

North West

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REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGISTS

Both survey and project work were hit hard this year because of the restrictions imposed during the Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic.

Nevertheless, some fieldwork was undertaken both immediately before the outbreak and following the lifting of restrictions.

CUMBRIA

Historic Landscape Survey of Coniston Hall Estate

Mp  A

The programme of historic landscape survey in the Lake District continued with research into the property located to the west of Coniston Water, an area of 870 acres that includes the lower slopes of Coniston Old Man. Although the area was occupied during the prehistoric and Norse periods, it was in the post-conquest period that the pattern for the present landscape was established. Richard le Fleming acquired the Manor of Coniston in 1250 as a dowry on his marriage with Elizebeth de Urswick, and soon after established the first Coniston Hall. Richard's son, John le Fleming, was shortly afterwards granted a hunting park or chase within the boundaries of the manor.

The creation of the hunting park was to have a great effect on the development of the surrounding landscape. These farms expanded their holding until they abutted the park wall, while the pattern of intakes crept up the fellside, eventually enclosing the deer park within a patchwork of small fields. On the lower slopes to the north of the park the medieval town field expanded as the number of farmholdings



A view of Coniston Old Hall. Brantwood, the home of John Ruskin can be seen above right.

R. THRIFT



The stone circle at Castlerigg, where stock control is being monitored in attempts to reduce erosion.

MIKE WILLIAMS/NTPL

increased and sought to maximise the amount of arable land. Around 1580 William Fleming began work on the present hall, although the le Flemings were to forsake Coniston Hall for a new residence in Rydal during the late-seventeenth century, with the hall being maintained as a hunting lodge until the park finally fell out of use around 1710.

In 1815 the hall, which had by then fallen into a state of some disrepair, was converted for use as a farmhouse. The great hall was also converted for use as a barn, much to the horror of the local tourists of the era. While the pattern of landscape outside the park was of course well established by this time, the area within the deer park underwent quite a transformation. Parts of the former demesne woodlands were felled and cultivated, while the remaining woodland was managed as coppice. Numerous charcoal burning pitsteads were recorded during the survey attesting to the later industrial exploitation of these woodlands.

The National Trust bought Coniston Hall in 1971 with the assistance of private bequests. The hall continues in use as a farmhouse today.

Lake District Bloomery Project Phase III

M A

A third season of magnetometer surveys on unpowered iron smelting sites (bloomeries) has been undertaken in partnership with the Lake District National Park and with the assistance of Peter Crew of the Snowdonia National Park.

The latest surveys concentrated on sites around Coniston Water, where an extensive distribution of bloomeries has been identified. The National Trust owns three of the sites surveyed, including one, Springs (a scheduled monument), which was partly excavated at the

end of the nineteenth century by W.G.

Collingwood, local antiquary and secretary to John Ruskin, who lived at Brantwood on the opposite side of Coniston Water. Some correlation was possible between the locations of Collingwood's excavated furnaces and the geophysical responses.

To date, 26 bloomeries have been surveyed, making it perhaps the largest group of such sites to be examined in this way in a single area. Further survey is planned for 2002/3 and a small programme of radiocarbon dating is currently underway, the first to be undertaken on Cumbrian bloomeries.

Castlerigg Stone Circle - erosion problems and stock control

P

At Castlerigg Stone circle the closure of the site and cessation of grazing following the unfortunate culling of the grazier's stock during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak resulted in an exceptional recovery of grass-cover on previously badly eroded areas within the circle. Erosion has always been especially severe around the 'entrance' to the circle and in the area of an internal, rectangular stone setting known as the Sanctuary. In an attempt to examine ways of minimising future erosion of these same areas an electric fence has been erected across part of the field and the tenant has agreed not to restock with cattle on the area of the stones and to restrict sheep numbers. Whilst not a long-term solution to the erosion problems experienced here, this trial will allow an opportunity to assess the effect of stock control on the monument and should assist in planning longer term stocking rates and other erosion control measures. Work also continues on a Conservation Plan for the monument.

Sedgwick Gunpowder Works Pm Mo

The production of a Conservation Plan for Sedgwick Gunpowder Works is nearing completion, helped by the initial results of an English Heritage archaeological and architectural survey of the monument - part of a wider project to study the gunpowder industry of South Cumbria. Initial negotiations with the current tenants of the monument (The Caravan Club) have been held to discuss a new lease that will allow both increased protection of the scheduled monument and, hopefully, the introduction of public access to the gunpowder works. A first phase of conservation work on the remains of the incorporating mills had been planned for 2001 but, again as a result of Foot and Mouth Disease, has been re-timed for 2002.

Cockshot Country Fair

Opportunities for events were greatly reduced during 2001, making involvement in Cockshot Fair that takes place in Bowness-on-Windermere each year even more important. This year a model of an oak bark peeler's hut was erected using materials taken from the estate; the hut even had a working fireplace that smouldered and smoked throughout the day. After exploring the hut and imagining what life must have been like for the woodcutters and their families, children and adults alike were given a demonstration of the oak peeling process and were free to try their hand.

A group of children try their hand at bark stripping at Cockshot Fair.

I. KEMP



Geophysical survey in the parkland at Acorn Bank found traces of a possible original approach to the house. R. MAXWELL/NT

Vernacular Building Surveys

Some ten vernacular building surveys have been commissioned and completed during 2001/2002. These have been undertaken on properties throughout the Lake District as well as on a number of other properties including a former Temperance Hotel near Sedbergh in the east of Cumbria, and farms on the small Stubbins estate near Ramsbottom in Lancashire. These surveys have been undertaken as part of an attempt to complete the survey provision within the region. A complete list of the surveys undertaken is presented at the end of the Review.

OTHER PROJECTS

(CUMBRIA)

Yew Tree Farm, Yewdale, Coniston

Rapid field survey and enhancement of the National Trust Sites & Monuments Record was undertaken in advance of a change in tenancy at this farm.

Historic Landscape Survey of the Hartsop Valley, Ullswater

Investigations into this property are currently underway.

Geophysical Survey at Wordsworth House, Cockermouth

Geophysical survey was commissioned within an area of the rear garden at this property, William Wordsworth's birthplace in Cockermouth. It suggested the possible survival of garden features. The work was undertaken to inform consideration of a re-creation of the garden of Wordsworth's time.

Geophysical Survey at Acorn Bank, Penrith

Geophysical survey in the parkland in front of the Acorn Bank house confirmed the existence of an extensive cobbled surface, possibly a broad trackway perhaps representing the original approach to the house. A possible building platform was also located within the parkland.

(LANCASHIRE)

Rufford Old Hall

Excavation outside the long demolished west end of the great hall was undertaken prior to the creation of a new disabled access route. Evidence of the west range (the original solar block of the house) was hoped for, but unfortunately nothing of this survived archaeologically within the area examined.



A search for a solar: Small-scale excavations at Rufford Old Hall.

R. MAXWELL/NT