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The Chapel House Wood Landscape Project, Kilnsey, North Yorkshire.

1. Introduction

This is the first of two summary interim reports covering a long-term investigation in Upper Wharfedale. It will describe the background to the project and the earthwork survey, and will be followed by a second report summarising progress with the ongoing excavations. Although the report appears here in the bulletin of the Prehistory Research Section, the project is concerned with a multi-period landscape typical of many areas in the Craven uplands. These are nationally important palimpsests of human activity covering at least eight thousand years up to recent times (without, in this instance, including the evidence from caves in the area).

2. Background to the project

The significance of this particular piece of Dales landscape became apparent following fieldwork in the area with students from the Adult Education Department of the University of Leeds in the late 1990s (Martlew 2004). The project builds on preliminary surveys by Dr Arthur Raistrick in the mid-1960s and Stuart Ainsworth in the 1970s; sherds of Samian pottery collected from mole-hills prompted Raistrick to classify the Chapel House Wood settlement as a Romano-British hut circle with enclosures, although the entry in the Historic Environment Register now gives a somewhat broader possible date range from the late Bronze Age to Romano-British periods. Over 70 years ago Dr Raistrick produced the first survey of evidence for Iron Age settlement in the area (Raistrick 1937), but we still lack further work to refine this preliminary interpretation. Within a three-mile radius of Chapel House Wood a range of settlement types has been recorded, including isolated and grouped hut-circles set within small fields, blocks of co-axial field systems, enclosed settlements and complexes with multiple platforms suggesting the presence of both stone and timber buildings (Horne and Macleod 2001). In common with the rest of the Craven uplands, the evolution of this settlement pattern can only be guessed at by general analogy (Blood and Cater 1996), and our understanding at present is based primarily on surface surveys and an unknown amount of small-scale, unrecorded and/or unpublished digging. Careful examination of the existing surveys of Chapel House Wood revealed discrepancies and alternative interpretations as well as large unrecorded areas – the latter summed up by a rather desperate note on the edge of Stuart Ainsworth's plan, with arrows indicating that the 'field system continues'.

The Chapel House Wood Landscape Project was set up to tackle these issues and to provide fieldwork experience for students from the University of Leeds. As the project developed it attracted support from Earthwatch and the Center for Field Research, and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. The early stages of fieldwork were interrupted by restrictions due to foot and mouth disease in 2001, and then by Leeds University's decision to close its adult education department. The author set up the Yorkshire Dales Landscape Trust with the aim of continuing to provide support for community-based archaeology in the region, and the Trust is now developing an international Field School based on Chapel House Wood and the outstanding historic landscapes of upland Craven.

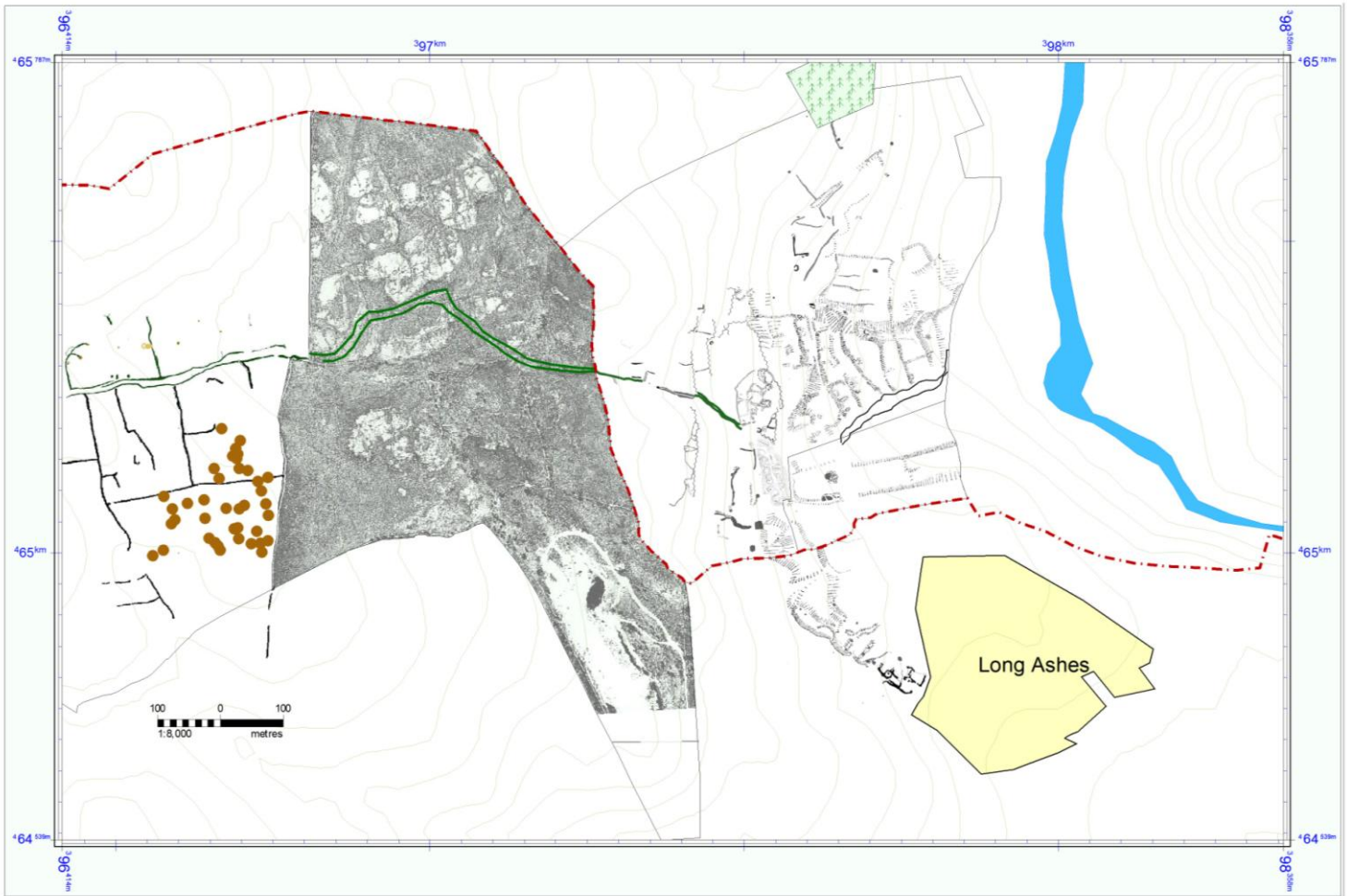


Fig. 1 The study area on the western side of the River Wharfe. The area that is now the northern part of Threshfield Quarry is shown as an extract from an aerial photograph taken before the quarry was extended. The dots in the western area mark the locations of newly-discovered cairns.

3. The landscape palimpsest

The study area lies on the western side of the River Wharfe, between Threshfield and Kilnsey (Fig 1), rising from the B6160 road at around 190m OD to the eastern edge of Malham Moor at around 350m OD. The area straddles the Threshfield/Kilnsey township boundary, occupying a position remote from the Medieval monastic grange and the present village at Kilnsey so earlier features can be expected to have a better chance of survival and visibility. The study area lies on limestone bedrock and is bisected by the northerly extension of Threshfield Quarry, and in common with most of the upper Dales it is under permanent pasture and rough grazing.

The only woodland at Chapel House Wood today comprises a few plantations of conifers and isolated thorn trees, but the mid-19th century Tithe Map suggests woodland across the whole area intersected by rides. There are records of small-scale lead mining in the area, including the Whitaway Mine which disappeared in the northern expansion of Threshfield Quarry (Gill 1994). Whitaker (1878, 529) interprets the place-name 'Chapel House' as indicating a monastic chapel serving the monks of Kilnsey, and if such existed it may lie beneath the Georgian house that bears the name, to the north of the study area and closer to the grange. The monastic records refer to the main activity of the region – managing large flocks of sheep on the Dales pastures and processing wool for home consumption and for export.

The Fountains Abbey rental for 1495-6 lists a close called 'Carlecroft' as part of the Chapel House farm (Michelmores 1994, 21). This name appears in other sources, and has particular significance for the work at Chapel House Wood. In the 12th century William son of Fulk of Threshfield donated land to the monks at Kilnsey from 'the

head of their culture called Carlecroft upon the bank of Wherf...'; the confirmation of this grant by his son Adam mentions 'the lower head of the same culture...' (Lancaster 1915, 1, 435). Fields with this name appear in the Tithe Award of 1845, occupying a narrow strip along the western bank of the River Wharfe on the edge of the project study area; it is also preserved in the name of a barn called Carlecroft Laithe which is shown on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey six inch map but no longer exists.

The name was therefore current in the Medieval period when this block of land was granted, but the boundary description makes no reference to an actual settlement. If the name can be taken to indicate the croft of a carle, with potentially Anglo-Scandinavian linguistic origins, it may indicate the surviving legacy of an older, abandoned, farmstead. The scant documentary evidence for the area does show that settlements have disappeared at various times, such as *Heurde* which is listed in Domesday Book between Kilnsey and Conistone (on opposite sides of the river Wharfe), and which may subsequently have become part of Conistone township (Faull and Stimson 1986, ii, 331 c, d and note 28W25). Such fluidity in the evolution of settlement patterns is to be expected, but can only be seen on a very coarse scale of resolution in the landscape evidence at present.

4. The earthwork survey: methods and results to date

A preliminary walk-over survey of the Chapel House Wood area produced a gazetteer of over 70 separate features of interest, with more expected to appear following further intensive work. A control network of reference points for the survey was set out initially using a total station, followed more recently by the use of differential GPS. Large area surveys were undertaken using a self-reducing alidade at scales of 1:1000 and 1:500, with detailed surveys of particularly complex evidence at larger scales using triangulation and off-set by tape. Surveys are scanned, and integrated using GIS software.

4.1 Settlement evidence

The existing record for this area almost certainly represents only the most visible end of the spectrum of surviving evidence – structures with upstanding stone walls or foundations, and building platforms cut into sloping ground. Evidence for timber

buildings is much harder to identify, and can be clearest when use was made of a steep slope to form one side of a lean-to building. Such evidence has emerged during the current survey and is the focus of continuing research, including the use of geophysical survey techniques where structures are suspected on more level ground.

There are two contrasting concentrations of structural remains in the heart of the Chapel House Wood study area, and this interim summary will concentrate on these. The northern settlement focus presents some problems of interpretation, since it is clearly not as simple as was originally supposed. Within a substantial stone bank, small garden plots are enclosed within rubble banks that run from two massively-walled structures. These differ in size and proportions, but have the same basic layout of a rectangle with one rounded end and a slight internal subdivision (Fig 2). In the northern structure, the curved end-wall is noticeably

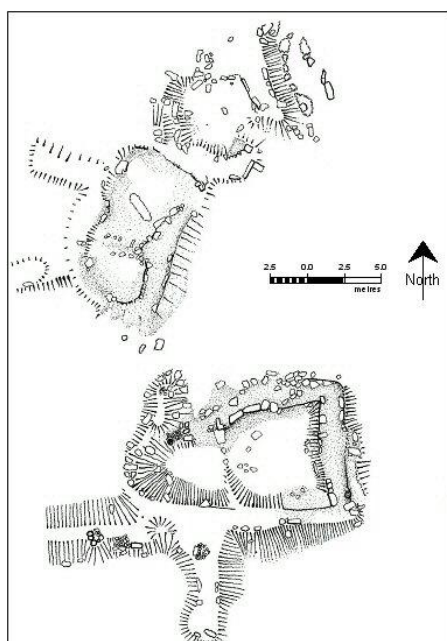


Fig. 2 The northern settlement focus

asymmetrical; short spurs of rubble bank project from each structure, creating a narrow entrance to the area between them. The larger of the two enclosures appears to have an entrance in the side wall, but there is no clear access point through the walling of the smaller structure. While it is conceivable that this latter structure could have been roofed, the larger enclosure would have required substantial timbers to bridge the five-metre width; it appears to have a beehive quern top-stone built into one of the walls.

This part of the settlement complex bears similarities to the remains on Greenber Edge in Wensleydale (Blood and Cater 1996). Rectangular buildings with internal subdivisions, some with curved gable ends, were recorded there in association with single-cell buildings, garden plots and stock yards. In the absence of any direct dating evidence it was felt that these structures belonged to the earlier part of a medieval phase of pastoral farming. Closer to Chapel House Wood an 'early upland steading' on Lea Green, north of Grassington, has been compared to earthworks at Crosby Ravensworth (Walton 1950) and appears to have a similar curved gable wall. This structure forms part of the extensive enclosed settlement that was dug into by the Upper Wharfedale Exploration Committee in the late 19th century (Speight 1895), and was thought to belong to the Romano-British and early medieval periods.

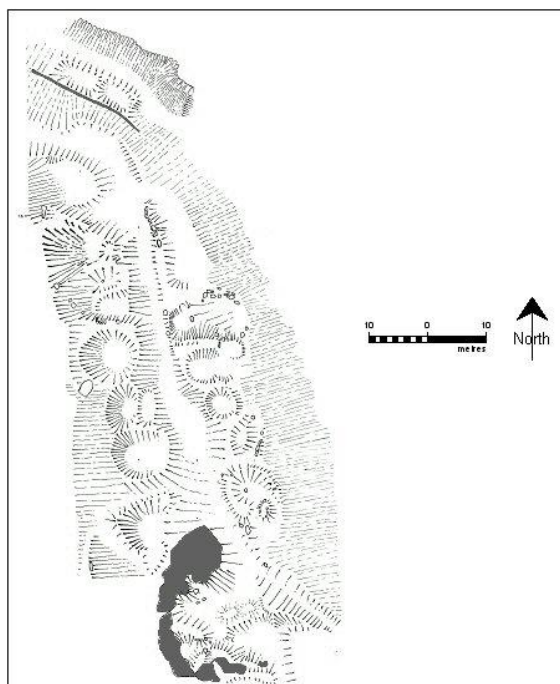


Fig. 3 The southern settlement focus

The contrasting southern settlement area at Chapel House Wood comprises a single stone-walled enclosure, and a series of platforms to the north of this along either side of a hollow way (Fig 3). The enclosure contains a sub-rectangular structure that is integral with the enclosing wall, and possible circular building platforms on the southern exterior. A large pile of boulders at the northern end of the enclosure appears to be more than just the remains of a collapsed structure: given the presence of a large lime kiln in the field below, it may represent a stockpile of stone that has been collected from the settlement area ready for burning. Apart from this puzzling element, the evidence suggests a series of building platforms and foundations representing a variety of structures. Some may be quarries, as suggested by Raistrick, but the absence of signs of walling implies that

some of the platforms may have supported timber buildings (notwithstanding any stone robbing that may have resulted in the present appearance of the remains).

A crucial question arising from this detailed survey work is whether the differences between these two zones represents changes over time, with 'settlement shift' along the hillside, functional differences or a combination of both. Independent dating has to be obtained by more invasive means, and is essential if the interpretation of this and comparable landscapes is to progress beyond speculation.

4.2 Fields and droveways

The main settlement zone occupies a natural terrace with fields and enclosures on the hillside above and below. Plough-lynchets have accentuated natural steps created by the limestone bedrock, and trackways run through the area to provide access through the fields to the settlement zone. The most significant track follows a

natural cleft in the limestone between the two settlement areas, and continues up the hill past further fields as a hollow way (Fig. 1). Aerial photographs taken before Threshfield Quarry was extended show this track continuing towards the eastern edge of Malham Moor, where it is associated with a large area of boulder-defined fields. As a natural access route following the local topography this track could have been used over many centuries if not millennia: it gives access from the lower valley slopes to the high grazing land, and it also passes the lead veins that were certainly exploited in historic times. One of Raistrick's map annotations labels the track as 'monastic droveway', based presumably on the circumstantial documentary evidence for summer sheep-grazing on the higher ground of Malham Moor. These sources, though, make explicit mention only of Chapel House and Kilnsey. The current project is investigating the hypothesis that each of these medieval farms had their own access routes to the summer pastures (that from Kilnsey making use of the long-distance route along Mastiles Lane), so the droveway identified at Chapel House Wood may have been associated with a separate farm (potentially the Carlecroft identified in the river-side field names), and need not be restricted to inferred monastic connections.

Evidence for at least two phases of fields has been identified by detailed survey work, with traces of an early co-axial system apparently relating to the settlement zone. Superficially, two areas of contrasting earthworks appear to be separated by the glacial melt-water channel that cuts a steep-sided gully down the hillside: to the south are the imposing lynchets of long, broad fields running both along and across the contour, while to the north there are fewer, less well-developed lynchets but also the remains of irregular stone-walled enclosures, at least one 'hut circle' and occasional small cairns (Fig 1). It is interesting to note that the township boundary runs across the middle of one of the fields to the south of the settlement zone. A significant linear bank and ditch runs up the hillside across the northern zone, and appears to turn a right-angle in the bottom of the melt-water channel and continue towards Kilnsey. The project is investigating whether this has any significance in the light of the record of William of Threshfield's grant of land in the 12th century.

5. Conclusions

By bringing together detailed and comprehensive survey evidence for the first time, the project is allowing new hypotheses to be developed about a substantial block of historic landscape in the Yorkshire Dales. The project is challenging theories based on existing records of the area, and is developing more detailed and sophisticated ideas for further examination. The initial results suggest that a block of land granted to Fountains Abbey in the 12th century may have been based on an abandoned early medieval farmstead, the origins of which may lie even further back in the past. The implications of this relate back to our understanding of how the landscape of Upper Wharfedale was divided between dispersed farms, each with access to the River Wharfe and to upland grazing areas. This settlement pattern evolved throughout what was essentially a prehistoric period, but on present evidence alone any attempt at dating by analogy requires caution. The archaeological investigations that develop these themes and provide further new evidence will be presented in the next interim report.

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