

3 History of the Secular and Diocesan Boundaries in Yorkshire

3.1 Natural Communities

- 3.1.1 We began our Review with the aim of establishing whether the shape and boundaries of the existing dioceses tend to facilitate the Church's mission to the people and communities of Yorkshire or whether different boundaries would enable the Church to relate to them more effectively. In what follows we set out the background to the approach that we have adopted.
- 3.1.2 People belong to communities of varying size and geographical extent. The most local communities beyond the street or neighbourhood have been civil parishes (and, in the case of larger parishes, individual settlements within them). People also belong at the same time to larger communities, however. These may be counties (and sometimes, ancient units within them) or cities. In some counties and cities the sense of common identity is and always has been strong; in others it is weaker. (In addition, people increasingly belong also to non-geographical communities formed by common interest and social grouping, sustained by swift means of transport and by the internet.)
- 3.1.3 Because the Church of England is the established church and because it understands itself as having a mission to the nation and not just to individuals, it seeks to relate to geographical secular communities at various levels – in particular, to parishes, counties and unitary authority areas, but also to regions as well as to England as a whole.
- 3.1.4 Some of this work of relating to secular society at its various levels is well known, but much of it proceeds without people in the parishes becoming directly aware of it. The fact that they are not very conscious of it does not mean that it is unimportant, however, or that they do not benefit from it.
- 3.1.5 There are occasions when the Church needs to address the wider community at a level other than the parish – not least, when an area is affected by disasters and emergencies. The modern media look for a comment from an individual, not a statement from a committee – ideally, from a person who is well known, and if not, then at least from one whose office is familiar. In this context, the role of bishops as representatives of the Church to the community at levels beyond that of the parish has gained in importance. Even if the bishop is not well known as an individual, the office is still familiar in a way that other ecclesiastical offices are not.
- 3.1.6 In an unpublished paper entitled 'What is the Diocese?', given in 1996, Professor David Ford commented:
- ‘A diocese serves and builds up both parishes and the region (just as a parish serves and builds up both its congregation and its locality). This is a pivotal issue in much current finance-led debate about the diocese: is

the diocese only a service organisation for parishes? If there is no vision of ministry to the region in ways that cannot be adequately fulfilled by parishes, then there will be a serious breakdown of the polity of the Church of England.’

Such responsibility was not delegated upwards from the parishes to the diocese, he added: the regional ministry of the diocese should be seen as ‘constitutive of the Church and needing to be recognised by the parishes as the truth of our polity’: ‘Not to recognise this is to want the character of our Church to change fundamentally.’

- 3.1.7 It is for these reasons that English dioceses have, for the most part, been configured to the secular communities that they have been intended to serve. Initially these were generally Anglo-Saxon kingdoms or political or tribal divisions within them. In many cases they were one or more of the counties into which those kingdoms or the Kingdom of England came to be divided. In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when county boundaries had ceased to define the communities of urban and industrial England in particular, they were cities and their hinterlands. Where dioceses were expanded in the nineteenth century without regard to coherence in terms of secular communities, the changes were quickly found to be unsatisfactory and were eventually undone.
- 3.1.8 In the rest of this third Chapter we look at the history of the secular boundaries within Yorkshire (sections 3.2 and 3.10), the division of the Church in Yorkshire into the present five dioceses (sections 3.3-3.8), and the boundaries of the other churches for which Yorkshire is not a single unit – the Roman Catholic Church and the Methodist Church (section 3.9). As we do so, we shall identify and describe some of the boundaries that are most significant for our review.

3.2 Ancient boundaries

- 3.2.1 For secular purposes, Yorkshire was divided while under Danish rule into three Ridings (from ‘Thriding’, an Old Norse word meaning a third). Down to a point just south of Masham, the boundary between the West Riding and the North Riding was the western and southern watershed of the River Ure and its tributaries. Wensleydale was thus in the North Riding but Dent, Craven, Wharfedale and Nidderdale were in the West Riding. From just south of Masham onwards the Ure, which in its lower course becomes the River Ouse, formed the boundary between the West Riding and the North and East Ridings.
- 3.2.2 Originally, the whole of Yorkshire was within the Diocese of York, which also covered Nottinghamshire, Lancashire north of the Ribble, Cumberland south of the Derwent and southern Westmorland. By the mid-twelfth century the diocese had five archdeaconries, as follows: York (for the West Riding), Richmond (the western part of the North Riding and the part of the diocese

‘beyond the moors’ – in Lancashire, Westmorland and Cumberland), Cleveland (the rest of the North Riding), the East Riding, and Nottingham (Nottinghamshire).

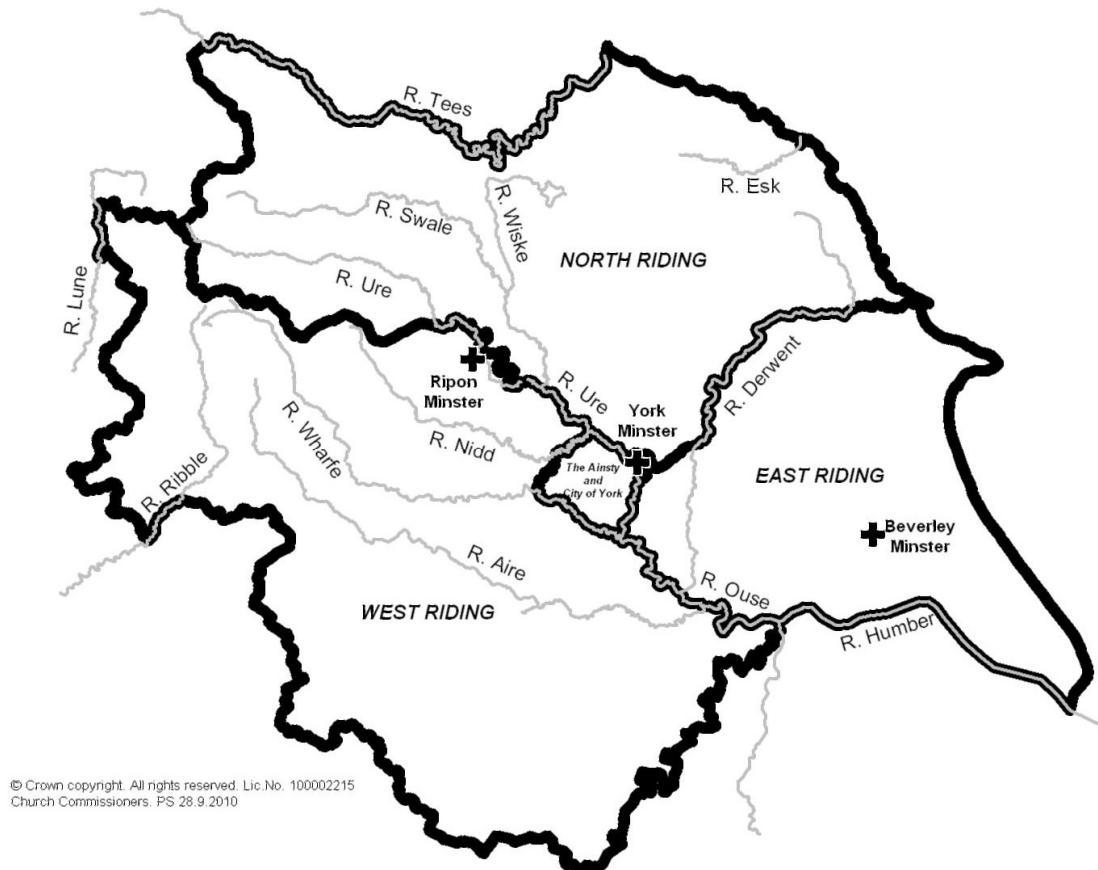


Figure 1: The Ridings of Yorkshire

- 3.2.3 The eastern boundary of the Archdeaconry of Richmond (and of its secular counterparts) was the River Wiske, which from a point close to the River Tees flows south to its confluence with the River Swale west of Thirsk. The northern portion of the eastern boundary of the Diocese of Ripon & Leeds still essentially follows the River Wiske.
- 3.2.4 The area under discussion in this report comprises most of the former West Riding of Yorkshire, together with that part of the North Riding that has for more than 900 years formed part of the Archdeaconry of Richmond.
- 3.2.5 In 1541 the Archdeaconry of Richmond was removed from the Diocese of York and united with the Archdeaconry of Chester (Cheshire and Southern Lancashire) to form the Diocese of Chester.

3.2.6 In the middle ages three collegiate churches had served effectively as secondary cathedrals for their respective areas of the Diocese of York: Ripon Minster (in the West Riding), Beverley Minster (in the East Riding) and Southwell Minster (in Nottinghamshire). Their foundations were dissolved with those of the other collegiate churches in 1547, but Southwell and Ripon were re-constituted as collegiate and choral foundations in 1585 and 1604 respectively. Ripon Minster was given a dean and six prebendaries, with a sub-dean added in 1607.

3.3 The Diocese of Ripon (1836)

3.3.1 In 1836 a new diocese was created, the first since the Reformation. The aim was to reduce the Dioceses of York and Chester to more manageable proportions and to serve the industrial area of Yorkshire (with a diocese for industrial Lancashire to follow). The Yorkshire part of the Archdeaconry of Richmond and the northern part of the West Riding were detached from the Dioceses of Chester and York respectively to form the new diocese. The southern part of the West Riding was recognized as being distinct and remained in the Diocese of York, as did the area of the West Riding immediately west and south of York, including Selby. (York was further reduced in size by the transfer of Nottinghamshire to the Diocese of Lincoln in 1839/1841.)

3.3.2 As the only ecclesiastical building within the new diocese that had the proportions and configuration of a cathedral, and being already a collegiate and choral foundation, Ripon Minster was the obvious candidate for designation as its cathedral. The 1830s was a time when the concern was to cut the cost of bishops and cathedrals and divert money towards making better provision for the cure of souls in populous parishes. To build a new cathedral church (or enlarge an existing building for that purpose) and endow a new cathedral foundation would not have been politically possible. The new diocese accordingly became the Diocese of Ripon.

3.3.3 The fact that Ripon was not situated within the industrial area that the new diocese was primarily intended to serve, and was not easily reached from it, was problematic from the outset, however. Not until 1849 was there a rail link between Leeds and Ripon.

3.4 The Diocese of Wakefield (1888)

3.4.1 The Diocese of Wakefield was founded in 1888 as the last of six dioceses provided for by acts of Parliament in the later 1870s.

3.4.2 Some of the new dioceses were natural units, at least when they were founded. For example, the Diocese of Truro was and remains a single-county diocese almost entirely surrounded by water, historically and culturally distinct from its

only neighbour, Devon. The Diocese of Liverpool similarly had a natural unity – though one based not on historic identity or correlation with a county but on social geography.

- 3.4.3 The Diocese of Wakefield, by contrast, was not a natural unit. It consisted of the southern part of the 1836 Diocese of Ripon and divided the industrial area which was ultimately to become the county of West Yorkshire, separating Wakefield, Huddersfield and Halifax from Leeds (which eventually became the area's metropolis) and Bradford. In Owen Chadwick's words, 'Wakefield had no natural unity but became a success thanks to the extraordinary personality of its first bishop, little Walsham How.'³³
- 3.4.4 There had been much discussion in the mid-1870s as to which town should be the see city for the new diocese. Huddersfield was the largest, with a population of 70,000, closely followed by Halifax (65,000), while Wakefield only had 28,000. (Leeds and Bradford had 259,000 and 145,000 respectively.) Huddersfield's parish church was completely rebuilt earlier in the nineteenth century, whereas Halifax had an impressive late mediaeval church. Wakefield, though much smaller than Huddersfield and Halifax, was the county town of the West Riding and at that time was also the focus of the area's railway lines. Its sizeable mediaeval church was eventually chosen as the cathedral for what accordingly became the Diocese of Wakefield.
- 3.4.5 Though the Diocese of Ripon was relieved of half of its population, much of what was left, in Leeds and Bradford, was now at the very southern edge of the diocese, as Ripon was on its eastern edge.³⁴

3.5 The 1907 Report

- 3.5.1 A committee consisting of the Bishop of Ripon (convener), the Archbishop of York and the Bishops of Durham and Manchester met in September 1907 to consider 'the increase of the episcopate' in the Northern Province. In 45 years its population had almost doubled, from 6.1 million to 11.7 million. Its average diocesan population was over 250,000 higher than in the south (a difference equal to the population of the Diocese of Hereford). Furthermore, hilly and moorland areas made communications slower and between some places virtually non-existent. The report pointed out that development of 'diocesan consciousness' in some dioceses was hindered by the fact that they lacked 'territorial coherence', comprising parts of different administrative areas – a factor that had often been overlooked in the shaping of northern dioceses. The committee identified the 'real problem' as being in Lancashire and Yorkshire and proceeded to review the dioceses in these two counties.

³³ W. O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church, Part Two: 1860-1901* (2nd edn: London, 1972), p. 346.

³⁴ P. S. Morrish, 'Leeds and the Dismemberment of the Diocese of Ripon', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, second series, vol. 4 (1994), pp. 62-97, at pp. 75-82.

- 3.5.2 The Diocese of York, it found, ‘possesses a heavy population, a wide area and an incoherent territory’ (including the East Riding and parts of the North and West Ridings). If the diocese were reduced to York and the East Riding, it would be of ideal population size (500,000) with a manageable area. Given the Archbishop of York’s national responsibilities, it was desirable that his own diocese should not be too big.
- 3.5.3 In the committee’s view, the West Riding’s population was such that it needed two if not three dioceses in addition to the Diocese of Wakefield, with sees in Sheffield, Leeds and (if a third see were possible) Bradford.
- 3.5.4 If Dioceses of Leeds and Bradford were created, Ripon would lose almost all of its West Riding population. It was therefore suggested that the Diocese of Ripon could be refocused as the diocese for the North Riding, which was seen as another coherent area. If the Ripon, Knaresborough and Nidderdale areas were added to the North Riding the diocese’s population would be 450,000 and its area not much smaller than the reduced Diocese of York.
- 3.5.5 The committee also floated the possibility of a Diocese of Middlesbrough for the York part of the North Riding, but with the rather ambivalent comment that ‘There is much to be said for this scheme, provided an additional Bishopric in Yorkshire is practicable’. Such a diocese would in fact have rendered Ripon, with only the western half of the North Riding and without those areas of the West Riding that would become the Dioceses of Leeds and Bradford, unviable.³⁵

3.6 The Diocese of Sheffield (1913)

- 3.6.1 Progress towards the creation of a Diocese of Sheffield was already well advanced, and the Diocese was established in 1913. It comprised most of that part of the West Riding which was still in the Diocese of York, except that York retained the area immediately to the south and west of York itself.
- 3.6.2 Thus, the western part of the Diocese of Sheffield’s northern boundary is that established between the Dioceses of Ripon and York in 1836. To the east of that, the boundary is the southern and eastern boundary of the former Hemsworth and Pontefract Deaneries, which in 1913 remained in the Diocese of York but were later transferred to Wakefield. East of Knottingley, the boundary is the River Aire and then the River Ouse down to the Humber.
- 3.6.3 A small part of the Diocese of Southwell (which initially embraced Derbyshire as well as Nottinghamshire) that was now in the see city of Sheffield was also transferred to the Diocese of Sheffield when it was founded.

³⁵ ‘Report of the Committee of the Upper House on the Increase of the Episcopate’, *York Journal of Convocation* (1908), Appendix, pp. xiv-xix, at pp. xiv-xvii.

3.7 The Diocese of Bradford (1919)

- 3.7.1 By 1911 the population of the residual Diocese of Ripon (what remained after the southern part became the Diocese of Wakefield) had reached almost 1.2 million, and a need for division was generally felt.
- 3.7.2 The 1907 committee had proposed allocating the City of York and the East Riding only to the Diocese of York, making the Diocese of Ripon cover the whole of the North Riding, and dividing the West Riding into four dioceses: Wakefield, Sheffield, Bradford and Leeds. Four of the dioceses would have been comparable in population: Ripon (nearly 450,000), York (500,000), Bradford (475,000) and Leeds (525,000); Wakefield and Sheffield would be larger. Views about this radical proposal were mixed, however, and there was a certain lack of enthusiasm in Leeds itself for a Bishop of Leeds – not least in view of the prominent position and influence already enjoyed within Leeds by the Vicar of Leeds. Discussion rumbled on until 1913, when Archbishop Lang (who in 1909 had succeeded Archbishop Maclagan, who had been a member of the 1907 committee) informed the Bishop of Ripon that he was willing to support a new Diocese of Bradford once the Diocese of Sheffield had been established (as it was later that year) but was not prepared to give up York's part of the North Riding to Ripon. Without that addition to the Diocese of Ripon, a Diocese of Leeds could not be created, since the rump of the Diocese of Ripon, with only 100,000 inhabitants, would no longer be viable. The Diocese of Bradford was duly established in 1919.³⁶
- 3.7.3 The Diocese of Bradford comprises the western part of the former Diocese of Ripon (in modern terms: the Craven District, the areas that are now in Cumbria and Lancashire, the City of Bradford and the western fringe of the City of Leeds). Two parishes in the south-east of what is now the City of Bradford (Wyke and Tong) were transferred to the new diocese from Wakefield in 1919.

3.8 York-Wakefield Boundary Adjustment (1926)

- 3.8.1 In 1926 the Diocese of Wakefield was expanded to include the deaneries of Hemsworth and Pontefract, which had remained in the Diocese of York when the Diocese of Ripon was created in 1836 and again when the Diocese of Sheffield was formed in 1913. There has been no substantial change to the boundaries of the Yorkshire dioceses since 1926.

³⁶ Morrish, 'Leeds and the Dismemberment of the Diocese of Ripon', pp. 82, 85-86, 88-9, 93.

3.9 Roman Catholic and Methodist Boundaries

- 3.9.1 For most of the Church of England's ecumenical partners, Yorkshire falls within a single unit. The United Reformed, Baptist and Moravian Churches respectively have a Yorkshire Synod, Association and District. However, Yorkshire falls within three Roman Catholic dioceses (Hallam, Leeds, Middlesbrough) and five Methodist districts (Sheffield, West Yorkshire, Leeds, York and Hull, Darlington).
- 3.9.2 The Roman Catholic Diocese of Hallam, established in 1980, covers South Yorkshire, parts of the High Peak and Chesterfield Districts of Derbyshire, and the Bassetlaw District of Nottinghamshire. The Diocese of Leeds covers the former West Riding except for South Yorkshire. The Diocese of Middlesbrough covers the former North and East Ridings and the City of York.
- 3.9.3 Methodist districts consist of local churches rather than territorial parishes and thus the boundary between one district and another is often simply a line drawn half-way between the last church in one district and first in the next district. It is less precise than a diocesan boundary. Most Methodist districts are named after cities or towns and reflect their spheres of influence rather than the boundaries of the counties or districts within which they lie.
- 3.9.4 The areas covered by the five Methodist districts between which Yorkshire is divided are roughly as follows:
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| Sheffield: | South Yorkshire (except for four churches in the north-west of the Borough of Barnsley and a small area of Sheffield), most of northern Derbyshire (but not its western edge), most of northern Nottinghamshire and a small area of Lincolnshire. |
| West Yorkshire: | Four churches in the north-west of the Borough of Barnsley, the Boroughs of Kirklees and Calderdale, the City of Bradford and the Craven District of North Yorkshire. |
| Leeds: | The Cities of Wakefield and Leeds and part of the Harrogate District of North Yorkshire. |
| York and Hull: | The City of York, the East Riding and most of North Yorkshire. |
| Darlington: | The Boroughs of Stockton on Tees, Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland, the Richmondshire and Stokesley Districts of North Yorkshire and adjacent areas of North Yorkshire together with most of County Durham. |

3.10 Secular Boundary Changes

3.10.1 In 1974 two new counties were created within the former West Riding: South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire. Within them, local authorities were grouped together to form 'metropolitan boroughs'. South Yorkshire comprises the City of Sheffield and the Boroughs of Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham; West Yorkshire comprises the Cities of Bradford, Leeds and Wakefield and the Boroughs of Calderdale and Kirklees. Calderdale includes the former County Borough of Halifax; Kirklees includes the former County Boroughs of Huddersfield and Dewsbury. In 1986 the county councils were abolished and the metropolitan boroughs became unitary authorities. However, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire continue to be ceremonial counties, each with its own Lord Lieutenant. Various services (for example the police and the fire and rescue services) continue to be organized on a county basis.

3.10.2 Those parts of the West Riding that were not included in the new counties of South and West Yorkshire in 1974 were instead transferred to other counties, as follows:

- the M62 corridor east of Great Heck, with Goole and the Marshland, to Humberside (when Humberside was broken up in 1996 this area became part of the new East Riding of Yorkshire ceremonial county and the new East Riding unitary authority);
- the area east of Leeds and Wakefield was joined with the area of the former East Riding west of the River Derwent to form the Selby District of North Yorkshire;
- areas north of Bradford and Leeds formed the Craven and Harrogate Districts of North Yorkshire (the latter including a small part of the North Riding);
- areas north and west of the new Craven District were transferred to Lancashire and Cumbria.

3.10.3 The core of the North Riding, together with the northern fringe of the East Riding and the Selby District, became the new county of North Yorkshire. The City of York unitary authority forms part of the ceremonial county but is not in the administrative county.

3.10.4 The northern tip of the North Riding became part of County Durham. East of Darlington, a new county of Cleveland was formed, comprising areas on both sides of the River Tees. This was abolished with effect from 1996, the areas south of the Tees that had formerly been in the North Riding becoming part of the ceremonial county of North Yorkshire but remaining outside the administrative county. That area now forms the Borough of Redcar and Cleveland, the Borough of Middlesbrough and the southern part of the Borough of Stockton on Tees. These boroughs are unitary authorities.

3.10.5 The lack of correlation in many places between the diocesan boundaries and the new county boundaries within Yorkshire is one of the factors that prompted the present review.

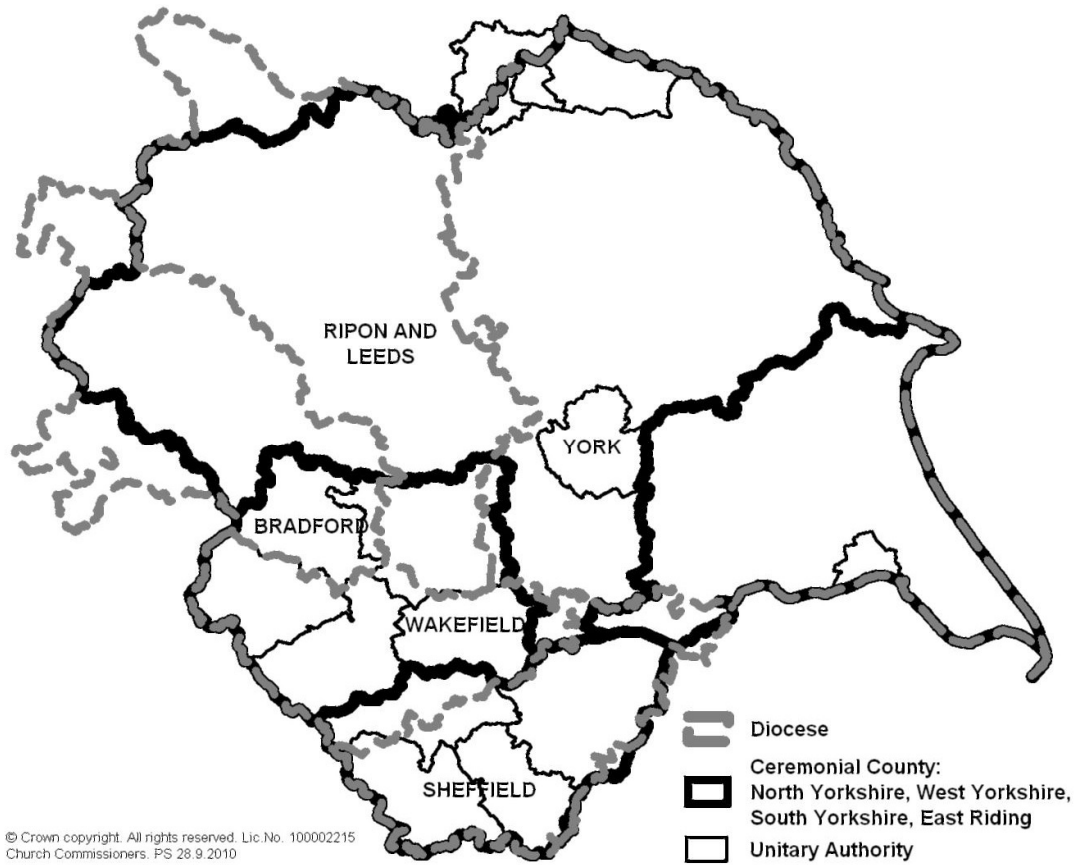


Figure 2: The Dioceses of Yorkshire