THE EARLY HISTORY OF GRASBY

Nothing specific appears to be known of Grasby in the prehistoric or Romano-British periods, although some fragments of Roman pottery were exposed in the parish by deep ploughing in 1962. According to local detectorists Roman coins have also been found in several fields in the parish.

The present village lies on the southerly facing scarp face of the Wolds. A line of similarly positioned settlements runs along the edge of this chalk scarp from Caistor to South Ferriby. A trackway, almost certainly of prehistoric date, joined these settlements and is still followed by the A1084 today between Caistor and Bigby.

The settlements along this spring line created good, viable economic units with easily worked arable land on the chalk Wolds (wold is from the Old English word "wald" or "weald", meaning high forest land), settlement sites at the springs and ample pasture and meadow in the lowland to the south.

The estates into which Anglo-Saxon England was divided were known variously as *scirs*, shires or multiple estates. At the centre of each estate was a *caput* which contained the lord's hall and barn, church, mill and an area of demesne farmland and pasture. Alongside the *caput* were a number of other settlements whose inhabitants provided food for the lord's barn, labour services as required and attended the lord's court. These shires seem to have been taken over by the Danish colonists, somewhat reorganised and re-named wapentakes. The great estates became known as sokes in which the land (demesne) and peasants (villeins) directly controlled by the lord was known as inland, and that controlled by peasants (sokemen) was known as sokeland. Yarborough wapentake, in which Grasby lies, was very large and included another shire, based on Barnetby. The wapentake had its own court and men from Grasby would doubtless have travelled to its meetings, probably held in Melton Ross parish.

Grasby lay within the very extensive *scir* based on Caistor. This estate was held by an earl before the Norman Conquest and by the King afterwards. The great estate was beginning to fragment by 1066 and in Grasby itself two other discrete estates had appeared – held by Ulchil and Chetelbern respectively. Ulchil had further strengthened his position by building a Church for his peasants at Grasby and appointing a priest to serve in it. It might have been at this time that the parish boundary of Grasby was finally fixed. It would hold all the people and land which would owe tithe to the settlement's church.

Place-name experts are unable to give a convincing explanation of the meaning of Grasby, but it does seem certain to be of Scandinavian origin. The first element may possibly be from the Old Norse *grjot*, meaning gravel

or stones. The suffix is the Old Danish *by*, a farmstead or village. Many other Scandinavian names occur throughout the parish – in particular '-gate'; from the Norse *gata*, a way, path or street.
Grosbei appears twice in the Domesday Book of 1086; *Grosbi* and *Grossebi* both once. *Grossebi* appears in the Lindsey Survey of c.1115 and then later *Gressebi*, *Gresby*, *Griseby*, *Grisby* and *Grassebi* appear numerous times.
There are three entries for the settlement of Grasby in the Domesday Book. Taken together they show that it was assessed at three carucates, a quarter of a Domesday Hundred. Each wapentake was divided into a number of hundreds, each with a court responsible for the conduct of its inhabitants, and required to pay *geld* to the King.
The first entry appears after the Norman Conquest and tells us that in 1066 Grasby was part of an extensive estate (*manerium)* whose capital or *caput* was Caistor. The estate belonged to Earl Morcar who was jointly Earl of Northumbria and Mercia with his half-brother Edwin. However, the property in Grasby was recorded as belonging to the Church of Caistor and valued at 6 shillings and 8 pence = half a mark. Morcar was one of the hostages taken back to Normandy by William in 1067. Later he was to join Hereward at Ely, but in 1071 William besieged the rebels and Morcar and many others were imprisoned.
The second entry appears to record details of a *manerium* whose *caput* was at Grasby. In 1066 the estate was held by Ulchil, but by 1086 it had come into the hands of William's half-brother, Odo, the Bishop of Bayeux. Some two thirds of Grasby's geld payments were collected from this estate which also had attached to it a parcel of sokeland in Swallow. Grasby Church belonged to this estate and was by then a church with full rights. There was also a water mill belonging to Grasby, the siting of which will in all probability remain impossible ever to pinpoint. It may have been located somewhere along what is today North Kelsey Beck or, more likely, with what would almost certainly been a much higher water table, close to the village using water issuing from a spring near to the base of the chalk. (The 1607 map, in Section II below, shows a tributary of the Ancholme reaching the edge of "Grassbye"). If, as appears to be most probable, it was a "Norse Mill" (a horizontal wheel consisting of a vertical shaft around the bottom of which were fixed radial boards or paddles) water would have been directed at these panels so that it caused them and the shaft to rotate. The rotating shaft would have been used directly to turn a grindstone to make flour. These wheels were relatively simple to construct and could also turn a modest-sized grindstone using very little water flow. Its simplicity made this type of wheel common in small rural communities.
The third entry recorded another small estate in Grasby. Its holder in 1066, Chetelbern, was apparently still in possession in 1086. He appears to have held extensive lands in 1066, but had lost most of them by 1086.
In the early C12th Stephen Le Grosse, Earl of Albermarle (and Yorkshire) appears to have been the overlord of Grasby, but Osbert the Priest who,

having served Henry I as sheriff, had the under-tenancy of lands which included Grasby. When he died his sons Richard and William Torniant tried to hold onto these lands by paying Henry money (the sons of priests couldn't legally inherit). Although this was agreed, they failed to come up with the sureties required and Stephen redeemed the lands.
William Le Grosse succeeded his father, Stephen, but in 1142 he gave the village (with other lands, including Audelby) to Thornton Priory. In 1156 he also gave the "*Church of Grosseby and tithes of the demesne to the Canons of Thornton Priory, when first founded*". Whether this means when Grasby Church or the Priory was first founded is unclear, but the Priory was founded in 1139, by William, and raised to the status of Abbey in 1148. A church existed in Grasby before this, but whether or not being "given" to the Priory changed its status is not known. William was buried at Thornton Abbey in 1179. Although the title was re-created in 1670, this particular family line of Earls died out in 1439.
In 1281 jurymen appointed by Edward I challenged the legitimacy of a certain William De Veer's claim on land (an oxgang and 2½ acres) in Grasby, described as an appurtenance of the King's demesne at Caistor. William's wife, Isobel, was born in Goxhill*****.

******Information taken largely from "Some notes on the early history of Grasby" (Lincoln Archive)*

Before his death in 1416, John Poucher, Knight, held West Rasen in his demesne with land stretching as far as Scawby, Glentworth, Hainton and Heckington. In addition he was paid rent at 20s by John Alynton for land in Osgodby, Owersby, Caistor and **Grasby**.
Nothing more has come to light so far about Grasby during the rest of the C15th. The layout of today's village suggests from the distribution of older properties that over time a number of separate or small groups of households have been amalgamated to form a single village by infilling. This historic open nature of the settlement perhaps explains its long standing and complex tenurial pattern.
The National Mapping Programme 1992-96, undertaken by the Royal Commission of Monuments in England, has revealed, through the examination of aerial photographs, earthworks of medieval ridge & furrow in three locations in the parish – to the west, south and east of the village. The latter was identified again in 2014 in the field immediately to the east of the properties in Front Street. The alignment in each case is on a south west/north east axis.
The population of Grasby appears to have been relatively stable during medieval times. The axis of the village ran east/west along the line of the scarp with a throughway to Clixby in one direction and Searby in the other, with streets running up and down the scarp. A curve on the east/west street and its intermittent wide sections, particularly where the

present Clixby Lane joins Front Street, may indicate a former open green area. An intriguing piece of evidence pointing to a possible slightly different shape to the village is provided by the First Series of OS Maps, dated 1805-69. The map shows a continuation of Main Street south, roughly alongside where Reading Room Cottage is today, which joins with Church Hill somewhere in the vicinity of the Old Bluebell Inn.

The present church dates back to the C13th and would have been the focus of the local community as the most common and best attended meeting place of the entire population. Furthermore, the seating arrangements would have reflected the village hierarchy.

Apart from the ridge & furrow very little archaeological evidence of the past has been found in Grasby. However, a Henry VII groat (silver coin worth 4 pennies), dated 1490 – 1504, was found in 1970 in OS field 147, adjacent to "Knapton's reservoir" in the south of the parish.

According to Joan Thirsk (1957), Lincolnshire is a county with a deeply rooted tradition of peasant farming and even in the times of the Domesday Survey its population included an unusually high proportion of free peasants, many communities of whom survived through to the C19th

The unanswerable question is did Grasby, at least before the Black Death (1348-50), have a fully-fledged open-field system of agriculture? According to Joan Thirsk (1964) such a system comprised four essential elements:

i) the arable and meadow land is divided into strips among its cultivators, each of whom may occupy a number of strips scattered about the open-fields; ii) both arable and meadow are thrown open for common pasturing by the stock of the commoners after harvest and in the fallow seasons, which necessitates some rules about cropping are observed so that spring and winter-sown crops may be grown in separate fields or furlongs;

iii) there is common pasturage and waste, where cultivators of strips enjoy the right to graze stock and gather other commodities such as wood and peat; and iv) the ordering of these activities is regulated by an assembly of cultivators – the manorial court or, when more than one manor was present, a village meeting.

There is no evidence remaining of a medieval manor house in the village, although if one ever existed all trace of it could have vanished. "Manor Farm", a modern house today and a modest sized dairy farm in the late C19th, suggests the possible site of a manor house in the past. The name and its site, adjacent to the church, are in its favour; the fact that it is not marked as such on even the earliest OS maps is against the possibility, unless the name persisted long after the manor had disappeared. The evidence above suggests that Grasby was only ever a small part (appurtenance) of large estates that changed hands according to the wishes of the King and was taken away as easily as it was awarded to those who gained and lost favour, or simply died. It appears that no family of note ever resided in the village during this period. Documentary evidence (see below) confirms that Grasby in the middle of the C17th was still part

of the manor or soke of Caistor. How much if any of the parish was demesne land belonging to a lord of the manor resident in Caistor or elsewhere is unknown. What is clear is that the village had two open-fields, largely unenclosed until the C17th, which appear to have been divided into the East and West low fields below the scarp (as evidenced by C17th enclosure documentation) and fields on the Wold land which remained unenclosed until the C19th. Commoners also had access to grazing on Caistor Moor, common land which also remained unenclosed until the C19th (this common land was shared with Searby-cum-Owmby, Clixby, North Kelsey, South Kelsey and Caistor and there must, therefore, have been some level of co-operation between these villages and oversight of the way in which the common was used). What is unknown is whether any of the Wold land originally constituted waste or furze, or was ploughed and then turned into a sheep walk, before being brought under the plough again at a later date.

To cultivate the open-fields it is likely that oxen, up to 6 or even 8 in a team, would have been used to pull a wooden "swing" plough, with no wheels and dependent on the skill of the ploughman to keep furrows straight and the depth even (unless the caracua, associated more with the Midlands, had been introduced - a large wheeled plough which still, however, required a large team to pull it and was awkward to turn round). There would have been carts, waggons, harrows etc., but most of the work would have depended on hand labour.

A typical farm year could have been:

Late June/July:- haymaking
Early Aug:- meadows "broken" i.e. opened for grazing
Aug:- begin harvest, winter corn first
Aug/Sept:- winter corn field broken; spring corn harvested
Oct:- spring corn field broken
Oct/Nov:- fallow field ploughed, harrowed, sown with winter corn
Early Nov:- meadows closed
Nov/Dec:- spring corn field prepared for planting
Late Nov:- animals leave open fields, except some sheep
March:- spring corn sown
April:- stock turned out onto meadows; lambing, calving, farrowing
May: meadows closed