

Bilsdale Study Group newsletter

14th May, 2013

Foord Watercourses

Present: Malcolm Bowes, Rob Chapman, Geoffrey Coston, Reed Gamble, Howard Gaskin, Brian Marsay, Clive Marsh, John Rees

Apologies:- Peter Smith, Anne Rees

Updates

An enquiry has been received from Cathryn Hill from Beauly about her father, Fred Hill, who was born at "Ella Bridge Cottage" Bridge End cottage in 1903. She is interested in making contact with any surviving relatives. Her grandmother was Jane Ainsley

It's time to start thinking about Bilsdale Show – what are we doing and who is available to look after the stall. All ideas and offers of help are welcome.

Foord Watercourses

Our guest speaker was David Taylor who spoke about Joseph Foord and the water courses he constructed. Born in 1714, he was a quaker tho' was subsequently expelled due to indiscretions. He was a farmer, worked for the gentry, was involved in enclosures, was an engineer and had been involved in draining coal mines. He was born at Fadmoor and farmed near Hodge Valley on the Tabular Hills. In the early 18th century the population was increasing and agricultural output needed to increase. The geology of the moors with the southward dipping strata enabled Foord to construct the watercourses. There is higher rainfall on the northern moors, but on the limestone tabular hills the soil is thin, the southern aspect increases evaporation and the limestone is permeable so streams disappear underground. The villages on the tabular hills needed water for irrigation, domestic uses and industry/tanning. Foord solved this problem by building 8 watercourses, the longest was 13 miles. One of the watercourses was still partly working in 1960.

Maintenance was a major job, not only dealing with the effects of moles and voles but also theft. The court books record cases of farmers allowing ducks and geese in the watercourse, soaking hides in them or wilfully damaging them. A waterman was employed to deal with these issues.

David circulated a map showing the main watercourses and briefly described them, starting in the west. The Old Byland watercourse runs from the Kings Spring to Old Byland over oxford clay. The Rievaulx watercourse is the longest , though it doesn't take water to Rievaulx village. It starts in Tripsdale, traverses the eastern side of Bilsdale, crosses the road at the top of Newgate Bank and continues to Stiltons Farm, Abbott Hagg and Griff. The Carlton watercourse starts above the Rievaulx watercourse in Tripsdale then crosses the moor to the east of Roppa Edge, there is a 170 yard embankment 6 ft high at Cowhill Bank, then it continues to Carlton. Two watercourses start at Piethorn spring. One takes a route west of Birk Nab to Pockley. The other crosses Bonfield Gill by aquaduct, collects additional supplies of water then heads to the east of Birk Nab to Nawton. There are two watercourses from Gillamoor which then pass either side of Boon Hill and take water to Howkeld Mill. Fadmoor, Gillamoor and Kirkby Moorside. There is also a small watercourse to Lastingham.

David then showed photographs of various features along the watercourses and these were supplemented by recent photos of the Carlton and Rievaulx watercourses taken by Howard and Malcolm. During the subsequent discussion David explained that the watercourses were usually 12-18 ins deep, and were not lined with clay. This would have made the construction too expensive. The flow of water sealed the base with silt, though mole holes would be plugged with clay. Where public rights of way from the moors to the

dale crossed the watercourse a “brigston” was laid – this is a large stone across the course. Howard also showed a more recent wooden bridge constructed for shooting parties.

David was thanked for a most informative and enjoyable talk.



Riexaulx watercourse



Carlton watercourse

Future meetings

11th June – 7.00, walk around the Wainstones. Meet at the layby at the top of Clay Bank

July – discuss Bilsdale Show

August – Bilsdale Show, Stokesley Show

September – tbc

October – tbc

November – AGM

December – tbc

Potential topics

The following activities are being considered for future meetings, if you have any suggestions please let us know:

Visit to William Beck Farm **Action AR**

Visit to Cross Holme Farm and Beacon Guest quarry **Action – TB** to enquire

Visit Arden Hall **Action – RG** to progress

Open evening to scan old photos, Collate group photos

Discuss alum extraction at Carlton Bank

Visit a working farm

Foraging talk by Robin Smith **Action RG** indicated Robin will lead a walk

Discussion with Albert Kirk **Action AR** has mentioned this to Albert

Listen to and discuss the Forge Fest audio tape from local residents **Action MLB**

View the “Bygones of Bilsdale” video **Action MLB**

Arrange summer walks **Action ?**

Talk by Robin Cook – **Action MLB**

Railway talk – **Action BM**