

GLOSSOPDALE & LONGDENDALE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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GLAS is a member of the Greater Manchester Archaeological Federation
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Report for the Derbyshire HER on possible field boundaries at Brown Hill, Whitfield, Glossop, centred at SK 041 928

Summary

Evidence of multiple field boundaries or terraces on a west-facing hillside south-east of Whitfield village was observed and photographed from Lees Hall in March 2009. These features are adjacent to two similar independent observations. Their date is unknown, but they appear to be unrelated to the known mediaeval field system of the village and may possibly be Romano-British.

Previous observations

Wightman, W.E, "Open Field Agriculture in the Peak District" , Derbyshire Archaeological Journal Vol LXXI 1961 pages 110-125, refers to "*faint traces of an open field system at Charlestown*" at SK 037 927, immediately south-west of Whitfield Green and close to the line of the ancient way from the south. This may have been a horizontal observation from the modern road, Chunal Lane, the A624, but if so it cannot now be replicated due to tree growth.

In 2006 Dr Paul Brotherton, then Secretary of GLAS, filed with the HER a report identifying possible Romano-British or mediaeval field boundaries at Chunal at SK 035 923, and this is recorded as HER no 3696.

This observation

In early March 2009, at 8.30 am on a frosty morning with low sun, the late Dr Bill Hood, who was then completing his MA on Field Names in North Derbyshire, took from an upstairs window at his house, Lees Hall, two horizontal images (attached) of the western slope of Brown Hill opposite, which show a series of up to 16 distinct linear features roughly aligned to the contours. When plotted on a map (attached), they appear to be at fairly regular intervals of about 25 metres, and up to 250 metres in length. As the land to the north-west of Lane Ends Farm is out of shot, and the site identified by Wightman south-west of Whitfield Green is obscured by trees, it cannot be assumed that the images show the full extent of these features or that they are not continuous with the features noted by Wightman.

The features are not aligned with the present field boundaries and must therefore predate them. The present boundaries on the southern and eastern part the site, plus the line of Kidd Road, were determined by the 1813 Whitfield Enclosure Act, this land presumably being open common prior to that date. The remaining land is described on the plan to the Act as "ancient enclosures", and the date of these is unknown, but it is clear from the map that they were created in a planned manner,

possibly in phases, rather than by piecemeal assarting of land from the common, and it is likely that they date from the establishment of Lane Ends Farm some time between the late C17th – mid C18th.

Discussion

The features recorded by Dr Hood on Brown Hill appear to be either raised field or strip boundaries (balks), or possibly terraces given that they run across a slope of about 1 in 7. Whitfield is a “Domesday village” which had an open field system, the fossilised boundaries of which are apparent on C19th maps, and one possibility is that these features represent a part of this system which was later abandoned to common.

This is, however, unlikely for three reasons:

1. The visible field system is, at about 25 hectares, around the average for the larger of the 12 Domesday villages in the Manor of Glossop. The features on Brown Hill could, however, potentially cover a similar area, which would have made Whitfield far larger in terms of open arable acreage than the other villages (including Glossop and Charlesworth, the two mediaeval market centres) and there is no documentary evidence for this, nor for a separate “lost” village.
2. Abandoned open arable fields normally reverted not to common but to enclosed pasture, with the boundaries preserved as “fossil open fields.” As the open-field systems in the Manor were relatively small and sheep farming was a major source of income at least during the later mediaeval period, there would always have been a need for enclosures beyond the open fields, and it is likely that because of the increased concentration on sheep farming the open fields themselves were largely converted to pasture during the C16th.
3. In 1972-4 Peter Wroe and Peter Mellor traced the Brough-Melandra Roman road from Brough to Hobhill, on the edge of Whitfield village, cutting two sections on the line where it runs between these features and the visible field system. They found intact surfaces at a depth of only 45 cm, making it unlikely that this area had ever been ploughed to any depth, and therefore indicating that the two systems are separate.

Taking into account also the steepness of the slope, the presence of the Roman road and the proximity to the garrison and *vicus* at Melandra, this appears to point to a greater likelihood of a Romano-British than a mediaeval date. Dr Hood (*pers.comm*) observed that “*they seem to fit into the description of Romano-British fields given in Barnatt and Smith's 'The Peak District: Landscapes before Time' pp 49-53 i.e small, irregular shapes and in some cases having parallel narrow strips, with banked land divisions.*”

Roger Hargreaves

18/2/16

Attached:

Photographs - Whitfield enclosures 1 and 2 (Bill Hood)

Plan of boundaries derived from the photographs



Possible field boundaries at Brown Hill, Whitfield, Glossop

