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“Yorkshire boundaries: a postscript”

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The Society publishes a wide range of books and booklets on historic OS map series and its journal, *Sheetlines*, is recognised internationally for its specialist articles on Ordnance Survey-related topics.

Yorkshire boundaries: a postscript

John L Cruickshank

Further to my recent article¹ another example of a complex disputed boundary in Yorkshire, surveyed and published by the OS only after it had been defined by the Tithe Survey, has come to my attention.

In 2002 David Bourne described the complexity of the boundaries within the North Riding township of Flaxton, and their historical origins.² In summary, Flaxton is a compact, near-rectangular township with well marked boundaries that follow geographical features. One quarter of it (by area) lay in the small parish of Foston, while three quarters lay in the large parish of Bossal. The definition of these parochial boundaries by the tithe survey in 1843 had required the resolution of a dispute that had been running since the early eighteenth century, if not before. The Foston element of Flaxton was eventually defined by the tithe survey as being fourteen separate detached areas within the township, including one area in the middle of the actual village of Flaxton that had the effect of dividing the settlement into three parts.

The medieval village and its three named common fields had been a planned settlement. The individual strips in the open fields before enclosure were arranged in the same order as the corresponding houses along the village street. Thus next-door neighbours in the village were also next-door neighbours in the fields, so-called *solskifte*. The partition of Flaxton between two ecclesiastical parishes can be traced to a division of ownership of the township that was already in existence by the time of Domesday Book (1086). 1½ carucates (or 12 oxgangs) within Flaxton were recorded then as being soke of Foston, which corresponded to a quarter of the township. Bourne was able to establish that the individual tenements held by Count Alan as lord of Foston (which were in the centre of the village) became those that lay in the parish of Foston, while the remaining tenements became part of Bossal parish. The open fields of the township were eventually enclosed by agreement in 1658. It was following this enclosure, in which newly enclosed separate fields scattered round the township were allocated to each land-owner and his tenants (who still retained their existing houses and garths in the village), that conflict arose about exactly which fields owed tithe to which parish. The key issue here is that the only administrative importance of this very complex parish boundary was for the collection of tithe, and perhaps for the registration of births, marriages, deaths and wills. Once all these had ceased to be ecclesiastical matters this boundary became administratively irrelevant. In this case the abandonment of the recording of ecclesiastical parish boundaries by the OS in the late nineteenth century was sensible, practical and simple. In essence, by merely recording the township of Flaxton as a civil parish, without subdivision, the OS swept aside a millennium of tenorial complexity and returned matters to what had, no doubt, been their primordial condition.

¹ John L Cruickshank, 'Surveying the administrative boundaries of Lancashire and Yorkshire after the 1841 Ordnance Survey Act', *Sheetlines* 92,6.

² David Bourne, 'Flaxton: a township in two parishes', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 74 (2002), 155-167.