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# Archaeological investigation and analytical field survey on Cawood Castle Earth, Cawood, North Yorkshire

Al Oswald

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## SURVEY REPORT

Archaeological Investigation Report Series AH16/2005



ENGLISH HERITAGE

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION AND ANALYTICAL  
FIELD SURVEY ON CAWOOD CASTLE GARTH,  
CAWOOD, NORTH YORKSHIRE.**

**ISSN 1478-7008**

**Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/16/2005**

<b>County:</b>	North Yorkshire
<b>District:</b>	Selby
<b>Parish:</b>	Cawood
<b>NGR:</b>	SE 5738 3758
<b>NMR No:</b>	SE 53 NE 20
<b>RSM No:</b>	20539
<b>Date of survey:</b>	October 2005
<b>Surveyed by:</b>	Al Oswald, Abby Hunt, Trevor Pearson and members of Cawood Castle Garth Group
<b>Report author:</b>	Al Oswald
<b>Illustrations by:</b>	Al Oswald

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Cawood Castle was developed from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century as a rural palace of the Archbishops of York. Little used after the arrest of Archbishop Thomas Wolsey by Henry VIII in 1530, it was ruinous by the time of the Civil War and largely demolished subsequently. Apart from short stretches of the precinct wall, all that now survives is the three-storey stone gatehouse built by Archbishop Kempe (1426–52) and an adjoining contemporary range built in brick, traditionally (but almost certainly incorrectly) known as the Banqueting Hall. The area of pasture known as Castle Garth, which lies adjacent to the south-western side of the palace, and in front of the gatehouse, has been argued to include the site of the medieval garden of the palace.

In October 2005, English Heritage took part in an analytical field survey at 1:1,000 scale of earthworks surviving on the Garth and carried out a rapid review of evidence noted by previous investigators for the development of the village as a whole. In 1989, a landscape investigation by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, together with an analytical field survey of the Garth at 1:2,500 scale, had interpreted the same earthworks in detail and demonstrated that the palace complex must be understood in the context of the settlement pattern as a whole (Blood and Taylor 1992; see also Figure 3). In March 1993, English Heritage carried out a geophysical survey of the area of the supposed medieval garden, but this added little to the understanding gained from the earthwork survey (Payne 1993).

The 2005 fieldwork was carried out primarily as a training exercise for members of the Cawood Castle Garth Group and formed part of a community-based conservation and research project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'Local Heritage Initiative'. A range of survey techniques were employed, from differential GPS satellite mapping to traditional graphical taped survey. The new investigation does not substantially modify or advance the conclusions reached by the 1989 investigation, but the field survey adds some details omitted from the earlier plan and suggests a few important possibilities not previously proposed. Comparison of the earthwork survey with other evidence – including a new geophysical survey of the whole of the Garth and historic aerial photography – was left for members of the Group to carry out themselves, with support where needed.

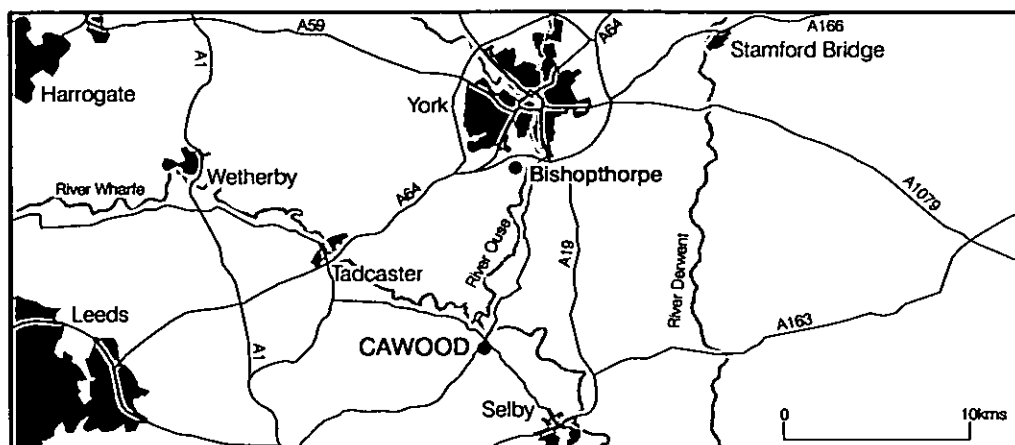


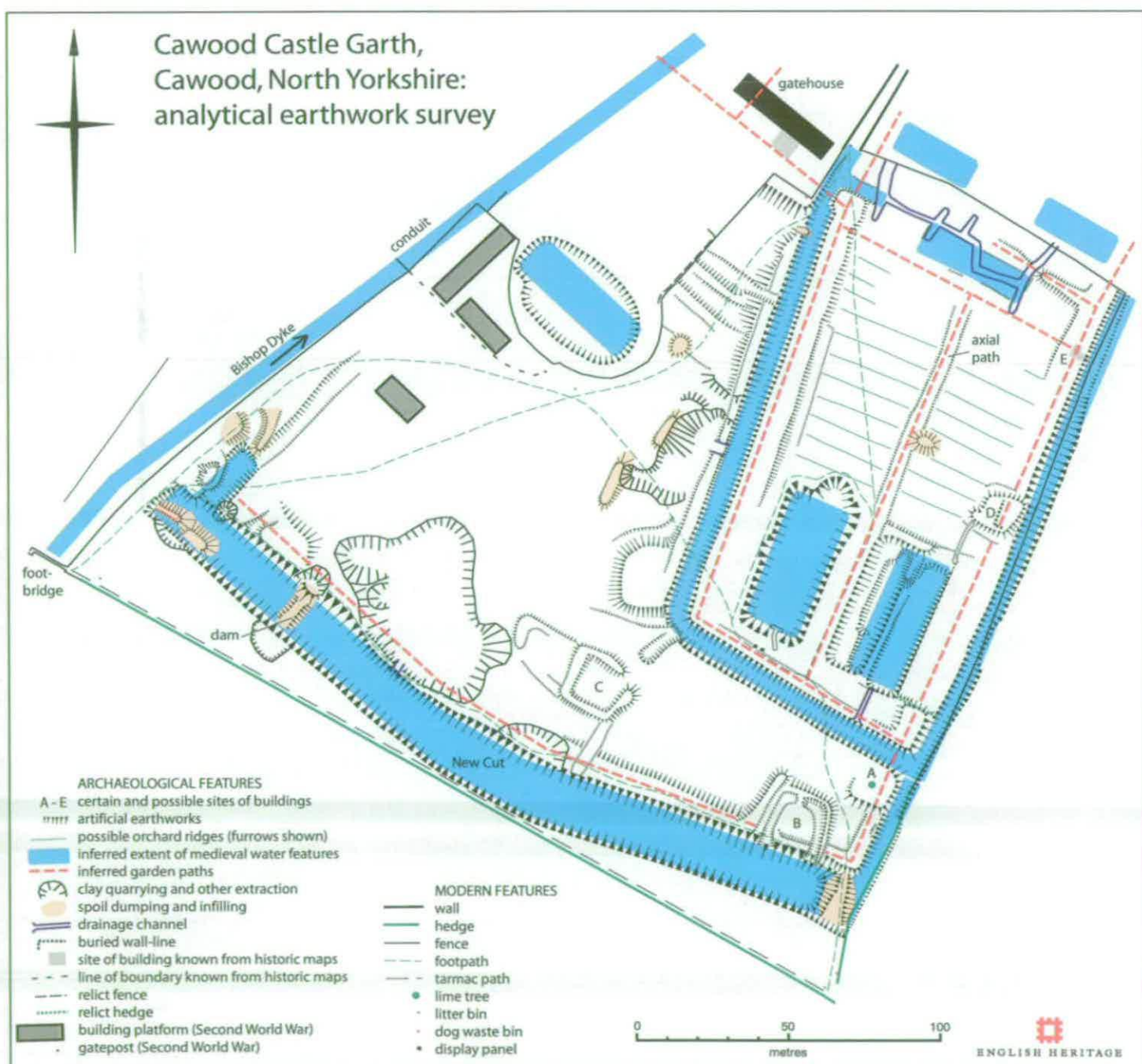
Figure 1.  
location map

## 2. DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE REMAINS

### 2.1 Medieval remains

An almost rectangular enclosure with an internal area of 1.62ha (4.00 acres), defined by a moat-like channel that is now dry, was interpreted by the previous survey as the site of a garden compartment, dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier. In the light of the documentary evidence for the sharp decline in the use of the palace after 1530, a medieval origin seems most likely if the garden is indeed the creation of an Archbishop. The slightly imperfect geometry of the almost rectangular plan, which suggests that the design was executed by eye, is consistent with the nature of most moats dating to the late 12<sup>th</sup> to early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries,

Figure 2.  
English Heritage  
plan, reduced from  
original survey at  
1:1,000 scale



the period which is generally agreed to have witnessed the climax of moat building in England (le Patourel 1973, 22; Le Patourel and Roberts 1978, 51). A pair of large rectangular ponds (one of which has been dry since at least the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century), together with the River Ouse, define three sides of the Archbishop's garden at Bishopthorpe, which may be broadly contemporary in origin with the moated garden compartment at Cawood. In passing, it is worth noting that the location of Cawood Castle is also comparable to that of the palace at Bishopthorpe. Both are located on the outsides of bends in the Ouse, where the water next to the river frontage of the palaces would have been deep enough to facilitate wharfage; both also stand adjacent to the sites of ferry crossings.

It remains uncertain how much further to the north-east the moat originally extended, but it is reasonable to assume that a garden would have been at least partly overlooked by the south-eastern range of the palace quadrangle, implying that the garden may have continued approximately as far as the line of Water Row. Such a continuation would have brought the symmetrical, rectangular design of the compartment surviving as earthworks on the Garth into conflict with the south-eastern range of the palace itself and there are hints that the north-western arm of the moat may have turned a right angle to north-east just within the present area of the Garth. Vestigial traces of earthworks hint that the post-medieval drainage channel towards the modern north-eastern boundary of the Garth may partly have followed the line of an earlier feature, such as a continuation of the moat or another long pond, or perhaps both, which could have defined the north-eastern edge of the compartment.

If the garden did continue as far as Water Row or thereabouts, it follows that there must have been a second compartment, essentially separate and presumably with its own character, but somehow integrated into the overall design. Some support for this theory is provided by the former existence of a rectangular pond located in what is now a timber yard to the north-east of the Garth, which was filled in during the 1960s. In 1989, it was proposed that a second pond might be expected to have existed to the north-west of the documented one, thus continuing the symmetrical design evident in the earthworks surviving on the Garth (Blood and Taylor 1992, 97). If such a pond existed, it must have been filled in by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, since it does not appear on historic maps (Ordnance Survey 1851). The length of the infilled pond, whose extents have been added to the new plan, based on the depiction of the feature on historic maps, certainly appears to reflect the breadth of the space available between the south-eastern arm of the moat and the line of an axial path within the moated garden compartment, which is discussed further below. At its south-eastern end, the system of relatively modern drainage channels still identifiable as earthworks on the Garth clearly used to drain into the infilled pond. Support for the former existence of the proposed second pond, although not recognised as such by the 1989 survey, is the fact that at the north-western end of the network of drainage channels, a second channel continues up to the present fenceline, as though feeding into a second pond.

The new survey has demonstrated that some of the material dug out to create the moat was used to form a slight but regular embankment apparently running around the whole of the inner edge of the water feature. This almost certainly marks the line of a perimeter walk.

Almost at the point where the north-western arm of the moat now terminates is a bulge in the inner edge of the ditch, which is not necessarily part of the relatively modern infilling that has clearly taken place here. Given that this occurs at the point where the presumed approach to the gatehouse from the market place would intersect, if projected south-eastwards, with the edge of the moat, the bulge may represent a bridge abutment.

Three ponds – of which two are dry – were recorded by the 1989 survey within the south-west end of the moated garden compartment. The new survey suggests that the central pond may have been remodelled at some stage. More important is the possibility that the two dry ponds may have been created by the subdivision of an earlier single, large pond. In this putative form, the pond would have almost perfectly mirrored the extant pond on the opposite side of an axial path. This slightly embanked path, whose earthworks were considered too slight to survey at 1:2,500 in 1989 (Blood and Taylor 1992, 97) can now be seen more clearly as central to the symmetrical design of the garden.

Immediately north-east of the ponds, two plots of cultivation ridges were convincingly interpreted by the 1989 survey as the sites of formal orchards, perhaps representing part of the 7 acre (2.8ha) land parcel called 'Apulgarth Flatte' in 1515 (Blood and Taylor 1992, 97-8). Although it was noted in 1989 that the ridges did not align with each other on either side of the axial path, the new survey makes it clear that the ridges are actually precisely staggered on either side of the path. It is perhaps worth noting that while the same pattern has commonly been used for laying out land drains from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the moat and ponds themselves serve to drain this ground, so it seems unlikely that such a drainage system would have been considered necessary. Therefore, the precision of the pattern seems to confirm the ornamental nature of the features.

While acknowledging that there is no documentary evidence for the existence of the water feature known as 'New Cut' prior to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the 1989 survey concluded that the broad channel, now virtually dry, may have been a late medieval dock, connecting with the formerly navigable Bishop Dyke at its north-west end (Blood and Taylor 1992, 96). The new survey does not necessarily support the existence of such a connection. The potential for geophysical survey to resolve this important question, on which depends the interpretation of New Cut and, by extension, the larger part of the Garth itself, is limited by the proximity of metal in the adjacent fence, which would grossly distort the readings. The question can therefore probably only be ultimately resolved by excavation.

On the other hand, the new survey does offer support for the observation made previously that the Ordnance Survey First Edition 6-inch scale map appears to show an arm of the channel extending for a short distance to the north-east from a point near its north-western terminal (Ordnance Survey 1851). Not only can this arm now be satisfactorily identified on the ground, but a very shallow depression of similar dimensions seems to continue considerably further to the north-east. This runs not quite parallel to the adjacent section of Bishop Dyke, but – intriguingly – almost parallel to the line of Sherburn Street and the section of Bishop Dyke south-west of the footbridge. The abrupt and apparently inexplicable

change in the alignment of Bishop Dyke at this point was highlighted by the 1989 investigation (Blood and Taylor 1992, 91). If the newly recognised earthwork is indeed medieval, it might be inferred that Bishop Dyke too originally ran parallel to Sherburn Street and influenced the line of the newly recognised earthwork. The alignment of Bishop Dyke north-east of the footbridge may then have been changed to its present course, perhaps when the newly identified earthwork was filled in, or when work on it was abandoned.

If the newly identified shallow depression does represent an infilled or unfinished arm of New Cut, it seems more likely that the feature as a whole was primarily ornamental. At the Archbishop of Lincoln's palace at Stow, a body of water comparable in size and plan to New Cut (though less regular, because it results from the modification of a shallow natural valley) has been linked with a documentary reference in 1186 to the Archbishop's swannery (Everson, Taylor and Dunn 1991, 185 and figure 130). This example illustrates the degree to which function, ornament and symbolism were interwoven in the design of medieval gardens.

Similarly, at the south-eastern end of New Cut, the new survey has recorded a slight slope on Gill Green which could indicate that the water feature turned back to the north-east, perhaps continuing as far as the corner of the moated garden compartment. However, the chronological relationship between the two supposed gardens is impossible to infer with confidence. Based on the plan evidence alone, it is tempting to speculate that New Cut actually bounded an earlier enclosure, 4.83ha (11.93 acres) in internal area, into which the moated garden compartment was later inserted. Nevertheless, the opposite sequence could be argued. In addition, the interpretation of the larger enclosure as a garden must remain highly speculative in view of the lack, within the area bounded by New Cut, Bishop Dyke and the western sides of the more certain moated garden compartment, of many other features which might convincingly be linked with a medieval garden. The possibility that work was left unfinished is perhaps too convenient to accept, though Wolsey is said to have initiated major renovation works at Cawood prior to his arrest (Blood and Taylor 1992, 93).

One feature within this enlarged area which very probably was ornamental, to some extent at least, is the pond (almost dry at the time of the 2005 survey) within the garden of Cawood Castle House. Angular bends at the north-western corner of the pond strongly suggest that the original pond was rectangular in form and that its current oval plan is the result of later modification, at some point before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Ordnance Survey 1851). The ring of sycamore trees surrounding the pond seem too young for their planting to be contemporary with the modification of the pond itself. That the pond was originally partly ornamental in purpose is suggested by the fact that, in its supposed rectangular form, it would have been aligned precisely parallel to the south-western frontage of the palace and extended symmetrically either side of the axis of the gate passage.

A second potentially ornamental feature within this enlarged area is the squarish mound (A on Figure 2) adjacent to the southernmost corner of the moated garden compartment. Now 0.5m high at its highest point, there are signs that it may have been partially levelled. The top of the mound is now occupied by a single lime tree very approximately 50 years old. It



also carried an isolated deciduous tree, perhaps a specimen, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which had apparently been planted after 1847, since it is not shown on the First Edition 6-inch scale map (Ordnance Survey 1851). The tree might, as is often the case with ornamental planting, have been sited to exploit an earthwork which was more prominent at that date. A mound in this position would have afforded good prospects across the whole of the Garth and the moated garden compartment in particular, so could conceivably be the site of a garden building or a low viewing platform.

As noted previously, the earliest reference to a tileworks (*tegula*) in the area is in about 1235, when it was described as 'abutting on the ditch of the garden of the Archbishop' (Blood and Taylor 1992, 96). The new survey has identified an irregular depression with two adjoining mounds – perhaps spoil heaps – directly against the north-western side of the moated garden compartment. The form of the depression is not dissimilar from the post-medieval clay extraction pit adjoining New Cut, but it is shallower and more degraded in appearance, which explains why it was omitted from the earlier survey. Also like the larger extraction pit, the depression appears to have been connected to the moat by a drainage channel.

Also abutting the north-western side of the moated garden compartment, and extending up to the boundary of what is now the garden of Cawood Castle House, are a series of four linear mounds, the most prominent 0.4m high but the others considerably slighter, with intervening shallow gullies. Parts of these were depicted on the earlier survey but their interpretation was left open. Although reminiscent in places of medieval arable cultivation ridges ('ridge and furrow'), this interpretation seems implausible given their landscape context, so some more specialist function – perhaps horticultural – remains a possibility. With a single exception, the gullies respect a more regular low bank which appears to represent a formal boundary outside the moated garden compartment.

## **2.2 Probable post-medieval remains**

The large irregular depression which impinges on the north-eastern side of New Cut and is connected to it by a drainage channel was certainly used as a willow bed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Ordnance Survey 1851). Based on the 1989 survey, it was suggested that it probably originated as a clay extraction pit earlier in the early post-medieval period and the new fieldwork supports that interpretation. A low bank, apparently deliberately constructed as a dam, crosses the base of New Cut on the line of the north-western end of the extraction pit. This may be connected with the clay extraction, or perhaps more probably with the willow growing, since it serves to pen water in the south-eastern end of New Cut.

Two small square enclosures appear to post-date New Cut. One, which has a more planned appearance (B on Figure 2), may have surrounded a building; indeed a shallow gully may actually represent the robbed-out foundation of a building. Despite the fact that it evidently post-dates the construction of New Cut, a structure in this location – like one sited on nearby mound A – could therefore conceivably have been a component of the garden design. The second enclosure (C on Figure 2) has fainter traces of an attached yard or pen to its north-west. The enclosure seems to be associated with a boundary running between the

south-western corner of the moated garden compartment and New Cut, thus cutting off the arm of land between the south-western end of the moated garden compartment and New Cut. This is more probably post-medieval and could relate to livestock management.

A building (D on Figure 2), whose foundations apparently survive intact just beneath the surface of the turf, occupies a prominent mound adjoining the south-eastern side of the moated garden compartment. Though it apparently predates the earliest available map – the Enclosure map of 1780 – the building is demonstrably of later origin than the orchard ridges and the moat itself. A vestigial bank that overlies the mound and extends south-westwards from it corresponds to the line of a boundary shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map. The bank almost certainly carried a hedge, for a line of mature hawthorns surviving in the belt of scrub that now extends along the inner edge of the moat represents the south-western stretch of the same boundary.

A building (E on Figure 2), not depicted on the Enclosure map, but shown on the First Edition map as 'Kennels' (Ordnance Survey 1851), and still present at the time of Second Edition, has left no earthwork trace. The approximate position of the building has been plotted onto the new plan based on the historic map depictions.

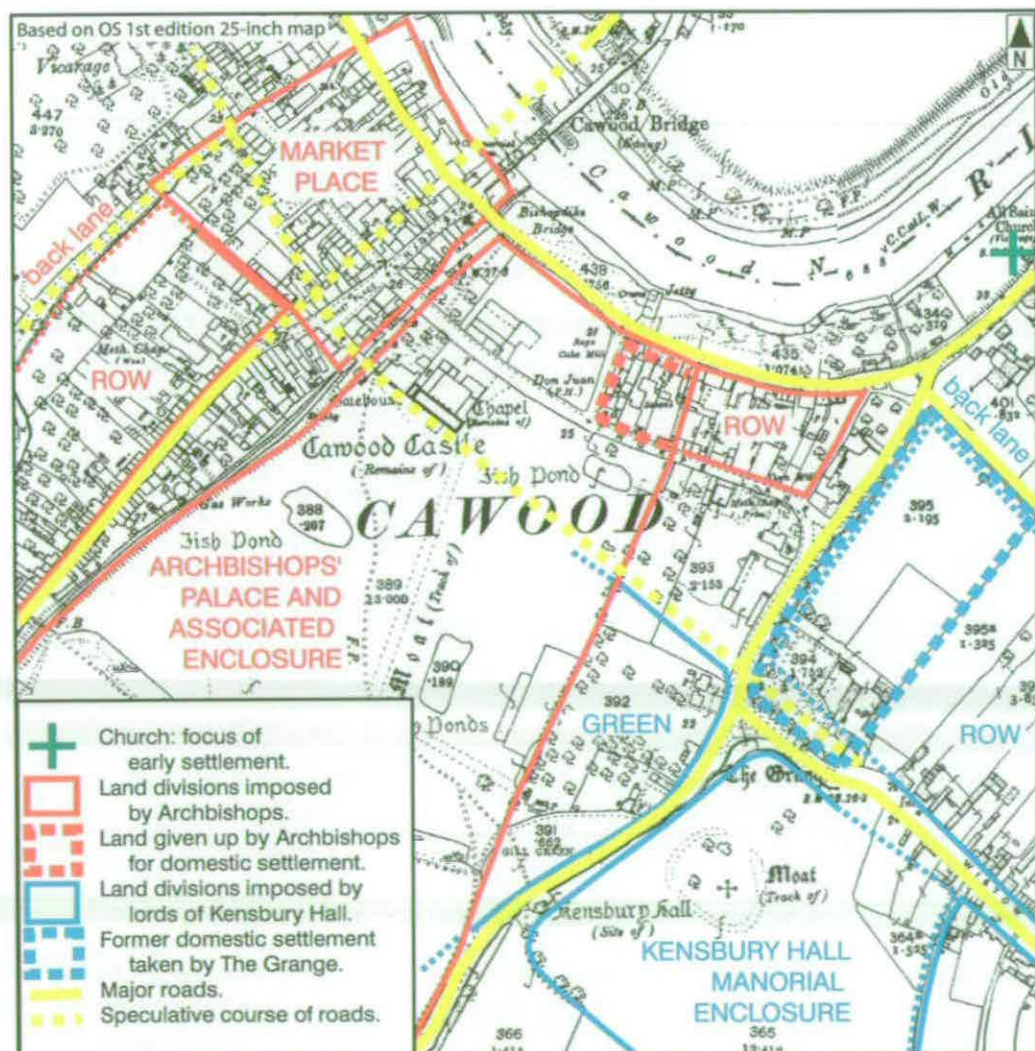


Figure 3.  
Interpretation of the  
overall settlement  
pattern, based on  
RCHME 1989  
investigation.

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