

HOW FAR CAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY DEMONSTRATE HUMAN ACTIVITY ON THE LANDSCAPE SURROUNDING THE VILLAGE OF PRESTON-UNDER-SCAR IN NORTH YORKSHIRE?

Introduction

Preston-under-Scar is a small village (c.170 inhabitants) situated on the south facing slopes of Wensleydale (SE07059115) some 4km to the northwest of Leyburn. The settlement appears little changed over time and the aim of this investigation is to establish the level of impact human activity has had on Preston and its environs.

Methodology

The following record holding establishments were visited:-

- The Yorkshire Dales Sites and Monuments Records (SMR)
- The North Yorkshire SMR
- North Yorkshire County Archives Office
- North Yorkshire County Library

The following sources were consulted:-

- Previous archaeological records
- Archive mapping
- Archaeological internet sites
- Local history and archaeological books
- Local historians and residents
- Aerial photographs
- Ordnance Survey maps (OS)

The area was visited and a walk over survey undertaken. The results, including the abstraction, analysis, synthesis and interpretation of information, will be divided into five topic headings: -

- Farming and field systems
- Settlement
- Route ways
- Ritual landscape
- Industry

Results

Farming and Field Systems

The Domesday Book of 1086 predates the village but mentions a small community that was taxed for the use of two ploughs on a small manor. Physical evidence uncovered from field walking and the study of the cartographic evidence shows evidence of earlier farming. Modern OS map show a settlement and field system to the east of the village (SE0818 9114). Although recorded by the SMR evidence is extremely limited. A 1977 survey (SE09SE03) interprets the remains as three

rectangular buildings and a circular enclosure, possibly of Iron Age origin. The remains of severely damaged walls show fields measuring approximately 20m² and evidence of lynchets. Similar systems possibly lie to each side of this site. Modern farming methods have added much to erosion of this site. A lack of research makes correct interpretation of the site difficult. A copy map from the 1977 survey plus oblique and vertical aerial photographs from 1990 (Appendix A) show the visible remains. Field walking of land to the south of this settlement could provide results that allow a better interpretation of the site.

To the west of Preston lies a better preserved site, which is also pre-historic (SE06559155). Only two sources for information were identified. Firstly the 1914 six inch OS map (Appendix I) that shows the site as 'foundations'. The second is local resident Edward Fawcett. Rapid field survey gives approximate measurements of 250m x 30m, consisting of at least seven rectangular buildings and three circular enclosures that are similar in size to those at the opposite end of the village. The circular enclosures are similar in design and size to the recorded 'Celtic' fields at West Burton, some five miles further west. If the circular structures are enclosures then they are more indicative of the Bronze Age. These structures are now preserved *in situ* in an area of woodland. Natural decay and stone robbing to construct later barns and walls have had a destructive affect on the site. It is difficult to interpret the taphonic process without excavation. Bio and cryoturbatory influences will take a greater effect on the destruction over the years, but at this time it is still possible to make out entrances and straight lined edging stones. The remains are under 0.5m high and now have a spread width of up to 2m.

This site is much longer than the one to the east, and therefore it is safe to assume there would have been a larger population. If so, then these people had to survive by some form of farming. What evidence is there to show a farming subsistence for these people? The escarpment behind this settlement (Spring Wood) consists of several levels which can be interpreted as lynchets. The outer edge of each level is bordered intermittently with orthostatic stones laid in linear fashion. Others are placed at right angles forming small rectangular fields. Orthostatic stones, in some of the boundary walls, indicate that they could be Iron or Bronze Age structures. Difficulties arise in surveying the lynchets because of the excessive undergrowth. Rapid survey shows at least five different levels that run to a length of up to 0.5km. Without proper surveying and recording it is not possible to obtain an accurate representation of these structures. As the area of lynchets is now scrubland with no farming they remain well preserved.

Muir (2000) states there is 'no single form of field system' which is confirmed by today's OS map. By examining modern field boundaries and going through a regressive process, it is possible to gain an insight into past field systems. . Traces of medieval long strip are evident to the south and west of the village. Some walls seem to have been dissected by the Wensley to Redmire road, indicating that the fields are older than the road. The earliest mention of a routeway is at a Quarter Sessions in 1675 when it was referred to as the 'ancient and common highway from Wensley to Preston, Ridmer and Bolton (and) is in great decay'. Some indication of the age of the road can be gained when it is referred to as 'ancient' in 1675.

Further evidence to show the existence of medieval long strips can be seen in the extensive survival of ridge and furrow. The 1959 OS map (Appendix B) plots the remains and direction of existing ridge and furrow. It can clearly be seen from this map and the 1971 aerial photographs (Appendix C) that the ridge and furrow follow the line of the fields in a predominantly north to south direction. All run with the gradient, indicative of this farming method. However, over the years these fields have been divided and then sub divided into smaller units.

The earliest known map (Godson 1737) shows small fields separated by hedged boundaries. Following the post-medieval period there has been a reversal to the smaller fields with the enjoinment of fields. Hedges have disappeared over time and not replaced, accounting for the larger modern fields we see today. The collapse of stone walls (indicated by lines of dots on Appendix C) is a further indication of how larger fields have formed from the collapse of walls separating two smaller fields.

There are no physical remains of the medieval three field system. Field names from the village map of 1841 (Appendix D) gives an indication that this system may have been incorporated. 'Lays' indicates fallows field once cultivated. There are several fields around the village with a suffix of 'Lays'.

The maps of 1799 and 1803 which are of unknown origin (Appendix E & F) show huge expanses of open common and moorland to the north of the village. The first Parliamentary Enclosure Acts to affect Preston came into force in 1819. The subsequent maps of 1841 and 1869 Tithe map (Appendix D & G) show the effects of enclosure. Huge rectangular fields that can be seen today are an excellent example of the regular pattern of enclosed fields brought about by wealthy landowners through Parliamentary enclosure.

Another example of post-medieval fields can be seen to the rear of each property in the village. Small garths, used to grow vegetables and tend domestic stock, can be seen on the earliest map of 1799 (Appendix E). These enclosures have altered little since the construction of the individual properties.

'The ages of a field are to divide a land unit into a function sub unit suitable for use at a given level of technology, to give a physical expression to aspects of the property system and to confine livestock in suitable groups and to prevent them destroying crops and interfering with each other' (Muir 2000). All three aspects are exemplified during the pre-historic, medieval and post-medieval periods.

Settlement

Preston is a settlement that has changed little since the medieval period. It has always been a working village as opposed to a wealthy one.

Field walking, research of old maps and SMR documents reveal that earliest settlements lie to the east and west of the village. These small Bronze or Iron Age settlements do not have a well defined structure and are more of a linear scatter of buildings, dwellings or enclosures. The poor condition of these abandoned structures and lack of recorded information makes identification and use difficult to interpret. Migration of prehistoric settlement is common but it cannot be said with certainty

which direction this migration has taken. If the previous survey of the eastern settlement correctly identifies the settlement as Iron Age, and the comparisons with known Bronze Age sites at West Burton correctly identify the western site as Bronze Age, then we could say the migration was from the older west site to east. It seems ironic, therefore, that the west site is better preserved, having avoided modern ploughing and reclamation of uncultivated land. The size of both sites and the use of stone on a large scale indicate they were permanent as opposed to temporary settlements. When viewed from across the valley, house platforms are clearly visible at the west end of the village. Closer inspection by field walking revealed some small or partially in filled ditches adjacent to the platforms. Local resident, Edward Fawcett has identified the anomalies on his land over many years of farming.

The migration from east and west has resulted in a nucleus that is now the present village.

There is no supportive evidence to show the present settlement as a polyfocal village. It is not on a link route. Why the village was built at this location cannot be accurately stipulated. Historical research has shown that the majority of nucleation settlements occur between AD850 and 1050, continuing through to AD1200 (Muir 2000). These dates coincide with the change to open strip field systems. Individual farmsteads or hamlets would have found themselves obstructing an open field system. Occupants moved to nucleated settlements and their former dwellings and buildings were abandoned and lost in the new agricultural system. There is no evidence of isolated farmsteads, with the exception of Tullis Cote, a farm situated east of the village (SE07889091). It is therefore probable that the earliest inhabitants of the village moved there to accommodate new farming methods.

There is further evidence to support the view that Preston originates in the early medieval period. Historical records from nearby Jervaulx Abbey show that lead for the abbey roof was mined from land around the village. Industrial archaeology is discussed in detail below but it can be seen from church and estate records that the population of the village fluctuated with the highs and lows of the mining industry.

Today, as in medieval times, the land around the village was in the hands of estate owners (Bolton Estate). Buildings built by the estate tend to follow a regular pattern. Toft rows are small dwellings attached to paddocks or crofts, all stretching back to the same boundary. Examination of old and modern maps and a field walk of the village, shows this pattern in the village. This supports the theory that the estate owners built these houses – probably for miners who were employed in his lead and coal mines. This is supported by Bolton Estate tenancy records.

Routeways

Even today Preston is an isolated settlement. Access seems to have been awkward for most of the village history. The first recorded documentary evidence is the Turnpike, but there must have been earlier links to the village. The Roman road from Ingleton to Bainbridge (Cam High Road) is well documented, and there are remains of a small fort at Bainbridge (Virosidum). There was a large Roman settlement at Catterick. The route of the Roman road from Bainbridge has been lost, but it is not unfeasible for the road to have continued eastwards onto the Scarth Nick Road which rises above

Preston and directly to Catterick. Bainbridge is only 9km from Preston and from the top of Scarth Nick looking south west the linear Cam High Road can be seen forming a straight line, but maintaining the alignment of the road to Catterick. Roman influence is further evidenced within a mile of the village by the remains of a marching fort in the valley bottom (SE08358929).

Early records of industry at Preston relate to lead mining. Ecclesiastical records show that lead from Keld Heads was used on the roof of Jervaulx Abbey, a large Cistercian monastery 7km southeast of Preston. A transport link was required to connect the mine to the existing east west routeway along Wensleydale. This is now the main road onto the village, passing the mine site 0.5km to the east.

During the mid eighteenth century construction began on the Richmond to Lancaster Turnpike road, opening up the area to business and commerce. This incorporated the Roman road from Catterick and by-passed the village at Scarth Nick. Parish records show the existence in 1751 of a turf roofed gate house at the bottom of Scarth Nick. There are no visible signs of the gatehouse now but cartographical research shows the existence of a building at the bottom of Scarth Nick in 1799 (Appendix E) but not on the 1841 map (Appendix D).

Further cartographical research and Enclosure of Commons legislation evidences the replacement of a path with a road north of the village at the turn of the nineteenth century. The map of 1803 (Appendix F) shows a gate and path as the only link to the north. The 1819 Enclosure of Commons Act led to the construction of what was called the Preston Turf Road. This ran from the east end of the village, directly north and joined the Richmond to Lancaster turnpike road. The road not only acted as a transport link but as a boundary for enclosure of land by Lord Bolton. The 1841 map (Appendix D) shows a substantial road replacing the pre-existing track.

Preston once had two approaches from the Wensley to Redmire Road. The parallel lanes separated by only two fields are evident on the earliest maps. Known as 'Dark and Light' lanes, they can clearly be seen on the 1856 map (Appendix H). The 1914 map (Appendix I) shows the existence of the eastern Light Lane. It is not known why Dark Lane was abandoned. It exists only in the form of a public footpath now.

Apart from road links, the only other form of transport to have an influence on Preston is rail. The Leyburn to Askrigg line was opened in 1877 and closed in 1954 running on flat land to the south of the village. The most obvious and beneficial use of the line was for transport of lead from the Keld Heads mine. There is evidence of quite substantial sidings at the mine. The rail plans (Appendix J) show how close the track ran to the mine. The planners of this line obviously had no affinity for antiquity or for tenants as is evidenced by the line running through field systems, lanes and the only remaining known Bronze Age tumulus in the area. The tumulus can be seen on modern OS maps, with the now closed railway running through it's south side.

Following closure of the railway the village reverted to a road network sufficient only for local's purpose.

Ritual Landscape

Preston under Scar and its environs could hardly be described as a ritual landscape. Currently there is only one recorded site with ritual connections. This is a bowl barrow sited south of the village (NYM20856 / SE06789079). It is possible that there are other unknown sites on moorland above the village that remain unrecorded. It is likely that any similar sites have been removed through extensive quarrying that took place on land above the village during the first half of the twentieth century.

It can be seen why Hawkes placed religion and ritual on the upper rungs of his ladder of inference (after Hawkes 1954). Although the site was accurately recorded by ground level survey and fieldwork, associated ritual remains an enigma.

It is not uncommon for several Bronze Age or Neolithic barrows to be found together in a landscape. It is therefore unusual that only one known sites exists today. This makes it unique for this area. Further landscape archaeology in the form of field walking across the moors may reveal other ritual sites. No known excavation has taken place and therefore information from artefacts is non existent. The tumulus occupies a magnificent position. This site, on a flat plain, must have been chosen specifically. Looking directly south from the tumulus, it is seen that the site lies directly in line with the centre of massive Penhill. In assessing the monument for English Heritage Newton eloquently says “They are a major historic element in a modern landscape and their considerable variation of form and longevity as a monument of type provide important information on the diversity of beliefs and social organisations amongst early prehistoric communities”.

The site has suffered erosion by natural and cultural factors over the years. Cryo and bio turbatory influences are evident, but the most dramatic influence on the tumulus did not occur until the 1870’s when the Leyburn to Askrigg railway line cut through the south side of the monument causing irreversible damage. More modern thinking and a desire to preserve our heritage should hopefully ensure that the site lasts another 3500 years.

Preston actually means “farm or houstead of the priest(s)”. It seems ironic therefore, not to find a church in the village until the late nineteenth century. It is known from parish records that members of the village travelled the short distance to the church at Wensley. It may be that members of the clergy lived in Preston or that monks from nearby Jervaulx Abbey resided there on a temporary basis. Jervaulx owned land in and around the village and eked an income from use of this land. The 1856 map (Appendix H) shows a chapel situated above the village. Earlier maps do not show such a building. There are no other records of this ecclesiastical building. Field walking does not support the existence of a building. It is extremely unusual for there not to be an existing record of a church. Is it therefore a cartographical error?

Christianity has not had a great influence on the landscape of this area. Methodists founded a chapel in the late nineteenth century and a modern grave yard can be found on a small plot of land outside the village.

Industry

Probably the greatest influence upon the landscape around Preston has come from industry. The people of Preston have eked out an existence from beneath the land since medieval times. Mining and quarrying have left huge scars on the landscape. In it's heyday of the mid nineteenth century lead mining at Keld Heads was the most productive in the country. The earliest documentary records show lead extraction from shafts in Condenser Wood and Preston Moor. Condenser Wood contained the whole of the Keld Heads lead mining complex and followed the natural line of the Chayter vein. Dips and hollows in the ground similar to natural sink holes can be seen following the vein up and across the moor. The waste from one shaft was infill for its neighbour. Some shafts were sunk up to a depth of 30m with lead extraction ceasing when the ore was exhausted, water became too much of a problem or the air polluted. The shafts are too numerous to count. They are clearly seen on the O.S. map and are exemplified on an aerial photograph of the Preston Moor (Appendix K).

Advances in industrial technology during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to the sinking of levels to greater lengths and depths both at Keld Heads (SMR 28242 / SE07939076) and at Cobscar on Preston Moor (SMR 34827 / SE05169305). This one small area contains almost the whole history of lead mining since the medieval period. Additionally, the whole production process can be found contained in these two mines; from extraction to the finished item. Keld Heads mine is quite a rare industrial archaeological landscape. Each feature of the lead mining industry can be seen inter-linking with the next. The original shaft can be seen intersected by the later level. Above this stand the substantial structures of the power house, engine house and chimney. The power house is one of the oldest brick built buildings in Wensleydale. The chimney, like that at Cobscar is a prominent feature on the landscape. Housing for the water wheel remains, situated at the old shaft entrance. Further up the gill is the Peat House which is in excellent restorative condition and is the only building still in use. Progressing further up the gill, are two smelting mills, Condenser House (giving its name to the wood) a water wheel housing, plus water settling beds. All are linked by a large double flue that runs eventually 3km to the Cobscar chimney. There is in effect a passage back in time, the further up the gill you precede. Older workings, including the original smelt mill and further shafts, are found in the middle section of the gill. Opportunities exist to examine the remaining structures and to show how new buildings have been built over existing ones. The waste tips allow opportunities to examine the effectiveness of the extraction process.

Water was a vital component in the lead mining process and a reserve was required. The stream within the gill was dammed to form three reservoirs during the eighteenth century. These structures, which altered the course of the stream, still remain in a remarkably good condition.

The double flue, which at the time of its construction was the longest in the country, terminates at the older Cobscar mine, on Preston Moor. This mine remained remarkably intact until the 1940s. The army then used the buildings for target practice. Old pit shafts litter the moor and surround the whole mine. The remains of

the smelt mill, engine floor, dressing floor and chimney, are still prominent landscape features. The surrounding moor is covered with waste from the 250m deep shaft.

Adjacent to the mine is a single wall of a building. The Calamine House was constructed to maximise the efficiency of production by extracting zinc from waste materials.

To the north of Cobscar mine lies an area riddled with bell pits used in the extraction of coal. During the medieval period through to the seventeenth and eighteenth century, this was one of the most productive coal mining areas in the Yorkshire Dales.

The mining of lead ceased towards the end of the nineteenth century but was followed almost immediately by limestone quarrying. Huge areas of Preston Pasture and the adjacent Redmire Moor have disappeared to quarrying. Nobody will know what, if anything, of archaeological interest has disappeared. Records of the local SMR show flint finds from the Neolithic period around the edges of the quarry (NYM reference 11576 & 15679). It has been argued that a larger ring cairn may have existed at the top of Scarth Nick adjacent to the edge of the quarry. Remains of a ditch and embankment can be seen, but until a full field study is conducted, the argument for the existence of a ring cairn will be flawed. From these few finds, it may be reasonable to assume that something of antiquity has been lost.

Conclusion

The industrial archaeological remains, like the earlier settlements and field systems have all under gone erosion from both weathering and changes in human activity. The type and nature of erosion varies from location to location, but the overall survival as it stands is uncertain. Local historians, like Ian Spensley, have made excellent records of the industrial archaeological landscape but its actual survival will depend on positive intervention to prevent further decay.

An initial impression of the area around Preston being of archaeological interest is not expected. A holistic picture reveals a different landscape. A landscape that archaeological survey reveals as sites of different types forming a continuous structure across the landscape, but with some sites having a specific role within that landscape.

A proliferation of field systems and industrial archaeology combined with a ritual site and communication routes of varying ages have formed the nucleus of the present settlement. This gives a strong foundation on which to base detailed archaeological research. Ground working could reveal a landscape of antiquity, especially in relation to prehistory in an area that is generally devoid of such sites. Without ground work and excavation no amount of survey will reveal an accurate interpretation. However, even without a correct interpretation, it can still be said that Preston and its environs are a landscape extensively modified by human activity.