

The 'Hermitage'



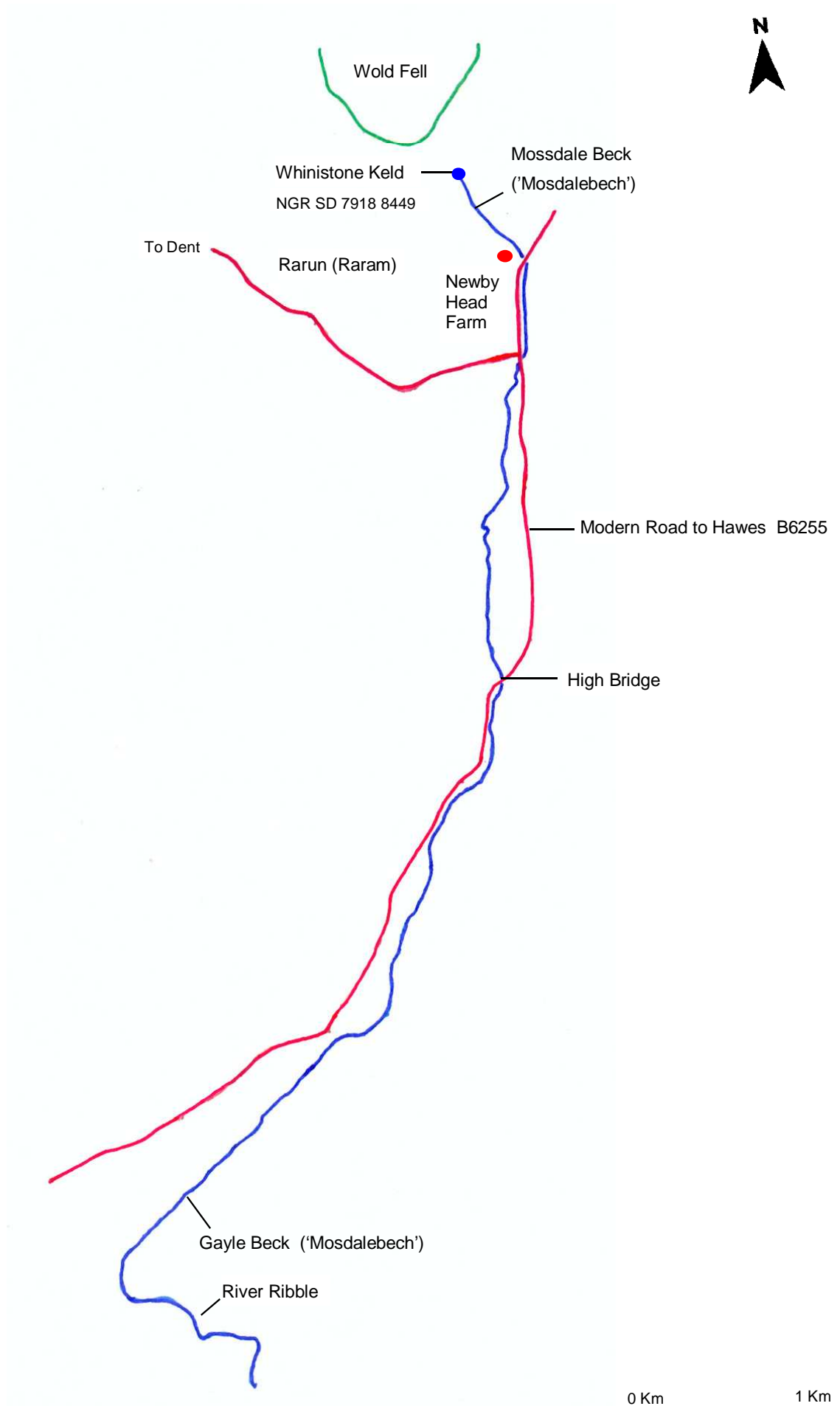
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Update November 2009

The Hermitage - Update November 2009 ©

Published by Batty & Batty

Fig 1: Showing the course of Mossdale Beck and location of Whinistone Keld



Update to the Hermitage

Continuing research into the possible identification of a Hermitage in Gauber High Pasture has highlighted: intriguing new dating evidence; confirmation of the name of a beck and reassessment of a previous artefact. Further archival investigation has also introduced a new direction of research that could be of important significance, but the theory remains unproven.

The Boundary Perambulation

In a perambulation regarding the Boundaries of the High Division of the Manor of Newby dated 1739 its states ..*“from thence north east directly upon Raran Rigg to Mossdale Beck Head otherwise called Whinistone Keld”*. This location is shown on the 1851 1st Edition OS map. Plate 1 shows Whinistone Keld the source of Mossdale Beck. Plate 2 shows Mossdale Beck as it travels SW to join Gayle Beck at High Bridge. The drawing (Fig 1) shows the location of Whinistone Keld (NGR SD 7918 8449) and the course of Mossdale Beck. Comparing this with the site map in “The Hermitage” (Batty & Crack, 2009) it can be seen that from High Bridge to Whinistone Keld, Mossdale Beck has been re-drawn to account for the new findings. There is now no doubt that from Whinistone Keld, to the right angle bend in the river where it becomes the Ribble, is Mossdale Beck, confirming the findings in the above mentioned publication.

Gauber High Pasture

At the excavation in Gauber High Pasture (King, 1972) a 56cm long ‘sword’ was found in the entrance to the main building. A drawing of the sword supplied by Mr King, is reproduced here with his permission (Fig 2). The British Museum identified it as a socketed spearhead with a 41cm blade, with wood still surviving in the socket.. An almost identical blade to this has recently been found in a longhouse type structure in Kingsdale (Plate 3). Research carried out on this blade has shown it is more likely to be a weaving sword. Charcoal associated with this artefact gave a C¹⁴ date of AD 760-900. We think the item found in Gauber High pasture has been wrongly identified by the British Museum and could also be a weaving sword. A photograph of a weaving sword (Plate 4) shows the type used in Iceland and the Faroes up to the nineteenth century and Plate 5 illustrates its use (Hoffmann, 1964). In our previous publication we suggested that the finds from this site showed a high degree of self-sufficiency, and a weaving sword would add to this interpretation.

An Anglo-Saxon axe head found in the remains of a structure close to the Gauber High Pasture site also had charcoal associated with it and was C¹⁴ dated to AD 660-780. It is not known if these two sites are contemporary as there is no C¹⁴ date for Gauber but if they are it means the Gauber site could pre-date the Viking period by a considerable length of time possibly 150 years.

Structure of known Hermitages

Hermitages were not always solitary dwellings hewn out of rock or caves. Eremitic (community) hermitages prospered in the 7th century (Thomas, 1971). According to the English Heritage website the basic construction consists of an oratory and one or more cells that varied according to the needs of that

community. Often quarried material was used to construct the walls, and occasionally there was a room for general domestic purposes. A small area of cultivated ground, to support the community, is often identified in known Hermitages. Yorkshire, with fifty six (or is that now 57?) identified hermitages, has the highest number in the country (Wref: ¹). Another website mentions Bede's description of St. Cuthbert's hermitage on Farne Island; the walls were "*constructed not of hewn stones or brick and mortar, but of rough stones and turf*" (WRef: ²). The construction at Gauber High Pasture could be one of this type.

Bishop Wilfred

The new direction of research concerns Bishop Wilfred who died cAD 709, approximately midway between the radiocarbon dates mentioned above. Wilfred was Bishop of York twice in the late 7th century; Abbot of Ripon cAD 660-709 and Bishop of Hexham from AD 705-709. He had a varied and interesting career as Bishop and Abbot and, for those interested, his career can be followed in many sources – (see WRef: ³ and 'Further Reading') leading to a host of further references. He was a controversial figure in the Church of that time, as he took his canonical beliefs from the Roman Church, unlike some of his contemporaries i.e. St.Cuthbert and St.Cedd who followed the Celtic tradition. During his life there was a schism between these two factions regarding the date that Easter should be celebrated and after a Synod held in Whitby in AD 664, arranged and overseen by King Oswiu, the matter was debated and eventually the Roman tradition was adopted. Wilfred was given many grants of land throughout his long career, one of these grants *could possibly* refer to land in our area. During a consecration ceremony of the Church at Ripon (cAD 671-678¹), to which all kinds of dignitaries had been invited, including King Ecgfrith and Aelfwini who had bestowed the land, Wilfred read out the list of lands the two kings had bestowed on him. Wilfred's first known biographer, Eddius Stephanus states that these lands included:

... "*et haec sunt nomina regionum: iuxta Rippel et Ingaedyne et in regione Dunutinga et Incaetlaevum in caeterisque locis.*"

Professor B. Colgrave translated Stephanus' latin text (Colgrave, 1927) but notes that the place-names were translated by Professor Chadwick of Cambridge University to "around Ribble and Yeadon and the region of Dent and Catlow and other places. Two of these areas are of interest, Ribble (the proposed Hermitage is near the source of the Ribble) and Dent. David Boulton argues that 'Regione Dunutinga' is a small pre-conquest Kingdom of Dent, the name being taken from its leader Dunawt, and also makes a connection to Bishop Wilfred (Boulton, 1993), Mary Higham suggests that 'Dunutinga' is centred on Dent, but the translation involves Ingleborough (Higham, 1992). Some authors consider this grant to be "*lands in and beyond the Pennines*" (Roper, pp 63 1974). Roper also states in the 9th century

"Lindisfarne, which had originally been part of the *paruchia* of Iona, appears to have exercised supremacy over a group of Bernician monasteries comprising Melrose, Abercorn, Coldingham, Norham,

¹ William Farrer dates this episode to AD 705 which we think is erroneous (Farrer, 1901)

²Eata was original founder of the a religious community in Ripon cAD 659

Tynningham and possibly Tillmouth. The connection with Melrose appears to date from the abbacy of Eata², who had earlier been Abbot of Melrose and does not appear to have resigned that office on becoming Abbot of Lindisfarne. Melrose at that time appears to have exercised some sort of supervision over Coldingham. Ripon, before its grant to Wilfred, had also been a dependency of Melrose". (ibid, pp 66).

Previously having perused the accounts of transactions in the Coucher Book of Furness Abbey, we were interested to note that Reynario or Rainerio, the Abbot of Mailros (Melrose) is mentioned as being present as a witness at three land transactions concerning Selside and Birkwith; one c1189-1190^(a); one dated 1190^(b) and another c1189-1194^(c) (Brownbill,1916).

While acknowledging that these transactions occurred some five hundred years after the period under discussion, could this indicate an unknown, long-standing, vested interest of lands around Ribbleshead by the church community at Melrose and/or Ripon? Admittedly this is a very tentative link and there are a number of questions that need to be asked:

1. How accurate is Stephanus's Life of Bishop Wilfred? Some commentators argue that it is biased and not accurate. Colgrave, (1927) discusses this in his Preface.
2. Do we have a correct translation of the place-names in the Stephanus' Life of Bishop Wilfred? As previously mentioned above most authors retain the translation that Colgrave obtained from Professor Chadwick, and Roper's quote of land "*in and beyond the Pennines*" is, unfortunately, an un-sourced assertion.
3. Has Roper translated Dunutinga to the Pennines, or is he using it as a summary for some of the place names?
4. Was the land '*iuxta Rippel*' around the land at Ribchester where St. Wilfred founded a church? The history of the Church indicates that there was a previous wooden-built Celtic church on the site before the stone one possibly built by Bishop Wilfred (WRef: ⁴).

If the land '*iuxta Rippel*' is not around Ribbleshead, and presuming that the other lands mentioned have been correctly translated, it would seem the land located in '*Dunutinga*' could be a possible connection to Wilfred.

While the theory of the Wilfred's connection is tenuous, it is not outside the realms of possibility, although, unless some other evidence comes to light, it may never be established to any degree of certainty. There is one further, tantalising entry in the Stephanus text. During Wilfred's final illness, a brother Caelin came to stay with him for some time but eventually Wilfred sent him back to his former life in the '*desert places*' i.e. he was a hermit (Colgrave, pp 139). It is, therefore, worth keeping an open mind to the possibility that Wilfred may be a link in the history of the proposed Hermitage.



Plate 1: Whinistone Keld the source of Mossdale Beck



Plate 2: Mossdale Beck looking towards High Bridge

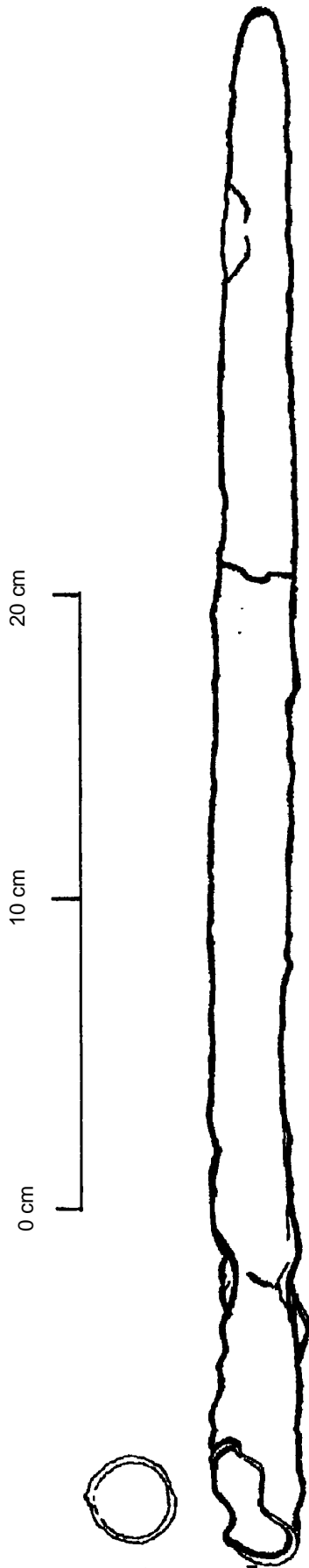


Fig 2:
Sword found at
Gauber High Pasture.
Drawing: Alan King.



Plate 3:
Weaving sword
found in Kingsdale

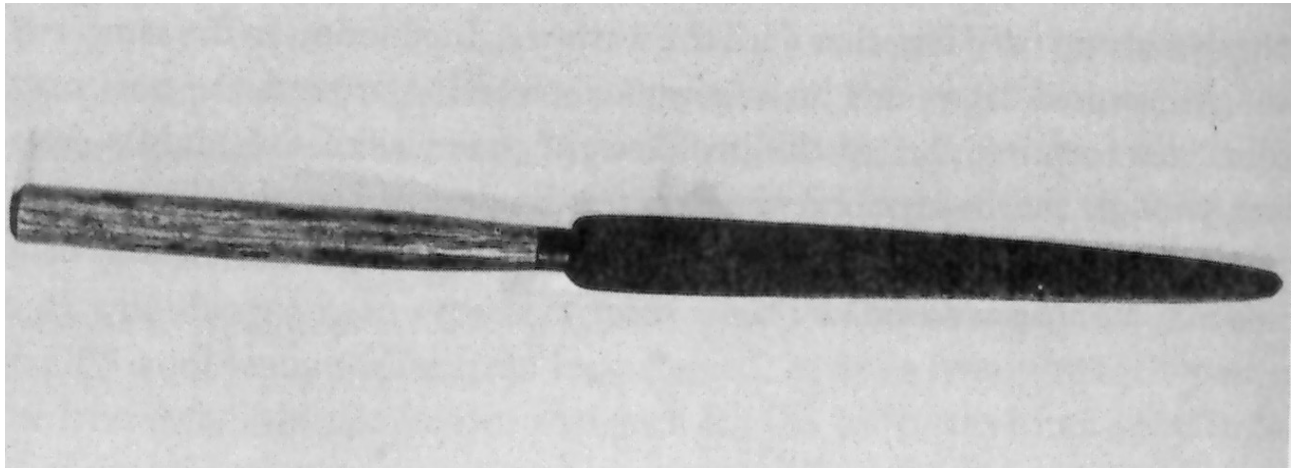


Plate 4: Sword beater of iron with a wooden handle, modern. Plate ref : Hoffmann (1964)

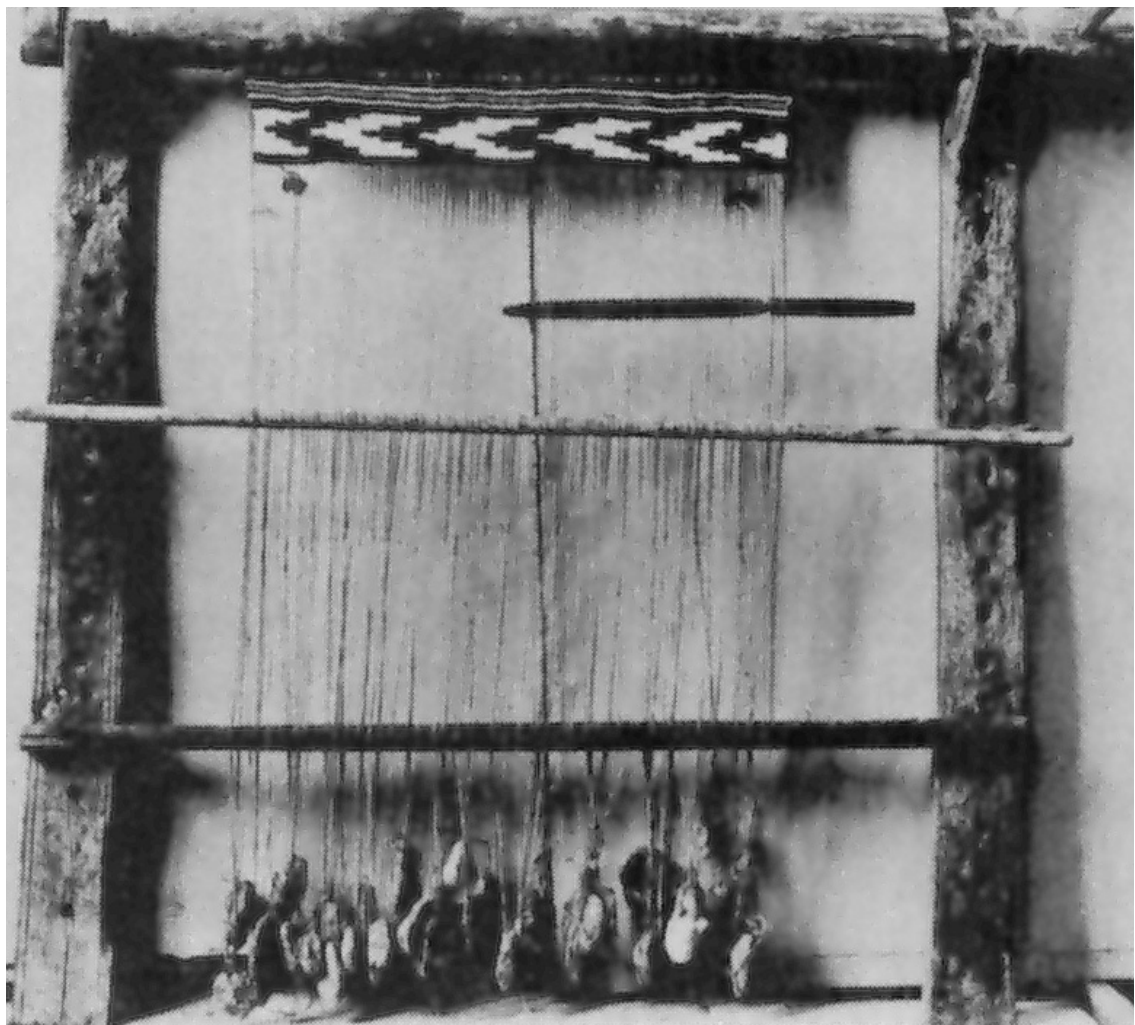


Plate 5: The photo shows a loom with the sword beater inserted between the warp threads. It is being used to beat the weft in an upward direction. Plate ref: Hoffmann, (1964)

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- (a) pp 335
- (b) pp 336
- (c) pp 337

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1. English Heritage: www.eng-h.gov.uk/mpp/herm.htm
2. Bede's description of St. Cuthbert's Hermitage: <http://www.hermitary.com/articles/digambara.html>
3. St. Wilfred: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilfred> has an interesting entry on the life of St. Wilfred with good references listed.
4. Link to St Wilfred's Church in Ribchester: http://www.saintwilfrids.org.uk/html/saint_wilfrid_s.html

General interest Internet Reference

Anglian Leadership in Northumbria, 547AD through 1075AD
This dissertation, found on the internet, is an interesting historical background to the period discussed.
http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-06152005-131704/unrestricted/Haves_dis.pdf

Plate and Figure References

Fig 2: Alan King

Plates 4 and 5 have been reproduced from **Hoffmann, M.** (referenced above in Bibliography) the photographs have the following references:-

Plate 4: Sword beater, modern. Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo. Photo. Norsk Folkemuseum.

Plate 5: Loom. Haus, Hord. Nordiska Museet, Stockholm. Photo. Nordiska Museet, Stockholm

All other plates and figures by Arthur Batty.