

 <p>VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY</p> <p>Leicestershire</p>	<p><b>The Parish of Welby</b></p> <p>Draft Text (liable to change, as further research is completed)</p>	<p>Alan Fox, 2017</p>
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## INTRODUCTION

Welby is a ‘depopulated village’ and ancient parish in north-east Leicestershire, two miles north-west of the market town of Melton Mowbray. In 2016 it remains one of the six chapelries of the *ecclesiastical* parish of St Mary’s in Melton Mowbray.<sup>1</sup> Welby had 42 taxpayers in 1377,<sup>2</sup> but the medieval village was depopulated in *c.*1605 by the lord of the manor, William Digby, and only seven or eight households remained.<sup>3</sup> Since 1875 the southern part of the parish has been transformed by industrialisation, and a failed attempt at coalmining between 1986 and 1997.<sup>4</sup>

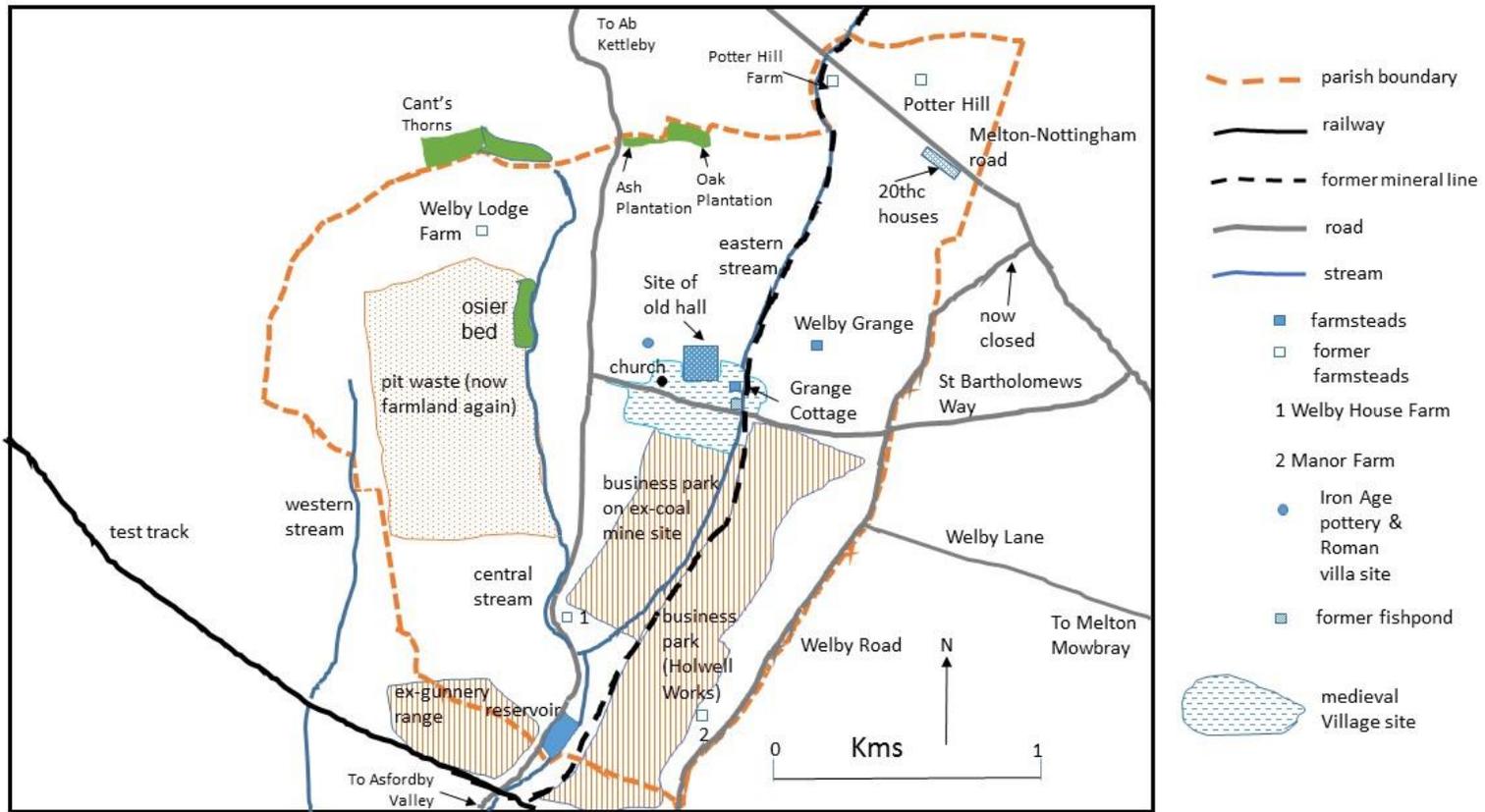
### Boundaries and extent

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.melton.leicester.anglican.org> (accessed 6 March 2014).

<sup>2</sup> *Poll Taxes* (Fenwick, ed.), 485.

<sup>3</sup> L.A. Parker, ‘The depopulation returns for Leicestershire in 1607’, *TLAS* xxiii, part ii (1947), 238, 257; TNA, C 205: Chancery: Special Commissions of Inquiry, James I; TNA, STAC 8/17/16, James I.

<sup>4</sup> ROLLR, D6319/1, Holwell Iron Co. Ltd Centenary booklet (1975); Melton Mowbray Borough Council Development Brief, 8 Nov 2000, concerning coal mine site.



Map 1: Welby Ecclesiastical and pre-1936 civil parish

In 1831 the parish area was stated to be 1,200 a.<sup>5</sup> Of the parishes in the surrounding area of north-east Leicestershire, Welby was ranked in size at 44 out of 56.<sup>6</sup> The parish areas ranged from 378 a. at Eye Kettleby to 4,824 a. at Saltby. Welby *civil* parish containing 1,185 acres (2,928.25 ha.) was created in December 1866, separate from the *ecclesiastical* parish, although both covered the same area.<sup>7</sup> It ceased to be a *civil* parish in April 1936, when all but 35 acres (86.5 ha.) was transferred to Asfordby *civil* parish,<sup>8</sup> and the remaining 35 a. strip of land immediately west of the Welby Road was transferred to Melton Mowbray. The Potter Hill area that had been transferred to Asfordby was transferred again in 1988 to Ab Kettleby Civil Parish.<sup>9</sup>

The extent and boundaries of the *ecclesiastical* parish (and pre-1936 *civil* parish) have been largely unchanged through the previous 900 years.<sup>10</sup> It is very roughly in the shape of a triangle, with its base running north-west to south-east (Fig. 1). This boundary cuts across land which slopes down generally in a southerly direction. It includes within it the site of the abandoned coal mine and its pit waste area (now reclaimed for agriculture), as well as the industrial area and business park around Holwell Works. The Melton Mowbray to Nottingham test track railway and nearly all the houses at Asfordby Hill lie outside Welby parish.

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<sup>5</sup> J. Curtis, *A Topographical History of the County of Leicester* (1831), 182.

<sup>6</sup> J. Curtis, *A Topographical History of the County of Leicester* (1831), *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> F. Youngs, *Local Administrative Units: Northern England* (1991), 240.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*; The County of Leicester (Melton and Belvoir Rural District)(Union of Parishes) Confirmation Order, 81175, 1936.

<sup>9</sup> Statutory Instruments 1988 No. 2100, Local government England and Wales, changes in local government areas, The Melton (Parishes) Order, 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10393097/boundary>

The apex of the triangle is in the Potter Hill area on the Melton Mowbray to Nottingham road. Here the ancient parish extends across this road to include Stonesby House Farm, Potter Hill Farm and some 1950s-built houses. This Potter Hill area was transferred from Asfordby *civil* parish to Ab Kettleby *civil* parish in 1988.<sup>11</sup> In the east the boundary with the ancient Sysonby parish followed Welby Road, for much of its length. To the north and north-west much of the boundary is still clearly defined by lines of trees at Ash plantation, Oak Plantation, Cant's Thorns and a tree-lined footpath south of the latter.

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<sup>11</sup> Statutory Instruments 1988 No. 2100, Local government England and Wales, changes in local government areas, The Melton (Parishes) Order, 5-6.

## Landscape and physical features



Map 2: Welby and surrounding area in 1959

The parish lies on the higher ground of the Leicestershire Wolds, nearly 1½ miles away from the nearest point of the River Wreake to the south.<sup>12</sup> In general the land slopes down in a southerly direction, but this incline is cut into by the valleys of three southward-flowing streams. The eastern valley has included at its southern end, since 1875, the site of an industrial area at Holwell Works.<sup>13</sup> The railway, which formerly brought ironstone from the area around Holwell village, also followed this valley.<sup>14</sup> The middle valley is a tributary of the eastern one and once contained an osier (willow) bed due west of the medieval village.<sup>15</sup> The valley lies to the west of the Asfordby Valley to Ab Kettleby road. It joins the eastern one just north of the Holwell Works reservoir, which is adjacent to this road. The lowest part of the parish, at about 70 m. (230 feet) above sea level, is located on the parish boundary at the southern edge of the reservoir.<sup>16</sup> In the extreme west of the parish there is short section of a third valley.

The high ground on the eastern boundary separates Welby parish from former Sysonby parish, whereas the high ground in the west forms the boundary with Saxelby and Ab Kettleby parishes.<sup>17</sup> The highest point of the parish at 135 m. (443 feet) is on the north-western boundary just west of Cant's Thorns.<sup>18</sup> The site of the medieval village slopes down from west to east into the eastern valley.<sup>19</sup> Much of the high ground between the

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<sup>12</sup> See OS map 1:25000 Explorer sheet 246 (2000).

<sup>13</sup> ROLLR, D6319/1, Holwell Iron Co. Ltd Centenary booklet (1975).

<sup>14</sup> E. Wilson, 'The Lias Marlstone of Leicestershire as a source of iron', *The Midland Naturalist* (1885), 61.

<sup>15</sup> ROLLR, DE 748/1, tithe map and apportionment, Welby (1839).

<sup>16</sup> OS map 1:25000 Explorer sheet 246 (2000).

<sup>17</sup> OS map 1:25000 Provisional Edn SK 71 (1954, reprinted 1957) and SK72 (1954, reprinted 1959).

<sup>18</sup> OS map 1:25000 Explorer sheet 246 (2000).

<sup>19</sup> OS map 1:25000 Explorer sheet 246 (2000).

middle and western streams is covered in pit waste from the abandoned coal mine.<sup>20</sup> It has now been reclaimed for agricultural use.

Most of the parish is covered in boulder clay deposited in the Ice Age.<sup>21</sup> This produces heavy and sticky soil, which is difficult to cultivate. The three streams of the parish have cut down to much older Jurassic strata in the valley floors, but they also consist largely of clay.<sup>22</sup> The eastern valley contains a narrow strip of alluvium deposited by the stream in flood.

## Land Use

Most of the southern half of the parish is occupied today by two business parks, one around Holwell Works and the other on the site of the abandoned coal mine. The rest of the parish is mainly farmland with grassland predominant. Land use maps of the 1930s show that over ninety per cent of the Melton area was grassland.<sup>23</sup> This has preserved the ridge and furrow of the medieval arable strips, which are still visible over much of the parish.

The desertion of the medieval village occurred in c.1605, which would have accompanied a change from mixed to predominantly pastoral farming.<sup>24</sup> The abandonment of the village left a parish with very few scattered buildings occupied by farmers and farm

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<sup>20</sup> OS map 1:25000 Explorer sheet 246 (2000).

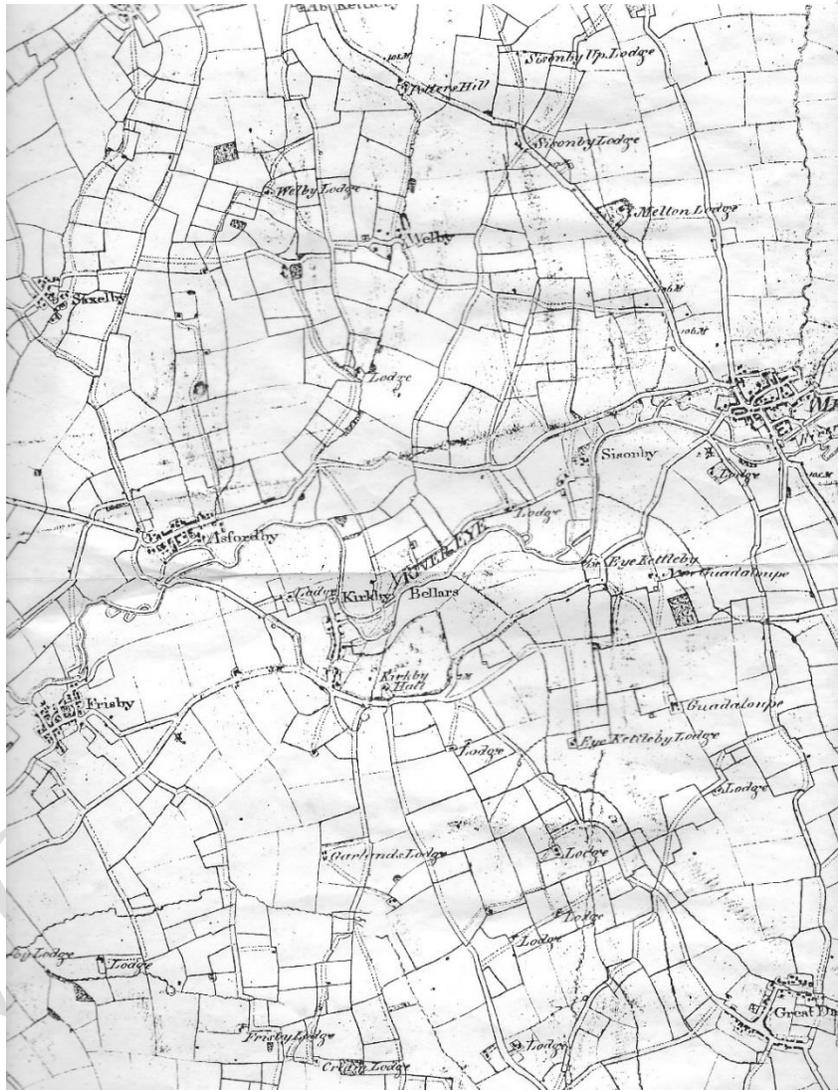
<sup>21</sup> Geol. Surv. Map, 1:63360, drift, sheet 142 (1969 edn); A.J. Thomason, *Soils of the Melton Mowbray District* (1971).

<sup>22</sup> Geol. Surv. Map, 1:63360, drift, sheet 142 (1969 edn); A.J. Thomason, *Soils of the Melton Mowbray District* (1971).

<sup>23</sup> Dudley Stamp Survey, Geographical Publications Ltd, Land Use Survey of Britain 1:63360 Sheet 63 Leicester, 1931-5.

<sup>24</sup> L.A. Parker 'The depopulation returns for Leicestershire in 1607', *Trans. Leics. Archaeol. Soc.* xxiii, part ii (1947), 257-8, citing TNA, C 205: Chancery: Special Commissions of Inquiry, James I; TNA, STAC 8/17/16, James I.

workers.<sup>25</sup> From 1875 the southern part of the parish was transformed by industrialisation, but the associated houses for the workforce were built outside Welby parish, particularly at Asfordby Hill.<sup>26</sup> The spread of the industrial site obviously reduced the farmland and associated farmsteads in the parish.



Map 3: 1816 Ordnance Survey surveyor's map

<sup>25</sup> TNA, HO 107/2091, 313 Census 1851.

<sup>26</sup> ROLLR, D6319/1, Holwell Iron Co. Ltd Centenary booklet (1975).

There was no reference to woodland in the parish in 1086.<sup>27</sup> The 1816 Ordnance Survey surveyor's map (Map 3) shows small amounts of woodland at Lord Wilton's Gorse and the adjacent osier (willow) beds in the central valley; Thorny Plantation in the north-west, as well as Ash Plantation and Oak Plantation on the parish boundary in the north.<sup>28</sup> These are all still present to some extent today. The 1839 tithe award shows that there were 12 areas of woodland, totalling just over 11 acres, all called plantations and owned by Edward Godfrey, lord of the manor.<sup>29</sup>

## Communications

### *Roads*

The earliest detailed map of the area shows that Welby Lane from Melton Mowbray in 1777 took very much the same route as in 2016 (Map 4).<sup>30</sup> The only change has been the deviation around the site of the coal mine in the late 20th century. The road passed through the medieval village to meet the road from Ab Kettleby to Asfordby Valley. The Melton Mowbray to Nottingham road cut through the northern extremity of the parish at Potter Hill for nearly half a mile. It was a turnpike road from 1753 to 1873.<sup>31</sup>

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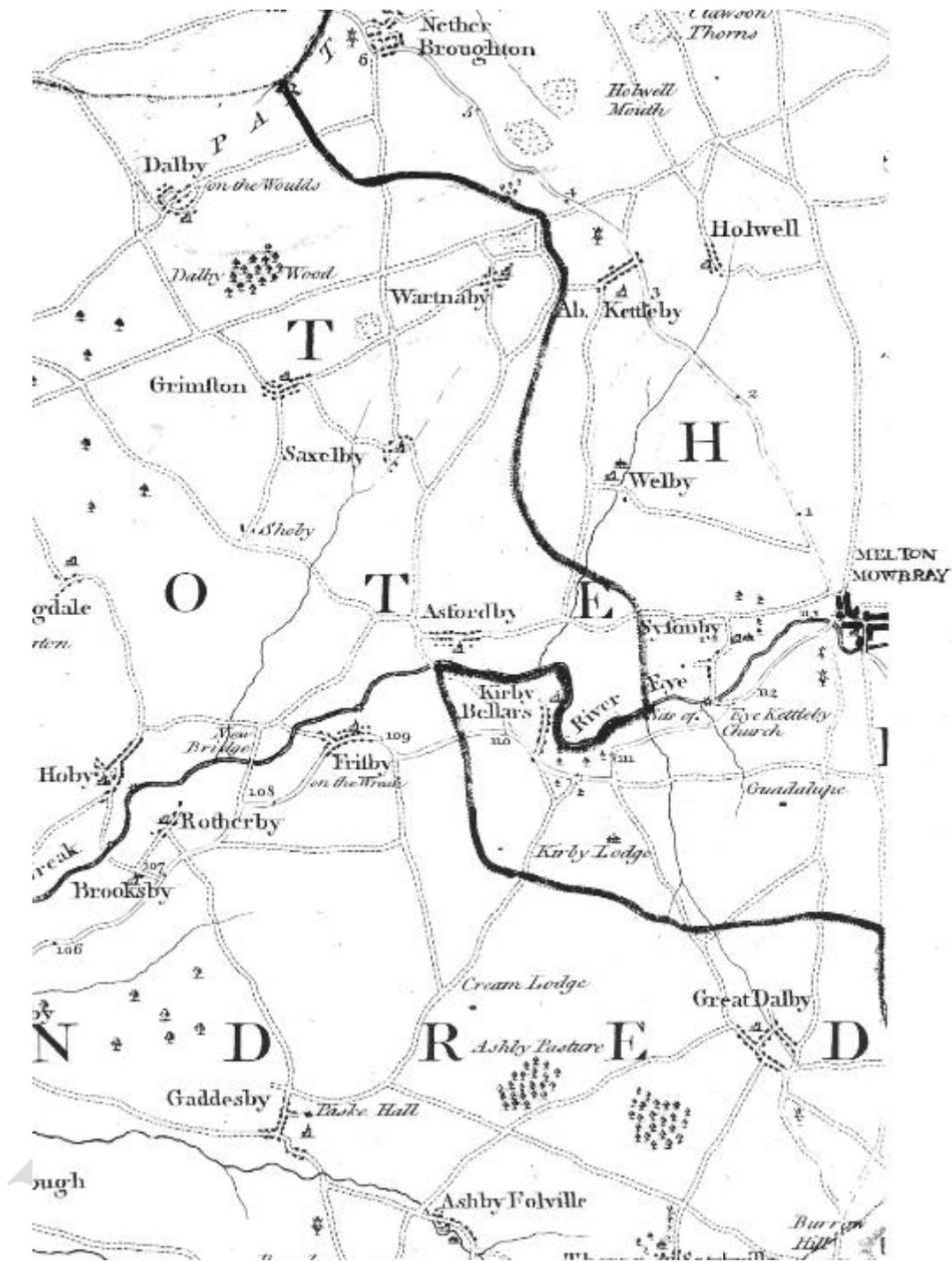
<sup>27</sup> Morgan, *Domesday Book Leicestershire*, 235d 29, 4, 236b 40, 13, 236c 40, 37, 236d 40, 38.

<sup>28</sup> British Library, Melton Mowbray area, two-inch to one mile surveyors' map, 1816.

<sup>29</sup> ROLLR, DE 748/1, tithe map and apportionment, Welby (1839).

<sup>30</sup> ROLLR DG 9/Ma/LI [DG 9/2727], John Prior's map (1777); J. D. Welding (ed.), *Leicestershire in 1777: an Edition of John Prior's Map of Leicestershire* (1984), 26.

<sup>31</sup> Turnpike Act of 1st Authorisation, 4 Geo. III, c.84 (1753-4); Annual Continuance Act, 36-7 Vic., c. 90 (to expire 1 Nov.1873); A. Cossons, *The Turnpike Roads of Leicestershire and Rutland* (2003), 48.



Map 4: From Prior's map of Leicestershire, 1777

The 1816 surveyors' map for the Ordnance Survey (Map 3) shows more roads than Prior's map.<sup>32</sup> In particular, there was a road, now called Welby Road, along the eastern parish boundary from Asfordby Hill to the Melton-Nottingham road at Sysonby Lodge (Farm). The road from Melton Mowbray, through Asfordby Hill to Asfordby and beyond runs just to the south of Welby parish. In order to provide better access to the coal mine, a new road known as Bartholomew's Way was constructed from the Melton Mowbray to Nottingham road about 1990.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Rivers and canals*

The nearest navigable waterway was the Melton Mowbray Navigation along the River Wreake from mid-1790s to 1877.<sup>34</sup> The nearest wharves were at Asfordby and Kirby Bellars.

#### *Railways*

The only railway line to run through the parish was the mineral line from the ironstone workings near Holwell village to the iron works at Asfordby Hill (Map 2).<sup>35</sup> This opened in 1876 and continued in use to 1962 when ironstone mining ceased.<sup>36</sup> It entered Welby parish in the north along the valley near Potter Hill Farm and then followed this eastern valley southwards.

In 1879 the main line railway from Melton Mowbray to Nottingham was completed by the Midland Railway Company.<sup>37</sup> It ran immediately outside and south of the Welby

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<sup>32</sup> British Library, Melton Mowbray area, two-inch to one mile surveyors' map, 1816.

<sup>33</sup> OS map 1:50000 Landranger series, sheet 129 (1991).

<sup>34</sup> *Leicester Journal*, 19 Jun. 1795; Act for closure of Navigation, 40-1 Vic., c 78.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, 'Lias Marlstone of Leicestershire', *Midland Naturalist*, 61.

<sup>36</sup> ROLLR, D6319/1, Holwell Iron Co. Ltd Centenary booklet (1975), 5.

<sup>37</sup> [www.meltonmowbrayrailways.info](http://www.meltonmowbrayrailways.info) (Accessed 14 December 2015).

parish boundary, and a junction was made with the Holwell mineral line. The main line was closed for normal use in 1968, but it became the Old Dalby Test Track, used for testing new designs of trains, and it still has that use in 2016.<sup>38</sup>

## Settlement

The Welby Hoard,<sup>39</sup> discovered by a farmer digging a trench in 1875, is probably the most important Bronze Age find in Leicestershire. The location of the find was described as the Gravelhole field and this is probably the Gravel Pit Close of the 1839 tithe map.<sup>40</sup> It is just to the south of the osier beds and is now beneath the pit waste of the abandoned colliery. The hoard consisted of 16 objects from 1,000–800 BC, and included three bronze socketed axe heads, a sword, a small bronze bowl, cauldron mounts and a few other pieces.<sup>41</sup> It was reported that there were more items, but the finder had melted some down at a local foundry before local resident Mr W. S. Barnes witnessed this and managed to purchase the remaining objects.<sup>42</sup> Some of the objects are of continental origin, arriving in Leicestershire through long-distance trade or exchange, while one of the axes is of an unusual type, which matches an axe-mould found at Rothley in 2009, and was therefore probably made locally.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> [www.meltonmowbrayrailways.info](http://www.meltonmowbrayrailways.info) (Accessed 14 December 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland Historic Environment Record, Welby MLE6366, 19 Nov 2013.

<sup>40</sup> T. G. E. Powell, 'Late Bronze Age hoard from Welby, Leicestershire', *Archaeological Journal*, 105 (1948), 27; ROLLR, DE 748/1, tithe map and apportionment, Welby (1839).

<sup>41</sup> Powell, 'Late Bronze Age hoard', 29-35.

<sup>42</sup> Powell, 'Late Bronze Age hoard', 40.

<sup>43</sup> <https://finds.org.uk/counties/leicestershire/treasure-20-melton-museum-welby-hoard/#>;  
<https://finds.org.uk/counties/leicestershire/treasure-20-charnwood-museum-rothley-hoard/> (accessed 24 Sept. 2017).

The Melton Mowbray Archaeological Fieldwork Group have also found Roman tile and pottery sherds, mixed with Medieval and possibly Iron Age sherds to the west of the church.<sup>44</sup> There was possibly a Roman villa to the north-west of the church.<sup>45</sup>

The name of the parish in 1086 was Alebi, which later became Aleby, Oleby, Owelby and finally Welby in 1518.<sup>46</sup> This Scandinavian name means ‘the farmstead or village of a man called Ali’.<sup>47</sup> The name does not necessarily denote a Scandinavian origin for Welby, as it is possible that an earlier Anglo-Saxon village was re-named. However no Anglo-Saxon finds have been recorded in the parish.<sup>48</sup>

Aerial photographs of the substantial earthworks which remain suggest that the medieval village of Welby was rectangular in form, stretching west to east for about 450 metres (492 yd) from the parish church down hill into the eastern valley, where there was at least one fish pond.<sup>49</sup> The north-south extent of the village was about 300 metres (328 yd).

In 1871 there were only 8 inhabited houses and 2 uninhabited ones in the parish and this remained the same in 1881 after the establishment of Holwell Works.<sup>50</sup> The later loss of some farmsteads due to the expansion of industrial sites in the south was offset by the

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<sup>44</sup> P. Liddle, Archaeology in Leicestershire and Rutland’, *TLAHS*, 55 (1979-80), 96; Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland Historic Environment Record, Welby, MLE18614, MLE18614, MLE6502, MLE3345, MLE3349; 19 Nov 2013.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, MLE3349, 19 Nov 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Morgan, *Domesday Book Leicestershire*, 235d 29, 4 (left hand page in Latin); B. Cox, *A Dictionary of Leicestershire and Rutland Place-Names* (2005), 111.

<sup>47</sup> Morgan, *Domesday Book Leicestershire*, 235d 29, 4 (left hand page in Latin); B. Cox, *A Dictionary of Leicestershire and Rutland Place-Names* (2005), 111.

<sup>48</sup> Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland Historic Environment Record, Welby, 19 Nov 2013.

<sup>49</sup> F. Hartley, *Medieval Earthworks of North-East Leicestershire* (1987), aerial photograph, 80; Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland HER Welby MLE3340, 19 Nov 2013.

<sup>50</sup> *Population tables*, Parl. Papers 1872 (C.676, LXVI pt1) p. 212; Parl. Papers 1883 (C.3563, LXXIX.1), p.396.

building of houses at Potter Hill in the 1950s.<sup>51</sup> A few houses on Welby Road at Asfordby Hill also lie within Welby parish.

### **Built character**

The abandonment of the village in 1605 left a parish with about seven or eight households at the most.<sup>52</sup> Apart from the church and the old hall to the north-east of the church, Prior's map of 1777 shows no other buildings (map 4),<sup>53</sup> although Welby Grange Farm was surely there, judging from its style of architecture.<sup>54</sup>

The Ordnance Survey map of 1816 (map 3)<sup>55</sup> shows several more buildings, including 'Mackley's Cottage' just to the south of the east-west road that runs past the church, Welby Grange Farm, Welby Grange Cottage, Welby House Farm on the Ab Kettleby Road, Welby Lodge Farm in the north-west of the parish and Potter Hill Farm (called Potters Hill) on the Melton to Nottingham Road. There may also be a building on the site of Manor Farm, now lost to Holwell Works expansion.

Welby Grange Farm, which lies to the east of the eastern valley, is probably situated on the site of Welby Grange, which belonged to Garendon Abbey in the medieval period.

The grade II listed farmhouse is of the mid to late 17<sup>th</sup> century, although there have been several changes, with possibly a 19<sup>th</sup> century rebuild.<sup>56</sup> The house is built of squared

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<sup>51</sup> ROLLR, DE 748/1, tithe map and apportionment, Welby (1839); OS maps 1:10560 sheet SK 72SW (1938, revised 1953) and (1959).

<sup>52</sup> L.A. Parker, 'The depopulation returns for Leicestershire in 1607', *TLAS* xxiii, part ii (1947), 238, 257; TNA, C 205: Chancery: Special Commissions of Inquiry, James I; TNA, STAC 8/17/16, James I.

<sup>53</sup> ROLLR DG 9/Ma/LI [DG 9/2727], John Prior's map (1777); J. D. Welding (ed.), *Leicestershire in 1777: an Edition of John Prior's Map of Leicestershire* (1984), 26.

<sup>54</sup> Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland HER, Welby MLE13762, 19 Nov 2013.

<sup>55</sup> BL, Melton Mowbray area, two-inch to one mile surveyors' map, 1816.

<sup>56</sup> Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland HER Welby MLE12762, 19 Nov 2013.

ironstone with an artificial slate roof. The outbuildings include a threshing barn, cart shed and cattle shed of the nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup> These incorporate fragments of masonry from the 14th to 16th centuries, including window frames, possibly from the medieval monastic grange of Welby or nearby Sysonby, and part of a fireplace (Figs 2 and 3).<sup>58</sup> Nearby is ironstone-built Grange Cottage, probably of the 17th or early 18th century, with alterations in the 20th century.<sup>59</sup>



Figure 2: *Welby Grange Farm, incorporating earlier masonry*

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<sup>57</sup> Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland HER Welby MLE12762, 19 Nov 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland HER Welby MLE12762, 19 Nov 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland HER Welby, MLE12764.



Figure 3: *Welby Grange Farm, outbuildings*

Potter Hill Farm is an early 18<sup>th</sup> century three-storey brick building on a stone plinth. The roof is of glazed black pantiles.<sup>60</sup>

The 1839 tithe map for Welby confirms the reading of the 1816 map although ‘Manor Farm’ was just a barn and stack yard, not a farmstead.<sup>61</sup> Even in 1945 the geographical location of the buildings were much the same despite the arrival of Holwell Works in 1875. In the 1940s several buildings were erected close to Welby House Farm.<sup>62</sup> They included Stonehouse Farm and the semi-detached properties called Plas Newydd and Ashlea. In 1957 an aerial photograph shows that there was still at least part of the old hall

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<sup>60</sup> Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland HER Welby, MLE12493.

<sup>61</sup> ROLLR, DE 748/1, tithe map and apportionment, Welby (1839).

<sup>62</sup> Oral testimony of Alan Berry, former resident of Plas Newydd, 11 October 2015.

standing and ‘Mackley’s Cottage’ was still in position.<sup>63</sup> Both had square boundary hedges surrounding their south-facing gardens. An Ordnance Survey map of 1959 shows new houses alongside the main road at Potter Hill.<sup>64</sup>

By 1987 the Old Hall and Mackley’s Cottage, both featured on the 1957 aerial photograph, had gone.<sup>65</sup> The last remnant of the Old Hall had been demolished in 1961 by the owner Mr Hobill as it was in a dangerous condition.<sup>66</sup> It is thought to have been the home of the Digby and Bennett families, lords of the manor.<sup>67</sup> Archaeologists have identified the site of the hall surrounded by parterres and terrace walks in its sixteenth and seventeenth century gardens.<sup>68</sup> They could have been laid out by George Bennett or his son, also called George, who became High Sherriff of Leicestershire in 1622.<sup>69</sup>

Mackley’s Cottage had suffered from the encroachment of industrial waste from Holwell Works and then the development of the new coal mine.<sup>70</sup> The shafts for the mine were started in 1986 and the National Coal Board bought Welby House Farm and the adjacent houses, as well as Welby Lodge Farm because the land was needed for the pit waste disposal.<sup>71</sup> The coal mine project proved a failure and the mine closed in 1997.<sup>72</sup> The pit waste area has been reclaimed for agriculture, but the farmsteads that had been demolished were not restored. Potter Hill Farm is no longer a working farm,<sup>73</sup> leaving

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<sup>63</sup> Hartley, *Medieval Earthworks of North-East Leicestershire*, 80

<sup>64</sup> OS map 1:10560 provisional edition SK72SW (1959).

<sup>65</sup> OS map 1:10560 provisional edition SK72SW (1959).

<sup>66</sup> Oral testimony of Mr Hobill, 11 March 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland HER Welby MLE8862, 19 Nov 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland HER Welby MLE8862, 19 Nov 2013.

<sup>69</sup> Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland HER Welby MLE8862, 19 Nov 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Melton Mowbray Borough Council Development Brief, 8 Nov 2000, concerning coal mine site.

<sup>71</sup> Oral testimonies of Spencer and Rosemary Houghton 13 Nov 2014 and Margaret Hill (born Garfoot) 18 Mar 2015, former residents.

<sup>72</sup> Melton Mowbray Borough Council Development Brief, 8 Nov 2000, concerning coal mine site.

<sup>73</sup> Oral testimony of owner Mike Walker, 8 Nov 2014.

just Welby Grange Farm as the only working farm in the village in 2016. The only other domestic buildings in the former parish area are Potter Hill Farm and the 1950s-built houses in the same area. There is a bungalow close to Welby Grange Farm.

### *Industrial and Commercial Sites*

A field near the T-junction of roads to the west of the church is called Mill Hill. There may have been a former water mill close to the osier beds in the middle valley of the parish.<sup>74</sup> There may have been a pottery kiln at Potter Hill in the medieval period.<sup>75</sup>

From 1875 there was a major change in the parish with the founding of Holwell Iron Works in the eastern valley.<sup>76</sup> The enterprise still continues in 2016, as part of St Gobain Pipelines plc but covers much less area than formerly. The rest of the site is now home to several commercial organisations, making up the Melton Mowbray Business Park.

In the mid-1980s an attempt at developing a coal mine<sup>77</sup> resulted in some coal extraction and pit waste was spread over an area to the west of the Ab Kettleby road. The mine was finally abandoned in 1997 and the pit waste area has been reclaimed for agriculture. The site of the actual pithead has now become the Asfordby Business Park.

## **Population**

Before the national censuses started in 1801 any population data for Welby tended to be included in the figures for Melton Mowbray. After 1935 Welby civil parish was part of

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<sup>74</sup> Leics CC, Leics & Rut HER, Welby parish MLE3348.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., MLE3343.

<sup>76</sup> ROLLR, L671, *Holwell Works Centenary 1875-1975* booklet, 1.

<sup>77</sup> Melton Mowbray Borough Council Development Brief, 8 November 2000.

Asfordby civil parish and again separate figures are unavailable.<sup>78</sup> However on a few occasions there were separate statistics for Welby. In 1086 the Domesday Book recorded 28 people, including 18 freemen, seven villeins and three bordars (smallholders).<sup>79</sup> These figures suggest a population of over one hundred. In 1327 eight people in Oleby (Welby) paid the lay subsidy tax and in 1332 the number had been reduced to six.<sup>80</sup> Hoskins estimated that only around half to one third of heads of household paid this tax, so these figures show possibly a small fall in population from 1086.<sup>81</sup>

The 1377 poll tax document gives a total of 42 tax payers.<sup>82</sup> This should include all adults, male and female, aged 16 and over. The 1381 poll tax document for Oleby (Welby) is barely legible, but it seems to give a total of only 27 adults paying tax.<sup>83</sup> The drop in numbers from 1377 may well be due to a great deal of tax evasion in this year of the poll tax riots. In the 1524 lay subsidy the number of tax payers on goods or wages was 12, and the number taxed on goods alone in 1543 was 11.<sup>84</sup> In 1572 there were only three tax payers, based on slightly different criteria for eligibility.<sup>85</sup> The lord of the manor, William Dygbie, and widow Jane Dygbie paid tax on income from their lands. William Towke was the only person taxed on moveable goods worth at least £3. In 1524 six people had been taxed on goods worth £3 or more and in 1543 it was eight. The

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<sup>78</sup> The County of Leicester (Melton and Belvoir Rural District) (Union of Parishes) Confirmation Order, 81175, 1936.

<sup>79</sup> Morgan, *Domesday Book Leicestershire*, 235d 29, 4, 236b 40, 13, 236c 40, 37, 236d 40, 38.

<sup>80</sup> TNA, Lay subsidy E179/133/1 (1327); 179/133/2 (1332).

<sup>81</sup> W.G. Hoskins, 'Population of an English village: a study of Wigston Magna', *TLAHS*, 33 (1957), 17.

<sup>82</sup> *Poll Taxes* (Fenwick, ed.), 485.

<sup>83</sup> *Poll Taxes* (Fenwick, ed.), 603—4.

<sup>84</sup> Farnham, *Medieval Village Notes*, IV, 274: TNA, Lay subsidy E179/133/108 (1524) and E179/133/136 (1543).

<sup>85</sup> Farnham, *Medieval Village Notes*, IV, 275: TNA, Lay subsidy E179/134/204 (1572).

reduction to one only in 1572 suggests a fall in population numbers through the 16th century, or a decrease in the numbers of relatively wealthy people.

In 1607 it was reported in a document that is now badly damaged, that William Digby deceased had decayed three houses of husbandry and taken the land away and that the decay was being continued by Thomas Digby his son.<sup>86</sup> This is the point at which the village of Welby was deserted, leaving a parish church and a handful of farms. In the hearth tax list of 1664 seven people paid tax and there were no exemptions.<sup>87</sup> Thus there were only seven households in the parish and Nichols reported the same number in 1795.<sup>88</sup>

In 1801, the first national census gave a population total of 57 in 8 families.<sup>89</sup> This produces a high average of 7.1 people per household, because there were servants and labourers in residence. The population numbers then fluctuated between a high of 76 in 1811 and a low of 44 in 1831.<sup>90</sup> In 1851 there was a population of 66 in ten households, six of which were headed by a farmer and included at least one agricultural labourer living at the farm.<sup>91</sup> Between 1871 and 1881 when Holwell Works was established the numbers dropped from 62 to 55, but the number of households was eight at both dates.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Parker, 'The depopulation returns for Leicestershire in 1607', 238, 257; TNA, C 205: Chancery: Special Commissions of Inquiry, James I; TNA, STAC 8/17/16, James I.

<sup>87</sup> TNA, E179/251/4/2 hearth tax for Framland, Mich. 1664.

<sup>88</sup> J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of Leicestershire* (1795, reprinted 1971), II, 285.

<sup>89</sup> *Population returns* (Parl. Papers 1801-2 (9) vi. i), 176.

<sup>90</sup> *Population returns* (Parl. Papers 1852-3 (1632) lxxxvi.i), 24; *ibid.* 1862 (3056) l.i), 66; *VCH* 3 (1955), 193.

<sup>91</sup> TNA, HO 107/2091/313, Census 1851.

<sup>92</sup> *Population returns* (Parl. Papers 1871 (c.676) lxxv. i. 1), 212; *ibid.* 1883 (c3563) lxxix.i), 396.

At the beginning of the 20th century the population dropped to 38 in 8 households in 1901, probably due to the expansion of Holwell Works.<sup>93</sup> Descendants of Welby farmers tell how the noise and dust of the works had an adverse effect on nearby pastures and farm animals.<sup>94</sup> However by 1921 population had risen to a high of 107 and was still high at 96 in 1931, the last census figure available for the parish.<sup>95</sup> From then, the families are included within the figures for Melton Mowbray and Asfordby. Further population decline due to increasing industrialisation was offset by the building of houses at Potter Hill in the 1950s. In the 1980s the National Coal Board bought and then destroyed farmsteads and other houses in the western part of the parish, thus causing a major fall in population numbers.

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<sup>93</sup> TNA, RG13/3012, census 1901.

<sup>94</sup> Oral testimony to this author.

<sup>95</sup> *Leics. VCH*, III (1955), 193.