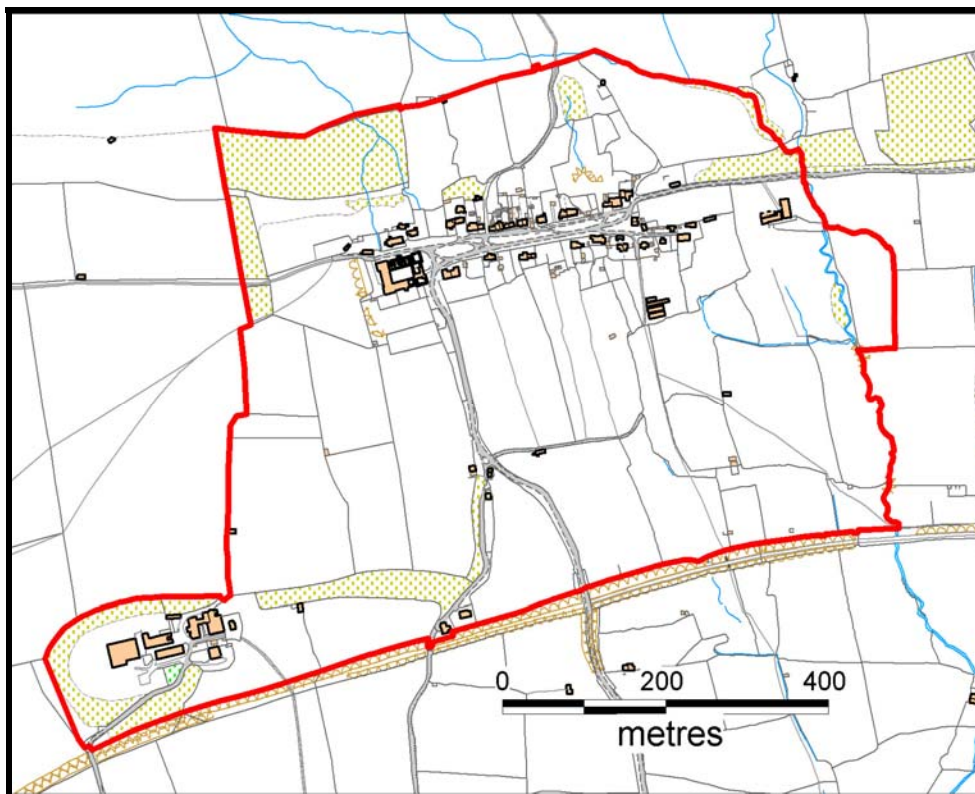


Castle Bolton, Wensleydale – Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Designated – 30 November 1999



© Crown copyright, Yorkshire Dales NPA, Licence No. 100023740 2007

1. Introduction

This character appraisal has been prepared as part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's Conservation Area Strategy. It has been drafted following four consultation meetings with residents of Castle Bolton in August and September 1999.

2. The location and setting of the village

Situated high up on the north side of the wide, glaciated valley of Wensleydale, on the 240 metre contour, Castle Bolton nestles on gently sloping land immediately below the low scar of Ellerlands Edge. Breaking ground slopes away below the village to the south and extensive surrounding woodland plantations ensure that the village of Castle Bolton is not particularly prominent from distant views. Instead, the towering mass of the 14th Century Castle acts as an emblem of its presence, the special character of the village only being really appreciated from close to.

Castle Bolton today is located away from the main communication routes through Wensleydale, being reached only via narrow country lanes. It sits on the eastern edge of the National Park, 1 kilometre north west of Redmire, with which it shares a history as an estate village, and 8 kilometres from the market town of Leyburn.

3. The historical origins and development of Castle Bolton

The origins of Castle Bolton are, like many Dales villages, obscure. Place name evidence suggests a possible date for the first settlement in Anglo-Saxon times – “Bodle” meaning house or to build, and “Ton” meaning enclosure or settlement.

While it is quite likely that the present form of the village dates from after the construction of the Castle, which was built between 1377 and circa 1400, the existence of a sun-dial, situated in the shadow of the Castle, on the 14th Century St Oswald’s Church, as well as documentary evidence of an associated Vicarage being relocated in 1403 to the east end of the village possibly because of the Castle’s construction, suggest that a settlement may well have existed at or about this position in the later half of the 14th Century.

Such a village might have served the extensive agricultural field system which still survives to the west and south west. This is one of the finest and best preserved examples in northern England. Recent archaeological research suggests that part of this dramatic topography of linear lynchets and other earthworks may well date back to sometime before circa 1200, when a grange of Rievaulx was thought to have been first established near to Castle Bolton. The exact development and chronology of this field system is not yet fully understood but there are signs that lynchets were still being formed and cultivated in the 17th Century.

Almost certainly, by the 17th Century the present form of the village is likely to have been established. One house in the centre of the present group dates from the 17th Century while a photograph, supplied by a resident during the consultation meetings, suggest that a building which formerly sat at the foot of the Castle, on the south side of the green, may also have been of that date. Most other surviving buildings date from the 18th or 19th Centuries. Interesting, the narrow plot of Studio Cottage has, since at least 1778, projected out onto the green, probably for reasons which are ancient in origin. Map evidence suggests that the Scrope family, owners of the Castle Bolton Estate from the early 13th Century, invested considerably in developing the Estate in the late 18th Century. Between 1778 and 1799 five new buildings seem to have been constructed around the village green; a significant amount of formal tree planting took place around the edge of the village; and the post medieval enclosed field system began to be rationalised, particularly around Castle Bank, where a new model farm and house was built on land formerly known as Kidgill Banks. This process seems to have continued well into the 19th Century, to such an extent that by 1856 the village green was almost totally enclosed by buildings and today’s landscape of field boundary walls and stone field barns was mostly in place. Significantly, however, the long narrow fields which lead away from the village to the south were hardly altered at all, their pre-enclosure origins contrasting with the open parkland to the north and west and the larger field sizes to the east.

Census returns from 1851 reveal that as many people in the village were occupied in quarrying and mining as were occupied in farming or related activities.

In the 20th Century the upward population trend for the village has been reversed. Between 1851 and 1991 the population of the village has decreased by about half, while the number of buildings surrounding the village green seems to have been reduced by about a similar proportion over the same period. Much of this reduction is likely to have taken place before 1902, when a photograph on a postcard reveals that, other than the loss of two heather thatched cottages, the village seems to have remained almost unaltered from that time. There has been no significant modern development and the historic integrity of the settlement has been largely retained.

Significant events and people that have been associated with the village include Mary Queen of Scots who was imprisoned in the Castle, her retinue being billeted in cottages in

the village, between 1568-9. The Castle was garrisoned during the English Civil War and partly slighted soon afterwards.

In 1765 Nicholas Manners was sent into Wensleydale to sermonise by John Wesley and he stayed at a cottage at Mill Hill on the edge of former waste ground a short way above the village. This was the first recorded non-conformist religious activity in Wensleydale. Bella Jackson was a coal seller in the village in the 1850s and her herd of donkeys grazing on the village green were renowned. In recent time Fred Lawson, a well known local artist came to Castle Bolton for a month's holiday in 1910 and stayed until 1968, using Studio Cottage in the centre of the village as his base. The drama festivals created by George Jackson in the 1950s are also fondly remembered.

4. The architectural and historic interest of the buildings and other structures

Dominated by the late 14th Century Castle, which is both a Grade I listed building and a Scheduled Ancient Monument, the village of Castle Bolton has three other listed buildings – the Church of St. Oswalds, the earliest surviving building in the locale, which is Grade II* listed; Crake House, a somewhat modified house with definite 17th Century origins; and a K6 style telephone box designed in 1935.

Nevertheless, there is much to enjoy and appreciate in the other houses which form parallel rows along the north and south sides of the village green. Constructed chiefly of sandstone, almost certainly extracted from quarry sources available close to the edge of the village, they create a harmonious unity of buildings in their environment, a product of the very landscape they sit in. Probably every house was constructed by the Scrope family for its tenants and farmers. Despite such a long period of control there is no discernible consistency of design or form, as there is at, say, East Witton, although the size and appearance of each building is generally similar, while the general lack of architectural ornament or sophistication underlies the fact that, historically, Castle Bolton has been a hard working and unpretentious state village. A few of the late 19th Century cottages share a 'T' plan form with pronounced gables and decorative kneeler stones, but generally the impression is of buildings with a simple unsophisticated vernacular construction laid out to a regular, rectangular ground plan. Roofs, like side walls, are mostly constructed from sandstone, but those cottages which date from after the arrival of the nearby railway in 1877, which reduced transport costs and encouraged the introduction of non-indigenous materials, were roofed with true slates from North Wales or Cumbria. These roofs tend to be steeper in profile than traditional sandstone roofs and often buildings with such material appear taller, more uniform and less vernacular in character than their earlier neighbours. A small number of buildings have been re-roofed in dark artificial tiles in recent years, although these are not graded into diminishing courses as are the earlier roofs.

One significant factor which is particularly noteworthy is the survival of traditional joinery details to door and window openings in many buildings. While a few of the Estate cottages seem to have received side-hung casement windows in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, many other houses retain sash type fittings, both horizontally and vertically framed, as well as traditional board details to door openings on various elevations. Such a situation is particularly unusual in the late 1990s and probably reflects traditional Estate practice, an approach to repair and maintenance which has changed in recent years as PVCu fittings of non-traditional design and proportion have, unfortunately, been inserted into openings in those cottages still in Estate ownership.

5. Land use in and around the village and the contribution the public and open spaces make towards the character of the village

The contrast in scale between the irregular lines of low stone cottages which flank the long, narrow, undulating village green and the massive form of the five storey ruined Castle shapes one of the most dramatic village compositions in the whole of the National Park. Yet, despite the dominant part that the Castle plays, close inspection of the street scene reveals a village which is rich in detail and character. Castle Bolton is unusual in that the frontages of almost all the cottages around the green face south to catch the sunlight, rather than inwardly upon themselves. This, coincidentally, provides almost every property with a spectacular view southwards across the dale towards the steep, terraced slopes of Pen Hill and the long glaciated valley of Bishopdale. In addition, the empty building plots on the south side of the village green enable such vistas to be enjoyed from numerous parts of the green itself. Castle Bolton is certainly rich in visual amenity when looking south, although viewing opportunities are more restricted in all other directions, by woodland planting and shelterbelts which create a much more enclosed feeling. Views into the village are similarly constrained, even from the south, where the sloping topography nevertheless allows the roofscape of the village and the outline of the Castle to be seen as distinctive and important skyline features.

The village also possesses a number of smaller features which add considerably to its special character. A 19th Century cast iron pump is located at the east end of the village while a stone water trough and possible washing feature, situated in the central part of the green, are of an unusual, and possibly unique, design. The Victorian post box and listed K6 design telephone box are also worthy of preservation.

Properties boundaries in the village are generally quite uniform. Map evidence suggests that the shallow front gardens to houses around the green are a late 19th Century innovation, with most houses prior to 1856 fronting directly onto the green. The majority of these front garden walls are constructed in squared sandstone with distinctive, dressed triangular copings. These were probably erected by the Estate and their consistency of form adds significantly to the character of the village.

There is generally a lack of amenity street lighting in the village but the modern illumination of the Castle more than compensates for this. This adds greatly to the character of the village after dusk and is prized by many residents.

The irregular, narrow and often roughly surfaced tracks which lead up through woodland over the Scar to the more open land above the village, or downwards through meadow land to the south are historically important and add considerably to the special historical interest and appearance of the area.