The North Pennines from Prehistory to Present

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Cover:
Front: Holwick, Upper Teesdale.
Back: Long Meg stone circle, Eden Valley.

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To the people of the North Pennines -
past, present and future.

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PF (Frosterley)
MG (Hunstanworth)
GF (Dotland)
June 2024.

Foreword

By Stewart Ainsworth

Firstly, this book would never have happened without the boundless energy, commitment and enthusiasm of the authors, Paul, Martin and Greg. But behind this trio there also lies a wealth of support and encouragement from many members of Altogether Archaeology, the community archaeology group of volunteers whom I am proud to say that I represent as their Honorary President. This result of all their labours, *The North Pennines from Prehistory to Present*, presents an easily digestible, up-to-date summary of archaeological research in the area and brings together the results of many years work by many other individuals and teams from the professional, academic and volunteer sectors. It includes a significant amount of practical archaeological work and documentary research undertaken by Altogether Archaeology itself. It therefore demonstrates how volunteers can not only contribute to archaeological research, but can also spread that knowledge out to the general public through publication. It does not pretend to be an exhaustive and complete inventory of all research to date. It is by design an accessible overview that is understandable to both the wider public and professional sectors who together have an interest in the heritage of the North Pennines.

Altogether Archaeology has undertaken a range of archaeological and heritage related projects, ranging from lidar-based non-invasive surveys of large landscapes, to detailed excavations, and includes many sites which have been 'put on the map' for the first time. The members of Altogether Archaeology have also generously provided assistance and advice for a number of other archaeological groups, university students and individuals as well as hosting and participating in outreach events for the general public. For many, community groups like Altogether Archaeology have provided the first step into the world of archaeology and its mysterious ways.

When first asked to write a foreword for this book, Paul suggested it might be appropriate to say something about my own association with the North Pennines – and ultimately Altogether Archaeology. 'Putting things on the map' therefore provides a convenient theme to show how that association came about, and why I feel that groups like Altogether Archaeology are integral to the future of archaeology. Like many members of the Altogether Archaeology group, I too took my first steps into the world of archaeology in the North Pennines, but with a map in hand, not a trowel.

Most of us are familiar with the way Ordnance Survey (OS) maps not only guide us along the highways, but also how they also tell us a story which embraces many other aspects of the landscape, not just how we navigate from point to point. For professionals and the general public alike, historic and modern OS maps of all scales can be used as companions on a journey to investigate the past. For example, contours help us understand geology and landforms, place-names often inform us of historical origins of people who shaped our landscape, and differing patterns of fields show us how phases of agricultural change have evolved. These maps and the clues they contain often provide the only documentary evidence for the heritage of our landscape: industrial activities such mining and quarrying, changes in the agricultural landscape such as field boundaries, settlement patterns, and monuments to the long dead. Even up to the 1970s, these maps were the only national record of archaeological sites. The maps of the upland areas of the North Pennines were largely empty of prehistoric, Roman and medieval archaeological sites, traditionally depicted by hachures and symbols. The mining and extractive industries were largely ignored and not recorded as archaeology at all by the OS.

That context, the very early 1970s, was when I took my first steps into the world of North Pennines archaeology – my Ordnance Survey phase – resplendent with long hair and flared trousers. I was in the embryonic stage of my career as an archaeological investigator with the former Archaeology Branch of the Ordnance Survey and fortunate to be around when the uplands and rural areas were being resurveyed for the 'new' National Grid maps, destined to replace the old and out-of-date County Series editions. The archaeology and landscapes of the North Pennines, Scottish Borders, Cheviot Hills, Lake District, North York Moors and the Yorkshire Dales were to become my day-to-day 'office', learning on the job alongside an experienced investigator. I and my fellow investigators (there were only three of us for the whole of northern England) hopped from one landscape to the other and back again, driven by tight deadlines set by the department and trying to keep ahead of the topographic mapping in progress throughout the region, so that archaeological sites made it onto the new maps.

Even into the 1970s, many of the large-scale maps of many of those upland areas had not been revised since the early 1900s, and the only archaeological record for the whole of England, Scotland and Wales was that created by the Ordnance Survey on a series of index cards and 6-inch scale paper record maps. Throughout that re-survey period, I was part of a map production line with tight deadlines. Our aim in the Archaeology Branch was to ensure that sites were surveyed accurately, that there was a consistency in terms used in the site record, and that the written component was brief. Most important of all, was that it was in the hands of the draughtsman in Southampton before the prescribed deadline for the production of the relevant OS map.

Investigators set out for fieldwork armed with a bundle of the existing index cards and record maps for each 1:10,000 scale map, plus any relevant new archaeological information from reports and county journals as well as the currently available, but out of date map. The job was to find, record and survey any existing or new archaeological sites that would warrant publication on the new maps. In the course of this work, many new sites were discovered during the process of walking from one known site to another, but we were not allowed to systematically cover every inch of ground – there just wasn't time for that. Some previously published sites turned out not to be where they had been mapped and had either been destroyed (often shown as 'Site of') or had been misinterpreted as natural features and were subsequently erased from the map. Many hours were wasted trying to locate sites with erroneous grid references published in county archaeological journals and other publications – some by well-known archaeologists (no names mentioned).

A short entry for each site was written up on a proforma (usually no more than a few sentences) during the evening in the bed and breakfast establishments which were our 'home' for the period, and hachured surveys drawn in ink onto an 'Antiquity Model' (a survey plan at map scale). These were ultimately supplied to the OS HQ office to be traced onto the final map or drawn directly onto the topographic surveyor's field map in a local office. A senior member of the investigation team checked samples of what we had produced, and offered critical guidance, often leading to heated debate as our own confidence and experience matured (as we all know, archaeologists rarely agree). After checking and editing, a folder containing the resultant information, forms and cards was returned to HQ by post when each 1:10,000 map (25 square km) had been completed. We also had to submit time sheets to account for our labours. The rule of thumb presented to me was to complete three sites per day, i.e. 15 sites per week, including getting to the site, surveying the site onto the map (no GPS then of course), writing up, drawing and all associated paperwork. It all seems very antiquated and outdated now in the digital age, but the map production deadlines had to be met.

During this first stage in my North Pennines odyssey, I was tasked with checking the archaeology for a new area being mapped around a remote location called Alston, a place I had never been to before. This was an area of upland I had only seen from a distance, fringed with dramatic escarpments and most of the time seemingly shrouded in low cloud. In production-line mode, each new 1:10,000 scale map in the area was checked, and all known archaeological sites in the area (few in number) were visited. I surveyed the Roman fort at Whitley Castle, some hilltop prehistoric cairns and a handful of lead-mining sites onto the new maps but little else. I spent more time walking than surveying. However, it was clear that there were lots of unrecorded earthworks indicative of archaeological sites, including abandoned steadings, complex field systems and abundant industrial remains. None of this could be mapped or recorded under the rules of the day, when almost everything after the late 17th century was not considered archaeology and field systems were a definite no-no! Under the Archaeology Branch rules at the time (yes – we also had a rule book – I still have a copy), few industrial sites warranted survey or creation of an index card. I was not allowed to walk every inch of the ground seeking out sites, but if anything was stumbled on accidently or following a tip-off from a local, that was fine, and a new site might find its way onto the map. In other words, there was a large element of randomness in the process rather than it being a systematic landscape approach. We did not record or survey field systems when we found them – even though it was clear that some of the earthworks around Alston were possibly of a prehistoric date (indeed cairnfields were mostly ignored as they were classed as field systems). The rationale was that if we surveyed the features, which often covered large acreages, there could end up being more archaeology on the map than the more important topographic features (imagine maps with all the ridge-and-furrow being depicted on it). Equally importantly, it would take too long and deadlines would be missed.

Little wonder that the archaeological sites were few and far between on the maps around Alston published in the late 1970s (along with most other upland areas) – it wasn't that we didn't see them, we simply weren't allowed to record them. Despite these constraints, the OS archaeological record cards formed the foundations of national heritage recording and all the county Historic Environment Record (HER) databases today, a truly magnificent achievement and a legacy which will long outlive the currency of the maps on which the sites were depicted. So next time you look at an archaeological site on an OS map or an entry on any of the HERs or Historic England records for the counties which cover the North Pennines, remember a phrase used by Keith Blood, an OS investigator with many years of experience and former colleague of mine – *'we were always chasing time'* (Frodsham *et al.* 1999).

Fast forward my own career to 2008, having spent many years as an investigator with the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England. Now came the next part of my North Pennines odyssey – my English Heritage phase – by then with greying hair, and overly expensive 'technical' trousers. I was a senior investigator with English Heritage, no longer restrained by a 'rule book' and now looking for new research opportunities to demonstrate the importance of landscape archaeology (rather than just site recording) as a fundamental part of management and conservation of the natural environment, particularly within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). This was an aspiration against the background of two pieces of European legislation: the European Landscape Convention and the Water Framework Directive (which had particular relevance in mining landscapes). In effect, I tasked myself with identifying an upland landscape that offered probable historic 'under-recording' of the archaeological resource, combined with extensive extractive lead-mining and potential fluvial and water pollution issues as a result. My experience in the North Pennines with the OS had demonstrated that Alston Moor fitted that profile to a tee. I consequently set out to design and implement a project which would set in train an innovative, systematic, heritage-led, landscape-scale field survey which could be used to inform upland environmental conservation and management issues. Such a project offered enormous potential to show how understanding the past through archaeological field survey could help shape the future of environmental research and collaboration with other agencies.

The result, the 'Miner-Farmer' project (Ainsworth 2008, 2009; Ainsworth *et al.* 2013; Oakey *et al.* 2012; Oswald and Oakey 2011; Went and Ainsworth 2009, 2013), has helped inform various sections of this book. A brief introduction here will provide some context. The multidisciplinary project was started in 2008 and covered *c.* 50 square km of the varied and intensively mined landscape around Alston at the heart of the North Pennines. It combined specially commissioned high-resolution lidar data, vertical aerial imagery, and digital field methodologies to provide a landscape-scale platform for a nested suite of surveys. This led to the establishment of a project GIS designed to include issues and threats relevant to the conservation and protection of the landscape heritage. As such it could be shared with other bodies with an environmental agenda, such as the North Pennines AONB and the Environment Agency. It recorded hundreds of sites, including incredibly well-preserved prehistoric and Romano-British settlements, many identified and mapped for the first time. Detailed surveys were produced for some sites. The time spent on the survey of the Roman fort at Whitley Castle led to a post-retirement decade of personal time, starting in 2012, spent as an advisor to Elaine and John Edgar at the farm and later the Epiacum Trust.

Finally, to 2013, (by then retired from English Heritage and liberated from organisational strategies) and the third and last part of my North Pennines odyssey – Altogether Archaeology. To continue the momentum of new discoveries revealed during the Miner-Farmer project, Paul (then with the AONB) asked me to design and run a landscape recording project for volunteers using lidar as part of Altogether Archaeology, at the time an AONB-managed community archaeology project. Over two years (2013-2015) the volunteers recorded an area of 285 square km of the North Pennines in the Allen Valleys and Hexhamshire. As a result, 1027 newly identified archaeological sites were 'put on the map' and added to the county HERs (Ainsworth 2016). The success of this project led to three other large areas of North Pennine landscape being recorded in the Upper Derwent, Weardale and Teesdale areas led by Paul. This project ultimately covered over 800 square km, recording hundreds of new sites; I was still heavily involved, as an advisor and mentor. Ultimately, after the completion of the Altogether Archaeology project a new community archaeology group emerged as the current Altogether Archaeology, and I was later pleasantly surprised to the be asked to become its Honorary President.

The publication of this book in 2024 marks a notable bench-mark for the group and is a tribute to all past and present members. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with you all. ***Altogether Archaeology is now on the map.***

Professor Stewart Ainsworth FSA, MCIfA