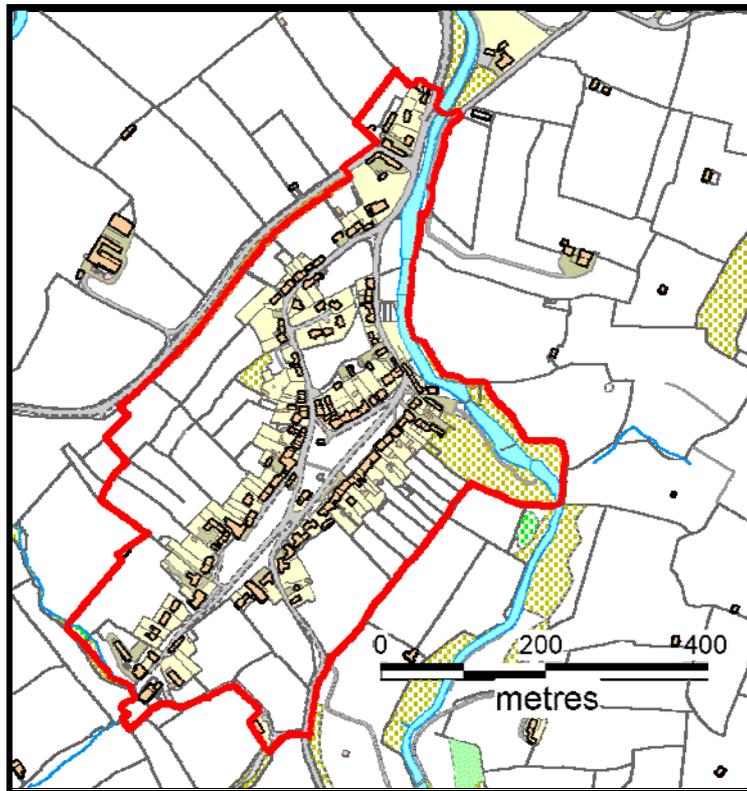


West Burton, Waldendale – Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Designated – 30 November 1999



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1 Introduction

This character appraisal has been prepared as part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's Conservation Area Strategy. It follows on from two meetings of a Conservation Area Workshop with the residents of West Burton village in September and October 1999.

2. The Location and Setting of the Village

West Burton is located on a tapering spur of mainly level land at the northern end of Forelands Rigg, situated slightly above the floodplain of Bishopdale, and adjacent to the narrow gorge containing Walden Beck, which drops down into Bishopdale at this point to provide a confluence with Bishopdale Beck, some 2km to the north. When viewed from across the valley to the west the village appears to nestle in a well wooded site contained below hill slopes rising up to North Burton Moor, to the east. Hawes, the present market town for the upper dale, is located some 15kms to the west, while Leyburn, the nearest sizeable town is some 12.5kms to the east. West Burton has extensive views over farmland in the valley bottom as well as towards Wensleydale and the towering presence of Castle Bolton, a short way to the north.

3. The Historic Origins and Development of the Settlement

Iron age settlements exist high up on Burton Moor, 2km to the east. But, whilst there are numerous Norse and Danish place names locally, the first settlement of the existing site may have commenced in the Saxon era, Burton probably deriving from the Saxon 'Burgh

Town' or 'important farmstead or centre'. There are no known references on modern maps or other documents to there having been an East or any other Burton in the close vicinity.

The village is described as a relatively small settlement, along with nearby 'Ecinton' or Eshington, in the Domesday Book but it had grown sufficiently to have obtained manorial rights by the 12th Century. Land in and around the village formed part of the Scrope family's estate at Castle Bolton from 1404 until the early 19th Century, although it is now difficult to assess the importance of such status on the form and the development of the settlement during that period.

It is not clear how or when the present village plan developed. Broad greens such as at West Burton often evolved from Anglo-Saxon defensive enclosures which would both repel aggressors and allow the corralling of stock from nearby isolated farmsteads and hamlets. However, many planned settlements were created in North Yorkshire early in the 12th Century in an effort to recolonise land laid to waste during the early Norman era. The apparent growth of a manorial settlement at West Burton in the 12th Century might support a later date for the creation of the village's present form.

The present group of buildings date mainly from the late 18th Century and 19th Century with only two buildings displaying obvious pre-18th Century origins. West Burton was certainly a thriving small town in the 18th century when 30 landowners were recorded in the village in 1746. The emergence of nearby coal and lead mining, and stone quarrying in the 19th Century is reflected in census returns. Numerous people were involved in commercial and service industries such as shopkeepers, milliners, dressmakers, tailors, a sempstress, as well as traders and craftsmen such as blacksmiths, carpenters, saddlers, and cordwainers (shoemakers). In the 1851 census return, only 17 of the 92 houses then existent in the main village core were occupied by farmers (only one third of townsfolk seem to have been involved in agriculture related activities at this time) and the existence of such trades and services reveals how prosperous the village was by the middle of the 19th Century.

The layout of the village has changed very little in the intervening years with one or two buildings disappearing in the 20th Century while a number of new houses have been constructed in recent years. Generally, development in the latter part of the 20th Century has been reasonably discreet and has, for the most part, followed traditional building lines and forms. However, almost all the craft and service occupations described above have now ceased and West Burton is now mostly residential in character.

4. The Architectural and Historical Interest of the Buildings and Other Built Features

West Burton possesses 9 listed buildings, all Grade II in status. Only two of these buildings seem to pre-date 1700 – Ryders Farm, on the Back Nook, which has both 17th Century details (chamfer moulded mullions, a fine projecting rear stair turret and a plan form typical of the period) as well as 18th Century elements (the moulded architrave to the window which lights the rear staircase) and West End/Inglenook Cottage, which shows evidence of having been refronted, but incorporating 17th Century ornamentation, either reinstated or introduced. Other listed buildings date from the 18th and 19th Centuries and reveal a mixture of vernacular detailing, such as the door and window surrounds detailing at the Black Bull House, and more classical motifs such as to the door surround at Wensleydale House, or the unified symmetrical façade evident at The Grange. Galloway House is a more unusual building, dated to circa 1830 but displaying Tudor and Gothic revival details such as the embattled parapets, four centred arches and a plate tracery headed window, which are more in keeping with a remodelling at the later part of that century.

Numerous unlisted buildings possess similar qualities and characteristics which together with their listed neighbours help bring a positive contribution to the special architectural quality of the area. These are shown on the attached character analysis map.

The aforementioned prosperity of West Burton in the 19th Century is recognisable in the design and detailing of many buildings which survive today. Numerous buildings which appear to pre-date 1800 seem to have been refenestrated or refronted, whilst those newly built during the 19th Century are often typical examples of the high Victorian 'villa style' architecture featuring bold projecting bay windows, ornamental door surrounds and a strong emphasis on symmetrical facades with classical decorative details. Good examples include The Mount, Valley House, West Burton House and The Grange and, typically, these are set back in their building plots unlike the more vernacular structures along the north west and south east sides of the green, where building lines are generally linear with shallow front gardens being often only a metre or two deep. Many of the latter gardens are enclosed behind distinctive wrought or cast iron railings and stone gate piers of various ornate designs and these give a strong unifying visual character to properties fronting the green.

Almost all of the houses in the village consist of two storeys with those buildings with origins before about 1850 being more horizontal in form with shallow roof pitches often of sandstone slates, while their later neighbours tend to be slightly taller with a more pronounced vertical emphasis, typically under steeper roofs of Welsh or Cumbrian true slate.

The noteworthy unifying element in the village is the more or less consistent use of local sand and gritstones for construction, even on the more consciously 'designed' Victorian houses. Construction details range from random rubble walling through to finely jointed ashlar with smooth and peck dressed finishes. Whilst the stone selected is of mixed quality and durability, it provides a consistent and a harmonious material which shapes the special character of the built environment. A few buildings now possess smooth modern cementitious renders while others reveal evidence of former lime-rich renders and wet dashes, sometimes colour washed, mainly with white limewash. These surface treatments may well have been more prevalent in earlier periods and the modern practice of removing these coatings to expose wall construction of poor quality is to be regretted.

5. Land Use in and around the Village and the Contribution the Public and Open Spaces make towards the Character of the Village

The long, wide and irregular shaped green, bisected by modern roads and effectively divided in two by the encroaching presence of Black Bull House and Cottage and the tall market cross, is one of the most distinguished open spaces within the National Park. The contribution made to the special character of this space by the positioning of important individual mature trees, especially in the central area of the cross, is considerable. The regular, closely spaced rows of houses down each side of the green generates a strong sense of enclosure, an effect reinforced by the narrowing perspective along each direction of the main axis away from the wider open 'market' area near the cross.

The general linearity of building lines along the south east side of the green contrasts with the more curving, irregular arrangement of the opposite side, where building frontages project and recess from the green edge and the green itself tapers into the Back Nook area. This contrasts with the northern end of the green where the space is abruptly terminated by the low, Mill House group, whilst still allowing views outwards towards the hills to the north.

Other areas of the village offer a further contrast in character. The curving, narrower streets of Back and Front Nook create a more intimate feel and the changes of levels and

more verdant area near The Grange and along the side of Walden Beck create a strong impression as one enters the village. The lower Falls here contribute significantly and the view back over Walden Beck from the end Front Nook is very attractive, especially with the terraced gardens in front of Margaret Cottage creating much foreground interest. Because of this, the sudden emergence onto the village green via the negotiation of a slight rise in road levels alongside the curve in front of The Mount is even more profound.

The heavily wooded gorge east of Mill House provides a cooler, shaded contrast to the openness of the nearby green and the sound of the spectacular upper falls and the attractive viewpoint provided by the stone arched bridge over the beck create a space of real tranquillity and beauty, which is only lessened by the influx of visitors at certain times of the year.

Evidence of earlier land use is visible to each side of the village. Cultivation terraces, of medieval or earlier origin, lie to the north west and help reveal the village's ancient relationship with the surrounding agricultural land. To the south east the distinct linear tofts behind the south east row of houses are historic evidence of the 18th Century enclosures which altered the nature of farming in the village and the surrounding areas. These features are important visual reminders of the historic interest of the area.