The Gaywood River Valley in the post-medieval period
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Historic Parishes in the Gaywood Valley
The late medieval parishes of the valley can be divided into four different groups **(Fig. 1).** The first group consists of Great and Little Massingham, which lie at the eastern edge of the area. Both lie wholly in what Arthur Young called the "Good Sands" area of Norfolk - an area which, throughout most of the post-medieval period, was dominated by large estates. Little Massingham consists of a number of scattered farms and estate cottages, while Great Massingham is a more concentrated settlement round ponds and greens.

Fig. 1. Faden's map, 1797, geo-rectified to modern map trajectory (after Macnair and Williamson 2010, CD-ROM).See: www.fadensmapofnorfolk.co.uk

The second group is formed of Congham, Grimston and Gayton, which are large parishes running east to west for many kilometres, but are only about two kilometres north to south. The eastern parts of these parishes lie on thin, dry soils on top of chalk, with better soils on the spring line in the centre, and then dry, sandy soils to the west. Settlement is close to the spring line and also, in the case of Grimston and Congham, on the edges of a green shared with Roydon.

The third group, consisting of Roydon, Bawsey, Ashwicken, Leizate and Mintlyn, are smaller parishes, and much of their land is poor, sandy soils. For most of the post-medieval period, settlement in these five parishes consisted of one or two isolated farms in each.

The final group is Gaywood and King's Lynn. These two parishes are irrevocably linked - King's Lynn, having been carved out of Gaywood in the late eleventh century, remains the only urban settlement within the Gaywood Valley and, until the mid-nineteenth century, was contained within its medieval walls. Gaywood lies on a sandy ridge between the waterlogged fen and pastures of the Gaywood River and the

Middleton Stop Drain. Until the end of the nineteenth century, settlement in Gaywood was concentrated on both sides of Norwich Way (now Lynn Road and Gayton Road), between the current King Edward VII school and Gaywood Hall.

In the twelve parishes throughout the medieval period not all the land was used for crop production (mainly cereals, and also legumes), and there would have been meadows for hay, and common land for grazing as well as for collecting fuel. Most of the arable land would have been in large fields sub-divided into small strips. Any one villager's holding would have consisted of a number of strips scattered across the various open fields of the parish.

Agricultural change in the late Middle Ages

During the medieval period, most villages would have been self-sufficient in agricultural production, and any surpluses would have been sold or exchanged at market for goods and services not available in the local communities. Although there was farmland within the walls of King's Lynn, the town would never have grown enough to feed itself and would have been a ready market for agricultural surpluses from the Gaywood Valley. Poor harvests in the early fourteenth century, and the Black Death of 1348 and subsequent outbreaks of the disease, are thought to have halved the human population of England by the year 1400. This drastic decrease in population led to there being excess land for cereal production, and an increase in wages for those who laboured on the land. Poorer soils were taken out of grain production; lighter soils reverted to commons, and heavier water-logged soils were converted to permanent pasture. With fewer people keeping animals, the rich were able to increase the size of their flocks, which fed on the common land.

Gaywood 1487-1810

A survey of Gaywood taken in 1487 shows that much of the parish consisted of pasture belonging to residents of King's Lynn. The Bishop of Norwich maintained a palace where Gaywood Hall now stands. This palace was surrounded by two moats and had a park attached on its south-eastern side. The park would have been a deer farm, and its size (152 acres) would have meant it was too small for hunting. To the east of the palace, on both sides of Norwich Way, there was an extensive common on the poor sandy soils. The Gaywood Valley itself was used for summer grazing, and there had been efforts at water management to improve the quality of grazing and to divert the course of the river to the south to provide King's Lynn with a reliable water supply. To the north of the river there was more grazing land, and the survey suggests that Reffley Wood was more open than now, and with extensive pasture **(Fig. 2).**

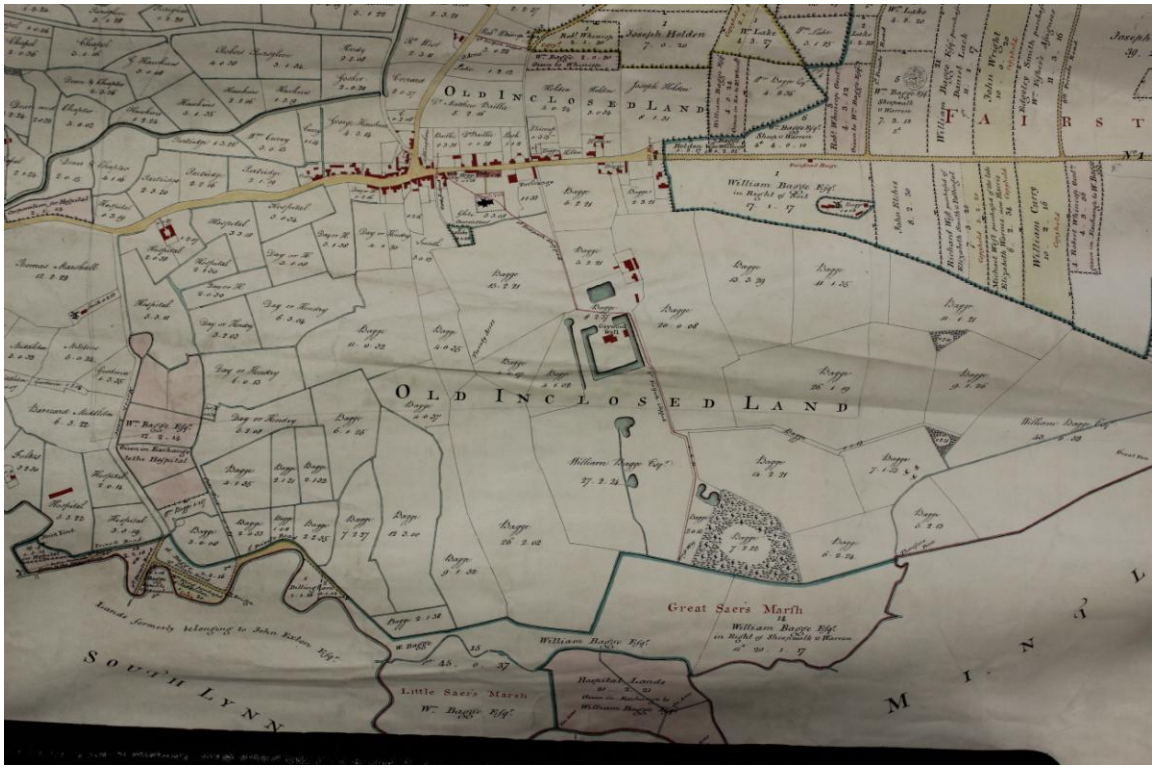

Fig. 2. Enclosure of Gaywood and Mintyln, 1810 (NRO7, C Sc2/131).

This pattern of land use in Gaywood remained relatively stable throughout the next 300 years. During the Reformation, a series of land exchanges between Henry VIII and the bishop saw Gaywood pass into royal hands, before being purchased by the Bagge family, who were Lynn merchants. The deer park fell out of use, being converted into enclosed pasture. Reffley Wood changed from pasture to true woodland - the pollards which still stand on its eastern boundary being the sole surviving relic of its ancient past.

Bawsey, Mintlyn, Leizate and Ashwicken in the sixteenth century

The very sandy, dry soils of the last three of these parishes, which also extend into the western parts of Congham and Grimston and cover most of Roydon, were not suitable for arable farming in the Middle Ages, nor did they make very good pasture for cattle or sheep. On the other hand, they produced ideal conditions for rabbit warrens. By the sixteenth century, there were extensive warrens in these parishes **(Fig. 3).**

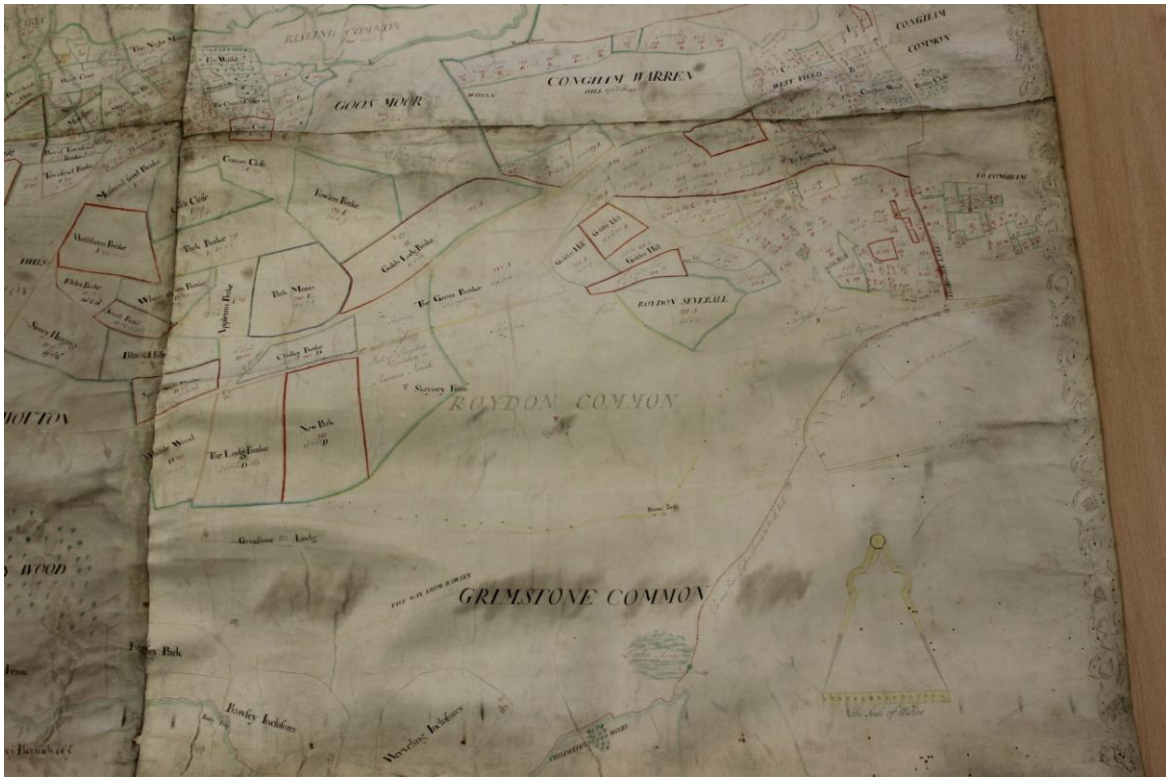

Fig. 3. Map of estate of Henry Bowes, 1732 and Bawsey area (NRO1, MC 2485/1). Also, see Fig. 6 below, for another extract of the same map.

Warrens were the property of lords of the manors or other large institutions such as monasteries **(Fig. 4).**

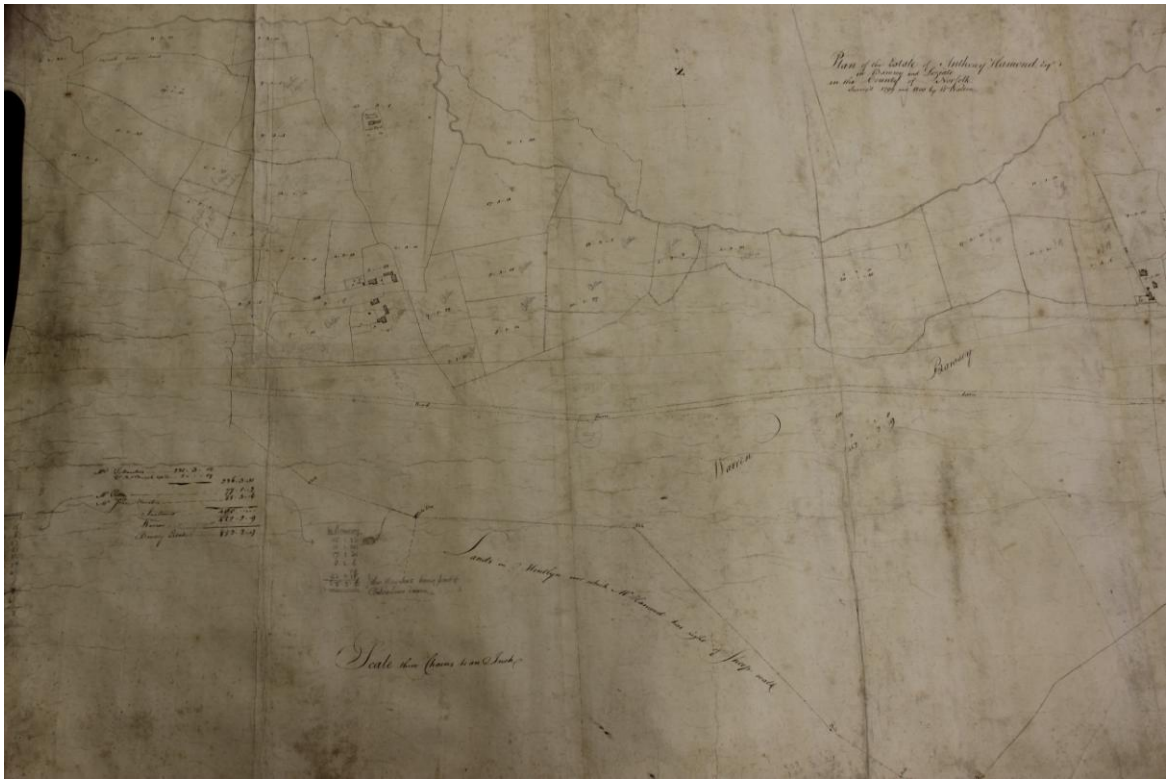
Fig. 4. Estate of Anthony Hammond, 1799-1800 (NRO13, BL 41/2).

From lay subsidy (tax) returns of the fourteenth century, it is evident that none of these parishes supported a large population and that, following the Black Death, their populations declined further. By 1428, Bawsey and Leizate were exempted from paying tax, and Mintlyn had been combined with Gaywood.

Nationally, especially in the Midlands, there was a trend for large landowners of small communities to depopulate the villages and convert the arable to enclosed pasture for large flocks of sheep. Sheep farming, relying on only a few shepherds, was much cheaper to operate than arable farming, and the late fifteenth century was a prosperous time for the wool and cloth trade of England. Norfolk landowners also followed this pattern - the most famous being the Townshends of Raynham and the Fermors of East Barsham, who owned huge flocks in the Fakenham area. In an inquiry of 1517, Thomas Thursby, lord of the manor of Gayton, was accused of enclosing arable lands in Ashwicken, Leizate and Bawsey, as well as depopulating the hamlet of Holt in the parish of Mintlyn. Frequently, only one farm in a parish survived this type of enclosure, and this appears to be what happened in Bawsey, Ashwicken and Leizate. A map of about 1690 shows there were still approximately ten houses in Mintlyn, and even the modern Ordnance Survey maps record Mintlyn Farm close to the ruined church, and White House Farm near a moated site in the south-east of the parish **(Fig. 5).**

Fig. 5. Map of Manor of Hauelies, 1698 (NRO26, BL 14/15).

The northern and eastern parts of the Gaywood Valley in the eighteenth century
Roydon was also a sparsely-populated parish, but it survived the wholesale enclosure of its commons – probably because it fell under the influence of the Howard family of Castle Rising who, for much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were in a

state of confusion because of their Catholic faith and lack of favour with the Crown. The little remaining arable in the parish – near Hall Farm, the church and the northern edge of the common - appears to have been enclosed by 1700. A map of 1732 shows an area of "severalls" north of the present common being taken into cultivation. This is likely to have been ploughed for a few years, and then allowed to revert to grass (although this area is arable today) **(Fig. 6).**

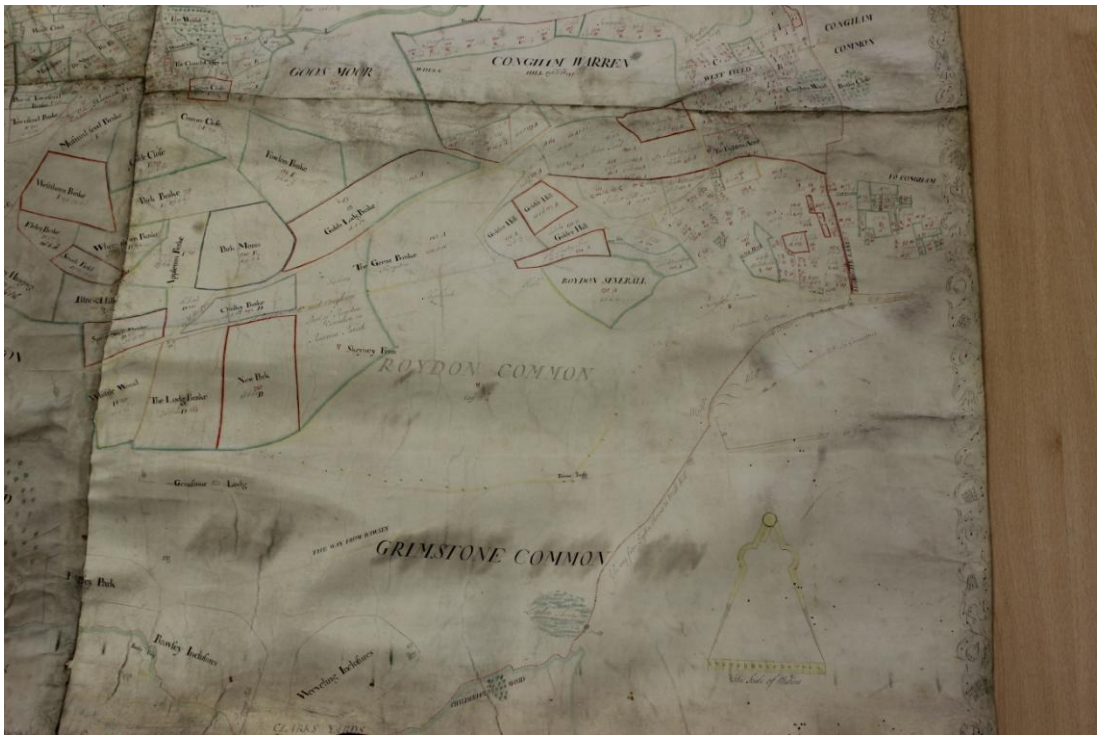

Fig. 6. Map of estate of Henry Bowes, 1732 (NRO2, MC 2485/1).

The warrens on the western parts of Congham and Grimston survived throughout the eighteenth century, and Congham's was only swept away by the Enclosure Act of 1812. Grimston's warren was never enclosed, but was exploited for sands and gravels in the late nineteenth century, planted with conifers in the twentieth century, before being converted back to heathland by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust in the early years of this century.

The areas of better soil in Congham, Grimston and Gayton close to the settlements remained arable throughout the eighteenth century while, further east, on the chalk, there were areas known as "brecks" or "brakelands" on eighteenth-century maps. A breck would be ploughed for a number of years for a grain harvest, before being allowed to revert to grass to recover its fertility. Typically, it would be farmed for four to six years in a ten- to twelve-year cycle.

There were extensive heaths on the eastern edge of all three parishes. The heaths were connected to the settlements in the village centres by tracks running east to west, which crossed the brecks and the arable fields. The strips in the brecks and arable fields ran north-south between these roads, suggesting that the roads pre-date the laying out of the arable fields, and may date back to prehistoric times. Some of these tracks survive in the modern landscape.

The prime function of the heaths was day and summer grazing for sheep. At night, the sheep would be brought on to the unsown arable fields, where they would be closely penned so that their droppings would be concentrated and fertilise the soil. Most of the flocks were owned by the lords of the manors, and villagers' sheep would have to be included in the lord's flocks. This was known as the right of foldcourse, and the area it covered was a sheepwalk. The lord had the right to determine the areas first fertilised and, in some cases, prevented the villagers from owing their own sheep. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the concentration of large estates on this type of land in west Norfolk – the two most important being Houghton (Walpole, later Cholmondely) and Holkham (Coke). The Hammond estate at West Acre included significant acreages in Congham and Gayton, as well as in Ashwicken and Leziate **(Fig. 7).**

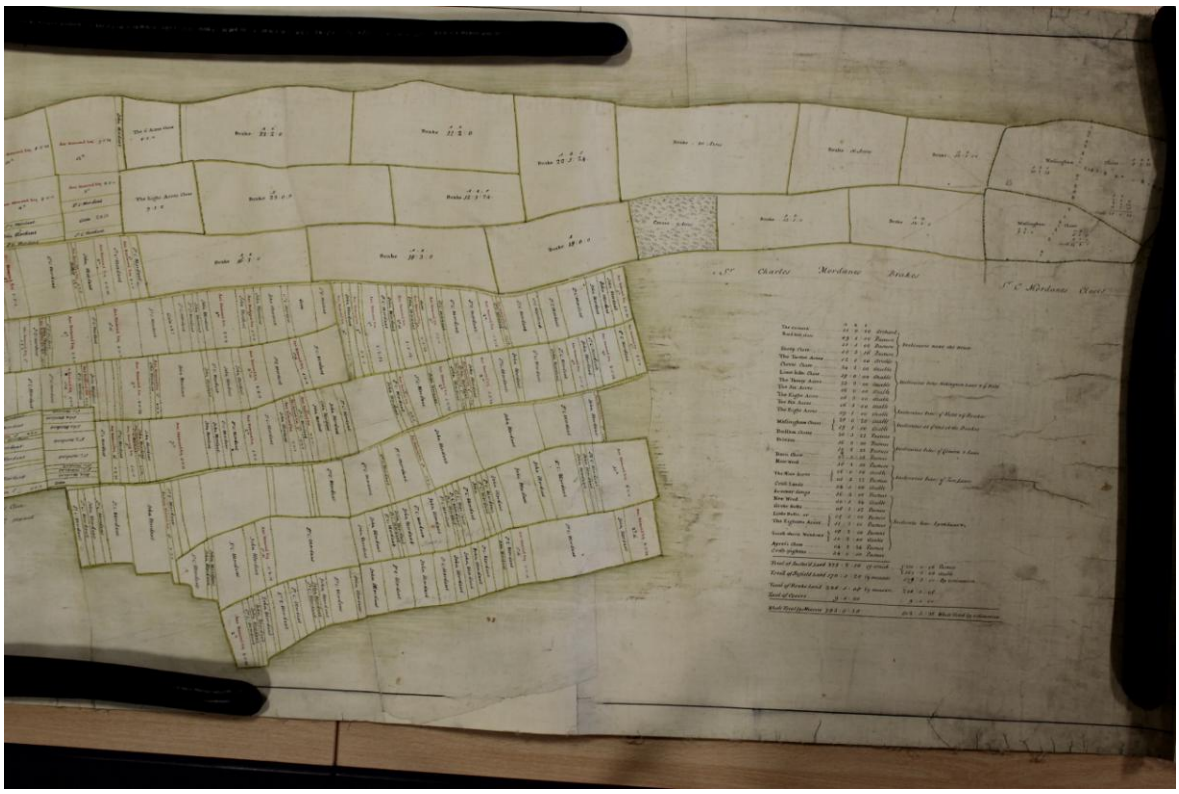

Fig. 7. Estate of Anthony Hammond, 1732 (NRO41, BL 34).

As the population of England increased throughout the eighteenth century, arable farming became more profitable, and large landowners concentrated their holdings, bought out smaller farmers and enclosed parts of the commons. In Gayton, the St. John family gave up their right of foldcourse, and enclosed part of the eastern heaths of Gayton. The Hammonds appear to have acted similarly in Congham. The heaths of Grimston survived, but the brecks were enclosed in 1780, and much of this poor land was used to create a farm for the owner of the tithes.

Early in the eighteenth century, the fields close to the settlements were hedged. The majority of a person's arable would have been scattered across large open fields further away from the dwellings. This can be seen from a map of Well Farm in Gayton dated 1720, and in a 1730 map of Great Massingham. As the eighteenth century wore on, holdings were concentrated and, in Great Massingham, the majority fell into the hands of the Walpoles at Houghton and the Cokes at Holkham. The

Walpoles created three large farms – ranging from 600 to 1200 acres. Most of the arable on these farms was enclosed in large fields, but extensive areas of heathland on these farms in the west of the parish remained unploughed until the Second World War.

Enclosure in Gaywood, Gayton and Congham in the early nineteenth century
The French Wars of 1793-1815 was a time of great prosperity for cereal growers. During the early years of the nineteenth century, many commons were enclosed to allow farmers to grow more grain. Where there was more than one large landowner in a parish, this process often required an Act of Parliament. This was the case in Gaywood, Gayton and Congham. At the same time as enclosure of the commons, the three parishes were reorganised so that people's lands were concentrated in a single area. In many places, farms and/or barns and animal sheds were built in the fields away from the villages, so that they were more conveniently located. With the exception of Tithe Farm in Grimston, this did not happen in the Gaywood Valley. There are isolated barns in Gayton and Congham, but these appear to pre-date the Enclosure Acts.

Following the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, Gayton was chosen as the location for the workhouse of the Freebridge Lynn Union **(Fig. 8).**

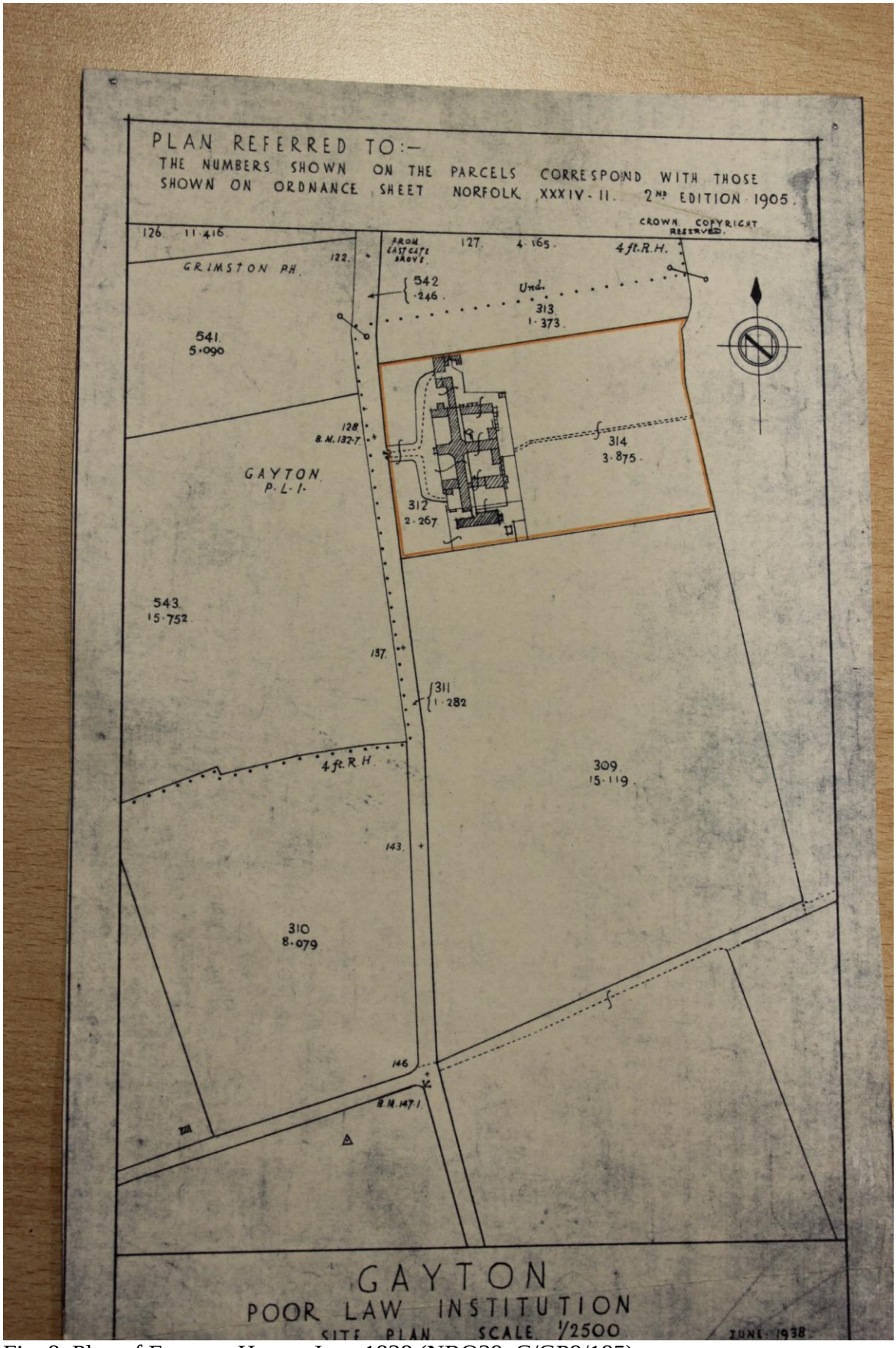

Fig. 8. Plan of Eastgate House, June 1838 (NRO39, C/GP9/185).

The building was designed by William Donthorn, who was also architect for a number of other workhouses in Norfolk, as well as of Hillington Hall (now demolished). The workhouse was situated over a mile from the village of Gayton, on the border with Grimston. This isolated position and the austere building were deliberate choices to discourage people from applying for poor relief. In the twentieth century, the building became a home for the elderly, before being converted to private flats.

The Gaywood Valley in the twentieth century

Although two turnpikes operated from the late eighteenth century, little change occurred in road transport facilities until the coming of the motor car and, in the 1930s, tarmac surfaces were laid. From the 1860s, two railways connecting King's Lynn with Hunstanton and Fakenham were built. The expansion of the town of King's Lynn in the late nineteenth century saw the creation of docks; also the development of suburbs (especially in Gaywood). Housing in Gaywood increased rapidly in the twentieth century, and especially in the 1960s with the arrival of London's "overspill".

Village settlements remained much the same from the Middle Ages to the end of the nineteenth century, for example Gayton **(Fig. 9).**

Fig. 9. Map of the estate of St Andrew St John in Gayton, 1805 (KL/D3/12).

Building materials were invariably sourced locally. In the Gaywood Valley, those materials were carstone, flint, clunch and brick. Villages used the most suitable local source, so that Grimston has many carstone buildings, while chalk is found in Congham and flint in Great Massingham. The railways brought in cheaper machine-made bricks from the Peterborough area, slate from north Wales and, later, concrete tiles; these led to changes in the appearance and character of the buildings. Between

the 1930s and 1950s, many council houses were built, both in King's Lynn and its hinterland.

The railways closed in the 1960s, mechanisation of farms led to a reduced workforce and a movement of people away from the small settlements. The villages were saved by the motor car, which enabled residents to commute to the factories of King's Lynn and, later, further afield. The dream of living in a rural community became a reality for many, and populations grew for the first time since the 1850s. This resulted in the building of many new houses, whose character invariably bore no relationship to that of the older properties in the settlements.

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