

Some Brief Notes on the History of Grasby

Nothing specific is known of Grasby in the prehistoric or Romano-British periods, although some fragments of Roman pottery were found in the parish in 1962.

The present village is sited on the southerly facing scarp face of the Lincolnshire Wolds, one of a number of similarly positioned settlements on this chalk escarpment running from Caistor to South Ferriby, joined by a trackway of prehistoric date. Fresh water springs emerging from the base of the chalk, easily worked arable land on the chalk wolds and ample pasture land on the lowland to the south made favourable sites for settlements.

Place-name experts are undecided on the exact meaning of "Grasby", but it does seem certain to be of Scandinavian origin and the spelling has changed over time. *Grosbei* appears twice in the Domesday Book of 1086; *Grosbi* and *Grossebi* both once. Later spellings include *Gressebi*, *Gresby*, *Griseby*, *Grisby* and *Grassebi*.

In the early C12th Stephen Le Grosse, Earl of Albermarle, appears to have been the overlord of Grasby. His son, William, gave the village to Thornton Priory in 1142 and in 1156 gave also "*the Church of Grosseby and tithes of the demesne to the Canons of Thornton Priory*". The Priory was raised to the status of Abbey in 1148.

The population of the village appears to have been relatively stable in medieval times. The National Mapping Programme 1992-96 revealed the remains of medieval ridge & furrow in three places in the parish. Up until the C17th Grasby had two open-fields, the east and west low fields, below the scarp and open wold land to the north. The latter was possibly ploughed at times when not used as a sheep walk, but it remained unenclosed until the C19th. In addition villagers had grazing rights on Caistor Moor, over 2,000 acres of open common land shared by Searby-cum-Owmbly, Grasby, Clixby, North Kelsey and Caistor. The road south out of the village, Station Road today, ended at this time at North Kelsey Beck where the common land began.

According to the Diocesan return for the Deanery of Yarborough, Grasby comprised 28 households in 1563. At this time sheep were the mainstay of husbandry on the wolds. Large tracts of waste land were used as sheep walks, although at night the flocks were folded on arable fields for their manure. Grasby had over 566 acres of wold and scarp land, over half the area of the parish. Some neighbouring villages, notably Clixby, Audleby and Fonaby, were depopulated during this period, probably as a result of the expansion of grazing land for sheep.

Grasby, as part of the manor and soke of Caistor, was almost certainly returned to the Crown in the C16th following the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the change in status of Thornton Abbey to Thornton College. How much of and to whom its lands, including Grasby, were sold is unclear. Monastic lands were often sold to laymen, the beginnings of the new English property owner. There were lay impropriators (people to whom church lands had been transferred) in Grasby during both the C18th and C19th, but no evidence of a lord of the manor being a resident of the village until the arrival of the Rev Charles (Tennyson) Turner.

There is clear evidence that Grasby's open-fields were being enclosed i.e. divided into smaller fenced units, in a piecemeal manner from as early as 1649. As Grasby was never depopulated it is possible that most of the land in the parish was owned by a caucus of gentlemen and yeomen farmers as opposed to, for instance, a single member of the aristocracy who could have simply removed his tenants to make room for sheep. It seems that since the Dissolution of the Monasteries Grasby has always been an "*open*", not a "*closed*" or estate village with just one landowner. By the end of the C18th there were 22 landowners in Grasby who were able to add new fields to their farms through the Parliamentary Enclosures which allowed all the remaining open-fields, common and waste land to be claimed by these landowners and divided up into the field system, with its familiar pattern of hedgerows and drainage ditches we still recognise today. The common pastures and wastelands were the mainstay of the independent poor. With enclosure they lost their common rights, the effect on the cottager was often described as "*before enclosure the cottager was a labourer with land, after enclosure a labourer without land*".

Caistor Moor was enclosed 1811-14, with each of the six adjoining villages being granted additional land. This increased the size of Grasby Parish by 101.25 acres south of North Kelsey Beck, which was straightened and deepened as part of the process. In addition Station Road (known at the time as Great Drift) was extended in a straight line to the North Kelsey Moor crossroads and named Grasby Road. The enclosure of the remaining open land on the escarpment and wolds in the parish was a long drawn-out affair lasting from 1815-44.

The population of the village in 1801 was just 168, probably no larger than it was in the C11th. There followed a period of considerable growth to 455 residents in 1851. This was the so-called golden period of farming and Grasby's economy would also have benefited from the opening of a toll road from Caistor to Brigg in 1765 (the A1084 today), followed by the construction of the Caistor Canal, with its actual terminus in Moortown, which opened in 1800. It operated for only 55 years, its demise hastened by the coming of the railway. North Kelsey Station opened in 1848.

The lord of the manor in Grasby at the beginning of the C19th was Philip Skipworth, who lived in Moortown House on the Brigg to Market Rasen road (the B1434 today) at the north east corner of his 4,500 acre South Kelsey Estate. By 1835, however, the village's most famous resident had arrived and had become the new lord of the manor. Charles Tennyson was the son of the Rev Dr George Clayton Tennyson of Somersby and brother of Alfred Lord Tennyson. Charles inherited, not from his father, but the estate of his great uncle, the Rev Samuel Turner, parson and squire of Caistor and Grasby. Charles changed his name from Tennyson to Turner (he never used Tennyson as part of his name again) as a condition of the will and moved first to Caistor, then to the Old Vicarage in Grasby. He married Louisa Sellwood in 1836 (Alfred later married her sister Emily) and had a new vicarage built, the Grange today, on what then became Vicarage Lane. Before his arrival Grasby had suffered a poor reputation (described as a "*depraved village*" by the Stamford Mercury in 1840), but his influence, as well as

the building of two non-conformist chapels in 1840 and 1841, appear to have helped improve its image. He even placed at the village inn a "reliable man" as landlord in attempt to control drunkenness in the village.

As well as partially refurbishing the church in 1850, Charles funded the re-building of the village school in 1855. When the school was first built is unknown, but must have been sometime after 1818 after the Select Committee on the Education of the Poor reported that Grasby had "No school of any kind, with the poor educated at schools in adjoining parishes". He also established the Reading Room as a village library in 1853 and stocked it with books. The Reading Room became a sweet shop in 1907 - where the books went remains, apparently, an unsolved mystery.

In common with many villages there was a slow decline in the population during the second half of the C19th, reaching a low of 347 in 1891. This was as a result of a combination of an agricultural depression and industrial growth in neighbouring areas offering new employment opportunities. Grasby, however, was never "depopulated" by these changes, adapting to the new economic climate. Occupations other than those in farming grew in the village from 8% in 1841 to 22% by 1881. As well as the presence of the normal range of rural craftsmen - blacksmiths, carpenters, wheelrights etc., the number of retail outlets grew steadily to 12 establishments in the 1890s - grocers, butchers, drapers, publicans. The village appeared to become a minor centre of clothing and shoe "manufacture" in the 1850s and 1860s with mantua makers, boot & shoe makers, tailors and dressmakers all present. Later, at the beginning of the C20th, Grasby residents again showed their versatility by embracing a new technology and taking up occupations linked directly to steam traction engines - an owner, a repairer, a flagman, a stoker and 9 drivers were identified living in the village in the census.

The Lime Pits opened sometime in the C19th and in the 1930s were producing about 3,000 tons of lime per annum. In 1944 it was formally opened as "Grasby Limes Ltd" by Mr E Addison, Chair of Caistor War Agricultural Committee, on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture to meet the new demands of agriculture. Production post war rose to 100,000 tons a year and the village became a very noisy and dusty place to live in until the end of the 1960s. The quarry on the other side of the A1084 fed the plant with chalk by a conveyor belt, which ran in a tunnel under the road. Although the entrances are bricked up, the tunnel is still exists.

There was a steady decline in the population of the village between 1911, when it stood at 373, and 1971 by which time it had fallen to 267, despite the inclusion of Clixby when it ceased to be a parish in its own right after 1936 and was amalgamated with Grasby. This reflected changes in agriculture with increasing mechanization and diminishing need for manual labour. The Mill (a windmill), north of the A1084, operated until 1921. North Kelsey railway station fell under the "Beeching Axe" and closed in 1965. Retail activity, however, still remained healthy in the village until the 1960s with a tailor, a butcher, a grocer, a draper & grocer, cobbler, blacksmith, carpenter and cycle repair shop all present. There were two petrol pumps at the bottom of Front Street and two more next to the Cross Keys. The present village hall replaced a wooden building, erected in 1937 (the oak tree outside the hall was planted to commemorate the coronation of King George VI), in the 1960s. At some point the two village water pumps disappeared, one opposite the Old Bluebell and one on Middleton Lane.

A low point for Grasby was probably reached in the late 1960s. The population had declined to 267 (the lowest number since 1811), businesses were closing, the primary school roll was falling and there was a growing number of derelict properties. The last significant employer disappeared when the quarry shut down. Ironically, the closure of this noisy and dusty enterprise probably led to a new and entirely different future for the village as it moved inexorably away from its farming roots. In this respect, the village and the surrounding agricultural land in the parish gradually became separate entities as the few remaining farms no longer looked to the village for labour and agricultural services. The last of the latter, the blacksmith's smithy and workshop on Church Hill, finally closed in 1990. At the same time villagers had to look beyond the parish for employment opportunities and eventually, as the country moved towards almost universal car ownership and local shops closed, for all other services. All the village shops closed in the 1970s, with the exception of the Post Office which finally shut its doors for the last time in 1990. Grasby, however, began to be seen as a picturesque hillside village, which had a school within the catchment area of Caistor Grammar School, and from which people could commute to work in neighbouring towns and the Humber Bank.

The 2001 Census summary information provides a picture of the village at the end of the C20th. The population had grown to 395, with an average age of 38, which compared with the West Lindsey average of 41. The population of the parish had grown to about 440 by 2015 and appears set to reach and even pass the previous high mark of 455 in its 1851 heyday, albeit with a very different socio-economic, employment and age profile.