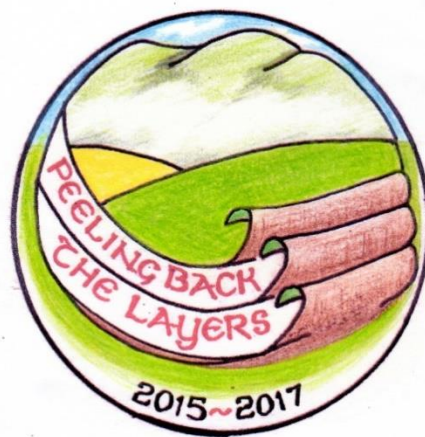


A Report on the Results of a Tape and Offset Survey Undertaken at Whitle Bank, Under Whitle, near Sheen, Staffordshire

for
Peeling Back the Layers: A Community Archaeology Project



A Report by Dr Ian Parker Heath



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Introduction

As a result of an earlier walkover survey undertaken by the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) in 2004, the property known as Under Whittle was known to contain a number of archaeological features such as lynchets, platforms and earthworks which were presumed to be of various dates, but largely medieval and post-medieval in origin (Rylatt, 2005). The purpose of this survey was to clarify for the Tudor Farming Interpretation Group (TFIG) the archaeological features highlighted by the 2004 survey and create a more detailed record of them. As a part of this, one particular field/area known as Whittle Bank was identified as being suitable for surveying using a methodology known as 'tape and offset'.

Background

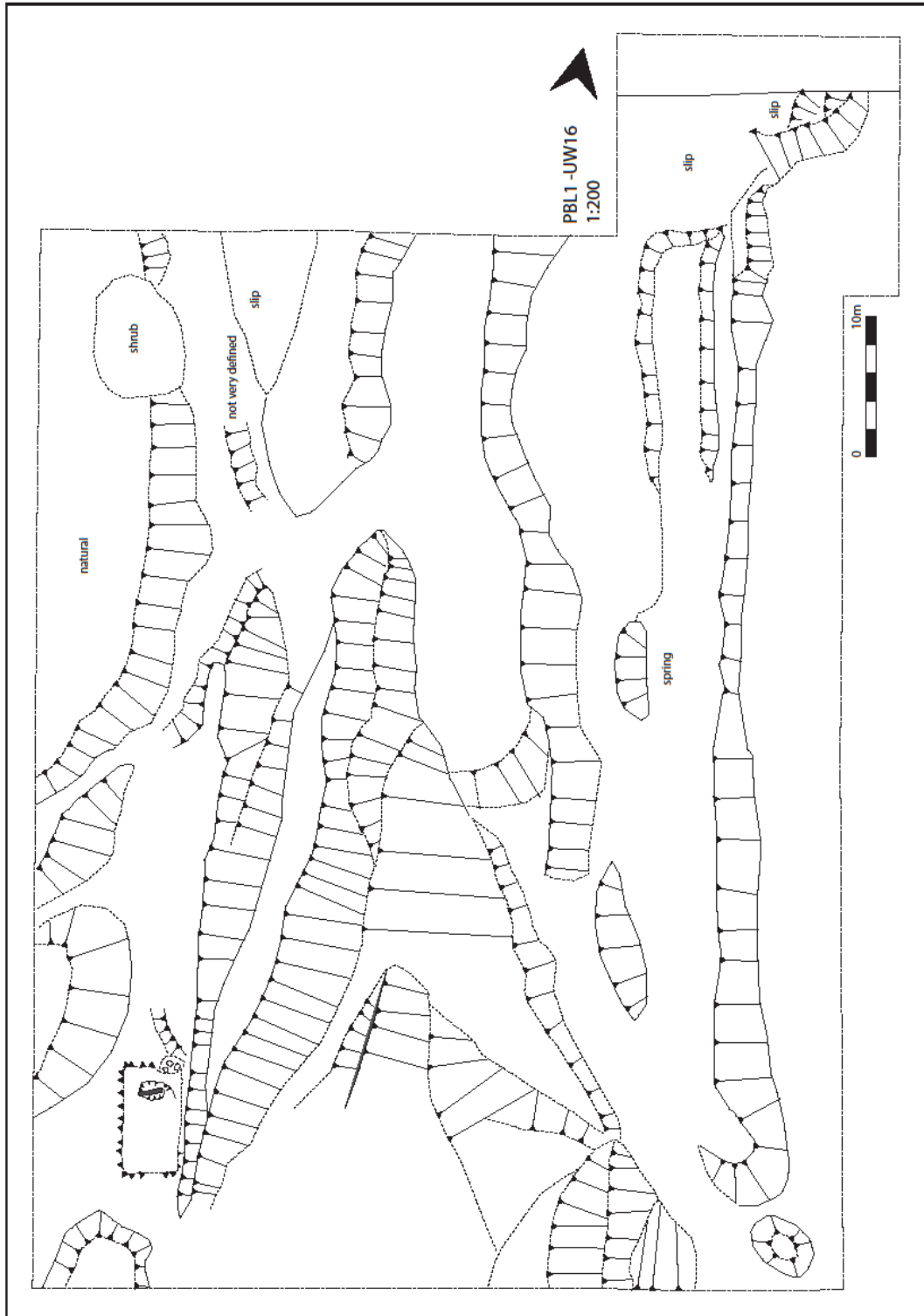
In addition to the survey cited above, there are a number of sources that informed this survey. All of these are known to the TFIG and include the 1845 tithe map which shows at least one structure in the field. The most recent source is the LiDAR survey completed by the Environment Agency on behalf of the TFIG. As this data is already known it will not be repeated here, except to say that some of the larger, more distinct features appeared on the images produced. In addition, it also shows evidence of features seemingly continuing beyond the contemporary field boundary and landslide.

Methodology

The field known as Whitle Bank was selected as being suitable for undertaking a tape & offset survey largely as a result of its topography. This being said, it nevertheless presented a challenge for the self-same reason. The area is part of the east-facing valley side of the upper reaches of the River Dove which forms the boundary between Staffordshire and Derbyshire and is characterised by a marked slope from west to east. In addition, there are natural features such as landslips which have resulted in a division of a relatively large field into two distinct parts. This survey was therefore carried out in the southernmost of the two areas colloquially known as 'the cellar field'.

Tape & offset survey is typically used on sites that are largely flat, and to record evidence such as standing stones, earthworks or buildings. This survey area then was atypical and required an approach that could overcome the bias of the slope. To do this the primary base-line was established using 'line of sight' between three points along a mid-point, whereby features both above and below this could be included. The next step was to create a grid over the site to allow the survey team to 'step-down' or terrace the grid and overcome any vertical bias. The grid itself was based on 10m squares to facilitate measurement by volunteers using tape measures of varying lengths. Data were collected and recorded before being transferred to a scaled drawing of the features. The resultant drawing was made at a scale of 1:200 and has been reproduced digitally on the next page.

Fig. 1 Plan of the results of tape and offset survey



Analysis & Interpretation

As with any survey, the analysis and interpretation depends in part on the subjective view of those undertaking the work. In this case, the final decision as to what was an artificial/archaeological feature rested with the author, although the whole team of volunteers who took part also made valuable contributions along the way. The field contained a number of features of an artificial/archaeological character and these are now identified in turn, using the plan as a guide, clockwise from the top left-hand corner of the field.

In the extreme top left-hand corner of the plan is a low, sub-circular feature, the maximum dimensions of which are approximately 5m x 7m. There are a number of pieces of what appears to be worked stone tipping out of the edge of this feature. Any southern edge of the feature lies just beyond the survey as the ground tips down into a water-course. To the north of this is the most obvious feature of the field - the 'cellar' - which is presumed to have been part of a more substantial building, possibly a house. This currently sits within an area some 4m x 7m fenced off from the rest of the field for safety reasons. The fenced area is slightly smaller than a very low rectangular feature with a well-defined edge. The construction of this structure shows that each end is different. The southern end has a corbelled vaulting and steps, while the northern end has a simple stone lintel. Due to vegetation and the potentially hazardous state of the structure itself, the survey was limited to the elements that could be observed at a safe distance.

Abutting the northern edge of this, are a number of probably worked stones and these sit adjacent to another low, sub-circular feature with stone showing in the edge.

This latter element is approximately 4m x 2m at its maximum extent. Whilst there are at present no upstanding walls, these traces of worked stone in close proximity to the area may be the remains of structures. The 1845 tithe map identified two buildings in this corner of the field, and it is possible that these features may be demolition debris from one or more of these, although this would need confirming by excavation.

Fig. 2 Feature adjacent to cellar area. (The scale in all images is 1m)



This flat area extends for a further 17 metres in a north-west direction and varies in width between approximately 4m-6m. To date, this has largely been understood as being a house platform, due in no small part to the presence of the 'cellar'. This remains the most likely use for this area although there remains the question of the absence of any other evidence of a structure on this site beyond this. The eastern edge of the platform is clearly visible for the most part and slopes down to the east.

The western edge is rather more indistinct but there is a small path and the larger trackway on this side.

The platform area is truncated on its northern edge diagonally by a feature best understood as a trackway. This follows the slope of the valley side and is a major feature of the survey and is also identified on the Lidar survey. It passes through the field, entering on the westernmost edge in a northerly direction, then turning sharply south-east and continuing across the field before it passes beneath the contemporary southern field boundary. It is not always clearly defined, but where it is, such as shown in Fig.3, it is between 1m -1.5m wide. Although it is beyond the survey area itself, it should be noted that the trackway becomes much clearer once it is beyond the modern field boundary and this is shown in Fig. 6 below.

Fig. 3 Trackway passing under later field boundary wall.



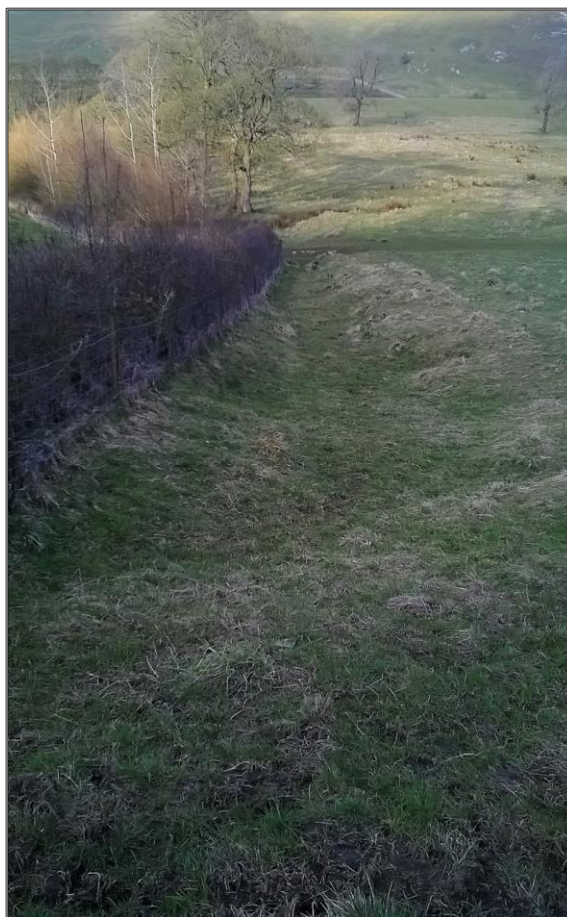
Fig. 4 Looking up trackway to boundary wall.



Fig.5 Trackway running toward southern field boundary.



Fig.6 Trackway continuing eastward beyond survey area.



In addition to this trackway there are a number of smaller pathways leading to/from the platform area. On the western edge of the platform there is a small break in an artificial bank that is, in all likelihood, a footpath or small track leading up the slope and beyond this field. There are two more on the eastern edge of the platform, which run down to the trackway (Fig. 7). Moving across the western edge of the field there is another less defined pathway and this is blocked by a modern landslip and was not surveyed any further.

The central area of the field is characterised by two irregular features that are relatively flat in comparison to the overall topography but not as clearly worked as the

platform already discussed. The first of these is shown in Fig. 8 below and its broad dimensions are 18m x 6m. It is difficult to ascribe any singular function to this area. It is close to the trackway and could have been a passing-place or an area to allow carts or similar vehicles to turn the bend in the trackway, which is quite sharp. It may also have been a garden plot or a further house platform. There are no other identifying structures or earthworks etc. which point to a function. There is a similar but smaller area at only 4m wide to the west of this, and again it is difficult to identify a particular function for this.

Fig. 7 One of the pathways to/from platform area.



Fig. 8 Levelled area in centre of Whittle Bank.



Fig. 9 Looking west, the levelled areas clearly visible.



Fig. 10 Linear terrace (looking north).



The final feature to note is a long narrow terrace on the eastern edge of the field and survey area, and is also found on the Lidar survey. The terrace is little more than one metre wide for most of its 65m length. As can be seen in the image below, the edge of the feature is most clearly defined by a change in vegetation. The gentle slope from this edge runs toward the field boundary established by the current owners approximately 30 years ago. There are some further observations to be made on this feature. Firstly, there are possibly two breaks in it. One is for what appears to be a spring at an estimated mid-point of the feature. The second is more curious, and is at its southern terminus. Here there is a rounded edge to the feature and what can be interpreted as a break (Fig. 11). This 'break', being a little over one metre wide, runs west to join the trackway, but any further eastward progress cannot be seen

beyond the new field boundary. It is of course, possible that at some time in the past it did exist but that recent working has removed it.

Fig. 11 Possible break in linear feature.



At the northern end of the feature there is further evidence of human activity as the terrace and bank make a 90° turn to the East and the new field boundary. Sadly, much of this has been covered by a recent landslip, but enough remains visible both on the ground and in the Lidar imagery to suggest that this continues into the next field and beyond. Quite what its function was is open to debate.

Suggestions for location of excavation

The project Peeling Back the Layers will be carrying out excavations as part of their community archaeology project from 20th June to the 9th July, 2016. The following are suggested locations for trenches that would potentially answer some of the questions posed and clarify what some of the features described above are:

1. Around the top of the cellar, the two sub-circular features that have stone tipping through the edges. A small slit trench through each of these, in conjunction with the excavation of the cellar, would much improve our understanding of their relationship both on the ground and in relation to the 1845 tithe map.
2. A small trench at the location shown in Fig. 3 and abutting the field boundary wall would confirm the trackway and possibly provide dating evidence.
3. The southern terminus of the linear feature shown in Figs. 10 and 11. This would include the sub-circular feature identified in the survey and establish the relationship, if any, between the two.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the TFIG for inviting me to become involved in the project and the survey, Mrs & Mrs Walker for their hospitality and to the volunteers for their help in carrying out the work, in particular Paul Burke for his efforts on the drawing.

References

Rylatt, J (2005) *Archaeological Field Survey for the Peak District Environmental Quality Mark Scheme*, Peak District National Park Authority (a pdf of this report can be downloaded [here](#))