

GLHS Outing – Deserted Medieval Villages

On Saturday March 30th 2019 a group of 12 members and visitors went on a tour of four villages in the Glendale area, lead by Allan Colman as a follow-up to his talk on deserted medieval villages in January.

The first port of call was Doddington. The name 'Doddington' is Anglo-Saxon and probably means the 'ton' or township of 'Dod's' people. or else it was named after nearby hill, Dod Law.

Fine weather prevailed as we walked around the village, now much reduced in size from earlier times. We started by the tower and bastle house within the thick and high stone walls of the now South Farm, then passed by a former smithy and a corn mill to reach the church.

The main church building dates from the early 13th century and retains a Norman font. There was originally a school room on the west side. In the 19th century the church was renovated, unusually with the altar facing west; this may have been arranged by Horace St Paul who used the old road from his Ewart Park mansion, built on the site of a substantial medieval village, to attend church. As he came from the west, he would have crossed Cuthbertson's hog-backed stone bridge, which sadly collapsed in March this year. The churchyard has a watch-house to guard against Edinburgh body-snatchers.

The group continued onward to pass the Victorian school house in Drovers Lane. On the southern side of the village is a large area of desertion with substantial earthworks of former tofts and crofts, and evidence of ridge and furrow cultivation. We passed the former large mill pond of South Farm on the left, now a modern housing development, and proceeded back to the main road. On the eastern side is the former toll house, the market cross of 1846 adjacent to the 'Dod' Well, then another area of desertion and the remains of the old Cock Tavern hidden in the undergrowth.

We then headed north to the village of Ancroft, our arrival coinciding with that of a vigorous cold front that brought squalls of rain and plummeting temperatures. Ancroft possibly gets its name from Aidan's croft. St Anne's Norman church was built by the monks of Holy Island around 1145, possibly on the site of a former Saxon church. Although the church is much altered, the original Norman entrance can still be seen along with the 13th century pele tower, unusual in that it is attached to the church, and also a projecting medieval buttress. Inside the church there is plenty to read on the history of the village, church and farming practices.

Ancroft was laid waste by the Scots in the 14th century then rebuilt to the south of the church in a field now known as Broomey Field. This post-medieval village was burnt to the ground following a severe outbreak of plague in the 17th century, the bodies of the victims being covered in broom then set-alight along with their houses in an effort to contain the disease. A hollow-way and substantial earthworks are still to be seen.

The village expanded again in the 18th Century, specialising in shoe and clog making for the army and navy, with no metal parts that could spark and ignite gunpowder. Legend has it that

the line of trees at the back of the Broomey Field commemorates these cobblers. At the western end of the village beyond Town Farm was once a large limestone quarry, which had fallen into disuse by 1890.

We then drove via Duddo and Greenlaw Walls to the ford at Etal. We passed the castle which was the former home of Robert de Manners who obtained a licence to crenellate in 1341, to help repel the border raiders. Etal Castle was taken by James IV, the Scottish King, on his way to the battle of Flodden in 1513. The English deposited his colours at the castle following his death on Flodden field.

We looked at the sites of the old Etal ferry, the weir, the corn mill and suspension bridge, before proceeding along the carriage drive to the remains of the 12th century St Mary's chapel on the right bank of the Till, where travellers using the river would have stopped to pray for safe passage onwards. Adjacent to the chapel are some pipes and derelict buildings associated with the spout well, a former water source for the village which originally lay on an east-west axis between the 18th century manor house and the castle. The route of the old road, diverted during the early 19th century, can be discerned along a lime avenue, passing much closer to the manor.

The tour finished at Maelmin, on the outskirts of Milfield, where in worsening weather we visited the reconstructed dark-ages house, and looked at the open field on Milfeld Plain which is the site of the large Anglo-Saxon settlement and royal palace which moved from Ad Gefrin in the 7th century.

A good lunch was enjoyed at the Maelmin Café at the end of the tour.