



I - ISLE OF AXHOLME

The Isle of Axholme occupies the far north-west of Lincolnshire and is the only part of the historic county lying west of the River Trent. Rather like the better-known Isle of Ely in Cambridgeshire, the 'isle' refers to a physical feature – literally an island of higher ground surrounded by wetlands – but was also a wider territory of Anglo-Saxon or earlier origin defined on all sides by rivers. The name Axholme probably derives from the addition of the Old Norse word 'holm' (island) to Haxey, which is an earlier, Anglo-Saxon name already denoting an island by its 'ey' ending.

The Isle of Axholme is geographically distinct from the rest of Lincolnshire and still retains aspects of its unique history in the landscape and local customs. As explained later, the Isle developed primarily as a landscape of numerous smallholders who were able to defend their interests over larger landowners to an unusual degree. A spirit of robust independence is still reflected in the famous Haxey Hood event which has been held annually between the villages of Haxey and Westwoodside since the 14th century.

Axholme is also unique within Lincolnshire in its proximity to Yorkshire, which adjoins the area on the west. In clear conditions the Pennine hills appear surprisingly close on the western horizon, adding a hint of highland drama that is not found elsewhere in Lincolnshire. The Isle is also said to

have historic and cultural ties with Yorkshire, including elements of the local accent, and this has continued in recent decades as Axholme has become a popular commuter and retirement area for south Yorkshire.

The 'island' at the centre of Axholme is composed of Triassic Mercia Mudstone and forms a low, elongated hill with spurs rising from the surrounding flatlands. This provided dry land for settlement and farming to develop while also giving access to the adjoining wetland resources including fish, wildfowl, peat, reeds and grazing. The main villages on the island are Epworth, Haxey and Belton plus their satellites. Two much

FACING PAGE: **Crowle Moor**

RIGHT: **landscape near Epworth**

