

## Granges, Lodges and Urban Property

### Granges and Lodges

The Cistercian economy was wholly dependent on grange estates, the focal point of which was the grange itself. The grange was a complex of various buildings, laid out in a cloistral plan, that included a chapel, refectory, lay brothers' dormitory, guest house, farm outhouses, mills and workshops. It was common for granges to be enclosed by a wall with a gatehouse as the single point of access, and for some to include a piped water system similar to that found in abbeys. The first buildings were of substantial timber construction with cobbled footings, that were often replaced by equally substantial stone buildings when the mother abbey had acquired sufficient wealth; in some instances, the wealth of the mother abbey was such that substantial stone buildings were constructed from the start. From the fourteenth century onwards, grange complexes were replaced by smaller domestic (manorial) buildings as a result of the decline in lay brothers, which also saw a shift to a tenanted or paid workforce.

The first grange(s) established were those closest to the mother abbey. In addition to providing focal points for the wider network of granges they functioned as the home farm(s) of the abbey providing its immediate food needs. Whilst granges were, in the main, within a relatively short distance from the mother abbey, it was not uncommon for granges to be located at a great distance from the abbey. Early statutes stated that granges were to be no more than one day's journey (approximately twenty miles) from the mother abbey. This allowed for more effective management of the grange by the cellarer and allowed the *conversi* working the grange to attend Mass in the abbey church on Sundays and major feast days. The nearest grange to the abbey was often known as the 'home grange' or 'home farm' which supplied the community with its food; larger abbeys may have had more than one home grange. The home grange often had oversized granaries or barns to provide additional storage to the abbey's cellarge. Granges were overseen by a grange master who was typically a lay brother (although the grange master of a home grange could be a choir monk) who was answerable to the cellarer.

Granges were generally populated by *conversi*. With the demise of the *conversi* from the fourteenth century onwards, however, it became common practice for granges to be tenanted for rent income; although a less common practice, which kept the grange under the direct control of the abbey, was the use of a hired workforce under the management of a directly appointed bailiff. Tenant farmers had no freedom to farm as they wished; they wore the abbots livery and owed feudal service, whilst stock remained the property of the abbey - if an animal died it would only be replaced on delivery of the hide to the abbey. Stock was to be delivered to the abbey annually for slaughter to prevent it from being sold at a local market. Although granges were managed and worked by the lay brothers, and latterly by tenants or hired labourers, choir monks worked with regularity on the home farm and those home granges that were close enough to allow the monks to return to the abbey when the *horarium* dictated. During the harvest period, it was not uncommon for choir monks to work on more distant granges.

Grange estates were self-contained, and capable of mixed or specialized farming practices and industries. Estates were created from various land endowments from benefactors. It was not uncommon for endowed lands to be disparate areas that, whilst fruitful in their own right, were not profitable in isolation. The more viable and productive of these holdings would be consolidated, where possible, through the acquisition of neighbouring lands; achieved by the exchange of lands considered too distant to be profitably managed, or by purchase. From this consolidation grew the comprehensive arable and pastoral granges of well-connected field systems typical of the Cistercian grange estates. Endowed lands that could not be incorporated into an estate, or utilized as a lodge serving a mother grange,

would be rented for income, or sold or exchanged in order to obtain land adjacent to an existing grange or adjacent to other lands that could then be consolidated into a new grange. The benefit of an interconnected network of granges and lodges facilitated the movement of livestock and produce across lands belonging to the mother abbey; to enable such movement of goods from granges and lodges isolated from abbey lands wayleaves were negotiated with the respective land holders. Grange estates were also where industries considered too noisy or unpleasant for the confines of the precinct (when no outer court was established) were carried out, such as; pottery kilns, forges, vaccaries and tanneries. The average size of an arable grange was 150 to 200 hectares (375 to 500 acres).

In addition to lands, other endowments that were often incorporated within a grange, included: woodlands and forests with full entitlement to rights of timber, fire-wood, pannage and hunting; water courses or bodies with full entitlement to the setting-up of mills, fishing and any water-fowl thereon; mills for grinding, fulling, paper, bark and industrial power, or a share of income thereof. Although climate, landscape and soil often dictated the nature of grange husbandry, granges in the main practiced mixed husbandry. Good communication between the granges of an abbey was essential and Cistercian abbeys invested significantly in selected land corridors between their granges; some donations to abbeys were specifically for that purpose. Where these crossed other lands the landowners often benefitted from the improved roads, in return for which they regularly exempted the Cistercians from tax on the passage of goods through their lands and granted freedom from toll and customs payment at market.

It was not uncommon for villages or other settlements that came into the possession of a Cistercian abbey to be depopulated and the lands transformed into a grange or incorporated into an existing grange. Despite such instances of depopulating villages that were considered too close to an abbey site or grange complex and relocating the population, Cistercian abbeys preferred to acquire tenanted lands where possible, as they inherited seigniorial rights over the dependent population who became intrinsic to grange economies; both as a ready workforce and through the taxes they paid in kind. Examples of such depopulation are the villages of Greenbury and Thorpe Underwood which were depopulated by Fountains Abbey, and the villages of Barnoldswick and Accrington which were depopulated by Kirkstall Abbey.

The success of Cistercian land management and the grange system led to instances of competition for land which often brought a Cistercian abbey into conflict with neighbouring religious houses, including other Cistercian abbeys. The agricultural success of Cistercian granges was not so much the result of techniques and practices that surpassed their contemporaries, but rather their land management methods and the ability to create expansive estates.

### **Urban and Other Properties**

Many abbeys obtained urban properties (despite a General Chapter ruling of 1134 that no monk shall live in towns) in order to gain access to markets at which they could sell or barter their surpluses, and obtain products they would not otherwise be able to; invariably at sea and river ports, in the case of abbeys whose prime industry was sheep farming and wool exports. Following a General Chapter statute in 1189, urban properties were solely occupied by lay brothers and hired help. In the main, urban properties were either warehouses for the storage of goods, or houses in which their agents lived; these houses also provided accommodation for monks and lay brothers travelling on essential abbey business. In instances where an endowed urban property was unsuitable for the conducting of trade, it was common for them to be rented for income. In addition to houses, two Yorkshire abbeys are reported to have each owned a ship licensed to carry wool.

## **The Lands, Properties and other Temporalities of Sawtry Abbey**

At its founding, Sawtry Abbey was endowed with the manor of Sawtry Judith in its entirety; which included Ewingeswood, afterwards known as Monks' Wood and the lesser Athenryswood (also referred to as Little Wood, or today as Archers Wood), the manor house and the manorial church of St Mary. This manor was a ready-made domain of well-connected fields from which two granges were established by 1285. Ivo Le Moyne and other local land-owners added to this endowment with lands and other rights in Bedfordshire (Barford, Everton), Cambridgeshire (Babraham, Hungry Hatley, Westhorpe, Gamlingay, Bourn, Soham, Stow and Cambridge), Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire (Fotheringhay) and Norfolk (Narford, Stowe and Lynn). Although the full extent and location of these additional lands is not known, the following endowments are recorded; eight virgates of land in Conington, the parish churches Honingham (Norfolk) and Fulbourn (Cambridgeshire), and fisheries, at various times, in Blakemere in the fen of Walton and Whittlesea Mere with one boat. The abbey also had miscellaneous possessions in Sawtry Moyne, Conington, Grafham, Huntingdon, Great Stukeley, Wood Walton, Winwick, Tetworth, Waresley, Eynesbury, Great Paxton, Little Paxton, Offard D'Arcy, Yelling and Bread Street in London

There are two potential locations for the Old grange. One, which is suggested by the results of a 1967 excavation, is the area of earthworks (now ploughed out) at the north edge of Archer's Wood; however, dating evidence of the excavation assemblage puts this location to question. The other is the original manor house of Sawtry Judith. The manor house would have been immediately available to the Cistercian monks of Sawtry Abbey, and may well have served as the home farm from the earliest days of the abbey; and it would have been a natural evolution for this to later become a grange.

New grange is believed to have been located on the site of the present day Grange Farm. It was established as a vaccary during the period 1281-1285, making Sawtry abbey one of only twenty-one Cistercian abbeys in England and Wales to practice cattle husbandry rather than that of sheep - the nearby fenlands being better suited to the grazing of cattle. It is quite apt, therefore, that a small herd of cattle are farmed on the abbey site today.

### **Notes**

Seigniorial - a man of rank; a feudal lord; lord of the manor

Seigniorial rights - the rights of a feudal lord or lord of the manor to the labour of his tenants

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