Taskscapes and community dynamics in rural Yorkshire, *c.*1920–1965

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Abstract
Using the framework of Tim Ingold's concept of 'taskscape', this article seeks to address the role of work in shaping the dynamics of rural community in the mid-twentieth century. We do this by examining oral histories of two communities which have important points of similarity and difference: the community farming on the small, mixed farms of Lower Wharfedale, on the border between North and West Yorkshire, and the workers and farmers cultivating the large-scale arable enterprises of the East Riding of Yorkshire Wolds. We argue that the form of agricultural work which took place in these localities during the mid-twentieth century was crucial in setting up the types of work relationships which characterized the different communities there. Localized differences manifested in several ways through the unique taskscapes of the two case studies: a deeply stratified community structure versus pseudo-familial employment relationships; proletarian village communities versus close farmer-employee relationships; and mobility versus stability.

'Community' is a contested term, difficult to define, freighted with normative baggage and frequently discarded by exasperated scholars as unhelpful. Nonetheless, it is a term that points towards a set of problems that have an enduring fascination and have been central to the social sciences since their origin: how do people form, inhabit and value face-to-face groups? In both the sociological and popular imagination it has often been assumed that if 'community' exists anywhere, it is in stable villages where families who have lived in proximity for generations rub along, helping each other, sometimes feuding, but never indifferent to each other.[1] For sociologists, nineteenth-century social theorist Fernand Tönnies' dichotomy contrasting *Gemeinschaft* ('community') with *Gesellschaft* ('society') has been influential.[2] In the first half of the twentieth century, Chicago School sociologists took Tönnies as inspiration for narratives positing that true 'community' existed in pre-modern, rural societies but had been eroded by the development of modern, urbanized 'mass society'.[3] At the same time, cultural commentators in interwar England lamented the decline of the rural 'organic community', which they saw as under assault from urban modernity.[4]

Historians of the British countryside present a more complex story of community change in the modern era. Reay considers that the agricultural revolution helped create a landless rural proletariat. He shows how agricultural labourers in nineteenth-century Kent developed a common identity: shared experiences of work and the Poor Law were strengthened through sociability in village pubs and beer houses away from the eyes of their employers.[5] Newby offers a similar analysis, arguing that English villages in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were 'occupational communities' analogous to urban neighbourhoods.[6] For

Reay and Newby, community was a product of modernity rather than a survival of a pre-modern rural idyll. Nevertheless, historians argue that the twentieth century brought the demise of the village-as-occupational-community. Short writes that in the 1920s and 1930s, villages became less self-contained: shops and trades disappeared from high streets while motorized transport and mass communication brought in new people and ideas.[7] For some authors surveying the interwar period, 'adaption' is a better word than 'decline' for the fortunes of the village community.[8] Nonetheless, most consider that the village as 'occupational community' came under further pressure after the Second World War. Newby found that by the 1970s, the reduction of the agricultural workforce, the influx of outsiders into villages and the paradoxical increase of the tied cottage led to an intensification of the farmer-worker relationship and the end of the village as 'occupational community'.[9] Other authors are wary of the notion of community-in-decline, since the relocation of commuting urbanites to the countryside often brought new kinds of social interaction.[10]

The present article contributes to this historiography through analysis of two case studies of rural community and social change across the mid-twentieth century. These case studies exemplify Howkins' contention that divisions between the various landscapes of Britain 'were not purely spatial but also social, cultural and economic'.[11] We highlight how local agricultural working practices were imbricated into community relations and underpinned social change that was distinctive to these contexts. In this we take a materialist approach, inspired by geographers and social anthropologists who consider work as central to the processes through which locality is given meaning by residents.[12] In particular, we turn to anthropologist Tim Ingold's conceptualization of 'taskscape'. This idea refers to the ways in which a landscape is imprinted, shaped and made meaningful by an interweaving of the tasks people undertake there. Ingold writes:

> It is to the entire ensemble of tasks, in their mutual interlocking, that I refer by the concept of taskscape. Just as the landscape is an array of related features, so – by analogy – the taskscape is an array of related activities.[13]

These activities cannot be separated from their social context: 'the taskscape exists not just as activity but as interactivity'. Time is an important dimension of the taskscape, since activities occur in a temporal plane and their impacts accumulate; the taskscape is therefore dynamic, always in the process of becoming.[14]

We use the oral recollections of people who lived close to agriculture between *c.*1920 and *c.*1962 to examine the relationships between rural taskscape and community. Oral history is a source with methodological challenges, but numerous historians have used recorded

reminiscences fruitfully not only for 'recovering' details of past activities and attitudes, but also for understanding how individuals and groups make sense of their historical experience.[15] Placing personal testimony within the framework of taskscapes allows us to identify key activities which characterized interaction between the agricultural workforce in our case study areas, and the effect these had on community structure. By analysing how people view their own stories and communities during their working lives, we find the links between everyday task structures, work patterns, and the ways in which agricultural communities conceptualized themselves in the mid-twentieth century.

This article utilizes oral history collections from two contrasting rural settings in Yorkshire: the Wolds of the East Riding, and Lower Wharfedale on the border between North and West Ridings. The case studies focus on the period *c.*1920-1965, taking us from the interwar agricultural slump occasioned by the abandonment of wartime controls in 1921 and the global Depression of the later 1920s and 1930s to the relative stabilization of agricultural incomes in the period following the 1947 Agriculture Act.[16] Change was apparent across rural Britain throughout this period, resulting in the post-war transformation that Howkins terms 'the second agricultural revolution'.[17] Most strikingly, the number of people engaged in agricultural work in Britain fell considerably, from 857,000 in 1930 to just 400,000 in 1970.[18] Data on twentieth-century British agriculture are easy to come by.[19] What is less explored is the way in which this large-scale political, economic and social change impacted different communities in different ways, depending upon the surrounding topography, the type of agriculture employed locally and the types of tasks and working methods required to carry them out. These distinctions are quite clear over even relatively short distances, as shown by the two Yorkshire case study areas investigated here.

The case studies

For the first case study, we use a collection of oral histories focusing on the Yorkshire Wolds in the East Riding. The Wolds is a farming region of low, chalk hills extending in a crescent from the shore of the River Humber to Flamborough Head on the North Sea coast. A distinctive pattern of farming developed here after the period of parliamentary enclosure. Between 1730 and 1850, two out of every three acres on the Wolds were enclosed.[20] With its free-draining chalk and light soils the Wolds are ideal for arable production (80 per cent of agricultural land on the Wolds was in arable production in 1950).[21] During our period, the area was characterized by large post-enclosure farms, commonly 500-1000 acres, usually farmed by tenants.[22] This model of farming required a workforce of young, live-in farm servants (employed yearly,

receiving food and board as part of their payment) to look after and work horses on farms situated at some distance from villages. East Riding farm servants ('hired lads' or 'horse lads') tended to move position yearly, often travelling some distance from job to job. Most farms also employed older married men as labourers. Stephen Caunce has described the social and economic working of this system, explaining its persistence into the twentieth century, after farm servantry had disappeared in most other parts of the country.[23] Caunce's work was based on oral history interviews conducted in the 1970s with men who remembered working on farms in the East Riding in the period 1900-1920. The present article utilizes a collection of 60 interviews conducted in 1999-2000 for an oral history project undertaken by the East Riding Museum Service.[24] Interviewees were both male and female; their memories covered agriculture and rural life in the East Riding from the 1920s to the 1960s. The coherence of the system described by Caunce was fragmenting during the interwar years. Whereas 59 per cent of employed males aged 12 and over in rural districts of the East Riding worked in agriculture in 1921 (the majority of whom were paid workers), only 35 per cent of those aged 14 and over did so in 1961.[25] By the end of the 1950s there was no longer a need to employ live-in labour to care for and work heavy horses. So, the period with which we are concerned saw significant changes to the ways in which agricultural work was organized on the Wolds.

The second case-study, Lower Wharfedale, is very different, both topographically and in terms of historic agricultural employment patterns. The valley is characterized by millstone grit, covered by a shallow layer of clay soils. The hillsides are free-draining, although the sandier valley bottom is prone to flooding from the River Wharfe. Movement through the area has historically centred on the market town of Otley, the site of a bridge over the Wharfe, and former home of four livestock auction mart sites.[26] In terms of agriculture type, the dictates of the soil and topography mean that little has changed since Fred Cobley's *On Foot Through Wharfedale* (1882), which described:

> Otley may be regarded as the centre of a wide agricultural district. The weekly market is invariably numerously attended by farmers, cattle dealers, and others from many miles around… Still, Wharfedale is not much of a grain-producing district, and grazing is most prevalent.[27]

The 1943 Farm Survey demonstrates that post-war farming in Lower Wharfedale took place on a relatively small scale. Farm sizes were, on average, 70-100 acres (28-40 hectares), and the agriculture largely of a mixed character, with production of cereal crops taking place in the valley bottom, while cattle and sheep dominated the hillsides.[28] Land use data demonstrates that little has altered in terms of grassland-arable distribution across the valley between the

1930s and the twenty-first century. A process of amalgamation of smaller farms had begun to take place by the 1960s; however, 2019 DEFRA statistics showed that the number of holdings of between 20 and 50 hectares has reduced by only six per cent since 1950, suggesting relative stability in farms of this size. The typical Lower Wharfedale farm remains about 40 hectares.[29]

These small, mixed farms required much less non-familial labour than the East Riding's large arable units. Census data shows that in 1931 in Wharfedale Rural District labourers were outnumbered by farmers (30 per cent and 33 per cent respectively), whereas in the East Riding's Driffield Rural District (an area covering mostly Wolds farmland and villages), labourers far outnumbered farmers (66 per cent of the male agricultural labour force as opposed to 18 per cent).[30] This difference reminds us that the large agricultural workforces which formed Reay's and Newby's occupational communities were more common in the arable counties of southern and eastern England.[31] Indeed, our two case studies fall at each side of the northerly part of the diagonal line with which James Caird divided Britain's lowland, arable zone (to the south and east) from the upland, pastoral zone (north and west).[32] Of 424 farms in the Lower Wharfedale area for which National Farm Survey returns were made, over half, 222, employed no one outside of the family in 1943. Around a quarter, 108, employed a single labourer, 47 farms employed two labourers, 29 employed three labourers, and only 15 farms in the area employed between four and ten labourers. One farm, at Clifton, reported ten labourers, all employed on a casual basis. The largest number of labourers employed by one single enterprise was reported by the manager of Home Farm on Harewood Estate, one of the largest agricultural enterprises in the area. The majority of labourers on Lower Wharfedale farms in 1943 appear to have been employed on a permanent basis, with only 53 of the 424 analysed returns featuring casual staff.[33] Interviews in Lower Wharfedale were carried out as part of PhD research between 2011 and 2013. Overall, 41 interviews took place, with both men and women born between 1914 and 1951 who were either farmers, labourers, or people otherwise connected with agriculture.[34]

These descriptions demonstrate the key differences in employment patterns and task cycles between the arable Wolds and the mixed/pastoral gateway to the Dales. The life-cycles and networks which formed the basis for community on the farms and in the villages in these two areas have been heavily influenced by these factors, as have the particular forms of social change these areas experienced.

Taskscapes on the Yorkshire Wolds

The system of farming that developed on the Wolds in the nineteenth century and persisted until the mid-twentieth century was characterized by a mobile workforce and physical, economic and social distance between farmers and labourers. George Nellist, a farm worker on the Wolds from 1919 until the 1970s, considered that 'there were farmers and labourers … two classes, that's all.'[35] Most Wolds farmers were tenants, but this did not imply social and economic proximity to their labourers. The wealthier farmers lived in substantial farm houses some distance from villages in the midst of the fields created during parliamentary enclosures (*c.*1770-1850).[36] Though farmers might personally recruit their farm servants, many left both the management of their farms and the feeding and housing of farm servants to their foremen. Some interviewees described these farmers as 'gentlemen'. Jack Henson remembered a farmer at Watton Grange in the 1920s who would not allow hired lads in the stable where he kept his riding horses:

> We wasn't allowed in groom's stables, wasn't lads. I know he caught me in once… I was helping John, the young lad [the farmer's son]. He came in, he said, 'what are you doing in here, Jack? You aren't allowed in here'… He threatened me once for swearing… He says, 'I'll horsewhip you if I hear you swearing anymore!'… No, he was a gentleman farmer.[37]

The societal distance between farmer and worker was reflected in the organization of the farm's domestic space, with farm servants usually sleeping in the farm foreman's house. When farm servants lived with the farmer, this was often in a loft or other separate space, and most did not eat with their employer. Older, married farm labourers might receive a tied house near to the farm or, more usually, rent a cottage in the nearest village.[38] As Gary Moses has shown, this system did not make for a close identification of employer and employee.[39] Neither does the oral history evidence from the Wolds suggest the 'traditional deferential' attitude towards employers that Howkins identifies amongst farm servants in the interwar period.[40] Jack Henson, in the narrative quoted above, uses the term 'gentleman' descriptively, even ironically; Caunce notes that the subculture of East Riding farm servants was autonomous and independent.[41]

It is also possible to distinguish a third socio-economic grouping in the rural East Riding. Living in the villages were smaller farmers, including small-holders and market gardeners, as well as tradespeople, including blacksmiths, joiners and shop keepers. These were emphatically not 'gentlemen'. Marie Grice grew up in Middleton-on-the-Wolds in the 1930s and remembered:

> The village farmers weren't all that rich… They were working farmers sort of, themselves. Maybe one man or two that's all… When I used to go to fetch the milk, you see, it was the farmer's wife who got you the milk… she worked hard.[42]

These small farmers included the market gardeners in Skidby who Ken Grasby remembered 'were only just making a living – they weren't going out for meals or to pubs'.[43] Because of their physical situation within the village and the fact they might only employ family members or one or two labourers, smaller farmers and their labourers often had closer relationships of the kind described below in Lower Wharfedale. For example, Eileen Green's parents had a dairy farm in the interwar years in Cottingham: 'We had one man work for us all his life, from being 12 until he died, when he was about 55. He was a very good worker, very reliable, very honest'.[44]

In the first half of the twentieth century, however, workforce mobility was a significant feature of the Wolds taskscape. There was little alternative to employment in agriculture and domestic service for school leavers, and many young people spent time 'hired out', boys on farms and girls as domestic servants. In 1931, 58 per cent of occupied males living in East Riding Rural Districts worked in agriculture. In the Administrative County as a whole, 63 per cent of females aged between 14 and 20 worked as domestic servants.[45] This somewhat bucks national trends – in England as a whole farmworkers were a minority of the rural population by 1931, and only 12 per cent of employed women in England and Wales worked in domestic service in 1921.[46] Bessie Gibson grew up in the Wolds village of Rudston Parva, and recalled her own and her brothers' entry into the labour force in the 1920s:

> The vicar… went to see Mother and Father to see if they were agreeable for me to go and would I go, you know, to work there… I just went and lived there and I got paid once a month… I had four brothers and one sister and money was very short, I mean, and you had to go straight away, you see, to earn a bit of money so as that you looked after yourself and you didn't cost them anything… the others all did farm work… They were hired out, the same as me. Wherever they went they slept there.[47]

Farm servants had no need to develop loyalty to a particular employer as it was customary and accepted that East Riding hired lads changed position most years. George Nellist, hired out on the Wolds in the 1920s, recalled:

> You had a chance to change farms once a year and you very often did and that's how you got to know the country so intimately; you stopped a year in one place, got to know that district and then you moved to another farm in another district.[48]

Caunce has highlighted that this mobility enabled young farm servants to bargain for more money as their skills and strength improved.[49]

However, mobility was circumscribed. Few of the interviewees moved more than 20 miles. Different methods of farming were dictated by different landscapes within the county, and those who learned their farming on the Wolds preferred to stay there. George Nellist spent all of his working life on Wolds farms, apart from a couple of occasions where he 'slipped off each side' of the hills.[50] In the 1920s, Jack Henson left a job in Sproatley in the low-lying Holderness area of East Riding because he 'didn't like the country' – he returned to a Wolds farm near Driffield that he had previously worked on because he 'always liked Driffield side.'[51] Young women also benefited from mobility. Bessie Gibson's first job was as a domestic servant in the village vicarage, but she moved around to live and work across the next few years:

> They weren't suited when I left, like, but I thought I was bettering myself and maybe getting another shilling or two you see… I went to Haisthorpe into a farmhouse. We had three men in, lived in… there was their bedroom to keep clean and the beds to make… then I went into Bridlington. I had two places in Bridlington. I left there and got back to Lowthorpe to The Elms.[52]

Though mobility was central to the experience of young workers, it could also be important to older farm labourers. When a farm servant married, life as a hired lad ceased and the couple would move wherever work was available. Bessie met her husband, who was from North Yorkshire and was working as a farm servant near her parents' village. After they married, Bessie's husband found work as a shepherd at Fimber Field farm, 13 miles from Rudston Parva, and the couple moved into a tied cottage there. Later Bessie made moves of four, nine and five miles to the villages of Huggate, Sledmere, and Garton-on-the-Wolds, following her husband's work. Bessie suggests that pecuniary incentives trumped any notion of loyalty to a particular employer:

> Wherever he was he was always a year or two… he was with a man called Mr Byers, he was him four years and then he went to Mr Ewbank and he worked on Sledmere estate for so many years… a bit more money, maybe, maybe only a shilling or two, but it was a lot of money.[53]

This mobility meant that villages typically contained a mix of both 'born-and-bred' residents – young people whose parents had a farm or smallholding could often move into the family business, thus avoiding being 'hired out' – and incomers to the village, workers who moved around following employment. However, as Reay also noted in nineteenth-century Kent, mobility took place within a relatively circumscribed geography; many 'incomers' were nonetheless 'insiders' in terms of their attachment to and knowledge of the immediate landscape and its customs and practices.[54]

On the Wolds in the first half of the twentieth century, villagers lived amongst agricultural processes, leading to some blurring of the boundaries between the tasks of the workplace and those of the village more generally. Bob Leveridge recalled that the day-to-day traffic of agricultural work was a consistent background to village life in the 1930s, as farm workers took horses to the pond to be watered and cleaned, and horses to the blacksmith to be shod:

> When I was a lad we used to play football on the roads… only thing what stopped us in them days more than traffic was cows and sheep running on the roads, you know, taking them to the sheep dip and that.[55]

Agricultural tasks taking place in and around the village often involved cooperation. Whereas the large Wolds farms were self-sufficient in terms of labour – some even employed their own blacksmiths on site– for the smaller village farmers, many jobs required pooling resources.[56] Ken Grasby remembered that during threshing time in the 1930s and 1940s, in addition to a gang of casual labourers who 'went round with the threshing machine':

> A few people in the village used to come. A few of them used to work for farmers in the village you see. We used to help each other… We all got paid as if we were ordinary casuals.[57]

It was not only paid labourers who participated in the agricultural taskscape. There were opportunities for children interested in farm work. Ken Grasby grew up in Skidby in the 1930s and remembered:

> I used to go up there and help the farm up there and there was a chap was working with four 'osses in a drag… I says 'Can I take two'. I was eleven. So he says, 'Aye, you put the oldest two in roller' and he took the other two in harrows. 'Right' he says, 'follow me, like' and I drove these two 'til dinner time.[58]

Other interviewees recalled how, as children, they had involved themselves in the activity of farms – for example, moving 'stooks' of corn out of the way of the horses during harvest and helping to load carts. As in Lower Wharfedale, and perhaps in farming areas throughout Britain, this could develop into mentorship of young boys who showed a particular enthusiasm for farming. For Ken himself, an early interest in farming led to paid casual work while he was still at school and then to jobs in market gardening and eventually working his own smallholding.

Though agriculture framed much social interaction in Wolds villages in the first half of the twentieth century, not all residents were involved. The gender separation characteristic of industrial communities was also a feature of the East Riding countryside.[59] The wives of small farmers might undertake some agricultural work looking after chickens and making butter;

women might undertake seasonal tasks in market gardens in villages nearer to Hull; in the nearby Vale of York, the 'gang system' employed women to harvest root vegetables.[60] But the large Wolds farms, specializing in cereal cultivation, did not employ women for farm work in this period. The oral histories do not reveal female domestic servants undertaking farm work in the ways that Nicola Verdon and others have described in some other parts of northern England.[61] Therefore, to a significant extent, the place allotted to the Wolds farm labourer's wife was in the home; their daily tasks and social interactions were little different to those recalled by working-class women in towns and cities at the time.[62] Marie Grice remembered her mother's life as the housewife of a farm labourer in Middleton-on-the-Wolds in the 1930s:

> There was a copper with the fire underneath you know, and that copper served four cottages, families. They had to take it in turns… My mother used to get up early to have the first turn with the copper and then they'd fill it up and leave it running low for the next person to use, so the fire didn't go out on them, and two used it on a Monday and two used it on a Tuesday. My mother would have it all done practically by [the time] we were ready to go to school. She worked very, very hard… then she'd go out and do a load of washing for somebody else.[63]

Margaret Barker moved to Middleton from Driffield in 1939, and remembered that as a housewife of a labourer, she didn't really know much about the agricultural life of the area: 'well I don't know who worked on the farms, 'cause I didn't have much to do with them'.[64] Gary Moses has described the working conditions of the East Riding farm servant of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as 'proletarian'; aspects of the life stories and experiences of the Wolds labouring classes, particularly that of women, speak less of an urban/rural divide than of common working-class experiences.[65]

The agricultural taskscape of the Yorkshire Wolds militated against workers engaging in some of the leisure activities that historians have described young working-class people enjoying in the interwar years – the mass courtship of the urban 'monkey walks', the commercial dance halls and cinemas.[66] Farms were often in remote settings, and hours were long for hired lads who had to feed their horses after a working day that could last from six in the morning until six at night. Jack Henson, a hired lad in the 1920s, recalled:

> Well, you didn't bloody finish! By time you'd got your tea, you'd to finish doing horses and after you got them done you maybe had a saddle room, or a 'slum', as they used to call it… as in winter time, you couldn't go out on a Sunday because you knew you had to go back and do all your horses.[67]

Though hired lads could socialize with their peers after a long day's work, girls often worked alone. Bessie Gibson recalled of her first job as a domestic servant in a vicarage:

> I used to finish, maybe eight o'clock or something like that, because you see, they used to have an evening meal and there was all the washing up and that. Why, I just used to read and then go to bed. I mean, you went to bed early in them days. Because there was nothing else to do… You didn't see anybody. You weren't allowed out.[68]

However, this is not to say that all aspects of a wider leisure culture were unavailable to young people living and working on the Wolds. Brian Short considers that in the interwar British countryside there were 'signs of social change and modernity… isolation was breaking down'; he points to village hall 'peripatetic film shows or glee parties' and the increase of motorized transport including public bus services.[69] Jeremy Burchardt picks out the provision of village halls as 'perhaps the single most important component of the revitalization of rural leisure' in this period.[70] On the Wolds, access to an expanding leisure culture depended on proximity to town or village, and perhaps access to a bike, though some interviewees remembered using buses to visit towns to watch a film or attend a dance on a Saturday night. There were also dances organized in village halls, and one interviewee remembered that some lads took every opportunity to attend.[71] Bob Leveridge recalled that he and other hired lads would cycle four miles on an evening from their farm to Skidby to watch a travelling cinema show in the village hall.[72] Of course, for the married farm labourer, village pubs were popular and married couples might attend whist drives together.[73]

Howkins described English agriculture and the countryside in the first half of the twentieth century as 'Janus faced' because many parts of an older, out-dated society persisted alongside features of modernity.[74] The East Riding testimony supports this assessment. Dances, film shows, and whist drives were part of a broader working-class culture making its way into the countryside in the interwar years, but elements of a more distinctively local communal culture, rooted in the county's particular taskscapes, persisted. The distinction between farmer and farm labourer in the East Riding village had since the nineteenth century been marked by attendance at church (or Wesleyan Methodist chapel) for the farmer and the more radical, working-class Primitive Methodist chapel for the labourer.[75] Though the role of Methodism in East Riding rural culture declined after the First World War, some interviewees remembered that the distinction between church and chapel, and between Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism, was still pertinent.[76] A further distinctive element of the East Riding social scene during the twentieth century was the Martinmas hiring fairs held in the market towns over two weeks every November. Fairs were an opportunity for farm servants to seek new employment, to drink and to see old friends, renewing the bonds of their occupational community. Interviewees testified that hiring fairs were still taking place in some towns

through and just after the Second World War.[77] Jack Henson remembered of the 1920s and 1930s:

> I used to go to Beverley [hirings] an' all, and Driffield. When I got older I used to reckon to have two Tuesdays at Hull and two Saturdays at Beverley and two Saturdays at Driffield, if I could afford it.[78]

If the Martinmas hirings were an opportunity for farm servants to express their common identity, another communal occasion with origins in the nineteenth century focused on the village itself. Caunce notes that the hiring system scattered families; Friendly Society 'Feast' days, involving a parade, a communal meal and celebrations for the whole village (often with a fun fair) were a way in which families and communities were brought back together. [79] Friendly societies lost their economic importance after National Insurance was introduced, but annual Feasts were held in at least one Wolds village until 1939, as Audrey Thompson remembered:

> All the young farm lads that were on the farms they used to, I mean they used to come from miles away. I had cousins and uncles and, you know, they all used to come. That was the family gathering was Middleton Feast. It was bigger than Christmas.[80]

On the eve of the Second World War, the demands of capital-intensive arable farming on the Yorkshire Wolds had been met for over a century by a young and mobile workforce of hired servants. Though Caunce and Moses argued that the internal coherence of the East Riding farm servant system was undermined by the First World War, being 'hired out' continued to be a fact of life for many young people in the 1920s-1940s.[81] There were 3954 agricultural workers listed as horsemen in the East Riding Administrative County in the 1911 Census; [82] in the 1921 Census, 4132 were 'distinguished as in charge of horses' and, despite the Depression, in 1931 there were still 2762 employed in charge of horses.[83] British Farming experienced well documented doldrums during the interwar years, with the staple of Wolds farming, grain cultivation, badly hit; however, Martin includes the Wolds as part of the chalkland areas of Britain where it was still possible to undertake 'profitable cereal production' in the 1930s.[84] The Second World War extended the life of the hiring system, since many capable hands had signed up for the army – 'farmers had to rely on young lads and prisoners of war' recalled Harry Dennis, who was hired out aged 14 in 1939 and worked as a farm servant throughout the war.[85]

The testimony of those who were hired out in the 1940s suggests that tension between old and new worlds was apparent in the workplace. For example, John Harrison worked for one year as hired lad with farm horses, the next year on a farm, driving tractors, and the year

after was hired back onto a large farm 'amongst horses' again. In this time of change and transition, different generations brought conflicting expectations about how social relations might work on the farm. John got trouble from the foreman because he lingered in the house rather than returning immediately to the stable after one evening meal: 'you were supposed to spend half an hour in the stable after you'd had your dinner. The gaffer said "your place is in the stable"'.[86] Bob Leveridge recalled that after his first year hired onto a farm where the lads could treat the foreman's house as their own home, he left his next post after two weeks because he didn't like the 'old-fashioned' ways:

> It was what you'd call an old-fashioned place where you lived in a different place, do you see, and just went in for meals. And we were always used to just grabbing hold of paper, anything and just looking as though I was at home… whereas that place, it was just as if you, there was a stranger all together… you lived in the big house but after, they had another building… when you'd had your meal, you used to go… that used to be what you call 'your house'.[87]

The post-war years saw the rapid end of the farm-servant system in the East Riding; according to Caunce the vitality of this system was weakening after the First World War, and the mechanization of farming which accelerated during and after the Second Word War removed the rationale for hiring live-in 'horse lads'.[88] Short records that tractors deployed on British farms increased from 102,000 in 1942 to 295 000 in 1950 and 430 000 in 1958.[89] Skidby farmer Ken Grasby remembered a relatively speedy reduction in the numbers of horses in the fields around the village in the later 1940s:

> A lot of horses disappeared in '48, so I think you would be going up the road and you would see half a dozen in a field and you would see just three and then you would see just one, which they kept for fetching turnips in, going round sheep fold and such as that, and then these Fergie tractors with hydraulics come on the go so folks didn't need to struggle with them.[90]

The East Riding followed the national trajectory whereby prospering post-war agriculturists utilized new methods that meant a sharp decline in labour requirements. The number of non-family workers on English farms dropped from almost a million in 1945 to under 100,000 by 1990.[91]

These changes undoubtedly impacted on the village communities of the Wolds. The post-war severance of village life from agriculture noted by Howard Newby was particularly marked in an area of large farms where there had previously been a high demand for agricultural labour.[92] The change appeared obvious to those like Bob Leveridge who had lived and worked in and around Skidby since the 1920s:

> I mean most of the people what you talked to was farmers' lads [labourers] and one thing and another because all the farms had to – I mean now they haven't anybody on farms now, but farmers and sons.[93]

John Harrison's career as a farm worker in the 1940s and 1950s epitomizes the changing position of agricultural labourer in these years. He began as a hired lad working with horses in 1939, and recalled many of the traditional aspects of an East Riding farm servant's life (living in, annual pay, a hierarchy with foreman, 'wagoner' and so on). By the time John became foreman on a Wolds farm in the mid-1950s, the lads he and his wife looked after were not farm servants but students gaining a year's work experience while studying farming at Bishop Burton Farm Institute, founded in 1954.[94]

So, on the East Yorkshire Wolds, Howkins' 'second agricultural revolution' took place in a taskscape that had become characterized by a mobile workforce, distant and relatively short-term relations between labourer and employer, gender division and villages that resembled Newby's 'occupational communities', with institutions and sociable practices which preserved class distinctions. The taskscape of Lower Wharfedale, 50 miles away, represents a considerable contrast.

Taskscapes in Lower Wharfedale

Progression through working life in mid-twentieth century rural Lower Wharfedale was characterized by stability, rather than mobility; intergenerational mentorship; regular use of public space to cement community bonds that transcended the employer-employee divide; and the development of locally specific, and task-specific expertise which correspond to the particular agriculture type and topography of the area. However, as Ingold's work on taskscapes posited, working relationships between community members, their job roles, personal roles, and landscape were perpetually in process.[95] As technology, agricultural policy, and agri-economics changed, so the value of certain tasks and knowledge shifted, becoming more or less important to the functioning of the working community, and the meanings individuals saw within the construction of community itself.

For young people, finding agricultural work often marked a moment of transition from childhood to adulthood. In the absence of annual hirings and large-scale workforce movements, neighbourly relationships often played a major part in finding a first job, especially for the children of non-farmers.

In contrast to Hobsbawm and Rudé's 'dark village' of a century before, to which farmers and landowners emphatically did not belong, this community exhibited a more complex and interwoven social structure.[96] As noted above, small farmers predominated here.

These small Yorkshire farmers, according to a study from 1958 cited by Martin, 'saw themselves as manual workers and were content if their unit provided a return commensurate with wage levels received by manual workers in other industries'.[97] The social alignment of small farmers and labourers has been noted in other contexts – for example, Reay writes that in nineteenth-century Kent small farmers were 'more socially aligned with labourers – in terms of literacy levels and life-styles – than with large farmers'.[98] Nonetheless, farmers' sons (and, less often, daughters) had a clear path into agriculture laid out for them, whereas those whose parents did not have land relied upon less prescribed routes into farm employment.

This landscape of small, tenanted farms surrounding small villages lent itself to a system of employment whereby only one or two labourers, alongside the farmer's family, including women, were necessary to keep each farm running. In these circumstances, the recollections of former farm labourers show that young people were identified early as potential workers, and a relationship of mutual trust was established, through favours, advice, and support. One interviewee recalled a typical pathway of selection, mentorship, and increasing responsibility:

> Where I lived in Guiseley, there were a cattle dealer and he used to drive cows. We'd just a few buildings and that, and a field, and he used to rent it off us, and then as the cows calved when he wasn't there, he used to say, 'watch them for us,' and he used to give us a penny or tuppence for going across and telling him a cow had calved, and then I started – I was about ten – and I used to sit at the side of the road, with the cows eating the road sides off… and then when I got to twelve I used to go milk by hand – well, I could allus milk because I was fairly strong in the arm – and I used to milk for him, a few cows, and it got, you know, bigger and bigger, and then when I was twelve he bought us a brand new bike, and I says, 'what's that for?' and he says, 'so you can take the cows [to auction]'… Every year from then on he bought me a new bike, because I used to wreck them – well they used to get kicked – and I left school, I shouldn't have done but I did, at about twelve - officially you could leave at thirteen in them days – and so I left and then I went to work for this Tom Penny, and then I sort of graduated on. I never had a farm of my own, I've allus been a manager, you know.[99]

For those young people who did not have a farm-based childhood, the path into agricultural work in the mid-twentieth century relied heavily on the ability to be mobile, and to move independently through the landscape. This was important both for getting to sites of work, and, as the cattle dealer's protégé explained, in an area where auction marts provided key loci for economic and social exchange, for carrying out tasks within the context of wider agriculture. This provided an entry point into the community, allowing a young person to enter the normally closed space of the auction mart, supported by the name of the more established man – the

cattle dealer or farmer who already had a reputation within the community.[100] Unsurprisingly, the bicycle featured heavily in these recollections as the key method of transport for boys who were interested in farm work. 'As soon as I could ride a bike' was used by male interviewees to pinpoint the age at which they began to spend time on nearby farms.[101]

For farmers' sons, the boundary between home and work was more porous, the same space being used for both. Task-based mobility took the form of travel with an older relative, and this usually began at a very young age. Farmers' sons related how grooming for work was an integral part of their childhood. One farmer, who grew up close to Harrogate, explained:

> The first thing I can remember is delivering milk with my father when I was about eight, and we used to ladle it into jugs on the customers' doorsteps… Then after that, one just works, are you with me? As a farmer's son, you just – work. You don't realize it until one day you say, 'I don't want to go,' and they say, 'Well you won't get your sixpence.' [laugh] And then you realize you're actually working for your living![102]

He continued:

> Onwards to maybe 1964/5 when I decided I wanted to be a sailor. I was told while I was thinking further about it I would help on the farm. I'm still helping! … So I never actually accomplished what I actually wanted to do, you know, you sort of had to do as you were told, as you might say now. 'You're not going to sea.' Well, they didn't say that, no, as I said, you know, 'Whilst you're thinking about it.' Well, I'd already thought about it, but still.[103]

This was a typical experience related by farmers' sons, who frequently recalled helping with small tasks around the farm, a role which began as a privilege and evolved into an obligation.

In mid-twentieth century Lower Wharfedale, unlike on the Wolds, close personal relationships between farmer and labourer were the norm. These relationships had their foundations in this early, subtle recruitment process. In this social structure, we find something of the paternalism which Newby identified in *The deferential worker*.[104] Farmers who worked with a small number of labourers were likely to take on a mentoring role, as one retired labourer, who had worked on three Lower Wharfedale farms over his lifetime, explained:

> When I worked for Mr Wardle, he was just like a father to me, he were a lovely man. He couldn't have been better. Because when Mr Coball said to come down, I said, when Mr Wardle died, I said, 'he was just like a father to me,' which he was, and he said, 'Well Derrick,' he said, 'I can't be as good as that but I'll do my best.' Anyway I got on well with them here. I did my job. I've always tried to do a right job, you see… And Mr Wardle, he was just like a father to me. He'd buy me a watch at Otley, buy me anything what he could do. The thing he did once, he used to come down every Thursday, down to Weardley for his dinner, and my teeth at that time were breaking off. I were looking after them, but they seemed to keep breaking off, you see.

> And my wife said to him, she said, 'Aren't his teeth a mess?' she said, 'he wants them out!' so he says, 'right, when I go to Otley on Friday I'll go see the dentist, I'll make an appointment for him to go!' … Well, it wasn't a bad thing, it wanted doing. But as I say, he were just like a father to me. He was really, really, really good. It broke my heart when he died. Because I'd worked for him 27 year and he'd been a really, really lovely man.[105]

The interviewee had taken his first job on Mr Wardle's farm as a teenager, and the relationship between the two men took a variety of forms. While this was an explicitly paternalistic relationship, it also incorporated elements of mutual respect and equality, demonstrated through the powerful gesture of eating together. Commensality was a feature of agricultural life in Lower Wharfedale which cropped up again and again in oral interviews. The importance of sharing food is a theme which has long been established in the field of anthropology, and it is well recognized that eating together creates a sense of 'we' as opposed to 'them' and 'us'.[106]

Many interviews included references to farmers and labourers eating together in the fields (see Figure 1). This was a crucial part of the day-to-day interactions between the different workers on the small mixed farms. This kind of interaction over the long periods of employment built close, almost familial relationships, in which employers could expect loyalty and hard work in return for pastoral care and material support. Those who did not commit to this hard work were excluded from the paternal relationship with the farmer, and consequently from the potential of long-term stability in employment.

Figure 1

While slacking off work was something of a taboo in both case study areas, in this environment, where relations between employer and employee were much closer, it held an added element of betrayal of trust. Those who did not pull their weight in Lower Wharfedale became the butt of jokes and teasing, which could last a lifetime, for example the nickname 'Rice Pudding' for the man who chose to help in the kitchen on threshing day, rather than take on the dirty job of raking chaff out from under the threshing machine.

Mr Wardle's former employee continued to describe the sense of obligation he felt to his employer, and the trust he enjoyed as a result of fulfilling this work obligation:

> As long as you did your job you were alright… you had to do your job and if you didn't do it that were it, you'd be off… You don't just work like hell because the boss is there, because he knows, 'Well he's only doing that because I'm there.' But it's what you do when the boss isn't there, because he can tell then that he's been working while he hasn't been there. No, I never were bothered if the boss caught me stood about, I wasn't bothered, because as I say, I cracked on.[107]

Another former farm labourer and manager remembered:

> If you were a worker you were alright, but woe betide you if you were one of these here that were a bit dodgy like. We once had a lad down there, I won't mention any names, and we set him on to do calf rearing… he used to disappear after he'd fed the calves, and I went looking for him one morning and I couldn't find him anywhere. I thought, oh he must be sat in the toilet or something, he's maybe been taken short, so I went and I flung the door open, and he's sat reading a newspaper in the toilet! [laugh] Aye, he was! Sat reading a newspaper in the toilet! I said, 'I think you'd better come out of there!'[108]

In an area of mixed agriculture, dangerous tasks were part of everyday life: handling animals, working with increasingly powerful machinery, pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Farmers and labourers working together in small groups or pairs were forced to rely upon one another for personal safety, as well as for animal welfare and economic success, in a way which would be alien to farmers employing a larger labour force and a farm manager to do the work of the farm. Shirking work not only betrayed the pseudo-familial mentor-mentee relationship between farmer and labourer, but had the potential to put others at risk.

Unlike on the Wolds, the relationship between farmer and worker in Lower Wharfdale frequently transcended the private space of the farm. Particularly important public spaces in the agricultural life of the area in the mid-century were the auction marts and pubs. For previous generations, the churches and streets of the area had provided the same function, but by the mid-twentieth century, particularly towards the end of the study period, the majority of interviewees did not recall church attendance as a significant part of their lives. The turn of the twentieth century had also seen the selling of cattle on the streets stopped, and these activities moved into dedicated spaces away from the non-farming population. Just as the annual hiring fairs in the East Riding reinforced the occupational community of hired lads, these spaces were the locus of social interaction, the focus of economic activity, the means and motive for mobility, and a forum for creating and affirming insider status. Public space allowed the mixing of the wider community, beyond those working directly in agriculture.

Otley, at the centre of Lower Wharfedale, had two auction marts: the Wharfedale Farmers' Auction Mart, built in 1893 and still in business today, and the Bridge End Auction Mart, built in 1934 and closed in 2000. Other marts were dotted across the valley, at Knaresborough, Pannal, Wetherby, Skipton and Bingley; however, following a national trend which continues today, they gradually disappeared across the period.[109] In the mid-twentieth century, these marts were the backbone of the Lower Wharfedale agricultural economy. However, they were very much closed spaces, at which behavioural expectations and personal

reputation played a crucial role in the winning of the trust of the wider community, and the achievement of insider status.[110]

Commensality also characterized these public spaces. Auction marts were judged almost as much by the quality of their food provision as by the trade that happened there:

> I used to go down to Bridge End and there were a lady in there called Mrs Eckersley, and she had a belly pot stove thing in the middle of the room, and she made some fantastic dinners. Christ almighty! They were right dinners![111]

A day at the auction mart would often be followed by a visit to the pub. A resident of Otley remembered: 'in Otley on a Monday, which was auction day, all the pubs would be full with farmers everywhere, the town was full of farmers.'[112] This was not simply a social occasion, or a chance to drink. Another farmer explained:

> If you'd been to market you went to the pub afterwards and had a drink, and that's where you used to do some more dealing. In the olden days you would go to market and you'd take your cattle, and you would sell them, and then you would come in. And you learnt – believe it or not – you learnt more in the pub afterwards than what you could do in a whole week on the farm, simply by talking to different farmers, saying, 'I'm having a problem with so-and-so,' and someone would say, 'Oh I had that problem, years ago, and I found that so-and-so'… you could perhaps cure a cow or repair something by just going to market for a couple of hours afterwards and having a pint or whatever, a couple of pints, and then coming back home and carrying on working. That's what markets were for. It was a social occasion to a certain degree, but it was also a learning curve too.[113]

These testimonies demonstrate the extension of the trust-based, commensality-supported, mentor-mentee relationship away from the farm and into the wider community. Women can be seen in these recollections as a constant presence in conceptually male space, providing food, facilitating pseudo-familial and wider community relationships, and carrying out farm work as part of family farming enterprises.[114] Public space provided fora for the sharing of locally specific knowledge and experiences which cemented community bonds. As early as 1906, H. Rider Haggard, on visiting Otley, had written that the method of farming 'seems well suited to the locality, and new comers who attempt other fashions usually fail or fall into line with the local custom.'[115] Expertise in farming the particular topography of one region carried a social capital which would not translate easily to another.

Across the period 1920 to 1965, the technology available to farmers changed almost beyond recognition, with much of this change coming in the Second World War and after. In terms of mobility alone, the number of motor vehicles on Britain's roads increased from 2.3 million in 1931 to over 20 million in 1973.[116] The effect of this increasing mechanization and

mobility on agriculture was twofold, increasing the distances which people could travel in a day, and further reducing the number of hands needed on the farm. This caused a change in the taskscape, as the number of jobs for labourers declined, a larger range of tasks fell onto the shoulders of fewer workers. In Lower Wharfedale, the recipients of mentorship were increasingly likely to be farmers' sons, rather than village children, and the closure of key public spaces like pubs and auction marts reduced opportunities for commensality, and rendered the bicycle redundant as a means of effective mobility through the taskscape. One interviewee summarized: 'nowadays if my son goes to market, he takes the cattle, drops it off, hasn't time to stop, and comes home.'[117]

Lower Wharfedale lies only fifty miles from the Wolds of the East Riding. The economies of both areas were based around agricultural production, despite close proximity to the industrial centres of Leeds, Bradford and Hull. In the mid-twentieth century, both localities grappled with changes that were general to the wider British countryside: technological upheaval, societal change, and a declining agricultural workforce. Despite these parallels, interviews within these two communities revealed striking differences that shed new light on the regional variation in rural taskscapes and life experiences in the mid-twentieth century. Though geographical variety in agricultural practices and farming fortunes in this period are well recognized in the historiography, the extent of variation of rural society has not been fully explored; the influential works in this area tend to present either detailed case-studies of single areas, or broad surveys.[118]

We have used Ingold's concept of 'taskscape' to foreground the interweaving of spatial and social dimensions of agricultural work. Interviewees set their stories of work and community within a well-drawn local landscape of farms, villages and market towns. Agricultural employees on the Wolds found themselves and their landscape best served by continuing to utilize a mobile approach to work, in which ties of loyalty to individual farmers were usually weak. Hired lads and farm labourers were spatially and socially separate from the class of farmers, and knowledge about the taskscape was gained by moving from farm to farm. The Wolds farm labourer demonstrated an independent attitude and a relatively instrumental attachment to place. By contrast, Lower Wharfedale's young farmworkers might expect to stay with the same farmer, as the only, or one of a few workers, for an extended period. In these cases, familiarity with the landscape was gained through long term association with a particular patch of land, and the relationship between farmer and labourer took on a reciprocal form, with obligations and responsibilities on both sides. This has much in common with Newby's

description of the 'deferential' relationship between farmer and worker in Suffolk during the 1970s.[119] However, the societal distance between these two groups in Lower Wharfedale was smaller than on the large cereal farms of East Anglia and the East Riding Wolds. Therefore, Newby's depiction of farmer paternalism as 'hegemonic control' exercised by one class over another does not seem quite appropriate as a means of capturing the lived experience of workers and farmers in mid-century Lower Wharfedale.

The characteristic workplace relationships of each taskscape impacted on the patterning of local communities. Wolds villages, where many residents were agricultural labourers, resembled the kind of 'occupational community' depicted by Reay and Newby, though the extent of mobility on the Wolds meant that these were not the settled 'organic communities' idealized by interwar sociologists and commentators.[120] In Lower Wharfedale, the key distinction even before the Second World War was one that historians have described in the British countryside during the later twentieth century: between those who were connected with farming and those who were not.[121] In both areas, familiarity with the landscape, the environment, and local cultural norms with regard to working the land were key to a sense of belonging. Integration within the 'farming community' of Lower Wharfedale would not grant insider status among the labourers at an East Riding hiring fair, for example. This difference in knowledge and experience of environments, and, consequently, in approaches to the management of localized landscapes is what, fundamentally, separates these two rural Yorkshire communities and makes them different from one another; entities of their own, with unique characteristics within the imaginations of their participants.

Figure. 1. ‘Drinkings’ Farmer Henry Rowling (right) and farm labourer sharing food *c.*1940s (J. Rowling private collection)

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