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Leasehold and Tenancy in Late Medieval Eakring.
Exploring the Economic Links and Religious Provision
between Rufford Abbey and Eakring, c. 1300-1500.

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree of
Masters of Research

August, 2017

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the rental agreements and contracts between the monks of Rufford Abbey and the residents of Eakring made between 1300 and 1500. Principle resources for this study have been The Rufford Charters, an edited collection of sources, and the Savile Records, which are held at Nottingham County Archives. This study aims to shed light on the social relationship between the monks and the villagers by exploring the many varieties of lease holdings and contractual agreements made between the two parties. Successive chapters explore the different variations of tenancy agreements, place Eakring as a nucleated rural settlement and extracted evidence from maps locates Eakring in an agrarian community. Focused case-studies are drawn from original manuscript charters to demonstrate how the relationship between landlord and tenant was expressed. This study makes connections between the economic ties and religious provisions of the monks alongside the social challenges of the time, such as The Great Famine, the Black Death and the Peasants Revolt. This thesis establishes that the social contacts expressed in the monastic charters were varied, with the many types of lease holdings catering for the individual requirements of the laity.

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INTRODUCTION: SOURCES, METHODOLOGY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Background

During the twelfth century the Cistercian Order expanded throughout Europe. To mark their territories Cistercian monks built great imposing stone structures. These monasteries marked the monks' ideal life style of isolation from medieval towns and villages. There are many monuments left of these magnificent buildings, of which one of the smaller ruins will be the centre of this thesis. Popularised by one of the orders most famous spiritual leaders, Bernard of Clairvaux, this monastic expansion was far reaching, stretching outwards from France and into the rural lands of England, Scotland and Wales, as well as other European countries like Germany and Poland.¹ The influence of Bernard, attributed to his charismatic personality, popularised the ascetic life of poverty and chastity, promoting strict adherence to a life style in the wilderness just like the original desert fathers had led.² With the growth of the Cistercian Order came opportunities for the wealthy landed nobility to bestow gifts on the monks, and to found new religious houses as a means of demonstrating their piety.

¹ C. Brooke, 'St Bernard, the patrons and monastic planning', in C. Norton & D. Park (eds.), *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 11-23.

² C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism* (New York, 1989), p. 183. There are further and more intense discussions regarding the subject of Bernard's charismatic nature which can be found in B. P. McGuire (ed.), *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux* (Brill, 2011) and S. C. Jaeger, *Enchantment: on Charisma and the Sublime in the arts of the West* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

As Cistercian monasteries were founded by members of the lay nobility they offered no threat to temporal powers and were answerable to the foundations of the Cistercian Order in Citeaux. The first Cistercian monasteries built in England, the mother houses, would house a community of about 100 monks.³ Mother houses acted as hubs for the later developed and much smaller houses that were later founded. For example, Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire was founded in 1132 by Walter Espec.⁴ Rievaulx was the mother house to Melrose, Warden, Dundrennan, Revesby and Rufford.⁵ These daughter houses, or 'cells', were founded by lay nobility too and were placed on lands granted by the founder.⁶ The monastery at the centre of this thesis, Rufford Abbey, was founded in 1147 by Gilbert de Gant and placed in the rural grounds near to the villages of Eakring and Cratley, lands which Gilbert gave to the monks.⁷

Gilbert's investment as founder of Rufford Abbey may have been a religiously motivated act, as he came from a family who had previously invested in other religious houses. In the eleventh century his paternal grandfather had refounded Bardney Abbey, and his own father, Walter de Gant, had founded the Augustinian Priory of St Mary's in Bridlington. Significantly, Walter de Gant had been one of the first noblemen to act as benefactor and patron to Rievaulx Abbey in 1132.⁸ Founding a monastery

³ G. Coppack, *The White Monks* (Gloucestershire, 1998), p. 41.

⁴ E. Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey and its Social Context, 1132-1300: Memory, Locality and Networks* (Turnhout, 2005).

⁵ D. Knowles & R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses* (Essex, 1971), p. 124.

⁶ M. Heale, *The Dependent Priors of Medieval English Monasteries* (Woodbridge, 2004), p. 4.

⁷ Savile Charters DDSR 20/7. Held at Nottingham County Archives.

⁸ Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey*, p. 2.

had significant social implications by facilitating a relationship between the monks and the nobility and by extending social networks between different members of the nobility. Details of such relationships are evident in monastic charters.

Research Questions

Charters are important records to study because they reveal two crucial factors between the monks and the laity in medieval society; religious expectations and economic investments. They disclose who the significant benefactors were to the monastery and which families had a greater interest in the monastery. Lay benefactors were important to the monks, as the donations given by patrons secured the monks' duty to offer prayers for the laity.⁹ Alongside spiritual provision there was an economic tie that existed between the monks and the laity. This is evident in the charters appearing as transactions of land either through rent agreements, property leases, and donations. Gifts made to the monastery included various amounts of money and parcels of land, all varying in size dependent upon the wealth and status of the benefactor. They secured the ties between the laity and the monks and were an important feature of the relationship.¹⁰ In exchange for these material gifts, the monks offered prayers and the spiritual safety of the deceased.

⁹ M. B. Bruun & E. Jamroziak, 'Introduction: withdrawal and engagement', in ed. M. B. Bruun, *The Cambridge Companion to the Cistercian Order* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 11.

¹⁰ D. Postles, 'Small gifts, but big rewards: the symbolism of some gifts to the religious', *Journal of Medieval History*, 27 (2012), p. 24.

The Rufford Charters reveal that as the monastery's influence increased, the relationship between the monks and the laity altered. By 1500, the surviving evidence in the charters show that the documents were functioning as rental and property lease contracts, as the land which had been acquired by the monks was being leased out to the laity. Meanwhile, the request for salvation of the benefactor's soul had become almost obsolete from these charters and replaced with the confirmation of annual payments to the monastery in exchange for land. The statement of 'pro salute anime mee et patris mei et matris mee et pro animabus omnium antecessorum et successorum meorum...' was largely removed from the written detail in the Rufford Charters.¹¹

Analysis of what was written in the charters is an essential part of this research, specifically examining the economic and religious content. Charters demonstrate the relationship and contacts between the monks and the laity, in both religious and economic terms, and reveal how these relationships altered over time. Some charters have no mention of expected religious provision, indicating that this feature was not a priority in the creation of these charters. Therefore, this study will look at the charters from an economic position, and will consider medieval tenancy agreements, mostly because the evidence for religious provision in the later charters is scarce.

¹¹ Translated by the author as 'For the salvation of my soul, of my father's, of my mother's, and of my ancestor's and successor's'. This is a standard clause which features in most charters, signifying the religious links between the patron and the monks.

Rufford Abbey and the Rufford Charters

The remains of Rufford Abbey are situated on the outskirts of Sherwood Forest. All that now remains of the original medieval construction is the frater house and cellarium. For this research I will be looking at a series of published charters belonging to Rufford Abbey. The collection of these charters, 1002 individual manuscripts, covers the period from 1147 to 1535. To keep my research contained I shall focus on those charters that date from 1300 to 1500. I have chosen this time frame because of the social upheaval caused by the Great Famine of 1315-17, the Black Death of 1348, and the Peasants Revolt in 1381.

The primary sources used in this study have already been collated in *The Rufford Charters*, a four-volume edition of the surviving documents belonging to Rufford Abbey which have been translated and edited by C. J. Holdsworth.¹² A large quantity of the original medieval documents are held at Nottinghamshire County Archives. To enhance my research on the charters I have visited the archives in Nottingham and so this study will include findings from my own research on some of the original manuscript charters as well as information from the published sources.

It was necessary to carry out research on the original documents because not all the detail from these records has been published in Holdsworth's editions. To demonstrate, a grant made by William Somare of Ompton, dated c.1406 was transcribed by Holdsworth and printed in Volume Two

¹² C. J. Holdsworth, *The Rufford Charters, Volumes 1-4* (Nottingham, 1972-1981).

of the Rufford Charters.¹³ A full Latin transcription accompanies this grant, along with a summary of the details, but there is no full translation available. The detail provided by Holdsworth reveals that William Somare gifted his lands, goods and debts to brother Robert of Rotherham and Henry Carburton of Wellow.¹⁴ On inspection of the transcription, and the original manuscript, there is much more detail within this grant between William, Robert and Henry. In the grant, William states ‘...sine calumpnia seu perturbacione mei vel heredum meorum aut aliorum...’ which translates as, ‘...without claim or commotion from my heirs or others...’.¹⁵ This declaration is indicative of the bond between William and Robert and Henry, which was so great that William felt compelled to give all of his possessions to these men, essentially writing his own heirs out of any inheritance. This detail reveals that by the early fifteenth century the Abbot of Rufford Abbey was still receiving generous gifts of land from members of the laity, which were possibly to help reduce the financial strains of the monastery at this point.¹⁶ These ties and bonds were extremely important, and although it may appear that William was disinheriting his heirs, the expectation for religious provision was high, so William may not have been providing for his heirs economically, but spiritually he was. This example demonstrates that the information

¹³ Holdsworth, *RC, Vol II*, p. 252.

¹⁴ Savile Charters DDSR 102/195. Dated 1406, with handwriting on back of manuscript titling the item as ‘Deed of gift of lands and goods to Rufford Abbey’. Held at Nottingham County Archives.

¹⁵ Savile Charters DDSR 102/195. Translated by myself.

¹⁶ R. N. Swanson, *A Calendar of the Register of Richard Scrope Archbishop of York, 1398-1405* (York, 1985), p. 2-22.

omitted by Holdsworth is important to examine as it offers greater context to the social networks between the monks and the laity.

The Rufford Charters have been underused in the field of medieval monastic research, which enhances the significance of my research for two reasons. Firstly, my research will add to the existing research on Yorkshire monasticism by using Rufford Abbey as the focus point. The research I have been able to complete on the original manuscript charters will strengthen the evidence published by Holdsworth and increases the knowledge of how Rufford Abbey was connected to the surrounding villages, in particular the village of Eakring. Secondly, it offers interest in terms of local history and identity, particularly considering recent concerns of local fracking developments and tourist commercialisation, which are currently threatening the preservation of such places.¹⁷

The Purpose of a Charter

Charters were created for most religious institutions at the time of their foundation.¹⁸ We know this because charters survive for other monasteries and not just for Rufford Abbey.¹⁹ Cistercian houses are regarded as being most advanced in record making during the twelfth

¹⁷ Nottinghamshire County Council are in the process of handing over the management of Rufford Country Estates to a Parkwood Outdoors, while Sherwood Forest and nearby Clumber Park are under observation for potential fracking exploits, resulting in increased local awareness for the conservation of wildlife and historical tourist attractions. Sherwood Forest is also in receipt of Lottery Funding and redevelopment of the Visitor Centre by the RSPB will be commencing soon.

¹⁸ J. A. Raftis, 'The East Midlands', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol II, 1042-1350* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988), p. 197.

¹⁹ J. Burton, *The Foundation History of the Abbeys of Byland and Jervaulx* (Borthwick Publications: York, 2006) is one such example of published monastic charters, also W. Farrer (ed.), *Early Yorkshire Charters, Vols I&2* (Edinburgh, 1914-15) which gives selected examples of translated monastic charters.

century because of their meticulous approach to using charters.²⁰ These surviving cartularies enhance our understanding of the networks and relationships between monasteries and the laity at the time of their foundation and for the life of the monastery.

The Rufford charters were created as legal and binding documents, and now act as the recorded history of the wealth and prosperity of the abbot and his monks. Exchanges in land ownership and tenancy agreements were vital for recording as land represented economic value, political capital and a mark of social status.²¹ Each charter includes the name of the benefactor requesting a provision, those receiving payment for this service (which in the case of ecclesiastical records would normally be the monks of the abbey) and a list of witnesses to confirm the agreement made. Each charter purposely began with an opening preamble. For example, one charter between John le Marchall of Eakring, dated in 1307, begins with 'Sciant presents et future qd ego' with the name of the testator following.²² John le Marchall gave his land and a building in the vill of Eakring ('unum toftum en edifican in villa de Estrynge) to John Abbot. This is a typical composition for a medieval charter, formulaic in structure and in content. By analysing the content in the charters we can establish who the wealthy patrons to the monastery were and what lands the monks of the abbey acquired. Other frequent introductory statements

²⁰ M. T. Flanagan, 'Irish Royal Charters and the Cistercian Order', in M. T. Flanagan & J. A. Green (eds.), *Charters and Charters Scholarship in Britain and Ireland* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 120.

²¹ A. Rio, *Legal Practice and the Written Word in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 19.

²² Savile Charters DDSR 102/75. This translates as 'To all those present and in the future that I...'

in the Rufford Charters include phrases like 'Omnibus Christi fidelibus ad hoc presente', (To all Christ's faithful present)²³ and 'Hec est convencio facta inter abbatem de Rufford et...' (This agreement is made between the Abbot of Rufford and...)²⁴ In each introduction the language used signifies the purpose of the charter and the names of those it involved.

We can also assess how the relationships with patrons of the abbey altered too. The founder of Rufford Abbey, Gilbert de Gant, and the Gant family name, did not survive beyond the twelfth century due to lack of male heirs.²⁵ The monastery was therefore vulnerable to patrons who did not have strong ancestral connections with the abbey. The personal motives of Gilbert de Gant for investing in a new monastery may have differed to those patrons who later invested in Rufford Abbey as family connection to the monastery became further removed from the original motivations of the Gant family.²⁶

The Original Manuscript Charters

The original charters were written on vellum, and most can be translated from Latin into English. The documents vary in size of the parchment used but most of them would comfortably fit onto an A4 size piece of paper. There is a variation in style of hand used, reflecting the expanse of years that these were created over. Some are the remnants of

²³ Savile Charters DDSR 102/176.

²⁴ Holdsworth, *RC, Vol II*, p. 140.

²⁵ Burton, *Bylands and Jervaulx*, p. 16.

²⁶ K. Stober, *Late Medieval Monasteries and their patrons, England and Wales, c.1300-1540* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 80.

cirographs, with an exposed jagged edge purposely cut at the end of the vellum, signalling that a second copy of the same charter was written and given to a second person, which could be later used if any disputes about land ownership arose. Preservation of the manuscripts has served them well, although not all the original documents are held at the same record office. A number are held at The National Archives, the British Library and Arundel Castle.

Approaches to available sources

An important consideration when looking at the surviving charters for Rufford Abbey is to what extent do the charters reveal the relationships between the monks and the laity? This is a very relevant question to ask, and my search for wills to assist me with this query has not been a successful one. Wills reveal the bonds between members of the family and social networks which existed between members of the village.²⁷ Any wills which may have existed for the villages connected to Rufford Abbey would have also illuminated the social connections and bonds between families. Despite continuous searching, I have been unable to locate wills of those benefactors mentioned in the charters. A lack of wills does not mean that conclusions cannot be drawn. One will which survives and mentions Rufford Abbey will be discussed in Chapter Five, and by using this evidence, along with the information in the surviving charters, it is

²⁷ A good example of this is in S. K. Wray, *Communities and Crisis: Bologna during the Black Death* (Brill, 2009). Wray focuses on how the Black Death shaped people's reactions to religion, family and community.

possible to make an assessment about the relationship between the laity and the monks as landlords. To note, specifically in this research, wills are not an essential source of evidence for my study but those that have been found will simply add to the detail.

By assessing the evidence alongside key events such as the Great Famine of 1315-22, the Black Death of 1348 and the Peasants Revolt of 1381, it will be possible to understand why the relationship between the laity and the monks appear to have altered through this period. Traditionally the Cistercians observed the Rule of St Benedict, leading lives of simplicity, chastity, poverty and isolation.²⁸ As the popularity of the Cistercian Order grew, so too did a set of contradictions against this Rule. Land acquisition, a result of noble patronage, was in conflict with the Rule of poverty and isolation, although there are cases that the 'ideals' versus 'reality' conundrum faced by the monks was central to the monastic tradition.²⁹ The accumulation of land through gifts gave the monks reason to modify approaches to the Rule, and rather than sit on gathered wealth they had to manage their lands effectively or they were accused of drifting away from the austerity expected of them.³⁰ Hence the establishment of monastic granges, which provided an avenue for the monks to labour on their acquired lands. the charters that have survived

²⁸ M. Heale, *Monasticism in Late Medieval England, c. 1300-1535* (Manchester, 2009), p. 77.

²⁹ Bruun & Jamroziak, *Introduction*, p. 3-4.

³⁰ Heale, *Monasticism*, p. 22.

are important to investigate to seek evidence of this manifestation of land management.

Methodology

To select the sources for this research, I looked through The Rufford Charters and chose the documents dating 1300-1500. Holdsworth originally edited the charters into place category rather than into a chronological order, keeping his work in line with the organisation of the charters carried out in the sixteenth century.³¹ This current research groups the charters together into villages. Collectively, there are 1002 surviving charters for Rufford Abbey, with most of these predating 1300.³² There are just 76 charters dated after 1300, and it is this group that shall provide the evidence for this current research. Each one has been edited by Holdsworth, but not all have been published with their full translations, therefore transcribing and translating the original manuscripts became an important exercise. As there is a wide field of academic research which exists on medieval economics and agriculture I wanted to make sure my work would also be contributing to this field, as well as providing a local insight into the abbey.

As charters are formulaic in their content and structure with the same excerpts of information present in most charters. Every charter within my

³¹ Holdsworth, *RC, Vol I*, p. xix.

³² J. Lord, *Pro Salute Anime-The Religious Provisions of Rufford Abbey, 1147-1300* (Unpublished Undergraduate Dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2015). This dissertation includes an examination of the religious provision supplied by the monks residing at Rufford Abbey between 1147 and 1300, drawing evidence from the charters which do not feature in this current research.

collection of sources can be assessed according to this content; that being the date of the charter, the value and timespan of the lease, and the amount of land involved. Spreadsheets have been the most useful way to present this information, because it was possible to extract what was relevant from the charter and use this later to analyse results. Specific headings were chosen for the spreadsheet because they easily contextualise the elements made in contractual agreements.³³ Religious expectation was not included on the spreadsheet because it was a factor that appeared in variable forms, presenting a complication due to the wide variety of religious expression.

One of the advantages to quantitative research is that not only does it rely on using consistent information, but once the information has been collected it can easily be broken down into smaller parts. By presenting the information in tables for each village, a collection of 76 sources became more manageable, simplifying analysis. Comparisons were far easier to look for in the charters, and similarities between different villages could be seen, particularly when looking at the values of rents and the amount of land being leased out.

Maps

There is a whole chapter dedicated to the discussion of maps, which will accompany data from the spreadsheets. I have also carried out some

³³ P. R. Schofield, 'The Social Economy of the Medieval Village in the early fourteenth century', *Economic History Review*, 61 (2008), pp. 38-63.

topographical work on the villages for which charters have been preserved. This was to help me identify the names of the fields and lands mentioned in the charters to see if I could get an idea of their size and where they were positioned. The early modern maps I looked at are all originals, except for MS 280.³⁴The four maps belonging to this collection show the layout of fields in Laxton, Nottinghamshire, and have aided when exploring the medieval field system in Laxton, a small village near to Rufford Abbey. Laxton is a significant comparison for my research as the fields there lie next to the lands that were in Rufford Abbey's care. These maps have been extremely useful to demonstrate how land was divided between the occupants.

Specific maps of relevance to this thesis include a map of Eakring c. 1737 by Joseph Colbeck.³⁵This map shows how the fields in Eakring had been divided into strips and furlongs, and on some strips are written the names of those who have leased this land out. Although this map dates a couple of centuries later than the charters, it gives an impression of how the land may have been organised in previous centuries, especially given the longevity of tenorial patterns at nearby Laxton. Also there are the Caldecott maps, a series of drawings dated at 1664, which show how land in Eakring was divided between the Earl of Shrewsbury and the Duke of

³⁴ MS 280, 20TH Century copy of map of Laxton by Mark Pierce, 1635, in four sections, including Ompton, Kirton and Egmonton @<http://mssweb.nottingham.ac.uk>.

³⁵ Ma 5 P I, Map of Eakring Parish, 1737, by Joseph Colbeck, held at The University of Nottingham Manuscript and Special Collections Department.

Rutland.³⁶ This map of Eakring shows that some parcels of land were bigger than others. The size of fields and lands on these maps are not a reliable indication of wealthier landowners or tenants. Evidence taken from maps can be used with the charters because an acre refers to an amount of land which can be ploughed in a day and not a measurement of size.³⁷Therefore, an acre in Eakring may be a different size to an acre in Ompton, which could reflect the difference in values of rents on these lands and the uses of the fields. This is because of conditions of the soil in that area. An example of soil quality affecting acreage is that on light soils an acre could be 22 yards wide, but on heavier soils it might just be 3 yards wide, which also takes in water drainage.³⁸This forces a necessary consideration regarding the quality of soil, and if the charters show a differentiation in the value of rents as a reflection of the soil quality.

The landscape surrounding Rufford Abbey was dominated by Sherwood Forest, with the soil quality not being great. Raftis states this was one of the reasons why the twelfth century witnessed a surge of grants in land to religious houses, because the land was too poor to be farmed and landowners needed it to be used.³⁹It is fair to say that the land was tough terrain, explaining the existence of Sherwood Forest, due to high amounts of sandstone in the soil, as well as some areas being peaty.⁴⁰

³⁶ Savile Charters DDSR 227/17. Plan and survey of Eakring, 1664. Held at Nottingham County Council Archives.

³⁷ J. V. Beckett, *A History of Laxton, England's Last English Open Field Village* (Oxford, 1989), p. 20.

³⁸ C. S. & C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields* (Oxford, 1938), p. 43.

³⁹ Raftis, 'The East Midlands', p. 196.

⁴⁰ W. N. Edwards, *Geology of the county around Ollerton* (London: 2nd Edn, 1967), p. 164.

A limitation with maps is that very few exist for England dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Therefore, to gather a conceptualization of how land was organised I have referred to the oldest maps available, and by using these have tried to gather an impression about the medieval fields around Rufford Abbey. These maps have provided me with an insight into how the management of land ownership was recorded as visual evidence.

The Rufford Charters in previous historical publications.

There are two distinctive ways that the Rufford Charters have been used. Prior to the publication of Holdsworth's *The Rufford Charters*, the cartulary belonging to Rufford Abbey had featured in predominantly antiquarian publications. William Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum*, which dates to the later years of the seventeenth century, was the first publication to mention Rufford Abbey.⁴¹ Robert Thoroton, Derek White and The Victoria County History Compendiums all use Dugdale's *Monasticon* in their footnotes, as this work was ground-breaking research for historians of medieval monasticism and antiquity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Thoroton's three-volume collection of works, published in 1796 as part of the *Antiquities of Nottinghamshire* series, refers to early deeds and events relating to Rufford Abbey, starting with the foundation of the abbey.⁴²

⁴¹ W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (London, 1692).

⁴² R. Thoroton, *The Antiquities of Nottinghamshire, Vols I-III* (Yorkshire, 1796).

However, Thoroton does not offer an analysis of the individual charters as it is an antiquarian representation of the historical facts of Rufford Abbey. In 1904, Robert White published a small amount of records from the abbeys of Rufford, Welbeck and Thoresby.⁴³ The sources White used from the Rufford cartulary are not extensive, but within the book, White included a 12 page article about Rufford Abbey, including details of the charters in translation, some of which were later transcribed and translated by Holdsworth.⁴⁴ White recorded his sources as coming from the Public Records Office or the British Museum.⁴⁵ By the time Holdsworth used them some 70 years or so later they had been dispersed to different archives throughout the country. In 1910 the Victoria County History group published a two-volume history of Nottinghamshire.⁴⁶ Although only 4 pages long, there is a small section dedicated to Rufford Abbey, with reference relating to grants made by King Henry III, Edward I and IV.⁴⁷ In this respect, the Victoria County History publication uses the charters and available sources differently to previous works. As well as providing an historical account of Rufford Abbey, this article also reflects upon the administration between the monastery and the monarch and provides an insight into the economic management of the monastery. It is apparent that the existence of a large cartulary belonging to Rufford Abbey was known about, as proven by the frequent use of them in

⁴³ R. White, *The Dukery Records* (Worksop, 1904).

⁴⁴ White, *The Dukery Records*, p. 111-2.

⁴⁵ White, *The Dukery Records*, p. iv.

⁴⁶ Page, *VCH Vols I & II*.

⁴⁷ Page, *VCH Vol II*, pp. 101-4.

eighteenth and nineteenth century historical literature. It wasn't until the twentieth century that historians started looking at the individual charters in greater detail and attached wider significance to them. Stenton's work of 1911 offers an insight into some of the nobility in Nottingham avoiding crusade in the twelfth century.⁴⁸ Stenton refers directly to individual charters which had not been mentioned in any other work, such as a discussion about William de Stenten, who was the grandson to Geoffrey de Stenten. Geoffrey was one of the original benefactors of Rufford abbey in 1147, which Stenton references this source taken from Thoroton, but using the Register at Rufford as the direct source.⁴⁹ As this article was published in 1911, long before the country estate of Rufford had been auctioned, it was still in the possession of the occupiers, the Savile-Lumleys, so the Register that Stenton refers to in his footnotes must have been dispersed at the sale of the property in 1938.

Another peice of work which includes some of the original documents from Rufford Abbey was written by Maurice Barley in 1957.⁵⁰ Barley discusses the probability that the monks moved the original village of Rufford and re-established the vill in what is now known as Wellow. This work is incredibly significant as it opens discussions as to why this land was essential to the monks and why villages were relocated. The sources used by Barley can be found in Nottinghamshire County Archives, the

⁴⁸ F. M. Stenton, 'Manumissions at Staunton, Nottinghamshire', *English Historical Review* 26 (1911), pp. 93-97.

⁴⁹ Stenton, *Manumissions at Staunton*, p. 94. See footnote 3.

⁵⁰ M. W. Barley., 'Cistercian Land Clearances in Nottinghamshire: Three Deserted Villages and their Moated Successor', in *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 1 (1957), pp. 75-89.

British Museum, Pipe Rolls, Calendar Rolls and he also used the *Monasticon* and *White's Dukery Records*. The article focuses on the archaeological history of the lands surrounding Rufford Abbey.

Since Holdsworth's work on the *Rufford Charters*, access to the original manuscripts has been made easier for historians. In *The Rufford Charters*, Holdsworth provided a detailed survey of Rufford Abbey along with accounts of the families who had close networks with the monastery. For historians researching medieval monasticism, this gave access to a rich supply of evidence which could be used without having to view the original document. One such historian who has used Holdsworth's work to enrich our understanding of medieval Cistercian monasticism in Yorkshire is Emilia Jamroziak in her 2005 monograph *Rievaulx Abbey and its Social Context, 1132-1300*.⁵¹ Jamroziak's work regarding the social networks of Rievaulx Abbey include much information relating to Rufford Abbey, as a daughter house to Rievaulx.⁵² Jamroziak discusses how the abbots from each house would act as witnesses for each other when charters were being drawn out, demonstrating a working partnership. Jamroziak uses the *Rufford Charters* as supporting evidence, and refers to other articles by Holdsworth, signalling that he has contributed much to the historiography on medieval monasticism.⁵³

⁵¹ E. Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey and its Social Context, 1132-1300: Memory, Locality and Networks* (Turnhout, 2005).

⁵² Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey*, p. 82-4.

⁵³ Selected works are: C. Holdsworth, 'A Cistercian Monastery and Its Neighbours', *History Today*, 30 (1980), pp. 32-37; C. Holdsworth, 'The Chronology and Character of early Cistercian Legislation on Art and

Influential Research

Alongside research by Holdsworth and Jamroziak, publications about medieval monasticism are broad and vary in depth, scope and context. David Knowles' monumental work on monasteries and religious houses provides background information regarding all religious orders in England during the early and late medieval period, and these texts can be used as a reference point for any historian embarking on studies in medieval monasticism.⁵⁴ Martin Heale has published work on medieval monasticism leading up to the Reformation, presenting important and relevant arguments regarding how these institutions operated, particularly the relationship between mother and daughter houses.⁵⁵ Likewise so has Karen Stober, whose emphasis has been on the social relationships between monasteries and their patrons.⁵⁶ More in-depth studies of the Cistercians have been provided by Janet Burton and Julie Kerr who have placed great emphasis on Cistercian monasticism in Yorkshire.⁵⁷ There has also been extensive work on medieval agriculture within medieval villages, such as that by Phillip R. Schofield and J. A. Raftis.⁵⁸ Miriam Muller has written extensively on relationships within the medieval village,

Architecture', in C. Norton & D. Parks (eds.), *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 40-56.

⁵⁴ D. Knowles, *Religious Orders in England, Volume 3* (Cambridge, 1959).

⁵⁵ M. Heale, *The Dependent Priors of Medieval English Monasteries* (Woodbridge, 2004).

⁵⁶ K. Stober, *Late Medieval Monasteries and their Patrons: England and Wales, c. 1300-1540* (Woodbridge, 2007).

⁵⁷ J. Burton & J. Kerr, *The Cistercians in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2011).

⁵⁸ P. R. Schofield, *Peasant and Community in Medieval England, 1200-1500* (Hampshire, 2003), and J. A. Raftis, 'The East Midlands', in H. E. Hallam (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume II* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 325-40.

particularly villages who were under the care of an ecclesiastical landlord and has provided many case studies to assist with this research.⁵⁹ This thesis will contribute towards this catalogue of research by providing an original study of a Cistercian monastery and the charters which belong to it. Rufford Abbey has not been the prime focus of any previous research, therefore my thesis will fill this gap and will consolidate some of these works to produce a comprehensive study of the ties between a medieval monastery and its local villages.

Some of the historiographical debates to be explored in this thesis, alongside the evidence in the charters, will consider the relationship between lords and peasants and their direct dependency on the land. These relationships were all bound together, but some historians place emphasis on different parties. Christopher Dyer argues that hamlets and villages that struggled with land prices and poor soil quality may have made the decision to merge together and create the open field systems.⁶⁰ Dyer suggests that human initiative was a far more important factor in the establishment of rural villages than the relationship between lord and tenant, and that these decisions were 'deliberate and decisive'.⁶¹ Furthermore, he adds that along with the formation of village structures and field systems, the economic pull of commercial markets made an

⁵⁹ Selected works are; M. Muller, 'Conflict and Revolt: The Bishop of Ely and his Peasants at the Manor of Brandon in Suffolk c. 1300-81', in *Rural History*, 23 (2012), pp. 1-19, and M. Muller, 'The Aims and the Organisation of the Peasants Revolt in Early Fourteenth-Century Wiltshire', in *Rural History*, 14 (2003), pp. 1-20.

⁶⁰ C. Dyer, 'The Past, The Present and the Future in Medieval Rural History', *Rural History*, 1 (1990), pp. 37-49.

⁶¹ Dyer, 'The Past', p.40.

impact on the peasants' desire to produce and consume goods.⁶²All these factors suggested by Dyer leave little room for the driving force of the relationship between landlord and tenant to be reliant solely on one party, particularly if considering the role of the landowning lords. Hatcher, on the other hand, sees that the peasants were under the power of the landlord, due to the nature of their relationship being based on payments of rents and labour, and therefore considers this to have been an 'exploitative' relationship.⁶³If decisions made leading towards village formation and field systems were initiated deliberately, as opposed to circumstantial, then decisions made by peasants to lease and sell their land might not have been a reaction to the declining population and suffering land prices. Whereas Bekar and Reed have found that peasants who bought and sold small parcels of land during times of social pressure reduced subsistence risk, whilst simultaneously creating a group of smallholding peasants.⁶⁴This is why it is important to extract evidence from the surviving charters for Rufford Abbey to make an assessment of the relationship between the ecclesiastical landlords and their tenants in the surrounding villages of Eakring, Ompton and Kirton to place this relationship in context of land management.

Chapter One examines the role of Rufford Abbey and places the monastery in context of its religious and economic duties. The

⁶² Dyer, 'The Past', p. 42.

⁶³ J. Hatcher, *Modelling the Middle Ages: the history and theory of England's economic development* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 72-3.

⁶⁴ C. Bekar & C. G. Reed, 'Land Markets and Inequality: evidence from medieval England', *European Review of Economic History*, 17 (2013), pp. 294-317.

relationship between the ecclesiastical landlords and peasants are commented on, followed by a discussion on the challenges faced by medieval men and women during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including the impact of the Great Famine and Black Death. This chapter lines up the duties of the monks with the social challenges and places them alongside the agrarian culture during the same period, with a discussion on rural settlements and the geography of Rufford Abbey and Eakring. This chapter provides an insight into the geography of the area, by presenting maps as evidence, and uses John Beckett's phenomenal work on Laxton as a comparative guide for the area.⁶⁵ This chapter presents Eakring as a prime village with much attachment to the monks at Rufford Abbey.

Chapter Two uses maps as an accompaniment to the evidence regarding the land rented and leased in Eakring extracted from the Rufford Charters. There is a full description of two sets of surviving maps for Eakring. The first set of maps are a group of images showing the land survey of Eakring in 1664.⁶⁶ The second map is the Joseph Colbeck Survey of Eakring from 1737.⁶⁷ By identifying field names and areas on these maps it is possible to align information from the Rufford Charters to these maps, which facilitate a discussion on arrangements between landlords and tenants. Also, these maps assist to identify fields which

⁶⁵ J. Beckett, *A History of Laxton, England's Last Open-Field Village* (Oxford, 1989).

⁶⁶ Savile Charters DDSR 227/17. Original manuscripts held at Nottinghamshire County Archives.

⁶⁷ M a P 51. Joseph Colbeck Survey of Eakring, 1737. Original manuscript held at The University of Nottingham's Manuscript and Special Collections Department, King's Meadow Campus.

have existed for hundreds of years, further attributing significance to the relationship between the monks of Rufford Abbey and the local tenants.

Chapter Three provides an exploration of what the Rufford Charters reveal about the activities of people living in medieval Eakring, with specific attention to the years 1300 to 1400. Using the evidence in the charters, there is an in-depth discussion on the different types of leaseholds created between the monks and the inhabitants of Eakring and how they represent the feudal obligations of the tenants towards their ecclesiastical landlords. A discussion of the values of rents and decreases in the value of land is also included, along with the length of leaseholds and duties to the lord's manor. Within this chapter there are comparisons drawn to studies completed by William Hoskins⁶⁸ and Miriam Muller⁶⁹, who have both contributed great works to the historiographical debates about ecclesiastical landlords and their tenants.

Chapter Four explores Eakring in the years 1400-1500, with a dominant focus on widowhood. The small source base surviving for this century provides reason for important discussions on female status and widowhood in the medieval village community. Jane Whittle states that possession of land indicates that women were involved in the management of agriculture.⁷⁰ As the charters demonstrate, and as

⁶⁸ W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant* (London, 1957).

⁶⁹ M. Muller, 'Peasants, Lords and developments in leasing in later medieval England', in B. J. P van Bavel & P. R. Schofield (eds.), *The Development of Leasehold in Northwestern Europe, c.1200-1600* (Turnhout, 2008).

⁷⁰ J. Whittle, 'Rural Economies', in J. Bennet & R. Karras (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2013), p. 2.

Chapter 4 will explain, some widows were able to negotiate new contracts with the monks. Whittle states that despite property rights being gendered, with the rights of medieval men taking priority over women, the change in female status when widowed provided her with new rights.⁷¹ Based on the evidence it is possible to comment on how widows were able to successfully negotiate quitclaims and land releases with the monks and explores the nature of female widowhood in medieval society. As Cavallo and Warner state, women became visible when they were widowed due to the change in their status and because their patrimonial position altered.⁷² The evidence in the charters shows that widows had good relationships with their monastic landowners and that these women were able to enforce these rights. The discussion on widowhood is followed by the presenting of evidence of religious provision in the form of a grant in free alms. This grant gives good reason for a discussion on the lack of evidence for the monks to provide religious intercession, which shows a remarkable contrast to the original motives for the laity to bestow gifts at the foundation of the abbey.

Chapter Five looks at the evidence from two other villages which also feature in the Rufford Charters. The Ompton and Kirton charters are examined for their economic and religious bonds to Rufford Abbey, with attention to the use of land in these areas, their similarities and differences to Eakring and their links to the monks. This chapter draws

⁷¹ Whittle, 'Rural Economies', p. 4.

⁷² S. Cavallo & L. Warner, *Widowhood in medieval and early modern Europe* (Abingdon, 2014), p. 3. Ebook.

connections between these villages and pulls in evidence of a will made by William Bevercotes, to establish that Rufford Abbey was performing roles of both religious care provider and landlord and was an important part of economic life.

CHAPTER ONE: RUFFORD ABBEY AND EAKRING

This chapter will discuss the village of Eakring by exploring its agricultural heritage and its connections to Rufford Abbey. Focus will be on farming and land management, which will demonstrate changes between medieval Eakring and modern Eakring. Previous approaches regarding relationships between landlords and tenants will be considered, giving wider significance to this small village. Eakring has been chosen as the main focus for this study because a greater amount of charters survives for this village. As the Rufford Charters reveal the organisation of land holdings and tenants' duties towards the Abbey, this can explain certain aspects of Eakring's history. The charters enlighten what is known about Eakring during times of great social pressure, such as the Great Famine and the Black Death. It is therefore necessary to explore medieval agrarian practices and land management in Eakring by comparing other villages who have had similar agricultural experiences to Eakring. This will draw me to conclusions regarding the relationships between the monks of Rufford Abbey and the villagers in Eakring.

Rufford Abbey performed two roles; as a Cistercian monastery, and as an ecclesiastical landlord. The relationship between monastic landlords and the tenants on their estates functioned the same way as that between lay landlords and their tenants. Each landowning group held their tenants to their lands by feudal obligations of servitude and payments of rent.

Peasants were therefore connected to their ecclesiastical landlords for

religious and economic reasons. Medieval life for the rural peasant was intensely connected to the land in respect of living standards and life expectancy with men and women of medieval England living their everyday lives with a dependency upon the land for food, clothing and shelter. Some theories on medieval life have adopted a Marxist approach, such as that by Rodney Hilton who differentiates between the landlord and tenant as the ruling class and peasant society.¹ Defining the two groups in polemic terms demonstrates how landlords and tenants depended on each other, highlighting the feudal boundaries of their interaction. Hilton states that the peasant class were submissive to the ruling class by supplying demesne labour on their lords' lands and by paying rent.² This relationship may not have always been avaricious, as monks may have offered credit to their patrons and benefactors in times of need.³ Possibly this only included benefactors who could provide political influence or some other advantageous gesture, so exactly how far down the chain of feudal society the generosity of offering credit extended is questionable, as monastic landlords were still under their own financial pressure to contribute towards ecclesiastical tithes. This also makes way for a longstanding contradiction of the role of the monks as to whether their role as ecclesiastical landlords superseded their obligations of religious charity.

¹ R. Hilton, 'Towns in Societies-Medieval England', in *Urban History*, Vol 9 (1982), p. 7.

² Hilton, 'Towns in Societies', p. 7.

³ E. Jamroziak, *The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe, 1090-1500* (Oxon & New York, 2013), p. 197.

Social challenges

The first challenge faced by medieval society in the fourteenth century was the Great Famine of 1315-17. The Great Famine depleted the population significantly.⁴ In a village of around 50 people, which may have been the number living in Eakring during this period, anywhere up to 25 people may have died because of the contagion.⁵ Bad weather did not just increase the risk of crop failure, but also gave rise to illness and disease among animals. For example, in Clipstone, near Eakring and Sherwood Forest, almost an entire flock of sheep were lost, including 72 per cent of lambs and yearlings, as well as 159 out of 193 goats perishing to illness.⁶ Those who were fortunate enough to survive were then left with the task of coping with food shortages and cultivating poor lands, with little in the way of labour power to help them.

The second major catastrophe of the fourteenth century to affect population numbers was the Black Death of 1348.⁷ The drop in population presented opportunities for those who survived, as rent prices decreased and wages inflated, alongside the challenges of dealing with unharvested fields and unaccounted livestock.⁸ John Beckett says that in the East

⁴ There are variations for losses: for between a quarter and half a million, see B. Campbell, 'The Land', in M. W. Ormrod & R. Horrox (eds.), *A Social History of England, 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 182; for 10 per cent, P. Schofield, *Peasant and Community in Medieval England, 1200-1500* (Hampshire, 2003), p. 92.

⁵ This number is estimated by the author and is based on the evidence collated from the Rufford Charters, considering the number of villagers whose names appear in the Charters.

⁶ I. Kershaw, 'The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England, 1315-1322', in *Past & Present*, 59 (1973), p. 21.

⁷ There are variations for losses: for a third of the population, see M. H. Keen, *England in the Later Middle Ages* (Cornwall, 1973), p. 169; for 40-50 percent, see R. Britnell, *The Black Death in English Towns*, *Urban History* (1994), pp. 195-204.

⁸ Campbell, 'The Land', p. 185.

Midlands area during the post Black Death period rents in Laxton between 1388 and 1433 dropped considerably from £20 to just £5, affecting the rate at which the areas were able to recover.⁹ With fewer people to rent out properties, advantageous contracts could be made, with fewer demands placed on tenants. The Ordinance of Labourers was enforced and swiftly followed two years later by the Statute of Labourers.¹⁰ These acts safeguarded the interests of the landholding elite by securing maximum wage levels and preventing peasant migration from one village to another. Medieval peasants, dissatisfied with the conditions that medieval serfdom had to offer, resisted the Statute of Labourers.¹¹ The Peasant's Revolt became a struggle between peasants of all land holdings, free or unfree tenants, and gave both parties a common goal to try to abolish bondage and serfdom.¹² And although these conditions were not met, what this unification of the peasant groups demonstrated was that despite political influence, collaboration against the government between such groups could be very dangerous.¹³ The Peasant's Revolt was felt throughout all of England, and was not an incident restricted to the south of England, with some northern centres like York, Beverley and Scarborough being the main culprits in the northern counties.¹⁴

⁹ J. V. Beckett, *A History of Laxton, England's Last Open-Field Village* (Oxford, 1989), p. 14.

¹⁰ J. Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath of the Black Death', *Past & Present*, 144 (date) p. 10.

¹¹ M. Muller, 'Food, Hierarchy and Class Conflict', in R. Goddard, J. Langdon & M. Muller (eds.), *Survival and Discord in Medieval Society: Essays in Honour of Christopher Dyer* (Brepols, 2010), pp. 231-248.

¹² R. H. Hilton, 'Peasants Movements in England before 1381', *The Economic History Review*, 2 (1949), p. 135.

¹³ Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, p. 185.

¹⁴ R. B. Dobson, 'The Risings in York, Beverley and Scarborough, 1380-1381', in R. H. Hilton & T. H. Aston, (eds.), *The English Rising of 1381* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 9-43. Dobson offers a more concise discussion on the events in these three cities prior, during and after the Revolt.

Open fields and agriculture in medieval rural villages

John Beckett's work on Laxton facilitates an understanding of farming approaches in medieval Eakring. Laxton is just six miles from Eakring, and although being larger than Eakring, the two villages share similarities in their backgrounds, particularly a heritage of medieval strip farming and the open field system of farming. Strip farming was the organisation of land into manageable long strips for villagers to grow crops, allowing for more efficient ploughing and full use of soil. Open fields had no physical barriers and were shared between the village farmers. Beckett discusses the medieval open field system of farming in Laxton to great detail.¹⁵ Laxton never adapted to the modern approach of field enclosure, which not only gave obvious partitions between lands but also introduced tighter controls of land management, placing responsibility of management under one just landowner rather than a shared responsibility between the villagers. This alteration was a modern development in farming techniques, with some villages adapting quicker than others, which depended upon the Lordship of the estate. Eakring and Laxton thus share similarities in their soil type on the ground due to their proximity and the arrangement of strip farming, as multiple landowners claimed dominance of rights over the villages and fields, and many freeholders could rent out land for cultivation.¹⁶ Therefore approaches and techniques to farming

¹⁵ Beckett, *Laxton*, pp. 19-54. Chapter Two concentrates on Open-Field farming.

¹⁶ Beckett, *Laxton*, p. 129.

between the two villages and the environmental conditions of the landscape were the same.

The type of strip farming which existed in the region as the open field system has been named the 'midland' or 'classic' system.¹⁷ By being allocated parcels of land in different fields, farmers had a share of good and poor lands.¹⁸ Although the open-field system may traditionally have been a strategy to cope with difficult soil conditions, by distributing the risk of crop failure and success evenly, the resistance to enclosure is indicative of freeholding between villagers. The fate of the village was to be in the hands of the Lord of the Manor, with the ownership of Eakring's land being much disputed by Earl Manvers and Henry Savile.¹⁹ Laxton avoided enclosure acts. Eakring is now an enclosed farming district, eventually succumbing due to depopulation and poverty of the village during the nineteenth century.²⁰ Eakring was one of the last villages to adapt to enclosure laws. Alongside the open field system of farming, medieval peasant farmers were accustomed to using the rotational methods of the three-field system of farming. Like the organisation of the open fields, the three-field rotation system would ensure a successful growth of crops, allowing appropriate time for the field to repair and replace the necessary nutrients. The three-field system operated as

¹⁷ Beckett, *Laxton*, p. 19.

¹⁸ Beckett, *Laxton*, p. 19.

¹⁹ D. Walker, *Eakring's Thousand Years*, (Cratley, Eakring, Newark), pp. 34-37.

²⁰ Walker, *Eakring's Thousand Years*, p. 35.

such; one field each was used for sowing, harvesting and lying fallow.²¹ Common grains used were wheat, rye, oats and barley, and would contribute towards the production of bread, ales and food for cattle and horses.²² A survey of Eakring from 1862 records that the soil was unsuitable for turnip cultivation, indicating the challenging conditions of the ground.²³ Each year these fields were rotated, protecting them from exhaustion. Along with organising the fields, peasant farmers managed woodlands and meadows, and less agriculturally based, but vital for sustenance, the village mill and fisheries.

William Hoskins has written about the medieval village of Wigston, Leicestershire.²⁴ Using charters from Wigston Hospital Hoskins assessed the economic and tenancy activities of families in the village during the middle ages and summarised some of the following points. He noted that some larger land holding tenants would re-grant smaller parcels of land to poorer men in the village, generating an extra income for themselves. Also, he noted there was a continuation of land purchase, even if just small parcels of land were involved, often between peasant families. And finally, he points out that this activity contributed towards a peasant aristocracy, where some families could accumulate property.²⁵ This would indicate that In Wigston, through tactical leasing and sub-letting of land,

²¹ E. King, 'The East Midlands', in E. Miller (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol III, 1348-1500* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 210.

²² D. L. Farmer, 'Marketing the Produce of the Countryside, 1200-1500', in E. Miller (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol III, 1348-1500* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 358.

²³ Walker, *Eakring's Thousand Years*, p. 34.

²⁴ W. G. Hoskins, *The Medieval Peasant* (London & New York, 1957).

²⁵ Hoskins, *Medieval Peasant*, pp. 30-1.

some peasants were able to improve their situations and increase their land holdings and wealth. As Hoskins' work on Wigston shares the same time frame as this study on Eakring, it can be used as a comparison to discover similar activity within Eakring, and to see if there is evidence of the same features in tenancy leasing in the Rufford Charters. If so, then the Rufford Charters can assist a broader understanding of how peasants in Eakring organised land between each other as well as with the monks. Similarly, Wigston lay on the main road connecting Leicester to Northampton, so would be witness to many men passing through²⁶, as would the villages of Eakring who lived close by to the main road connecting Nottingham to Lincoln.

Modern Eakring

Eakring sits among gentle hills and green fields, hidden away with just one main road passing through this little village. The old village mill has been modified, whilst elegant Victorian cottages sit covered in climbing ivy, all just within a hundred yards from the local village public house called the Savile Arms. The medieval history of Eakring is marked by the striking presence of St Andrew's Church, which dates from the twelfth century. The main road through Eakring leads to St Andrews, although more recently, and because of new building developments, a new and smaller road has been built which will lead to the church.

²⁶ Hoskins, *Medieval Peasant*, p. 78.

Image 1 Source: St Andrews Parish Church, Eakring. Author's photograph.



It is evident that Eakring has remained a rather small nucleated settlement within the rural landscape , with agriculture surviving as a lifestyle evident by the presence of tractors on driveways and with names of properties, referring to their agricultural heritage, called 'Lodge Farm House', 'Hall Farm House' and 'Pond Farm House'.²⁷ Some of these Grade II listed buildings date from the eighteenth century and are a reflection of Eakring's medieval agricultural life, as some take their names from the old fields. Leyfields Farm, Brecks Hill Farm and some fields like Hell Hill, still carry their ancestral names. It is possible that these buildings not only take their name from old medieval fields but are standing on the foundations of medieval buildings. The main road leading through

²⁷ <http://historiceengland.org.uk>. Accessed 07/04/2017.

Eakring directs towards Maplebeck and Kneesall, as well as there being public footpaths and national trails. The Robin Hood Way trail leads right through the village directly past the very outskirts of Rufford Country Park. Nearby Mansey Common, the name surviving from at least 1737, along with Duke's Wood and Eakring Meadows are all protected nature reserves.²⁸ Eakring's Brail Wood is protected by the Forestry Commission, again the name surviving from a much earlier period. Neighbouring villages to Eakring are Ompton, Kneesall and Maplebeck, all of which share Eakring's past ties to Rufford Abbey. At just four miles away, Eakring is the closest village to Rufford Abbey represented in the Rufford Charters.

Image 2 Source: Author's photograph of Mill Hill Field.



²⁸ www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org. Accessed 05/03/2017.

Map 1 Source: www.cassinimaps.com. Eakring's Civil Parish Boundary, 1911.



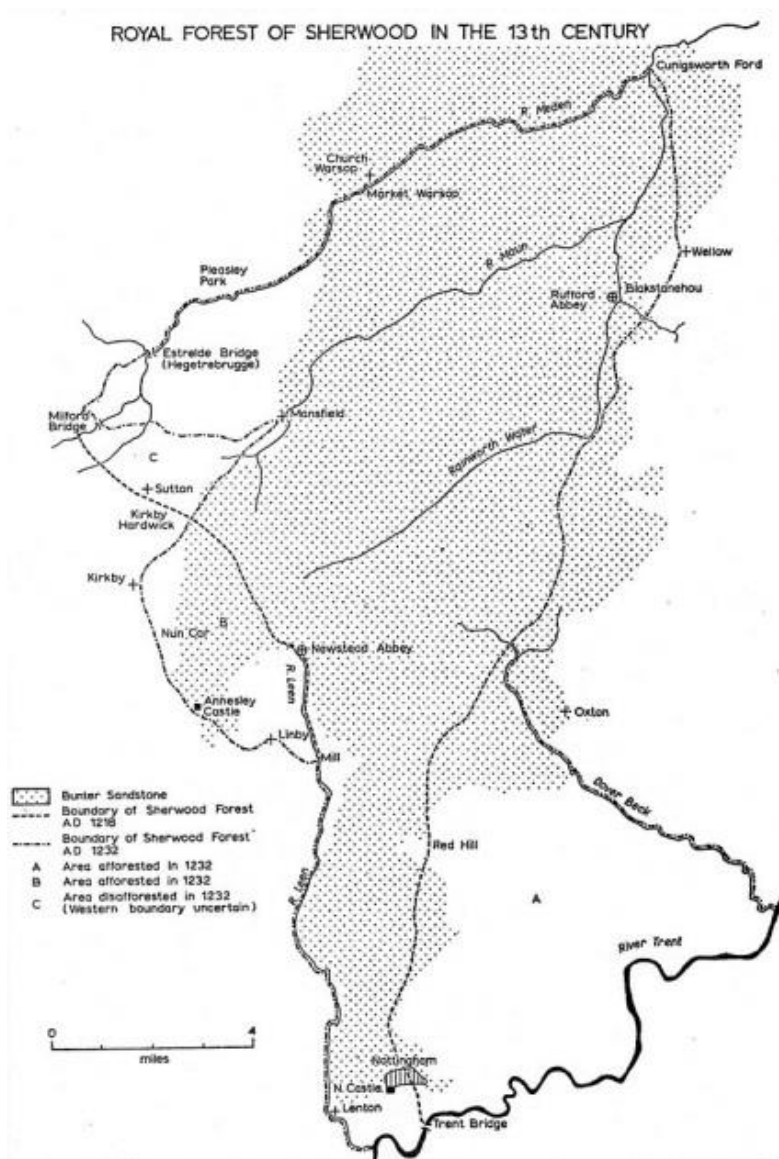
translation of the name Eakring could originate from France, with the translation meaning 'oak ring'.³² Gilbert de Gant had become a prominent land owner in England after his arrival from France with the Normans, and it was this Gilbert who was the grandfather to the founder of Rufford Abbey.³³ Along with the gift of Eakring, Gilbert, like many other nobles who migrated from France during the eleventh century, became a significant landholder in England. His grandson, also Gilbert de Gant, held onto the lands of Eakring until 1146, when he bestowed them Rufford Abbey as part of his foundation gift.³⁴

³² J. E. B. Gower, A. Mawer & F. M. Stenton, *The Place Names of Nottinghamshire* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 49.

³³ C. J. Holdsworth, *The Rufford Charters, Vol 1* (Nottingham, 1972), p. xxiii.

³⁴ C. J. Holdsworth, *The Rufford Charters, Vol 3* (Nottingham, 1980), p. 409.

Map 3. Source: A map of the Royal Forest of Sherwood in the 13th century.³⁵The village of Eakring is just south of Wellow.



³⁵ www.robinhoodlegend.com. Accessed 10/02/2017.

Eakring sits within the boundaries of Sherwood Forest, a rich and dense forestland, which during the medieval period stretched from the River Trent in the south to the River Medan in the North.³⁶ As pasture ground, Sherwood Forest was difficult land to cultivate, partly due to heavy clay type soil, making fertilization of crops poor.³⁷ In the thirteenth century, due to the intense use of the land to support agriculture and living, there required a vast amount of disafforestation. Map 3 clearly shows how the area covered by Sherwood Forest was reduced leading up to the fourteenth century.³⁸ Although Eakring lay on the cusp between the Keuper Marl and the Bunter Sandstone, so was thus positioned between good and bad soils, Domesday settlements in the area were relatively thin.³⁹ Eakring rested on undesirable soil, within the boundaries of heavy woodlands, which must have potentially affected the prospects of the living standards and success of farming of those who already resided there requiring clearing and cultivation before a permanent settlement could be established.

The Charters for Eakring

A total of 133 charters have survived for Eakring, the highest amount belonging to any other village. This suggests that the villagers of Eakring had close networks with the monks. It also suggests that Eakring became

³⁶ <http://sherwoodforesthistorproject.blogspot.co.uk/p/forest-law.html>. Accessed 15/11/2016.

³⁷ W. Page, *The Victoria County History, Vol II* (Folkestone & London, 1910), p. 374.

³⁸ Map of the Royal Forest of Sherwood in the 13th Century @ www.robinhoodlegend.com. Accessed 12/12/2016.

³⁹ I. B. Terrett, 'Nottingham', in H. C. Darby & I. S. Maxwell (eds.), *The Domesday Geography of Northern England* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 241.

one of the more densely populated villages in the area, with more people being acquainted with the monastery. Although Maurice Barley has argued that the Cistercians were often responsible for the desertion and re-settlement of medieval villages to enable their own settlements on lands, in particular relation to Cratley, Wellow and Rufford, there is no evidence to suggest this was the case with Eakring.⁴⁰ Unwin, whose study on rural settlements contests that of Barley in regards to the monks deserting villages, refers to villages as simply decaying and then reforming as a natural process of development for medieval villages.⁴¹ According to Unwin, when the monks arrived to build their monastery, the village of Rufford was removed with some of the inhabitants becoming lay brothers to the new monastic foundation.⁴² Unwin summarises by stating that the monks established a new type of settlement, with particular reference to monastic granges, rather than destroying villages and enforcing desertion.⁴³ A good relationship between the monks and their tenants would facilitate close bonds. This is demonstrated in the Rufford Charters involving the Capella family of Eakring and cover a thirty-year period. Emma and Osbert Capella granted many of their lands to the monastery, suggesting a long-lasting relationship, where the monks provided religious intercession and the Capella's provided the monastery

⁴⁰ M. W. Barley, 'Cistercian Land Clearances in Nottinghamshire: Three Deserted Villages and their Moated Successor', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 1 (1957), pp. 75-89.

⁴¹ P. T. H. Unwin, 'Patterns of hierarchies of Rural Settlement in Nottinghamshire before 1700', Unpublished PhD thesis, 1979, @ ethesis.dur.ac.uk, p. 129.

⁴² Unwin, 'Patterns of hierarchies', pp. 199-201.

⁴³ Unwin, 'Patterns of hierarchies', p. 243.

with land.⁴⁴ Their interactions with the monks are a common example of a bond between monks and patrons in the early years of Rufford's establishment.

This chapter has presented Eakring as an intensely rural settlement, with a heritage of agriculture which still dominates the village to the present. Established within the tough terrain of Sherwood Forest, land clearing and agriculture date back to the time of the Conquest when the vill became part of the lands owned by Gilbert de Gant. Medieval approaches to agriculture included the traditional three field rotation system as well as the open field system, ensuring maximum output of crops and shared success for the village farmers. Disputes regarding enclosure laws and land ownership delayed Eakring from becoming enclosed until 1867, meaning that Eakring was to continue with medieval methods of farming for much longer than most other areas. Because Laxton never fell to enclosure laws, there is a surviving example of how Eakring would have been managed. Friendship networks seem to have been established between the villagers of Eakring and the monks due to the high amount of charters surviving for the village which detail these connections. For a closer look at how these connections worked the next chapter will discuss maps and how they can help to interpret relationships between the villagers and monks.

⁴⁴ J. Lord, *Pro Salute Anime-The Religious Provisions of Rufford Abbey, 1147-1300*, Unpublished Undergraduate Dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2015.

CHAPTER TWO: TOPOGRAPHY AND MAPS

Maps for Eakring

This chapter will explore surviving maps and other topographical studies which concern neighbouring lands to Eakring. These maps will facilitate an assessment of the geography, quality of land and approach to agriculture, and to fill in the gaps left behind by the charters. There are 22 surviving charters for Eakring which are dated from 1300 to 1500. Maps are therefore an essential aid to this thesis because they will provide a wider frame of reference and will help to contextualise the information taken from the charters.¹ This task invariably faces some challenges as maps showing medieval villages before the fourteenth century do not exist.² However, there is at least one map of medieval Sherwood Forest which was produced, possibly during the early fifteenth century. It is not possible to view this map in the archives, as there are restrictions in place by the archives at Belvoir Castle where the original manuscript is held. This map has been published before, by both M. W. Barley and Derek Price.³ Despite the difficulty of obtaining such evidence from the medieval period, it is worthwhile to note that there is also some cartographical evidence of the lands of Eakring produced in the early

¹ B. M. S. Campbell & K. Bartley, *England on the Eve of the Black Death: An Atlas of Lay Lordship, Land and Wealth, 1300-49* (Manchester, 1988), p. 3.

² J. A. Raftis, 'The East Midlands', in H. E. Hallam, (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol II, 1042-1350* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 327.

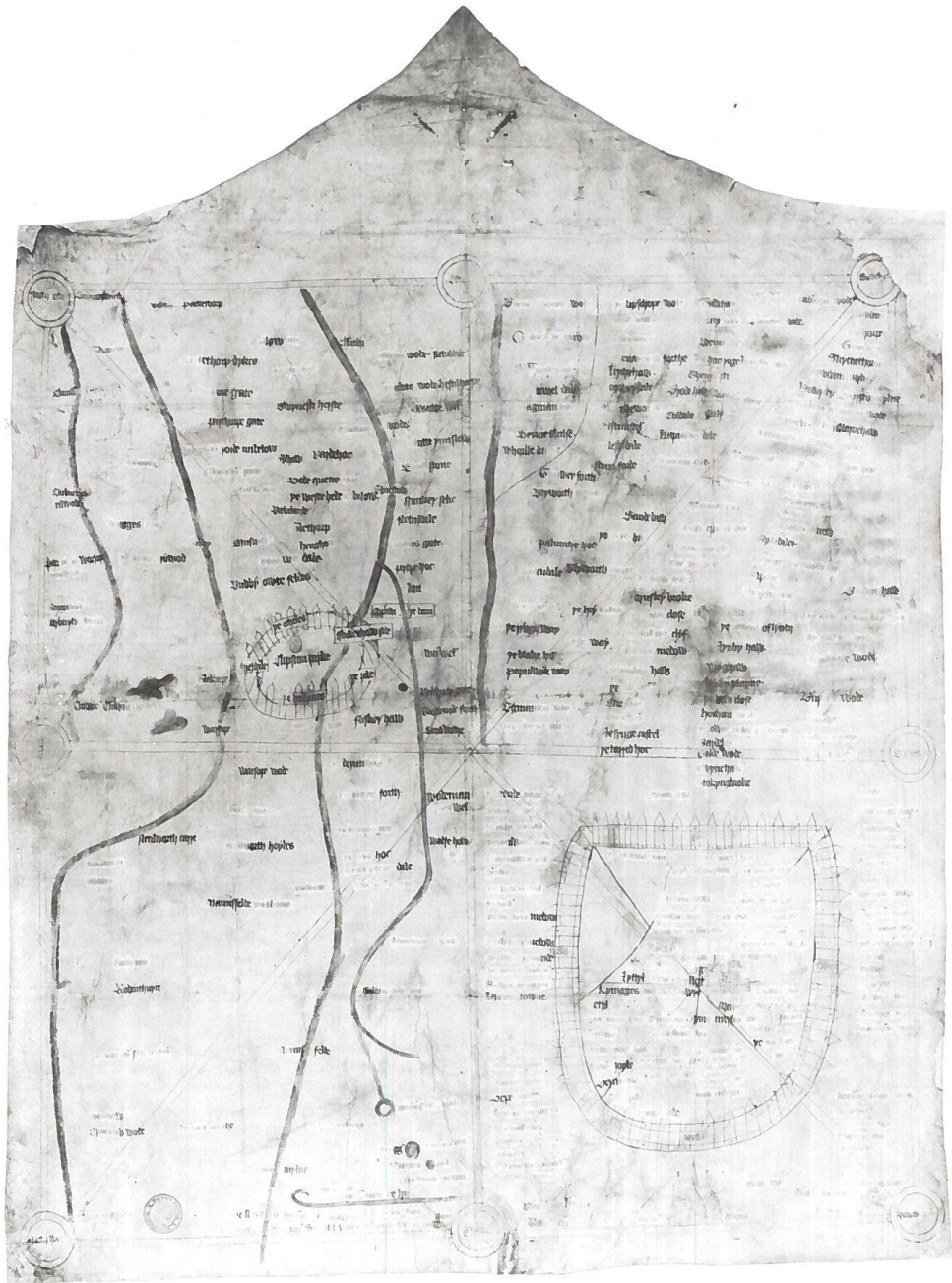
³ M. W. Barley, 'Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire', in R. A. Skelton & P. D. A. Harvey, *Local Maps and Plans from Medieval England* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 132-139, and also D. Price, 'Medieval Land Surveying and Topographical Maps', *The Geographical Journal*, 121 (1955), pp. 1-7.

modern period. One such map shows the Lordship of Rufford as it looked in 1637, when the lands of the monastery were in the hands of Sir William Savile.⁴ Although this document is a copy of an original by John Bunting, the item shows the lands and forests which connect the Rufford Abbey estates to neighbouring villages. In the Bunting copy, Eakring is unmarked by the artist, but is situated almost directly in the middle of this map. As the fields named North Lathes and Hunger Hill are still present on modern maps, these make identification of the location of Eakring possible. These early drawings help to place Eakring in our period and confirms the location of the village.

It is therefore the prime focus of this chapter to explore two sets of documents which have survived for Eakring. Firstly, a collection of three drawings which are dated at 1664, and then secondly, a map of Eakring, dating 1737. By offering a transparent exploration of these maps, identifying a consistency of presence of the lands which feature on these maps, and by identifying those which exist today, can offer a direct link back to the Rufford Charters. It is possible to see which fields and lands belonged to Rufford Abbey and to see how far the monks as medieval landlords could stretch their grasp.

⁴ RF 4 L. A hand drawn copy of the Map of the Lordship of Rufford, c. 1637. Original by John Bunting, but present location unknown. This copy is currently held at Nottinghamshire County Council Archives.

Map 4 Source: R. A. Skelton & P. D. A. Harvey (eds.), *Local Maps and Plans from Medieval England* (Oxford, 1986), p. 132. A copy of the medieval map of Sherwood Forest.



Eakring 1664

The first collection of maps which show the organisation of the land in Eakring is a group of three images drawn in 1664, by Henry Caldecott.⁵ This collection was drawn up at the request of Henry Broome, the Bailiff of Eakring.⁶ These three maps each refer to individual fields in Eakring, showing fields of interest, detailing who the landowners were, and are useful to show how land divisions were being organised during this period. The two major land owners mentioned on the maps are the Earl of Rutland, who may have requested Henry Broome to carry out this survey, and the Earl of Shrewsbury, whose name features on the maps as owning land aligning that of the Earl of Rutland. Although these maps were produced well over a century after the Dissolution of Rufford Abbey, the land was still in the possession of the line of the Earls of Shrewsbury who had been granted the estates in 1537.⁷ As these maps were produced at the request of Henry Broome, the Bailiff of the manor instigating the survey on the maps, it is possible that these were to solve a dispute over land boundaries and ownerships. The Broome family may not have held family lineage with Eakring, as it is interesting that the Broome family do not appear at all in the Rufford Charters. This could mean that the Broome's either moved to the area after the Dissolution or that under new ownership, the Earl of Rutland appointed noblemen from outside of his

⁵ Savile Charters DDSR 227/17. Three separate sections complete this set, and shall be referred to individually. Original manuscripts held at Nottinghamshire County Archives.

⁶ DDSR 227/17. Image 1.

⁷ C. J. Holdsworth, *The Rufford Charters, Vol 1* (Nottingham, 1972), p. xiv.

faction to oversee the management of his lands. The Broome family name can be traced back to the village of Carcolston in Nottinghamshire in the seventeenth century, where some members appear in the visitations records.⁸ Carcolston is just 20 miles from Eakring, and it would have made sense for the Earl of Rutland to appoint somebody outside of Eakring to act as his representative in legal and financial matters.⁹ The earliest parish church visitation record has a 'Henery Brome of Brome Hall in the county of York', whose great-great-grandson Henry Brome was ten years old in 1614.¹⁰ Could it be that this young Henry Brome became the Bailiff of Eakring in 1664?

The first of the three images in the Caldecott map collection is a richly coloured drawing framed by a red border and holds the family crest of the Manners family, who held the titles of the Earls of Rutland. Rufford Abbey had become the property of George Talbot, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury, after the Dissolution¹¹, and this same George had married Gertrude Manners, daughter of Thomas Manners, Earl of Rutland.¹² George was a prominent landowner, having in his possession alongside Rufford Abbey, Sheffield Castle, Welbeck Abbey and Worksop Manor. However, this map was likely to have been commissioned for the interest of John Manners, 8th

⁸ K. S. S. Train (ed.), *A Second Miscellany of Nottinghamshire Records Vol XIII* (Nottinghamshire, 1950), p. 67.

⁹ www.google.co.uk/maps. Accessed 27/04/2017.

¹⁰ G. D. Squibb (ed.), *The Visitation of Nottinghamshire begun in 1662 and finished in 1664 by Sir William Dugdale* (London, 1986), p. 134.

¹¹ R. White, *The Dukery Records* (Worksop, 1904), p. 77. At the time Shrewsbury came into possession of Rufford Abbey, he also acquired 640 acres of arable land, 640 acres of pasture, 60 acres of meadow and 3 water mills.

¹² www.tudorplace.com. Accessed 30/04/2017.

Earl of Rutland. The Manners family emblem dominates this image. A beautiful blue peacock with his feathers displayed in full glorious colour sits on a plush red cushion within a circular roped edging, on top of which rests a crown.¹³ As this map now belongs to the Savile Records held at Nottingham County Archives, it shows that the land depicted was shared between the Earl of Shrewsbury of Rufford Abbey and the Earl of Rutland, who both had a vested interest in the village of Eakring. Beneath this is a drawn scale of measurement, underneath which is an introduction to the series of maps. The inscription to the introduction reads;

**The manoure of Eykringe in the Countie of Notinghm being
parcell of the possessions of the gd righte honourable
Roger Earle of Rutland Lorde of the same Manoure,
Surveyed the fiffe daye of Julye, 1664, by Henry Caldecott
Gent by the inssistaunce of Henry Broome Gent Bayliff of
the Saide Manor, And by the informacion of Robt
Cullingworth, Symon Camme & divers other Tenaunts of the
Same manour as hereafter enssweth. Beholde gd this
Figure dothe make demonstracon of the Sichte of the
manoure. The other figure, the Tenements of George
Kitchen adjotneng to the same. The residue of the tenents
de described in the towne of Eykring so as I colde not**

¹³ Savile Charters DDSR 227/17. Image 1.

**conveniently make demonstracon by figure, but as it dothe
appear for the booke of particulars.**

The fields which are drawn on Image 1 of the Caldecott maps show 'Hell Hill Felde'. Lands carrying the title 'hell' were notoriously difficult to work, hence the name.¹⁴ This field, partially owned by George Kitchyn, sits next to the land of Thomas Cowper, and shows two roads running through the larger of the two fields. Upon this larger field there sits a building, which could possibly be the church of St Andrews. There are also two smaller buildings too, so if this map is not showing the position of the parish church on these lands, then it is likely that the picture is showing the tenement of George Kitchyn as including the field and three buildings. After examining the Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths for the Parish of Eakring, the Kitchyn family name never appeared in the registers, signalling that George Kitchyn was not part of the village community in Eakring and was possibly from a different village, or lived elsewhere. Thomas Cowper however had family links to Eakring which dated back to 1573, with the marriage of Richarde Gee and Sisley Cowper.¹⁵

Image 2 of the Caldecott maps is more detailed. There is a chart drawn labelling what names are presented on the map, with astrological symbols used as indicators. Those depicted on the map are; The Hall, Widowe Reve, Willm Reddishe (Capricorn), Widowe Beck (Cancer), George Kitchin (Leo), Symon Camme (Libra) and John Greve Freeholder (Pisces).¹⁶ It is

¹⁴ Gover, Mawer & Stenton, *Place-Names*, p.

¹⁵ Eakring Early Registers, c. 1603-1702 @<http://www-st-andrews-eakring.org.uk/EarlyRegisters>. Accessed 02/02/2017.

¹⁶ Savile Charters DDSR 227/17, Section 2.

interesting that the lands held by these people are signposted on the map by astrological symbols, rather than numbers or letters. There is also a small section of text on this image, which says:

**Theis little ----- are good medowe and are called
Rudingbeck close, Theother figures are pasture enclosed &
arable not enclosed, as the Figures doo make
Demonstracions.xxx.**

Image 4 Source: DDSR 227/17. Image 2 from the Caldecott Plan and Survey of Eakring, 1664.



Some of these family names appear in the Registers for Eakring, linking them closely to the village. Family names like Reeve appeared as early as 1576, with Reddishe following in 1604 and Greaves appearing in 1627.¹⁷ However, Cowper and Greaves no longer appear in the Registers after 1653, while Reddishe was present until 1684. Beck never made an appearance at all. It is apparent from the observations taken from the Registers that the families mentioned on the Caldecott map had some existing ties to Eakring village, and these families may have been related to those who feature in the Rufford Charters, although this is just speculative rather than a firm assessment.

The fields shown on Image 2 of the Caldecott maps are named as Hill Close, which sits next to a larger plot of arable land. Both these fields border against Maplebeck and 'Eykringe Fielde', the land belonging to the Earl of Shrewsbury. Below this is a small arrangement of eight strips of lands, sitting together in a line, with the relevant astrological symbols to indicate which landowner held them. A river or stream runs through these fields, possibly a small off stream from the River Maun, providing a water supply for the villagers and water to help with crop growth. There is no scale for measurement and because of how the images are drawn on the map there is no way of identifying where these fields were positioned in relation to each other. There features the Latin inscription 'Facilius est corrigere, qua de novo creare' which translates as 'It is easier to correct

¹⁷ www-st-andrews-eakring.org.uk/EarlyRegisters. Accessed 02/02/2017.

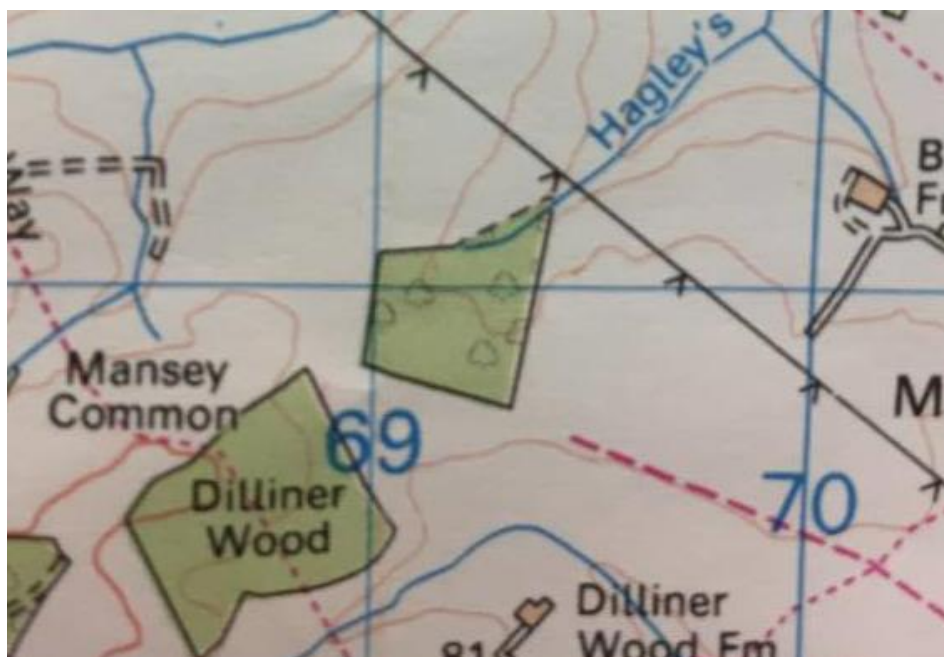
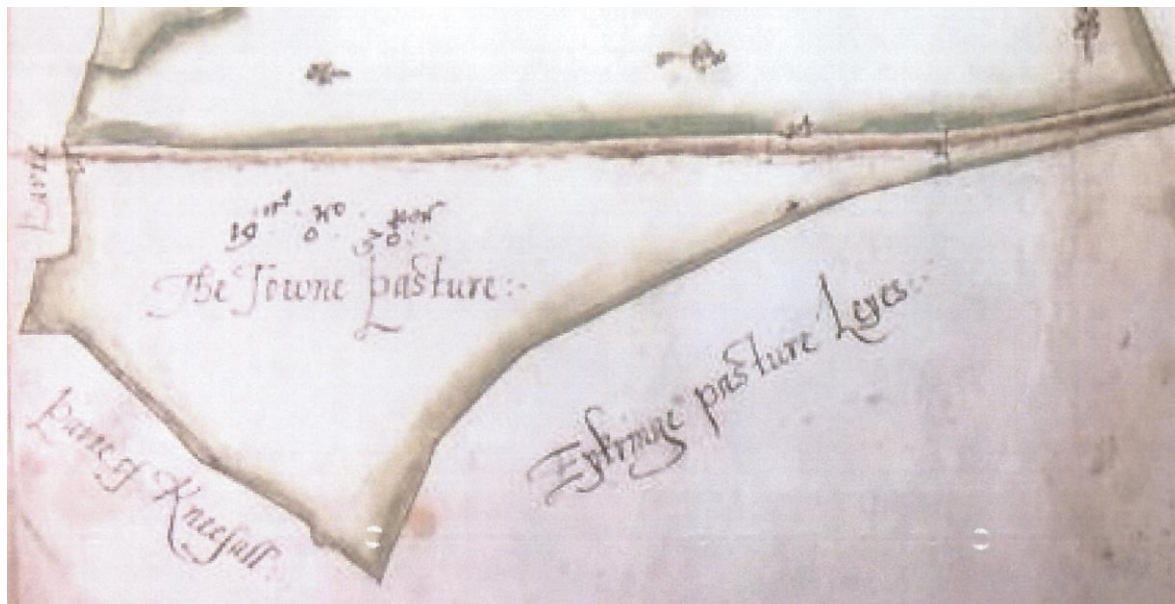
than create new'.¹⁸This seems to be a reference to the request by Henry Broome that a survey on the lands be completed, with the intention of confirming boundary lines between each land owner.

The third image of the Caldecott maps shows those lands which appear to be mostly wooded areas, indicated by little drawings of trees scattered on them. The main image shows three separate lands, The Towne Pasture, The Ladye Parke and The Launde. 'The Ladye Park' is the biggest of these fields, which at this point was owned by the Earl of Shrewsbury and was once a deer park. Part of this field can be located on modern Ordnance Survey maps, where the shape of the Towne Pasture appears to have remained the same shape as it was in 1664.¹⁹ In 1664 this field bordered alongside Maplebeck, which was positioned to the right of the field, with Eakring to the north and Bilsthorpe on the left. The town border between Bilsthorpe and Eakring is clearly visible on the map, separating the Towne Pasture from the Ladye Parke. The field named as Towne Pasture would have functioned just as such, as common farming land shared between the villagers. The smallest of these three fields is that called The Launde, which sits in-between The Ladye Parke and the Maplebeck border.

¹⁸ Savile Charters DDSR 227/17. Author's translation.

¹⁹ Ordnance Survey Map, Mansfield and Worksop (Southampton, 2002) and

Images 5 & 6 Sources: DDSR 227/17. Image 3 of the Caldecott Plan and Survey of Eakring, 1664. OS Map of Sherwood Forest, 2002. The shape of Towne Pasture can be recognised on modern OS maps.



This map also shows two fields called 'Upper Breale', and 'The Nether Breale'. The names of these two fields indicate different spaces within the same field, possibly referring to the distance from the village or to the

positioning of them in the field itself. The positioning of these two fields border against Eakring and Bilsthorpe and were held by the Earl of Shrewsbury and may have been located within what is now known as Eakring Brail Wood. This cannot be confirmed by their appearances on the map but can be assessed due to their name. Eakring Brail wood survives as the largest forested area close to Eakring as a protected environment. Again, how these fields sit in relation to each other is not so easy to decipher as they are displayed as individual images. The motivation for producing the map was to clearly establish which parcels of land belonged to different landowners, the Earl of Shrewsbury being the main landholder, and Henry Roos being another. The inscription on the map reads:

The ladie parke is a woodgrounde and the wooddes therein are lately solde, so that sitse profite is to be made thereof by woodsales for meny yeres. Therefore in my opinion it were good to stubbe the moste perse thereof & convert it to pasture so that thereby present presale maye be made, and the rather for that it is to be kepte enclosed continuallye.

The other two wooddes called Upper Breale & the nether Breale, the wooddes thereof are likewise solde verye latelye, and those are to be throweng open after nyne yeres, for they be parseise wooddes. And the Towne of

Eykrynge is to have covein of pasture therein. Therefore the Springes thereof are to be cherished.²⁰

²⁰ Savile Charters DDSR 227/17. Image 3.

These three maps are the closest images available for showing how the lands and fields in Eakring were separated and organised between the wealthier landowners in the village during the seventeenth century. Although this map relates to a time frame beyond this thesis, it is significant because it indicates who the families of influence were in Eakring after the dissolution of Rufford Abbey. As Image 2 indicates in the text, there may have been a recent shuffle of land in Eakring with sales of the woodlands and meadows and this survey was produced to establish new ownerships. Importantly, the land referred to on this map still carried the same characteristics as that land occupied in medieval Eakring, so was essentially the same land. Just as today when viewing the fields surrounding modern Eakring, the fields and lands are the medieval lands. The substance and composition of the soils have remained the same, therefore the important point is that the fields which exist today are the same fields that have always existed in Eakring.

Eakring 1737

The next map of interest for Eakring was drawn in 1737.²¹ Joseph Colbeck produced a beautiful and intricately detailed map of Eakring at the request of Lord George Savile for an assessment of his estates. Savile was the 7th Baronet of Rufford Abbey, which he had acquired through inheritance after the death of his cousin, Sir John Savile, in 1704.²² He

²¹ Ma P 5I. Map of Eakring Parish by Joseph Colbeck, 1737. Original manuscript held at University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections Department.

²² www.historyofparliamentonline.org. Accessed 13/04/2017.

died in 1743, leaving his estates to his eldest son, also Sir George Savile. The Colbeck map details what lands in Eakring the Savile's held. Drawn on vellum, and measuring 58 x 35 inches, this map displays the layout of land including field names as well as a scale bar and a colour code to identify who the lands belonged to; either Sir George Savile, the freeholding tenants or lands which were common pasture. The size and intricate detail on the map raise questions as to how the map was used and the practicality of it being taken out on location to the village. The map however is strengthened by two wooden rods, one at the top of the map and one at the bottom, and these would have been used to hold the map with.

The map shows Eakring divided into two main fields; Mill Hill Field on the west and Rudding Field and the east. Derek Walker states that Eakring had in fact three main fields. He says, along with Mill Hill Field and Rudding Field there was also Loskey Hill Field, and between these three fields the villagers could rotate their crops using the traditional three field system of rotation.²³ The Colbeck map does indeed show a Loskey Hill Field, but it shows it as a rather small field which held several strips, and does not hint that this field was large enough to support an entire village. In 1737 Loskey Hill Field was part of Mill Hill Field and had not yet succumbed to enclosure. Further to this, in comparison to Eakring, surviving maps of the nearby village of Laxton, and neighbouring

²³ D. Walker, *Eakring's Thousand Years* (Cratley, Eakring, Newark, 2008), p. 6.

Clipstone show that both these villages had four main fields.²⁴ This detail is a strong indication that not only did Eakring hold less land than Laxton and Clipstone, but also supported the agrarian life of fewer tenants.

Although by 1737 the charters had ceased to be valid, the Colbeck map depicts land organisation and details how strips were organised between those who leased or owned it. It can be seen quite clearly that there existed a high amount of cultivated land leased by tenants which was surrounded by woodlands and forest areas. The Colbeck map is revealing because it shows the organisation in a medieval village, with the village houses positioned north of the village, while the village itself sits in the middle of the two main fields, enabling convenient access for the villagers.

This map reveals that by 1737 some parts of Eakring had fallen to enclosure, with Rudding Field showing more enclosed fields than Mill Hill Field does. Mill Hill Field was still occupied by a good deal of strips, particularly as the village houses were closer to this field than Rudding Field. The map shows that Brail Wood had partly been cleared to become Brail Close, so enclosure of this field was gradually taking shape. Hall Close, sitting almost central in the map, would have been where the Manor Hall sat, and this was surrounded by Hall Yards.²⁵ A striking feature shared by the 2002 Ordnance Survey map and the Colbeck map is the

²⁴ J.D. Chambers, *Laxton* (London, 1964), p. 18, for a visual representation of the field plan in Laxton in 1635. The University of Nottingham's Manuscript and Special Collections Department also hold copies of maps by Mark Pierce, c.1635 under the catalogue references MS 280. For a map of the fields in Clipstone see J. Wright, *A Palace for our Kings* (Great Britain, 2016), plate 8.

²⁵ I would like to thank James Wright for kindly meeting me to discuss fields.

shape and size of Eakring's Brail Wood. The Colbeck map shows this wood in the early stages of enclosure, but interestingly it can be seen from the Ordnance Survey map that after 1737 Eakring Brail Wood did not succumb to further enclosure, as the shape of the woods on both maps are the same. The Colbeck map shows that there are a group of fields called Grange Yards which are sitting next to Brail Wood.

Holdsworth suggests that this area was where the monks of Rufford Abbey held their grange lands for the lay brothers to work on.²⁶ It is possible, with exception to the main roads, that Eakring reflects a similar set up to how it existed during our period. The medieval fields are still the same, partly thanks to the late arrival of enclosure.

²⁶ C. J. Holdsworth, *The Rufford Charters, Vol 2* (Nottingham, 1973), p. 407.

Map 7 Source: Ordnance Survey Map, Sherwood Forest, 2002.



Some of the fields on the Colbeck map are mentioned in the charters, which is significant because this tells us that the same fields were owned by Rufford Abbey and existed as such for hundreds of years. There is no reason to suppose that these names had not already been in use before the monastery was built. These fields are Bectangles, Bilsthorpe, West Field, East Field, Mill Field and Lings (although in the charters these appear as Southlynges and Northlynges). Many of the field names on the Colbeck map are different to those mentioned in the charters, or do not appear in the charters at all. However, on the Colbeck map there are small fields named as 'Grange Yards', slightly to the north of Brail Wood. Grange Yards is a reference to the monastery's agricultural background when lay brothers were employed to toil the monastery's granges allowing the monks to spend their time in prayer. The term 'Brail' may mean that on this land once was a deer park, with the word coming to us

through French means.²⁷ Derek Walker suggests that these fields were in fact small granges which the monks of Rufford Abbey had cultivated.²⁸ From this it can be assessed that the monks, or the lay brothers of Rufford Abbey, were clearing the lands of Eakring for agricultural use, shaping the landscape for their use and for use by the villagers.

The Colbeck map also shows some of the fields named in the Caldecott map of 1665. A comparative study of these two maps shows that the field names of Hell Hill, Lady Parks and Hill Close were still present in Eakring long after the abbey had been dissolved. The comparison allows for the fields in Eakring to be placed in relation to each other, which shows that the fields named in the charters and the fields named in the Caldecott map do not overlap, that they sit on opposite sides of the village so can be visually placed in relation to each other.

One significant detail about the contents of the Colbeck map is that by 1737 much of the land in Eakring was still using the open field system of farming, and had not yet adapted to the enclosure system unlike other agricultural spaces in the county. Although there is evidence that the area was starting to succumb to enclosure, the change never really took off. However, disputes between the landowners of both Eakring and Laxton about ownership and land exchanges, convoluted with

²⁷ J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer & F. M. Stenton, *The Place Names of Nottinghamshire*, (Cambridge, 1979), p. 49.

²⁸ Walker, *Eakring's Thousand Years*, p. 5.

neighbouring villages and freeholding rights, meant that neither village ever came under the Parliamentary sanction for enclosure.²⁹

This chapter has examined what maps of Eakring reveal about land organisation during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Eakring. By drawing links between two different series of maps drawn at different times, it can be noted that some fields in Eakring were known by consistent names, and there is no reason to think that these lands were not used during earlier periods for farming. It has also been proven that Eakring was slow to enclose fields, that the process had started by 1737, suggesting that this development was slow rather than fully resisted like that of Laxton. Furthermore, it has highlighted that land owners in Eakring were changeable and depended upon inheritance rights and marriages within families. Therefore, new land acquisitions for the wealthy brought about the introduction of new landlords for their tenants. During these times of shift the tenants' security in their dwellings may have been shaken and dependent upon new contracts of tenancy formulated between their new landlords. The next chapter will explore these relationships between landlords and tenants more closely.

²⁹ J. V. Beckett, *A History of Laxton, England's Last Open Field* (Oxford, 1989) pp. 169-171.

CHAPTER THREE: EAKRING AND THE RUFFORD CHARTERS, c. 1300-1400.

This chapter examines the Rufford Charters with a focus on what they reveal about Eakring as a rural village. By extracting the economic detail, a broader assessment can be made regarding the relationship between landlord and tenant. The charters have been separated into groups by a determination of their relevant century and a discussion shall commence in chronological order. Patterns of behaviour between the villagers and monks are expressed in the charters. Likewise, trends in prices for rents and leases will be obvious by looking at the evidence this way. There will be discussions including the content of charters, the different types of lease agreements made, the duration these agreements lasted for and other obligations expected of tenants. This analysis will then lead to a conclusion regarding the relationship and communication between the monks and the villagers of Eakring. This chapter will look at the time frame 1300- 1400, whilst the time frame 1400-1500 shall be examined in Chapter Four.

Table 1: Medieval villeins leasing property in Eakring, 1300-1500.

Name of Villeins	Date	Number
Cecilia, widow of Robert Qwitlof	14thc	1
Thomas and Agnes Curteys	14thc	2
William Marshall and his heirs	1307	2 or 3
John Marshall and his heirs	1318	2 or 3
Richard and Matilda Faber and heirs	1330-1	3 or 4
Henry and Isabell and 1 heir	1345	3
Nicholas and Elesia and 1 heir	1363	3
John and Alice Merevall and their heirs	1367	3 or 4
John of Winkburn, wife Alice and 1 heir	1371	3
Richard and Matilda de Walley and 1 heir	1375	3
Alan and his wife Alice	1381	2
Robert and Christiana Coke	1382	2
John and Isabell Palfrayman and 1 heir	1383	3
William and Alice and 1 heir	1394	3
Henry and Beatrice Pec	1409	2
Agnes, widow, and son Thomas	1409	2
William Beru	1454	1
John and Alice Dey and 1 heir	15thc	3
Widow of Tho Aleen, Rob Palett and wife	1457	3
Total		46 - 49

Family-Land Bond

There are 17 charters belonging to Eakring for the period 1300-1400.

The earliest, a charter dated 27 July 1307, involves a grant of land between John le Marchall and his brother, William.¹ In terms of religious expectation, John made no request for the provision of his soul or made any reference concerning his family's salvation. He did give full blessings

¹ Savile Charters DDSR 102/175. Grant dated 27 July 1307. Held at Nottinghamshire County Archives. Holdsworth, RC Vol 3, p. 462. Holdsworth reference 870.

with his confirmation of this grant, which included a toft with buildings in Eakring ('unum toftum en edificum im villa de Eykrynge').² These were to be held freely as chief lord of the fee for the service due and customary ('Tenendum et habendum').³ There are two possible reasons that John granted this land in Eakring to his brother and to his brothers' heirs: either as a family bond agreement, which was a way to provide assistance and charity to his kin, or because he held surplus land in Eakring, and by distributing it he ensured the land would be maintained.

Expectations for inheriting land often fell to the oldest surviving son within a family, and it would only be through the generosity or obligation that grants of land would be made between family members. This is because inheritance laws controlled and regulated land transference between family members, forbidding the bequeathing of land in wills.⁴ Because John had granted the land to William no rent was expected in return, as grants were essentially gifts. However, because William was given full rights of the property as chief lord of the fee, this gave him the freedom to lease out smaller parcels of this land if he should wish to, providing him with the opportunity to bring in a small income, but maintaining overall ownership. By doing so, William would have displaced his own heirs from the rights to the land and would have weakened the family's size of land holdings. It is possible that the land and buildings granted to William by

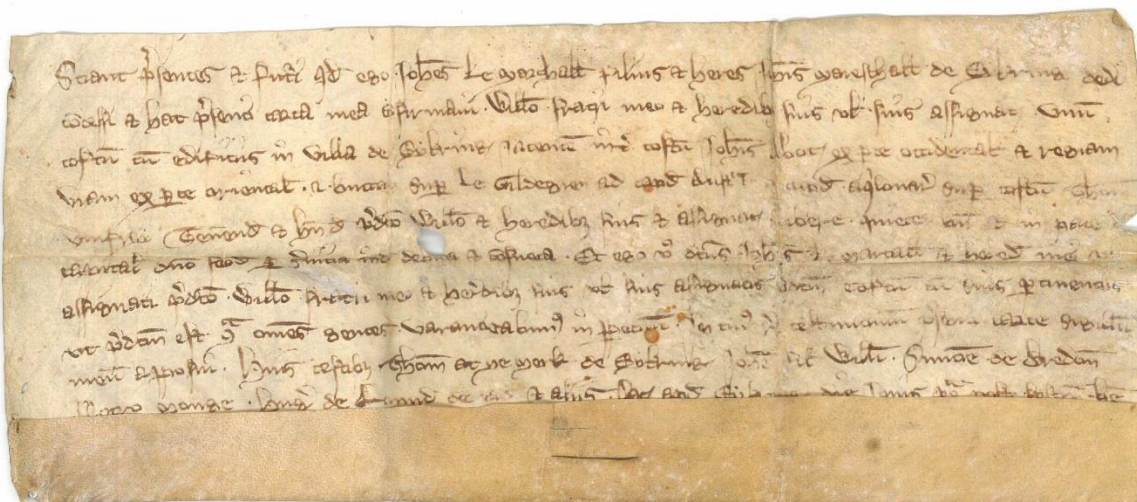
² Savile Charters DDSR 102/175.

³ Savile Charters DDSR 102/175.

⁴ B. Campbell, 'The Land', in M. W. Ormrod & R. Horrox (eds.), *A Social History of England, 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 197.

John did not remain in the family for many years afterwards, as Holdsworth suggests that in a later charter, dated 6 January 1381, this land was leased out by the Abbot of Rufford to a married couple called Alan and Alice.⁵ This charter refers to the land formally held by 'William Marschall'.⁶ It is apparent from this transference of ownership, from the Marschall family to that of the monks of Rufford, that an event facilitated this transaction. In between 1307 and 1381 the land held by the Marschall family was relinquished to the monastery, possibly result of a fatality, and possibly as a consequence of the adverse conditions experienced during the fourteenth century.

Image 8 Source: DDSR 102/175. Grant between John le Marshall of Eakring and his brother William, c. 27 July 1307.



This example demonstrates how complex and diverse the procedure was for orchestrating grants of land, and how fragile land ownership could be. Phillip Schofield points out that there were many types of landlord and

⁵ Holdsworth, *RC Vol 3*, p. 464. The Cotton Charters are held at The British Library.

⁶ Holdsworth, *RC Vol 3*, p. 464. Holdsworth reference 877.

tenant relationships within villages.⁷ The Rufford Charters include examples of different types of land transference, including grants, leases, agreements, and quitclaims. Bruce Campbell states that frequent buying and selling of land and property was a method to provide for the family, an act of the emotional family bond that was intended to provide for family members when there was no form of welfare provision in place.⁸ In many cases, this land transference and provision for kin tended to come after death.⁹ The example of John and his brother William demonstrate both these points well; John did make a provision for William, and yet by 1381 the land held by William had been passed onto the monks and was being leased out to Alan and Alice of Eakring.¹⁰

Most of the charters for Eakring dated 1300-1400 involve the leasing of relatively small holdings such as tofts and crofts. Likewise, another popular feature for leasing is a messuage with some land on it. A messuage is a similar type of abode to a toft, being described as the standard term for a dwelling house and its appurtenances.¹¹ Both these types of accommodation were typical sizes of rural holdings. 12 out of the 17 charters which are dated for this century include this type of property for lease, whilst the remaining five involve land or buildings. This is a good indicator that most people in Eakring were renting small

⁷ P. R. Schofield, *Peasant and Community in Medieval England 1200-1500* (Hampshire, 2003), p. 11.

⁸ Campbell, 'The Land', p. 209.

⁹ Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, p. 53.

¹⁰ Holdsworth, *RC, Vol 3*, p. 464. Holdsworth reference 877.

¹¹ E. Rutledge, 'Landlords and tenants: housing and the rented property market in early fourteenth-century Norwich', *Urban History*, 22 (1995), p. 10.

landholdings from the monastery to secure housing and land to grow crops on. Most contracts concern the same amount of land and this shows that Eakring fits in with the historiography that peasants typically rented out small pockets of land to distribute the inevitable success and failure of crop growth.¹² It must be considered that the size of an acre differed with soil type, so an exact measurement of the land cannot be assessed. Schofield states that in Hinderclay, in the period 1310-1320, the average land holding size was just less than 1.5 acres.¹³ Most tenants in Eakring therefore were holding an average portion of land, according to Schofield's evidence.

Decrease in rent prices

The Rufford Charters show that after the Black Death the amount of land some peasants rented grew larger in size as they were able to afford more land. Campbell states, in some areas, pre-Black Death tenancies involved small amounts of land, whilst post-Black Death tenancies involved larger parcels of land.¹⁴ This applies to Eakring, but only so far as a collective quantity of land is concerned. The charters show that some peasants rented out many strips of land which added up to larger amounts of land. For the period 1300-1400 there are two charters that demonstrate this well. Dated at 1367 and 1394, each one of these two

¹² R. Britnell, 'Agriculture in a Region of Ancient Enclosure, 1185-1500', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 27 (1983), p. 50.

¹³ P. R. Schofield, 'The Social Economy of the medieval village in the early fourteenth century', *Economic History Review*, 61 (2008), p. 47.

¹⁴ Campbell, *The Land*, p. 206.

charters involve more land than the average 1.5 acres, or distributes the lands over a vast area, therefore distributing their rents further. The charters confirm that peasants leased out small pockets of land, rather than just one strip. For example, in 1394 William and Alice Wright rented 7 acres of arable land.¹⁵ These arable strips were in separate fields named Raynbarngate, Bordeland ad Betangle, Sternewell and Whitewong.¹⁶

The charter from 1367 was a lease between the Abbot of Rufford and John and Alice Merevall. This charter concerns just one and a half acres of arable land, and these strips were again located at various points around the fields of Eakring, namely on Sternewellewong, Field Mill and East Field.¹⁷ These charters can be used as firm examples of peasants considering their potential crop growth security against any crop failure. Although there is a difference in the value of these rental agreements, with the Merevall's agreeing to pay 3 shillings per year in 1367, as opposed to the 9 shillings which the Wright's agreed to in 1394, they show that the price for an acre decreased slightly between these two dates. For example, it can be summarised that the charter belonging to the Merevall's in 1367, reveals that the value per acre they agreed to pay was 2 shillings, for in this charter a rent of 3 shillings was expected for 1.5 acres.¹⁸ The later charter, involving the Wright's in 1394, tells us that 9 shillings were expected for 7 acres of land.¹⁹ Through calculation, this

¹⁵ Holdsworth, *RC*, Vol 3, p. 466. Original manuscript held at The British Library. Holdsworth reference 882.

¹⁶ Holdsworth, *RC*, Vol 3, p. 466.

¹⁷ Holdsworth, *RC*, Vol 3, p. 463-4. Holdsworth reference 874.

¹⁸ Holdsworth, *RC Vol 3*, p. 463-4.

¹⁹ Holdsworth, *RC Vol 3*, p. 466.

places the value of one acre at just 1s 3d.²⁰ Therefore there was an estimated drop in value of 9d, with the Wright's paying less in 1394 than the Merevall's had in 1367. So, according to the Rufford Charters, not only was land cheaper after the Black Death, but for a long period during the fourteenth century the value of land continued to fall. Likewise, tenants could spread their rented strips of land out between different fields.

These two charters involving the Wright's and the Merevall's demonstrate two things; firstly, that tenants holding these strips of land had available financial wealth and were able to accumulate more land, and secondly that they were taking advantage of cheaper land prices and consuming what they could afford. Taking this evidence in line with that on the Caldecott and the Colbeck maps discussed in Chapter One, it is possible to see how strips were organised on the outskirts of the village, easily accessible but away from the village centre. Unfortunately, the Wright's and Merevall's only appear on this one occasion in the Rufford Charters, but they provide evidence to enable this discussion of deflated land prices post Black Death in Eakring.

²⁰ List of Medieval Prices @ www.medieval.ucdavis.edu. Accessed 6/3/2017.

Length of agreements

If the average size of a land holding was an acre with a building on it then this suggests that Eakring was a nucleated settlement, with the tenements occupied for living purposes and not just for agricultural use. The value of these lands and the duration for which they were held for are an important feature of the charters, especially when considering the events during this century. Between 1300 and 1400 the charters make no mention of the duration of the timescales these leases were to last, until we get to 1367. In the charters which exist after this date, two different expressions are used to detail the lengths of leaseholds. The most popular expression is confirming the length of the contract as an amount of years, which is mostly stated as a sixty or eighty-year period. The second term used for confirming the duration of the leasehold was for the life of the leaseholder and that of their heirs.

There are several examples which can be used to demonstrate this feature. As already discussed, John and Alice Merevall leased out various small plots of land in Eakring from the abbot of Rufford Abbey in 1367.²¹ The transcribed annotation of this charter by Holdsworth states that this lease was for eighty years.²² Likewise, in 1383, John Palfrayman and his wife Isabell leased a messuage in Eakring for the period of 60 years.²³ The remainder of the charters for Eakring were drafted to last for the rest

²¹ Holdsworth, *RC Vol 3*, p. 463-4.

²² Holdsworth, *RC Vol 3*, Charter 874, p. 463-4.

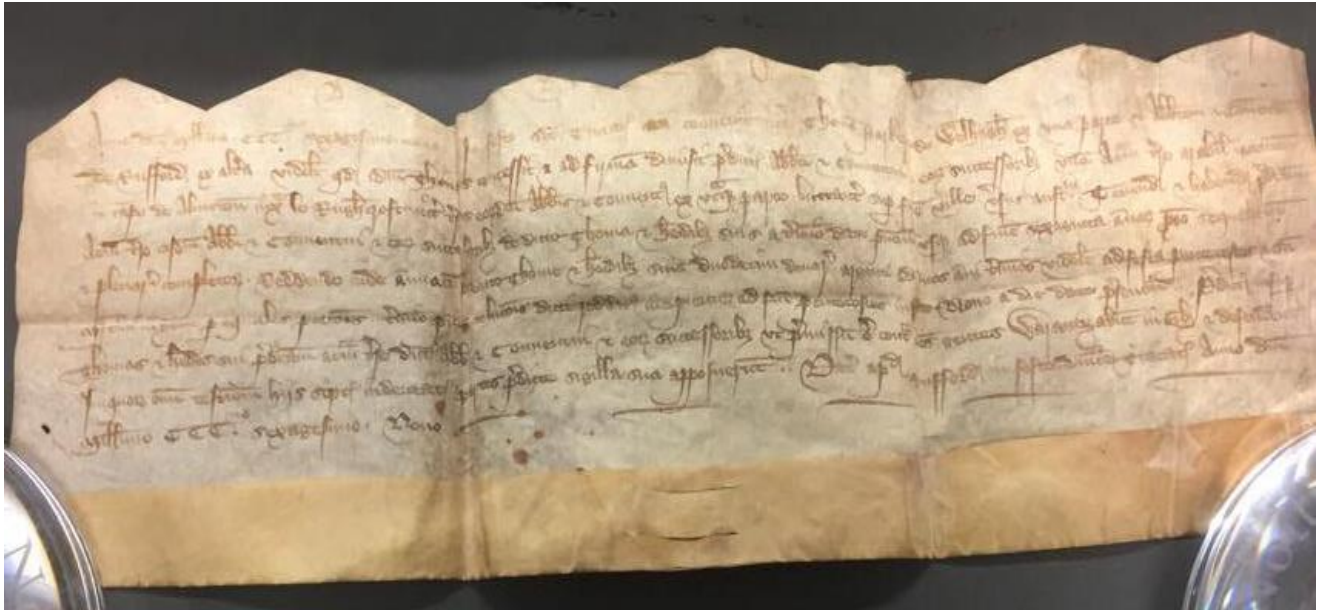
²³ Holdsworth, *RC Vol 3*, Charter 879, p. 465.

of the tenant's lives, a feature which shall be discussed more closely later on. There are charters belonging to other villages that also held their tenancy agreements for this unusually lengthy amount of time. Thomas Parker of Wellow leased out one acre of arable land in Ompton to the Abbot of Rufford in 1369, and this lease was to last for the duration of sixty Years (sexaginta annos).²⁴ In 1388 John of Granby and his wife Johanna leased all of the Abbot's lands in Shirebrook for a term of forty years (ad firmam tenet ad terminum xl annorum).²⁵ It could be the case that the lease between Thomas Parker and the Abbot of Rufford made more practical sense to be issued for forty years as it was the Abbot of Rufford who was tenant, and therefore the land would have been in the care of the monastery rather than in the hands of an individual leaseholder. From this perspective, the monastery would have been around longer than Thomas Parker. Although this provides a plausible explanation, it does not account for why local tenants were able to hold contracts for these lengths of time also.

²⁴ Savile Charters DDSR 102/190. Original Manuscript held at Nottinghamshire County Archives. Holdsworth, RC Vol 2, p. 251. Holdsworth reference 484.

²⁵ Savile Charters DDSR 208/42. Held at Nottingham County Archives. Holdsworth, RC Vol 1, p. 76. Holdsworth reference 143.

Image 9 Source: DDSR 102/190. Thomas Parker's lease to the Abbot of Rufford, c. 1369.



How typical these exceptionally long periods of agreement were is worthy of some exploration, as a sixty to eighty year term would be longer than the average life expectancy of a medieval peasant. These exceptionally long-term agreements which appear in The Rufford Charters were unusual. Miriam Muller has found in her research regarding leases and debt at Brandon during the fourteenth century that the majority of leases were made for a period of three years or less.²⁶ It was not unknown for peasants to agree to a lease to last for longer periods, but generally, if made, these longer periods were for seven to nine years.²⁷ Muller makes no mentioning of these leases lasting for anywhere near the sixty years

²⁶ M. Muller, 'Peasants, Lords and developments in leasing in later medieval England', in B. J. P. van Bavel & P. R. Schofield (eds.), *The Development of Leasehold in Northwestern Europe, c.1200-1600* (Turnhout, 2008), p. 160.

²⁷ Muller, 'Peasants', p. 161.

that can be found in the Rufford Charters. There is perhaps a very practical reason for this. Muller's research was based on the inter-tenant leases forged between the villeins at Brandon. This process involved an agreement made between two villeins, one who would agree to rent land from the other, whilst rightful ownership of the land remained with the landlord. Therefore, a third party was involved who would have been required to pay separate fines for this privilege. A similar activity to this has already been discussed, with the example of John and William le Marchall from the Eakring charters.²⁸ Hoskins also found this to be a regular feature in the charters belonging to the village of Wigston, particularly with frequent land exchanges between peasants involving small parcels of land.²⁹

Although this activity risked the future possession of the land for inheritance within the family, it offered a practical and immediate solution to debt management for those holding the land. The opportunity to raise extra cash in times of severe financial strain, or the chance to purchase extra pieces of land with surplus income, may have been issues settled away from the landlord. As Muller suggests, landlords needed the rents to be consistently paid, but the peasant had to modify his approach to land accumulation depending on different circumstances; too much land could be a heavy and expensive burden to peasant farmers.³⁰

²⁸ Savile Charters DDSR 102/175.

²⁹ W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant* (London, 1957), p. 52.

³⁰ Muller, *'Peasants'*, p. 163.

The long length of contractual agreements in Eakring could explain why there are so few charters belonging to Eakring for this period. The monks were agreeing to long durations for leaseholding land to guarantee an income long term, meaning that contracts were renewed less frequently than in other areas where contracts lasted for three or four years. These lengthy lease arrangements may have been preferred by the monks, who had to prevent their lands from alienation during times of social instability or when there were challenges on agriculture due to poor weather.³¹

However, the peasants within Eakring were dealing with land management on a much smaller scale and may have yielded to opportunities of sub-letting to their neighbours. Muller reports that these inter-tenant leases became less frequent in Brandon after the Black Death, partly because of the intervention of the landlord and impositions of fines.³²

A further consideration must be made for the type of landlord the tenant had to deal with, as ecclesiastical landlords owned well over a third of land in England.³³ Muller's tenants in Brandon were leasing lands from the bishop of Ely.³⁴ An ecclesiastical landlord, no less so than the monks at Rufford Abbey, but the relationship between the tenants and landlord may have been a key factor influencing the duration of the leases. The monks at Rufford Abbey, through their religious provision, may have held

³¹ Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, p. 18.

³² Muller, *'Peasants'*, p. 166.

³³ Campbell, *'The Land'*, p. 203.

³⁴ Muller, *'Peasants'*, p. 156.

stronger bonds with the villagers in Eakring, with family connections to the abbey, in the form of commemoration and memory, dating back generations. These family bonds may have made the long-term contracts appealing, because the family were connected to their ancestors as well as providing for their living family. If the lease was expected to last for a period of sixty to eighty years, or even if the lease was set at a term of life, there may have been an expectation for a family member to continue with the lease after the lease holder's death, therefore ensuring family continuity with the monastery.

Both these arrangements for the length of contract suggest that long term contracts were much more advantageous than short term contracts for the monks of Rufford Abbey. The monks needed to ensure an income from their estates and they needed to secure this income for a long period of time.³⁵ By securing tenancy agreements for these lengthy periods, the monks were guaranteed their income. In the years after the Black Death, when population levels had dropped so low that peasants could demand much better terms for land holding and rents, the monks needed to ensure that their lands were occupied. Miriam Muller found this to be the case in her study of Winslow Manor after the Black Death, where the Abbot of St Albans held concerns with maintaining the tenant population in his manor.³⁶ A method of controlling peasant movements was to levy

³⁵ B. Harvey, 'The Population Trend in England between 1300 and 1348,' in *The Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, XVI (1966), p. 35.

³⁶ M. Muller, 'The function and evasion of marriage fines on a fourteenth-century English manor', in *Continuity and Change*, 14 (1999), p. 179.

marriage fines on both men and women who avoided the merchet tax, which would make marriage a difficult achievement for those who tried to obtain a licence outside of the fee.³⁷ In the Midlands area, between 1348 and 1400, the value of an acre of land varied from 3 ½ d to 4 d, which was almost 1d less than 100 years before this.³⁸ The attraction for the peasant to engage in these long term contracts was possibly the amount of the rent expected in exchange. Typically, according to the evidence in the Rufford charters for this period, rents varied from as little as 3 shillings per year to 9 shillings per year (although this lease was for a considerable amount of land, far greater than just an acre).³⁹ After the Black Death in 1348 rent prices in Eakring were slightly lower than pre-Black Death prices. This gave the peasants an advantage because rents and leases worked in their favour. However, to be held to a single plot of land for such a long amount of time was risky, as during times of pressure on the land, such as poor environmental conditions which consequently affected the quality of the soil, the health of animals and crop growth, the advantage of low rents could soon be irrelevant if the land was spoilt.

³⁷ Muller, 'Marriage fines', p. 180.

³⁸ W. Page, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, A History of Nottinghamshire, Vol II* (Folkestone & London, 1970), p. 102.

³⁹ Holdsworth, *RC Vol 3*, p. 466. Holdsworth reference 882.

Contracts for life

A further positive aspect for the tenant was if the duration of the lease included the lifetime of an heir as well, then provision had been made to secure tenancy for their heirs. This would facilitate an easy transition of property and land through inheritance to other family members in the event of a death. It functioned to secure a family's investment in the property as well as providing for the next generation, providing family members with security, and therefore working very similar to how a will would have done. This is an example of what Schofield called the 'family-land bond'.⁴⁰

It is necessary to briefly discuss a charter which serves as a firm example of this kind of consideration in the charters. This lease, dated 1409, was made between the Abbot of Rufford and the widow Agnes Bolom.⁴¹ This charter states that the lease will be held at a rent of 20 shillings per year (which seems very expensive) but will last for the duration of her life and that of her son, Thomas. The important factor here is that the contract was to last for the lives of two generations. It could be that this charter was a re-affirmation between Agnes and the monks following her husband's death. Most of the surviving charters for Rufford Abbey are between married couples or sole men, and only feature women alone if they were widowed. This is because medieval women were only viewed as

⁴⁰ Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, p. 53.

⁴¹ Savile Charters DDSR 102/196.

tenants in their own right in the absence of male heirs or if they were widowed.⁴² However, the representation of this fact in documental evidence can sometimes lead to misunderstanding the individual status of the woman, as Muller also points out in the manorial court roll evidence from Heacham, that assumptions of women being single or without a male counterpart in the absence of the label 'wife of' can be misleading.⁴³ A more thorough examination of how widows are presented in the Rufford Charters will be discussed in Chapter Four, but this charter demonstrates well that lifetime contracts were made to last an unspecified amount of years.

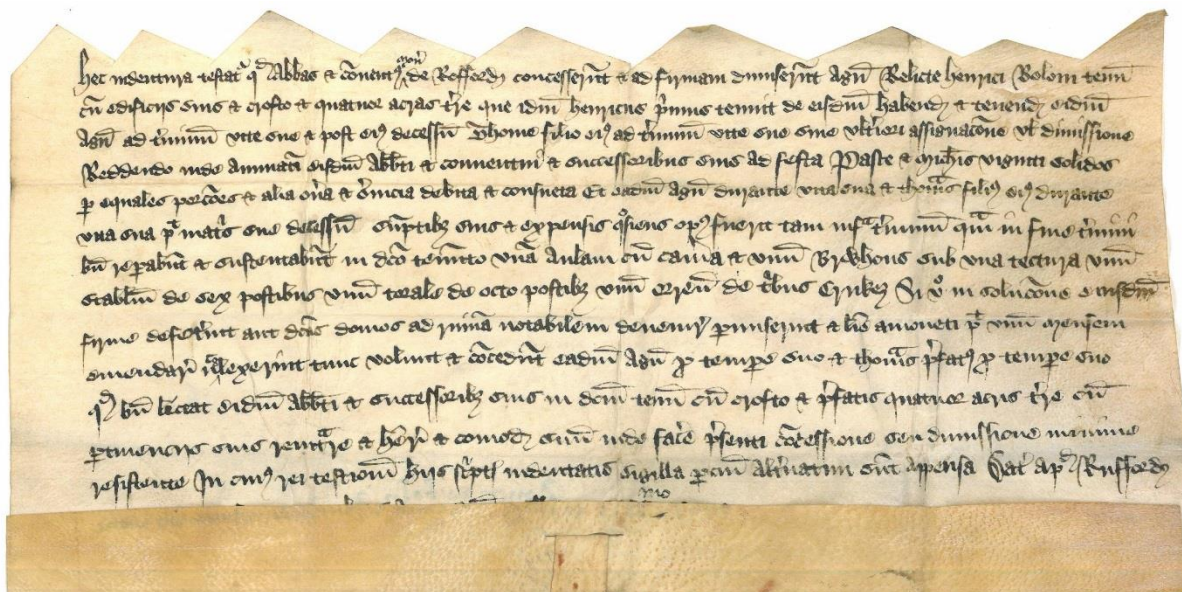
It would seem the purpose of this lease between the monks of Rufford Abbey and Agnes was not just to re-affirm Agnes' status as the principle tenant of the property, but to also state Thomas' involvement in the leaseholding. Thomas, as the male heir to Agnes, was then expected to contribute significantly to the maintenance of the property in question. This suggests that Thomas was of adult age and not classed as a minor. Thomas' personal investment in the property and land, involving his labour services with the possible outcome of inheritance of the lease after Agnes's death, required acknowledgement by the monks of Rufford Abbey. This charter also states that Agnes and Thomas are to keep the tenement in good condition, and at their own expense.⁴⁴

⁴² Muller, 'Marriage Fines', p. 182.

⁴³ M. Muller, 'Peasant Women, Agency and Status in England', in C. Beattie & M. F. Stevens (eds.), *Married Women and the Law in Premodern Northwest Europe* (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 104.

⁴⁴ Holdsworth, *RC*, Vol 3, p. 466.

Image 10 Source: DDSR 102/196. The grant between the widow Agnes Bolom and the Abbot of Rufford Abbey, c. 8 Nov, 1409.



This leads on to another feature in the Rufford Charters. In this charter, the condition for lease is that Agnes and Thomas will keep the land in good condition. This may have been to ensure that the monks would be able to rent out the property when the land next became free; they were safeguarding their ability to re-lease the land by ensuring it was well maintained and did not suffer from exhaustion. This same clause features in another charter, dated 1375.⁴⁵ In this charter, a lease between the Abbot of Rufford Abbey and Richard and Matilda de Walley, the property was rented under the terms that the buildings would be maintained well and then given back to the Abbot in a better condition than they had

⁴⁵ Holdsworth, *RC*, Vol 3, p. 464. Holdsworth reference 876.

received them.⁴⁶ This would seem like a heavy financial expectation on top of the 8 shillings rent expected from the de Walley's each year.

Unless this land was exceptionally good quality, there can be no explanation for this heavy burden placed upon the family. It would appear to be quite a contradictory clause coming from the Abbot, who in another charter, dated 1363, the Abbot states that he will provide timber for buildings on the land.⁴⁷

These variations in the generosity, or lack of generosity, by the Abbot are more than likely an aspect of the economic situation of the Abbey at that time, as there is some evidence in the charters that wood was provided to some tenants if needed for repairing damaged buildings.⁴⁸ The charters featuring these particular clauses, concerning the maintenance of buildings and the provision of timber, were all granted after the Black Death, during a period when tenancy agreements were thought to be at the advantage of the tenant rather than the landlord. This evidence suggests this was not the case. Two things need to be considered regarding the aftermath of the Black Death in rural society. Firstly, the devastation of the plague had caused a mass decline in the population. The population in the East Midlands area had dropped by 50 per cent during 1348 and 1400.⁴⁹ This in turn affected the numbers of people able

⁴⁶ Holdsworth, *RC*, Vol 3, p. 464. Holdsworth reference 876. This summary of the evidence is based on the translation given by Holdsworth as the original source is Cotton Charters xxi, 35, held at The British Library.

⁴⁷ Holdsworth, *RC*, Vol 3, p. 463. Holdsworth reference 873.

⁴⁸ Savile Charters DDSR 102/189. Original held at Nottingham County Archives. Holdsworth, *RC* Vol 2, p. 270. Holdsworth reference 531.

⁴⁹ J. V. Beckett, *A History of Laxton, England's Last Open-Field Village* (Oxford, 1989), p. 14.

to perform labour services on the land.⁵⁰ These charters express the concerns of the monks about the preservation of their lands and buildings so that after they fell back in the possession of the monks they could be leased out again.

Furthermore, the request for the tenants to maintain the buildings may have been a reaction to severe financial strain experienced by the monastery. Ecclesiastical landlords still faced financial pressures of heavy taxation imposed upon them.⁵¹ There is evidence in the Archbishop of York's registers that Rufford Abbey, along with 'nunneries of the province, and the monasteries of Calder and Egglestone...' were frequently exempt from paying taxes to the archbishop.⁵² This exemption was granted to Rufford Abbey continually for the years from 1398-1405. There is further evidence which would suggest that Rufford Abbey was in financial trouble long before these dates. This may explain why the demand was placed on some tenants to maintain the properties themselves, as the monks were also facing financial difficulties during these times.

Suits of court

Featuring in six separate charters for this period, a suit of court was the responsibility of serving administration duties and participating in the Lord's court for a day.⁵³ In this case, the obligation would have been

⁵⁰ J. Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath of the Black Death', *Past & Present*, 144 (date), p. 23.

⁵¹ M. M. Postan, 'Investment in Medieval Agriculture', *Journal of Economic History*, 27 (1967), p. 580.

⁵² R. N. Swanson, *A Calendar of the Register of Richard Scrope Archbishop of York, 1398-1405* (University of York, 1985), p. 2.

⁵³ Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, p. 27.

carried out at the Abbot's ecclesiastical court. The agreement made between the Abbot of Rufford and John and Issabella Palfrayman in 1388 (or 1368) reveals that the Abbot held his court in Eakring as the charter says 'magna cur(ia) dominorum abbatis et conventus in Ekeryng' (at the great court of the Lord abbot and convent in Eakring).⁵⁴ A suit of court removed the villein from his daily work on the fields so that this free labour could be performed for the Abbot, demonstrating a typical feudal relationship between both landlord and tenant. This would have affected the amount of land ploughed by the family on that day, resulting in smaller amounts of crop gathering. In most cases a suit of court was expected to be carried out twice a year, possibly during times when sowing and gathering were at their peak. However, serving at court provided a necessary function for the relationships between people living in the village, and ensured local agrarian matters were attended to and any disputes between villagers were dealt with.⁵⁵ Alongside the Palfrayman family, court service was also expected of Henry and Isabell of Eakring⁵⁶, Nicholas the son of Hugh of Caunton⁵⁷, John and Alice Merevall⁵⁸ and Thomas and Agnes Curtys of Frythbek.⁵⁹ Service at court was an obligatory act of labour and was an expected due along with the annual rent. This gives a broader perspective of the amounts of services,

⁵⁴ Savile Charters DDSR 102/189.

⁵⁵ D. Stuart, *Latin for Local and Family Historians* (West Sussex, 1995), p. 57.

⁵⁶ Holdsworth, RC Vol 3, p. 463. Holdsworth reference 872.

⁵⁷ Holdsworth, RC Vol 3, p. 463. Holdsworth reference 873.

⁵⁸ Holdsworth, RC Vol 3, p. 463. Holdsworth reference 874.

⁵⁹ Holdsworth, RC Vol 3, p. 468. Holdsworth reference 888.

fees and rents the tenants were paying to their lords, and it was another method for the lord to exploit his tenants.⁶⁰ If two days of labour were sacrificed whilst attending court, that may have accounted for a significant loss of two days ploughing on the lands. It also tells us that unfree villeins were expected to perform other duties. Schofield says that alongside rents, and suits of court, peasants were also expected to provide labour services on fields in winter, mowing service in June and July, reaping in August and September, a day's ploughing in winter and sowing at Lent, alongside suits of court and suits of mill and the construction of haystacks.⁶¹ Rents may have appeared to have dropped since the Black Death, but expectations of labour services had not diminished. As the last mention of serving a suit of court appears in a charter from 1388, coincidentally after the Peasants Revolt, it can be assessed that certain demands imposed by the landlords slightly altered between the monks of Rufford Abbey and the tenants in Eakring after this point.

John and Issabella Palfrayman appear in two charters. The first charter, dated 1383, only mentions their heirs being included in the lease, but with no identity of an heir given, leading to the conclusion that in 1383 the couple were childless.⁶² However they must have been of childbearing age as their next appearance, just 5 years later in a charter

⁶⁰ M Muller, 'Conflict and Revolt: The Bishop of Ely and his Peasants at the Manor of Brandon in Suffolk c. 1300-81', in *Rural History*, 23, (2012), p. 1.

⁶¹ Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, p. 27.

⁶² Holdsworth, *RC Vol 3*, p. 465. Holdsworth reference 879.

dated 1388 (although Holdsworth states this date could also be 1368) includes the name of their son, John.⁶³ The terms of the lease are the same in both charters, being granted for a term of sixty years and including two suits of court for each year. These two charters show that when John and Issabella's family circumstances altered the charters were updated to include new family members. New terms and conditions were not agreed to, and neither was there an alteration in the price of the rent. This shows that naming heirs in charters and acknowledging family members was an important feature for medieval people and provided a link to secure tenancy rights over property. It was also a method to record a growth in the number of tenants in the village and of stating an individual's legitimacy.

To summarise, this chapter has explored many features that appear in the Rufford Charters for the period 1300 to 1400. It has been possible to show that communication between the villagers of Eakring and the monks were expressed in a variety of ways, each with a definite economic dependency. There has been scrutiny on the economic content of these charters, which has included discussions on family land bonds, decreases in rent prices after the Black Death, the length of lease agreements and the duties of the medieval peasant to serve a suit of court. These different features in the charters reveal that many factors could affect the ability to lease property from the monks, but the variety of clauses

⁶³ Savile Charters DDSR 102/189.

included in the charters are also indicative that most people had an economic contact with the monastery. The variety of lease agreements suggests that the period was unstable, possibly more so for the monks than for the peasants, as tenants needed to be tied to their leaseholds to avoid alienation and the charters ensured this. The next chapter will focus on the period 1400 and 1500, and it shall be interesting to see if the same clauses are included in the later charters.

CHAPTER FOUR: EAKRING AND THE RUFFORD CHARTERS, c. 1400-1500

There is a significant drop in the number of surviving charters for Eakring belonging to this period with just five recorded by Holdsworth. With a much smaller source base than the previous chapter, this chapter shall examine two important features that make the charters for this century significant; those charters including widows, and the one charter detailing the desire for religious provision. These important features in the charters reveal the connections and contacts between the people of medieval Eakring and the monks at Rufford Abbey, and due to their nature, make an interesting contrast to the charters belonging to the period 1300 to 1400. By using the evidence from the charters this chapter will explore how widows were able to successfully negotiate land agreements with the monks and will provide a brief overview about the identity of widows. The discussion about widows is to be followed by an analysis of the request for religious provision in one of the charters. This request was made in the form of a grant in free alms, and the discussion shall include the social significance to these requests and why they were included in monastic charters and how the act symbolised a continuation of family commemoration with the monastery.

Widows

Sally Smith states that the ability for medieval women to deploy their resources successfully while occupying their status as widow suggests

that they held a 'genuinely powerful position'.¹ Smith argues, in the case of medieval women with ecclesiastical landlords, that the relationship was different between that of medieval man and the monks.² The relationship between medieval women and ecclesiastical lords were defined by architectural spaces, according to Smith.³ This implies that relationships were more religiously based and revolved around the church as an arena for expression of this relationship through prayer. Evidence of this form of relationship exists in the earlier charters surviving for Rufford Abbey, with close ties between the monks of Rufford and Emma de Capella being strengthened through the exchange of gifts.⁴ However, as Cavallo and Warner have argued, widowhood enabled the medieval woman to exercise her own legal identity and would thus mean her relationship with her lord would have been equal to that of her fellow village men.⁵ Evidence of medieval women defending their property rights in widowhood are not unheard of, as is demonstrated by the case of Annora de Pierrepont.⁶ Annora is an example of how visible a medieval woman became through her status as widow, as her legal challenges and successful outcomes are well documented.⁷ Although Crook presents Annora's ability to defend her property as a testament to her courageous nature when she was so often

¹ S. V. Smith, 'Women and Power in the Late Medieval English Village: a reconsideration,' *Women's History Review*, 16 (2007), p. 318.

² Smith, 'Women and Power,' p. 317.

³ Smith, 'Women and Power,' p. 317.

⁴ C. J. Holdsworth, *The Rufford Charters Vol 3*, (Nottingham, 1980), p. 446.

⁵ S. Cavallo & L. Warner, 'Widowhood, 'widowerhood': problems of visibility and definitions,' in S. Cavallo & L. Warner (eds.) *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon, 2014), p. 3.

⁶ D. Crook, 'The Widowhood of Annora de Pierrepont of Holme Pierrepont, Nottinghamshire, 1290-1297,' *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 49 (2005), pp. 64-79.

⁷ Crook, 'The Widowhood of Annora de Pierrepont,' p. 65.

opposed to, and undoubtedly this was the case, there was also a clear presence of the support from a network which Annora had built during her married life.⁸ This factor is not visible alongside any of the charters which will be discussed during this chapter, signalling that social status may also have had impact upon the status and abilities of medieval widows.

The presentation of widowhood in the charters offers insight into how female status was regarded and how widows used their position to maintain their living standards. One charter, concerning Agnes and her son Thomas, has been previously discussed in Chapter Three as an example of a family-bond lease.⁹ The remaining two charters involve Cecilia, widow of Robert Qwitlof, and the unnamed widow of Thomas Aleen.¹⁰ Widows from neighbouring villages of Kirton and Ompton are also present in the Rufford Charters, and shall be included in this discussion, with Kirton having a charter for the widow, Agnes Bate¹¹, and Ompton having charters for four widows, that of Margery, the widow of Robert Muskham,¹² Cecilia Mody¹³, Beatrice, one time wife of William¹⁴, and Agnes, widow of John in le Hane of Wellow.¹⁵ In reference to Chapter Two, the widows Reve and Peck also make an appearance on Image 2

⁸ Crook, 'The Widowhood of Annora de Pierrepont,' p. 65.

⁹Savile Charters DDSR 102/196. Held at Nottingham County Archives.

¹⁰ C. J. Holdsworth, *The Rufford Charters Vol 3*, (Nottingham, 1980), p. 468. Holdsworth reference 886 & 887. Also, Savile Charters DDSR 208/48.

¹¹ C. J. Holdsworth, *The Rufford Charters Vol 2* (Nottingham, 1973), p. 314. Holdsworth reference 633.

¹² Holdsworth, RC Vol 2, p. 238. Holdsworth reference 439.

¹³ Holdsworth, RC Vol 2, p. 245. Holdsworth reference 463.

¹⁴ Holdsworth, RC Vol 2, p. 243. Holdsworth reference 458.

¹⁵ Holdsworth, RC Vol 2, p. 244. Holdsworth reference 460.

from the Caldecott 1664 survey map of Eakring.¹⁶ Despite there being a small amount of evidence of widows negotiating charters on their own behalf, it still shows that widows in Eakring and surrounding villages were actively participating in land agreements with the monks and there were contacts between them.

Table 2: Number of times widows appear in The Rufford Charters, 1300-1500.

Village	Number of charters	Number of widows
Eakring	22	3
Kirton	14	1
Ompton	25	4
Kelham	4	0
Cratley	1	0
Shirebrook	2	0
Rufford	1	0
Nottingham	2	0
Besthorpe	2	0
Abney	1	0
Hockerton	1	0
Scarcliffe	1	0
Total	76	8

A significant feature of the charters is the terminology used to refer to the status and identity of these women. Six out of the eight charters give women their identity through their relationship with men, naming their departed husbands on the charters, and referring to the women as 'the widow of...' In the case of the widow of Thomas Aleen we are not given her name at all. To accompany her name on the charters is also that of

¹⁶ Savile Charters DDSR 227/17.

her daughter and son-in-law, so this widow may not have been viewed as the sole tenant of the property because she was still sharing the agreement with her son-in-law, and therefore had a male counterpart.¹⁷In medieval England a woman's identity was gained through her relationships with men, either as a daughter, wife, mother or widow. Neither of these terms gave medieval women a freedom of position, always being bound by their role in the family rather than as an individual. For example, Muller makes note from her research into female brewers in the manor of Brandon that women were referred to one of three ways during the fourteenth century; either by her own name, or as the anonymous wife of a man, or her name was given alongside her marital status.¹⁸ This would also appear to be the case with widows in the Rufford Charters, as the evidence shows there was only Agnes Bate of Kirton and Cecilia Mody of Ompton named as women in their own right, without mention of their deceased husbands. The other six widows fall under the references which Muller highlights.

What is interesting about these charters involving widows is that only two out of the eight are continuations of a lease holding on property in the absence of the husband; those belonging to the widow of Thomas Aleen and Agnes Bolom, widow of Henry Bolom. The remainder of the charters involving widows are a combination of lease and quitclaims and small

¹⁷ Holdsworth, RC Vol 3, p. 468. Holdsworth reference 886.

¹⁸ Muller, 'Peasant Women, Agency and Status in England', in C. Beattie & M. F. Stevens (eds.), *Married Women and the Law in Premodern Northwest Europe* (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 105.

grants of land to other villagers. These quitclaims and grants are evidence of the widows surrendering their lands. In 1316 Cecilia Mody of Kneesall (but appearing in the charters for Ompton) granted to Robert, son of John le Brewest, 'in her widowhood' various lands in Ompton, including half an acre on Hingandehil (possibly now Hunger Hill).¹⁹ In 1326 Agnes Bate of Kirton granted to Simon le Turner, his wife and their legitimate heir 'in widowhood and lawful power' one selion of land on Hungirhul.²⁰ Four other charters are quitclaims and releases, those belonging to Cecelia, widow of Robert Qwitlof, Margery, widow of Robert of Muskham, Beatrice the one-time wife of William of Muskham and Agnes, widow of Jon in le Hane of Wellow. The case for widows being able to hold onto their lands and keep their pre-existing tenancy agreement until her circumstances altered, seem rather slight in these cases. Until their status changed, it was possible for widows to hold onto their property if they remained unmarried, chaste or until an heir came of age.²¹ In the evidence from the Rufford Charters the women appear to be relinquishing their hold on land without mention of a change in their status. Beatrice assigned all her rights of a plot of land in Ompton, Agnes also quitclaimed her right to 5 roods in Ompton. Cecilia and Margery both quitclaimed their rights by reason of dower to the abbot and convent of Rufford. These charters do not tell us if this was all the land in the

¹⁹ Holdsworth, RC Vol 2, p. 245. Holdsworth reference 463.

²⁰ Holdsworth, RC Vol 2, p. 314. Holdsworth reference 633.

²¹ R. M. Smith, 'Women's Property Rights under Customary Law: Some Developments in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 36 (1986), p. 169.

possession of these women, and it is probable they held land elsewhere in which they had some type of dwelling, but the overall amount of land owned by these women is unknown. The suggestion here is that these women had a reason to give up these lands. Financial crisis would be the most obvious reason, as a lone person trying to continue with the agrarian responsibilities of landholding may have been difficult. Although these quitclaims and releasing lands may not have been down to a forcible manoeuvre, and may have been of a practical nature, as Muller notes that widows would have been active in the leasing market because of their ability to shrink their land holdings due to a lack of labour.²² Therefore rather than being forced into giving up her lands, these women made active decisions about their own situations. In line with this, Bekar and Reed suggest that a strategic disposal of land was carried out to maintain themselves during a time when provision was an individual matter and not a state concern.²³ Therefore the circumstances of widowhood dictated the practicality of selling lands, rather than this being a forced act by the landlord.

Religious provision

The most distinguishable charter belonging to Eakring is the grant made between William Beru of Eakring and Rufford Abbey in 1454, which a grant was made in free alms.²⁴ Further evidence of grants in free alms do

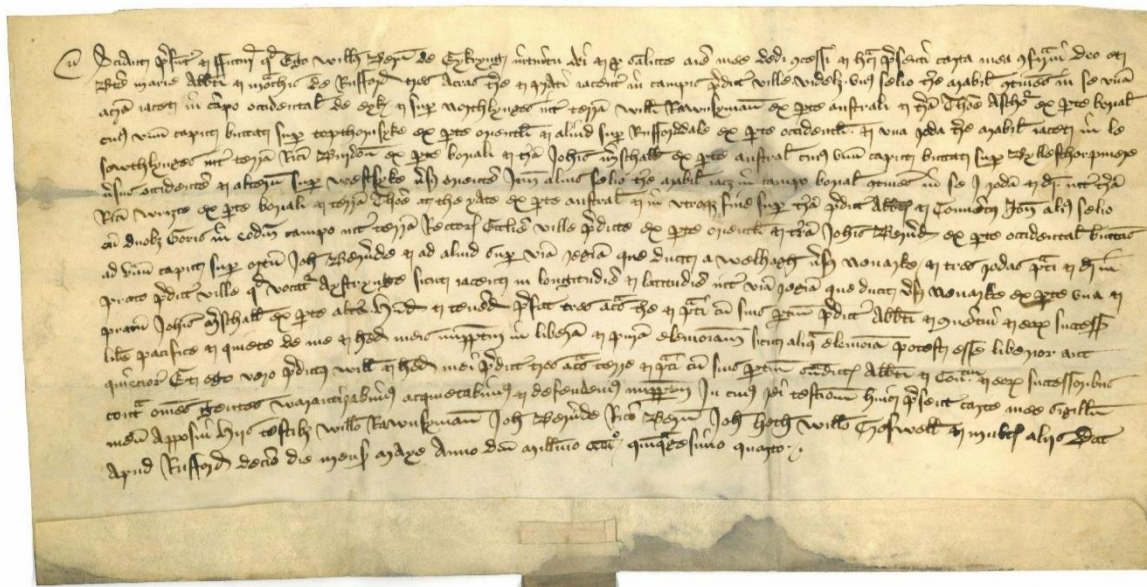
²² Muller, 'Peasant Women', p. 110.

²³ C. Bekar & C. G. Reed, 'Land Markets and inequality: evidence from medieval England,' *European Review of Economic History*, 17 (2013), p. 301.

²⁴ Savile Charters DDSR 208/40.

not feature in the Rufford Charters after 1454, making this one the last entry of this kind. Expectation for religious provision in the charters features frequently for the period 1147-1300, but curiously after this date there is a significant decline. For this reason, a closer examination of this charter is necessary along with a brief discussion about why these requests were incorporated into charters.

Image 11 Source: DDSR 208/40. Grant in free alms by William Beru to the Abbot of Rufford, c. 3 May 1457.



Grants in free alms were important because the benefactor of the grant would bestow land and property to the monastery, of which the rights would eventually transfer to the monastery on the death of the

benefactor.²⁵ Often the gift would include rights to all the property owned by the benefactor, which would exclude rightful heirs from their family estates. In exchange for these donations of land to the church, the monks would supply religious provision. This provision included prayers for the salvation of souls, of people living or deceased, and might demand that family members were buried inside the monastic chapel house, so they were given a prime position nearer to God. The monks' prayers would work to ensure family members who had died were safeguarded from entering hell as well as sealing the bond of commemoration between those dead and alive. Grants in free alms were a common feature in the relationship between the monks and the laity, as not only did they secure an economic investment, but they acted as confirmations of spiritual dependency. It was therefore a two-way relationship, with each party depending upon the other to confirm their status in medieval society.

It is through these grants that monks could accumulate much of their lands and wealth, and one of the principles of monastic culture that has come under much criticism. Although the possibility that the monks had become victims of their own success must also be a consideration, as the increase in the growth of the popularity of the Cistercians led to the nobility to making endowments of land and property to the monks. This in turn presented a contradiction to their cause, as the accumulation of wealth made some monasteries incredibly rich. Land owned by

²⁵ E. Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey and its Social Context, 1132-1300: Memory, Locality and Networks* (Turnhout, 2005), p. 215.

ecclesiastical landlords accounted for almost half of the estates in the country, making them wealthier than lay landlords, of which this group included the crown.²⁶ This contradiction may account for the rise of religious scepticism, as for some members of the laity, the accumulation of monastic wealth was questionable and seemed a distant example to that of a life of poverty. Evidence from the Rufford Charters suggest that the request for religious provision began to disappear from the charters, and as none appear to have survived after 1454 an absolute confirmation of this fact can only be sited as an observation.

This grant, between William Beru and the monks of Rufford Abbey, concerns the endowment of numerous strips of land to Rufford Abbey. William gave the monks a significant amount of land, including 3 acres of arable, 3 and a half roods of meadow and various selions of land dotted around different fields in Eakring.²⁷ These selions were in the West Field on Northlynges, Sowthlynges, the North Field and a meadow in Astrynge. The charter clearly directs the location of these strips of land, and places them next to lands owned by other landowners or tenants, and names the fields that they sit next to. Some of these fields can be located on the Joseph Colbeck map of 1737, such as Westsyke and Astrynge.²⁸

In the 283 years which separate the grant made by William Beru and the Joseph Colbeck map some of these field names have slightly altered. On

²⁶ B. Campbell, 'The Land, in M. W. Ormrod & R. Horrox (eds.), *A Social History of England 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 201.

²⁷ Savile Charters DDSR 208/40.

²⁸ Ma P 51. Held at The University of Nottingham Manuscript and Special Collections Department.

the Colbeck map, they appear as Westing and Eistring whilst Northlynges and Sowthlynges have been replaced by the single term of Lings. It is noticeable that these strips are positioned at various points in Eakring, with Westsyke and Aystrynge sitting to the south of the village and Northlynges and Sowthlynges sitting at the north side. This may infer that the type of land was different, although the use of -ynges or -ings at the end of the field name suggests that the land was simply low-lying grass land or meadow.²⁹ If these strips were meadow, then it was not just the amount of land that was being gifted to the monks which was significant, but also the type of land. Meadow lands were a most luxurious type of land to be given away, as they required a great deal of nurturing due to them being a man-made feature on the landscape.³⁰ They could also be rich in wildlife, had access to sufficient nourishment from the ground and facilitated good hay crops, and were therefore very valuable. William's grant of these lands to the monastery demonstrates the wealth of this individual, the strength of his religious belief, and his social bond with the monks, as William's family line was well established in Eakring.

The Beru family name appears in the Rufford Charters as early as 1240, in a confirmation charter by Richard Foliot to the monks for two tofts in Eakring.³¹ The deed is titled 'De tofto nuper Ricardi Beri', and if this is a

²⁹ J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer & F. M. Stenton, *The Place Names of Nottinghamshire* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 280.

³⁰ Campbell, *The Land*, p. 187.

³¹ Holdsworth, *RC*, Vol 2, p. 416. Holdsworth reference 775.

reference to the reason for the confirmation, then the latin word 'nuper' would suggest that Ricardi Beri had recently been in possession of this land. As his name is not included in the transference of this land, or as a witness, it is possible that Ricardi Beri was deceased. Holdsworth notes that William Beru of the 1454 grant could be a relation to Ricardi.³² The monks and the Beru family were probably very familiar with each other, and the grant in free alms reaffirmed a connection between the two by pronouncing continuity in their relationship. It was important for both parties that networks were secured, and the relationship between the monks and the Beru family confirm that relationships between the monks at Rufford and the laity were important for economic and religious reasons.

The grant in free alms was later re-confirmed by William Beru in 1455 with a quitclaim and release to the monks.³³ This act ensured that the transference of these lands would pass over to the monks without any future disputes from anyone who may have felt they had an entitlement to this land. As the document was composed over a year after William's original grant in free alms, this time must have offered William a cooling down period to reconsider his options, and whether he felt compelled to change his mind regarding the quitclaim. It was extremely important to the monks that these huge grants of land to the monastery were secure, so that in the event of dispute by disinherited family members, the monks

³² Holdsworth, *RC, Vol 2*, p. 416. See Holdsworth's notes for Charter 775.

³³ Holdsworth, *RC, Vol 3*, p. 467. Holdsworth reference 885.

could provide evidence that the grant had been given in good faith. However, the Beru family do not feature in the charters at all after this final act in 1455, which unfortunately closes the door on any future interactions they may have had with the monks.

Along with the economic and religious reasons for granting this land to the monastery, the grant of this land could also be an indicator of the changes in the environment. After the turbulence of the fourteenth century where the population in medieval society had decreased drastically, the land was no longer suffering from over exploitation and was able to recover. Campbell states that in the 150 years that followed the Black Death, due to the decrease in population and the amount of lands which went uncultivated, land began to slowly regenerate itself.³⁴ If so, the meadows that had required much labour may have gradually become a drain on resources to a population that was still trying to reclaim its numbers. Holding vast amounts of meadow lands, particularly if there was a shortage in labour to work these fields, would only be as valuable as the profits emerging from this land, and if labour could not be provided then the land was useless to the owner. It would therefore make good sense to donate this land to the monastery, removing high maintenance meadows from the daily responsibility but at the same time satisfying a personal religious gesture.

³⁴ Campbell, *The Land*, p. 189.

In brief, and due to a shortage of available evidence, this chapter has primarily examined the presence of widows in the charters, and the available evidence for religious provision. Despite there being very few charters involving widows, the evidence suggests that widows were able to successfully communicate with the monks regarding their lands.

Likewise, the evidence taken from the grant in free alms by William Beru is suggestive that lay people were still prepared to invest in their local monastic institutions. It can be summarised that because of the lack of evidence of religious provision, that the relationships between the people of Eakring and the monks of Rufford Abbey were expressed through roles as landlord and tenant rather than as strictly clergy and laity.

CHAPTER FIVE: OMPTON AND KIRTON

Eakring in the wider context

This chapter shall examine two other villages that appear in the cartulary. These two villages are Ompton and Kirton. The feature connecting all three villages is that Eakring, Ompton and Kirton were all monastic granges, so came directly under the management of the monks' lay brothers who performed the agricultural duties for the monastery. This fact facilitates an observation whether the land was managed differently and if the villages were nucleated or used solely for agriculture. This chapter explores Ompton and Kirton by discussing significant charters that help to contextualise Eakring's relationship with Rufford Abbey. The exclusion of a discussion including other villages which are in the Rufford Charters is a result of limited space within this thesis. There will be a discussion about the rural land in Ompton and the presence of a dominant landowner, detail which is missing from the Eakring charters. Kirton shall be used to highlight more evidence of religious provision in the Rufford Charters, with reference to two individual cases. There will also be a brief discussion of a will made in 1513, which places Rufford Abbey as a significant institution within the region.

Ompton

Ompton is located next to Eakring and differs from Eakring because it was not a nucleated settlement, but a seemingly large patch of cultivated fields with a few buildings placed on it. The whole cartulary for Ompton includes just 68 charters, out of which just 25 are in the period 1300 to 1500. Dating from 1311 to 1406 and covering a period of less than a hundred years, their most striking feature is that many of the charters involve the leasing of fields, as opposed to leasing tofts and crofts. 19 out of the 25 relate to land alone, and the remaining 6 involve the leasing of lands including buildings, which indicates that Ompton was not a nucleated settlement like Eakring. If the evidence in the charters suggest that there were few households within Ompton, then compared to Eakring, Ompton was much smaller. Ompton, as a rural development, was used primarily by villeins for growing crops, which indicates that those who were holding tenancy agreements for land in Ompton must have been in possession of land agreements in other neighbouring villages. Sitting between Eakring and Wellow, Ompton remains a rural part of the county and is surrounded by farmsteads and fields. Ompton succumbed to enclosure far earlier than Eakring did, in 1780.¹ But it is apparent that late enclosure to these sights has not impacted their use for successful farming.²

¹ J. D. Chambers, *Laxton: The Last English Open Field Village* (London, 1964), p. 27.

² Chambers, *Laxton*, p. 27.

Ompton can be traced back to the Domesday Book, where it is listed under the names of Almutone or Almentune.³ Most of the fields in Ompton that are mentioned in the Domesday Book end with -wong, such as Nooking Wong, Clay Wong, Dead Whong, Green Wong, Little Wong and Weel Wong, and the catchy title of Gossip Wong.⁴ Of these field names very few appear in the charters, although -wong is used frequently, with the field names Wodwong, le Seliwong and Galtre Wong being in Ompton. Even though maps do not exist to demonstrate the exact positioning of these fields, it was a standard feature of medieval charters that land was identified by referring to the fields they lay in.⁵ This helps us to position various plots of land on more modern maps, as demonstrated in Chapter Two. As Ompton can be traced back to the Domesday Book this is an indication that the area was not a new plot of land for agricultural use during the medieval period.

Taking this view further, and considering the importance of an area like Ompton, their direct relationship can be assessed. G. G. Askill suggests that small medieval towns were more like small villages. He uses the case put forward by Bridbury that settlement and economic life fluctuated between town and village.⁶ The relationship between Ompton and Eakring would have involved cooperation and organisation, with the larger and more densely populated Eakring depending upon the produce grown

³ J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer & F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 56.

⁴ Gover et al, *Place Names*, p. 298.

⁵ J. A. Raftis, 'The East Midlands', in H. E. Hallam (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume II, 1042-1350* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 327.

⁶ G. G. Askill, 'Archaeology and the smaller medieval town', *Urban History*, 12 (1985), pp. 46-53.

in Ompton to sell at markets and fairs, or even to sustain the populace of the surrounding villages. As already suggested, Ompton was primarily an area for growing crops, with villagers living elsewhere. This is no doubt due to the fact that Ompton was once a grange belonging to Rufford Abbey, which would have been worked on by the lay brothers from Rufford Abbey.⁷ J. G. Hurst states that from the fourteenth century it was common for granges to be leased out by the lay brothers to tenants.⁸ Ompton was an environment solely for agricultural use, with little in the way of population, the significance of this area to the peasants would have been profound, partly because the soils there would have been rich with nutrients. Also, the charters for Ompton frequently mention the village of Wellow, which formed part of the landholdings belonging to Newstead Abbey. The two different spaces of land bordered alongside each other, which explains why Wellow appears in The Rufford Charters. There are two features within the charters for Ompton that require further discussion. The first is the visibility of an apparently significant land owner, as most of the charters reveal that multiple lands in Ompton were held by Robert Breuster. Secondly, the charters for Ompton hold one of the very few charters for this period which demonstrate a personal link with the monks at the abbey, not by containing a request for religious provision however, but by William Somare granting his lands and

⁷ C. J. Holdsworth, *The Rufford Charters Vol 1* (Nottingham, 1972), p. li.

⁸ J. G. Hurst, 'Granges', in H. H. Hallam (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol II, 1042-1350* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 889.

possessions to the abbot. This makes the charters for Ompton important because key features for Ompton are missing from the evidence in the Eakring charters. From the charters which have survived for Eakring it appears that there was an absence of a dominant tenant, or a family whose name appears more frequently than others in the charters.

Robert le Breuster

Robert le Breuster appears in eleven of the Ompton charters; eight of these are the grants of land he acquired from others in a relatively short period of time, and the remaining three of these are grants of land he leased out to others. Table 3 shows the progress of land acquisitions made by Robert in the first part of the fourteenth century, with the first five transactions being made in what might have been a three-year period. During this time, he acquired the tenancies of multiple acres of land in Ompton. From these sources, it can be assessed that he came into a total 7 acres of arable, 6 roods, 2 selions, one toft with buildings on it, one messuage and a plot of land. These agreements make no implication that Robert was a wealthy land owner or that he held land elsewhere, but they do reveal that he was able to come into the tenancies of a fair amount of land in a small period. Schofield states that this type of action may have been a response to the decrease in population levels after the Great Famine, which had provided opportunities for buying

alienated land available in the land market.⁹The land acquisitions by Robert took place during the Great Famine. There is no way to prove what his motivations were for the acquisition of these lands, and there are no other landowners to compare these transactions with. The need to acquire more land was a response to poor harvests and cattle mortality rates, increasing chances of crop growth and to provide food for families. For example, in nearby Clipstone, murrain was ravaging numbers of sheep, with losses of 72 per cent of lambs in 1316-1317 and 159 out of 193 goats succumbing to illness.¹⁰ It is recorded too that the increase in the price of wheat expanded from 8 shillings a quarter in 1315 to 26s and 8d by the summer of 1316.¹¹

⁹ P. R. Schofield, *Peasant and Community in Medieval England, 1200-1500* (Hampshire, 2003), p. 75.

¹⁰ I. Kershaw, 'The Great Famine and the Agrarian Crisis in England, 1315-1322', in *Past & Present*, 59 (1973), pp. 3-50.

¹¹ Kershaw, 'The Great Famine', p. 8.

Table 3: Details of charters involving Robert Breuster.

Charter Reference	Date	Details
H463	1 Dec 1316	Grant by Cecilia Mody in her widowhood to Robert son of John le Brewest.
H462	7 Jan 1317	Grant by Thomas son of Jueta of Ompton to Robert son of John le Brewest.
H455	30 June 1317	Grant by Richard Freman of Kneesal to Robert le Brewest of Bolsover.
H464	8 Sept 1319	Grant by Richard le Pynder of Ompton to Robert le Breuster in Ompton.
H457	Early 14thc	Quitclaim by John Sampson on Mansfield to Robert le Breustare of Bolsover.
H458	5 May 1336	Quitclaim by Beatrice (widow) to Robert of Bollesover of Ompton.
H461	2 July 1338	Grant by John in le Hane of Eakring to Robert of Bolsover living in Ompton.
H459	Mid 14thc	Grant by Agnes, daughter of John son of Emma of Wellow, to Robert of Bolsover.

Extending the discussion about the land holdings of Robert, table 4 shows some of the lands Robert had acquired in Ompton and how he distributed them out to his three daughters, Cecilia, Agnes and Isabella. In total, between these three charters, Robert leased out two plots of land, with part of a building or with enough space at least to place a building on it, and 3 roods of arable land. This is less land than he had acquired earlier in the fourteenth century. What became of these remaining lands that he held in Ompton is unknown. Hoskins found similar activity in his study of medieval Wigston, with daughters receiving small parcels of land from their fathers whilst other pieces of land were disposed of for money.¹²

¹² W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant* (London & New York, 1957), p. 76.

Holdsworth suggests that at some point these lands belonging to Robert fell into the hands of the monks of Rufford, as the grants and quitclaims involving these lands are now included in the Rufford Charters.¹³ However, the actual charters which detail these specific lands held by Robert turning over to the possession of the monks at Rufford Abbey are not in with the Rufford cartulary, and the transaction charters for this arrangement have either been lost or are held somewhere else, although Holdsworth suggests these transactions were undocumented.¹⁴

Source: Table 4, Charters involving Robert Breuster's daughters.

Charter Reference	Date	Details
H452	Early 14thc	Grant to Cecilia Breuster of a plot of land for building.
H453	Early 14thc	Grant to Agnes and Isabella Breuster of a plot of land and the western part of a house standing on it.
H454	25 Jan 1346	Grant to Cecilia Breuster of 3 roods of arable in Ompton.

The second distinguishable feature about the Ompton charters relates to donations given to Rufford Abbey. In 1406, William Somare of Ompton, gave his lands to Brother Robert of Rotherham, the cellarer of Rufford Abbey, to save the rights of the abbot of Rufford Abbey.¹⁵ It has already been stated that Rufford Abbey suffered from poverty towards the end of the fourteenth century, and was on several occasions granted exemption

¹³ R. C. Holdsworth, *The Rufford Charters*, Vol 2 (Nottingham, 1974), p. 228.

¹⁴ Holdsworth, *RC*, Vol 2, p. 228.

¹⁵ Savile Charters DDSR 102/195. Grant by William Somare of Ompton to brother Robert of Rotherham, dated 15 October 1406. Original held at Nottinghamshire County Archives. A Latin transcription of this charter is published in *The Rufford Charters*, Vol 3, (Nottingham, 1974), p. 252. Holdsworth's reference 487.

from paying taxes to York.¹⁶ This generous donation made by William may have been an attempt to ease the financial burden suffered by the monks at Rufford, given out of charity. A full transcription of this charter is provided below:

To all of Christ's faithful whom present this writing of William Somare of Almeton everlasting greetings from the Lord. Know that I have given and confirmed to Brother Robert of Rotherham cellarer of the monastery of Rufford and Henry Carburton of Wellow all of my lands and tenements my goods and chattels and immovable whether living or dead or whatever it is I hold in the realm of England. Likewise with all of my aforesaid debts which are due to me and now exist in my hands to save the rights of the Abbot and convent of Rufford, to have and to hold all the premises with appurtenances with the aforesaid brothers Robert and Henry, his heirs and assigns forever without claim or troubles from my heirs or others. I have put my seal on this charter....

The exact detail of the lands and tenements that were donated to the Abbot of Rufford are not known as William does not specify in this charter. Without the assistance of a will and probate it cannot be said whether William's goods and chattels were donated to the monastery

¹⁶ R. N. Swanson, *A Calendar of the Register of Richard Scrope Archbishop of York, 1398-1405* (York, 1985).

when the time came, or even if William was choosing to donate his possessions in exchange for his entry into the brotherhood at the abbey. Likewise, it cannot be proved that the donation of his lands was made with the expectation of some religious intercession to be made in return, as there is no mention of any request in the charter. Whatever William's motivations were, the clause to defend against any future questioning of the legitimacy of the grant by his heirs was included to safeguard the interests of the monks' newly acquired property. Stober states that during the later years of a monasteries life, grants and donations to monasteries were much smaller than they had been during the earlier years of a monastery when it was receiving original gifts of endowment, when patrons were keen to endow gifts for religious intercession.¹⁷ However, this donation shows that interest and care in Rufford Abbey was apparent, which contradicts Stober's summary that laypeople were losing interest in religious communities from the fourteenth century.¹⁸ As already stated this grant is the only one of its kind which exists for Ompton during the period 1300-1500. There is further evidence of the laity commemorating their ancestors through the religious intercession provided by the monks, namely in Kirton which shall be discussed later in this chapter. This transaction makes it apparent that there were members

¹⁷ K. Stober, *Late Medieval Monasteries and their patrons, England and Wales, c. 1300-1540* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 65.

¹⁸ Stober, *Late Medieval Monasteries*, p. 117.

of the laity who felt a charitable closeness and bond with their monastery to donate their possessions to it and disinherit their heirs.

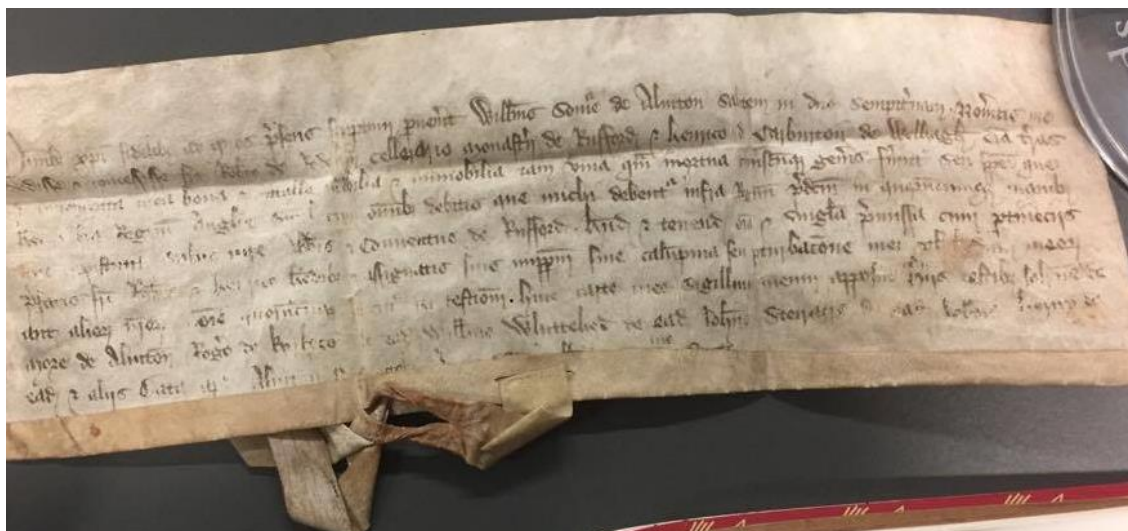
Links with Rotherham were strong because of the fellow Cistercian monastery of Roche Abbey. To connect Rufford to Rotherham further, the monks of Rufford Abbey held rights to the market in Rotherham, as evidence in the charter of John Swerd of Chesterfield testifies to.¹⁹ Roche Abbey, although a Cistercian abbey, was not affiliated to the Rievaulx family. Instead Roche was a daughter house to Fountains Abbey.²⁰ Fountains and Rievaulx were the two domineering front holds of the Cistercian order in Yorkshire with Roche Abbey and Rufford Abbey, as their respective daughter houses, having similar features with their numbers of monks, architecture of their buildings and geography in the East Midlands area.²¹ The links between the monks of Rufford and Roche Abbey's demonstrate that networks of friendship were an integral part of the Cistercian order and were important for support systems in times of need. The connections between Rufford and Roche essentially bound the mother houses of Rievaulx and Fountains, strengthening the Cistercian Order's presence within Yorkshire and the East Midlands.

¹⁹ C. J. Holdsworth, *The Rufford Charters, Vol 3* (Nottingham, 1980), p. 543. Detailed in Charter 990 C.

²⁰ G. Coppack, *The White Monks* (Gloucestershire, 1998), p. 53.

²¹ C. McGee & J. Perkins, 'A Study of the Cistercian Abbey at Rufford, Nottinghamshire', in J. S. Alexander (ed.) *Southwell and Nottinghamshire Medieval Art, Architecture and Industry* (Leeds, 1998), p. 90.

Image 12 Source: DDSR 102/195. William Somare's Deed of Gift of Lands and Goods to Rufford Abbey, dated 15 Oct 1406.



When examining the prices of rents in Ompton, there is far less evidence than that available for Eakring. 17 of these charters were made of the chief lord of the fee for the usual service, so these cannot be included in the following analysis. Also, the three charters which do mention a monetary value are variable in the amount of land they refer to. These three charters were made during the latter half of the fourteenth century, between 1369 and 1397, therefore made in the aftermath of all the turmoil of the great catastrophes in the fourteenth century. DDSR 102/190, dated 1369, is the earliest charter to mention rents, and this charter, between Thomas Parker of Wellow and the abbot of Rufford is fairly straight forward, with an agreement that Thomas will pay 12d a year for sixty years for just one acre of arable.²² When comparing this

²² Savile Charters DDSR 102/190.

price of land to that of Eakring, if we return to John and Alice Merevall of Eakring who agreed to pay two shillings per acre in 1367, it can be noted that land in Ompton was significantly cheaper than in Eakring.²³ However, the two later charters for Ompton, which detail the agreements made between the abbot of Rufford and Marmaduke and Emma of Wortley, show that land in Ompton was more expensive than in Eakring.

Marmaduke and Emma were to pay rents of 11 shillings in 1392 and then a later agreement was reached where they would pay rents of 15 shillings in 1397. For these amounts, they were to acquire various pieces of land including 69 selions of arable land, various meadow lands and furlongs.²⁴ Collectively these two agreements show that a significant amount of land was involved in the leases, but perhaps it only amounted to a total of about 5 acres in total.²⁵ This suggests that the second agreement made in 1397 was either a reaffirmation of the original 1392 agreement with added lands onto this. If so, this would mean they were to pay approximately 3 shillings per acre in 1397. In comparison to William and Alice Wright of Eakring who had agreed to pay just 1 shilling and 3d per acre in 1394 this seems like a large difference, over twice as much in value. One reason for this difference may have been the quality of the soil, although Eakring and Ompton were near each geographically so a

²³ Holdsworth, *RC Vol 3*, p. 463. Holdsworth reference 874.

²⁴ The totals of land from both charters has been totalled up together to get a total amount.

²⁵ This calculation was made by estimating fifteen furlongs or selions were able to fit into one acre of arable land. Thus the price per acre was arrived at by using the equation 70 acres divided by 15 shillings, which equals 4.6 acres. It was rounded up to 5 acres to account for the various meadows and headlands and butts which were also included in the agreements.

different land type would have been unlikely. However, the evidence from the charters referring to Marmaduke and Emma implies that the price per acre in Ompton increased between 1369 and 1397, rising from 12d to 5 shillings per year.

Kirton

There are 105 charters belonging to Kirton which have been edited in *The Rufford Charters*.²⁶ There are just 14 relevant to our period, commencing from the early fourteenth century and ending at 1388. There are similarities between the charters for Kirton and those belonging to Ompton, as some demonstrate a concern with lands in the villages sitting next door. As Ompton often refers to lands in Wellow, the charters for Kirton also mention lands in Walesby. There seems to be a direct relationship with neighbouring villages, through shared boundaries and agricultural similarities. Kirton was a small nucleated settlement, with many of the charters referring to tofts and messuages, confirming that people resided within Kirton as well as using it for agricultural purposes. It does not appear to have been as densely populated as Eakring, so sits as an intermediary between the village of Eakring and the agricultural space of Ompton. There is however a small parish church which was built during the thirteenth century, *The Holy Trinity*, so it is likely that the laity from Kirton relied on this church for their religious provision.²⁷

²⁶ Holdsworth, *RC Vol 2*, p. 274.

²⁷ Southwellchurches.nottingham.ac.uk/Kirton. Accessed 05/06/2017.

Some evidence of religious provision has been discussed previously but there are two charters which belong to Kirton which detail close contacts and religious expectation. The first and earliest charter to be discussed is a quitclaim made by William, the son of Henry of Walesby.²⁸ Dated in the early fourteenth century, William quitclaimed his rights to the land which Ralf of Wadeland held of him of the monks' fee. These lands were tenements held in Kirton, Willoughby, Walesby and Besthorpe and one acre in Ompton.²⁹ The key point regarding this charter is that the land was quitclaimed with the expression 'for the salvation of his soul and his father and mother...' This would suggest that William had a firm belief that the monks could offer his family spiritual protection post mortem. Although the original manuscript has not been viewed by this author, the common phrasing of this clause would have appeared as 'pro salute anime mee et pro salute anime patris mei et matris...'³⁰ Clear indications are given by the testator as to who should receive salvation, and this is because the gesture was an expectation to protect family members from purgatory. Any rites of passage that were commemorated by the church and laity, including baptisms and burials, all reaffirmed and strengthened the relationship with God through the church.³¹ This quitclaim by William is evidence that some medieval men and women were still keen to invest in their local monastery as an act of religious behaviour.

²⁸ Holdsworth, *RC, Vol 2*, P. 313. Holdsworth reference 632.

²⁹ Holdsworth, *RC Vol 2*, p. 283. Holdsworth reference 555.

³⁰ Translation by this author. This was a standard phrase used more frequently in the charters belonging to Rufford Abbey.

³¹ Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, p. 187.

The second charter from Kirton to include an expectation of religious provision is a grant in free alms, by John Teke of Kirton, made in 1379.³² With this grant, John agreed to pay the abbot of Rufford an annual rent of 6s 8d for a message of land in Kirton. Postles discusses the complexities of medieval man and woman professing a request for 'free alms' in grants because of the ambiguity and unspecified nature to the request.³³ As with William, the request by John Teke demonstrated a separation between himself and the rest of the social community in Kirton, a point which is ostensibly made by Postles.³⁴ The definition of what the specific expectation was in a request for a grant in free alms was always left unclear by both parties.³⁵ However, the rent that John Teke agreed to pay was considerably high in comparison to other villages, so perhaps this offers a clue that the grant in free alms included prayers or the reference to family commemoration.

Grants made in free alms were different types of requests to those for the prayers of salvation for the benefactor's souls and that of their family and ancestors. These two charters show that not only were the medieval laity able to exercise an individual preference of where they placed their religious expectations, but they were also able to choose what type of provision they could request as an extension to that provided by the local

³² Savile Charters DDSR 208/10. Grant in free alms by John Teke of Kirton, 1379. Original manuscript held at Nottingham County Council Archives. Transcribed copy found in Holdsworth, *RC Vol 2*, page 276, reference 539.

³³ D. Postles, 'Small gifts, but big rewards: the symbolism of some gifts to the religious', *Journal of Medieval History*, 27 (2001), pp. 23-42.

³⁴ Postles, 'Small gifts', p. 24.

³⁵ Postles, 'Small gifts', p. 25.

parish church. As Postles states, this was an active form of voluntary religion, where members of the village parish could seek alternative religious care.³⁶

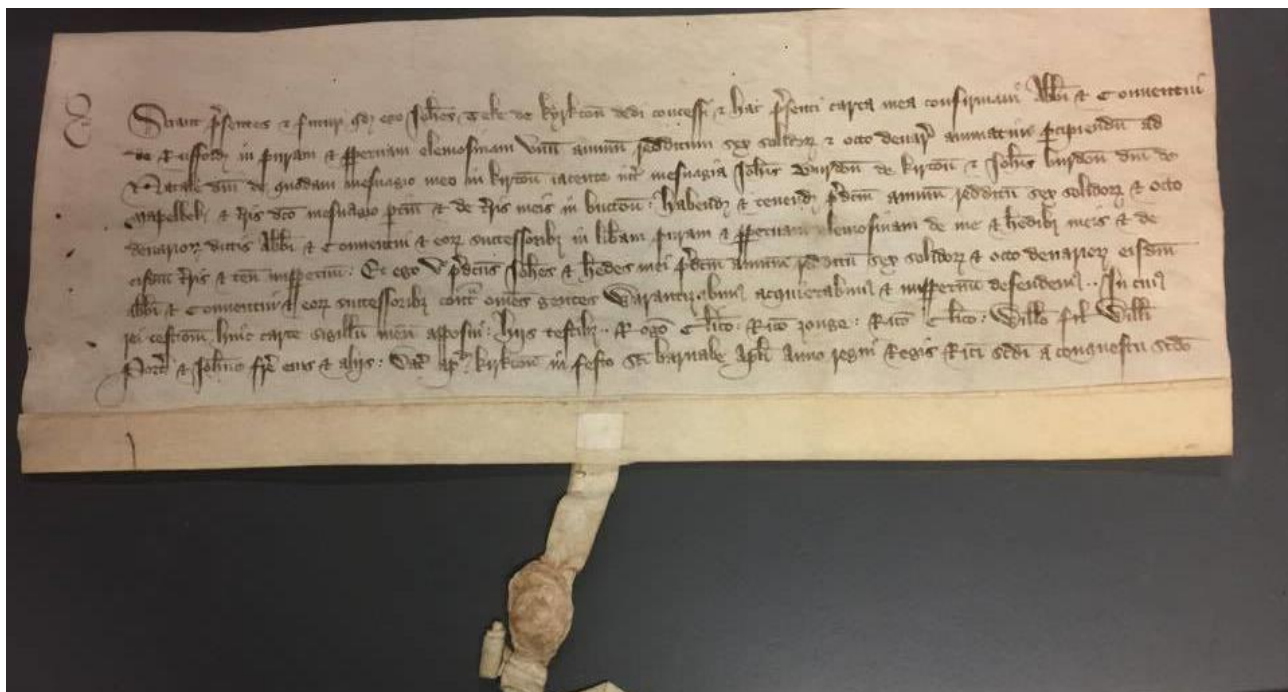
Both these charters regarding William and John Teke offer a small insight into the religious activities of the laity. So far, there has only been one previous mention of the request for a grant in free alms being made, that made by William Beru of Eakring in 1454.³⁷ These three charters are the only ones to include any religious expectation and are indicators that spiritual relations with the monks were on the decrease. Networks and connections with the monastery did not seem to be wavering, as the monks still offered a role in the form of landlord and agrarian manager. Schofield states that forms of pious expression in medieval villages was fluid and tended to shift depending upon the change of village communities and economic experiences.³⁸ It could be that John Teke's decision to include the grant in free alms to his rent of a messuage was influenced by social experiences, this was made just two years before the Peasants Revolt of 1381 after all.

³⁶ Postles, 'Small gifts', p. 25.

³⁷ Savile Charters DDSR 208/40. Grant in free alms by William Beru of Eakring, 1454. Original manuscript held at Nottingham County Council Archives. Transcribed version in Holdsworth, *RC Vol III*, p. 467. Reference 884.

³⁸ Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, p. 195.

Image 13 Source: DDSR 208/10. Grant in free alms by John Teke of Kirton, 1379.



William Bevercotes

Although it has not been possible to find any surviving wills made by the inhabitants of the villages in the Rufford Charters, one will has been located which mentions Rufford Abbey. This will, belonging to William of Bevercotes, was made in 1513, and includes the wish that one trental is to be said for his soul at the church in Bevercotes, and another trental to be said for him at Rufford Abbey.³⁹ This is a clear example of a member of the laity securing his religious salvation. The fact that William requested the monks at Rufford Abbey to perform a trental, as well as his

³⁹ Ne D 970, Will and Probate of William Bevercotes, 24 Oct 1513. Held at The University of Nottingham's Manuscript and Special Collections Department.

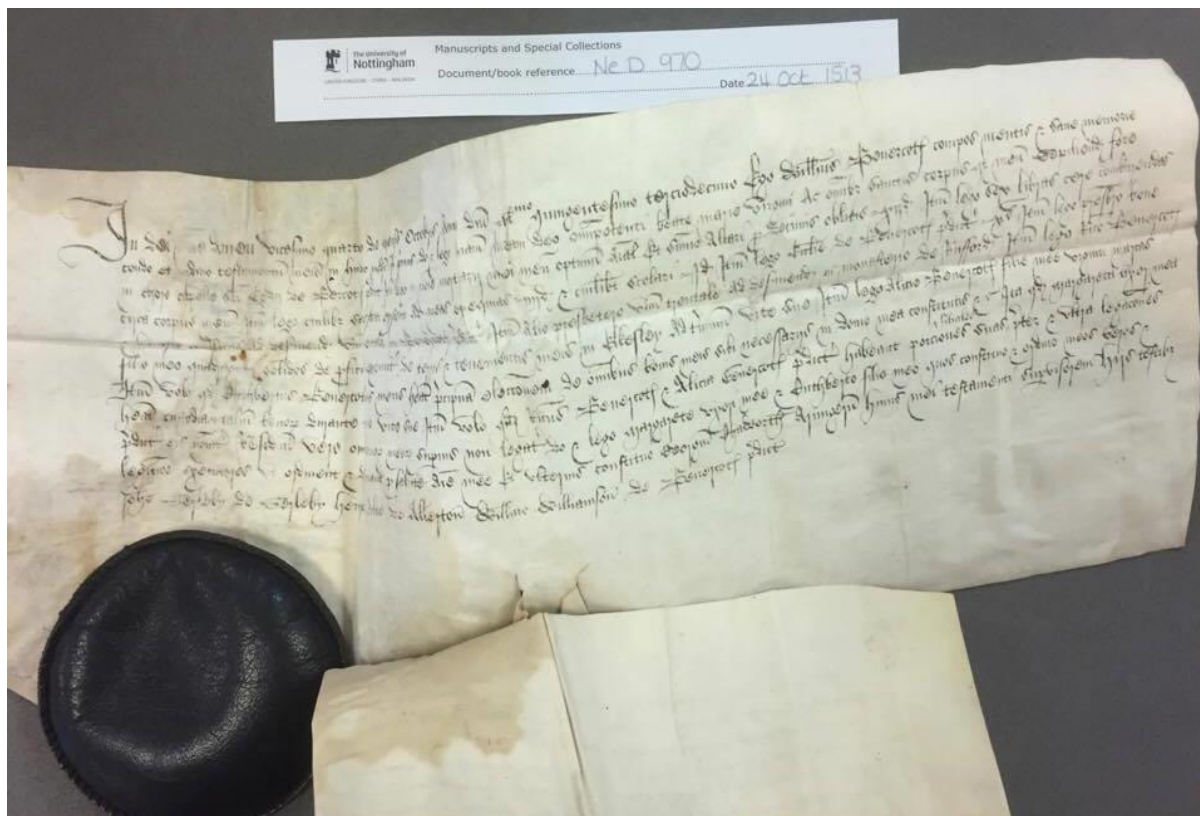
own parish church, indicates that religious provision by the monks was still an important service. William Bevercotes' will also specifies that, along with the series of trentals in the two religious institutions, that £6 be donated for candles to be burnt around his body and he gave instruction for carrying out the office of the dead. The performance of a trental involved a priest or monk to perform 30 masses over the duration of 30 days. The performance of these rituals offered an extra layer of religious provision, additional to that received by church attendance. It shows, that in 1513, William Bevercotes held a confidence in the monks of Rufford to offer him post mortem salvation. Therefore, for some members of the laity, the monks were still as important as ever.

The Bevercotes family name appears in the Rufford Charters and are mentioned as early patrons and benefactors to the monastery, but nothing of their name appears after the mid-late thirteenth century. The Bevercotes were early patrons to the monastery, as a William de Bevercotes is mentioned in an early charter involving Robert of Lexington.⁴⁰ The Bevercotes name appears in the charters before 1300, the start of which this thesis is concerned with, so a discussion of their activities with the monastery cannot be given, due to space allowance. However, it does seem relevant that the family name be connected to the

⁴⁰ Savile Charters DDSR 102/47. Grant by Robert Lexington to the monks of Rufford Abbey, c. 1240. Held at Nottingham County Archives.

monastery and requiring a service from the monks, especially when by the 1513 there was drop in the services of the monks.

Image 14 Source: Ne D 970. Will and Probate of William Bevercotes of Bevercotes, Nottinghamshire.⁴¹



To summarise, this chapter has looked at Ompton and Kirton which places Eakring in a broader context with its surrounding environment. Both these villages shared an affiliation to Rufford Abbey but were different to Eakring. Ompton was a rural space, with the evidence demonstrating that the lands there were used for agricultural purposes and it was not used as a village settlement. In contrast, Kirton was larger than Ompton,

⁴¹ Ne D 970. Will and probate of William Bevercotes of Bevercotes, Nottinghamshire: 24 Oct, 1513. Held at The University of Nottingham's Manuscript and Special Collections Department.

yet not as large as Eakring, with there being some evidence of settlement in the village. There are other differences too. Ompton had a dominant landowner, a feature which is missing from both Eakring and Kirton. And Kirton has evidence from two charters that demonstrated close ties with the monastery by requesting religious provision from the monks, despite there being a parish church in Kirton. The evidence shows that each of these villages had their own identity, and despite each one having contact with Rufford Abbey their relationships were different. Whether the contact between the village and the monastery was to secure religious provision or to strengthen economic ties, communication to secure these networks were vital. The will belonging to William Bevercotes further demonstrates that contacts with Rufford Abbey were established farther afield than just in the villages presented in the Rufford Charters, and an endowment to the monastery was a desirable gesture. In conclusion, it can be stated that each village had a unique relationship with the abbey, which marked the abbey as a key institution within the locality of these villages.

CONCLUSION

By using The Rufford Charters, this thesis has examined the role of the monks at Rufford Abbey as monastic landlords. Details within the tenancy agreements and leasehold contracts have revealed how the relationships between the monks of Rufford Abbey and the villagers living nearby were expressed in terms of agricultural organisation and religious provision. Specifically, this thesis has focused on the evidence for Eakring, but has also considered the evidence for Ompton and Kirton.

The charters for Eakring cover a period of 150 years and have aided an assessment to be made regarding Eakring and its contacts and communication with the monks of Rufford Abbey. Each chapter has highlighted the social impact of these relationships and has shown that there was a mutual dependency between the two groups. The evidence shows that the villagers who leased lands from the monks typically held small parcels of land with buildings attached to it. It is fair to suggest that this was to provide housing and land to sustain themselves and their families. To ensure the monks had continuous income from these rents, contracts lasting for up to sixty years were formulated, guaranteeing lands were occupied and rents were gathered.

A study of rent prices and the quantity of lands leased out has shown that there was a decrease in the value of lease holdings after the Black Death, due to a fall in the value of an acre of land. This assessment was made by taking note of the increase in the amount of land peasants were

leasing from the monks and comparing it to the prices they were paying before the Black Death. The decrease in rent prices places Eakring in line with other medieval villages and supports available historiography that not only did rent prices fall during this time, but afterwards the desire for land accumulation increased. Britnell has proposed that with this desire for land accumulation, came the chance for peasants to rent out small pockets of land to others, which would have reduced the risk of crop failure and secured greater chance of successful crop growth.¹ Bekar and Reed further consider other factors which led to the unequal distribution of land during this period, mentioning population growth and partible inheritance.² Furthermore, their suggestion that active buying and selling of land demonstrated that medieval peasants had no emotional ties to the land show that families were resourceful and practical.³ This argument was also put forward by Smith when considering the evidence for widows' involvement with tenancy agreements, suggesting that widows were acting through resourcefulness and using the power they wielded over their land in order to maintain themselves.⁴

Maps have been a useful resource and have provided a visual medium for the location of medieval Eakring. By comparing the evidence on the maps with evidence from the charters it has been possible to get a broader

¹ R. Britnell, 'Agriculture in a Region of Ancient Enclosure, 1185-1500', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 27 (1983), p. 50.

² C. Bekar & C. G. Reed, 'Land Markets and inequality: evidence from medieval England', *European Review of Economic History*, 17 (2013), p. 298.

³ Bekar & Reed, 'Land Markets', p. 301.

⁴ S. V. Smith, 'Women and Power in the Late Medieval English Village: a reconsideration', *Women's History Review*, 16 (2007), p. 318.

understanding of how landlords and tenants organised their lands. This was accomplished by locating certain fields mentioned in the charters and identifying field names which have remained in use. It is apparent that approaches to field use in Eakring continued with the open field system of management, either as a direct defence against poor soil conditions or to prevent crop failure. Beckett's intense research on Laxton has shown how this practice was shared by the neighbouring village of Laxton, with both villages maintaining their rights to free hold tenancy well after agricultural practice in the area had conformed to the customary enclosure laws.⁵ Laxton, still functioning as an open-field community today, offers a good example of how the fields were organised in medieval Eakring.

Evidence of religious provision is relatively thin, so there has been less comment on the spiritual relationship between Eakring and Rufford Abbey. However, the available evidence has facilitated important discussions about the type of religious provision requested of the monks. A grant in free alms made by William Beru in 1454 is the last surviving charter of its kind, and it has been noted that this request cannot be extracted from anymore of the charters for Eakring from this period.⁶ Relationships sealed through the commemoration of deceased family members and the expectation that those still alive would benefit from religious intercession in the future were integral to medieval society.⁷

⁵ J. V. Beckett, *A History of Laxton, England's Last Open-Field Village* (Oxford, 1989), p. 19.

⁶ Savile Charters DDSR 208/40.

⁷ E. Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey*, p.

The fact that there is little evidence of religious provision between the monks of Rufford and the villagers of Eakring is an indicator that this service was being provided elsewhere. An obvious place would have been the local parish church of St Andrews in Eakring. Interestingly, this church is never mentioned in the Rufford Charters, nor is there mention of the local parish priest. This provides one explanation why there is a lack of religious evidence surviving for Rufford Abbey. The villagers of Eakring may have been attending religious services at their local church or other religious institutions like the Prebendary church in Southwell, rather than travelling to their local monastery. The will and probate of William Bevercotes supports the case for individual choice as the evidence shows that upon his death he desired religious care from the church in Bevercotes along with the monks of Rufford Abbey.⁸ Choice for whom medieval men and women could seek to provide religious provision was in abundance, and allegiance to a single religious institution may not have been enough to guarantee safety from purgatory. This places the emphasis on what the laity expected from the monks.

The charters were a legal and binding contract between the laity and the monks. Unwin states that after the fourteenth century Rufford Abbey entered into a period of stagnation, when the monks stopped expanding their settlements.⁹ Possibly their awareness of their accumulated wealth

⁸ Ne D 970. Will and Probate of William Bevercotes, 24 Oct, 1513. Held at The University of Nottingham's Manuscript and Special Collections Department.

⁹ Unwin, *Patterns of Hierarchies*, p. 201.

and properties and the conflict this posed to their observance of religious poverty, the monks of Rufford Abbey may have resisted entering into further contracts regarding land ownership. The lack of evidence which has survived after 1300 could support this theory. This may also explain why the monks were happy to negotiate landlord and tenancy contracts with the length of the contract lasting for decades, as it enabled the monks to remain isolated from neighbouring population centres but still catered for their own economic support. This is an important consideration and would indicate the monks were no longer interested in accumulating new land and desired to remain isolated from society. The Rufford Charters reflect the monks' dedication to the original monastic clause of isolation, rather than the charters showing that the laity turned their backs on the monks in preference to other methods of demonstrating their piety. It can also be said that as the existence of the monastery developed the deep connections which had been made with the original patrons of the monastery eventually disappeared, the same can also be said about the inhabitants of Eakring, whereby family connections to the monastery became weaker as time passed by. In brief, the relationship between the laity and the monks did alter.

It is justified to say that Eakring became a well-established nucleated village surrounded by the strips of fields leased out by the monks. The charters which have survived for Eakring reveal it was one of the largest villages closest to Rufford Abbey with an estimated population of around

50 inhabitants.¹⁰Overall, the evidence in the charters for Eakring, and Ompton and Kirton, suggest that the villagers participated in a complex but harmonious relationship with the monks. Articulated through the wide variety of leases, grants and confirmation, these relationships may have been contractually binding, but because each charter was slightly different it does raise the issue that each charter was made with a practical and individual focus.

Despite the shortage of charters involving widows, an assessment was made that female agency and widowhood was used to the widow's advantage and that widows were able to successfully negotiate new contracts. As Whittle points out, this is evidence of medieval women being involved in the management of agriculture, giving them status, power and some wealth.¹¹ However, the charters involving widows show that these women were still referred to in terms of their relationships with men, as was discussed in Chapter 4. This shows that their legal status had altered, and thus had legal rights given to them, but they were still referred to in patrilineal terms. It was stated that these women had made practical decisions about the land they held rather than being forced into relinquishing it, with reference made towards Muller's suggestion that these women shrunk their holdings due to a lack of

¹⁰ Calculation made by the author, using evidence from the charters and identifying the families who were from Eakring.

¹¹ J. Whittle, 'Rural Economies', in J. Bennett & R. Karras (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2013), p. 2.

available labour.¹² This shows that the monks were caring and charitable to the individual circumstances of their tenants. There are no charters which indicate that a peasant ever had lands reclaimed by the monks. A final summary can be made that the religious bonds only enhanced their relationship as landlord and tenant.

Agriculture and farming were cornerstones to life, dominated by working the lands. The charters confirm one major factor, and that is no matter what form the relationship took between the laity and the monks, land was continually occupied, and therefore the villagers of Eakring were able to contribute to the commercial markets through production of goods and selling their produce. Dyer has suggested that peasant involvement in commercial markets encouraged country dwellers to produce more surplus goods.¹³ This would have contributed to Eakring establishing itself as a nucleated village, which Dyer states was a 'deliberate and decisive' act, along with farming with the open field system.¹⁴ The relationship between the monks and tenants of Eakring were built on a mutual dependency, involving the continual occupying and farming of lands, contributing to the local economy and ultimately establishing Eakring as a large agricultural village. It matters little whether the motivations were religious or economic, the relationship was both diverse and practical.

¹² M. Muller, 'Peasant Women, Agency and Status in England', in C. Beattie & M. F. Stevens (eds.), *Married Women and the Law in Premodern Northwest Europe* (Woodbridge, 2013), p.105.

¹³ C. Dyer, 'The Past, The Present and the Future in Medieval Rural History', *Rural History*, 1 (1990), p. 42.

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