeter University to assist, but we also want volunteers from NDAS. This project has the potential to become very important for the archaeology of North Devon, so clearly we want members to get involved. If you would like to join in building survey and test-pitting this September, please ring Colin Humphreys on (01271) 882152 or me (Terry Green) on (01271) 866662.

Terry Green, Chairman.

Parracombe Project: First Report - Terry Green

(Newsletter Summer 2002)

I. Building Survey and Test-Pitting:

As promised in the Summer 2001 Newsletter, the Parracombe Project got under way in September. It began with the limited aim of surveying buildings and testpitting at Bodley, a settlement focus to the north-west of the village centre (Fig.1). Here there appear to be three original farms, East, Middle and West Bodley plus Higher Bodley which is a later addition. In the first two weeks of September, the buildings at East Bodley were surveyed and recorded. At the same time four test-pits were opened within the curtilage.

The house at East Bodley turned out to be complicated. The building bears two datestones, one (1754/5) on a cross-wing extension at the east end and the other (1638) on a porch attached to the main wing. It is necessary to be cautious about date-stones, since it is not clear that they actually record the date of uilding. In this case the 1754/5

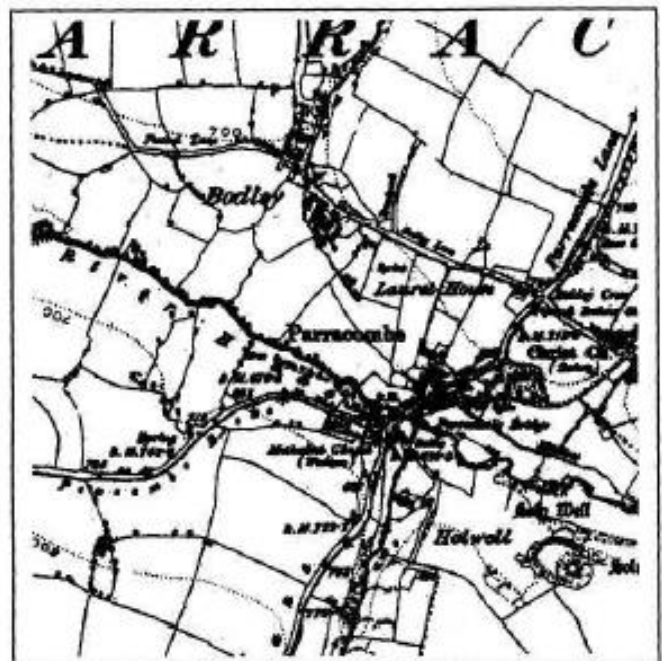


Fig.1: Extract from the First Edition OS 6" map of c. 1890 showing the relationship of Bodley to the centre of the village of Parracombe

stone claims to mark the building of the house, but evidently refers only to the cross-wing. The porch joins the main wing with a straight joint and presumably post-dates it, but whether it was actually built in 1638 is open to debate. The roof structure of the main wing is all 17th century, which is consistent with the porch date, but the building is not of one phase. One internal wall is exceptionally thick and the suspicion is that it belongs to an earlier, possibly pre-16th century phase.

The first test-pit (TP1 ~ see fig.2 below) was dug within a walled area to the west of the building. In the wall on the north side of the area are signs that a building or perhaps just a wall has been removed, and when we opened up this first 1m x 2m test-pit, we found the lower courses of a wall running east-west and corresponding to the scar visible in the standing masonry. To the east of this was a cobbled surface, while to the west a large quantity of rubble, pottery sherds, glass and animal bone filled the void against the (inner) face of the wall and sat straight on the natural. The date-range of this material was (probably) 17th to 19th century. All of it was apparently redeposited and none was earlier than the apparent date of the house. Interestingly it included, just below the turf, two Chinese coins! These probably owe their presence to the Blackmores who had occupied the house until the early 20th century and had included missionaries to China amongst their numbers.

The second test-pit (TP2) was dug in the garden to the west of the house and produced a dozen early modern sherds including a piece of 18th century thick, black bottle glass.

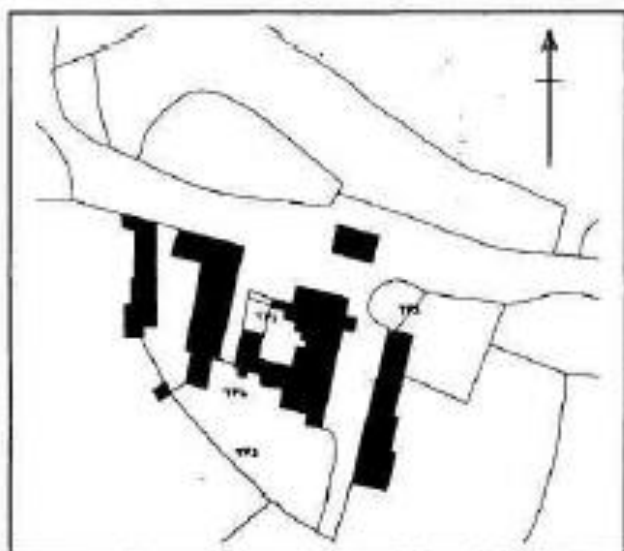


Fig.2: The plan of the buildings at East and Middle Bodley as shown on the tithe map of 1840. Location of test-pits TP1 – TP4. (Not to scale)

The third pit (TP3), dug in the area to the south which, on the 1840 tithe map, is shown as a stock yard, produced exclusively 20th century material. These pits were a disappointment after TP1. At a slightly later date, a fourth pit (TP4) was dug in another part of the former yard and this time produced a large quantity of pottery fragments with a date range similar to that found in TP1. This was also redeposited material dumped as make-up over the surface of the former stock-yard. The worn cobbles of the yard were revealed at the bottom lying immediately above natural.

All pits were dug down to natural and all produced unstratified post-medieval material. There was no recognisably medieval pottery. Events took over and so far we have not progressed to Middle and West Bodley. We have, however, surveyed two further buildings, one at Holworthy Farm and the other at

Walner Farm. The latter is a complex of buildings lying in an out-of-the-way location between West Middleton and Heale. The peculiarly elongated house was surveyed over two days in October with plans of ground and first floors and an elevation drawing of the south face of the building.

The house has smoke-blackened thatch in part of its roof and initial analysis makes it clear that there have been numerous phases of building and suggests that there may be a genuine longhouse at the core of it all. Test-pitting has yet to be done here. Holworthy Farm was also surveyed in October, but see below for further details.

II. Field Boundary Survey:

With the FMD crisis (hopefully) out of the way, the field boundary survey was able to proceed. East Middleton Farm, taken on as a test-bed for the recording procedures, had been held up since February and was finally completed just before Christmas. The data have now all been fed into a data-base, and it is hoped that in future the information will contribute towards a digital phased landscape map. One preliminary finding is encouraging.

In the Autumn/Winter Newsletter 2001, page 20, Figure 4, a long curving boundary was singled out as early and significant. Interrogation of the data-base, highlights the remaining portion of this boundary to the west of Pound Lane as of considerable bulk and unique in supporting both ancient oak and holly. (The previous reference to it as slight and overgrown was a mistake - mea culpa!) Now that methods have been tested, the survey should proceed to cover, ultimately, all of the parish. It's a long process and needs more help!

III. Holworthy Farm:

During last year, Dr Ralph Fyffe from Exeter University had been in search of suitable sites on Exmoor for taking core samples of peat for palaeoenvironmental analysis. Among others he found a suitable location below Chapman Barrows on the land of Holworthy Farm.

Anyone who has read through *The Field Archaeology of Exmoor* (Riley and Wilson-North, 2001), will have found on pages 71 and 72 a landscape study of Higher Holworthy and South Common, Parracombe. Figure 3.22 is an aerial photograph of the ploughed out remains of a hillslope enclosure, which lies within the land of Holworthy Farm and close to the site where Ralph Fyffe has taken his core samples. With the permission of Phil and Julie Rawle and with the agreement of Rob Wilson-North, the plan for this year (2002) is to commission a geophysical survey of the hillslope enclosure and to follow this up with a focused excavation. Just to the south of the site is a field which, we are assured, will be available for field-walking during this year - probably in early June. The opportunity exists, therefore, to relate together the findings from at least four different investigative approaches. In addition, it should then be possible to place any results in a wider landscape context, because Holworthy Farm, reaching west from the moorland edge just below Chapman Barrows, includes on its land, the fossilised remains of a medieval field-system, a deserted farmstead (Higher Holworthy) and further earthworks beside the main farmhouse. Furthermore, to the west the land butts up against the boundary of what appears to be an early (infield) enclosure related to the medieval core settlement of Church Town.

Holworthy Farm presents the opportunity to carry out every type of survey, and to make a substantial contribution to the ultimate goal of the Parracombe Project, a complete parish survey. We hope that many members will want to become involved (phone Colin: 01271 882152 or fill in the volunteer form on page 19-20).

The excavation at Higher Holworthy is a highly desirable goal, but at present we still need an experienced excavator to take it on as a commitment.

Terry Green.

Getting back to the NDAS Parracombe Project - Terry Green

(Newsletter No 11 2005)



Part of the curving boundary of St Petrock's churchyard: an early sacred enclosure or "llan"?

The Holworthy excavation came out of the NDAS Parracombe Project which we set up in 2001. The aim was to conduct an archaeological/historical survey of this interesting parish as a contribution to the understanding of the evolution of the North Devon Landscape. The project was to include documentary history, a survey of the buildings of the parish, a field-boundary survey, field-walking where and whenever possible, test-pitting and excavation when required. The ultimate model for the project was the Shapwick Project conducted in Somerset by Mick Aston and Chris Gerrard. While that project was backed by University departments, and could set far more ambitious goals than a local society ever could, it seemed possible that with enough voluntary assistance we might ultimately arrive at an understanding of the evolution of Parracombe, an upland parish. Inevitably what can be accomplished is determined by the number of people who are willing to become involved, and we are at present only a small part of the way towards achieving the goal which we set ourselves. The most successful part of the project – apart from the Holworthy excavation – has been the field boundary survey which has so far taken in East and West Middleton (though this farm has yet to be completed) and Holworthy Farm. At Holworthy Farm we have

also done field-walking and have completed a measured survey of the house. In fact it was when we came to Holworthy that we became distracted! We were encouraged to take a look at the slight earthwork on the hillside above the farm and the rest, as they say, is history!

The Holworthy Farm excavation, conducted between 2002 and 2005, has been a signal achievement, but now that we are wrapping it up, we can get back to plan A. The first thing to do in the field is to complete the field-boundary survey of West Middleton and move on. In fact we have set dates to continue the survey (see Dates for your Diary) and if you are able to volunteer your assistance, please get in touch with June Aiken on 01598 763316.

The purpose of such a survey is to provide data with which to begin to peel away the layers of the historic landscape. Through previous survey work we have begun to establish that certain physical characteristics of the existing hedge-banks can help to pinpoint some of the oldest boundaries. Comparing these with the historic maps, we can isolate tell-tale characteristics and recognise succeeding episodes of enclosure. At Holworthy Farm, for example, there is a boundary on the hillside below the Bronze Age enclosure, which is recognisably a late, probably 18th century construction. In the 1840 tithe award the steep ground below this boundary is called Holy Pound, but it seems very probable that before the boundary was made this name, with its clear reference to a pound or enclosure, was attached to the whole outfield area in which the Bronze Age settlement is situated. This suggests that the enclosure was visible in historic times.

Currently a number of NDAS members are offering their voluntary assistance with the Victoria County History project recently initiated on Exmoor. The purpose of the project is to combine documentary and field evidence to produce parish histories of a number of South Exmoor parishes. Parracombe is not included, but what we are trying to do there parallels the VCH project. With this in mind, Rob Wilson-North (ENPA archaeologist) has recently suggested the following "Parracombe Agenda": It is suggested that we should:-

- Consider the Bronze Age evidence in the light of Holworthy, looking at other enclosures, Martinhoe Common, South Common, the flint scatters, etc;
- Draw together existing information on field monuments such as Chapman Barrows, Voley Castle, Holwell Castle, etc.;
- Examine the field-systems, their chronology and development;
- Consider the origin of the settlements, both the principal nuclei and the farmsteads (Parracombe Churchtown with the church of St Petrock, Bodley, Middleton, Rowley, Holworthy, Holwell, etc.);
- Develop models to trace settlement evolution;
- Within this framework, consider recent influences such as the railway, road patterns, changes in farming, the World Wars, modern communications, etc.

The questions raised should be considered in the light of Dr Martin Gillard's PhD thesis on the Exmoor landscape, Dr Judith Cannell's thesis on the archaeology of Exmoor woodland, the Holworthy dig, building records, the work going on under the VCH umbrella.

This all amounts to a thorough investigation of the landscape with opportunities for all the main techniques such as fieldwalking, geophysical survey, earthwork survey, standing building recording, documentary research, oral history. A number of elements here tie in with the parish history being developed by the Parracombe Historical and Archaeological Society.

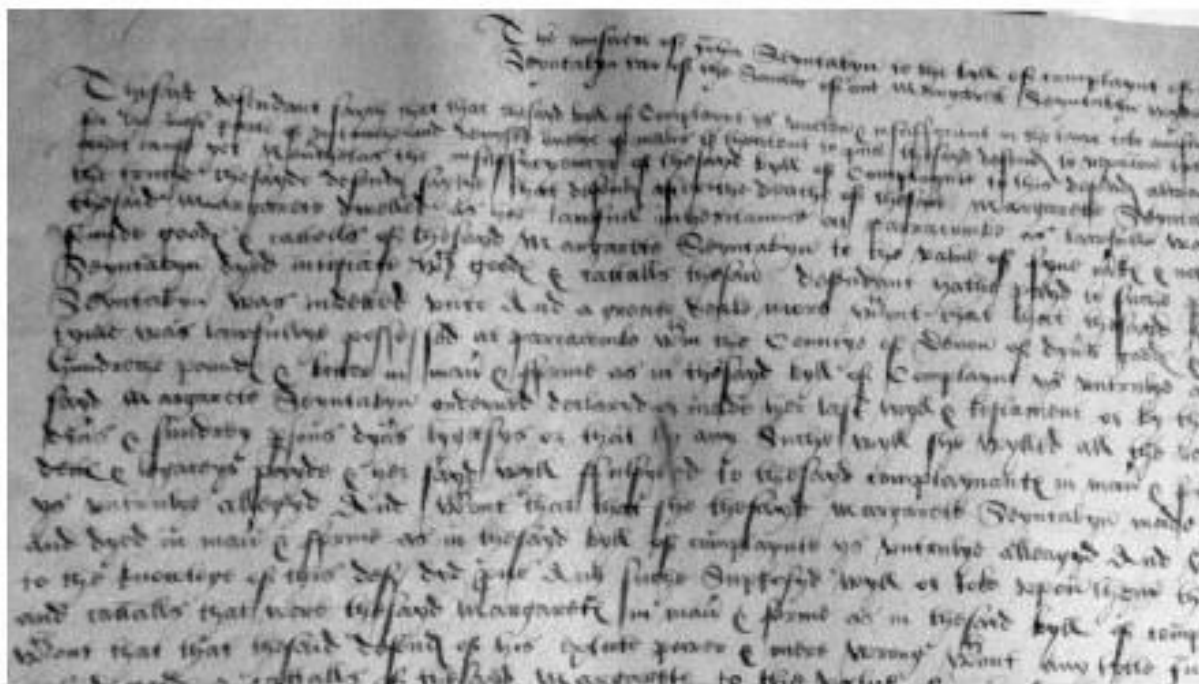
A very important contribution to the Parracombe Project was recently made by Mary Houldsworth and Jim Knights, when they completed a geophysical survey of Holwell Castle.

And currently Margaret Reed is doing a documentary sweep in the record offices, a necessary and important step towards providing a framework of recorded history for the archaeological evidence.

From evidence gathered in these ways, we can piece together a parish history which goes beyond the written records. Ultimately and ideally one would like to be able to trace a continuous development from the first arrival of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers in the area, through the prehistoric period to the arrival of Christianity, to medieval settlement, to the arrival and departure of the railway and beyond up to the present day. In there somewhere there will be a place for the Holworthy Farm settlement, and hopefully its antecedents and successors.

Documenting Parracombe -Margaret Reed

(Newsletter No 12 2006)



Part of a 16th century document relating to a dispute at Parracombe (National Archive: Photo Susan Moore)

As part of the NDAS Parracombe Project, I was invited to ‘do a documentary sweep in local record offices...towards providing a framework of recorded history for Parracombe’. On re-joining the society after an absence of some years I had thought that humble pot washing was likely to be my main contribution, in preference to kneeling in muddy holes. Instead I was offered the exciting task of discovering any records that might assist in tracing the evolution of the parish of Parracombe, and in particular of the landscape history. The important archaeological fieldwork carried out by the Society in the last five years, combined with the enthusiasm and dedication of the members of the Parracombe Archaeology & History Society in researching and publishing Parracombe and the Heddon Valley – an

Unfinished History, makes my task much easier than starting with a blank canvas. I hope that I can provide some answers to the queries, fill in some of the gaps and maybe add a few extra pieces of the puzzle along the way.

May I at this point make a plea for any documents or records relevant to Parracombe's past that may be in private hands? I have already been given access to some such papers, and would welcome more if available. So, what information have I located so far in this quest for relevant documents? Domesday is of course the most likely start, failing a Saxon charter or two that have, so far, not materialised.

From the time of the Norman Conquest onwards life in this upland Devon parish can be traced through official records running like a thread through a thousand years, from a time when the parish as such did not exist and much of it was uncultivated heath and moor. The survey of 1086 records three manors or estates, each previously owned by Saxons: Parracombe, Middleton and Rowley. These later grouped together to form the parish as we know it today.

Fourteenth century tax returns based on goods or land indicate how the population gradually increased in numbers and wealth, thus creating the need to bring more land under cultivation. Through Norman, Plantagenet, Tudor and Stuart reigns a number of surveys record names and other details of the inhabitants and the development of the farms. Sheep, which provided the bulk of the population with a living, figured largely in the economy of the parish for centuries.

There has been a church in Parracombe for at least eight hundred years, maybe more. The patrons of the living and the rectors they appointed during that time exerted significant influence upon the lives of the inhabitants, especially in the matter of tithes.

In the sixteenth century the records show how Parracombe prepared for the possible arrival of the Spanish. Each male was named and trained with longbow, musket or pike if fit to do so, or if unfit, but with means, was charged with providing the equipment. In the event, no invasion occurred. Other surveys tell us how many fire hearths there were in 1674, how the land was used and what taxes were raised. Wills provide us with an insight into the wealth of some of the local gentry and which properties they owned.

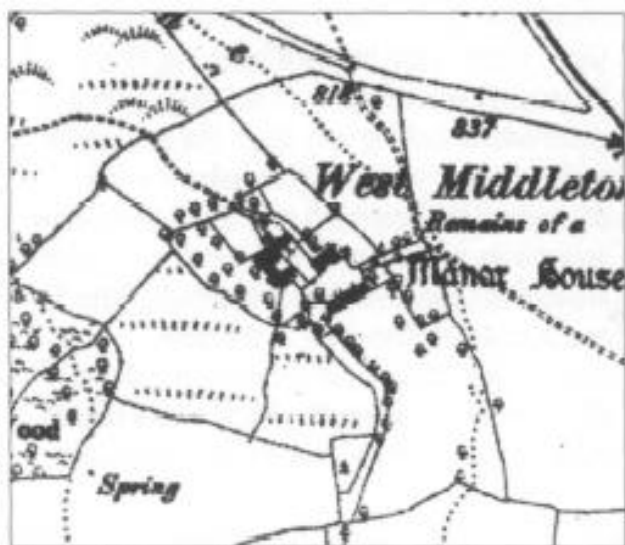
In the nineteenth century we have the tithe maps and awards and the census returns. In the twentieth century, perhaps the biggest changes of all in lifestyles occurred. Communications have evolved over the years, from track-ways to turnpikes, railways and new roads suited to modern traffic. Living memory is invaluable in this respect, much of it found in the works of Arthur Smyth, J. F. Chanter, local newspapers and An Unfinished History. The list of sources is endless and varied; all are important in adding to the history of Parracombe and its evolution into the twenty-first century and there is so much still to be discovered. I hope to be equal to the challenge.

Field Boundary Survey at West Middleton, Parracombe - Terry Green

As part of the Parracombe Project, NDAS members have during the last eighteen months or so - with permission of the owners John and Norma Smyth - surveyed the field boundaries of West Middleton Farm. As reported previously, this involves going out into the field armed with a map, several ranging-poles, tape-measures, record sheets, clipboards and pencils (plus a picnic lunch and preferably in fine weather) to record the dimensions and details of the existing field boundaries. In Parracombe these are mostly Devon hedge-banks, solid earth banks, often stone faced and with or without a hedgerow on top. The aim of the

exercise is to ascertain whether a chronology of boundary formation can be achieved by comparing the dimensions and morphology of these features which are the most widespread archaeological monuments in the landscape.

Boundaries represent the definition, protection and control of land. The process of enclosure continued over many centuries culminating in the Parliamentary Inclosures of the 18th and 19th centuries. Boundaries of this period are usually recognised by their straight lines and right-angles and in this area usually represent the enclosure of hitherto open commons or moorland (often called 'Downs' in this area). When we measure these boundaries we find them to be modest in size, normally neatly faced with regularly pitched stone with a hedge - if there is one - of a single species on top. Proceeding from these late boundaries towards the settlement core, we find more irregular boundaries of more massive proportions with mixed hedges. These represent earlier periods of enclosure. On a map it is often possible to work out a development sequence where, for example, boundaries clearly radiate from a long curving boundary close to the settlement core. When we come close to the settlement we may find ourselves in an area of small irregular fields with massive boundaries which seem out of proportion to the size of the enclosed area. Here we are among the oldest enclosures with the oldest boundaries.



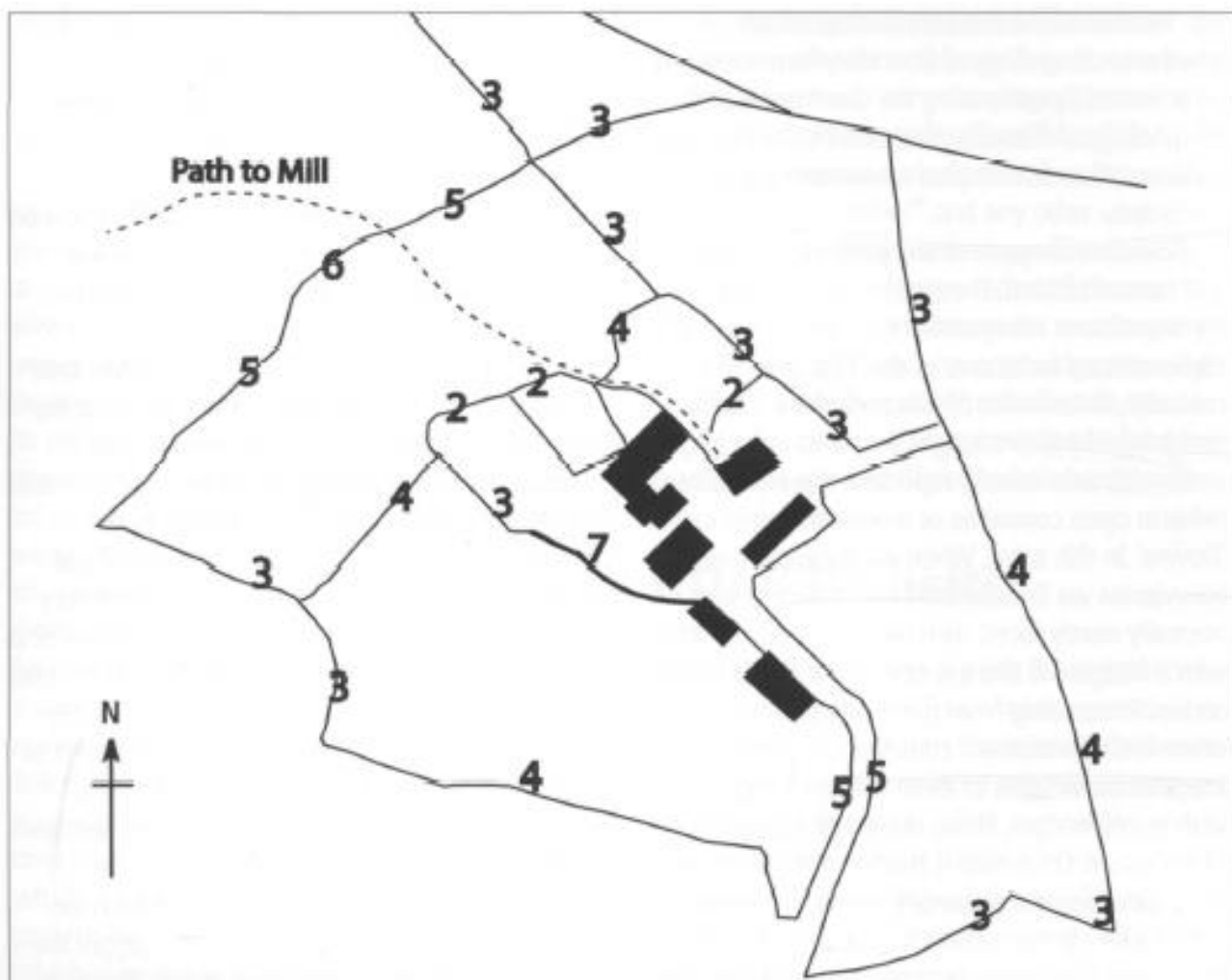
The buildings and nearby boundaries of West Middleton Farm, Parracombe as recorded by the Ordnance Survey in 1890.



Plate 1. One of the more massive boundaries, David Parker standing in its ditch. (Photo: T.Green)

The above is a simplification - it's never that clear or simple - but it makes the point that the earliest boundaries tend to be very big. The reasons for this are probably various, but it should be clear that a big boundary represents the digging and piling up of a large volume of soil and stone, which represents a lot of man-hours and therefore expense, either in money terms or in terms of time lost to the important matter of food production. Big boundaries therefore, probably date from a time when expense was no object or expense was not an issue, which suggests a period when the lord of the manor could demand the service of his peasantry without cost to himself. If, at this period, cost was not an issue, then prestige quite probably was. The bigger the barrier behind which you could reside, the more you impressed the

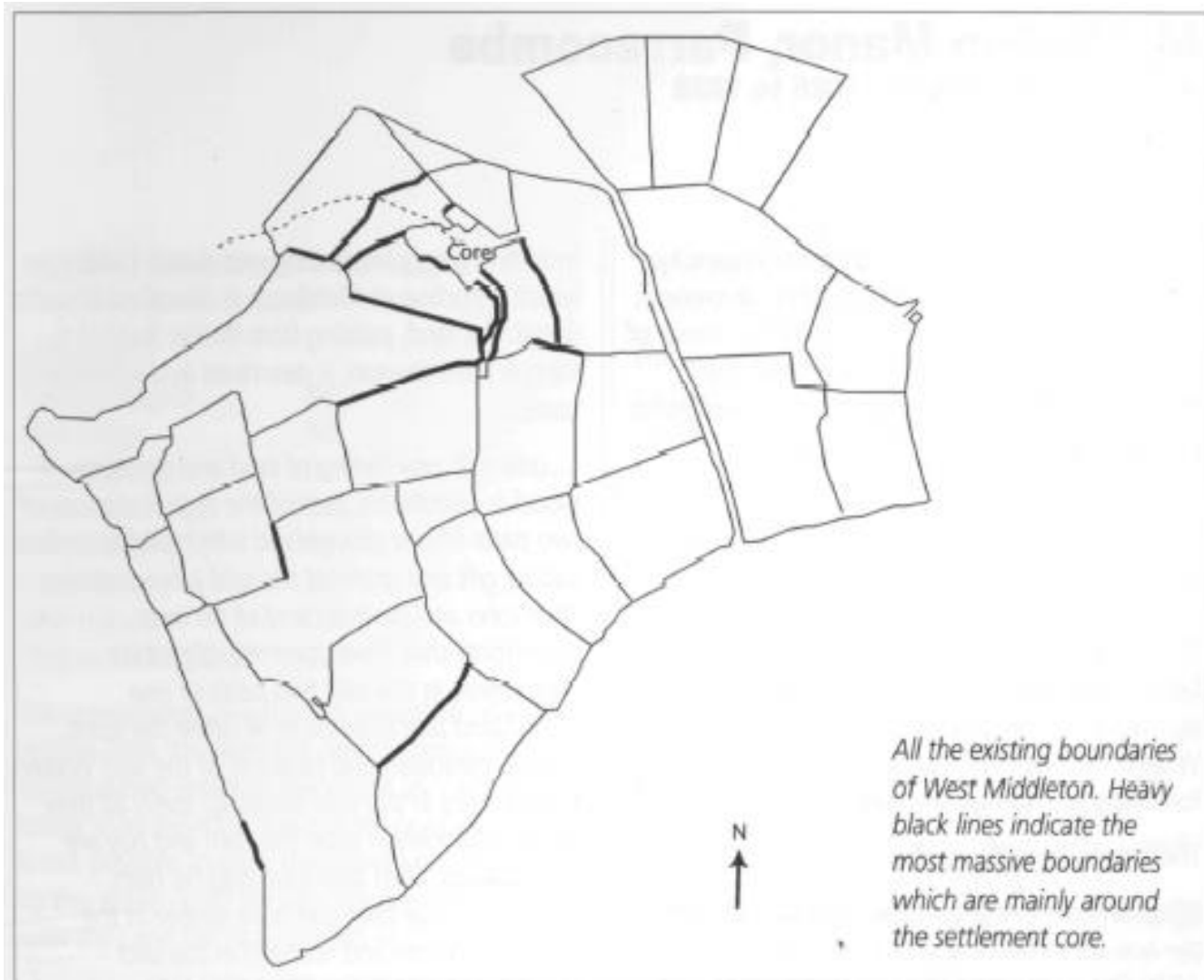
neighbours, either with what you could afford or with what you could afford to waste. This would be the situation prior to the population decline and consequent scarcity of labour of the mid-14th century.



Boundaries around the settlement core of West Middleton. Numbers indicate the size group in which the boundary falls (eg. 3 represents 3 cubic metres of material per metre of length). Note the boundary numbered 7.

At West Middleton, which in the medieval period, was the core of the manor of Middleton, we have found a number of very massive boundaries close to the core of the settlement. Seen on the First Edition OS map (Fig.1), the boundaries around the farm buildings form a quadrilateral looking very much like a manorial enclosure such as is found elsewhere in the county and the country. A number of these inner boundaries are very massive indeed, in the most impressive cases over 2.5 metres high (Plate 1) and over 4.0 metres wide at the base representing up to 7 cubic metres of soil and stone per metre of length: clearly a very serious piece of work. We are aware that hedgebanks become eroded and are periodically maintained, so that over time their dimensions can change. Since the effort required to move soil (in an unmechanised age) would always be the same, and as labour becomes more expensive and motives change over time, it seems fair to assume that a rebuilt boundary will be less rather than more massive than the original. Therefore when we come across a length of very massive boundary, we assume it represents something like the original. Boundary WM111A (shown in Fig.2 with a heavy line and the number 7) represents this well. This south-eastern end of boundary WM111 is the most massive boundary we have found anywhere (group 7), but to the north-west of the kink (arrowed) it thins down to a group 3. The thinner section is clearly a rebuild. The boundary running along the north-western edge of the settlement core is the most

consistently massive we have seen. It has a ditch on its northwest side and through it runs a track leading to Mill Wood, where probably was the mill which features in the documents which Margaret Reed has studied. Whoever was arriving or leaving by this route would have been impressed. Massive boundaries are not confined to the settlement core, though elsewhere they are scattered. Fig.3 shows them with heavy lines. As can be seen they are few, but may represent divisions within a medieval field-system. Our field boundary analysis is not an exact science, but it does help to characterise these important and ubiquitous monuments and to make sense of them within a settlement pattern.



Middleton Manor, Parracombe A Preliminary Survey -1086 to 1838 - Margaret Read

Margaret Read has been applying her research skills to the documentary record of Parracombe. She was asked to look particularly at the manor of Middleton and has demonstrated how the extent of the manor and the pattern of ownership and occupation have developed over nine centuries.*

(Divided probably since the 15th century into West and East Middleton.)*

The Saxon manor of Middleton, owned by Edmer before 1066, became one of the many estates across a dozen English counties awarded by William I to Geoffrey, Bishop of Coutances following the Norman invasion.

The Domesday entry reads:

Middleton -(In the hundred of Shirwell- held of the honour of Bamstaple) - Edmer held it before 1086. It paid tax for half a virgate of land. Land for 4 ploughs. In lordship 1 plough; 1 furlong. 2 villagers have another plough and 1 furlong. Meadow 6 acres; pasture 30 acres; woodland 3 acres; 15 pigs. Formerly 8 shillings, now 12 shillings. [Domesday Book: Devon, Part One (3.52), Thorn and Thorn 1985.]

This description of the manor in the Domesday Survey of 1086 is, to say the least, confusing. While the ancient boundaries remained into recent times, the extent of cleared, and therefore taxable, land in the eleventh century is uncertain as land measurement took account of soil quality. Also the terms hide, virgate and furlong were not constant and bore little relation to modern acres or hectares. However, it has been assessed that Middleton was taxed on 359 acres in 1086. During the next two centuries several changes of overlordship are recorded in Feet of Fines, including a very interesting one dated 1248/9, in which a portion of Middleton is described in some detail. The land, passing from Walter Baghal to John & Joan Weston, is described in the following terms: -

'... one mill, one ferling of land and ten acres of wood in Middleton, part of the appurtenances of two parts of one ploughland which Walter before had by gift and grant of the said John and Joan. Thus John and his heirs and all his men henceforth shall have common of pasture everywhere in the said two parts of one ploughland and likewise in all other the lands, woods, meadows and pastures of the said Walter and his heirs in the said township tor[7] all their cattle in Middleton after the corn and hay are carried away. Thus also John and his heirs henceforth may take and have timber in the woods of Walter and his heirs in the said township of Middleton to repair, make and sustain the mill by view of the foresters of the said Walter and his heirs for ever...' (Feet of Fines, Devon and Cornwall Record Society 1912, Vol. 1, No. 461, 29.10.1248-27.10.1249)

Here is evidence that a mill had been introduced since 1086 and that the woodland had increased in size, the three acres having now grown to at least ten, bearing in mind that this is only a portion of the entire Middleton estate. By 1332 the Lay Subsidy Roll recorded eight people in Middleton liable to pay the tax, which was assessed on at least ten shillings' worth of moveable goods in rural areas, with the tax being levied at one fifteenth. Here is evidence that Middleton was occupied by several families of sufficient means to be taxpayers rather than labourers. The first name on the list is probably that of the descendant of Walter Baghal mentioned above in 1248: -

Middleton

Baldwin Baghel 8d

John Greye 8d

Henry de Hele 10d

Thomas de Hele 18d

John Puddyng 8d

Adam Bryan 8d

John Horsmer 10d

Thomas de Brydewyk 12d

Tax assessments, muster rolls and other official returns from the sixteenth century onwards unfortunately relate to the parish as a whole rather than separate 'townships' or manors, so it is not possible to trace the growth of Middleton by this means until the late eighteenth century, with the Land Tax Assessments of 1780 to 1832:

Land Tax Returns 1780: Middleton Manor (North Devon Record Office)

Property	Proprietor	Occupant
Voley	Henry Beavis, Esq.	George Pugsley
Heal	Henry Beavis, Esq.	Nicholas Ridd
Walner & Gratton	John Crang	John Crang
Heal & Winslade Meadow	John Crang J	John Crang
West Middleton	Henry Down, Esq.	Richard Dovell
Heal	Richard Dowell	William Frost
Middleton	John Slader, snr.	John Slader
East Middleton	Henry Beavis, Esq.	Henry Harding
Grattons	John Prowel	Humphrey Merchant
Heal	Mr. Berry	Thomas Challacombe
East Middleton	Henry Harding	Henry Harding
Heal	Richard Tucker	Charles Blackmore
Invention	Timothy Harding	Timothy Harding

Tithe Award 1838: (North Devon Record Office)

Following on from the tax returns, the Tithe Award of 1838, complete with detailed map of the whole parish, is a complete record of land use and property ownership at that time. There were fifteen separate landholdings in the area formerly known as the manor of Middleton which were in the hands of six landowners who occupied almost 1300 acres. The holdings at this date were West Middleton, Walner, Voley, Heale (part), Heale Moor, East Middleton (in three parts), Heale Down (in two parts), South Hill, Invention, a cottage and garden in Middleton and a plantation and wood. Major landowners among these were Robert Newton Incedon, various members of the Dovell Family and Amelia Warren Griffiths.

The figures in 1838 are a far cry from those of Domesday. Seven hundred and fifty years after the survey the rural manor of Middleton had become a thriving community within the parish of Parracombe, with every occupier engaged in some form of agriculture, while the landowners, as before, were not all resident. Robert Newton Incedon was Recorder for Barnstaple and lived in Pilton, while Amelia Warren Griffiths also had strong connections in Pilton and owned property in several parishes in Devon and elsewhere.

This preliminary survey necessarily ends with the Tithe Award of 1838. Middleton retains a landscape of farmland and wooded cleaves, bounded by streams and ancient trackways, as it was a thousand years ago, and although agriculture remains, the way of life for the farming community has changed beyond recognition.