

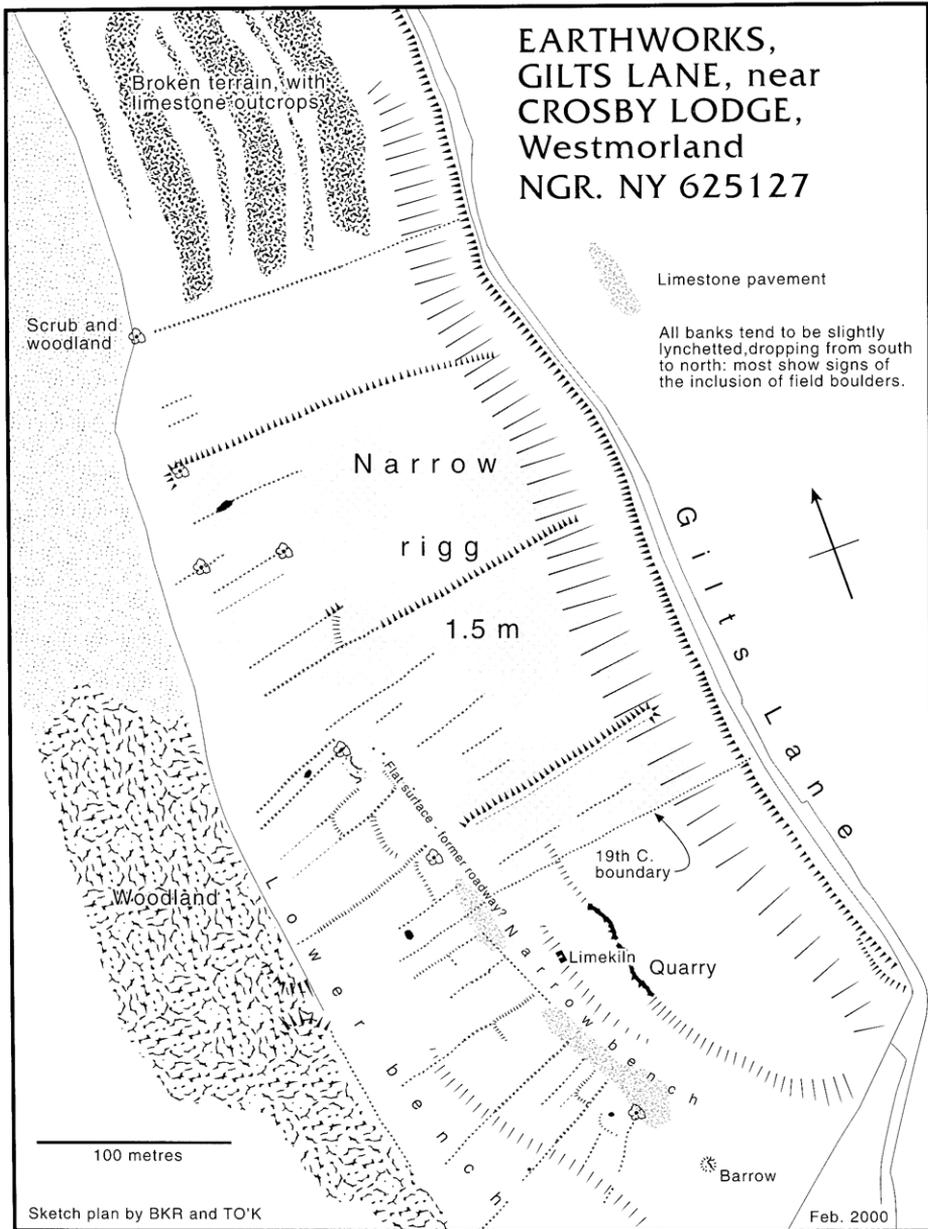
ART. IV – *Earthworks near Crosby Lodge, Westmorland*

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THE unknown is always a challenge. Figure 1 records a site whose character and date are wholly uncertain and for which an exploratory ground survey only creates further questions. Nevertheless, the unknown is as much a part of the archaeological record as the known, indeed as the author argued in a paper published in 1993(a), a careful re-examination of a group of well-known and well-mapped sites can sometimes produce unexpected results. Thus, a group of homesteads with a well-established pre-historic or Roman-British provenance were found to bear traces of occupation in the form of rectangular buildings which, it was argued, extended long into post-Roman centuries. Occupation may have only ceased at the Norman Conquest of the region in the last decade of the eleventh century, when tenants were concentrated into villages and hamlets (Roberts, 1993a). The observations presented here are of earthworks in two fields in the upper Lyvennet valley (OS 25-inch map sheet XXI/4, fields 467 and 484, now available on www.old-maps.co.uk). The Ordnance Survey *Outdoor Leisure* map 19, *Howgill Fells and Upper Eden Valley*, forms a useful context for discussion.

The dominant features of the site can be glimpsed driving up-valley from Crosby Ravensworth (NY 6214) towards the farmstead of Gilts (NY 627118) which lies on the head-dyke between the improved inby land and the grazings of the limestone fell. The most obvious features are a set of large lynchets, running away from the road at right angles, across a low domed ridge that runs parallel to and slightly below the road. The ridge gradually climbs in height from north to south, and the lynchets are sufficiently well marked to drop as much as a metre and a half in a northerly direction. The field was surveyed, with the kind permission of Mr John E. Wood of Crosby Lodge, in an appalling gale in February 2000. A wall corner on a 1:2500 plan, the putative barrow and on-site trees allowed a paced survey line to be followed and offsets established. What appears is thus no more than a sketch, but is closely observed, and the work was undertaken by the author and Dr Tadhg O’Keefe of University College Dublin.

The site’s features may be speedily described: in addition to the substantive lynchets there is a series of low banks, all tending to lie parallel to the main lynchets, and running across the top and western side of the ridge. The thin soils at the southern end of the field, where, as the quarry reveals, the limestone is closer to the surface, bear no features. North of this area lie the major lynchets and the lesser banks, all overlain by faint traces of narrow ridge and furrow. In fact most banks are slightly lyncheted, falling from south to north, and many bear indications of the inclusion of field boulders, although a number of unmoved larger boulders still litter the site. To the south-west and west, downslope of a narrow flat bench, where patches of limestone pavement are exposed, extends a complex of low banks. At only one point is there any feature that resembles a building. This comprises a roughly rectangular and slightly hollowed tumble of stones, and is set across the north-eastern end of one of the small closes. A substantial limekiln lies to the west of the quarry, while a small barrow, shown on the modern 1:25,000 map (NY 624126), comprises an approximately circular unturfed pile of stones, bearing some signs of disturbance. The northern end of the field shows no obvious cultural



features, and comprises a very broken terrain with stark limestone outcrops. Beyond the site, to the west, is a steep valley slope, plunging down to the Ravens Gill and the Lyvennet Beck, more wooded to the south-west but giving way to more open scrubland to the north-west. At one point there is a suggestion of former hollow-way access to the site.

The simple question "What is it?" cannot easily be resolved, and discussion must proceed via a series of simple observations and questions. The site lies at 250 metres above sea level, and not far from the present head-dyke. It is part of a great complex of earthworks in the upper Lyvennet which are gradually being explored by the author. This altitude and context must be taken into account when framing an interpretation.

First of all, the over-ploughing is evidence of tillage. One has the distinct impression that the tillage, in the form of 1.5 metre narrow rig, over-rides, and may have partially destroyed, some of the low banks. The presence of a substantial limekiln, in part rock cut, suggests that this was undertaken in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. It should be noted that near the building the rigs extend right onto the "flat surface" of the "former roadway(?)" along the "narrow bench", i.e. the tillage took place at a stage *after* the lime had been taken from the kiln to be added to the immediate arable area. Paradoxically, liming was necessary in this limestone area because the relatively high rainfall tends to leach the soils developed on glacial drift or residual materials from the decay of the limestone. It would be a fair assumption that this is later eighteenth century activity, the result of "improvement" practices and the practical need to extend the arable during the Napoleonic War, when crops of oats were often taken from marginal land. The narrow rig terminates at the northernmost lynchet, yet extends beyond the southernmost lynchet to the line of a former field boundary documented on mid-nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps. This last is important, because it could not be traced across the lower bench on the flatter western side of the field, even under the good light-conditions prevailing at the time of the survey. This is presumably because of a sustained, if slight, downslope drift of soil particles onto the lower flat.

Second, the lynchets are impressive: thinking about the weight of material moved they are awe-inspiring. They are the sort of feature which are common-place amid the greater depths of sub-soil on the lowlands, where long-sustained tillage, stable fields and formal landownership structures ensured a downslope movement of soil against a largely unmoving boundary line. It is hard not to see the three large lynchets as demarcating three block-fields, yet the thin soils of the southernmost of these, above the quarry, failed to attract the later tillage. The soil had presumably already largely disappeared from the surface of the limestone capping when the narrow rig cultivation took place. Substantial lynchetting is not generally a feature of marginal landscapes: it is a characteristic of well-populated and long-tilled landscapes. By way of detail, both the southern and the central lynchet change towards the south-west: the latter declines in height and definition, and the former, while it does continue beyond the putative roadway, merges with the low bank complex.

As a third point, this latter complex poses many problems: three features are of particular note. First, we are faced with a small series of parallel-sided enclosures, running downhill from the narrow limestone bench, with the boundaries eventually

disappearing amid the hillwash. Second, there is the single building feature, and its location, with even an entrance to the enclosure at the rear being visible along its northern end, suggesting orientation relative to the parallelism of the enclosures. It is set square to, indeed facing into, the roadway. Third, there are no obvious traces of any further buildings, although small cross-banks can be found on the upslope sides of the plots. However, the areas of bare limestone pavement on the narrow bench, across which some of the boundaries can be traced, suggests a lowering of the surface at this point, a stripping away of the soil. Similar areas of limestone pavement are found, near, or underneath homesteads thought to be prehistoric or Romano-British (e.g. at Cow Green NY 616121 and NY 622123). This can be attributed to an accelerated lowering of the surface, either because of the acids present in the urine of stock or because of increased local run-off from poached surfaces where stock have been penned. Thus the possibility of penning beasts, either sheep or more probably cattle or horses, and perhaps even dwellings along the bench cannot be excluded. It is likely that the rather "tidy" appearance of the area around the kiln may have been caused by the removal of surface material during its construction. Quarrying to feed the kiln was higher upslope, so that loading could be from the top. A supply of fuel must have been a problem: Loudon makes it clear that either coal or coke was usual, but it is possible that charcoal could also have been used (Loudon, 1839, 625-6).

Nevertheless, this descriptive analysis brings us no closer to explanation. However, the low bank complex is of the order of 225 metres long and about 100 metres deep, so that one is, almost unwillingly, drawn to the conclusion that this is of the same general dimensions as a toft compartment. This is a block of land laid out as a rectangle and then divided ladder-wise to create a succession of tofts or home closes associated with dwellings (Roberts, 1987, fig. 10.3; Roberts, 1993b, fig. 1). Even if it were never fully occupied, these earthworks could represent an attempt to found a small single-row hamlet in the medieval period, perhaps in the early to mid-twelfth century, a date by which a small settlement such as Little Asby (NY 6909) was developing (Smith, A. H., 1967, 54). We need not argue that the land had not been previously cleared, for on the eastern side of Gilts Lane there are a succession of homesteads generally seen as prehistoric or Romano-British, while the possible barrow, "tumulus", on the site is indicative of activity (NY 628120, 627125, 627128, 627132 etc.). However, the existence of Gilts Lane destroys any possibility of close correlation with the earthwork sites above and to the east of its line. If earlier fields existed on the ridge, then their reorganisation when the settlement was planted, involving the ploughing or re-ploughing of the thin soils, the removal of stones and boulders to the three lines which eventually became the large lynchets, can be seen as a reasonable possibility. The residual low banks, surviving as fragments between the large lynchets, and over-ploughed by the narrow rig, are traces of series of medieval strips, where stones had been thrown to the edges of each strip, along the ownership boundary (Steensberg, 1968, *passim*).

There should be no doubt that this interpretation slides quietly from reasonable deduction to pure hypothesis. But let us consider the context. Maulds Meaburn reveals evidence for the imposition of a planned medieval settlement over lands which may reasonably have been improved at an earlier stage (Roberts, 1996), while Crosby Ravensworth shows traces of great strips and lynchets (NY 615145 to

618146 and 625147) around what must have once been a vast meadow green (centring on NY 623146), a type also to be seen at Orton (NY 6208). Crosby, in work yet to be published, has produced traces of what may be an almost wholly destroyed homestead no more than 150 metres from the present church (NY 621152) although this author is sceptical about the substantive enclosure appearing on the present Ordnance Survey map (NY 618149). As has been argued in some detail in Waitby and Smardale (Roberts, 1993), that in the Eden Valley a major Norman landscape restructuring took place, drawing the inhabitants of earlier scattered steadings into nucleated villages and hamlets. These settlements were normally structured around core furlongs whose great strips could run for 400, 600 or even 800 metres in length (Roberts in Sporrøng, 1990, 189-97). However, in the restricted environment of the upper Lyvennet such efforts at settlement plantation were doomed to failure, and the hill farmers retreated, perhaps by the later twelfth century (Smith A. H., 155, *Gilts*), to their old steadings or occupied new sites adjacent to them. While one does not doubt that the ancient and medieval economies were based upon stock, there were undoubted attractions in the corn plots of the ancient steadings, tilled and manured, warmed lands, still productive of grain in the medieval centuries. The Gilts Lane ridge afforded only cold comfort.

This site is a good example of the complexities that lie within the apparently simple. Even if the chronologies suggested here are wrong, i.e. Napoleonic ploughing over a field system originating between the later eleventh and, perhaps, the mid-twelfth century, built from landscapes which had experienced activity in the Romano-British or prehistoric period, the facts of the complexity of this enigmatic site remain. It is worthy of record.

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