

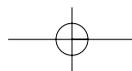
# 4

## Research

### 4.1 Stephenson Ground Scale: a Gateway to the Past



**Photo 59** Burial cairn with cist at Stephenson Haw



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### 'It started with a cist'\*

'When, in 1983, I came across an obviously important grave just sitting in the middle of the fell, it was frustrating that although various people in the neighbourhood knew it was there, nobody had the slightest idea why, where, or for how long, it had been there.'

So wrote Penni Harvey-Piper of Stephenson Ground Farm. She was not to know how this discovery would influence her own life over the next 15 years and, through her photographs and records, stimulate many others to look beyond the beauty of the fells.

The R2R project has encouraged many to see what she saw and experience the excitement of looking back in time. Our thanks go to Penni for her continued interest, and the loan of her personal records of the major excavation at the site in the Lickle Valley.

Peter Ball commented in his *Guide to the Archaeology of Stephenson Ground Scale*, 'It is worth reflecting at this point just how ephemeral Bronze-age upland archaeology tends to be. There was absolutely no visible trace of this site above ground when the project started in 1986. It was therefore a pleasant surprise to discover the site but it also demonstrates how the picture of Bronze-age settlement in the area will always be haphazard and related to chance discovery.'

With these 'opportunities' in mind, over 30 novice archaeologists from the Duddon Valley Local History Group set out to discover and, more importantly, record their findings in the Duddon and Lickle valleys.

As the site at Stephenson Ground Scale fell within the overall project area, we were required to re-survey and record the excavation area. Unfortunately,

what we were able to see were the covered sites of the excavations that had taken place over a period of 10 summers, and the impact of re-growth of grass and bracken over the last 12 years. By carefully walking the area, particularly in the winter when the bracken is dead, many of the outline features became clearer, but without the depth of excavation, the true extent of the site is difficult to appreciate.

In an attempt to recognise the importance and diversity of this relatively small area (SD 240945), the record of the excavations provides the best interpretation of the many discoveries. The following is a potted summary of these records.

Beneath the northernmost of three cairns and extending over a large area to its west, a substantial spread of Bronze Age material was found. This included fragments of pottery as well as flint tools. Evidence of flint waste shows that flint was collected as pebbles on the coast and brought up into the valley where tools were fashioned as required. Large amounts of charcoal and other clear signs of occupation were found but no evidence of features such as post-holes, trenches or walls, suggesting no substantial building ever existed on this part of the site.

Heading towards the impressive waterfall, you reach a fairly level patch of drier ground surrounded by many large stones. This is the site of an irregular oval shaped early medieval longhouse (Photos 9 and 61). The building is aligned east/west and is 12 metres long. Constructed of two rows of large boulders forming the base of the wall, with a second single row placed on top, these would probably have been covered in turf after being in-filled with soil and rubble. Timbers would have sloped inwards from the base of the wall to form the roof, and were probably thatched with bracken. This construction design is very rare amongst British medieval buildings, most of which tend to be rectangular. Closest parallels to this

\* With apologies to Errol Brown and his hit song, this seems an appropriate way to introduce this section of the book.

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site can be found on the Isle of Man, in Shetland and Orkney and the Western Isles of Scotland, all areas settled by Norse farmers from the tenth century. The shape of this structure, as well as finds such as a sharpening stone, suggest that this building was influenced by Norse design, but radiocarbon dates have indicated a later date in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Protruding stones in the floor of the building mark post-holes that would have held roof

supports and internal divisions probably gave an area for livestock, providing protection from predators and warmth for the human occupants.

Moving on to the upper part of the Scale, much more activity becomes obvious. A Bronze Age roundhouse was indicated by a circle of post-holes four metres in diameter that would have supported a roof extending to a diameter of 10 metres (Photo 60). Internal features of stake holes, fire pit and shallow

**Photo 60** Stephenson Ground Bronze Age hut excavation (conducted before the R2R project) (The small upright stones mark the positions of the excavated postholes) (© LDNPA)





**Photo 61** Stephenson Ground Longhouse excavation (conducted before the R2R project) (© LDNPA)

pits were discovered, suggesting a more permanent house occupied year round in the warmer Bronze Age climate. Sherds of pottery as well as flint tools and production flakes were also found. This site was discovered by accident when the remains of a much later medieval shieling above it were being excavated, built some 1,500 years later. This shows the importance of sheltered and dry locations.

About twenty metres north of the roundhouse site, in a large, natural, wet depression surrounded by crags on its north and east sides, are the remains of a large building, having twin walls approximately nine metres

by five metres in dimension. At the south-west end of the building is an area three metres by one and a half metres of flag stones, probably used as a sleeping platform. A large concentration of charcoal along with several fragments of iron were found within a large dump of material against an inner wall. To the south of the building, several layers of cobbles had been thrown into a boggy area to consolidate the surface. In the unsettled times of the fourteenth century, this well-concealed site would have had a higher priority as a safe dwelling area than avoidance of the wet conditions that surrounded it.



**Photos 62 and 63** Two of the finds from the Stephenson Ground Scale dig. On the left are sherds of fifteenth century pottery. On the right is a bead found in the longhouse site.

Just 20 metres north from the double-walled house, built on much drier ground, are the remains of a sixteenth-century shieling. Some well faced stones and through stones, along with finely built corners exist, but much would have been robbed to construct the later fell wall. Sherds of pottery dating from the fifteenth or sixteenth century were all that were found during excavation (Photos 62 and 63).

A little south of this building lies a semi-circular, rough wall enclosure, with no evidence of a laid surface. Finally, uphill to the west, near to the fell wall, is a smaller, probably later, post-medieval structure.

Unfortunately, most of the stones have been robbed to build the fell wall although a small portion remains, suggesting a size of five metres by five metres.

The excavation at Stephenson Ground Scale revealed a variety of late medieval shieling huts, a very rare double-sided building, a medieval longhouse and two Bronze Age sites. This suggests that the Lickle Valley has been occupied for at least the last 3,500 years.

A display of finds from the Stephenson Ground Scale dig, and various leaflets, can be seen in the Broughton-in-Furness Information Centre.

## 4.2 A History of Pikeside Farm

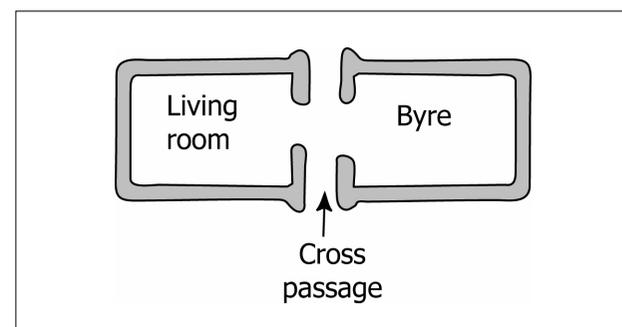
Pikeside Farm is in the Parish of Ulpha and is situated at the upper limit of improved land in the Duddon Valley at a height of 250 metres. Remarkably for such an exposed situation, the area around the farm has been occupied, at least intermittently, since pre-historic times. We know this because it is scattered with archaeological evidence of previous occupancy (see Map 5). This includes a hut circle, an enclosure, lazy beds and clearance cairns, as well as more recent evidence of mining and charcoal burning.

We found some ruined structures situated to the south east of the present farm, near a large ruined barn, which were particularly interesting. The ruined barn dates back, at the earliest, to the eighteenth century, according to the National Trust survey,<sup>5</sup> and was shown on the earliest Ordnance Survey map of the valley in 1860, but the ruined structures were not shown on this map and so must have been in a ruinous state by this time. It is possible that they are the remains of one or more medieval longhouses.

Longhouses were the dwellings of farmers in the medieval period. They usually consisted of two rooms on the ground floor with a cross-passage (Fig. 1). One room was used for animals and the other was for

domestic use. This had the advantage of protecting the animals from predators and keeping the people in the house warm. Sleeping accommodation would be in a loft. Some longhouses had stone foundations or low stone walls. They were built mainly of wood but some have been found with turf walls which would fit particularly well with the raw materials to be found in this area. Central hearths were common.

The remains of the structures can be seen clearly on aerial photos (Aerial Photo 1). They look like three broadly rectangular buildings, each differently oriented and one covered by a more recent structure (Fig. 2).



**Figure 1** General layout of a Longhouse

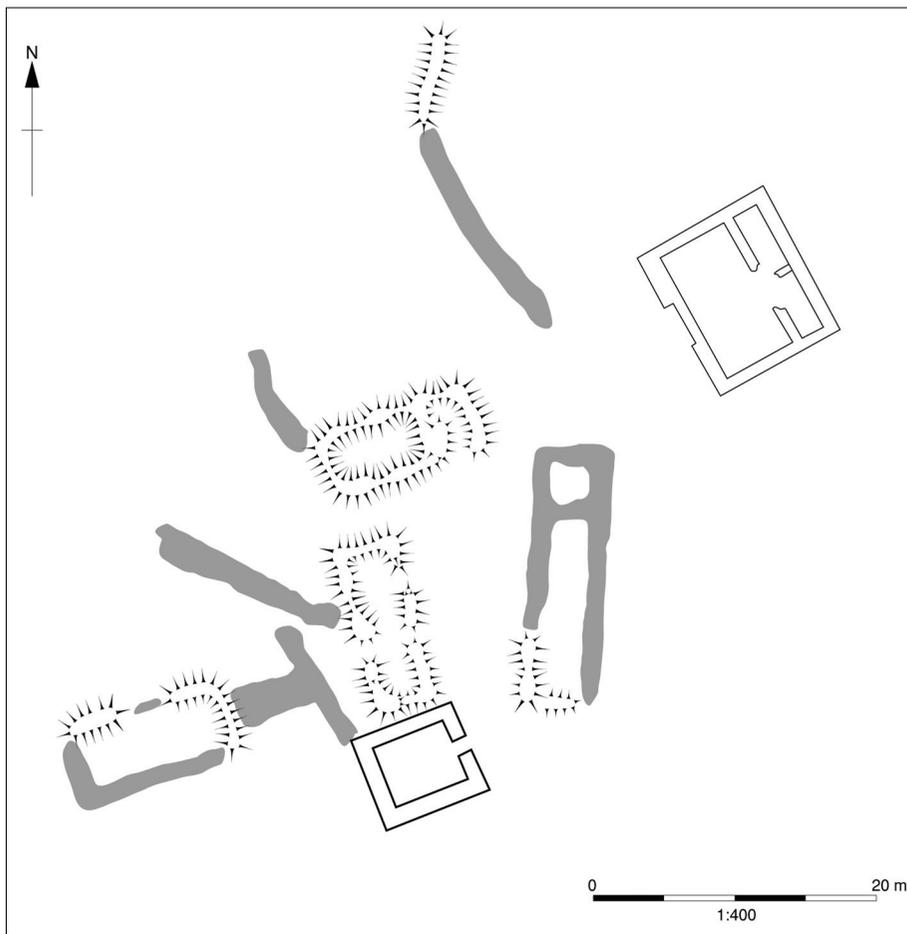
In the HER listing it says the 'site is comprised of a ruined building and associated rubble, a 2-sided enclosure which uses the natural outcrop as a base, having a curving wall max 1.5 m and a linear wall, one stone high.'

During our survey we identified two possible rectangular structures, one 13.4 by 5 metres and the other 17.5 by 5 metres. The smaller structure has a later sheepfold built on its northern end. In the immediately surrounding area we found the remains of stone walls which made an enclosure, utilising the natural rock face.

There are problems in surveying the site. The area has such an extensive covering of bracken that in summer it is impossible to identify any features. It is easier in winter but there is a build-up of dead bracken to contend with. The later structures – the barn, the sheepfold and later walls – cover parts of some earlier structures and probably stones were taken from the earlier structures to build the later ones.

A visit with three enthusiastic amateurs and with the benefit of the aerial photograph (Aerial Photo 1)

produced many more possible structures. There seems to be a large, roughly triangular enclosure with one side made up of the natural rock face and the other sides consisting of what look like ruined buildings and the remains of early walls. There may be up to 3 rectangular structures. They seem to have walls of about 0.75 metres in width which looks as if they are



**Figure 2** Rough diagram of how the site appears from the air (traced from an aerial photograph)

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constructed in a similar way to a dry stone wall. The structure nearest to, and partially covered by, the sheepfold seems to have two stone partition walls and three separate entrances. There seem to be two other possible enclosures. One is to the north-east of the barn, between it and the field wall. There also seems to be another L-shaped enclosure in the field to the north of the site.

Written records of the buildings are hard to find. The earliest part of Pikeside Farm is thought to date from the seventeenth or eighteenth century since it has a long window seat characteristic of houses in the Duddon Valley and Coniston in this period.

It is possible to trace the occupants of the farm back to Thomas Lowder in 1705 but it is not clear which of these were owners and which were tenants. DVLHG also hold a record in their Craven Files prefixed by the number 1706/13/05 of 'an old farmhouse in excellent repair'.<sup>4</sup> Near it is a huge barn with a missing roof. Unfortunately it has not been possible to find the original source of this quotation.

In the National Trust survey of the large barn it states that the currently occupying farmer indicated that the longhouse foundations were thought to have been the remains of an earlier farmhouse and that apple trees nearby supported this theory. It also refers to another ruined building north west of the present farm which could also be the remains of an earlier farmstead. All this suggests that the buildings could date from a time of population expansion resulting in the 'colonisation' of the marginal land. There were two such periods of population expansion. One between 1100 and 1300 and the other between 1450 and 1550. The evidence for the earlier expansion includes place names, evidence of woodland clearance and written evidence of twelfth and thirteenth century charters giving new owners the right to assert and cultivate new land.

At this time the parish of Ulpha was part of the Seigniorship of Millom. The earliest known Lord of Millom was Godard de Boivil, c. 1125. In 1513 John Huddleston succeeded to the Lordship of Millom.<sup>7</sup> He was based in Gloucester, however, so Millom had an absentee landlord. Ulpha was designated as the 'Lord's Forest'. In theory this meant it was the private hunting ground of the great feudal landowner and was preserved against settlement, but it soon became a reserve of land available initially as upland pasture for the lowland community and by 1300, as pressure of population increased, the forest supported a substantial community of farms.

Between 1300 and 1400 the population declined. This was caused by the Black Death, crop failure, diseases of cattle and sheep (*murrain*), climatic deterioration, and the war with Scotland. As a result of this many farmsteads and fields were abandoned. In the years 1450–1550 growing prosperity led to the renewed enclosure of 'waste' and subdivision of holdings to accommodate more families. In most cases the margins of improvable land were reached by this time. By the mid sixteenth century sub-letting was forbidden in many manors, so most boundaries remained stable until the late eighteenth century parliamentary-led enclosures.<sup>1,6</sup> So it is likely that the ruined buildings at Pikeside date from one of these periods of colonisation.

It is interesting to note that in her book, *Duddon Valley History*,<sup>2</sup> J. C. Cooper states, 'There is a tradition that the earliest group of settlements which constituted Ulpha were at what is known as High Ulpha, that is at the Pyke'.

What was daily life like on these marginal farms? Farming was at a subsistence level with an emphasis on stock rearing. Typically a farmstead would have 6–9 cows and less than fifty sheep. The cattle were sturdy black longhorns and sheep were kept for their

wool and milk rather than their meat. Fresh meat was a luxury eaten only on special occasions, and oats and barley were virtually the only crops grown. The main diet was milk, cheese, butter and oats. Transhumance was practiced until the fifteenth or sixteenth century in Cumbria. This was when the herdsman moved with his family and stock to a hut in the summer pasture often several miles away. These were known as shielings. Some of these shielings later became permanent dwellings. The structures at Pikeside could have been used in this way. Vanessa Lascelles in her book on *Field Names in the Duddon Valley*<sup>3</sup> suggested that the '-side' in Pikeside could be derived from the Nordic '-saetre', meaning summer dairy pasture on high ground.

Other features of medieval agricultural life in this area were common rights held by virtue of being a tenant of a particular manor. These included the right to collect peat for fuel, and bracken for thatch, bedding for cattle and for burning into ash to make soap. Also the right to collect timber and wood for their own use.

In *Harvest of the Hills*,<sup>8</sup> Angus Winchester looks at Manorial Court Records from 1400 to 1700 and uses them to provide information about upland farming. Among the records he used were those for the Manor of Millom including the Parish of Ulpha, so we can use these to get some fascinating insights into life at this time. For example, Ulpha seemed to have particular problems with goats. We find that in 1513 it was found necessary to state that goats were only permitted on the tenant's own ground and, in 1543, 'foreign goats [would be] gathered in and taken to the bailiff and no goat in woodland without lord's license.' An entry for 1546 ordered the removal of all goats, but in 1661 the 'byrlaw court' fined five individuals for keeping them 'unlawful good wherebye the lord of this manor and neighbours are annoyed by their eating of barke and croppes of wood'.

The landscape would have looked quite different as there were few 'live' hedges or stone walls; rather there were dry hedges and sometimes 'earthen banks revetted with stone', so keeping animals away from the crops was a constant problem. In 1603 Ulpha court forbade any person to 'poule downe, breake or carye away anye headwood to burne or to any other use, interest, or purpose or cut upe any hedges or hedgewood but their own'.

Jack Askew, the farmer who has lived at Pikeside all his life, said that the field containing the ruined structures has only become part of Pikeside relatively recently. In the 1920s that field (Hoe End) plus the two adjacent ones (Middle and Far Hoe End) belonged to a woman who lived at Kiln Bank. This supports the idea that they are part of a separate farmstead, possibly called Hoe End. Unfortunately a computer search at Barrow Records Office found no references to Hoe End but this does not mean it never existed, as most of the computerised data available dates from the eighteenth century onwards.

A search of the Ulpha Parish records from 1700 to 1750 – the earliest period for which records remain – also failed to show any references to Hoe End but this may indicate that it was abandoned before this date. The records refer in some places to 'Pike' and in others to 'Pikeside'. At first it seemed that these might be alternative names for the same farmstead but on several occasions there were births recorded within months of each other with different family names. For example 'William son of William Brocklebank of Pikeside baptised March 16th 1721' and 'Mary daughter of John Whinney of Pike baptised June 30th 1721.' This suggests that there could have been two or more farmsteads in this area, one of which, the Pike, no longer exists. This also explains what looks like an unreasonably rapid turnover of occupants during this period and suggests

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another possible name for the ruined structures.

Researching an ancient property is like solving a complex puzzle with lots of dead ends but with each new clue throwing up more possibilities.

The early Manorial Records might be a good source of information on the many ruined domestic buildings the R2R project found in the Duddon Valley. These are included in the Lonsdale collection in the County Record Office in Carlisle. The only words decipherable in the Millom Rental for 1510 were 'Millom' and 'Ulpha'. Not only is there the problem of medieval handwriting but also the peculiarities of medieval spelling as well as the archaic language they contain. Reading these documents requires a whole new range of skills. So this piece of research is far from complete but is just a beginning.

### Acknowledgements

Advice and encouragement from Angus Winchester, Venetia Lascelles, Bob Boyd of High Bigert Mire, Jack Askew of Pikeside Farm and members of the Duddon Valley Local History Group.

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### 4.3 The Mystery of Carter Ground Iron Ore Mine

The location of the iron mine near Carter Ground is well known as it is on access land and near to a public footpath. The workings comprise several collapsed levels, an adit and a level area which may have been a dressing floor.<sup>1</sup> The whole area is overgrown by bracken which makes it more difficult to see the details. According to members of the Cumbria Amenity Trust Mining History Society, it is the earliest recorded haematite mine in the Dunnerdale area.<sup>2</sup> The ore was found in a vein in rocks of the Borrowdale Volcanic Series which can be seen on the British Geological Survey map of the area.

The mine was owned by the Carnforth Haematite Company and was worked from 1872 to 1874, producing 2,105.6 tons of ore worth £1,453 in 1872 and 2,800 tons worth £3,500 in 1874.<sup>3</sup> No figures are available for 1873 but according to John Adams a total of 6,555 tons of ore was raised.<sup>1</sup>

In 1872 the company placed an advertisement in the *Whitehaven News* requesting tenders for the carting of iron ore from the mines to the railway station at Broughton-in-Furness.<sup>4</sup> The ore was then taken, presumably by rail, to the iron works at Carnforth which had recently started using the Bessemer process to produce high-quality steel.<sup>5</sup> The haematite from

Furness was of the low phosphorus content required for this process. Around this time, the haematite price peaked because of the Franco-Prussian war; however the high prices did not last and this was presumably why the mine had such a short life. Things did not go well for the Carnforth iron works and three of the four blast furnaces were closed in the 1890s; the final one kept going until 1929.

There is a small stream, Carter Ground Beck, running southerly down from the mine through farmland to the road below (Photo 64). When surveying this area we came over a wooded knoll and, to our surprise, found two small stone buildings, a tiny pond containing iron stained water and a barrow mound of iron rich rocks alongside this stream. One of the stone buildings appears to have been a roofed hut, presumably to provide shelter for the workers, but the other is much more difficult to interpret. It is roughly square with three stone-built walls but no roof. The open side is immediately adjacent to the stream and part of it has a ramped floor leading down to the water level.

A little further down towards the road, part of the stream has been diverted and culverted into a straight channel which comes to a dead end; there is also another mound next to the culvert.

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**Photo 64** Remains of the iron ore mine at Carter Ground

None of these structures appear on the modern OS map but, next to the culverted part of the stream, the 2nd series OS map appears to say 'Level Ironstone'; the last part is very indistinct so it is difficult to be sure. We have been unable to find out any more about these structures or their use. However, it opens up the possibility that some sort of pre-processing or sorting of the ore was happening before it was transported to Carnforth.

This is one of the many unanswered questions produced by this project; we would be very grateful for any further information about the Carter Ground mines.

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## 4.4 Old Hutton Retting Ponds

In a remote spot above Broughton Mills lies a ruined farm building called Old Hutton. In front of this ruin is an area of land that at first glance appears to be nothing more than a reedy marsh (Photo 65). When viewed from above however this marsh is curiously criss-crossed with a grid of raised lines (Photo 52). When we came upon this in the course of the survey we were initially puzzled. Closer examination revealed that the area covered approximately 100 by 110 metres. The lines that we had noted were in fact raised walkways across the marsh with drainage gullies underneath. Between the walkways were reedy, waterlogged, rectangular trenches or ponds. At the eastern side of the site we found a deep sump into which the water from the gullies drains. By blocking the outlets at this sump it would thus be possible to control the level of the water in the ponds.

We had thought we were becoming proficient amateur archaeologists but this had us totally bewildered. There followed much scratching of heads and discussion. Why on earth had someone gone to the trouble and expense of constructing such an extensive and well-engineered feature on a remote, marshy, upland bog?

In the back of our minds however the words 'retting pond' kept surfacing. We had heard of such

features but knew nothing about them, so embarked on some research. This quickly uncovered sufficient information for a confident definition of the site as a complex of retting ponds. As usual however one question leads to another and the issues of what, how, when and who in relation to the site remained a mystery. Further and more painstaking research has begun to answer these questions. In contrast to the site's archaeology however the documentary evidence is less accessible and more deeply buried.

So what are retting ponds and how were they used? Retting is a term used for the process of rotting the fleshy part of the stems of certain plants to release the fibres prior to preparing them for spinning to produce fabric. The two main plants grown to make fabric in this area were hemp and flax. Hemp (*Cannabis sativa*) was grown to produce rope, canvas, and rough 'homespun' fabric, while flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) was used to make linen. The seeds of both plants were also harvested for their oil.

The cultivation of hemp and flax fitted in well with pastoral agriculture. The crop required minimal attention during the summer months. Hemp could also be grown on the same plot year after year with little or no deterioration in its yield. The growing of

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hemp was described in 1580 by East-Anglian farmer, Thomas Tusser, in his *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*.<sup>1</sup> He recommended sowing the seed in May, after which no work was needed until July when the male plants were culled and the thicker female stalks left until September. The process of retting then began. The stalks were tied into bundles and submerged in water for between 7 and 10 days until only coarse fibres remained. An alternative method was to lay it out on the grass and let the dew cause the rotting, but this was deemed less satisfactory and more prone to attracting mould. Once retted the stalks needed to be dried rather like hay. The laborious process of removing the outer skin or ‘pilling’ then took place followed by ‘scutching’ which involved beating to remove any residue. Finally the task of ‘heckling’ or combing to separate the fibres was undertaken.

The retting process itself left the water foul smelling and toxic to both animals and humans. So much so that from Tudor times it was forbidden by law to allow the water from a retting pond to drain into an accessible stream or water course. Thomas Tusser again makes this point when he advises that in September it is time to

pluck up thy hempe, and go beat out the seed,  
And afterward water it as ye see need.  
But not in the river where cattle should drink,  
For poisoning them and the people with stinke.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of this it was interesting to note that at Old Hutton the water that drains into the sump is then channelled underground. It does not surface until, diluted by other streams, it meets fast-flowing Stickle-tongue Beck which in turn joins the River Lickle below Broughton Mills, downstream of all habitation.

The big question on all our minds once we knew what the site had been used for was, who had had the

time and resources to create this retting area that can only be described as industrial in scale? Also, when had it been used?

Looking at the history of flax and hemp cultivation in Britain we find that it becomes well established by the early medieval period. Thereafter increasing documentary references to its associated textile production can be found. For example, Mary Higham has studied twelfth and thirteenth century flax retting in the Ribble Valley and other parts of north west England.<sup>3</sup>

We know from historical records that from the Tudor period to the nineteenth century the British were dependent on hemp to maintain their sea power. Vast amounts were required for the ships’ ropes and sails. As early as 1533, King Henry VIII required all farmers to cultivate one-quarter acre of hemp or flax for every sixty acres of land under tillage, and Queen Elizabeth repeated this order in 1563. Supplies remained insufficient, however, and in 1611 King James I ordered a commission stating ‘we understand that a great mass of treasure is yearly spent upon linen cloth, brought from beyond the seas at dear rates ... if the fishing so much desired by us ... and our shipping increased, it will require much greater proportion of hemp... We commend unto your considerations the best ways how the sowing of hemp and flax may be encouraged and undertaken within this kingdom, whereby so much good would rebound to us and our people?’<sup>4</sup> Despite such attempts at regal intervention it appears that domestic production never met demand and a great deal continued to be imported.

Although we have this general historic backdrop the task of identifying historic details specific to our site at Old Hutton is far from complete. Some

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fascinating pieces of information have, however, been gleaned from searching old documents. These help to bring the site to life and enable us to develop theories about its origins.

Firstly, we know that hemp and flax *were* grown and processed locally. For example, the Court Baron records for May 1758 tell us that Thomas Carter, tenant of the nearby Hutton farmstead (not to be confused with Old Hutton itself) complains that 'John Whinery has been plowing beyond the landmarks in my Hemp Rigg and Bean Rigg'. Also in the 1760s a Thomas Briggs living in Broughton-in-Furness was a 'flaxman' and his descendants appear to have continued in this line of business. By the middle of the eighteenth century a significant rope industry was developing in the area. In 1752 we have a record that a number of wealthy businessmen including James Machell Esq. and J. Backhouse went into partnership with a William Noble of Ulverston who operated a ropery 'making all kinds of cables, ropes and cordage'. The business thrived and a document tells us that in 1765 'James Marshall of Kincardon, Scotland, master and owner of the *Elizabeth* (lying at anchor off Pile of Fowdrey) was hired by William Noble, James Fell and John Dodgson all of Ulverstone, merchants for a journey to Petersburg in Russia to fetch 16 tons of hemp, as much flax as possible, and 10 tons of iron'. The same businessmen are linked to the Low Wood cotton and flax mill at Ulverston and their accounts show flax being imported from Holland and supplies purchased from many companies in the north west. We can therefore safely conclude that there was plenty of money to be made by anyone willing to invest in the cultivation and production of locally grown hemp and flax.

Secondly we have documentary information about Old Hutton's ruined farm building. The first record of occupancy is in 1665 when a John Watters lived there. It continued to be lived in by a succession of families until 1749. From 1719 to 1726 it was occupied by a William Picthall, a weaver, and his large family. After this a Henry and Mary Pearson became its last tenants and both are recorded as being paupers. We have to wonder whether it is likely that a large complex of retting ponds would have been constructed so close to a dwelling while it was being occupied.

Thirdly, the deeds of the land enable us to trace ownership. We find that in the early 1700s although the land came under the freehold ownership of Broughton Manor, a Sir John Askew owned the leasehold. He was very wealthy and his will of 1739 written at his estate in Wiltshire is both detailed and revealing. We learn that his family originated from Dunnerdale and that his only child, a daughter called Katherine, was married to William Myers of Bracelet Hall near Broughton Mills. He bequeathed all his Broughton and Dunnerdale estates with their 'houses, lands, tenements, mills, kilns, malshouses, hereditaments and other appertenances' to William Myers. This will is interesting as it gives us insight into ownership of the local industries and reveals that there was considerable wealth for investment in projects such as a large-scale retting area which would have added another dimension to the already established woollen industry in the valley. If we put the site into its broader local context we can see that in the past Old Hutton would not have been as remote as it appears today. Nearby track-ways lead to local farmsteads and on to Broughton Mills, a busy

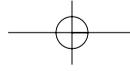


**Photo 65** The site of retting ponds at Old Hutton

industrial centre at this time with its various mills and kilns as well as other commercial outlets such as a blacksmiths, an inn and general stores.

When William Myers died in 1773 his unmarried daughter Betty inherited the family estates which amounted to a large proportion of Broughton Mills and the surrounding area. In 1776 she sold Old Hutton (along with Pichhall Ground and several acres of farmland) to Edward Keen a wealthy landowner from Colton. It is interesting to note that the above mentioned gentlemen who invested in William Noble's ropemaking business were also from Colton and undoubtedly acquainted. This theory is supported

by the fact that one of these businessmen James Machell rented Bracelet Hall for a period around this time. Keen sold Old Hutton to an Isaac Pritt who in turn sold it in 1811 to John Gunson and John Casson. Although we do not know exactly when the retting ponds were used we know for certain that by this point in time they had fallen into disuse. In the deeds of 1811 they are simply referred to as 'the moss' and were divided between the two purchasers with new walls being built to mark the boundary. These walls have subsequently begun to sink due to the waterlogged nature of the ground on which they were built.



## Old Hutton Retting Ponds | 95

It seems reasonable to speculate therefore that the retting ponds were in use some time between 1746 and 1811. Further research will be needed to obtain a more detailed and accurate assessment. Finally, however, we should not forget that it is possible that smaller-scale hemp or flax retting may have traditionally been undertaken on the site in earlier centuries. We know from nearby ancient walls and 'rig and furrowed' fields that the land was farmed in the medieval period. Over the centuries retting in natural marshy ponds such as that at Old Hutton would certainly have occurred.

### Notes

- 1 Tusser, T. (1580) *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, in W. Mavor (ed.), London, 1812.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Higham, M.C. (1998) 'Some evidence for 12th and 13th century linen and woollen textile processing', in Roberts, E. (ed.) *A History of Linen in the Northwest*. Lancaster, Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster. ISBN 1-86220-064-5.
- 4 Thirsk, Joan, and Cooper, J. (1972) *17th Century Economic Documents*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

