

The 'Hermitage'

Proposed Location

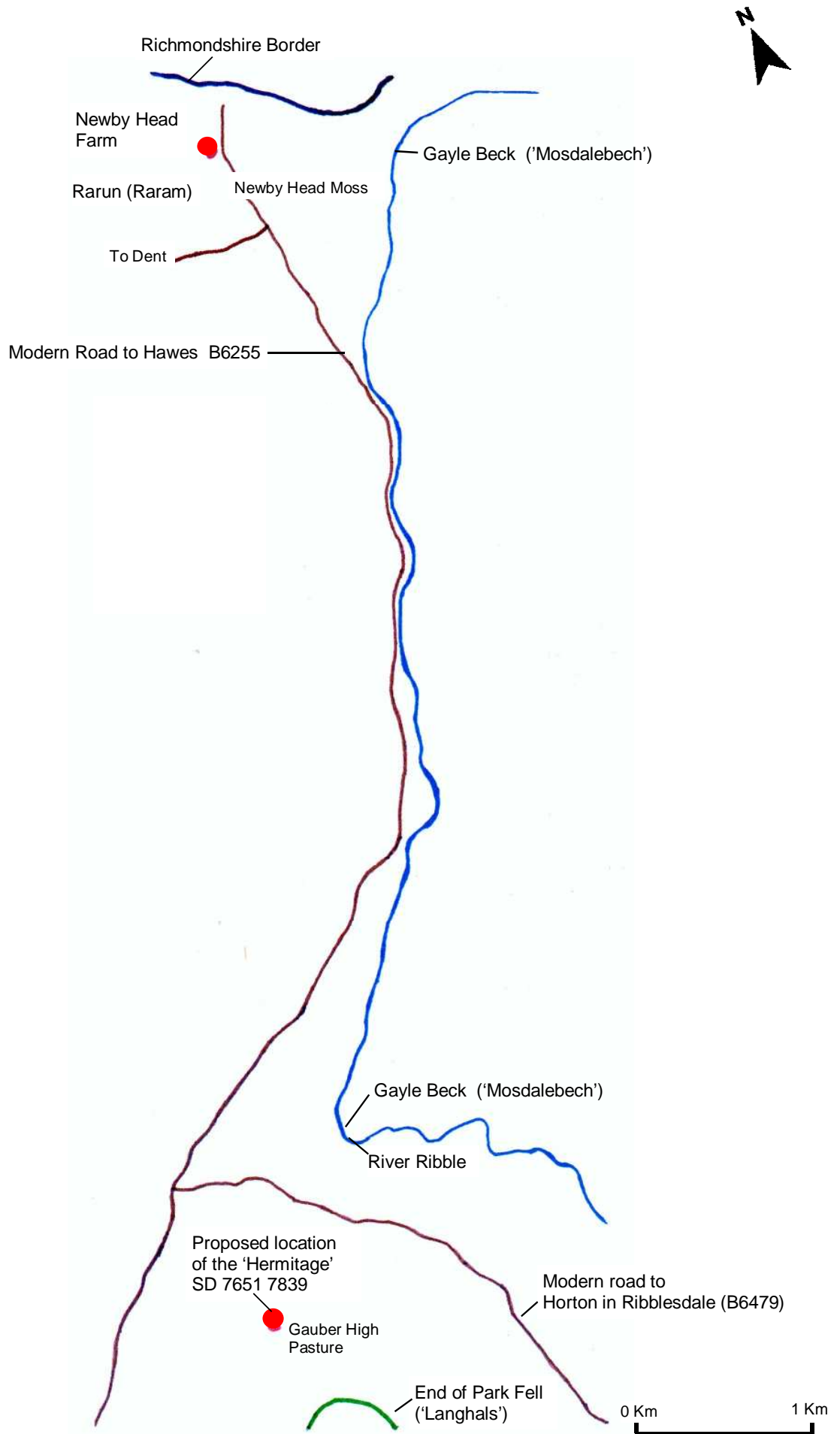


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2nd Edition

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Fig 1: Proposed site of the 'Hermitage' - map of places discussed in the text



The 'Hermitage'

Although today's meaning is usually a place where a hermit lives in seclusion from the world, hermitage was more commonly used to describe a settlement where a person or a group of people lived **religiously** in seclusion. There are several references to a hermitage in the Coucher Book of Furness Abbey (Brownbill, 1916). There is a common boundary between Selside/Birkwith and Southerscales (Souterscales) that goes from the summit of Ingleborough to the Richmondshire border near Newby Head. The dates of these boundary perambulations are 1190, 1209, 1220, 1250-51, 1356 and one from the reign of Henry 1V around 1400.

The proposed Hermitage (Fig 1), at Grid Ref: 7651 7839, is also mentioned in an agreement of 1203-4 between William de Mowbray, who held the lordship of Burton in Lonsdale with its castle and chase, and Adam de Staveley the local lord who held the chase under William. At the time William was under severe financial pressure because of huge debts that he owed to King John, and which he had incurred in order to secure his claim to certain other estates. The document, a re-negotiation of an earlier agreement between the two men, states:

"Furthermore it is to be known that the three cow pastures, namely Qwersyde, Souterscales and Burbladthwait are to remain with the aforesaid Adam and his heirs together with the wood (? bosco), meadows and pastures and all their appurtenances; and the hermitage will remain waste (? et heremitorium remanebit vastum) on condition that there will be none there except with the permission of William de Mowbrai save for the woods (? salvis boscis), meadows and pasture for Adam and his heirs; and aforesaid Adam will build no cow pasture or lodge anywhere else except in the aforesaid three places nor enclose a meadow except the meadow which was enclosed before this agreement"* (ibid pp 293 - 294).

* NB see Bibliography

In this document William seems to be imposing certain restrictions on the right of Adam, and his people of Ingleton and the two Benthams, to pasture and improve certain lands within the chase, possibly in order to improve the hunting and increase its value. The document refers specifically to the Hermitage and states that it shall remain waste. It is interesting to speculate that a large area of open and flat ground stretching from Ribbleshead, southwestwards below Park Fell and Ingleborough, could have provided some of the best hunting land in the chase.

This brings us to the question of where is the Hermitage located, and are there any remains? It has already been stated that the Hermitage is mentioned several times in boundary perambulations in the Coucher book; there are different spellings of the word in Vol 11 Part 11 mentioned above; *domum heremite* (pp 334/ 335/351); *domum herimite* (pp 337); *Erimitehus* (pp 326) ; *heremythous* (pp 341). In Part 1 of the Coucher Book (Atkinson, 1886) it is found spelt *domum Heremitaie* (pp 201) and *Heremitehous* (ibid pp 203). There is no doubt that all these descriptions are referring to the same structure. The Selside/Birkwith boundary, starts **from** the summit of Ingleborough goes along Langhals

down the (from) the head of *Langhals* to the Hermitage and then to *Mosdalbek* as far as the forest of the Count of Richmondshire. The return length of the Southerscales boundary **to** the summit of Ingleborough, (in the **opposite** direction from the Selside/Birkwith), is described as going from Rarun then to *Mosdalebeck*, then to the Hermitage from there to the eastern head of *Langhals* (Figs 1 and 2), along *Langhals* following the Selside/Birkwith boundary to the summit of Ingleborough. As can be seen the only difference in the two boundary descriptions is the mention of Richmondshire in the Selside/Birkwith perambulation, but this makes no difference to the location of the Hermitage. All perambulations describe the Hermitage as being between the end of *Langhals* and *Mosssdale Beck*. Neither names are on any O.S. maps.

To identify the area in which the Hermitage is located we need to locate the *eastern head of Langhals* and *Mosssdale Beck*. Breaking the word *Langhals* into two syllables gives us *Lang* = long and *hals* (*Old Norse*) = a ridge dividing two valleys; a narrow neck of land; a channel of water (Smith, 1956). How does this fit with the topography?. As you descend from the summit of Ingleborough going in an easterly direction you are going along the ridge towards Park Fell. On one side there is Ribblesdale and on the other Chapel-le-Dale. The Birkwith perambulation (16) in the Coucher Book (*ibid*) states that the boundary goes from the top of Ingleborough along *Langhals=the ridge* and then “ascendit contra frontem de Laghals,” = “to climb against the forehead of *Langhals*”. This is exactly what happen when you descend from Ingleborough, walk along the ridge and then climb up again onto Park Fell, which would be the forehead of *Langhals*. These descriptions match the criteria for *Langhals*, and also fit the topography.

Mosssdale Beck (Figs 1 and 3) is described as going all the way to the Richmondshire border. The only beck in front of you as you leave Park Fell, coming from the Richmondshire border, is *Gayle Beck* flowing from *Newby Head Moss* turning at 90° (Figs 1 and 4) and going down Ribblesdale, this is the point (*Ribblehead*) where *Gayle Beck* becomes the *River Ribble* (Grid Ref: SD 7750 7910). *Mosssdale Beck* is also mentioned in two other boundary perambulations in Ingleborough Estate Records; in 1683 the Boundaries of the Manor of *Newby* states;

“....from thence unto Rarum and from thence to Mosssdale =beckhead all those abutting and bounding on the North west upon the Lord or Lords of Dent.....”

A perambulation of The Boundaries of the High Division of the Manor of *Newby* dated 1739 states;

*..... (from) blackrake from thence North East directly upon Raram Rigg to Mosssdale Beck ** NB*

Gayle Beck was formerly *Dale Beck* but no maps are known to the writers showing this as *Mosssdale Beck*, however, it does originate on *Newby Head Moss* and fits the criteria in the perambulation. We have now identified an area between the end of *Park Fell* and the bend in the river where *Gayle Beck* becomes the *River Ribble*. Somewhere between these two points lies the location of the Hermitage. Within this area there are considerable archaeological remains i.e. stone built features; walls,

enclosures and possibly dwellings as well as more recent features such as railways, roads, quarries and farm walls.

In 1974-6 Mr. Alan King excavated one of these remains, a large longhouse type structure (Fig 5), and two other associated stone structures, located in Gauber High Pasture, which we consider may be the 'Hermitage', based on the following evidence. The largest structure, the main dwelling, measuring 64 x 13 feet (internally) with 6 feet thick stone walls. This is a large structure with exceptionally thick walls and after 10 years of field-walking in, and around, this area we have never found remains of another building similar to this one, its size and structure alone make it unusual. The other buildings were thought to be a 'kitchen' and a 'workshop'. Items found in the proposed kitchen were a complete rotary quern, a small bell and a quantity of domestic and wild animal bones. In a corner of this building was an arc of stones that could have formed an oven or corn drying kiln. The 'workshop' was poorly built; a cracked sandstone hearth was found roughly in the centre of the unpaved floor. Other finds consisted of a quantity of iron-rich clinker, a lath turned spindle whorl and two slipper-shaped hammer stones that had been re-used as sharpening stones. The finds from both these buildings suggest a high degree of self sufficiency. Finds from the main dwelling consisted of a large socketed spearhead found in the northern doorway; three coins in the northern gable; one coin in the paving outside the northern entrance and a scatter of iron objects between these paving slabs. These object were identified as two angle-backed knife blades and half a bi-partite horse bit.

As there is no radiocarbon date for this structure the dating of the coins is crucial to ascertaining the period of use. One coin is of Wylfhere who was Archbishop of York at the time the Vikings invaded York AD 867. He fled York and set up his archbishopric at Addingham in Wharfedale, returning to York 20 years later as the first archbishop of the Viking administration. The second coin is of Edilo, a moneyer of Aethelred the second of Northumbria, who reigned from AD 840 to AD 848. The third coin is a debased Northumbrian styca, and the fourth too corroded for any identification (King, 1978). While no firm conclusions can be drawn as to the date of the construction of the main dwelling, it is reasonable to suggest that no coins of Wylfhere would be minted after AD 867 when he fled York, and although dated slightly earlier, the same reasoning can be applied to the Aethelred coin that none would be minted after AD 848. If these coins stayed in circulation for 10 years this would give a combined period of around forty years, from first minting, to end of circulation. Although the deposition of the coins can be allocated a probable timespan, no conclusive dating for the end of occupation can be established from this evidence, but we think this would be around the end of the 9th century.

The finding of a small bell is interesting and King states;

"It seems rather fine to have been a cow bell, and may have had some religious significance. It was made of iron, bronze plated, though surprising the bronze is 40% tin, so it would have appeared like silver" (ibid pp 41).

This is an interesting description when compared with a point made by R.H. Jones (Jones, 1967).

Remarking on the materials used in bell making he writes;

“In the middle ages their tin content was increased to harden the alloy and to produce bells of greater vibrancy.” Could this bell and the coins be suggesting a religious element to the occupation of this site?

Conclusions

As with any archaeological and historical research the conclusions are seldom conclusive. The several boundary perambulations used in this research are quite specific in stating that the Hermitage is between the end of *Langhals* and Mossdale Beck, and given the documentary and topographical evidence, we are reasonably confident these locations have been correctly identified as Park Fell and Gayle Beck respectively. It is fortunate that archaeological remains discussed here have been excavated; are of an unusual construction for the area, and situated between the end of Park Fell and Gayle Beck. The finds from the excavation seem to suggest religious connotations and a high degree of skill and self-sufficiency by the occupants. We think they may have been of some religious order, living in seclusion and administering to the people of Ribblesdale and Chapel-le-Dale. The location in Gauber High pasture is ideal, being at the head of both dales and secluded. The finding of a 22 inch long spearhead, lying on the paving in the doorway suggests to us that once the building was vacated, possibly by the end of 9th century, it was never occupied again. The fact that the spearhead lay at the entrance for all to see, if allowed to go near, may show that there is some religious significance to its deposition and nobody dared to steal or remove it. All this may still have been in the handed down memories of people for over 300 years, and entered in the Furness Abbey records that the Hermitage had to remain waste.

In these conclusions we have attempted to bring together documentary and archaeological evidence combined with a theory or two to shed light on the location of the Hermitage. It is for others to judge if this has been achieved, and also to take the research forward to a more conclusive result or expound some alternative theories based on more substantial evidence.



Fig 2: Northeast end of Park Fell (*Langhals*). The walls of the proposed 'Hermitage' are on the bottom right.



Fig 3: Gayle Beck (*Mossdale Beck*) on the centre right of the picture, looking towards Richmondshire border.



Fig 4: Gayle Beck can just be seen coming in from the centre left and flowing towards the 90° turn to the right of the picture where it becomes the River Ribble.



Fig 5: The walls of the 'Hermitage' looking southeast. The lower slopes of Park Fell are at the top right.

Bibliography

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The translations from Latin have been supplied by David Bishop

NB

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In the third paragraph on page five, there are two queries for 'wood'. The first term used is 'bosco' the second is *salvis boscis*. Mr Bishop has queried the translation to wood and we could not find a translation from the Latin. However, according to the *New Elizabethan Reference Dictionary* (ed Peter Finch) the word *Bosk* in English means a thicket, a small forest (ME). 'Bosco' is an Italian diminutive of *boschetto*; a grove or a plantation of small trees and underwood in a garden or a park.

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The transcripts of Ingleborough Estate Records from Northallerton Record Office were kindly provided by Helen Sergeant. Helen notes that they were drawn up in the middle of the 19th Century (possibly by a member of the Farrer family) when there was a dispute over where the boundary between the Manors of Newby and Dent lay in the region of Whernside and Bleamoor.

All photographs taken by Arthur Batty

Front cover photograph:

Park Fell in the distance with the course of Gayle Beck to the left of the road.