

# I

## Prestwick Carr: Its Draining and Enclosure

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THIS study was prompted by a request from my colleague, Allen Creedy, to provide a potted history of the Carr. Since David Maddison's description predated the draining and enclosure, and the topic was barely touched in the *Northumberland County History*, there was no help for it but to start afresh.<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction*

Prestwick Carr, as the name suggests, was boggy ground, often wholly or partly covered with water, near Prestwick east of Ponteland (NZ 190 744) (fig. 1). At its extreme west tip the Carr emptied into the River Pont, here flowing north to join the River Blyth on its way eastwards to the sea. Drained 150 years ago, the Carr today consists of nearly 700 flat acres (274 ha.) of monotonous landscape relieved only by the hedges, ditches and plantations of the 19th century. The change caused by the drainage was lamented in 1890 by Thomas Hodgkin, secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle. "... Prestwick Carr forty years ago; the favourite haunt and breeding place of various sorts of wild-fowl ... a favourite place of pilgrimage for the naturalists of Northumberland". Once "a picturesque, unprofitable waste", it is now "two square miles of common-place Northumbrian cornland".<sup>2</sup>

In ecological terms Prestwick Carr is a basin mire, formed of deep peat, occupying a depression on the site of a former lake. In the 1930s two bores were made in the middle of the Carr, and their section was found to consist, from the top, of one foot of gravel and soil, 10 to 16 feet of peat containing many fragments of wood and, at the bottom, grey silt or marl. This was interpreted as showing that for a long period in the earliest times the Carr had been open water, a lake fed by several small local streams,

"but mainly by the Pont". Then, as silt, reeds and mosses grew, a peaty marsh was formed, sometimes wet, sometimes dry. In the drier times vegetation and trees crept out over the surface. The pollen samples showed that, at the beginning, pine predominated with a little birch and that later, by about the half way point, alder had increased with hazel also being important.<sup>3</sup> More recent boreholes by the National Coal Board confirmed and greatly extended the section, and revealed that the grey sandy clay and silt was 44 feet thick, and the boulder clay 10 feet, before sandstone was reached 60 feet down.<sup>4</sup>

### *Early History*

The first recorded fact of human activity was an isolated event—the loss or concealment of the Roman camp kitchen set known as the Prestwick Carr hoard. In June 1890 a William Shotton was ploughing a field called Middle Carr, 350 yards north of Prestwick Whins Farm, when, quite near the surface, he dug up thirteen assorted bronze vessels. They were in two groups, 10 to 12 yards apart, and some of the pots were said to be piled up in a cauldron. Though a description of all of them was published the collection became split, Charles Lorraine Bell of Woolsington, the landowner, giving seven immediately to the Society of Antiquaries but keeping five.<sup>5</sup> It was the intention of his widow to lend the second group to the Society,<sup>6</sup> but they never reached the museum and subsequently disappeared.<sup>7</sup> The thirteenth, the cauldron, was missing even before the publication of the report in the *County History*.<sup>8</sup>

This "batterie de cuisine", as it was rather grandly called in the 1920s, consisted of a cauldron, four bowls, one basin and seven saucepans. A few were decorated, two bore a

## PRESTWICK CARR: LOCATION MAP

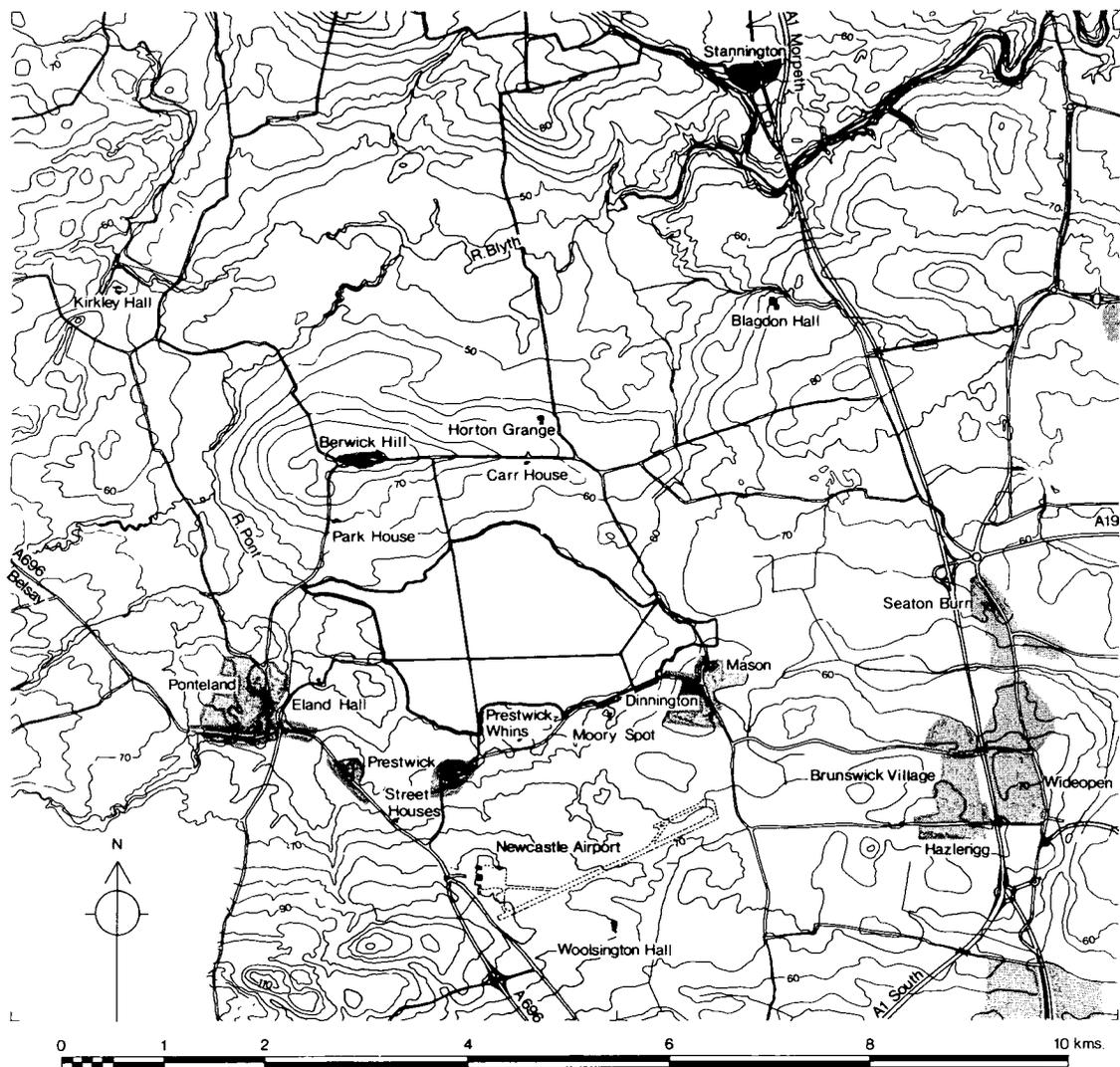


Fig. 1 Prestwick Carr: location map.

maker's stamp, at least one had the names of its owners or users punched on it. One appeared to be calibrated for measuring liquids. They were nearly all damaged, battered from heavy use, patched and bent, and some lacked their handles.

There are two questions, neither of which

can be answered with certainty. Who did the collection belong to, and why was it in the Carr? There are two possible owners, either an army on the march, or a native settlement who had acquired the vessels secondhand. They are considered to be too battered to be part of the baggage of a superior officer, as Hedley sug-

gested in 1923. There is a choice of three reasons for dumping. It was either an accident, or to conceal a theft, or as a votive offering. The last is the least acceptable since the gods were not likely to be grateful for damaged goods. The most probable explanation is that the horse or cart carrying the vessels strayed from the dry edge of the Carr, became bogged, and the load had to be abandoned.<sup>9</sup>

Nothing more is known of the Carr until the 12th century. It then appears in the written sources as Merdesfen (Merdo's fen, later altered to Mason) in the barony of Mitford,<sup>10</sup> but its status as common land, with the legal rights over its surface shared by the seven surrounding townships of Mason, Dinnington, Prestwick, the Eland Hall section of Ponteland, Berwick Hill, Horton Grange and Brenkley,<sup>11</sup> was not explicitly recorded at this date. Intercommuning occurred elsewhere in Northumberland, and was usual in the fens and marshes around the Wash from the 10th century as a result of communal reclamation.<sup>12</sup>

There is, however, evidence for another normal practice, the habit of the owner of granting out parcels of common to institutions and individuals who had no previous rights to the land.<sup>13</sup> In 1157/65 Roger Bertram I gave his vill of Horton and part of the peat moor to Newminster Abbey, and in 1190 St. Bartholomew's Nunnery of Newcastle received two and a half acres of fen. Roger Bertram III made three grants of peat bog to Tynemouth Priory in the late 13th century, including free access by the paths, the pasture of their draft oxen, and permission to make a dike to lead out the water.<sup>14</sup> Private individuals, such as Sir Bertram Monboucher, and Sir John Middleton of Belsay, were also recorded as holding small areas of peat land or turf land there in the medieval period.<sup>15</sup> Since the 19th-century township boundary round the edge of the Carr roughly corresponds to the 55 m contour, perhaps the maximum high water mark, it is probable that these grants were only temporary and did not result in a permanent reduction in its size. The value of the fen at this time lay in its peat, and in 1296 it was declared to be worth 10s p.a.<sup>16</sup>

### *Before Improvement*

In the 18th and early 19th centuries Prestwick Carr was both a beauty spot offering opportunities for such leisure pursuits as walking, fishing and nature study, and a source of livelihood for neighbouring farmers. The use which was made of it depended on the time of year,—“in the Winter and wet seasons, it is inundated and covered with water to the extent of one-half of the whole surface . . . At all seasons there are pools interspersed on the plain”.<sup>17</sup> It was always to be treated with respect and not ventured upon lightly. The summer of 1723 was dry, and a party was able to cross over the middle, but a cautionary tale was told of “a south country gentleman who would not be dissuaded from going through the Carr”, and had later to be dragged from the bog.<sup>18</sup>

However dull the Carr may seem to us today, to David Maddison, the Dinnington schoolmaster, it was a source of delight. “The plain is interspersed with pools . . . the centre part is covered with heath and other plants, belted round with furze, which displays its golden flowers great part (*sic*) of the year. The sides are covered with a fine coat of grass . . . The grounds adjoining having a gentle rise upon the different sides, renders the view more beautiful and picturesque, being interspersed with villages, farm houses, and luxuriant fields of corn and grass”.<sup>19</sup> It gave him pleasure not least as a naturalist, since he could here “find scope for his favourite pursuit”. Maddison's study is probably most valuable for his lists of species, 148 plants, and 79 resident and visiting birds, as well as fish, mammals, reptiles, insects and shells.<sup>20</sup> Ornithological observation continued, of course, even if much of it was done by shooting and egg-collecting, and records for the years before 1855–56 were published by Hancock and Adamson in 1874 and 1880–1.<sup>21</sup>

There were extensive opportunities for fishing and shooting on the Carr, sports which could only legally take place with the permission of the lord of the manor. This position had been acquired by the Mitford family in the mid-16th century, and in the early 19th century was held by Bertram Mitford who employed a

gamekeeper to expel poachers. There must be more than a suspicion that he turned a blind eye to the presence of the gentry. "Sir Matthew White Ridley, bart., . . . had had a boat of his own upon it (the Carr), had been in the habit of fishing there, and never asked leave of any person. He was never discharged from the Carr . . . Charles William Bigge, Esq., (a leading north-eastern coal owner), deposed that he had fished upon the Carr frequently, and had been there with parties".<sup>22</sup>

The most important use of the Carr, however, was as common. The grass around its sides was available for grazing by cattle of the owners and tenants of land, cottages and garths "in respect of which a right of common has been immemorially enjoyed". It seems that there was a system of stints, that is a farmer could only pasture the number of beasts considered to be in proportion to his acres of land with right of common, but a stint is not defined in any greater detail. There is no doubt that, in the early 19th century, the Carr was both overstinted and also grazed by geese, which were not only "very destructive to the herbage", but "not commonable cattle". The management of the common by the lord of the manor had been slack for at least the previous half century, no manorial court having sat between 1756 and 1775.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Early Attempts at Drainage*

The digging of drains to rid parts of the Carr of water had occurred in the medieval period, and presumably continued intermittently through the centuries which followed. In the latter part of the 18th century there is a record of such work taking place, although it is not clear whether it was a new drain or the cleaning out of an old one, or even both. It must be supposed that the work was intended both to increase the amount of available grazing and to safeguard the enclosed farmland on the fringes of the common. It was carried out in a casual, opportunistic, manner by a group of tenants as and when the need arose. "They each paid for the draining according to the cattle they had on. They never asked any leave of any person to drain . . .", and indeed the draining was

apparently never referred to in the manorial court roll. "Every farmer sent a man when the Carr wanted draining . . . They were sometimes two days in draining, and sometimes more, according to the number of men employed. It was a very large drain that they made, and it took a great deal of making".<sup>24</sup> These early efforts were small-scale and short-lived, and they were quite inadequate if, as had begun to emerge, the ultimate aim was to drain the Carr, stop the Pont flooding into it and carry out enclosure.

Although few commons were enclosed in Northumberland before the mid-18th century, the possibility of draining and dividing Prestwick Carr was discussed as early as the 1720s. The work required to control the River Pont, which "when in a flood, runs into the Carr", was not to be "done on a sudden". A satisfactory drainage system might, however, be achieved "by cutting a large ditch, and raising a large mound on each side of it, so as to exceed the greatest height that the Pont ever flows to. This they do in Holland".<sup>25</sup> Eighty years were to pass before there was another recorded reference to this issue by which time Bailey and Culley had written, "The commons in this county capable of being converted into profitable tillage land are now very trifling, the greatest part having been inclosed within the last thirty years . . .".<sup>26</sup> Prestwick Carr was not among them.

It was more than another half century later before the draining and enclosure of the Carr was finally achieved. Tate suggested two reasons for late enclosures such as this,—either agreement to proceed could not be obtained, or the land was simply not worth the expense "until this had been minimised by the cheap and convenient procedure of the later general acts".<sup>27</sup> Both explanations may have had a bearing on this case, but there is not enough evidence to do more than speculate. The succession of unrealized schemes described below perhaps suggests a combination of a lack of concerted will (for a variety of reasons) with alarm at the cost.

The process of real, if very tentative, improvement may be said to have begun in

1807. In that year Bertram Mitford, lord of the manor, summoned all the freeholders, tenants and residents to the manorial court.<sup>28</sup> This was such an unusual event that it was probably the talk by the local landowners and tenants of draining and enclosing the Carr which prompted him to assert his rights. In view of the sloppy management of the common, trespass and damage occurring unchecked,<sup>29</sup> it does not seem at all likely that he was the initiator of such ideas. It must be admitted, however, that the court was poorly attended, there is no evidence of what took place there, and the bailiff, some years later, could not remember enclosure being discussed.

Whether or not the matter was raised in 1807 there was a firm proposal for the division of the Carr by 1809,<sup>30</sup> though who initiated it is unknown. Those who claimed rights of pasturage and therefore stood to gain were Matthew Bell, for land at Prestwick, Eland Hall and Dinnington, John Stapleton for Berwick Hill, John Bray for Dinnington, John Wilkie for Eland Hall, Robert Horsley for Carr House, Bacon Forster for Horton Grange, Revd. Frederick Eken for Make-me-Rich, Mrs. Barker for Prestwick, and the lord of the manor. A combination of some or all of these people presumably commissioned J. Watson to produce large-scale plans of the Carr and design a scheme for its drainage, and these were ready in the autumn of the same year. The plans showed both the extent of the Carr (fig. 2) and the waste ground in the villages of Dinnington and Prestwick, and also the boundaries of the estates of the landowners claiming pasturage.

Watson proposed to drain the Carr from the west end, the method which was to prove successful nearly fifty years later. After taking a series of levels on the bottom and surface of the water in the Carr, and the River Pont as far as Kirkley Mill dam, he concluded that the problem of flooding could be solved by making two fresh cuts. The first was a new line for the Pont, to be dug through "Mr. Stephenson's Grounds", and to run from c. half a mile south of Berwick Hill Bridge (NZ 167 738) to just above its junction with the Small Burn (NZ 164 746), so bypassing the existing, very

winding, course which would then be filled in and granted to the neighbouring landowners. The second was designed to carry water off the Carr itself and to run in a straight line from close to Berwick Hill Bridge to the north end of the new cut for the Pont. These works would remove the principal meanders of the Pont, and he calculated that between the Carr and Kirkley Mill dam there was a fall of more than 8 feet, enough "to answer the purpose of bringing the water off" (fig. 3).

This scheme may never have been started and certainly cannot have been realized in its entirety since the notion of draining the Carr was revived in 1835. The only statement arousing doubt about what actually happened was by Eneas Mackenzie in 1825. He wrote of the Carr that "Much of the land was lately gained, by cutting a drain from the lake into the river Pont".<sup>31</sup>

Thomas Bell's two-part drainage proposal of 1835 met with no greater success<sup>32</sup> (fig. 3). At the west end of the Carr the meanders of the Pont were to be eliminated and a straighter course cut for the river from just downstream of Berwick Hill bridge almost to the upper end of the Kirkley mill race. At the east end he suggested creating an entirely new watercourse from the edge of the Carr (NZ 195 746) north-east and north to the River Blyth east of Bellasis Bridge. While there is no explicit clue to the instigator of this scheme, the idea of an eastern watercourse is perhaps a hint of possible interest by Sir Matthew White Ridley. There is, however, no reason to suppose any of this work was undertaken.

#### *A Possible Water Supply for Tyneside*

While local landowners were trying to dispel water from the Carr northwards, the Newcastle and Gateshead Union Joint Stock Water Company were considering the abstraction of water for the better supply of Newcastle and Gateshead to the south, and they obtained an Act to this effect in 1840. The proposal was to draw water from the junction of the Pont and the Carr, and carry it in an open conduit along the south shore of the Carr to a reservoir near

PRESTWICK CARR: 1809

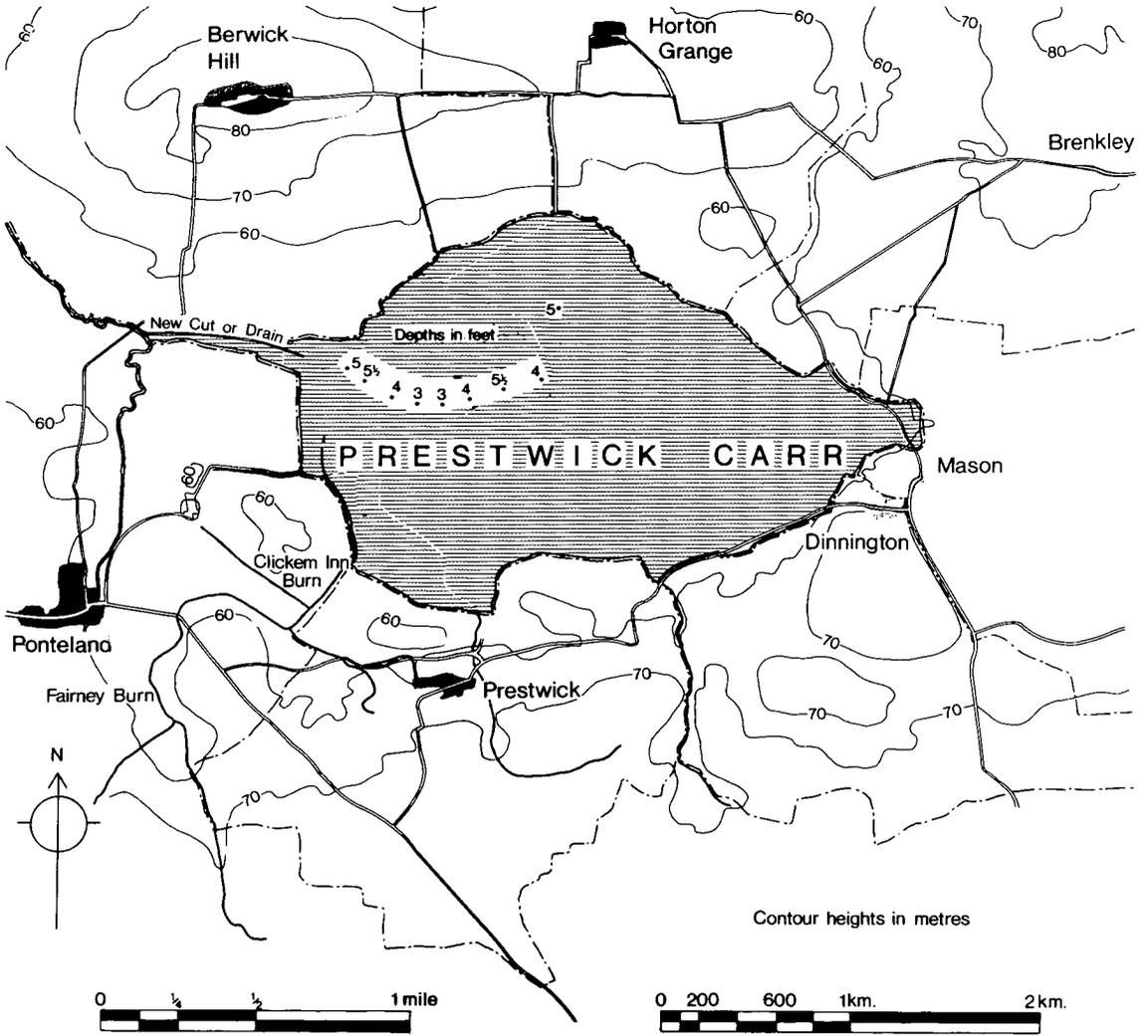


Fig. 2 Prestwick Carr: 1809.

Moory Spot lane end. From there it would flow by pipe or conduit past Brunton Mill to a second reservoir on the south side of Fawdon Road. The third stage was east to West Brunton, past Coxlodge Square, down Kenton Lane and Kenton Road to pass Kenton Lodge, and so across the Town Moor and past Spital

Tongues to the third reservoir south of the barracks on the edge of the Moor. The main pipe ran from there down Barrack Road to Gallowgate and St. Andrew's.

Nothing came of this, perhaps because of the conditions which had to be met. There could be no abstraction from the Carr when the water

level fell below a certain point, and care had to be taken not to injure the mill owners on the Pont.<sup>33</sup>

### *The Lord of the Manor*

The lord of the manor assumed a more active role in the early 19th century than had hitherto been the case, possibly being driven to this by pressure for improvement by the local land-owners. Be that as it may, in 1816 Bertram Mitford initiated legal proceedings for trespass against one of the Berwick Hill tenants and, by so doing, successfully established his manorial rights.<sup>34</sup> There is then some evidence that, in the twenty years or so before enclosure he, and his successor, Admiral Robert, actually exercised some of their rights. The boundaries of the Carr were formally perambulated in 1834, a number of encroachments on to the common were noted at Prestwick, Dinnington and Mason, and the encroachers were duly listed and fined. The evidence does, however, suggest that the fines were only spasmodically collected, and as there is no mention of the encroachments being removed it seems possible that the fines became akin to rents. Almost every imaginable encroachment was there—dwellinghouses, gardens, coalhouses, teefalls, pigsties, stables, byres, shops, stairs, a stack-yard and a plantation.<sup>35</sup> What the Mitfords did not do until after enclosure was to exploit the underlying minerals which they owned.

### *Drainage and Enclosure*

Prestwick Carr was enclosed under a general Act for the Inclosure Exchange and Improvement of Land passed in 1853.<sup>36</sup> The Award was made according to the provisions of the General Enclosure Acts of 1845 and 1852. The former was the more important, and was to be executed by the newly established "Inclosure Commissioners of England and Wales" who could appoint Assistant Commissioners, and who exercised a general supervision over the locally chosen executive officer, now termed a valuer. An Assistant Commissioner, John Job Rawlinson of Duddon Hall, Cumberland, was appointed to "ascertain and set out" the

boundary between the parishes of Ponteland and Dinnington and another, Col. R. K. Dawson, on 7 February 1860 approved and signed the map which accompanied the Award. The person of significance, however, was the valuer and there is nothing to show how Thomas Smith Woolley the elder, of Collingham, Notts., obtained this position, or why he resigned before the job was completed. He was succeeded by Thomas Smith Woolley the younger, presumably his son, also of Collingham and specifically described as a land surveyor.

The Award was signed in March, 1860, seven years after Parliament had approved the enclosure. Work did not, however, start immediately, and Woolley's letter to Sir Matthew White Ridley in November, 1854, suggested the delay had been occasioned by disagreements among the interested parties.<sup>37</sup> Thereafter, with the exception of the financial problems, the project went forward smoothly enough. The planning and execution of the drainage system was completed by 1857,<sup>38</sup> and the roads and allotments by 1858. In June of that year Admiral Mitford was told by Woolley that he could take possession of his allotment(s) on 1st July when he would be shown its location, and the fences he had to make.<sup>39</sup> No reason has been found to explain why the Award was not signed until nearly two years later.<sup>40</sup>

The administration and financing of the work cannot be described with certainty. It is clear from the surviving correspondence between Woolley, Sir Matthew White Ridley and Matthew Bell (six letters in all) that Woolley took instructions from and reported to meetings, probably of the commoners, chaired by Bell. It is also clear that Woolley did not tolerate disagreement with the way in which he wanted to work. The argument, which caused delay at the beginning and was probably between Woolley and Ridley, seems to have been over "the scheme of Drainage" and the means of implementing it. There had been a proposal by the engineer, Robert Nicholson,<sup>41</sup> to drain the Carr from the east end, partly in a culvert 5 feet 9 inches in diameter, to the Blagdon Burn and the River Blyth.<sup>42</sup> Nichol-

# PRESTWICK CARR: PROPOSED DRAINAGE SCHEMES

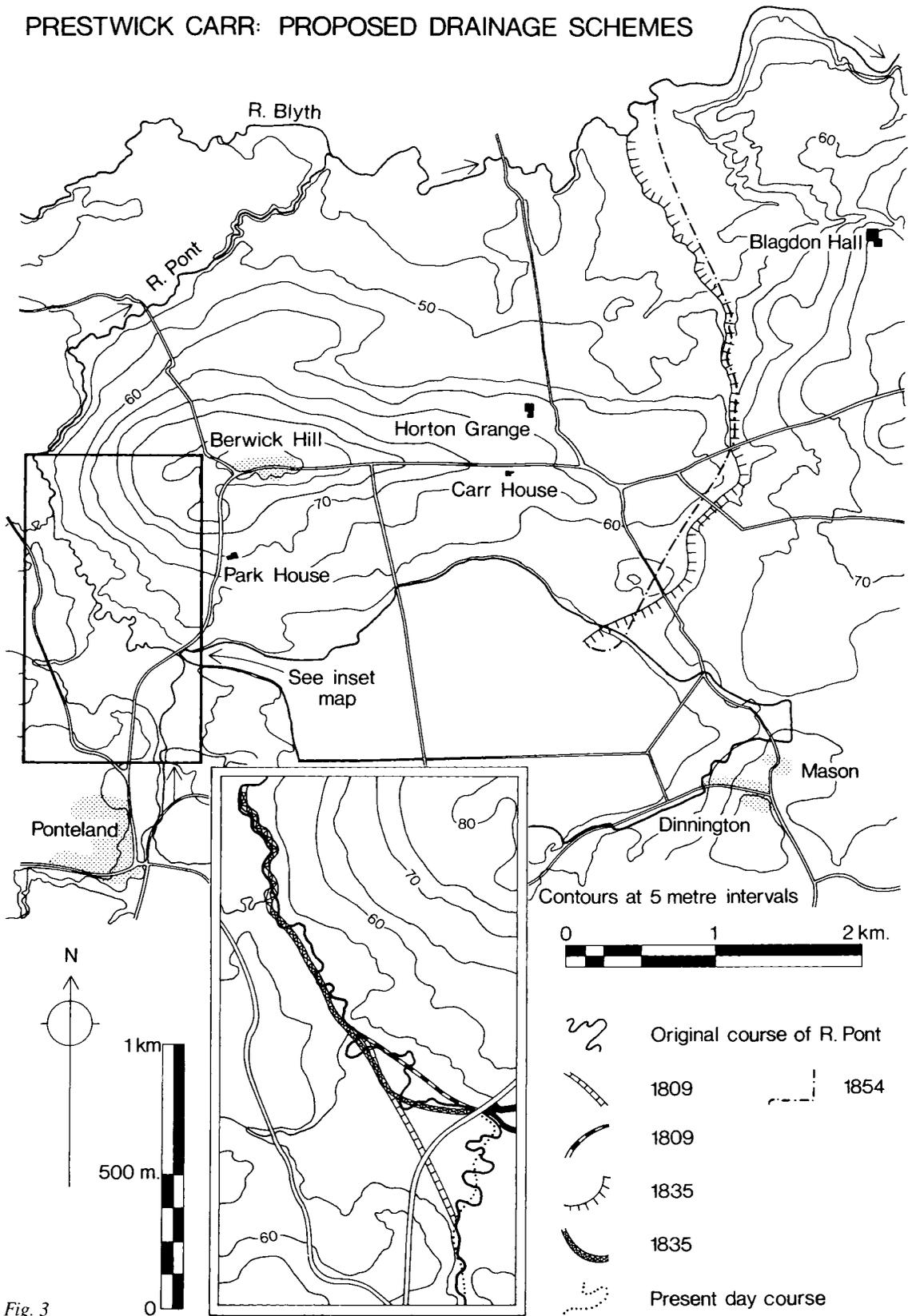


Fig. 3

son, who produced a report Woolley considered inadequate, had been engaged by Ridley, and the culvert would largely have run on Ridley's land. The matter must have come to a head, with Woolley getting his own way, at the meeting on 4 January, 1855. "The Western Scheme must now be acted upon . . ." he wrote to Ridley two days later, and ten days after that Ridley reported that Nicholson had withdrawn.

The drainage design was the work of John F. Tone (1822–81), and the contractor was John Lackland, their signatures appearing on the surviving drawings.<sup>45</sup> Tone was a civil engineer who practised principally in the north-east of England, and who is known to have worked both on the Blyth and Tyne, and on the Border Counties Railways,<sup>44</sup> and also for the Whittle Dean Water Company on the aqueduct from the River Pont via Whittle Dean to Newcastle.<sup>45</sup> Virtually nothing is known of the substantial labour force which would have been recruited for the project, the only information so far found being preserved on a gravestone in the churchyard of St. Matthew's, Dinnington.<sup>46</sup> This commemorates William Betts of Ragnall, Notts., who "died suddenly at Dinnington where he was engaged upon the Carr(*sic*) drainage works on the 30th July 1856 in the 62nd year of his age".

The scheme which was implemented was similar to the earlier proposals in many respects. The principal works outside the Carr formed the first phase, and consisted of a new (main) drain leading from the Carr, secondly "the new River", that is a diversion and enlargement of the Pont from Coldcoats Burn upstream to a point beyond a new weir on the Pont, (presumably that at NZ 164 745), thirdly the weir itself, and fourthly a new bridge to carry Berwick Hill Road over the drain. Though approaching completion in February, 1856, these operations had "nearly exhausted the existing Guarantee of £2,500" before work on the Carr itself had really begun. Though there is no evidence to show what this sum was supposed to cover, it is clear that it was a "personal guarantee of the parties interested" against which Lambtons Bank made advances.

The second phase of construction, the drains, culverts, banks and bridges on the Carr itself, (fig. 4) had been approved at a meeting on 25 January, 1856. The cost of this phase was estimated at £6,083 to which had to be added £2,795 for the outfall. Woolley suggested to Bell that, of the two ways of raising money, selling the land or arranging with the bankers for a further advance on another personal guarantee, the second was preferable. ". . . it is manifest that the attempt to sell land in its present unimproved state would involve an enormous sacrifice, not less probably than 50 per Cent on its real value". He therefore suggested that not less than £3,500 should be found so that most of the roads and main drains could be completed before any land was offered for sale.

The task of arranging a new guarantee seems to have been left to Matthew Bell. His not wholly legible letter of 7 February, 1856, to Sir Matthew White Ridley survives:

"Dear Matt,

. . . As it is of great importance that the works should proceed as rapidly as possible during the spring and summer and as there is ample security on the land of the Carr for the guarantee . . . I hope you will feel disposed to allow your name to appear on the Guarantee along with the names of such other Commoners as may be inclined to sign . . . my name is already to two Guarantees yet I'd not hesitate to sign this the third if you will join and a few other of the Commoners.

Matt Bell".

Ridley's reply on 20th February was distinctly unenthusiastic—"I have the greatest possible objection to guarantees . . ."—and he wanted his solicitors to approve the scheme before he became further involved. No later letters survive and it is therefore unknown whether any guarantees were forthcoming, or if all the funds required were obtained by the sale which followed a few months later.

Land was offered for sale by auction in April, 1857. It comprised "the best portion of the recently drained common, known as 'Prestwick Car', . . . virgin pasture land of the richest possible description, sound, perfectly

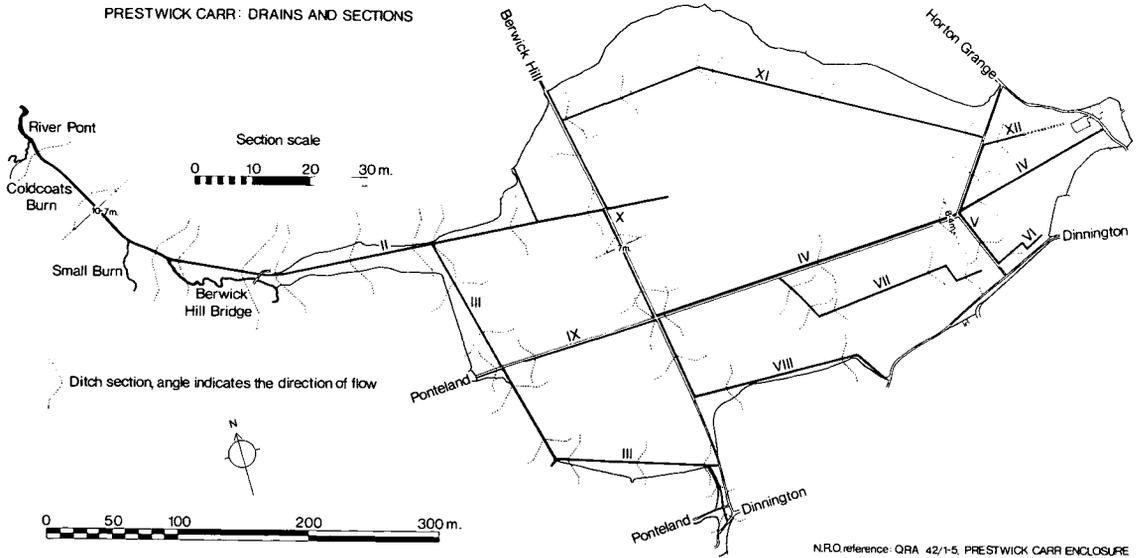


Fig. 4 *Prestwick Carr: drains and sections.*

drained, and securely embanked from flood. Its value, whether let as accommodation land to small tenants, or held in connection with Upland arable farms, can hardly be over-rated".<sup>47</sup> Eventually 600 acres were sold for £12,000. The vicar of Dinnington bought the fields next to his vicarage, William Berkley of Eland Hall the land between his farm and the Clickemin Drain, the Revd. Edward Ogle of Kirkley Hall 100 acres at the west end of the Carr, and Matthew Bell 30 acres on the south side of the Carr. The largest area, nearly 450 acres, went to David Thornbury of Washington in Lincolnshire (fig. 5). He seems to have been setting himself up as a Northumbrian landed gentleman, having bought Prestwick Lodge and farm a few years earlier, and being also the owner of Prestwick Street Houses and West Farm, and three cottages in Prestwick.

The valuer had had to begin replanning the Carr by persuading the owners of some of the land on its edge to release portions, and declare them allottable, so that the watercourses could be accommodated. Then, once the land had been drained, he could complete the

new layout. The watercourses largely determined its pattern, running in long straight stretches often parallel to the roads, the two together becoming part of the allotment boundary system. The public roads were set out 30 feet wide and ran across the Carr connecting the old access points from the surrounding settlements (fig. 6). The two private roads were narrower, and were intended to give access to individual allotments only. He also realigned a short stretch of the Ponteland to Dinnington Road south of Prestwick Whins. He made provision for the maintenance of both roads and drains. The roads were a normal charge on the parish, and the boundary was redefined so that the burden was shared. The expense of cleansing, repairing and maintaining the drains was met by a rate, a percentage being charged against each man's allotment. To give the watercourses some protection it was stipulated that none were to be used for watering cattle, and any watering places required had to be made by the farmer and fenced off from the watercourses.

Two special groups had to receive allotments of land before the main body of commoners

PRESTWICK CARR: PRINCIPAL LANDOWNERS AND THEIR ALLOTMENTS OF COMMON

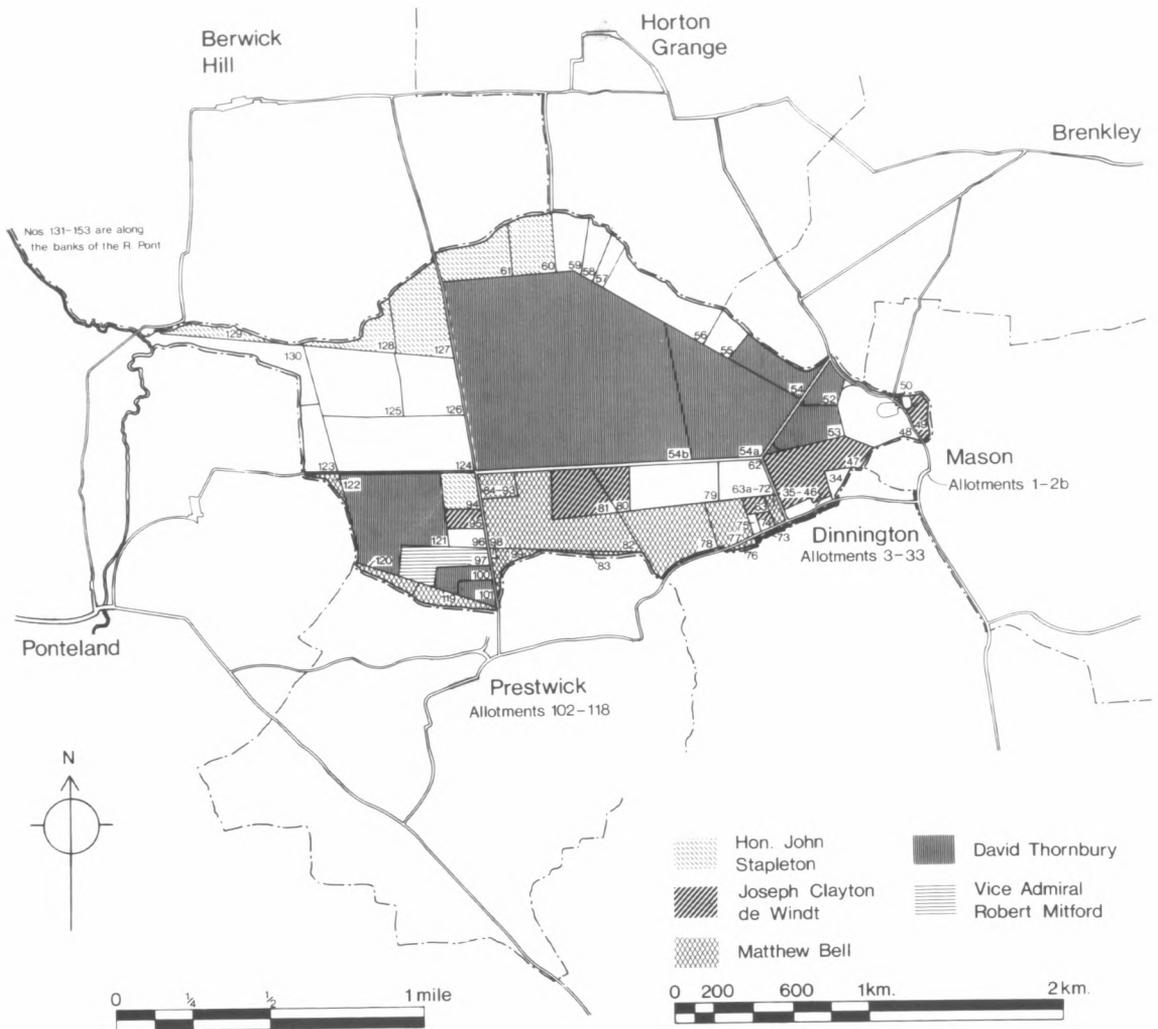


Fig. 5

could be considered. The lord of the manor received a standard one sixteenth of the residue. On the Carr this amounted to just 20 acres, and consisted of many small pieces of land to consolidate Mitford's existing holdings, largely cottages and gardens in Dinnington and Prestwick. He was also confirmed in possession

of his right in all mines, minerals, stones and other substrata under the Carr. This included the power to enter, search for, work and carry away minerals etc. anywhere, subject to the payment of compensation for damage to the surface. The second group, the churchwardens and overseers of the poor of the parishes of

## PRESTWICK CARR: TOWNSHIP ALLOTMENTS AND NEW ROADS

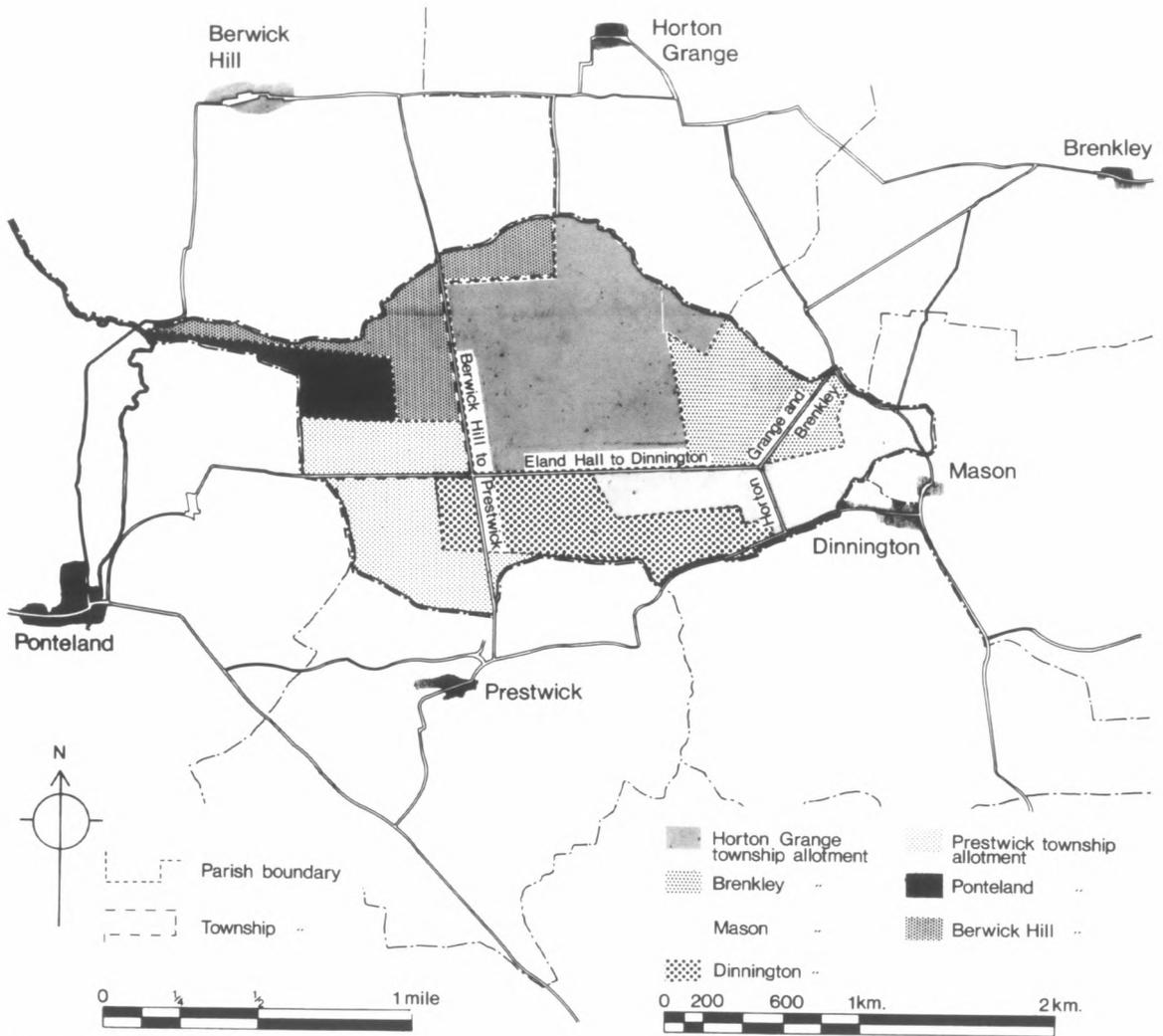


Fig. 6

Dinnington<sup>48</sup> and Ponteland, benefited directly from the General Act of 1845. This had made it illegal to enclose town or village greens, and had authorized the making of allotments for exercise and recreation, and for the labouring poor. Woolley therefore allotted them what may be termed Prestwick village green for use as a place of exercise and recreation for the

inhabitants of Dinnington parish. They also received the triangular field north-west of the White Swan "as an allotment for the labouring poor" of Dinnington, and the small fields on the south-east side of Prestwick for the use of the same class of persons of the townships of Prestwick and Ponteland.

The last of Woolley's tasks was to allot the

## PRESTWICK CARR: EXTENSION OF THE FARMS ON TO THE CARR (1889–1920)



Fig. 7

remaining land to those who had a right to it. Each person's share was made in proportion to the value of his holding on the Tithe Map of 15–20 years earlier. Most of the new land went to a very small number of big landowners, some to Matthew Bell together with his lessees, and a little to the owners of houses, cottages or even two rooms, principally in Mason and

Dinnington. The Award of Common was finally signed by Woolley on 23rd, and by H. C. Miles and Wm. Blamire, Inclosure Commissioners for England and Wales, on 29th March, 1860.

#### *After enclosure*

The enclosure had two immediate effects on

the pattern of agricultural holdings. Because, in accordance with normal practice the allotments had been located, where possible, next to the owner's existing property, they tended to be absorbed into the neighbouring farms and so, on a map at least, the original shape of the Carr disappeared. This could not happen for the two large allotments bought by Thornbury and Ogle in the middle of the Carr, and for them new farms had to be built. Carr Grange Farm was therefore established at the east end of the Thornbury holding, and Prestwick Mill Farm at the west end of the Carr for the Ogle land (fig. 7).

Although the lord of the manor, Admiral Mitford, gained little from the enclosure and sold more than half his allotments because the expenses, presumably of fencing, were so heavy,<sup>49</sup> the draining of the Carr seems to have encouraged him to exploit his mineral rights. In answer to an enquiry early in 1861 about the existence of coal under the Carr, the Admiral's agent was told that there were three seams, including the Hartley Seam, all within a depth of 40 fathoms (c. 250 feet).<sup>50</sup> Thereafter the coal was leased to a coal company and normally worked from a pit outside the Carr. Latterly the tenants were the East Walbottle Coal Company who paid £250 rent for the royalty, 5.5d per ton of coal and 4d per ton of fireclay brought to bank. A particularly good year was 1929 when 65,000 tons of coal were mined and the Mitfords made £1500. This did not last, however, and by 1941 the Beaumont and Brockwell Seams produced nothing.<sup>51</sup>

### Conclusion

As the initial draining and enclosure of the Carr neither prevented intermittent flooding nor produced good agricultural land it follows that it was not a success. Even though a large-scale scheme to drain the area and reduce the risk of flooding was carried out in 1945-6 by the then Northumberland Rivers Catchment Board, the problem has remained unsolved. Flooding occurred in 1947-8, 1967 and 1977, after which it was said, in a report which could have been written 100 years before, that large

areas of the Carr were still subject to regular flooding, and that the River Pont still tended to back up and spill over its banks.<sup>52</sup> Those of us who saw the Carr half under water in 1992 must now wonder if Nature should not be allowed to have her way.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to a number of people for their help with this paper. While some are acknowledged in specific notes, I would like to thank here Francis Burton for preparing the illustrations, Derek Cutts, my brother Stephen Harbottle and Stafford Linsley for commenting on the text, Robert Carmichael for additional information, the staffs of the Northumberland Record Office and the Local Studies Section of the Newcastle Central Library, and—in the library of the Natural History Society in the Hancock Museum—David Noble-Rollin, and Hugh and Stella Chambers.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hodgkin, "Discovery of Roman Bronze Vessels at Prestwick Carr", *Arch Ael*, 2, XV (1892), p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> A. Raistrick and K. B. Blackburn, "The Late-Glacial and Post-Glacial Periods in the North Pennines. Part III.—The Post-Glacial Peats", *Northern Naturalists Union Transactions* Vol. 1, Part 2 (1932), pp. 79-103. I am grateful to Stephen Speak for this reference.

<sup>4</sup> *Northumbrian River Authority, Prestwick Carr Drainage Scheme, Engineer's Report* (February 1968), p. 3. Tony Clarke, of the NRA, kindly provided this reference.

<sup>5</sup> Hodgkin op. cit., pp. 159-161.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. Hedley, *PSAN*, 3, X (1923), pp. 186-7.

<sup>7</sup> Pers. comm., Lindsay Allason-Jones, Museum of Antiquities.

<sup>8</sup> *Northumberland County History* XII (1926), pp. 41-50.

<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to Lindsay Allason-Jones for discussing these possibilities with me.

<sup>10</sup> *NCH* XII, p. 471.

<sup>11</sup> David Maddison, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of Prestwick Carr and its Environs* (1830), p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> W. G. Hoskins and L. Dudley Stamp, *The Common Lands of England and Wales* (1963), p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup> *NCH* XII, p. 471-2, 553.

<sup>15</sup> Maddison op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> *NCH* XII, pp. 449-50.

<sup>17</sup> Maddison op. cit. p. 15 and n.

<sup>18</sup> John Horsley, "Materials for the History of Northumberland 1729-30", reprinted, without a date, in *Inedited Contributions to the History of Northumberland*, a pamphlet in the Local Studies section of the Newcastle Central Library, p. 18. Grace McCombie kindly provided this reference.

<sup>19</sup> Maddison op. cit., pp. 19-20.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 73-88.

<sup>21</sup> J. Hancock, "A Catalogue of the Birds of Northumberland and Durham", *Natural History Transactions of Northumberland and Durham*, 1873, Vol. IV (1874), and C. M. Adamson, *Some More Scraps about Birds* (1880-1).

<sup>22</sup> Maddison op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95, 102-04.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-4, 98-99.

<sup>25</sup> Horsley op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> J. Bailey and G. Culley, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Northumberland* (1797), p. 110.

<sup>27</sup> W. E. Tate, "A Hand List of English Enclosure Acts and Awards. Northumberland", *PSAN* 4, X (1942-46), p. 44.

<sup>28</sup> Maddison, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

<sup>29</sup> C. M. Adamson, *Sundry Natural History Scraps* (1879), p. 81.

<sup>30</sup> All the information about the 1809 proposals is in NRO ZAN Bell 35/36, 3410 Wat 25/30 and Wat 3/102/3 nos 3 and 7. Another plan of the Carr was produced in 1810 by John Bell, but the reason for this survey is not stated. NRO ZAN Bell 35/5.

<sup>31</sup> E. Mackenzie, *View of Northumberland* Vol. II (1825), p. 388.

<sup>32</sup> NRO ZAN Bell 35/6 and 8.

<sup>33</sup> Robert William Rennison, *Water to Tyneside* (1979), pp. 14-15.

<sup>34</sup> Maddison, op. cit., pp. 89-104.

<sup>35</sup> NRO 4267. This, the Mitford Collection, is in the process of being catalogued, and at the time of writing no individual document numbers were available. Note that, according to the General Act of 1845, any encroachments less than 20 years old at

the time of enclosure would be allotted and enclosed.

<sup>36</sup> Tate op. cit., p. 51. This General Act was to cover land which did not include open field arable. Tate notes that the 1904 *Blue Book* (and, incidentally, *NCH* XII) gives the erroneous date of 1852.

<sup>37</sup> NRO ZRI 39/9. A file of correspondence among the Ridley papers providing evidence for the preliminaries of the Award.

<sup>38</sup> NRO ZAN Bell 35/12, and Hancock op. cit., p. xvii.

<sup>39</sup> See note 35.

<sup>40</sup> NRO QRA 42/1-5.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholson was a civil engineer who had worked for several railway companies, including two with John Tone, as well as for the Whittle Dean Water Co. Rennison op. cit., p. 332.

<sup>42</sup> NRO 309/M107. Plan and section of the aqueduct, 31 Aug. 1854.

<sup>43</sup> NRO 309/M106-108.

<sup>44</sup> Newcastle Central Library, Local Studies, *Newspaper Cuttings* Vol. 4, p. 228.

<sup>45</sup> Rennison op. cit., passim.

<sup>46</sup> I am grateful to Joan Foster for drawing my attention to this stone.

<sup>47</sup> NRO ZAN Bell 35/12.

<sup>48</sup> *NCH* XII, p. 437. Though Dinnington was only a chapel of ease to Ponteland at this time, and was not formally constituted a parish until 1886, it was classed as such for the purposes of the Award.

<sup>49</sup> See note 35.

<sup>50</sup> NRO 3410 Wat/3/88/3 nos 2 and 4.

<sup>51</sup> See note 35.

<sup>52</sup> Northumberland Rivers Catchment Board Reports 1942-45, 1945-50; NRA Prestwick Carr Drainage Scheme Engineer's Report 1968; NRA Report to Regional Land Drainage Committee 1974; Report to the Drainage Ratepayers on the Drainage of Prestwick Carr 1978. I am most grateful to Tony Clarke, of the National Rivers Authority, Northumbria Region, for supplying information about this late period in the Carr's history.

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