

## A Note on Lynchets in Derbyshire.

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LYNCHETS is the name most commonly given by archæologists to those ancient cultivation terraces which are to be found in various parts of England. Attention was long ago directed to them by Seebohm in his *English Village Community*, and by Canon Greenwell. Since then they have been mentioned in various articles in *Antiquity* and elsewhere. One peculiarity of these terraces is that as a rule they run parallel to the contours, and begin at the top of the slope of a hill and descend by steps into the valley. They are most commonly found in limestone and chalk regions, particularly on the Berkshire and Wiltshire Downs, the North and South Downs, and the dales of Yorkshire. The simplest explanation of their form is that they are the natural result of soil creeping downwards to the level of the balk at the lower end of the ploughed strip. It has been shewn as a result of excavation that where the terraced fields have short sides and are high up the side of a hill they are Celtic, and date to a time when the plough was drawn by man (or more probably woman), and where they are long and narrow running along the bottom of the slopes they are Saxon, having been ploughed by oxen. It is also assumed that it was the custom always to plough in one direction along the slope, turning the sods over down the slope; the plough would make its return journey with the share out of the soil; this would give the ox or the woman a breathing space. If this was the custom it would explain

the absence of any sign of a 'rig' in the middle of the terrace, and would help to hasten the process of terracing.

Some of the balks at the bottom of the slopes in Yorkshire have been proved to have been constructed with stones and turf. So far no excavations have been recorded in Derbyshire, but in Yorkshire, Mr. Raistrick, as a result of the finds after excavations has proved that these cultivation terraces are definitely either of Romano-British or of Saxon age. They may be earlier but not later. In Derbyshire the chief places where lynchets are conspicuous are:—

Horsestead in Priestcliffe;

Alsop en le Dale by Cross Low;

Horse Dale by Bonsal;

Sharplow by Tissington;

half-a-mile S.W. of Oaker Hill near Snitterton; and

half-a-mile W. of Bakewell.

With a view to reaching some idea of the dates of the Derbyshire lynchets, in the absence of excavation, the following observations may be of assistance.

1. They all occur high up in the limestone district. None has been seen in the grit and shale country.

2. The limestone walls sometimes ignore and sometimes conform to the limits of the lynchets. The dates of the erection of the walls can probably be fixed by the Enclosure Acts, but in many cases in N. Derbyshire the walls outline the narrow strips which fall naturally into the three-field system of the Saxons. This is particularly clear at Chelmorton where, however, no lynchets have been observed.

3. They frequently occur near tumuli, as is indicated by the names, Cross Low and Sharplow.

4. In N. Staffordshire at Castern Grange in the Manifold valley, what has been taken for a Neolithic celt, now in the Buxton Museum, was found on the balk of a lynchet. On the opposite side of the valley at Throwley

Grange, there are more conspicuous lynchets circling round the grange. The presence of the lynchets may perhaps account for these medieval manors having arisen in these remote spots.

5. In nearly every case ancient mine shafts or quarries lie near the lynchets, but as the whole surface of the limestone is riddled with these, the connection cannot be pressed.

It would be interesting if local archaeologists would investigate any lynchets in their neighbourhood with a view to fixing their date.